Venturing into the Uncharted World of Aesthetics

Venturing into the Uncharted World of Aesthetics

Edited by

John Murungi and Linda Ardito

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Venturing into the Uncharted World of Aesthetics

Edited by John Murungi and Linda Ardito

This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-9281-2
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-9281-0

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTRIBUTORS

Alphonso Lingis, Ph.D, is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the Pennsylvania State University. Among his books published are *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, *Abuses*, *The Imperative*, *Dangerous Emotions*, *Trust*, *The First Person Singular*, *Contact*, *Violence and Splendor*, *Irrevocable,* and *The Alphonso Lingis Reader*.

Kip Redick, Ph.D., is Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Christopher Newport University. Professional interests include pilgrimage studies, spiritual journey, spirituality of place, aesthetics, and film studies. His specific research interest centers on the study of wilderness trails as sites of spiritual journey. Among his publications are: "Interpreting Contemporary Pilgrimage as Spiritual Journey or Aesthetic Tourism Along the Appalachian Trail." "Aesthetic Sojourning on the Appalachian Trail", "Sensuous Encounter where Journey and Festival Meet: a Phenomenology of Pilgrimage.", "Spiritual Rambling: Long Distance Wilderness Sojourning as Meaning-Making." "Profane Experience and Sacred Encounter: Journeys to Disney and the Camino De Santiago." "Wilderness as *Axis Mundi*: Spiritual Journeys on the Appalachian Trail."

Donald Kuspit, Ph.D., is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Art History and Philosophy at Stony Brook University and a former A. D. White Professor at Large at Cornell University. He has published twenty books, some 1500 articles, catalogue essays, exhibition and book reviews. He has five honorary doctorates, received the Frank Jewett Mather Award for Distinction in Art Criticism from the College Art Association, a Citation for Distinguished Service to the Visual Arts from the National Association of the Schools of Art and Design, and the Tenth Annual Award for Excellence in the Arts from the Newington-Cropsey Foundation. He has delivered the Getty Lectures at the University of Southern California and been the Robertson Fellow at the University Glasgow. He has curated

many exhibitions, received many fellowships, and has been editorial advisor for European Art 1900-1950 for the Encyclopedia.

John Murungi, Ph.D., is Professor of Philosophy at Towson University, Maryland USA. His publications include: A*frican Philosophical Currents*, *African Philosophical Illuminations***,** *African Musical Aesthetics*. His co-edited books with Linda Ardito include *Home-Lived Experiences, Trajectories*, *Elemental Sensuous, Rendezvous with the Sensuous*. His co-edited books with Gary Backhaus include *Symbolic Landscapes*, *Colonial and Global Interfacings: Imperial Hegemonies and Democratizing Resistances.* His research is in Aesthetics, African Philosophy, Legal Philosophy, and Twentieth Century Philosophy. He is the Co-founder of the International Association for the Study of Environment, Space, and Place.

Bongrae Seok, Ph.D, is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Alvernia University in Reading, Pennsylvania, USA. He received his Ph. D. in philosophy from the University of Arizona. His primary research interests lie in cognitive and comparative Asian philosophy and moral psychology, philosophy of neuroscience and AI, moral neuroscience, neuroethics and neuroasesthetics. His recent books include: *Naturalization, Human Flourishing, and Asian Philosophy: Owen Flanagan and Beyond*, *oral Psychology of Confucian Shame: Shame of Shamelessness* (2016), and *Embodied Moral Psychology and Confucian Philosophy*.

Ellen Miller, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. Her book, *Releasing Philosophy, Thinking Art: A Phenomenological Study of Sylvia Plath's Poetry* (Davies Group Publishers), is the first full-length philosophical examination of Plath's poetry. She has published several articles on philosophical issues in Plath's work. Her other publications and scholarly presentations focus on topics in ethics, philosophy of art, feminist philosophies, and philosophy of education. She has received grants for her pre-college philosophy outreach work.

Monica Toledo Silva is a semiotician, audiovisual artist and researcher of body images and performative languages. She is an Independent professor at PUC Minas; editor of the books Performances of Memory and Dramaturgies of Reality by the publishing label Bloop. She runs the Swimming Seas Net, dedicated to the migrant art through knowledge creation (artists talks, collective curatorship and exhibitions around the themes of the refuge, displacement and territoriality worldwide. She has held three post-doctor fellowships (UFMG/ Communications 2013, UNICAMP/ Multimedia 2015 and USP/ Letters 2022). She also has published essays and has participated in conferences and video series and installations.

Linda Ardito, Ph.D., researches and writes extensively on subjects in the arts and humanities after a long and distinguished career in New York as Professor of Music. She has co-edited with John Murungi and authored book chapters in *Home – Lived Experiences–Philosophical Reflections*; *The Poetry in Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Christos C. Evangeliou*; *Sensorial Trajectories; Elemental Sensuous: Phenomenology and Aesthetics;* and *Rendezvous with the Sensuous: Readings on Aesthetics*. She has also authored chapters in *Creativity: Fostering, Measuring and Contexts*; and *Symbolic Landscapes*; and entries in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*; *The Grove Dictionary of American Music*; and the *Encyclopedia of Education and Human Development*; as well as journal articles in *Skepsis*; *International Journal of Musicology*; and *Perspectives of New Music*, among others.

