THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

ARTIFICIAL GODS:

WHITEHEADIAN AESTHETICS AND THE ART OF THE THEATER

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HELENA: We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,
Have with our needles created both one flower,
Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,
Both warbling of one song, both in one key,
As if our hands, our sides, voices and minds,
Had been incorporate.

- *William Shakespeare*, A Midsummer Night's Dream

BOY: What am I to tell Mr. Godot, Sir?

VLADIMIR: Tell him… (*he hesitates*) … tell him you saw me and that … (*he hesitates*) that you saw me.

- *Samuel Beckett*, Waiting for Godot

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CHAPTER 1
Introduction: The Two Senses of *Aesthetic*

Why is it that to multitudes art seems to be an importation into experience from a foreign country and the esthetic to be a synonym for something artificial?
- John Dewey[1]

Despite its notorious difficulty and whatever else its shortcomings, Alfred North Whitehead's "Philosophy of Organism" is attractive for the prominence it gives to humane values.[2] Whitehead felt the western tradition of substance metaphysics described the universe in deeply unsatisfying ways, as a static and mechanistic world whose final real things were intangible ideals and "substance," the unknowable, subterranean stuff of the "really real," the noumenal "thing in itself," lurking beneath illusory qualities or accidents or knowable only as phenomena. This view of the universe — particularly as ruled by a deterministic and distant God-the-unmoved-mover — denigrated time, change, and relation in favor of immutability, impassiveness, and aseity. Reacting against this tradition, Whitehead conceived of his system in terms of dynamism, relation, and a balance between receptivity and expression. Determinative providence becomes divine receptivity and divine lure; pure idea takes a back seat to feeling and to feelings of feeling; and, as is often noted, *becoming* displaces *being* as the organizing

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[1] John Dewey, *Art As Experience* (New York: Perigee, 2005), 11. The book was originally published in 1934, edited from Dewey's 1932 (inaugural) William James Lectures.

[2] *Philosophy of Organism* is a phrase Whitehead himself often uses to describe his metaphysical endeavor (though, for technical reasons, Whitehead preferred the term *cosmology* to *metaphysics*). Later names for Whitehead's system and its cognates include *process philosophy*, favored especially by Christian process theologians such as John B. Cobb Jr. and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, and *neoclassical metaphysics*, favored by Charles Hartshorne and Schubert M. Ogden. See, for example, John B. Cobb, Jr and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1976); Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *God Christ Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology*, revised edition (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1989); Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948) and *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing Co., 1970); and Schubert M. Ogden, *The Reality of God and Other Essays* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1992).

question. And so values formerly neglected or given secondary status become for Whitehead the primary values.

This is nowhere clearer than in the question of Beauty. No longer the poor stepsister to Goodness and Truth, Beauty takes on a central role in Whitehead's cosmology. Indeed, both questions of truth and of goodness find their answers in reference to beauty in Whitehead's fundamentally aesthetic philosophy. The basic building blocks of reality might be described as "experiences of feelings" or "experiences of relationships." Experience is fundamental. The subject is not understood as someone who *has experiences*; rather the subject emerges from experience. And so metaphysics is to be understood as rigorously aesthetic: the study of experience. Likewise, the final measure of experience is not its truth or its virtue but its beauty. Again, the system is thoroughly aesthetic.

This aesthetic foundation for Whitehead's metaphysics makes it an ideal system from which to articulate a philosophy of art, a general understanding of the status, resources, and potentialities of the products of human artistic imaginative effort. Any philosophy of art, in order to be maximally general, should begin from a still more general understanding of the workings of things. Artistic experience becomes a legitimate philosophical category when understood as a subset of experience in general; the task of a philosophy of art then centers on specifying the principles that delineate the sub-category. This is the best hope for identifying some common defining feature proper to all — and only — the arts, justifying the category "art" as something more than a conventional grouping of endeavors that are really either philosophically distinct or philosophically insignificant. Further, rooting art in the basic working of consciousness may also

be a path to understanding why it is that works of art are experienced as transcendent, elemental, primal, existentially essential, or in some sense spiritual. The advantage of using Whitehead's cosmology for this rooting is that, since experience itself is governed by the desire for beauty (defined in Whitehead's particular way), the source of the expressive power of artistic experience can be seen in a context of the most basic foundations of reality, deeper than artistic technique or culture. A more adequate understanding of art in Whiteheadian terms will demonstrate its place in the broader cosmology and suggest an explanation for the force of art in the experiences of individual humans and in cultures more broadly, as the "slow drift of mankind toward civilization."[3] Further, to the degree that Whitehead's cosmology is indeed more satisfying than other traditional models, a Whiteheadian aesthetic may yield a more satisfying philosophy of art.

Another way to say this would be to insist that the question of aesthetics as it has been traditionally asked requires parsing the term into two distinct but related senses, a broad and a narrow. Aesthetics in the broad sense is the general study of experience as such and of beauty's role as a factor in all experience, a relevant question at least since the turn to the subject in Enlightenment philosophy. Aesthetics in the narrow sense is the general study of artistic experience and of beauty's role in human art. A philosophy of art should be able to clarify the relationship between these two senses of the word: can one word meaningfully describe both studies, metaphysics and aesthetics proper, in two different but related senses? When metaphysics understands itself as an aesthetic project in the broad sense, opportunities arise for new understandings of aesthetics in the narrow sense.

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[3] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), vii.

Thus, Whitehead's metaphysical system, thoroughly aesthetic in the broad sense, would seem an ideal foundation for a compelling aesthetic philosophy in the narrow sense of the term. Unfortunately, as Chapter 2 will hope to demonstrate, the process school has only had limited success in articulating such a system. Despite a promising starting point — a world fundamentally driven by beauty — little attention has been paid to the potential advantages of a Whiteheadian aesthetics. Though on occasion he wrote sensitively about art and suggestively about its role in his system, Whitehead himself did little to sketch such an understanding in a systematic way. His followers have paid only cursory attention to the question. And general aesthetic philosophy has likewise almost completely neglected the question, dominated as it has been by the legacies of Hegel, Kant, and Nietzsche and the more recent linguistic turns in Wittgenstein and the post-structuralists. Whitehead's disciples have not entirely ignored the question, but it clearly took a back seat to the application of Whitehead's thought to questions of Christian theology and of ethics. And their seminal statements of a Whiteheadian aesthetics, while grounded in deeply refined understandings of Whitehead's thought, are not entirely compelling. Indeed, they seem rather clumsy in the treatment of art.

Philosophy has always taken up the question of art, its definition, its function, its creation, and its effect. Likewise, works of art, as the product of self-reflective consciousness, have always themselves encoded attitudes about the nature and purpose of artistic endeavor that can be inductively abstracted from the work and stated propositionally. Whitehead found intuitions of ultimate nature as he understood it in the work of previous philosophers, intuitions that were not systemized but anticipated his own system. In the same way, there are intuitions of

Whiteheadian aesthetics in works of art throughout the canons that can be systematized according to Whitehead's thought. Without taking on the burden of justifying Whitehead's system, the goal here is to outline and explore what a Whiteheadian aesthetic would look like if Whitehead's basic intuitions are correct. In this chapter and the next, the outlines of such an aesthetic theory are drawn in reference to other aesthetic theories and then in the context of Whitehead's own philosophy. The final three chapters seeks to induce the aesthetic theories encoded within various works to test whether they anticipate Whitehead and an aesthetics built on his system. The hope for such a Whiteheadian aesthetics would be two-fold. On the one hand, it would allow a long tradition of aesthetics to be refined in line with whatever advantages accompany a Whiteheadian philosophy of consciousness. On the other hand, it would further clarify an understanding of Whitehead's philosophy on the implications of a key point, the desire for beauty. That is to say, an exploration of Whiteheadian aesthetics could allow art to teach something to Whiteheadians, as well as the converse.

The Aesthetics of Immanuel Kant and John Dewey

As an introduction to the question of Whiteheadian aesthetics in context, it is helpful to review a few classic modern attempts at aesthetic philosophy. Their strengths, commonalities, and shortcomings help define both the challenge facing Whiteheadian aesthetics and its promise. There have been important examples of modern philosophers attempting to articulate both a metaphysics of consciousness that are rigorously aesthetic in the broad sense of the term and a philosophy of art that is aesthetic in the related narrow sense of the term. A brief review of two

important examples, Immanuel Kant and John Dewey, will delineate the nature and scope of the problem. At stake for each is not merely whether a philosophy of art is derivable from the more general system, but the integrity of the more general system itself. Both Kant and Dewey imply that a philosophy based on an examination of the structure of experience must finally entail a philosophy of art for its own completeness. That is, both insist on the necessity of connecting aesthetics in the narrow sense with the philosophy of experience in consciousness. Kant is, of course, the unavoidable classic in modern aesthetics. Dewey, while less frequently studied, is perhaps unrivaled in clarity about this necessary connection, as well as a contemporary of Whitehead. For each, something about the making of art is itself disclosive of the unfolding of experience in general. That is, with Kant and Dewey both, aesthetics in the narrow sense is not merely incidental to a metaphysics of consciousness but implies the more general system and is controlled by it.

For Immanuel Kant, the relationship between metaphysics and aesthetics centers in the power of judgment, described at greatest length in the third critique.[4] The consideration of the status of art in Kant's aesthetic theory needs to start with his aesthetic theory of the beautiful in general, of which objects of fine art are instances. This is Kant's version of the procedure

[4] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

suggested above, clarifying how the philosophy of art derives from the more general philosophy of experience as such.[5]

For Kant, a judgment that some object is beautiful must be, in the first instance, a *disinterested* judgment: "But if the question is whether something is beautiful, one does not want to know whether there is anything that is or that could be at stake… in the existence of the thing, but rather how we judge it in mere contemplation (intuition or reflection)."[6] He casts this point in the imperative at the section's end: "One must not be in the least biased in favor of the existence of the thing, but must be entirely indifferent in this respect in order to play the judge in matters of taste."[7] This point appears as a postulate given, rather than an argument made or a conclusion drawn. The truth of this postulate is not self-evident; indeed, many theories of beauty could be imagined as based upon highly interested, even utilitarian motivations. Nevertheless, the postulate seems to have a ring of intuitive truth, particularly if we evaluate it in comparison with our own subjective experience of beautiful objects. The moment of judgment about beauty can indeed seem the most impartial moment of all, as the pleasure of the experience evokes a laying

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[5] An example of the way Kant continues to dominate aesthetic discourse is found in Isobel Armstrong. Although the "radical aesthetic" for which she argues is certainly a highly modified Kantianism, central to her argumentation is to demonstrate the way a "derivative, over-simplified Kantianism," a straw-man that can sometimes look like "a parody of orthodox Kantian aesthetics" has been set up to be knocked down by recent purveyors of "the anti-aesthetic". Her working assumption is that Kant must be rescued before the radical next expression can be stated. (Isobel Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic* [Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000], 3, 10, 2.)

Frank Burch Brown likewise takes Kant as a central conversation partner, describing his own aesthetics as a "reformed Kantianism": "…Kant in particular expresses in a sophisticated way many of the kinds of convictions and habits of mind that do, in fact, underlie our everyday ways of thinking about taste, some of which are mis-conceived." His reform is to address the problem that Kant "puts his philosophical weight behind some ideas that tend to take modern theory and criticism far away from any conception of aesthetic taste that could be considered either ecumenical or religious." Brown's desire for an ecumenical or religious art is not the aim of this dissertation, even though the aesthetics described here are philosophically theistic. (Frank Burch Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste: Aesthetics in Religious Life* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 171-2.

[6] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 90.

[7] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 91.

aside of the entire world of commitments and investments in the reality of particular things to encounter this moment, this object, and appreciate what it is, without any final investment in *whether* it continues to be.

For Kant, *disinterestedness* implies *concept-less-ness*. A concept, an objectively true, *a priori* proposition, is in itself good, and concerns the good, and thus requires interest; therefore, disinterestedness requires the absence of any determinate concept, which in turn requires the absence of particular content. The content of an object — which seems to entail for Kant things like color, character, charm, emotion, or reference — can contribute to its agreeability, but not to its beauty. Therefore, judgments of beauty are concerned with pure form. Further, they are entirely subjective: without *a priori*, objective concepts to which any reasonable person would, of necessity, accede, judgments of beauty are *singular* to the particular judge. Nevertheless, they are also subjectively universal. All declarations of beauty make a claim to universal accord, and any disagreements of judgment that arise are the result of an error made by one or both of the disagreeing parties. The faculty by which these judgments are made is called *taste*:

> That object the form of which (not the material aspect of its representation, as sensation) in mere reflection on it (without any intention of acquiring a concept from it) is judged as the ground of a pleasure in the representation of such an object — with its representation this pleasure is also judged to be necessarily combined, consequently not merely for the subject who apprehends this form but for everyone who judges at all. The object is then called beautiful; and the faculty for judging through such a pleasure (consequently also with universal validity) is called taste.[8]

While "Everyone has his own taste"[9] they will agree in judgments of beauty.

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[8] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 76.

[9] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 214.

This idea of subjective universality is, of course, a problem. Given that the hallmark assumption of enlightenment rationality is precisely the *objective* universality of reason as the necessary, common factor of human existence, to posit a *subjective* universality seems a betrayal of the entire project. Kant seeks to defend his idea by rooting subjective universality in the structure of the human cognitive faculty, which is itself objectively ascertainable. Judgments of beauty are based on the pleasure that comes from the harmonious fit between the form of the beautiful object and the free play of imagination and understanding in the subject. He describes it like this:

> …Now there belongs to a representation by which an object is given, in order for there to be a cognition of it in general, **imagination** for the composition of the manifold of intuition and **understanding** for the unity of the concept that unifies the representations. This state of a **free play** of the faculties of cognition with a representation through which an object is given must be able to be universally communicated, because cognition, as a determination of the object with which given representations (in whatever subject it may be) should agree, is the only kind of representation that is valid for everyone.
>
> The subjective universal communicability of the kind of representation in a judgment of taste, since it is supposed to occur without presupposing a determinate concept, can be nothing other than the state of mind in the free play of the imagination and the understanding….[10]

The justification for subjective universality is that, while we will each judge according to our own taste, the fact of a common faculty of cognition in general will necessitate the recognition in every judge of a beautiful form that is in harmony with imagination in free play with this cognition in general. As the judgment of beauty is entirely formal, we will recognize the form of free play and judge it as beautiful.

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[10] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 102-3.

The need to posit for beauty a status that is both *universal* and *subjective* serves Kant's deeper concern, unifying Nature and Freedom. The appreciation of beauty is a real response, one which any judge whosoever is obliged to share, to something inherent in the form of the object, intimating perhaps even something of the supersensible thing-in-itself that reason cannot attain; so it is something of nature. It is also, however, a subjective, singular response arising from the free play of imagination and understanding in the individual judging subject, free from any obligation to the necessities of transcendental logic; it is an exercise of human freedom. Kant is surely susceptible to the accusation of wanting to have it both ways. But his dilemma here is hardly a new one; interpreters of beauty have always insisted that it is both radically polysemous and intuitively universal. Kant's attempt to explain how it might be both, the recourse to the subjectively universal response to beautiful form, is ingenious; and though it is not entirely intuitive, neither is it clearly wrong.

Entailed in this unification of nature and freedom is the idea of purposiveness without purpose. Purposiveness is "the causality of a **concept** with regard to its **object**," which is the concept's end, its goal.[11] As such, it is intimately linked with the faculty of desire, the will, and therefore practical reason, which is, unlike the faculty of taste, thoroughly rational and objective. It is possible, however, to distinguish the *form of purposiveness* from any actual purpose:

> An object or a state of mind or even an action, however, even if its possibility does not necessarily presuppose the representation of an end, is called purposive merely because its possibility can only be explained and conceived by us insofar as we assume as its ground a causality in accordance with ends, i.e., a will that has arranged it so in accordance with the representation of a certain rule. Purposiveness can thus exist without an end, insofar as we do not place the causes of this form in a will, but can still make the

[11] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 105.

> explanation of its possibility conceivable to ourselves only by deriving it from a will. Now we do not always necessarily need to have insight through reason (concerning its possibility) into what we observe. Thus we can at least observe a purposiveness concerning form, even without basing it in an end (as the matter of the *nexus finalis*), and notice it in objects, although in no other way than by reflection.[12]

This *form of purposiveness,* without any actual purpose, is that which judgments of taste concern. It is this form that harmoniously matches the free play of imagination and understanding. Its lack of actual purpose allows for freedom from interest, from determinate concept, and from merely local idiosyncrasy, while its purposiveness in form provides the possibility for true subjective universality and true pleasure. As Kant has it,

> The consciousness of the merely formal purposiveness in the play of the cognitive powers of the subject in the cases of a representation through which an object is given is the pleasure itself, because it contains a determining ground of the activity of the subject with regard to the animation of its cognitive powers, thus an internal causality (which is purposive) with regard to cognition in general, but without being restricted to a particular cognition, hence it contains a mere form of the subjective purposiveness of a representation in an aesthetic judgment.[13]

Beauty is the experience of an object that has purposiveness without purpose. As Kant says in a footnote, "A flower… is held to be beautiful because a certain purposiveness is encountered in our perception of it which, as we judge it, is not related to any end at all."[14] It is therefore distinct from practical reason, in which the actual end is always a prime concern. But its rooting in purposiveness nevertheless tempts a connection with practical reason and its purposiveness; as we will see, it also tempts a conjunction with teleology and ultimately, the divine.

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[12] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 105.

[13] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 107.

[14] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 120.

Kant's theory of the fine arts proceeds from this theory of beauty. For Kant, beautiful art (as distinguished from merely agreeable art, which lacks universality) is the beautiful representation of a thing produced through freedom. The work of art is therefore a human product (distinct from nature), an indeterminate and unknowable product (distinct from science), and a liberal product of spirit whose purpose is only play (distinct from handicraft, a remunerative art).[15] Further, it must share the purposive purposelessness of beauty in nature: "the purposiveness in its form must still seem to be as free from all constraint by arbitrary rules as if it were a mere product of nature."[16] This is a key point, particularly in relation to Kant's theory of teleology. For now, the point to be made is the absolute necessity that, like the beauty of nature, the beauty of art must be free from any actual end and display only the *form* of purposiveness. As such, the experience of beautiful art exhibits all the qualities of beauty described above: disinterestedness, lack of definite concept, and universality.

Kant's centers his discussion of the fine arts on the question of their origin, which he describes by the term *genius*, "the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) **through which** nature gives the rule to art."[17] The genius of artistic creation is free from all determinate rules, but rather brings forward original representations, governed only by the indeterminate rule given it by nature, which is purposiveness as though it were nature. In a sense, genius works in imitation of nature, striving to represent natural objects in beautiful ways. But what of nature is to be imitated is precisely its freedom from external laws or governing ends. For an artist of

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[15] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 183.

[16] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 195.

[17] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 186.

genius to represent this freedom, she must take this only, the form of purposeless purposiveness, as the law from nature and represent it through her imaginative originality for the free play of imagination and understanding in the one judging. "[Genius] displays itself not so much in the execution of the proposed end in the presentation of a determinate **concept** as in the exposition of the expression of **aesthetic ideas**, which contain rich material for that aim, hence the imagination, in its freedom from all guidance by rules, is nevertheless represented as purposive for the presentation of the given concept."[18]

Indeed, so free is the imagination of genius that even genius itself cannot describe how it produces its works. As distinct from cognition, in which "the imagination is under the constraint of the understanding and is subject to the limitation of being adequate to its concept," the imagination of aesthetic genius is unconstrained by concept, governed only by the judgment of taste, which remains the faculty for judging the harmony of the artistic object with the free play of imagination and understanding.[19] Genius is the productive superaddition to taste that provides for the original production of art. But only when combined with taste can the product of genius be *beautiful* as well as *inspired*, and so the judgment of taste remains primary.[20] This is, for Kant, the point: Art can be beautiful, which requires a theory of artistic production that conforms with his theory of beauty. Kant achieves this through the idea of genius, which in its productivity mirrors the free play of imagination and understanding required for beauty.

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[18] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 195.

[19] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 194.

[20] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 197.

Of course, Kant famously bifurcates aesthetic judgments into two categories, the beautiful and the sublime, raising the question of whether the imitations of fine art can also be sublime. It is a question Kant answers only indirectly, and seemingly in the negative. Kant situates his discussion of the fine arts in the deduction of pure aesthetic judgments, which explicitly concerns only judgments of *beauty* because judgments of the *sublime*, being indirect, require no such deduction. This implies that judgments about art are exclusively judgments of beauty. Further, the importance of form (*i.e.* that the form of purposiveness is what evokes pleasure) in Kant's theory of art seems to make the proposition of a sublime art inconceivable and inconsistent due to the boundlessness of objects that arouse sublime feelings, though Kant never discusses such a proposition either way. There are, nevertheless, hints that such a proposition might be defensible within this system.

First, the judgment of the sublime is one we make about our feeling in the face of an object of absolute magnitude or power, which defies the capacity of intuition to take it in as a whole, and brings us to the indirect pleasure at the greatness of reason in the face of the failure of imagination and intuition. This is something one might feel when confronted with "the boundless ocean set into a rage, a lofty waterfall on a mighty river, etc."[21] But, of course, the boundless ocean is not literally boundless, especially to one standing on the shore, nor is a lofty waterfall of any absolute or immeasurable height. So, as Kant admits, the judgment of the sublime is not about the object in itself but about the feelings aroused in the judge. There seems to be no reason why art could not arouse such emotions as powerfully as nature.

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[21] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 144.

Indeed, at some points in his discussion of fine arts, Kant implies as much, though without making the connection to the sublime. In his discussion of spirit as the essence of genius, he writes "Now I maintain that this principle is nothing other than the faculty for the presentation of **aesthetic ideas**," which is "that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., **concept**, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible."[22] It is unclear here whether the impossibility of a concept is due to the necessary concept-less-ness of all aesthetic judgments, or due to the richness of the ideas themselves. The former must be so; but later in the discussion, he implies that the latter may be so as well. He writes,

> Now if we add to a concept a representation of the imagination that belongs to its presentation, but which by itself stimulates so much thinking that it can never be grasped in a determinate concept, hence which aesthetically enlarges the concept itself in an unbounded way, then in this case the imagination is creative, and sets the faculty of intellectual ideas (reason) into motion, that is, at the instigation of a representation it gives more to think about than can be grasped and made distinct in it (although it does, to be sure, belong to the concept of the object).[23]

This seems directly parallel to Kant's description of the feeling of the sublime, in which an object that "gives more to think about than can be grasped and made distinct," "in an unbounded way," "sets the faculty of intellectual ideas (reason) into motion." To conceive of art as being potentially sublime would require a change in the theory of genius, perhaps toward a possibility of imagination or spirit in its free play overwhelming taste toward the indirect stimulation of reason. But this seems to do no violence to the basic system; indeed, it is perhaps more consistent, given the experience of the sublime that might be had in a performance of *King*

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[22] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 192.

[23] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 193.

Lear's third act, or in a contemplation of the whiteness of the whale. In either case, we might expect to feel the pressure of something that is beyond the ken of reason, the intimation of an order that cannot be perceived.

After his discussion of the aesthetic power of judgment, which dominates the critique, Kant turns to the teleological power of judgment. Kant's general theory of teleology is yet more difficult to comprehend, but seems a crucial lynchpin in his metaphysical project, at least according to Kant himself, who at several points insists that the operations of pure and practical reason depend on it. A basic sketch might run as follows. Beyond the capacity of science to describe the raw mechanism of the workings of things, there is a need for an overarching theory about the ultimate value — the final ends — of things in themselves. Because things in themselves are supersensible, unknowable to reason, and therefore finally indeterminate, this theory focuses instead on the faculty of judgment, to which these ends are in some way accessible. The teleological power of judgment is the power to judge these internal and unknowable ends of things in themselves, and of the ultimate ends of larger systems and the whole of nature. Although these internal ends are indeterminate, they can function as regulative concepts for the reason in its moral endeavor to live according to the categorical imperative, i.e. as though everything is an end rather than a means. As such, though teleological judgment is indeterminate, it is also indispensable.[24]

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[24] "In fact, [the anatomists of animals] could just as little dispense with this teleological principle as they could do without the universal physical principle, since, just as in the case of the abandonment of the latter there would remain no experience at all, so in the case of the abandonment of the former principle there would remain no guideline for the observation of a kind of natural thing that we have conceived of teleologically under the concept of a natural end." (Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 248.)

The principle to be used for the judgment of the effect of the whole that lies beyond the blind mechanism of nature is the principle of teleology. Although it cannot be proved, it is necessary and indispensable for the interpretation of anything in nature, based on the intuition (subjectively appropriate reason) of "the maxims that everything in the world is good for something, that nothing in it is in vain; and by means of the example that nature gives in its organic products, one is justified, indeed called upon to expect nothing in nature and its laws but what is purposive in the whole."[25] The judgment that nature as a whole is driven toward ends leads to a sense that morality itself is rooted in nature, and that practical reason, in its reflection upon freedom, as well as theoretical reason, in its reflection upon nature, are connected through the power of judgment.

Kant never connects his theory of the fine arts with the teleological power of judgment; it derives from the aesthetic power of judgment with regard to judgments of beauty. But an inroad for art into teleology is suggested by the principle of purposeless purposiveness. As Kant begins the analytic of the teleological power of judgment, he writes of the intellectual purposiveness that undergirds teleology: "The intellectual purposiveness, however, although it is objective (not, like the aesthetic, subjective), can nevertheless be conceived, as far as its possibility is concerned, as merely formal (not real), i.e., as purposiveness that is not grounded in a purpose, for which teleology would be necessary, but only in general."[26] This general teleology is exactly that which judgment takes for nature's underlying end. Therefore, art, as a constructed instance

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[25] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 250.

[26] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 236.

of purposeless purposiveness, might be understood as a representation of nature's inner purposiveness. This speculation is unsupported in the text. Kant speaks of art only as a representation of the object depicted therein: art represents the very purposiveness of the object in a beautiful way. He never seems to conceive of art's purposiveness as representative of anything larger. Again, however, the inference is not clearly wrong: the feeling of pleasure in a judgment of beauty as purposeless purposiveness might lead one to contemplation of purposiveness on the broadest scale, the general end of nature as a whole. Art thereby might be an occasion (perhaps an invitation) for the teleological power of judgment to exercise itself once more.

Perhaps the clearest hint Kant makes in this direction is in his analogy of God with the Author. For Kant, the end of nature cannot be something within nature, or it would be susceptible to sensation and reflective reason. Rather, nature takes its originating force in certain *lemmata* that must necessarily remain outside of the sciences, including transcendental ones. Further, the whole of nature must be understood as having its ends *intentionally*, so to speak, as the regulative principle derived for reason from judgment. As with the sublime, so here there seems to be the apprehension of basic pattern, a driving order (purposiveness) that is beyond conceptuality (identifiable purpose). So finally teleological discussions become theological. For Kant, this is expressed in the analogy of God as the moral author of the world:

> Now this is not yet the inference from moral teleology to a theology, i.e., to the existence of a moral author of the world, but only the inference to a final end of creation, which is determined in this way. Now that for this creation, i.e., the existence of things, in accordance with a **final end**, there must be assumed, first, an intelligent being, but second, not merely an intelligent being (as is necessary for the possibility of the things in

> nature that we are forced to judge as **ends**) but also a **moral** being as author of the world, i.e., a God, is a second inference, which is so constituted that one sees that it is made merely for the power of judgment, in accordance with concepts of practical reason, and that as such it is made for the reflecting and not for the determinative power of judgment.[27]

Here, the teleological power of judgment seems to require this analogy, despite being unprovable, as a regulative concept. Then, extrapolating, to posit *author* as an analogy for God is to suggest a divine analogue to genius, which exercises divine imagination and divine understanding in free play to produce expressions of beauty (and perhaps sublimity). This, then, is something like implying that art is an analogy for nature. In the idea of "God the Author," aesthetics and teleology are linked.

This can be said with greater force. If God is the author of the world, then the human creator is somehow behaving analogously to the divine. In discussing the imagination of creative genius, Kant writes,

> The imagination (as a productive cognitive faculty) is, namely, very powerful in creating, as it were, another nature, out of the material which the real one gives it. We entertain ourselves with it when experience seems too mundane to us; we transform the latter, no doubt always in accordance with analogous laws, but also in accordance with principles that lie higher in reason (and which are every bit as natural to us as those in accordance with which the understanding apprehends empirical nature); in this we feel our freedom from the law of association (which applies to the empirical use of that faculty), in accordance with which material can certainly be lent to us by nature, but the latter can be transformed by us into something entirely different, namely, into that which steps beyond nature.[28]

The imagination crafts "another nature," something more concentrated and intense than the first, so as to entertain when general sensual experience is too mundane. The artistic genius, animated

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[27] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 320.

[28] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 192.

by spirit, is in a sense playing God, fashioning an alternative creation, secondary to the first and derivative from its raw materials, but substantially free. The creation of art, then, becomes the playful human exercise of divine faculties. Art's products are thus objectifications of this free play, and to experience them is to experience an epitome of the cosmic teleology. Again, this is not explicitly in Kant, but it seems to follow. I would argue for art, therefore, a more exalted final status in Kant's system than Kant himself seems explicitly to provide for. If it is true that "Beautiful art is an art to the extent that it seems at the same time to be nature," then perhaps it is likewise true that nature is a teleological nature to the extent that it seems at the same time to be art.[29] This would truly be nature giving the rule to art. The products of the imagination, another nature, reach beyond nature with a display of purposiveness, rendering them susceptible not only to the aesthetic power of judgment but the teleological as well. While the objects of art play a disappointingly small role in the overall line of argument, Art as such seems finally to be the governing analogy for the teleological power of judgment, in which nature and freedom find their ultimate unity.

Although Kant's aims and concerns are very similar to Whitehead's, their methods dramatically diverge. A far closer kin in terms of philosophical mechanism is John Dewey, for whom (as for Whitehead) the essence of art is rooted in the fundamental role of experience in metaphysics. Indeed, in some ways, Dewey faces the opposite challenge from Kant. While Kant had to justify how an understanding of art is *related to* a fundamental understanding of experience (or how the power of judgment governs the operations of pure and practical reason),

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[29] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 185.

Dewey has to explain just how it is that artistic experience is *different from* general experience, given how closely he saw them aligned.[30] He has to answer, What added specifications distinguish our experience of a work of art from our "esthetic experiences" of life generally?[31] It is an "ironic perversity" for Dewey that philosophical aesthetics is tasked first with clarifying not the difference between artistic experience and ordinary, but the continuities with it: "This task is to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience."[32] Dewey first must argue for the continuity he believes should have been taken for granted, but only as a prelude to the more difficult challenge of defining what specifies experiences of art.

At least implicitly, Dewey insists on the same distinction between the two senses of the term *aesthetic* that I describe above.

> We cannot answer these questions [about the artistic and aesthetic quality implicit in normal experience] any more than we can trace the development of art out of everyday experience, unless we have a clear and coherent idea of what is meant when we say "normal experience."[33]

This normal experience is rooted in the animal operations of the sense organs and the mostly instinctual, emotional, and pre-intellectual responses that arise from those sensa. It is the overlap, the "interaction" of the "live creature" with the environment. "Every need, say hunger for fresh

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[30] On Dewey's "refusal" of Kant, as well as a discussion of his importance as an aesthetic philosopher who takes a genuinely different and salutary tack, see Isobel Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic*, 162-170.

[31] Dewey prefers the spelling *esthetic*. I have adopted it here in places where it is his particular conception and his discussion of it I am treating. I maintain the latinized *aesthetic* when discussing the general philosophical discipline.

[32] Dewey, *Art As Experience*, 2.

[33] Dewey, *Art As Experience*, 11-12.

air or food, is a lack that denotes at least a temporary absence of adequate adjustment with surroundings. But it is also a demand, a reaching out into the environment to make good the lack and to restore adjustment by building at least a temporary equilibrium."[34] In a sense, experience is not something the live creature has but is the equilibrium or even agreement between the creature and the world. In contrast to Kant, the boundary between the experiencing subject and the environment is permeable, as the subjective state of yearning or maladjustment brings the environment into the creature and leads the creature out into the world.

Experience always brings with it the burden of feeling, an emphasis that complements the "intellectual" "in the constant rhythm that marks the interaction of the live creature with his surroundings."[35] Dewey's pragmatism transcends the subject-object split by insisting that the felt meanings of experience are borne by experience itself:

> The live animal does not have to project emotions into the objects experienced. Nature is kind and hateful, bland and morose, irritating and comforting, long before she is mathematically qualified or even a congeries of "secondary" qualities like colors and their shapes…. How could it be otherwise? Direct experience comes from nature and man interacting with each other. In this interaction, human energy gathers, is released, dammed up, frustrated, and victorious. There are rhythmic beats of want and fulfillment, pulses of doing and being withheld from doing.[36]

This is to assert that for Dewey experience is always aesthetic in the broad sense of the term. Experience impresses upon the subject its feelings and qualities. Indeed, it even has a kind of meaning associated with it, immanent within the experience itself. The experience organizes the

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[34] Dewey, *Art As Experience*, 12.

[35] Dewey, *Art As Experience,* 14.

[36] Dewey, *Art As Experience*, 15.

flow of human energies, giving them rudimentary form and a kind of aim, whether to frustration, release, disappointment, or victory.

For example, in a flash of lightning, we experience not merely a momentary event, but "the focal culmination of long, slow processes of maturation. It is the manifestation of the continuity of an ordered temporal experience in a sudden discrete instant of climax."[37] Dewey's understanding of experience centers on rhythms of build-up, maturation, and climax. Experience is not an undifferentiated stream of perceptions; rather, it is episodic, punctuated and segmented. Dewey insists that by *experience*, what we really need to talk about is *an experience*, which has a kind of wholeness and inner form or rhythm. As he describes,

> Philosophers, even empirical philosophers, have spoken for the most part of experience at large. Idiomatic speech, however, refers to experiences each of which is singular, having its own beginning and end. For life is no uniform uninterrupted march of flow. It is a thing of histories, each with its own plot, its own inception and movement toward its close, each having its own particular rhythmic movement; each with its own unrepeated quality pervading it throughout.[38]

An experience, though it might arise from something prior and lead to something subsequent, is a part of life that has been rounded out and is self-contained, self-explicating, integral and whole. On the one hand, seemingly in direct but unnamed criticism of Whitehead, Dewey denies that time (the container of experiences) is "the succession of instantaneous points which some philosophers have asserted it to be."[39] Rather, an experience has duration without losing its singularity. On the other hand, as above, time is not an undifferentiated or abstract uniformity,

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[37] Dewey, *Art As Experience,* 24.

[38] Dewey, *Art As Experience,* 37.

[39] Dewey, *Art As Experience*, 23.

but rather is organized into experiences, each with its gathering impulses and its final consummation. As he summarizes, "An experience has a unity that gives it its name, *that* meal, that storm, that rupture of friendship. The existence of this unity is constituted by a single *quality* that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts." And while we may intellectualize the experience after the fact, talking or theorizing *about* it, the *having* of it is different: "In final import they are intellectual. But in their actual occurrence they were emotional as well; they were purposive and volitional…. No thinker can ply his occupation save as he is lured and rewarded by total integral experiences that are intrinsically worthwhile."[40]

This understanding of what an experience is in general readily lends itself to an understanding of artistic experience in particular. In fact, it seems nearly overdetermined in Dewey. He often uses artistic experience as an analogy for experience in general, nearly assuming the basic point he is arguing for. For example, in the discussion of the lightning strike that culminates a process of maturation in an experience, Dewey goes on to write, "It is as meaningless in isolation as would be the drama of *Hamlet* were it confined to a single line or word with no context…. Form as it is present in the fine arts, is the art of making clear what is involved in the organization of space and time prefigured in every course of a developing life experience."[41] Perhaps oddly, Dewey seems to be offering the workings of art as an analogy for the workings of general experience: the meaning and formal integrity we expect to find in art is to be expected of life in general, any time we have any experience at all.

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[40] Dewey, *Art As Experience,* 38.

[41] Dewey, *Art As Experience,* 24.

This is not, however, merely circular. For Dewey, the essence of art is that it works like life, and so comparisons can be drawn either way. As he clarifies,

> Art is thus prefigured in the very processes of living. A bird builds its nest and a beaver its dam when internal organic pressures coöperate with external materials so that the former are fulfilled and the latter are transformed in a satisfying culmination. We may hesitate to apply the word "art," since we doubt the presence of directive intent. But all deliberation, all conscious intent, grows out of things once performed organically through the interplay of natural energies. Were it not so, art would be built on quaking sands, nay, on unstable air. The distinguishing contribution of man is consciousness of the relations found in nature.[42]

The productions of animals are not art, because they are done without consciousness. But for Dewey, there is more in human experience that derives from our animal natures than for most philosophers. And in particular, the play of feeling ("esthetics") in experience, the felt need or lack in the context of which the self expresses itself into the world, is not an intellectual matter. So though lacking "directive intent," even animal productivity prefigures art. Art is rooted in the pre-conscious, natural energies of human experience as its foundation. We see a basic challenge of Dewey's aesthetics to the tradition in his constant urge to emphasize the continuity between the special and the general. For Dewey, much aesthetic philosophy struggles precisely because it aims itself at objects, works of refined art, that are too abstracted from their original context, memorialized in museums as personal experiences rather than products of a cultural environment. Most aesthetics suffers from a premature or arbitrary split between the highest objects and art "in the raw," which may be any experience "enjoyable in itself." A chief remedial task for Dewey's aesthetic philosophy, therefore, is to repair the split.

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[42] Dewey, *Art As Experience,* 25.

This separation comes from various circumstances: capitalism (art is commodified), nationalism (art valorizes the patria), and imperialism (museums as monuments of conquest). Dewey says this is why "imitation" has been an important account for art: for all its flaws, imitation aesthetics emerged from an understanding of art as connected with everyday life. Indeed, in ages when the connection between art and everyday experience are realized, appreciation of the arts are strong and they are integrated into civic life; in ages when the connection is weak, "high art" is relegated to remote and esoteric niches of "self expression," while popular arts are coarse and vulgar. Works lose their "indigenous status" and become "specimens of fine art and nothing else."[43] An aesthetics that focuses, as it usually does, on the "fine arts" too often starts "from a ready-made compartmentalization, or from a conception of art that 'spiritualizes' it out of connection with the objects of concrete experience."[44] Instead, it must begin with art's connection to discovered qualities of ordinary experience, not an ecstatic eulogy of the beauty of the flower, but an understanding of the soil, rain, and sun that produced the flower, requiring a "detour" from fine art back to everyday experience.[45] For Dewey, the important question is, as he frames it early on, "Why is it that to multitudes art seems to be an importation into experience from a foreign country and the esthetic to be a synonym for something artificial?"[46] His argumentation focuses on this question in a way that seems generally

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[43] Dewey, *Art As Experience,* 8.

[44] Dewey, *Art As Experience,* 10.

[45] Dewey, *Art As Experience,* 9-11.

[46] Dewey, *Art As Experience,* 11.

compelling. But perhaps the more difficult question is, How shall we distinguish art from experience?

The aesthetic quality of an artistic experience has initially to do with its shape, pace and structure. Central to Dewey is the idea of rhythm, the contour of ideas and feelings within the space-time of an experience, as a formal, organizing force. In experience, something is attempting to come alive. Perfect obstruction will prevent this, but so will perfect permissiveness, which would result in the exhaustion of the energies at hand. So the rhythmic interplay of impulse and resistance is needed to shape experience:

> Impulsion from need starts an experience that does not know where it is going; resistance and check bring about the conversion of direct forward action into reflection; what is turned back upon is the relation of hindering conditions to what the self possesses as working capital in virtue of prior experiences. As the energies thus involved re-enforce the original impulsion, this operates more circumspectly with insight into end and method. Such is the outline of every experience that is clothed with meaning.[47]

Experiences shaped into art by consciousness (i.e. by the artist) present this interplay of impulse and resistance in such a way that the raw material of the experience (the subject matter, the media, the techniques and crafts) as well as the context of history and past experience find fulfillment in something that feels alive, or "clothed with meaning." For Dewey, this aesthetic meaning is called *expression*, an integration of old and new through a process of impulse and resistance. "The junction of the new and old is not a mere composition of forces, but is a re-creation in which the present impulsion gets form and solidity while the old, the "stored," material is literally revived, given new life and soul through having to meet a new situation."[48]

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[47] Dewey, *Art As Experience,* 62.

[48] Dewey, *Art As Experience*, 63.

Expression is this emergence of meaning and feeling from the integral experience, like juice squeezed from grapes, Dewey says. "It takes the wine press as well as grapes to ex-press juice, and it takes environing and resisting objects as well as internal emotion and impulsion to constitute an *expression* of emotion."[49] We may say aesthetic experience is experience of something that expresses; and the work of art is an expression.

Underlying Dewey's idea of the expression is a presumption of wholeness to an experience, the integral completion of something, the impulse that has been shaped by resistance into a final form. An expression is an experience that can be had to completion and consummation. This, then, implies its own kind of purposiveness. In distinguishing "intellectual" experiences from "esthetic," Dewey describes the goal of intellectual experience as entirely for the sake of its conclusion, which can then be taken and used in other intellectual endeavors. By contrast, he explains:

> In a work of art, there is no such single self-sufficient deposit. The end, the terminus, is significant not by itself but as the integration of the parts. It has no other existence. A drama or novel is not the final sentence, even if the characters are disposed of as living happily ever after. In a distinctively esthetic experience, characteristics that are subdued in other experiences are dominant; those that are subordinate are controlling — namely, the characteristics in virtue of which the experience is an integrated complete experience on its own account.[50]
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> In every integral experience there is form because there is dynamic organization. I call the organization dynamic because it takes time to complete it, because there is growth. There is inception, development, fulfillment. Material is ingested and and digested through interaction with that vital organization of the results of prior experience that constitutes the mind of the worker…. That which distinguishes an experience as

[49] Dewey, *Art As Experience,* 67.

[50] Dewey, *Art As Experience,* 57.

> esthetic is conversion of resistance and tensions, of excitations that in themselves are temptations to diversion, into a movement toward an inclusive and fulfilling close.[51]

It is helpful here to distinguish between *telos* and *teleology.* Intellectual experience has an aim or a goal, for which the process of arrival is completely instrumental. One goes and sees in order to know the answer. This goal, this telos, is the purpose of the intellectual experience. Esthetic experience for Dewey is, beginning to end, pervaded by the purpose of its own integration, achieving wholeness and expressing the original impulse as shaped by environmental, contextual, and historical factors and by an appropriate, empowering resistance. It doesn't merely serve an end, but is an experience of "end making," a display of the coming together of things. Its purpose is, in part, a display of purposiveness. I will call this display of purposiveness *teleology*.[52] Regardless of the subject matter, this movement of impulsion-consummation is the essence of all art, the expressiveness beneath whatever is expressed. All art includes this display of purposiveness for Dewey, this teleology. Artistic expression involves and includes a feeling of the purposiveness of things.

At this point, despite the cursory nature of this summary, the fundamental similarity between Kant and Dewey emerges. For both, the essence of artistic experience is a kind of display or rehearsal of the fundamental drive to life-meaning-existence that all experience rests on as its predicate. The display of purposiveness (teleology) as such is prioritized over any

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[51] Dewey, *Art As Experience,* 57-58.

[52] To clarify this use of *teleology*: Normally we would think of teleology as the study of *teloi*, that is, of ends and purposes. I am using *teleology* differently, as an experience or concept of purposiveness. It is a display or imitation of the purposiveness of things in art. Kant, for example, says judgments of beauty discern purposeless purposiveness: I could refer to this as a "telos-less teleology." This coinage, though unusual, helpfully preserves the language of telos while avoiding more awkward constructions, e.g. telos-iveness, telos-ish.

particular purpose (telos). To experience art is to experience the way life lives as an integral expression (Dewey), the free play of the imaginative will (Kant). For both, art re-presents the basic drive of existence toward significance. It is this display of purposiveness that demarcates art as art, whatever the content.

George Steiner's Theistic Account of Art

Kant and Dewey also share the same basic flaw in their theory, at least from the Whiteheadian perspective. Neither fully addresses why it is that things should want to integrate, consummate, or achieve a telos in the first place in a way to suggest why this would be the key object of art's imitation. For both, the yearning for completeness or the fulfillment of purpose at the heart of reality is a postulate. As we will see, for Whitehead, answering this question lies at the heart of the theory. In his philosophy of organism, the only sensible answer to this question is God: experience is had, and desires its final expression (what Whitehead calls *satisfaction*) because it includes (inherits) God's desire for continual consummation. God wants things to come into being, and so they become. This is a highly untechnical, even romantic way of putting the point, but it is not inaccurate to Whitehead's cosmology. And this response, to say that the divine is the engine that drives the emergence of creation process by process, frames a dilemma that neither Kant nor Dewey might easily resolve. If God is real, then it would be strange at best to have an account of human creativity, including art, without reference to the Creator. And if

God is not real, it is difficult at best to account for the source of creativity rooted in the idea that anything matters.[53]

Because Whitehead's system is pervasively theistic, though not religious, an aesthetics based upon it would need likewise to acknowledge the role of God in the infusion of the drive to final expression at the heart of artistic experience. It may be helpful, then, to turn to a thinker who arrives at similar conclusions to Kant and Dewey but in a more explicitly theistic formulation, George Steiner, as a bridge to the discussion of Whitehead in Chapter 2. Steiner helpfully complements the first two in two crucial ways: he is explicitly theistic, and he writes from the point of view of critical interpretation and appraisal of texts. Kant and Dewey both fall into a characteristic pitfall of aesthetics, the focus on art in general to the neglect of art works in particular. In principle, this would be appropriate: aesthetics is concerned with clarifying what must be true of any work whatsoever, and so cannot be proved by particular works.[54] But it would be an odd thing indeed to claim to be developing a theory of art without reference to any actual works, genres, or traditions. Many aesthetic systems are impugned by their overly narrow preconceptions about what constitutes art. The examination of experience, the starting point for aesthetics, must be combined with an adequate understanding of the canon of art works in its

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[53] I should hasten to add, as will become clear, Whitehead's divinity is one defined by philosophical procedure, not the interpretation of the religious witness of any particular tradition. Whitehead's convictions about the necessity and character of God are themselves necessary, he believes, to any coherent theory of reality. Likewise, the project here is one of philosophical aesthetics, not religious: what can we say about art in general, and not simply what can we say about the use or status it has in any particular religious tradition?

[54] This is a special application in aesthetics of the principle that empirical evidence cannot prove metaphysical claims, which must be true of any experience even conceivable and not merely of the experiences we have to hand. Incidentally, the converse does not hold: experience can indeed disprove bad metaphysical theory, which is shown in an instant to be inept. Actual art works often disprove aesthetic philosophies; for example, many of the strongest works of the 20th Century are rocks on which many theories founder when based on simplistic ideas of beauty as comeliness or proportion.

diversity and complexity. Steiner is helpful, therefore, in claiming a more empirical method, examining works and reflecting on his experiences thereof. His expansive survey of what he takes to be great art is marshaled in an attempt to answer what he takes to be the essential question, How does art mean?

Steiner's book *Real Presences* takes up the challenge of "Gertrude Stein's *boutade*: 'There is no there there,'"[55] which describes what he takes to be the common estimation of the situation of poetry in the wake of deconstruction. Steiner's goal is to "argue the reverse." Steiner believes we are living in a new situation, a time of epilogue (*after-word*), characterized by a surfeit of secondary writings, critiques, and theories; doubt of the possibility of transcendence; and (thanks to the mortal games of deconstruction) a hopeless nihilism with respect to the possibility of words, music, art, sculpture, architecture, or literature to mean anything actual or absolute.

> We speak still of 'sunrise' and 'sunset'. We do so as if the Copernican model of the solar system had not replaced, ineradicably, the Ptolemaic. Vacant metaphors, eroded figures of speech, inhabit our vocabulary and grammar. They are caught, tenaciously, in the scaffolding and recesses of our common parlance. There they rattle about like old rags or ghosts in the attic.[56]

Steiner fears that thinkers like Derrida and Barthes have left us in a situation of a kind of aphasia, an inability to speak meaningfully, as though the restrictions of apophatic theology were newly

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[55] George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 121.

[56] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 3.

extended from God to art: here too, we are now prohibited from evoking the transcendent.[57] Acts of speech are vacant or eroded in their meaning, "ghosts in the attic."

Steiner argues that any adequate answer to nihilism, positivism or deconstruction must derive from something deeper than the secular. "This entails taking one further step, a step beyond both moral good sense and the existentially empirical…. Transcendence is another, almost technical, name for that passage."[58] Steiner's premise here is that, if God were really real, then God's existence could secure the meaning of meaning. God's transcendence would allow an escape from the closed system of the language game. By demonstrating the possibility of transcendent meaning in great works, Steiner believes he could both rescue language from vacancy and defend the legitimacy of claims about the existence of the divine.

