Volume 5
Number 1
(2016)

Aesthetic Inquiries 2

Evental Aesthetics

Evental Aesthetics

www.eventalaesthetics.net
ISSN: 2167-1931

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AESTHETIC INQUIRIES

VOLUME 5 NUMBER 1 (2016)

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COLLISION

Epiquotation:

Why We Sometimes Misquote Stubbornly

Jason Holt

ABSTRACT

Most misquotations are owing to carelessness or willful misrepresentation and perpetuated by ignorance. More interesting, however, are those that persist despite being widely recognized as erroneous. Such memes are culturally selected for, and this can be explained by what I call the SIC hypothesis: compared with their originals, such misquotations are uniquely symbolic (S), improving (I), or compressive (C). In such cases, a loss of fidelity is compensated by aesthetic enhancement. But the apparent conflict between truth and beauty here evaporates as these are not simply misquotations, paraphrases, or interpolations but a different phenomenon entirely, which prompts the coinage of "epiquotation" (*n*) or some such neologism, together with punctuational revision. As tropes, epiquotations are quotation-adjacent, true to the presumed spirit of their originals, unique mnemonic keys, and aesthetic frames; and though they are extrinsic, they become essential addenda to the originals, which prompt yet fail to realize such potential expression. So construed, the epiquote phenomenon has paradoxical implications for retroactively describing the original works whose cultural reception has deemed them epiquotable.

KEYWORDS

Misquotation
Truth
Aesthetics
Trope
Frame

FRED MADISON: I like to remember things .... How I remember them.
Not necessarily the way they happened.

—David Lynch and Barry Gifford, *Lost Highway* (1997)[1]

Beauty is truth, truth beauty....

—John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1819)[2]

As a kind of stubborn misquotation, what I call "epiquotation" is different from typical misquotation. In typical misquotation, one is careless or malicious in misrepresenting the original text or speech, and if the incorrect version proliferates, it is from ignorance or laziness. Typical misquotations are dull and contrast sharply with the interesting examples I will discuss. "Play it again, Sam" is a paradigm case, plausibly the most memorable movie line that never was. The actual lines in *Casablanca* are "Play it, Sam. Play 'As Time Goes By,'" and "Play it. You played it for her, you can play it for me."[3] As with epiquotations generally, "Play it again, Sam" persists in our imagination and culture despite being widely recognized as erroneous. Here I will limit discussion chiefly to works of literature and film, though much of what I say about such cases will also apply to misquotations of political figures and other celebrities where the misquote somehow fits them better than their actual words, like an off-the-rack suit subsequently tailored.

Stressing the *mis*quotational aspect of these locutions will obscure crucial differences between them and typical misquotations. Indeed, we arguably distort the phenomenon if we insist on any currently standard classification: to call them (mis)quotations fails to capture their aesthetic stubbornness; to call them paraphrases fails to acknowledge that they come close to quotations; to call them interpolations — as in "Play it [again, Sam]" — fails to render either their holistic character or their conventional status. These locutions are quotation-adjacent, true to the presumed spirit of their originals, unique mnemonic keys, and aesthetic frames, and this indicates a phenomenon whose concept is becoming clearer as our vocabulary lags behind. It is to fill this gap that I offer the neologism

"epiquotation" (*n*) — as in "To epiquote *Casablanca*, 'Play it again, Sam.'" Note the apt connotations: like epigraphs, epiquotations are separate from the work but help to frame it; like epiphenomena, they are byproducts; like epilogues, they come afterward; like epicondyles, they are outgrowths that anchor further attachments.

Certain cases to be discussed are described in *What They Didn't Say: A Book of Misquotations*, understandably enough as mere misquotations. The book's introductory essay characterizes these locutions as "wrongly remembered sayings" that "represent unconscious editing" and become "part of our general vocabulary," sometimes even having "achieved iconic status."[4] The essay's tone suggests that the persistence and sheer number of such misquotations indicates an amusing aspect of human fallibility. This is apt to leave a misleading impression that such locutions are merely a type of misquotation perpetuated by laziness or ignorance. But this impression obscures what is operative in and interesting about epiquotations.

Consider Woody Allen's play and the subsequent movie *Play It Again, Sam*. Allen's choice of this title might be interpreted as echoing *What They Didn't Say* in lampooning our tendency to misremember quotations and remember misquotations. Indeed, the film's tagline is "Here's laughing at you, kid." However, despite the humor, it is clear that for Allen's character and Allen himself the misquotation conjures a poignant nostalgia for *Casablanca* that echoes that in the film. In other words, Allen's use of "Play it again, Sam" is decidedly *not* a product of his ignorance or his derision of other people's. There is something else going on.

To be clear, although I am more interested in the aesthetic aspects of epiquotations, the imperfections of human memory are often also involved. "Play it again, Sam" persists in many people's minds because they mistakenly think the line occurs in the film. But it also much more tellingly sticks in the minds of people who know better, and this is because though it is wrong as a quotation, it gets something *right* about the film. It is the stubborn appeal of epiquotations to those who know that they are *not* quotations that is especially intriguing. Still, it seems highly likely that most epiquotations originate in faulty memories, that their origin is not deliberate. Their aesthetic appeal, however, is not only a significant factor in their cultural persistence, but it is also no doubt unconsciously at work in helping to motivate and shape the original mismemories on which epiquotations often depend. We can speculate about what psychological mechanisms may underlie such aesthetic distortion.

Setting aside more psychoanalytically oriented approaches, which nonetheless may be worth exploring, one way in is through meme theory. Memes are units of cultural selection, including "tunes, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches …. [M]emes propagate themselves in the

meme pool by leaping from brain to brain."[5] As memes, epiquotations are both mutations of their originals and culturally selected for: successful replication errors. Generally speaking, a meme will tend to proliferate because it has value. For instance, a recipe will become more popular the tastier the dish. Likewise, a more efficient technique for performing some necessary task will tend to catch on. Consider this not the survival of the fittest but "the virality of the catchiest." Although I find this meme-theoretic perspective helpful, nothing in what follows necessarily hinges on it.

As memes, tunes and catch-phrases — including epiquotations — often catch on not because of their immediate utility but because of their aesthetic value. I propose that epiquotations are stubborn because — and to the extent that — they aesthetically enhance their sources in a way that the original quotations do not. This intuition underlies the SIC hypothesis: epiquotations are aesthetically enhancing because they are uniquely symbolic (S), improving (I), or compressive (C). This hypothesis is meant to be doubly inclusive in that these are held to be the principal but not necessarily the only properties that feed into the aesthetic appeal of epiquotations and also in that a single epiquotation may exhibit more than one of them. Thus the SIC hypothesis concerns properties of epiquotations that we tend to respond to aesthetically. If an epiquotational meme goes viral, this will largely be the result of its aesthetic appeal, and such appeal, according to the SIC hypothesis, will often be due to at least one of the three hypothesized functions: symbolic, improving, or compressive.

Let us start with the symbolic function. Consider "Elementary, my dear Watson," which is nowhere to be found in the Sherlock Holmes novels and stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, though it is a staple of pop-cultural references to the great detective. The aesthetic appeal of this misquotation lies in its serving as an elegant symbol, evoking immediately Holmes and Watson, the manner of their relationship, Holmes' intelligence and detective work, and typical turns in conversation and plot. Having a similar function is the infamous "Beam me up, Scotty" not from *Star Trek*, which as a symbol helps define the television series. Such a line would be inferior as part of the show's dialogue since for one reason formal communication protocol — in *Star Trek* as in real life typically — begins with first contact and identification (e.g., "Kirk to Scotty") and is only then followed by orders (e.g., "Beam me up"), not the reverse.

Somewhat differently, the phrase "the road less traveled," which is neither in nor the title of Frost's "The Road Not Taken," uniquely represents the poem's key image as perhaps *the* metaphor for finding one's own path. Similarly, the altered "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet" epitomizes its general point better than Shakespeare's original "*That which we call* a rose by any other *word* would smell

as sweet."[6] In fact, both the Frost and the Shakespeare misquotations along with "Beam me up, Scotty" are arguably acontextual improvements on their originals; although the originals are not inferior in their original contexts, they do prove inferior for use in other contexts, that is, as symbols of the relevant works or their key ideas. An epiquotation that serves as a better symbol apart from the work often would have been an aesthetically poorer choice in the original work than the actual quote.

This, however, suggests the second way epiquotations can be aesthetically enhancing: by constituting genuine improvements of their originals. For a literary example, take "Ask not for whom the bell tolls" or "Do not ask for whom the bell tolls," both of which seem to improve on the original from Donne: "[*N*]*ever send to know* for whom the bell tolls."[7] It might seem hubris to think our misquotation poetically superior to the original line from the great metaphysical poet. However, although "No Man Is an Island" is often presented as a poem, it is a prose passage from one of Donne's *Devotions*.[8] We cannot fault Donne for prose that rings of imperfect poetics to the modern ear. Indeed, the "Ask not" and "Do not ask" misquotations are part of how we appreciate Donne's passage as if it *were* a poem.

Other, less controversial examples of epiquotational improvement suggest themselves. *Alice in Wonderland* would have been a better title than *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The unqualified "Greed is good" would have suited *Wall Street*'s ruthless Gordon Gekko better than "[G]reed, for lack of a better word, is good."[9] Or consider, frequently misremembered from *Sunset Boulevard*, "I'm ready for my closeup, Mr. DeMille." We prefer this mismemory because the original is aesthetically inferior: "All right, Mr. DeMille, I'm ready for my closeup."[10] This may seem an unjustified preference, yet recall the principle of composition that recommends leaving new information till the end of a sentence.[11] As Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson) emerges to face a wall of news cameras, "I'm ready for my closeup" should prime us for the delusional revelation — "Mr. DeMille."

Last, some epiquotations prove stubborn because they compress a lot of information. Take "Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him well," a misrendering of Hamlet's "Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio." Here the misquotational "well" elegantly condenses Hamlet's subsequent description: "a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times…. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. — Where be your gibes now? Your gambols? Your songs? Your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar?"[12] Similarly, "Slipped the surly bonds of earth and touched the face of God" takes elements from the first and last lines of the poem "High Flight," in effect compressing the entire poem between its evocative, well-matched bookends. Consider "nasty, brutish, and short" from Hobbes, though not a true misquotation,

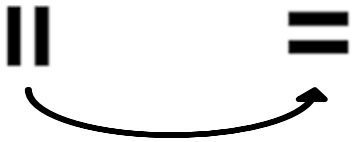
as compressing the more complete "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[13] Further, the quintessential "Play it again, Sam" compresses various elements of *Casablanca*: the song "As Time Goes By," its emotional significance, the nightclub setting, the Rick and Sam relationship, the romance and nostalgia of the subsequent flashback — indeed, the whole of *Casablanca* itself.

Epiquotations reflect the well-worn tension between truth and beauty, "true" indicating that a claim "corresponds to reality" (as in the schema "'*P*' is true if and only if *P*"), a reality often plain and ugly and thus in those cases neither naturally nor aesthetically beautiful. These locutions as misquotations are not true to their originals; they get the words wrong. Since they are not strictly part of those works, it is false to claim that they are. However, as stubborn, they do get something right. They aesthetically enhance their sources from without, and so they need not be seen as competing with or an affront to the original lines or works or our memories of them. Their aesthetic appeal does come at the price of lost fidelity, and they thus run afoul of Keats' paradoxical truth–beauty equation. However, in a way epiquotations actually exemplify the Keats equation. In step with the *Lost Highway* epigraph, they inform how we like to remember the works they get wrong even where we correctly remember the actual words. They frame their sources for our aesthetic pleasure in ways that no actual quotation could do nearly as well. Despite the hazard of distortion then, they express for those sources both our appreciation and our respect. Thus epiquotations, though not true to the *letter* of their originals, are true to the *spirit* or presumed spirit of their originals, fitting if unfit.

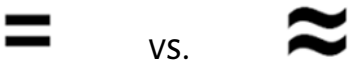
It might seem, however, that endorsing epiquotations imperils our epistemic duties, that we do wrong by truth by doing right by beauty. "Elementary, my dear Watson" is in the spirit of Sherlock Holmes, but it can mislead people into falsely believing that such a line occurs in the Conan Doyle corpus. So it might seem that by their beauty epiquotations seduce us into perpetuating ignorance. But even though strict quotation is often important (in scholarship, journalism, etc.), we often overemphasize the need for it in other contexts. For example, for most conversational purposes in making such reference, "Luke, I am your father" will suffice though the actual, far less recognizable line is "No, *I* am your father."[14] One can appreciate an "Elementary, my dear Watson" or a "Play it again, Sam" without being deceived or misleading others about the source. Indeed, "Play it again, Sam" — as apropos of but not in *Casablanca* — is part of the film lore that true fans make it their business to know. Thus as distinct from but associated with their originals, epiquotations serve as metonyms without threat of distortion, without necessarily imperiling our epistemic duties. Where epistemic duty is done, we cannot reject epiquotations on epistemic grounds.

Although the proposed neologism "epiquotation" has some justification, more than terminological revision seems warranted. To further disambiguate epiquotations, I propose a new punctuation mark. This mark will not be as widely useful as quotation marks of course though it may serve as a convenience on par with shorthand, copyediting marks, or logical symbols as I will illustrate below. Many fonts have quotation marks that look something like this:

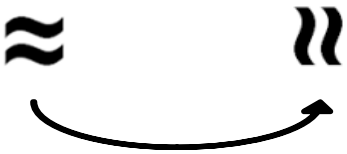
Rotating the quotation marks ninety degrees yields an equals sign:



In mathematics, the equals sign is straightforwardly distinct from the approximately equals sign:



Rotating the approximately equals sign ninety degrees parallels the initial move from quotation marks to equals sign:



Call the result *epiquotation marks*. Such marks are fitting because they connote that enclosed expressions are not exactly but *approximately* the same as the originals. They also recall the potentially illusory effect of heat waves. Hence, to quote from *Casablanca*, ⁞⁞Play it⁞⁞ — but to epiquote, ≈≈Play it again, Sam.≈≈

Whether or not these proposals are adopted, it seems appropriate to conclude with the following paradoxical slant. Epiquotations are extrinsic to the works that inspire them as they are not — unlike quotations — contained by those

works. Nonetheless, as memes they take on a life of their own and seem to become after the fact essential addenda, in a sense perhaps becoming modest artworks in their own right. Note how ‟Play it again, Sam‟ has become such an important frame for *Casablanca*, enhancing and encapsulating its aesthetic appeal, that it is now all but indispensable to our concept of the film. The frame has become part of the work. Although *Casablanca* was complete, was *re*plete, before epiquotation, it has become more than it was. It has achieved self-transcendence. Despite its erstwhile completeness then, we may rightly if oddly view the unepiquoted predecessor as retroactively incomplete, lacking the meme that was to become its unforeseen descendant. In contrast to the ossified eulogy that mere quotation often seems, epiquotation reflects an ongoing, living engagement with organic, vital works.[15]

Notes

1 "Watched," *Lost Highway*, DVD, directed by David Lynch (Universal City, CA: Universal, 2008).

2 John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," in *The Pocket Book of Verse*, ed. M. Edmund Speare (New York: Pocket Books, 1940), 133.

3 "Play it, Sam," "Of all the gin joints," *Casablanca*, DVD, directed by Michael Curtiz (Burbank, CA: Warner Bros., 2003).

4 Elizabeth Knowles, "Introduction," in *What They Didn't Say: A Book of Misquotations*, ed. Elizabeth Knowles (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), v–vi.

5 Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 192.

6 William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. René Weis (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 189 (2.2.43–44). Emphasis added.

7 John Donne, "Meditation 17," in *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. Anthony Raspa (Montreal: McGill–Queen's University Press, 1975), 87. Emphasis added and removed.

8 Ibid., 86–87.

9 "Greed Is Good," *Wall Street*, DVD, directed by Oliver Stone (Beverly Hills: Fox, 2000).

10 "'All right, Mr. DeMille, I'm ready for my closeup,'" *Sunset Boulevard*, DVD, directed by Billy Wilder (Hollywood: Paramount, 2002).

11 See for example William Strunk and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*, 4th edition (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2000), 32.

12 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Francis Fergusson (New York: Dell, 1958), 196 (5.5.202–211).

13 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Revised Student Edition, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 89.

14 "Vader's Revelation," *The Empire Strikes Back*, DVD, directed by Irvin Kershner (Beverly Hills: Fox, 2008).

15 Thanks to the editors and two anonymous reviewers for helpful feedback. An early version of this article was presented at the 2015 Atlantic Region Philosophers' Association conference at St. Thomas University and the University of New Brunswick.

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COLLISION

The Aesthetic Force of the Unpleasant

Jane Forsey

ABSTRACT

Of the three forms of reflective judgment analyzed in Kant's third Critique, the pleasant has received the least attention because it is seen in part as purely subjective, in part as a mere foil for his theory of judgments of beauty. This paper makes a case for the philosophical consideration of this kind of judgment by focusing on its converse: the unpleasant is a form of aesthetic response that is initially negative but has great motivating power. More modest and common than judgments of the purely beautiful or ugly and more rational than our visceral responses to the disgusting, the unpleasant can capture the aesthetic tenor of our daily lives and concerns.

KEYWORDS

Kant
Aesthetic judgment
The unpleasant
The ugly
The disgusting

When I bought my current home, I announced that I simply could not live in it until the rooms had been painted. They were what one might euphemistically describe as somewhere between apricot and salmon, but to my mind they were really what in my childhood was called "fleshtone" by Crayola Crayons. Further, the walls had a slight sheen to them, making them *sweaty* fleshtone Crayola Crayon or maybe *feverish* fleshtone Crayola Crayon. Never mind the structural work required on an old wooden house exposed to Canadian prairie winters — like a new roof perhaps — it was the paint that had to go. Immediately.

Now, it should be clear that I found the walls ghastly, even dreadful. And I hope it is equally apparent that my response to them was aesthetic — albeit negatively so. But what is particularly interesting is that my aesthetic judgment was also a spur to action. I did not simply dislike or reject the walls (I did buy the house, after all); instead I strove to change them. And this kind of response — that is negative but creatively motivating — holds some aesthetic promise. As a reader of Kant, my impulse has been to call this a judgment of the unpleasant: I would like to suggest that it is an aesthetic category worthy of consideration. Of course there is a body of literature — extending back as far as Aristotle's writing on catharsis — that deals with negative emotions in our aesthetic responses. But such *reactions*, as they are described, do not for the most part involve a direct call to creative or transformative *action*. What I seek to capture here is this peculiarly motivational force of negative emotions — as we will see.

When philosophy talks about aesthetic experience, it is most often in terms of our *responses* to art and other kinds of beauty and is largely concerned with pleasurable and positive responses as in Kant's analysis of judgments of the beautiful. But I think that the aesthetic tenor of our lives is in fact more complex — and as such more philosophically engaging. One of the goals of the recent movement in Everyday Aesthetics has been the inclusion of *action* — not simply observation and reaction — in the scope of aesthetic experience. Yuriko Saito, for instance, considers aesthetic responses that "do not presuppose or lead to such spectator-like experiences but rather prompt us towards actions" such as cleaning, purchasing, and repairing things like dilapidated buildings, rusty cars, and dirty linens.[1] My effort to articulate the centrality of the aesthetic in our quotidian activities also drives my own interest in those moments when its force is at least initially negative. In my case, those fleshtoned walls presented an obstacle to my aesthetic enjoyment of daily life. And in seeking to change the walls, I had to

creatively reimagine the space in which I would dwell with all of its possibilities and decide what was needed instead of that color so that the space could provide me with positive rather than negative experiences. In short, I had to be aesthetically creative and active rather than merely responsive. As a philosophical concept, the unpleasant can capture this. But let me first distinguish it from two other negative aesthetic ideas.

The unpleasant is not the ugly. A sick person can look ghastly without also looking ugly.[2] A certain shirt can look dreadful on you without thereby being an ugly shirt. And apricot, while perhaps awful on a living-room wall, is not itself an ugly color (at least when found on an apricot). We tend to use terms like "dreadful" and "ghastly" as though they were synonymous with ugliness, but there is an important conceptual difference between them. The purely ugly — or what is judged to be ugly *tout court* if one takes a Kantian approach to the matter — will have certain characteristics that the unpleasant does not have: the judgment of ugliness will be disinterested, subjectively universal, and involve the free play of the cognitive faculties. That is, judgments of the ugly will have the same logical structure as judgments of free beauty, acting as a negative mirror of them. And like Kantian beauty, ugliness will invite us to *linger*. The ugly does not provoke desire or aversion — again, judgments of the ugly are disinterested — but ugliness can fascinate us.[3] Judgments of the ugly (and warty toads get a lot of press here) are made by us as mere spectators, and like judgments of the beautiful, judgments of the ugly involve no direct call to action. Saying "this toad is ugly" or "this Francis Bacon is ugly" does not imply any revulsion or desire to turn away from what we are viewing — it can indeed draw us in.[4]

The unpleasant is also not the disgusting. The disgusting, Kant writes, destroys all "aesthetical satisfaction"; when we encounter the disgusting, we "strive against it with all our might."[5] Disgust is visceral; it does not just repel us but physically revolts us as with rotten food or a decaying corpse.[6] We reject the object before aesthetic judgment can even occur.[7] What disgusts us is immediate and quite personal, but it need not be ugly: snakes, entrails, and placentas display what many would find to be beautiful colors or shapes in other contexts. But if and when we are disgusted by these things, our capacity for disinterested reflection is destroyed through their forceful imposition on our (visual, olfactory) senses: we often react with *nausea*. Faced with the disgusting, we are either simply repelled or at best attempt to eradicate the offending object as when one finds maggots in the garbage or cockroaches on the stove. But the disgusting is not an aesthetic response, and from it we are never *inspired*.

The unpleasant stands between the ugly and the disgusting — neither inviting us to linger nor driving us away — as an aesthetic response that is uniquely

motivating. It bears a similar structure to Kant's account of the pleasant. The unpleasant is a feeling of displeasure — as the pleasant a feeling of pleasure — that is grounded in direct physical sensations rather than in the complex workings (or free play) of our cognitive faculties at some degree of distance. Even so, the story of the unpleasant is not a strictly causal one as it also involves an aesthetic judgment. We have a sensation and feel displeasure from it. Experiences of the ugly also bring about feelings of displeasure. The difference between the ugly and the unpleasant lies in the "relations of representations to the feeling of pleasure and pain" and not in the feelings themselves.[8] That is, the displeasure which arises from the unpleasant stems from a judgment that is interested and provokes desire whereas the displeasure of the ugly is disinterested and desire-free.

Kant's examples of the pleasant are primarily gustatory, which may be why judgments of the pleasant have been seen as wholly subjective. But he also states that this kind of aesthetic judgment regards not only "the taste of the tongue, the palate and the throat, but … whatever is pleasant to anyone's eyes and ears" — that is, to the full range of our sensations, including those that have long been considered the sole domain of beauty.[9] Still, a gustatory example may help us on our way. Black licorice, I must confess, has an extremely unpleasant taste: it gives me immediate displeasure (yuck!), and my judgment about it is negative. This judgment leads to desire: I judge licorice to be unpleasant, and when I represent it as being what has displeased me, my desire is provoked; in this case a desire to avoid not just licorice but all similar things: ouzo, Sambuca, fennel, aniseed, and so on. This is not a purely automatic response; it involves both a judgment and a mental representation. In other words, my response is not visceral but rational and results in willed actions (evasive in this case) that are "directed and described by concepts": my *knowing* what things have that yuck-factor directs my *deciding* to avoid them and their relatives.[10] Thus the unpleasant begins with physical sensations but engages our higher faculties: judgment, conceptual thought, and the generation of rationally willed desires. With the disgusting we do none of these things but are merely repelled; and with the ugly we are disinterested and our judgments produce no desires at all — which is why we can linger over that hideous toad.

Judgments of the unpleasant are indeed subjective rather than universal. As we learn from Kant's famous canary wine example, when I say licorice is unpleasant, I really ought to say it is unpleasant *to me* as I relate the sensation to my own feeling of displeasure. This "taste of sense," as Kant calls it, "lays down mere private judgments" which are empirical.[11] However, what is often overlooked is that, like many other empirical rules, these judgments can make claims to general validity. Kant notes that "actually there is often found a very extended concurrence in these judgments" as we can see from cultural preferences in gustatory tastes —

pigs' feet for some, goats' heads for others — and with historically changing trends in fashion and decorating: from bell bottoms to skinny jeans, shag carpeting to hardwood floors.[12] The unpleasant is more modest than the universalizing demands of ugliness and beauty but need not be completely personal: it can speak to at least relative, general trends.

The preceding gives us a basic account of the unpleasant. My desire to avoid licorice is a desire for less just as a judgment of the pleasant (as of chocolate) provokes a desire for more. But there is little creativity or inspiration associated with food aversions except of a very simple kind: if there were nothing to eat but licorice, I might be prompted to creatively mask its flavor as when children use ketchup to cover the foods they don't like. Yet this is hardly the positive aesthetic engagement I first proposed. A basic account of the unpleasant involves a largely negative outcome of a negative judgment: what I am after is a *positive* outcome, one that provides a more interesting aesthetic response. For this, let me return to the more complex example of the walls of my house. They brought about immediate displeasure but having bought the house, I could not merely avoid them. To live in the house was to encounter those walls on a daily basis. Nor could I eradicate them: a house needs walls after all. And to get rid of the fleshtone was not to get rid of color altogether: whatever I did, I would still have walls, and they would still have visual impact in my house.

