

Sense and Sensibility: The Origin of the Work of Art

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For the last twenty years philosophy has had little to say about art, and what it has said is largely limited to the function of policing it. This arose from the hegemony of the analytic approach to art which consists in organizing it from the outside in order to determine in advance what is and is not art and what limited purposes art must serve either for philosophy or, more broadly, as a variable for cognitive, emotive, and perceptive beings within society. Aesthetics, as a separate discipline, has subsisted, more narrowly, within analytic philosophy as well as among continental philosophers who are particularly interested in the question of taste. It refers to describing works of art or the beautiful from within, in formal terms, separating "nature's handiwork" from that of human beings so as to differentiate the immediate or rational, intellectual interest of the inherently "good soul" from those who have merely cultivated their moral feeling, and so must refer artworks to an educated aesthetic of taste rather than to their own intuitive judgments.¹

Of the two approaches, aesthetics has certainly been more powerful in art circles, perhaps because of the close relation between aesthetics and taste and the ease with which the latter is elided with ideas about style and design. Aesthetics embraces taste because its judgments are "exemplary"; they exemplify a universal rule, that everyone ought to judge the object of nature to be beautiful on the basis of their immediate interest in it or that everyone ought to judge the object of art to be beautiful on the basis of their well-cultivated moral feeling. It is no wonder that Kant, whose *Critique of Judgment* formulates the necessary principles of aesthetics, declares that the universal rule determining precisely under what conditions everyone ought to agree that a particular object is beautiful is incapable of formulation. In the case of natural beauty, universal agreement is based on being a good soul, and in the case of art it is based on refinement. Who wishes to formulate these justifications openly, indeed, who can claim the right?²

Philosophers, of course, claim the right to make exemplary judgments about the beautiful. Heidegger, for example, is unstinting in his claims for the Greek temple's capacity to be the truth of beings setting itself to work, the unconcealedness of being.³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty famously argues that paintings, notably those of Paul Cézanne, are the realization of a philosophy of vision, a prehuman way of seeing that anticipates the labor of vision.⁴ Michel Foucault extols René Magritte for rendering the

presumed privilege of words over things ineffective, making their relation reversible, eliminating origin and copy, thereby affirming that art is not about knowledge (based on concepts) nor judgments (based on origins), but rather the revelation of a system of repetition whose surroundings nonetheless beg for elucidation, for knowledge and judgment.⁵ In their claims, each is careful to choose art that is uninfected by what Theodor Adorno calls the culture industry—art for consumption—and none of these philosophers has wandered far from the aesthetic dimension as formulated by Kant, that dimension defined by uniformity between the form of beautiful objects and our disinterested delight in them.⁶

Kant argues that if one seeks a pure aesthetic connection with the morally good and not one that is partially ordered by reason (reason's determination of the morally good as the highest end), the best solution is to go out into nature, or if the individual is a writer or speaker, to learn Latin or Greek. From this point of view, a segment of society, either those who go alone out into nature, "even at the risk of some misadventure" to themselves, or those who stay at home but speak "dead and learned languages," live in a realm of universal accord and moral goodness. As Kant argues:

... models of taste with respect to the arts of speech must be composed in a dead and learned language; the first to prevent their having to suffer the changes that inevitably overtake a living one, making dignified expressions become degraded, common ones antiquated, and ones newly coined after a short currency obsolete; the second to ensure its having a grammar that is not subject to the caprices of fashion, but has fixed rules of its own.⁷

Meanwhile, those who are not viewing rare bird species in South America and/or those who are not classically educated risk sliding into dreary cultural homogeneity because they have a merely empirical agreement with respect to the rules of taste and inevitably are subject to the poor taste we have come to expect from fad and fashion.

In contemporary academia, serious philosophers do not pursue either philosophy of art or aesthetics, except as an aside when it cannot be avoided because their own areas of specialization—those hard-headed fields such as epistemology, logic, philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, or ethics—have somehow been contaminated by a momentary definitional or aesthetic question, a weak link in an otherwise strong chain of reasoning. Such a crisis might force philosophers to redefine their terms and redraw disciplinary boundaries, yet their investigations tend to be limited to either a cursory examination of a category like representation in order to establish it as a form of de-

notation or reference or to an engagement with the taming of *aesthesis*, that troublesome realm of the sensible conditions of experience which David Hume claims is the basis of all sentiment and all cognition.⁸ Contemporary philosophy prefers especially to stay as far away as possible from the messy material and affective processes of movement and change, whether this be a studio filled with high-tech video and sound equipment, an outdoor site that is doomed to disintegrate over the span of a few years, or a performative sensibility that continually invites transgression. In addition, the existence of women artists is scarcely if ever acknowledged. This allows philosophy to side with the bird watchers and the classically trained and to retreat from any suggestion that art is not somehow determined by the rational project of moral enlightenment, a project apparently unsuited to disorder or to women.

Those pure philosophers who dabble in the philosophy of art, as opposed to aesthetics, make sure that it has its own questions to ask. They are questions motivated by a belief in and commitment to an objective view of the world, that is, minimally that a specified set of concepts can adequately represent art. The act of determining the conditions under which an object conforms to a concept presupposes that art, in order to be known, must be detached and distanced from its form and content of expression, especially the material aspects of the creative and experiential process, aspects that are primary to the process of making art but either ignored or given a secondary status for philosophy. What is a work of art's relation to truth? What is a painting? What is a film? How is it different from video? Is architecture really a form of art? What about music and dance; can we adequately theorize them or does the lack of a permanent art object condemn them to secondary status? How can we define all the visual and sonorous arts in terms of representation? These are the legitimate questions.