Steiner draws his connection between art and the divine, both bold and embarrassed, first with recourse to the divine fiat:

> I can only put it this way (and every true poem, piece of music or painting says it better): there is aesthetic creation because there is *creation.* There is formal construction because we have been made form…. The core of our human identity is nothing more or less than the fitful apprehension of the radically inexplicable presence, facticity and perceptible substantiality of the created. It is; we are. This is the rudimentary grammar of the unfathomable.
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> I take the aesthetic act, the conceiving and bringing into being of that which, very precisely, could not have conceived or brought into being, to be an *imitatio*, a replication on its own scale, of the inaccessible first *fiat* (the 'Big Bang' of the new cosmologies, before which there cannot be, in true Augustinian fashion, any 'time', is no less a construed imperative and 'boundary-condition' than is the narrative of creation in religion). The conceptually intractable nature of that primal 'let there be' entails the

[57] Interestingly, Steiner implies that this is a new situation foisted upon us by Deconstruction. That is, Derrida *et al.* did not so much reveal something about our abiding situation that we missed, as they did create the catastrophe we now inhabit. This impulse perhaps helps account for Steiner's recourse to old traditions newly applied for a solution.

[58] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 200.

> possibility, itself conceptually inaccessible except in a trivially formal sense, of preceding nothingness, of the void.[59]

Nothing from within the world or the language system can authorize the meaningfulness of art. But because the originating act of all that is lies beyond the closed system of the world, Steiner believes there is room for a transcendent other. In this, he is following an age old path, from Augustine's paradoxes of the knowledge of God through the apophatic theology of Thomas Aquinas to the concluding proposition of the *Tractatus*: to posit a realm of truth inaccessible to reason has often been to clear room for the transcendent.[60] Further, to style the "Big Bang" as "the inaccessible first *fiat*," Steiner is identifying the occupant of this transcendent space-beyond-space as God the Creator of Genesis. That there is creation implies the existence of the creator.

The artist, the human creator, is driven to create in response to the existence of the prior creation, a task undertaken with both fatalism and rage. The "art-act," emerges from the givenness of the world physiologically, linguistically, materially, and socially, but is driven by

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[59] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 201.

[60] For Augustine: "I entered, then, and with the vision of my spirit, such as it was, I saw the incommutable light far above my spiritual ken, transcending my mind: not this common light which every carnal eye can see, nor any light of the same order but greater, as though this common light were shining much more powerfully, far more brightly, and so extensively as to fill the universe. The light I saw was not this common light at all, but something different, utterly different, from all these things. Nor was it higher than my mind in the sense that oil floats on water or the sky is above the earth; it was exalted because this very light made me, and I was below because by it I was made." (Saint Augustine, *The Confessions,* trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B. [Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997], Book VII.10 (16), 172-3.)
For Thomas: "… these names signify the divine substance, and are predicated substantially of God, although they fall short of full representation of Him. Which is proved thus. For these names express God, so far as our intellects know Him. Now since our intellect knows God from creatures, it knows Him as far as creatures represent Him…. Therefore the aforesaid names signify the divine substance, but in an imperfect manner, even as creatures represent it imperfectly. So when we say 'God is good,' the meaning is not 'God is the cause of goodness,' or 'God is not evil': but the meaning is, 'Whatever good we attribute to creatures, pre-exists in God,' and in a more excellent and higher way." (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Vol 1, trans. English Dominican Friars [Los Angeles: Viewforth Press, 2012], Part I Q13 a 2, 56.)
For Wittgenstein: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence." (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness [London: Routledge, 1974], 89.)

the dream of utter novelty. Doomed to "secondarity," art yearns for primacy, in imitation of the first creation. The engine that drives creation is a kind of fury at this unalterable condition of posteriority.

> Deep inside every 'art-act' lies the dream of an absolute leap out of nothingness, of the invention of an enunciatory shape so new, so singular to its begetter, that it would, literally, leave the previous world behind. But the writing of poems, the making of music, the carving of stone or wood by mortal men and women is not only grounded in available circumstance: it is a *fiat*, always after the first.[61]

So the heart of his understanding is the idea of an agonistic process of "counter-creation."

> I believe that the making into being by the poet, artist and, in a way yet to be defined, by the composer, is *counter*-creation. The pulse of motive which relates the begetting of meaningful forms to the first act of creation… is not mimetic in any neutral or obeissant sense. It is radically agonistic. It is rival. In all substantive art-acts there beats an angry gaiety. The source is that of loving rage. The human maker rages at his coming *after*, at being, forever, second to the original and originating mystery of the forming of form.[62]

For Steiner, the creation of art is a drama of struggle between the creative creature and her prior Creator, and the artist struggles to beat the Creator at his own game. Steiner never clarifies what makes the artist, whether a particular surfeit of this resentment about posteriority or some extra quality akin to Kant's *genius* that is given to some and not others. But the artist, the one driven to create, is fueled by this scandal of posteriority, and the outcome of her expressive rage is the work. For Steiner, this dynamic is again best captured in religious language: "The image of Jacob

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[61] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 201-2.

[62] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 203-204.

and his Angel is, above all others, emblematic of the poetic. 'Why was I named before I could name, why must I limp after?' asks the poet."[63]

Setting aside for the moment the dramatic emotionalism of the agonism, the angry gaiety and the loving rage, there lies beneath here something like a metaphysical method of the kind we have seen at work: Steiner too seeks to relate "the begetting of meaningful forms to the first act of creation," seemingly akin to finding a foundation for our understanding of art in the understanding of reality in general.[64] This relation is found in appeal to the Aristotelian tradition of art as imitation, *mimesis*. In wrestling with the stranger by night, the one who lames the artist and names her before she could be named, the artist is striving with God.[65] For Steiner, this agonistic struggle is fundamentally mimetic, as we can see in the many parallelisms of his constructions between the second creator-namer-begetter and the first. The human creator imitates the divine.

But, as with all aesthetics of mimesis, the salient question is, what does art imitate? For Steiner, the art work is an imitation of the created world, a microcosm.

> The mortal artist would beget — that "only begetter" inception of Shakespeare's Sonnets — he would encompass, he would make an articulate *summa* of the world, as the unnamable rival, the "other craftsman" (Picasso's expression) did in those six days. The most concise of *haikus*, the briefest of Webern's studies, an early Kandinsky of a rider in

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[63] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 205. Steiner also wrestles with prior creators in his theorizing. The allusion to Nietzsche's gaiety occurs above, and his debt to Harold Bloom's poetics is also clear (*The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973]). The location of the source of the prior artist in the "frankly theological" Creator rather than the merely antecedent poet is perhaps Steiner's own "swerve."

[64] The reservations implied in formulations like "something like a metaphysical model" and "seemingly akin" stem from the fact that, although Steiner frequently invokes and alludes to philosophers and their aesthetic and metaphysical ideas, he never engages them meaningfully enough for us to claim he is doing serious philosophical work.

[65] Genesis 3:28 glosses Jacob's new name, Israel, as one who strives with God and with humans.

> a nightwood, so concentrated in scale that we must bend close, can do just that. They create a counter-world so entire, so imprinted with the mark of their craftsman's hand, his 'second-hand', that this world will "rap and knock and enter in our soul" (Browning) and that we in turn give it echo, sanctuary of remembrance, by discovering in it a habitation for our most intimate needs and recognitions.[66]

For Steiner, the work begins when the artist finds herself the already belated inhabitant of a world that precedes her. The first creator has already acted, and the world exists in totality, a finished product. The artist's response is to seek to create a second world, circumscribed within the first, and offer it as an alternative, "a habitation for our most intimate needs and recognitions." Although one might think to examine titanic works to make good this claim — Mahler symphonies or Shakespearean tragedies, perhaps — Steiner has a particular attraction to the concentration of small works, sonnets, haiku, sketches and miniatures. The stunning achievement he finds here is the reduction of the entire cosmos so effectively as to retain all the flavor but none of the volume, so to speak. Nothing about the smallness of the work vitiates its claim to completeness as an entire world. Rather, that claim becomes more vivid, more audaciously unmistakable, when reduced to miniature.

Note, this counter-world is not to be understood (and perhaps cannot be understood) disconnected from the first; the burden of it being "second-hand" is in part a statement of relatedness. Counter-worlds make sense only when we first know the world, a relationship Steiner makes explicit in naming this process *mimesis*. The second-handedness of the art work is not merely a matter of temporal priority, but also of existential precedence. The givenness of the

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[66] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 204.

world inspires and provides model for the work of art.[67] The little world is carved out from the first, but also echoes it, enticing us both by the thoroughness of its re-creation and by the approachability of its scale: here, bounded in a nutshell, the artist can be ruler of infinite space. The microcosm works as does the cosmos.

Given the preceding analysis of teleology, art's explicit display of nature's implicit purposiveness in Kant and Dewey, it makes sense to wonder about teleology in Steiner's aesthetic. For Steiner, the question of teleology rests on the question of God, because the purpose of art is God's purpose, the creation of a significant world. To ask about purpose in Steiner is to ask about the divine aspect of creation, both cosmic and microcosmic, and so to answer the question of teleology in art in Steiner's aesthetic we first need to examine his understanding of the divine.

Steiner is hard to pin down on whether he believes in God, but he is clear in his belief that only God could authorize the meaning of meaning. Unlike Dewey' explicitly atheistic philosophy and Kant's largely unnecessary God (at least for the workings of aesthetics), God is essential to Steiner's aesthetic. Indeed, though Steiner's chief effort is to rescue "the meaning of meaning" from deconstruction and death by secondary discourse, his explicit goal is to secure the significance of talk about the divine. For Steiner, God's calls worlds into being by fiat, conjuring reality by means of divine speech. Art is significant because it inscribes this creative purpose, the "Let there be" of the artist, in juxtaposition to the circumscribing fiat of the first creator, a little world within the large. It displays its own creating, makes a theme in angry gaiety

[67] Honoring Steiner's work on Heidegger, one might say "the thrown-ness of the world." See George Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* (New York: The Viking Press, 1978).

of its own coming-into-being. Its own existence is its purpose, rather than its usefulness for some other end. In Steiner too, thus, art displays a kind of purposeless purposiveness, an instance on its own limping-after. Indeed, the primal dream of the artist, to name before being named, to achieve primacy when doomed to posteriority, is to exist as her own end, self-justifying and autonomous, instrumental for no other end (Dewey's "intellectual experience") but wholly self-contained and fully expressive, a *mundus contra* but free from the circumscribing *mundum*.[68]

Unfortunately, Steiner's theory is debilitated in at least two ways from being an anchor point for an adequate aesthetics, leaving it merely suggestive rather than probative. The first fatal flaw is the breezy sophistry of his engagement with genuine concepts of philosophy and theology, as though a kind of philosophical name dropping would substitute for argumentation. In places he flirts with philosophy — "'Being and time,' says the philosopher. The two are indissoluble. Priority in time entails an essentiality in respect of the work itself and of what comes after"[69] — but never with much engagement of actual philosophical systems, either Heidegger's or anyone else's. Steiner is clearly versed in the philosophical tradition as well as the aesthetic, but never finally marshals that erudition for a sustained argument. And so Aristotle, Descartes, Pascal, Leibniz, Kant, Wittgenstein, and others make cameo appearances, but not to much purpose or effect.

This flaw, seen first as a lack of seriousness about the aesthetic tradition, manifests more deeply in the ultimately provisional, "as if" nature of the argument. In Steiner's argument, the

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[68] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 204.

[69] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 150.

appeal to transcendence is always a tentative one, conditional and speculative. He writes of the need to take "one further step, a step beyond both moral good sense and the existentially empirical. It is a step embarrassing beyond words where 'embarrassment' must serve precisely as that which compels inference beyond words. Transcendence is another, almost technical, name for that passage."[70] Of course, *transcendence* is indeed a technical term in any number of discourses that Steiner implies he might want to join, perhaps if not for the embarrassment. But he offers only a "wager on transcendence" rather than an argument for it, as if to say, "if God were to exist, meaning would be secure":

> What I affirm is the intuition that where God's presence is no longer a tenable supposition and where His absence is no longer a felt, indeed overwhelming weight, certain dimensions of thought are no longer attainable…. We must read *as if*.[71]

The appeal to transcendence, Steiner implies, is indiscreet, foolish, and embarrassing to the postmodern scholar at this late date, an untenable move we can no longer make; and the consequence is our inability to read literature and experience art in its deepest dimensions. The wager on transcendence attempts to read *as if* God were real, or *as if* the "density of God's absence" were weighty enough to provide the necessary gravity, thus restoring the lost meaning to the work.[72] Articulating the syllogism is not an empty achievement. But then to back off making it good, to retreat into the "as if," seems a betrayal of the project to defend the meaning of meaning. It is, as Steiner himself admits, a wager in the "Pascalian vein," perhaps theology's most craven formulation: we will believe in God because if God exists, we will have meaning;

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[70] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 200.

[71] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 229.

[72] Steiner, *Real Presences* 229.

and if God does not, nothing is lost in the effort.[73] We should therefore make an upside "wager on transcendence," a "presumption of presence."[74]

The presence he presumes is, finally, a divine pressure, whether the mysterious other wrestler, the prior creator, or the dense, abysmal presence of God's absence. "So far as it wagers on meaning, an account of the act of reading,… is a metaphysical and, in the last analysis, a theological one. The ascription of beauty to truth and to meaning is either a rhetorical flourish, or it is a piece of theology."[75] The encounter with art, with "significant forms," is an experience that touches upon the basic foundations of reality as Creation and upon its divine Creator. Steiner makes this explicit when he asks whether all art, "that which is grave and constant (Joyce's epithets) in the mystery of our condition," is religious.[76] He then analyzes *religious* into two senses. The first sense is art's long history of explicit relationship to religious myths, narratives, contexts, and liturgical functions; in this historical sense, Steiner finds art has nearly always (save for very recently) been religious. The second sense is the one Steiner has been concerned with, an implicit religiousness, the enactment of "a root impulse of the human spirit to explore possibilities of meaning and of truth that lie outside empirical seizure or proof."[77] Steiner also answers a tentative yes to the question of art's religiousness in his second sense: "it is, I believe, poetry, art and music which relate us most directly to that in being which is not ours."[78]

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[73] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 215.

[74] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 214.

[75] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 216.

[76] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 224.

[77] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 225.

[78] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 226.

Here we begin to see the second debilitating flaw in Steiner's argument. Steiner's two senses of *religious* correlate rather neatly to the traditional distinction between religious theology (the efforts of a particular religious tradition to interpret and validate its claims) and philosophical theology (the philosophical endeavor to say about the divine whatever can be said on the basis of reason). These endeavors are not entirely separable, except in the most extreme cases of positivism, fideism, or fundamentalism. But they are to be sharply distinguished around the issue of generality. Christian religious theology, for example, seeks to explain and justify what the Christian witness claims about God the father of Jesus Christ in the context of the revelatory content of the faith and its theological and practical tradition. Philosophical theology speaks far more generally about the sources of existence, its purposes, and its ultimate unity according to the processes of rational reflection. I would argue an analogous distinction for aesthetics, between theological aesthetics and philosophical. The task of philosophical aesthetics is to produce an account that is generally applicable to all art, actual or conceivable, and not merely to art from a particular religious milieu. So it bears asking, which kind of aesthetics does Steiner have in mind? Clearly, Steiner believes that most art in the west was in fact created for the service of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and so he finds it religious in his first sense of the term. But what is the scope of generality comprehended by his claim that it is also religious in the second?

Given the philosophical imprecision of his argument, it is not possible to give a full answer. Throughout, he implies a desire for a maximal generality in the aesthetic account, sought in the transcendent otherness that confronts the contemplator in the experience of any art object

whatsoever. One support he offers is simply to draw from a stunningly broad trove of examples, across differences in medium, genre, and historical period. Apart from the occasional reference to Asian forms such as haiku or landscape, he remains mostly rooted in the West, mitigating his claim to perfect universality. And to be sure, he readily admits to a primary concern with Western Art. Nevertheless, his attempt at scope is admirable.

It turns out, however, that Steiner's account for art's expressivity is limited by more than just his exemplary range. As has been marked, his basic metaphor for the process of artistic creation is the story of Jacob wrestling in the night: "The image of Jacob and his Angel is, above all others, emblematic of the poetic."[79] This is a fundamentally Judeo-Christian way of conceiving of poiesis, anchoring an understanding of aesthetic procedure in a long tradition of understanding the relationship of the divine with the chosen people of Israel, in which the story of Jacob wrestling at Peniel is the eponymous inflection point. Paradigms from other religious traditions, even Western ones, are ignored. The Trojan horse, the animistic spirits that dwell within things, the productivity of Buddhist nothingness, the 10,000 gods that reside within Brahman all might seem equally helpful paradigms for the transcendent guarantor of immanent meaning. Of course, it could be argued that the story of Jacob is itself an aesthetic product, an art work (a religious one) that seeks to disclose and thematize its own source. But to redeem that argument would require appeal to a prior, more general, pre-religious theory of art against which

[79] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 205.

the religious testimony could be measured; and this account is precisely what, as becomes clear, Steiner lacks.[80]

The real governing metaphor of Steiner's argument is finally not Jacob but Christ. The title of his book and its constant appeal to "irreducible autonomy of presence, of 'otherness'," are an allusion to the Christian sacramental theology of the eucharist, itself a reference to and even a participant in the stories of the passion and resurrection of Christ.[81] Steiner makes the point explicitly enough at the book's outset: "The wager — it is that of Descartes, of Kant and of every poet, artist, composer of whom we have explicit record — predicates the presence of a realness, of a 'substantiation' (the theological reach of this word is obvious) within language and form."[82] The doctrine of transubstantiation to which he alludes claims that, in the mystery of the eucharist, the philosophical substance of the bread and the wine are replaced with that of the body and blood of Christ while leaving the accidents of bread and wine intact. Thus, while they

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[80] Interestingly, Frank Burch Brown struggles with Kant in the contrasting direction, not that Kant is bound to a religious framework, but that he disables one. "Kant's main emphasis was on giving aesthetic taste its own validity and value. That meant demonstrating that Taste and beauty are not subject to the dictates of intellectual understanding, morality, or religion." Kant's demand that art be conceptless and purposeless disables its capacity to function in the service of religion, a problem Brown overcomes by situating the raw material of taste, the elements of artistic composition, in cultural context for their significance: "What makes universal claims in matters of taste inherently implausible is not that people share nothing in common as human beings, or no common values in the realm of taste. It is that everything we share in common is to some extent culturally and socially conditioned." The elements over which the imagination has free play and to which it makes its judgments of taste are themselves not without cultural reference, if still somehow conceptless. This resonates with the Whiteheadian theory put forth in Chapter 2, in which the elements of the work of art become "food for possibility" actualized by the free decision of the contemplator. (Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste*, 172-176.)

[81] Although not a study of sacramental theology, the broad range of Christian interpretations on the mystical and symbolic meanings of the Eucharist recur throughout this project. The Christian doctrine of real presence often arises in discussions of theistic aesthetics. Anthony C. Yu described the operative tensions in his review of *Real Presences*: "Zwingli, not Derrida, delimits the theological reach of Steiner's title. Those who advocate some form of artistic sacramentalism too often speak as if such perceived doubleness truly inheres in the nature of things. They forget that even the Christian Church, in both its Catholic and Protestant segments, has long struggled — none too satisfactorily — to maintain the central paradox in the theology of sacraments: the 'objectivity' of the means of grace and the discerning faith of the communicant." (Anthony C. Yu, "A Meaningful Wager," *The Journal of Religion* 70, no. 2 [April 1990], 243.)

[82] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 4.

seem ordinary elements, they contain the extraordinary — indeed, the mysterious and miraculous — real presence of the risen Christ. In this way, Steiner might argue that the Kantian dilemma of living in a world of phenomena is resolved by the transcendent, real presence of the irreducible other in at the heart of the experience of the work, transubstantiated, as it were. Within the phenomenal accidents of text, pigment, or tone row dwell the real, noumenal presence of the divine, just as in the eucharist: "I am wagering… on the informing pressure of a real presence in the semantic markers which generate Oedipus the King or Madame Bovary…."[83]

Again here, Steiner never finally does argue what he might. Indeed, he sums up his "conjectures" with an appeal to Aristotle: "It is a matter of *apaideusis* not to distinguish between that which requires demonstration or proof and that which does not." Glossing *apaideusis* as "connoting an indecency of spirit and of understanding" (and resonating with the importance of *courtesy* throughout the text), Steiner implies it would be indecent, discourteous to the rituals of encounter between contemplator and work in the postmodern age, to force such a demonstration. And so, "Such conjectures cannot be proven."[84] The transcendent presence immanent in art cannot be mastered by proof; it must be approached deferentially, mutually, with an open-ended refusal of predetermined expectations. Predefinition arrived at through abstract proof denies art its "free play," to use Kant's term. It falls into the very trap postmodernism has freed us from, the closed system that is smaller than the immanent world, while still not finally preparing us for the transcendence at the heart of the wager.

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[83] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 215.

[84] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 231.

There is one final appeal to this analogy. Our situation, Steiner suggests, is like that of the Christian cosmos on Holy Saturday — pendant, benighted but expectant, between crucifixion and resurrection — which has "become the longest of days."

> We know of that Good Friday which Christianity holds to have been that of the Cross. But the non-Christian, the atheist, knows of it as well. This is to say that he knows of the injustice, of the interminable suffering, of the waste, of the brute enigma of ending, which so largely make up not only the historical dimension of the human condition, but the everyday fabric of our personal lives. We know, ineluctably, of the pain, of the failure of love, of the solitude which are our history and private fate. We also know about Sunday. To the Christian, that day signifies an intimation, both assured and precarious, both evident and beyond comprehension, of resurrection, of a justice and a love that have conquered death. If we are non-Christians or non-believers, we know of that Sunday in precisely analogous terms. We conceive of it as the day of liberation from inhumanity and servitude. We look to resolutions, be they therapeutic or political, be they social or messianic. The lineaments of that Sunday carry the name of hope (there is no word less deconstructible).[85]

On Good Friday, the Christian cosmos is too undone by the enormity of life's tragedy to craft form or representation from it. On Easter Sunday, there is no need to peer into mirrors dimly, because we are seeing face to face. But in the suspension of Saturday we need works and forms to experience both the tragedy and the comedy. Abandoned, belated creatures imprisoned in a prior creation, we need the works of counter-creators to experience the real presence of the first Creator, the echo of the first fiat. Works of art perform for Steiner precisely the same function as the Christian eucharist, allowing for a present experience of the real presence of the transcendent in the time of interim immanence.

The problem, of course, is that Steiner here completely subordinates aesthetics to Christian theology. Steiner allows for "non-Christians or non-believers" to experience likewise,

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[85] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 231-2.

but only in "precisely analogous terms," a tack not unlike the "anonymous Christian" strategies of Christian theologies of religious tolerance: non-Christians and non-believers know all the same experiences of loss and renewal, of tragedy and comedy, to which the Christian triduum answers, and so can experience the real presence of the day between despite not knowing its name or primal expression. It is difficult to know how, on this account, Steiner would account for the transcendent in art on any basis other than this Christian mythos. Perhaps Steiner might argue the Christian mythos has accounted for experiences of transcendence in this way, and artists brought up in its milieu can only be understood accordingly. But such an argument would leave unanswered the very question Steiner claimed to be taking up: how can we rely on art to continue to convey a sense of transcendence in a deconstructed, post-Christian, postmodern world? Absent a more general model upon which both religion and art could be founded, Steiner's only recourse is a retreat to a belated Christianity, embarrassed, provisional, "as if."

Because he lacks a metaphysical system more general than the Christian mythos, there is no account Steiner can give of the terms on which both religion and art can be understood. He can therefore only secure the meaning of art in terms of religious meaning. Nevertheless, he provides several aids, if only suggestive or speculative ones, to the present exploration. First, he confirms the teleological nature of art's imitation we saw in Kant and Dewey. In Steiner's terms, what art imitates is the first divine creation, the fiat that created the world. It is an imitation of the fundamental, existential purposiveness of things. Art exists to imitate the reason for the existence of anything at all. And further, in the Jacob-like, agonistic struggle of the secondary maker against the first, we find not only an imitation of creative purpose but its display; the work

of art demonstrates its own creativity in a thematized display of *telos*, what I have termed teleology.

Second, Steiner helps clarify the role of artists and works in the aesthetic debate. As a foundation for aesthetics, Whitehead's system suffers from its own kind of vulnerable belatedness. It would be puzzling indeed to claim that, after millennia of exertions, the proper understanding of art had only become possible in 1929 with the publication of *Process and Reality.* Whitehead's philosophy, in the abruptness of its departure from the philosophical tradition, lays itself bare to a charge of hubristic novelty. Whitehead himself took great pains to articulate a continuous strand within the philosophical tradition that undercut the dualism of substance metaphysics and the "misplaced concreteness" of Platonic idealism in which his philosophy of organism could stand. This thread — a minority tradition, to be sure — begins with Heraclitus and Plato's *Timaeus* (which Whitehead saw as an alternative to the metaphysics of the *Republic*), extends through Leibniz and Kant, and is recognizable in various elements in a variety of systems, including Spinoza, Newton, Hume, Santayana, and the pragmatic impulses of contemporaries such as Bergson, James, and Dewey.

Steiner suggests another body of thought, another long tradition of aesthetic philosophy, that might be enlisted to support a Whiteheadian aesthetic and defend it from a charge of novelty. These are the aesthetic philosophies encoded in the works of the artists themselves. As a critic, Steiner exemplifies the discernment and articulation of a theory of art inscribed by the artist into a work and the use of it as an argument about the nature of art. In this way, we might be able to see whether a Whiteheadian aesthetic indeed finds the support of a long line of practitioners who

understand their art to function in ways analogous to those Whitehead might describe. This may be so especially in works that render their own operation thematic, part of the meaning of their meaning. That is, art that thematizes its own artifice in intertextual, self-referential, or meta-artistic ways might be the most fruitful place to look. The hypothesis is that, in portraying the agonism of their struggle with the prior creator, in imitating the *creatio mundi* with the creation of a circumscribed microcosm, artists provide self-conscious arguments about the workings of their art. Of course, these arguments are not offered in anything resembling a philosophical mode. They are neither explicit, nor literal, nor abstract, all requirements of philosophical argumentation. They are implicit and embedded deeply in the concreteness of the work and its symbols, metaphors, techniques, images, and resonances. Works of art can only be offered to the philosophical conversation with the help of criticism, interpreting, inferring, or inducing the arguments implied in the work and its workings. The goal of this dissertation is to stage such a conversation, offering first an account of what a Whiteheadian aesthetics might look like and then providing examples of artists — in this case playwrights — providing works that, interpreted in context, concur with this Whiteheadian model.

Finally, Steiner provides a further help by suggesting a bridge between the art of the theater and a key element of Whiteheadian aesthetics. Earlier I suggested we should momentarily set aside Steiner's dramatic emotionalism. But it has its place; his critic's intuition about "angry gaiety and loving rage" can be seen pointing to a key aspect of Whitehead's metaphysics and of any aesthetics that might be built upon it. Recall, Steiner writes, "The pulse of motive which relates the begetting of meaningful forms to the first act of creation… is not mimetic in any

neutral or obeissant sense. It is radically agonistic. It is rival. In all substantive art-acts there beats an angry gaiety. The source is that of loving rage."[86] The emotions described here are complex, resentment alongside appreciation, a rebellion that pays tribute. It is no great leap to infer that, in Steiner's thinking, the artist cannot but marvel at creation, including her own createdness. Why else would the imitation of the divine fiat be such a compulsion? Yet it is also rival, agonistic, stubborn in its insistence on its own autonomy. The counter-creation of an art work clears out a space within the created world where the artist's creativity seeks to displace the divine. In terms to be developed in Chapter 3, it is a circumscribed world in which the artist's providence countermands the providence of God. It does so fiercely, defiantly, with an angry gaiety and a loving rage.

To the sentimentality of this account, there is an analogue in Whitehead's philosophy. For Whitehead, as Chapter 2 will develop, the building blocks of reality are feelings. This is a technical term in Whitehead's system, not to be conflated with the passions and emotions of Steiner's account. But they are not unrelated. Whitehead's feelings, *prehensions* in his terminology, are not neutral relations; there is no such thing. Prehensions include attitudes of reception, biases of inclusion, decisions about weight, prominence, and meaning of the relation in the total momentary experience. The experience that includes a feeling of the prior creator can meet that feeling with awe, with bitterness, with denial, with embrace. These attitudes and modes in prehension leave room for the roots of emotions like those Steiner invokes.

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[86] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 203-204.

The source of angry gaiety in the work of art is the impossibility of encoding marks of the artist's own creativity without also including marks of divine creativity to render them comprehensible. The circumscribed world of the work is only known as a world at all in its juxtaposition to the original. We must feel the strength of the stranger by night before we can understand Jacob's struggle. We must feel the real presence to understand the palpability of the artist. Steiner admits as much in his discussion of self-portraiture. "'Painting himself,' a charged phrase, the writer or artist re-enacts the creation of his own persona. He had not willed that creation; he had no choice in its lineaments. The self-portrait is the expression of his compulsion to freedom, of his agonistic attempt to repossess, to achieve mastery over the forms and meanings of his own being."[87] The bravura of re-possession, of re-enactment, of reclamation are coherent only given the presence of the first possessor, the first enactment, the prior claim.

In Whitehead's terms, this drive to creative expression and significant form is rooted in the basic feeling of purposiveness that organizes an experience. While each experience (or *process*) decides its own immanent aim, this decision is always made in the context of the divine aim for all experience, the telos that the primordial source bequeaths to all emerging actuality as part of its inheritance. This divine telos is the drive to beauty described at the opening of the chapter. As Chapter 2 will take up, art can be seen as the human creative attempt to respond to God's invitation to (or *appetition for*) the creation of beauty in the cosmos with a microcosm governed by its own local appetite for beauty. Besides *telos* and *appetition*, Whitehead sometimes calls this primordial prehension "the Eros of the Universe." It is this *desire* that drives

[87] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 205.

creation, a passionate drive to consummate something in the union of self and other. Art here will finally be understood in terms of this desire: as Steiner suggests, it is an imitation of the creative appetite that is a condition of every actuality, expressed with an insistence on its own local autonomy in the world. It is a microcosm within the cosmos, governed by its own local god, a loving rival of the prior creator. And so, with Kant and Dewey and in a sense with Steiner, a Whiteheadian aesthetic will be seen as a display of the purposiveness of things within an experience that unfolds according to its own logic and form into its own autonomous satisfaction.

What the theater pieces and the debates about them in Chapters 3 and 4 will contribute to a Whiteheadian aesthetics is their emphatic focus on the erotic as the providential heart of artistic experience. In their real-time embodiment, theater works place heavy emphasis on the driving power of desire in art. As becomes clear in study of the debates, interpretations, and controversies engendered by the theater, we can infer again and again an insistence on the pressure of God's telos as desire: the desire of a plot for its resolution; the desire of staged characters for each other; the desire of humans for significance and for justice; the desire of audience members for the actors they see on stage. God's process of creative synthesis in aesthetic recapitulation becomes human desire.

For Whitehead, a central flaw of traditional philosophical theology was its puppet-master God, whose providence was understood as strictly deterministic control of all events, according to which the future could only be understood as the gradual disclosure of a predetermined actuality without room for novelty, evolution, or a sense of possibility. Whitehead's God is both

less determining and yet more intimately involved in history's unfolding than that of Aquinas, Calvin, or Kant. For Whitehead, the idea of a pre-determined future is nonsensical; every moment requires a novel response, what Charles Hartshorne called "creative synthesis," for its satisfaction. At the same time, every moment of synthesis is itself a response by the actual entity to God's aim for creation, the divine telos, beauty as the "Eros of the universe." Each experience is governed by its inheritance of this eros, this desire; its satisfaction is its response to that desire. It is just this desire that art imitates in its creation of a circumscribed world. Thus, theater works provide stronger support than Leibniz or sections of Spinoza and Hume for the claim that something like a Whiteheadian metaphysics has always been a voice in the aesthetic debate. Further, in their explorations of the aesthetic pressure and weight of desire, they may also lead to a more refined understanding of Whitehead's general concept of the divine telos, the Eros of the Universe.

CHAPTER 2
The Mark of Creative Effort: Toward a Whiteheadian Aesthetic

> *The work of Art is a fragment of nature with the mark on it of a finite creative effort, so that it stands alone, an individual thing detailed from the vague infinity of its background. Thus Art heightens the sense of humanity. It gives an elation of feeling which is supernatural. A sunset is glorious, but it dwarfs humanity and belongs to the general flow of nature. A million sunsets will not spur on men towards civilization. It requires Art to evoke into consciousness the finite perfections which lie ready for human achievement.*
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> - Alfred North Whitehead[1]

Chapter 1 sought common factors among the aesthetic thinking of Immanuel Kant, John Dewey, and George Steiner in order to identify key elements for the articulation of a philosophy of art rooted in a metaphysical system. It argued that art creates the illusion of a microcosm in which can be experienced the imitation of the basic purposiveness that underlies reality in its creative emergence. This imitation is rendered comprehensible in the resonances and contrasts between the little world and the real, between the immanent purposiveness felt within the experience of the work and the general purposiveness of experience as such. The appeal to the general purposiveness of experience as a metaphysical category argues for a theistic aesthetics, as Steiner attempted to demonstrate: an account of the products of human creativity raises the question of creativity as such and that of its source.

At this point the advantages of using the metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead as the foundation for aesthetics become clear. Whitehead's account of the source of purposiveness at the heart of experience derives from a rational, philosophical understanding of the divine. In this way, a Whiteheadian aesthetics would avoid Steiner's pitfall of reducing the necessary and

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[1] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 270-271.

primordial source of creativity to the Judeo-Christian "God the Creator," maintaining at least a hope for something universally applicable to all art actual or conceivable. At the same time, Whitehead's system avoids the mechanistic causation of much western metaphysics, making it particularly apt for an account of art: the free play treasured by Kant, the freedom Dewey celebrates from the tyranny of a pre-determined end, the "relaxed ironies and liberalities" Steiner wishes to defend, are all secure in Whitehead's system and its emphasis on novelty and creativity as primary factors in the gradual emergence of actuality over time.

The goal of this chapter is to articulate the outlines of a Whiteheadian aesthetic. The way forward is not as clear as one might wish. Though beauty, creativity, and aesthetics in the broad sense are at the center of Whitehead's system, he himself never takes the step of writing a philosophy of art. Indeed, the epigraph to this chapter is among his most extensive discussions of aesthetics in the narrow sense. His most important early followers, perhaps consumed with the large and seemingly more urgent tasks of adopting Whiteheadian philosophy to ethics and Christian theology, generally neglected the question of art. There are, however two early, important attempts to be reviewed. Then I hope to offer some refinements to these early accounts for the workings of the art object in the stream of experiences. Finally, the sketch is rounded out with a brief discussion of how this Whiteheadian understanding of artistic experience animates an understanding of interpretation.

The Foundations of a Whiteheadian Aesthetic

It will be useful to review some relevant parts of Whitehead's system, even if only in a necessarily brief form. Perhaps the place to begin is with what Whitehead terms the "Category of the Ultimate," which is gathered together under the description *creativity*: "'Creativity,' 'many,' 'one' are the ultimate notions involved in the meaning of the synonymous terms 'thing,' 'being,' 'entity.' These three notions complete the Category of the Ultimate and are presupposed in all the more special categories." He goes on to describe the interaction of these notions:

> 'Creativity' is the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact. It is that ultimate principle by which the many, which are the universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion, which is the universe conjunctively. It lies in the nature of things that the many enter into complex unity.
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> 'Creativity' is the principle of *novelty*. An actual occasion is a novel entity diverse from any entity in the 'many' which it unifies. Thus 'creativity' introduces novelty into the content of the many, which are the universe disjunctively. The 'creative advance' is the application of this ultimate principle of creativity to each novel situation which it originates.[2]

Whitehead means these claims literally. A static universe is to Whitehead inconceivable, because the final real things of the world, what Whitehead calls *actual entities* or *actual occasions,* are not things at all, but events or *processes* by which the entity emerges from a vague and massive welter of unordered relationships to the rest of the actual world, the "universe disjunctively." These relationships include relationships to past iterations of the self (which dominate) and to the external world (which come to be interpreted in the conscious actual occasion as perceptions). The emergent entity imposes order on the disorder: it promotes a few relationships into prominence, and various aspects of a few others, from the vague background of the totality of the

[2] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality Corrected Edition*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 21.

universe; it demotes the rest into insignificance; and thus it expresses an integrated singularity, the "universe conjunctively," into the future to become a datum for subsequent actual entities. This is what Whitehead is describing in the above quotation, summed up by "It lies in the nature of things that the many enter into complex unity."

Novelty is not only possible but necessary in this system. "An actual occasion is a novel entity diverse from any entity in the 'many' which it unifies." Each actual occasion becomes concrete (*concresces*) in ways that are greatly determined by its inherited relations. But the selection and valuation of which relations to make prominent, which to promote and which to demote, are made in the process of concrescence according to the *aim* of the emerging entity, yielding something new. The emergence of any actual occasion unifies — and simply *is the unification of* — a set of inherited diversities. But unification does not mean simply conglomeration; selections are made, features highlighted, an attitude is taken. The inherited *prehensions* (that is, feelings of past relationships) are unified in some or other way, according to some aim decided by the actual occasion itself, its *subjective aim*. Elements common to the various prehensions are made prominent, emphasizing the compatibility of the prehensions. Likewise, incompatibilities are eliminated, although they still participate negatively, by virtue of elimination: nothing is lost. In this way, a harmony is found among the diversities. Every actual occasion necessarily entails novelty, some or other new ordering of previously disjunctive relations; novelty is logically necessary, analytic to this idea of reality.

In the lowest orders of actual occasion — the concrescences of atoms or nerve cells, say — the possibilities of creativity are strictly curtailed, and the inherited data of the past dominate.

The novelty introduced is trivial (though never zero), and the satisfaction of such an actual occasion is massively conformal with its inheritance.[3] In more complex actual entities — the subjectivity of consciousness being the extreme — the range of possible novelty expands dramatically. Aims can become various and subtle, based on propositions about possibilities alternative to those represented by mere conformity with the past. Imagination, theory, rational ideation, and memory all become part of the inherited data in the most complex occasions, providing enormous latitude for novel interpretations, feelings, and decisions in the satisfaction of such concrescence.

So, for Whitehead, *creativity* gives the most general description of reality and its emergence, from which the rest of the system derives. Further, creativity governs every level of reality, from the satisfaction of the individual atomistic process, to the career of a *personally ordered society* of such actual occasions as make up the life of an enduring creature, to the general "creative advance" of human civilization and of the world. The world itself, and everything in it, concrescence by concrescence, drives to an ever greater degree of total harmonized complexity.

Novelty alone, however, is not an adequate account of creativity. There is a particular character to the novelty possible in Whitehead's system. Relations combine in an actual occasion because they have an appetite to combine. Everything, from the atomic actual occasion to an occasion in the flow of human consciousness, conscresces because it desires to become concrete. This desire comes from a feature included in the inheritance of the past. Among the things each

[3] At the least, it is novel in this respect: the four-billion-and-first concrescence in a string we would identify grossly as an amoeba over time contains an inheritance, a set of past relations, one member numerically greater than its most recent relative, occasion four billion.

occasion inherits — alongside the feelings of satisfaction from its immediate past selves and whatever new data is felt from the broader world — is a feeling (technically, a *hybrid physical feeling*) of the subjective aim of the divine, God's *appetition* for complex unity. The prehension of this divine telos is a dominant feature of the emerging occasion, demanding its unification. God's appetite for unity bequeathed to the world is God's participation in creativity (or, creativity is the world's participation in God's appetition — Whitehead will not allow us to define one ultimate idea in terms of another). This is the reason the selections and perspectives embodied in an actual occasion occur as they do. The subjective aim of the actual occasion is decided in part as a response to its feeling of God's subjective aim. The actual occasion inherits God's aim at harmonized unities.

Whitehead defines the target of God's aim as the maximized intensity of unified diversities. Each of the three terms — intensity, unity, and diversity — is essential. In an actual occasion, the diversities are the various prehensions, relationships with past actualities and future possibilities. Because they are relationships with different actual things in the world, they are diverse. Unity is the final actual occasion, which achieves full reality in the moment of its satisfaction, when all diversities have been coordinated by its creative decisions of selection, valuation, and contrast. Both diversity and unity contribute to intensity. The more diverse the factors positively included (i.e. not eliminated) under a single unity, the greater its intensity, because of the greater contrasts successfully unified. Conversely, the better unified (with minimized remainder) the diversities are, the greater their intensity. So intensity can be achieved either by virtue of diversities or by virtue of their successful unity; the greatest intensity is

achieved when both diversity and unity are maximized. The goal of the emergent occasion is therefore not just novelty, but a novelty that maximizes intensity of unity in diversity. This is the desire of God for her world, what Whitehead sometimes refers to as the "Eros of the Universe."[4] Again, this is true on both the *microcosmic* level, the emergence of the single actual occasion, and the macrocosmic*,* the creative advance of civilization.

For Whitehead, intensity of unified diversity is the definition of *beauty*, "the mutual adaptation of the several factors in an occasion of experience."[5] This is to say, for Whitehead, the aim of all process, all becoming, is to realize maximal and ever-increasing beauty on every level. And God's final "judgment" on creation is better understood as reception, sympathy, and appreciation. The prehension of God's appetition inspires desire for creative unity in all actual occasions, that is, all creatures; in this way, God is an object of every emerging subject. And then God receives the satisfaction of that subject as a contribution to the everlastingness of the divine life; God is also the subject of every actualized object. God feels the feelings expressed, fully aware of what more-beautiful possibilities went unrealized and fully appreciative of the beauty of the possibilities made actual. That is to say, God's judgment is an aesthetic one, a judgment about the beauty bequeathed to her by the world. And God's subsequent creative act is to perform her own synthesis, integrating all the diversities of the world into a single, maximally intense, cosmic whole. In Whitehead's system, beauty governs both the good and the true; each is defined in terms of and understood in service to the beautiful. So, Whitehead's system is

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[4] See, for example, Whitehead, *Adventures,* 253.

[5] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 252.

fundamentally aesthetic, in the broad sense of the term. The understanding of the meaning and value of existence comes by an appreciation of its beauty.

As I argue in Chapter 1, it would seem an advantage to the undertaking of aesthetics in the narrow sense to have its footing in a metaphysics so fundamentally aesthetic in the broad sense. Several of Whitehead's chief early expositors undertook the task — notably John B. Cobb Jr. and Donald W. Sherburne — and it is to their outlines of aesthetics in the narrow sense that I would now turn. Perhaps the first important attempt at Whiteheadian aesthetics was offered by Cobb in an article entitled "Toward Clarity in Aesthetics."[6] Cobb's chief goal is "to determine what 'the aesthetic' is as the defining and delimiting characteristic of objects felt to be aesthetic." He wants to identify "that quality by virtue of which there is common agreement that painting, music, poetry, and sculpture have aesthetic properties not significantly shared by work, sports, planning, or study." [7] Despite the troublesome implications of "common agreement," Cobb pursues this goal in a metaphysical, not empirical, mode.

In Whitehead's system, all explanations begin with reference to actual occasions, the final real things.[8] Cobb's search obeys this dictum, seeking the reason for "the aesthetic" in the concrescent entity. Now Whitehead's *theory of concrescence* is extremely technical, far beyond the rudimentary sketch given above, describing a series of ever more complex phases of decision

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[6] John B. Cobb Jr., "Toward Clarity in Aesthetics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 18, no. 2 (Dec. 1957), 169-189.

[7] Cobb, "Toward Clarity," 169.

[8] This is Whitehead's "ontological principle": "The notion of 'substance' is transformed into that of 'actual entity'; and the notion of power is transformed into the principle that the reasons for things are always to be found in the composite nature of definite actual entities…. The ontological principle can be summarized as: no actual entity, then no reason" (Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 19).

and comparison made in the emerging actual occasion.[9] In occasions of extreme complexity — those characterized by consciousness — these decisions include: ordering the inherited feelings (*physical feelings*) according to subjective attitudes about them (their *subjective forms*); identifying other ideal possibilities (*conceptual feelings*) related to those physical feelings; contrasting the physical and conceptual feelings into *propositions*, yielding *propositional feelings*; and contrasting these propositional feelings again with the original physical feelings, yielding *intellectual feelings*. From this model Whitehead offers explanations for both perception and consciousness. So Cobb's quest for a rigorously Whiteheadian aesthetics begins with the complex actual occasion of consciousness. If *art* as a category has any great degree of philosophical generality, the roots of its explanation lie there.

Cobb begins by asserting "…. the decision between 'the aesthetic' and 'the non-aesthetic' must be made at the level of the subjective forms of prehensions."[10] The subjective form of a prehension can be understood as the subjective perspective by which the actual occasion integrates the objective datum of the prehension: "the 'subjective form' is *how* that subject prehends that datum."[11] That is, *what* is prehended can be prehended according to various *hows*. This is the beginning of the series of decisions an actual occasion makes in its emergence, the beginning place of novelty. In Whitehead's words, "The initial data … may have served other feelings with other subjects. But the subjective form is the immediate novelty; it is how *that*

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[9] It is important to remember that here, as often, *decision* is not for Whitehead primarily a conscious matter, but something more like an attitude or a perspective, a pre-conscious intuitive orientation.

[10] Cobb, "Toward Clarity," 175.

[11] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 23.

subject is feeling that objective datum."[12] Each actual occasion encorporates its various relationships according to subjective responses it has to them. In this way, unity begins to be achieved in a coordination of subjective response to the diverse data.

Cobb locates the crucial aesthetic decision in the subjective form of the prehension, rather than its objective content, because "Presumably the same content can have even simultaneously both aesthetic and non-aesthetic meaning for the auditor or spectator, as a representational painting may move a spectator both aesthetically and sentimentally."[13] If "the aesthetic" were inherent in the objective datum received from outside — presumably from the art object — then it would limit free response. All perceiving subjects would be compelled to account for the object aesthetically, a consequence Cobb wants to avoid. The aesthetic quality for Cobb depends on the free decision of the subject occasion. According to Cobb, part of the free response of the subject occasion to external sensa can be to incorporate them into itself with that subjective form which signals the experience as aesthetic.

Before specifying the particular subjective form that defines the aesthetic, Cobb introduces another refinement, based on Whitehead's complicated theory of perception. For Whitehead, perception is not immediate experience. Experience of the outside world comes through the operations of the bodily organs (eyes, optic nerves, etc.) The concrescent subject interprets prehensions inherited from these organs as referring to some *thing* over *there* just *now*. This interpretation requires prehensions in two modes: *causal efficacy*, by which the content of the data itself — the color, the sound — are felt; and *presentational immediacy*, by which the

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[12] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 232

[13] Cobb, "Toward Clarity," 175.

projective field of the outside world and its current spatial arrangements are constructed. Only when the color mass is given its place in the coordinated region can we finally say "an apple is there now." Whitehead calls this complex process of perceptive prehension *symbolic reference*.

Donald W. Sherburne exposits the modes of perception like this:

> Perception in the mode of causal efficacy is awareness of the massive presence of the past. Perception in the mode of presentational immediacy is awareness of the extensive relationships structuring a continuum experienced as constituting the immediate present. …[O]rdinary perception is a mixed mode of perception compounded out of the two more primitive modes.[14]

Presentational immediacy interprets the sensa only vaguely in themselves but projects them into a contemporary locus in the extensive continuum, the external space beyond the subject. It provides the *there now* of perception. Causal efficacy interprets the sensa in their massive actuality, which is always a matter of the immediate past because we have no relations with the exactly contemporary world around us. Their massive actuality includes the content of the prehensions from relationships to bodily organs, without regard to space or currency. Symbolic reference, what Sherburne refers to here as "ordinary perception," is the result of the combination of these two prior modes.

Cobb argues that the prehension to which the aesthetic-defining subjective form is applied is a prehension in the mode of causal efficacy. This is because:

> The subjective form of perception in the mode of presentational immediacy is less determined by the object than is that in the mode of causal efficacy.… '[T]he aesthetic' as a property of *the object* must be found in that part of experience of the prehending human occasion which is determined by the object and is for that reason not dependent upon particular past experiences and present interests.[15]

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[14] Donald W. Sherburne, ed., *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality* (Chicago, U of Chicago Press, 1966), 113.

[15] Cobb, "Toward Clarity," 176.

Aesthetic experiences form themselves around what is most sensuous in their inherited data; the colors of the painting, the sounds of the instrument, the feelings of what the senses sense in their "massive presence" should therefore be what first determines the aesthetic experience. It is this massive data of the senses — that is, the prehensions of the object in the mode of causal efficacy — that the subjective form which is proper to aesthetic experience must shape. Prehensions in the mode of presentational immediacy also play their role, giving the object its final definiteness in perception. But, for Cobb, "… 'the aesthetic' must be located initially in the subjective form of the prehension in the mode of causal efficacy…."[16] For Cobb, this guarantees that the experience is maximally determined by the object itself.