INTRODUCTION

The uncharted world of aesthetics is an essential consideration with respect to the broader appreciation of the world of aesthetics. To consider the world of aesthetics is also to take this component into account. Thus, attempts at charting this uncharted world remain a permanent feature of the world of aesthetics. Of course, this uncharted world can never be fully charted. Moreover, the world of aesthetics is, itself, inextricable from the world as a whole. Indeed, it is an essential feature of this larger world, and an invaluable key to its appreciation. Consequently, to venture into the uncharted world of aesthetics is to also venture into this larger world. This larger world might be referred to as the "cosmos" or the "universe." In the didactic, Latin poem, *De rerum natura* (*On the Nature of Things*), Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius (c. 99 BCE – c. 55 BCE) reflects upon the nature of the universe:

> I am blazing a trail through pathless tracts of the Muses' Pierian realm, where no foot has ever trod before. What joy it is to light upon virgin springs and drink their waters. What joy to pluck fresh flowers and gather for my brow a glorious garland from fields whose blossoms were never yet wreathed by Muses round any head.[1]

The nature of the universe may be perceived and experienced as the universe of nature. Nature's universe or the universe of nature is precisely where the world of aesthetics resides. Thus what Lucretius says in his poem is relevant to what is said about the world of aesthetics. Nature gives birth to language and language gives birth to nature. Nature and language are coeval—here connoting that they have the same theoretical date of origin. In a sense, we may say that they cohabitate as a way of their being. The editors and authors of the present book may be regarded as heirs or descendants of this cohabitation. Aesthetics, it may be said, is a child of the creative processes that would be associated with this coeval union.

Every contribution in this book makes use of language, for it is in this that its expression is made manifest. In some way, the use of language is an

extraordinary feat that only attains the intended objective by itself bearing the attributes of aesthetics. Indeed, language is, itself, extraordinary in that it is not merely an instrument of communication. As Heidegger puts it:

> … words and language are not wrappings in which things are packed for commerce of those who write and speak. It is in words and in language that things first come into being and are. For this reason, the misuse of language in idle talk, in slogans, and phrases, destroy or authentic relation to things.[2]

When language bears the attributes of aesthetics, which it must do if its subject matter is aesthetics, it must be perceived and understood aesthetically. It gives birth to itself and comes into relief as an aesthetic phenomenon. Indeed, it gives birth to itself as aesthetics, and it is only in this sense that it can enter into relationship with the aesthetic phenomena to which it gives birth. We may say that it has an uncharted element, and that it speaks silently. Moreover, we may say that it is permanently pregnant with silence. Indeed, this is what is uncharted about it. It does not merely transmit ideas. In it and by it, the world of aesthetics and the world to which the world of aesthetics belongs are brought to bear on each other in an essential way. Thus, unchartedness belongs to both.

When this book is read from an aesthetic perspective, each author and their respective contributions, are, in a sense, blazing a trail, a trail through the uncharted world of aesthetics and the uncharted world that is called the "universe." Ultimately, their respective contributions will leave the world of aesthetics yet uncharted, and, thus, their work should be read and understood in this context. This would apply to not only the content of each contribution but also to the language in which it is expressed. Speaking or writing about the aesthetic world calls for an aesthetic language. This language itself is the flesh of aesthetics, and it shares the features of the aesthetic world. In it, there is what is and what remains uncharted.

This book is intended as an invitation, not only for those who have already embarked upon the activity of venturing into the uncharted world of aesthetics, but also for those who wish to join in this activity, including those for whom such venturing is unfamiliar. Strictly speaking, it is not the

editors who extend this invitation. It is extended primarily by the uncharted world of aesthetics itself. One could say that the chapters contained herein constitute responses to this invitation. It will be important for the reader to bear in mind that each author, by his/her contribution to this book, makes an inescapably singular response. While there is a place for singular venturing in the uncharted world of aesthetics, such venturing would presuppose that each author is open to what is presented by the other authors of the present book. Such openness necessarily belongs to the aesthetic world in both its charted and uncharted expressions. One does not have to disavow his or her singularity to contribute to and be a part of this broader world of aesthetics. Indeed, to be open in this way would not be contradictory. It is instead part of the enigma of the uncharted world of aesthetics, and it would be understood as an opening to venturing. This is how it would be understood: as opening itself to venturing. Singularities are singularities of this world. Each is claimed by the world as its own. Each door opens to others.

Notwithstanding any and all instances of venturing into the uncharted world of aesthetics, the unchartedness of this world remains forever what it is: uncharted. As such, venturing into it is an endless endeavor. Indeed, such venturing will never render this world fully charted. So, what inspires the venturer? It is the experiential component of venturing that inspires the venturer. The condition of unchartedness inspires those who venture into it. It mirrors the venturer, and the venturer mirrors it. The reciprocity of this mirroring is such that without the one the other would not exist. The uncharted world is such that it constitutes and reveals the venturer as uncharted. In venturing into this world, one ventures into oneself and experiences oneself as unchartered.