Even when the "subjective" viewpoint creeps in and aesthetic feeling or taste, that is to say, how the work of art produces a feeling of harmony and unity by means of its form, becomes an issue, it is always about the universal status of the beautiful and its relation to the good in the soul of an individual, who, for Kant, is invariably male. The beautiful work of art harmonizes minimally the rational and imaginative faculties of the viewer, and maximally the entire social sphere because an appreciation of the beautiful, as Kant claims, depends on a prior appreciation of the good. In the first place, "to take an *immediate* [meaning intellectual] *interest* in the beauty of *nature* [not merely to have taste in estimating it] is always a mark of a *good* soul and where this interest is *habitual*, it is at least indicative of a temper of mind favorable to the moral feeling that it should readily associate itself with the *contemplation of nature*," that is, with the beautiful forms of nature.⁹ Comparably, there

are the "refined and well-grounded habits of thought of all men who have cultivated their moral feeling," that is, of the classically educated who are qualified to judge works of art with "the greatest correctness and refinement." When confronted with works of art that appeal only to vanity or "social joys" such a "man" will quickly flee in order to throw himself back upon nature whose immediate, that is, intellectual beauty always gives way to moral feeling, in this way insulating himself from the empirical pleasures of those who are neither good nor habitual.¹⁰

If, in the interests of art, we inquire of the philosopher as to why the educated and effete have to return to nature, even if only to the admiration and love of wild flowers, birds, or insects, in spite of the personal dangers or discomforts this may pose, his answer seems to be that we must return to nature to *serve the interests of reason*.¹¹ These interests are that the moral feelings beauty gives rise to are objectively real. Thus, our pleasure in nature is immediately intertwined not only with the beauty of flowers, birds, and bugs (one can only speculate on what Kant takes to be the dangers of viewing them regularly), but more importantly with the fact that nature's beauty consists in it being the ground of *uniformity*, a uniformity between the form of its beautiful products and our disinterested delight in them (for example, that we do not wish to smoke, eat, or otherwise exterminate them). Uniformity between the form of nature and our disinterested feeling must be a priori in order to conform to law. This is because, as a priori, it is a law for everyone, and thereby produces in us all an interest in law, which we call moral feeling, but which at its core is nothing but *adherence to law and the demand that everyone and everything adhere to law*. Morality is law and law is morality; the logical relation is one of identity and not inference.¹² Thus, we can begin to appreciate why the vanity and social pleasures of fine art, not to mention an interest in it as sensuous or erotic, are so quickly dismissed by aesthetics. Art is serious business. It is about law, conformity to law, and the uniformity that law exemplifies.

Although for Kant, a true experience of the beautiful must be a disinterested experience, the fact that only those who understand and appreciate the good and have an interest in the good can appreciate the beautiful indicates the extent to which the work of art is always subordinated to rational order by means of respect for and adherence to law. For rational order is nothing but this adherence to law. As Kant writes, "we have a faculty of judgment which is merely aesthetic—a faculty of judging of forms without the aid of concepts, and of finding, in the mere estimate of them, a delight that we at the same time make into a rule for everyone."¹³ The aesthetic feeling must be given as the same for everyone or for no one. Failure to adhere to this law will signal a lack of respect for law per se and by implication an immoral character. One

might easily conclude that beauty serves not only a rational purpose but also a social purpose insofar as anyone who fails to respect the beautiful can be judged not only uncouth but immoral and, in failing to respect the law which is universal, outside the law, an outlaw.

Contemporary philosophers of art, savvy to cultural relativism, refrain from judging anyone's taste. Nonetheless, when philosophers of art commit themselves to the act of defining the range of art objects, their function, roles, and limits, they too submit works of art to a set of rules, this time not pure a priori rules but rather a set of philosophical restrictions based on epistemological expectations and/or demands, such that there is no acknowledgment of works of art that do not conform to these epistemological requirements. What cannot be accounted for by means of these basic concepts cannot be known, and so slips into oblivion. Philosophy of art standardizes the work of art as an object of representation, as something whose truth value depends on whether the object can occupy the place of a variable within a proposition. This in turn requires that the object conform to or satisfy the proposition's conditions of reference. Thus, the debate rages on over the conditions of reference of a proposition, but very little is said about particular works of art.

The dominance of these approaches to art raises numerous questions about why they prevail. Minimally, it might be interesting to ask what purpose is being served in discussing the art object or the aesthetic object in propositional and/or aesthetic terms? This is particularly the case because both approaches situate the work of art in terms of reason's demands for uniformity and conformity. In both cases, it is a matter of finding the right rule. Thus, the successful work of art is one that follows the rule—it remains lawful with respect to its definition and/or with respect to its effect on the viewer. Certainly, much in the history of art confirms this view. The experience of the beautiful is valued for the judgment of uniformity between nature and our faculties, the effect of a priori law, and for validating the habits of the good soul who contemplates nature in order to become conscious of law and to stand within the law. Good taste is defined by law, and morality is defined by law. If all members of a society agree on what is or is not beautiful, as they must (because the judgment of beauty adheres to a priori law), this makes the production and distribution of beauty that much easier and also justifies its consumption. Might it not be the case that today, in a world overwhelmingly dominated by the universalizing, that is, globalizing forces of market capitalism, whatever its intentions, when philosophy sets about defining the work of art, it does so in service to the marketplace, to what can be known and subject to a rule, so that it may be universally, that is, globally produced, distributed, and con-

sumed? As in the case of the philosophers of art, philosophy rationalizes the consensus it defines, and so can claim to be working in service to truth.