At first look, this may seem like a contradiction. Cobb first insists we ground the aesthetic quality in the subjective form of the prehension, seemingly to guarantee the freedom of aesthetic response. And then he insists that it be a prehension taken in the mode of causal efficacy, seemingly to limit the freedom of aesthetic response before the actuality of the work. Cobb is arguing that we must freely choose to make the experience of an art object an *aesthetic experience*; but once that choice is made, we give over governance of the experience to the object itself as perceived first in the mode of causal efficacy. Once we have yielded, we find that which makes the object aesthetic inscribed in the object itself.

What coordinates this "giving over" is the overarching subjective aim (not to be confused with subjective form) of the actual occasion. Cobb writes,

> Not every experience of a particular painting is equally an aesthetic experience. The art historian may examine it to learn something of the techniques employed by the

[16] Cobb, "Toward Clarity," 177.

> artist, the art dealer may view it to estimate its commercial value, the worshipper may seek to be lifted by it to the contemplation of the reality which it expresses. To all of these the aesthetic character of the painting is relevant, and this aesthetic character consists in the kind of causal efficacy which it has for those who look at it. However, the role of this aesthetic quality in their total experience is limited by their own respective subjective aims. Only when the painting is contemplated for its own sake or for the sake of that which it effects in the experience of the contemplator can it make its full aesthetic impact.[17]

The degree to which an object *can be* experienced aesthetically depends on inherited objective qualities perceived in the mode of causal efficacy. But whether the artifact *indeed is* experienced aesthetically depends on the purpose of the one doing the experiencing. And purpose, subjective aim, arises from the free decision of the emergent occasion. That decision once made, because the objective data in great conformity with the artifact itself (due to the perceptive mode of causal efficacy), minimally colored by other data, Cobb says this is an experience of the art object "for its own sake and for the sake of that which it effects in the experience of the contemplator." The resulting impression is one of something like surrender. The contemplator's experience decides on a subjective aim of surrendered to the experience of the artifact for its own sake, in itself. "In this case the subjective aim is that the entire occasion be maximally determined by the art object."[18]

There is a circular feel to Cobb's reasoning: "the aesthetic" is defined as that experience which freely chooses to experience something aesthetic aesthetically. This is because, as yet, the particular subjective form that delineates the aesthetic has gone undefined. Cobb explicitly clarifies this subjective form in his discussion of artifacts.

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[17] Cobb, "Toward Clarity," 176-7.

[18] Cobb, "Toward Clarity," 177.

> Art objects are here defined as those which are intended to possess positive aesthetic value or beauty. That is, they are those objects the creators of which strive for such internal relationship of parts as will be prehended as aesthetically satisfactory in the mode of causal efficacy.[19]

Cobb is relying on Whitehead's understanding of beauty here. Working backwards, the aesthetic experience depends on prehensions of something "aesthetically satisfactory in the mode of causal efficacy." That is, it depends on some thing, an experience of which, when allowed to be dominated massively by that thing itself, is one of intensely unified diversities. This is achieved in the object by a certain apposite "internal relationship of the parts" as arranged according to the intention of the creator. This relationship of the parts in the object is such as to suggest intensity of unified diversity, so as to be experienced as such when dominant in an actual occasion.

Moving beyond the seeming circularity depends on the introduction of beauty as the subjective form that distinguishes aesthetic experience from in-aesthetic. An experience is aesthetic in the narrow sense of the term when its subjective aim is to surrender to its prehensions-in-the-mode-of-causal-efficacy under the subjective form of beauty. Art objects are those objects which can be used effectively as initial data for such an experience. Further, Cobb generally insists that these items must be *intended* to be so used, implying items of human manufacture, intended to function as art objects (although in places he opens the possibility that any item can be used aesthetically, regardless of the intent of its creation).

The chief questions Cobb leaves unanswered in this brief sketch concern this intention. Is the aesthetic intention of the creator encoded in the artifact itself for subsequent prehension? If so, how does this come about: by the sheer fact of the beauty achieved, or by some marker of

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[19] Cobb, "Toward Clarity," 179.

artistic craft, or in some other way? If not, how would the contemplator know of such an intent? And if intent is not finally necessary, but only beauty, what distinguishes aesthetic experiences (in the narrow sense, "experiences of art objects") from other beautiful experiences or experiences of beautiful things? These are questions that find responses in the other attempt at Whiteheadian aesthetics I am discussing. But before turning to Sherburne's account, I want to highlight one particular virtue of Cobb's analysis.

This virtue is just Cobb's insistence on the definitive importance of intention and aim. For Cobb, the work must somehow let you know it is intended to be experienced as art, aesthetically, by means of some reified sign of this aim encoded in the object itself. At the same time, he concrescing subject must acquiesce to this aim, choosing to have a certain kind of experience of beauty, to surrender herself to something immanent within the perceived object. Further, it should not be missed that the aim governing aesthetic experience, beauty, is God's aim for the universe. In these ways, Cobb has sketched a preliminary Whiteheadian aesthetic that takes its explanation from the final real things of reality and its teleology.

Donald W. Sherburne's study of the problem is given in his doctoral dissertation, subsequently published as the book *A Whiteheadian Aesthetic*.[20] Like Cobb, Sherburne finds his point of departure in a technical feature of the concrescent subject, albeit a different one. But Sherburne reverses the order of the discussion: he begins with the "The Aesthetic Object" and only then proceeds to "Aesthetic Experience."

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[20] Donald W. Sherburne, *A Whiteheadian Aesthetic: Some Implications of Whitehead's Metaphysical Speculation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

> In this chapter it will be argued that art objects have the ontological status of Whiteheadian propositions. Crucial to this argument is the distinction between works of art and their performances, which will be shown to be the distinction between propositions and their objectifications.[21]

This will require a brief exposition of the *proposition* in Whitehead's theory of concrescence. But it might be helpful first to reiterate the "crucial distinction" Sherburne makes. Sherburne's concept of the art object is profoundly different from Cobb's. By art object, Cobb means some external or even material thing that provides the sense data for the perceptions that the subject experiences aesthetically. He means what we might commonly mean by the phrase: a painting we look at or the performance of a symphony we listen to. Sherburne calls this thing the *objectification* or the *performance* of the aesthetic object.[22] By the *art object*, Sherburne means a different notion: the *art object* is, in his sense of the term, "an ideal," "not an actual entity, but a thing of the spirit."[23] It is this ideal that has the ontological status of a proposition in Sherburne's account.

The proposition occurs at a more advanced phase of concrescence than the prehensions of perception with which Cobb dealt. As described above, the actual occasion entertains its prehensions of past actualities as objective data and subjective form. This takes place in the *initial phase* of concrescence, and all of these prehensions are thus far called *physical feelings*, consisting of the feelings of the prehended object itself as well as the forms of how they are felt. In the *first supplemental phase* of concrescence, *conceptual feelings* join the physical feelings.

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[21] Sherburne, *Whiteheadian Aesthetic*, 98.

[22] *Performance* seems to be a synonym for *objectification*. Although Sherburne spends some time on the difference between "Performer Arts" and "Non-Performer," this difference is not that the former have performances (in the sense of *objectifications*) and the latter do not.

[23] Sherburne, *Whiteheadian Aesthetic*: for "Ideal" see, for example, 111-12; for "a thing of the spirit," see 110.

Physical feelings arise from the prehension of past actualities. Conceptual feelings arise from the ingression of the ordered field of sheer possibility, what Whitehead calls the realm of *eternal objects*.

The eternal objects are perfectly indeterminate, specifying nothing actual, representing only the total set of possibility; Whitehead calls them "Pure Potentials for the Specific Determination of Fact, *or* Forms of Definiteness."[24] Included in them are an "objective species," comprised of "the mathematical and Platonic forms," and a "subjective species," which is "an emotion, or an intensity, or an adversion, or an aversion, or a pleasure, or a pain." An eternal object of the subjective species "defines the subjective form of feeling of one actual entity."[25] The eternal objects are a kind of menu of possibilities received by the subject occasion, which selects possibilities for actualization compatible with the actual physical data, the "matter of fact," it also inherits.

In the extremely complex actual occasions of consciousness, a vast array of alternative possibilities can be actualized in advanced propositions about the initial data. The possibility of red, one of its many shades, actualized in the apple, comes along with the possibilities of green, or yellow, or "not an apple at all." A proposition is the combination of some selection of possibilities (prehended as conceptual feelings) with the physical feelings that gave rise to them. A proposition contains both the physical feelings which occasioned it, called its *logical subject*, and the conceptual feelings that complete it, its *predicate*. But — and this is crucial to

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[24] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 22.

[25] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 291. Note, with Cobb we were discussing the subjective form of the various prehensions in the initial phase of an actual occasion. Here, we are discussing the subjective form of the actual occasion as a whole, a different thing.

Sherburne's analysis — the logical subject is drained of its actuality and made to serve merely as a hypothetical subject for its predicate conceptual feelings. The apple is no longer "that apple there," or a Pavlovian "Lunch!" but has become "…say, an apple, a red apple, which might have been green, or yellow, or a banana." Propositions entertain theories about the logical subject or even alternatives to it. As Whitehead explains,

> Thus in a proposition the logical subjects are reduced to the status of food for a possibility. Their real rôle in actuality is abstracted from; they are no longer factors in fact, except for the purposes of their physical indication. Each logical subject becomes a bare '*it*' among actualities, with *its* assigned hypothetical relevance to the predicate.[26]

The inherited actualities of physical feeling demand a great deal of conformity; they are "stubborn fact." The ingression of the eternal objects bring sheer possibility, without any definiteness whatsoever. The proposition is the means by which possibility gains acquaintance with some relevant actuality. At the same time, the proposition liberates "stubborn fact" to become "for instance…," "food for a possibility."

So, when Sherburne claims for the art object "the ontological status of a proposition," he is claiming that it is a pattern of possibilities become partially definite because of its moorings in a set of physical feelings (those arising from experience of the objectified performance), which have themselves been abstracted into food for possibility. They exist as an ideal, originally formed in the mind of the artist, awaiting their objectified performance.[27] Once given that

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[26] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 258.

[27] Sherburne seems to be invoking Kant and his doctrine of genius here. As we will see, this is perhaps where he deviates most greatly from Whitehead's metaphysical impulses and from an adequately Whiteheadian aesthetic model.

performance in aesthetic experience, the proposition regains definiteness with the restoration of its logical subject.

Sherburne offers an example, Robert Frost's poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." The poem is, for Sherburne, not about a sleigh ride, a horse, or a snowfall. These are logical subjects of the poem, serving to give definiteness to the proposition, which is the art object itself. Sherburne gives his sense of that proposition:

> I feel that Frost has captured exquisitely the experience one has occasionally of floating on the surface of one's own cosmic destiny, cut off from the world and seeming to drift aloof from all involvement for a brief spell, seeing oneself almost as a second person.[28]

The proposition is for Sherburne something like the art object's thematic essence or meaning. To become an art object (rather than, say, an apothegm of discursive wisdom), it gains definiteness in an objectification. Frost's proposition says, "We float on the surface of our own cosmic destinies." When asked, "What do you mean by that?" it responds, "Whose woods these are I think I know. / His house is in the village, though…." The proposition of this poem becomes definite only when given Frost's particular words and images as its logical subject.

Sherburne provides another example in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*:

> The play itself is not a physical entity, it is an ideal entity. In a performance of the play, the objectification which has been eliminated in the ideal entity is restored; hence the performance is called an objectified proposition. But the objectification in the performance is second hand. An actual occasion is what it is; it does not persist, change, or reappear. Propositions can and do reappear in different performances because they are not actualities. Different actualities at different times and places, i.e. different acting companies, can serve as the objectifiers of a given proposition. Each company provides in its actors a group of actualities which objectify the proposition which is the play they perform. These actualities supply the objectification eliminated

[28] Sherburne, *Whiteheadian Aesthetic*, 164.

> in the proposition which is the play itself. But it is the secondhandness of the objectification which they supply that Bullough refers to in his doctrine of Distance. Were the objectification immediate there would be a street-knifing and not the assassination of Julius Caesar in the play of that name.[29]

The importance for Sherburne of grounding the art object in the proposition can be seen here as having two reasons. The first is that it gives the art object a kind of portability and permanence not dependent on a particular objectification. Since no performance is the same twice (in the case of performer arts at least), Sherburne believes that to identify the art object with the performance would be to assert each performance of *Julius Caesar* to be an entirely different art object, something he is unwilling to do. So instead, he identifies the art object with the proposition, which allows for it an enduring definiteness through many objectified performances.

The second reason proposition is important for Sherburne is this idea of psychical distance, which he takes as a classic aesthetic doctrine from Edward Bullough. Psychical distance, this "secondhandness," allows for an appreciative gap between the events depicted and our responses. Without this distance, aesthetic objectifications would entail claims to facticity or literal truth, seeming to be experiences of actual events rather than artistic representations. As Sherburne says it, "…the crucial point made by the doctrine of Psychical Distance is that it is catastrophic for aesthetic experience to identify the performal medium with the aesthetic object."[30] Aesthetic experience, on Sherburne's account, requires this kind of distance, a disinterestedness toward the objectification in favor of the proposition it objectifies. Otherwise, we miss the point: we call the police after seeing a knifing in the theater; we try to sit in the

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[29] Sherburne, *Whiteheadian Aesthetic*, 111-112.

[30] Sherburne, *Whiteheadian Aesthetic*, 109.

Louis XIV chaise because our feet hurt after a day in the museum. Sherburne gives an even sharper example:

> The theory being presented here suggests that burlesque is ballet "stripped" of its propositional character. In a burlesque show the idea is to encourage the patron to focus his attention upon actualities; a fortiori, the attitude of the patron could not possibly be aesthetic…. In one sense, certainly, "propositions" are made on the runway, but my point would be that at a burlesque house there is complete loss of Distance on the part of the audience because the predicative patterns involved are attributed to actualities *qua* actualities and not to a performal medium *qua* objectifying the logical subject of a proposition.[31]

To have aesthetic experience, one must maintain psychic distance, or lapse into mere sensual involvement. The sense data must be uprooted from stubborn fact and freed to be food for still other feelings. Thus, psychic distance depends on proposition, "the predicative patterns involved."

The psychical distance of the proposition becomes Sherburne's pivot from his account of the aesthetic object to his account of aesthetic experience. "These considerations [of Psychical Distance] will become more plausible as they are integrated into a theory of aesthetic experience… [as] the aesthetic re-creation by the contemplator of the proposition objectified in a performance."[32] As we have already seen, the proposition contains the thematic content of the art object, that meaning (like "floating on the surface of one's own life") which the objectification makes definite. The portability of the aesthetic proposition leads to its reproducibility in the experience of those who take in its objectification. The emergent subjectivity of the contemplator re-creates in itself the proposition of the art object through integrating the physical data of the

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[31] Sherburne, *Whiteheadian Aesthetic*, 147-8.

[32] Sherburne, *Whiteheadian Aesthetic*, 112.

objectification, the proposition's logical subject. The proposition of the art object lures the appetition of the contemplator, leading the proposition to be re-created in the structure of his own consciousness. This follows directly from the function of the proposition in Whitehead's system: "It is an essential doctrine in the philosophy of organism that the primary function of a proposition is to be relevant as a lure for feeling."[33] Sherburne's proposition gathers the experience of its physical data under its felt form: "Whose woods these are I think I know…" is gathered under that feeling of floating on the surface of one's life.

Again, as with Cobb, this becomes a matter of subjective aim for Sherburne.

> The art object is an object intended by its maker, through its propositional character, to serve as a lure which will determine the subjective aim of prehensions of it. That subjective aim becomes: to re-create in that process of self-creation, in that concrescing experience, the proposition which is objectified in the prehended performance.[34]

Sherburne's proposition, like Cobb's art object, invites the subjective aim of the contemplator to surrender itself to the governance of the object experienced. An aesthetic experience is one which replicates the art object itself in the structure of the consciousness of the contemplator in its full autonomy, granted the surrender of the subjective aim of the contemplating subjective occasion. For the contemplator to aim at something else is to fail to have an aesthetic experience. It is to be like a voyeur at a burlesque, rather than an audience member at the ballet; it is to be Cobb's art historian, viewing the painting merely for insights into brush technique.

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[33] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 25.

[34] Sherburne, *Whiteheadian Aesthetic*, 118. He says much the same on 143: "It is my contention that an experience is aesthetic when it is experience of an objectified proposition which lures the subjective aim of that occasion of experience into recreating in its own process of self-creation the proposition objectified in the prehended performance."

As I ended my discussion of Cobb's theory, I remarked an implicit connection between aesthetic experience and the divine. For Cobb, the self-creation of an aesthetic experience is an aim at beauty; the aesthetic contemplator makes his own aim in the aesthetic experience the same as God's aim in the reception of the universe. For Cobb, aesthetic experience in the narrow sense is thus related to aesthetic experience in the broad sense. This seems not to be true for Sherburne, perhaps the most significant divergence of their theories. For Sherburne, the subjective aim of replicating an aesthetic proposition in one's own self-creation preempts one's normal participation in the divine aim.

> Normally this proposition [which controls the becoming of a subject] is the vision of what that subject might become; it is a vision of the potentialities relevant to its concrescence as they are prehended in the hybrid physical prehension of God. I am suggesting that in aesthetic experience the normal goals and aims of everyday living are suspended; in grasping the subjective aim of one who experiences it aesthetically, the art object insists that it be experienced as an end in itself. It temporarily short-circuits the long-range, overarching subjective aims that shape the life patterns and dominate ordinary living.[35]

In general experience, the subjective aim is to actualize possibilities in accord with the prehension of the divine aim in that moment. For Sherburne, the subjective aim in the experience of an art object — that is, the subjective aim of aesthetic experience — restricts itself to the object itself. The art object carves out something like a metaphysical envelope for the emerging subject, offering to it a structure of self-becoming excerpted from the serial flow of concrescence. In Sherburne, "surrender" seems to dislodge God's telos from experience. The

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[35] Sherburne, *Whiteheadian Aesthetic*, 143-4. Sherburne's desire is not an utterly atheistic aesthetic. Elsewhere he writes, "The artist is not God, and his creative activity presupposes God in the same sense that all advance into novelty presupposes God." (Sherburne, *Whiteheadian Aesthetic*, 182). His narrower point here concerns only the the subjective aim of aesthetic experience: that it is exempted from — it "short-circuits" — the divine aim.

contemplator of such an object frees herself from the circumscribing world and the divine factors of past actuality that generally dominate its flow of experience.

Here can be seen both questions we might raise about Sherburne's theory, as well as its strength. With respect to the questions, the first I would ask is whether an actual occasion can attain as much freedom from God's subjective aim as the theory requires. Given the strength of God's aim in the necessary inheritance of every actual occasion, it seems doubtful. It also seems an unwise choice for Whiteheadian aesthetics, given that God's aim is beauty. Does the concrescing subject really throw over God's aim at beauty and choose instead to aim at re-creating an aesthetic proposition within itself *without regard* to whether the experience thereby achieved is beautiful? If not, if it does so *with regard* to the potential beauties achieved, then it would be difficult to separate this regard from God's lure.

The second question is, while more technical, also more troubling. While the proposition does indeed have some degree of "ontological status," being one of Whitehead's "eight categories of existence," it is nevertheless indefinite without its roots in a physical feeling of something actual serving as its logical subject, what Sherburne calls its objectification. Sherburne's insistence on rooting the aesthetic in the "ideal" (the art object) rather than the actual (its objectified performance) seems counter to Whitehead's fundamental impulses. To appeal to an "art object" as somehow metaphysically prior to its objectified performance in an actual artifact seems to offer a reason without an actual entity; that is, it seems to violate Whitehead's "ontological principle" at the bedrock of the system.

For example, Sherburne tells the story of a review of a piano recital:

> I remember once hearing a critic say after a performance of the "Claire de Lune" which was very, very slow in the opening and closing sections and fairly flew through the middle arpeggios: "I'm not sure just what I did hear, but it certainly wasn't Debussy." I agreed with him; a proposition was objectified that evening, but it was not that proposition which is Debussy's "Claire de Lune," and not a proposition of any great aesthetic value.[36]

It is difficult to know what "it certainly wasn't Debussy" can mean as an aesthetic claim. It is likely not an evaluation from aesthetics at all, but one from criticism, based on a cultivated knowledge of Debussy-appropriate tempi and performance practices, according to established canons of taste. As an aesthetic judgment, it would have to be by appeal to some *a priori* standard of DEBUSSY, perhaps as one of the eternal objects. This is what Sherburne seems to be attempting in the appeal to proposition: there is some ideal proposition DEBUSSY or CLAIRE DE LUNE, for which the score is a set of instructions, and against which actual objectifications of it can be measured. But the proposition cannot function in this way; it is a lure for feeling, but not a predetermination of it. Indeed, the proposition itself is understood first to emerge from out of concreteness, and only then to stand in judgment over it.

That said, Sherburne contributes two essential elements for the refinements which I will propose. First is the yearning for artistic autonomy implicit in Sherburne's desire to exempt aesthetic experience from the ordinary dominance of the quotidian world. This seems endemic to accounts of aesthetic experience, and a common, arguably universal feature of artistic expression. The second is another more technical matter, the identification of the proposition as the means by which to achieve this kind of envelope. To be sure, I doubt that the proposition can function as Sherburne argues for it, as a suspension of ordinary aims, and particularly of the

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[36] Sherburne, *Whiteheadian Aesthetic*, 120.

divine aim. But if it can function in some way to set aesthetic experience off from ordinary experience, experience taken generally, the way the picture frame sets the painting off from the gallery wall, something important is accomplished. In this way, it can indeed function as the delimiting quality that philosophically defines artistic experience as a sub-category of experience.[37]

A Constructive Response

Together, Cobb and Sherburne provide a starting place for a Whiteheadian aesthetics. From Cobb, we see emphasized the importance of the concrete actuality of the art object and the marks of artificiality it offers to the percipient subject who chooses to surrender the experience to them. We also understand the importance of the divine telos. Sherburne gives us the key insight of centering the workings of artistic experience in Whitehead's concept of the proposition, which describes the way Cobb's surrender works with greater technical specificity. As I turn now to refining these ways of understanding artistic experience on Whitehead's terms, I begin by noting one more serious deficiency shared in common by these two theories discussed. Both Cobb and Sherburne seem to seriously underestimate the massive complexity of artistic experience.

This underestimation is clearest in Sherburne, who exudes a kind of confidence in the unequivocal nature of artistic meaning and reference. Frost's poem or Debussy's piano work seem to have for Sherburne something like a singular theme, a stable meaning, a right way of approach. At this late date, of course, such an assumption is indefensible. Current aesthetic

[37] As a matter of terminology, I prefer "artistic experience" to "aesthetic experience." I have used the latter so far because it is the term Cobb and Sherburne both use.

theories simply must acknowledge the lessons critics have taught us about various ways of reading, layers and levels of interpretation, and contemplator perspectives in their complex dynamics. They must allow for, and explain, the incredible range and multiplicity of artistic response. In what ways might a mannered or even grotesque performance of "Claire de Lune" highlight the piece's original challenge to established political-poetic hierarchies or its attempt to reassure a nervous bourgeoisie at the start of the 20th Century? And why might someone prefer such a performance to one that is more in line with performance convention? How does the implied narrator of "Stopping by Woods…" reveal his own psychodynamics of denial in the odd, simplistic rhyme scheme and in the eroto-structuralist tease of "Between the woods and frozen lake / The darkest evening of the year"? And what is to be made of the fact that I am imagining a particular lake, one from my youth, when I read these lines? These questions are perhaps not finally the right ones from a critical point of view. But any aesthetic theory would be unacceptable that did not allow space to ask these and all other particular questions of critical inquiry and contemplator response with respect to particular works.

The insistence on the self-explicatory nature of an art object required by Sherburne and implicit in Cobb drastically narrows the range of interpretive (that is, conscious) response. But Whitehead's account of conscious experience would seem to imply the opposite, empowering a myriad of possible responses. The art object is assembled from vast storehouses of more-or-less public and private images and materials and from canons of conventional tropes and forms within the historical traditions of each culture, medium, and genre.[38] The contemplator must

[38] As Cobb and Sherburne use "art object" differently, I should specify I am generally using it from here on in Cobb's sense of the term, a synonym for "artifact" and what Sherburne means by "objectified performance."

include whatever prehensions of these factors she can in her contemplative experience alongside perceptions of the art object itself for the object to be at all intelligible. This means the artistic experience necessarily gathers data from a field far broader than the art object itself. Further, this data, though to some degree publicly available, will also be idiosyncratic to the personal history of the contemplator. The contemplator's experience will also therefore be unable to exclude, even under the perspective of the subjective aim proper to artistic experience, prehensions of the many associations and resonances that are for her a central part of the artistic experience, howsoever far beyond the scope of the work they seem to many other contemplators and howsoever contrary to the original hopes and intentions of the artist.

So some kind of amendment is necessary here that allows for a vast number of possible prehensions to be unified under the subjective aim of experiencing the work and that preserves latitude for a great range of subjective responses and critical inquiries. To be sure, different contemplators are having artistic experiences centered on more-or-less the same perceived object, so their experiences will have a great deal in common. Cobb is right to insist on the stubborn dominance of the object in experiences had of it. But these experiences will also be particular and idiosyncratic. They will also include past experiences of similar objects, special training, and the personal associative trove of each contemplator. This implies that the propositional frame of the artistic experience is perhaps far hungrier, requiring far more food for its feeling, than Sherburne had thought.

Cobb and Sherburne underestimate artistic complexity in another way, too: they share a common assumption that an artistic experience occurs within the duration of a single actual

occasion. This is assumed even in the case of art objects that manifestly require a span of time for their experiencing — a Mahler symphony, for example, or a novel. Cobb does not engage the question. Sherburne alludes to it briefly, smoothing it over as a kind of mechanical problem, the "uploading" required before the experience can happen.[39] But this seems to me a crucial point: Artistic experience cannot be conceived of as an experience had all at once, but only as something that occurs over a series of moments, perceptions, and interpretations. Even the contemplation of works from the plastic arts requires time. Even a painting, even a miniature, cannot be seen synoptically, but must be "read"; the eye has to roam, the rhythm of the painting discovered and felt, as part of the having of the artistic experience. To be sure, there is a culmination, a moment when the music stops and the applause begins, a moment when the contemplator can break gaze and stroll to the next gallery. But it would be mistaken to see this moment of culmination as the only moment to be characterized under the category *artistic experience*.[40] Rather, the gradual unfolding of the artistic experience over a series of actual occasions seems basic to its aesthetic definition.

John Dewey's insistence on the temporal extension of the artistic experience resonates here. Recall, Dewey distinguishes between intellectual experience, had for the purpose of the final utilitarian conclusion, and aesthetic experience, whose value resides not only in the end point but over the whole duration of the experience. For Dewey, every stage and stopping point

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[39] "I suggest that the discursiveness of the temporal arts must be overcome before the objectified proposition can be fully grasped…" (Sherburne, *Whiteheadian Aesthetic*, 131).

[40] By using *experience* in this way, I am no longer using it as a synonym for *actual occasion*. Technically, Whitehead would say that this "experience" is really a series of actual occasions transmuted into a single serially ordered society for the sake of consciousness.

in the contemplation of the art object contributes to artistic experience, which must be understood to have temporal extension. He is nearly explicit in contrasting this understanding of experience with that of Whitehead: "Time ceases to be either the endless and uniform flow or the succession of instantaneous points which some philosophers have asserted it to be."[41] Whitehead, among "some philosophers," acknowledges the temporal duration of conscious experience in the concept of the *personally ordered society*. An "'enduring creature,' is a society whose social order has taken the special form of 'personal order.'"[42] Each actual occasion in the life of such a society bequeaths to the next member what it has inherited and integrated within itself, ensuring its serial continuity. Our conscious lives are a long series of actual occasions strung together in this way. I am conceiving the artistic experience here as a segment of such a personally ordered society, a discrete segment within the life of a conscious enduring creature whose aim is given over to the artistic proposition. This accounts for the temporal dimension of artistic experience, pace Dewey.

These comments bring us to a point where the theory can be further refined. They concern, not surprisingly, the two central features of artistic experience that have emerged from this study, in their interrelatedness: Sherburne's framing proposition and Cobb's assertion of subjective aim. These features correlate to the two identified in Chapter 1, the circumscribed microcosm and teleology. First, the question of frame. Perhaps the most neutral and defensible definition of the art object is as the spatio-temporal region delineated by some set of conventional tropes or markers of self-identification: "this is art." This is most readily seen in

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[41] John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 23-24.

[42] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 34

literal, denotative conventions: the proscenium, the conductor's raised baton, the picture frame, the phrase "A Novel" after the title. But it is also inherent in the fiber of the work itself. Brushstrokes, stage diction, camera angle, the timbre of a clarinet — the building blocks of art objects are themselves manifestly artificial. A perfect feat of *trompe l'oeil* is impossible: although it might be remarkable in terms of technical achievement, it would, by definition, go unremarked. A perfect work of *trompe l'oeil* evaporates into mere reality. Conceptual art — Duchamp's *Fountain*, say — must *tell you* it is art, or you may use it for other purposes, missing the point entirely.[43]

This implies that the frame is, as Cobb suggests, encoded in every actual occasion in the series that makes up total artistic experience. This is the massive influence of the object itself on experience, perception in the mode of causal efficacy. But Cobb invests "the aesthetic" in the object's beauty rather than its manifest artificiality. The brush strokes themselves suggest this frame for each moment within the artistic experience. Their manifest facticiousness, not their beauty, is what signals art. Beauty is indeed essential to the subjective aim that organizes the experience and gives the sense of teleology, as I will describe. But the marks of artificiality, perceived in the initial phase of concrescence, are what invites the conscious subject to understand the perceived object as art.

Sherburne makes a similar mistake, taking the definitive mark of the art object in his proposition to be its thematic meaning content rather than, more simply, a proposition that the experience being had is something artistic. The physical prehension of these traces of artistry —

[43] This is, perhaps, what is finally unsatisfying about conceptual art, the clumsiness of the demarcation. Of course, that would be a critical judgment, not an aesthetic one.

the brushstrokes, timbre, stage diction, and the like — themselves serve as the logical subject of Sherburne's proposition that "this is art." Any component actual occasion of a serial artistic experience will contain many transmutations, propositions, and conceptual and intellectual feelings: those brush strokes add up to this shape; this shape depicts an apple; an apple reminds me of the story of Adam and Eve; the story of Adam and Eve reminds me today of the inherent sexism of the historical church that paid for the production of this painting; and so on. But these actual occasions are unified under a proposition implied by their common prehension as markers of artificiality. So the predicate of the proposition is not so much the thematic meaning of the work, as Sherburne would have it, but more simply something like, "this is factitious," "this is human-made and not 'real'," or maybe most elementally, "this is art."

Sherburne's proposition would then function in a series of actual occasions as Sherburne suggests. Once the contemplator surrenders to it, the "this is art" proposition governs the subjective series of occasions, using the prehensions of the art object as its logical subject. As such, the proposition is indeed a lure for the various feelings engendered by the art object in the series of actual occasions, gathering them under the rubric of a discrete, artificial world, a complete and autonomous realm of its own. This is, I would argue, the force of Whitehead's pronouncement from our epigraph, that "The work of Art is a fragment of nature with the mark on it of a finite creative effort, so that it stands alone, an individual thing detailed from the vague infinity of its background."[44]

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[44] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 270-71.

As Sherburne and Cobb both persuade, the question of subjective aim is central to artistic experience. This is where the role of beauty is seen in the governance of artistic experience.[45] The art object itself cannot have an aim in the relevant sense; aim is a question of the subjective experience had of the object in the consciousness of the contemplator. But the art object can in fact "display" aim, creating an artificial illusion of aim, what I have called teleology. As each component actual occasion in the series prehends that moment's new elements — the next musical phrase, the density of color in the lower-left corner of the canvas — several things happen. First, the new element is appreciated in itself, for its own beauty. Then, the new element is integrated with what has already been appreciated in prior actual occasions and bequeathed to this most recent one. The unifying aesthetic proposition continues to demarcate this particular series of actual occasions, giving a sense of boundary to the entire experience, identifying which past data to integrate with the new element in the series to be bequeathed in transition to its next member. Thus is created an emerging sense of an artistic whole. As each new member of the series actualizes a new and increasingly complex version of this posited whole, the overall experience gains a feeling of development, evolution. It gains the feeling of a drive to completion, of a wholeness aimed at and gradually nearing attainment; it has the feeling of a telos. In this way, the art object can be said to display aim over the course of subjective experiences of it. This display of aim is the teleology of an art object.

My proposed amendment regarding subjective aim rests on this teleology. The amendment is that this teleology is felt as a kind of sign of the presence of a posited subjectivity,

[45] Again, *beauty* always meant in Whitehead's sense, the intense unification of diversities. Again, as the art of the 20th Century proved, vast, even violent diversities can be intensely unified in ways that no one might call lovely or harmonious in the common senses of those words.

a sense of a subject aim immanent within the experience as if emerging from the art object.[46] The artistic experience displays over the course of a series of actual occasions the operation of the single actual occasion, the drive to unify many diversities into a single intense and harmonized whole, according to the posited aim of a posited subjectivity, the sense of the creator at work in the work. The artistic experience is one of a display of aimed becoming. Now recall, "aimed becoming" is a way to describe the metaphysically basic foundation of reality. Therefore, by this thinking, the artistic experience re-presents the basic process of reality slowed down and enacted in such a way as to be consciously felt. This appeal to a "telos effect," a teleology, can explain how for Whitehead art "evoke[s] into consciousness the finite perfections which lie ready for human achievement."[47]

This account can perhaps be accused of demoting artistic experience, rooting it not in the final real things themselves, but in the effect achieved by a complex series thereof. But this is appropriate: only humans — and not atoms or even animals — are capable of art. Art is indeed a complex operation, depending on great facility in complex operations proper only to the highest order actual occasions in serially ordered societies. But whatever its thematic content, art objects on this account nevertheless display the most basic operation, common to all reality. It might also be accused of circularity, "art is that which claims to be artistic." Again, art is a complex cultural operation. As a cultural product, one must learn its conventions. To recognize art according to cultural signs must be learned. To recognize brush strokes as "artistic," one must have learned

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[46] This posited subjectivity may be constructed by the contemplator in a variety of ways: as the author or artist, the implied narrator, the daimon of the work, etc. This is by no means a theory of authorial intent. The claim is only that the contemplator will posit some kind of teleologically driving subjective presence.

[47] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 271.

about paint brushes, paint, and the custom of creating images in this way. That is part of the para-artistic data necessary for artistic experience. Nevertheless, the dimensions of the discrete artistic experience and the character of its local creative governance must be learned anew with each art object.

This may help to explain the sense people sometimes express that art feels true in some ultimate way. As we will explore in Chapter 5, Whitehead defines truth as "the conformation of Appearance to Reality,"[48] and thereby defines art's relationship to truth: "Art is the purposeful adaption of Appearance to Reality. Now 'purposeful adaption' implies an end, to be obtained with more or less success. This end, which is the purpose of art, is two-fold, — namely Truth and Beauty. The perfection of art has only one end, which is Truthful Beauty."[49] Artistic experience, as a society of prehensions of a perceived object governed by a proposition of its integrated wholeness, is an appearance according to Whitehead's definition. One basic truth of this appearance lies in the way it mimics the basic feeling of reality, by which many become one. This basic artistic truth undergirds all the other truths the experience may hold according to the particularities of the art object, its themes and subject matter, and its resonances in the personal history of its contemplator.

Finally, this refinement also suggests, as Cobb positively and Sherburne recalcitrantly did before, a connection between art and the divine. This teleology would necessarily be inherited over the course of the artistic experience as a hybrid physical feeling, a physical prehension of something which was originally a conceptual prehension, the eternal object *aim*, inherited in

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[48] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 241.

[49] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 267.

each successive occasion of the serial artistic experience. But of course, God's aim is also felt as a hybrid physical prehension. The teleology felt in artistic experience feels like the divine telos, the appetition for beauty under the category of the ultimate, the Eros of the Universe. The art object, in this way, is felt as an echo of God. And experience of the object feels like the experience of a local telos conditioning a local region of creativity, a little world. This little world feels to be carved out, excerpted from the circumscribing world, by means of its propositional frame. And it feels to be governed by its own providence, according to the posited aim of its own posited divinity.[50]

Sherburne's point, therefore, that art demands its own autonomy from the normal and even divine aims of quotidian existence, remains important. The propositional frame, having carved out its own realm, defines a whole that is felt with its own immanent aim inferred from the successive steps of its self-completion. At the same time, however, the immanent aim displayed within the artistic experience is inescapably juxtaposed to the divine aim that influences experience itself, and indeed is rendered comprehensible in the juxtaposition. The sequence of actual occasions that comprise an artistic experience display the workings of experience itself; the convergence of an artistic experience is an imitation of the basic process. And so both things are true: this teleology felt in artistic experience echoes the divine telos, and

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[50] Some resonance may be felt between such an aesthetic theory and Aristotle's theory of tragedy, where the plot of the work exhibits complications that lead to a reversal of the hero's fortunes and an accompanying recognition of something deeper, something of necessity. At the end of a tragedy, on Aristotle's account, the plot has led to something integral, whole, and completed. As Gadamer glosses it, "The spectator recognizes himself and his own finiteness in the face of the power of fate" (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 2nd, rev ed [London: Continuum Books, 2004], 128).The drive of the plot to this final culmination in recognition results in a catharsis, a purgation resulting from the experience of the whole after its completion. Such a final moment of culmination will perhaps be analogous to the realization of beauty in the integration found in the final expression of artistic experience. (Aristotle, *Poetics*, in *Criticism: The Major Texts,* ed. Walter Jackson Bate [Miami: Wolf Den Books, 2004], 13-37.)

yet it is insistent of its own independence, as well. Art is thus felt spiritually, but this can have different characters. It can serve as a pious reiteration of the divine call. It can be an uneasy acquiescence to God's circumscribing world. Or it can be a Miltonian rage, Steiner's called "*counter*-creation," the "fury of secondarity."[51]

Artistic Experience and Interpretation

When a contemplator experiences the work of art over the duration of its unfolding in her consciousness according to the governance of the "it is art" proposition, it makes sense to say the work of art is about at least two things. First, it "is about" whatever is included in the thematic material or particular the content of the work. This is greatly particular to each work in actuality, and should be construed broadly, including not only things like plot, themes, and references but also particular ways of handling the resources of the media and genre at hand. Second, it is about the teleology, the way experience collects the diverse elements of the world and drives to an integrated wholeness in which the intensity of the unified diversities is maximized. Artistic experience begins in the assembled raw materials of a new world, and ends with an expression of that new world in its completeness.

Of course, these two things that the art work is about are not separable or independent of each other. The general working, a display of the process in which unity emerges from diversity, can only be seen as abstracted from the experience of these particular diversities in their movement toward this particular unity. Conversely, even in the particularity of the work, a

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[51] George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1989), 203-4.

generality is expressed, a proof that, like all things, this material too can be integrated. In creating a novel integration of the disparate elements of the work, the work says something new about both how these particular elements interact in experience, and about the general range of the kinds of unity that are possible. There is creativity possible on both fronts. There is then another opportunity of creativity as well, the response of the contemplator in the experiencing of the work, both in its gradual unfolding and upon completion. This creative opportunity is what we mean most generally by *interpretation*, and I would like to end this chapter with a brief discussion of the contemplator's role.

As we have seen repeatedly, a chief value in aesthetics has been freedom. All of our thinkers have been keen to defend the autonomy of the work to mean whatsoever it will. The point of both Kant's purposeless purposiveness and Dewey's distinction between artistic experience and intellectual is the same, protecting the work from having to serve any master beyond its own self-selected aims. Cobb's linkage of the aesthetic to the mode of causal efficacy is done for the purpose of guaranteeing the fullest possible autonomy for the work in determining the experience of it. And, as Sherburne argues, a chief virtue of locating the aesthetic in Whitehead's proposition is its power to excerpt the object of experience from quotidian materiality into the realm of possibility. All of these thinkers seek to establish for the art work a freedom from externally imposed ends and an autonomy of meaning on its own terms.

For Steiner, most sensitive to demands of interpretation, the need to guarantee the freedom of the work is at the heart of the problem he is trying to solve. The costs of

deconstruction and postmodernism have been terrible, but the value of the purchase is not negligible. He writes,

> Today, the liberal imagination is more or less at ease with the manifold discourse of uncertainties. It perceives in this multiplicity and indeterminacy of possible discourses and metaphoric modellings a guarantor of tolerance…. The relaxed ironies and liberalities of this position are attractive.[52]

Even while arguing to maintain an older way of reading, one situated in a world of transcendent meaning, he never seeks to undo the advances of theories that empower readings from different perspectives of race, gender, or historical context. And while "attractive" seems perhaps damning with faint praise, Steiner has ceded the point. These "relaxed ironies and liberalities" are exactly why for him we can now only read "as if," substituting the subjective postulate of God for the embarrassing assertion of God's objective reality.

From the Whiteheadian perspective, however, it is possible to assert both a transcendent source of meaning's security and a warrant for radically immanent, contextual, individual, and even idiosyncratic interpretations of that meaning by any particular contemplator of any particular work. This is because the concern of transcendence is with the immanent. The transcendent source of meaning is the strictly generic appetite for maximally intense unification of diversities. The contemplator approaches the work already feeling the pressure of the Eros of the universe, and encounters over the course of the unfolding series of moments that comprise the experience of the work the added pressure of the teleology, the drive to artificial completion displayed in the work itself. But the contemplator cannot be seen as a passive recipient of the experience. Indeed, even the requisite "giving over" or surrender of the subjective aim of the

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[52] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 199-200.

experience is an active, not passive, decision in the subjectivity of the contemplator. And that proposition, “this is art,” will reach beyond the sense data given by the art object in its hungry search for food for possibility.

As I implied above, the contemplator must include a broad array of data beyond the work in order for the work itself to be intelligible to any great degree. In each of the moments that comprise an artistic experience, the contemplator takes in the sensory information of the unfolding elements of the work itself, according to the phases of process described by Cobb, constructing a sense of the object in space and time. If the contemplator has chosen to accept the invitation of the proposition, the elements of the work will indeed dominate. But other data will be available as well. Much of it will be closely associated with the work itself, such as relevant knowledge of how art of this kind works. The more cultivated or experienced a contemplator, the richer this set of associations will be. The experience of a Beethoven piano sonata, say, is enriched by understanding of the structure and history of the form, in its evolution from sonatas of Scarlatti and the Bachs through Haydn and Mozart; in the expectations given by tradition for each movement’s structure and function in the work; even in the accrued associations with other works in the same key. This cultivated knowledge adds richness to the experience, as Beethoven can be heard using, modifying, and often simply rejecting those traditions and associations. In this way, the contemplator’s experience of the work and its melodies, harmonies, and sonorities becomes thicker, even recognizing its place or role in grander artistic enterprises.

So there are the cultivated associations of art history and technique. There are likewise associations possible with the social and political milieu or the historical moment of the

composition; with what is known of the artistic creator and her intent or practice; and with the long line of critical commentary any particular work or genre has engendered. Knowledge of Freud's "Oedipus Complex" is likely to alter one's experience of *Hamlet,* European history one's viewing of *Guernica*, or the story of Kafka's dying request one's reading of *The Trial*. At one extreme are works so esoteric as to be nearly unintelligible without such "para-artistic" associations. What sense could one make of "The Waste Land" without extensive experience in poetry and literature, Eliot's footnotes notwithstanding? At the other extreme, contemporary contextual association can influence or even dominate interpretation. In a time of national quarantine, there is no way to read *The Plague* or even *The Decameron* without including the association of COVID-19. Certain jokes are rightly judged "too soon." The autonomy art claims is answerable to these contextual associations, and can be overwhelmed by them. No contemplator with any humanity would easily find comfort in Nero's fiddling while Rome burned, howsoever great his skill.

We might roughly divide these "para-artistic" associations that come along side the perceptions of the art object itself into two classes, public and private. Public associations are ones such as I have described above, the associations available from the culture generally to a broad swath of potential contemplators. They include, as I have said, knowledge of the particular medium and genre of the work in question including its techniques, conventions, and history; biographical information about the artistic creator; historical associations about both the time of creation and the time depicted; special knowledge that pertains to the subject matter; and current

events at the time of reception (especially in the case of works or adaptations intended to be particularly topical). This list is partial.

The private class of associations are far more idiosyncratic to the contemplator in question, data from her own life experience or approaches to the work that are not likely to be shared by others as part of a common trove of possible connections. Perhaps the actor looks like an old lover; or the work is one mother particularly adored, or detested. Perhaps, as I suggested above, there is a particular lake from childhood she used to stop by of a snowy evening. On first blush, these associations may seem irrelevant, or even inimical, to the responsible reception of a work. Part of the task of becoming more cultivated in the reception of art works is learning to discipline the admission of these private associations. Yet, I suspect these private associations are the ones that have the strongest role in determining one's personal canon, one's list of favorites. And much of the pleasure in repetitious encounters with favorite works derives from these associations: "Just wait — I love this next part!" In any case, there is no bright line to be drawn between the public and the private classes of associations. Some knowledge, though public enough, is so esoteric as to be available to only a few contemplators. And sometimes a critical interpretation, begun in a rumination on some private dimension of the encounter with a work, will yield a powerful new avenue of interpretive inquiry. While the distinction between public and private will be helpful, it must always be heard with an implicit caveat: *more or less* public, *more or less* private.

In the reception of a work the contemplator is free to admit any data into the series of concrescences that make up the artistic experience. In this way, the act of experiencing a work

becomes its own creative endeavor, seeking to maximize the intensity of unified diversities that include both the perceptions of the work itself and these diverse para-artistic associations and resonances. There can be no passive artistic experience; the creative subject immediately goes to work constructing a version of the experience for himself, which will be partly answerable to publicly available associations appropriate to the work and partly idiosyncratic; but it will be novel, it will be his. In this way, we might say that the first moment of artistic experience is already the first moment of interpretation. Immediately while taking in the work, the contemplator is shaping it into something concrete in his own experience, giving it meaning and appreciating its beauty.

This implies another helpful distinction to be made here. There is the kind of interpretation that happens alongside of the very having of the experience and in its immediate aftermath. In some ways it makes little sense to call this interpretation at all, except to highlight the fact that having an artistic experience is already an act of creative response to the work. Then there is interpretation in the more common sense of the term, the process of further reflection, conversation, study, rumination. The memory of the artistic experience is re-examined, initial feelings tested and then brought into further synthesis with other data. The fruit of this interpretative process then becomes its own pleasurable, if second-order, experience of the work, as well data for future artistic experiences that call this one to mind. This kind of interpretation can be undertaken in the mind of the contemplator, in conversation with others, and in the formal and publicly focused ways that become what we call criticism.

According to this model, the freedom of both the work and the contemplator are protected. The work gathers its content into a display of the emergence of unity from the various diverse elements, expressing alongside their themes and meanings a display of the driving process of the universe, standing up a created world, a microcosm, that displays the desire of a posited local creator for creative synthesis in imitation of the divine. The contemplator takes in the perceptions of these features in surrender to the invitation of the framing proposition that they be experienced as a work of art, and then combines these perceptions with the para-artistic data available to him from his own history. The contemplator thus creates his response, even as he has it. The work is likewise free, governed only by the divine lure, the Eros of the universe, the drive to maximal intensity in the synthesis. And room remains for the free play of the imagination of the contemplator and for the "multiplicity and indeterminacy of possible discourses and metaphoric modellings" in which the modern reader finds "a guarantor of tolerance." Under the influence of the divine aim, all manner of beauty is possible. And yet, all of it testifies to the pressure of the primordial source of the desire for beauty, imitated by the local creature, even rebelled against, but never overthrown.

While this is all clothed in the abstruse terminology of Whiteheadian cosmology, it harmonizes well with classic explanations of the interpretation of art. As suggested above, it may be felt to resonate with Aristotle's theory of *The Poetics*. For another example, take the hermeneutic approach of M. H. Abrams. According to the schema he lays out, the art work sits at the center of a triad of possible relationships. There is the relationship between the work and the

audience; that between the work and the universe, including both nature and human culture; and that between the work and the artist who created it.[53]

Abrams describes the types of aesthetic theory that arise from the emphasis of each relationship over against the others. The one closest to this Whiteheadian scheme described above is what he describes as the "pragmatic theory," which emphasizes as primary the relationship between the audience and the work. He calls these theories pragmatic because he sees them as focusing their interpretations on the effect the work is to have on the contemplator. A signal critic of this type for Abrams is Sir Philip Sidney. Although Sidney claims to be an Aristotelian devoted to the mimetic theory of art, he is really a pragmatic theorist, caring more about the moral purpose of art than about the mimetic means of achieving it: "For convenience we may name criticism that, like Sidney's, is ordered toward the audience, a 'pragmatic theory,' since it looks at the work of art chiefly as a means to an end, an instrument for getting something done."[54] For Sidney, this effect was to be a moral one: the purpose of poetry was to make people better, to instruct them morally by means of mimetic delight.

