Indefinite Openess: Thinking Love in Art

Kathryn A. McFadden

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalmaine.com/academic

Recommended Citation

http://digitalmaine.com/academic/18

This Text is brought to you for free and open access by the Maine State Documents at Maine State Documents. It has been accepted for inclusion in Academic Research and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Maine State Documents. For more information, please contact statedocs@maine.gov.
INDEFINITE OPENNESS: THINKING LOVE IN ART

Kathryn A. McFadden

Submitted to the faculty of
The Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

August 2016
Love does not call for a certain kind of thinking, or for a thinking of love, but for thinking in essence and in its totality. And this is because thinking, most properly speaking, is love.

Jean Luc Nancy

For my daughter, Kate.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First I must acknowledge my director, Dr. Sigrid Hackenberg. Words fail to express how much I appreciate your singular presence over the duration; for sharing your wisdom and intelligence—you took me to a limit. You are the embodiment of poiesis in a philosopher.

I am also grateful to IDSVA’s teachers, staff and administration for their guidance over the past seven years. Dr. George Smith must take credit for the topic of this thesis. I remember the moment at Brown University when he said, “You should write about love.” I should? Well, I took his words to heart as I began the writing process. Certainly love is immanent in the concept and praxis of IDSVA, which cultivates many crossings. I thank all of the students and instructors for time and effort extended to me even in the most transient of moments.

There are a few individuals who have gone above and beyond any expression of friendship I could imagine. In particular I want to single out these friends for their extremity of presence: Nell Stifel, Dr. Jen Hall, Dr. Rob Anderson, Dr. Conny Bogaard and Blyth Hazen. When I became deathly ill in the middle of writing this dissertation, you made me want to live; I felt cherished by you. Thank you.

My further appreciation goes to Dr. Bob Carroll for being my cross-country study-buddy, and to my oldest friend Jesse Crawford for his bottomless well of tender concern. Many thanks also to my perceptive and generous copy editor, Lis Bralow as well as my former teacher and friend Sanda Iliescu, who has always made me feel like I have something to offer; hugs to Dr. Elin Danien for her cheerful support and wisdom since my undergraduate years. Also a warm shout out to the Beverly Philosophical Society: a dedicated group of philosophers and artists who are keen to formulate the questions. Thank you, all.

Last but not least, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my daughter, Kate McFadden for putting up with many distractions on my end for the past few years and for my mother who gave me a moral compass. And—although gone from this world for over twenty years—I must acknowledge Billy James for his encouragement to follow a dream; his optimism for life’s possibilities lives on in my heart.
ABSTRACT

Kathryn A. McFadden

INDEFINITE OPENNESS: THINKING LOVE IN ART

What happens when someone confronts a work of art—the inexplicable connection to something brought into the world by an artist? Might we call this moment love? If so, how does this love differ from other loves, like eros or philia? Love originating in the interconnectedness of viewer, artwork and artist resists conventional positions; art is in fact a philosophy of love in action.

I argue the primary action for love in art is thinking. Thinking about art is a manifestation of love when the viewer is overcome by wonder when contemplating a work of art. This love arises from a movement—yet something beyond the semblance of logical movement—that occurs in the viewer and artist. This conveyance offers the potential of a rupture, a burst that takes place in the between, a theoretical zero space of love. As a space of pure potential, the between allows for the connection necessary for thinking love, a love that asks unanswerable questions. Love in art offers indefinite openess because it initiates endless possibilities for what a subject can feel or know.

Love as I define it is not necessarily dependent on empathy, struggle, hierarchy or equivalence; it is not dogma, ideal or truth; it is neither rational nor irrational. It is not to be desperately sought and located; it is a matter of presence and duration. Love in art waives between understanding and ignorance; it is embodied, immeasurable, generous, fleeting and
erratic. It is a manner of thriving in the expansion of self. With this paper I stake a claim for the importance of love in contemporary aesthetic practice.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: The Progress of Love</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: Origins of possibility</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: <em>Intermedius</em></td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Wonder full</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: Indefinite openness</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five: Pure knowing</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

The Progress of Love

Let us consider the subject of love, specifically in the context of works of art. What happens when someone experiences an inexplicable connection to something brought into the world by an artist? Might we call this moment love? If so, how does this love differ from other loves like eros or philia? If it is not comparable, is it possible that love in art stands outside the Western canon of conventional notions of love? How does art explain, connect, and participate in love? What is art’s role in the act of thinking? To begin to take on these questions and by way of example, I commence with a particular contemporary artwork that is both performative and collaborative in nature. This work was included in an expanded exhibition titled The Progress of Love.
In late 2012 through early 2013 three art exhibitions with the shared title *The Progress of Love* were concurrently mounted in three cities across two continents: The Menil Collection in Houston, Texas, the Centre for Contemporary Art, in Lagos, Nigeria, and the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, in St. Louis, Missouri. The exhibitions included artists from Africa, Europe and North America. The title *The Progress of Love* indicates a curatorial intent within a cross-cultural context to examine reforming aspects of love expressed in contemporary art. Kristina Van Dyke along with co-curator Bisi Silva displayed the representation of love in art in terms of time and space, a notion affected by history.¹

Each exhibit locale had a different thematic emphasis. The Houston show was the most dogmatic in that it examined how a digital episteme of globalization informs notions of love. The St. Louis location contemplated the loss of love, while at Lagos the exhibit focused on how love is performed between subjects. By offering a dialogue between the exhibits and the viewers, Van Dyke aspired to “a possibility of self-identification”² that would robustly engage onlookers who attended the venues.

Enacted at the Lagos venue (and subsequently performed in sites beyond *The Progress of Love*) was Valérie Oka’s³ performance *In Her Presence.* [Figure 0.1] The performance comprises a dinner table set for twelve guests including Oka; all participants partake of a three-course meal while sharing in conversation. This conversation specifically concerns “Love, Fear and the point between the two where each of us has the illusion to be.”⁴ At the conclusion, each participant is invited to use what is left on the table to create an image, write a sentence or act out something representative of a lived emotion. Their
“artworks” remain on the table in the gallery for seventy-two hours so that subsequent visitors to the Centre see the remains of the performance. [Figure 0.2]

Figure 0.2 Samples of artworks by participants in Valérie Oka’s performance In Her Presence (2011). Image: Oka’s Flickr pages.

Oka’s creative prompt for the dinner guests to make representations of experiences provides a measure of intimacy within the group. It also prods the participant to specifically articulate or illustrate thought, and to share the role of artist. In Her Presence is a relational and interactive work that—like the noun/verb love—is contingent on the subject, the other, and the agency of connection. In the particular vehicle of Oka’s art performance, links between people are formed via conversations that reflect upon love and other feelings in the subject’s emotional-experiential landscape.

Love, as subjects experience it, is shaped to varying degrees by cultural, social, economic, political, historical and religious contexts, all of which are in constant flux. Love is commonly argued as a universal noun/verb, meaning that virtually everyone feels it;
however, it is not a ubiquitous experience in that how love is experienced and felt is contingent on a subject’s singular response in the face of receiving, giving or losing love. What I respond to in Oka’s performance is her straightforward and sincere concept of having individuals connect over the commonplace and familial format of a meal, which is part of every day life. Also, she also fosters her collaborators to explore their connections in a fairly organic method that culminates in a creative expression of the sharing that has occurred.

While the curators’ aim for the viewer’s self-identification was likely accomplished by *In Her Presence*, I want to stress that it also summoned the viewer to *think* about love—a word that is both noun and verb—in terms of origins and feelings as well as how subjects tend to perform love. We might imagine that the guests at Oka’s dinner came away from that performance with some new insights about intimacy as a result of conversations with others at the table. It is also possible that the participants took leave of the experience with more questions than answers. And if correct in that premise, then it may be said that *In Her Presence* was a conduit for a particular kind of thinking. I want to emphasize here an important aspect of art: it creates a time and space for thinking. It may be argued that many things provoke thinking—including art—but what I further contend is that *thinking about art is a manifestation of love that is based in wonder*.

**A movement of sense**

In this dissertation I unpack a philosophy of love concerning contemporary aesthetic practice. The methodology of my thesis resonates (to a greater or lesser extent) with phenomenological philosophies found in the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, Judith Butler and Jean-Luc Nancy. The philosophies of
Merleau-Ponty, Nancy and Butler are major influences on my thesis. It is significant that phenomenology is not concerned with analysis, but description. In this way it is a manner or style of thinking. This thesis unfolds a way of thinking about love—and about love as something that may happen—that may be experienced and described—with a work of art.

The movement of phenomenology established by Edmund Husserl in the 20th century is an enquiry into and description of a subject’s consciousness. Its precepts begin to unfold in the earlier ideas of Hegel, Nietzsche and Freud. Importantly for my argument, a definition of phenomenology is neither straightforward nor homogeneous. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes, “The fact remains that it has by no means been answered.” He elaborates,

It is a search for a philosophy that shall be a “rigorous science” but it also offers an account of “lived” space, “lived” time and the “lived” world. It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of it psychological genesis and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian, or the sociologist may be able to provide.

The notion of something “lived” is apposite to my dissertation, because the love that may happen within the subjective engagement of a work of art is an experience. The example of Oka’s collaborative work In Her Presence described at the onset of this chapter offers the viewer/participant an accounting and description of feelings that are lived and therefore become part of being’s subjective experience. It is very much an artwork with a phenomenological construct.

Yet as something based in possibility, a thesis of thinking love in art cannot be firmly placed into an existing philosophical structure; instead it is perhaps an “anti-structure”—one that bumps up against established metaphysical scholarly approaches. In his explanation of phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty describes it as a “search” indicating an act of exploration.
Searches tend to be ripe with possibilities. As phenomenology seeks to account for what is lived, I seek the potential of love and for the occurrence of what may be thought of as love in art. This underscores something about how vital art is to life in the same way that love is also important. In his essay on the celebrated Paul Cezanne, Merleau-Ponty stresses the importance of the artist or philosopher’s ideas and the effects on their audience,

A painter like Cezanne, an artist, or a philosopher must not only create and express an idea but must also awaken the experiences which will make the idea take root in the consciousness of others.¹²

Oka’s performance dinner did just this by coordinating a focused kind of thinking and artistic expression for her collaborators. The artwork is designed to have them to think about love, to find meaning via a mindfulness of feeling in terms of memories, to connect and share.

Art—like love—is lived. It is lived with the encounter of a painting on a gallery wall, the artist building something in the studio or the engagement of artist and viewer within a performance. With In Her Presence experiences of love and fear (perhaps) forgotten were remembered and reemerged in consciousness for the subjects who participated. Oka reenergized ideas about love and for a few hours joined together subjects to offer them a new experience that (perhaps) would be remembered at the least and introduce new ideas at the most.

Something else that Merleau-Ponty writes seems important here in terms of how phenomenology influences my thesis,

The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which shows through at the intersection of my experiences, and the intersection of my experiences and those of others, by their engaging each other like gears—this world is therefore inseparable from the subjectivity and from the intersubjectivity which find their unity through the
taking up of my past experiences in my present experiences, the taking up of the other’s experience in my own...The philosopher tries to conceive the world, others, and himself and to conceive their relations.13

Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “intersection” is not far from my idea of the between that happens in the course of engagement with a work of art (as I explain later in this chapter.) The relationship of a subject with a work of art or directly with an artist may be thought of as a form of subjective-intersubjectivity in which past and present come together, also notable for the example of In Her Presence. Oka’s actions in this work concern what Merleau-Ponty terms “radical reflection”14 an undertaking he attributes to philosophy but certainly enacted by art as well.

For Nancy, artworks provide avenues of thinking not conceivable in other ways.15 Nancy’s essay “Shattered Love” strongly influences my thesis.16 Writing about art with its intersection of philosophy has been a principal preoccupation for Nancy in which he reworks existential philosophy.17 While he does not specifically address love and art, a number of his concepts are considered; I borrow his terminology, although expand upon or alter it for my argument. Nancy’s post-phenomenological18 ideas surrounding how a work of art is experienced drives a number of notions of thinking love in art. In The Fragmentary Demand Ian James notes,

...Art, in Nancy’s thought, exists in, or as, a relation to the world, a relation to shared finite existence, and more specifically to that movement of sense, which is, or opens up, world-hood itself in all its singular plurality...The whole concept of art is rethought in terms of his wider philosophical thinking of existence and his rereading and reworking of existential phenomenology.19

The encounter with works of art is a form of relationship (however long or brief) and offers experiences that cannot be predetermined or definite. In every sense it has the ability to open
An artwork may spark something in us—perhaps love; it seems to “make sense” to us in ways that other things do not. Art is an exposition of “sense” which is an important term in Nancy’s lexicon. It is not the conveyance of meaning per se but connotes an ontological, shared, worldly and material existence.\textsuperscript{20} Sense has a dual aspect: it is embodied and always in relation to an artwork’s distinct presence as heard, seen, touched (the sensible) as well as the intelligible.\textsuperscript{21} Nancy’s double meaning of sense as intelligible/sensible arises from the ancient classical through to phenomenological studies as well as modern French thought.\textsuperscript{22}

The subject’s body with its senses and sensations is the way in which meanings and experiences of the world are accrued.\textsuperscript{23} This includes the love found in art, applicable to both artist-maker and art audience. These senses and sensations are both heterogeneous and a multiplicity; we cannot conceive of them in isolation—it is a “singular-plurality.”\textsuperscript{24} For Nancy the concept of “touch”\textsuperscript{25} covers the range of possibilities as the corpus of plural and heterogeneic senses; how a work of art is experienced is always a matter of the body.\textsuperscript{26} Therefore, love in art, as sensible-intelligible, is implicated within our embodiment as movement of sense, which exposes us in some way—perhaps to something inclusive of love. Yet not love in the conventional sense of completion, fulfillment or the romantic; instead this love is a piece—\textit{a fragment}—that takes us to a limit.

