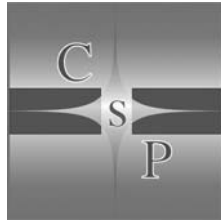


Collision

Collision:
Interarts Practice and Research

Edited by

David Cecchetto, Nancy Cuthbert,
Julie Lassonde and Dylan Robinson



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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INTRODUCTION

COLLISION: COLLECTING PARADOX

DAVID CECCHETTO, NANCY CUTHBERT,
JULIE LASSONDE, AND DYLAN ROBINSON

The most common image of collision—one repeated relentlessly in the popular media—is of two or more vehicles colliding with disastrous results. Turn on the TV almost any evening and you can see the familiar series of repeated vignettes: cameras scan the wreckage; a news helicopter surveys the resulting traffic congestion; a ground crew follows up by interviewing witnesses; and paramedics are shown aiding injured drivers and passengers. It's an unfortunate scene, certainly, but the ubiquity of such coverage is due in part to the fact that many viewers derive a certain pleasure from these brief accounts—their concern is not entirely with how traffic was flowing during the nightly commute. The voyeuristic element of the media's response to such disasters was sexualized in David Cronenberg's *Crash*, a film that highlights the possibility that collision is fundamentally a metaphor for seduction, production, and the unexpected. Moreover, it could be argued that the resulting desensitization to the sensationalist repetition of collision presented in the media is similar to the proliferation of interdisciplinarity in academic and artistic work, and its subsequent dismissal by some critics as unremarkable and mundane. It is precisely this voyeuristic or superficial novelty-seeking perspective on interdisciplinary research and practice—in the arts and in academia—that this collection of essays seeks to challenge.

Adopting the admittedly problematic notion of collision as a conceptual rubric for interdisciplinarity helps to counteract the simplistic valorization of interdisciplinary research as the saviour for topics that cannot be addressed by a single field of inquiry. While it would be foolish to claim that such research questions cannot provide important justification for interdisciplinary approaches, they should not be regarded as natural or self-evident proof of the benefits of interdisciplinary work. In this book the productive struggle between two or more art forms or

disciplines is described as a radical exteriority, suggesting continual movement and negotiation while resisting any final unity or acceptance of one form's dominance over another. In this way, collision elevates disciplinarity's—and not interdisciplinarity's—constitutive aporetic “in-betweenness” to the surface, allowing this space of uncertainty within disciplines to serve as a plane of circulation for emergent disciplinary intensities.

Previous research on interdisciplinarity between the arts has been strangely piecemeal, especially when one considers the abundance of recent scholarly writing devoted to the challenges and possibilities of academic interdisciplinarity. For example, in the arts we find a number of valuable interdisciplinary art histories located within the disciplinary discourses of music (Dieter Schnebel's “Visible Music,” Richard Kostalanetz's “Two Ways of Polyartistry,” and Simon Shaw Miller's *Visible Deeds of Music*); theatre (Hans Thies-Lehman's *Postdramatic Theatre*, Bonnie Marranca's *The Theatre of Images*); and visual art (Grant Kester's *Conversation Pieces*, Suzanne Lacy's *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, and Lynne Hughes and Marie Josée Lafortune's *Penser L'indiscipline/Creative Con/Fusions*). Similarly, in the realms of science, social science, and the humanities, both Julie Thompson Klein and Robert Moran have produced cogent studies on the nature of interdisciplinarity as an academic methodology that examine a wide range of topics in interdisciplinary theory from multiple non-art perspectives. In particular, Klein's 2005 book *Humanities, Culture and Interdisciplinarity* provides a cogent historiography of interdisciplinary research methodologies across literary studies, art history, and musicology. Notably absent from the majority of these books, however, is an in-depth examination of the complex questions and negotiations artists face when amalgamating artistic disciplines. With very few exceptions, interdisciplinary art and interarts practices—examined as such, including the perspective of artist-researchers, and not subsumed under a singular category of performance or visual art—have until now been largely ignored. While it would be simplistic to think that this collection somehow rectifies the “piecemeal” status of this discourse on interarts work, our wager is that this collection works towards presenting an understanding of this status as, in a certain sense, constitutive of the field.