Abrams himself goes beyond Sidney's moralism to generalize about pragmatic theories:

> There is, of course, the greatest variance in emphasis and detail, but the central tendency of the pragmatic critic is to conceive a poem as something made in order to effect requisite responses in its readers; to consider the author from the point of view of the powers and training he must have in order to achieve this end; to ground the classification and anatomy of poems in large part on the special effects each kind and component is most competent to achieve; and to derive the norms of the poetic art

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[53] M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 6-7.

[54] Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 15.

> and canons of critical appraisal from the needs and legitimate demands of the audience to whom the poetry is addressed.[55]

A Whiteheadian understanding of interpretation shares this emphasis on the experience of the contemplator and the workings of the work within that experience. Indeed, it is the pressure of the unfolding perceptions of the work in the series of actual occasions of the subject contemplator that comprise artistic experience. To be sure, the Whiteheadian understanding seeks a much richer range of possibility for the ends to which art is a means than Sidney's aim at edification. And the contemplator of the artist's intention need be no one other than the contemplator's own future self; art is not necessarily conceived of as a method of education or communication. Nevertheless, the principle that the artistic experience begins in the subject aligning her aim for it with the "this is art" proposition requires that the primary locus of art dwell in the relation of the work as perceived with the subject perceiving it.

Abrams' other classes of aesthetic theory are also relevant. *Mimetic theories* privilege the relationship between the universe and the work, seeing art as an imitation of something found in nature or, in some cases, in human culture or ideals. Abrams sees these as the oldest theories, and though seemingly "primitive," as representing a surprisingly complex and philosophically rich school of inquiry.[56] From Plato's "dazzling dialectic" of a three-fold imitation (art imitates the thing which imitates the ideal form of the thing) through Aristotle's taxonomic classification of types of imitation to Romantic models, Abrams traces the effort to connect art with something in the world upon which the art reflects. This aligns with the requirement above that the artistic

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[55] Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 15.

[56] Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 8 ff.

experience must include independent knowledge of the world in order to be comprehensible at all. This is certainly true in the linguistic and representational arts, where one must know what the thing itself is before being able to recognize its representation. It is also true in the abstract arts, where the formal interplay of elements makes sense only in the context of past experiences of such interplay at work. Further, this Whiteheadian theory is explicitly mimetic in its insistence that all art imitates the divine lure and the reality-making which it drives. The Whiteheadian addition here is to clarify that mimesis concerns not so much the relationship between the work and the universe as it does the relationship between the contemplator's experiences of both the work and the universe in his own subjectivity as he creatively orders them.

A similar addition would relate this Whiteheadian aesthetic to Abrams' other two categories, the *Expressive Theories* and the *Objective Theories*. Expressive theories emphasize the relationship of the work and its creator.

> The first test any poem must pass is no longer, 'Is it true to nature?' or 'Is it appropriate to the requirements either of the best judges or the generality of mankind?' but a criterion looking in a different direction; namely, 'Is it sincere? Is it genuine? Does it match the intention, the feeling, and the actual state of mind of the poet while composing?'[57]

Invoking Wordsworth's sentiment from the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, that poetry is the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," Abrams sees expressive theories focusing on the creator as having something to say. In some ways, Steiner's theory described in Chapter 1 is a theory of this sort. For Steiner, the expressivity of the artist lies close to the the essence of art, in

[57] Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 23.

the agonistic struggle of the artist to name after having been named, to create a secondary world inside the prior one.

Of course, none of this expressivity actually expresses absent a contemplator who receives and decodes it: It is finally up to the contemplator what to make of the things that seem to be expressed. That is, expressivity must be recognized as such, or it expresses nothing. Again, the contemplator takes the primary role in the process of reconstructing "expression" from the work, including whatever techniques of craft seem to encode sincerity, genuineness, intention and feeling, and from other knowledge about the artist. This Whiteheadian aesthetic attempts nothing like Kant's account of *genius* as the creative source or expressive purpose of the artist. Of course, these things are not irrelevant; but they are only pertinent as inscribed into the work itself or present to and included by the contemplator into the experience. The relationship of the artist to the work remains important, but only as food for the experience of the contemplator. The fruitful question of the expressive critic is one she asks as a contemplator: what is the creator (the actual artist or the posited creative voice immanent within the work) trying to say?

Objective theory is Abrams' name for an aesthetic system "which on principle regards the work of art in isolation from all these external points of reference, analyzes it as a self-sufficient entity constituted by its parts in their internal relations, and sets out to judge it solely by criteria intrinsic to its own mode of being."[58] These "art for art's sake" theories seek to safeguard the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the work from needing to be seen in relationship beyond anything but themselves. From a Whiteheadian perspective, such a desire is, strictly speaking,

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[58] Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 26.

nonsensical; nothing can exist without relations to other things. Art in particular requires many relationships, to the audience, the universe, and the artist, to be comprehensible at all. The virtue of objective theories, however, is the reminder they provide that the work itself can and perhaps should dominate the artistic experience over against the para-artistic associations that it will necessarily engender. Objective theories assist in disciplining the contemplator's admission of these para-artistic associations.

Abrams' own work focuses on the expressive, tracing the "development of the expressive theory" as a key to understanding how Romantic poetry and literature were conceived of, received, and interpreted. This is the "lamp" of his title, a metaphor for the poetic mind that projects into the world its expression of it. This is to be contrasted with the "mirror," a metaphor for the mimetic theories of 18th Century poesy and criticism. It also serves as a hedge against the ascendancy of the objective theories of the New Criticism and its excesses of art-for-art's-sake. The virtue of his scheme for the present purposes, however, is in the possibilities it opens for dynamic interplay. The validity of each of these modes means the artistic experience is a complex interplay of factors contributed by the work, the universe, the artist, and the audience. And while one of these dynamics may predominate in or focus any particular critical enquiry or school, all are lively and valid.

Abrams captures this system of theories in a figure:

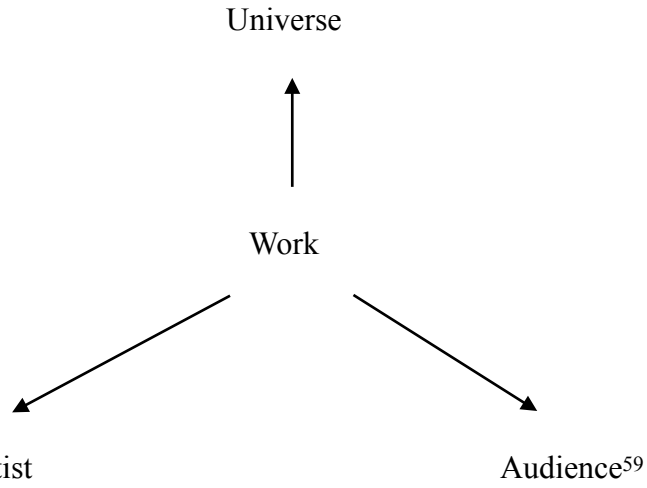

Figure 1. M.H. Abrams' model of interpretation.

A Whiteheadian approach coexists with it without too much conflict. Indeed, the insistence on dynamism makes it quite amenable. The introduction of Whitehead, however, reframes Abrams' scheme somewhat by the addition of a temporal vector: whatever the resonances between artist and work, work and universe, or work and audience, that audience sits downstream from the other elements, so to speak, all of which flow into her conscious process. Whiteheadian aesthetics will, in this sense, insist on the primacy — or better, the *finality* — of the process of the contemplator in the experience and interpretation of the work. Abrams aims to refocus a theory of interpretation on the expressive purpose and work of the creator. As centuries of interpretative practice attest, this is a fruitful focus of interpretation. A Whiteheadian aesthetics raises the question of just how the contemplator registers the marks of the authorial. On this account, expressive interpretations originate in the contemplator's reconstruction of the artist's voice felt within the work, along with historical and biographical data he has about the artist

[59] Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 6.

herself. The expressive intentions and impulses of the artist sit alongside sensory perceptions of the work and shape its interpretation. The same would be said of mimetic interpretations, substituting data about the relevant world for data about the artist. The primacy of the contemplator, however, should not be missed as the cauldron in which the smelting occurs.

Perhaps a Whiteheadian re-working of Abram's figure might look something like this:

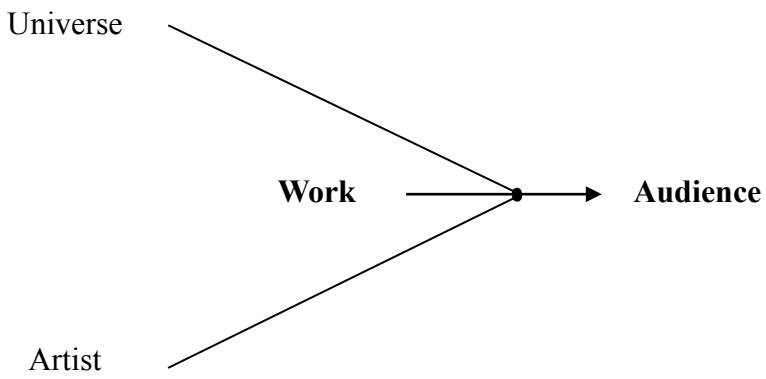

Figure 2. A Whiteheadian amendment to Abrams.

The primary relationship here is between the work and the contemplator. The experience of that relationship, as it unfolds in a series of actual occasions in the creative process of the contemplator, is the artistic experience. But it may admit anything the contemplator chooses from either the artist or the universe in the attempt to render the work more comprehensible and the experience of it more intense in the diversities it unifies.

The rest of this dissertation aims at supporting this way of understanding art with testimony from artists themselves, in this case, playwrights. In a sense, it engages in a very theoretical kind of expressive reading. The goal will be to inductively abstract from theater

works the theories their playwrights put forth about the workings of their works. While the systematic articulation of a Whiteheadian aesthetics is possible only after Whitehead, this understanding is un-systematically anticipated in earlier artists, particularly in response to contemporary social and cultural debates about the meaning and power of art. In this way, I hope to defend the claim that a Whiteheadian model of the workings of art — really, the workings of the contemplator in constructing an experience of the work — offers a *more adequate* understanding of art than aesthetic systems rooted on other metaphysics. That is, when we understand the experience of a work of art as the experience of the display of the coming-into-being of reality in microcosm, we have access to greater insight into the diverse elements it unifies and the unity it achieves. The following chapters will turn to these demonstrations.

As I have mentioned, these demonstrations will focus on the art of the theater. In one way, this could be seen as an arbitrary choice; if this Whiteheadian approach yields an adequate aesthetic theory, then it should be applicable to and demonstrable within any medium or genre of art. But the art of the theater and its cultural locations and functions over time lend themselves to a particularly clear set of demonstrations. In the first place, the theater has inspired cultural debates about the meaning and power of art that proceed in terms analogous to this Whiteheadian aesthetic. We will see this most clearly in Chapter 3 and its examination of the theater milieu of the English Renaissance, when the theater becomes the expressive battleground for truly mortal arguments over God and the role of creative providence in the governance of the world (both macro-cosmic and micro-) and in human destiny and moral significance. Hundreds of years

before Whitehead, both the artists of the theater and their detractors understand the workings of art in analogous terms, providing firm antecedents to this way of aesthetic thinking.

In Chapter 4, the modern theater's tradition of extreme self-consciousness, especially in the writings of Samuel Beckett, presents an opportunity to see art again define and defend itself. After World War II, the crisis of meaning in the nuclear age was felt both aesthetically and existentially: can the theater say anything, and is there anything to be said? Samuel Beckett used the theater to create the only kind of microcosm he thinks even minimally plausible, an envelope of near-nothingness and near-meaninglessness in which experiments about hope can be run. The drive to unity in these works express their own kind of perfect closure, even in foreclosure. Beckett is a stranger God than William Shakespeare or even Christopher Marlowe, a self-abnegating god of a world that means its near meaninglessness with heart-breaking poignance. As such, he reinforces the Whiteheadian aesthetic by linking his meta-theatrical rumination on the *how* of meaning with the thematic assertion of meaning's *what*.

Finally, in Chapter 5 we will explore the ways the strength of the theater in re-presenting the concrescence of desire, the Eros of the Universe, is central to artistic experience. Briefly to recapitulate what I said at the end of Chapter 1, the theater, given its foundation on the medium of embodiment, is an apt place to explore the place of desire in aesthetics. Indeed, the theater will be seen to contribute to the Whiteheadian aesthetic I will have put forward, in its demand that world take God's desire for beauty more seriously as the key metaphysical and theological concept.

CHAPTER 3
This Distracted Globe: The Theater and Its Detractors in Renaissance England

Yet I repeat once more: besides the specific doctrine of faith and repentance that sets forth Christ as Mediator, Scripture adorns with unmistakable marks and tokens the one true God, in that he has created and governs the universe, in order that he may not be mixed up with the throng of false gods. Therefore, however fitting it may be for man seriously to turn his eyes to contemplate God's works, since he has been placed in this most glorious theater to be a spectator of them, it is fitting that he prick up his ears to the Word, the better to profit.

- John Calvin[1]

The work of the previous two chapters has been to articulate a Whiteheadian aesthetics in the context of other signal modern theories. As I have mentioned, a key vulnerability to such a theory would seem to be its novelty, as though only with the publication of *Process and Reality* could art be understood aright. The work of the balance of the dissertation, therefore, is to demonstrate that, implicit within the native terminologies of aesthetic debates of other contexts and encoded in the works themselves are understandings of art that align with this Whiteheadian approach. The goal is to discover ways Whiteheadian categories restate explicitly what has long been argued implicitly, at least by some artists. If Steiner is correct, that art is always felt as a lovingly rage-filled struggle between two creators, one subsequent, local, and human and the other prior, comprehensive, and divine, then we should be able to find evidence of this struggle everywhere. What has generally lacked was a connection between that struggle and a larger metaphysical understanding of reality that renders the struggle philosophically significant. Whitehead's cosmology provides such an understanding.

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[1] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion Volume 1*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 72.

In this chapter, we see the playwrights of the English Renaissance encoding their own struggles for dominance as creators of circumscribed worlds, discovering retrospective openings for Whitehead's system. In Chapter 4, we see in the theater of Samuel Beckett a similar struggle to articulate significance, in a context where both existential and artistic meaning has been called into doubt, aiming to unify diversities in a world nearly devoid of purpose or beauty. Finally, in Chapter 5 we will wonder what additions, refinements, or emphases these theater works would suggest for an expansion of either the theory as I have proposed it or even for Whitehead's cosmology itself.

The aesthetic debates of Renaissance England face a fundamental obstacle in the loss of confidence in the relationship between sign and thing, between appearance and reality. As we will see, this anxiety combines many threads. But aesthetically the clearest version is in the Reformation debate over transubstantiation and the eucharist: how can one thing stand in for another, like bread for the body of Christ, or Richard Burbage for Hamlet, prince of Denmark? As Steiner argues, in a culturally Christian context, the question of aesthetics is the question of the eucharist, the question of real presence. For the Reformers too, the question has a metaphysical dimension, how "*is* means *is*," as Luther would have it, or Zwingli's refinement, how "*is* means *represents*." The doctrine they criticized, *transubstantiation,* is explicitly metaphysical, a claim that the sensible form of the elements (*accidents* in the Thomistic terminology) remain constant while their metaphysical essence (*substance*) is transformed from that of bread and wine into that of the mystical body and blood of Christ. These Reformation

debates elided metaphysics into aesthetics, reducing the distance between the study of reality and the study of appearances. They lead into the territory we will explore.

In *On The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) Luther argues that, contra the Thomistic doctrine, it is permissible to believe "the bread and wine on the altar are real bread and wine."[2] While at first he claims to wish to "allow anyone to hold whichever opinion he prefers" — merely *opinion* because it lacks scriptural warrant — Luther argues his own view with characteristic vigor. Transubstantiation to him is an Aristotelian foolishness, entailing inconsistencies (why does the flesh of the Virgin not likewise become transubstantiated to contain Christ?) and loose ends (why is a "trans-accidentation" not required to accompany transubstantiation?).[3] His resolution is to create an analogy between the presence of Christ in the elements and the presence of the Son (the second person of the trinity) in the incarnation, the doctrine of the dual natures of Christ:

> Thus what is true in regard to Christ is also true in regard to the sacrament. It is not necessary for human nature to be transubstantiated before it can be the corporeal habitation of the divine, and before the divine can be contained under the accidents of human nature. Both natures are present in their entirety, and one can appropriately say: "This man is God"; or, "This God is man." Though philosophy cannot grasp it, yet faith can. The authority of the word of God goes beyond the capacity of our mind. Thus, in order that the true body and the true blood should be in the sacrament, the bread and wine have no need to be transubstantiated, and Christ contained under the accidents; but, while both remain the same, it would be true to say: "This bread is my body, this wine is my blood," and conversely. That is how I would construe the words of divine Scripture and, at the same time, maintain due reverence for them. I cannot bear their being forced by human quibbles, and twisted into other meanings.[4]

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[2] Martin Luther, "The Pagan Servitude of the Church" in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings,* ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), 266.

[3] Luther, "Pagan Servitude," 268-9.

[4] Luther, "Pagan Servitude," 270.

Luther resolves the "quibbling" of the Thomists by appeal to the mystical and supra-rational realm of revelation: "Though philosophy cannot grasp it, yet faith can." In part, the appeal to Whitehead is an appeal to a philosophy that can indeed grasp it. But even in the period in question, there were philosophers of art — that is, the playwrights of the English stage — who also understood better, and without recourse to the black-box metaphysics of mystical transubstantiation, how a thing can participate in what it both is and is not. I will seek to demonstrate this in what follows in three steps: first, an examination of the social struggles over the theater in Renaissance England, particularly in their religious and critical aspects; second, a broader view of the Renaissance intellectual trend toward perspectivalism that made truth seem both more precise and more problematic; and third, the Reformation theology that, in seeking to re-establish certitude, created the context in which theatrical expression were both most articulate and most threatening.

The Polemic Against the Theater and its Self-Defense

On September 2, 1642 the English Parliament issued "An Order of the Lords and Commons concerning Stage-playes," closing the theaters of London and ending the most productive period of writing for the stage that the English language has known:

> Whereas the distressed Estate of Ireland, steeped in her own Blood, and the distracted Estate of England, threatned with a Cloud of Blood, by a Civill Warre, call for all possible meanes to appease and avert the Wrath of God appearing in these Judgements; amongst which, Fasting and Prayer having bin often tried to be very effectuall, have bin lately, and are still ejoyned; and whereas publike Sports doe not well agree with publike Calamities, nor publike Stage-playes with the Seasons of Humiliation, this being an Exercise of sad and pious solemnity, and the other being Spectacles of pleasure, too commonly expressing laciuious Mirth and Levite: It is

> therefore thought fit, and Ordeined by the Lords and Commons in this Parliament Assembled, that while these sad Causes and set times of Humiliation doe continue, publike Stage-Playes shall cease, and bee forborne. Instead of which, are recommended to the people of this Land, the profitable and seasonable Considerations of Repentance, Reconciliation, and peace with God, which probably may produce outward peace and prosperity, and bring againe Times of Joy and Gladnesse to these Nations.[5]

As Martin Butler is quick to point out, it is less clear than is commonly thought that this closure was seen at the time either as permanent or as having a simple theological motivation.[6] The language of the act itself contemplates a temporary, if indefinite, closure, "…while these sad Causes and set times of Humiliation doe continue…." The popular theaters had been closed frequently since their rise in the mid 16th Century due to outbreaks of both plague and civil unrest.[7] Indeed, the provision of back pay to the King's Men in 1646 and the delay in pulling down the major theaters until the 1650s seem to imply that the closure was only seen as absolute after the fact.[8]

Likewise, the motive cannot be reduced simplistically to Puritan moralism about the stage. The theater was much less a gathering place for "a great sort of ydle Persons, doing nothing but playing and loytring, having their livings of the sweat of other Mens browes"[9] in the 1630s than it had been fifty years earlier. The theater's audience had by then split between the

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[5] Quoted in Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage: Dramatic Companies and Players* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), vol. II, 690.

[6] Martin Butler, "The Condition of the Theatres in 1642" in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre Volume 1: Origins to 1660*, ed. Jane Milling and Peter Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[7] For data on the closures, see the Chronology in Milling and Thompson, *Cambridge History* and "The Closing of the Theatres Because of Plague" in Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 652 ff.

[8] Butler, "Condition of the Theatres," 441. I am indebted to Butler *passim* for this cursory history.

[9] Phillip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, quoted in Diana E. Henderson, "Theatre and Controversy, 1572-1603," in Milling and Thompson, *Cambridge History*.

large public houses like the Rose and the Globe and the indoor, highbrow theaters such as the Blackfriars and the Drury Lane Cockpit, which mitigated the threat of miscegenation and disorder that had seemed so vivid in the earlier period. Further, given the expansion of the patronage system during the reign of James I (1603-1625), the closing of the theaters can be seen as much a blow against the culture of monarchy as an attack on the theater's depravity. Of course, the monarchy and the theater participated in the self-same sin to Cromwell's theocratic effort.

Nevertheless, a frontier had been crossed, and we can trace much of the motivation for that crossing back to the charges of moral corrosiveness leveled at the theater for over half a century. Butler summarizes this tracing:

> September 1642 … has … frequently been regarded as a moment redolent with ideological symbolism, which brought to a head enmities that had long existed between the drama and those who were hostile to it on grounds of religion or morality. Not only was playing discontinued by order of Parliament, but the directive — with its emphasis on the need for fasting and prayer, and its assertion that 'lascivious mirth and levity' were ill-suited to times of 'sad and pious solemnity' — resonated with the discourse of puritan anti-theatricalism. [10]

The roots of these enmities lay in the anti-theatrical rhetoric of the 1570s and '80s and their analysis of the aesthetic mechanisms of the theater, especially when seen in light of the broader cultures of humanism and Calvinism in which the controversy is steeped. Buried beneath the accusations of "lascivious mirth and levity" lay theories about the theater as a factory of lies and a tool of the devil, a microcosm that perverted the moral structure of the circumscribing world. To its detractors, the theater was an anti-church, and its plays were sacraments of moral

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[10] Butler, "Condition of the Theaters," 440.

wreckage. Playgoers were at risk of moral and spiritual corruption, placed there by each feature of the playgoing experience.

The publication of religious pamphlets and tracts was something of a cottage industry in Elizabethan England, and a chief target was the moral disaster of the stage. But the anti-theatrical polemicists were themselves a "great sort of … persons": not all were puritan preachers, though many were, and as Peter Lake (with Michael Questier) document, the anti-theatrical controversies of the 16th Century are complex, arising from multiple motivations and serving multiple ends.[11] As London became a center of cheap printing, disposable income, and leisure activity, its culture became embroiled in a battle over the moral and economic loyalties of its citizens. Entertainments such as bear baiting and this thriving pamphlet industry proliferated along side the theater, each commanding an increasing share of the time and money of the citizenry.

> What was at stake here was in part how Londoners spent their disposable income: at one point in the dedicatory epistle to his *A Godly Exhortation* [John] Field almost admitted as much. As we have seen, like the other anti-theatrical pamphleteers Field contrasted the image of full theatres with that of empty churches…. Field merely wanted to increase his market share, swelling those at his sermons at the expense of the crowds at the theatre and to do so, if necessary, by official fiat.[12]

For the first time, the church did not command exclusive authority over the people's Sabbath time. As "market share" moved increasingly toward the secular diversions, London's divines became actively focused on motivating or legislating a reversal. Although it would be too cynical to suggest that their chief motivation was economic competition, this shift of audience frames the

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[11] Peter Lake with Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

[12] Lake with Questier, *Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, 502-3.

terms of the attack that follows in the minds of the preachers and pamphleteers who waged it. As the public seemed to shift its loyalties from church to theater, the theater came to look increasingly like the church's competition, its alternative, and finally its opposite, an anti-church for the antichrist.

What perhaps begins in part as a matter of market share is quickly interpreted in the starkest moral terms. "Theatres, in short, were 'a consultory house of Satan'; the 'chapel of Satan,' the 'schoolhouse of Satan, and chapel of ill counsel.'" [13] They were "those schools of vice, dens of thieves and theatres of all lewdness," and plays "the sacrifices of the devil, taught by himself to pull us from the service of our God."[14] Arising out of this context of competition, the opposition to the theater came to be seen primarily in theological terms, a stand against a chief new tool of Satan.

As the theater's trumpets began to drown out the church's bells, the terms of the criticism became likewise polarized. Diana E. Henderson offers the example: "Professional competition clearly aggravated their moral indignation. As John Stockwood lamented in a 1578 sermon, 'Wyll not a fylthye playe, with the blast of a Trumpette, sooner call thither a thousande, than an houres tolling of a Bell, bring to the Sermon a hundred?'"[15] This represents a further development in the argument, which evolves in sets of contrary moral pairings. As the church taught virtue, the theater taught vice. As the church was the communion of the saints, the theater was the rabble of the damned. And the receding of the church before the theater's advance

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[13] Lake with Questier, *Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, 429.

[14] Thomas White and Stephen Gosson, respectively, quoted in Lake with Questier, *Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, 428.

[15] Henderson, "Theatre and Controversy," 243.

betokened the advance of Satan against Christ in the world. Or as Phillips Stubbes says it: 'The Lord our God hath ordained his blessed word and made it the ordinary mean of our salvation, the devil hath inferred the other, as the ordinary mean of our destruction."[16]

These polarized points of comparison soon give the crisis a mirror-world construction:

> The starkness of the contrast being drawn between the two houses or realms might be taken as evidence of precisely the contrary of what was being protested rather too stridently by these authors. Rather than proof of the dissimilarity of the cultural and institutional distance between the godly pulpit and the stage, such passages can, in fact, be taken as a sure sign of their structurally parallel relationship to a culturally and socially mixed, 'popular' metropolitan audience for the attention of which the stage and pulpit were rivals.[17]

"These authors," the anti-theatrical polemicists, in demonstrating the wicked oppositeness of their theatrical rivals end up sketching a series of structural parallels. That is, the stage came to be understood to function in just the same way, albeit in the opposite moral direction, as the pulpit. Just as the preached Word of scripture had power, so did the acted lines of the plays. Their equal but opposite power derives point by point from the structural analogs: prompt-book for bible, stage for pulpit, actor for preacher, audience for congregation, trumpet for bell. The theater is seen to replicate the church point for point, with the same mechanisms and the same measure of moral force, albeit in the contrary direction. And, it seemed, the theater was winning.

This makes clear the underlying structure of the controversy. The anti-theatrical writers attack the theater on multiple levels: the shallowest is an attack based on the moral depravity of theater people, both players and playgoers; a deeper attack concerns the moral content of the

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[16] Lake, *Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, 429.

[17] Lake with Questier, *Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, 429.

plays, the "horrible enormities" that comprised the action so often staged.[18] But these merely reinforce this deepest attack, that the corrupting force of the theater roots in its form of representation. The theater is an anti-sacrament, not just in the sense that its aim is profanity rather than sacredness, but also in that it inverts, reverses the polarity of, the tools of sacrament. As the means of the church present and represent the offer of salvation, so the means of the theater present and represent temptation to perdition.

Stephen Gosson, himself a playwright turned polemicist and eventually preacher, makes this utterly clear in discussing a play by George Buchanan, whose matter was the biblical story of Herod, Salome, and John the Baptist:

> If it should be played one must learn to trip it like a lady, in the finest fashion, another must have time to whet his mind unto tyranny, that he may give life to the picture he presenteth, whereby they learn to counterfeit and so to sin. Therefore whatsoever such plays as contain good matter are set out in print may be read with profit but cannot be played without a manifest breach of God's commandment.

Lake draws the conclusion, "And here, of course, we approach the essence of the case against the theatre. For however much it might ape or attempt to portray onstage the workings of divine providence and grace on a sinful and a fallen humanity, claiming thereby to edify and instruct the onlookers, the very pretence involved in playing could only serve to undermine any such claims to moral authenticity or value."[19] The biblical character of Salome could not be presented onstage in an edifying way, because the sheer act of the presentation rendered it sinful. The difference between the actor and the preacher, their parallel power notwithstanding, and even in moments when each spoke words of equal virtue, was that the preacher was who he portrayed

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[18] A sermon by Thomas White, quoted in Lake with Questier, *Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, 441.

[19] Lake with Questier, *Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, 443, including the Gosson quote.

himself to be, and the actor was not. The lying medium gainsaid whatever virtue was in the message to begin with. Simply to play was to infect all of one's words and actions with the stain of counterfeit and sin, its own kind of transubstantiation masking the essence of vice in the accidents, the clothing, of virtue. In perverse agreement with sacramental Christian theology and its anti-Donatist doctrine *ex opera operato*, the moral character of the one who performed the (anti-)sacramental act was irrelevant to its efficacy.[20] No matter how virtuous the theatrical celebrant, the theatrical act conferred damnation regardless.

That this formal attack was the most profound can be seen in Philip Sidney's response to Gosson. Humanistically trained like Sidney, Gosson dedicated his first major anti-theatrical tract, *The School of Abuse*, to him in the hope of finding a kindred spirit.[21] But Sidney's own tract, *An Apology for Poetry* (ca. 1583), is often seen in part as a direct response to Gosson's presumption. Sidney is likely rebutting Gosson directly in his refutation of the third of his "most important imputations laid to the poor poets," that poetry is "the nurse of abuses, infecting us with many pestilent desires, with a siren's sweetness drawing the mind to the serpent's tail of sinful fancy."[22] Against Gosson's charge that artistic representation is necessarily immoral because dishonest, Sidney defends imaginative expression. Sidney argues that poetry, like medicine or law, can be used for either good or ill.

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[20] Donatism held that the efficacy of the sacrament depends on the moral character of the priestly officiant; a traitorous priest could not offer a valid sacrament. The canonical response held that the validity of the sacrament derived only "from the working of the work," *ex opera operato.*

[21] As A. C. Hamilton puts it, "The *Defence* might have been occasioned by the attack on poetry in Gosson's *School of Abuse* (1579), or by the dedication of that work to Sidney, which provoked him not to answer Gosson specifically but Plato and all after him who had spoken against poetry" (A. C. Hamilton, *Sir Philip Sidney: A Study of his Life and Works* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977], 107).

[22] Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Forrest G. Robinson (New York: MacMillan, 1970), 55.

> For I will not deny but that man's wit may make poesy (which should be *eikastike*, which some learned have defined, figuring forth good things) to be *phantastike*, which doth contrariwise infect the fancy with unworthy objects…. But what, shall the abuse of a thing make the right use odious?[23]

Sidney insists that poetry is formally neutral. The moral telos of poetry, good or ill, depends on the matter depicted, whether "good things" or "unworthy objects." Foolish or profane matter should be avoided absolutely, because poetry's power of delight will amplify a wicked lesson as surely as a just; but poetry itself is defended precisely because of the power of this delight, that it might be used for edification.

Reading further, however, we begin to see Sidney more ambivalent about the potential for good in "Our tragedies and comedies (not without cause cried against)…."[24] Sidney praises *Gorboduc* (though with tongue in cheek) as "full of notable morality, which it doth most delightfully teach, and so obtain the very end of poesy…." Given the earlier criterion, that it contain "good things" rather than "unworthy objects," *Gorboduc* is edifying poetry. It is nevertheless flawed: "…yet in troth it is very defectious in the circumstances, which grieveth me, because it might not remain as an exact model of all tragedies." This is because it violates Aristotle's unities of time and place. "For where the stage should always represent but one place,

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[23] Sidney, *Apology*, 59-60. As Robinson explains in the footnote to this passage, "*Eikastike* ('imitative,' the creation of a perfect likeness) and *phantastike* ('fanciful,' the creation of a semblance) are terms which appear in Plato's *Sophist*, 235-36. The distinction between likenesses and mere semblances leads to the conclusion that artists and sophists do not create perfect images of things, but deal with fanciful illusions, at two removes from the truth. In Sidney's usage, however, the terms are not used to explain the proximity of images to their models, but to make a moral distinction between 'figuring good things' and presenting 'unworthy objects.'"

[24] As Ronald Levao argues, Sidney's overarching metaphysical framework is rooted in a "paradoxical" version of Renaissance neoplatonism. However, when Sidney turns to stage plays, he appeals to Aristotle's categories for the standards of a proportionate and edifying art. (Ronald Levao, "Sidney's Feigned *Apology*," in *Sir Philip Sidney: An Anthology of Modern Criticism*, ed. Dennis Kay [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987], 127-146.) In general, studies of the *Apology* treat Sidney's overall philosophical and rhetorical approach while mostly ignoring the specifics of his treatment of the stage or its mechanisms of representation.

and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, both by Aristotle's precept and common reason, but one day, there is both many days and many places inartificially imagined."[25] In Sidney's appraisal, *Gorboduc's* failure to be good theater threatens its success in containing good poetry.

Further, for Sidney, *Gorboduc* is the best of the lot: "But if it be so in *Gorboduc*, how much more in all the rest? where you shall have Asia of the one side, and Afric of the other, and so many other under-kingdoms, that the player, when he cometh in, must ever begin with telling where he is, or else the tale will not be conceived."[26] Nor is Sidney's mockery confined to the failure of the English stage to honor the unity of place. He lambastes the Elizabethans' mis-staging of time ("After many traverses, she is got with child, delivered of a fair boy, he is lost, groweth a man, falls in love, and is ready to get another child, and all this in two hours' space"), action ("…they must not [as Horace saith] begin *ab ovo*, but they must come to the principal point of that one action which they will represent") and genre ("…how all their plays be neither right tragedies, nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns …, so as neither the admiration and commiseration, nor the right sportfulness, is by their mongrel tragic-comedy obtained").[27] For Sidney, the representations of the stage will tolerate only such latitude as allows Thebes to be Thebes, but not such as allows it also to be Asia or Afric, twenty years past or twenty years hence, or simultaneously tragedy and comedy, admiration and sport. Sidney's version of Aristotle undervalues the theatricality of the Greek stage, thinking it more poetry than theater and

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[25] Sidney, *Apology*, 74-5.

[26] Sidney, *Apology*, 75.

[27] Sidney, *Apology*, 76-77.

expecting of it more a portrait than a stage piece, more oratorio than opera, so to speak.[28] Sidney's model is one of staged oratory, "full of stately speeches and well sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca his style."[29] Under the rubric of *poetry* he construes the theater more narrowly than Sophocles — as much choreographer and composer as poet — might have allowed.

More to the point, Sidney clearly undervalues the essentially theatrical vitalities of the emerging *Elizabethan* stage. While the monuments of the Elizabethan period (*The Spanish Tragedy*, *Arden of Feversham*, and the plays of Marlowe and the early Shakespeare, for example) are yet unwritten, these vitalities are already clear in the early 1580s when Sidney is writing.[30] Sidney decries exactly that which makes the Elizabethan theater preeminent in its day as both popular diversion and art form: the nearly limitless plasticity of the Elizabethan playhouse to stage open combat, hidden intrigue, and secret love; childhood, youth, maturity, and dotage; society's sweep from high to low, rude mechanicals and sweet princes alike. His famous

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[28] Aristotle himself is appreciative of these theatrical elements, but still lists them last among the elements of tragedy: "Of the remaining elements Song holds the chief place among the embellishments. / The Spectacle has, indeed, an emotional attraction of its own, but, of all the parts, it is the least artistic, and connected least with the art of poetry. For the power of Tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors. Besides, the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet" (Aristotle, *Poetics*, in *Criticism: The Major Texts,* ed. Walter Jackson Bate [Miami: Wolf Den Books, 2004], 22).

[29] Sidney, *Apology*, 75.

[30] Examples include: The transitional interludes of the 1540s and 50s like *The Four PP* of John Heywood and Mr. S's *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, while comedically grotesque in Sidney's terms, are also full of slapstick and stage business, putting Chaucerian humor into a morality play format. Sidney's own example, Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton's *Gorboduc* (1561), though deserving of some of Sidney's mockery, is boldly theatrical in its use of dumb show at the start of each act to move along the story. Thomas Preston's *Cambyses, King of Persia*, (late 1560s) stages fights (including a murder and flaying), romance, and direct addresses to the audience; although it was universally mocked (including by Shakespeare in the "Pyramus and Thisby" scenes acted by Bottom and the rude mechanicals) it was also extraordinarily popular and spectacularly theatrical. And finally, John Lyly's *Gallathea* (mid-1580s) is replete with on-stage alchemical business, songs and fairy shows, disguises, and an enchanted wood reminiscent of (and inspiration for) those of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. See Russell A. Fraser and Norman Rabkin, ed., *Drama of the English Renaissance Vol. I: The Tudor Period* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976).

principle, that the poet "nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth," finds its limit in the purported times and places of contemporary plays, whose non-affirmations he declares lies on their face. And so, implicitly, Sidney finally rejects the representations of the stage altogether. The theater is finally not covered by Sidney's defense.

The theater's representative capacity which Sidney ultimately, if implicitly, rejects is the same capacity as the one that Gosson and the other polemicists condemn. At first glance, Sidney's problem with the stage is that, the instant it strays beyond simple and mostly verbal action that is displayed in real time in a single place, it becomes ridiculous and absurd. This is the force of his mockery in the Asia and Afric passage quoted above. A sentence later, still full of sarcasm, he complains, "Now ye shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and by we hear news of shipwreck in the same place, and then we are to blame if we accept it not a rock." Then, "how absurd it is in sense, even sense may imagine, and art hath taught, and all ancient examples justified…." And again, "So falleth it out, that having indeed no right comedy, in that comical part of our tragedy we have nothing but scurrility, unworthy of any chaste ears, or some extreme show of doltishness, indeed fit to lift up a loud laughter, and nothing else." The purported representations of the contemporary stage strain credibility and exaggerate what can be discreetly represented out of any proportion. They are monstrous and grotesque, "gross absurdities." [31]

The monstrous disproportionality of the theater finally becomes for Sidney a moral failing, as his scornful tone has implied throughout. Here, grotesqueness leads quickly to deeper

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[31] Sidney, *Apology*, 75-78.

problems, "scurrility, unworthy of any chaste ears." This becomes clearest in his discussion of comedy, which the Elizabethan stage exemplified, in his judgment, in only the most defective and improper way. "But our comedians think there is no delight without laughter." Although Sidney admits that laughter can stem from the delight that is proper to comedy, it generally derives instead from the grotesque. "We laugh at deformed creatures, wherein certainly we cannot delight," and "the scornfulness of the action stirreth laughter."[32] Laughter is chiefly the sign of an abomination for Sidney, a perversion of nature out of sorts, and so the contemporary comedy, no comedy at all in Aristotle's sense for Sidney, had swallowed up tragedy as well, in which the grotesqueness of the stage itself functioned in parallel to the grotesqueness of "such scornful matters as stirreth laughter only." Sidney remarks that "the great fault even in that point of laughter, and forbidden plainly by Aristotle, is that they stir laughter in sinful things, which are rather execrable than ridiculous: or in miserable, which are rather to be pitied than scorned."[33] At the end, what makes us laugh in the theater, at least in the defective theater of Sidney's day, is generally the execrable nature of sinful things and the misfortune of others. While at first his general point against the theater is that it is ridiculous, he seems closer here to saying that its ridiculousness implies its sin.

This becomes explicit in the close of Sidney's discussion of the theater:

> But I have lavished out too many words of this play matter. I do it because, as they are excelling parts of poesy, so is there none so much used in England, and none can

[32] Sidney, *Apology*, 78-79.

[33] Sidney, *Apology*, 79.

> be more pitifully abused; which, like an unmannerly daughter, showing a bad education, causeth her mother poesy's honesty to be called into question.[34]

While Sidney seems to include dramatic works under the umbrella of the poetry he wishes to defend according to the classical delineation, he ultimately separates the poetical in drama from the theatrical, the lines from their staging. The stage play is the bastard offspring of an honest mother, poetry, and a seductive rake, the theater. As a bastard, she herself is incapable of behaving well, and her own wantonness besmirches the family honor. By calling poesy's *honesty* into question, Sidney seems to imply every sense of this complex Elizabethan word: reputation, chastity, integrity, and finally virtue. The folly of theatrical representation seems finally to vitiate its morality: it begins ridiculous, becomes grotesque, and then execrable, and finally dishonest. It is only a small step — and perhaps a logically necessary one — to the realization that whatever vitiates morality is never merely folly (for we become fools *for Christ*), but wickedness. As soon as the stage does that which is most essential for it to do, it invalidates all defense, abuses its audience, and calls into question the honesty of all poetry. And so Sidney's defense, in these terms, succeeds only if he can cut off the theatrical from the poetic, like a gangrenous foot from an otherwise salvageable leg.

The larger point is that, as we can see both in Gosson's attack and more deeply through Sidney's traitorous defense, the very *theatricality* of the theater is what becomes seen as its most pernicious threat. No matter the morality of the content, the piety of its lessons, or the beauty of its verse, the very act of embodying character and portraying action on stage implicated both players and audience in the foulness of idle playing. Early-day MacLuhans, the polemicists

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[34] Sidney, *Apology*, 80.

believed that no good message could come through so corrupt a medium. Henderson summarizes this nicely in her discussion of polemicist Anthony Munday. Like Gosson, Munday had himself been a playwright; unlike Gosson, Munday returned to it after his time as a pamphleteer played out. Speculating about his backslide, Henderson wonders, "What lured him back? Was it lewdness, drunkenness, idleness, or pride — all common charges against players, their audiences, and the very stories they represented onstage?" Was it the relative freedom to travel that patronized players enjoyed? She suggests a deeper answer:

> Munday may have been led back to his craft by the power of representation itself, a power acknowledged by both theatre's critics and defenders. As the temporarily reformed playwright remarked, 'Are not our hartes through the pleasure of the flesh; the delight of the eie; and the fond motions of the mind, withdrawen from the service of the Lord, & meditation of his goodnes?'.[35]

The matter of the play is finally irrelevant to its turpitude. That players were wanton and low, that the audiences were unruly, lascivious, and infested, and that the plots focused on lewd matters and lowly personages, all these were mere icing on the polemical cake, incidental fortifications for the central objection: That the theater dared to represent at all, that the stage dared to *impersonate* reality, to use Stephen Orgel's word, was already its sin and its condemnation.[36]

In order to make this basic point about the corrosive power of theatrical representation as understood by the polemicists, it might serve to look more closely at two aspects of theatricality that they found particularly objectionable, the staging of the world and the embodiment of

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[35] Henderson, "Theatre and Controversy," 244-5, where she also quotes Gosson's response to Munday's reprobation: "according to Gosson (1582), his fellow reformer Munday has returned, 'like ye dog to his vomite, to plays againe'."

[36] Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

character by actor. Examining the theater's creation of an alternative, theatrical cosmos, with its own space, time, and cosmology, inhabited by creatures subject to the stage's own god and native providence, will help to place front and center the touchpoints with the Whiteheadian aesthetics discussed in Chapter 2.

As we have already seen, Sidney's outrage at the modern stage is first provoked by his sense of its absurd peregrinations. A basic irony of the Elizabethan stage is that, in its lack of scenery, it is liberated rather than handicapped in its representation of place. As the courtier exits stage left from the king's throne room, the posse of murderers enters stage right onto what is now the forest lane. Indeed, it is only as the posse inhabits the space that it becomes the forest lane, carrying their space with them, as signified by their trappings and their talk of hiding behind this or that tree. For some short moment in a fast-paced production, the realities of "throne room" and "forest lane" can coexist on stage like two fog clouds rolling across, one receding as the other advances. Further, it is the mention of *tree* that makes it so. The words themselves conjure the reality, and the propertied actors create their space according to a fairly conventional code: flags and bucklers create a battle field, a chair creates a court, and two men looking across the audience side by side quickly sketch a cliff or the prow of a vessel at sea. This stage is capable of creating a dazzling variety of spaces and places; literally *anywhere* can be represented.[37]

These created spaces, these represented *anywheres*, become morally charged according to the moral vector of the play. A youth and a maid, alone together on stage, create an illicit space; two cloaked lords tarrying after the royal party leaves, a regicidal one. Arden has its Edenic

[37] This defining relationship of word and thing echoes the eucharistic controversy with which we began. Making the stage Arden wood simply by calling it so is not far removed from making bread into the body of Christ by the naming of it.

innocence; Faustus' study its infernal power-lust; Bartholomew Fair its gregarious tolerance. These spaces are all pervaded with the moral meaning inscribed by their playwrights. God's fiat, that *It is good*, does not govern the theatrical microcosm as it governs the circumscribing world. God's fiat is replaced by that of the playwright: "It is fair-and-foul," "It is a brave new world." The play's capacity to pervade its stage space — and by representation its world — with an alternative moral valence implied the profanation of all that God called good.

Take an example suggested by Stephen Greenblatt, the stage-space representations of Rome and Egypt in *Antony and Cleopatra*.[38] Shakespeare famously uses the respective territories of his title characters to further the thematic contrasts of masculine and feminine, reason and passion, war and love, in the great struggle of values that the play portrays. He endows on-stage Rome with martial, linear order; Egypt is staged as a space pervaded by amorousness, sensuality, and femininity. But of course, these are not the canonical associations of these places. Canonically, Rome is the historic seat of the Christendom as defined first by Paul's letter to its church and Egypt is the land of exile and God's deliverance of his chosen people.[39] Shakespeare commandeers Egypt and Rome, reinscribing them with a new story. They are no longer the realms of Pharaoh and St. Peter but of Cleopatra and Antony. And the domains of their moral energies are entirely reoriented according to the narrative needs of a profane playwright, not a holy God.

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[38] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, with a new preface (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 195.

[39] Masculine pronouns are used for the divine in this chapter to reflect the gendered naming conventions of the period.

Greenblatt explores the extreme limit of this cosmological profanation in the plays of Christopher Marlowe. Commenting on Tamburlaine's machine-like frenzy for the acquisition of territory, a *thing* that "cannot slow down or change course," Greenblatt writes:

> … Marlowe seems to be battering against the boundaries of his own medium: at one moment the stage represents a vast space, then suddenly contracts to a bed, then turns in quick succession to an imperial camp, a burning town, a besieged fortress, a battlefield, a tent. But then all of those spaces seem curiously alike. The relevant contrast is *Antony and Cleopatra* where the restless movement is organized around the deep structural opposition of Rome and Egypt, or *1 Henry IV* where the tavern, the court, and the country are perceived as diversely shaped spaces, spaces that elicit and echo different tones, energies, and even realities. In *Tamburlaine*, Marlowe contrives to efface all such differences, as if to insist upon the essential meaninglessness of theatrical space, the vacancy that is the dark side of its power to imitate any place. This vacancy — quite literally, this absence of scenery — is the equivalent in the medium of the theater to… the reduction of the universe to the coordinates of a map.
>
> > Give me a Map, then let me see how much
> > Is left for me to conquer all the world,
> > That these my boys may finish all my wants.
> > (*2 Tam* 5.3.4516-18)
>
> Space is transformed into an abstraction, then fed to the appetitive machine. This is the voice of conquest, but it is also the voice of wants never finished and transcendental homelessness.[40]

Marlowe's use of the space, as Greenblatt describes it, is yet more dangerous to a vision of the sacred world. What Shakespeare implies, Marlowe performs. For if Shakespeare can reinscribe the moral meaning of a place, perhaps the cosmos itself is, prior to inscription, vacant. Marlowe makes good on this threat, evacuating the space of Tamburlaine's world of its sacredness. Maps should lead one into the world; *Tamburlaine* reduces the world to a map. Sidney's anxiety, already applicable to Rome and Egypt, reaches its nihilistic extreme in *Tamburlaine*. Sidney

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[40] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning,* 195-96.

thought the anti-Aristotelian representation of multiple spaces rendered the drama ridiculous. I argued above that *ridiculous* must be seen finally to imply *wicked.* Marlowe, through his frenetic assault on the representation of space, actually moves beyond *wicked* to yet worse, *vacant*. In a wicked world, as the puritan divines well knew, God still held sway. But in a world whose deepest truths could be charted like coordinates on a map, or could be interchangeably displayed like so many properties on a stage, God would finally prove absent. Of course, as Greenblatt notes, Marlowe's deconstruction is aimed in both directions, battering against the stability of theatrical representation even as he renders vacant the space of the world. And here is where the theater's commandeering of reality becomes the most dangerous: unlike the world, the theater will rise again. The theater's *creatio ex nihilo*, and in Marlowe's case, its apocalypse, its *nihil ex creatione*, would play again the next day.

The immorality and, at the extreme, the vacancy of theatrical space was understood to be contagious. Going to the theater, one not only saw a morally reinscribed world but sat in it as well. The commandeering profanity did not stop at the edge of the thrust, but filled the entire theater. As the preacher's words filled the church, the actor's filled the playhouse, and to abide for even a short time in this immoral space made one a permanent resident. For example, Stephen Gosson tells how the lewd transactions of the stage spill into the audience, who then carry forth into the city.