Finally, a third prong of my methodology involves the decentering thought of Judith Butler, particularly her emphasis of love and body as unfinalizable or open-ended. Butler’s writings tend toward opening up possibilities; no single consideration of construction is viable. Love, like gender, demands to be read through multiple lenses. Love, like gender is revisable and changeable.
Thriving

For Nancy thinking/thought serves as a relation to the world. $^{27}$ Valérie Oka’s performance work *In Her Presence* is an artwork that provokes her participants to think and to share that thinking with others. What is it to think? Jean-François Lyotard explains,

*To think is to question everything*, including thought, and question, and the process. To question requires that something happen that reason has not yet known. In thinking, one accepts the occurrence for what is: ‘not yet’ determined. One does not prejudge it, and there is no security. Peregrination in the desert.$^{28}$

For Lyotard asking questions is at the *heart* of thinking; this continues the tradition of Socrates$^{29}$ who made it his philosophical practice to consistently make inquiries of his fellow Athenians. Socrates reasoned that by asking questions a subject might determine the best way one to ought to live; continuous querying is a key pathway to gain insight into what is important. Also, questioning is a form of doubt, serving as an expression of humility that negates the self-satisfied and dead-end certainty of righteousness. The Socratic model for philosophy is to sit in a place of unknowing, or wonder, which is not the same as ignorance since the root of wisdom is to realize how much one does *not* know.$^{30}$

Hannah Arendt weighs in on thinking in *The Life of the Mind*, “The thinking activity—according to Plato, the soundless dialogue we carry on with ourselves—serves only to open the eyes of the mind…”$^{31}$ As she further reminds us, thinking, which is the most quintessential of mental undertakings, has the sense of vision as a metaphor.$^{32}$ For example, when a thought strikes us as extraordinary, we exclaim, “Ah, I *see*!” At the same time we should not confuse, “the need to think with the urge to know.”$^{33}$ Arendt advises we could
seek knowledge in thinking, but thinking in itself is a different sort of undertaking; it is a search for meaning. She describes thinking is an “appetite for meaning.” Arendt explains that losing the craving for meaning would,

...cease to ask unanswerable questions, [and] would lose not only the ability to produce those thought-things that we call works of art but also the capacity to ask all the answerable questions upon which every civilization is founded.

Arendt’s definition of an artwork as a “thought-thing” contributes a novel concept to how a viewer approaches an artwork, since art generally tends to be considered an aesthetic experience rather than one concerned with thinking. And while it is also a representation of something by an artist, the viewer thinking about it and questioning it in some way changes this representation.

This likelihood for change is demonstrated in Oka’s performance work. In Her Presence is a collaborative effort on behalf of an artist and her participants. Together the group shared their thoughts about love, and in this framework there were changes in thinking, perhaps not always immediately evident to the individual. Even if questions were not voiced aloud, it is imaginable they were posed in silent consciousness—the dialogue with the self.

And here is a parallel for the practice of art and philosophy: the love of wisdom, the exchange of ideas, the action of focused thinking. Art and philosophy share the property of wonder.

Luce Irigaray is also on the Socratic track when she reminds us that questioning can “awaken consciousness” which allows for other ways of thinking. In other words, thinking
expands our cognitive boundaries by going beyond. She insists this is not a thinking that in any way would compromise singularity, but one that allows for a subject to flourish.

Love is a manner of thriving; so is viewing art. In spirited consideration of the ideas of many philosophical voices, this paper thinks about the interconnectedness of viewer, artwork and artist as it concerns the phenomenon of love. Rather than Lyotard’s cognitive desert, my thoughts and questions wander in the fecund landscape of contemporary visual art. My project will emphasize specific works of art that include performance, installation, painting, video, and literary practice created within the last 20 years. While I highlight contemporary aesthetic practice, at the same time I employ artworks across history to tie together how this theory of love is put into practice.

What happens when someone confronts a work of art—the inexplicable connection to something brought into the world by an artist? Might we call this moment love? If so, how does this love differ from other loves, like eros or philia? Does this particular love stand outside the Western canon of the four Greek loves?

I suggest that a particular kind of love arises from the movement of thinking that occurs in the subject when confronted with a work of art. This conveyance gives rise to a rupture, a kind of burst that takes place in the between, a metaphysical space of love.

To and fro

Thinking about artwork is a manner of thriving. Nancy claims that, “…thinking, most properly speaking, is love.” He acknowledges this is a challenging idea because what he asserts here is not that love and thinking, as such, are dogma or ideal as often imagined. What
he proposes here is something significant: Nancy invites us to reconsider love and thinking in a broader frame of reference. After all, we engage in “thinking” from early in life to the end of it; thought is a universal prosaic activity. Nancy does not necessarily mean a specific kind of love, such as romantic, or a fixed kind of thinking such as thinking about a lover. This is, of course possible. Yet Nancy casts a wider net aiming for the existential aspect of thinking. By way of illustration I refer again to Oka’s artwork *In Her Presence*; she designed the performance to stimulate participants to consider the spectrum of love as *lived* emotions. Thinking that through, collaborators may make associations, note contradictions, examine collisions and alliances, and imagine other possibilities. They ask questions (of themselves and others) and contemplate connections in regards to what love means and how it might be lived. Oka leads them to wonder about love. In this way *In Her Presence* may be compared to Plato’s *Symposium*, a text that sets the Western stage in history for thinking about love. Both works involve a convivial party and a polyphonic discourse of the origins and manifestations of love; both are representative of the arts (fine art and writing.)

Does it matter whether *In Her Presence* or *Symposium* actually arrives at a singular reliable conclusion or ideology of love? No. Instead I argue that we regard art as a philosophy of love in action. As such it is a movement—an activity—in which something happens.

***

Nancy addresses two formulas for how love is traditionally considered. The first is that love consists of an extraordinary action of exceeding the self towards an end. He proposes that this idea is couched in the expression, “Love is the extreme movement beyond
the self of a being reaching completion."³⁹ Yet Nancy argues that this conventional thinking about love is not feasible; the goal is actually contradictory. Are we ever finalized? Therefore instead of a finalization of self or personal fulfillment, we may consider the most critical component is reaching out for connection.

Instead of this law of the completion of being, one would want to deal only with a moment of contact between beings, a light, cutting, and delicious moment of contact, at once eternal and fleeting. In its philosophical assignation, love seems to skirt this touch of the heart that would not complete anything."⁴⁰

Nancy describes here the potential love relation between beings, but what about the “moment of contact” as it links a being and a work of art? Does something similar happen in that instance? Viewing and spending time with an artwork does not complete us, but creates an instance of a caress to the heart by way of the viewer’s thinking about it. What is this thinking? It is a questioning process, a metaphysical movement. To reiterate Lyotard, “In thinking, one accepts the occurrence for what is: ‘not yet’ determined.”⁴¹ This is important: questions in the contemplation of an artwork do not require answers since to establish them would be a completion or resolution that is not the necessary end. Instead, artwork and viewer are linked in a transitory moment, which presents open-ended possibilities. Importantly, the love located in a work of art is not a form of security as we might imagine other kinds of love to offer.
A second common prescription of love is that it is long lasting and stable in nature. Yet Nancy’s further definition of love concerns its short-lived state—what he describes as an “incessant coming-and-going.”42 This evokes what Paul Armstrong characterizes as the “to and fro” of interplay in reading, which also happens in an aesthetic experience. In other words, analogous to reading a text, the artwork makes a demand upon the viewer to take it in, and reciprocally the viewer enjoins the work by thinking about it. Armstrong terms this reciprocity a “hermeneutic spiral”43 a capricious movement that “goes back and forth, shifting and rearranging itself.”44 Arendt also mentions a spiral and describes it as a situation in which cyclical and rectilinear notions of time are made congruent.45 Then I suggest that the thinking of art is akin to a helical conveyance that involves interpretation by way of questioning. Considering the hermeneutic spiral as the model of connection between viewer and artwork, love becomes a phenomenon with a dynamic and chancy nature. It is completely erratic and fleeting—nothing to depend on—but nonetheless love.

Between

Thinking as movement—as an action described as a to and fro—demands an ontological space-time I refer to as a between. This interstice accommodates the helical movement of thinking about art, about love in art. The between is not a definite space of boundaries, yet it does share some aspects of the space of an interval where something starts and stops and perhaps begins again.
By way of analogy consider the concept of negative space in the practice of perceptual drawing whereby edges that border the shapes are discerned in relation to the object being drawn. For example, the “air” between the leaves of a plant determines the figure-ground relationship; the figure is the so-called positive shape and the ground is the negative one. [Figure 0.3] A flipped looking at the negative is important in observational drawing because the “nothing”—what is between—is key to capturing a likeness by the drawer. This non-space space is in a dynamic and dependent relation to the observed object, but its importance is often sublated to the actual object(s) under scrutiny; however, the negative space—the between—is real and important. To apprehend the relationship of inside/outside or positive/negative in the act of drawing serves to make a composition that is unified while creating solid objective representations of an observed object.

There is a Chinese philosophy concerning “empty space” in representational painting that further upholds my concept of the between. The emphasis on the void in a composition arises from Daoist principles whereby such non-space space is the “beginning of myriad things” in terms of the representation of perceptual forms. The Dao cosmological term qi (chi) is the idea of formlessness, and when applied to artwork, takes on the idea of emptiness, which is invisible like air and essential to sustaining life. Qi creates movement in the composition, inserting a dynamism that enlivens how the artwork is experienced. In this way what is observed holds equivalence to what is not seen. In this way the between can be regarded as invisible harmonious energy.
Rachel Whiteread is an example of a contemporary artist who literally engages the negative space of objects to create her artwork. She subverts the tradition of sculpture by employing the byproduct of casting, in terms of the negative space of the cast, rather than the finished object. In other words, she materializes the void around an object, such as the open space around a bookshelf, or the space within an empty box, rather than the thing itself. A recent work, the *Gran Boathouse* [Figure 0.4] is the cast interior of an old boathouse perched on the edge of a waterway in Norway. Wooden boathouses in Norway are a common site on shores along the water and are traditionally used to store boats and fishing gear within a simple rectangular floor plan. Using concrete as medium, Whiteread cast the interior space of an original boathouse that was beyond repair.

Figure 0.4. Rachel Whiteread, *Gran Boathouse* (2010). Concrete. Location: Røykenviken, Hadeland, Norway. Image: www.Skulptur-Stopp.no
The outer wooden framework, roof and façade were removed and the remaining hardened concrete literally turns the structure inside out. Elin-Therese Aarseth of the Vigeland Museum in Oslo writes, “By defining and capturing the negative space of objects, Whiteread invites the audience to construct visions and thoughts about what is not visible. She is creating an interaction between what we see and what we know.”49 Returning to Arendt’s notion of thinking discussed in the beginning of this introduction, we recall that thinking is not concerned with an accumulation of knowledge. Arendt also stresses that thinking’s principle characteristic is not only a soundless dialogue,50 but that it is invisible as well.51 In this way Whiteread’s use of the invisible—the negative space—is a kind of thinking out loud.

I would argue that Whiteread’s thought-things also invite wonder about what we do not know or what we tend not to think about such as the space under a chair or—as in the case of Gran Boathouse—the air invisibly occupying a room. In other words, what might be considered empty space—the open-ended, the qi. Further Aarseth’s remark about the not visible in Whiteread’s work is cogent to my explanation of the between as a space in the phenomenon of love found in art. It is metaphysically there, an ontological space-time between artwork and viewer. Nancy’s explanation of his use of the “between” in the text Being Singular Plural further supports my thesis, which requires further denotation,

This “between,” as its name implies, has neither a consistency nor continuity of its own. It does not lead from one to the other; it constitutes no connective tissue, no cement, no bridge. Perhaps it is not even fair to speak of a “connection” to its subject; it is neither connected or unconnected; it falls short of both; even better, it is that which is at the heart of a connection…52
I propose the between is necessary as a space of pure potential or open-endedness that allows for the contact necessary for thinking love. This is what Nancy is getting at: self as here and now and self as possible, or “existence’s plurality.” The future time for the self—the plus now—always brings unforeseen possibilities. Within this existence is love’s plurality as well; love always concerns unseen or unexpected potential.