A precondition of successful venturing into the uncharted world of aesthetics is an appreciation for the requisite divestiture from fixation on/in the charted world of aesthetics. To subscribe to this precondition is to free oneself from this fixation, and, in so doing, to, in a sense, free oneself from self. This divestiture is occasioned by the uncharted world of aesthetics. Rendering oneself ready for this occasion is analogous to what phenomenologists refer to as *epoché*. One must wean oneself of pre-judices or, at least, suspend one's pre-conceptions. This *epoché* is

accomplished by adhering to the requisite approach to the uncharted world of aesthetics.

As has been mentioned, the present authors and their respective contributions are, in a sense, blazing a trail through the uncharted world of aesthetics and the uncharted world that is called the "universe." In so doing, they are also blazing a trail to self. These trails are paradoxical. They end where they begin and begin where they end. The beginning is the end, and the end is the beginning. The uncharted world of aesthetics is the uncharted world of self. What this world says about self is that self is what it is by being uncharted and by remaining so even as it charts itself. Self is expressed as both a singularity and a state of openness to other singularities. One affirms and experiences oneself aesthetically and, in this sense, would remain as such. It is precisely in this sense that one has to perceive and conceive each author and their contribution to the present book. Its perception and conception necessitates that the perceiver and the conceiver be similarly situated. One cannot read what is said about aesthetics without reading it aesthetically and, in a sense, without one being an aesthetician. As said earlier, the uncharted world of aesthetics opens to the larger uncharted world. In its aesthetic context, self is truly self in the context of this larger world. It is what it is by being inseparable from nature and from the universe. Self is self in and of nature and in and of the larger world. Self is in the universe and of it. It is in the cosmos and of it. Thus, self is as much revealed in the world of aesthetics as it is in the larger world.

When self is not aesthetically understood or affirmed and is experienced in this sense as referenced above, it loses contact with itself. Such loss would constitute impairment to the self. To eliminate such loss would be to subscribe to that which is therapeutic. An aesthetic pursuit is a pursuit for the wellbeing of self. Nature, the universe, and the cosmos are as diagnostic clinics within which are held remedies for the impaired self. Understood aesthetically, such remedies are what they are. In part, they remain uncharted, perennially out of hand. Recognizing this is therapeutic for those who are and remain under the sway of aesthetics. For those who are not under such a sway, it would not be an overstatement to say that lacking this recognition could be catastrophic in ways not necessarily

understood. Life remains uncharted in spite of its chartedness. The charted and the uncharted remain as dynamic yet permanent features of life. Whether charted or uncharted, the world of aesthetics is a lived-world, a world that is perhaps more narrowly referred to as the world of fine arts.

The editors hope that readers will be inspired by what they read and respond creatively to their experience of the uncharted sense of who and what they are. We also hope that readers will gain a greater appreciation for how works either on or about aesthetics are also works that reflect who and what they/we are. Such works are pregnant with endless possibilities of being, possibilities that are essential features of the uncharted nature of aesthetics.

Notes

[1] Lucretius, *The Nature of the Universe*, translated by Ronald Latham (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Classics), 1962, 130.
[2] Heidegger, Martin, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, translated by Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1959, p. 13-14.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SAME TASTE

ALFONSO LINGIS

Humans vary in what body types, clothing and furniture they find beautiful. An individual varies; a painting I found beautiful may later strike me as shallow and trivial and unattractive. There are a few things that people in one culture find beautiful but people in another find ugly—the monumental buildings built by the fascist regime in Spain, or the bound feet of Chinese court women. Some philosophers and sometimes we in our conversations take taste to be subjective and idiosyncratic. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. *De gustibus non est disputandum*. Yet art historians and critics and philosopher Immanuel Kant speak of beauty that anyone with eyes and ears and experience can recognize. So often, before a sunset, a building, a dancer, we act as though we think, it's not just me, that just is beautiful.

What is more, there is a sense of the beautiful that we share not just with anyone in the human species but also with other species.

Humpback, blue, fin, minke, and bowhead whales sing. More whale species may sing; research is still inadequate. Male whales sing during the breeding season but also during their long migrations. The loud songs of blue whales can travel the ocean a thousand kilometers. The humpback's songs have a hierarchical syntax. Phrases made of sets of sounds are repeated in patterns forming themes. Songs comprise two to nine themes sung in a specific order. "These sounds are, with no exception that I can think of, the most evocative, most beautiful sounds made by any animal on Earth," researcher Roger Payne wrote. People agree; the greatest single pressing of any album of recorded music was of the 1979 album *Songs of the Humpback Whale*. Of the approximately ten thousand species of birds, about half are songbirds. Songbirds are believed to have originated in Australia some 24 million years ago. Nightingales, canaries, Asian koels, rose-breasted grosbeaks, American robins, song thrushes, channel-billed cuckoos, and house sparrows sing richly varied songs. Sedge warblers sing very long and complex songs. Superb lyrebirds sing hundreds of songs and mimic hundreds of songs of other species and random sounds of the environment.

In North America the songs of wood thrushes use the Western diatonic scale; canyon wrens use the more complex chromatic scale and hermit

thrushes sing with the pentatonic scale of traditional Asian music. Musician wrens of the Amazon forest sing in perfect consonances, which are used in many folk and children's songs.