> …vice is learned with beholding,… and those impressions of mind are secretly conveyed over to the gazers, which the players do counterfeit on the stage. As long as we know ourselves to be flesh, beholding those examples in theaters that are incident to flesh, we are taught by other men's examples how to fall.
> …

> In the playhouses at London, it is the fashion of youths to go first into the yard and to carry their eye through every gallery; then, like unto ravens where they spy the carrion, thither they fly, and press as near to the fairest as they can. In stead of pomegranates they give them pippins; they dally with their garments to pass the time, they minister talk upon all occasions, and either bring them home to their houses on small acquaintance, or slip into taverns when the plays are done.[41]

This is a common trope throughout the literature. Seeing bawdry onstage, inhabiting this space whose lascivious moral valence has become visible, leads audience members to repair to brothels and taverns immediately after the performance. Recall Anthony Munday: "Are not our hartes through the pleasure of the flesh; the delight of the eie; and the fond motions of the mind, withdrawen from the service of the Lord…?" Vision, the delight of the eye, is the gateway to apostasy.

Further, the theater was a general viewing gallery; although the main attraction was the onstage performance, the round hall allowed audience members to look at each other, theatricalizing one another and further drawing the onstage immorality into the stands. The spectacle invited the wandering gaze, like that of the youth who "carry their eye through every gallery," extending the moral reorientation of the space beyond the stage throughout the playhouse. The entire hall became a clearing through which prurient eyes could leer. And the moral taint, like lurid candlelight, colored the vision of the spectators, causing them — most willingly — to look only for the performance of vice. It is no wonder that lust, a particular sin of vision, was a chief presenting complaint of the polemicists.

Lake provides another example the connection between profane theatrical space and this prurient lust in a discussion of Philip Stubbes' screed against the exhibitionist pride and sartorial

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[41] Quoted in Tanya Pollard, ed., *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Sourcebook* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 108-109.

pomp of playgoers. For Stubbes, says Lake, "All these vectors of sin clustered together in and around the synecdoche of the theatre and the image of theatrical performance." For Stubbes, the theater was a perverse worship house dedicated to the concentrated display of vice. Lake describes the method by which this occurs for Stubbes:

> The theatre, indeed, was a temple built to the sensual pleasures and social values of illusory outward display. It provided the audience as much as the players themselves with an arena in which they could both see and be seen, experiencing, as they preened and promenaded, the inherently sexualised pleasures of watching others watching you, pleasures that were soon to be replicated and depicted on stage. Here was a hall of mirrors in which — as participants in a mixed and miscegenated social scene, where one could indeed be taken to be what one seemed or presented oneself to be — everyone could both perform and observe.[42]

Notice the inherently theatrical nature of the transaction: wickedness is spread by means of spectacle, by means of looking at another and seeing in his costume, in the raiment of his feigned identity, a model for oneself. This kind of leering required a cleared space, highly charged with sin and lust, both a temple (again, the "anti-church") and a hall of mirrors. This latter image is most telling, leading again to Marlowe's extremity: nothing is more vacant than a hall of mirrors. It contains no objective point of reference, no pre-existing standard or ethos, but only the distorted images of those who enter it. In the moral vacancy of the theater could be erected the mirrors of human vanity, where lascivious eyes could ogle and spy free from the obscuring haze of virtue. The hall of mirrors is a space in which the prurient sinner could finally see clearly the final object of his lust, his own damned self.

This has already led us to the second aspect of theatricality I wish to take up, the performance of personal identity. It is a commonplace of literary criticism to note the ways in

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[42] Lake with Questier, *Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, 465.

which the Elizabethan stage made the relationship of actor to character both a theme and a problem. For example, we often note the ways that Hamlet's direction of "The Mouse-Trap" and his "antic disposition" activate our awareness of Hamlet's own status as a character in a play, at the same time as it activates our awareness of the instability of identity generally. This feature of Elizabethan theatricality obsessed the polemicists, as well. In the same way that the theater seemed unseat God as the creator of the world, it seemed at the same time to unmake the human creature as a child of God.

The full force of this obsession is most clearly and quickly seen in the outrage over the peculiarly English maintenance of the transvestite stage. Stephen Orgel points out the oddity of this feature of English performance: "Actresses were, to be sure, a relatively new phenomenon in continental theaters, first appearing around the middle of the sixteenth century; but by Shakespeare's time they were a commonplace feature of the European stage…."[43] In England, however, women are forbidden to play throughout the period, and only begin to take the stage after the Restoration, nearly a century later. Orgel develops a sophisticated and suggestive explanation for why: the transvestite stage, alongside other instances of cross-dressing in the popular Elizabethan imagination, served a balancing, regulatory function in a time of anxiety around the reign of a woman who needed to be mannish and her successor, a man who was known for his men.[44] In the same way that the virgin queen used her sexuality to maintain a balance of power and security for the nation in a world of warrior kings, the transvestite theater

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[43] Orgel, *Impersonations,* 1-2.

[44] For further discussion, see Michal B. Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality* (Stroud, GB: Fonthill Media, 2016) or David M. Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999).

helped to modulate and coordinate gender roles more generally. Orgel argues that, in the ambiguity over whether a female character performed by an immature male actor makes the female more masculine or the male more feminine, room was found for the variations of human life, a progressive force for challenging gender roles. On the one hand, the homoerotic implications of the transvestite stage, obvious in the proxy love mechanics of *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, help to normalize the fact that "at the center of [royal] patriarchy, the obligations of patronage and homosocial bonding in fact took precedence over the sanctity of marriage."[45] On the other hand, the transvestite stage "enacts the dangerous possibility that is articulated in innumerable ways throughout this society, from gynecological theory to sartorial style, from the fear of effeminacy to the stage's translation of boys into women and women into boys: that women might be not objects but subjects, not the other but the self."[46]

To effect the opening of these progressive possibilities, however, was to destabilize the notion of settled identity. In a literature obsessed with themes of playacting, pretense, authenticity, and hypocrisy, every line spoken by a female character seems to reiterate the theatrical questions of sincerity that underlay the thematic ones. The theater's general equation of actor and role itself challenges the concept of stable identity, a challenge heightened by the customs of transvestite playing. The concept is nearly shattered when the theater used transvestitism, as it often did, in the most self-conscious way, not to ameliorate its own destabilizing effect but to exacerbate it.

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[45] Orgel, *Impersonations*, 133.

[46] Orgel, *Impersonations*, 153.

This happens perhaps most egregiously when characters who are female according to the play's representations cross-dress (back), impersonating males. Take, for example, the courtroom scene of *The Merchant of Venice* (1598). Portia, dressed as the learned Dr. Balthasar, enters two main male provinces, the court and, through her words, the church. In appealing to Shylock on Antonio's behalf, Portia invokes the most stereotypically Christian of doctrines against this most stereotypical of Jews, "The quality of mercy is not strained" (IV.i.184).[47] All the while homoerotically enacting her heterosexual love for Bassanio (remember, she is now "really" a boy dressed as boy), Portia preaches the gospel like a puritan divine. She uses all the quintessentially male virtues of the day — dialectical reason, dispassion, religious virtue, and a wily command of the law — to accomplish quintessentially male ends, the winning of a legal case and the conversion of a Jew. It is a severe challenge to gendered identity roles — as Shakespeare, his actors, and his audience all well knew— that Dr. Balthasar is really a woman. But, of course, the perennial joke is that everyone also knows that she is "really" a boy, who has either donned a second disguise or taken the first one off, depending on how one looks at it. The moment, like many throughout the literature, sets the question of identity on full tilt, needing to be reset before the play can continue, hence the long, straight and poetically straightforward love scene between Lorenzo and Jessica to begin Act V.

Needless to say, this cultivated instability causes endless outrage for the anti-theatrical polemicists (recall Gosson's censure of Buchanan's play, in which "one must trip it like a lady").

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[47] Note: Shakespearian citations all come from *The Riverside Shakespeare,* ed. G. Blakemore Evans *et al* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974). Given the many different editions of Shakespeare that readers may consult, however, I cite all quotations with reference to play, act, scene, and line rather than with footnotes citing specific page numbers in one particular edition. Dates reflect the entry of the play to the Stationers' Register.

It is no surprise that Stubbes, for whom sartorial pride and theatrical illusion were always linked at the center of the devil's schemes, focuses his ire on this theatrical device: "Our apparel was given us as a sign distinctive to discern betwixt sex and sex, and therefore one to wear the apparel of another sex is to participate with the same, and to adulterate the verity of his own kind. Wherefore these women may not improperly be called *Hermaphroditii*, that is, monsters of both kinds, half women, half men."[48] While the actor might be portraying a woman, he has himself stopped being even human, transformed into something else by his costume. Stubbes, wishing for a return to a simpler equation of appearance and identity, complicates things further, introducing a new term. The theater comes to have an almost magical capacity to transform boys into not only women, but monsters.

Or, to take another example, Orgel describes a later Jacobean tract, William Prynne's *Histriomastix*, that links this monstrous hermaphroditism explicitly to a homoeroticism that turns the natural order entirely inside out:

> In *Histriomastix* the transvestitism of the stage is especially dangerous because female dress is an important stimulant specifically to homoeroticism: the 'male priests of Venus' satisfy their companions, the 'passive beastly sodomites in Florida,' by wearing women's clothes, the 'better to elicit, countenance, act and color their unnatural execrable uncleannesses.' Heterosexuality here only provides the fetish that enables the true homosexual response to emerge. It is significant that the transvestite is not the passive one in this relationship."[49]

It is difficult even to trace the reversals sketched by this passage: the male priest of Venus, a goddess of feminine love, cross dresses as a woman and then penetrates his (her?) male, sodomite (catamite?) partner, in a heterosexually fetishized homoeroticism. Reversal after

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[48] Quoted in Orgel, *Impersonations*, 27.

[49] Orgel, *Impersonations*, 29.

reversal, thus, testify to Prynne of the monstrous unnaturalness of this Floridian play. The unnaturalness breaks every precept of virtue and tempts the onlookers to a general lust, all for all. Further, it destroys any sense of what one "really" is. In all of these polemics, the staging of gender reversal is absolutely corrupting, leading to despair of the possibility of spectators remaining in any true relationship to their own natures.

Throughout the literature, this voyeuristic corruption of personal identity strikes both genders. From the male side, the polemicists nurse a constant concern with the corruption of the young men of England, "young boys inclining of themselves unto wickedness, trained up in filthy speeches, unnatural and unseemly gestures, to be brought up by these school masters in bawdry and in idleness…,"[50] as Munday laments. To be sure, this concerns not only feminization: the anxiety also has to do with the "masterless" nature of the theatrical system. Many of the boy actors were free from an apprentice system that was seen both to teach them a trade and to keep them in order. Likewise, such anxiety was felt about their masterless masters, who, without royal patronage, were understood by law to be vagabonds.[51] However, masterlessness and transvestite effeminacy are intimately related in the "obligations of patronage and homosocial bonding." They cohere for Munday, as well: masterlessness leads to idleness, then to lewdness, then to perversion. For Gosson, the boys thus employed threaten all men: "The devil is not ignorant how mightily these outward spectacles effeminate and soften the hearts of

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[50] Munday, quoted in Lake with Questier, *Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, 457.

[51] In 1551, a "Royal proclamation requires all professional acting companies to be licensed" [Milling and Thomson, *Cambridge History*, xix].

men."[52] When boys played girls, both the boys and the male spectators were corrupted by the disguise. Lake summarizes the point nicely:

> And here, in the midst of [their] analysis of that corruption, was the theatre, mere contact with which was enough to turn the moral world upside down; turning children and servants against their masters and parents, wives against their husbands…and women into men and men into women 'or worse'. But then, what else could be expected from an institution that was staffed and run, from top to bottom, by beggars and vagabonds, masterless men and lascivious boys, devoid of any lawful calling, and which featured at the core of its public performances men and boys dressed up as women.

To look at "men and boys dressed up as women" on the stage became a proximate cause for the devil's corruption, exactly because of the power of theatricality to set aside nature. The theatrical spectacle had the power to "transnature" men into monsters, infecting the spectators with the very instability of natural identity that they viewed in the actors.

There is an equally sexualized danger to women. Munday warns about the temptation to wantonness that the staging of women presents to the women in the crowd.

> Some [men], by taking pity on the deceitful tears of the stage lovers, have been moved by their complaint to rue on their secret friends, whom they have thought to have tasted the like torment; … some, seeing by example of the stage player one carried with too much liking of another man's wife, having noted by what practice she hath been assailed and overtaken, have not failed to put the like in effect in earnest, that was afore shown in jest.[53]

The staging of eroticized gender proves a temptation — in some authors, a seemingly irresistible one — for women in the audience to transgress sexually. The theater created seductive predators, teaching them the practice necessary to overtake once-innocent maids and wives. Paranoid and nightmarish descriptions abound of audience members having intercourse (both heterosexual and

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[52] Quoted in Lake with Questier, *Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, 460-61.

[53] Quoted in Lake with Questier, *Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, 460.

homosexual) in the stand before and during the performance, or resorting to brothels and bawdry houses afterward. To see romance staged is, for the polemicists, tantamount to fornication. When it is the integrity of women at stake, anxiety over the transvestitism of the actor playing "another man's wife" recedes. The male actor becomes a hypersexual temptation to the female spectator; simply to look on him destroys a woman's chastity. She sees herself reflected in the female characters practiced upon by (and practicing on) the male, and then desires a like practice for herself. She sees young lovers, and then she takes one.

Upon the stage played Stubbes' *Hermaphroditii*, monsters of both kinds: the boy actor, like Satan himself, is a universal tempter, able to seduce both women and men. Stubbes anticipates in reverse the balance for which Orgel ultimately argues. For Orgel, the transvestite actor created room for the empowerment of both self-determined femininity and for homosocial masculinity. Masculinity and femininity are equally uplifted on Orgel's account. For Stubbes, each is corrupted, though still in equal balance. In questions of anthropological identity, as in questions of cosmology, the theatricality of the Elizabethan stage is merely and finally pernicious, and indeed infernal.

The Renaissance Crisis of Certainty and Perspective

This theatrical destabilization of the cosmos poses a further question: can only God create the world and govern its creatures in his providence? Or are the playwrights not functioning as creators (to the polemicists, Satanic creators) in their own right? The echoes of the Whiteheadian aesthetic developed in Chapter 2 should be sounding clearly. But before exploring these

questions in their theological dimensions, it makes sense to see the larger context of uncertainty in which the questions arise. This will serve to understand why these questions become the salient ones, and for both playwrights and the polemicists. Practical questions of certitude are already at work, creating general anxieties about the cosmos, God's sovereignty, and human nature. Appearances have become suspect, and so a dramaturgy of *seems* activates all the questions already in the air. The English stage is a signal locus for an intensified enactment of general cosmological and anthropological anxieties.

Some reasons for this are local to England, including the uncertainties of leadership under a "woman king" and the spycraft used by Catholic nations against this Protestant sovereign. As we shall see, deeper questions arise from general trends in Renaissance art and thought, reflecting both its optimism for and anxiety about new ways of seeing the world. In England, the question of the reliability of human appearance is in the first place a practical matter of political survival. After a generation of turbulent alternation between established Anglican Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, the Elizabethan settlement is an uneasy one.[54] Suspicions about secret Catholic plots against the Protestant queen — both domestic and continental, some fantastical and others quite real — led to a general paranoia. In response, the Queen's Privy Council employed spies, double agents, and phantom plots of their own to ferret out actual subversives

[54] Henry VIII, excommunicated in 1533, reigns as a Protestant king until his death in 1547. The reign of his minor son Edward VI (1547-1553) was overseen by regents who continued to consolidate Protestantism, reflecting Edward's own religious zeal but in a context of political uncertainty and infighting. The reign of Mary I (1553-1558) reestablishes Roman Catholicism in England after Thomas Wyatt's Protestant insurrection in 1554 and brutally represses Protestantism. Elizabeth I succeeds Mary in 1558 and reestablishes the Protestant Church of England with herself as its head with the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity.

both in England and abroad. Someone who seemed to be a Catholic conspirator, even imprisoned for the offense, might well turn out to be a loyalist agent, and *vice versa*.

Driving this secrecy was the problematic assumption behind the Elizabethan settlement: that conformity was a matter of behavior, and that tolerance would be extended at least so far as the interior life, the reality beneath behavior. David Riggs describes the atmosphere:

> It is an irony of political history that the Conformist policy of "not liking … to make windows into men's hearts and secret thoughts" led to a culture of secrecy and paranoia. As the plots and conspiracies of the 1580s fuelled anti-Catholic hysteria, the early Elizabethan equation between outward compliance and good citizenship came under an intolerable strain. What if external consent concealed inward treachery? One Protestant demagogue reasoned that conforming Catholics who "show to have a good outward carriage to civil matters" were actually "more dangerous" than recusants. By this paranoid logic, the flight of the Catholic exiles proved the *dis*loyalty of their co-religionists in England, for "By the plain profession of them that are fled the realm, and have … showed themselves in their colours, we may justly doubt the affection of those that remain with us; how demurely so ever they will show themselves."[55]

Allowing others to close the windows of their hearts only exacerbated curiosity and finally paranoia about what lay therein. For those who seemed to be conforming to the requirements of law and the expectations of society, once suspicion had fallen upon them, their very appearance of conformity was a sign of deviance. Appearing true and loyal to the Crown could itself be seen as proof of falsehood. Secret agency, and double- and even triple-agency, became favorite tools for infiltrating various suspect cohorts and ferreting out the truth. But the tool likewise backfired. If someone was amenable to serving as a secret agent, what assurance could the Lord Chamberlain have that the agent was not a double? The Elizabethan settlement, which allowed

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[55] David Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), 147.

the "reality" of a person's religious loyalty to be whatever it would so long as the appearance conformed to legal requirements, only created suspicion about the relation of the two.

This culture of political suspicion and intrigue neatly intertwined with the world of the theater.

> The question of what was inside a person and how to discover it bridged the novel professions of secret agent and playwright. Elizabethan plays taught their audiences to look for the inward truth beneath the outward show of theatrical presentation. Among the handful of dramatists that emerged in the 1570s and 1580s, George Gascoigne, Thomas Watson, Anthony Munday and Christopher Marlowe all combined the trades of intelligence gatherer and playwright. The plots and counterplots of this era taught Marlowe that spies and scriptwriters had a lot in common.[56]

There were practical advantages to using dramatists as spies. Their "masterless"-ness gave them a certain plasticity of social identity, an ability to trade between various roles as scribe, tutor, translator, house poet, and courtier, serving various masters by turn, fit for various errands and embassies. Players were freer than most to travel. The university training many of them carried (including Gascoigne, Marlowe, and perhaps Watson from Riggs' list) gave them enough background in theology, rhetoric, and the Classics to pass for whatever the mission required. And finally, of course, the dramatists knew how to act a role. The difference between actor and spy was marked by the frame of the stage. Because you were in a theater, you knew the actors were acting. Take him off a stage, and the playwright became a spy.

The practical consequences of rising anxiety about the reliability of appearances in England as a matter of survival is but one approach to the implications of the disintegration of certainty. There are others. The appropriation of classical dialectics for university education

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[56] Riggs, *Marlowe*, 156.

seemed to reduce eternal truth to mere "probability," the susceptibility of a given position to reasoned rhetorical defense.[57] The Calvinistic theology of England's divines, including the anti-theatrical polemicists, insisted on the inability of fallen human reason to access the final truths of the world and its Creator. And as Karsten Harries demonstrates, the legacy of thinkers like Nicholas of Cusa, Nicholas Copernicus, and Leon Alberti dislodged any idea of an absolute center, creating a world in which what one sees depends to a terrifying degree on the vantage point from which one looks.[58] Any number of intellectual trends converge on this same point of uncertainty and even paranoia, in which everything is a matter of perspective. But there are two advantages in first taking note of this most practical and political aspect. First, it focuses on the literal outward behavior of both the conformist Catholics and the many spies and double agents, and so clearly demonstrates the life and death consequences of severing the warrant behind the assumption that anyone is as they seem. Second, it directly implicates several seminal dramatists of the period, suggesting that the culture of the Elizabethan theater was entirely clear about these consequences. Many of the Elizabethan playwrights were imprisoned over these matters; Marlowe may well have been murdered because of them.

The emerging skepticism about the reliability of appearance came quickly to be a matter of philosophical and theological import. Doubts about appearance arise in questions about the stars in their seeming orbits and the vanishing point illusions of Renaissance painting. Language about vision, speculation, perspective, light, figure, semblance, and appearance become the dominant metaphors for the anxieties and skepticisms of the period. These metaphors so pervade

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[57] Riggs, *Marlowe*, 80 ff.

[58] Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).

rhetoric of the period's significant thinkers — politicians, theologians, polemicists, and playwrights alike — that they become a paradigm for the moment, to use Harries' word: "The understanding of the modern world presupposes first of all the reflection on the perspectival character of appearance. Such reflection has to lead to a distinction between appearance and reality."[59]

Harries summarily traces the steps toward skepticism. To distinguish appearance from reality invites a recourse to reason, free from the physical limitations of visual point of view. But to transcend an absolutist dependence on appearance in favor of a perspectival attempt at sub-facial reality requires self-awareness and self-reflection, which quickly leads to doubts about the security of reason's judgments. This leads to a further distinction between limited reason and infinite reason, ultimately a distinction between the human and the divine. God's infinite knowledge was understood to be inaccessible to human reason. Quickly, reason was understood to be just as bound to perspective, and in just the same way, as vision. So, Harries argues, the epistemological doubts of the Renaissance find their governing paradigm throughout the period in talk of seeing and of appearance, whose lessons are taught through the visual arts. The visual metaphor becomes pervasive.

Harries does not discuss the theater as theater, but he invokes it figuratively at several points in the service of this governing paradigm. Most extensively, Harries marshals the theater as a metaphor in his discussion of *The Ambassadors* (1533) by Hans Holbein the Younger.[60] Holbein's painting elaborately stages two French envoys to the court of Henry VIII standing on

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[59] Harries, *Infinity and Perspective*, 128, which also begins the summary I paraphrase next.

[60] Harries, *Infinity and Perspective,* 93-96.

either end of several shelves. The shelves are laden with a *tour de force* of perspectival emblems: globes of the earth and the heavens, navigational devices, a book of mathematics, a lute, and a Lutheran hymnbook. But what chiefly occupies Harries' attention is the distorted, anamorphic figure that dominates the foreground. When viewed head on, the figure seems merely interruptive, an elongated white mass connoting something dark but more or less indecipherable. Only when viewed from the side and below, from a particular point of view, does the figure become clear: it is a skull. As Harries points out, this is Holbein's witty signature (the name means "hollow bone," skull). Harries cautions against over-emphasizing the technique: "Anamorphic painting should not be taken too seriously. It is born of a love of tricks and games. But it is precisely this lightness that gives it a particular adequacy in an age that had learned to distrust the eye and had despaired of the adequacy of the visible to the divine."[61] Indeed as we have seen, the playful tricks of Renaissance art, especially in their clever self-consciousness, ask the most deadly serious of questions.

For Harries, this anamorphic skull is a perfect symbol for the basic paradox of the perspectival consciousness of the age. On the one hand, as he says, anamorphic painting makes the point that a shift in perspective could give access to new meanings and heretofore hidden truths, a window beneath the vanities and pretensions of life viewed on its surface, head on. "Anamorphosis thus would seem to function as a metaphor for the world, which first presents itself to us only as meaningless and confusing; only a change in point of view reveals its deeper order and meaning."[62] But on the other hand, anamorphosis itself is a device, an artifice, whose

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[61] Harries, *Infinity and Perspective*, 96.

[62] Harries, *Infinity and Perspective*, 96.

forced perspective is no more natural than the other surfaces in the work: "that such compositions call to our attention the power of perspective itself prevents us from trusting even the second point of view."[63] *The Ambassadors* thus becomes a profound but also troubling meditation on the lives depicted, a statement about the mortal limits of both human life and artificial perspective. The "particular adequacy" of the anamorphosis roots in its invitation to mistrust straightforward appearances and to look for truth askance or beneath.

To marshal Harries for the present argument, it is important first to understand the use he makes of the theatrical metaphor in his analysis. Otherwise, we risk mistaking his rhetorical use of the theater for more serious reflections upon it. *The Ambassadors* creates what Harries describes as a highly theatrical display: "the men pose before a green curtain, presenting themselves to us as actors on the stage of the world,"[64] complete with the properties of modernism on the shelves between them. This quality of staged theatricality, for Harries, suggests a judgment upon human vanity, which the skull makes explicit. Harries describes here a clash of artificialities, the anamorphic artifice forcing a shift in perspective that reveals the more mundane, and perhaps better disguised, artifice of the two envoys playacting their roles. The envoys standing like actors on a stage represent mere and vain illusion, requiring to be pierced through from a new perspective to be interpreted aright. With only one exception, Harries uses *theater* in this way, as a metaphor for inauthenticity. In a book concerned with the visual arts and their relationship to cosmology, this is perhaps a helpful metaphor, giving the author a way to verbalize the illusions with which perspectival Renaissance philosophy is obsessed.

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[63] Harries, *Infinity and Perspective*, 96.

[64] Harries, *Infinity and Perspective*, 93.

Unfortunately, this use of the theater as a metaphor obscures the ways in which the Elizabethan theater contained its own tricks of vantage-point, devices that functioned exactly as the anamorphic skull in *The Ambassadors*. In using "theater" in such a flat sense, Harries misses the anamorphic depth of the theater of the day.

Harries reveals the shallowness of this use of the theater most tellingly when he invokes Shakespeare to describe anamorphic technique, quoting *Richard II*: "As Shakespeare explains, 'rightly gazed upon,' such compositions 'show nothing but confusion; eyed awry' — that is, looked at from the side — they 'distinguish form'."[65] Harries here invokes Shakespeare as a cultural observer and his text as a cultural document, a contemporary explanation of how anamorphic painting worked. But, of course, Shakespeare was a playwright, one obsessed with questions of perspective and of self-revealing artificiality, and this description of anamorphosis comes through the mouth of a character in a stage play. Indeed, the anamorphic reference in *Richard II* (1597) comes in a scene that enacts its own anamorphosis.

In the scene in question, appearance and reality plays a central theme. The Queen, though having promised Richard to be happy after his departure so as to lay his heart at ease, continues in sorrow over both his absence and a mysterious premonition. The lines Harries quotes are given by Bushy, a courtier, encouraging the queen to disregard the "twenty shadows" of grief which attend grief's substance. Trick painting is his simile for the many images of sorrow we see fractured through our tears:

> BUSHY: Madam, your majesty is too much sad:
> You promised, when you parted with the king,

[65] Harries, *Infinity and Perspective*, 94.

To lay aside life-harming heaviness
And entertain a cheerful disposition.

QUEEN: To please the king I did; to please myself
I cannot do it; yet I know no cause
Why I should welcome such a guest as grief,
Save bidding farewell to so sweet a guest
As my sweet Richard: yet again, methinks,
Some unborn sorrow, ripe in fortune's womb,
Is coming towards me, and my inward soul
With nothing trembles: at some thing it grieves,
More than with parting from my lord the king.

BUSHY: Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows,
Which shows like grief itself, but is not so;
For sorrow's eye, glazed with blinding tears,
Divides one thing entire to many objects;
Like perspectives, which rightly gazed upon
Show nothing but confusion, eyed awry
Distinguish form: so your sweet majesty,
Looking awry upon your lord's departure,
Find shapes of grief, more than himself, to wail;
Which, look'd on as it is, is nought but shadows
Of what it is not.

(*Richard II* II.ii.1-24)

Bushy is urging the queen to realize the artificiality of the skewed images glanced through her tears; like anamorphic paintings, they are mere illusion, tricks of the eye. The queen responds, "It may be so; but yet my inward soul / Persuades me it is otherwise." Something in the fractured vision of her tears, to take Bushy's conceit, has given the queen insight into something deeper than her separation from her husband, a premonition of a vaster evil, which the balance of the play vindicates. Bushy's counsel, that the Queen stop looking awry, stop dwelling on shadows, is bad advice. Looking awry here shows the deeper truth. As with Holbein's anamorphosis, eyed awry through her tears, the queen sees a vision of the skull, of death, and of the deepest

dimensions of her own tragic life. Likewise, the simile becomes our invitation to look for something deeper in the play, as we see the Queen seeing.

As spectators, the queen's speculation becomes our opportunity to see the deeper truth as well. She becomes our anamorphic signal into the play of appearance and reality in both the plot and the stagecraft. Like the skull, the conceit of fractured vision calls attention to its own artifice. After all, to speak of the queen's tragic life is to speak doubly, both of the tragic quality of the life depicted, and of her life as a character in a tragedy. Indeed, the exchange can be read in part as a commentary on the artificiality of stage craft. In the first place, the exchange begins with an inquiry about the Queen's capacities as an actor to "entertain a cheerful disposition." While it is a question posed of the character within the fiction, it is impossible not to hear it as a reference to the theatricality of the moment as well. The actor portraying "Queen" is acting sad because she has learned that this play is to be a tragedy. Next, the bald, even clumsy handling of foreshadowing in the scene — "methinks, / Some unborn sorrow, ripe in fortune's womb, / Is coming towards me…" — also highlights the artificiality of the performance, the constructedness of its story, and the workings of an artificial providence in this little world. Finally, Bushy's declaration that "Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows, / Which shows like grief itself, but is not so" seems a direct reference to the way history — for example, the life and death of King Richard the Second — becomes stage play, a shadow. Shades, shadows, dreams, are all images Shakespeare uses to describe the actor, often in these self-referential,

meta-theatrical ways.[66] As in *The Ambassadors*, the perspective is at work here on multiple levels. First, it foreshadows the mortal dimension of life beneath the regal pomp. Second, it displays its own artificiality, even while displaying the artificiality of the rest.

As I alluded, there is one place where Harries' theatrical metaphor goes beyond serving as a flat synonym for inauthenticity, opening upon the richer possibilities of the theater itself for anamorphic expression. For Harries, Holbein's anamorphic skull hints at a deeper truth at the cost of admitting its own artificiality. The skull is no less artificial than the rest of the painting, and so it questions the truths revealed by perspective, even as it asserts them. Harries implies, however, that the anamorphic skull has at least this advantage: in revealing its own artifice, it can comment forthrightly on the unacknowledged artifice of the rest. "It resembles a theatrical performance in which the illusion is broken by an actor addressing us, reminding us that what we are watching is only theater; and yet that addresses [*sic*], too, is part of the theatrical performance."[67] With respect to the theater, this seems exactly right. We are invited to take a new view, looking awry, upon the artifice of the entire performance, by a means that is itself likewise artificial. The direct address of a soliloquy gives the audience insight into the inner life, the deeper fears and hopes and plans, of the character. It is important to emphasize how rife the literature is with such moments; they are integral to the Elizabethan understanding of the theater. The direct address of an aside, though quicker and lighter, is ultimately more jolting in its

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[66] For example: "Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage…" (*Macbeth* V.v.24-25); "These our actors, / (As I foretold you) were all spirits and / Are melted into air, into thin air…. We are such stuff / As dreams are made on…" (*The Tempest* IV.i.148-150, 156-157); "If we shadows have offended, / Think but this, and all is mended, / That you have but slumb'red here / While these visions did appear" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* V.i.423-426).

[67] Harries, *Infinity and Perspective*, 96.

anamorphic interruption. Here, the actor reaches across the thrust directly into the audience just the way Holbein's skull ruptures the frame of the picture. The Elizabethan repertory constantly displays its own artificiality, making again and again the anamorphic point: seeing more deeply requires perspective, and perspective requires artifice. In the theater as well, the tools for peering beneath appearance into deeper reality are themselves tricks of appearance.

Harries' discussion of *The Ambassadors* is perhaps most helpful in reminding us of what is often at stake in this emphasis on perspective. Harries emphasizes that the anamorphic aim is not merely to display the act of "eyeing awry," but to use it to look at something deeper. The anamorphic point could have been made by any figure; the skull, however, reveals life and death, in their most basic dimensions.

> Far more important is the way a change in the observer's position [to view the anamorphosis in its proper perspective] reveals the meaning behind the worldly pomp of the envoys…: all this is only an appearance, a stage play. Death haunts this theater. The skull recalls us to what really matters.[68]

Once the theatrical display — the staging of the envoys among their pomps — is peered through on an angle, the truth of the matter is revealed: the final mortality to which all flesh is heir, and from which neither stately commissions nor ermine robes protect. Extraordinary artifice thus provides the perspective to see through ordinary artifice, often to discover beneath it mortality, even the potential for damnation and oblivion. In this way, Holbein's skull was raising similar questions to those raised by the theatrical artifices of the world-threatening stage. These dark and seminal questions were hardly new to human experience; but the devices of perspective implied

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[68] Harries, *Infinity and Perspective,* 93.

a new instability to the old assurances of confidence. Things could no longer be looked at in a straight-forward way. But looking awry might reveal true reasons for tragedy and grief.

The skull is an interesting touch point with the stage, as well. What immediately comes to mind, of course, is Yorick, Old Hamlet's jester whose remains the prince comes across in a graveyard.

> HAMLET: Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy: he hath borne me on his back a thousand times; and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! my gorge rims at it. 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? Not one now, to mock your own grinning? quite chap-fallen? Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come; make her laugh at that.
>
> (*Hamlet* V.i.184-195)

Shakespeare's point here seems to be exactly that of Holbein: regardless of the raiment of office or the trappings of power ("let her paint an inch thick"), death is the final end. Artifice (gibes, gambols, songs) gives way to the starkest reality. And still, to make this point, artifice is required; indeed, even the bad zinger, "quite chap-fallen," is irresistible. To see Hamlet with Yorick is to be reminded that the role "Hamlet" sits on the lead actor's visage like flesh on bone. As the audience well knows, no actors were harmed in the making of this play; the "skull" is a prop. Through Hamlet, Shakespeare too opens a window into a deeper world of existential desperation, grief, and desire. But the view through this window is not absolute. It depends on seeming, perspective, the "antic disposition" of the actor portraying Hamlet. Hamlet feigns, mis-represents, and so the deeper message, the "true" message, hides within artifice. Shakespeare,

and all the Elizabethan dramatists, were creating exactly the kinds of perspectival images as Harries argues for Holbein, Brunelleschi, and Alberti.

How Does Is Mean Is?

It remains to make fully explicit how Calvinist theology anchors the polemical objections to this theatrical perspectivalism. To do this requires recourse to the Calvinist theology in which the polemicists were steeped. Riggs describes the theological training of the university divines:

> The Cambridge BA course prepared graduates for careers in the Church…. Marlowe's generation used Wolfgang Musculus's *Commonplaces of Christian Religion*….
>
> Twice a week, one of the college Fellows explicated a passage of the Scriptures, 'whereupon he taketh occasion to entreat of some commonplace of doctrine, the which he proveth by Scripture and the doctors'.... Although the Fellows argued over fundamental points of Christian doctrine, the rules of dialectical disputation required them to argue for and against every thesis, and thus to uphold heretical or even blasphemous positions. Henry Barrow recalled that these exercises treated God's word 'as a tennis ball'.
>
> …Any doctrine could be made credible; none could be proven.[69]

This use of dialectic, although ostensibly aimed at producing the truth, further obscured it behind the rules of rhetoric and the craft of the dialectician. While one student argued, for example, that "the style of sacred Scripture is not barbarous," another argued the converse. [70] The best argument won. We can see the perspectivalism of the day at work even in theological education, touching on the very questions that ought to be most absolute. The challenge of the "tennis ball"

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[69] Riggs, *Marlowe*, 90-91.

[70] Riggs, *Marlowe*., 91.

quality of such theologizing gave rise to a Puritan backlash among Cambridge faculty. The most learned of the anti-theatrical pamphleteers were trained by this backlash faculty.

The perspectival challenge of proclaiming God's truth was not simply a Cantabridgian fashion, however, imposed upon Calvinism. This difficulty in ascertaining the truth was inherent to Musculus's theology, and that of Calvin himself from which it is derived. As Musculus describes the system, before the fall, the truth of God was knowable by reason through the clear light of God's glory:

> It cannot be denied that there is in us a certaine quicknesse of understanding & strength of reason, as might be the eyes of our mindes, whereby we maye knowe in Gods workes, God himselfe the worker therof: but unlesse the brightnes of the workes of God were so great, that they did set forth the majestie of the worker to be seen throughout all the earth, our reason shoulde have had no means to have known that there had bin a God. Therefore the first cause of our knowledge of God is attributed to that light & brightnesse of the works of God, wherby even the Philosophers did knowledge the majestie of the invisible God as the Apostle witnesseth.[71]

The maker is known in what he has made, the Creator by his creation. Before the fall, the majesty of God's work visible in creation was a sure and reliable sign of God for his creatures. And some virtue to reason's eye remains; we are not completely blinded by the fall. That "even the Philosophers" had something of this truth, that they could see something of God's glory through reason, their minds' eyes, testifies to the fact that even fallen humans carry a vestigial capacity to see God's majesty in God's world.

Here, as with Harries, the visual paradigm pervades the argument. God's glory is described in visual terms. Indeed, the metaphorical quality of the vision rhetoric is almost lost.

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[71] Wolfgang Musculus, *Common Places of Christian Religion*, trans. John Man (London: Henry Bynneman, 1578), 3.

The fall is likewise described in visual terms, a corruption of our ability to see: "Now if any man shal aske me howe our senses being so marvellously corrupt and blinded, may attaine to this knowledge of God…."[72] With the fall, we are blinded, no longer able to see God's majesty rightly; and salvation depends on restored sight. Again and again, the visual metaphor pervades the argument about sin's noetic effect. Even when Musculus reminds us that God is invisible, his reminder simply makes the point over again:

> They that be so grosse and so unfaithful, that they can not apply theyr understanding and credite to things invisible… because they suppose there is nothing farthere, and besides that which is seene with our eyes: and so they acknowledge not God in their hart, for that he is not seen. They consider not that there be also some other things invisible, which for al that they see them not, yet they can not deny them to be. Who ever sawe a voice? Who hat seene the winde? Who sawe any favour? These things in deede are invisible, but yet notwithstanding no man of any perseverance will denye them to bee.[73]

There are real things that cannot be seen, and these things are *just as real* as the visible ones. Visibility remains the touchstone for certitude, even for things invisible. Vision *as metaphor* has almost entirely elided into vision as reliable proof. How we see is, in the Elizabethan divine rhetoric, tantamount to how we know and how we receive revelation.

In Musculus, as in the theatrical analysis above, the key objects of vision are both cosmological and anthropological, the world and the person. I have described the cosmological, that God is known in viewing the glory of his world. And chief among the world's glorious objects is the human. For this reason, after the fall, the human creature remains a chief object of

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[72] Musculus, *Common Places*, 3.

[73] Musculus, *Common Places*, 4.

speculation: “the very malice of mans nature, corruption, and depravation doth most manifestly shew it self.”[74] This is most clear as Musculus describes sin’s effect:

> First, the state of Adams innocencie was such, that before his sin he was not ashamed of his nakednesse, for that it was not subject to any filthynesse, as we see in children. He lost that good immediately after he had eaten of the fruit of Science, forbidden him. So the scripture saith Who did eate, and the eyes of them both were opened. And when they knewe that they were naked, they sowed togethere leaves of figtrees & made them coverings.[75]

The first consequence of sin is visual, a knowledge of nakedness, and a newly-proper shame: Adam and Eve cover up their filthiness, once unseen, but now manifest. Their eyes have been opened. The fallen human is visibly sinful, and must take measures to cover, to costume, that sin. Echoing Phillip Stubbes, Musculus links the sartorial and the sinful. A literally visible response, an alteration in appearance, is required; and this literally visible response becomes the governing metaphor for Puritan anthropology and ethics. On the one hand, dissembling and hypocrisy become chief sins. On the other, sincerity and modesty, the visible appearance of the reality of faith, the signal virtues. It all depends on the relationship of appearance to reality, in the very moment when certitude about such things comes to naught.

At issue here is the capacity of reason to access truth reliable for salvation. Calvinist theology teaches that saving truth — *i.e.* enough knowledge of God that one can freely choose faith as a rational option — is beyond the capacities of fallen human reason. God’s saving act is the incarnation of the Son, which reorders fallen creation. Knowledge of that salvation comes by Scripture, a supra-rational and divine revelation to which the sinner can look to “see” the offer of

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[74] Musculus, *Common Places*, 31.

[75] Musculus, *Common Places*, 33.

salvation. Reason alone cannot teach such truths as lead to salvation. Neither, however, is reason totally incompetent. The pagan philosophers *did* have some access to the truth, including some glimpse of God's glory. Human reason, as celebrated in the rise of Renaissance humanism, was neither entirely blind, nor sufficiently reliable.

Here the anxiety over perspectivalism becomes clearer. If reason were merely corrupt, the search for new angles or points of view would be unnecessary and merely sinful. But reason's power to reveal some truths, as shown by Copernicus or Alberti, was a partial good. This is the source of the strain. Since reason's fruits are not obviously wrong, even though they are assuredly incomplete and sometimes deceptive, reason becomes dangerous, to be both used and suspected. This is why the world seems full of snares and traps. In Calvinist doctrine, one could be sure of her own salvation; but she could never be sure of another, even in the case of preachers standing in the pulpit quoting scripture. Appearance of justification proved nothing about justification's reality in others. Seeming truth hides a deeper lie, and any true idea will, if taken only the slightest step to far, lead to damning error. Faith comes to resemble the paradox of Elizabethan conformity, in which steps taken toward tolerance, "not liking … to make windows into men's hearts and secret thoughts," gave rise to paranoia rather than openness.[76] Since we cannot know the heart of another, a profession of faith simply raised the suspicion of impersonation. Since we cannot have certainty, a convincing argument raised only more doubt. Penetrating new perspectives reveal both sincere truth and artificial sin. Clothing, necessary for

[76] Riggs, *Christopher Marlowe*, 147.

modesty and "as a sign distinctive to discern betwixt sex and sex," could also become costume or even disguise. And "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose" (*Merchant of Venice* I.iii.98).

Calvin is himself a good humanist, and as such cannot simply reject reason. For Calvin, the world was, famously, a "magnificent theater of heaven and earth, crammed with innumerable miracles…."[77] Reason once did, and might again, give access to the divine. The world could be a viewing gallery from which one could gain a point of view on the reality of God, at least before the fall, and to some slight and inadequate degree since. For Calvin, the effect of the fall is not to efface God's glory from the world, but to damage our capacity to discern it. Again, the metaphor is visual.

> Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.[78]

Notice, we are not blind, but only hopelessly bleary-eyed and near sighted. The truth still shines, but sin has so distorted our capacity to see it that we can hope for very little — scarcely two words — without divine help. To mix Calvin's metaphors, we need opera glasses to again see the glory of God in his theater. This can be read as its own kind of perspectivalism. Calvin does not argue that we will be graced to return to a prelapsarian, pre-Copernican world, whose truths are absolute and independent of point of view. Rather, he argues that what we need is precisely the proper point of view. We need to see the world from the correct perspective, that of scripture. In a way, scripture is Calvin's anamorphosis, the perspectival device by which the deeper meaning

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[77] Calvin, *Institutes*, 241.

[78] Calvin, *Institutes*, 70.

of all things is revealed. Indeed, it even reveals its own artificiality, after a fashion: it must be interpreted, according to its historical construction (thus the commandments had an original application, and a new one, *etc*.) and mode of speech (plain, allegorical, *etc*.). There is no doubt that Calvin believes only one perspective truly reveals things properly, as Holbein's skull can only be recognized from one vantage point. But neither is there a doubt that this is, finally, a matter of perspective. The question of faith becomes the question of seeing — strictly speaking, being given the grace to see — from the right perspective.

So, when turning back to the question of the hatred of the English playhouse, Calvin's metaphor for creation as a "magnificent theater" is more than apt. The world is like a theater for Calvin, a place where one could go to see the staging of the glory of God's creation, if only one had eyes to see. Calvin shows the irresistible availability and eloquence of the theater as a playground for these questions of world and person, of cosmos and anthropos, as a site for the contemplation of all that is and what it is meant to be. Given all this, the hatred of the theater can be more adequately and deeply understood as a response of those already anxious about the need for perspective in discerning appearance from reality. The English theater seemed like an open assault upon them at their most vulnerable point, the need for human means as perspectives for seeing God's truth and glory.

The polemicists' analogy between the house of worship and the playhouse make clear that the church's defenders understood, if tacitly, the artificial nature of their own *mise en scene*. They knew that their preachers were engaging in staged acts of self-presentation, that Scripture was a prompt-book for faith in manifestly human language, that the congregation's gaze was

likewise at stake, and that the pulpit itself was a bit of scenery. Salvation, which was to be certain and doubtless in the elect, seemed anything but if dependent on these human means, especially in the light of the way those very means were tortured outrageously and intentionally by the secular stage. The anxiety over *seeming* is prior to the theater's rise. But the Renaissance theater inflames it enormously, creating an effect in which the obvious truth that these actors were not who they seemed was belied at every turn by the moving poetry and insightful philosophy they espoused. One's preacher, despite all seeming, could really be a reprobate or a tempter to sin. The theater, despite its obvious seeming, seemed, like Greek philosophy, to have some access to truth. The theater displayed a manifest impersonation of reality; but it could also seem like a loyal double agent, using duplicity to access a deeper truth. In such an unstable world, where appearance was so tantalizing in its glory and so terrifying in its deception, the theater called to mind all of Satan's most clever trickery, and so threatens any security one might provisionally feel.

There is still a deeper reason for this hatred. The theater did not just happen to exacerbate this anxiety, but did so willfully. It was not just dangerous, but often openly hostile. And this hatred finally centers on the playwrights, the authors of these atrocities. Recall, the world is glorious because it shines with the glory of its creator. As Calvin says it, "But upon his individual works he has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory…."[79] The chief glory that humans can perceive is the image of God within themselves: "For nothing is more preposterous than to enjoy the very remarkable gifts that attest the divine nature within us, yet to overlook the Author who

[79] Calvin, *Institutes*, 52.

gives them to us at our asking. With what clear manifestations his might draws us to contemplate him!"[80]. With Miranda, Calvin exclaims "O brave new world, / That has such people in't!" (*The Tempest* V.i.183-184). Both parts of the exclamation — the brave new world, and the people in it, cosmology and anthropology — refer to the Author. The theater too offered a brave world, full of wondrous people. But the theater's world had a different kind of author, following moral vectors not determined by God, and its people were not children of Adam. The theater's world and its people were shadows, sheer fancy, overlaid on raw material drawn from a world that was already cosmologically and anthropologically shaky. The author of this little world was the playwright, whose force of creation seemed to countermand everything about the natural order. Wars, hurricanes, disaster could be conjured at will; men made women and back again. Providence itself was usurped by this human author. The theater, on one level a horrific reminder of the limits and vulnerabilities of reason and perception, at this deeper level became counter creation. Calvin, asserting the theater of God's glory, reminds us of both the parallel with and the opposition to the human stage. God created his World as a playwright creates his. But to the Puritans, the human theater showed only a fallen world of human providence according to the lascivious will of a human author, rather than the glories we see in God's theater.

Here the resonance with a Whiteheadian aesthetic is clear. The plays as staged were inner worlds, circumscribed but perspicuous, seemingly run according to their own rules, populated with their own people, described by their own cosmology and their own anthropology, and governed by their own providence. This is the very thing a Whiteheadian theory would expect to

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[80] Calvin, *Institutes*, 58-59.

be at stake. The polemicists assume, as Calvin would warrant, that no human-created microcosm could possibly reveal glory. Only the divine cosmos, as seen through the spectacles of scripture, had such power, making the Christian worship service the only proper perspective, the only sincere performance. In a Whiteheadian cosmology, the relationship between human creativity and divine can be seen as mutual and collaborative; the human derives from and contributes to the divine. In a Calvinistic world of double predestination, these claims about art's working can only be interpreted as antagonistic to divine providence. The polemicists are forced to assume that these theatrical performances are indeed merely wicked, merely deceitful, merely corrupting, towards only damnation. Positing another world and another humanity, the playwrights seemed to lift themselves up as another god.

The playwrights' self-defense, breathing the same cultural air and making the same tacit assumptions, further aggravates matters. Implicit in their works are both the sense of struggle against the divine creator as well as the aesthetic theory of how their art works. The theatrical space demarcates a little world which, over a period of time, unfolds its own history according to its own telos, its own providence. Marlowe is notorious, in *Tamburlaine* as described above, and perhaps more so in *Dr. Faustus,* staging as it does heaven and hell and the entire world traversed in a way in which all distinctions of sacredness are obliterated.