It seems a reasonable if not common phenomenon that love in general is not perfectly fixed; it is full of maybe; it moves in endless effusions and diffusions; like tidewater it ebbs and comes in again. Love appears and vanishes; pushes forward and goes into reverse; expands and contracts; it is mediated by time. In an essay concerning G.W.F Hegel’s early discourse on love, Judith Butler addresses the idea of mediation and summarizes it by stating, “…A certain displacement in time and space constitutes the condition of knowing…” The to and fro is just such a displacement; I would add to Butler’s assertion that this displacement in time and space is much the same as the action of thinking. The experience of love found in art is brought about by the to and fro—the movement—within the between. This movement of thinking constitutes a change in the relationship to the artwork, which may range (initially) from curiosity to indifference. Butler points out that the phenomenon of love has its own logic based in a temporal unfolding; its very denotation is an “indefinite openness.” This indefinite openness is true of the phenomenon of art as well since art opens up immeasurable possibilities for what a subject can feel or know.

In his surviving fragment about love, Hegel asserts love as more than a solitary feeling that in its multiplicity does not concern reason or understanding. Hegel is referring to love between equals; any difference (otherness) is annulled by their shared love. His
The definition of love is a fixed wholeness in which consciousness of otherness disappears. This is a very traditional and romantic view of love that is based in Christianity. In this relationship there can be no between because it is a kind of fusion that prizes completeness and sameness. The love found in art defies this conventional position on love. Instead it upholds new insights and connections for the subject who remains independent; nothing is finalized; wholeness is inconsequential. Thinking love in art is a process by which (perhaps) a subject’s cognitive boundaries are expanded. And it must be stressed that at the same time this knowing contains indefinite openness because the self that understands something today may understand it differently tomorrow—or not understand it at all—and so on. Nothing is static.

The to and fro that takes place in the between marks it as a transitional space. It is akin to Martin Heidegger’s\(^58\) notion of “clearing,” a metaphysical interval he sees as analogous to an opening in the forest devoid of trees. For example, a hiker in dense woods suddenly comes upon a clearing, which might seem at first to be an encounter with nothing.\(^59\) The trees to which she is accustomed are now gone redirecting her attention to how she sees the forest. Things appear differently; a lack of shadows, the sky and the ground are now open to full view. Lain D. Thomson remarks upon this phenomenon, To experience this “noth-ing” is to become attuned to something that is not a thing (hence “nothing”) but which conditions all our experiences of thing, something that fundamentally informs our intelligible worlds but that we experience initially as what escapes and so defies our “subjectivistic” impulse to extend our conceptual mastery over everything.\(^60\)
As with an encounter upon a forest clearing, the metaphysical between offers a new way of seeing that generates questions and thoughts. In this way the nothing becomes something real and remarkable; absence is another manner of presence.

It is within this Heideggarian clearing as transitional interval that the subject is receptive to encountering a truth or understanding of Being, the unanswerable question of what it means to be. Truth is defined as not concerned with correctness or facts, but a revealing of something via an indefinite openness. This revealing works in tandem with a concealing, in the same way negative and positive space come together in a two-dimensional image, or in the case of Whiteread’s work, a three-dimensional thought-thing.

**Thinking-with**

The between is a temporal space in which a kind of movement takes place: a to and fro energy that offers pure potential through questions that arise when thinking about a work of art. In the between there is nothing that acts as adhesive and there is no consummation. To reiterate part of Nancy’s assertion about love between subjects,

Instead of this law of the completion of being, one would want to deal only with a moment of contact between beings, a light, cutting, and delicious moment of contact, at once eternal and fleeting.\(^6\)

Nancy is saying that love is exposure between subjects that is a lithesome touch, a deeply felt caress momentary yet memorable. I suggest that love in art is comparable, and that the contact is thinking with the artwork and/or the artist.
Thinking is an existential action. In thinking art, the culmination of this movement results in the moment of an inexpressible revelation whereby the artist—either indirectly or indirectly—metaphysically touches the other who is present to the artist’s work. Karim Benammar offers a definition of what it is to make art,

Creating art is engaging one's being beyond the limits of the self.

Writing, communicating, is displacing oneself, it is engaging one's being beyond oneself, beyond the limits of the self; we are never freed from this ecstatic desire.62

“We” are artist-makers that take joy in their engagement with the other and our self-imposed exile from the center. Art is made for both self and other, born—as Hegel states—from the artist’s imagination.63 He further states that the artist is deeply attuned to her “emotional life” as well as her internal and external experiences in the world.64 In using a combination of creativity and feeling to make something to share with the other, the artist reaches beyond the self. And more than that, the artist invites the viewer to think-with, to contemplate the object or performance.

Nancy considers philosophy a “thinking-with”65 since thinking is an extension of the self to the other. I argue that art does the same thinking-with as philosophy. In the context of this thesis, thinking-with is at the same time a questioning-with. The undertaking of the artist is to imagine possibilities deployed in the art medium that calls forth a thinking-with; subsequently the viewer is thinking-with, questioning-with and being-with the artwork. She is present. In this way an artwork performs the function of philosophy.
Bennamar’s reference to “ecstatic desire” speaks to the great pleasure experienced by the artist in aesthetic practice—a _jouissance_ of creativity. By comparison Nancy locates the joy found in love at the intersection of self and other, creating what he terms a “burst,”

To try to enter into the question one could say at least this: _self_ that joys joys of its presence _in the presence of the other_. He, she is only the presence of the reception of the other presence—and the latter cuts across. The presence that cuts across is a burst. To joy, joy itself, is to receive the burst of a singular being: it is more than manifest presence, its seeming beyond all appearance—_ekphanestaton_, Plato said.66

In addition to the presence of another, the self may also find elation (or other strong feeling) in the presence of art, and when this happens—when there is a crossing of self and art—there may also be a rupture, which I redefine as the moment of contact with the artist—the heart of the connection. This is not a rupture in a pessimistic sense. Instead it is break from absolute subjectivity that creates the between.

Thinking love in art brings about a rupture via an artwork. This occurs through pure presence, whether that presence is indirect—with the absence of the artist—or with the work embodied by the artist. In either case it is a presence of being-with and thinking-with. Thinking love is a vehemence of presence. Lyotard’s statement, “…To make seen what makes one see, and not what is visible”67 is apropos to help the reader comprehend the wonder of the rupture and Nancy’s assertion of “seeming beyond all appearance.”68 The rupture is a transport to an unknown limit.

Through this greater-than—its seeming beyond all appearance—the rupture brings about a form of transformation. Plato’s69 _ekphanestaton_, according to Martin Heidegger, is
how art allows us insight in a radiant, illuminating way. At the same time this luminescence, while taken to heart, is ineffable.

**Punctum**

Thinking-with is an important aspect of the love found in art for both artist and viewer. I invite you to consider this action as an open-ended presence that is a rupture of our everyday insulation, which connects the subject to art and artist. The rupture decenters the subject; it engages us in questioning. Every work of art we encounter offers thinking love as a new rupture, but it is not always joyful or satisfying. It may be difficult, painful, disturbing or mournful; it can feel like an abrasion or slap. While we normally consider love as a tender or sweet feeling there are actually myriad possibilities for emotions experienced in love found in artworks.

Art can deploy what Roland Barthes terms the “punctum,” a prick or wounding of feelings. His description of the punctum is a perception on behalf of the viewer examining a photograph that involves (perhaps) the viewer’s memory or a visual detail within the composition that causes the subject to experience concern or connectedness to the image. That feeling may range from deep care to distress. Barthes’ theory of the punctum especially
carries import for my argument of thinking love with art in the way it holds “a power of expansion.” The rupture is just such an extension or expansion of the self to ideas and questions kindled by the artwork and the artist. By way of example, I think of the photographs taken of people tumbling to their death from the World Trade Center Towers on September 11, 2001 in New York City. The Falling Man [Figure 0.5] by Richard Drew, which captures the last moment of an anonymous living being, is overwhelming to me; he went to work one unremarkable day and perished in a most extraordinary and unimaginable way.

The image consists of a male figure with arms at his sides and a bent left leg, headfirst in mid-fall in front of the tremendous structure that was the North Tower. The façade of the skyscraper completely fills the background of the photograph. He is located at the top half and center of the composition; this focal point lends an eerie sense of weightlessness to his form, which is miniscule compared to the epic scale of the 110 story tower. Another contrast is that he is in color and the building in grayscale; an orange tee shirt under a jacket startles by hinting at the everydayness of choosing what to wear in dressing to go to work. The falling man is the punctum in the photograph.

The image provokes questions for me: Did he make the decision to jump or was he blown out by force? If he jumped, how was it that leaping from the tower seemed the better option for his inescapable extinction? I consider myself in his place—what would I do? What would my last thoughts be if this were I? I care about him at the same time his predicament shocks and distresses me. This feeling is the punctum, a perforation of my armored heart; a hole is made that lets the art in. Although dead for fifteen years now, the photograph freezes
this man as perpetually alive, thinking and breathing in the measure of utter finitude. The image makes the past present.

I think about myself at the same time I think about the falling man; in this way my subjectivity is decentered. Nancy asserts that if thinking is confronted, then it is because it holds meaning.\textsuperscript{74} The photograph expands my sober contemplation of impossible choices and unknown fates. My grief becomes a thinking-with love that decenters me to consider and question the unnamed other, the other that like me is always vulnerable to another’s actions. Love arrives amidst the subsequent questions and thoughts in the rupture. Experienced by the viewer in response to an artwork, the rupture has many of the qualities of Barthes’ \textit{punctum}, foremost the expansion of the self. Love arrives: \textit{feeling} (shock, dismay, concern, affection, etc.) crosses with \textit{thinking}, to question everything in art.

The plus of love

The \textit{punctum} in a work of art presents the viewer with a kind of emotional rupture, which has a decentering effect. I cannot claim to love the photograph, or the photographer, or the falling man. Yet I love. The artwork stirs up thoughts I otherwise would not have contemplated. Thinking activates or animates an artwork, which subsequently unsettles the viewer who may remember and reflect on it after seeing it and spending time with it. Barthes mentions an important point about this relationship, “…It is an addition: it is what I add to the photograph and \textit{what is nonetheless already there}.”\textsuperscript{75} This aspect of an addition, a \textit{“beyond,”}\textsuperscript{76} speaks to the notion that love engendered by art is never lacking, it is always abundance, something new to contemplate.
As mentioned, Drew’s *Falling Man* reminds us of the subject’s ontological unpredictability. As part of a historical overview of various philosophical projects, contemporary philosopher Marcus Steinweg refers to being’s capriciousness as chaos or abyss since we are subjects without a god in the aftermath of Nietzschean philosophy. He describes this godlessness as a “fundamental lack”; however, this begs the question: how does the subject lack something it never truly had? (This paper will not debate the existence of a god or lack thereof since that argument enters the arena of faith; my topic is love.) At any rate an authentic lack is a privation of something that existed at some point (not necessarily from a psychoanalytic point of view), or something intentionally removed from its grasp. For example, in the former, a biological female does not have a lack because she does not have a penis, since she is not physiologically designed to have one. As for the latter: if a person is paid less of a salary because of gender or race-based discrimination, she has a true lack of income. All else is a perceived or imagined lack, which is arguably not an insufficiency at all.

***

I love you.

But the words of love, as is well known, sparsely, miserably repeat their one declaration, which is always the same, always already suspected of lacking love because it declares it.

While Nancy reasonably critiques this well-worn utterance of the subject, he offers no alternative.
Luce Irigaray’s re-phrasing of “I love you” is “I love to you.” The more common claim or statement “I love you” is either a declaration or a reply to a question or need; whereas “I love to you” belies the wholesome recognition of alterity. This affirmation of otherness is also an expansion of the self. Additionally “I love to you” emphasizes love as active as opposed to passive, as action as opposed to merely feeling. Irigaray explains, “‘I love to you’ is an unusual turn of phrase compared with ‘I love you’ but is more respectful of the two: I love to who you are, to what you do, without reducing you to an object of my love.”

Thinking love is being in relation-with an artwork and the artist that created it. The work of art as I am framing it concerns a “listening-to” by the viewer in order to stage this relation with love. The artwork and viewer enter into a wordless dialogue, as described in the to and fro in the movement of thinking. The artist is likely to imbue the work with meaning, even if this meaning is esoteric; the viewer’s response to it will generate other meanings by way of thinking. The artwork and the artist relay the idea of “I love to you” which does not contain a lack in terms of the viewer as in need of love.