The question that emerged was what I wanted instead of fleshtone, and here the creative space opens up. This "instead of" is open-ended and rife with possibility. To attend to my desire to be free of fleshtone, I had to consider what would please me, what I could replace it with. And this could be a great range of things: a different color of paint, rolled, sponged, or splashed on the walls; wallpaper; hung fabrics; wood paneling — even shag carpet, I suppose. But whatever it would be, I would have to engage imaginatively with the problem that the unpleasant posed to me and produce a positive solution to it.

How creative and engaged I was in response to the walls is also open-ended: I could have undertaken a study of color theory, taken courses in interior design, experimented, or simply hired a decorator. But even in the last instance, I would still have had to choose from suggestions posed to me. If I did not — if I simply said "do *something*" — I would have been no more engaged than I am with the avoidance of licorice. The unpleasant provides an *opportunity* for aesthetic action: it is not one that we are compelled to accept. But when we do accept it, when our initial negative judgments give rise to an imagining of what the "instead of" could be, we are, I think, more aesthetically engaged in our lives than we are when we simply survey the beauty or ugliness that we see around us. The

unpleasant brings with it — in fact, initiates — creative action, and the unpleasant is perhaps the only form of aesthetic judgment to do so.

As a catalyst of aesthetic action, the unpleasant provides a particular problem that focuses our attention. In so doing, it gives rise to complex and nuanced aesthetic decisions. With the walls, just as mere avoidance was insufficient, so too was simply choosing another color that I liked better than fleshtone: some colors which I like — black for example — would not have improved the walls of the house at all. How to fix the fleshtone problem involved considerations of the style of the house, the size and shape of the rooms, the amount and direction of the light, the color of the hardwood, and so on. These forms of engagement are open-ended yet at the same time quite specific to the problem at hand. They involve choices, desires, and actions. They are constrained by the negativity of the original judgment but also by the physical, logical, economic, and even conceptual limitations of the problem. But they are free and open-ended in that within these parameters, our activities are guided by our imagination and creativity. Either that or we hire decorators.

In our daily lives and activities, experiences that summon what Kant calls "pure" judgments of beauty are just not that common (unless we are very fortunate). We are more often mucking about with what pleases and displeases us, what to preserve or have more of, and what to avoid, eradicate, or transform. We are concerned with and affected by questions of how and where to live, of gardens and homes and offices, cars, kitchens, and fashions — of making these spaces and things those that give rise to experiences of comfort and pleasure. This mucking about, I think, constitutes the larger part of our lives and activities and has an important aesthetic element. To make something better, good enough, or just right, as Saito has noted, begins with a judgment that it is somehow lacking and needs our attention and care.

If I have made the beginnings of a case for the unpleasant as an aesthetic category, does it not still remain private and purely personal? After all, the previous owners of my house clearly chose and favored fleshtone for their décor. Was all of my creative activity directed only at pleasing *myself*? If so, how much philosophical interest can the unpleasant have? I'd like to end with a suggestion that the unpleasant has a broader reach than the wholly subjective, that it can extend to others even if it cannot achieve the kind of universality that Kant hoped for with pure judgments of taste. Both Saito's and Kant's examples are in fact unhelpful for a more robust account of the unpleasant: hers, because judgments about dilapidation, dirt, and so on are what she calls "moral-aesthetic" judgments, which have an objective aspect that involves all of us; his because his examples of gustatory taste involve each of us alone.[13]

Let me return to the gustatory for a moment: instead of focusing on choosing or avoiding foods because of my own palate, where there is indeed no arguing about taste, let us imagine that I am cooking for others who have been invited to dine. Of course I want them to have a pleasant experience — I want to arouse their desire to return; therefore I want to please their palates too. That is, my creative activity in the kitchen concerns a community of others — even if it is not a universal one. Kant did note that the unpleasant and the pleasant can make claim to general validity and not mere personal satisfaction. There are historically and culturally specific gustatory norms that we follow when entertaining: the time at which we have dinner, the courses served and in what order, the utensils used, and so on. These norms are decidedly not universal, but neither are they merely personal idiosyncratic choices. Having "taste" here refers not merely to our own but to a taste and pleasure that is, however locally, shared.

Similarly, my own actions in countering the unpleasant can be seen in a wider context. Painting the walls of my house was not an act intended merely to bring me private pleasure but also to make my home a welcoming place for friends and family, a space of hospitality and enjoyment. It is not that I expect guests to share my taste in color or that I "impute" or "ascribe" the same judgments to others — as Kant claims that we do in judgments of beauty.[14] But my striving, I wish to suggest, was also not wholly self-regarding, and the aesthetic force of the unpleasant lies in part in the way that it involves us in a community of others, however small or local that community may be. What we are aiming for in making something better or good enough or just right for ourselves is the hopeful possibility that that something will be better or good enough for others too. Even such a modest notion of the unpleasant can have this effect: it points to the power of the aesthetic in our lives. EA

Notes

1 Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 10, 51.

2 G. P. Henderson, "The Concept of Ugliness," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 6 (1966): 219–229; 222. Henderson uses the term "ugliness" throughout his paper but distinguishes between *kinds* of ugliness in a way that is similar to Kant's distinction between the ugly, the unpleasant, and the disgusting.

3 Christian Wenzel, "Kant Finds Nothing Ugly?" *British Journal of Aesthetics* 39, no. 4 (1999): 416–422; 418. An anonymous reviewer of this article described this fascination as "it's horrid, but I can't stop watching," which well captures what I seek to describe here.

4 There has been a great deal of debate in recent years about whether ugliness can be made consistent with Kantian aesthetic theory. I will bypass this debate and note only that *if* there is such a thing as pure ugliness, it will have the features that I have described.

5 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard, New York: Hafner, 1951, §48, Ak 312.

6 Henderson, 220.

7 Mojca Kuplen, "Disgust and Ugliness: A Kantian Perspective," *Contemporary Aesthetics* 9 (2011): 1–21; 12.

8 Kant, §5, Ak 209.

9 Ibid., §5, Ak 212.

10 Rachel Zuckert, "A New Look at Kant's Theory of Pleasure," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60, no. 3 (2002): 239–252; 246.

11 Kant, §7, Ak. 212.

12 Ibid., §7, Ak. 213.

13 Saito, 208.

14 Kant, §8, Ak 216.

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The Extended Body and the Aesthetics of Merleau-Ponty

David Goldblatt

ABSTRACT

An extended "restless" body was the center of perceptual and ontological importance for Merleau-Ponty — a source of insight into how persons navigate and understand the world. But he was sufficiently aware as well of the roles an *extended* body played in art. This paper considers two stages in Merleau-Ponty's work, roughly corresponding to his early and late writings, where the boundary between body and world can be flexible and complex but where the body's extension is artistically significant. After Fred Rush's coinage of "prosthetic effect," I utilize prosthesis metaphorically to illustrate the use of an extended body in the production and reception of art when the world demands an immediate response and the imposition of engagement and where the potential for aesthetic *identification* has greater explanatory power as a unit than as a body separate from that environment. The second use deals with Merleau-Ponty's more difficult notions of flesh and chiasm to consider an intersecting world unfolding itself — reversing the direction of the usual dialogue between artist and a soliciting world, as Merleau-Ponty sees it. In the course of doing so, this essay includes a discussion of Paul Klee's painting, *The Ventriloquist in the Moors*, Descartes on phantom limb pains and artistic identity. While technology has fostered digital devices, which appear as prostheses and form significant aspects of our culture, Merleau-Ponty had imagined our extended bodies in more ubiquitous and quotidian ways.

KEYWORDS

Merleau-Ponty
Prosthetic
Ventriloquism
Flesh
Cézanne
Klee
Descartes

The Extended Body and the Aesthetics of Merleau-Ponty

Maurice Merleau-Ponty was sufficiently astute in recognizing that an extended view of the human body had significant consequences for the understanding of production, reception, and experience in art. In this paper I use the metaphor of a prosthesis to illuminate aspects of an extended human body, which in certain contexts is at one with the person extended, and hope to show that what others have called a prosthetic effect has explanatory power when it comes to artists and the auditors of their work. The use of a prosthetic metaphor is primarily about *identification* and in this paper artistic identification, where thinking of a unit is more useful (and a stronger claim) than thinking about elements that are separate and individual.

This paper is organized into four sections. The first indicates the use of the prosthetic metaphor from a phenomenological point of view and notes how Merleau-Ponty understands the extended body, not simply as a way of navigating the world but also how it functions in an aesthetic domain. The second section turns to Paul Klee's painting, *The Ventriloquist in the Moors*, where I see the ventriloquist tied to his dummy as an apt example of a prosthetic effect and the moors an excellent case of the world folding back upon the body. The third section introduces a Cartesian point of view, to which Merleau-Ponty was opposed, utilizing the ventriloqual analogy to help dismiss Descartes' views of animals as automata and persons as ontologically dual. And lastly, I move the prosthetic discussion to the artistic identity of the artist as I suggest Merleau-Ponty understands it.

The Prosthetic and Merleau-Ponty

In my use of the term 'prosthesis' I hope to distinguish two kinds that are relevant to Merleau-Ponty's various views on art and the artist. There is, for Merleau-Ponty, a practical perceptual immediacy for which the prosthetic metaphor is important. However, there is also the more general, universal ontology where the concepts of flesh and chiasm, as utilized for example in the posthumous work *The Visible and the Invisible*, stretch the body's intimacy with the world forming an intimate binary — a situated body and a complex, intersecting world that folds back upon it.

When the body is up against situations where responsibility, potentiality, and action appear to be demanded, the aforementioned prosthetic metaphor expresses the body's extended domain. But here the claim is stronger than, say, the affordances given in an environment, but rather the prosthetic is a point of view where what we might otherwise think of as independent entities is thought of as one. That idea brings to the fore the incarnation, the melding and contact, of the animate and the inanimate. But with respect to his general ontology, which Merleau-Ponty has called an astronomical sense of the world, is his notion of a chiasm, an intertwining, interconnected universe — akin to Leibniz's pre-established harmony. It is a perspective of a world internality related.

Well into the background of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is the belief that the sciences, for all their astounding prosperity and achievement, are about dead things, or rather the reductionist physicalism of science excludes as basic ontology the recognition of the lively activity of objects of perception. Even in the cosmological analysis of pre-Socratic Greece, with the ancient elements, earth, air, fire, and water, a chance was missed for something live being elemental. In contrast, Merleau-Ponty uses the general term 'flesh' as something he refers to as elemental. Suppose we leave that as background and return to it later on, less as a full ontological account but rather as it relates to Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics.

Writing about the phenomenology of architecture, Fred Rush explains Merleau-Ponty's idea of a body already embedded in the world, an extended living body not separated from a world perceived, in terms of a prosthesis. In introducing his analysis of Steven Holl's 2004 modernist Bloch

Addition to the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City, itself an extension, he says, "Merleau-Ponty stresses that objects and spaces appear to me almost as bodily — i.e., as continuous of my own bodily movements and aims." [1] He says, "There are times when the prosthetic effect is extremely strong — e.g., a musician's experience of her favorite instrument as indissolubly part of her." [2] For Merleau-Ponty, an experience like playing the violin or typing is a pre-conscious activity closely linked with habit, sometimes a *haptic* experience as when touching comes together with other senses, all or some merging. At times, as Rush says, the effect may be strong but may vary in degrees of embodiness and unity. Here, Rush is emphasizing that perceiving the world may be a matter of the predominance of one bodily aspect over another, arms rather than legs as with the violin, or may involve the body as a whole, which surely is not always the case. So then, the prosthetic effect need not be an experience of tactile physical contact, but rather the perceptual field need only be an extension of my body as far as the "projection of my aims regarding that space and objects." [3] So, according to Rush, the prosthetic extension of our bodies includes what may lie ahead of us as part of our perceptual moment — the objects in the space at which I aim to traverse but have not yet arrived, as with the Bloch Addition leading the visitor architecturally. Later on I will make reference to the artist's identity, which is less physical, more ethereal, but with inescapable consequences stemming from a prosthetic or prosthetic-like effect but susceptible to change as we shall see.

When we think about prosthetics in this general sense of an extended body, additional examples from everyday life are not hard to find: the third baseman's mitt on his hand but also the space considered the defensive domain of that position, the fork in the hand of the diner but also the plate on the table are examples (the 'I can' of the fielder or diner), which after a time being unthinking or natural extensions of ourselves for purposes of expanding our status and/or powers, without which the doing of what we intend would not be a possible circumstance or at best would not be possible to do well. Prosthetic effects are oriented toward a future and are expressed under conditions of intention and responsibility. Here of course I am widening the application (but not the general meaning of *prosthesis*) to stretch well beyond its work in the anatomical reconstruction of missing limbs. This general sense of prosthesis implies an integration of a body with something otherwise thought to be external to it. In this more general sense, there are links between self and world where the world's objects are

unthinkingly perceived as part of our selves, and the distinction between acting with them and being without them, that is, as external objects or parts of our bodies — this ambiguity — is simply irrelevant. Those times, those conditions, I am thinking of as prosthetic occurrences, their effects and experiences.

Consider these remarks by Merleau-Ponty:

> A woman may, without any calculation, keep a safe distance between the feather in her hat and things which may break it off. She feels where the feather is, just as we feel where our hand is. If I am in the habit of driving a car, I enter a narrow opening and see that I can 'get through' without comparing the width of the opening with that of the wings, just as I go through a doorway without checking the width of the doorway against my body. … The blind man's stick has ceased to be an object for him, and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, providing a parallel to sight. In the exploration of things, the length of the stick does not enter expressly as a middle term: the blind man is rather aware of it through the position of objects rather than the position of objects through it.[4]

One consequence of the bodily prosthetic is that the boundaries of selves can change. The woman with the hat would not always be wearing it, and the man in the car need not be condemned to a life of driving. The point here is that identities of selves, how and where they move, their domain of responsibility and power, their limits and opportunities may be strong but temporary, even fleeting, may change on a dime and in many cases with corresponding changes in an identity of the person involved. In the case of the driver or the third baseman, traces or vestiges of those identities may subsist when no longer in their former prosthetic circumstance, like driving or playing baseball, so that we *may* recognize and identify each as driver or baseball player when not driving or playing ball. The trace of celebrity is particularly obvious, being most apparent with in-person appearances of movie and television stars, their work carried with them to other contexts. However, a prosthetic vestige can be the subject of social controversy as with the players of video games when they are away from their gorgeous display screens and dramatic fictional narratives.

The idea that a prosthetic effect can have serious moral consequences has a great deal to do with these traces and has come to the fore in issues regarding video games. If I play at killing men or abusing women, where the mechanisms of virtual reality are prostheses in my control, very much like musical instruments, will my attitudes or behavior

continue in subtle ways when the game is over? I am after all empowered in situations that I have entered and effected in ways that are unlike movies or novels, where my involvement logically prevents me from entering the action. Such games, enhanced by a new realism perfected by technology, are particularly poignant cases of taking art personally. Or, we might note that the cultural consequences of our attachments to mobile devices have not yet been sorted out.

Garry Hagberg has suggested that when it comes to the mind/body problem, we should use the term 'body' only with respect to corpses.[5] However, when Merleau-Ponty uses the term "body image," what he implies by 'body' is a certain dynamic. By "dynamic" he says, "this term means that my body appears to me as an attitude directed towards a certain existing or possible task." And by spatiality he means a spatiality of situation to contrast it with simply a position in space like the fielding situation of the third baseman or the musical session of the violinist. Our body always takes location with it, and location is oriented in a site-specific context. As Deleuze and Guattari quip, "never is the pasture separated from the cows that populate it." [6] However, the idea of context here includes possibilities and change and with it a future which may be unpredicted and intermingled with an unlimited array of forthcoming events and objects. The location of the body for Merleau-Ponty is a place of "unrest," and the interaction between the perceiver and the perceived takes the form of interrogation or questioning, a dialogue that is a general condition of philosophy itself, with the world responding.

Commonplace in the creative process as well as in the experience of the spectator is a prosthetic element when photographer and camera are at work or painter with oils and brush. The dancing surface is prosthetic; the performance floor and performance space are considered extensions of the dancers. The dancing surface may be stepped or sloped as well as flat, ice or like ice or puddled water as in the case of Gene Kelly in the rain, or a surface broken in a swimming pool in a Busby Berkeley performance. Or, the microphone's impact on singers and songs and then its miniaturization for singing and dancing transformed entertainment. In each case, an appreciation of the artistic event would be incomplete without taking into account the prosthetic effect and its at-oneness with the artist and performer. No doubt, we often do this without the need to articulate its

status, and it is always possible to see the prosthesis as an independent element.

Paul Klee and Ventriloquism

As art expresses or exposes the meaning of a culture, it extends it in new and imaginative ways. So, it is not surprising that throughout the work of Merleau-Ponty the arts play a central role. After Cézanne, Matisse, and Leonardo, Paul Klee is the painter he discusses most frequently. Galen Johnson reminds us that Klee's "The Thinking Mind" was influential in Merleau-Ponty's own "Eye/Mind" and that "it was in the reflections of Paul Klee on the art of painting that Merleau-Ponty found some of the most germinating insights" for that writing.[7] He attributes to Klee's work an emphasis on the line, which he says is "an adventure, a history, a meaning of the line" and "a blueprint of a genesis of things" as it "renders the visible." Klee's paintings, *The Vocal Fabric of Singer Rosa Silber* and *Battle Scene from the Comic Operatic Fantasy* "The Seafarer," deal with popular vocal performance, hence examining vocality through the visible as with his 1923 painting *The Ventriloquist in the Moors*.

Paul Klee's *The Ventriloquist in the Moors* can be read as an exemplar of many aspects of Merleau-Ponty's ontology. Klee worked on this painting while at the Bauhaus, where he had built his son Felix a puppet theatre for Punch and Judy shows and over the years had produced more than 500 works whose titles related to theatre, masks, music, and puppets. There is an obvious connection in Klee's painting with *der Bauchredner*, the German word for ventriloquist, literally belly or stomach speaker, and what appears as the ventriloquist's motionless lips, his mouth tied at the top of his face. The ventriloquist's transparent belly contains a host of imaginary creatures, perhaps the ventriloquist's vocal interpretations of the natural citizenry of the moors, a kind of primordial or wild nature, while he seems to be captivating yet another at the bottom of the painting. Merleau-Ponty notes Cézanne saying, "The landscape thinks itself in me and I am its consciousness."[8] That the body of the ventriloquist exhibits transparency reflects a certain uniqueness of the act: that ventriloquism is illusion without deception. Further, in a more general way, ambiguity, a central concept in Merleau-Ponty's theory of being — presence and absence, incarnation and transcendence for example are paralleled in the ventriloquist's effacement

of herself as speaker while presenting herself as an alternate persona. And, we have in this painting something Merleau-Ponty believes the artist does generally: " … he is spelling out nature at the moment he is recreating it." [9]

In the usual case, the strange speech act of the ventriloquist is a paradigm case of the prosthetic. The dummy is attached to the ventriloquist as an extension of her body and her potential abilities — what she does with her hands in manipulating her dummy as she pretends to listen while speaking is as much a part of her attempt at illusion as keeping her lips still. The ventriloquist and the dummy, like the subject-object, form a binary relationship — there is no one without the other. However, in Klee's ventriloqual painting, it would seem that there is no apparent external object to play the role of the usual mechanism for the object of the ventriloquist's "thrown voice." While this may warrant no explanation, it is sufficiently curious to deserve some comment and one that is particularly relevant to Merleau-Ponty's work, having to do with one of his more significant remarks. He says,

> The painter lives in fascination. The actions most proper to him … seem to emanate from the things themselves … Inevitably, the roles between him and the visible are reversed … That is why so many painters have said that things look at them. As André Marchand says, after Klee, 'In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me … I was there listening. I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it.' [10]

Merleau-Ponty says, "Things pass into us as we into things." [11] In this painting by Klee, it is the forest, the inhabitants of the moors as approximately imitated or interpreted by the ventriloquist that have penetrated the ventriloquist's body as the body had first to penetrate it. The penetration of the visible world is what the perceiver sees while at the same time what is invisible is meaning; what the perceiver imposes upon the world that speaks to him. The world is not passive but folds back upon the perceiver. In short, it is nature itself, displayed as moors, that replaces the traditional dummy in Klee's painting, but it is the ventriloquist speaking for an otherwise silent world. Galen Johnson asks, "Why is it that painters have so often said, in the manner of Klee, that the forest is speaking in them, or the trees were looking at them, or why did Cézanne say that 'nature is on the inside?' It must be that there is a system of exchange between body and world such that eye and hand become the obverse side of things, the inside of an outside in which are

both enveloped."[12] On this account, Klee's painting illustrates the interactivity between the body and the animated moors. And this, according to Johnson, is the opposite of what we might expect.[13]

In many cases of prosthesis or prosthesis-like effects, its removal would result in a significant step backwards, a change in the status and powers of the perceiving body so that without the cane the blind man is a man less mobile. This may be an awkward way of emphasizing that as the violin expands the powers of the player, the identity of the body playing is also altered so that the prosthesis is a factor in identification of the violin player as well. As in the case of the ventriloquist and her dummy, one identifies the other. It is a marriage of sorts between this couple, self and world, that would be misleading at best to think of each as independent — misleading not to accept a wider, if temporary, perceptual view of the self in action. With the prosthetic as with the ventriloquist act, it is possible to see the inanimate and animate merely as separate objects, but in both cases the point of it all would be missed entirely.

Flesh and Chiasm – an aesthetic connection

A great deal of literature has been devoted to Merleau-Ponty's dual notions of chiasm and flesh. Not the least reason for this volume is the difficulty in interpreting just what Merleau-Ponty was up to regarding his choice of those particular, imaginative terms. My interest in this section of the paper is to link these concepts with Merleau-Ponty's aesthetically relevant concerns rather than offer an extensive ontological account.

In his book *Action and Agency in Dialogue*, François Cooren says, "The term embodiment or its Latin version, *incarnation*, etymologically refers to the act of being made flesh (*carnis* means flesh in Latin) or being given a body. … While the term *incarnation* is often used in a religious context … it is noteworthy that (Harold) Garfinkel did not hesitate to use this terminology to refer to the incarnated character of things" as diverse as rules, norms, mutual understandings, and even institutions to the extent that they are shown to be "'incarnately displayed' in interaction."[14] The use of the word flesh appears in Sartre's *Being and Nothing* in his chapter on the body, where

he uses it as recognition of the Other stripped of its particulars (race, ethnicity, etc.), mere corporeals but always in a situation. He adds that such an affective apprehension of its contingency results in a particular kind of *nausea*.[15] No doubt Merleau-Ponty would like to retain this visceral connotation as flesh passes between the world of the body to the body of the world of things. The word 'flesh' helps to emphasis that which is soft, flexible, and supple as the flesh of the body takes on the forms of a world that is neither linear nor monolithic but rather gains its meaning as it folds itself towards our own bodily flesh. This unfolding in the reversibility of perception implies a route that is not simple and direct but tends to take on meaning in a variety of directions. The landscape, he says, is overrun with words. Even when one perceives red in a certain context, the red belongs to a constellation of reds, the Revolution, "certain terrains near Aix or Madagascar," red garments, not to mention a set of personal associations that may return to the seer with a swarm of emotions.[16]

Merleau-Ponty says, "That the presence of the world is precisely the presence of my flesh to its flesh, that 'I am of the world' and that I am not it, this is what is no sooner said than forgotten: metaphysics remains coincidence."[17] This two-sided feature of flesh, belonging to our bodies and the world, is described this way by Jerry Gill:

> Flesh not only serves as the exterior line of demarcation for the individual subject, but it serves as well as the point or veil of the connection with the 'outside' world. In short, flesh faces in two directions at once and thereby unites us with as well as separates us from the world of things and persons in which we are situated. Moreover, flesh breathes or seeps, as well as containing or separating. … In this sense, Merleau-Ponty sees the fleshly character of our embodiment as limiting or grafting us to one another as well as providing our individual entry point into the world.[18]

This dual nature is distinguished in art by a flesh that perceives and a flesh that cannot.

In "Cézanne's Doubt," Merleau-Ponty sees the artist in the example of Cézanne, deviating from the practical but habitual world of "man-made objects" suspending a world of familiarity and comfort. Here we can find an artist's extension of the body as contrasted with the prosthetic effect of the woman and her hat, the man and his automobile. It is a matter of dislocation as with the ventriloquist and acquaintance with an alternate vision. He says,

> We live in a world of man-made objects, among tools, in houses, streets, cities, and most of the time we see them only through human actions, which put them to use. We become used to thinking that all this exists necessarily and unshakably. Cézanne's painting suspends these habits of thought and reveals the base of inhuman nature upon which man has installed himself. This is why Cézanne's people are strange, as if viewed by another species. Nature itself is stripped of its attributes which make it ready for animistic communions: there is no wind in the landscape, no movement on the Lac d'Annecy; the frozen objects hesitate as at the beginning of the world. [19]

With Cézanne and so for the indefinite possibilities of art, Merleau-Ponty sees the prosthetic connection of a body with a world unveiled — a primitive landscape, like the moors for Klee, intimately and animatedly portrayed. It is an astounding possibility of picturing a nature that cannot any longer be perceived.