> The songs [of humpback whales] have musical structure. They are comprised of four to ten themes sung in the same order, and each theme is a unique set of musical note sequences—phrases and subphrases. Of vast significance for understanding musical intelligence is that, when played at high speed, whale songs are indistinguishable from bird songs; at an intermediate speed, they can be mistaken for possible human compositions. Apparently, birds, humans, and whales possess a basic musical intelligence since they can listen to, appreciate, create, and sing intricate and beautiful music that is executed by each taxon at a different tempo.
>
> —Theodore X. Barber[1]

Whales in the oceans, birds in the skies, and humans have the same taste in melodies.

Flowers are made to attract the eyes of pollinators; the patterns and colors, the beauty of flowers delight our eyes. The intense and iridescent colors and rhythmic patterns, the beauty of feathers exceeds that of flowers. The oldest feathers discovered were on ornithischian dinosaurs from the Triassic age, 250 million years ago. Recent research has revealed feathers colored, patterned, and iridescent; *Anchiornis* in black, white, grey, and red; *Sinosauropteryx* in orange and black stripes; *Microraptor* in iridescent black. Colors and patterns that are attractive. Feathers first evolved not for flight but for display.

Malayasian great argus pheasants are found in forests of the Malay Peninsula, Borneo, and Sumatra. Their heads and necks are blue, with black crests, their upper breasts rufous red. Their legs are red. The males have decorative wing feathers up to three feet long, and tail feathers up to four and a half feet in length. On the wing feathers are sixteen ocelli; they are three-dimensional, raw umber shading into taupe in depth, with highlights like gleams of light: marbles in sockets. "These feathers have been shown to several artists, and all have expressed their admiration at the perfect shading," said Charles Darwin.[2]

A male clears an expanse of forest floor and utters loud calls. When a female arrives, he dances before her with his wings spread in a great circle.

Females visit the dance floors of many males until finally choosing the most beautiful and graceful performer. The pair remains monogamous.

In Europe in the sixteenth century rooms set aside for their collections by aristocrats and prosperous merchants came to be known as *Wunderkammern* or *Cabinets de curiosités*. They held religious relics (icons, fragments of the True Cross), paintings and jeweled boxes, ancient sculptures and coins, objects from far-away lands (wampum belts, Oriental footwear, carved alabaster panels and ivory tusks), dragon's eggs, fossils and mineral specimens, and horns, claws, feathers and other things belonging to strange and curious animals (a dodo from Mauritius, the upper jaw of a walrus, armadillos). Unlike museums later, rationalizing and didactic, these rooms displayed the objects without order or context. Each was individually displayed, to give rise not to explanation but to astonishment, delight, wonder.

There are twenty species of bowerbirds in New Guinea and Australia. They range from 21 to 38 centimeters in length. Male bowerbirds construct individual theaters, clearing the forest floor and then covering it with woven mats of leaves, carpets of moss, or gardens of flowers, and then erecting parallel walls of twigs that they regularly paint with juices of berries. Archbold bowerbirds in the western highlands of Papua New Guinea are one of the biggest species; they are black and the males with a golden crest. They also attach flowers or colored leaves in the twigs of trees above their collections of objets d'art, to a height of twelve feet. Vogelkop bowerbirds build dome-shaped pavilions eight feet long, six feet wide, and four and a half feet high. In front of their bowers or pavilions bowerbirds array collections of objects of specific colors, varying with the species and also the individual: a satin bowerbird first covers the display area with bright yellow leaves and flowers, and then on top arranges bright blue objects—feathers, flowers, butterflies, beetles, and berries pieces. One I observed on a university campus in New South Wales had in addition a gleaming collection of bright blue plastic bottle caps and drinking straws. Bowerbirds have also been observed creating optical

illusions, arranging objects in the bower's court area from smallest to largest to produce a forced perspective.

The bird named King of Saxony bird-of-paradise (by a museum director in Dresden fishing for patronage) inhabits montane forests of New Guinea and West Papua. The Papuan people call it "Kiss-a-ba" or “Leme,” as it names itself, sounds with which it announces itself when it arrives at a scene. The male is black with yellow breast and is 22 cm long. Planted on his head he has two scalloped enamel-blue plumes 50 cm long that he turns up and down, to the sides, ahead and to the back as he dances and sings in courtship ritual. These plumes have gleaming tabs on only one side of the shaft.

These plumes are much prized by Archbold bowerbirds, who collect any they find molted by King of Saxony birds of paradise and feature them among them the objets d’art they collect and display. Papuan people steal the plumes from those bowers and decorate their heads with them.

The long head feathers of male King of Saxony birds of paradise are admired by female King of Saxony birds of paradise, by Archbold bowerbirds, and by Papuan people. All three species have the same taste in visual beauty.

Notes

[1] Theodore Xenophon Barber, 1993. *The Human Nature of Birds: A Scientific Discovery with Startling Implications.* New York: St. Martin’s Press., 132.
[2] Charles Darwin, 1875, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. New York: Appleton, 3987, 2.