Thinking: of Love

In “Shattered Love” Nancy titles the first part of his essay “Thinking: of Love.” Yet should we be thinking: of love or thinking love? His use of the colon indicates the idea of “therefore” or “that is”, i.e., thinking (that is) love. The title is apt to his project: to have us consider the myriad and heterogenetic possibilities of love, including the potentialities that would seem adverse to love as we conventionally think of it.
Love deflowers and is itself deflowered by its very essence, and its unrestrained and brazen exploitation in all the genres of speech or of art is perhaps an integral part of that essence—a part at once secret and boisterous, miserable and sumptuous. But this reticence might signal that all, of love, is possible and necessary, that all the loves impossible are in fact the possibilities of love, its voices or its characteristics, which are possible to confuse and yet ineluctably entangled: charity and pleasure, emotion and pornography, the neighbor and the infant, the love of lovers and the love of God, fraternal love and the love of art, the kiss, passion, friendship...

Nancy’s reframing of love is an extraordinary postmodern proposition. “Thinking: of love” is open-ended, at once marvelous and a mess.

I have edited Nancy’s phrasing and punctuation of “Thinking: of Love” to reflect an alternative yet sympathetic idea, that of the straightforward “thinking love.” To strike out the preposition “of” along with the colon negates the possessive relationship between the verb “thinking” and the noun “love.” Instead, it creates a fluid linking of verb and noun. Or, the words might be read as two verbs, as in “I love to you” (the word “to” is an infinitive, the basic form of a verb sans tense.) Either way “thinking love” continues to situate love as contemplation and action as Nancy does, but thinking love is acting upon love, or even the act of loving itself. And, as established earlier, thinking is the action of questioning, which, like Nancy’s project, offers possibilities without certainty for answers that come to light. So it is with love in its relation to art: thinking love is to privilege possibility over truth since to trust a truth discourages inquiry.

***

The following chapters analyze works of art made within the last fifty years, which serve to illustrate my thesis of thinking love. In addition to recent artworks, I reference a limited selection of earlier works in history that are relevant to my argument. My choice of
images aims to represent a wide spectrum of possibilities for thinking love with emphasis on art that reaches for a limit of some kind. Along with illustrations, each chapter highlights a key concept for thinking love in art and draws upon numerous thinkers whose philosophies contribute—or in some way relate—to my argument.

Love is a starting point. Outside of religious law, what are the origins of possibility for love? Chapter One (“Origins of Possibility”) surveys some of the derivations of what we think of as conventional love. What are the mythical, physiological, psychoanalytical and philosophical starting points of love? How do they concern a theory of love in art? The first section of this chapter takes on (1) the role of myth, (2) Roland Barthes’ image-repertoire and (3) Jacques Lacan’s notion of the split at birth in the formation of a sexed subject.

Myth is an influential source of how a society understands notions of love. In *Symposium*, Aristophanes’ offers a story of the mythological origin of human beings in which they are split in two as punishment by the gods. As a result humans are in a desperate search for their “better half.” This story is an example of a notion contained in the image-repertoire, described by Barthes as a transhistorical depository of ideas a culture has about love such as creation stories and fairytales. Lacan also describes the split of the psyche that occurs when a subject is born. In this moment the child is marked as a sexed individual. The notion of what I refer to as “primordial breakups” factor into the origins of love.

How does a theory of love in art stand in relation to science and established philosophies? In contrast to myth, I offer a short examination of brain research that deploys current technologies to determine a physiological ground of love for the embodied subject and reflect on Hegel’s and Levinas’ ideas regarding self-consciousness, recognition and the
relationship to the other. The final section of Chapter One interprets Lacan’s psychoanalytical theory of the mirror stage (a second formational split of the subject) as well as Heidegger’s notion of anxiety with regard to the representation of the body. The radical practices of body art performance demonstrated in artworks by Mickelene Thomas, Annie Sprinkle, Deborah de Robertis and VALIE EXPORT place a strong psychological demand on the viewer and incite what I call an aesthetic of anxiety. For Heidegger, anxiety as mood discloses what it means to exist. This part of the chapter considers how these artists express care and concern in a particular way for what it means to be human, reflecting how artists’ actions and intent are demonstrative of love in art.

The act of thinking and questioning is the bedrock of thinking love in art. Chapter Two commences with an explanation of the theoretical “between”—the intermedius—as a time-space in which thinking about a work of art occurs when the viewer is willfully engaged. Where does my notion of the between originate? Diotima’s speeches in the Symposium offer an elaborate description of love; in numerous sections she describes a middle ground position that is not fixed and always moving. By examining a short fictional film that tells the story of an ill-fated friendship, titled five deep breaths (directed by Seith Mann in 2003), I explain how the between functions for love in art as well as how it diverges from Aristotle’s notion of philia.

Much of how we define and regard general ideas of love today comes from the oldest recorded religious laws. How do these earliest God-given mandates relate to the love found in a work of art? The second section of Chapter Two reflects on Doris Salcedo’s vast installation in the Tate Modern titled Shibboleth in 2007. This work is coded with meaning in
terms of the other regarded as outsider—the opposite of friendship; it recalls the archaic
divine law to love your neighbor and the Christian concept of agape. By reviewing a few
examples of early scripture as well as Freud’s atheistic psychoanalytical position on love in
Western civilization, I clarify how love in art deviates from preexisting paradigms.

How is wonder important to a theory of love in art? Returning to the theme of myth in
Chapter Three, I emphasize wonder and thinking as keys to love in art. The first section of
the chapter looks at the intersection of art and myth by considering Nancy’s explanation of
myth and two contemporary artists who deploy singular approaches to manifesting wonder in
their work: Mariko Mori’s site specific Primal Rhythm in Japan (2011) that draws upon
ancient mythology and Wangechi Mutu’s mythopoeic collages that anticipate a future of
freedom through technology. Thinkers Haraway and Bakhtin contribute to the consideration
of their artworks.

What is the relationship an artist has with their art? Is this liaison also a manifestation
of love in art—of wonder? The second half of the chapter switches from the perspective of
the viewer to that of the artist. The practice of celebrated painter Kay Walkingstick is
contrasted with virtually unknown photographer Vivian Maier. While different in trajectory,
each artist’s work points to a critical intersection of life and art in their practice and imagery.
Bakhtin’s theory of “art for life’s sake” in concert with his assertion of answerability both
concern the response of self to other—another marker of thinking love in art. Arendt’s
explication of thinking via Plato is discussed along with Heidegger’s concept of poiēsis—the
collaborative and care-full becoming of art—are further addressed in terms of how artists
may think love in a work of art.
Chapter Four’s heading “indefinite openness”—also part of the title of this dissertation—refers to Judith Butler’s notion of how love is characterized by its property of unfinalizability. In other words, while a performance or an interaction with a work of art ends, its effect on the artist and viewer remains open-ended. This chapter unpacks a number of works from the oeuvre of performance artist Marina Abramović. Her work fosters a direct relationship with the viewer in real time. If love in art is indefinitely open, what is the limit for an artist and a viewer in a live performance? The first section of the chapter takes a close look at her unprecedented performance at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2010 as a direct artist-to-viewer manifestation of love in art. The use of Abramović’s body to extremes in her work often results in pain; in the second section I consider how an aesthetic of pain factors into thinking love. Next, I contemplate the discursive inter-subjective engagement vital to a loving relationship between artist-performer and viewer with a focus on the face-to-face encounter. Finally, the bodily risk taken by Abramović in an early career performance, *Rhythm 0* (1974) is discussed in terms of reaching for a limit in risky and spontaneous audience collaboration.

Titled “pure knowing,” the final and fifth chapter starts with the notion of an aesthetic of joy. This phrase derives from Schopenhauer’s argument of how a work of art has the potential to liberate the subject’s will evoking an extreme kind of experience. What does the feeling of delight in art offer beyond enjoyment? This chapter commences with Stendhal’s nineteenth century account of embodied ecstasy in seeing the great art of Florence. My discussion includes ideas of embodiment and consciousness in the thinking of Merleau-Ponty.
Greek *erōs*, as a manner of love based in desire, remains a widely considered manifestation of love. Does *erōs* shape a theory of thinking love in art? How does a representation of the nude body factor into thinking love? How does shame factor in to images of nudity? The second section of Chapter Five considers the representation of the nude body and includes the iconic couple John Lennon and Yoko Ono who deployed their bodies in late twentieth century political protests. I then consider the Samoan artist Shigeyuki Kihara’s gender-bending otherness in *In the Manner of a Woman* (2005). S/he uses he/r body through a postcolonial lens in order to create images that address the rupture of gender performance set off by Western missionaries in he/r South Pacific culture. I then review the collaboration of Breyer P-Orridge, a project in which a married couple took radical actions for a committed partnership; they throw into question prescribed gender roles and *rethink* the representation of the body through surgeries. To address problems that come up with these works of art I call upon the thinking of Merleau-Ponty, Nietzsche, Butler, Foucault and others.

The third section of Chapter Five reflects on the phenomenon of artworks that represent painful self-disclosure on behalf the artist. Multi-media artists Tracey Emin and Louise Bourgeois create artworks that contain an aesthetic of confession. Emin’s installation *My Bed* (1990) was the actual furniture used in an experience of heartbreak and Bourgeois’ sculptures express memories of her childhood; both artworks are poignantly representative of intimate experiences. How does the autobiographical nature of an artwork figure into thinking love in art?
What are the choices for action the subject has in dealing with life’s gritty challenges?

In what way does the artist’s sharing of private experiences contribute to thinking love in art?

In the last part of Chapter Five I look carefully at a video by Emin titled *Why I Never Became a Dancer* (1995). This work is confessional yet also asserts an affirmation of life—what Nietzsche calls the will to power. I stress that love in art is at the same time *an act of love*. 
Chapter One

Origins of Possibility

Where and when does love begin? *This chapter counts some of the ways—possible and impossible origins of love that are mythical, physiological, psychoanalytical, and philosophical.* We tend to think of love as comforting, just as we are likely to count on love with its consolations. While love blooms it is measured, weighed and analyzed; when it dies or abandons us we do the same. Love counts and it is of consequence. Emmanuel Levinas asserts, “Love is originary”\(^86\)—it is the starting point, profoundly bound to our roots as human beings.\(^87\) What are the origins of possibility for love? And do these beginnings substantiate a claim for love in art?

Figure 1.0 Primordial androgyny on Greek vase (2400 BCE) Image: eden-saga.com
In the first section of this chapter called “primordial breakups” I will take stock of the mythical story of primal beings as told by Aristophanes in *Symposium*. In these narratives we also grasp the beginnings of what Barthes calls the “image repertoire” which may be described as a transhistorical warehouse of ideas a culture has about love. *Symposium* (as an example of the image repertoire) resonates over two millennia later in how love is realized as the search for a perfect partner, which is understood in the idiom one’s “better half.” Something halved was once whole and in creation stories there often is the idea of a split. The notion of an immanent fragmentation continues in concepts concerning the origin of the human psyche.

The split is an important theory in the psychoanalytical perspective of Jacques Lacan in the twentieth century. For Lacan it begins at the instant of human birth as the formation of a sexed subject. What was before and what do we leave behind in that experience? A second division occurs as a baby sees itself in the mirror for the first time. In this pivotal moment the child recognizes the self as separate from the others that love him. What is the consequence for this split in terms of love and love in art?

How does a theory of love in art stand with science and established philosophies? In the second section titled “cerebral affairs” I consider the hard-wired physiology of the human brain as a contrast to chimerical myths. What does twenty-first century science reveal about love? Are science and psychoanalytical theory able to cohabit? How does our embodiment inflect our ideas and performances of love? The explanation of brain physiology raises even more questions when considered in distinction to certain philosophical thought. Subsequently
I briefly reflect on Hegel’s and Levinas’ ideas regarding self-consciousness, recognition and the relationship to the other. Artists often address these ideas in their work.

Does love originate in the self or in self-reflection? In the third part of this chapter I unpack a number of works of art by returning to Lacan’s theory of the split with elaboration on the mirror stage. Titled “aesthetics of anxiety,” the artworks arise from a particular standpoint of identity formation. The artists have deployed their bodies as subject matter in unprecedented and transgressive ways—means that bring about a particular kind of anxiety addressed by Heidegger. How do these artists express love in their work? What is the role of anxiety in art and love? What consequences are at stake in conveying that love? How do their viewers experience love in an encounter with the performing body or the art object?