This animistic communion is an understanding of the world as flesh. As Merleau-Ponty says of Cézanne's painting, the landscape "is caught alive in a net which would let nothing escape." [20] But for Merleau-Ponty, the world is reflecting and inviting us, attracting us at all perspectival turns, an inescapable occasion for meaning. One might say that Cézanne has seeped into some of the many alternate aspects of the chiasm and visualized it, rendering it with meaning that had not to that point been the object of any seer — previously invisible. If we return to the idea that artists interrogate the world and engage it in dialogue, reversing the direction of the artist's imposition upon the world, we might say that Cézanne has asked some unusual ontological questions about how some aspects of the chiasmatic world might appear to his body. And, says Merleau-Ponty, "It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings." [21]

On this interpretation, the world is seductive — the case of Odysseus tied to the mast is simply universal. As Fred Evans says, "Objects solicit our bodies, that is, ourselves, and we complete their meaning within the setting where they appear to us: they beckon to us, we render them more definite, and each, from the very beginning, requires the other in order to be that invitation and that response. So intertwined are we with what we encounter that Merleau-Ponty says, 'the world is wholly inside {me} and I am wholly outside myself.'" [22]

Artistic Identity

In his article, "The Origins of Selves," Daniel Dennett argues against what he calls a fixed and minimal self in favor of one where our personal boundaries, as with Merleau-Ponty, may in certain circumstances change by virtue of expanding. He says, "[A] minimal self is not a thing inside a lobster or a lark, and it is not the 'whole lobster' or the 'whole lark' either; it is something abstract which amounts just to the existence of an organization which tends to distinguish, control, and preserve portions of the world, an organization that thereby creates and maintains boundaries." [23] Dennett argues for a view of selves unbounded by bodies that is similar to Merleau-Ponty's extended embodiment.

The intimate relationship between an artist and what she has achieved reflects the kind of extended boundaries of self that the name of the artist exemplifies and in this sense is like a prosthetic effect. The artist's personal body of work, the achievements of the past, their domain of chronological location, is part of the artist's body of the present. Merleau-Ponty says, "There is no essence, no idea, that does not *adhere* to a domain of history and geography." [24] What occurs in terms of artistic identity is a dynamic relationship between past and present.

This familiar idea that the artist's life and work are to be connected in an intimate or personal contextualism is echoed by Merleau-Ponty. Jonathan Gilmore notes that, "Merleau-Ponty will reject the dichotomy between self and its external attributes, actions and experiences. … For Merleau-Ponty, art, artist, and artist's life are interdependent … Merleau-Ponty will introduce a way of conceiving of art as reflecting its creator's life, but not transparently. That is, Merleau-Ponty will argue that this internal relation reflects contingencies in how the work and life should unfold." [25]

The word 'chiasm' like the term 'prosthetic' is borrowed from general medical research. It designates a complex set of intersecting, intertwining relationships, some invisible like the institutions under which we operate and the events that form a history. For example, the third baseman mentioned earlier as an example of a situated prosthetic effect is also intimately connected to the institution of baseball with its set of constitutive and regulative rules as well as to past statistics that are relevant to his post

and, if professional, the in-person and beamed lineup of fans throughout the world. The diner is aligned with farms and commerce, with sets of recipes and their creators, and with the silversmiths and inventors of eating utensils and the textile industries for napkins and tablecloths.

The insistence on contextualism broader than the artist's work is many-faceted for Merleau-Ponty, but he is quick to understand it as a kind of anti-elitism; that art is only a part of but connected to any artist's life who lives in a world like others. Here is one example from his numerous accounts:

> If we take the painter's point of view in order to be present at that decisive moment when what has been given to him to live as corporeal destiny, personal adventures or historical events crystallizes into 'the motive,' we will recognize that his work, which is never an effect, is always a response to these data, and that the body, the life, the landscapes, the schools, the mistresses, the creditors, the police, and the revolutions which might suffocate painting are also the bread his work consecrates. To live in painting is still to breathe the air of this world — above all for the man who sees something in the world of paint. And there is a little of him in every man. [26]

Succinctly put, in "Cezanne's Doubt" he says, "We never get away from our life." [27]

Descartes, Ventriloquism, Speech, and Phantom Limbs

In one of Merleau-Ponty's many expressions of anti-Cartesianism, he says, "A Cartesian does not see himself when he looks in the mirror; he sees a dummy, an 'outside,' which, he has every reason to believe, other people see in the very same way." [28] I hope to make use of the ideas of ventriloqual illusion and prosthetic effect as it relates to Descartes by recalling his work on phantom limb pains, which is an absence of flesh made relevant by virtue of illusion. The illusion of ventriloquism is something like what happens at the movies where the sound system, aptly called speakers, is dislocated from the speakers (the mouths of the speakers) visually presented, the characters whose visual images are apart from their voice source on the screen but completing the seamless illusion. In a remarkably similar sense, the

Cartesian body is the object of an illusion and, as I will argue, a prosthetic of the mind.

To begin with, Descartes, who holds that the greatest prejudice we have retained from infancy is that of believing that brutes think, is notorious for his claim that animals are mere automata, material bodies without minds. While they move about on their own and are more complex, animals are but nevertheless something like the dummies of the ventriloquist, a certain species of mechanical thing. While Descartes is more generous towards the souls of animals in his *Passions of the Soul* — more than in his *Discourse on Method* — animals have no thoughts though they may exhibit pain behavior without feeling pain. Descartes' evidence for the inability of animals to think is that they have no capacity for speech. Descartes' claim regarding animals was true too for the bodies of humans so that ontologically animals and human *bodies* are comparable. In a certain post-Hobbesian spirit, Descartes, a great dissector of corpses, says, "I might consider the body of a man as a kind of machine equipped with and made up of bones, nerves, muscles, veins, blood and skin in such a way that, even if there were no mind in it, it would still perform all the same movements as it now does in those cases where movement is not under the control of the will or, consequently, of the mind." [29] Here is where the idea of illusion rises to the occasion. Since bodies cannot feel pain, the mind helpfully judges its location at the point of bodily damage where the pain is not since pain is only in the mind. For Descartes then, I am merely under the illusion that the pain is in my foot when I step on a nail.

Aware of what we call phantom limb pains, Descartes says, "I had heard that those who had a leg or an arm amputated sometimes still seemed to feel pain intermittently in the missing part of the body." [30] Cleverly, the illusion that the pain is in my foot when I step on a nail is something like a bizarre reversal of phantom limb pains. In phantom limb phenomena, the pain might seem to be coming from a foot I do not have. For Descartes, in the more usual case, there is illusion in that pain seems to come from a foot I do have. I am under an illusion in each case, but when the pain in my foot seems to come from my foot when the foot I have is injured but instead comes from the mind, it is hardly a coincidence. It is, for Descartes, an illusion fostered by the goodness of God but congruent actually with good Darwinian reasons.

In a scenario that resembles the act of the ventriloquist, Descartes, writing in *Meditation Six*, says, "Nature also teaches me, by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst and so on, that I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit."[31] This well-known sailor analogy has its ventriloqual vocabulary: being closely joined to, intermingled with, forming a unit are good enough to characterize the ventriloquist/dummy connection. But since it is speech that interests me here, my point is that for Descartes, the human body itself takes on a role similar to the dummy with the mind akin to the vocal source of the ventriloquist. While the location of speech, unlike the ventriloquist's dummy, comes from the public body, its origin comes from the non-corporeal, animate but private mind, made audible by the body. It is an interior projecting its thoughts on an exterior — or so the logic of dualism goes — and I am tempted to parallel the ventriloquist's act by calling this a dislocation of vocality. However, since the mind has no location, is not capable of being extended or closely joined with anything at all, the parallel there falls short. So goes this *reductio*.

Here, Descartes' view of animals and the privileging of his own mind to ward off the illusions presented by the body is only a special case of his initial general solipsism, a dismissing of the body as a source of knowledge and a determiner of the body's navigation through its immediate environment. If we recall how flesh can exclude solipsism by virtue of an interactive relationship and how the artist reveals the body's potential in portraying a world outside our habitual routines, we should see how Merleau-Ponty's anti-Cartesian stance is central to his philosophy of the arts.

Conversation with Others

As mentioned earlier, for Merleau-Ponty there is a dual aspect to perception. There is the seer for example and the seen — those who see the seer from a variety of perspectives. In writing about being in communication with others, Merleau-Ponty says:

> Henceforth as the parts of my body together comprise a system, so my body and another person's are one whole, two sides of one and the same phenomenon, and the anonymous existence of which my body is the ever-renewed trace henceforth inhabits both bodies simultaneously. … There is one particular cultural object, which is destined to play a crucial role in the perception of other people: language. In the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are interwoven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us are the creator. We have here a dual being, where the other is for me no longer a mere bit of behavior in my transcendental field nor I in his; we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity. [32]

So then, the notion of a prosthetic applies to those entities we call persons and in particular to persons in certain common kinds of conversation, those where saying and thinking as in most cases of speaking cannot be distinguished and conversation that makes clear the improvisational aspects of verbal exchange. Here, in conversation, is one way the prosthetic effect is extremely strong: that our conversational partners are like the prosthetics of ourselves. In his set, *The Visible and the Invisible*, he says this of Sartre, "He became aware that all attempts to live apart were hypocritical because we are all mysteriously related, because others see us and so become an inalienable dimension of our lives — become, in fact, ourselves." [33] And, we should recall that for Merleau-Ponty, the body is to be compared not to a physical object but to a work of art, a system of meanings "as a focal point of living meanings" where the perception of the world is personal and unabashedly anthropomorphic.

Conclusion

Breaking with traditional empiricist epistemology, Merleau-Ponty envisions an active perceiver that is at times inseparable from a complex and intersecting world — one that folds back upon that perceiver as he/she chooses to navigate through it. Through what I have called a prosthetic metaphor, I have hoped to show how Merleau-Ponty's view of the arts is enriched by its use in drawing together, seeing as one, the artist's body and the artistic environment. The prosthetic helps to explain Merleau-Ponty's view of a diversity of artistic phenomena and experiences, including the artistic identity of the artist and his/her work and the performances of the

acts of creation and the place of the artist's roles in time, collapsing temporal distance between the artist's presence and the revisable history of art. It is a perspective that would be seriously impoverished without keeping in mind this unlikely metaphor from medical reconstruction.

With regard to prosthesis, I have distinguished two kinds that are relevant to Merleau-Ponty's various views on art and the artist. There is, for Merleau-Ponty, a practical perceptual immediacy for which the prosthetic metaphor is important. However, there is also the more general, universal ontology where the concepts of flesh and chiasm stretch the body's intimacy with the world forming an intimate binary — a situated body and a complex, intersecting world that folds back upon it. The artist is in the best position to capture the results of interrogating a world that beckons to us in reversal of meaning from world objects to bodily flesh. For each kind of prosthesis, there is a chronological relevance in that each represents a different stage in Merleau-Ponty's thinking — especially as contributions to his theory of aesthetics and its importance for his philosophy more generally.

Notes

I would like to thank John Carvalho, who was my commentator at an Annual Meetings of the American Society for Aesthetics when I presented a very different version of this paper, and a very helpful editor at *Evental Aesthetics*.

1 Fred Rush, *On Architecture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 21.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 143.

5 Garry Hagberg, *Art as Language: Wittgenstein, Meaning, and Aesthetic Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 173.

6 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 23.

7 Galen Johnson, "Phenomenology and Painting: 'Cezanne's Doubt,'" in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 43.

8 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Nonsense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 17.

9 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Northwestern University Press 1964) 56.

10 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 167.

11 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, ed. Claude Lefort (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 123.

12 Galen Johnson, "Ontology and Painting: 'Eye and Mind,'" in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 47.

13 One further remark about Klee's painting and about what is missing from this ventriloqual representation: As a performer, the ventriloquist (in the usual case) requires an audience — a knowing audience who is in on the act. It is a visual deception buttressed by a dual vocality. But here we have what Merleau-Ponty calls the ambiguity of the word "vision" as the ventriloquist is the seer and the seen. The visible too relates to both the seer and the seen as a parallel to what Sartre would call being-in-itself and being-for-others. Among Sartre's dozens of illustrations of this is the voyeur discovered in the act of voyeurism in a sudden shift of consciousness and of his self-identification.

14 François Cooren, *Action and Agency in Dialogue* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Johns Benjamin Publishing, 2010), 142.

15 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), 421.

16 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 132.

17 Ibid., 127.

18 J. R. Gill, *Merleau-Ponty and Metaphor* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1991), 60.

19 Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Nonsense*, 16.

20 Ibid., 17.

21 Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, 162.

22 Fred Evans, "Chiasm and Flesh," in *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts*, eds. Rosalyn Diprose and Jack Reynolds (Acumen, 2008), 180.

23 Daniel Dennett, "The Origin of Selves," in *Self and Identity*, eds. Daniel Kolak and Raymond Martin (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 358.

24 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 115.

25 Jonathan Gilmore, "Between Philosophy and Art," in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, eds. Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 293.

26 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, Ibid. 64.

27 Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Nonsense*, 25.

28 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 170.

29 René Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," in *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 119.

30 Ibid., 113–114.

31 Ibid., 116.

32 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 354.

33 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 45.

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COLLISION

A New Aesthetic of Postnature: Tara Donovan's Material Modulations

Renata Lemos Morais

ABSTRACT

The work of Tara Donovan represents a new aesthetics that manifests the conceptual nuances of posthuman thought via material assemblages. Her work creates a detour that, instead of having the fluidity of digital networks as its point of departure, starts with material objects and repetition as textual elements that create postnatural landscapes permeated with biomorphic, organic, fluid motions that seem to expand our understanding of the natural. I compare her aesthetics to James Bridle's New Aesthetics. New Aesthetics embody the technological properties of the digital by accumulating virtual traces of material networks, documenting and curating various examples of immaterial physicalities. Tara Donovan's work represents a reversed form of New Aesthetic that, instead of bringing the 'digital' into the 'physical' in an automated and mechanical way, infuses and shapes materials according to the fluid possibilities of the natural — organically and meticulously. Both artistic movements — be it from the virtual into the physical or from the natural into the artificial and vice versa — are conducive to a new aesthetic territory: a postnatural landscape that manifests as immaterial physicality.

KEYWORDS

Immaterial Physicality
Postnature
Naturecultures
New Aesthetic
Next Natures
James Bridle
Tara Donovan

We are creating a new nature in the world. – James Bridle

Introduction

As digital technologies and nanotechnologies reshape our relations to the material world, we witness the emergence of *immaterial physicality*: "a transfer instantiating the immaterial in a physical form, a 'print-out' whose tangibility then becomes the operative dimension in asserting the presence of an immaterial, digital, 'information space.'" [1] In mainstream Western cultures, the informational structure and logic of computational code give form and structure to contemporary life as it mediates the cultural and political outputs of data networks. Code shapes the noise, visual identity, and political interface of contemporary life. The artificial blends with the natural in such an intimate way that the aesthetic modulations of culture become a perfect example of Donna Haraway's *naturecultures*: collective expressions created and distributed by a network of agents that operate in a world of pervasive and invisible prosthetics connected to the material-semiotic assemblages of biological bodies. If "the machinic and the textual are internal to the organic and vice versa in irreversible ways," then so is their aesthetic. [2]

It is in this context that I wish to analyze the work of Tara Donovan as representative of the aesthetic dimensions of a postnature.[3] Having had to come to terms with the *end of nature* and the *death of nature*, environmentalism now faces the stark realities of climate change and the possible collapse of human civilization.[4] There is no going back to the purity of classic notions of nature, as it is now impossible to separate human, non-human, and inhuman. Welcome to postnature: a chaotic mesh of uncontrollable geological change set in motion by humans. Postnature is the head-on collision of what was once considered "natural" and "artificial." It "involves not simply pushing nature to the edges of our experience but rather getting inside of life itself and rewriting its genetic instructions." [5]

There are few better examples of the aesthetics of postnature than the work of Tara Donovan. Instead of taking the fluidity of digital networks as its point

of departure, her work begins with material objects and repetition as textual elements that create postnatural landscapes permeated with biomorphic, organic, fluid motions that add a new dimension to natural aesthetics. Her work "allows the shape of the chosen material to determine the form of the piece until it becomes magically other ... managing to transcend both materiality and gimmickry in a culture that celebrates both."[6] Tara Donovan's art is able to achieve a double aesthetic effect: by subverting and extrapolating the physical properties of material objects (density, depth, transparency, smoothness, etc.), she transports us into a dimension vibrant with designs that create an overlap between biomorphic structures and the genre of technological aesthetics present in contemporary computer-generated art. This aesthetic overlap between the images of her biomorphic material objects and digital landscapes of generative art creates yet another layer of fusion between the architecture of physical spaces and informational spaces — seamless continuity and flow is made manifest in minute detail.

Material Infinity

My work functions as a field of material that could extend infinitely.
Tara Donovan

Tara Donovan's sculptures and installations explore the material properties of common objects to create elaborate and meticulous objectscapes that are able to evoke the organic aesthetics of flows and forms found in nature. Her work is characterized by a fluidity which is usually only found in natural organic flows – even though her materials are industrial, mass-produced, ordinary objects such as pins, styrofoam cups, and buttons. One can sense a silent movement in them evoking the mysteries of light and shadows, the ethereal and the translucent, expressing immateriality through the properties of matter itself. Her work is solid and precise, rooted in the "pragmatic rigor" of previous artistic movements; however "it brings it into our own period by suggesting digital, cellular, emergent networks. It seems to speak to the systems that are shaping our lives." [7]

Another significant characteristic of her work is the capacity to materially modulate the semiotic qualities of given objects. *Transplanted*, a piece in which thousands of sheets of tar paper are stacked and ripped to create the effect of a flowing sea of solid black marble, is a perfect example: the patterns and shape of the piece's topography are waves in harmonious flow whereas the sheer volume and mass of the piece are reminiscent of the landscape of a valley made of black marble. Matter and meaning are equally modulated to transform and transcend

the material properties of her medium. Tarpaper sheets, originally fragile and brittle, become portentous monuments that challenge our perception. In Tara's own words:

> How do I go from an object to something that is more like a field, something where as you walk past it, your eye moves over it, and it actually visually shifts? So that you're looking at the same thing but it's changing constantly? … The smaller it is, the choppier it seems and the more earthy it looks. Whereas the larger it gets, the more like a sea it becomes.[8]

Tara Donovan's work is in many ways a metaphor representing the infinite sea of big data and its network aesthetic without utilizing the technologies of the digital. The biomorphic qualities of her work are reminiscent of the generative aesthetics of algorithmic art, as in the DIY possibilities of *weavesilk.com*.[9] *Toothpicks* and *Drawing Pins* are examples of her meticulously created works which enable us to visualize complex patterns of interaction and object disposition that are usually only found in data visualization systems. The giant mesh of big data within which we are all enclosed can be felt pulsating in the background of Tara's installations. Beyond aesthetic correlations between physical and virtual worlds or natural and artificial worlds, Tara's artistic practice also functions as a scientific ground of experimentation with the very properties of matter, using the forces of physics as artistic means of creative enunciation. *Toothpicks* deploys geometry and an intricate network of structural relations designed to surpass the limitations of gravity:

> What holds the thousands of toothpicks together? Adhesion — a combination of density, friction, and gravity, from which a few stray toothpicks on the floor around the base seem determined to escape. Those errant shards are important to the sculpture, however, because they hold the visual key to what could conceivably happen, especially in a seismically unstable setting. In a world that is alive and constantly changing, the static sculpture seems to expand beyond its physical limitations, encompassing the floor beneath your feet, the room in which you stand and the inherent instability of all perceptual experience.[10]

A different kind of physical expansion can be seen in *Bluffs*. Here, piles of translucent buttons seem to expand organically much in the same way that fungi, yeasts, and molds propagate themselves in nature. Here, the artist moves past the order of geometrical patterns found in nature and proceeds into the disorder of biological movement and displicent accumulation. Chaosmosis, defined as "the ensemble of conditions which render possible the emergence of individual and/or collective instances as self-referential existential Territories, adjacent, or in a delimiting relation, to an alterity that is in itself subjective," seems to be Tara Donovan's ground of practice and artistic manifestation.[11] Through the poetic-

existential catalysis present in her plastic discursivity, we gain access to emergent levels of material enunciation. Her work is able to transubstantiate the aesthetics of biology into that of technology, once again recalling Guattari's production of subjectivity in which "the quality of the base material matters little ... what does matter is the mutant rhythmic impetus of a temporalisation able to hold together the heterogeneous components of a new existential edifice."[12]

Such existential edifices — with boundaries defined by the physical constraints of matter itself — are pregnant with *leibhaft*:

> The carnal presence (*leibhaft*) of the things themselves answers to the sensuality of the intentionality of consciousness. It is across this sensuality of consciousness ... that consciousness approaches the things, that it visits them, and comes into contact with them ... sensuous cognition [is] a cognition for which the objects are not just intersections of relations, but sensible proximity, dense and carnal presence.[13]

Carnal presence encapsulates and manifests "the immaterial physicality of the 'new aesthetic,' present[ing] a convergence of ... machinic, semiotic, and biologic productions."[14] Tara Donovan's work is representative of this 'new aesthetic' which operates via chaosmosis and sensuous cognition. I dare to speculate that the chaosmosis which is blatantly present in Tara's work occurs not in relation to the production of human subjectivity, as in Guattari's definition of the concept, but instead in relation to the production of a *postnatural subjectivity*, materially established and object-oriented, which could be understood as a realm of immaterial physicality in itself.

Next Natures

Koert Van Mensvoort, an artist and philosopher from Amsterdam, has created a digital platform dedicated to the concept of *next nature*. Next nature represents a shift from the traditional dichotomy between the worlds of human technology and the natural world, moving forward into a vision of the future in which there is no difference between artificial and organic processes. This vision aims to achieve "a balance between both the declining biosphere and the emerging technosphere – between old nature and next nature."[15] Through the concept of next nature, one is transported to the fields of Heideggerian thought in its exploration of the origin of the work of art as an organic process of creation in which the very essence of the

things being made is intrinsically connected to the matter and physicality of such things. This intrinsic connection is made visible by Tara Donovan's work:

> I'm completely relying on the physical properties of the material before me, kind of going where it naturally inherently wants me to go, so that things always wind up mimicking nature in a way.[16]

Matter is, for Tara Donovan, a living force of creation that gives direction to her practice as an artist, which she often describes as a remanufacturing of the intended fate of manufactured materials. Industrial processes, seen as the very antithesis of nature and responsible for the degradation of our planet's ecosystems, are reappropriated by the artist as a new kind of raw material for the creation of organic patterns. *In the industrial ashes of nature, the artist seeds the emergence of a postnature*.

A New Aesthetics of Postnature

James Bridle has been celebrated as the icon of a *new aesthetics* of immaterial physicalities generated by combining visual landscapes using online digital curation. Network aesthetics is, in James Bridle's work, represented by the "dripping of the virtual into the real" as seen in the materialization of digital aesthetics as industrial and 3-D printed objects.[17] His new aesthetic is about curating shapes, textures, and patterns which were only possible thanks to digital technologies and are now made physical by 3-D printing and industrial manufacturing.

This new aesthetics originates from the virtual and expands into the physical, creating an interstitial territory in which both co-exist. Tara Donovan's work creates the same kind of interstitial territory in which the virtual and the physical seem to be intertwined. However, her work originates from matter itself and expands into the virtual by creating fields of sensuous cognition around spatial objectscapes which are permeated by the same type of immaterial physicality found in Bridle's work. It is through the material accumulation and manipulation of synthetic and mass-produced objects that Tara Donovan is able to achieve a similar aesthetic continuum between material and virtual levels of reality to that which James Bridle has been achieving via digital curation. Both artistic practices belong to a social network of industrial consumption that is based on capitalist accumulation of images and objects. Both use accumulation and excess as an

aesthetic language. Both kinds of immaterial physicalities have political implications and could be understood as the active operations of a new aesthetic.

If the work of James Bridle is iconic in regards to a new aesthetic that represents the technological properties of the digital by accumulating virtual traces of material networks, documenting and curating various examples of immaterial physicalities, then Tara Donovan's work would also be iconic in regards to a reversed form of new aesthetic which, instead of bringing the 'digital' into the 'physical' in an automated and mechanical way, infuses and shapes materials according to the fluid possibilities of the virtual — organically and meticulously — generating in this process a new aesthetic of the postnatural. Both artistic directions — be it from the virtual into the physical or from the natural into the artificial and vice versa — are currently converging within the new aesthetic territory of the postnatural.

Notes

1 Michael Betancourt, "Automated Labor: The 'New Aesthetic' and Immaterial Physicality," Theory Beyond the Codes: tbc048, *CTheory* (2013).

2 Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 15.

3 Paul Wapner, *Living Through the End of Nature* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2010).

4 See Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1990). And Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (New York: Harper Collins, 1980).

5 Merchant, 119.

6 Christine Muhlke, "The Right Stuff. Tara Donovan Is The Ultimate Material Girl," *TMagazine*, February 11, 2011.

7 Nicholas Baume and Carol Kino, "The Genius of Little Things," *The New York Times*, September 23, 2008.

8 Tara Donovan, interview with Lawrence Weschler. "The Work of Tara Donovan," *The Design Observer Group*, October 9, 2008.

9 http://weavesilk.com/

10 Christopher Knight, "Art review: Tara Donovan at San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art," *Los Angeles Times*, January 14, 2010.

11 Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 9.