In either case, the most we can hope for here is the kind of philosophy that has been described as providing pleasant or aggressive dinner conversations at Mr. Rorty's house. Rorty's dinner guests proffer rival opinions as to how best to define cheese, whether eating cheese constitutes good taste, and, I would add, whether the enemies of cheese can truly be "good souls." There is no reason to expect that their discussions of art would be any different.¹⁴ The popular conception of philosophy—essentially opinion—involves a correspondence between an external perception and an internal affection. Mr. Rorty's guests are far less interested in the qualities of cheese or art than they are in the correspondence between agreed upon qualities of perceived objects and the affect or feeling of a number of privileged subjects who experience those objects. Rather than slavish adherence to law, there appears to be room here for a range of opinions about the positive and negative aspects of the qualities of cheese or art. Philosophical discussion then ranges over which qualities should be selected, but it is a determination made ultimately on the basis of the power of the subject who is affected by those qualities. In Rorty's dining room the debate rages on: "Is to detest cheese to manage without being *a bon vivant*? But is being a *bon vivant* a generically enviable affection? Ought we not to say that it is those who love cheese, and all *bons vivants*, who stink? Unless it is the enemies of cheese who stink."¹⁵ From here, the discussion might shift to whether detesting Kiki Smith or Rene Cox means that one is an enemy of contemporary art, unless it is those who love Smith or Cox who are the real enemies of contemporary art.¹⁶ The conclusion here is one we have already reached: "in this sense all opinion is already political," because true opinion (the aim of the philosopher of art) is that which coincides with that of the group to which one already belongs.¹⁷ In other words, one's judgments concerning taste may not be universal a priori, but because they are subject to social and political power, they become the standard of objectivity, that is, conformity to a concept.

The denunciation and harassment of Rene Cox by politicians (in this case the mayor of New York City) for placing an image of her own nude body in the center of an image of a venerated painting of "The Last Supper" is not surprising. Under such conditions, eating cheese or disliking Smith or Cox ceases to be the basis of an affinity with others and become the group image. When the image is one for which the group has a positive affinity, the image is quickly commodified. Armed with the image, the group has the power to determine which qualities of the object are to be experienced and whether these qualities are positive or

negative. In this manner powerful groups establish the rule in the form of an image of truth, beauty, and goodness. In a capitalist society such images are then packaged and sold to an eager public waiting to consume them, a public eager to emulate the perceptions and affections of those in power. Thus, we may say:

Ours is the age of communication, but every noble soul flees and crawls far away whenever a little discussion, a colloquium, or a simple conversation is suggested. In every conversation the fate of philosophy is always at stake, and many philosophical discussions do not as such go beyond discussions of cheese, including the insults and the confrontation of world views. The philosophy of communication is exhausted in the search for a universal liberal opinion as consensus, in which we find again the cynical perceptions and affections of the capitalist himself.¹⁸

What if, however, someone, some artist, comes along and, refusing the offered images, instead mixes planes of consistency, not merely mediums and genres, and does not merely engage in bad taste or redefinition but again, refusing both, overruns the image with works of art whose sensibility precludes either aesthetic or propositional judgments? Then perhaps we are in a different structure, something whose heterogeneity cannot be projected in a universalized, commercial image of good taste and does not seek to outrun it either. This would be a work of art that influences us whether we seek it out or not, and it is this influence that becomes the basis of our thinking about the work of art.

Nevertheless, given the model of philosophy that we have arrived at in this discourse, which, even if it successfully defends itself against both the judgments of taste and dinner at Rorty's, nevertheless succumbs to the transcendental Idea—the successful work of art is one that follows the rule—and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's work of art follows a rule. Just as for Kant, whose a priori manifold of space and time is the condition of the possibility of all knowing and acting, there is a rule defined by mathematics. Mathematical idealization posits a geometrical model, called *state space*, for the set of *idealized* states of any phenomenon—thus “the relationship between the actual states of the real organism and the points of the geometric model is a fiction maintained for the sake of discussion, theory, thought, and so on.”¹⁹ Within such state space, changes in position can be represented by points which when connected form a curved line. Each point is an implicit record of the time at which an observation is made within the geometrical model. This is the definition of a trajectory. A time series may also be represented across multidimensional space, meaning a series of state spaces,

each one situated vertically at a unique designated time. Representations of trajectories in geometric state space or of the time series (graph) of the trajectory were already in use in the middle ages. The modern innovation, introduced by Newton, was the addition of velocity vectors, that is, the ability to calculate, using differential calculus, the average speed and direction of any change of state.²⁰

Trajectories determine, calculate, and accurately predict velocity vectors, the average speed and direction of a change of state. Velocity vectors may be derived at any point, that is, at any time along the curve. Inversely, velocity vectors can also determine, calculate, and accurately predict trajectories using the process of calculus known as integration. Thus, if every point in a given state space were to be mapped in this manner, the state space would be filled with trajectories.²¹ Over time, which is to say, at many different given points that are connected and represented as trajectories, each point will have the exact same velocity vector (the average speed and direction of any change of state), as the vector specified by the dynamical system. There will be no surprises. The system determines velocity vectors. Second, and equally important, the space of a dynamical system is *smooth space*; it is continuous, without jumps, breaks, leaps, without corners, as trajectories are smoothly curved.²² If a dynamical model is called upon to describe some observable behavior, the model will consist of a manifold or state space and a vector field; it is a model for the habitual tendencies of the situation as it evolves from one state to another. This charting of evolution is what makes the model dynamic. But insofar as the system yields qualitative predictions of long-term behavior, its evolution is deterministic. This is what makes it useful.