This wager—the wager of collision itself—is where the present collection stands in stark contrast to other studies exploring the notion of “interarts,” of which there are only a few to begin with. For example, the 1997 anthology *Interart Poetics: Essays on the Interrelations of the Arts and Media* presents several clear analyses of interarts works, but

ultimately conceives of such work within the realm of disciplinary influence, where one art form borrows or adopts characteristics from another. The *Collision* anthology generally downplays this art historical model, and focuses instead on questions practicing artists ask when they are developing and exhibiting interdisciplinary works. In addition, *Collision* moves further away from a traditional concept of influence by drawing upon Roland Barthes' disruptive notion of interdisciplinarity as an act that results in mutation when "the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down—perhaps even violently" (1984, 56). In accordance with this conception of interarts, *Collision* emphasizes the uneasiness of the in-between through an engagement with the processes by which disciplinary boundaries are ruptured, as well as the interstices that result from these ruptures.

This rupturing of boundaries points to the sense in which the term "collision," while maintaining its suggestion of forceful impact between two or more distinct masses moving in different directions, also conveys a potentially productive learning from differences. This collection's essays examine relationships that are often bumpy and filled with risk, but demonstrate that collision in the arts occurs as a fundamental process in inter-artistic creation. This process is one that is frequently also the site of collaboration. In search of an appropriate form through which to communicate their work, interarts practitioners grapple with practices that may be as unfamiliar as foreign languages. The dialogue that emerges as artists and researchers attempt to understand these radically different approaches and relate them to one another is of great value as a potential model for community and dialogue; interarts and interdisciplinary works often demand a high degree of openness to unfamiliarity from their audiences as well as from artists. In most cases, both groups have a strong knowledge of one or more artistic forms or disciplines, but interarts projects bring them into a foreign territory where the traffic signs are unfamiliar and the road ahead potentially treacherous. As artists and audiences seek to establish new connections between segregated discourses, fields, and forms through interarts and interdisciplinary works, they create temporary bonds and specific hybrid languages that resist the growth of wider audiences strictly interested in innovation or broader (co-opting) disciplinary narratives. However, the danger remains that this engagement between artists and audiences takes place on a relatively superficial level, as the innovation of such hybrid practices and the spectacle of combination itself threaten to overwhelm the specific conceptual and/or socio-cultural implications of the work.

* * *

In the face of the challenges mentioned above, this anthology represents an interdisciplinary approach that bridges scholarly and artistic perspectives. Rather than offering a theoretical methodology of interarts practice and research (which would inevitably amount to the constitution and maintenance of a violently normalizing discourse), the collection reflects the widely dispersed ideas and processes that make contemporary interarts practice and research the resonant field that it currently is. To this end, the opening section of the book, titled “Eyewitness Reports: Multiple Perspectives on Collision between the Arts,” examines the boundaries of interdisciplinarity and its underlying motivations. The first collision we encounter is thus the terminological friction between interdisciplinarity and interarts, a clash that reveals the impossibility of placing a strict boundary between art and non-art. A first sphere of transgression, from the strictly artistic to the interdisciplinary, occurs where connections are made between art and broader cultural notions of thinking, creating, and engaging spiritually. Danielle Boutet’s “Spiritual Forms: Notes for Thinking about Art and Spirituality” explores some of these connections in relation to her own artistic practice. For Boutet, art is a way to experience, know, and increase our consciousness of the world, which is closely related to spirituality. In addition, both art and spirituality involve the production of meaning. In order to better understand these connections, Boutet considers a point in history when a disconnect between art and spirituality was not imagined as a possibility. This historical account leads her to re-think in more contemporary terms how interdisciplinarity may be inherent in art. Like Fabiola Nabil Naguib, whose work is introduced below, Boutet’s position on interdisciplinarity and the interarts is that it is not a “new” phenomenon. Instead, she insists that artistic disciplinarity is, in fact, a more recent development, and one that unnecessarily limits the purview of artistic experience.