12 Ibid., 20.

13 Alphonso Lingis, "Hyletic Data," in *Analecta Husserliana*, vol. 2, ed. Anne-Teresa Tymieniecka (1972), 99.

14 Betancourt.

15 Koert Van Mensvoort, "Razorius Gilletus – On the Origin of a Next Species," *Next Nature*, March 1, 2010.

16 Donovan, interview with Lawrence Weschler.

17 Bruce Sterling, "An Essay on the New Aesthetic," *Wired Magazine*, April 2, 2012.

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The *Holzwege* of Heidegger and Finlay

Sacha Golob and
Kathleen McKay

ABSTRACT

On both conceptual and methodological levels, this article explores the relationship between Martin Heidegger's philosophy and the work of the poet and visual artist Ian Hamilton Finlay. At the center of Heidegger's account of experience is the notion of the clearing or the open, a space within which and against which entities are "disclosed" or become fully apparent. The purpose of this text is to examine how Finlay's work might be seen as a response to this Heideggerian framework. In particular we look to the poet's garden *Little Sparta*, part of which instantiates Heidegger's vision of the clearing and of the "*Holzwege*" or "wood paths" that shape it. We demonstrate the way in which *Little Sparta* sustains a distinctive form of aesthetic inquiry, from our initial state of doubt in the *Holzwege* thicket to a deeper understanding of the process of meaning.

KEYWORDS

Martin Heidegger
Ian Hamilton Finlay
Holzwege
Little Sparta
Meaning
Aesthetics

On both conceptual and methodological levels, this article explores the relationship between the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and the work of the poet and visual artist Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925–2006). At the center of Heidegger's account of experience is the notion of the clearing (*die Lichtung*) or the open (*das Offene*), a space within which and against which entities are "disclosed" or become fully apparent.[1,2] Conceptually, this clearing can be understood as the context in terms of which meaning or sense accrues and through which we thus encounter the world. Heidegger often supplements this metaphor with another, that of binding or gathering. He argues for example that the original definition of λόγος, typically translated as "word" or "reason," was a "constant gathering," a knitting together of the world around us.[3] He combines this with an emphasis on the ability of physical objects in particular to act as focal points around which such senses might gather and stabilize – his famous analysis of the jug in "The Thing" concludes that the "jug's presencing," its capacity to exemplify and tie together a way of life, is this "manifold simple gathering."[4] However, Heidegger's discussion of these ideas is marked by repeated warnings about the dangers inherent in philosophical treatments of them. The fundamental challenge is to prevent intellectual reflection from distorting or deforming the tacit experience of meaning which characterizes our lives.[5] He therefore suggests that his own work should be read not as demonstrating some set of doctrines but rather as pointing back to experience. "One cannot prove these 'theses'," he writes, "rather, they must prove themselves in phenomenological experience itself."[6] Heidegger's task, as he sees it, is to sustain a mood of experience that is attentive enough to the structures that form it – avoiding both the "tranquilized" nature of everyday life and the overly intellectualized project of much traditional philosophy.[7]

The purpose of this essay is to examine how Finlay's work might be seen as a response to this Heideggerian framework. In particular we look to the garden *Little Sparta*, created by the poet at his isolated home in the Pentland hills, South Lanarkshire.[8] This land was formed into a garden for and crucially by his artworks from 1966 until his death in 2006. Finlay openly casts part of *Little Sparta* in terms of Heidegger's vision of the clearing and of

the "*Holzwege*" or "wood paths" that shape it: the garden and the objects within it model the Heideggerian process of encircling, opening, and gathering. In this sense, at the methodological level, *Little Sparta* provides a guiding thread by which one might envisage the type of phenomenological exploration that Heidegger calls for. Simultaneously, however, discussion of Finlay's garden raises the very dangers of which Heidegger warns – how can one adequately capture in a theoretical discussion the physical act of walking through the landscape, of moving from one artwork to the next, and of returning to the first via another path? [9] One option would be to attempt a conceptual analysis of the distinctive nature of physical experience (for example, via a discussion of non-conceptual content). But the concern from a Heideggerian point of view is that the discursive nature of such a project would automatically skew its conclusions in favor of a misleading intellectualism. We have therefore adopted an alternative approach. We will combine a close description of the physical tenor of the garden – the even pacing of one path and the uncertain nature of the next – with a structure designed to mirror the cant and topology of the experience. Instead of operating within the linearity of a proof, this discussion will map the viewer's progress through Finlay's *Little Sparta*, starting in one woodland, walking out beyond it, and finding oneself in a second woodland before returning to the first.

More broadly, the investigation of specific areas of *Little Sparta* will show how Finlay's practice may be read as taking up and elaborating themes implicit in Heidegger's thought. For example, Finlay's work explores violence and conflict – themes which are largely suppressed in Heidegger's magnum opus, *Sein und Zeit*, and yet which come increasingly to the fore in the *Schwarze Hefte*, the recently published notebooks kept by Heidegger from the 1930s onwards.[10] Ultimately this article aims to show how Finlay as an artist and poet both realizes and responds to Heidegger's philosophy. In doing so, the article explores the nature of aesthetic inquiry, tracking the ways in which an artist might engage, extend, and challenge a philosophical research program. Given the scope of the discussion, it will not include all of the standard texts of Heideggerian aesthetics such as "The Origin of the Work of Art"; rather it focuses on the ideas and passages with which Finlay directly engages. In line with the methodological considerations noted above – particularly the concern that philosophical language will "level off" experience – this discussion requires a range of approaches and is therefore co-authored by a philosopher and a visual artist.[11] The hope is that our

cooperation will allow us to respect Heidegger's methodological warnings by moving between straightforwardly assertoric and more phenomenological or poetic styles. We begin with Finlay's foundational engagement with Heidegger – with what one might call the *Holzwege* plinths (Figure 1).[12]

Figure 1. By courtesy of the Estate of Ian Hamilton Finlay. Photo by Kathleen McKay.

An Opening Description

On entering an area of woodland at *Little Sparta*, it quickly takes a heavy, Northern Romantic turn and the wood turns to thicket. Such qualities were described by Finlay as the "Glooms and Solitudes" of the garden.[13] Distinct from other areas of *Little Sparta*, which are more open to the sky and views of further land, here the evergreen canopy sets the domain of the wood with such force that everything beneath appears dark and overwhelmed. It is with a sense of the trees' claim to their own place that ways through the wood are made, quickly subsumed, and ended. Walking there, we come across various sections of track or path; some are cast, others have been laid with stone or brick, and some remain earthen. Yet they appear disjointed, and any certainty of course or footing soon passes.

It is under these same conditions that Heidegger's prefacing note to the collection of texts entitled *Holzwege* (*Wood Paths*) is made:

> Holz lautet ein alter Name für Wald. Im Holz sind
> Wege, die meist verwachsen jäh im Unbegangenen
> aufhören.
> Sie heißen Holzwege.
> Jeder verläuft gesondert, aber im selben Wald. Oft
> scheint es, als gleiche einer dem anderen. Doch es
> scheint nur so.
> Holzmacher und Waldhüter kennen die Wege. Sie
> wissen, was es heißt, auf einem Holzweg zu sein.[14]

> "Wood" is an old name for forest. In the wood there are paths,
> mostly overgrown, that come to an abrupt stop where the wood is untrodden.
> They are called "wood paths."
> Each goes its separate way, though within the same forest. It often
> appears as if one is identical to another. But it only appears so.
> Woodcutters and forest keepers know these paths. They know what it means to
> be on a wood path.[15]

The darkness of the wood before us is a destitution in which we now find ourselves. As we move further into the woodland, the darkness increases. So too does the thicket. Signs and marks become harder to see; things that would be points of orientation within the impenetrable mass of branches are covered over in the darkness.

We come upon three identical plinths along the way, each made from a composite stone. Three inscribed metal plates mounted on top of the three successive plinths read:

IN THE WOOD

ARE PATHS

WHICH MOSTLY

WIND ALONG

UNTIL THEY END

QUITE SUDDENLY

IN AN

IMPENETRABLE THICKET.

THEY ARE CALLED

WOODPATHS.

OFTEN IT SEEMS

AS THOUGH ONE

WERE LIKE ANOTHER.

YET IT ONLY

SEEMS SO.

Here on a doubtful path – on finding Finlay's adaption of Heidegger's note – we approach an understanding of the poetic economy of the woodland garden and Finlay's wider philosophical approach. In the following paragraphs, we look at Finlay's work in light of Heidegger's thoughts on the role of the poet within the wood's deep cover and destitution. Starting from Finlay's formulation of Heidegger's lines, we follow the route it offers us into Heideggerian thought – specifically toward the phenomenology of "disclosure." We will find that Finlay's approach has close ties with Heidegger's thinking both with respect to the artwork as a gathering, a point at which meaning coalesces, and with respect to the model of progress, charted by Finlay's garden and by Heidegger's wood paths, from which this "gathering" quality arises.

Making Way

The three inscriptions on Finlay's plinths offer Heidegger's remarks on *Holzwege* as a succession of passages that end without conclusion. The passage or movement of Heidegger's text is deliberately re-arranged; typographically, Finlay pushes the text to the right-hand limit, visually emphasizing the sense of an ending. Finlay separates Heidegger's text into three sequential parts, one for each plinth. The first sets the reader on a way; the second establishes something, confirming the reader's way; the third introduces doubt and offers the possibility of a discovery. The poet establishes a route sequentially through the text by moving from plinth to plinth. On first sight, the three equally-spaced plinths set a regular pace and imply a step-by-step progression. But the inscribed text parts us from that rhythm: the last passage turns back on the previous two and questions the way of understanding they established. At this juncture there is something for the reader to reconsider. The poet leaves us in doubt. Significantly, Finlay omits the final lines of Heidegger's text, leaving them to be discovered. This is what Finlay's woodland garden will itself come to say to those standing within: "Woodcutters and forest keepers know these paths. They know what it means to be on a *Holzweg*."[16] We too will come to know the revelation of these lines. Finlay's plinths are the point at which we begin to orientate ourselves to this and revel in the wider course of this thought.

On making our way through the wood, we will begin to realize the poetic progress instantiated there. For Heidegger, the open is experienced as a disclosure, the act of opening up a previously closed space full of meaning. It is the poet's task to bring about this clearing, a revelatory disclosure of being in which the world accords to the person, to the extent that he or she finds it recast anew. Finlay's plinths will model this same understanding of the poet: they will bring the reader into a clearing. Yet within this shared framework of revelation and disclosure, there are tonal differences, and it is with these that we need to begin. Heidegger's post-war work, as has been widely noted, is marked by a valorization of passivity and an almost meditative attitude to meaning and the clearing. In contrast, Finlay is often decisive in acts of clearing, accepting the "command" inherent in the poet's advance. Heidegger himself discusses the poet's venture and the risks involved in the essay "What are poets for?" [17] The quality of being during poetic venture, of seeking to rework meaning, is that of being flung loose. Being on *die Wage*, Heidegger writes – using an archaic spelling of *Waage* – is a balance; one may quickly tip one way or another. Heidegger thus associates the path or way (*Weg* and the archaic verb *wegen*) with the wager (*wagen*) and risk involved in the instrument of a balance (*die Wage)*.[18] A stone in the way is a wager around which different routes become weighted. Risk is incipient in the wind of the *Holzwege*: "if that which has been flung were to remain out of danger, it would not have been ventured."[19] For Finlay, pursuing on the natural track at Stonypath – the wider location for his creation of *Little Sparta* – such venture is vital to the poetic task. Growth is met as if it were itself an advance; trees claim ground, and their canopies establish dominion, cutting paths short. Finlay's works there often respond by marking out a domain that seems at first glance to be a rejoinder to nature: predominately through the use of classical motifs, the works impose an order and a sharpness that is not only distinctively human but also presents itself as a civilizing and rationalizing force. Simultaneously, however, Finlay recognizes an inherent violence in this human drive to order, which makes it not so much an alternative to the natural cycle but another expression of it. Indeed, Finlay stated that "conflict is one of the givens of the universe. The only way it can ever be tamed or managed or civilized is within the culture. You cannot pretend that it does not exist."[20] Violence is as much part of the cultural or political revolutionary cycle as it is of the natural cycle. *Little Sparta* enforces this view; when we come across gate piers with hand grenades as finials, we realize that both the grenade and the more familiar

acorn and pinecone which it mirrors are for Finlay isomorphic points within a single overarching cycle.[21] To take another set of examples, Finlay's sequence of works on the subject of Arcadia, involving *Arcadia* (1973), *Et in Arcadia Ego* (1976), and *Homage to Poussin* (1977), all deploy a Panzer as a central image and exemplify the poet's willingness to take on and embed in a natural context the interlinked risks of conflict and violence.[22]

Clearing

The task now is to further develop Finlay's conception of the clearing. We will see that Finlay's work while often extremely assertive also contains a Heideggerian notion of dwelling, which tempers the confrontational character of the artworks that appear in the garden and gives us a more coherent impression of *Little Sparta* as a whole. In the woodland among the natural declarations of tree post and new leaf are Finlay's poetic declarations creating an "intercalary day amid the natural darkness."[23] The poet's clearing comes in several forms. First it may be found, as we have seen in the *Holzwege* inscriptions, in the form of textual assertion: Classical lettering is carved on numerous objects, foundation stones, and plaques of wood, metal, and stone throughout the garden. There is a forcefulness and finality to the assertions, which are most often quotes, short statements, or single-word warnings. The initial declaration often clears a direct path between two concepts or entities so that one can fully reach the other. In *Exercise X* (1974), a booklet made with George L. Thomson, Finlay uses two crossing calligraphic lines to compare the ways in which two paths might meet.[24] In one "X," an open circular space appears at the point where the two direct lines make an abiding bind, each bending in accordance with that meeting. Here two ideas become a joint in thought rather than, as another demonstrates, strike past one another. As well as modeling this clearing, "X" is the most immediate mark to hand, used for example to indicate the critical point of a topography, and also a substitute for that thing that has clearly struck the mind but which defies further extrapolation beyond that one clear sign. This "X" therefore brings together several fundamental aspects of the clearing as presented at *Little Sparta*. Describing the phenomenology of a sudden point of poetic concentration and the subsequent attempt to re-

orientate oneself following it, Finlay wrote: "that one word was everything… it just seems to open onto another possibility completely."[25] Finlay plays here on the sense in which that clear revelation whilst eluding our discursive abilities might be opened up by a single word, for which "X" stands. This calls to mind Heidegger's 1959 lecture "The Word" on Stefan George's 1928 poem of the same title, which describes the poet's experience of such a word: "they are words by which what already is and is believed to be is made so concrete and full of being that it henceforth shines and blooms and thus reigns."[26] We will return to this sense of fullness and subsequent reign.

We can now turn to a second example of Finlay's modeling of the clearing: concretion of the clearing action and the physical and ideological way it clears appears in the form of an axe. Finlay placed the object of an axe, made in 1985, in the *Garden Temple* of *Little Sparta*.[27] Inscribed on the handle is the declaration:

HE SPOKE LIKE AN AXE • BARÈRE ON SAINT-JUST

Louis Antoine Léon de Saint-Just (1767–1794) was a central figure in the French Revolution's "Reign of Terror." The incisive impression that Saint-Just's speech left on Bertrand Barère is made in turn on Finlay's axe. Saint-Just's speech cut through doubt in the minds of his audience, creating connections between disparate drives and visions and thus made things clear. A later axe made by Finlay in 1987 concisely articulates the essence of this idea (Figure 2).[28] On the head is inscribed "*acte*" (act), and on the handle at the point at which one would grip in order to swing the axe is "*idée*" (idea). The close-coupled words carved on this one, functional object relate their inextricably bound purpose as coincident makers of a way. The swiftness of the clearing axe also relates the suddenness of poetic disclosure brought by such a word or phrase, as Finlay described, and the permanence of that mark embedded in the mind.

Figure 2. Photo by John Andrew. Courtesy of the artist.

The violence and clarity represented by Finlay's axe – an archaic weapon and deforesting technology – manifest what Heidegger called "repetition": a return to the past to identify resources that one might use to determine the present.[29] Here the object, the axe, functions as a tightly gathered form that inherently retains its cultural position. This upholds a class of object in the vein of those made by Daedalus – a classification that was dominant in early Greek thought and which Heidegger echoed in his description of the object as a gathering point of sense. This type of object – a *daidalon* – was asserted wholly, a persistent gathering: a highly wrought form in which the object's exterior appearance was consistent with its inbound purpose. Objects made in this vein could be swiftly and decisively redeployed by Finlay, their purpose having remained vital. In Finlay's garden setting, figures such as Saint-Just make way with these instruments and tools, cultivating the ground assertively, forcibly even.

Tempering Violence

The initial incisive point of the Saint-Just wood axe widens; a tempered, more pastoral aspect follows. This occurs first in the axe's proximity to the other objects in the *Garden Temple*. Many have been sanctified there as instantiations of the actions involved in seasonal turns such as the bee hive and flower vase. Yet our view of the axe and several scythes in the *Garden Temple* may turn color when we realize that they mark words spoken by a

figurehead who was beheaded: Saint-Just's own death was by guillotine. Elsewhere, a different functional and seasonal object – a watering can – weeps for Saint-Just, its inscription recording the date of his birth and death. It offers solace in the form of rain that breaks the heat of high summer and thus reminds us that Saint-Just's death was a tipping point in the French Revolutionary calendar: his execution was part of the Thermidorian Reaction. The Revolutionary calendar is also deeply governed by turns in nature's cycle, mirroring the cyclical aspect of Finlay's understanding of history discussed above. The break of summer's peak is declared by a lightning strike, the force of which heralds rain and the harvest to come. Indeed, Saint-Just's execution marked the end of the Reign of Terror: the extremely violent, most radical phase of the French Revolution and a watershed moment in the revolutionary process. The lightning strike is a repeated motif elsewhere in Finlay's work — for example in the mutation of a lightning bolt's shape from the *ff* of musical force towards the final, violent force of the Third Reich's *SS* in a work from the booklet *SF* (1978)[30] and again in the mutation of the form of a sickle's blade in the lithograph *Sickle/Lightning Flash* (1990).[31]

Thus the wood axe is used as an instrument with which to forcefully cut back to the French Revolution, but it also leads to a re-establishment, prolonging those movements' spirits and values here in Finlay's garden, where they may abide. As we have seen, the manner and spirit of this re-establishment is a re-armament in the case of Saint-Just. From this point on, following the axe, a revolution of sorts comes about at Stonypath. Finlay defined his statement of intent in *Revolution, n.* (1986), a lithograph produced with Gary Hincks, thus: "REVOLUTION *n.* a scheme for the improving of a country; a scheme for realizing the capabilities of a country. A return. A restoration. A renewal."[32] We have seen how the redeployment of an object of war and revolution has a necessarily violent point for Finlay from which new poetic lands are borne and cultivation and civilization unfold. Incised objects highlight the poet's cutting advances in pursuit of such a return. Through concise inscription, Finlay rebinds — or in Heideggerian terms "repeats" — parts of earlier thought in our contemporary world, cutting through thicket.

Gathering

Finlay's engagement with the French Revolution forms one part of what theorist and fellow Concrete poet Stephen Bann called his "poetic cosmology"; a complex framework which locates the French Revolution, German Romanticism, and the Third Reich as developments and mutations of Greco-Roman values.[33] It is to this Classical fulcrum of Finlay's work that we will now turn; as will become clear, his practice here links the conception of the clearing explored above to one of the notions that underlies it in Heidegger's own work, that of the Classical object. At *Little Sparta*, Finlay seeks to re-affirm aspects of Classical thought – more specifically Classical values – and their rigorous assertion through action. Thus Finlay not only selects objects that are Classical, he selects the most longstanding objects of the Classical world: column, capital, temple, marble bust and stone inscription. There is a force to many of the clear-cut forms asserted by the poet, objects dominant and certain of their place. This builds on the notion of the *daidalon* introduced above: such objects are a gathering or concentration of truth; they penetrate the mind intact and established meaning there. The material density of a longstanding object goes hand in hand with the sharpness of any inscription thereupon. Hence in Finlay's word-bearing object there is twofold clearance: by the clear-cut form of the object and by the incisive poetic inscription.

The density of Finlay's word-bearing objects is both a function of the phenomenological instilment of the poetic disclosure, which allows us to suddenly "see" something, and a function of the extent to which there develops and dwells an investment of bind, a gathering in the Heideggerian sense, a coalescence of meaning, which has reached a concretion of form. Thus density of material and certainty are tied together in direct relation to the semantic and conceptual binds thereby held. But this sense of the inbound rigor of such objects is hard to retain, Heidegger warns:

> Our thinking has of course long been accustomed to *understate* [sic] the nature of the thing. The consequence, in the course of Western thought, has been that the thing is represented as an unknown X to which perceptible properties are attached. From this point of view, everything *that already belongs to the gathering nature of this thing* does, of course, appear as something that is afterward read into it. Yet the bridge would never be a mere bridge if it were not a thing.[34]

How should we think about Finlay's plinths without applying a "reading" after the fact of the artwork? Heidegger continues, offering a useful point:

> What the word for space, *Raum*, *Rum*, designates is said by its ancient meaning. *Raum* means a place cleared or freed for settlement and lodging. A space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary, Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its presencing*.[35]

As in a woodland clearing, so too here in this new clearing created by the artwork's presence, disclosure allows being to dwell and become apparent. In phenomenological terms, the art object forms a boundary – its clearing – the space within which meaning occurs. Under these metaphysical conditions, by its very existence, the art object is a gathering: being has an "incipient power gathering everything to itself, which in this manner releases every being to its own self."[36] In the artwork, the thing's own binds, its capacity to tie strands to the point of coherent unity, subsist there with such purchase that it has a hard, certain quality. By laying down a Classically Greek boundary in the sense mapped by Heidegger, a thing is bound to be fulfilled: the objects of Classical art as he conceived them were points at which the concretion of meaning occurred, points at which the physical form of the object was sharp enough to mark a space of understanding. When it reaches a state of being fully bound, the thing comes to fruition and "reigns." Thus fullness is vital.

This restored object's reign exerts a gravity on its surrounding field, recasting lines of thought in accordance to the object. Admittance can be gained by being on the way of or following the "draw" to such a gathering. Thus it is through the effect of the object on its surrounding domain – not by "reading into" the object – that we come to know the object more than its tightly gathered state allows. We come to see that Finlay's word-bearing objects are, to paraphrase the poet Edwin Morgan, constructions that hold.[37] There is a creation of a new poetic order around such points of anchor, which harness other cultural fields to our own. Surrounding the artwork, the paths in Finlay's garden become deeper and wider, more certain of their way; some are even laid with stone. Thus it comes to pass that, around the single point

of an artwork, the poet becomes "sure of his word, and just as fully in command of it."[38]

Therefore, Finlay answers Heidegger's appeal not only in his choice of objects but also by the manner in which they exist in the garden and hence by our approach to them, which is also gathering by nature. It is precisely the poet's task to create clear opportunities, which will lead us to dwell intently in the manner described by Heidegger. This is an inevitable consequence of our innate state of bind; bound here only temporarily, we "*must ever learn to dwell*." [39]

What the Woodcutters and Forest Keepers Know

When we come across Finlay's *Holzwege* plinths in the woodland garden, we find this point around which to orientate. From these incisive plinths unfolds a more gradual wind – a contemplative re-working – as the gravity of the certain object goes to work on the doubtful thicket surrounding it.

Finlay's garden and the pull of the word-bearing objects placed there begin to reveal what Heidegger's woodcutters and forest keepers know. As we walk there, the wood paths – disjointed parts of a path in doubt – start to cohere. The axe in the temple, the objects surrounding it, the longer draws of Classicism and French Neo-Classicism: these exert draws on our understanding and recast the wind of paths we develop around the *Holzwege* plinths. It starts to make sense that there would be sections of deeply grooved tank tracks marking one way to the plinths. The woodcutters and forest keepers know why the wood paths make a certain pattern of movement apparent on the ground; they have made way there in the wood.

Here is what the woodcutters know: that it is their process of clearing that governs the paths that draw us into the open. Once we see the disclosure in the wood clearing, what seemed to be doubtful ways now manifest the economy of the woodland. The necessary precedence and violence of the poetic disclosure is realized in Finlay's axe, after which the wood paths are deepened in accordance with the newly disclosed open, cut trees borne along and pulled out along certain lines. Paths, once uncertain, now deliver the clearing to us. The poet has shown us what it is to be on a

Holzweg. Thus it comes to be that Finlay's woodland enacts the poet's task in the world as described by Heidegger: the processes of cutting, disclosure, and establishment of dwelling deliver the revelation promised in the *Holzwege* inscription. The artwork establishes a foundation stone that functions as a joint in thought, allowing a wider field to unfold in accordance to the object. The cohering operation it performs on the wider garden is not achieved by introducing some new or external model of unity but rather, as Heidegger identified, by making visible connections that already belong to the gathered nature of the object. The poet's thought there dwells and by that dwelling gains a deepening hold on the ground, answering Heidegger's call "to bring dwelling to the fullness of its nature."[40] We may find this in the poet's expanding territory, in the more tightly wrought bent of paths in the established garden, and in the flattened areas of earth around an artwork, where approaches gather. It is by poetry's nature that this progressive dwelling develops: "poetry that thinks is in truth / the topology of Being."[41] With each persistent mark on wild land, the garden's poetic scope and potential territory enlarge. To the forest keeper and poet, the woodland is now increasingly bound to disclose. Thus the larger artwork of *Little Sparta* begins to emerge – and with it Finlay's conception of being in the world.

Figure 3. By courtesy of the Estate of Ian Hamilton Finlay.
Photo by Kathleen McKay.