But into this picture of a stable and predictable world enters the second law of thermodynamics. Thermodynamics studies the transformation of energy, and the laws of thermodynamics recognize that although energy is conserved, when energy is defined as "the capacity to do work," nevertheless nature is fundamentally asymmetrical, that is, although the total quantity of energy remains the same its distribution changes in a manner that is irreversible. For example, although human beings long ago figured out how to convert stored energy and work into heat, the problem has been to convert heat and stored energy into work. Otherwise expressed, how are we able to extract ordered motion from disordered motion?²³ When a system is heated, or when it is heating its surroundings, it is stimulating incoherent or disordered motion; energy tends to disperse and lose coherence. Deleuze and Guattari enter the plane of art by first positing a universe in which for every act of breakdown, for every loss of coherence, there is a "little order to protect us from chaos."²⁴ It is, they argue, because we are constantly threatened

with loss that we hold on so tightly to our ideas and fixed opinions. Conceding that were there not some "objective antichaos," some order in things themselves or in states of affairs, there could be little order in ideas, they nevertheless proceed to search for what they take to be the true causes of this order.²⁵ According to the first law of thermodynamics, a glass of cold water could spontaneously heat up, an old person could become a baby, energy could not only spontaneously localize and accumulate in a tiny spot in the universe, but it could do so coherently. Energy, highly localized and stored in the coherent motion of atoms, could reflect the reversal of chaos and entropy. If so it would imply change in the direction of greater order and organization.²⁶ The question becomes how to achieve this highly improbable order and organization, how to create order out of chaos.

The philosopher, the scientist, and the artist must do more than empirically associate ideas, since empiricism yields no more than opinion, no more than pleasant dinner conversation and debate. The philosopher, scientist, and artist return from the land of the dead, that is, they return from the dispersal of energy, the degradations of quality, but in order to do so they need much more than opinions. The philosopher must have not merely associations of distinct ideas but "*reconnections through a zone of indistinction in a concept.*"²⁷ Thus, it is clear that no mere opinion, no empirical association of ideas, will save the philosopher from dissipation, from chaos. Ideas may be associated as images and they may be ordered as abstractions, but much more than this, they must be *mental objects, determinable as real beings* in an *open Whole*, a plane of consistency, which is, however, conceptualized as a *single wave*, present everywhere at once. Even as its peaks and troughs are multiple, they are nevertheless absolutely identical, giving way to a global homogeneity more absolute than any ever conceived. Extended to larger and larger values, such a system is no longer open, but closed since it encompasses everything.²⁸ Of course, the Whole, the wave, will be observer-independent as well.

Thus, for Deleuze, philosophy is free to embrace chaos, defining it as the infinite speed of birth and death taking place on a plane of immanence, a single wave present everywhere and at once, giving consistency to chaos, giving rise to an *infinity of consequences*. Whatever is, whatever exists, is a consequence of the One-All, the homogeneous wave, present everywhere and at once. Science, on the other hand, is burdened by the plane of reference, the referenced chaos called nature, the requirement that its hypotheses are testable, which means it is burdened by the reality of physical existence. This reality is bogged down by invariants, most notably the speed of light, which is, for Deleuze and Guattari, the freeze frame, the deadly slow-down, the dirty laundry, the

fallout consisting of infinite consequences that limit or border science and reassures it as it confronts chaos. And art, what happens with art? Art, like science, does not struggle with the whole of chaos as does philosophy—art places a little block of chaos in a frame, forming a composition of sensation or extracting a bit of sensation. Art does not create, it *preserves* and is *preserved*—and what is preserved is a block of percepts and affects independent of and exceeding any living being, standing on its own, meaning without reference, without resembling any object, simply expressing a pure sensation—freeing it from objects and from states of a subject.²⁹ Thus, art creates nothing; it preserves the nonhuman becomings of “man” and the nonhuman landscapes of “nature.” Artists are beings who sacrifice all to becoming—even if it kills them. What is this becoming for whose sake artists perish? The affect and the percept are consequences of the single universal wave that is everywhere and everywhere the same. They are extracted from it in the purest possible form. Their origin is not in human or animal life, not even in nature, but in the chaos of the One-All. Perhaps we can still call this origin the unconcealment of Being.³⁰

The artist is said to add varieties, beings of sensation, analogous to those variables of the scientist and the philosopher, expressions of the single wave of infinite chaos. The philosopher's variables are concepts, those of the scientist are functions, and those of the artist are sensations. What are the implications of this notion of artistic varieties? Is it deeply creative? Is it the expression of the chaos that is the universe or is it one more tool in the philosopher's box? Is the artist the means by which the triple organization of perceptions, affections, and opinions are undone and replaced with percepts and affects, blocks of sensation—even if the effort of this process destroys the artist? What matter, since what remains for the philosopher is the language of sensations, a stammering, singing language, a style producible by no other means? Any other origin for the work of art, any origin relating to nature or to the human, would return us to the realm of opinion. This is the situation, we are told, that phenomenology falls back into when it tries to make *flesh* the perceptual and affective a priori of lived experience, the transcendent function that determines the limits of experience, that traverses the lived in the here and now, and that constitutes the embodied experience of living sensation. Flesh is both world and existence within that world, the reversibility of feeling and felt that precedes the intentionality of consciousness and makes it possible. But flesh, we are told, only measures the temperature of becoming. “Flesh is too tender”; it remains both a pious and a sensual notion, an affront to the law of non-contradiction.³¹ Embodied flesh, incarnated flesh of the World, transcendently pious yet sensuously lived. Tied to experience,

flesh is the *Urdoxa*, the founding or original opinion, but still an opinion insofar as it is the body's orientation in the world, the habituation of an embodied being for whom the parameters of the world are defined by foreground, background, horizontal and vertical sections, left and right, straight and oblique, rectilinear or curved, and beyond these nothing but chaos.³²