CHAPTER TWO

FOLLOWING THE UNCHARTED WAY: AESTHETIC JOURNEYS ON LAND, SEA, AND WITHIN

KIP REDICK

Introduction

We felt a slight breeze from the south, enough to keep the sail from hanging limp, and set a course toward the mouth of the Back River, where a spit of sand forming Factory Point separated the river from the Chesapeake Bay. My sister and I sailed this river regularly during our teenage years. Approaching the barrier spit we entered the deep channel that ran just offshore from the point. I called out, "ready about," and turned the vessel into what little wind there was until our sail could catch it again, taking us back into the river. The tide was flowing rapidly out of the mouth of the river. The sandy point, just a few meters away, made it possible to measure our progress by watching the boat in relation to the shore. Right away I could see that the tide was much stronger than the wind, and we were being shuttled out toward the open waters of the bay. Dread washed over me as I realized that it had been the tide and not the wind that propelled us out to Factory Point. Now we would be pulled out into the bay, a place where I had rarely sailed. The prospect of the vast and open water of the bay in relation to our small and seemingly useless sailboat initiated an aesthetic experience approaching the sublime.

We had one paddle, and I gave it to my sister, telling her to stoke for her life. I took the center board out and used it to paddle. We set a course north toward Plum Tree Island, where the tide would have less power in the shallow water. We were paddling perpendicular to the tide, and though

we were moving into the bay, Plum Tree Island offered refuge. We finally reached the shallows near the island. Here the slight breeze was strong enough to overcome the tide. We slowly made our way back into the river. Though the Chesapeake Bay has been charted and sailed for centuries, it was a mysterious body of water for me. The familiar inlets and coves in the Back River were known. The interplay of charted and uncharted, of an aesthetic of the beautiful versus the sublime, revealed itself that day.

Later in life, while in my early twenties, I worked commercial fishing boats in the Atlantic Ocean. I became familiar with charts indicating the ocean depths. We dropped heavy dredges and pulled scallops from the sea floor. The boats had state of the art navigation systems, Loran-C that used low frequency radio signals to locate position. Once we found a bed of scallops, the Loran-C helped us stay on top of them. Even though we followed the charts and relied on state-of-the-art navigation systems, riding out a storm could be a sublime experience. What good is a chart when the seas overcome one's vessel? Again, the interplay of aesthetic experiences became manifest on the seas.

The ocean is a vast wilderness. But sailors have learned to navigate the undulating waters by tracking the regular course of the stars. Compasses and sextants helped sailors find their way across this wilderness in relation to latitude. In more recent history, by the mid seventeen hundreds, chronometers allowed for navigation in relation to longitude. The oceans have been charted and measured. But if one were to venture into the ocean in a small sailing craft without GPS, compass, chronometer or sextant, it would appear as a vast wilderness of uncharted water. The interplay between charted and uncharted journeys across the ocean includes an aesthetic dimension, an experience with untamed beauty as the sublime or with peaceful, calm waters that seem to soothe the soul.

The world of aesthetics has also been charted, measured, and conceptualized since Plato. Whereas Plato presents us with the myth of the cave in the *Republic*,[1] he depicts a myth of the journey of ascent in the *Symposium*.[2] Eros is said to be between wisdom and ignorance. In this way Eros, as others who lack both wisdom and ignorance, desires wisdom. Diotima tells Socrates, "He who does not think himself in need does not desire

what he does not think he lacks."[3] Being in need of wisdom enacts desire and sets one in motion toward the desired thing, movement toward wisdom as a journey. Wisdom is also said to be beautiful, attracting Eros and those who journey in that direction, "For wisdom is surely among the most beautiful of things, but Eros is love of the beautiful; so Eros is necessarily a philosopher, a lover of wisdom, and, being a philosopher, intermediate between wisdom and ignorance."[4] Diotima goes on to ask, "Why does he who loves, love beautiful things?" and "What will he have who possesses beautiful things?"[5] The answer gives us the terminus of the journey, to love the good that becomes one's own forever.[6]

Rather than outlining an aesthetic theory, such as those set for by various philosophers from Plato through Heidegger, I will employ phenomenological description as a way of focusing on the interplay of charted and uncharted, exterior and interior aesthetic journeys. I will also explore the call coming from aesthetic experience itself and the response of communicating that experience. Phenomenology, in attempting to return to the things themselves, sets conceptualizations aside in order to discover an experience of the uncharted. Merleau-Ponty characterizes phenomenological description, writing that, "To turn back to the things themselves is to return to that world prior to knowledge of which knowledge speaks,"[7] and "The real must be described and not constructed or constituted."[8] What follows is a phenomenological exploration of the interplay in aesthetic experience through descriptions of a few examples in relation to journey. In journeys at sea, I will first look at a selection of medieval literature, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis*, the voyage of St. Brendan the Abbot.[9] Moving to interior journey, I will explore Saint Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*, as she carefully charts her mystical union with God and at the same time makes explicit that it is not a course anyone can follow.[10] Bernini's sculpture, *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, is a response to Teresa's communication of a mystical aesthetic experience. I will question whether this artwork remains faithful to the uncharted interior journey Teresa has described. Finally, I will return to journeys at sea and discuss a few of J. M. W. Turner's paintings, with a special focus on his seascapes.