Another Way

On a path descending from the peak of *Little Sparta*, we approach another patch of woodland, located just beneath the summit of the garden. Finlay proposes an alternative route though this wood. As if stating a founding tenet, a plaque is fixed to the first dominant tree establishing this new territory (Figure 3).[42] It reads:

> All the noble
> sentiments of my heart,
> all its most praiseworthy
> impulses – *I could give them*
> *free rein, in the midst of*
> *this solitary wood*.[43]

The heart and woodland are aligned. This "solitary" wood – alone, a unity – is tied-off from other parts, is something sole. A concordance begins to take hold, which increasingly positions both heart and woodland as gatherings: both are solitary thickets. The dark density of Finlay's woodlands and the impossibility of any new opening in the heart's mass of branching parts align the two closer still. Resonances between heart and woodland are perhaps most notably traced to Homer who described the heart as close-textured, highly bound, or bushy in quality.[44] Plato understood that the lungs took on the impact of the "leaping" heart – cushioning it – their volume thick with branches.[45] Thus the lungs' many branches and pathways developed in response to the heart's one insistently set and highly bound passage. The bushy nature of the heart was thus thought to map the extent and quality of its awareness as the seat of consciousness within the body.[46] The reign of the heart within the body becomes palpable as does its curiously involved autonomy there.

This sense of the heart's reign may reach a critical point at which it seems to turn against us; we dwell in the world only to the extent that the heart allows. The bounds of the heart not only delineate the physical extent of its bleeding field through the body but also delimits the duration of that

hold. The form of the heart is felt to repeat an inbound rhythm that sometimes sits like a stranger in the body, throwing its weight about.

This may prompt the poet to revolt. For example, the poet Theodore Roethke defies the heart and its boasting dominance, describing it as a "knot of gristle": old, over-wrought, and assuming.[47] He questions the authoritative position that the heart is said to hold as the primary seat of being or seat of the first nutritive soul. Here, poetic "free rein" – abundant and expansive in its course – makes way in defiance of the one ingrained way of the heart, which goes over the same course again.

After Counter-Revolt, Louvet

Having turned against the idea of the heart as a thicket, we reconsider the route proposed by Finlay through the wood before us, returning to Finlay's plaque and the different area of woodland it introduces. Once inside and in contrast to the dark *Holzwege* thicket, this woodland is lighter, full of young, deciduous trees, yearlings, and in parts has the appearance of a coppice. The author of the passage quoted on the plaque at Figure 3 is Jean-Baptiste Louvet de Couvrai (1760–1797), who came to hold a position post-Thermidorian Reaction. This point in the French Revolution was a revolt against the extreme violence of the Reign of Terror that led to a turn towards a non-reactionary, more temperate way, curbing the counter-violence of figures such as Saint-Just. Here Finlay hints at an alternative course of action towards insight – towards disclosure – and puts down Saint-Just's axe.

Finlay's Louvet plaque establishes a post-Thermidorian Reaction position both in accordance to the former figures we have explored and in the form of the woodland's terrain. We may remember the objects in the *Garden Temple* devoted to Saint-Just and the clearing action they were devoted to and also the watering can dedicated to Saint-Just. After this peak of terror follows the water's run: here is Louvet's landscape. The path through the wood now before us is downhill, closely following the course of a stream, tipped from the peak behind us and flowing from a full reservoir high in the garden. The nature of Louvet's "rein" is said by the text to be free. It follows that the water through the Louvet wood makes a gradual passage,

easing its way and pooling. A more intricate relation is wrought between land and water alongside which our path winds.

Free Rein

We can see that Finlay has built a territory of meaning with a different turn in nature in the Louvet wood, and when we consider this terrain in combination with other figures of the French Revolution chosen by the poet, we recognize a wider topology of being at *Little Sparta*. Louvet's passage though the wood is perhaps comparable to the way in which Heideggerian meaning is gained; made on the way, its grip on the ground deepens with being's inherence in the world. Yet Louvet's grip is weak. Washed-out and sentimental in comparison to the clearings created by Saint-Just's axe, Louvet's passage is far more defined by the established extremes of Revolutionary and counter-Revolutionary positions than by any will of his own. The way through the Louvet woodland is conciliatory and hardly creates clearings; rather, the course settles on its way via the least contested pass, following the course of water. Louvet has free rein only within uncontested territory.

If cutting and clearing are not active here in the Louvet wood, how can insight be gained? One option would be to trace the idea of "free rein" back through Heidegger's own widely discussed use of "*walten*," meaning "to prevail" or "to let rule." Heidegger himself uses "*walten*" to capture the process of a coming to presence that establishes a context of meaning, which creates a context in terms of which other objects are understood and so "reigns."[48] This is precisely the process discovered via the *Holzwege* plinths in the first half of this article. There is an implicit violence in the term, a violence borne out by its cognates such as the deeply ambiguous "*Gewalt*"; standardly "violence" but in many contexts something closer to "legitimate authority."[49] In the contrast between the *Holzwege* and Louvet woodlands, we see Finlay working with this type of tension: the freedom that Louvet attains, his "free rein," exists only where dominant territories will allow. Again Finlay's greater willingness to recognize the interpenetration of "*walten*" and "*Gewalt*" is apparent; the freedom Louvet gains is generated and dominated by the cyclical process of revolution and the violent assertion of meaning

exemplified by figures such as Saint-Just. Yet there is also an alternative route that will ultimately bring us back to and further illuminate the idea of disclosure: the heart's way.

The Heart and the Thicket

The significance of metaphors based on the heart deepens in Heideggerian aesthetics, where it must be conceived outside of a purely biological discourse. Heidegger states: "the widest orbit of beings becomes present in the heart's inner space."[50] The heart is an open: an auditorium within which being's way resounds and is discovered. Thus the heart becomes a device that, inherently attuned to the throws and pitches of being, will gain insight. The heart's hold over the body no longer sounds estranged nor authoritarian; instead it accurately gauges the way in which we dwell: "the whole of the world achieves here an equally essential presence in all its drawings."[51] Recognition of the heart's involvement ties the artist's methods closer still to the Heideggerian instruction that we "must ever learn to dwell."[52]

Curiously, a work by Finlay may have anticipated this connection. *Woodpaths* (1990) is a small booklet in which Finlay restates the first two parts of the *Holzwege* inscription.[53] He adds a last, third passage of his own making:

> "In the wood are paths which
> mostly wind along until they end
> quite suddenly in an impenetrable
> thicket."
>
> "They are called woodpaths."
>
> They are paths where the heart and
> the foot walk hand in hand.[54]

For Heidegger, the manner in which being is discovered is *grounded* in the explorative disclosure of the world; meaning is made on the way, on and by the foot at Stonypath. By fixing the Louvet plaque to the first tree, Finlay "re-cognizes" the heart's way in the woodland that follows and provides further ground for this alternative Heideggerian course towards clearing.

Resonance

We have found that a rhythm has built between the heart's thicket and the wood's thicket. One crucial emphasis that arises is on their common isolation. When pitched together, two distinct unities – wood and heart – can build a familiarity of meaning. The heart's thicket and the wood's thicket develop, and we become attuned to their common binds – their concordances – between the two. When the two are set to work together, meaning that is incipiently gathered within each thing can be realized outside of its individual bounds.

Between solitary and fixed artworks resonance builds; concordances between the two things bind them increasingly. As these points coincide, they coalesce, holding things in relation. Indeed, Finlay made the role of resonance clear, stating that he thought of poetry "in terms of the *resonant* image, and it is precisely this resonance which animates and justifies the surrounding space."[55] A resonant image gathers meaning towards it. From a Heideggerian perspective, this idea is fundamentally linked to that of atmosphere or mood. Heidegger's preferred term for these – *Stimmung* – is deliberately and naturally read as "resonance" or "tuning."[56] In this sense, Finlay's remark that "superior gardens are composed of Glooms and Solitudes and not of plants and trees" captures the Heideggerian process through which a mood attunes in a certain way, making certain things apparent.[57] Atmosphere does not occlude: it is the air's pitch turned toward the persistent object. For Heidegger, therefore, atmosphere is a cultivating substance in which we are "trans-planted" and in which meaning grows.[58]

We have found resonance not simply within a single aspect of the garden terrain but a resonance between two distinct parts: the *Holzwege*

wood and the Louvet wood. In working together, the woods illuminate aspects both of the open and of the manner in which meaning is gained: in turn on the way, strikingly, or resoundingly through concordance.

In Conclusion

By engaging with Finlay's response to Heidegger, we have demonstrated how *Little Sparta* sustains a distinctive form of aesthetic inquiry – from the initial state of doubt in the *Holzwege* thicket to a deeper understanding of meaning's progress. The works of art located in Finlay's garden and the form of garden surrounding them, as exemplified by the interaction of the *Holzwege* and Louvet woods, all serve to model the way of meaning traced by Heidegger. In this sense our study has sought to discover Finlay's description of his own work as "a model, of order, even if set in a space which is full of doubt."[59]

Notes

The authors would like to thank two anonymous referees, the journal's editors, and Andrew Patrizio for their comments on earlier drafts of this material. We would also like to thank the carver John Andrew, who kindly supplied the photograph of the axe he made in 1987 in collaboration with Ian Hamilton Finlay, and Pia Simig and the Little Sparta Trust for permission to reproduce the relevant images.

1 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 171.

2 As Sheehan observes, Heidegger employs a range of terms for this structure with "*Lichtung*" ultimately coming to dominate:

> [T]he goal of *Being and Time* was to identify and explain the openness that makes it possible to take something as this-or-that … This 'open space' went by a series of cognate and mutually reinforcing terms throughout Heidegger's career, among which are *Da*, *Welt*, *Erschlossenheit*, *Zeit*, *Temporalität*, *Zeit-Raum*, *Offene*, *Weite*, *Gegend*, and *Zwischen*. In his later work, however, all these terms tended to gather around *Lichtung* (Thomas Sheehan, "What, after all, was Heidegger about?"*Continental Philosophy Review* 47 (2014): 263).

3 Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. G. Fried and R. Polt (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 136.

4 Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Perennial, 2001), 171.

5 Dahlstrom refers to this as the "paradox of thematization." For discussion, see Daniel Dahlstrom, *Heidegger's Concept of Truth* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 433–4.

6 Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. M. Fritsch and J. Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 57.

7 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 223.

8 Ian Hamilton Finlay and Sue Finlay, *Little Sparta*, 1966–2006. The title is in part a reference to the complex role the Classical world plays in the artistic and intellectual space of the garden; we return to this theme below.

9 We are grateful to an anonymous referee for pressing this point.

10 There is of course an extensive and important debate occurring over the intellectual and political complicity of the *Schwarze Hefte* writings in the violence against the Jews and others during the NS-period, but our concern here is not that but the increased use there of a violent imagery of domination to frame Heidegger's own question, the question of the clearing and of being. See Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen II-VI: Schwarze Hefte 1931–1938* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2014), 362.

11 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 201.

12 Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Untitled ("Holzwege plinths")*, 1990–5, composite stone and bronze, each plinth 20 x 26 x 91.5 cm, Figure 1. There is not an established date for this work. A printed work on *Holzwege* – Finlay's booklet *Woodpaths* – was published in 1990, and an exhibition of his work titled *Holzwege* was staged at the *Neuer Aachener Kunstverein* again in 1990. A different version of the three plaque-plinths quoting the same passage from Heidegger was installed in 1995 at the *Schlosspark*, Grevenbroich. It therefore seems likely that the version at *Little Sparta* is within or close to the period 1990–5.

13 Ian Hamilton Finlay, "Detached sentences," in *Little Sparta: A Portrait of a Garden*, eds. R. Gillanders and A. Finlay (Edinburgh: Scottish National Portrait Gallery, 1998a), 1.

14 Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe 5: Holzwege (1935–1946)* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1977), [no pagination].

15 Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. J. Young and K. Haynes (London: Cambridge University Press, 2002), [no pagination].

16 Ibid., [no pagination].

17 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 87–139.

18 Ibid., 101.

19 Ibid., 100.

20 Malise Ruthven, "Gardens: Politics of Little Sparta," *Architectural Digest* 46, no.7 (1989): 111.

21 See, for example, Ian Hamilton Finlay and David Edwick, *Gate Piers*, 1991, brick and stone.

22 Ian Hamilton Finlay and George Oliver, *Arcadia*, 1973, screenprint on paper, 35.5 x 43.7 cm. Ian Hamilton Finlay and John Andrew, *Et in Arcadia Ego*, 1976, marble, 28.1 x 28 x 7.6 cm. Ian Hamilton Finlay and John Borg Manduca, *Homage to Poussin*, 1977, booklet, 16 pages, 13 x 13 cm.

23 Walter Pater, *The Works of Walter Pater, Volume 4: Imaginary Portraits* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 132. This comment is made by Pater on Apollo, who is a recurrent figure in Finlay's work. Indeed, Apollo is directly identified with Saint-Just in works such as the *Proposal for a temple of Apollo/Saint-Just* (1994). While numerous and close ties can be made between Saint-Just and Apollo, this would draw our present study too far from its course. For discussion, see Stephen Bann, "Epilogue: On the homelessness of the image," *Comparative Criticism: Walter Pater and the Culture of the Fin-de-Siècle* 17 (1995): 123–128.

24 Ian Hamilton Finlay and George L. Thomson, *Exercise X*, 1973, booklet, 24 pages, 9.5 x 14 cm.

25 Ian Hamilton Finlay, "The sail-boat on the pillow," in *Little Sparta: A Portrait of a Garden*, eds. R. Gillanders and A. Finlay (Edinburgh: Scottish National Portrait Gallery, 1998b), 53.

26 Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 144.

27 Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Axe*, 1985, wood and iron, 93 x 23 x 7 cm.

28 Ian Hamilton Finlay and John Andrew, *Axe*, 1987, wood and iron, 93 x 23 x 7 cm, Figure 2.

29 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 437.

30 Ian Hamilton Finlay and George L. Thomson, *SF* (Dunsyre: Wild Hawthorn Press, 1978), [no pagination].

31 Ian Hamilton Finlay and Gary Hincks, *Sickle/Lightning Flash*, 1990, lithograph, 29.8 x 46.9 cm. See items 4.90.13–15 at http://www.ianhamiltonfinlay.com/1990_Prints.html.

32 Ian Hamilton Finlay and Gary Hincks, *REVOLUTION, n.*, 1986, lithograph, 43 x 43 cm.

33 Ian Hamilton Finlay, Ron Costley, and Stephen Bann, *Heroic Emblems* (Calais: Z Press, 1977), 29.

34 Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Perennial, 2001), 151. Emphasis original.

35 Ibid., 152. Emphasis original.

36 Ibid., 98.

37 Alec Finlay, ed., *Wood Notes Wild* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1995), 7.

38 Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 145.

39 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 159. Emphasis original.

40 Ibid., 159.

41 Ibid., 12.

42 Ian Hamilton Finlay and Andrew Whittle, *Tree-plaque*, 1991, stone, approximately 40 x 30 cm, Figure 3.

43 Original emphasis.

44 Homer, *Iliad* (London: William Heinemann, 1928), XVI, 553 f. For further discussion of the heart and its quality as a thicket, see Richard B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 23—43.

45 Plato, *Timaeus* (London: MacMillan, 1888), 70 B ff.

46 Plato, *Theaetetus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883), 194 E f. For discussion, see Richard B. Onians, *The Origins of European*, 28–9.

47 Theodore Roethke, *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* (New York: Anchor Books, 1975), 75.

48 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 175–7.

49 The inherent ambiguity in the term and the significance of this for Heidegger's work were particularly stressed by Derrida in his final seminar series: see for example Jacques Derrida *The Beast and the Sovereign*, trans. G. Bennington (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), 279.

50 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 125.

51 Ibid., 125. This heart is not essentially biological. The metaphor relates the core Heideggerian sense in which meaning is gained and drawn equally to being.

52 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 159.

53 Ian Hamilton Finlay and Solveig Hill, *Woodpaths*, 1990, booklet, 14.5 x 8.8 cm.

54 Ian Hamilton Finlay and Solveig Hill, *Woodpaths* (Dunsyre: Wild Hawthorn Press, 1990), [no pagination].

55 Ian Hamilton Finlay and Stephen Bann, *Midway* (London: Wilmington Square Books, 2014), 152. Emphasis original.

56 For example, a *Klavierstimmer* is a piano tuner.

57 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 172–77.

58 Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 131.

59 Ian Hamilton Finlay, "Letter from Finlay to Pierre Garnier, September 17th, 1963," *Image* 10 (1964): 10. Finlay describes the operation of his Concrete poetry in this quote; however it can be applied more widely to other word-bearing objects such as those at *Little Sparta*. The poet's later work *Little Sparta* – a work of "avant-gardening" – shares a lineage and logic with his earlier Concrete poetry. In 1966, Finlay states:

> I have become interested also in concrete poetry in relation to architecture and avant-gardening. This is not a whim, but the logical development of earlier concrete poetry – from the poem as an object on the page to the poem as an object properly realized in sandblasted glass, stone or indeed concrete (Ian Hamilton Finlay, "Autobiographical sketch," in *Ian Hamilton Finlay: Selections*, ed. Alec Finlay (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), xx).

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COLLISION

On Consciousness-with and Virtual Lines of Affection

Ana Ramos

ABSTRACT

If we wish to think experience primarily as a relational dimension in which dynamic forces are activated, then we may need to conceive the body as both a crossroads and a threshold across which events burst forth. First, the body is a crossroads of virtual lines of affection where consciousness becomes a with-ness in which bodies-things-percepts-sensations collide: intertwined movements of becoming. But it is also a threshold because the body is a multidimensional place where events are reported – or not. Like a black hole, it is constantly attracting affectivities and engulfing them: it is affected by its surroundings. But what becomes of these affectivities? The body is not just a black hole; it is also a musical instrument: it resonates with its surrounding, emitting affective forces through the pulsation of its presence. The body is affected as much as it affects its situation. To conceive experience as an aesthetic process contributes to an acknowledgement of the affective dimension of experience in the process of communication, thus allowing sense to be felt as an event.

KEYWORDS

Consciousness
Perception
Relation
Affect
Virtual

On Consciousness-With

To begin with, a "simple" question: what is consciousness, and where is it located? In my work, I put great emphasis on conceiving the human body as a plane of emergence of aesthetic qualities. I refer to it, inspired by Erin Manning, as a becoming-body.[1] By this expression I mean that the body is not a materiality linked to a predetermined identity. Instead, I conceive the human body as an *organism that persons*. To illustrate how "person" may function as a verb, Arakawa and Gins explain that "other types of organisms dog, giraffe, or cockroach the world."[2] These examples allow us to better grasp "being" as a movement: namely, a becoming. Action is intrinsic to it: "being" is a "doing." What is it that the becoming-body is doing? Moving and sensing: basically, experiences are happening. There is no such thing as a witness-consciousness but only movement and becoming sensing itself. In the essay "Does 'Consciousness' exist?", William James conceptually addressed what we today call *embodiment* by suggesting experience as a synonym for consciousness.[3] He argues that although consciousness and body may be considered as contrasted to each other in philosophy (as in "spirit and matter" or "soul and body"), this dualism is out of balance as long as consciousness stands for an entity. He insists instead in consciousness as a function: knowing. In this context, consciousness ceases to be considered as an abstract fixed substance acting as a witness of the events happening to the body. What is at stake here is the relationality of the body as a set of *pure experiences*, a relational field. Therefore what is being put forward is a care for the processual continuity of "thoughts" and "things" instead of their classic distinction as separate entities.

If consciousness is experience, then the entire becoming-body is consciousness. As experience, consciousness is a relational dimension of the becoming-body: a *consciousness-with*. When we are swimming, for example, we experience a dynamic unity of "being together" as an attunement of rhythms and movements that produces a merging-with experience. What happens here is relation emerging, and we may say that *Flow* is the force activated by the being-with-water experience. Therefore the concept *consciousness-with* attempts to attend to the relational dimension of experience. It assumes the point of view of the relation as a point of coagulation, entanglement, and subjectivity as it has been foregrounded in process philosophy by authors such as William James, A. N. Whitehead, and more recently Brian Massumi, Erin Manning, and Arakawa and Gins, who take relation as their starting point. In James' terms, this centrality of relation is what defines "radical empiricism" as opposed to classical empiricism, which starts from discrete entities. As such, the idea being articulated here is not about a general oceanic flow that would direct the movements of the body

immersed in it. More specifically, *Flow* refers to the singular quality emerging in that situation as relationality.

The perception of immersion arises not only through the activity of all my five senses but also through a sixth one – or we could say through a virtual complement to what is actually happening perceptually. Here, "virtual" is not opposed to "actual" but should be understood as a dimension of experience which is felt in the body and at all moments present as potential. In fact, as Alfred North Whitehead points out, our sense-perception is always fused with *non-sensuous perception*:

> In human experience, the most compelling example of non-sensuous perception is our knowledge of our own immediate past. I am not referring to our memories of a day past, or of an hour past, or of a minute past. Such memories are blurred and confused by the intervening occasions of our personal existence. But our immediate past is constituted by that occasion, or by that group of fused occasions, which enters into experience devoid of any perceptible medium intervening between it and the present immediate fact. Roughly speaking, it is that portion of our past lying between a tenth of a second and half a second ago. It is gone, and yet it is here. It is our indubitable self, the foundation of our present existence.[4]

Non-sensuous perception refers to a wider aspect than our sense-perception. It senses the background and the foreground of an actual experience, fusing all this data into a singular feeling: the *affective tone* of a situation.[5] This wider aspect of perception allows us to think consciousness-with through two facets: multiplicity and virtuality.

At the contact of water, the becoming-body holds to that situation as it responds to it. In this context, the verb "to hold" is indebted to the writings of Arakawa and Gins, particularly as it is used in *Architectural Body* where they develop a theory of perception. The latter aims to attend to relationality's full potential as it has the power to reconfigure life. Their main concept, *landing site*, refers to the fact that every perception lands (as a process) on a defined site (situation). This landing is an act of apportioning out, in other words, a sorting out (Whitehead would call it prehension) of experience. Every perception is a landing site, "each holding of the world equaling a landing-site configuration."[6] Thus, as the becoming-body holds to the being-in-the-water situation, the movements that run through the whole relational event provide support for the floating situation. At a virtual level, they are attuned to the relationality between the becoming-body and the element water as virtual lines of affection allowing this relational event to emerge. The consequence of this relationality is the Flow as a center where sensations, perceptions, emotions, and lines of tension (as floating-sinking and other forces) collide. Thus, the relational event hosts a multiplicity. There is a virtual crowd swarming here, which is endowed with a common objective: the event. There is no

simple, dualistic relation between water and a becoming-body. Instead, there is a more-than-human situation arising through the holding together of a relational complex. The Flow is this more-than-human situation. It is a relational event: a singularity emerging through experience which carries an affective tone. The event is the real subject of the relation, the being of relation. This is why I call it a more-than-human situation. The becoming-body contributes to its existence but is not its main element: this is why I speak of a consciousness-with. It is this activity of co-creation between the becoming-body and water that allows the Flow to emerge as a singularity. The multiple affective memories of the being-in-the-water situation are sensed in the becoming-body as a felt synthesis of these virtual lines of affection. Its complexity expresses itself in experience as an aesthetic quality. When aesthetics is understood from a relational point of view, we see the becoming of experience as an ontogenetic process of in-formation of felt qualities. In this regard, it is "aesthetic in its multidimensionality."[7] How does this happen?

The Becoming-Body as a Crossroads: Becoming-Actual

As the becoming-body jumps into the water, the sensation on the skin activates water-affective memories. There is a gathering of virtual lines of water-affection emerging as the immersion-event happens. These multiple being-in-the-water affective memories arise in experience to gather heterogeneously as a *passive synthesis*.[8] They are passive because they are not actively operated but gathered in an emergent holding together that is aligned by the event as it happens. As Henri Bergson describes the interpenetration of affective memories, he affirms that they self-organize to penetrate each other as the notes of a melody do, forming thus a qualitative multiplicity.[9] This multiplicity of virtual lines of water-affection subsists as part of a virtual dimension of the becoming-body: I call it *affective-consciousness*. Every time a becoming-body is immersed in water, an affective memory of a being-in-the-water situation is registered as experience. Each affective memory acts as a complex, oscillating *virtual line of affection* in experience. Within every immersion-situation, there is the emergence of a *real potentiality*: sensations, perceptions, emotions, floating-sinking, and other forces coming together into a certain *conditioned indetermination*.[10] In this specific situation, the real potentiality finds its determination as the Flow. This emergence of potentiality befitting the becoming of the immersion-event is conditioned by affective memories combined with the law of gravity, the capacity of the becoming-body to float, among other human and non-human conditioning forces. This real potentiality arising through the experience of being-with-water becomes tangible as relationality. In the

emergence of relationality, the water-affective-memories arising through the contact of water throw themselves towards the actualization of experience. At the contact of water they are all here, present in experience, so ready to forge the singularity ready to bloom. These are the virtualities of the relational complex. The consequence of the relationality that they compose is the Flow as a virtual center where multiple conditioning forces co-create the event. Consciousness-with is thus the co-creation of relationality and is located not only everywhere in the becoming-body but also "in" the event. Understanding the relational complexity of the Flow's emergence allows us to better grasp the virtual movement of becoming-actual in act.