From this point of view, phenomenology fails, for it never makes the passage from the finite to the infinite. It moves from the lived flesh to the transcendental world flesh but never to the infinitely varied infinities. By contrast, molecular becomings are proclaimed to be cosmic or cosmogenic forces, forces by which the body disappears into color or into matter. Non-human forces are everywhere, overtaking the transcendently organized human or animal or plant body, the body of perception, the body of opinion. If, for phenomenology, art is the way in which human beings give birth to perception and perceive the world, for the philosophy of the variable, art is limited to the sphere of sensation. It does not create concepts; strictly speaking it does not create at all insofar as its sensations are becomings, consequences of the single wave in the realm of the finite that reaches up to the level of the infinite. It is rather the sacrifice demanded by the cosmos, the price paid in order that philosophy not succumb to the slow-down. Rather than things or objects, art gives us intensities, affects and percepts that sweep through our world, sweeping away the habitual ways of knowing, but always in conformity with the rule, the rule of the One-All.

Let us pause for a moment to consider the following. In the discussion of thermodynamics "we have not considered the consequences of a *flow* of material through systems. Ordinary thermodynamics concentrates on closed systems, in which matter does not dribble in or out; but the living body is *open*, and matter is ingested as food, drink, and air, and in due course is discarded."³³ If, as noted above, the philosophy of difference is predicated on *real beings* in an *open Whole*, a plane of consistency conceptualized as a single wave present everywhere at once, then its multiple peaks and troughs are absolutely identical, giving way to a global homogeneity more absolute than any ever conceived. Moreover, extended to larger and larger values, infinitely extended, such a system is no longer open but closed; it encompasses everything. Is it then a closed system that we encounter, within which philosophy, science, and art express the infinite consequences of the one universal wave? This is entirely possible from the scientific point of view, that is, even in a closed system there are local reversals of chaos which appear as emerging structures, but always at some price. Like the artist who is consumed by the effort of preserving the blocks of sensation that she cuts out of the triple organization of perceptions, affections, and

opinions, local abatements of chaos must compensate for their organization with the generation of a certain amount of chaos elsewhere.³⁴ A bit of oil, for example, does not disperse and dissolve when dropped into water, but here the appearance is deceptive. Dropped into water, the oil molecules are immediately surrounded by water molecules, each of which rests in a delicate molecular structure. The water molecules are more organized in the presence of oil, thus there is an increase in the order in the world and a decrease in entropy, a decrease that counters the increase in entropy caused by dropping the oil into the water in the first place.³⁵ Is it not the same with the artist who carves a bit of sensation out of the cosmos and gives it to the philosopher, but at the cost of her own health and life?

Let us consider another possibility: an artist who also philosophizes, and in doing so finds herself in the midst of the standard model for important art, a trajectory defined by the differentiated attractors of high and low art? The artist I have in mind here is Antwerp artist Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven (see www.clubmoral.com), known for transforming images of women taken from pornographic media as well as for her multidimensional visual commentaries on philosophers from Dennett to Rorty to Deleuze and writers from Baudelaire to Houellebecque.³⁶ High art, she notices, is put on a pedestal; low art wrestles with itself, driven through everyday living and the transfer of powers. Beyond this initial state, high art is subdivided into two groups, two limit cycles around which it endlessly spirals: the lucrative and the non-lucrative. The artist notices that non-lucrative high art must be subsidized. In fact, non-lucrative high art has always been subsidized, and without subsidies it never occurs. She notices too that such subsidies are the supporting components not only of the art but also of the artists, thus that subsidies participate in the very constitution of works of art and in the subjectivity of the artist. Arbitrary, contingent, destabilizing subsidies both construct or connect and tear apart the artist's habituation. They are among the contingent affects, percepts, and concepts that are her subjectivity, that enter into the formation of non-lucrative high art, even as they safeguard the possibility of originality, which is to say, contingency. From this trajectory, lucrative high art appears to be untouchable, unscathed by the destabilizing forces that swirl around the subsidized artist. Thus the principle of power, of predictability, winds around its message. Nonetheless, the artist notices that each of these high art forms, each in its own manner, is mixed with the low art branches: the mass media, popular music, publicity, ready-to-wear fashion and street culture. What is transmitted from low to high is channelled through what she refers to as language (social strength), technology (economic strength), people (sexual strength), and renewal (mystic strength).

The artist hovers unwillingly between one trajectory and the other. She does not plunge into the trajectory of lucrative art which would attract her only in order to hold her, to keep her circling in its orbit of predictability. To evade this end, she *slows down*, meaning she takes account of her sensibility, which is not to be found among percepts and affects. Maintaining her distance from everyday progressive art, from the standard model of art, she leaps from the standard model to that of something she calls "anti-sade." The space around her curves and twists, huge discontinuities emerge and having nowhere else to go, she falls through the cusp, from one reality to another. This move is called a catastrophe. It is a catastrophe that saves her but also condemns her as it hurls her onto a completely new plane. There she inhabits a parallel universe. She constructs rooms, each seemingly dedicated to one of many possible male standard-bearers, authors or characters, of Western philosophy and literature. Rorty, Heathcliff, Baudelaire, Grimm, Freud, Houellebecq, Dennett, Deleuze, each name entwined with sex, language, consciousness, or all three. At first it seems as if these figures are philosophical friends, invitations to enter new realms of thought, new connections for the mind. Yet they are precisely the established order the artist must reinterpret and forsake. For example, Rorty's anti-foundationalism, anti-representationalism, and anti-essentialism give way to a naturalism that sees no breaks in the hierarchy of increasingly complex adjustments to novel stimulation—in other words to continuous, dynamical trajectories. Houellebecq's characters' redemptions, like Freud's civilization, arrive thanks to a positivistic account that dispenses with sensible spatio-temporalization, substituting a continuous dynamic, a succession of mental states yielding beings unable to make contact with any other living thing until death looms ahead, the only remaining attractor. From here, it is only a nuance away to Dennett's theory that consciousness is an abstraction built from a linear narrative of one's life, based on a functionalist view of cognitive science. While Deleuze, like Houellebecq, insists upon the chaotic aspect of dynamical systems, there may in the end be little to distinguish him from Dennett. From another point of view, no less problematic, are the brothers Grimm's tales of children sent out to die in a wood at the hands of wicked female witches or victimized by cruel stepmothers or young women forced to marry frogs or bears in hopes of recuperation. For perversion, the transcendental Idea of connection and disconnection, nothing exceeds Baudelaire's thesis on the inseparable nature of beauty and corruption.