Aesthetic Experience and Its Liturgical Action

Plato's journey of ascent involves a liturgical action: wisdom calls the philosopher, who is a lover of wisdom and intermediate between ignorance and wisdom, and the philosopher responds, beginning the journey toward wisdom. The *telos* of the journey is to love the good that in the end becomes one's own, a terminus of communion. Whereas the terminus of the journey for Plato is to love the good, Christian liturgy can be understood as a journey completed in loving God. In both cases the journey rises out of a call which then initiates a response; a liturgy whereby the pilgrim moves from the initial call, through a response, answers another call, responds, and continues repeatedly until reaching the terminus. In Plato, the journey toward the good begins in the pilgrim's youth with an exterior desire, a call to love beauty that arises from an experience with a single beautiful body. The young pilgrim responds by loving the immediate beautiful body. A further call directs this pilgrim/philosopher to the realization that other bodies less immediate have similar beauty. This in turn gives rise to a response wherein the sojourner begins to love the beautiful in all of the bodies. Through iterations of call and response the pilgrim/philosopher's attention shifts to the soul and initiates an interior journey. Diotima depicts this liturgical journey as ascending a ladder. For the purposes of this essay, each rung of the ladder presents a call, and each step is the pilgrim's response. Diotima says:

> Beginning from these beautiful things here, to ascend ever upward for the sake of *that*, the Beautiful, as though using the steps of a ladder, from one to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, and from beautiful bodies to beautiful practices, and from practices to beautiful studies, and from studies one arrives in the end at *that* study which is nothing other than the study of *that*, the Beautiful itself, and one knows in the end, by itself, what it is to be beautiful. . . . that human life is to be lived: in contemplating the Beautiful itself.[11]

Response in the liturgy of exterior and interior journeys also manifests through enactments of beautiful speech, γεννᾶν λόγους καλούς.[12] In conjunction with climbing the ladder, pilgrim/philosophers communicate their aesthetic experiences and thereby create artifacts, the enactment of

poiesis. The enactment of beautiful speech is an action and form of art. That is, communicating one's contemplation of beauty, one's aesthetic experience in the form of beautiful speech, becomes art.

In addition to ascending a ladder, this liturgy can also be understood as a journey with twists and turns whose terminus might be a return to the starting point. The Muslim mystic poet, Rumi, depicts such a journey in his story, "In Baghdad, Dreaming of Cairo: In Cairo Dreaming of Baghdad."[13] Similar to Plato's philosopher who desires wisdom, but unlike that philosopher who is intermediate between ignorance and wisdom, Rumi's pilgrim begins empty, "The Prophet has said that a true seeker must be completely empty like a lute to make the sweet music of *Lord, Lord.*"[14] Rumi's pilgrim receives the call while empty, "in a dream he heard a voice, 'Your wealth is in Cairo. Go there to such and such a spot and dig, and you'll find what you need.'"[15] After journeying to Cairo and winding up in jail, the pilgrim discovers that his treasure is actually back in his home in Baghdad. The last stanza of the poem brings us back to the place of the original call, "The water of life is here. I'm drinking it. But I had to come this long way to know it!"[16] Even though the desired thing was always there in Baghdad, the pilgrim needed to respond to the call and journey to Cairo in order to arrive at wisdom, to recognize the beauty of the desired thing.

Pilgrim/philosophers become artists after responding to the call of an aesthetic experience. In responding pilgrim/philosophers communicate their experience by creating some artifact of expression, what the Greeks referred to as *poiesis*. The philosopher, in contrast to the artist, communicates aesthetic experience by explaining it in the form of dialectic, that is, through rational discourse. Ernesto Grassi notes that, "from Plato on, in the Western world, rational language became preeminent for determining beings and thus reality. Each word, in consequence of its rational definitions, aims at "fixing," out of space and time, the meaning of a being."[17] But explanation does not necessarily fulfill the desire implanted by the call of an aesthetic experience. Owen Barfield contends that the rational principle can "in no sense . . . be said to *expand* consciousness. Only the poetic can do this: only poesy, pouring into language its creative intuitions, can preserve its living meaning and

prevent it from crystallizing into a kind of algebra. 'If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character,' wrote William Blake, 'the philosophic and experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things, and stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round.'"[18] The philosopher in using rational discourse plots an already charted course.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between rational and creative discourse writing, "Language bears the meaning of thought as a footprint signifies the movement and effort of a body. The empirical use of already established language should be distinguished from its creative use. Empirical language can only be the result of creative language."[19] Creative language leaves a footprint, a charted course for rational discourse to follow. Merleau-Ponty continues, "Speech in the sense of empirical language—that is, the opportune recollection of a pre-established sign—is not speech in respect to an authentic language."[20] Authentic language would rise in relation to an uncharted course. Richard Lanigan, in exploring Merleau-Ponty's distinction between authentic and empirical speech writes "Speech is 'authentic' when it is primordial, creative, and expressive of existential meaning."[21] Lanigan further describes the interplay of the two forms of speech, "the sedimentation of authentic speech creates empirical speech."[22] Sedimentation, a "crystallizing into a kind of algebra,"[23] sets a charted course through thematizing.