My intention in this chapter is that by taking into account some of love’s origins of possibility, we will begin to ask more questions about love in art. As C.D.C. Reeve points out, the Greek noun erôs and Greek verb erôtan (to ask questions) are etymologically linked.88

**Primordial break ups**

What are the origins of possibility in considering the overarching ideas and definitions of love that continue to hold fast in the twenty-first century? Roland Barthes uses the term “image-repertoire” as a theory of how subjects in their experience of love draw upon a collective storehouse of representations. This depository of non-hierarchical cultural representations has no beginning or end; its wide range include myths, fairytales, texts, images, rumors or advice as well as personal experience. The image-repertoire is also a
language structure that serves conscious and unconscious references and concocts individual love stories by reconciling feelings and actions of love. Another way of saying this is that the image-repertoire mediates all knowledge and experiences of love for the subject; it is—as Barthes calls it—the lover’s discourse. Dominic Pettman writes, “Henceforth, the lover is at the mercy of the code’s signifying system, and all subsequent emotional welfare is conducted under the metasign of mediation itself.”

Pettman takes Barthes’ trope of the image-repertoire and further deploys it as a code. He compares it to a computer system that is designed to run a particular program; in the case of the image-repertoire the code is love. Pettman identifies Plato’s *Symposium* (375 – 370 BCE) as one of the earliest programmers of the image-repertoire. Therefore *Symposium* seems like a good place to start to begin to understand (and question) how it relates to theories of love in art.

To briefly summarize what happens in the text, *Symposium* explores the topic of love by way of a series of speeches and dialogue between Socrates and six of his male friends who are attending a drinking party in Athens hosted by Agathon, a tragedian. The intention for the party is to celebrate Agathon’s success in a drama writing competition. Of note, the dialogue contains a lone female voice, Diotima, introduced by Socrates as his teacher. She is not an actual party guest who is present but “speaks” of love by way of Socrates. (Diotima’s speech is reviewed more closely in the next chapter.)

The most fantastical oration in *Symposium*, and the one that relates a story of origin, is delivered by Aristophanes, a comic playwright. He begins by noting that “Human Nature” was originally a very different configuration. As he tells it: at the outset of time
human beings were formed as three sexes: female, male and female-male (what he calls androgy nous). Each individual was shaped spherically\textsuperscript{96} (like a planet) possessing two heads atop round necks, with four arms, four legs and two sets of genitalia all facing in opposite directions. [Figure 1.0] They worshipped and made ritual offerings to the gods, but often joined forces to attack them as they had an ability to move very fast in a spinning cartwheel motion. These offensives incensed the gods. Yet since they found humans useful due to their dedicated sacrifices, destroying them was not an option. Zeus—the king of the Greek gods at Mount Olympus—conceived of the idea to split them in half in the manner of an egg in order to permanently handicap their physical speed. After slicing them he instructed Apollo (son of Zeus) to twist their heads around toward the cut half as a reminder of their punishment. Apollo then covered their wound by stretching their skin and twisting it at what we now locate as our navel.

Humans subsequently went about seeking to reunite with their other halves, and upon finding each other held on in desperation, trying to fit together as they once had, yet eventually they began to die of hunger and hopelessness in the futility of their efforts. Concerned about their dwindling numbers, Zeus reconsidered his design and moved the genitalia in the same direction as the face—to the front of the body. With this new configuration, humans began to copulate and in the case of opposite-sex couples, reproduce. This assured the gods of an ongoing reverent human population. Plato writes in the voice of Aristophanes,

\begin{quote}
This, then, is the source of our desire to love each other. Love is born into every human being; it calls back the halves of our original nature together; it tries to make one out of the two and heal the world of human nature.\textsuperscript{97}
\end{quote}
This primeval mythos justifies the origin of the subject’s enduring desire for wholeness, since the gods never revoked the original rupture of their perfect completeness.

It is remarkable to note that Aristophanes’ myth has a parallel in the prelapsarian tale of Adam and Eve, figures comprising the creation story in the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Christians view this creation story of the Fall of Man as resulting in Original Sin, passed on to all subsequent humans at their birth. In their banishment from Paradise, the search for love (we may presume love was originally assured by immanence) comes about as a punishment for bad behavior and now is an irretrievable loss. Within Masaccio’s early Renaissance painting, the couple is notable for their anguished expressions at their betrayal of God, of knowing human sorrow for the first time. [Figure 5.4] Like Aristophanes’ roundlings, they suffer an irrevocable loss.

Jacques Lacan remarks upon the tale of Aristophanes and the primordial split to argue that what is vanished is the originary part of the self. What he means is that as fetus prior to birth we are in a state of suspended immortality—that is, we are not quite human, we are not yet acculturated, sexed creatures fated—or driven—to sexually reproduce. Through birth we are transported from this Real into the registers of experience he calls the Symbolic and Imaginary realms. In this way desire is based in the forever loss of nascent self. From a psychoanalytical perspective, Lacan considers this forfeiture the “real lack.” Lacan does not mention Adam and Eve, but it seems an argument could be made that they also existed in this “real” state of paradisiacal completeness before being ejected and forced to be fully human and impelled by desires and drives.
In both the creationary stories of Adam and Eve and Aristophanes, desire is born in wrongdoing; human beings broke god-made rules. Subjects are consequently in a position to always wanting something they do not have. As a result love hinges on the meeting of certain requirements. For followers of the Abrahamic God it is redemption through baptism and faith; for the ancient Greeks, as told by Diotima, the demand is for goodness that is achieved through human actions designed for immortality. What she proposes is that since subjects are not deathless like the gods, they must eternally reproduce. This is done either physically—such as having children—or via the psyche, what Diotima refers to as “pregnant in soul.” Importantly, this includes acts of goodness, learning, and the creative acts of humans. In this way she suggests that artworks (as acts of immortality and reproduction) are generators of love on behalf of artists.

I add to this idea that viewers have an opportunity to locate love in works of art; however, this space is not a site of desire or a drive, or space of deficit or retribution, but a place of thriving, for thinking about the work and contemplating questions it raises. With art there is always erôtan (to ask questions), not necessarily erôs (to desire in love.)
Cerebral affairs

Although Lacan’s psychoanalytic theories are based on those of Sigmund Freud he staked his own claims. Freud held science in high regard because it called into question religious beliefs; he was interested in the biological and its intersection with psychoanalysis. Whereas Lacan was adamant that science obfuscates the primacy of the Symbolic in the subject’s life. Also, science asserts itself as a truth, which is never stable. Throughout *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan repeatedly poses the question of whether psychoanalysis is a science. He seems to dance around a rock solid answer, and at one-point mentions that obscurity is a property of psychoanalysis, but he does make a distinction in methodologies,

…I am a bit suspicious of the term research. Personally, I have never regarded myself as a researcher. As Picasso once said, to the shocked surprise of those around him—*I do not seek I find.*

Taking stock of love in art I want to consider multiple avenues for origins of possibility. For the artist it is a matter of seeking *and* finding and seeking again. Therefore, my argument includes a survey of current research in physiology with the further understanding that this is not the be-all-end-all of how things are. The ground is always shifting.

In opposition to the impassioned primordial breakup narratives of Adam and Eve and Aristophanes’ originary humans described earlier, contemporary research indicates that *what*
we call love originates in the body as a disinterested biological drive. Brain studies carried out in the twenty-first century via technology indicate that the hardwiring of love is a physiological need like thirst and hunger. But for most of Western history, there was no substantiated knowledge about the physiology of emotion. The Greek physician Hippocrates\textsuperscript{111} seems to be the first to surmise that human emotion is somehow linked to the organ of the brain. He writes,

Men ought to know that from nothing else but the brain come joys, delights, laughter and sports, and sorrows, griefs, despondency, and lamentations. …And by the same organ we become mad and delirious, and fears and terrors assail us, some by night, and some by day, and dreams and untimely wanderings, and cares that are not suitable, and ignorance of present circumstances, desuetude, and unskillfulness. All these things we endure from the brain...\textsuperscript{112}

Hippocrates situates the brain as a site of all emotional feelings on the spectrum of human life. Ironically, the brain itself does not “feel” anything. There are no pain receptors in the brain, in spite of the fact there are a hundred thousand miles of blood vessels traversing its tissue. Yet Hippocrates did not have the technology to substantiate his theory, so the exploration of love was left to creative expressions such as painting and poetry—as well as philosophical reflections—for twenty-five hundred years.\textsuperscript{113}

In the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century the intangible became tangible with the discovery of the VTA and the role of the caudate nucleus\textsuperscript{114} located deep in the brain. VTA is the term used in reference to the ventral tegmental area, a tiny cluster of neurons (individual cells of the nervous system), which secrete the chemical dopamine that is related to the euphoric feelings of love. The caudate nucleus is a C-shaped area located near the reptilian brain. It is the area
of the brain that directs movements of the body and is part of the brain’s “reward system.”
While the anatomical “heart” is most referenced in the image-repertoire utterances of love, (for example: “She broke my heart” and “He makes my heart beat faster”) the brain is considered the material home of this ineffable power. Love becomes astonishingly corporeal if we have a basic understanding of its bodily home—our brain. The following generalized and abbreviated overview helps us to understand the brain’s important architecture, its physiologic functions and its genealogy.

The human brain reached its current modern evolutionary state about 35,000 years ago. An average adult brain weighs about three pounds, is roughly the size of a grapefruit, and is considered triune: it has three major layers all of which may play a part in the evolution of the human species. [Figure 1.1] These parts do not act independently of one another but are interactive via neural pathways that transport neurons, which are chemical and electrical signals called neurotransmitters. The deepest and most ancient is the reptilian brain (also known as R-complex) responsible for producing neurons that control the life-sustaining respiratory (breathing), cardiac (heartbeat) and digestive processes. This most primeval part of the brain is perched at the top of the spinal cord where nerve trails link to lower body vital organs and nestle at the base of the other two brain systems. Its role is essential for survival and defense mechanisms such as “fight or flight” but it does not play a part in emotional life. It does however contain the “primordial seeds of emotional responsiveness.”

Hippocrates would be satisfied to know that the next section of the brain gives rise to myriad emotions such as love, joy, abjection and hatred. This is the limbic system—also
associated with memory and cognition. The limbic brain is actually a set of structures that cover the reptilian core. Its presence is the long-term result of the evolution of lizards (currently understood as essentially non-emotional creatures) into early mammals. The limbic brain is well developed in all mammals.\textsuperscript{120} Mammalian emotions are generated in the limbic brain by electric and chemical upheavals provoked by responses to the external world, in addition to memories of past events. Is that person I am passing on the street friendly or hostile, flirty or aggressive? By collecting and sifting through rapid-fire sensory information, the limbic brain manifests an instantaneous reaction to the external world that includes the evaluation of the other.\textsuperscript{121}

***

There are interesting juxtapositions here in terms of the philosophical positions of Hegel and Levinas in light of how the limbic brain function assesses the other. Hegel proposed the model of the “master-slave” dialectic in order to determine the necessary overcoming of inequality between people. While not perfectly intelligible, Hegel’s dialectic also seems to address the process of man’s control over living in the world via the development of self-consciousness. He sets up the analogy of two individuals meeting for the first time in human history: a master (or lord) representing independent self-consciousness, and a slave (or bondsman) representing dependent self-consciousness. A fight begins in which the master chooses to risk his life in order to achieve recognition. This struggle initiates the movement of self-consciousness emerging through the desire for recognition of another self-consciousness. Both must survive the fight in order to maintain self-consciousness, because individuals are dependent on each other for recognition of the other,
but the slave as “loser” of this confrontation becomes subordinate to the master. Now the slave must work for the master, but his toil eventually provides the slave with enough power to end his state of bondage since the master becomes dependent on the slave’s production of labor. Hegel’s master-slave dialectic addresses the process of the subject’s control over living in a world of otherness; this idea of command is to have knowledge of the world as well as an understanding of the self as living in and comprehending it. This is to some extent congruent with the functioning of the limbic brain, which physiologically underlies our constant estimation of otherness.

Conversely, Levinas’ notion of the other’s face is antithetical to Hegel; he argues the a priori lack of control in the subject’s immanent world of alterity. Levinas asserts that when we come face-to-face with another subject we are ethically accountable for them in every way, and this relationship is not symmetrical because the other is our master. Levinas states, “The face is the very identity of a being; it manifests itself in it in terms of itself, without concept.” For Levinas the face is understood as the impermanence of another human being. He shifts the Hegelian idea of being-in-the-world as not about power or control, but being as responsibility, passivity and obligation to the other. Levinas does not see love as a factor. In fact, he expresses distaste for the word “love” preferring the action of responsibility. This is because Levinas sees love as too narrow; it occurs between two people to the exclusion of others; in that regard it is hierarchical. He states, “The morality of respect presupposes the morality of love.” Since the limbic brain is the seat of emotions, it also serves to negotiate the other in terms of empathy—to understand what others feel. Empathy is a form of understanding, a moral emotion that occurs in a relationship of respect for how
the other feels. Levinas states, “Respect is a relationship between equals. Justice assumes that original equality. Love, essentially is established between unequals, lives from equality.”