Only from her position in a parallel universe can the artist engage these ideas without being torn apart by them and reconnected within their perverse structures. She makes of each an image consisting of fragmented slices through multidimensional space, a space realizable

only on an abstract manifold. Each of these manifolds reflects a world of hard, monochrome surfaces whose colors seem to arise out of the drawings, like meaning out of language. Each contains female figures, sitting or standing or drawn distortedly in cluttered interiors overlaid with transparent objects, bits of anti-matter, objects belonging to other dimensions that have somehow entered this one. What is it that each of these signs communicates to us? Are they emblematic of the standard model of art, with its high and low values, its principle of power? Do they give rise to the spontaneous parallelism of anti-sade, the creation process, the anti-norm? Are they the separatrix between the manifold into which the artist has leapt from the world of habituation that would tear her apart, then perversely reconnect her elements, her elementary particles? Does the encounter between progressive art and thought and anti-sade release the energy that frees the creative process from the history of the body, the history of art, and the history of ideology? Or, even if it accomplishes this, does it occur only in the shadow of the melancholy and nihilism of those who have abandoned hope, those who live in a fragmented world on one side of the art—anti-sade parallelism, slaves in the world of metaphysics?

In this new world, even after a perfectly discontinuous break with the old world, if she has not been destroyed in the suspension between two manifolds, the artist proceeds but only with an infinite slowness made possible by crossing and recrossing her new trajectory at infinitely small intervals—wild intersecting separatrices—in order to keep moving, but not to move forward. She produces multiples, images of women as if from their insides, mostly naked women touching themselves, women whose self-touching wildly distorts both their form and their colors. Sensing displacement, sensing that she could plunge into another powerful trajectory that would pull her toward it with increasing ferocity, situated here on this *separatrix*, this site between attractors, the in-between, extreme sensitivity to initial conditions makes her flow irrevocable, *irreversible*. For what took place in that discrete and isolated “catastrophic” moment is the removal of “the Self from oneself,” so that the capacity to explode uncertainly but probabilistically into the actual evaporates. In a sense, nothing happens among these multiples, yet it is a positive, creative nothing. Not the infinite probability of the continuum, not the infinite consequences of the single wave, but nothing; nothing torn apart, nothing perversely reconnected. Insofar as there is still a great deal of melancholy, the artist waits ... for something, for the possible but not inevitable annihilation of standard art and anti-sade, the creative release of energy.

But even in this nothingness, this glacial existence, light travels, photons move, information spreads from event to event. Something is

happening, shaping itself, influencing and shaping whatever its light rays reach. It is not the differentiation of a transcendental Idea that connects then tears apart the elementary particles, subjecting them to the cruel axiom of capitalization. Nor is it the actualization of a physical, biological, or social Idea, but something else. It is a sort of "Moral Rearmament," an increased sensibility, an intimacy with oneself that allows the removal of one's "Self" to a different scale, to a scale-free creative practice unknown within the compass of either the standard practice of progressive art or its anti-sade mirror image. It is a sensibility that brings together "sex" and technology so as to elicit beauty as a therapeutic practice. Unpredictably, all of the artist's parameters are altered. Her diffusion, her slowdown, has kept her from being absorbed by processes forming in any direction, until the art field alters. Given this *discontinuous break*, this slowdown, this melancholy, invariably, albeit imperceptibly, these moments might have arisen in the context of discrete spaces, discrete times, influences shifting in relation to one another, contributing not to the artist's demise but to her heterogeneous duration. This is, then, her ontological unconscious awakening into a perspective, the emergence of a spatio-temporalization, the genesis of a context, images from the world reaching her, yielding for her, at any given moment, a remarkable view. It is a point of view shared by no one and nothing but overlapping with many others insofar as their lives and hers have intertwined whenever she and others have been exposed to the same images and influences, whenever they have influenced one another, wherever there is the absorption and emotion of light. If in this trajectory, and if the artist did not instantaneously perceive, conceive, and act on the basis of conventions and habituations, or on a less coarse level but what would have been the same thing, if she, meaning what is provisionally "she" were not simply enveloped by the myriad forces competing to compose her, the singular points and differential connections forming and reforming on the continuum—then she may have entertained an interval in which to pose a question from out of her own duration. Not transcendent contemplation, but contemplation from inside, a discrete life, the duration of a worldly consciousness without a soul.