Shakespeare, while more subtle, is perhaps even more fierce. He destroys the world on *King Lear*'s blasted heath. He creates it anew to conclude *The Winter's Tale.* And he takes total control in *Hamlet*, which brings me back to Holbein's skull. As I claimed, *The Ambassadors'* skull is reminiscent to us of nothing so much as Yorick's. But there is in the play another display

of a skull, this time Hamlet's own. Upon first meeting and taking his leave of his father's ghost whose parting command is "Remember me," Hamlet makes this promise:

> HAMLET: O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?
> And shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart;
> And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
> But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee!
> Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
> In this distracted globe.
> (*Hamlet* I.v.92-97)

"This distracted globe" is Hamlet's skull, the seat of his own playmaking imagination, his own crisis of appearance and reality, his own idiosyncratic morality, and the unsolvable riddle of his enigmatic character. *Hamlet* the play continually reminds us of the anthropological catastrophe represented by Hamlet the character. But the "distracted globe" signifies more, as well. Hamlet's oath implicates the three-tiered world — heaven, earth, and hell — the entirety of the Magellanic globe in its Calvinist cosmos. The staging of Old Hamlet's ghost disrupts the continuity not only of Hamlet's character, as an expression of his inner turmoil, but also of rotten Denmark, where ghosts no longer rest in peace. This is an anamorphic view of both person and cosmos. The "distracted globe" collapses anthropology and cosmology into one gesture of artificial meaning. Both Hamlet and the world suffer the irruption of the distracting ghost.

But of course, Globe has still another meaning: it is the name of the theater in which the audience to this double catastrophe sits. Shakespeare's telescopic collapse becomes total: both the human soul and the vast cosmos are set into the theater itself, to be created, manipulated, and disposed of at the playwright's will. Indeed, Hamlet's skull is turned inside out and staged for our inspection; at the same time, the whole world is condensed into a wooden playhouse, a "plot /

Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause, / Which is not tomb enough and continent / To hide the slain…" (*Hamlet* IV.iv.62-65). For Shakespeare, anything could be staged. The possibilities of perspective offered by Elizabethan stagecraft were endless. Remembering the tradition that Shakespeare himself played the ghost, he and his fellow playwrights haunted the Puritan world the way their characters haunted the theaters, distracting the Calvinist globe. Puritan anxiety about, and hatred for, such a ravening will, such a totalizing use of perspective, can be perhaps better understood in this light.

As the playwrights fight back against their Calvinist foes, they encode within their works their own implicit arguments about these aesthetic mechanisms. In a sense, they accept the aesthetic assumptions of their critics, agreeing that their plays do indeed, in the terms developed in the preceding chapters, create a microcosm governed by its own local telos. Their fight for the legitimacy of their art, their attempt literally to clear a space for themselves, depends on their demonstration of its power to create another world, a microcosm. In this fight, Calvinism stands in for the prior creator. Not only do the playwrights enact what the Whiteheadian theory describes, but they make a theme of it as well. It seems no accident that *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's most Lutheran play; he demonstrates his ability to impose his own cosmology on the Globe thrust, inscribed with his own drive to becoming. And as he declares "the rest is silence," he affirms his own telos, not that of the divine logos, as the last word.

In terms of Reformation theology, the key debate over the relationship of appearance and reality was the eucharistic. Without naming it, the theater does indeed invoke this debate. In his

discussion of the eucharist, Luther offers the analogy of fire and iron to discuss how the elements can be both bread-and-wine and body-and-blood-of-Christ:

> Why could not Christ maintain His body within the substance of the bread as truly as within its accidents? Iron and fire are two substances which mingle together in red-hot iron in such a way that every part contains both iron and fire. Why cannot the glorified body of Christ be similarly found in every part of the substance of the bread?[81]

This both-and understanding is untroubling to the playwrights. When payday comes around, of course the man is Richard Burbage, and the check is made payable to him, so to speak. But on stage, he is Hamlet; the reality of Hamlet, the fire, pervades the reality of "Burbage," the iron. In art, no one has a problem affirming both "paint on canvas" and "sun dappled field." Or "actors on a stage" and "The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark." This analogy works equally well for the theory expounded here, that the artistic experience is both microcosm and cosmic, with both human telos and divine. The work of art delineates and sets apart a time-space ruled by the creative desire of the local providence; at the same time, it is pervaded with the telos of the circumscribing creator, the aim to beauty that indwells and animates every experience. The presence of God as the cosmic drive toward the beautiful and integrated whole is felt alongside the presence of the posited creator, the "Shakespeare" of the play that is so driven, the fire in the

[81] Luther, "Pagan Servitude," 267.

iron. The play is, in this sense, eucharistic. It is, to use Luther's terms, the "outward sign" of something symbolized.[82]

Of course, in the context of the English Reformation, to analogize "this is my body, this is my blood" to "that is Hamlet, that is Gertrude," reduces the eucharistic claim to one of aesthetics. Indeed, it would seem to imply an analogy between "Burbage is Hamlet" and "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." This seems to reduce faith to an aesthetic claim. As John's Gospel makes the claim, "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (John 1:18). The deepest fear of the polemicists may be the implication that the revelation of God is finally an artistic re-presentation, rather than a miraculous feat. The fear is of reducing the claims of faith to mere aesthetics. The playwrights fight back: there is nothing "mere" about aesthetics. Luther has already conceded that "the philosophers do not grasp it." But this might simply mean that *his philosophers* might not have grasped it. Luther's appeal to mystery here, as elsewhere, seems an attempt to sidestep the need for a better philosophy, dressed up as a pious desire to transcend philosophy. The faith that grasps it, the faith that grasps that "this is Christ's body" seems no different from the faith that allows for "that boy is Portia pretending to be Dr Balthasar."

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[82] Luther, "Pagan Servitude," 260. To speculate a step further, the hatred of the theater is perhaps an example of the judgment Luther offers against those who make more of signs than of what they symbolize: "Long ago, we had lost the content of the sacrament while contending for the outer sign…. Indeed, this monstrous state of affairs arose at the time when, contrary to Christian love, we began, in our folly, to pursue worldly wealth. God showed it by that terrible sign, namely, that we preferred the outer signs to the things themselves. How perverse it would be if you were to concede that a candidate received faith in baptism, but you were to refuse him the sign of faith, i.e., water!" (260-1). The anti-theatrical polemicists were perhaps committing this same offense, opposing the sign of a creative God because the form was not profitable for them; and then using a back-formation to argue this sign-to-be-opposed must be symbolizing an equally profane god.

Playgoers might have no problem with the dual natures of Hamlet, or the dual or even triple natures of Portia-Balthasar. On this account, they might perhaps be Zwinglians: *is* means *represents.* This would be to distinguish an aesthetic claim from a metaphysical one, a claim of representation not actuality. Aesthetically, "This is my body" — i.e. this bread is Christ's body — is no more semantically troubling than "Burbage is Hamlet," or "Hamlet hath in madness Polonius slain" (IV.i.2661). The playwrights are clearly claiming more, an appeal to Luther in the theater as well as at the altar: *is* means *is*. As we will see in Chapter 4, the virtue of a contemporary appeal to Whitehead's philosophy is that philosophical claims and aesthetic claims converge in Whitehead's idea of truth as the relation between appearance (the beauty of the experienced as constructed) and reality (the actuality it comprises). In Whitehead we no longer face Luther's dilemma about what the meaning of *is* is. That is, by dislodging *substance* as the heart of reality and replacing it with the subject's creative emergence from actuality, Whitehead gives us a language to understand what it is they were fighting about more precisely. The Renaissance playwrights practice their art along lines that imply and anticipate a Whiteheadian aesthetics. In the same way that a more adequate, modern metaphysics was made possible by Whitehead's thought, so a more adequate, modern aesthetics in the narrow sense of the term, an account of art and its creation and reception, can be stated explicitly that elucidates the aesthetic arguments implicit in this earlier time.

CHAPTER 4
An Unforgivable Sin: The Minimum of Meaning and the Performance of Theatricality

It is possible that consciously or unconsciously Beckett is restating the moral and sexual basis of Christianity which was lost with Christ….

- Norman Mailer[1]

Beckett does not believe in God, though he seems to imply that God has committed an unforgivable sin by not existing.

- Anthony Burgess[2]

Samuel Beckett's theater has always posed special challenges to both performers and interpreters. Even in the thorny pantheon of 20th Century modernism, Beckett stands out as particularly recalcitrant. His plays offer a series of sphinx-like juxtapositions: low humor and existentially lofty themes, indelible images that remain nevertheless indeterminate, hooded figures, disembodied voices, vaguely anachronistic costumes and customs, predatory lighting, and words that evoke more than denote. From the start of his career with *Waiting for Godot* (1949), interpreters have insisted that its obscurities were the very key to understanding both the play and its audience.[3] This was a play whose meaning one had to be the right kind of person to understand, let alone to produce properly. His theater has always stood in judgment over those who attempted to stage or appreciate it. Beckett fosters the effect. His stage directions and descriptions of scenery are exacting and he notoriously allowed no variation. When the prominent avant-garde director JoAnne Akalaitis took up Beckett's play *Endgame* (1957) for the

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[1] Norman Mailer, "A Public Notice by Norman Mailer" in *The Village Voice,* May 9, 1956, 12.

[2] Anthony Burgess, *The Novel Now: A Guide to Contemporary Fiction* (New York: W. W. Norton Inc., 1967), 76.

[3] Beckett had written the play *Eleutheria,* in 1947, the year prior to *Waiting for Godot*. Roger Blin chose to debut the latter play and Beckett withdrew the former. It was not published until 1995, six years after Beckett's death.

American Repertory Theater in 1985, setting it in a New York subway station rather than "an empty room and two small windows," the playwright threatened legal action; the dispute ended in a compromise requiring the original stage description to be printed in the playbill along with a comment from the playwright and prohibiting the use of Beckett's name in advertising the production.[4] In plays as spare as *Waiting for Godot* or *Endgame*, this authorial tyranny would seem to limit artistic freedom. They offer little opportunity for variety in color, dress, or scenery, and require a kind of literal monotony in the pacing and delivery of lines. Given this draconian approach, performers generally must dig deeply before clearing room for their own creative presence.

Equally notorious was Beckett's reticence about the meanings of his plays. As Rónán McDonald documents, "Beckett's answer to the question 'Who is Godot?' was always, 'If I knew, I would have said so in the play.'"[5] Beckett is not merely laconic, letting the plays speak for themselves; he seems actively to mislead, misdirect. He is often categorized as an "absurdist" for these reasons — the logical non-sequiturs, mock intellectualism, and dead-end allusions — and his later plays as "minimalist" for similar reasons. The late theatrical miniatures and brief set-pieces are nearly abstract, sometimes without outward-pointing reference, acts of performance art rather than drama. The shortest, *Breath*, lasts under a minute, taking longer to

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[4] The dust-up was described nicely by Richard Christiansen under the headline "Beckett vs. Director" in *The Chicago Tribune* January 21, 1985, section 5,1-2.

[5] Rónán McDonald, The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006], 29.

read in its stage directions (there are no lines) than to perform. Despite all this, however, the plays yearn and strain to mean; they invite, even demand, interpretation.

The argument here is that Beckett's plays offer the performance of this yearn and strain to mean, particularly in the formal, theatrical self-referentiality that accompanies the thematic teases and feints. The heart of Beckett's theater, I will argue, is in its performance of theatricality itself. Attending to Beckett's performativity, we see the playwright displaying how his theater means. And in seeing *how* the plays mean — how Beckett crafts the little worlds he creates and reigns over them as an apathetic and hidden god — we see an implicit aesthetics resonant with and systematically expressible according to the Whiteheadian aesthetic I am proposing. As with the Renaissance dramatists, Beckett uses the art of the stage to imply, among other things, an argument about what art is and its relevance to the struggle of human existence, this time in a post-nuclear, modernist world.

A Parable of the Interpretation of *Waiting for Godot*

Jerry Tallmer, the prominent theater critic at the *Village Voice*, wrote an early review of the American premiere of *Waiting for Godot* in the spring of 1956. Here we see the tussling over correct interpretation and correct performance already begun. After expressing gratitude that at least some remain who can recognize artistic greatness, and after sketching the scenario that should already be known to everyone who has "not been off on Mars," Tallmer summarizes the extent of general agreement we may safely assume: "Nearly everybody is agreed that "Godot" is

in large part a play about God, and that Godot among other things stands for God." "In addition," he continues,

> …the play seems to me — though it is pretty early to be publicly hypothesizing, as the uptown critics were crippingly aware; but what the hell — the play seems to me about the Christian God specifically, Jesus Christ, and about suicide and salvation, and about man's duality, body and mind, and about dignity and ignominy and the nature of society and the nature of Nature, and of Life, Time, Damnation, many other things. It is without any doubt the most serious piece of writing to come our way since the death of Joyce, for whom Beckett served for a time as secretary. As such, it cannot in its raw form ever be palatable to the audiences of what Eric Bentley calls the commodity theatre — the theatre of Broadway in the twentieth century — even though it is in truth, everything else to the contrary notwithstanding, one of the funniest plays ever written…."[6]

Tallmer has an existentially expansive set of things the play is about, the biggest questions asked in the starkest way, comfortably located in the central mystery overshadowing the play, "the Christian God specifically, Jesus Christ." Tallmer is confident of the play's generational greatness, and if he is chastened by the prospect of publicly hypothesizing about a work so new, he does not hesitate in its praise. Tallmer's thematic evaluation of the play ends, however, with this cursory piling up of all the great human questions the play is about. The bulk of the review, introduced by reference to critic Eric Bentley's Brechtian disdain for "commodity theater," is about the production itself. This is not necessarily a flaw in the review, although given the newness of the play, debuted only three years earlier and in French, the *Voice*-reading theater goer might have benefitted from a more methodical examination of the basic themes. But Tallmer has an agenda alongside an appreciation or an analysis of the play's virtues: the criticism

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[6] Jerry Tallmer, "Theatre Uptown: Godot on Broadway," in *The Village Voice* April 25, 1956, 8.

of the Broadway stage and the accommodations to popularity required by its commodified expression.

When Tallmer calls *Godot* "one of the funniest plays ever written,"[7] it is not so much a compliment as an introduction to censure. A production true to the humor of the play would be "mordantly, violently, compassionately funny." But, such a "'straight' production could never succeed on Broadway in a million years." The Broadway production, instead, was "wrongly accented into comic neo-realism, wrongly loaded (in violence to the printed text) with comic 'business,' wrongly milked for every surface effect at the expense of the plumbless depths beneath." The chief evidence for this act of accommodation to Philistine taste is the casting of "burleycue-vaudeville comedian" Bert Lahr (best known as Oz's cowardly lion) in the role of Gogo. Lahr was, "taken on his own terms, marvelous — clowning it up with "Godot" on all six, and with a curious collateral tinge of bubble-and-flutter that I had not noticed in him before." But this Lahr element, too broad, too funny in the "wrongly accented" way, is what betrays the play's true message, rendering for the Broadway audience a sort of Godot-lite that could be palatable if shallow and compromised.[8]

Tallmer praises many "marvellous," "expert," "brilliant" and "miraculous" elements of the production, its director and its famous actors. Attending this production, "you will see many moving and even electrifying moments of humor and pathos and mystery and terror, but you will

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[7] Tallmer, "Godot on Broadway," 8.

[8] To be fair, this estimation of the Broadway premiere has generally been shared by scholars since. For example, in his contribution to the "Plays in Production" series, David Bradby writes: "The idea of casting the ebullient Lahr in the role of Estragon demonstrated a fundamentally mistaken emphasis on Myerberg's part. Beckett's choice would have been for the much more restrained and sad-faced clowning of Buster Keaton" (David Bradby, *Beckett: Waiting for Godot* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], 91).

Throughout, I refer to the play's main characters, Vladimir and Estragon, by their nicknames, Didi and Gogo.

not see the pure, sweet, piercing, infinitely simple, infinitely complicated seventeenth-century-type morality play that is 'Waiting for Godot.'" Nevertheless, he advises, "go uptown to night to catch the next best thing" to that true, "straight" production, which, he fears, he would never see.

As important a voice as Jerry Tallmer was for New York theater, the *Village Voice* would the very next week print a review of sorts of *Waiting for Godot* by a far more prominent figure, its co-founder, Norman Mailer. In May of 1956, Mailer used his weekly column to announce his departure from the paper, describing a "difference of opinion which I have had with the Editor and the Publisher. / They wish this newspaper to be more conservative, more Square — I wish it to be more Hip."[9] But that final column begins, superficially at least, in an entirely unrelated way, a self-serving diatribe against *Waiting for Godot*. To be fair, Mailer's column is more a diatribe against the play's first supporters, perhaps including Tallmer, than the play itself. Mailer saw these fans as pseudo-Hip intellectuals who, despite their best efforts, land on the wrong side of his Square-Hip Manichaeism. This criticism of *Godot's* fans, however, is inseparable from Mailer's initial, sight-unseen estimation of the play.

Mailer's column begins, "I have not seen 'Waiting for Godot' nor read the text, but of course I have come across a good many reviews of it…. What amuses me is the deference with which everyone is approaching Beckett…." Mailer sees the play as too popular among the intellectual readers of the *Voice,* earning their praise by appealing to their pretensions. They do not understand the play deeply, he assumes, while at the same time seeing the play itself as a regressive monument of the anti-Hip. This is all clear to Mailer simply by way of his Joycean

[9] Norman Mailer, "The Hip and the Square" in *The Village Voice* May 2, 1956, 5. Republished as "Column Seventeen" in Norman Mailer, *Advertisements for Myself* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 315-18.

insight on the play's title, lost on the pseudo-Hip, because "none of the celebrators of Beckett have learned anything from Joyce." Not that Mailer is any great "expert on Joyce — like many of you who will read this, I have read perhaps half of 'Ulysses' and fragments from 'Finnegan's Wake'." Nevertheless, he is convinced that his capacity to open the meaning of the play, sight unseen, surpasses that of "the critics" because of his truly Hip understanding of Joyce's genius as an entrée into the mystery of play's title.

> But at the very least, the critics could have done a little rudimentary investigation into the meaning of the title of "Waiting for Godot," and the best they have been able to come up with so far is that Godot has something to do with God. My congratulations. But Godot also means 'ot Dog, or the dog who is hot, and it means God-O, God as the female principle, just as Daddy-O in Hip means the father who has failed, the man who has become an O, a vagina. Two obvious dialectical transpositions on "Waiting for Godot" are To Dog The Coming and God Hot for Waiting, but anyone who has the Joycean habit of thought could add a hundred subsidiary themes. As for example, Go, Dough! (Go, Life!)[10]

Mailer does not deny the common starting point for seemingly all interpretations of this play, that "Godot" is a stand in for the conventional Christian deity, the white bearded old man who holds salvation in his hand and who promises via a child to return. His Joycean method (Mailer too knows that Beckett "worked as a secretary" for Joyce) leads him to insights he feels to be obvious, though far deeper than any that the play's celebrators have noticed: yes he is God, but God emasculated, God as a sexual failure.

The reason the celebrators have missed the obvious is itself equally obvious: they are likewise devoted to sexual failure. Though unable to understand it deeply, it seems, they

[10] Mailer, May 2, 5.

nevertheless recognize they play as their manifesto. Where Joyce is a poet of the Hip, Beckett is clearly a bard of the Square.

> Nonetheless, I like To Dog The Coming as the best, because what I smell in all of this is that "Waiting for Godot" is a poem to impotence, and I suspect (again out of the ignorance of not having seen it) that Beckett sees man as hopelessly impotent, and the human condition as equally impotent. Given the caliber of the people who have applauded "Waiting for Godot," I further suspect that the complex structures of the play and its view of life are most attractive to those who are most impotent. So I doubt if I will like it, because finally not everyone is impotent, nor is our final fate, our human condition, necessarily doomed to impotence, as old Joyce knew, and Beckett I suspect does not. When it comes to calling a work great one must first live with the incommensurable nuance of the potent major key and the impotent minor key.[11]

On his first attempt, Mailer finds *Waiting for Godot* to be a paean to all who never come, a reassurance for those who have given up hope of potency or power. Directly opposed to the "ode to impotence" is the essence of the Hip, a recovery of a juicy fecundity that is struggling to emerge in a new moment, in a new generation, like green shoots through the cracks in the concrete of the Square. As Mailer wrote the week prior to this column, "Hip is an American existentialism profoundly different from French existentialism because Hip is based on a mysticism of the flesh…," rooted in the experience of "the Negro and the soldier, in the criminal psychopath and the dope addict and jazz musician, in the prostitute, in the actor, in the — if one can visualize such a possibility — in the marriage of the call-girl and the psychoanalyst."[12] So for Mailer, reading backward from the pseudo-Hip to the object of their praise, the play certainly fails. Or at least, as someone who is not impotent, he doubts he will like it. Understood in this

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[11] Mailer, "Hip and Square" May 2, 5.

[12] Norman Mailer, "The Hip and the Square" in *The Village Voice*, April 25, 1956, 5. Republished in an abridged form as "Column Sixteen: The Hip and the Square" in Mailer, *Advertisements*, 314-15.

way, it is clear why the turn from this brief review of a play he has not seen to the notice that he will no longer be writing his column is not at all "a most brutal transition", but a perfect setup: "They wish this newspaper to be more conservative, more Square — I wish it to be more Hip."

And yet, a week later, things had changed. Having relinquished his weekly column inches, Mailer purchased a full page ad he called "A Public Notice by Norman Mailer" in which he reversed himself, swallowing his pride and apologizing in "the hardest but most meaningful way: — by public advertisement."

> I am referring of course to what I wrote about "Waiting for Godot" in my last column. Some of you may remember that I said Beckett's play was a poem to impotence and appealed precisely to those who were most impotent. Since then I have read the play, seen the present Broadway production, read the play again, have thought about it, wrestled with its obscurities (and my conscience), and have had to come up reluctantly with the conviction that I was most unfair to Beckett. Because "Waiting for Godot" is a play about impotence rather than an ode to it, and while its view of life is indeed hopeless, it is an art work, and therefore, I believe, a good.[13]

Mailer hardly reverses his opinion of the play's "present admirers," who remain "snobs, intellectual snobs of undue ambition and impotent imagination, the worst sort of literary type, invariably more interested in being part of some intellectual elite than in the creative act itself." But his new reading of the play is, if idiosyncratic and cursory, nevertheless appreciative, nodding with breezy insight to key tropes of the play's subsequent interpretation: impotence and fruitfulness, hope and despair, purpose and meaninglessness. Didi and Gogo, the main characters, "old and exhausted, have come to rest on a timeless plain, presided over by a withered cross-like tree, marooned in the purgatory of their failing powers. Their memories …

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[13] Mailer, "A Public Notice by Norman Mailer" in *The Village Voice* May 9, 1956, 12. Republished in an abridged form as "A Public Notice on Waiting for Godot" in Mailer, *Advertisements*, 320-25 and in Ruby Cohn, *Casebook on Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 73-74.

uncertain as vapors, their spirits broken…, they can only bicker and weep and nag and sulk and sleep….” They are too weak to commit suicide (despite the wan pleasure of a final erection), long beyond sex but still “looking for the potency of the phallus and the testes,” “debilitated children looking for God, looking for the Life-Giver.” Mailer sees in the characters not the Square but the challenge life poses to all who want to be truly Hip. It is a play of inspiration for those who wish to endure life’s insults in this particularly American mode of existentialism and remain in the fight for more.

This is the promise of Godot, on Mailer’s reading: the “creative nihilism of the Hip, the frantic search for potent Change [that] may break into the open with all its violence, its confusion, its ugliness and horror, and yet like all Change, the violence is better without than within, better as individual actions than as the collective murders of society.”[14] As interpreters of the play have often found, even in the infinitely recursive deferral of that promise, room remains for Mailer to hope. In the play, “God’s destiny is flesh and blood with ours, and so, far from conceiving of a God who sits in judgment… there is the greater agony of God at the mercy of man’s fate, God determined by man’s efforts…. At the end, Vladimir and Gogo having failed again, there is the hint, the murmur, that God’s condition is also worse.” Godot disappoints, participating in the sexual impotence of Didi and Gogo. But in forcing God into fleshly incarnation the human spirit continues to strive toward the Change that the Hip seeks to conjure, known by “the hints, the clues, the whispers of a new time coming.” This is the true Christianity, the Hip Christianity: “It is possible that consciously or unconsciously Beckett is restating the

[14] Mailer, “Public Notice,” 12.

moral and sexual basis of Christianity which was lost with Christ." As "Beckett's work brings our despair to the surface, it nourishes it with air…." And like so many interpreters, Mailer finds the play ultimately uplifting, through this lens of the Hip:

> Man's nature, man's dignity, is that he acts, lives, loves, and finally destroys himself seeking to penetrate the mystery of existence, and unless we partake in some way, as part of this human exploration (and war) then we are no more than the pimps of society and the betrayers of our Self.[15]

This is that same "mysticism of the flesh" Mailer had described two weeks prior, in the marriage of the call girl and the psychoanalyst. Having read the play, Mailer finds it an act of the Hip, a trace of its emergence. It remains a sign of judgment against the intellectual snobs of impotent imagination; but not because it is of them, but because they so ignorantly, so mistakenly think that it is.

It is hard to discern which elements of the play most inspired Mailer's reversal. Certainly, it includes the existentially heroic perseverance-in-waiting of the main characters; an American existentialism of the flesh is still, after all, an existentialism. But is this where Mailer found rediscovered the "moral and sexual basis of Christianity?" Or is it in the trifling banter? Is it in the grander themes evoked by the situation itself, the bearded old man who never shows and the predicament of his attendants? Or does it emerge simply in their bickering, weeping, nagging, sulking, sleeping behavior. It is never made precise.

Mailer's procedure here, of course, seems self-serving and facile, however interesting some of its insights. But he is hardly alone. I offer this parable neither as a joke at the expense of Norman Mailer, Jerry Tallmer, or *The Village Voice* nor as an attempt at their defense, but as an

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[15] Mailer, "Public Notice," 12.

unusually clear example of the effect Beckett's theater seems to have on nearly everyone who approaches it. The problem is not simply that *Waiting for Godot* is a reticent or a difficult work. Beyond that, it is a work that intentionally frustrates interpretation, simultaneously inviting and rejecting attempts to discern its meaning. The work begs for philosophical interpretation, framing itself as a *cri de coeur* of the very French existentialism that Mailer despised, as emblematic as *The Stranger* (1942) or *No Exit* (1944). Indeed, the work is replete with lines of poignant ennui: "I sometimes wonder if we wouldn't have been better off alone, each one for himself"; "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more"; and of course, the play's program-setting opening line, "Nothing to be done."[16] The overall tenor of the dialogue portrays the human condition as degraded, stripped of comforts to the point of bare subsistence. And of course, the overarching message that there is nothing to be done is reinforced by the constantly foreshadowed and twice-confirmed reality that Godot never arrives.[17]

Perhaps the best example of the play's existential feints, taken one way, is the early dialogue between Didi and Gogo about suicide.

VLADIMIR: What do we do now?
ESTRAGON: Wait.
VLADIMIR: Yes, but while waiting.
ESTRAGON: What about hanging ourselves?
VLADIMIR: Hmm. It'd give us an erection.
ESTRAGON: *(highly excited).* An erection!
VLADIMIR: With all that follows. Where it falls mandrakes grow. That's why they shriek when you pull them up. Did you not know that?

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[16] Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1954), 58, 103, 2.

[17] Perhaps the play's evocative reticence explains why it becomes so useful in many contexts. For example, the many instances of the play being staged for or by prison inmates (see the discussion of the Blau production below); Susan Sontag's staging of the play in post-war Sarajevo; or, more recently, Ron O. J. Parson's production at the Court Theatre of the University of Chicago featuring an African American cast.

ESTRAGON: Let's hang ourselves immediately!
VLADIMIR: From a bough? *(They go towards the tree.)* I wouldn't trust it.
ESTRAGON: We can always try.
VLADIMIR: Go ahead.
ESTRAGON: After you.
VLADIMIR: No no, you first.
ESTRAGON: Why me?
VLADIMIR: You're lighter than I am.
ESTRAGON: Just so!
VLADIMIR: I don't understand.
ESTRAGON: Use your intelligence, can't you?
Vladimir uses his intelligence.
VLADIMIR: *(finally).* I remain in the dark.
ESTRAGON: This is how it is. *(He reflects.)* The bough… the bough… *(Angrily.)* Use your head, can't you?
VLADIMIR: You're my only hope.
ESTRAGON: *(with effort).* Gogo light — bough not break — Gogo dead. Didi heavy — bough break — Didi alone. Whereas —
VLADIMIR: I hadn't thought of that.
ESTRAGON: If it hangs you it'll hang anything.
VLADIMIR: But am I heavier than you?
ESTRAGON: So you tell me. I don't know. There's an even chance. Or nearly.
VLADIMIR: Well? What do we do?
ESTRAGON: Don't let's do anything. It's safer.
VLADIMIR: Let's wait and see what he says.
ESTRAGON: Who?
VLADIMIR: Godot.[18]

Here, we find, taken one way, exactly the poem of impotence Mailer expected. Life is waiting, spent on bootless pastimes. Even suicide — the question lurking behind so much of existentialist philosophy — is a self defeating effort, giving little more satisfaction than a final erection, leaving behind no witness more eloquent to the meaning of life than the shrieking mandrake. The mechanisms of death are as tedious as those of the wait. The tramps have nothing available so poetic as Hamlet's bare bodkin, and so have to game out the possibilities of the pathetic tree that

[18] Beckett, *Waiting for Godot,* 12-13.

is the play's only piece of scenery. The play asks the archetypal question of philosophical existentialism, "why not suicide?" but offers none of its heroism — at least not in the profanities and trivialities of the dialogue. What gives Didi and Gogo pause is not a newfound resolve to face bravely into the abyss, but the same low-grade cowardice that suggests suicide in the first place. If waiting is unacceptable, then so is not waiting. And nothing, it seems, is learned by the characters, certainly not in their half-hearted consideration of suicide, and perhaps not in the play at all.

As the play continues, the philosophistical episodes pile up: attempts at biblical scholarship and sacramental theology, Proustian disquisitions on the nature of memory and time, and musings about the ethics of good government. But each ends up a dry socket, as devoid of answer as the question of Godot's arrival. Nowhere is this clearer than in Lucky's speech, the mock-academic diatribe unleashed by the otherwise speechless porter: "Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with a white beard quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell…" — and so it continues for three pages of script, a single run on sentence lacking even a main clause.[19] The speech is set up to be the intellectual centerpiece of the first act. Pozzo leads Lucky in with all the fanfare of a circus ringmaster, with promises of tricks: "Shall we have him dance, or sing, or recite, or think…."[20] After an abortive dance — called not "The Scapegoat's Agony" nor "The Hard Stool" but rather "The Net. He thinks he's entangled in a

[19] Beckett, *Waiting for Godot,* 45-47.

[20] Beckett, *Waiting for Godot,* 40.

net" — Didi requests "Tell him to think" from the menu. What passes for thinking, this speech, is laden with both glancing allusions to actual philosophical-theological concepts and the worst kind of parody thereof. Alongside Bishop Berkeley and "the divine Miranda" we are given Puncher and Wattman, Testew and Cunard, and Feckham Peckham Fulham Clapham for authority, testifying to the work of the "Acacacacademy of Anthropopopometry of Essy-in-Possy." The hope for "thinking" devolves into a manic recitation of mock authorities and a list of various sports. The speech, even as it hurtles toward breakdown, continuously offers glimpses of something that would have been thinking, glimpses of physical culture, of the light of the labors lost, of the fading skull. But nothing materializes; instead, it melts down. The climax of the speech is a general melee, leaving all four actors in a heap with relief coming only when Didi snatches off Lucky's thinking hat.

This is perhaps the moment, if it has not occurred earlier, that a viewer might finally conclude that, for all its trappings of philosophy, the play will not deliver on its promises. Perhaps this is the moment when Jerry Tallmer began wondering if he were missing something of the philosophical greatness of the text because of the onstage antics of its commercialized production. Or the moment when Norman Mailer, reveling at the thumb-in-the-eye delivered to pseudo-intellectualism, finds the American existentialism of the Hip in the play's brazen earthiness. As a philosophical text, *Godot* is ultimately a shaggy dog story whose punchline is a bilingual pun: *god* slips through the viewers' fingers like *eau,* a stream of water teeming with red herrings, a theophany promised but indefinitely delayed, as testified in the works of Fartoff and Belcher.

As Larry D. Bouchard points out, "Critics of drama typically divide between interpreters of scripts and interpreters of performances, which can make the study of drama awkward. What shall we examine, the inadequate text or the ephemeral performance? In fact, this division need not be so strict. Works of dramatic literature typically anticipate and reflect their realization in theatrical performance."[21] This clearly describes the divergence between Jerry Tallmer and Norman Mailer, who has seen the play but comments almost entirely on the script. David Bradby offers a helpful attempt to lessen the severity of this division and to understand the anticipation and realization of script in performance in his discussion of the second major American production of the play, staged by Herbert Blau and the Actors Workshop of San Francisco in 1957. By all accounts, this is the production Jerry Tallmer was hoping for, come along much more quickly than he had feared, a production consciously created against the commodifying values of Broadway with an eye to the avant-garde.

> The key to the success of the Actors Workshop *Godot* was Blau's understanding of the special (and at that time highly original) demands the play makes of its actors. As he put it, Vladimir and Estragon are simply two *performers* stripped of traditional notions of character. He understood perfectly that the desire to ask questions such as "What does it mean?" had to be resisted and the actors had to be given the confidence to simply trust Beckett's text: "As for uncertainty of meaning, just perform what he tells you to perform, and you will feel — as if by some equation between doing and feeling — exactly what you need to feel, and in the bones." …Blau recalled how his actors gradually discovered the exhausting physical effort demanded of them in performing what had at first seemed to them to be a very intellectual play.[22]

The insight here is that the play is first a stage piece before it is a philosophical tract, featuring performers rather than characters. Blau's approach was to sidestep the question of the play's

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[21] Larry D. Bouchard, *Theater and Integrity: Emptying Selves in Drama, Ethics, and Religion* (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 16.

[22] Bradby, *Godot,* 100.

meaning and emphasize its action: "what if to ask about the meaning of *Waiting for Godot* resembles asking about the meaning of *Duck Soup*?" To be sure, the analogy is not perfect. Something is happening in *Godot* on the level of ideas, in the realm of discourse. But the commitment of the Actors Workshop production was to see the performative approach as the more direct one. Postponing the importance of the question of the meaning of the play, Blau's production focused more literally on what happens. He privileged the practical question, "what to do while waiting?" over the philosophical one, "what does it mean to wait?" The onstage antics are what the actors do, while the audience spectates and enjoys.[23]

Recall, for example, the hanging scene quoted above, taken another way. It is certainly tempting to interpret it as an ode to — or a poem about, as you will — impotence. But in production it is also a frothy if morbid bit of comic patter. Given an acting style patterned after the vaudeville routines of a generation earlier, given actors dressed like Charlie Chaplain's little tramp, it is difficult to know how a serious staging would run. To the question of what to do while waiting, the question on every playgoer's mind as well by now, Gogo responds, "What about hanging ourselves?" — a darkly funny joke. Didi's response invites perfect comic timing: "Hmm. It'd give us erection" — "An erection!" — "With all that follows." Likewise, the subsequent working through of why the heavier one should sacrifice himself first as a test run of the strength of the bough, is a comedy sketch: "Use your intelligence, can't you? — *Vladimir uses his intelligence.*" This is a stage direction about a sight gag. Of course, it is up to the

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[23] We can feel the force here of the more literal translation of Beckett's title in the original French, *En attendant Godot,* which is more accurately rendered "*while* waiting for Godot" in English. Not incidentally, such a translation may increase the resonance with Whiteheadian thought and its emphasis on the ongoing processes of change and occurrence that create the passage of time.

production how broadly to play things — Bert Lahr or Buster Keaton. But certainly not the Royal Shakespeare gravitas of Laurence Olivier, the Hollywood star power of Clark Gable, nor the soul-wringing Method of Montgomery Clift. These are lines that cannot be delivered straight, but only find their place in the play's meaning through this more presentational, performative style. Just as Oliver and Hardy are not "playing" the roles of anyone else, the roles of Didi and Gogo sit transparently on the vaudeville craft of the actors. This is perhaps helpful in understanding the central refrain of the play, repeated multiple times in both acts:

ESTRAGON: Let's go.
VLADIMIR: We can't.
ESTRAGON: Why not?
VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Godot.
ESTRAGON: Ah!
Pause.

To be sure, many interpretations are possible — a Freudian repetition compulsion, a heroic response to the existentialist dilemma, a liturgy of some very strange and perhaps hopeless church. But it first reminds us of a different piece of theater:

COSTELLO: What am I putting on third.
ABBOTT: No. What is on second.
COSTELLO: You don't want who on second?
ABBOTT: Who is on first.
COSTELLO: I don't know.
BOTH: Third base!

This patter, like the diversion of Lucky's speech (and all the other items on Lucky's menu of amusements), is what one does while waiting. I am not arguing that the play is only a vaudeville amusement, or that its thematic gestures in the direction of meaning are merely gratuitous. But I am arguing that Beckett renders problematic any understanding of discursive meaning in his

theater apart from the embodied stage action of characters in space. In the tension between discursive content and embodied enactment, between script and performance, Beckett forces reflection on the way his art does and does not denote. As we will see, this emphasis on performativity is central to Beckett's theater, as is already evident in his first public play. More crucial to this study, we can therefore see in Beckett's extremely self-conscious theatricality his implicit aesthetic philosophy.

Artistic Self-Consciousness and the Presentational Theater

It is helpful to elaborate a working distinction, often implicit in the discussion of Renaissance theater in Chapter 3, between the *dramatic* and the *theatrical.* Although these terms are not required, any discussion of Beckett's stage must reckon explicitly with what they involve. By the dramatic, I mean a style of stage play that emphasizes a narrative recounted through the words, actions, and interactions of characters played by actors in situations denoted by scenery, sound and lighting effects, and various costumes and props. This dramatic style of theater is perhaps best epitomized in the 20th Century by the fourth-wall realism of the plays of Anton Chekhov, Henrik Ibsen, or Eugene O'Neill. Here, the actors are impersonating characters and acting out a story, a drama, whose emotional impact is derived mostly from the pathos — the pity and terror — of the story told and the catharsis derived from its unfolding, its climax, and its denouement. This is Aristotle's mimetic tragedy, an imitation of life. Generally, this dramatic style of stage play takes great pains to minimize the sense of artificiality, to submerge the tracings of stage craft beneath the arc of the story being told. Even when the illusion of realism is

pierced or the fourth wall breached, the continuity of actor with character and of scenery with narrative space are maintained. So for example, in the flashback scenes of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* the identities of time and space are suspended, but never those of character or story. Likewise, the actor delivering a tragic soliloquy may be addressing the audience directly, but still without threatening the sense of the role through which she is speaking. We might class those plays that place heavy emphasis on this dramatic style as *representational theater*.

By the theatrical, I mean a style of stage play that emphasizes the physical, real-time interactions of players with one another and the audience. Though using all the same tools — costume, scene, property, space, time, light, and sound — the theatrical elements tend toward becoming ends in themselves rather than stand-ins for other things. Onstage happenings no longer require motivations beyond their own inner logic, the physics of their theatrical interactions. This is not to say that the performers are not acting, in the sense of projecting some coherent sense of persona different from their actual personalities. "Oliver" and "Hardy" are performative creations. At the same time, at least in extreme cases, they are really not pretending to be anyone else, either. The characters of *Waiting for Godot* are good examples. Despite some vague and undeveloped references to earlier times, "a million years ago, in the nineties," respectable days peering like tourists off the Eiffel Tower, there is no deep backstory to Didi or Gogo; what matters is the business, the on-stage interaction.[24] We might class the plays that most rely on this theatrical style as *presentational theater*.

[24] Beckett, *Waiting for Godot,* 3.

It is perhaps easier today to define the presentational theater by what it seems to lack in the way of story and character. It seems a form of modern minimalism akin to abstract art. But this style is, if anything, more fundamental, rather than merely defective. It is certainly the older style: long traditions of mummery, *commedia dell'arte*, puppet show, clowning, and more recent minstrel and vaudeville traditions attest to its durability in European and North American culture. The expectation of verisimilitude in story telling is really the later innovation. However, since the emergence of representational theater, especially perhaps in the age of film and its love affair with Konstantin Stanislavski's method, creators of presentational theater have seemed the minority voice. In resurgence, they have sought to expose the tools of their trade on the surface rather than burying it in the bones of the working, emphasizing or even flaunting technique. This is a theater that revels in its artifice, featuring the delight of stage business and set-pieces — songs, feats of clowning and aerial acrobatics, flamboyant repartee, and extravagant props, costumes, and scenery — at the heart of the play.

The champion of the presentational theater in the 20th Century was Bertolt Brecht, who innovated a new, self-conscious style of theatrical production. For example, he used drop-down placards to give titles and mottoes for the scenes, both plot points and moral dilemmas, like museum labels in a gallery. Further, he innovated a style of acting, epitomized in Lotte Lenya and Peter Lorre, designed to heighten the audience's awareness of the artifice. He was seeking to create an "alienation effect" to separate the audience from the emotionality of the work. Brecht often cited traditional Chinese acting, or at least his interpretation of it, as his chief example:

> Above all, the Chinese artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him. He expresses his awareness of being watched. This immediately

> removes one of the European stage's characteristic illusions. The audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place. A whole elaborate European stage technique, which helps to conceal the fact that the scenes are so arranged that the audience can view them in the easiest way, is thereby made unnecessary. The actors openly choose those positions which will best show them off to the audience, just as if they were acrobats.[25]

Brecht's theater tells stories, but it seeks to pierce the illusions of artifice, on his account. It seeks to minimize the emotional and maximize the rational. And despite the invocation of Chinese forms, his theater is a creature of the European stage, as attested by his recovery of the ballad opera form for *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), equal parts dramatic and theatrical.

Using a series of program notes and occasional articles, Brecht laid forth a theory that privileged this theatrical style, which he called the *epic* theater, over the dramatic. Brecht's stated reasons were ethical and political. The representational theater, he argued, was a narcotic theater, an opiate to dull the critical capacities of the audience and render it compliant to an exploitive social and political order. This dramatic style carried the audience members away. In the epic theater, by contrast, they were forced into a more detached and critical attitude about both the performance and the story told by the self-exposure of technique and theatrical device. He imagined an audience trained in "complex seeing," taking in various design elements not as a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* but as requiring critical analysis. Comparing the epic theater to a boxing match in which the spectator was constantly evaluating the technique and skill of those he watched, Brecht called for "an attitude of smoking-and-watching."

> Such an attitude on [the spectator's] part at once compels a better and clearer performance as it is hopeless to try to 'carry away' any man who is smoking and

[25] Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting" in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, translated by John Willett (London: Methuen and Co., 1964), 91-92.

> accordingly pretty well occupied with himself. By these means one would soon have a theatre full of experts, just as one has sporting arenas full of experts.[26]

For Brecht, the motivation for an epic theater was political: an audience would be empowered with the critical expertise to engage the moral tableau portrayed, the *geste* of a scene, and the social and economic realities it revealed. But the means to this pedagogy was a presentational style of stage play, one that exposed the illusions of character-over-actor, place-over-scenery, story-over-action, and drama-over-theater.[27] Toward this end, Brecht created a theater of the avant-garde that privileges the theatrical style over the dramatic and sets the program for much of the theater (as well as film) of the 20th Century.

It is important not to draw these distinctions too sharply. As Brecht himself urges, these polarities are not "absolute antitheses but mere shifts of accent. In a communication of fact, for instance, we may choose whether to stress the element of emotional suggestion [i.e. the dramatic] or that of plain rational argument [i.e. the theatrical]."[28] The old saw remains well-said, "realism is just another -ism," and its practitioners are every bit as invested in the crafts of staging, acting, and the theatrical arts as those of Brecht's Berliner Ensemble. There is no reason to believe that maintenance of the illusion of the fourth wall is either easier or more difficult, more or less artful, than its transgression. And in many cases, much richness of meaning can be

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[26] Bertolt Brecht, "The Literarization of the Theatre (Notes to the *Threepenny Opera*)," in *Brecht on Theatre*, 44.

[27] It always needs to be said, Brecht's political didacticism does not exhaust his skill as a playwright. His plays are not merely Marxist case studies, but remarkable works of art. But in Brecht, didacticism and aesthetic value are inseparable. As he famously wrote in "A Short Organum for the Theatre," "Society cannot share a common communication system so long as it is split into warring classes. Thus for art to be 'un-political' means only to ally itself with the 'ruling' group" (*Brecht on Theatre*, 196).

[28] Bertolt Brecht, "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre (Notes to the opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*)" in *Brecht on Theater*, 37. Indeed, Brecht even has occasional approval for Stanislavsky, an avatar of the narcotic theater that is so often Brecht's nemesis (see especially "Some of the Things that can be Learnt from Stanislavsky" in *Brecht on Theatre*, 236-7).

found in the slippage between the two modes. For example, the English transvestite theater discussed in Chapter 3 could be interpreted as exploiting the hinge between the representational and presentational styles. Indeed, the better (i.e. more dramatically) the boy actor represents the woman character, the more presentationally performative the scene may come to seem. One should not commit too deeply to this distinction as a hermeneutic key for the unlocking of all dramatic meaning.

The point here, nevertheless, is that Samuel Beckett's theater is highly presentational: not to recognize this debilitates interpretation. This is the force of Herbert Blau's insight. In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett uses the tools of the presentational theater to distill his examination of the human condition into these two stage ciphers, players of a role without significant character or backstory, with the slightest of situations that can hardly be taken to qualify as a plot. Our sense of the tenderness of their relationship or the desperation of their plight emerges from their onstage antics, stage business and patter, more than from a narrative of their relationship. We know that, despite repeated threats, neither will ever leave, because the schtick will not allow it: no Oliver without Hardy, nor Abbot without Costello, nor Didi without Gogo. In Beckett's later plays, as we will see, the pole of drama recedes further. Indeed, it is arguable that *Waiting for Godot* is actually Beckett's most realistic play.

For a more presentational example, take the late play *Rockaby* (1981).[29] The fifteen-minute work consists entirely of a woman (W) seated in a rocking chair. The main action is the

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[29] Samuel Beckett, *Rockaby*, in *The Collected Shorter Plays* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1984). As of this writing, a YouTube video of its premier performance, directed by Alan Schneider and featuring Billie Whitelaw as W and V, is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66iZF6SnnDU. Although it has the usual handicaps of an attempt to film a stage play, the video captures the idea of the scene, as well as the music of Beckett's script as handled by two of Beckett's most important contemporary interpreters.

rocking of the chair, "mechanically without assistance from W," while her recorded voice (V) is heard speaking the repetitious, chant-like lines of the script, occasionally doubled by the live voice of W. At three inflection points along the way, the rocking stops, after a pause W looks up and says "More," each time more weakly, and the rocking resumes. At the end, when she fails to do so and instead lowers her head eyes closed, as the recorded voice intones "rock her off / fuck life / rock her off / rock her off / rock her off…" in a fade out, we take it that she has died. This is the entirety of the action. Beckett's stage directions and scene descriptions, typical in their rigor and detail, describe the chair, the woman's dress and appearance, the lighting scheme, and the schedule of the opening and closing of the woman's eyes, her only motion until her head droops at the end. The monologue contains a few elements of narrative, a sketched biography. W seems to be sitting in the same rocker that her own mother also rocked in, and died in, likewise wearing "her best black." Indeed, the dress receives as full a description as anything but the lighting scheme: "Black lacy high-necked evening gown. Long sleeves. Jet sequins to glitter when rocking. Incongruous flimsy head-dress set askew with extravagant trimming to catch light when rocking."[30] It connotes elegance and a certain social status, but also an old-fashioned fustiness, the dress W (or her mother) once wore to the occasions of bygone days. But even here, the description of the dress is as much about the effect of its staging, how its sequins catch the light, as any implication for back story or plot.

To say it that way, however — to tarry on the distinction between *content* and *enactment* — risks separating what may only be distinguished. Over the course of the four stanzas of

[30] Beckett, *Rockaby*, 273.

monologue, we hear aloud a woman's interior voice contemplating and coming to accept life's end, patterned after mother but claimed finally for herself. The stanzas each circle around this acceptance, each with greater concentration. The coming of a natural end is raised by the repeated start, "till in the end / the day came / in the end came / close of a long day," and coming around to a moment "when she said / to herself / whom else / time she stopped / *time she stopped*."[31] The italic in the script, the repetition of *time she stopped*, marks lines which W says simultaneously with the V recording, staging W's agreement to the coming of the stop. Much of the rest of first stanza evokes the motions of the rocking itself: "going to and fro / all eyes / all sides / high and low." Even at the end of the first stanza, and increasingly after each subsequent, an enormous tension accompanies the pause in rocking.

V: Time she stopped
time she stopped
[Together: echo of 'time she stopped', coming to rest of rock, faint fade of light.
Long pause.]
W: More.
[*Pause. Rock and voice together.*]

In the long pause, even after its first iteration, the audience is poised to know whether the rest of the rocker and the faint fade of light denotes W's death. In this way, the staging is fused to the narrative, each contributing to the explication of the story, such as it is. Or, to use Brecht's helpful term, each contributes to the creation of the *geste* of the scene, the moral and existential tableau of life that emerges from the performance.