Emmanuel Levinas describes thematizing as grasping "across an ideality on the basis of a said."[24] It is in saying rather than the said that creative intuitions communicate existential meaning. Such saying is always an adventure as it follows an uncharted course. In the thematization of the said there is no adventure, "Anything unknown that can occur to it is in advance disclosed, open, manifest, is cast in the mould of the known, and cannot be a complete surprise."[25] So, in order to encounter an alterity, to authentically respond to the call of beauty given through a meeting with an Other, one cannot be conscious in this way, grasping across an ideality on the basis of the said. Levinas wants to start in a place other than that of the "philosophical tradition of the West, wherein "all spirituality lies in consciousness, thematic exposition of being, knowing" that is as represented in sedimented speech. He writes, "In starting with sensibility interpreted not as a knowing but as proximity, in seeking in language

contact and sensibility, behind the circulation of information it becomes, we have endeavoured to describe subjectivity as irreducible to consciousness and thematization. Proximity appears as the relationship with the other, who cannot be resolved into 'images' or be exposed to a theme."[26] The Other encountered in this way is not "able to appear" in a theme. Rather than appearance the invisibility of encounter "becomes contact and obsession" by an alternative "way of signifying quite different from that which connects exposition to sight."[27] It "signifies in saying before showing itself in the said."[28] This is not a signification "given in consciousness" which would be a taming or domesticating theme, an immanence, versus "its adjacency in proximity" "an absolute exteriority",[29] rather, "it is always 'already in the past' behind which the present delays, over and beyond the 'now' which this exteriority disturbs or obsesses." Finally, "without allowing itself to be invested by the ἀρχή of consciousness" it is a "trace."[30] The already charted course of the philosopher discloses a thematization, "the ἀρχή of consciousness," and is unable to describe the encounter that is already in the past, a trace.

The artist—poet, painter, sculptor, architect, musician—communicates aesthetic experience through various forms of creative expression. The philosopher, employing empirical language, also creates an artifact that is set forth in the form of rational discourse. In each case we are given an artifact of communication. Persons who experience these artifacts, rationally articulated by a philosopher or creatively expressed by an artist, may discover a charted course, either toward understanding or in responding to aesthetic experience. They may be moved by an aesthetic experience produced by the artifact. That is, the artifact mediates the aesthetic experience. In each case they are removed from the experience being communicated, either through the abstraction of rational speech or the creation of a work of art. In this regard C. S. Lewis writes:

> Human intellect is incurably abstract. Pure mathematics is the type of successful thought. Yet the only realities we experience are concrete-this pain, this pleasure, this dog, this man. While we are loving the man, bearing the pain, enjoying the pleasure, we are not intellectually apprehending Pleasure, Pain or Personality. . . . In the enjoyment of a great

> myth we come nearest to experiencing as a concrete what can otherwise be understood only as an abstraction.[31]

Or, in the enjoyment of a great work of art, aesthetic experience is mediated so that we come near but are still removed from the primal encounter. The primal aesthetic encounter as immediate remains a personal experience, a memory until it is communicated. Communication mediates the experience, abstracting from the primal occurrence. Through each of the various approaches in creating a work of art, the artist communicates and mediates, which might be following a well-established course, a charted way.

The art of ancient Egypt shows a highly charted way. Daniel Boorstin writes, "The Egyptians' 'canon,' an archetype for the sculptured human figure, may be the most durable pattern in the history of art."[32] Both sculpture and painting adhered to "precise proportions" and "were followed for some twenty-two hundred years, longer than the whole Christian era."[33] Jane Ellen Harrison traces the rise of ancient art from ritual performance. Both "do not seek to copy a fact, but to reproduce, to re-enact an emotion."[34] The Greek ritual, *dromenon*, is both to feel and express an impulse.[35] The re-enactment of the hunt in a dance as a representation "cuts itself loose from the particular action from which it arose, and becomes generalized, as it were abstracted."[36] This abstracted form "becomes material for the magical dance, the dance pre-done."[37] Boorstin traces a similar impulse to perform magic in Egyptian art. Rather than taking the form of dance, Egyptian art expresses emotion through sculpture and painting, "Their conventional style, conforming to its own rigid canon, became an institution to be preserved with their religion."[38] As magic requires strict adherence to a formula, a strictly charted course, "Egyptian sculpture could not be the product of fancy, imagination, or originality."[39] As a form of magic and "since Egyptian sculpture was itself a religious institution, the continuity of their religion required a timeless sculptural style."[40] The Egyptian artist, just as those who conduct rituals, remains anonymous in conjunction with the continuity of style, the charted course.[41] Similar to abstraction in the Greek dance "Egyptian society idealized changelessness, so Egyptian sculptors aimed at an abstraction

suggested by what was seen. They succeeded so well so early that they felt little need to 'perfect' their style."[42]

The question arises, is there an uncharted way in aesthetics? Plato's dialogues present a new interpretation of art and at the same time become an art form in their own right. Plato's dialogues are examples of both rational discourse and poetic enactment. Plato is both philosopher and artist. His dialogues have a poetic character and can be interpreted as an art form. Leo Tolstoy is also both a philosopher and an artist. His treatise, *What is Art?*, sets forth in rational discourse a theory of art.[43] The way followed is clearly charted as Tolstoy interacts with Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Kant, to name a few. Tolstoy decides not to focus on beauty but on understanding art, which may be a foray into the uncharted world of aesthetics. Tolstoy's great works of fiction show him to be a great artist with the acute ability to describe some of humanities' deepest thoughts and emotions. In the following section I will interact with another writer, St. Brendan the Navigator, whose medieval book, *The Voyage of St. Brendan the Abbot*, was translated into many languages and widely read in Europe.[44] "The popular story of the Atlantic sea voyage of Brendan is extant in over 120 manuscripts covering a 600-year period, from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries."[45] The manuscript is "amongst the earliest printed works in any language."[46]