Thinking back for a moment to the tale of Aristophanes (and Levinas’ ethics of the face) we recall the mandate of Zeus to Apollo to arrange the heads of the split androgynes towards their cut side. This is a defining moment. Not only would they be able to see their punishment but were henceforth also face-to-face for the first time. Barthes’ notes it was this point that the beings would now, “Understand [their] madness.” He asks, “To understand—is that not to divide the image, to undo the I, the proud organ of misapprehension?” The “I” is split, divided, undone in an irretrievable act. Now they attempt to understand each other, which is an ethical action of acknowledging the “we” of being.

Love as I have defined it, specifically as it occurs in art, is not necessarily dependent on empathy, struggle, hierarchy or equivalence. Love in art has myriad possibilities that include the major component of connection manifested through questioning as opposed to veneration or respect. It is not a hierarchical relationship as it is in Hegel’s model of the master-slave.

Is our current twenty-first century knowledge of the brain described earlier applicable to our understanding of philosophies of Hegel, Levinas and others? I suggest that as embodied subjects who think, whatever we are able to discern about the physiology of the body should not be discounted in an ongoing philosophical discourse. Unprecedented contemporary developments of technology allow us insights and knowledge about our embodied selves. It is assured that this particular knowledge will change in the future.
Philosophy, which etymologically arises from the Greek for love of wisdom, should not overlook opportunities to learn all we can, to consider all possibilities for the conditions of being.

***

Finally, the limbic system mediates the information between the reptilian brain and the neo-cortex (or cortex), which is the latest and largest element of the human brain in terms of evolutionary sequencing. It is situated under our cranial (skull) bones directly over the limbic system and consists of four lobes. It plays a role in the senses of hearing and sight, reasoning, speaking (that is to say the symbolic area of linguistics), motor control and coordination as well as abilities such as art and mathematics. With regard to the feelings of love, the cortex is responsible for the thinking of love that originates in the limbic. The emotions of the limbic brain and thoughts come together in this area. The two language centers are on the left side; one permits us to understand the significance of what is being heard and the other prompts the articulation of a verbal response. On the right side of the cortex are “mirror centers” that do the same thing for the emotional content of speech. One permits the recognition and understanding of the emotional essence of speech—such as tenderness or sarcasm—and the other to convey it by way of the tone and inflection of the voice. So while the limbic brain generates the feelings of love, the cortex endows us with the ability to communicate it positively in the most efficacious way possible to our babies, lovers and friends.

As humans we share the common denominator of needing to express love as an operation of survival. In the twenty-first century, a scientific claim is staked that love is a
hardwired physiological phenomenon. The brain plays a role in how artists express what is called love in their work and that viewers connect with artworks in ways that feel like love as commanded by areas of the brain. On the other hand, with psychoanalysis, love sits outside of physiology whereby an artwork is a manifestation of an artist/viewer’s psyche, an unacknowledged desire that may be uncovered in analysis. In Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory, a work of art serves as an act of sublimation: a deep unconscious desire transformed into cultural representation. Levine asserts, “We want the work of art to confirm us in the wished-for unity of our being, we want the work of art to appear to want us to be its ideal viewer.” Alternatively love in art stakes no absolute claim. I define this love as not exclusively or necessarily rooted in physiology, philosophy or psyche. It is always in the between: the physical and the psyche, the artist and the artwork, the artist and the viewer, the viewer and the artwork. It is a changeable and ephemeral movement not fixed in any place or concept.

**Aesthetics of anxiety**

Does love originate in the self?

The arts and other genres have a running discourse about love and sometimes, a correspondence of ideas becomes apparent. For example, Aristophanes’ legend of a primordial split in the subject finds a parallel in the twentieth century psychoanalytical school of thought of Lacan. He asserted a sense of identity for the subject is not innate; in fact identity of the self is an illusionistic formation.
By way of an abridged explanation: the reflection seen in a mirror creates the original sense of self. As a baby (before the age of six to eighteen months) the subject cannot distinguish itself from others. Within that early age span, it discovers delight in recognizing itself in the mirror as a unified whole, a separate individual from its mother and other admiring subjects. Lacan refers to this revelation as the “mirror stage” and is analogous to Freud’s establishing of the subject’s ego, the “I” of the self.¹³⁴ Yet this occurrence of the mirror stage (what Lacan calls the Imaginary dimension of experience) is at the same time misrecognition because of a split that happens when the self is reflected back to the subject. (Lacan uses $S$ as the signifier of this split.) This fracture is the conscious and unconscious components of the subject: the former as the awareness of the self and body and the latter as the drives and instincts that function subliminally.

In other words how we appear in the mirror is not all of who we actually are. Kaja Silverman notes, “And because the subject’s identity will continue to be propped upon external images, its battle-to-the-death with its own mirror image is only the first installment in a life-long war between itself and everything else.”¹³⁵ The self we see is the Imaginary other, the ideal ego.

---

Figure 1.2. Mickalene Thomas, Origin of the Universe I (20), mixed media on canvas. Image: brooklynrail.org
An example of a contemporary work of art that confronts an aspect of the mirror stage is Mickalene Thomas’ painting *Origin of the Universe I*. [Figure 1.2] It is a large painting of the artist’s own nude mid-to-lower torso, legs spread, crotch exposed and pubic hair rendered with glittering rhinestones. To create the work she used a photograph to capture her mirror reflection. In other words, the camera acts as her modern looking glass. The pose is a calculated appropriation of Gustav Courbet’s controversial nineteenth century oil painting of a woman’s pudendum titled *L’Origine du monde* (Origin of the World) [Figure 1.3]—a painting that Lacan owned—now in the collection of the Musée D’Orsay.

Both paintings engage the double gaze of artist and viewer. Courbet directly observed his model to render the image and he did not deviate from its essential perceptual representation. In this way the painting’s content becomes the obvious act of the male gaze upon the (anonymous) female sex, loaded with implications for the artist and viewers in terms of an asymmetry of gender that emerges in patriarchal power. Courbet’s painting arises from a long tradition of male artists and their exploitation of the female body. In an art historical context, what is radically different about this work is Courbet’s “full frontal” emphasis on the female genitalia. Thomas remarks that she reclaims the pose using her own body in her painting. She states,
The mirror is a powerful tool because it forces you to deal with yourself on a deeper level. Conceptually, paintings are like mirrors. They are an expression from the artist: This is how I view the world—I’m presenting it to you.\textsuperscript{140}

The mirror/self portrait for Thomas is an affirmation of existence; it becomes a sort of origin of the self as Lacan describes it for the baby’s experience. \textit{It is also an expansion of self} and as such is an expression of love on behalf of Thomas. Her title reflects this enlargement; she increases the scope of “origin” in the title (\textit{The Origin of the Universe I}) in comparison to Courbet’s \textit{The Origin of the World}. Her reach is mightier.

The reflection of identity in paint offers not only a self-definition, but also access to “other.” To further consider the artist’s context, the prurient male gaze is not interesting to Thomas who is lesbian; therefore, the female gaze for her audience (and herself) is of erotic significance. Thomas overturns gender roles and assumptions; she invites \textit{all of us} to be voyeurs and thus levels the playing field. In an essay regarding female self-portraits Whitney Chadwick writes,

\textit{…A belief in the visuality of feminine self-identification, and the power of the image to mediate between art object and human subject, continues to endow the self-portrait with its power to work on our imaginations.}\textsuperscript{141}

In affecting our imagination many questions arise: How does this image function in terms of a singular female subjectivity? In what ways is femininity expressed in terms of “the beautiful,” sexuality and the body? Within love in art, questions are formed in the imagining
and thinking manifest in the between. These serve as radical points of connection; these (possible) connections are a condition of love in art.

In another interview Thomas elaborates further,

The mirror part comes from my reading about Lacan’s mirror stage and the sense of validation and ego development that seeing your own reflection in a mirror provides. I’m so interested in this idea of being seen and seeing yourself, and how that relationship is developed. We all want to be validated and recognized in some way. This also relates to the power of the gaze in my work. When I take a photograph, that gaze is forcing the viewer to see my subjects—to recognize them. 142

The painting of Thomas’ body in Origin of the Universe I is not intended as the body she inhabits, but its ego ideal, an interior image that one strives for in order to meet a standard imposed by society. This self-portrait—the Lacanian Imaginary—is more than what meets the eye. It reveals elements of her Symbolic and Real being.

The focus of the painting is on Thomas’ genitals, one of the sources of embodied pleasure for herself and her lover. Thomas admits taking on this particular pose was difficult because she felt vulnerable. 143 This plays out in the manner of how she represented pubic hair, which is rendered opulent with rhinestones, an imitation of diamonds. Thomas states her use of rhinestones alludes to indigenous art traditions and Haitian voodou art. 144 In this work, I also see their use as related to the glittering of stars in the night sky, perhaps alluding to the largely
unknown and unexplored visible universe. The effect in the painting is to create a textured, iridescent effect of her genitalia, which is dramatic and sensual, inviting both gaze and touch. Yet rhinestones are hard-edged objects; their use provides a subversive texture that indicates other (possible) meanings. To kiss or fondle them would be a bit menacing. This confounding representation of genitals in terms of touch recalls Meret Oppenheim’s famous surrealist Object, [Figure 1.4] which is a teacup, saucer and spoon covered in fur. This work is much more puzzling in representation, yet like Thomas’s painting speaks of desire, female sexuality and identity; however, in contrast to Origin of the Universe I uses the tactic of indirection. Object employs domestic mundane tea implements that are made unfamiliar with a fur covering to provoke the imagination and the unconscious. Anxiety in the viewer is often aroused by the use of subversive texture in design of an artwork. A cup (or vase) is generally read as a long-time signified concept for the vagina, the spoon denotes the phallic, and fur insinuates pubic hair. Like Object, The Origin of the Universe I is not what it seems and we cannot be sure what it means. A fur-lined tea set is as irrational as a rhinestone mons.

Since we are not certain what Thomas’ painting denotes in the manner of its appropriation, design and media it may incite many questions for the viewer. Note that while I offer the reader information Thomas provides in terms of making and thinking about the
work, generally when a viewer encounters an artwork in a gallery or museum, they do not have such facts and quotes at hand. It may be argued that this is a more ideal situation in which to view an artwork (as “unadulterated” experience) or that having such data provides a fuller understanding. I am not convinced that having knowledge about the artist’s process, choice of materials and inspiration inhibits questions on behalf of the viewer; perhaps it generates more of them. Even with the facts questions remain abundant. With or without, it does not affect the potential for love in art.

*The Origin of the Universe I* makes a strong psychological demand for the viewer because of the artwork’s conflicting nature. The willing viewer enjoins the work to think about it. While the image is the body, the subject is love, particularly love of erotic self. How is it to photograph and paint the self in such an exposed position? I stated earlier that love in art opens immeasurable possibilities for what the viewer can feel or know. *Love also encompasses inestimable potentials for what the artist can experience or understand.* Thomas deliberately took a calculated risk as evidenced by her feelings of vulnerability in producing the work. In light of this she may have experienced the *punctum* as the prick of feelings, an immeasurable dread of the unknown of what may happen in the aftermath of her gamble with exposure.

Thomas approached a personal limit—not without reservation, and without assurance she would not fail. From the psychoanalytical perspective the painting addresses loss, yet it can also be said that Thomas *finds* something else in terms of expanding herself. She validates herself and perhaps hopes the viewer will too, although not necessarily; should the viewer support her it would only be a further expansion. *The Origin of the Universe I* is a
metaphysical work in that (in the manner of Oppenheim and unlike Courbet) Thomas oversteps the truth of visual perception to reveal other ideas. Thomas’ work discards notions of psychoanalytical lack and visually declares Irigaray’s affirmation of “I love to you” a wholesome, robust recognition of otherness. This seems to me a radical notion uniquely located with love in art.

*Origin of the Universe* I brings to mind another artist who twenty-two years earlier staged an extremist work we might consider a “live self-portrait.” Annie Sprinkle\(^{146}\) is a performance artist; her practice is grounded in sex-positive feminism, an ideology championing the notion that sexual freedom is critical to women’s equality and inclusive of the complete range of human sexuality. Her performance titled *Public Cervix Announcement*\(^{147}\) [Figure 1.5] consisted of a semi-reclining Sprinkle, clad in an erotic costume, inserting a gynecological speculum into her vagina and inviting the audience to view her cervix with a flashlight. This allowed the viewer to directly see the intimate space of her gendered body in real time. In Sprinkle’s performance, a part of the female body ordinarily invisible and off limits was made visually accessible to the audience. Like Thomas, Sprinkle took her body to a limit.
Compared with the traditional artist’s plane mirror, the speculum\textsuperscript{148} is another type of mirror. Neither flat nor anamorphic but concave, it is an instrument typically implemented by health care professionals to physically dilate the elastic genital tissue for a visual inspection (or tissue sampling) of the vaginal cavity and cervix. By re-contextualizing the use of a speculum in an art performance, Sprinkle brings into play another kind of self-reflection—one that is singularly “ocular-eccentric” in that only one viewer at a time is privileged to survey Sprinkle’s genitals.\textsuperscript{149} In this way she constructs a kind of intimacy not located in Thomas’ *Origin of the Universe I* or Oppenheim’s *Object* because paintings and sculptures are objects on walls or pedestals that indirectly connect artist and viewer. In contrast, Sprinkle as artist is *directly* interacting with another being. Her body along with the speculum and flashlight comprise the media. The viewer is straightforwardly in contact with Sprinkle’s anatomy, in a manner that would normally be considered socially inappropriate. How does this breach of an imposed boundary serve as love?