[31] Beckett, *Rockaby*, 275.

Enoch Brater describes this fusion of staging and narrative. For Brater, Beckett's theater is rooted in the indelible image:

> A strange mixture of the carefully controlled and the spontaneous, the drama… restricts its subject matter and directs our attention instead to the formal elements of the play as performance. Light, sound, movement, and action therefore must be understood within the context established by this deliberately circumscribed stage space, an acting area in which a single image is expressed, explored, and advanced. Clear, articulate, definite, and precise, the visual impact becomes progressively haunting in its lonely simplicity.[32]

As with many interpreters, Brater finds a singular genius in Beckett's ability to craft an image that remains with the viewer long after the play. In meditation on the image, which changes so little but instead burns itself into the viewer's mind's eye, the play's impact takes root and ripens. Referring to the passage in section 4 where V describes her own descent "down the steep stair" and "into the old rocker / mother rocker / where mother sat / all the years / all in black / best black / sat and rocked" Brater finds the deepening link of language and image.

> A striking visual metaphor materializes before our very eyes as a poem comes to (stage) life. A visual image created by words is therefore something far more substantial in *Rockaby* than the term metaphor usually implies. For in this play we watch a verbal metaphor become concrete and palpable. In a word, it has become real. Sound therefore structures sight in *Rockaby*, just as sight skewers sound. Coming to us in the shape of words, sound provides the proper context for the dynamic image we see; the image we see provides the appropriate context for the haunting rhythms we hear.[33]

As Brater makes clear throughout his argument, the sight that skewers sound comprises the design elements of the play, and above all the lighting that plays so central a role in delimiting the stage space and focusing the gaze on W in her chair, which moves even though she does not.

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[32] Enoch Brater, "Light, Sound, Movement, and Action in Beckett's *Rockaby,*" *Modern Drama* 24 no 3 (Fall 1982), 342.

[33] Brater, "Light, Sound, Movement, and Action," 345.

The image is given its fullest definition in the words of the poem, as Brater calls it. At the same time, the image fixes those words in space and time (here and now), pinning them to this performance as what it is we are talking about. No mere poem about a past departure, we see its tale unfold before us.

Despite the thoroughness and concentration of the fusion, this is still no narcotic illusion that sweeps the viewer away, rapt and passive. As Brater makes clear, the process by which the verbal metaphor becomes real requires the activity of the spectator. "The degree of radical concentration and intensity achieved in the pictorial constituents of this theater style is meant to be studied, scrutinized, and finally assimilated during each break in the action. … [In] this play the image commands attention, something we will be forced to come back to again and again."[34] The concentration of space and image, along with the disembodiment of voice and motion, demand a consciousness of the viewer. The audience must piece together what is being represented and what is being enacted, solving a kind of mystery from the clues provided. The idea of *geste* may thus be especially helpful in approaching Beckett's theater, although harnessed for ends quite different from Brecht's. As with Brecht, Beckett frustrates any expectation of realism in his sheer theatricality. And as with Brecht, Beckett creates a moral and existential tableau that forces the audience member into a space of reflection and critical evaluation. The critical evaluation to which we are invited, however, is quite different. No longer Brecht's examination of social injustices, Beckett forces a consideration of the comforts and horrors of the onset of age and the coming of death.

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[34] Brater, "Light, Sound, Movement, and Action," 344.

We find a similar emphasis on the presentational style at work in all of Beckett's theater. It is seen, however, in its most trenchant and distilled form in the short, late works. In *Ohio Impromptu* (1981), for example, two identical figures sit caddy-corner at a table in identical postures, one reading to the other from a book which seems to be both his own (their?) diary of a long lost love and the stage directions for the production itself. Here the staging both allows and requires the examination of an ego in self-exploration and mirrored remembering, mirrored both by the second self onstage and by the audience members. In *Not I* (1972), which I discuss at greater length in Chapter 5, a disembodied mouth rants from out of the very trauma that caused her disembodiment, speaking the unspeakable in denial and deflection ("she found herself in the — … what?.. who?.. no!.. she!..."). A silent auditor watches from the side, pinning the audience's own acts of spectation and audition into the piece itself, while the mouth is both made visible and violated again by the piercing beam of light that defines the ambit of the play.

The most extravagant example may be *Catastrophe* (1982).[35] Even the play's title participates in this self-consciousness about the relationship between thematic content and theatrical form, having as it does two senses, the general meaning of utter ruin and the technical meaning of the climax of a classical tragedy. The second meaning seems to govern, at least for the majority of the play. The work shows a theater director and his assistant polishing up the final image of a stage play. The play within a play also seems to be quite Beckett-like, depending on a single image of a man displayed, dressed like a Beckett character in overcoat, nightgown, and broad hat, shabby and degraded like a Beckett character with ashy skin and molting pate, and

[35] Samuel Beckett, *Catastrophe,* in *The Collected Shorter Plays of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1984).

visually objectified like a Beckett character by a bright, focused spotlight. The director (D) gives his assistant (A, "his female assistant") a series of instructions about the appearance of the standing character (P, the protagonist), his costume, his flesh tone, and most importantly his physical posture and mien. D works quickly to construct the catastrophe of the play they are producing, the final image: P standing on a plinth, half clad in bedclothes, hands clasped and head bowed, and the final action of this inner play consisting entirely in a change of lighting, from full stage, to P's figure only, to only P's head. "Terrific! He'll have them on their feet. I can hear it from here," D says, as the image is perfected.[36]

D's catastrophe, however, is not Beckett's *Catastrophe.* More happens. In the catastrophe of *Catastrophe*, the last action, we see what comes after D is satisfied.

> A: [*Timidly.*] What if he were to … were to … raise his head … an instant … show his face … just an instant.
> D: For God's sake! What next? Raise his head? Where do you think we are? In Patagonia? Raise his head? For God's sake! [*Pause*.] Good. There's our catastrophe. In the bag. Once more and I'm off.
> A: [*To* L.] Once more and he's off.
> [*Fade-up of light on* P*'s body. Pause. Fade-up of general light*.]
> D: Stop! [*Pause*.] Now … let 'em have it. [*Fade-out of general light. Pause. Fade-out of light on body. Light on head alone. Long pause*.] Terrific! He'll have them on their feet. I can hear it from here. [*Pause. Distant storm of applause.* P *raises his head, fixes the audience. The applause falters, dies.*
> *Long pause.*
> *Fade-out of light on face.*][37]

The catastrophe that D has designed ends when the narrow spotlight focuses on Ps head, bowed. It is this image that D declares "terrific!" and that receives the distant storm of applause, added in

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[36] Beckett, *Catastrophe*, 301.

[37] Beckett, *Catastrophe*, 300-301.

pre-recorded form over the sound system. But P takes the performance a step further, explicitly violating D's dismissal of A's suggestion. Beckett's stage direction countermands D's dictate. P does raise his head and then he fixes on the audience. Here, audience means the live bodies sitting in the theater watching a performance of *Catastrophe*, not the recorded audio of the audience of D's fantasy, on their feet applauding his carefully constructed image. That is, at the very end of the outer play, Beckett's production pierces the envelope of the play-within-a-play. When P gazes upon — *fixes* — us directly, we are no longer watching a play about the staging of the final scene of a play. We are confronting directly the figure who has been so thoroughly objectified and instrumentalized by D. P has disobeyed, in order to make direct contact, as if to reveal the true suffering the actor feels. The image is one of pain, subjugation, and subversion: it is an image of catastrophe in the general sense of the term as well — ruin. The actor is no longer in D's play, but in the one we are watching. The lighting is no longer run by L, Luke the lighting guy of the inner play, but is run by the lighting engineer of the play we are watching. And "P" is no longer the name of a role in D's play (if it ever was), but rather is the name of a role in Beckett's play, the outer play, that is no longer the same as the inner.

Indeed, so stark and direct is the image, so devoid of the pretense of role or narrative, so far to the *theatrical* end of the spectrum, that it is possible for us to see not the actor playing P for D, who has improvised his own ending, but rather *our* actor, named David Warrilow or John Gielgud, accusing us directly, imploring directly that we not be unmoved in the face of this suffering, that we not be voyeurs without empathy. This moment is Beckett's version of a Brechtian *geste*, a moment when the dramatic illusion is pierced and the audience members

placed in a position of critical appraisal, having to decide for ourselves on an issue of existential authenticity. Beckett's geste, however, is even more aesthetically inflected than Brecht's. Beckett forces us to reflect on our "social location" not as citizens or consumers, but first as theater goers. He implicates how plays mean in the playing of the play. Only then can we see a second way in which "more happens" in the play. The first "more" is the few seconds after the inner play ends, when P expresses his freedom and transcends the play-within-a-play frame by directing his performance straight at us, the audience.

The second is the play's allegory of life under dictatorship. *Catastrophe* is Beckett's most political play, dedicated to dissident activist and avant-garde playwright Václav Havel during the latter's incarceration. The autocratic D, the servile A, and the abject P evoke the question of political repression. D barks orders, relating both to his personal needs ("Light!") and to the arrangement of P onstage. He commands P's dress, his physical posture, even the color and condition of his skin. At the same time, he never touches P directly, but orders A to do all the dirty work. She complies readily, handling P and his clothing. She also attempts to suggest improvements, to little reward.

> A: [*Timidly.*] What about a little … a little … gag?
> D: For God's sake! This craze for explicitation! Every i dotted to death! Little gag! For God's sake!
> A: Sure he won't utter?
> D: Not a squeak.[38]

She is not valued for her creativity, but only for her use as the factotum of the dictator. D, on the other hand, does value creativity. He wants his catastrophe to have a perfect style, a panache that

[38] Beckett, *Catastrophe*, 299.

will “have them on their feet.” Not too much explicitation, nothing crass or Patagonian, and no eye contact. D’s confidence in his total control over P as a fact of repressive autocracy foregoes the old fashioned mechanisms of bygone subjugation. P will not utter because of the thoroughness of the inner control of the modern dictatorship. The oppressed will not utter because the role into which they are cast in such a totalitarian society gives them no lines.

As with the Renaissance playwrights’ revolts against Puritan authority, Beckett turns his theater and its expressive means into an icon of rebellion, an artificial device in which one is invited to see an alternative world and the possibility, at least, of an alternative governance. As I have argued, any work creates an illusion of an inner, autonomous world governed by a local telos, aiming at the same aim as the wider world, beauty. Here, the inner world is highlighted in its political aspects. And the beauty aimed at is of a strange and severe kind, not pretty but faintly glowing with the possibility of resistance and liberation. *Catastrophe*’s inner world enacts the creation of its own inner world, the play-within-a-play directed by D and starring P. D seeks to create his own work, a work of propaganda rather than art, a work of style but finally no beauty of its own. The beauty — the pity and terror — of the outer play is its judgment on the pain and ugliness of the inner.[39] In some ways, this is the opposite of Shakespeare’s collapse of the world into the theater discussed in Chapter 3. While Hamlet’s outer world telescopically collapses into the theater, Beckett’s theater reaches out into the world, in the form of P’s direct fix upon the

[39] Aristotle’s theater, in which an experience of catharsis is offered to heal society, remains relevant. In Whitehead’s phrase, art contributes to the “slow drift of mankind toward civilization.” But the object of mimesis here is very different, not the imitation of the actions of great heroes but rather the imitation of the process coordinating the coming into being of actuality as the construction of a more beautiful world.

audience. Even more than Shakespeare, Beckett plays the games of meta-theater to implicate of the wider world in the drama he is displaying.

For Beckett, even more than for Brecht, this flamboyance of the display of the means and modes of production is inseparable from, and vital to, the message produced. The power of P's silent address to the audience has nothing to do with the eloquence of his lines — there are none. Nor is it even the silent scream of Brecht's Mother Courage, witnessed by only the audience through the pantomime of the character onstage but contained entirely within the scene. Beckett forces us to see the actor as actor, and retroactively redefines the previous action into this allegory of totalitarian life, thus inviting us to wonder about what else this image serves as the catastrophe — the final gesture of a classical tragedy — for. Although "P" utters no lines, displays no autonomy, and barely moves, we finally understand his designation as *protagonist,* the hero of the work. We are invited to understand at last that the work concerns him. In the convergence of these two themes, the political and the meta-theatrical, we continue to get a clear sense of Beckett's implicit aesthetic. The essence of the working of this theater is in the embodied, on-stage interaction and its spillover into the audience. Art's microcosm is asserted in the insistence on this time and place, this stage, and those people. Its local deity, its aim-giver, is on display in the drive to confront aimlessness.

The Being of the Character and the Presence of the Audience

As we have seen, at the heart of Beckett's theater lies his ubiquitous self-referencing theatricality. Beckett's plays constantly call attention to the fact that they are plays. This is of

course hardly unique to Beckett; recall Hamlet's naming of The Globe or, more profoundly, Hamlet's direction and staging of the Mousetrap. In Beckett, however, the practice is yet more directly thematized. While Hamlet will address the audience with an aside, Hamm in *Endgame* will bellow, "An aside, ape!" Didi leaves the stage looking for the restroom in the wings. *Catastrophe* is a play about a play maker, showing the making of the play we are to watch. Although there are many ways into Beckett's work, as many as there are interpreters, a look at this meta-theatrical thread can show us most efficiently his implicit theory of the theater and its art.

Often, Beckett's meta-theatrical extremity engages questions that are deeply aesthetic, philosophical ruminations about the nature of art enacted in real time in the space before us by the bodies of actors in some kind of physical relationship with us as audience. There is and is-and-is-not-ness to the theater, as Bouchard points out: "The performer both is-and-is-not "herself" and is-and-is-not the persona she plays, and so too the others players as we perceive and think of them. We should be asking what we believe about this hybrid presence of another."[40] In discussions of theater, these questions verge on something like the "ontological status" of our characters as we perceive the presence before us of some hybrid fusion of actor and role.[41] We marvel at an actor who can play different roles so differently, finding new ways to use face, posture, speech patterns, vocal tone, and physical rhythm to create what seem to be entirely new people. At the same time, we are fascinated by different portrayals of the same role,

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[40] Bouchard, *Theater and Integrity*, 15.

[41] In using "ontological status," I intend it in the way performance theory might, not as a strictly defined, philosophically literal concept but as a kind of theoretical metaphor for radical claims about person, actor, character, and identity in the context of the artistic transaction.

Stacy Keach's King Lear, say, menacing and brutal, versus Christopher Plummer's, confused and insecure. How will Estelle Parsons handle Winnie, we wonder, buried up to her waist for an hour of prattle? Differently from Billie Whitelaw or Jessica Tandy? Both of these abiding curiosities — actors in different roles and roles played by different actors — highlight our awareness of the duality. As soon as an actor walks on stage in the role of Pozzo ("I present myself: Pozzo…. I am Pozzo!… Pozzo!… Does that name mean nothing to you?"), the is-and-is-not is activated. The grand entrance presents unavoidably the persona we see and hear before us, thematic content and expressive technique fused by the spectacle of the moment. And yet the spectacle instantly invites analysis into its parts; one would be forgiven for whispering to a seat mate at, say, Mike Nichols' star-studded Broadway production, "Look! It's F. Murray Abraham!" In Beckett's theater, such "ontological" gestures of self-reference become a chief carrier of thematic meaning. They also encode his aesthetic theory, his understanding of how, in an aimless world, drained of meaning, meaning and purpose may still be possible.

Stanley Cavell ruminates deeply on these tensions of performance and meaning with an eye to the aesthetics implied by the art of the theater, particularly with an eye to the theater of Samuel Beckett. Cavell explores how the mechanisms of theatrical performance enact (and are used by the playwrights to enhance) existential crises of meaning and significance. For Cavell, plays perform responses to basic questions of the aim of human community, which we see by examination of the aesthetic transaction between the play and its audience. In the performative moment, he asks, which space, time, and person do we see? To which are we present, and which

are present to us? What are we doing when we spectate a play, and what is the play doing with us?

Perhaps the quickest entrée into Cavell's thought comes in his discussion not of Beckett but of Shakespeare's *Othello*, with his interrogation of the "usual joke … about the Southern yokel who rushes to the stage to save Desdemona from the black man."[42]

> What is the joke? That he doesn't know how to behave in a theater? … But what mistake has the yokel in the theater made…? He thinks someone is strangling someone. — But that is true; Othello is strangling Desdemona. — Come on, come on; you know he thinks that very man is putting out the light of that very woman right now. — Yes, and that is exactly what is happening. — You're not amusing. The point is that he thinks something is really happening, whereas nothing is really happening. It's playacting. The woman will rise again to die another night. — That is what I thought was meant, what I was impatiently being asked to accede to. The trouble is that I really do not understand what I am being asked, and of course I am suggesting that you do not know either. You tell me that that woman will rise again, but I know that she will not…. You can say there are two women, Mrs. Siddons and Desdemona, both of whom are mortal, but only one of whom is dying in front of our eyes. But what you have produced is two names. Not all the pointing in the world to *that* woman will distinguish the one woman from the other.[43]

For Cavell, the objection that "they are only playacting" is completely inadequate, because it denies the reality of the play we are watching. It implies that whether Othello strangles Desdemona is an unimportant question, while in fact it is the most important. Indeed, Shakespeare highlights its importance by temporarily resuscitating her to cry "murder'd" from behind the arras before finally dying. Witnessing this death, along with everything that has led up to it, is the point of attending the theater. We are not watching Mrs. Siddons pretend to be dead.

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[42] Stanley Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*," in *Must We Mean What We Say? Updated Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 327.

[43] Cavell, "Avoidance of Love," 327-28. This discussion of the relationship of Desdemona, character, to Sarah Siddons, actor, is this kind of question of of "ontological status". As Cavell frames it, "What is the existence of a character on the stage, what kind of (grammatical) entity is this?" 332.

We are here watching Desdemona die. Whatever work tragedy is intended to do on us, it is rooted in the sense of the reality of the scene we watch. This is not to say that Cavell denies the tension, the confusion behind the question being asked. He also cannot distinguish between Mrs. Siddons and Desdemona, when pointing to "*that* woman there." Neither can he deny that both Mrs. Siddons and Desdemona are involved, present to him, nor that one dies and one does not. As he concludes his exposition of the problem, "You go [to the theater] … in order to find out that Mrs. Siddons is not dead; I go to watch Desdemona die. I don't particularly enjoy the comparison, for while I do not share your tastes they seem harmless enough, where mine are very suspect."[44]

This is, of course, Cavell's wry way of pointing out that the question of Mrs. Siddons's survival is both uninteresting and entirely beside the point. We could, he allows, assure the yokel that "They are only acting; it isn't real." But while that may satisfy Cavell's yokel, it would not satisfy us. "Not that we doubt that it is true. If the thing *were* real. . . . But somehow we had *accepted* its nonfactuality; it made it possible for there to have been a play. When we say it, in assurance, it comes out as an empirical assertion."[45] If the point of the play is not to see the survival of Mrs. Siddons, it is certainly not to make an issue of it. In our Whiteheadian terms, the point is to surrender to the artistic proposition, not to examine it. By the time we go from assuming, or accepting, the play's nonfactuality to asserting it, we have betrayed our basic purpose. "'They are only pretending' is something we typically say to children…. The point of saying it there is not to focus them on the play, but to help bring them out of it…. If the child

[44] Cavell, "Avoidance of Love," 328.

[45] Cavell, "Avoidance of Love," 328-29.

cannot be brought out of the play by working through the content of the play itself, he should not have been subjected to it in the first place."[46] The yokel, like the child, could not merely assume the play's nonfactuality — indeed, he missed it altogether. And so stood no hope of experiencing the play as a work of art.

For Cavell, the challenge of experiencing a play as a work of art hinges on the meaning of the word *there* in "that woman there" and on its burden of presentness: how are the players and the audience members present together, present to one another, and in what kind of present? How do we make sense of the non-reciprocal nature of our relationship with the characters in a play? This becomes a question of presentness. "A character is not, and cannot become, aware of us…. We are not in their presence."[47] Our presence is irrelevant to the unfolding of the action, and makes no difference in the arc of the story told. The stage wights of *Ohio Impromptu* are present only to one another, reader and auditor. W and her recorded monologue in *Rockaby* are not explaining themselves to us, or requiring any sort of answer we might provide, whether to say, "It's ok to let go after so long a life," or "Do not go gentle…." We are witnesses to the unfolding, like viewers of a horror film, knowing of the killer in the closet but unable to warn or encourage the next victim.

Cavell's take on this does not seem entirely adequate. The most theatrical forms, from avant-garde pieces such as Richard Shechner's *Dionysius in 69* (1968) to even comedy club

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[46] Cavell, "Avoidance of Love," 329.

[47] Cavell, "Avoidance of Love," 332.

improv, all involve the audience in a way that makes its members present to the characters.[48] Cavell himself nods to the possibility of audience visibility: "Darkened, indoor theaters dramatize the fact that the audience is invisible [to the characters]. A theater whose house lights were left on (a possibility suggested, for other reasons, by Brecht) might dramatize the equally significant fact that we are inaudible to them, and immovable (that is, at a *fixed distance* from them)."[49] Cavell here allows the possibility of an audience whose un-presence cannot merely be assumed. But he bends this concession into a reinforcement of his point, rather than making some caveat to his argument.

It may be, however, that an interactive theater of the avant-garde is an exception that proves the rule. The acknowledgement by a character of the presence of the audience is a marked and signal moment, invasive and indiscreet. The bucket must be filled with confetti, not water; the front row spectators at the Blue Man Group must be provided with ponchos; always, the performers of an interactive play must take utmost care to read the audience for likely participants, people for whom the impertinence of the follow spot and the outstretched, inviting hand will not be overwhelming. For most theater, even something as presentational as Beckett's late plays, the convention of the character's unawareness of the audience remains intact. Indeed, it is the surprising violation of this convention that makes the ending of *Catastrophe* so striking.

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[48] See Richard Schechner, *Environmental Theater*, new and expanded edition (New York: Applause Books, 1994). *Dionysus in 69*, Schechner's avant-garde adaptation of Euripides' *The Bacchae*, involved characters directly with audience members. Actors came into the seating spaces to interact with audience members and ultimately invited them down to participate in the final bacchanal-orgy-rebirth scene. Actors and audience participants alike joined in the central playing space, clothed and unclothed, in Schechner's attempt to reclaim the fundamentally orgiastic and Dionysian performance of the cathartic expiation of society's ills that Classical tragedy was, in his view, to perform.

[49] Cavell, "Avoidance of Love," 332.

While we are not present to stage characters on Cavell's account, they are present to us. This presence makes an unavoidable claim on attention requiring an answer, even when there is no answer to be made. "This means, again, not simply that we are seeing and hearing them, but that we are acknowledging them (or specifically failing to)."[50] Witnessing a murder requires a response, and yet there is no response to be made. Presentness, being present, is not reciprocal: the characters are present to us, while we are not present to them. For Cavell, this lack of reciprocity is the heart of the theater:

> One may feel like saying here: The acknowledgement cannot be completed. But this does not mean that acknowledging is impossible in a theater. Rather it shows what acknowledging, in a theater, is. And acknowledging in a theater shows what acknowledgement in actuality is.[51]

Cavell's theater functions as a practice space in which the audience members can try on the meaning of authentically compassionate human existence. The suffering of tragedy is made present to us and we can wrestle with its meanings and obligations. Freed from the necessity to act and free for the contemplation of the necessity of responsible answer, we can explore the deepest dimensions of acknowledgment.

> For what is the difference between tragedy in a theater and tragedy in actuality? In both, people in pain are in our presence. But in actuality acknowledgment *is* incomplete; in actuality there is no acknowledgment, unless we put ourselves in their presence, reveal ourselves to them. We may find that the point of tragedy in a theater is exactly relief from this necessity, a respite within which to prepare for this necessity, to clean out the pity and terror which stand in the way of acknowledgement outside. ("Outside of here it is death" — maybe Hamm the actor has the theater in mind.)[52]

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[50] Cavell, "Avoidance of Love," 332.

[51] Cavell, "Avoidance of Love," 332.

[52] Cavell, "Avoidance of Love," 332-33. *Hamm* is a reference to Beckett's *Endgame*, discussed at length below, and to the meta-theatrical bent of Cavell's interpretation of the play.

In the face of actual tragedy, to remain in the shadows is to be a voyeur. The relentless demand of the actual — that we reveal ourselves and, after the yokel's example, that we *do something* — is relieved for the audience of theatrical tragedy. Our action must be the opposite of the yokel's, a pause of vulnerability. As the audience to tragedy, we can explore the possibility of truly acknowledging another.[53]

As this experience unfolds, the challenge for the audience member is to imagine what it would mean truly to come out of the shadows.

> We must learn to reveal ourselves, to allow ourselves to be seen. When we do not, when we keep ourselves in the dark, the consequence is that we convert the other into a character and make the world a stage for him…. Theater does not expect us simply to stop theatricalizing; it knows that we can theatricalize its conditions as we can theatricalize any others. But in giving us a place within which our hiddenness and silence and separation are accounted for, it gives us a chance to stop.[54]

For Cavell, the lesson of the theater is to learn what it feels like when one is theatricalizing — behaving like a voyeur toward — the actual others of her life. It teaches us the cost of such non-reciprocal presence. And perhaps it reminds us that, while the yokel is a fool to act in the theater, we are worse than a fool when we fail to act in actual life. Indeed, Cavell seems to imply that to be a voyeur is far worse than to be a yokel. Life requires that we come out of the shadows. The theater teaches us this, however, by clearing space and giving permission, a "chance to stop" still in the darkness, and to reflect on our acknowledgment of those to whom we are present in the context of those to whom we are not. Immersed in the theatrical experience, we are enclosed in a

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[53] Cavell's idea of *acknowledgment* coordinates nicely with's Whitehead's idea of *Truth*, discussed in Chapter 5. Acknowledgment entails the embrace of the deeper meaning of reality. For Whitehead, those meanings are constructed by the emergent subject, what he calls *appearance*, but remain answerable to reality itself. This answerability is *truth*, and its question could be reframed in Cavell's terms: "What is this appearance acknowledging?"

[54] Cavell, "Avoidance of Love," 333-34.

bounded world and our responsibility for it is replaced by our presence to it. In Whiteheadian terms, the things we see portrayed, such as the murder of a woman, have been drained of their actuality and have become for us Sherburne's proposition, food for feeling. That's what the yokel has missed: recognition that he has entered a microcosm governed by a local providence, whose events unfold not to him but for him or even within him. He fails to understand that the theater has created an envelope in the wider world, an enclosed microcosm governed by a moral and spatial physics that he is outside of. His ability to act is disabled by the proposition that encapsulates the play. Or at least, it would have been disabled had he acceded to the invitation of the proposition to the having of an artistic experience.

This proposition is finally what delineates Mrs. Siddons and Desdemona: the former is raw material, the *logical subject*, while the latter is the former incorporated into the artistic composition, the *predicate*. Canvass and paint, under the governance of the proposition, become the portrait. Mrs. Siddons, likewise drained of actuality, becomes Desdemona. The reason there is nothing to be done is that the work is an excerpted world, populated by its own inhabitants and governed according to its own local drives. The existential and moral lessons of acknowledgment and answerability that Cavell wants us to derive rely on our experience of reflection upon the juxtaposition of that world and our own.

While Cavell's essay on *King Lear* more easily makes clear his basic theory of the theatrical aesthetic, his essay on *Endgame* argues more deeply Beckett's particular use of the aesthetic capacities of the theater.[55] At the start of this complex and subtly textured essay, there

[55] Stanley Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game: A Reading of Beckett's *Endgame*" in *Must We Mean What We Say? Updated Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

seem to be two questions motivating the work. The first is the basic modern crisis of meaning that haunts modernism into a compulsive obsession with subjectivity: "…in modernist arts the achievement of the autonomy of the object is a *problem* — the artistic problem. …the modernist artist has continuously to question the conventions upon which his art depended; nor is it furthered by any position the artist can adopt, towards anything but his art."[56] That is, Cavell believes modernist art is necessarily more self-conscious and meta-artistic than earlier forms. The second question is the particular approach Beckett takes to the modernist dilemma:

> My argument will be that Beckett, in *Endgame*, is not marketing subjectivity, popularizing *angst*, amusing and thereby excusing us with pictures of our psychopathology; he is outlining the facts — of mind, of community — which show why these have become our pastimes. The discovery of *Endgame*, both in topic and technique, is not the failure of meaning (if that means the lack of meaning) but its total, even totalitarian, success — our inability *not* to mean what we are given to mean.[57]

In a typical double-negative formulation, Cavell argues that *Endgame* is Beckett's attempt to accept the challenge of meaning that existence inevitably poses prior to the meaningless question of meaninglessness: "not so much that [man] was ever born and must die, but that he has to figure out the one and shape up to the other and justify what comes between, and that he is not a beast and not a god: in a word, that he is a man, and all alone."[58] The question of suicide is, for Cavell (after Albert Camus), inadequate; it does not *respond* to this absurdity, but avoids it. "It is true that Hamm wants death, at least there is no life he wants, and one can say that his entire project is to achieve his death. Why will suicide not answer? Because he cannot imagine his

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[56] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 116.

[57] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 116-17.

[58] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 122.

death apart from imagining the death of the world…. He wants to end, but without taking leave."[59] This is to say that, to Cavell's thinking, the proper subject of Beckett's modernism is the problem of art, how the subject means her meaning. Or perhaps, how she fails to mean her meaninglessness. It is unavoidably self-implicating and self-referential. Modernist theater must be meta-theater.

For Cavell, these themes entail biblical and theological connections in *Endgame*, invoking canonical expressions of meaningfulness. Keying off Hamm's name, Cavell styles the bomb-shelter-like dwelling in which the play is set as a re-figuration of Noah's ark, the last place where there is life. God the creator is found caught in the same dilemma:

> The Covenant, therefore, is a bad bargain, and the notion of replenishing the earth is a losing proposition…. Hamm's strategy is to undo all covenants and to secure fruitlessness. In a word, to disobey God perfectly, to perform man's last disobedience. No doubt Hamm acts out of compassion. ("Kill him, for the love of God.") The creation and destruction of a world of men is too great a burden of responsibility even for God. To remove that responsibility the world does not so much need to vanish as to become *un-created.* But to accomplish that it seems that we will have to become gods. For mere men will go on hoping, go on waiting for redemption, for justification, for meaning. And these claims ineluctably retain God in creation — to his, and to our, damnation. And yet, where there is life there is hope. That is Hamm's dilemma.[60]

This dilemma is theological. From the divine perspective, God created humanity, which places responsibility for all the attendant suffering and meaningless upon God. But to annihilate is yet more abominable; and so there is no escape even for God from the problem of human existence. The dilemma is also aesthetic, how to create an un-creation. Hamm and the play he performs (as well perhaps as the play Samuel Beckett has written to display them) contrive an escape for both

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[59] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 132-33.

[60] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 140-41.

God (an act of compassion) and himself, a means by which un-creation can be created, winning the game one cannot win by somehow un-playing. Creation and God end together, when the curtain comes down at the play's end.

The koan-like nature of the dilemma becomes somewhat clearer when seen from its human perspective. Like the divine, the human faces a choice she cannot make and cannot avoid. As *Endgame* ends, Clov is poised at the door, ready to go, as Hamm delivers his "last soliloquy." Cavell points out that the conventional interpretation highlights the suspended questions that are not resolved: "Does Clov leave? There is evidence for believing he does and evidence the other way. We don't know, they don't know. And if he does leave, is *that* the end?" Cavell responds, "This can't, I think, be the right track. The end Hamm seeks must be shown in the efforts made throughout the play."[61] Those efforts lead to "a set of goals split against itself":

> … the end of the game will be to show that the game has no winner, the moral of the story to show that there is no moral anyone can draw, its art directed to prove that art — the grouping of details to an overwhelming expression — does not exist; that games, plays, stories, morals, art — all the farcing of coherent civilizations — come to nothing, are nothing. To accomplish this will seem — will be — the end of the world, of *our* world. The motive, however, is not death, but life, or anyway human existence at last.…
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> Suppose what Hamm sees is that salvation lies in the ending of endgames, the final renunciation of all final solutions. The greatest endgame is Eschatology, the idea that the last things of earth will have an order and a justification, a sense. That is what we hoped for, against hope, that was what salvation would look like. Now we are to know that salvation lies in reversing the story, in ending the story of the end, dismantling Eschatology, ending its world of order in order to reverse the curse of the world laid on it in its Judeo-Christian end.[62]

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[61] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 148.

[62] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 148-149.

Suffering and the frustration of hope cannot be countermanded or fixed, because the very hope of not suffering is itself the source of suffering, and so they must be deconstructed and self-re-absorbed. The final game is the end of games. It is a making of a world in which the world is unmade. And finally, Cavell shifts this back into his understanding of the workings of the theater: the final performance is the undoing of performance. *Endgame's* post-apocalyptic vision, both vague but also prototypical, performs an eschaton that is endlessly ending without consummation.

As we saw with his essay on *King Lear*, Cavell is concerned here too with what I called the "ontological status" of the character: what kinds of people are these people we are watching in a play, and what do their performances and its performativity mean, especially in relation to us as audience? Although in some ways Cavell's interpretive key to *Endgame* is the winding down of an unwinnable game of chess, he continually recurs to the play's self-consciousness about performance, and in particular the performances Hamm and Clov offer to one another. He identifies this early in the essay, explaining that "The medium of Beckett's dialogue is repartee, adjoining the genres of Restoration comedy, Shakespearean clowning, and the vaudeville gag…."[63] The language of the characters are themselves word games "whose point is to win a contest of wits by capping a gag or getting the last word." This accords with the *game* theme. But these word games are essentially theatrical, a snappy patter, dialogue full of brio and wit.

For Cavell, Hamm in particular is the artist, the director, the playwright, and the lead actor.

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[63] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 127.

> His final soliloquy, like every other moment in the play, was planned, rehearsed. His first words are "Me to play"; it's his move, it's up to him. Over and over we are shown that everything that is happening has happened before. Just before his last speech Hamm the ham makes what he calls an aside and says he's "warming up for my last soliloquy." True, this is said immediately before the boy appears, so that what is in fact his last soliloquy may not be the one he had planned. However, the last soliloquy contains the same reference to conscious composition as the former ones do ("Nicely put, that"), and its content is about the same.[64]

Beneath his grandiosity ("Can there be misery — [*he yawns*] — loftier than mine?"), Hamm has an understanding of his significance (both *importance* and *signification*) in the play he and his cast are enacting.[65] Hamm composes his chronicle and authors Clov's future in the form of his own past: "One day you'll be blind, like me. You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like me."[66] Hamm is the *artist* (vs. Clov, the *theologian*), and he "still hopes for salvation through his art…."[67] But he is not just an artist; he is a performer. He "hopes to move his audience to gratitude, win their love through telling his story."[68] And his role in the deconstruction is to perform the cessation of performance: "His end of endgame will come when he is able to 'speak no more about it,' stop telling himself the old stories of justification, or the new story that salvation can be found in art, or indeed that art, as we have conceived and practiced it, has any relevance at all to our current necessities."[69] Cavell sees this enacted most obviously in the relationship of Hamm and Clov. For Cavell, "the play is about their efforts to

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[64] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 148.

[65] Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 2.

[66] Beckett, *Endgame*, 36.

[67] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 151.

[68] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 151.

[69] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 152.

forgo the losing win of suffering. This is why they try to give each other up, because apart from one another the strategies are pointless."[70] To give up the strategies is to give up performing: "Each requires his audience: Clov, because his worthiness must be seen; Hamm, because his loftiness must be appreciated. And the giving up of audience must present itself, both to the theologian [Clov] and to the artist [Hamm], as death."[71] The play ends with Clov poised to leave, or to perform leaving, but not leaving (yet?). Hamm, dispensing with the idea of Clov as his audience, delivers his final soliloquy to no one in particular. Or rather, only to the actual audience seated in the theater. Again, Beckett's performers are left without the pretense of role, naked in their direct performativity to us.

The heart of Cavell's analysis again pertains to the relationship the play creates with the audience. "The first aesthetic fact about performances is that they have audiences. And my question now is: How are we to conceive of the audience of Beckett's (not Hamm's) play? If we say, not that there *is* no audience, but that the goal of the play is that there be no audience, then what are we to make of all those people sitting out there in the dark, watching and listening?"[72] If the way to resolve the unresolvable existential dilemma is to transcend it, to win the game whose only victory is to lose, this means to perform the cessation of performance as well. And to perform a play whose endgame is the cessation of performance requires a different relationship with the audience attending the performance.

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[70] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 151.

[71] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 151.

[72] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 156.

Cavell begins this analysis following Aristotle's question of how viewing tragedy brings pleasure. "The aesthetic problem about Beckett's dramaturgy is no more difficult, and perhaps no different: it still concerns how the people comprising the audience are different from those same people when they are not an audience."[73] As we have seen, for Cavell, members of the audience are passive, not present to the players, even while the the players are present to them. He defines *audience* in terms of the fourth wall. "Deny that wall" he says, " — that is, recognize those in attendance — and the *audience*, vanishes. It seems a reasonable hypothesis that if anything is sensibly to be grasped as 'modern theater' one of its descriptions would be the various ways in which modern dramatists have denied the wall."[74] Following Nietzsche, Cavell relates the vanishment of the audience with a return to a more primal and cathartic form of theater, and so a theater with greater potential to heal and transform. Cavell sits in line here with the attendant theory of the modernist theater, which likewise describes a radical renegotiation of both the relationship of the players with the audience and the "ontological status" of the audience; a transformed audience does indeed lead, in the dramaturgy of modernism, to a transformed world.[75]

Cavell narrows in on Beckett's particular negotiation of this modernist endeavor. "Beckett's way is two-fold. First, while he does not speak *to* those out there (a possible form of

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[73] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 157.

[74] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 157.

[75] As examples of modernist playwrights and theorists describing such a renegotiation, I have already mentioned Brecht and Schechner above. For other signal examples, see August Strindberg, *A Dream Play*; Luigi Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*; Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*; Eric Bentley, *The Playwright as Thinker*; Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*; or the Absurdist plays of Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee.

denial) he never lets them forget that those on the stage are acting, and know they are acting. He makes the fact that they are acting one of their constant topics and problems. This is scarcely original."[76] Beckett's self-referentiality serves, for Cavell, as part of the strategy to involve the audience self-consciously in the theatrical transaction. The second fold of Beckett's way is that "he has his own way of putting the audience in the position of the actors; I mean in the position of the characters." Cavell compares the situation of *Endgame* to other theater, where "the audience knows more than any character (for example, they know what happens when he is off stage); or some character knows more than the audience (for example, what is happening to him off stage)."[77] The fourth wall is defined as a limit of knowledge, where we on one side do know know the same as those on the other side. In Beckett's theater, we share a common knowledge, and the separation is destroyed:

> It is a matter of our feeling that no one in the place, on the stage or in the house, knows better than anyone else what is happening, no one has a better right to speak than anyone else. Something is happening, something is happening to the actors (I mean the characters). In *Waiting for Godot*: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful." But in *Endgame* there is something more awful, namely the experience of something happening…. The concept [behind the repeated, urgent question "what is happening"] is thematic, but at this point we can hardly enter a new theme. The suggestion is, partly, that for *anything* to happen is anguishing because that means the end has not come. But it also suggests that so far as something is *happening* to us, we are not *acting*, and if we are not acting, we are not in control; we have moved from the waiting of patience to the waiting of passion. And then anything can happen, in particular the most anguishing thing of all, that we may change. Any misery is better than that, I can always find some attitude toward my misery which exploits it, for the entertainment or enchantment of others, and to my fuller love of myself. But if I change, I am no longer intact; I die to my world. I would rather die.[78]

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[76] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 158.

[77] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 158.

[78] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 158.

In a play about the game whose playing ends all games, Cavell sees acting that ends action in theatrical terms, performance that ends all performance. For Cavell, this marks a significant difference between *Waiting for Godot* (the waiting of patience) and *Endgame* (the waiting of passion). As he points out, at the end of the former we are confident in the finality of Didi and Gogo together, that "they do not move" and never will part. In the latter, whether Clov stays or leaves rests on a knife's edge, one way or the other. Likewise, the boy who comes at the end of *Godot* signifies that everything repeats and nothing changes; the boy at the end of *Endgame*, spied from afar, portends something new. That excruciating possibility creates the urgency in ending the performance and brings the suffering of passion. The endgame is the move to the end of performance, the final set pieces and soliloquies to be performed.

This shift from the active stance of *acting* to the passive stance of *happening to* redefines the figures we see onstage and our relationship to them for Cavell.

> To the extent the figures up there are not *acting*, but undergoing something which is taking its course, they are not *characters*. And we could also say: the words are not spoken by them, to one another; they are occurring to them. It is play performed not by actors, but by sufferers. Clowns. Beckett has discovered how clowns would talk if they were given the power of speech, and if they couldn't be slapped any more (nobody has the strength), or trip (they can't walk), or do prat-falls (they can't sit). Their words take the falls for them, since they have to fall.
>
> That what is now happening to them is not now happening to us is our only difference from them — the deepest, the only unbreachable difference there is between two people: that they are two. The only difference, in the end, that counts.[79]

In this performance, what is performed is the elimination of all difference between the onstage figures and those seated in the stalls. Not just the fourth wall, but the entire illusion is broken open, as we wait to know whether Clov will stay or leave with exactly the same attitude as

[79] Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," 157-58.

Hamm waits, knowing that something will have changed. All we know — what we all know — is that we are not Hamm, and he knows he is not us. We are alone, and we are alone together in this world. Beckett has used the artistic mechanisms of the theater to make plain its theatricality and in this way he accomplishes his own remaking of the world, which melts away by the end of the play. Normally, we would expect the "this is art" proposition to end with the ending of the work. Here it does too, but, at least on Cavell's reading, in a way that becomes inherent in the work. The dissolving away of the play's artificiality is its end; to put it perhaps too roughly, where the end of the work usually closes the propositional frame, here the closing of the propositional frame is what ends the work. "Despite the histrionics and the theatricality of what we have been watching," an audience member might say, "it turns out there is finally no acting here at all. It must be time to leave."

Beckett's meta-theatricality becomes part of his argument about how the theater works, the world it creates. Beckett, as much as any playwright, claims sovereignty over the microcosm of his work. He fiercely delineates the region of experience, filling his stage with markers of artificiality. In his unique way, he uses these markers to involve and implicate the audience, defining his art as this shared world. Likewise, he makes thematic the very questions of telos, aim, that most art assumes. Before one may aim at unified diversity, meaning, or beauty, Beckett implicitly insists that we wonder about whether these categories are even meaningful. And it is in the display of wondering about their meaning that their meaning emerges. In this post-nuclear world, meaning comes from the examination of meaning, aim from the search for an aim.

Beckett clearly encodes a theory of art requiring frame and telos. What of the feeling of the presence of a posited, local deity, a providence? Beckett provides onstage god-characters, Hamm, Pozzo, *Catastrophe*'s D. But there remains the sense that these were themselves placed there by someone. If these characters — self-acknowledged as actors and role-players — were abandoned, there must have been a playwright, an author to their world, to do the abandoning. Even as Beckett is meta-theatrical, he is meta-authorial as well; he hints as his own existence, the local god who set these horrible conditions and placed these poor sufferers in their midst. Lucky's speech — "Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who … loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell…" — can perhaps be seen as Beckett's implication of himself as the local creator, Lucky's ode to his own maker, Beckett's own version of Mailer's "public advertisement." If God has, as Anthony Burgess suspects Beckett believes, committed an unforgivable sin by not existing, then Beckett (or at least, a posited local god of the same name) has committed the equal and opposite, still unforgivable sin of existing, as the necessary cause of this little world. If creation is to be uncreated, some creator is nevertheless required to create the un-creation. This local god has surely committed an unforgivable sin, that of creating this world. But no other exit is possible.

More likely, pace Burgess, Beckett's problem was never a belief that God does not exist, but a haunted, hollow-eyed certitude that God does, author to the context of such unavoidable suffering, endless waiting, and the ever-broken promise that one day he would, in some new and salvific form, show up. Indeed, the absentee existence of a God who answers for nothing would

truly be an unforgivable sin. What Beckett's presentational theater presents, finally, is this fundamental catastrophe.

The question of the relationship of ultimate reality and art can be asked in many ways. In Christianity, it is over-determined. The sacramental claim of the real presence of the divine in the mundane elements, as well as its Zwinglian substitute in the doctrine of memorial representation, suggest, as we have seen, the more general question of divine presence in other objects and experiences. Surely Beckett is, in an extremely strange way, a Christian playwright, precisely in his nearly liturgical sacramentality. He writes of almost nothing but the consequences of incarnation as a fusion of theology and stagecraft. If God is in everything, why art, to repeat George Steiner's question? Or if God has abandoned everything, how art? The doctrine of the incarnation promises that the abstract Word takes on concreteness in the flesh, and takes up a dwelling among us.[80] This over-determination lies at the root of much of Beckett's mordant humor: can we still have real presence in the Eucharist (celebrated with a wilted carrot, a phallic banana, or "me pap") long after the absence of the Lord? Thematic invocations of one whom Jesus called *Father* are dull and tinny, but still there remains the aesthetic experience simply of the pressure of something more. In a post-nuclear world where God's existence is neither assumed nor forgivable, to reign as sovereign is a paradoxical role. Indeed, it is possible to see Beckett's theological humor as jokes told at his own expense.

This is the force of Nagg's set-piece joke in *Endgame*:

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[80] The Johannine verb, *skênoô*, evokes the *skênê,* a tent, a tabernacle, or in the Greek theater, the scenery. Perhaps "the word became flesh and put on our costume" is a relevant paraphrase.

NAGG: An Englishman, needing a pair of striped trousers in a hurry for the New Year festivities, goes to his tailor who takes his measurements. "That's the lot, come back in four days, I'll have it ready. Good. Four days later.
"So sorry, come back in a week, I've made a mess of the seat." Good, that's all right, a neat seat can be very ticklish. A week later.
"Frightfully sorry, come back in ten days, I've made a hash of the crotch." Good, can't be helped, a snug crotch is always a teaser. Ten days later.
"Dreadfully sorry, come back in a fortnight, I've made a balls of the fly." Good, at a pinch, a smart fly is a stiff proposition.
(Normal voice.) I've never told it worse.
I tell this story worse and worse.
Well to make it short, the bluebells are blowing and he bollockses the buttonholes.
"God dam you to hell, Sir, no, it's indecent, there are limits! In six days, do you hear me, six days, God made the world. Yes Sir, no less Sir, the WORLD! And you are not bloody well capable of making me a pair of trousers in three months!"
"But my dear Sir, my dear Sir, look —
— at the world —
and look —
— at my TROUSERS!"[81]

The bad joke is also a kind of bleak *ars poetica*. Indeed, "I've never told it worse" may well be Beckett's self-indictment. God's world is bollocksed and broken; Beckett's world, like the tailor's belated trousers, is at least somewhat better made. Beckett's theater creates a world in which every appurtenance and comfort is removed and humanity portrayed in its most primal, as an experiment to see if there is still something in life worth embodying, some aim worthy of pursuit. To see if affirmations like Whitehead's optimism about the "slow drift of mankind toward civilization"[82] or his confidence in the power of beauty are still in some meager way warranted. Repeatedly, the answer to these questions are found in the theatricality of the theater

[81] Beckett, *Endgame*, 22-23.

[82] Whitehead, *Adventures*, vii.

as a mirror to the worldly-ness of the world. Even in *Endgame*, the performance must be performed as the means of ending performance. The game must be played in order to end games. And the world must be created before it can be uncreated.

It may be that Beckett's theater is about the business of undoing Calvin's, the theater of God's glory, exposing it as a lie. But that is itself an act of Passion, a salvific self-sacrifice. Perhaps to do so would be Mailer's recovery of the "moral and sexual basis of Christianity" restated by Beckett, though it leads to a fecundity of dust, an orgiastic melee of self-sacrifice in which one is, Pentheus-like, dismembered. To be sure, the is-and-is-not-ness of the two names we point to as "that woman there" evokes few ontological claims more vividly than the Christian doctrine of the dual natures of Christ, fully human and fully divine — fully actor and fully role, fully Patrick Magee and fully Hamm — offered for our salvation. Things really have changed, and we enter Beckett's theater eager, even desperate, to know whether the aim of creation may still be incarnate. In the creation of these theater pieces that in their artificiality deconstruct the artificial divide, in demarcating the little world in such a way that the border between the little one and the big one is shaken, Beckett dislodges himself as its micro-god, and so summons the macro-god into accountability for his absence. Or at least, that is the aesthetic attempt.