In contrast to Boutet’s proposal to consider interdisciplinarity as a more recent expression of a long tradition of art as spiritual engagement, Benjamin M. Evans’ “Five Problems with Interdisciplinary Art” focuses on issues related to interdisciplinarity as they emerge in current discourse. Among these issues is the contradiction inherent in distinguishing different artistic disciplines while insisting on art itself as a disciplining category. This incongruence leads the author to another, related, issue; namely the illusion of heterogeneity in interarts practices that in reality mobilize specific and narrow theoretical frameworks. Ultimately, although Evans believes that interdisciplinarity has the potential to create interesting

unexplored space for research, he urges us to seriously consider the risks posed by the removal, through claims to interdisciplinarity, of traditional mechanisms of critique that reside in conventional disciplinary structures.

In the next chapter, Fabiola Nabil Naguib adds another level of criticism to the contemporary discourse around interdisciplinarity. Situating her analysis as a post-colonial one, she locates such discourse in a western and eurocentric tradition. Instead of rejecting the concept of interdisciplinarity on these grounds, Naguib's "Decolonizing Inhabitations of Interdisciplinarity: Re/orienting 'Interdisciplinarity' as Connective Practice" presents her own work as an example of a re-appropriation of the notion of interdisciplinarity, one that draws on long-standing non-western and indigenous artistic traditions. Inhabiting and performing this non-western interdisciplinarity is, for her, a survival strategy in today's art world. Similarly to Boutet, Naguib embraces spirituality as part of the art process. However, Naguib's work adds a layer of urgency to this reflection in that she calls for action in decolonizing interdisciplinarity as a means to allow this spiritual dimension to survive. For Naguib, attempts at decolonizing interdisciplinary art can thus provide sites of resistance and allow for otherwise excluded lived experiences and socio-political landscapes to be artistically expressed.

Closing this section's set of eyewitness reports on interdisciplinarity is Sophia Lycouris' account, as a choreographer, of her participation in a collaborative interdisciplinary project with a specialist in control technology and a product designer. In "Performance Robot or Interactive Kinetic Sculpture? A Dialogue between Choreography, Product Design and Control Technology," Lycouris demonstrates how the effort to create a dialogue between collaborators from different disciplines produces the necessary constraints to enable quality control in interdisciplinary work. She argues that these constraints reveal themselves as collaborators attempt to find ways to communicate and forge a common ground where their project can develop. In this specific project—designing what came to be called a *Snake Robot*, a hybrid "performance robot" and "interactive sculpture"—language played a central role in developing a critical methodology that, according to Lycouris, should be the foundation of any serious interdisciplinary inquiry. Lycouris' chapter provides an example of how an increased consciousness of the interdisciplinary process can avoid some of the problems described by Evans, such as a lack of self-criticism and an illusory heterogeneity. In this sense, her contribution also exemplifies the productive collision that this collection of essays seeks to explore.

The following sections of *Collision* further develop many of the themes introduced in “Eyewitness Reports.” Section II, “Technologies and/of Theory: Posthumanism and Interdisciplinarity,” provides a critical analysis of technology as one of the significant contemporary sites of interdisciplinarity. In this section, technology is not explored for its emancipatory value, or for its apocalyptic potential. Instead, technology is itself considered as a site of collision, an emergent (non)space that allows us to focus momentarily on the ethical and political considerations that accompany interdisciplinary practice. Ultimately, concerns of this nature are at the root of Jackie Sawatzky’s “Plotting the Pixel,” which mobilizes the *R.g.b-project* towards a consideration of the role of digital visual technology as a cultural project of normalization. Demonstrating the computer’s complicity in constructing a limited and fixed notion of colour, Sawatzky asks what the ramifications of this process are. Rather than nostalgically calling for a return to a mythical pre-technological conception of colour, her project attempts to repurpose this technology through practice-based interrogation. As such, the digital visual technology that is the *object* of critique for Sawatzky is simultaneously employed in the *method* of critique. This tactic introduces a degree of self-consciousness that is traditionally absent within fixed disciplines.