As it is very difficult to discern one single experience, we could refer to it as a constellation of events.[11] Events constantly burst into existence by passing through our becoming-bodies as cars come and go on highways. Every event that blooms in our actuality brings forth into existence a highway: a virtual line of affection, which is in fact an affective multiplicity. This *movement of actualization* lies at the core of the fact of being alive.

At any given moment, singularities are coming into existence with the potential to actualize aesthetic qualities by affecting becoming-bodies. When I am in the water, for instance, the temperature of that environment is affecting me. There is as well a characteristic smell that drives my senses to a specific feeling. Perhaps a "soothing sensation" is coming to my awareness? The sound of the waves adds to this sensorial symphony a note of lullaby. What about that deep turquoise color unique to the Caribbean's tropical beaches? Is there a word to express the feeling of overwhelming well-being granted by such a situation? A word is never enough because in the event there is so much happening at the same time. Every micro-event composing a Sea-event acts as a virtual line of affection — or in other words, multiple intertwined movements of becoming. Here, bodies-things-percepts-sensations collide in a with-ness. They combine with virtual affective memories to bring forth the singularity of the actual event.

The Becoming-Body as a Threshold: Becoming-Virtual

So to speak, something extraordinary happens: experience. The becoming-body in this consciousness-with event gathers a multiplicity of virtual lines of affection into one singular complex feeling: the being-with-water experience. In Whitehead's vocabulary, we would say that the process through which this complex feeling emerges consists in the water experiencing itself as an *actual occasion*: "the final

real things of which the world is made up."[12] Thus, even though the becoming-body is a crucial aspect of the process, this microscopic view of the event does not consider the human element to be the subject of the process but a catalytic agent. The subject becomes then the event experiencing itself through the actualization of a singular affective tonality. In the process of experiencing, the becoming-body engulfs small details through a movement that virtualizes what had been brought forth into actualization. It does not disappear: it subsists as affective-memories (potentialities for other Sea-event situations). These bits of experience pass through the becoming-body as they would reach an event horizon**.** It means that the becoming-body acts as the threshold of an affective black hole attracting these virtual lines of affection for creative purposes. As Massumi states, "there is an incorporeal dimension *of the body*. Of it, but not it. Real, material, but incorporeal. Inseparable, coincident, but disjunct."[13] This incorporeal dimension, *affective-consciousness,* subsists through a myriad of passive synthesis: the coming together as a relational field of affectivities emerging through the event. What then becomes of these affectivities? As much as there is an action of the water-system on the becoming-body, there is also a simultaneous "being-with" of the becoming-body that acts upon the water-system. Relation. By vibrating the relation-tonality (relationality), the becoming-body brings a complex of feelings-sensations-emotions to existence: an immersion-event happens. The being-with of this immersion situation produces a *differenciation* in the most basic action of the becoming-body: the pulsation of its presence.[14] This pulsation is constantly slightly changing to harmonize itself with the aesthetic qualities of its environment. The becoming-body feels these affective tonalities as it co-creates them: that is consciousness-with. This very act is an attunement that constantly adjusts and vibrates affectivity. In this sense, we could call the becoming-body a musical instrument. What is the music that it is playing?

Reflective and Affective-Consciousness: A Delicate Dance

The becoming-body is always emanating affect. The latter can be felt but not named as affect is a non-verbal language. Irrevocably though, we try to grasp — retrospectively — what happened. We make sense of experiences by looking backwards. I call the dimension of the becoming-body that undertakes this mission the *reflective-consciousness*. It brings affect into action in the world by transforming what is felt into deeds, words, and actions, purpose, and focus. It is a

simultaneous translation: such a delicate cooperation runs through affective and reflective-consciousness that one is always holding some power over the other. The power of affecting and being affected binds them together.[15] Reflective-consciousness is always looking for focus. However, in experience, there is too much affective information, no linearity at all, and mandatory heterogeneousness. How do we make sense of that? We get a grip onto the emergent singularity, which we grasp in the form of aesthetic qualities that together convey a single affective tone.

What is the affective tone being played by the becoming-body-instrument? In the same way different sounds rhythmically organize themselves through the composition of a harmony, as Bergson notes, experience's affective becoming gathers the situation's real potentiality into one single affective tone: a felt aesthetic quality.[16] Forged by relationality through an activity of co-creation between the becoming-body and its environment, the Flow is animated by its own becoming-affective tonality. This is the being of relation; it is the real subject of the Sea-event. How may we describe a harmony? The same difficulty applies to felt experience. Although we might attempt to describe the Sea-Event as a "soothing sensation," words cannot convey the complexity of a feeling.

Notes

1 Erin Manning, *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).

2 Shusaku Arakawa and Madeleine Gins, *Architectural Body* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 1.

3 William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2003).

4 Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 181.

5 Ibid., 176.

6 Arakawa and Gins, Ibid., 81.

7 As proposed by Brian Massumi in *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011), 25.

8 On this concept, see David Lapoujade, "Le nombre obscur de la durée" in *Puissances du temps: versions de Bergson* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1968), 27–51; and Gilles Deleuze, "Repetition for Itself" in *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 70–128.

9 Henri Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 78.

10 "Real potentiality" and "conditioned indetermination" are theorized in more detail in Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978), 23.

11 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee Books, 1980), 35.

12 Whitehead, *Process*, 18.

13 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2002), 5.

14 In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze proposes the term differenciation as a genuine creation, 212. It is in this sense that "pulsation" must be understood: a process of always renewed being-with.

15 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1962).

16 Bergson, *Données Immédiates*, 79.

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Slanted Truths:

The Gay Science as Nietzsche's *Ars Poetica*

Joshua M. Hall

ABSTRACT

This essay derives its focus on poetry from the subtitle of *Die Fröhliche Wissenshaft: "la gaya scienza."* Nietzsche appropriated this phrase from the phrase "*gai saber*" used by the Provençal knight-poets (or troubadours) of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries — the first lyric poets of the European languages — to designate their *Ars Poetica* or "art of poetry." I will begin with an exploration of Nietzsche's treatment of poets and poetry as a subject matter, closely analyzing his six aphorisms which deal explicitly with poets and poetry. Having considered The Gay Science as a text about poetry, I will then briefly explore three further ways in which The Gay Science can be thought of as itself a kind of poetry. The result of these analyses is an understanding of Nietzsche's own understanding of philosophy (and of the best way to live) as also a form of poetry.

KEYWORDS

Nietzsche
Poetry
The Gay Science
Playfulness
Humor

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant –
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
–Emily Dickinson (ca. 1868)[1]

I. *The Gay Science* on Poetry

There are six aphorisms in *The Gay Science* that are centrally concerned with poetry as such: three in Book Two, one in Book Three, and two in Book Four. I will consider them in the order in which they appear in the text, building a cumulative sense of Nietzsche's understanding of poetry and thereby of his own *Ars Poetica*. I will begin with three aphorisms that investigate the sources of (1) the poet's power, (2) poetry itself, and (3) the phenomenon of "prose" as a kind of calcified poetry. From the beginning, one can see that poetry is not, for Nietzsche as opposed to Heidegger, some omnipotent, metaphysical force filled with gravitas.[2] Instead, poetry for Nietzsche is essentially incomplete, it traffics in the fantasy world of magic, and it is not above masking itself as its apparent other — prose.

Aphorism 79 argues that the source of poets' power and appeal lies in their forever approaching their goals without achieving them. "Indeed, [the poet] owes his advantages and fame much more to his ultimate incapacity than to his ample strength [*Kraft*]." Nietzsche writes of the poet's "foretaste" of a "vision" which is never wholly captured, and which by that very fact inspires such powerful cravings in the poet that it even spreads contagiously to the poet's listeners, and "lifts [them] above [the poet's] work and all mere

'works' and lends them wings to soar as high as listeners had never soared." The *eros* or *Lust* for the poet's ever-unfulfilled vision thus erotically transforms the listeners "into poets and seers" themselves. The expanding range of the concept of *poet* in this radical democratization, though it is seemingly anathema to Nietzsche's aristocratic sensibilities, also prefigures his later discussion of a kind of poetry of life, living one's life as a form of poetry, to which I will return below.

This interplay of erotic forces also suggests the *eros* of the Platonic dialogues, particularly the *Ion*, in which Socrates describes the young Ion's tremendous yet comical power over those who experience his recitations of Homer. As Socrates puts it to Ion, "this is not an art in you whereby you speak well on Homer, but a divine power, which moves like the stone which Euripedes named a magnet." [3] As for the comical dimension, during this divine inspiration, the poet "has been put out of his senses, and his mind is no longer in him." [4] Given Nietzsche's love of philology and the ancient Greeks, it would be surprising if he did not have this connection to Ion as the comically inarticulate poetic performer in mind.

Aphorism 84 builds on Nietzsche's understanding of the poet as master of potentiality, with its central thesis that the *Ursprung* of poetry — its origin or "upspring" as in Heidegger's *Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* — lies in "the magical song and the spell." In German, aphorism 84 reads as follows: *Zauberlied und Besprechung scheinen die Urgestalt der Poesie zu sein*. "Magic-song and incantation shines the originary-form of poetry to be." Against the popular conception of poetry as currently useless and therefore useless in its origins, Nietzsche asserts that, on the contrary, poetry had originally "a very great utility," a utility that was "superstitious" or "mythological" [*abergläubische*].

He explains that in ancient times, the awareness of rhythm as a mnemonic device for human beings was generalized to the belief that rhythm affected the gods in the same way, and that a "rhythmical prayer was supposed to get closer to the ears of the gods." In short, rhythm was seen as a way to exert power and control over even the gods in what contemporary Westerners would characterize as a silly, superstitious way. *"[M]an warf ihnen die Poesie wie eine magische Schlinge um*: One threw, at the gods, poetry like a magical lasso."

It is also interesting that Nietzsche in the preceding quote characterizes rhythm, the chief music of poetry, as a compulsion (*Zwang*):

the same word he uses to describe "every morality" in *Beyond Good and Evil*, in which he links moral compulsion to "the metrical compulsion [*Zwang*] of rhyme and rhythm."[5] Thus, both morality and poetry according to Nietzsche have a "compulsive" power, and in both cases this compulsion is linked to religion. For poetry this link to religion is explicit, as poetry is the lasso that pulls the gods. And as for morality, Nietzsche attributes what he terms "slave morality" to the priestly class of the Jewish people, the central aspect of whose faith is the sacred text (especially the *Torah*). Put differently, poetry in general for Nietzsche (like the Jewish poetry of the *Tanakh*) is a tool through which the priest can compel the people with their preferred new morality. The poet from aphorism 79 can thus be thought of as a sort of priest or mountebank, hawking a truth that is always deferred and delivered in the compulsion of the music of language. The poet is part of the same priestly lineage from which, according to the third essay in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the philosopher is born.[6]

To resume my reading of aphorism 84 of *The Gay Science,* and return from the specific issue of religious magic to magic in general: Nietzsche also distinguishes "an even stranger notion that may have contributed most of all to the origin of poetry" — "the power of discharging the emotions, of purifying the soul… precisely by means of rhythm." Nietzsche seems to be speaking here of the famous *catharsis* of Aristotle's *Poetics*. "[O]ne sought to push the exuberance and giddiness of the emotions to an extreme … a tranquilizer, not because it is tranquil itself, but because its aftereffects make one tranquil." Nietzsche also stresses the everyday utility of poetry as incantation or spell: "Every action provides an occasion for song: *every* action depends on the assistance of spirits." In other words, poetry is simultaneously ordinary and divine, since every action is worthy of song, every song is composed of lyrics (that is, lyric poetry), and every action requires divine assistance. With regard to the larger issue of poetry's origins, the point is that something which now strikes us as banal nevertheless began as divine — because the everyday for the ancient Greeks was itself a magical thing. Put differently, we undervalue poetry because we underestimate the magic of the ordinary.

Nietzsche concludes aphorism 84 by discussing the role of poetry in prophecy. He claims that prophecy meant originally, etymologically, "to get something determined … to bind the future." The power of rhythm was believed to be so great that when wielded by Apollo, it could "bind even the

goddesses of fate": goddesses so strong that, in Homer, even Zeus is powerless to control them. And remember here that Nietzsche was an atheist, and thus is not affirming prophecy as a legitimate and objectively rich faculty. Instead, he is affirming it as a fictively creative power. And that is the larger point of the entire aphorism. To wit, Nietzsche is attempting to separate the form of poetry from specific religious content so that he can both practice and advocate redeploying the form with new and better content. In other words, the Jewish priests used poetry to create gods, to compel their communities to live according to certain ethical values, but those values have outlived their purpose, and we have not yet learned to tap into that power of poetry in order to inspire present-day communities to live by new ethical values that will better promote flourishing today.

Aphorism 92 provides a greater clarification and expansion of Nietzsche's concept of poetry by juxtaposing it with prose. The aphorism begins: "It is noteworthy that the great masters of prose have almost always been poets, too … Good prose is only written face to face with poetry." Prose "is an uninterrupted war with poetry: all of its attractions depend on the way in which poetry is continually avoided and contradicted." Just as it is often argued in the professional dance community that ballet is the foundational dance, one sees Nietzsche arguing that poetry is the fundamental linguistic art, the *arche* of writing. In other words, anything other than poetry can only be written by, so to speak, turning poetry against itself, wresting the poetic away from poetry. Westerners today tend to adopt a contrasting view in which poetry is augmented and ornamented prose. But for Nietzsche, prose is fundamentally a stripped-down form of poetry, a poetry that negates most of its musicality and rhythm. So when prose asserts its minimalist independence from poetry, that is really just poetry minimizing itself. Poetry is thus a form of self-overcoming, while prose is one result or manifestation of that self-overcoming. As with the employment of rhythm to coerce the Fates, prose is merely a tool capable of perhaps bending the will of poetry but never of fully overpowering it.

All language for Nietzsche is fundamentally poetry although some poetry is so stripped down and minimal that it goes by another name, "prose." When one wants to accomplish certain goals — such as precision, clarity, or the appearance of scientific objectivity — it makes sense to write in the sub-genre of poetry that is prose. Nietzsche elaborates:

> Everything abstract wants to be read as a prank against poetry and as with a mocking voice; everything dry and cool is meant to drive the lovely goddess into despair. Often there are rapprochements, reconciliations for a moment — and then a sudden leap back and laughter. Often the curtain is raised and harsh light let in just as the goddess is enjoying her dusks and muted colors. Often the words are taken out of her mouth and sung to a tune that drives her to cover her refined ears with her refined hands. Thus there are thousands of delights in this war.[7]

This is a remarkable passage for several reasons. It constitutes a piece of prose that is performative of the very warfare it articulates between prose and poetry. For Nietzsche, following Heraclitus, "W*ar [thus, conflict, strife, opposition] is the father of all good things,*" including "good prose."[8] In the passage above, Nietzsche's prose dances and flirts with poetic imagery and devices such as metaphor and personification as it laughingly describes the same process.

However, there also seems to be a highly problematic, sadistic, sexual dimension to this passage. Poetry is personified as a goddess, a woman with whom one toys. One is cool towards her out of cruelty and then sadistically enjoys her ensuing despair. One feigns agreeableness only to savor her pain when the agreeableness is withdrawn. One steals her voice only to turn it against her painfully, all the while mocking her overly refined nature. In a sense, in the middle of this warfare between poetry and prose, the prose warrior bursts into the poetic stronghold to violate the poetic enemy.

On another analysis, this passage may itself be read as poetry. It is a poetry masquerading as prose that is locked in battle with poetry — and a poetry which laughs secretly at the reader for assuming that he or she is reading prose and assuming that the struggle between prose and poetry symbolized by the sexual imagery and language constitutes a sort of violation of poetry by prose — when in actuality, the entire scene is a fiction deployed by poetry for her own pleasure.

In order to corroborate the interpretation of aphorism 92 as poetry, I will now reproduce it in the original German in order to note a couple of poetic elements that were inevitably lost in translation:

> Jedes Abstraktum will als Schalkheit gegen diese und wie mit spöttischer Stimme vorgetragen sein; jede Trockenheit und Kühle soll die liebliche Göttin in eine liebliche Verzweifung bringen; oft gibt es Annäherungen, Versöhnungen des Augenblickes und dann ein plötzliches Zurückspringen und Auslachen; oft wird der Vorhang aufgezogen und grelles Licht hereingelassen, während gerade

> die Göttin ihre Dämmerungen und dumpfen Farben genießt; oft wird ihr das Wort aus dem Munde genommen und nach einer Melodie abgesungen, bei der sie die feinen Hände vor die feinen Öhrchen hält, — und so gibt es tausend Vergnügungen des Krieges.[9]

Note the alliteration of "s" sounds in the first clause and "k" sounds in the second clause as well as Nietzsche's use of repetition (for example, of the word "*liebliche*" in the second clause.) Note also the rolling cadence of the third clause, primarily established by the falling metrical pattern of the words: the first syllable is stressed, and the last syllables are not — as in "Aus-*lach-en*" and "plötz-*lich-es*."

In reviewing aphorism 92, one might conclude that Nietzsche presents poetry as the true *arche* of prose in the dual sense of origin or source and of governing principle or ruling trajectory. Nietzsche thereby problematizes the general distinction between poetry and prose, and the distinction between poetry and philosophy *qua* argumentative prose that is evident in his own writing. Is all philosophy simply poetry that to some extent resists its own "poeticity"?

Poetry, construed as the *arche* of prose, is thus strongly implicated in the lineage of philosophy. At least in Nietzsche's work, quoted above, philosophy demonstrates itself a rightful inheritor of the characteristics of poetry elaborated in aphorisms 79 and 84 above. The philosopher manifests as the unwitting carrier of the traits of the seductive, ever-seeking, ever-unfinished visionary, working in a linguistic medium born as magic and spells. What is more, if we attend to the history of this marginalized origin of philosophy in poetry, the memories of these spells can be restored to the philosopher, and the traits show themselves as a visible phenotype. In other words, the philosopher can become a poet. The benefit of this transformation is the ability to create worlds that do not forget their creative origins, which origins imply that we can and perhaps ought to laugh at "those creations," rather than force those creations on others in the guise of absolute truth.

II. *The Gay Science* as Problematizing of the Poet and Poetry

Having developed a general picture of the poet and poetry for Nietzsche, I now turn to the last three aphorisms on poetry in *The Gay Science*, which further explore the nature of the poet in ways that liberate the figure of the poet from both (1) a religiously-informed portrayal as medium of transcendent truth and (2) a narrow conceptualization as one who simply writes poems as instances of a literary genre. Beginning with (1), Nietzsche's most condensed statement of what makes poets unfit to serve as mouthpieces for transcendent truth appears in aphorism 222: "Poet and liar [*Dichter und Lügner*]: the poet considers the liar a foster brother [*Milchbruder*: literally, 'milk brother,' nursed by the same woman] whose milk the poet has drunk; so it is that the liar remains wretched and has not once attained a good conscience." The title of the aphorism, in which the names of the two figures constitute a half-rhyme or slant rhyme, adds literary potency to their discursive identification in the sentence that follows. Not only is the poet a liar, but his or her name also partially rhymes with the word "liar."

One may consider the privation of the poet as a privation insofar as lying is considered a privation of the truth. In formal logic, the presence of even one embedded negation or privation in an argument alters its conclusion. According to my descriptions of Nietzsche's other aphorisms above, the poet emerges as a more original form of the philosopher. The philosopher is thus as — an amnesiac-rebellious poet — indirectly condemned as essentially a liar as well.

It is not entirely surprising that Nietzsche should describe the poet as a liar, since in aphorism 79 he describes the poet as a visionary who lures others with the deception that his or her vision will eventually be realized. And in aphorism 84, he describes poetry as originating from incantations and other obscure occult practices, which certainly do not ring with connotations of truth to ears accustomed to scientific materialism. Furthermore, aphorism 84 ends with the following Homeric quote: "Many lies tell the poets." And in aphorism 92, poetry was also described as deceptive insofar as it often parades in a deformed disguise calling itself prose.

But in aphorism 222, this deceptive nature is made much more explicit to the extent that the poet drinks the same milk as the common liar but is only half-brother to the liar. The only significant difference between the two figures is that the poet achieves power and dubious renown while the liar remains despised. One assumes that the source of poetry's better fortune lies in its magical-musical aspects since only those who lie in prose are persecuted while their lyrically-inclined relatives prosper under a different name.

As a result of this essential deceptiveness, Nietzsche's poets doubtlessly prove themselves unworthy of the mantle of absolute truth and equally deserving of their exile from communities that hold absolute truth most precious, such as the allegedly ideal "city in speech" in Plato's *Republic*.[10] But this unworthiness with regard to Truth also allows Nietzsche to praise the poets for their considerable power and charm without fear of elevating the poets to the level of new transcendent idols.

By naming the poet as liar, Nietzsche as himself a lying poet performs a self-overcoming of lying as it has been understood in Western culture. The lie in its role as the poet's instrument begins to absorb the magical quality and beautiful seductive music that formerly belonged only to poetry. Nietzsche is in effect assisting the poet's milk-brother in finally getting his fair share of the milk, becoming healthy and strong and attaining a good conscience — all of which seems appropriate, given that the will to lie and the will to poetry for Nietzsche are but two names for the same drive, the same will to power.

This radical homogenization of deception and poetry has various implications both inside and outside of poetry as literary genre. In the context of poetry's sharing its powers and positive status with its formerly unacknowledged relatives, consider *The Gay Science*'s oft-quoted aphorism 299:

> *What one should learn from artists*. — How can we make things beautiful, attractive, and desirable for us when they are not? And I rather think that in themselves they never are. Here we could learn something from physicians, when for example they dilute what is bitter or add wine and sugar to a mixture — but even more from artists who are really continually trying to bring off such inventions and feats. Moving away from things until there is a good deal that one no longer sees and there is much that our eye has to add if we are still to see them at all; or seeing things around a corner and as cut out or framed; or to place them so that they partially conceal each other and grant us only glimpses of architectural perspectives; or looking at them through tinted glass or in the light of sunset; or giving them a surface and skin that is not fully transparent — all

> this we should learn from artists while being wiser than they are in other matters. *For with them this subtle power usually comes to an end where art ends and life begins; but we want to be the poets of our life — first of all in the smallest most everyday matters.*[11]

This entire passage, too, is remarkable and merits careful consideration. First, Nietzsche remarks that he thinks life is never beautiful, attractive, or desirable in itself. If Nietzsche took metaphysical claims to the realities of things "in themselves" seriously, this would indeed be a very dark sentiment. But for Nietzsche there is always the issue of all-too-human perspectives that necessarily rule out the possibility of a divine perspective for human beings. That is, by his own reasoning, Nietzsche can only be making this claim, whether genuinely or ironically, from one particular embodied perspective. Either he is serious, but it is just one person speaking from one position at one moment in history. Or he is disingenuous. But in neither case is this the timeless, absolute, "God's honest" truth about human life.

Second, Nietzsche in a certain way equates the physician's work and the artist's work. Both kinds of work pursue a similar goal, namely making the undesirable world appear desirable, and even their methods are somewhat similar. The physician, however, acts to shift the perception of the patient in a way that is unconscious for the patient (for example by helping a diabetic patient regulate her/his insulin levels, part of the benefit of which is more stable mood, as hypoglycemia can cause distressing feelings). By contrast, the artist works to consciously shift the viewer's perceptions. A more important distinguishing factor than medium, however, appears to be the intensity or obsessive duration of the artist's efforts, insofar as the artist is "really continually trying" to make the world appear beautiful. Since artists are trying to do so all the time and thus have plenty of experience, Nietzsche seems to suggest that we see what can be learned from their efforts.

The reader is then instructed to learn the following specific things: (1) to create distance between oneself and a thing until one is forced to create parts of the thing that one can no longer perceive in order to perceive the thing at all — as in the literary criticism of ancient texts for example; (2) to adopt an unusual perspective (which is typically considered inferior) on something — as in free-wheeling scientific experimentation; (3) to artificially frame a thing or put it in a different context; (4) to arrange things in such a way that each one obscures one's view of the others; (5) to examine things through tinted glass or inferior media; (6) to examine things at unusual times; and (7) to intentionally obscure an otherwise clear view of something

— all of which are possible descriptions of intentional, repressive, active forgetting.

These paraphrases and examples as well of course are merely possible interpretations — and similarly untrustworthy ones — of the will to knowledge that is always already the will "to ignorance, to the uncertain, to the untrue!" [12] However, according to Nietzsche we wish to go beyond the instructive example of the artist. And to do so requires that we liberate this deceptive practice of the artist from the confines of art and extend it to every other practice in our world, to the very living of our lives. "*Wir aber wollen die Dichter unseres Lebens sein, und im Kleinsten und Alltäglichsten zuerst!* — We, however, wish the poets of our lives to be, and in that which is smallest and most everyday, first." It seems this would entail the joyful celebration of perspectives and the carefree utilization of deception where necessary in our lives. In the light of the previous aphorisms, we wish to be the visionaries who hunger perennially for visions never fully realized in a language born as poetry, born as magical spells, fighting a constant war to return our prose to poetry, the joyful deceived-deceivers, the "tempting-attempting experimenters [*Versucher*]." [13]

One might wonder, however, what would stop the inevitable collapse of society consequent upon everyone's beginning to lie without constraint or inhibition. The answer lies in the very specific audience for whom Nietzsche's challenge was intended. He writes of what "one" should learn from artists and of the "we" who wish to be the poets of our lives. But who exactly are these people? Did they even exist for Nietzsche when he composed these lines? If not, do they exist now? The final aphorism I will consider, 301, should prove helpful in this context.