From the perspective offered by her increased attunement to her own sensibility, the artist begins an experiment in discontinuity. She connects a word and an image from files stored on her computer. She sends this discontinuously from her location to another. Altogether she sends ninety-six faxes to a house in Bruges, a house in a neighborhood whose most famous resident was a Flemish priest, a poet averse to women but not to words. Since every fax consists of an image of a woman and a word, the word is the key that unlocks the house and the bourgeois

neighborhood, opening them to the women as well. Visitors enter the insular bourgeois neighborhood; they ring the bell of the house and go inside to view the messages sent by the artist as if from a distant star. Under such conditions, relational networks are forming. Discrete images of women infiltrate even perceptions, percolating through them, saturating them with their coloring, their diffractions, prismatic and spectral, stunning in their range. This is not the same system as that of the catastrophe, which forms without connection in place of adjunct fields gathered together and singularities exploding, but the catastrophe, discontinuous in space and time, prepares our thought for this more ephemeral, shimmering construction. Persisting on the cusp, on the edge between attractors, in the intimacy of a life, something like a relational network is already thinkable, for the temporal dimension of a cusp is that of a change, be it separation or unification.³⁷ Yet between the standard model of art and anti-sade lies the abyss, the realm in which nothing occurs—no movement, no intensities, no individuation. Nothing gathers together the adjunct fields, nothing connected to nothing; thus there will be no condensation, no sublime explosion of the ideal into the actual. All around, such activities, such actualizations continue unabated, unfolding the universal, each transcendental Idea connected with every other, busily varying themselves, forming new multiplicities and breaking them up, oriented by the dream of complete determination.

Imperceptible neural circuits prepare habitual responses, so-called automatic reactions or involuntary movements. Yet alerted by the beginnings of the intensive sensations, something may intervene. Is this not the opening onto a world of startling beauty, that of "Les Evoûtements," evoking both womanly and magical charms? Like the women in these drawings, your body, your ears, eyes, skin, and nose, your neural circuits, your elements, all radiate the myriad imperceptible processes reaching you, contracting them in a perspective. Like them, you may lie in bed, awake but not moving, as the past gathers itself through you. You may be asubjectively conscious of the emergence of something unanticipated, unspecified, yet inevitable. Not only is your response altered, your existence is now reforming. These incidents, altering, reflecting, refracting, absorbing, emitting, are not the expression of an existing, known concept but the construction of a spatio-temporality from out of the light that reaches you from the stars. This is not the world of good or evil, subject or object, problems or solutions, but the world of non-intensive heterogeneous images assembled from the relations between myriad luminous influences by a universe that views itself from within, and you, the world-artist, are its eyes as well as its ears, nose, skin, and mouth.

Out of this, is it possible to construct a life whose sensibilities are vulnerable and subtle, vast yet circumscribed, where pleasure and pain arise from radiance and obscurity, crossing over and interfering with one another, rays of light, not a number but particles, energy, acceleration over unperceivable distances? In the clear and open space of Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven's installations, "Les Evoûtements," radiate energy and light. These angular but voluptuously drawn women, stretching themselves out on sofas or confidently sitting or standing, posing *themselves*, raise a question relating to thought. Is it not a logical contradiction that sensation is said to divide life infinitely and destroy the unity of being? Am I not a rational force? Do not sleep and suffering constitute a contradiction for what is vital, for life? Am I the product of a voluntary act or of force and necessity? Is not the end of law perfection? Are truth and justice the final objects of creation? Are we women not fully creative in our sensibilities, in our beauty and sensuousness, in our rationality and consciousness? Can you sense this intelligence as you depart from rooms redolent with catastrophic renderings of high art and now, with your subtle sensibilities fully illuminated, move among consciously provocative, seductively, situated women? These women, barely clothed, are found lying or posing themselves on beds, and below them in corresponding positions are anatomical sketches of their muscles, bones, tissue, the invisible material structure of their being. Are these women not flesh, muscle, bone, like all living matter? Does their sex make it impossible to count them among the sensible, rational creatures, those possessing language and consciousness? Is this how one creates a world in which different observers "see" partly different, partial views of the universe, partial views which nonetheless overlap? Would this imply a dependence on the location of the observer, on the observer's unique duration, not the flow that constitutes her, but the information that *constructs* her perspective—her *spatio-temporalization*?

The processes described here involve the construction of a vulnerable duration, a sensitive contingency, an ontological spatio-temporalization, an ever-changing perspective in the heterogeneity of space and time. Such a perspective, if it is thinkable, if it is real, could manifest itself as a sort of history, not a linear, causal chain, but a complex causality, layers and layers of events, always susceptible to realignment, to patterns and particles resolving their scintillation and constructing an ontological memory below the speed of light. These primary processes—imperceptible, ephemeral, and evanescent—influence one another, and in this they influence the sensibility of human beings. This is not yet perception for it does not yet imply typical perceptual prerequisites, thought-like mental processes such as description, inference, and problem solving, no matter how unconscious or nonverbal.³⁸ Rather, given

that this is something much more difficult to situate, it is much more likely to be overlooked. It is the manner in which events (including very tiny events) influence and alter one another and so influence and alter human sensibility, all sensibility. These influences are not the objects of perception nor of consciousness; they cannot be experienced as increases or decreases of power, as the raising or lowering of intensities. They are in some sense passive and primary. If they are noticed at all, it is insofar as they are *felt*, felt as pleasure, felt as pain, as expansion and diffusion, as distress. Their influence on sensibility comes via the sensory system, but as ontological not personal memory. It is manifest in the exceptional absorption and emission of each event-organism—purely contingent, subject to alteration, but circumscribing what is characteristic of each sensibility as an original spatio-temporalization. It is the way AMVK, an artist, collects, uses, and rethinks the myriad images that come her way; it is the graceful line drawing of an awkwardly posed naked woman; it is the lilting, shifting, blurred images of women, stark in their black and white, transforming themselves in vivid colors. It is an absolute, immediate, non-conscious consciousness, a worldly unconscious whose sensible existence no longer refers to an individual or to a being but is unceasingly suggested in the reflection, refraction, and dispersion of light, in a spectrum and combination, a network of relations giving birth to beauty through art and technology.³⁹