The place where Sawatzky leaves off is precisely the place where David Cecchetto’s “Melancholy and the Territory of Digital Art” begins. Is it possible, within the current climate of Nietzsche’s completed nihilism, to propose an ethico-political artistic project? Cecchetto’s paper states that it is not, but that this impossibility itself can be read through Judith Butler’s account of melancholic subjectivity as an intensification of the ground of an ethics of digital art. The result of this engagement is a text that continually says one thing, but performs another—a text that is an account of the inevitably vagrant migrations of a previous (perhaps fictional) subjectivity that amounts to a performance of the poststructuralist always-already. As such, Cecchetto’s text refuses the claims of the Lacanian construction of the individual, but is also dissatisfied with alternatives such as those posited by Deleuze and Guattari; what results, then, is the impossibility of an ethics of digital art that exists as the very necessity of this same perspective.

The conceptual “turning” that is articulated throughout Cecchetto’s chapter can be understood as the invisible ground of Doug Jarvis’ chapter “Sphereship.” Conflating notions of sphere and spaceship, *Sphereship* as a practice represents nothing less than an attempt to rethink the concept of space. This rethinking is made possible by the fact that Jarvis is not tied to linear constructions of spatiality, but uses spatiality as a technological term

that does not mark presence or absence (as it does in the tradition of Western metaphysics) but instead points to something else. In this sense, *Sphereship* is meaningless, but this meaninglessness is nonetheless marked as something other than meaningless through Jarvis' insistence on incorporating the literal materials of the notion into his artistic practice. While a discussion of meaning would return *Sphereship* to the realm of critique offered in Cecchetto's chapter, *Sphereship's* reality as practice instead insists on its paradigmatic excessiveness to this reading. Here, then, "Sphereship" (the chapter) is the abject detritus of the disciplinary collisions that are constitutively (and paradoxically) acted in *Sphereship* (the practice).

One theoretical perspective that emerges from the combined reading of these three chapters is that of the posthuman, a concept that underpins the section's concluding chapter: Ted Hiebert's "Nonsense Interference Patterns: Collisions, Reflections and Failures." Here, Hiebert explores the way, firstly, that mirrors and holograms constitute and are constituted by cognitive interference patterns and, secondly, how interfering with interference causes cognitive collision with the comprehensibility of disciplined (or disciplinary) understanding. As Hiebert demonstrates, this is not akin to a free-license for creativity, since even these meta-interferences can be patterned to create what Hiebert refers to as "sustainable (though scattered) delusion." Further, Hiebert's thinking precludes the possibility of failure, since each breakage is actually a deferral, a trajectory rather than a position—not so much a flow as its shadow, fundamentally relational but nevertheless caught within its own structure of delusion. In other words, Hiebert's concept of interdisciplinarity does not involve synthesis, except insofar as one might read the patterned subjectivity that is constitutive of the posthuman as fundamentally synthetic, which is to say fundamentally imaginary.

Moving from the space of technology to the geography of location, Section III, "Locational and Peripatetic Interdisciplinarity," highlights the importance of geographical themes and allusions to travel and migration in contemporary interarts practices. This includes the current vogue for site-specific works, as well as the prevalence of approaches that are literally and/or figuratively nomadic, with artists/authors undertaking physical journeys and traversing multiple disciplinary fields. The tension between the familiar and the foreign, between "home" and "away," is something artists and academics must struggle with when pursuing interdisciplinary interests. It is therefore not surprising that Mieke Bal's *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, one of the most rewarding and influential theoretical texts on interdisciplinary cultural analysis to be

published in recent years, is styled after the well known Rough Guide series of “cheap and handy” practical guidebooks. In addition to using travel as a metaphor, books and articles dealing with academic interdisciplinarity borrow constantly from the language of geopolitics, with words like “territory,” “boundary,” and “border” tending to reinforce links between traditional disciplinary gate-keeping and academic politics, particularly the firmly entrenched hierarchical systems which are threatened by (and sometimes threatening to) interdisciplinary practice.