This aphorism treats of the "higher human beings" who "see and hear immeasurably more, and see and hear thoughtfully." But this type of higher human being, according to Nietzsche, "can never shake off a *delusion* … He calls his own nature contemplative and overlooks that *er selbst auch der eigentliche Dichter und Fortdichter des Lebens ist* [that he himself, also, the actual poet and ever-poet of life is]." [14] In this passage, appearing only two aphorisms after the one just considered, one finds that it is the higher human beings, the contemplatives, the free spirits, who are not merely being encouraged to expand the will to untruth from art to life but rather already doing so:

> As a poet, he has … above all *vis creativa*, which the active human being lacks … We [higher people] who think and feel at the same time are those who really continually *fashion* something that had not been there before: the whole eternally growing world of valuations, colors, accents, perspectives, scales, affirmations, and negations. *This poem that we have invented* is continually studied by the so-called practical human beings (our actors) who learn their roles and translate everything into flesh and actuality, into the everyday.[15]

Thus, the higher persons in their continual acts of poetic creation actually create the world of meaning, signification, and value that all human beings inhabit. Nietzsche is never clear, however, as to whom he has in mind with the term "higher persons" — though it seems likely to include scientists and philosophers who are especially creative in their work. The deceptive aspect of the poetic impulse applied to life in general by the higher human beings to whom Nietzsche's above exhortations are addressed is thus not used primarily as a license to be destructive of society and the world but as the power to create ever new worlds. Nietzsche seems to loosely define a world as a collection of objects organized, evaluated, and created according to a particular set of standards. And each of those worlds in its broadest sense is a poem.[16]

One implication of this view is that adding an ordinary object like a new pair of shoes creates a new world. Though this might initially seem counterintuitive, consider the famous scene from the film adaptation of the *Grapes of Wrath* in which a young boy lights up with the joy of a new world when he receives a pair of new shoes. Or take the case of Che Guevara's classic text *Guerrilla Warfare*. Guevara mentions shoes no less than twelve times in that slim volume, claiming that they are the most important tool in the guerilla fighters' attempt to bring a post-revolutionary world into being.[17] And few things are more poetic than a revolution.

I will conclude my exploration of these aphorisms by presenting the rest of the passage quoted above, the meaning of which seems relatively clear:

> Whatever has *value* in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature — nature is always value-less, but has been *given* value at some time, as a present — and it was *we* who gave and bestowed it. Only we have created the world that concerns man! — But precisely this knowledge we lack, and when we occasionally catch it for a fleeting moment we forget it again immediately; we fail to recognize our best power and underestimate ourselves, the contemplatives, just a little. We are *neither as proud nor as happy* as we might be.[18]

III. *The Gay Science* as Poetry

I have already considered two ways in which, according to Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* itself constitutes a type of poetry. First, from the poetry/prose warfare described in aphorism 92, I observed that all prose is merely a kind of calcified poetry, constantly fighting its own poetic tendencies. Thus, *The Gay Science*, just like all prose, can be considered partially de-formed poetry. Moreover, *The Gay Science* would not be Nietzsche's only prose poem as he also composed the epic, ironic prose poem that is *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.[19]

Second, I noted at the beginning of this essay Nietzsche's allusion to the troubadours' art of poetry, *gai saber*, in the subtitle of *The Gay Science*. It is a widespread tradition for poets in the West to compose a poem entitled "*Ars Poetica*" in which they describe their particular way of writing poetry, which is itself in the form of a poem (including those by Archibald MacLeish and Timothy Liu). There are also, incidentally, many other poems that serve the same function without the official title, such as Marianne Moore's "Poetry."[20] The phrase "*Ars Poetica*" comes from the Roman poet Horace's treatise of the same name The contents and styles of these "*Ars Poetica*" poems vary enormously, as one might expect, from one type of poet to another. Compare for example these lines from Archibald MacLeish's contribution:

> A poem should be motionless in time
> As the moon climbs.[21]

to these lines from contemporary American poet Timothy Liu's effort:

> Childhood begins with your first good line —
> a spider waiting for its kill.[22]

Given the subtitle of the second edition of*The Gay Science: with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, which suggests that the book's "prose" content is surrounded at both ends by a group of individual poems, perhaps it would be fruitful to think of *The Gay Science* as itself an *Ars Poetica* and

therefore as a poem that both enacts and describes the art of poetry as the poet understands it. Moreover, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche describes the troubadours as "magnificent and inventive human beings… to whom Europe owes so many things and almost owes itself." [23] The significance that Nietzsche attaches to these knight-poets seems to further support my conception of *The Gay Science* as poetry. Recall that the title of the book is a German translation (*Die Fröliche Wissenshaft*) of the Latin phrase the troubadours used for their art of poetry. Finally, *The Gay Science* fits Nietzsche's broad conception of poetry as revealed in the above six aphorisms.

At any rate, these two groups of poems at the beginning and end of *The Gay Science*, particularly in their playful spirit, can be understood as forming a poetic boundary which is at the same time a sort of *un-bounding* insofar as it attacks seriousness and serious attempts to contain or achieve certainty in knowledge and thereby to contain life itself. Instead, one is free to willfully create knowledge for one's time in the service of life.

Consider for example poem 9 from the opening poems, entitled "My Roses":

> Yes, joy wants to amuse,
> Every joy wants to amuse.
> Would you like to pick my roses?
>
> You must stoop and stick your noses
> Between thorns and rocky views,
> And not be afraid of bruises.
>
> For my joy — enjoys good teases.
> For my joy — enjoys good ruses.
> Would you like to pick my roses? [24]

One would be at a loss here if searching for the kind of clarity and order which have long been demanded of philosophical texts by some philosophical traditions (sometimes at the cost of the clear thing being

pointless, the order stultifying and rigid). A Western reader encounters the phrases "my love is like a rose" and "the soul is a simple substance" with very different expectations, allowing possibilities to multiply in the case of the former while trying to nail down the timelessly transcendent truth of the latter. Against this bifurcation into serious philosophy and silly poetry, Nietzsche offers a prelude and appendix of poems to a philosophical text and thereby questions the assumption that poetry and philosophy must be interpreted differently.

In other words, in the face of what Nietzsche might describe as "Socratic" attempts to "cage Dionysus," the "prelude of rhymes" and "appendix of songs" can be thought of as rebellious, wicked guards that are always flinging open the gates of the cage. The prelude and appendix are nevertheless limits to the "prose" aphoristic center of the text, delimiting where the "book" begins and ends. But since poetry for Nietzsche is self-mocking, as I have attempted to show in this essay, the prelude and appendix also simultaneously un-limit the limits that they embody, loosening and unbinding the prose text, which thereby acquires the semblance of poetic freedom. The conventional poetry of the prelude and appendix can be read as a reminder to the reader of the light-hearted, subversive, poetic quality of the entire text of *The Gay Science*. The prelude and appendix of *The Gay Science* are not its only instances of poetic unlimiting limits. That which the prelude and appendix encircle, namely the aphorisms themselves, also resonate with poetic unbounding boundaries. Of particular relevance to this issue is the etymology of the word "aphorism." The word is derived from the Greek root *horizein*, from which is derived the English word *horizon*. As a verb, *horizein* means to bound, to limit, to mark; and in mathematical discourses, a true horizon is one in which one's visibility is unobstructed in all directions, resulting in a perfectly circular perspective. However, the limits enacted by even a true horizon are radically perspectival, and with even the slightest change of location, the observer finds her/himself no longer bound to those limits. Thus, a horizon should be understood not as an absolute limit but as a limit on what can be seen from a given point of view over one period of time.

One could in this light conceive of Nietzsche's aphorisms as a network of these various, circular true horizons, which a reader can overlap like seismographic readings to create more complex, subtle, and perhaps even accurate "readings" or results. Furthermore, the true horizon in its

circular nature can be articulated theoretically as the result of bending or slanting a perfectly straight line. All but parallel straight lines intersect at some point, so even the slightest slant on a line — or a truth — entails convergence, intersection, and the likelihood of circularity. As to why Nietzsche might have chosen to write this book aphoristically, one likely possibility is that most lyric poetry is short, and as a prose poem about poetry, it is fitting for *The Gay Science* to contain a significant number of lyric poem-sized sections. Poetry, as "slanted truths," as problematic and often circular lines of language and thought, can thus be thought of as the "true horizon" of language and thought. As Emily Dickinson reminds us, "Success in circuit lies."

IV. Conclusion: Slanted Truths

In light of the above explorations, it seems that the best way of characterizing poetry, broadly construed, would be as slanted truths. Slanted truths, meaning a plurality of truths attacked and constructed from different angles, always from an embedded, embodied perspective and always strategically. Truth slanted — to summarize my above analyses of the six aphorisms from *The Gay Science* — by the tempests of a vision that must always be pursued, slanted by the forces of magical incantations, by the glancing blows of the perpetual civil war of poetry expressed as prose, slanted by the power of creativity. And especially by the creation of the "higher persons" of their ever-evolving cumulative poems, which we call the world.

Notes

1 Emily Dickinson, "Untitled Poem 1263," http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/56824.

2 See, for example, Martin Heidegger, "Poetically Man Dwells," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Perennial, 2001), 211–227.

3 Plato, *Statesman. Philebus. Ion*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 533D (p. 421).

4 Plato, *Ion*, 534B (p. 423).

5 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: A Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), 260.

6 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), 115.

7 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage 1974), aphorism 92.

8 Ibid., emphasis original.

9 Ibid., emphasis added.

10 Plato, *The Republic of Plato: Second Edition*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic, 1991), Book II: 369A (p. 45).

11 *The Gay Science*, aphorism 299, emphasis added.

12 *Beyond Good and Evil*, 24.

13 *Beyond Good and Evil*, 42.

14 The word "delusion" is italicized in Kaufmann's translation, and the German is italicized merely as non-English text. In Kaufmann's translation, the word *Fortdichter*, a Nietzschean compound of *fort*, "continually," and *Dichter* "poet," is omitted entirely; and *des Lebens* is rendered as "this life"; whereas if the present author is correct, a more straightforward translation that would also expand the scope of the word "life" would be simply "life."

15 Emphasis added. "*Vis creative*" means "creative power" (Kaufmann 241n).

16 The characterization of poetry in this aphorism strongly suggests the original Greek sense of *poiesis* as "making" that is so important to Heidegger in his work on poetry.

17 See *The Grapes of Wrath*, DVD, directed by John Ford (Los Angeles, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1940); and Ernesto "Che" Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. J. P. Morray (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2012), 23, 27, 28, 41, 44, 72, 77, 78, 79, 96, 97, 98.

18 Emphasis original.

19 The reader is perhaps curious as to why I have chosen *The Gay Science* as opposed to *Zarathustra* as the exemplar of Nietzsche's art of poetry, given the fact that the latter is the most overtly and conventionally (qua prose poem) poetic of Nietzsche's texts. The advantage offered by *The Gay Science* however is a certain meta-analysis of poetry or poetics, simultaneous with an enactment of poetry, while *Zarathustra*, due to its style and format, is more purely an enactment of poetry without poetics.

20 Marianne Moore, "Poetry," 1919, https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/poetry.

21 Archibald MacLeish, "*Ars Poetica*," 1926, http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/detail/17168.

22 Timothy Liu, "*Ars Poetica*," 1999, http://salmagundimagazine.tumblr.com/post/83215274749/ars-poetica-by-timothy-liu.

23 *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 260, 201.

24 *The Gay Science*, "My Roses," 45.

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Lyotard on Postmodern Music

Ashley Woodward

ABSTRACT

This paper delineates the idea of postmodern music as it is found in the writings of Jean-François Lyotard. Lyotard's concept of the postmodern in general has informed debates about what "postmodern music" might be, but his own writings on music have not been given their due weight in such debates. While he never defines such a concept explicitly in his writings, it may be extrapolated from them. In the essay "Music and Postmodernity," he draws an analogy between the liberation of humanity in socio-political modernity and the liberation of sonic material in musical modernity. While Lyotard does not quite make this explicit, the implication is that for him, an event analogous to the well-known "end of metanarratives" which signals the transition to postmodernity is evident in the history of music. Just as the development of the Enlightenment project has resulted in a breakdown of the narratives of the emancipation of humanity, so too the successful liberation of sound in musical modernity has led to the explosion of a coherent narrative of musical "progress," instituting something like a musical postmodernity. Instead of any idea of general eclecticism following from this, however, Lyotard is clear about the stakes of postmodern music (as of all art): those stakes concern the aesthetic of the sublime and mean searching for "the inaudible" in the audible through any and all means of experimentation on sonorous matter. The upshot is that while Lyotard endorses a kind of heterogeneity in his approach to postmodern music, he denies the loss of all critical stakes which is often thought to attend such a position.

KEYWORDS

Jean-François Lyotard
Postmodern Music
Poststructuralism
Sublime
Timbre

Our ears are deaf to what sound can *do*. We must give back to the act of listening the power to open itself to the inaudible.

— Lyotard[1]

1

As in other areas, the term "postmodern" has been used in musicology to mean a variety of different things: the music of a particular historical period, the end of experimentation and return to traditional forms of composition, a pastiche of old styles, a breakdown of the distinction between "elite" and "popular" musics, a concern with the politics of marginalized identities, and so on.[2] One of the mostly widely accredited authorities on the meaning of the postmodern is Jean-François Lyotard, whose characterization of the postmodern as an "incredulity toward metanarratives" has often been invoked in discussions around postmodern music.[3] Lyotard was something of an amateur musicologist and devoted at least six essays solely to music in addition to numerous scattered remarks on the topic throughout his prolific writings.[4] However, remarkably, only Lyotard's general theory of the postmodern — principally as it is found in his book *The Postmodern Condition* and not his own writings on music — has significantly informed debates about the meaning of postmodern music.

My aim here is to rectify this by clarifying what "postmodern music" would mean for Lyotard. It is possible that his idea of postmodern music has not been more widely acknowledged because he never uses the term "postmodern music" or makes explicit what such a term might mean within his philosophical perspective. The *question* is clearly raised in his essay "The Inaudible: Music and Postmodernity," but even there an explicit answer is not forthcoming. However, as I shall argue here, it is possible to reconstruct what postmodern music would mean for Lyotard by "joining the dots" between a number of his essays on music and general aesthetics. As we shall see, for Lyotard the meaning of postmodern music may be intimately linked with an aesthetic of the sublime.

2

Let me begin with two brief methodological points which guide my reading of Lyotard's aesthetics, including his writings on music. First, while Lyotard is frequently characterized as a post-structuralist philosopher, when it comes to aesthetics, it is better to think of him as a "post-phenomenologist." By this I do not refer to the North American school of phenomenology represented by philosophers such as Don Ihde in association with whom the term "post-phenomenology" has also been used.[5] Rather, I mean to designate the way in which Lyotard takes up themes and concerns from the phenomenological tradition but develops them beyond the scope of that tradition in a manner similar to those of other roughly contemporaneous French philosophers: Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, or Jean-Luc Marion for example might also be described as post-phenomenologists. Lyotard's rich and diverse aesthetic concerns inscribe an arc which begins and ends in a critical encounter with Merleau-Ponty, especially the celebrated essay "Eye and Mind."[6] More significantly, the "unpresentable" that Lyotard consistently identified as being at stake in the arts may be approached via phenomenology but not elaborated by it since by definition the unpresentable does not appear phenomenally.[7] In this sense Lyotard's aesthetics pushes phenomenology to a point where it ceases to be phenomenology. Yet in a way this is simply the exercise and elaboration of a paradox inherent in phenomenology from the start. Since Husserl, phenomenology was never really content to describe appearances but sought through a kind of transcendental reasoning to identify the conditions of possibility for such appearing: consciousness in Husserl, Being in Heidegger, the flesh in Merleau-Ponty, life in Henry, etc. Typically, the conditions of the given are posited as not themselves being given. Thus Lyotard distinguishes in a work of art the given *presentation* — that which appears, which makes itself known to perception and thought — and the *unpresentable*, the elusive condition that enables what is presented to be art rather than an object of knowledge and to give rise to an aesthetic response. In music, as we shall see, this means — and I quote Lyotard — that "what is at stake in musical pieces that merit the name of opuses [is] the enigma of letting appear, of letting be heard" and that "[w]hat is audible in the opus is musical only in as much as it evokes the inaudible."[8]

Second, my reading is guided by what I would like to call "Lyotard's doubt." This terminology is inspired by Merleau-Ponty's well-known essay, "Cézanne's Doubt," and Lyotard's elaboration of this theme in his essay, "Freud According to Cézanne."[9] *Grosso modo*: Cézanne's continually shifting style through at least four "periods" may be explained by his doubt that there is any style which can adequately render the visual in painting.[10] Lyotard's aesthetics also seems to have its "periods": most notably an earlier Freudian "libidinal" period and a later Kantian "sublime" period. Like Cézanne's amorphous styles, Lyotard's shifting philosophical approaches may be understood as motivated by his doubt that any philosophy can adequately render the kinds of issues he seeks to think, including questions about music or art in general. This methodological point helps us to understand an aspect of Lyotard's work which is otherwise in danger of causing confusion and frustration. Not only do Lyotard's philosophical approaches change throughout his career — e.g., from Freud to Kant as a primary point of reference — but the value accorded to terms shifts as well. Each of Lyotard's terms is of course complex, but it seems that within each of his philosophical periods, certain terms indicate presentation while others indicate the unpresentable. What can seem disconcerting is that as Lyotard's thought develops, terms previously indicating the unpresentable move over to the side of presentation while new terms are summoned for the unpresentable. For example, after *Discourse, Figure*, "figure" begins to refer to discourse or structure; and while "desire" is the term exploited for its indeterminacy in Lyotard's work of the 1960s and 1970s, by the 1980s it is rendered in terms of "intrigue" in opposition to unpresentable "presence."[11] What this indicates is simply that, according to Lyotard, no term can adequately render "the unpresentable" — as soon as it is described and thought, it is too "presented," and something less familiar must then be introduced to indicate the unpresentable. With these methodological points in mind, let me turn to the elaboration of Lyotard's philosophical reflections on postmodern music.

3

Lyotard inscribes the stakes of a musical aesthetics into the problematic of modernity and postmodernity in the essay "The Inaudible: Music and Postmodernity," written in 1991. The argument proceeds by way of an analogy. Lyotard reiterates his well-known thesis on postmodernity as the "end of grand narratives," then asks whether we may consider something analogous to this event to have occurred in music. Lyotard defines *the modern* as the period marked by the credibility of a philosophy of history — called a "grand narrative" or "metanarrative" — which posits the progressive emancipation of humanity as its goal. In this sense, *the postmodern* marks the loss of credence given to this idea of historical progress. According to Lyotard, the legitimation of projects has largely ceased to appeal to the progress of human freedom. Instead, in the contemporary developed world, projects are seen as legitimate when they manifest an increase in the efficiency of the capitalist, technoscientific "system." This increase in efficiency is the only good now recognized, and the multiple ideologies of "progress" have been supplanted by an ideology of "development." "The postmodern condition," Lyotard writes, "is that of human beings when they are caught in this process, which simultaneously develops their powers and demands their enslavement." [12]

Lyotard draws an analogy with music by suggesting that "[t]he history of western music may be thought of globally as the *emancipation of sound*." [13] He takes his bearings here from Theodor W. Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music*, where the latter writes that "with the liberation of the material, the possibility of mastering it has increased." [14] Lyotard's suggestion is that all experiments and innovations in the history of western music have questioned the necessity of the rules which thus far have governed the ways in which sounds are selected, manipulated, and composed in order to be considered music within that tradition. Such rules include the principles of pitch, timbre, rhythm, melody, harmony, and so on. But experimentation reveals that such rules are conventional and contingent, and the only necessity of music is its *material*: sound or sonorous matter, "the vibration of the air with its components, frequency, duration, amplitude, color, and attack." [15] With this observation, Lyotard suggests that scientific research on

sound — as in acoustics and psychophysiology — may converge with new technological means of treating and synthesizing sound and the rule-breaking experiments of composers and musicians to liberate sound from the conventions of musical tradition and multiply its possibilities.[16]

While Lyotard does not explicitly specify as such, it is easy to see that this story would be a *modern* way of understanding music: the grand narrative of "western art music" as the emancipation of sound. As Derek Scott explains, musical modernism frequently subscribed to a teleological narrative of development: "Modernists have continually seen works as 'pointing forwards' to others, thus reinforcing a sense of self-determining progress in the arts … the dominant grand narrative for musical modernism was that of the evolution and dissolution of tonality."[17] What he has in mind here of course is the atonalism of Arnold Schönberg and his followers.

Lyotard's question then is whether we can speculate that there would be something analogous to the *postmodern* in music, an event which would call into question the credibility of this grand narrative of the liberation of sound. He states that the question is a little naïve, and this is perhaps why he does not quite give it an explicit answer. Yet the answer he implies is not too difficult to reconstruct, and this is what I will do in what follows. In doing so, I will demonstrate how Lyotard's reflections on the questions of musical modernity and postmodernity necessarily intersect with his reflections on the aesthetic of the sublime.

4

Lyotard stakes a claim for the predominant value of the aesthetic of the sublime in relation to the avant-garde arts in a series of essays published in the 1980s, and this aesthetic serves to clarify his understanding of the modern and postmodern in the arts. His essays devoted to music from this period make little direct reference to the sublime, but music is included in the general aesthetics of the sublime he outlines elsewhere.[18,19] Lyotard argues that with the avant-gardes, the aesthetic of the beautiful can no longer be understood as illuminating the stakes of art. Instead, such stakes

are linked with the aesthetic of the sublime. Some of the main lines of reasoning he provides are as follows.

First, he argues that avant-garde art departs from the aesthetic of the beautiful because the beautiful assumes a common taste shared by the public, which theoretically realizes itself in the feeling of pleasure universally produced in those who experience the work. The sublime by contrast assumes no such "common sense" of taste. The publics of avant-garde art "are prey to unforeseeable feelings: they are shocked, admiring, scornful, indifferent."[20] What is at stake is no longer producing a shared feeling of pleasure in the members of the public but surprising them.[21]

Second, Lyotard argues that "sublime" is the most appropriate description of *indeterminacy*, which was popular as an aesthetic technique among avant-garde artists. These artists recognized that rule-following — which after Aristotle was called "poetics" — is not sufficient for the production or appreciation of aesthetic effects. Lyotard writes:

> The predominance of the idea of *techne* placed works under a multiple regulation, that of the model taught in the studios, Schools and Academies, that of the taste shared by the aristocratic public, that of a purposiveness of art, which was to illustrate the glory of a name, divine or human, to which was linked the perfection of some cardinal virtue or other. The idea of the sublime disrupts this harmony.[22]

Third, Lyotard argues, the task of the avant-gardes after technical means of representing reality were perfected — namely by photography, film, and presumably also phonographic recording — is to present something other than what can be represented according to the traditional "rules" of representation. He associates "the unpresentable" with the Idea in Kant: a concept without an object which can be presented as an example. According to Kant's aesthetics, we experience the sublime in aesthetic phenomena that suggest but cannot fully represent the Ideas of reason: "the absolute" as such is just such an Idea for Kant. Similarly, writes Lyotard, the task of the avant-gardes is to "present the unpresentable": in painting, the invisible in the visible; in music, the inaudible in the audible. Lyotard insists that "[t]he sublime, and not the beautiful, is the sentiment called forth by these [avant-garde] works."[23]

In particular, Lyotard associates this movement away from realistic representation with minimalism and abstraction. According to him, artworks which come under these headings move away from a primary concern with *form* and towards a concern with *matter*. (As will be discussed below, this is specified by a concern with color in painting and timbre in music.) In Kantian aesthetics, the beautiful emphasizes the predominance of form as a shared basis of judgments of aesthetic taste while the sublime involves a crisis in the imagination's ability to present forms. The implication is that the experience of the sublime involves a kind of "formlessness." Lyotard writes:

> As the idea of a natural fit between matter and form declines (a decline already implied in Kant's analysis of the sublime …) the aim for the arts, especially of painting and music, can only be that of approaching matter. Which means approaching presence without recourse to the means of presentation.[24]

Kant did not think that a work of art itself could be sublime, only represent sublime objects: storms, mountains, and so on. In extending his reinterpretation of Kant, Lyotard develops the notion of an *immanent sublime* in which the absolute or infinite is associated with matter in the work of art. In the work there is an "absolute" insofar as there is an indeterminate aspect of the work, not given by relations between elements — as "absolute" implies "without relation." In order to understand this appeal to an "absolute" as an absence of relations between elements, it is instructive to recall that Lyotard's trajectory in aesthetics began with a critical rejection of structuralist aesthetics, which understands everything in terms of such relations.[25] According to Lyotard, this absolute, this "matter," is given by color in painting and timbre and nuance in music. As he emphasizes in his writings on the painter Barnett Newman, the sublime is *here*, *now*: it is the work itself in its materiality.[26] This immanence of the sublime is what Lyotard emphasizes as the mark of postmodern art in his most well-known aesthetic distinction between the modern and the postmodern, made in the essay "Answering the Question: What is the Postmodern?". The modern is sublime but nostalgic; it presents the fact that there is an absent, transcendent absolute. But the postmodern gives an immanent absolute; it presents the unpresentable in the work itself.[27] The differences between the two are often subtle, and Lyotard even suggests that works may contain

elements of both modern and postmodern aesthetics. Yet in general, the difference seems to rest on the quotient of experimentation evident in the work: the modern sublime is evoked by works which draw attention to the limits of traditional modes or representation, indicating negatively that a transcendent absolute exists but cannot be represented; by contrast, works which exhibit a postmodern aesthetic experiment with new modes of presentation, introducing an "unpresentable" element into the presentation itself. In literature, Lyotard names Proust as an example of the modern sublime and Joyce as an example of the postmodern.