Love in art cannot be measured, but it is comparative because the media (materials that comprise the artwork) and design elements affect the viewer in various ways. For some viewers an object (like marble or paper) provides a benign distance; for others the face-to-face of performance elicits some amount of unease in the viewer. Responses to medium are subjective. *Since love in art is not concerned with comfort or security, anxiety is a defensible and valuable tool in the artist’s toolbox.* It is manifested in various ways and to greater or lesser extents in illustrations discussed thus far in this paper: Drew’s *Falling Man*, Oppenheim’s fur-covered teacup, Thomas’ rhinestone pudendum, and Sprinkle’s transgressive performance.
Simon Critchley\textsuperscript{150} calls anxiety “the philosophical mood par excellence.”\textsuperscript{151} What he refers to is Heidegger’s notion of the function of anxiety with regards to Dasein,\textsuperscript{152} which is being-in-the-world. For Heidegger “world” is not the physical realm of existence on a planet, instead it is “something we find ourselves in.”\textsuperscript{153} Barbara Bolt explains, “Where we understand our world, we know what to do, how to act or comport ourselves.”\textsuperscript{154} Being-in-the-world then is to be amidst a cohesive structure of relations in which we function. As such, the subject is occasionally disposed to moods and emotions, the latter always in response to a specific situation. Heidegger describes anxiety not as emotion but as mood.\textsuperscript{155}

Anxiety as mood discloses what it means to exist. For Heidegger, this is not a particular anxiety, but a vague one that is experienced when the subject becomes conscious of an idea of meaninglessness.\textsuperscript{156} Much of the time subjects are thrown into the world of life’s hustle and bustle and do not contemplate their place in the world.\textsuperscript{157} At face value the world is a meaningful place that is accepted as is. At other times the subject becomes unanchored from life’s flow and an acute self-awareness of meaninglessness pervades as mood. The world subsequently becomes an uncomfortable place—at least temporarily. At these moments anxiety becomes a disclosure of being-in-the-world; the subject is anxious for Dasein.\textsuperscript{158} Heidegger asserts it is just this singular situation of self-consciousness manifested in anxiety that lends itself to the authentic self. The authentic subject is individualized when self-aware, when true to the self and not to the demands of others in the world.

There are two considerations of anxiety as it relates to love in art. First, anxiety experienced by the artist in making the work is a manifestation of love. One example might be the situation of admitted anxiety Thomas felt in photographing and subsequently painting
herself in a highly vulnerable position to create *Origin of the Universe I*. Doing so endowed her with an expression of an authentic self by way of opening up possibilities. This not only benefits an essential truthfulness to herself, but she also models it to others/viewers as a viable potential. In this way, her act of authenticity is compounded. Although as viewers we don’t always have knowledge of an artist’s anxieties in creating the art unless that information is shared with us, it does not diminish the genuineness of the artist’s self-awareness. Second, *anxiety as a calculated part of an artwork’s design is a manifestation of love in art*. When art brings forth anxiety in viewers it calls them to the freedom toward a more authentic self. This does not occur when taking a work of art at face value, but asking what are more than likely to be unanswerable questions. The artwork makes a demand upon the viewer to take it in and reciprocally the viewer enjoins the work by thinking about it and asking questions: How is the idea of drinking out of a fur-lined cup akin to a sexual experience? What were the falling man’s thoughts as he tumbled through the air? How am I to understand Thomas’s use of rhinestones? What would it be like to publically allow strangers to have access to my cervix? The act of asking questions in the face of anxiety expands the viewer by presenting endless possibilities for feelings and understanding—an indefinite openness. These possibilities located in an artwork constitute a more authentic self as a *beyond* what is.

To experience anxiety for the viewer is one manner of thinking-with and being-with the artwork or artist. Love in art is to privilege possibility. Love in art is manifested in *presence and absence*. Love in art is revealed by asking questions. Love in art is always abundance in having something new to contemplate.
Sprinkle raises other innumerable questions with *Public Cervix Announcement*: Who gets to look at the body? What does it mean to have that privileged position? How does *looking* change the viewer’s ideas or feelings? These questions are not new in thinking about art, but they are asked anew in works of art that concern the body. Importantly, viewers do not have the same gaze in the *here and now* of performance art that they have with paintings and sculpture. In artworks like *Public Cervix Announcement* looking for the viewer is a critical transgressive quality since it is an *immediate experience*. Reproductions of the performance documented in photographs cannot possibly convey the profound immediacy of taking the proffered flashlight and directly viewing Sprinkle’s live anatomy.159 Yet, these images can nonetheless compel the viewer to ask questions related to the artwork. Both direct and indirect exposure to an artwork can trigger the movement of love in art.

*A further manifestation of love in art is how artists create works that question previous standards of how art functions.* This in itself is another avenue of formulating an aesthetic of anxiety in a work of art. Sprinkle’s performance of *Public Cervix Announcement* contributes to un-demonizing the visuality of the male gaze in her eroticized performance. She holds control in the meaning of the viewing relationship of the audience, determining all aspects of what specifically is seen on her body, where it is seen, and for how long. Her viewers are anyone of any gender identification or sexual orientation. In this way Sprinkle’s art practice erodes the ever-weakening binary of patriarchal structures within gender formation. This destabilization substantially began in the 1960’s with a growing number of female performance artists who implemented their bodies as performative acts, such as Yoko Ono (*Cut Piece*, 1965), Carolee Schneemann (*Interior Scroll*, 1975), and Marina Abramović
In addition to anxiety as a call to authenticity, love in art facilitates an incessant movement of change within the practice of art.

The number of artists contributing to revisions of art practice and who address problematic issues within exhibitions and art history continues to thrive. Recently a young artist called attention to the well-worn issue of the sexualized gaze in a manner that arguably provoked some amount of anxiety owing to the fact that her performance was an ambush upon an unsuspecting audience. This is a marked departure from most performance art, which is conventionally carried out within an invitational framework whereby the viewers have voluntarily engaged with the artist—such as in the artists and performances previously mentioned and ones that will be addressed in upcoming chapters.

In early June 2014, a video\textsuperscript{160} circulated on the Internet in which performance artist Deborah de Robertis\textsuperscript{161} walked into the Musée d’Orsay and sat on the floor in front of Courbet’s iconic \textit{Origin of the World}. She lifted her gold dress and spread her knees up and apart to expose her genitalia to the surprised visitors in Room 20. Intending to show even more anatomy than Courbet’s painting, she pulled her labia aside to allow for a stark view of her vaginal opening.\textsuperscript{162} After some moments, a number of the onlookers broke into a polite sustained applause. (It would seem that for these individuals a connection was
made between de Robertis’ action and the masterwork hanging above her head.) As seen in the video, de Robertis holds this position until forcibly removed by museum security. Although she posed no concrete threat to her audience, as an unauthorized performance in a museum her actions were not tolerated by security. The artist titles this performance *Mirror of Origin*. De Robertis makes this statement in an interview,

> There is a gap in art history, the absent point of view of the object of the gaze. In his realist painting, the painter shows the open legs, but the vagina remains closed. He does not reveal the hole, that is to say, the eye. I am not showing my vagina, but I am revealing what we do not see in the painting, the eye of the vagina, the black hole, this concealed eye, this chasm, which, beyond the flesh, refers to infinity, to the origin of the origin.\(^{163}\)

There is much to be said about various meanings within her statement, but I want to stress that *Mirror of Origin* [Figure 1.6] is an act of love in art. De Robertis’ critique of Courbet’s canvas is compelling in that it offers her audience (like Sprinkle) a literal perspective as well as an opportunity for a new looking. By seeing anew the subject is given a broader frame of reference, a fresh chance for thinking. How does this act function as art? What is art supposed to “do”? What does the artist show us? What do we see? What do we *want* to see? What is the difference between real and represented? What is the difference between a living female and a painting of one? How do we connect to the “real thing” as much as the beloved painting? Is this offensive? Why?

*All of these questions are demonstrative of love in art as the movement of thinking.*

De Robertis prompts questions for the viewer like these in her performance at the expense of her own privacy—and perhaps safety—as well as the offense of breaking the law. In other
words, de Robertis—like all the artists I have discussed in this chapter—broaches a new limit with herself and with her audience. And at that limit is the origin of possibility for anxiety as being towards authenticity. It may also be considered another form of thinking love in art.

Art with the anxiety and questions it brings forth is one of the ways we come to understand what it means to be human, what it means to be. Heidegger regards art and philosophy as conduits for “movement in thought.” He sees thinking as not necessarily rational (a means to an end), but a process of being thought-full. Thought is something we can inhabit in the sense that it invites the thinker to presence. At the same time it is not a static presence, it moves (Heidegger uses the term “withdraws.”) To fully think we must pursue the thoughts, even as they retreat. His description of thinking’s withdrawal brings to mind the act of drawing. To draw—pencil on paper—we must erase and draw again. The act of drawing can be as much erasing and re-drawing as drawing. A mark is made, it is unmade; a mark is made again, and so on. It is a push-forward pull-back, a revealing and unrevealing. Drawing like thinking is pursuit. Drawing like thinking is learned by doing. Thinking, like drawing is something to be learned and mastered throughout life.

Heidegger writes,

The matter of thinking is always confounding—all the more in proportion as we keep clear of prejudice. To keep clear of prejudice, we must be ready and willing to listen.

Heidegger offers the reader advice. How do we avoid prejudice? The word in verb form means to prejudge, an action not taken in the act of reason. As a noun it is a form of harm,
the act of being unreasonable. To be prejudiced is to not think, it is to have an opinion not based in reason or actual experience. To not be prejudiced is to act in the best interest of self and others, an ethical command. Then, how are we ready and willing to listen? If we use Socrates as a model, as Heidegger does, then it seems to be that we must be ready and willing to listen; we need to be present. Socrates manifested presence in carefully listening to his interlocutors and asking them questions.

Certainly to be ready and willing to “listen” to a work of art we need to be present. This is most obvious in the intent of de Robertis and the impact on her audience. It separates out what might be spectacle from art that denotes a daring expression of love. Her performance prompts questions from her viewers in a more dramatic way than an object, but perhaps the message is in the medium.

I have previously noted that thinking about art is a manifestation of love based in wonder. The act of intentionally looking at art is also grounded in wonder. By wonder I mean the act of speculating, not necessarily that what one sees engenders admiration or amazement. Certainly there are situations in which the viewer responds to a work of art with surprise or even astonishment such as in case of de Robertis. Certainly artworks can be downright wonder-full. Others take on different forms of appreciation. But for the purpose of my argument regarding love in art, I want to clarify the notion of wonder as an expression of curiosity, contemplation or interest. How the artist moves a viewer to wonder is on a kind of spectrum. In the case of de Robertis, her work vehemently prods the viewer to wonder about the actual vagina and the represented one. For other artists, like Thomas, perhaps it is more of a nudge.
What happens when the Heideggerian mood of anxiety deployed in art becomes fear?

De Robertis’ unauthorized and startling performance brings to mind an earlier, more audacious act that took place in Germany almost fifty years ago. In 1968, Austrian artist VALIE EXPORT\(^{169}\) went into an art house cinema in Munich dressed in a sweater and pants with the crotch cut away and carrying a machine gun.\(^{170}\) The unsuspecting patrons were there to see a pornographic film and were unaware of EXPORT’s intention to stage an art performance. She walked among the seated audience in such a manner that enabled them to gaze directly at her exposed genitals while she pointed the gun at people’s heads.

This performance ruptured the expectations of an audience in the midst of the voyeuristic act of watching an erotic film, an act that employs a phallocentric cinematic gaze upon disembodied sexual organs. By offering the cinemagoers a ‘real’ fully embodied, and contextualized sexual organ, EXPORT not only exposed the fetishization at the heart of the viewers’ fantasies but also subverted the structure of patriarchal subjectivity located in pornographic media.

However, EXPORT also told the audience that her actual genitalia were available and that they could do with it as they pleased. In an interview ten years later, she said:

I was afraid and had no idea what the people would do. As I moved from row to row, each row of people silently got up and left the theater. Out of film context, it was a totally different way for them to connect with the particular erotic symbol.\(^{171}\)
EXPORT employed a guerrilla-style confrontation and transgressive tactic of exhibitionism. She gave permission for anyone to do anything to her pudendum, presumably including (at worst) bodily harm. While she admits to feeling vulnerable, her use of a gun placed the audience in an even more defenseless position since no one could have been certain that the gun was not real and that she would not deploy it. From a critical standpoint, the gun, a loaded phallic symbol, challenges and risks undermining EXPORT’s threat rather than augmenting it. Her reflection on what she did merely communicates her intention of using her feminist body as an implicit and explicit menace.