In their investigations of such themes as locational identity, travel, exploration, and mapping, contemporary artists often incorporate concepts and imagery drawn from the Romantic landscape tradition. In “The Interdisciplinary Sublime,” Nancy Cuthbert appropriates the aesthetic category of the Sublime, historically associated with landscape imagery in literature and visual art, as a broad theoretical framework for interdisciplinarity in artistic and academic research and practice. This framework is applied in a discussion of works by three prominent contemporary artists (Monica Bonvicini, Ross Sinclair, and Pierre Huyghe) that combine interarts approaches with imagery drawn from nineteenth century landscape painting. Particularly important as an inspiration for these reassessments of the natural Sublime is the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, whose iconic landscapes offer a shared art historical vocabulary that can be borrowed by artists wishing to foreground today’s environmental or geopolitical concerns. Both of these are central to Karin Bolender’s ongoing project as an artist and writer, but her practice springs from an entirely different artistic lineage. In “What you gonna do about yer ass? (or, an answer to Sun Ra, via journeys of incarnated poetics and interdisciplinary art practice)” she describes what is in some ways a fairly standard American automobile odyssey, but one that ends with a car crash in the Arizona Desert. This is followed by a very unusual, non-motorized journey through the American South that is at once a critique of car culture, an exploration of regional racial history, and a personal meditation on ethics and artistic identity.

In “Walking Between: Through Place and Practice,” Stewart Andrews and Fiona Bannon bring together a broad disciplinary geography: the extensive academic domains of theatre, performance and dance, and a specific locale: that of Scarborough, North Yorkshire, UK. These become starting points for a journey that explores the act of writing the region one inhabits, re-visioning the familiar through words, sounds and actions. In this way, Bannon and Andrews attempt to cross the boundaries of space and discipline to unsettle existing and emerging locations and celebrate new ways of seeing places and performance. Matt Hawthorn’s “[G]hosts

in the Frame—Walking the Periphery,” analyzes his own artistic practice, focusing on a site-specific interactive performance piece that he made in the English city of Nottingham in 1993. Like Bannon and Andrews, and also like Bolender, Hawthorn’s practice is “founded in the body,” and concerned with the particulars of place, with initial and subsequent perceptions of the environment (both cultural and physical), and their effects on how individuals relate to their surroundings. However, his essay makes these themes secondary as he focuses his attention on uncovering theoretical foundations for, or parallels to, his own work in the ideas of four prominent thinkers who have written on such related matters as art and culture, architecture and perception: Walter Benjamin, Peter Bürger, Michael Polanyi and Juhani Pallasmaa.

The relationships between the negotiated space of practice and research that are implicitly present in Hawthorn’s chapter are engaged in the fourth section of this collection, “Spaces of Practice and Research,” through both a figurative and literal exploration of spaces for scholarship. Here, the writers contest what performance theorist Susan Melrose has described as the fiction of “theory as writing” and “practice as non-writing”: the mistaken assumption that theory is synonymous with the written form and artistic practice is incapable of acting as a theoretical text. As an overview to the intricate maze of terminology and writing around the form of Practice as Research, Paul Stapleton’s chapter offers a provisional map to help the reader locate the multiple methodologies, trajectories and questions that have emerged in this heavily contested field. He points out that, although the growing literature on practice as research has, to date, focused on the issues of methodology and the integration of practice into a traditional research context of dissemination and publication, a notable exclusion has been the impact of this work across the academic and practical contexts. This chapter is contrasted, in style and content, by Martin Dixon’s diary, a piece that occupies the interstice between public discourse and private experience. Dixon’s performative writing presents the reader with the question of textual “admissibility” with respect to that which is experienced in the context of (writing as) practice as research. Dixon’s diary prompts us to examine how writing what is experienced might “hold on” to a presence often lost in textual practice.

Engaging with these two disciplinary-specific trajectories, both Tanya Augsburg and Dylan Robinson discuss with the challenges of thinking interdisciplinary scholarship (here in the context of art history and musicology, respectively) as an embodied critical practice. Writing on the work of feminist artist/academic Joanna Frueh, Augsburg argues that Frueh’s works tend to trouble and short-circuit the hierarchies of research

and practice because Frueh is able to simultaneously inhabit the position of academic, performance artist, and autobiographical subject. While this sometimes results in a “reception problem” that inhibits the dissemination and critical study of her work, this cohabitation allows Frueh to question this very thing: the nature of how performing identity contextualizes knowledge reception. Addressing a similar position of scholarship as art practice, Robinson’s article discusses the object-status of music and the metaphor of the musical work as monument. His article re-situates this discourse of musicology as a material practice and suggests that we re-deploy the metaphor of the “imaginary museum of musical works” to construct musicology as an artistic practice.