CHAPTER 5
Conclusion: The Concrescence of Desire

The perfection of art has only one end, which is Truthful Beauty.
- Alfred North Whitehead[1]

One face, one voice, one habit and two persons:
A natural perspective, that is and is not.
- William Shakespeare (*Twelfth Night* V.i.216-17)

From the beginning of this dissertation, the claim has been that Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of consciousness provides the foundation for an adequate, novel, and more fruitful philosophy of art than that yielded by much Western aesthetics. Its advantages would include:

- A theory of art rooted in a theory of experience that at once correctly honors the conformity of artistic experience with ordinary experience and yet delineates the meaningful, significant difference between the two. This is a theory that explicitly founds aesthetics in the narrow sense of the term upon aesthetics in the broad.
- An understanding of interpretation that both establishes the answerability of interpreters to the work and guarantees their freedom in light of their private perspectives and their free decisions.
- Most importantly, a validation of the intuition that art is fundamentally rooted in the basic metaphysical processes that drive the appreciation and creation of novelty and thereby the ongoing emergence of Creation.

The Whiteheadian aesthetic I have put forward derives its understanding of artistic experience from Whitehead's general theory of conscious experience, laying aside more mantic understandings relying on special categories of inspiration or genius. At the same time, it makes clear just what in artistic experience specifies it as a clear subset of conscious experience, the "it is art" proposition, and what the effect of that proposition is in the unfolding of the serial experience over its duration. Whitehead's system also allows us to understand the importance of

[1] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1933), 267.

the free choice of the contemplator in allowing the proposition to govern the ensuing series of experiences as a integrated work of art, while understanding that he may well choose to include other associations, connections, contexts, histories both public and private, and special knowledge of similar or contrasting works, genres, forms, and techniques. Although the metaphors of balance or moderation are inapt, this is a theory that credits both ends of what are generally taken to be polarities: first, the massive dominance of artistic experience by the work itself versus the freedom of the contemplator's response; and second, the ordinariness of artistic experience versus its uniqueness.

At least in terms of modern aesthetics, the overt theism of this model is perhaps its most controversial point. I have argued for an abstract theory, one that can, I believe, be coherently extended to any work produced to be experienced as art. Given these works and my own background and training, I have used arguments arising out of the Christian context with Steiner, Luther, Calvin, Beckett, and the theater debates and artifacts of the English Renaissance. This is intended to show that the theory may be of use in at least *some* context. But this should not imply its uselessness beyond that context. Every religion makes use of expressive form, and at least in the sense that religion concerns theism, every expressive form makes use of religion. Thus fruitful explorations could be made around many topics from many contexts: Islam's emphasis on calligraphy and prohibitions on the image, say, or Hinduism's understanding of idols. Each of these traditions has elaborate understandings of how the transcendent is present in the concrete products of human creativity which could profitably be brought into dialogue with Whiteheadian aesthetics. In the same way that Whitehead's philosophy might be seen to provide, in Schubert

M. Ogden's phrase, a norm of credibility to the theology of any religion whatsoever, its aesthetics should be able to stand in dialogue with the expressive acts of any culture.[2] There is likely no "generic humanity," pre-religious and not-yet-acculturated, to whom such abstract philosophy can itself stand as a religion. We do not learn about God's primal telos before we have experienced it, knit into our personalities and cultures and rendered utterly metaphorical, occasional, idiosyncratic, and concrete. But the commitment of philosophy is that there is a generality to which all concreteness responds. Likewise, the work of aesthetics is to articulate such a generality with respect to our understanding of art. This Whiteheadian aesthetic cannot be seen to govern or regulate any art; but it may help to elucidate its workings and its taproot in deeper metaphysical sources.

Perhaps more controversial still is the question of reliance on a theistic concept in the context not of interfaith dialogue but of conversation with secularistic interlocutors. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to argue for the necessity of Whitehead's God, although Ogden offers such an argument in his long essay, "The Reality of God."[3] For Ogden, a godless world would be abject meaninglessness, a state of moral and volitional entropy in which nothing would be possible because there would be no reason for it. In such a world, every choice or act is unmotivated and thus un-makable. Because every choice or act rests on an inescapable

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[2] On the norm of credibility, see Schubert M. Ogden, "What is Theology?" in *On Theology* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1992), 1-21.

[3] Schubert M. Ogden, "The Reality of God" in *The Reality of God and Other Essays* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1992). Ogden defines this sense of the *secularistic*: "It is one thing to affirm the validity of the scientific method and to insist on its complete autonomy within the field where it alone logically applies. But it is clearly something different to affirm that this method is the only valid means to knowledge we have, because it circumscribes the limits of the whole cognitive sphere. The first affirmation, I hold, is entirely of a piece with the legitimate *secularity* of modern culture [i.e. the *secular*]. The second, on the other hand, is an internal element in that *secularism* which appears to have become ever more widely prevalent among contemporary Western men [i.e. the *secularistic*]," (Ogden, "Reality of God", 9).

presupposition of the reality of God, God's existence must be taken as metaphysically necessary. For the present purpose, my argument is the conditional one: if God exists, then art has to do at least in part with the divine. This credits the frequent intuitions many have that art touches upon something fundamental, essential, or of ultimate concern. Art is, to many and usually in some vague sense, *spiritual.* Art connects to the numinous and invokes or evokes the wider realms and spirits. This is less than fully precise for philosophical use, but it does open as serious the question of the relationship between the reality of the transcendent and the possibility of art. My claim is that to posit a theory of art without reference to God is to posit creativity without reference to its primal source. In the context of Whitehead's cosmology, such an aesthetics, in which the Creator is simply irrelevant, would seem to be the most irrational aesthetics of all. To understand art apart from the divine creativity in an atheistic world would make sense if such a world made sense. In Whitehead's cosmology, however, it does not. For Whitehead, the activity of the divine is not an occasional revelation or a miraculous irruption into or suspension of the quotidian order; it is a constant feature, the very engine of creation, luring the concrescence of a new moment out of the raw material of what has been. In such a world, artistic experience can be seen as a deeply rooted in the workings of the divine; indeed, it must be seen as such.

Whitehead's cosmological vision drives this dissertation's argument. Chapter 1, in dialogue with Immanuel Kant, John Dewey, and George Steiner, identified two basic features of an adequate aesthetic philosophy. The first was an understanding of the work as a microcosm. The work creates an envelope in experience, defining a thing or a space or a time that is set apart from ordinary experience and delineated as the work. The second is what I called a *teleology*, a

display of end-making, will, or purposiveness. In this way, regardless of the topic, theme, or subject matter, the work also displays an immanent desire for coherence and expression. Having committed like Whitehead to an explicitly theistic approach, Steiner clarifies the role of the divine in the context of such an understanding. In his metaphor, the contemplator of a work experiences the struggle of the local creator, wrestling Jacob-like against a "prior creator," asserting his power to order this little world despite the pressure and presence of the will of the divine.

Chapter 2 outlined a Whiteheadian aesthetic that would account for the features identified in Chapter 1 and render Steiner's metaphorical understanding technically defensible in Whitehead's terms. It demonstrates an aesthetic philosophy in the narrow sense of the term — an account of art — controlled by Whiteheadian aesthetics broadly construed. Following the lead of Donald W. Sherburne, the *proposition* was identified as the phase of consciousness in which the work of art is demarcated. The proposition gathers the elements of the work in this spatio-temporal region into a singular, serial artistic experience, excerpted from the "vast welter" of the world. Of course, the contemplator is free to refuse the invitation of the proposition and so no artistic experience is had. This can occur in the case of those studying the work as an artifact of culture or history and it can occur in the case of those not looking for, noticing, or wanting an artistic experience. But for those who accept the governance of this proposition, the little world is defined.

Within this enveloped and unfolding experience, the contemplator experiences the basic process at the heart of Whitehead's cosmology by which the many become one as though slowed

down and displayed for her contemplation, a *teleology* of the type described in Chapter 1. The elements of the work — whether images, story, character, or musical line — interplay to create a sense of unfolding unity of meaning, achieved as the experience of the work is fully synthesized into the consciousness of the contemplator. Whatever the theme or subject matter, the work becomes an experience of "this is how…" — or at least, "this is one way…" — "…this material finds unity." For Whitehead, the source of this drive to a unifying becoming is necessarily the divine, which in its antecedent nature bequeaths to the world the divine telos as a universal and governing feature of every experience. The juxtaposition in the artistic work of its own teleological display of becoming over against the divine telos at the heart of every experience creates the possibility of Steiner's agonistic struggle, whereby the posited artist, the local creator, can be felt to be both mimicking and usurping God's role as cosmic Creator.

Chapter 3 explored the flourishing theater of the English Renaissance in tension with its Puritan detractors. Underneath the complaints of impiety, lasciviousness, and unruliness laid against the playwrights was a debate about the workings of their art and its power to threaten the divine order. The chapter argued that both the Puritans and the Playwrights finally understood the aesthetic working of the theater as the creation of little worlds governed by local aims that could reinscribe identity and commandeer providence. This anticipates the Whiteheadian aesthetic, though framed in the Reformation terms of their contemporary thought. The Puritans were worried exactly that the plays created a microcosm in which the infernal desires and drives of the playwrights and performers could set aside the divine order, creating a space for an alternate providence according to which *seems* supplanted *is*, and men and women could be

transmogrified into profane creatures of sexual lust, their gendered bodies literally reinscribed by the authors of the plays. The playwrights shared this aesthetic understanding and used their plays to assert themselves and their brave new worlds over against that of the every day. Here, we saw art both working and understood to work as the Whiteheadian aesthetic would predict.

Chapter 4 offered another example of the theater's working interpreted along these lines. Samuel Beckett's use of the theater to create its own second world is evident. Every bit as much as the Renaissance playwrights, he creates spaces and times governed by his own very unusual providence, narrative nowheres inhabited by ciphers, wights, and vaudeville performers. Beckett sharpens the aesthetic theory to be inferred from his stage with his rampant meta-theatrical self-consciousness. The plays are both theatrically and thematically self-referential, freighting their teleological display to a degree that can be quite terrifying. Beckett commandeers the Christian story of the incarnation in a way that both mocks it but also recapitulates it, seeking paradoxically to incarnate a dis-incarnation. The embodiment of character in Beckett represents finally a new creation, both onstage and strangely in the body of the contemplator himself. And so Beckett explores the operation of the theatrical arts entirely as a Whiteheadian aesthetic might expect, at a depth and trenchancy rarely seen.

The goal has been to find aesthetic intuitions encoded in the theater of earlier periods that accord with the theory of art that a Whiteheadian aesthetics makes explicit. The hope for such a Whiteheadian aesthetics is to allow a long tradition of aesthetics to be refined in line with the significant advantages of Whitehead's philosophy of consciousness. At the same time, the exercise can help further elucidate a central point of Whitehead's philosophy, the making

concrete of the desire for beauty that occurs in every actual occasion. As I conclude, there is at least one more clarification Whitehead's philosophy can offer, touching on the question of appearance and reality that haunts much Western art and aesthetics. I turn to this next, before finally suggesting at least one way this art of the theater might further refine Whiteheadian philosophy.

In Chapter 4, Stanley Cavell's parable of the yokel asked, in some ways, the same question as Luther's engagement with the doctrine of transubstantiation and the meaning of the eucharist in Chapter 3. Both asked whether the presentational claim of a concrete, embodied representation could co-exist with what the thing "really is"; and if so, which would prevail, the thing or the representation, and how? Was the victim of the strangling we had watched Mrs. Siddons or was she Desdemona? Was the food we had eaten bread or the body of Christ? And further, what is at stake in that question? Once we can agree with Luther that *is means is*, we can agree that we have truly witnessed the murder of Desdemona and that we have truly ingested the body of Christ. But then what have we gained? The preceding study of the theater argues a much broader scope for Luther's sacramental theology than merely the eucharist. The theatrical performance creates a whole world of meanings integrated over the top of their representative elements. This recasts the question in Whiteheadian terms: what is the advantage in finding a way to accept in such experiences the conformation of appearance to reality? For Whitehead, the answer is *truth*.

Truth for Whitehead is not primarily a binary property of a logical claim. "Truth is a qualification which applies to Appearance alone. Reality is just itself, and it is nonsense to ask

whether it be true or false. Truth is the conformation of Appearance to Reality."[4] This deceptively simple formulation belies a complex coordination within the emergence of the processual experience. The reality that is "just itself" is the vast welter of prehensions inherited as data for the current moment. There is no one correct way to coordinate them all into a single process, but rather their integration depends on any number of decisions and phases of decision, including the response to the lure to creative synthesis. No single integration can fully capture all the possibilities in the inheritance of a moment, as some threads are demoted to the background, others included only by their absence, while others are promoted into prominence. There is no single appearance that will do justice to reality. There is no one particular truth determined by an experience. And the appropriate question is rarely, *is it true?* but more often, *how true is it?* and more revealingly, *how is it true?* The Truth of an appearance depends on the use to which it is put: "For example, a portrait may be so faithful as to deceive the eye. Its very truthfulness then amounts to deception. A reflexion in a mirror is at once a truthful appearance and a deceptive appearance. The smile of a hypocrite is deceptive, and that of a philanthropist may be truthful. But both of them were truly smiling."[5] Appearance is the sense we make of the world we inherit in the moment of concrescence, an act of creativity, and truth is the responsiveness of that sense in relation to the world itself.

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[4] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1933), 241.

[5] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 241.

Truth and beauty are closely related in Whitehead's system: "Truth and Beauty are the great regulative properties in virtue of which Appearance justifies itself to the immediate decision of the experient subject."[6] As was explained earlier, Beauty is preeminent:

> …Beauty is a wider, and more fundamental, notion than Truth…. Beauty is the internal conformation of the various items of experience with each other, for the production of maximum effectiveness…. The teleology of the Universe is directed to the production of Beauty…. Truth has a narrower meaning in two ways. First, Truth, in any important sense, merely concerns the relations of Appearance to Reality. It is the conformation of Appearance to Reality. But in the second place the notion of 'conformation' in the case of Truth is narrower than that in the case of Beauty. For the truth-relation requires that the two relata have some factor in common.
>
> In itself, and apart from other factors, there seems to be no special importance about the truth-relation…. Still less is there any reason why such influence as a truth-relation does have upon subjective form should be in the direction of the promotion of Beauty. In other words, a truth-relation is not necessarily beautiful. It may not even be neutral. It may be Evil. Thus Beauty is left as the one aim which by its very nature is self-justifying.[7]

Beauty is a product of the various elements of appearance in their harmonic relations as well as their relations with the elements of reality. A depiction of a strangulation may be true and ugly both, while the final scene of *Othello*, even if mistaking the details in dramatic license, may offer far more beauty and so in this way be truer. There are broad possibilities for novel expression even if appearance seeks merely to be beautiful without striving for truth. Nevertheless, the two are closely related for Whitehead.

> Notwithstanding the possible unseasonableness of the truth-relation, the general importance of Truth for the promotion of Beauty is overwhelming. After all has been said, yet the truth-relation remains the simple, direct mode of realizing Harmony. Other ways are indirect, and indirectness is at the mercy of the environment…. The

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[6] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 241.

[7] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 265-66.

> sense of directness it carries with it, sustains the upstanding individualities so necessary for the beauty of a complex. Falsehood is corrosive.[8]

Elements that conform in some way become more directly available to the maximal integration that is beauty. Features of the appearance that conform to underlying reality are sturdier for use in its construction. Finally, Truth achieves greater depth and importance in Beauty:

> Truth is various in its extent, its modes, and its relevance. But an apparent object, beautiful beyond the hope of an antecedent imagination, as it functions in experience is realizing some hidden, penetrating Truth with a keenness beyond compare. The type of Truth required for the final stretch of Beauty is a discovery and not a recapitulation. The Truth that for such extremity of Beauty is wanted is that truth-relation whereby Appearance summons up new resources of feeling from the depths of Reality.
>
> When Appearance has to Reality, in some direct sense, a truth-relation, there is a security about the Beauty attained, that is to say, a pledge for the future.[9]

Beautiful appearance that is also truthful creates new possibilities for understanding and expression in the future. This is a truth that opens future possibilities for still greater beauty. "… Truth becomes in itself an element promoting beauty of feeling."

For Whitehead, Art finds its purpose in these terms.

> Art is purposeful adaptation of Appearance to Reality. Now 'purposeful adaptation' implies an end, to be obtained with more or less success. This end, which is the purpose of art, is two-fold, — namely Truth and Beauty. The perfection of art has only one end, which is Truthful Beauty. But some measure of success has been reached when either Truth or Beauty is gained. In the absence of Truth, Beauty is on a lower level, with a defect of massiveness [because it fails to connect most directly with reality itself]. In the absence of Beauty, Truth sinks to triviality. Truth matters because of Beauty.[10]

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[8] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 266.

[9] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 266-67.

[10] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 267. Again, this, along with the passage discussed in Chapter 2 from several pages later in *Adventures of Ideas*, is one of the very few, slight discussion of art Whitehead offers.

As I have argued, the work of art is an attempt to unfold and display the emerging process by which the world comes into being in each experience. It is a recapitulation of the creative process that comprises each moment, slowed down so that the pressure of the drive to beauty can be experienced in its working throughout the duration of the experience. This is to say, the work of art is appearance, a constructed version of some reality, promoting some elements and demoting others, offered to the contemplator. All I have said so far is that the working of the work is to echo the process of reality with a particular emphasis on its aim at Beauty and an implication of the source of that aim, its creator. Whitehead sharpens that working and its aim, and in ways that I take to be consistent with what I have argued. The aim of art is to to express Truthful Beauty, because this is the kind of beauty that is most directly answerable to reality itself. Art provides an appearance of life — human existence, moral challenge, and social relationship — that has the weight and significance of Truthful Beauty.

Here we also see the reinforcement of the "it is art" proposition as the delimiting and thus defining feature of a series of experiences we integrate as a work of art. As Whitehead explains in this context,

> A proposition is a notion about actualities, a suggestion, a theory, a supposition about things. Its entertainment in experience subserves many purposes. It is an extreme case of Appearance…. The unconscious entertainment of propositions is a stage in the transition from the Reality of the initial phase of experience to the Appearance of the final phase.[11]

The proposition gives guidance to the process of gathering and ordering the diverse elements of reality into a coherent whole. What we unconsciously entertain in the appreciation of a work, we

[11] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 244.

who are not yokels and unaware, is the proposition that all of the elements we see and hear in the performance at hand (or taste, smell, or feel depending on the medium) cohere together into a single artificial work. This does not mean that there are not other propositions that might be simultaneously at play, theories about the characters and their motivations, embryonic interpretations of the work. But it represents the invitation the contemplator receives from the structure of the work itself to interpret the piece as a microcosmic whole, a miniature of the world, to which we may give ourselves over for a time. As Whitehead says in one of his most quotable formulations, "It is more important that a proposition be interesting than that it be true…. But of course a true proposition is more apt to be interesting than a false one."[12] Thus the highest aim of art, for him, is at Truthful Beauty.

This truthful beauty, in its massiveness and significance, provides impetus for the advance of human community in its largest form, what Whitehead calls *Civilization*. "The merit of Art in its service to civilization lies in its artificiality and its finiteness. It exhibits for consciousness a finite fragment of human effort achieving its own perfection within its limits…."[13] As it slows down the process of the emergence of reality, art allows us to wrestle with the becoming of each moment and its appetite for beauty. By being excerpted, wrapped within the envelope of the governing "it is art" proposition, it becomes available for experience distinct from the usual flow of consciousness during the piece. The purpose of art is not to be educative or even moral in a smaller sense of these terms. Needing to be good, as well as true and beautiful, would disable the work for Whitehead, forcing it to focus on the creation of a

[12] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 244.

[13] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 270-271.

better future rather than on, as art always does, its own self-contained present. There are times when an otherwise beautiful work is inapt and therefore not contributory to the good: "Unseasonable art is … good in its place, but out of place a positive evil. … The charge of immorality is not refuted by pointing to the perfection of art." (Recall the positive evil of Nero's fiddling.) Nevertheless, only when freed from the need to be morally good, art achieves its vital role in provoking change: "…the defense of morals is the battle-cry which best rallies stupidity against change. Perhaps countless ages ago respectable amoebae refused to migrate from ocean to dry land — refusing in defence of morals. One incidental service of art to society lies in its adventurousness."[14] If art has a moral or educative purpose for Whitehead, it is not a utilitarian usefulness in the near term but to open new possibilities for the adventure of civilization in the long run. Its purpose is the fullest experience of the truthful beauty possible for actualization in the life of consciousness.

Not incidentally, we can see the opening of new possibilities in response to social need in both of the cases considered. As Stephen Orgel argued, the transvestite stage of the English Renaissance opened possibilities for both the empowerment of women and the loosening of gendered expectations generally. More deeply, it provided a regulatory space to mediate and perhaps moderate the fervor of a Puritanism that was on the path to revolution. Likewise, Western culture in the mid 20th Century faced two existential-seeming threats: the constant Doomsday Clock terror of nuclear annihilation and the unseating of Christianity from the heart of cultural meaning making. The barren, vacant landscapes of Beckett's plays and the physically

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[14] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 268.

fragmented, emotionally nonplussed characters that inhabit them provide test-cases for latter day contemplators wondering about the viability of the search for meaning. Beckett continually asks, "Reduce humanity to its basest and most elemental condition, is there still room for hope?" Part of his genius seems to be his ability to stage a claim to truthful beauty that is so austere and ambivalent, in harmony with the tenor of the times. Part of Beckett's truthful beauty in the 20th Century is his ability to create a world that offer either hope or despair.

Again, at the heart of art's capacity to inspire cultural adventure for Whitehead is its ability to juxtapose a little world, complete and perspicuous, over against the ongoing and vast unfolding of creation. As I have quoted,

> The merit of Art in its service to civilization lies in its artificiality and its finiteness. It exhibits for consciousness a finite fragment of human effort achieving its own perfection within its limits. Thus the mere toil for the slavish purpose of prolonging life for more toil or for mere bodily gratification, is transformed into the conscious realization of a self-contained end, timeless within time. The work of Art is a fragment of nature with the mark on it of a finite creative effort, so that it stands alone, an individual thing detailed from the vague infinity of its background. Thus Art heightens the sense of humanity. It gives an elation of feeling which is supernatural. A sunset is glorious, but it dwarfs humanity and belongs to the general flow of nature. A million sunsets will not spur on men towards civilization. It requires Art to evoke into consciousness the finite perfections which lie ready for human achievement.[15]

The social upheavals and technological challenges of both the English Renaissance and the 20th Century each threatened to dwarf humanity. Art was of service, Whitehead would argue, in evoking into consciousness what was ready for human achievement. This "finite perfection" is the appearance offered by the work to the consciousness of the contemplator, truthful beauty. The finite offers experiential access to the underlying infinite. It makes manageable what would

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[15] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 270-71.

otherwise overwhelm, and presents an appearance of things that can be taken in. As that appearance is truthful, it allows insight to the underlying reality. And as it is beautiful, it implies a greater perfection of which reality remains capable. Appearance re-presents reality for the purpose of the relevant experience being created while leaving out what would be irrelevant, over powering, or *de trop*. This would be the Whiteheadian explanation for both Luther's and Cavell's versions of the paradox of representation. In the context of the eucharist, bread gives the appearance of transubstantiation; in the context of *Othello*, Mrs. Siddons gives the appearance of Desdemona. In either case, is means is. What often presents as the basic conundrum of art, how can something be "is-and-is-not?" finally resolves into a dorm room debate. And its is-and-is-not-ness is finally less a challenge to the possibility of art than a reinforcement of its basic operation.

To this point, we have examined the impact of a Whiteheadian aesthetic on our understanding of art, particularly that of the theater. A word is in order about the advantages of the choice of this particular medium for the project. The art of the theater has a contemporaneity and a physical performativity that make it especially apt. Because each production is staged anew with the input of actors, designers, and directors attuned to the present moment, it is capable of contemporary response even when speaking from the distant past. Modern productions of *Othello* or *Merchant of Venice* are possible which undercut or comment upon their original racism and anti-semitism. Mary Zimmerman's staging of Seneca's *Trojan Women* at the Goodman Theatre in the spring of 2003 offered a poignant commentary and a kind of comfort to Chicagoans dreading the new United States invasion of Iraq. This capacity for contemporaneity

highlights the complex construction of art in experience, and especially the possibility of resonance with para-artistic factors that become integrated. Of course, all art can be interpreted and contextualized in the contemporary moment; but the art of theater offers opportunities to encode its response more directly into the original experience. This capacity for acute contemporaneity brings a Whiteheadian account of art particularly close to the surface of the work's implicit aesthetic.

Further, because the theater comprises human bodies that are staged in spatial and emotional relationship with one another, it mirrors the process of life to its audience in an embodied, even visceral way. The actors' bodies — the living, breathing reality upon which the appearance of the work sits — physically perform the work for those of us physically present to it. They create appearances of both pain and desire that come to be felt in the audience members, as I hope to sketch below. We feel it in our own stomach when a character is gut punched. And we feel it in our hearts, perhaps even our loins, when the characters lean toward each other to kiss. Theatrical art works in part by putting the experience of its working into the body of the spectator. This belies the line Donald W. Sherburne attempted to draw between burlesque and ballet. Recall, he writes:

> The theory being presented here suggests that burlesque is ballet "stripped" of its propositional character. In a burlesque show the idea is to encourage the patron to focus his attention upon actualities; a fortiori, the attitude of the patron could not possibly be aesthetic…. In one sense, certainly, "propositions" are made on the runway, but my point would be that at a burlesque house there is complete loss of Distance on the part of the audience.…[16]

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[16] Donald W. Sherburne, *A Whiteheadian Aesthetic: Some Implications of Whitehead's Metaphysical Speculation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 147-8.

For Sherburne, “Distance” was the resolution to the problem of the yokel, the way the audience member remained clear about the factitiousness of art. Having relocated that clarity by redefining the artistic role of the proposition, we have room to ask the questions Sherburne sends begging, such as that of the arousal one might feel at the ballet proper, or that of the artistry of striptease, revived recently by a resurgent interest in circus and cabaret performance arts. Even the presence of the bouncer at the lip of the burlesque stage might serve as one of the markers of artificiality that demarcate the work; and the idea that the dancer arouses us while we cannot arouse them seems a particularly sharp version of Cavell’s non-reciprocal presence. Voyeurism may not be so easily separable from artistic experience. Indeed, burlesque’s physical performativity and the visceral response it can elicit in the audience, a factor of experience to be included in the integration of the work from within the body of the contemplator herself, serves to bring the resonance of theater’s implicit self-understanding with a Whiteheadian aesthetic closer to the surface.

Initially, this may be clearer with the theatrical appearance of pain. Examples of this can be found throughout Beckett’s theater, where embodiment is generally more of a problem than a source of pleasure. As S. E. Gontarski makes the point:

> What drove (or lured) Samuel Beckett to theater — as a retreat, a haven, or even a sanctuary — was the body, the shape or form that text takes in performance; that is, onstage the body itself, whole or in part, damaged, otherwise restricted, or fully functional, as material object, shade, specter, or voice, is or becomes a, if not the, performative text, and Beckett’s theater of what Ruby Cohn has called “afflicted bodies” or what might be deemed spectacles of pain has attracted actors to explore the body’s functionality in performance, especially actors with certain limitations on that functionality, actors with forms of physical dysfunction or degenerations, an ill Julian Beck performing *That Time* (1985), for instance, or a failing Harold Pinter performing

Krapp's Last Tape in a wheelchair (2006), both actors dying of cancer as they performed.[17]

Beckett's plays are rife with examples of a bodily limitation that become felt in the audience member. *Waiting for Godot* starts, of course, with Gogo's elaborate challenge to remove his painful and ill-fitting shoes. What starts as a comic routine becomes nearly desperate, and every audience member who has felt a similar chafe can feel it again here. Didi's constant, painful need to urinate, including his trips offstage to find the facility, can cause a similar squirm. Beckett has a certain knack for this, an ability to bring the play's discomfort into the audience member's body.

Take, for another example, the constant discomfort of Hamm in *Endgame*. Our first view of him, once the over-sheet is removed, has his face covered with a "large blood-stained handkerchief." It is never explained during the play; it seems to be a necessary item with which Hamm is put away at day's end, perhaps to protect the larger sheet. But at several points in the play, Hamm's speaking recalls it to mind.

HAMM: Quiet, quiet, you're keeping me awake.
(Pause.)
Talk softer.
(Pause.)
If I could sleep I might make love. I'd go into the woods. My eyes would see . . . the sky, the earth. I'd run, run, they wouldn't catch me.
(Pause.)
Nature!
(Pause.)
There's something dripping in my head.
(Pause.)

[17] S. E. Gontarski, "'He wants to know if it hurts!': The Body as Text in Samuel Beckett's Theater" in *Revisioning Beckett: Samuel Beckett's Decadent Turn* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 195.

A heart, a heart in my head.
(Pause.)
……
Perhaps it's a little vein.[18]

There is something about the drip drip dripping, the heart-like pounding that renders sleep and comfort nearly impossible, that seems part of the work itself. I feel it, a malign post-nasal drip, in my own head as I watch. Hamm returns to the theme later: "Something dripping in my head, ever since the fontanelles…. Splash, splash, always on the same spot…. Perhaps it's a little vein…. A little artery…. Enough of that, it's story time, where was I?"[19] Between the image of the bloody handkerchief and these few lines, Beckett has sketched out for us the feeling of life within Hamm's skull, one we feel sympathetically ourselves. Beckett uses the felt, bodily histories of his audience members as raw material in his play, knowing they will be felt alongside the lines and properties we see in front of us. It is certainly not the case that Beckett's theater is more embodied than that of other playwrights. Paradoxically, Beckett embodies by disembodying: Hamm cannot stand, Clov cannot sit, Nagg and Nell live in garbage cans perhaps without legs at all; the three characters of *Play* (1963) are mere heads atop gray stone urns; and of course Winnie is buried first up to her waist and then up to her neck in *Happy Days* (1961). But in Beckett's theater, these disembodiments lead back into the body. We feel these disorders and restrictions in our own bodies, sitting in the theater, and our own sympathetic discomfort becomes part of the artistic experience.

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[18] Beckett, *Endgame*, 18.

[19] Beckett, *Endgame*, 50.

Beckett's most disembodied play is *Not I*. The title carries two meanings: the first is the main character's constant disavowal of herself as the one who has experienced the unnamed, life-shattering trauma that she rants of; the second is a grim pun, given the fact that she is indeed not an eye but a mouth, suspended without body or even face eight feet above the stage. The only narrative we get comes from the rant itself: the play is essentially a monologue. And as with *Rockaby* and many of the other late plays, the speech resembles a musical work as much as a narrative discourse, delivered in choppy phrases at a steady pace and tempo, imagistic more than discursive, and punctuated by both recurrent leitmotifs and the occasional scream. The performance begins before it is audible, so that by the time Mouth's monologue can be heard we are midstream. It ends likewise.

The thematic content concerns the coming into the world of a certain woman and her life of neglect and suffering.

> MOUTH: …. out… into this world… this world… tiny little thing… before its time… in a godfor— … what? .. girl .. yes… tiny little girl… into this… out into this… before her time… godforsaken hole called… called.. no matter… parents unknown… unheard of… he having vanished… thin air… no sooner buttoned up his breeches… she similarly… eight months later… almost to the tick… so no love… spared that… no love such as normally vented on the… speechless infant… in the home… no … nor indeed for that matter any kind… no love of any kind…[20]

This seems to be the inner monologue of a woman at the age of something like seventy, looking back on snapshot moments of her life. She has lived mostly silent, mostly incapable of speech. Life has held no pleasure for her, and has been defined, it seems, by one specific but unspecified

[20] Samuel Beckett, *Not I* in *Collected Shorter Plays* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1984), 216.

trauma, something that happened while "looking aimlessly for cowslips" in a field. Whatever the trauma, it was dissociating. Repeatedly, Mouth denies the opportunity to confess that she is speaking about herself: "… when suddenly… gradually… all went out… all that early April morning light… and she found herself in the— … what?.. who? .. no! .. she! … found herself in the dark…."[21] The performance of this character as a disembodied mouth re-enacts her dissociation. Her outward speech silent from birth, her body insentient, the stage becomes an inside-out auditorium for what she would perhaps have said. In fact, thinking about Mouth as a character at all is a stretch, implying so many things she appears to lack. There are enough bits of detail in the monologue — April morning, the shopping centre, Croker's Acres — that a backstory is implied. But the story cannot be reconstructed, and there is not enough to attempt a psychological profile or biography. The piece is more performance art than character sketch.

Indeed, the script makes its most sense in its resonance with the staging itself. It is rife with self-allusions and rhyming images. From what has been quoted already, it is hard not to come to understand "godforsaken hole" as the mouth itself. The aphasia Mouth speaks of is transformed (or perhaps belied) in this inward-turned-outward diatribe. She speaks of a constant buzzing in the skull, a dull roar that can only strike the audience member as the play she is watching. Further, Mouth constantly refers to a light, "this ray or beam… like moonbeam… always the same spot…."[22] The association of these lines with the only visible scenery in the play, the spotlight that defines Mouth and renders her visible, is inescapable. The effect of these

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[21] Beckett, *Not I*, 216-17.

[22] Beckett, *Not I*, 218.

lines is to lead the audience to understand themselves as witnessing in real time the character herself, no fiction or ostensible story, but simply the performance of disembodiment.

This becomes clearer with a word about the technical virtuosity required in the staging of *Not I*. A scaffolding must be built for the actor, including a frame into which her body and head can be strapped, immobilizing her. The actor is then draped all in black except for the lower part of her face, which is covered in black makeup except for her lips, painted red. For the actor, it is an experience of sensory deprivation and spatial disorientation. The rhythmic monologue, then, ushers her into an almost mantic state. The play, moreover, became possible only with advances in lighting technology that allow for a spotlight of such brightness and intensity to have such a narrow focus, less than six inches in diameter. The ray of light is a chief character in the play long before it is mentioned in the script. And Mouth's disembodied insentience is replicated in the actor's experience of the performance. Beyond even *Catastrophe*, Beckett has here created an existential tableau in which the play melts away into its performance.

Here, Beckett has put the play into the body of the performer with unique intensity. Has he put it into the body of the audience member? To be sure, the audience hears the same buzzing in the skull and witnesses the operation of the same ray of light. There is one other feature that brings the audience members onstage, the Auditor:

> downstage audience left, tall standing figure, sex undeterminable, enveloped from head to foot in loose black djellaba, with hood, fully faintly lit, standing on invisible podium about 4 feet hight shown by attitude alone to be facing diagonally across stage intent on MOUTH, dead still throughout but for four brief movements where indicated.[23]

[23] Beckett, *Not I*, 216.

Beckett's note describes these movements:

> this consists in simply sideways raising of arms from sides and their falling back, in a gesture of helpless compassion. It lessens with each recurrence till scarcely perceptible at third. There is just enough pause to contain it as MOUTH recovers from vehement refusal to relinquish third person.

Mouth seems at times to react to Auditor. The "vehement refusal to relinquish third person" comes as the response to some kind of interruption: "… and she found herself in the — … what?… who? .. no! .. she!" At other times, the unheard voice of this interlocutor seems to inquire about details of the story: "all silent as the grave… no part— … what? .. the buzzing? .. yes… all silent but for the buzzing…"[24] It is not entirely clear that the inquirer to whom Mouth responds is Auditor, who is without gender or even features, human only in barest outline, and decidedly silent. Which is to say that those who are hearing Mouth's rant are likewise disembodied. In the figure of Auditor, the audience members have a stand-in onstage, one there who represents us, our helplessness, our inability to respond in the face of the traumatized speech. But again, is Mouth's pain brought into our bodies? To be sure, its manic anxiety is. The play is only about fifteen minutes long, but after a performance one is wrung out and agitated. The image of the burning ray persists. At the end of such a performance, the audience member may well find he needs to "re-embody" himself, returning to normal time, space, and lighting. That is, he may feel need to get the play out of himself, even as he gets himself out of the play. The integration of the play's world in the experience of the audience member has included vivid feelings, or memories thereof, from within her own body.

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[24] Beckett, *Not I*, 218.

The implications of these feelings of the embodiment of pain for Whiteheadian cosmology come into their fullest relief seen alongside feelings of the embodiment of desire. To explore this other aspect, I turn to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. The play touches on many of the themes raised in Chapter 3; written the same year as *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night* (1602) is nearly as preoccupied with Protestantism, although in a comic mode. The killjoy puritan Malvolio serves as both a laughingstock and a cautionary tale about the growing power of the movement. And "Seems, madam? nay, it is, I know not 'seems'" (*Hamlet* I.ii.76) might just as easily have been said by Caesario (too knowingly) to Olivia, or by Sebastian (too unknowingly), as by Hamlet to his mother. Finally, this play is perhaps the preeminent example of the theatrical gender games played by the Renaissance at the expense of a faith in settled and absolute identity.

From the first lines of play, with Orsino's melodramatic melancholy over Olivia's rejections, the audience sees the embodiment of desire. Generally staged on something like a fainting couch, the Duke oozes his love-sick suffering, a latter day Actaeon: "That instant was I turn'd into a hart, / And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds, / E'er since pursue me" (I.i.20-22). From there, the play unfolds in its series of ill-matched pairings and its narrative drive to arrange the couples rightly. The deeper performance of desire comes meta-theatrically, as Viola's disguise destabilizes the relations among the other principals (Orsino, Olivia, and Sebastian) as well as the side characters (Toby, Sir Andrew, Antonio, Maria, and of course Malvolio). Because she is both man and maid, she is universally desired. Along the lines of the discussion in Chapter 3, the tension of whether Caesario is a female character who has put on a disguise or a male actor who has taken one off gives steel to the otherwise frothy questions of

mistaken identity. Can anyone trust their eyes to show them the object of their love? Or does everyone reprise Actaeon the voyeur? Deeper, can one be anything in particular beneath the outward appearances of one's circumstance?

The play's remarkable final scene achieves comic resolution without settling any of these deeper questions. The crisis of its start places Caesario at the center of attention, Olivia heartbroken that he has denied their marriage and Orsino furious that his page has usurped the hand of his heart's desire. Antonio is demanding of Caesario the money he feels he lent him, facing imprisonment or worse. And Caesario knows nothing about any of it, nor how to answer to it. The one thing Caesario knows is what he cannot say, that he loves Orsino, and in a way that Orsino might, if he understood, reciprocate. The audience knows the answer that will explain it all, defusing enmity and bringing peace and nuptial joy. But of course, we cannot tell them, not being present to them, and so must sit on the edge of our seats and to await the enfolding. As with Beckett above, however, we feel sympathetically what we are watching: our own anxiety for resolution as butterflies in the stomach, or our own stirrings of desire for whichever of the characters is suited to us.

In many ways, this is a stock situation. But there remains something nearly miraculous in the moments following Sebastian's entry onto the stage. In production, pains are taken to make sure the actors playing the two roles resemble each other at least passingly and that they are clad alike. Sebastian has been attacked by Sir Andrew, mistaking him for Caesario; Caesario has been accosted by Antonio, mistaking him for Sebastian. And so on it has continued for over three hours, and not once have the two been onstage at the same time until this moment. Sebastian

enters, having no idea of the confusion he is entering, with the purpose of apologizing to Olivia for bloodying her kinsman. In that moment, as the siblings recognize each other, in any production, everything stops. Each character looks at every other. Each audience member too finally can compare, how much do these two actors look alike? In a timeless moment, the basis for peace and resolution stands revealed in the flesh. This is the moment (very different from *Not I*) when we feel ourselves onstage. Likely, something in the body of any spectator rejoices, seeing the confusingly attractive twins side by side, finally able to sort through the spectator's own attractions and desires. And with the pause, Orsino finally gives voice to the identity crisis distilled in the moment: "One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons, / A natural perspective, that is and is not!" (V.i.216-17). The aesthetic process of the theater is defined here, as the "is and is not" is allowed to exist in stage space, which itself becomes that "natural perspective," or at least, an artificial one, natural to this little world. Antonio makes a similar exclamation: "How have you made division of yourself? / An apple, cleft in two, is not more twin / Than these two creatures" (V.i.222-224).

A sifting of appearance and reality takes place as Viola gradually helps Sebastian and the others to understand, a real catechism to amend the cruel parody of catechism inflicted by Sir Topas on Malvolio (IV.ii). However, the play maintains the existential tension even as the denouement of the plot unfolds. The language of the play, the words the characters speak, is not willing to yield to what seems to be the case. As Sebastian says "Were you a woman, as the rest goes even, / I should my tears let fall upon your cheek, / And say, 'Thrice welcome, drowned Viola!'" (V.i.239-241). This is a strangely conditional formulation, "were you a woman, I

would…." Was the point not that she *is indeed* a woman? But as we have seen, the rest does not go even; Viola is not really a woman, nor is Olivia, and all of these relationships are *really* the one thing the plot has never allowed us to contemplate, same-gendered. Viola, consistently (and ironically) the most clear headed and straight-talking character in the play, herself adopts this conditionality in her own identity:

VIOLA: If nothing lets to make us happy both
But this my masculine usurp'd attire,
Do not embrace me till each circumstance
Of place, time, fortune, do cohere and jump
That I am Viola....
(V.i.249-253)

Indeed, the moment we have been waiting for, Viola's moment of self-identification and self-fulfillment, the moment of un-winding for the entire play's action, is still conditional. She never says "I am Viola," but only "If my being Viola will make you happy, wait until I get my costume on." By now, her sexual identity is wholly in her clothes.

Nor does Sebastian, the other Caesario, escape this final ontological equivocation. He has been figured all along as the real man of the two, willing to fight the drunks, willing to marry Olivia, willing to relate in the most manly of ways with Antonio at sea. Now he would seem to be free and clear: he looks like a man, and is supposed to be a man, and is properly betrothed to a woman. And in that comfort, he says to Olivia:

SEBASTIAN: So comes it, lady, you have been mistook;
But Nature to her bias drew in that.
You would have been contracted to a maid,
Nor are you therein, by my life, deceiv'd,
You are betroth'd both to a maid and man.
(V.i.259-263)

Sebastian's clever recapitulation of the situation simply reinforces the questions of the final scene — who is Olivia's mate, who is really the man, who is really the woman, and how many people are here, anyway? Olivia is married to both halves of Antonio's cleft apple, it seems.

There is still hope for Viola, however, as Orsino takes possession of her and the play draws to a close. And to be sure, there are moments of affirmation of Viola's femininity here. In his formal proposal, Orsino says:

> ORSINO: Your master quits you; and for your service done him,
> So much against the mettle of your sex,
> So far beneath your soft and tender breeding,
> And since you call'd me master for so long,
> Here is my hand — you shall from this time be
> Your master's mistress.
> (V.i.321-326)

This is certainly a proclamation of Viola's feminine identity, though there is the puzzle as to why Orsino is so ready to trade Olivia for Viola as the object of his desire. And still, his final word returns to a note of ambiguity. He says:

> ORSINO: ... Cesario, come —
> For so you shall be while you are a man;
> But when in other habits you are seen,
> Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen.
> (V.i.385-389)

It is easy here to see Shakespeare showing off, reminding us of his power, and that of his stage, to transnature, reassign, and realign reality. What makes Viola a woman is not her biology but her master's fancy, the imagination of the playwright and, for our purposes, of the audience. Because of course we have bought into this. The audience has likewise construed Viola to be a woman, Caesario to be a man in disguise, Sebastian to be his identical twin (that is, the identical

twin of the man Viola would have been were she a man), in our agreement to the invitation to accept the work as a work. And while a layer of it has been somewhat lost on us today, who generally see female actors rather than male in the roles of Viola and Olivia, the point remains. We have agreed to see these characters as what the play tells us they are, women and men, young, desirable, the objects of attraction. And while actors are generally hired in part because they really do "look the part," we invest attractiveness in them every bit as much as they present it to us. We have agreed to find them desirable. Olivia is beautiful and Orsino is arousing because we have agreed to view a play in which that is the case.

The subtitle to *Twelfth Night* is *What You Will*. In one way, this is a throw off phrase, like "whatchamacallit." In another way, it is the signature of the author, *Will* Shakespeare. But of course, *will* is a complex word in the English Renaissance, meaning both volition and desire. The names *Olivia* and *Viola* are anagrams of the Latinate root for will. *Malvolio* has the same thing, but he has it badly. It means to desire what and whom we want. And it means what and how we decide. As such, it is perhaps a perfect word to end with at the heart of a discussion of Whiteheadian aesthetics. This understanding of art is rooted in the question of what we desire: the many to become one, with maximal beauty. As creatures of the Creator, our art aims at an experience of a little world coming into unified wholeness in our presence according to the universal, primordial, and so prior will for the same thing that governs all experience. And it is dependent more than anything on what we choose to do with the work we experience, how we will interpret it, how we will make it concrete in our experience.

The theater puts concrete experience into the body of the spectator, inviting the audience member to include in the experience of the work experiences even of his own body. Even when Beckett instills us with physical discomfort, it is an experience of desire for resolution, an ease to pain and an end to suffering. On the Renaissance stage, we are trained to see the objects of our desire in a way that drives an experience of the world it inhabits. In Whiteheadian terms, when we say yes to the proposition that we will receive this particular series of experiences as a work, we are agreeing to see the creatures contained in this microcosm according to its terms, male, female, infirm, arousing, debilitated, seductive, present. As the work finds its consummation, we experience such truthful beauty as it has managed to create, such finite perfection as it represents. And it becomes concrete — it *concresces* — within us. Of all the many possibilities that we might have made actual, we chose that one, the one made concrete, in concert with the work and with whatever we have felt and have chosen to make of it. As any artist will complain, the creation of a work is maddening in its finality and particularity. Philosophy can remain abstract, conditional, open-ended. Art, on the other hand, must settle somewhere and be just so. Art is nothing if not concrescence — that is the burden of Whitehead's phrase "finite perfections." And so it represents not merely the process of creation, but also the result of that process, a final real thing.

The service that this Whiteheadian aesthetics can render to Whiteheadian philosophy more generally is this insistence on the embodiment of God's desire that is made concrete in every actual occasion. This is nothing new to Whiteheadians, but its back-seat status (as such insights go) keep Whiteheadian philosophy and theology farther from other discourses than is

helpful. The stakes are high in every moment of concrescence, as some possibilities become actual and others are lost for good. Even as they become food for future experiences, the here-and-now concrescence is permanent and embodies God's desire, as well as our desire for what God desires. A Whiteheadian philosophy, and perhaps particularly a Whiteheadian theology, that understands the stakes of concrescence as a matter of embodiment are perhaps more eager and better equipped to take up the questions of pain, oppression, liberation, as well as those of joy, sexuality, and human relationship. There is also the consideration — crucial, as we have seen, for Whitehead's aesthetics — that these concrescences become food for future concrescence, and so can be re-contextualized and used for more. They are in this sense self-transcending. As Whitehead frees art from older dogmas, art may free Whitehead for new expressions.

Shakespeare's comedies often end with a meta-theatrical flourish that at once consummates the experience and "breaks the spell," so to speak, with a bid for applause. Prospero, having earlier reassured us that these revels we have observed are such stuff as dreams are made on, binds his fate to our decision at the play's end: "Now I want / Spirits to enforce, art to enchant, / And my ending is despair, / Unless I be reliev'd by prayer, / Which pierces so, that it assaults / Mercy itself, and frees all faults. / As you from crimes would pardon'd be, / Let your indulgence set me free" (*Tempest*, Epi.13-20). Rosalind, Viola's and Portia's equal in transvestite machination, keeps the double-edged game going to the end: "If I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleas'd me, complexions that lik'd me, and breaths that I defied not; and I am sure, as many as have good beards, or good faces, or sweet breaths, will for my kind offer, when I make curtsy, bid me farewell" (*As You Like It*, Epi.17-23). Puck likewise

breaks the spell and yet maintains it: “If we shadows have offended, / Think but this, and all is mended, / That you have but slumb’red here / While these visions did appear…. So, good night unto you all. / Give me your hands, if we be friends, / And Robin shall restore amends” (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, V.i.423-38).

In *Twelfth Night*, the coda is perhaps a little different. Rather than a speech directed at the audience, pivoting from performance to applause, the final action here is a song. If music be the food of love, perhaps this is offered as our dessert. It is also rather bittersweet, in tune with Viola’s only-conditional victory and Malvolio’s final threats of revenge. The lyrics are not particularly related to the play, except perhaps that they generally speak of the journey of a man through life: childhood, adulthood, coming to wive, and final illness (the step we do not see in the play). The final verse, however, seems like an apt coda for this project, as well:

> FESTE: A great while ago the world begun
> With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
> But that’s all one, our play is done,
> And we’ll strive to please you every day.
> (V.i.405-408)

The work of art begins with the inheritance of the primordial aim to create a unity from the vast diversity of things past, possible, and eternal. It begins with an aim at the finite perfections which lie ready for human achievement, the play we strive for every day, according to the primordial inheritance of the world begun long ago. The work is experienced over a series of moments that replicate in their gradual unfolding that process of the creation of unity in diversity. It displays the intertwining purposiveness — the *desire* — of the artist and the audience with that of the Creator, clarifying in experience our own role in our becoming. Finally, it makes concrete and

indelible the desire of God for the actual, echoed in our own desires. Each time the work is taken up or the play is performed, this striving for beauty becomes real and true again.

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