Far from producing an immediate interest, an intellectual interest in their form, whose grounds may be found a priori in the respect for law exemplified in the moral good, but expressible as infinite speeds and infinite consequences, such sensible works of art deliberately do not respect philosophically defined boundaries. They usually require that the spectator engage in sustained or repeated contact as well as a high degree of reflectivity in order to have any insight into the object beyond the immediate interest in its form or the kind of interest that allows a powerful group to distinguish its important qualities. What cannot be immediately interesting (because it probably will never be subject to a universal judgment of beauty nor ever associated with the moral good or with its plane of consistency) will most likely never be packaged, sold, and consumed by a mass market either. Nor does it contribute to the ethic of consumption, the new moral theory that consumerism is good as an end because it provides jobs and produces the wealth that allows for the investment in new consumable goods without which economies will stagnate and standards of living among the already well-off will decline. Ultimately many works of art are simply dismissed, certified as dull and boring because, falling outside of the realm of what can be clearly known as art objects or judged as objects of good or bad taste, useful for philosophy, the sustained attention and reflection they demand cannot

be given to them. It is in this manner, then, by means of its function of policing knowledge as well as experience, that philosophy sustains and may even be the condition of the possibility of social, political, and economic forces, which not only organize the world of art but guarantee the continuation of social, political, and economic systems committed to the production, distribution, and consumption of homogeneity, which is to say, uniformity and habit on every level: artistic, intellectual, social, political, economic, and personal. In this sense philosophy promotes the epistemology of slaves and the aesthetics of monotonous commercialism, disguising the former as morality and the latter as good design.

This is not, I would insist, the same old modernist concern about the relation between high culture and low culture; rather it is a concern about homogeneity and heterogeneity, consumption and creation, representation and its ruin. Making sense of the extent to which the control of art by philosophy is the effect of an epistemology and morality that organize and maintain production, distribution, and consumption in the socius in general by means of the image will require that we re-problematize. Serious artists are still being supported, but already they have to package the work of art as a commercial image because without this the public will have no way to make sense of the work. Either it is an object whose identification and consumption provides a certain homogeneous cultural identity or position to the consumer, or there is something morally uplifting or philosophically useful about its consumption, something which, as I have argued, produces respect for and adherence to law.

The hegemony of this kind of philosophy ensures the demise of another notion of the work of art, one that takes it to be implicated in a process of change, not only with respect to itself and the artist, but also for those who encounter it on its terms, and for the social and natural milieu within which it appears. For this to occur, a sensibility (love or hate) in relation to the work of art must precede rationalized, law-based prescriptions. Philosophical thinking about the work of art would have to cease being based on the image and power of a group of philosophers whose opinion about the true, the beautiful, and the good dominate those of other philosophers and those of artists. But also, the work of art could no longer be the product of human sacrifice on trajectories moving at infinite speeds. If the packaging of art as a product that can be universally produced, distributed, and consumed is indeed intimately dependent on and the effect of rule-giving, and such rule-giving is itself only the rationality of the intellectually powerful, then the necessity for some other relation to and conceptualization of the work of art emerges, once more, as a political act.

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Notes

1. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), Sect. 42, 157–8.
2. *Ibid.*, Sect. 18, 81.
3. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row), 37–8.
4. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Primacy of Perception*, trans. Carleton Dallery (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 168.
5. Michel Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe*, trans. James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 35, 38, 39, 45, 47.
6. Theodor Adorno, "Prologue to Television," in *Critical Models, Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 51.
7. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, Sect. 42, 158; Sect. 17, 75.
8. See, for example, Nelson Goodman, "Reality Remade," in *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, ed. Joseph Margolis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987) and Monroe C. Beardsely, "The Aesthetic Point of View," in the same collection.
9. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, Sect. 42, 157. Emphasis added.
10. *Ibid.*, Sect. 42, 157.
11. *Ibid.*, Sect. 42, 158.
12. *Ibid.*, Sect. 42, 159.
13. *Ibid.*, Sect. 42, 159.
14. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 144, 145.

15. Ibid., 144, 145.

16. Smith, well recognized for her distinct and difficult bodily sensibility, and Cox, infamous for her self-portraits in which she replaces her own body for that of a deified male, are just two examples of women artists who are recognized but not glorified by philosophers, critics, or the general public.

17. Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 144, 145.

18. Ibid., 146.

19. Ralph H. Abraham and Christopher D. Shaw, *Dynamics: The Geometry of Behavior, Part I: Periodic Behavior* (Santa Cruz: Aerial Press, 1984), 13.

20. Ibid., 19.

21. Ibid., 19–20.

22. Ibid., 21.

23. P. W. Atkins, *The Second Law* (New York: Scientific American Library, 1984), 8–13.

24. Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 201.

25. Ibid., 202.

26. Atkins, *The Second Law*, 48, 62–3.

27. Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 202.

28. The concept of a single universal wave was popular in the 1980s at the Santa Fe Institute. Conversation with Marek Grabowski, October 2005.

29. Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 163–7.

30. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 83.

31. Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 178–9.

32. Ibid., 179.

33. Atkins, *The Second Law*, 179.

34. *Ibid.*, 157.

35. *Ibid.*, 157–9.

36. See AMVK's web page at www.clubmoral.com. See in particular the link to Zeno X Gallery for images of the philosophical rooms.

37. John Casti, *Complexification* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 72.

38. See, for example, Irvin Rock, "The Intelligence of Perception," in *Perception* (New York: Scientific American Library, 1984), 234–5. Rock rightly differentiates between experience and perception and even proposes that perception may precede conscious reasoning in evolution, making thought a modification of perception.

39. Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life* (Cambridge: Zone Books, 2003), 27. I am extending the Deluzean conception outside the field in which it was instituted.