Concluding this section, Simon Jones provides an in-depth analysis of the development of *Skinworks*, a collaboration that explored questions of identity around gender, memory, and sexuality as encountered in the virtual space of the Internet. Jones focuses on the question of what constitutes knowing *across* communities of practice. His essay explores the cumulative contexts within which this particular collaboration exchanged knowledge between the academy and relevant art-practices, governed by interactive feedback relations that informed the various research contexts, which in turn influenced the development of research questions. Jones proposes that this matrix of contexts around and through practice-led interarts research provides a radical model for knowledge transfer between the academy and the creative industries—a new place in-between.

The final section of the collection, “Performative Collisions and Collisions in Performance,” focuses on specific ideas that have arisen in and from the proliferation of interartistic practices that has taken place under the auspices of time-based artistic activity. The theatricalization of the arts, once strongly opposed by Michael Fried, paved the way for traditionally visual practices to move into the realm of performance, eventually developing into Fluxus, performance art, and community and dialogical art practices. This chapter examines both the development of performativity as a site of interarts expansion and takes stock of current contemporary performance. Julie Lassonde’s “Feminist Performance, Community and Violence: Conversations between Elizabeth Chitty, Margaret Dragu and Julie Lassonde” is set out as an exploration of the embodied knowledge of three Canadian performance and interdisciplinary artists who have a common experience of the risk involved in performing feminism. As the conversation unfolds, the author-participant extracts recurring themes, which are central to all three discussants’ embodied experience, including the tension between community building and

violence. For Lassonde, the emergence of feminist performativities in performance and interdisciplinary practices is made possible through the development of relationships of trust within specific communities, a belief that is presented in both the form and content of the chapter.

Drawing on the work of Julia Kristeva, Leoni Schmidt's "Interarts Performativities: Writing-Drawing-Architecture" argues that interdisciplinarity occurs where thinking is caught in its unfolding and where a dynamic diagonal axis exists between the poles of theory and practice. The essay examines the work of several contemporary artists who interface their writing and drawing and who deploy drawing in an architectural register through choices regarding scale, site, space, and time, choices that invite the audience to participate in temporary "completions" of the work. Schmidt concludes by considering Gerald Crow's list of the writing "problems" of visual thinkers. These, she argues, should be celebrated as "strengths" because the projects introduced echo through performatively writing the enactment of corporeal understandings in transcognitive ways, making material a sense of temporal process in architectural space through the connective functions of drawing.

Heidi Taylor and Andreas Kahre's "The Aesthetics of Disappointment" investigates the proposition that interdisciplinarity is defined less by the formal boundaries it posits or transgresses, and more by the tensions it articulates between disciplines, between modes of artistic practice, and between the expectations that define the relationships among collaborators, performers, and audiences. Two projects provide the point of departure for this discussion: Taylor's site-specific performance project *Antic*, and Kahre's performance work *The Linear Animal*. Kahre and Taylor's discussion centres on how interdisciplinarity is defined in contemporary performance practice, and what types of relationships inform the decisions that are made in the development of new work.

Christine Stoddard's essay "Ruptured Flesh, Gaps in Time: Between Performance and Pain" explores the work of performance artists Kira O'Reilly, Ron Athey and Rebecca Belmore, all of whom place themselves and their audiences in the uncomfortable position of experiencing and witnessing pain. In this chapter, the experience of pain becomes the central location for transgressing the boundaries of performance and, more largely, of art. The suspension of time and the uncertainty of response provoked by pain raise questions about ethics and social responsibility in and beyond performance. These reflections ultimately bring Stoddard to embrace the notion, introduced by W.J.T. Mitchell, of interdisciplinarity as "indiscipline."

Each of the sections discussed above focuses on a specific area that has been a prominent site of interarts experimentation. These sections negotiate a series of interrelated collisions in order to address a range of theoretical positions, as well as a variety of international and cultural perspectives. In addition to addressing the notion of interdisciplinarity and the challenges of specific interarts practices, this publication seeks to question how we might understand interarts practice in a way that does not exclude perspectives such as spirituality, law, political activism and community development, to name only a few. The inclusion of these disparate practices within this publication—itsself a site of collision of the poetic, the conversational, and the theoretical—should thus not be understood as an attempt to unify or normalize them, but rather as a productive charting of their radical explosion; a collision that is always a colliding.