Saint Brendan the Navigator

Saint Brendan's book was influenced by the concept of *peregrination pro Christo*.[47] Here pilgrims leave their homeland "to serve Christ in a foreign place."[48] The story falls into the literary genre of the *immram*, a voyage or sea journey, and "developed out of the religious ideal and practice of pilgrimage overseas, the necessity of leaving family, friends and country for the love of God."[49] Dorothy Ann Bray writes, "Brendan's ocean-going experience becomes the Christian quest for eternal bliss (the heavenly home) adapted into the Irish literary tradition of the search for the happy Otherworld."[50] Consistent with Plato's ascent of the ladder, this Irish aesthetic ideal leads the pilgrim across the sea and toward the Otherworld.

Pilgrimage in general and this specific form of Irish pilgrimage follows the liturgy of aesthetic experience, the call to go out from one's homeland and the responding quest to journey. William Thrall writes that such pilgrims "hoped, under guidance of God, to find somewhere in the sea a desert island where they might find their earthly paradise."[51] This aesthetic ideal resulted in "a whole genre of literature, made up of narratives known collectively as voyage tales," that were "inspired by the actual historical experiences of *peregrini*."[52] It is interesting to note that "the island geography which forms the core of the *Voyage of Brendan* is, actually, real."[53] "The author of the *Voyage of Brendan* constructed a narrative that was rooted in actual maritime experiences. However, he wove together actuality with religions concerns. It is a testimony to the skill of the text that so many people still take it literally."[54] For example, "Columbus mentioned Brendan's Island, the Earthly Paradise, in his diary. It remained on navigational charts into the eighteenth century."[55]

The aesthetic aspect of this story was also important in the medieval period. Anderson writes, "Fiction, especially depicting a journey or pilgrimage to explore spiritual or psychological struggle, was a popular medieval literary form and was to become the hallmark of the neoplatonic School of Chartres during the twelfth-century Renaissance."[56] This medieval aesthetic is expressed in nonrepresentational style, "In works of this kind, time and space are not as we know them in the world around us. Still, they do not represent or constitute an unreal world, but rather the externalization of a psychological world."[57]

In this way Brendan's narrative describes both an internal and external journey. Anderson notes that the goal of the voyage also has an aesthetic element, "to see the *magnalia Dei* (wonders of God), to witness the *sacramentum rei* (mystery of creation)."[58] In addition to this Platonic ideal, "that human life is to be lived: in contemplating the Beautiful itself,"[59] witnessing the mystery of creation points to an aesthetics of the natural world. Bray writes, "the joy of nature and the celebration of God's creation, is also reflected in the *Navigatio*. Despite the many dangers on the ocean, the monks experience supreme awe at the natural world which surround them; it is a communion with nature and God as profound as the hermit's in the woods."[60] The liturgy of the aesthetic leads Brendan toward

"achieving unity with God through liturgical prayer and contemplation"[61] as well as deepening a communion with creation through experiencing its beauty. Even the voyage's seven years duration portrays an aesthetics of perfection.[62]

The story of Brendan's journey opens with a visit from another Irish monk, Father Barinthus, who tells of his own journey at sea, to the island called the Land of Promise of the Saints. Father Barinthus and his fellow monks tell Brendan about an aesthetic experience they had while journeying. The power of the experience continues to manifest as Barinthus "could only weep, and cast himself prostrate, and continue longer in prayer."[63] Brendan seems moved by this manifestation and asks Barinthus to "refresh our souls by recounting to us the various wonders you have seen upon the great ocean."[64] When pressed to give an account, Barinthus reenacts the journey through a telling, a performance of beautiful speech. While sailing to the west clouds and dense fog shrouded the way and then a great light revealed land "spacious and [with] grass, and bearing all manner of fruits."[65] Barinthus and his fellow monks stayed for fifteen days exploring the island, which he later calls the paradise of God. The story itself, an artistic enactment recounting an aesthetic experience, evoked a call and response from Brenden and his fellows, "Having heard all this, St. Brendan and his brethren cast themselves on the ground, giving glory to God."[66] This response is consistent with biblical accounts wherein human beings, having had an aesthetic experience, and in responding to the call of that experience, offer up praise. Psalm 104 presents a long list of natural wonders, beautiful to behold, including sun and moon, earth and sea, and all creatures therein. In the final stanzas the psalmist offers up praise.[67]

Brendan, inspired by the account, selects fourteen monks to accompany him on a journey to the island that Barinthus described. They build a boat and provision it with supplies for the voyage. Their journey takes seven years, though the island was said to be only a few days journey west of Ireland. In this way, Brendan and his fellows diverge from Barinthus' described journey, a charted course, and find themselves in uncharted waters. Yet, there is a cyclical pattern over the uncharted extent of the long journey. Bray writes, "The monks follow a defined route through the year;