The unpresentable is difficult for the mind to think, and Lyotard deliberately uses paradoxical terms to indicate it. In his writings on music, "the inaudible" is signaled obliquely by appeal to literary references (Kleist, Quignard) and even a spiritual one (Swedenborg).[28] Yet the "unpresentable" is not quite so mysterious as it might seem. It is nothing mystical, as Lyotard insists, but rather indicates what it is in art that *moves* us; something which cannot be identified in or reduced to "ordinary perception," to our knowledge of what the artwork is or represents, or to our understanding of the rules or principles governing its composition and effects.[29] This is why Lyotard insists on using terms such as "invisible," derived from Merleau-Ponty, and "inaudible," suggested by Varèse. At least in one important respect, the unpresentable is *affect*, that which moves the body and makes it feel not a recognizable emotion but unknown or unspecifiable feelings. Moreover, the unpresentable is a state of *matter* and not immaterial or spiritual in a metaphysically transcendent sense. Lyotard writes: "The inaudible and the invisible do not belong to a supra-sensible substratum that escapes entirely the normal condition of space-time-matter … the inaudible is a gesture in the space-time-matter of sound, and it gestures toward a 'presence' that is not presentable." [30]

5

For Lyotard then, the meaning of the postmodern in the arts is linked to a modality of the aesthetic of the sublime, which insists on the immanence of the absolute in the matter of the work. Although it is not explicitly stated, it

is not difficult to draw out the theme of the sublime in Lyotard's essays on music from the 1980s. We have seen that for him, the sublime is recognizable in arts which move away from form towards matter. In music, he argues, the sublime is evident in 1) the way that music seeks to escape temporal form, and 2) timbre as the matter of music. The first point identifies a general principle or logic which operates on two levels: it is the principle of form in western music, which operates according to repetition. One level is that of the audible experience of music and concerns its composition. On this level, Lyotard identifies musics which have what he calls a narrative form: they have a beginning, middle, and end, and they express and evoke recognizable moods, emotions, and feelings. As examples of "narrative" types of music, Lyotard indicates "the musical poem, the symphony, the sonata, the *lied*."[31] By contrast, Lyotard will associate the aesthetic of the sublime with all kinds of experimental musics which defy such narrative form. At a more profound level however, Lyotard argues that what is at stake in music — what gives rise to aesthetic feeling and makes it an art — is a "pure, punctual presence" that escapes from the repetitions which constitute the audible by giving it consistency and form.[32] This level concerns the constitution of the audible as such and evokes the paradox of "the inaudible," which is not directly experienceable but is that which in audible sound evokes aesthetic experience. Lyotard approaches this difficult idea of a "pure, punctual presence" and tries to argue for it in a number of ways, which include the references to Kleist, Quignard, and Swedenborg mentioned above; but let us summarize the point via his more strictly philosophical, Kantian approach.[33]

For Kant, space and time are the two basic forms of intuition, according to which objects are presented and become perceptible. Music does not require space in order to be perceived; but it is *par excellence* the art of time.[34] Kant understands "the given" — that which we perceive through the senses — as a manifold: for him, the term "matter" designates this "pure diversity" before any ordering, before form. In order to perceive objects, the mind must engage in an activity of synthesis, which gathers together the manifold and imposes on it a form. In this way, the manifold can be presented as a sensible object and offered to the understanding for categorization. Time is a form which allows the presentation or appearing of the perceptible through retention and repetition. In order for something to appear even for an instant in perception, there must be at the bare minimum a "microsynthesis" of the manifold, a grasping and comparing of different

elements of the manifold, which requires a repetition because "past" elements must be repeated in order for such a comparison, such a synthesis, to take place. In short, Lyotard posits that what gives the aesthetic feeling of the sublime in music may be theorized as escaping from repetition and the form of time and understood as "a pinch of manifold" so small that it is imperceptible to consciousness, unexperienceable, taking place below the threshold of perception.[35] Sound in this immediate present would escape from the form of time and be something monstrous, unformed, unpresentable. To use a term that is common in Lyotard's work, an inaudible sound would be a sonic *event*: that is, an occurrence irreducible to the systems of meaning, both perceptual and cognitive, that we try to capture it in.[36]

Lyotard further associates the capacity of sound to produce such an event with matter understood as *timbre*, the tonal quality of a sound which differs for example when the same note is played on different instruments. Timbre is one of three main aspects of sound and the most difficult to determine precisely or understand rationally. The other two aspects, pitch and volume, are relatively easy to understand in terms of objective quantitative measure and graded scales of subjective experience. Simply put, pitch largely corresponds to the frequency of sound waves, and different pitches are heard as higher or lower in relation to each other. Volume is measured physically as intensity, "the energy transmitted by the sound wave across unit area per second" and perceived by the listener on a comparative scale of louder or quieter.[37] It is possible to analyze timbre in terms of the physical aspects of sound, but it is a far more complex matter. Timbre is influenced by many factors in the production of sound, including the harmonic spectrum of the tone (its overtones), the starting transients (the time in which the sound vibration develops), the envelope shape (the changes in amplitude of the sound wave), and the formants (acoustic resonance factors) affecting the sound. These last include the physical parameters of the ear and brain receiving the sound, which differ between individuals (deafness across a certain range, etc.), and as Charles Taylor and Murray Campbell note, "the result of all this is, of course, that the wave that is finally perceived by the brain may be very different from the one that started out from the basic vibrator."[38] Subjectively, timbre is even more difficult to "rationalize" since it concerns quality rather than quantity. The convention is to describe timbre as the "colour" of a tone, yet as Isabella van Elferen has noted, this is a synaesthetically confused metaphor, which describes sound

with a properly visual concept.[39] Timbres are typically described using such synesthetic metaphors; timbres may be called "warm," "red," "grainy," "clean," etc. This elusive aspect of timbre led Romantic music theorists such as Johann Gottfried Herder and E.T.A. Hoffmann to associate it with the infinite and indeed with the sublime.[40]

For Lyotard, timbre is exploited as a "site" of the inaudible in sound, of the sonic event, by virtue of its indeterminacy. In short, he believes that there is in timbre something irreducible to the well-known parameters of perception and rational analysis, and this something is the "*je ne sais quoi*" which is responsible for our aesthetic feeling of music. He emphasizes the importance of timbre in avant-garde musics:

> It is clear too that from Debussy to Boulez, Cage or Nono, via Webern or Varèse, the attention of modern musicians has been turned towards this secret passibility to sound-timbre. And it is also this that makes jazz and electronic music important. For with gongs and in general all percussion instruments, with synthesizers, musicians have access to an infinite continuum of sound-nuances.[41]

This focus on the inaudible in music, understood as the unpresentable given in the present instant and the matter of timbre, explains why Lyotard links the aesthetic of the sublime with music. This idea of the inaudible is also what allows us to characterize his philosophy of music as post-phenomenological: in music, the inaudible is what gives the given — the audible — but is not itself given. In the later essay "Music, Mutic" (1993), using vocabulary typical of this later period, Lyotard describes music as a gesture made *in* space-time-sound, which makes a *sign* of the inaudible.[42]

In the passage quoted above, Lyotard uses the special term "passibility" to describe the kind of state required in order to be receptive to sonic events in music. Passibility is a state which involves both passivity and activity or ability: the state is passive insofar as it requires us to be open to the unexpected and drop our expectations and anticipatory interpretations of what will be given to us in sensation and feeling — but active insofar as it requires careful attention directed toward such openness. "Passibility" also enfolds the meaning of "passage" as it is a state in which one opens one's sensibility as a passage through which the event may be registered on the receptive mind or "soul": "a passage to the events which come to it from a

'something' that it does not know."[43] Lyotard compares this state with the kind of free-floating attention required in the psychoanalytic exercise of "free association."[44] It is only through such a state of receptiveness that the inaudible in the audible might be "heard."

6

Before we can conclude with a clear summary of what postmodern music would mean for Lyotard — a meaning that we have seen is linked with the aesthetic of the sublime — we must note that a significant complication is introduced into Lyotard's understanding of the sublime around the same time as the "Music and Postmodernity" essay was written. This complication is one which has only recently been made readily and clearly available with the 2009 publication in French and English of his contemporaneous book *Karel Appel: A Gesture of Colour*, which was previously only available in German. Here he writes as follows:

> It is foolish to pretend, or even to suppose, that each of these aesthetics, that of the beautiful and that of the sublime, rules a distinct *period* in the history of the arts or could be recognisable by a *manner* or an appropriate school. Take for example the avant-gardes. The art historian and the art critic distinguish there two major movements, one towards abstraction, the other towards the minimal.
>
> One could believe (this happened to me) that in *both* cases it is a question of attempting to forestall the trap of figuration and of bearing witness to that which escapes all presentation. An attempt at "negative presentation," as it were, that is obedient to an aesthetics of "too little to see," that would turn its back on the free profusion, on the "rich matter" of forms. One would thus recognise the sublime in certain *manners*. […]
>
> That is a hasty application of the results of critical analysis to the description of works. Minimalism and abstraction are names which designate, more or less, manners indeed observable in the history of art. But the critical issues that interest us do not coincide at all with these manners. […] Above all, the sublime does not become attached to manner, it is without manner, as Longinus already suggested. […] There is no sublime technique because technique deals with the shaping of matter in presentation and the sublime is only the feeling that the absolute makes a sign in the work, whatever its form. This "presence" signs itself as much […] in a rondo of Mozart and in a quartet for strings by Beethoven or Scelsi.[45]

The upshot of this is that the late Lyotard in a certain sense retracts his claim that over the last two hundred years, and with the twentieth-century avant-gardes in particular, art must be understood in relation to the aesthetic of the sublime, understandable as a movement away from form and towards matter, recognizable in stylistic movements such as minimalism and abstraction.

A corollary displacement occurs with Lyotard's treatment of music in his last essay dedicated to it, "Music, Mutic," published in 1993. Here, we see that while he continues to focus on matter as indeterminacy, opposed to form, timbre has now passed over to the side of form, of the presentation, of the audible. Recall here my introductory comments on Lyotard's methodological "doubt." He writes:

> There is a sonorous matter that is not what the musician calls the material. The latter is understood as the timbre of the sound. Matter is not heard […] sonorous matter […] clandestinely inhabits the audible material, the timbre.[46]

The above points complicate our attempt to understand Lyotard's ideas about postmodern music in important ways because he now suggests that the aesthetic feelings of the beautiful and the sublime cannot be distinguished in relation to the characteristics of the work — there is no sublime style, and timbre is placed on the side of form, not matter. In this period of Lyotard's aesthetics — the 1990s — he insists that *there is no history of art* properly speaking, only a history of the cultural reception of artworks, understood and classified according to their *forms*.[47] There is no history of what gives a cultural product an artistic value, which for him is its capacity to affect us: there is no history of the beautiful or the sublime, such that we would be able to say that for example a work by Matisse is more beautiful than one by Rembrandt because beauty has progressed.[48]

7

Having completed this brief survey of some pertinent aspects of Lyotard's philosophy of music, we may return to the question of whether there is an event analogous to the postmodern in the history of western music. As previously noted, Lyotard says this is a naïve question, and we may now readily see why: insofar as he wants to insist in his late aesthetics that there is no history of art, there is no history of the artistic effect in music. The stylistic changes which determine periods of music — baroque, classical, romantic, modern, to name just the broadest and best-known — take place on the level of *culture* and of the *presentation* of the work. What would be called "the postmodern" or "postmodernity" in music as in other fields must break with such a cultural history.

However, there are some ways in which there *is* a plausible analogy between the postmodern event and music history. We can see this elaborated in Lyotard's essay "Obedience," which appears in *The Inhuman*. The liberation of sound as material — something masterable which is used to produce specific aesthetic effects — might be thought to have revealed that sound is more (or perhaps less) than material; it is *matter*. Matter in this sense is what Lyotard called "immaterial" at the exhibition of that name (*Les Immatériaux*), for which he was principal director at the Pompidou Centre in 1985. Here he presented the hypothesis of a kind of negative dialectic with respect to modernity, understood as the attempt to liberate humanity through the technological control of materials. The very technoscientific researches which attempted to increase this mastery, he contended, have undermined it as it has broken down the distinction between subject and object which supported this project and the concept of the material, revealing an indeterminacy he names "immaterial matter."[49] Lyotard draws an explicit link between the themes of this exhibition and his reflections on music when he calls Varèse's *poème électronique* — played at the Philips pavilion, designed by Le Corbusier, in Brussels in 1958 — the first exhibition of immaterials.[50] What he calls *sonorous matter* is *immaterial matter* insofar as it involves this indeterminacy. The "liberation of sound" has not revealed something masterable, a key to calculating determinable musical effects, but a vast heterogeneous continuum of indeterminate, possible effects. The liberation of sound has revealed something indeterminate and

*un*masterable just as the modern attempt to liberate "Man" has revealed that there is no such coherent subject of history.

Despite Lyotard's later qualifications, postmodern music would still be bound up with an aesthetic of the sublime. In his later works, there are important aspects of the aesthetic of the sublime which he wants to generalize to *all* aesthetics. This generalization is the explicit task of the 1993 essay "Anima Minima," where he writes:

> The present description extends the import of the specific analysis of the sublime sentiment to all aesthetic sentiments. Being artists, writers, sometimes philosophers, contemporaries apply themselves to detecting within sensation the "presence" of what escapes sensation: something neutral, something gray, something blank "inhabits" the nuances of a sound, a chromaticism, or a voice.[51]

What Lyotard ultimately wants with the aesthetic of the sublime then seems to be what I have called the "post-phenomenological" aspect of his aesthetic — the "unpresentable presence," not only irreducible to conceptual determination but also to formed perception. He continues to identify this unpresentable presence with an immaterial matter even as the capacity to identify it in works which highlight timbre or color is now denied. The problem with Lyotard's emphasis on timbre in music in the '80s is simply that it identifies "presence" too strongly with the presentation and restricts it too much to a particular style or period. His later aesthetics further open the question of where "the inaudible" might be indicated through sound.

It thus remains the case that Lyotard wants to elaborate and defend the sublime as an aesthetic which best describes the stakes of the arts he is interested in — that is, experimental arts. Such arts might be called "avant-garde," not because they belong to a particular period or style but because they push the boundaries of the received rules of presentation through whatever manner or style in their search for the unpresentable. Lyotard's later considerations are not retractions of the sublime as an aesthetic of experimentation in the arts but rather of a too-easy historical periodization of such experimentation, which would recognize the sublime only in a particular manner or style. "Musical postmodernity" then would not be a period but a state, mood, approach, realization, perspective, or aesthetic whereby one would not give credence to the notion that the cultural unfolding of periods or styles progressively liberates sound but would search

for the inaudible through any and all styles and parameters of experimentation. There is in avant-garde music a vast multiplicity of experimental techniques pursued to approach the inaudible. Lyotard gives just two examples to illustrate the range of these heterogeneous possibilities of experimentation; two composers, who seem to him to approach the inaudible from opposite directions: Cage through "letting sound be" and Boulez through an "over-articulation" of sound.[52] If there is a recognition of the legitimacy of multiple, heterogeneous, and perhaps incommensurable regions of sound able to testify to the inaudible, we have entered — in music — something like the political postmodernity which Lyotard conceives as the multiplication of little narratives once the grand narratives of the emancipation of humanity, which claimed to subsume them, have broken down.[53]

While he argues for multiplicity and heterogeneity in music, however, this does not mean that Lyotard should be thought to have subscribed to the kind of postmodernism which denies any legitimate distinction between high art and populism such that for example Boulez's music would appear to have equal artistic value to Taylor Swift's. Lyotard does deny that the "liberation of sound" takes place along the path of a single approach such as the atonalism of Schönberg and his followers. However, he must be thought in a specific sense to continue to privilege the avant-garde as an "elite." Indeed, in an interview arranged as an exchange with Boulez, he asserts that "[e]litism, for my part, was never anything of which to be afraid."[54] In Lyotard's specific sense, such an elitism is simply a lack of concern with popular accessibility. But neither does Lyotard draw such a distinction along *cultural* lines, and he is happy to include Frank Zappa, Jimi Hendrix, Ravi Shankar, free jazz, and other musics and musicians who have found a popular cultural reception among those he would include in such an elite.[55] Rather, the line of distinction would be the capacity to testify to or gesture towards the inaudible, something which can ultimately only be a matter of aesthetic judgment but which remains at least associated with the creation of new forms or experimentation with new materials — that is, the appearance of something new on the side of presentation. Indeed, it is precisely the aesthetic of the sublime — understood as the search for "the inaudible" — which gives a specific character to Lyotard's understanding of postmodern music and saves it from the generalized eclecticism without criteria that is often thought to follow from the breakdown of metanarratives.

In the final section of the essay "The Inaudible: Music and Postmodernity," Lyotard repeats the appeal to heterogeneity and warning against the danger of cultural monism which closes his essay "Answering the Question: What is the Postmodern?" Here, he uses the image of Babel, suggesting that the postmodern scene in music means the multiplicity of stylistic experimentations, which would accord with the multiplication of idioms after the tower's destruction by God.[56] He suggests that some want to metaphorically rebuild the tower by basing musics around recognizable and agreed-upon features such as harmony and rhythm. Such rules, he suggests, are a kind of equal measure which are the sonic equivalent to money insofar as they equalize differences and impose a monolithic value under capitalism. Yet the Lord, he insists, was wise to destroy the tower of Babel, and Lyotard asserts the value of multiple experimentations in music which push the limits of the audible so that it approaches the inaudible. His argument then is analogous to the one he makes against so-called trans-avant-gardism — the return to painting in the early '80s — that he makes in "Answering the Question." It is a plea for continued efforts in experimentation and musical invention, resisting desires to return to the recognizable and comfortable.

We can now summarize the specific and nuanced sense in which we can understand postmodern music according to Lyotard. Postmodernity in music must be understood as an approach which rejects the linear historical development which characterized modernism (and which applies only on the cultural level) and embraces a plurality of experimental approaches and procedures. Postmodern music would be a search for the inaudible, for what Lyotard would consider the *art* in music, rather than an attempt to make cultural forms progress. Insofar as it can be periodized, a musical postmodernity would refer only to a condition in which such an approach predominates. Moreover, as we have seen, for Lyotard postmodern music is characterized by a sublime aesthetic. Such an aesthetic must be understood not in terms of recognizable stylistic features but as indicating that aspect which Lyotard isolates and generalizes to all aesthetics: the unpresentable in presentation, the matter in form, the inaudible in the audible.

Notes

1 "The Inaudible: Music and Postmodernity," in *Miscellaneous Texts I: Aesthetics and Theory of Art. Jean-François Lyotard: Writings on Contemporary Art and Artists*, vol. 4.1, ed. Herman Parret (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 211.

2 For surveys of various meanings the term "postmodern music" has been given, see Derek Scott, "Postmodernism and Music," in *The Icon Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought*, ed. Stuart Sim (Cambridge: Icon, 1998); Jonathan Kramer, "The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism," *Current Musicology* 66 (Spring 1999): 7–20; Babette Babbich, "Postmodern Musicology," in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*, ed. Victor E. Taylor and Charles Winquist (London: Routledge, 2001); and Jann Pasler, "Postmodernism," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., vol. 20, ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrell (New York: Macmillan, 2001).

3 For example, Pasler suggests that a certain type of postmodern music "often addresses the 'master narratives' of tonality, narrative structure, Western hegemony and male dominance" (*op. cit.*, 214).

4 These essays are "'A Few Words to Sing,'" in *Toward the Postmodern*, ed. Robert Harvey and Mark S. Roberts (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993); "Several Silences," in *Driftworks*, ed. Roger McKeon (New York: Semiotext(e), 1984 [1972]); "Obedience," in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991 [1986]); "God and the Puppet," in *The Inhuman* [1987]; "The Inaudible: Music and Postmodernity" [1991]; and "Music, Mutic," in *Postmodern Fables*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997 [1993]).

5 See Don Ihde, *Postphenomenology: Essays in the Postmodern Context* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1995).

6 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993).

7 See "God and the Puppet," 160.

8 Lyotard, "Music, Mutic," 220.

9 The notion of "Lyotard's Doubt" has previously been used by Gaëlle Bernard: "Art et *épokhè*: Le doubte de Lyotard," in *Lyotard et les arts*, eds. François Coblence and Michel Enaudeau (Paris: Klincksieck, 2014). Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993). Jean-François Lyotard, "Freud According to Cézanne," trans. Ashley Woodward and Jon Roffe, *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy* 23 (2015): 26–42.

10 Lyotard writes: "Cézanne's pictorial journey moves in the originary element of an uncertainty, of a suspicion in relation to what is presented as "natural law" in the schools of painting … this suspicion, this deficiency, is given first and everywhere underlies this work of displacement, whether theoretical or plastic, that it undertakes. This means that it is vain to search in the failure of the composition, plastic for Cézanne, for the (dialectical) reason for the subsequent invention. Every composition is a failure and a success; they only *succeed* each other in a surface history, and are *contemporaries* in the substratum where Cézanne's desire, immobile, generates disconnected figures, divided spaces, contrary points of view" ("Freud According to Cézanne," 32).

11 For an example of the first, see "On a Figure of Discourse," in *Toward the Postmodern*, ed. Robert Harvey and Mark S. Roberts (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993). For an example of the second, see the chapter "Presence," in *What to Paint? Jean-François Lyotard. Writings on Contemporary Art and Artists*, vol. 5, ed. Herman Parret (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013).

12 Lyotard, "The Inaudible," 203.

13 Ibid., 205. Emphasis mine.

14 Quoted in Lyotard, "Obedience," 165.

15 Lyotard, "The Inaudible," 205.

16 Ibid., 205; 219.

17 Scott, "Postmodernism and Music," 136–137.

18 "Obedience" and "God and the Puppet."

19 The relevant essays (with original publication date) here are "Answering the Question: What is the Postmodern?" (1982), in *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982–1985*, trans. Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas (Sydney: Power Publications, 1992); "Presentation, Representation, Unpresentable" (1982), "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde" (1983), and "After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics" (1987), all in *The Inhuman*.

20 Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," 97.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 96.

23 Lyotard, "Presentation, Representation, Unpresentable," 126.

24 Lyotard, "After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics," 139.

25 Lyotard's major work in this regard is *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lyton (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

26 See Lyotard, "Newman: The Instant," in *The Inhuman*.

27 See Lyotard, "Answering the Question, What is the Postmodern?"

28 Heinrich von Kleist is referenced in "God and the Puppet," Pascal Quignard in "Music, Mutic," and Emanuel Swedenborg in "Obedience."

29 Lyotard, "The Inaudible," 209; 213.

30 Ibid., 213.

31 Ibid., 215.

32 Lyotard, "God and the Puppet," 156.

33 This Kantian approach is explored particularly in the essay "God and the Puppet."

34 Lyotard writes: "For music, the great question becomes: how to divide up what is called sonorous space? Which is, in reality, an immense reflection on time. I am struck by seeing that each time some philosophers have undertaken to work on time, they have taken their examples from music." "La réflexion créatrice," in *Éclats/Boulez*, ed. C. Samuel (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1986), 16. [My translation.]

35 Lyotard, "God and the Puppet," 160.

36 See Geoffrey Bennington's *Lyotard: Writing the Event*, the study which established "the event" as a term central to all Lyotard's work.

37 Murray Campbell and Clive Greated, "Loudness," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., vol. 15, ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrell (New York: Macmillan, 2001), 215.

38 "Sound" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 23, 770.

39 Isabella Van Elferen, "The Lure of Timbre: Paradoxical Realism between the Sublime and the Grain," *Contemporary Music Review*, forthcoming.

40 Ibid.

41 Lyotard, "After the Sublime," 141.

42 Lyotard, "Music, Mutic," 218.

43 Lyotard, "Rewriting Modernity," in *The Inhuman*, 30.

44 Ibid.

45 Lyotard, *Karel Appel, A Gesture of Colour, Jean-François Lyotard: Writings on Contemporary Art and Artists*, vol. 1, trans. Vlad Ionescu and Peter W. Milne, ed. Herman Parret (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009), 87–89.

46 "Music, Mutic," 230.

47 He writes: "The transcendence — whether beautiful or sublime it matters little, the difference not being discernible in relation to the work — of the work of art is found right there in the evocation of this precariousness forever enveloped in sensation" ("Music, Mutic," 233).

48 See the chapter "Long Indictment of the History of Art" in *Karel Appel* and with specific relation to music the opening passages of "Music, Mutic."

49 See Lyotard, "Les Immatériaux," *Art & Text* 17 (1985): 47–57; and Lyotard, "After 6 Months of Work…" *30 Years After Les Immatériaux*, eds. Yuk Hui and Andres Broeckmann (Meson Press, 2015).

50 "Obedience," 173.

51 "Anima Minima," in *Postmodern Fables*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 244.

52 "The Inaudible," "Obedience," and "Music, Mustic."

53 See *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); and for a less well known but more philosophically rigorous analysis, *Enthusiasm: The Kantian Critique of History*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

54 Lyotard, "La réflexion créatrice," 16. [My translation.]

55 See for example the essays "Several Silences" and "After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics."

56 Lyotard, "The Inaudible," 221–23.

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