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PART I

EYEWITNESS REPORTS: MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES ON COLLISION BETWEEN THE ARTS

CHAPTER ONE

SPIRITUAL FORMS: NOTES FOR THINKING ABOUT ART AND SPIRITUALITY

DANIELLE BOUTET

Beyond contributing beautiful—or meaningful—objects to the public, art practice is a way for me to experience and think about the world, a way to understand the world and, through it, to understand something about humanity. This has always been the purpose of art-making for me: to experience in that way, to be conscious in that way, to *be* in that way. Striving for expressive perfection, for an always greater mastery of art-making and theoretical studies, for beauty and eloquence; venturing into aesthetically hazardous or philosophically contested terrain; and taking liberties with rules and definitions has served the essential purpose of developing more expansive knowledge and more intense experience.

The framework for understanding art as a way of knowing and being in the world is not the same as a scientific framework. For this reason, it is hard to demonstrate this idea in a way that is comparable to how one would demonstrate a philosophical or scientific claim. Through sharing my personal and impressionistic thoughts, I hope to open conceptual ground for reflection on an artistic practice that is not striving to create so called “sacred art,” but is a way of enhancing a form of consciousness related to (or evoking) spirituality. Like Mircea Eliade (1959), I see spirituality as an inherent dimension of consciousness—and, essentially, as an experience of being.

I present a framework where art—as a practice involving space, time and matter, as well as a practice related to consciousness and presence—shares some key features with certain spiritual practices. I do my best to define these very terms—consciousness, sacred, spiritual, meaning, matter, reality, and knowledge—as they appear in my work. I do not understand the notion of art in a romantic, idealized way. Rather, I see it as a practice entirely contingent upon context, materials and media, though not defined by them. In my view, art is a non-disciplinary practice of

shaping time, space and materials (which could include intangible objects such as concepts and images, sounds, symbols, etc.) to create meaningful forms, objects, and situations.

Through art making, I experience an intensification of my consciousness and of the *feeling* that the world is meaningful. This way of being in the world and perceiving its underlying coherence—a coherence of which we are an integral component—brings about a sense of our presence and matter's presence. We perceive matter as living and vibrating, as no longer inert. We experience matter as *presence*, anchored in significance. This is an ontological perspective for which there can be no proof; no argument or discourse can make someone else feel it too. It comes from *experience*, the encounter with embodied and materialized work. It arises from contemplation rather than from observation and measurement.

This form of knowledge is different from scientific knowledge or information. I see it as a form of *gnosis*, which in the Greek language refers to knowledge derived from intuition and recognition, as opposed to *epistamai*, which is a Greek word meaning knowledge derived from study and external sources of information (Bailly 1901, 173, 345). Similar descriptions of knowledge (as *gnosis*) are often seen in descriptions of how meditation elicits a feeling of unity and wholeness, of the integration of spirit and body.

Living with the feeling that I am interrelated and integral to everything else is vital to me. It probably is vital to all of us, as the contemporary movement toward “re-enchantment” would suggest.¹

There is a sense, indeed, that the lack of connection with the world and the loss of the sense of its underlying unity is the source of ecological disaster. I look for and cultivate practices that have the potential to enhance that sense of presence, meaningfulness and significance. Among such practices, art is the most effective for me: the process of shaping materials and sounds so that they become “art work” is my way of participating in the revelation of the world's coherence. Seeing or sensing an underlying coherence intensifies my intuition of the sacred, as well as my impression that my presence is ontologically founded.

The sense of an “irreducible real” is how physicist Basarab Nicolescu defines the Sacred (1996, 183), while Mircea Eliade defined the Sacred as “the experience of a *reality* and the source of our awareness that we exist in the world” (2006). Enhancing my experience and awareness that I exist in a meaningful world is the primary reason that I make art. Abstract expressionist painter Barnett Newman argued that we should make work