Heidegger maintains a distinction between fear and anxiety. The former is always the subject’s fear of something, whereas with the latter the subject cannot pinpoint the source of their anxiety. Heidegger notes, “…What anxiety is about is the world as such.” Fear is a response to the threat of harm—something specific—a way of knowing how something is, a disclosing. It is more than likely the subjects in the Munich theater initially felt fear at the sight of EXPORT’s gun. It was not a moment of indefinite anxiety existentially evoked. I cannot conceive how in that moment these men had access to love in art as I describe it. It is possible in a later reflection about their confrontation with EXPORT they eventually felt anxiety, but this is merely speculative since no witnesses are accounted for.

The argument of love becomes a challenge in championing a work of art that employs a threat of violence that most would construe as an unethical act. How is love in art reconciled in the display of such fierce aggression to the other? Here we return to Nancy’s definition of love,
…All of love is possible and necessary, that all the loves possible are in fact the possibilities of love, it voices or its characteristics, which are impossible to confuse and yet ineluctably entangled: charity and pleasure, emotion and pornography, …To think love would thus demand a boundless generosity toward all these possibilities, and it is this generosity not to choose between loves, not to privilege, not to hierarchize, not to exclude…Love in its singularity, when it is grasped absolutely, is itself perhaps nothing but the indefinite abundance of all possible loves…\(^{173}\)

I want to stress Nancy’s love as it contains an infinite generosity on behalf of both artist and viewer.

There seems to be two promising ways to calculate the actions of EXPORT’s performance in terms of love in art. The first concerns infinite generosity on behalf the amenable reviewer.\(^{174}\) The openhandedness of the reviewer in EXPORT’s performance means to offer unprejudiced consideration for the actions in the theatre—and foremost her intent. What was she attempting to do and why? Like de Robertis she calls attention to the real and represented. Is this simple? Not at all; but we must remember that love in art cannot be counted on to be easy, safe or satisfying. When art takes aim at our fears, when it transgresses social taboos, when it inflames high anxiety, it seems antithetical to the long-held ideas of love as consolation. Love in contemporary art will rarely be solace. It is more likely to be a mess. Love in art is not for wimps; it may appear abusive, offensive or irrational. If the viewer makes an effort to move beyond a personal response of fear or abjection, he or she initiate love in art with a tenacious and generous effort to connect with the artwork. In this connection the viewer engages in the between, the space of pure potential and open-endedness. Love in art arrives upon the questions it raises as expansion of the self.
How can we understand EXPORT’s work as generous in this performance? A synonym for the word generous is care and therefore the theatre performance can be framed as an expression of care. Specifically her mindfulness concerning the exploitation and objectification of the female body as it is deployed in the industry of sexual images controlled by males. Heidegger addresses Sorge (care) what he considers the subject’s fundamental way of being in the world. This care is an “ontological structure”\(^{175}\) in which the subject as being-in-the-world expresses itself within life’s circumstances. He writes,

The multiplicity of these kinds of being-in can be indicated by the following examples: to have to do with something, to produce, order and take care of something, to use something, to give something up and let it get lost, to undertake, to accomplish, to find out, to ask about, to observe, to speak about, to determine…. \(^{176}\)

Art then may be understood as an expression of care. In the case of EXPORT’s performance, she speaks about the inequality of gender and undertakes the project of feminism.

EXPORT identifies as a feminist and her art practice must be considered in the context of late 1960s feminism. Amelia Jones, in an essay on EXPORT clarifies feminism as,

…The activist, coalitional, and theoretically informed set of debates, political actions and modes of cultural production that have promoted a critical approach to understanding sexed/gendered subjectivity since the Second World War. \(^{177}\)

EXPORT ‘s staging of her body in the Munich theater\(^{178}\) assumes an activist position of critique with regard to the cultural production of pornography. EXPORT’s strategy to address this particular social injustice is to turn the performance of gender into a mirror, one in which the alarmed theatregoers may recognize their own enactment of power (collusion
with the pornographic cinema) at the same time they understand their inherent powerlessness (EXPORT’s confrontational performance). One way of considering her artwork is as dialectic of art and activism that becomes the generosity Nancy asserts as love.

***

There is a second part to EXPORT’s performance that takes her activism and love in art further afield. A year later in Vienna, her friend and photographer Peter Hassmann shot the iconic black and white photographs, entitled Aktionshose: Genitalpanik (Action Pants: Genital Panic).

[Figure 1.7] In these photographs, a young EXPORT sits on a chair, striking a defiant glare, wearing a black leather jacket and jeans with a cut-away crotch, holding a rifle. Barefoot with her hair wildly teased; her legs are spread, exposing pubic hair and labia that are centered in the middle of the photo’s composition. These photographs were subsequently screen-printed onto flyers, which were posted in public spaces and in the street.

EXPORT’s work was originally presented in the art cinema as performance, re-presented in a photograph, and then re-re-presented as a placard for mass viewing. Unlike De Robertis’ video, EXPORT’s ancillary photographs and posters are not documents of the actual event since they were created a year after the performance. Instead they act as both
independent images and mediatory artworks, spotlighting and at the same time criticizing the
fetishistic gaze of disseminated images. Jones writes that in the 1960s the
photographic/cinematic provocation of female genitalia had the expressive power to dislocate
the organization of fetishism. Discussing *Genital Panic*, Jones explains, “EXPORT’s
project was to turn fetishism violently around, to enact the female body as a site of agency
and potential violence.”

By using a photograph of a staged representation of blatant power and sexuality,
EXPORT calls into question the expectation of the fetishizing gaze, and prompts viewers to
realize that newer standards of looking, thinking—and loving—are possible. For example,
EXPORT’s performance demonstrates that the vagina is not a lack. Freud describes female
pudenda as a deficit in his theory of the castration complex wherein young boys learn as a
result of punishment to perceive female genitalia as castrated penises. Yet an authentic lack
is a privation of something that was possessed at some point, something that has been
removed from someone’s grasp. EXPORT’s work blatantly reveals the truth: *that in the
female body no such lack exists*. As Jones puts it, “Exacerbating its threat to the male psyche,
EXPORT’s cunt refuses lack and refuses to congeal as a fetish.”

*Aktionshose: Genitalpanik* strikes me as still relevant today in a culture that persists in fetishizing
the female body. The artists discussed in this chapter—EXPORT, de Robertis and Sprinkle—
strip away assumptions about what art should be and how the female anatomy is. By taking
responsibility and risks with their bodies they show care of being-in-the-world and offer a
connection of love for viewers. Art based in protest is not just a form of resistance it is also
an expression of affirmation of love in the way it expresses respect for human dignity and anticipates a change towards a more equitable world.\textsuperscript{183}

Confrontations with the labial-vaginal as artistic subject matter or subtext are common in art history. Western art textbooks typically commence with images of female statuettes sporting emphatic vulvas from the Upper Paleolithic period. Within the last fifty years, artists like Thomas and de Robertis snatch those images from a subtext of a patriarchal agenda. To overcome patriarchal notions of transcendence like the Freudian lack, these artists “embrac[e] immanence”\textsuperscript{184} by doggedly negating the long-standing image of the \textit{Venus pudica},\textsuperscript{185} an image created and sustained by patriarchal epistemes.\textsuperscript{186} This is certainly demonstrated in de Robertis’ performance emphasizing her specific vaginal opening, and statement that stresses what Courbet\textsuperscript{187} did not show: the “hole,” the “eye,” the “origin of the origin.” Artists thereby raise the question of what Judith Butler calls the “unrepresentable absence.”\textsuperscript{188}

The performances by EXPORT, Sprinkle and deRobertis, and the art objects of Oppenheim and Thomas, are intended to be an edifying experience, or at least a critical one, that communicate potent messages about reality and fantasy as objects of the gaze. Their straightforward exhibitionism paradoxically negates a kind of gratification that is generally found by viewers in an X-rated cinema, a museum or an art gallery—spaces that exhibit suggestive images of nude bodies. These artists seem to be latter-day \textit{sheela na gigs}\textsuperscript{189} in which “the body is not only historical idea, but a set of possibilities to be continually realized.”\textsuperscript{190}
Although the making of images and the act of looking are part and parcel to art, love in art is not something represented; it is not in the compendium of the image-repertoire. This is because love in art is an action on behalf of viewer and artist. Love found in art is a movement in thinking. The primary movement deployed in love in art is asking questions that arise within the nexus of art, artist and viewer in which cognitive boundaries are expanded. The paradox is that these questions do not require answers.

The perception of loss is situated in both primordial myths about human origins and psychoanalytical theory. Yet love generated by artists in their work is not made in a space of deficit, desire or drive, nor in a space of retribution. Artists create in a place of thriving and thinking that is shared with viewers (or reviewers) who in turn thrive by thinking about the artwork. The sharing of love between artist, artwork and viewer takes place in the between, an energizing unfinalisable transitional space. The between is pure potential that offers a possibility for love.

While humans are hardwired to love both emotionally and physically, love in art is not fastened to any biological mechanisms. The brain plays a physical role in that its processes in the neocortex enable us to think love; however, love in art is not necessarily rooted in the body; it stakes no claim on philosophy or the psyche. The love located in art is not about struggle, empathy, hierarchy or equivalence but connection.

In conventional love we are connected to others or things in which we find pleasure, security and consolation, but love in art is not solace. Art can disturb the status quo. Sometimes it deploys aggression as a weapon of social change. It may intend to provoke anxiety about what it is to be human. Yet at the same time artists demonstrate deep care and
concern within their own subjecthood and for the world. This care and concern is expressed in taking on responsibility for what is, Dasein fulfilling its own possibilities for authentic being. Care is contained in the infinite generosity offered on behalf of artist and viewer. Love in art is merely possibility; it is set apart from all conventional notions of love in that it cannot be counted and it cannot be counted on. Yet it still counts.
Chapter Two

Intermedius

What lends possibility to the role of the between of love in art? To review the concept, the between is an ontological space-time which “hosts” the helical movement of thinking that occurs when a viewer encounters a work of art or interacts directly with an artist in performance. This space—intermedius in Latin—opens up when the viewer begins to wonder, to silently pose questions with regard to it. The between is akin to the qi in Daoist thought whereby the empty space in a work of art—a formless and open-ended interval—holds an enlivening quality. As a transitional space of potential, the between can also be compared to Heidegger’s concept of “clearing.” Clearing is an openness or receptiveness to truth in which something is revealed.

What does Plato’s Symposium—the originary code of love—disclose to us about love and how does it reconcile with love in art? In the first segment of this chapter titled “middle ground” I turn to the Symposium. The focus is on the part concerning Socrates’ relationship with his teacher Diotima, which he explains to his interlocutors by relating a dialogue with her that illustrates the foundations of love. Diotima stresses to Socrates how the intermediate position is the most important aspect of thinking about love. The notion of the between arises multiple times in her explanation. How does this apply to works of art? Using a short film made in 2003 I explore how the between as a component of love in art is manifested.

Diotima further describes the iconic ladder of love in this section of Symposium. The metaphor of the ladder is demonstrative of love’s hierarchical schema in Plato’s theory of
Forms in which the ascent concerns a mastery of love. I compare it with Martin Puryear’s sculpture *Ladder for Booker T. Washington* (1996) as a ladder better suited as visual metaphor for the actuality of love in which skill and control are impossible.

Does the love found in art resemble *philia*, the category of love found in friendship? The film *five deep breaths*¹⁹¹ tells the story of two friends. Aristotle wrote extensively about friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics*;¹⁹² he saw perfect *philia* as an expression of the good. I discuss his ideas to consider how it relates but also contrasts with love in art, which—perhaps un-intuitively—holds no elements of virtue.

The second part of this chapter—“love rules”—considers Doris Salcedo’s monumental 2007 installation at the Tate Modern titled *Shibboleth*. This artwork raises questions concerning the obligation of a subject towards the other by presenting as metaphor a cracked floor that serves to reveal racial and ethnic contempt within a community that fears immigrants and racial diversity. How does this artwork serve an opportunity for the love found in art? In what way does *Shibboleth* offer meaning to the viewer? One way to think about meaning comes from a definition by Heidegger.

As a work of art that calls for ethical contemplation with regard to the other, *Shibboleth* addresses the more open-ended category of conventional love: *agape*, an unconditional love of the other. This particular love stems from Western rules located in ancient scriptures mandated by God that persist today in cultural memory and religious doctrine. I take a closer look at what these early religious doctrines have to say. I then contrast these ideas to Sigmund Freud’s more cynical or rational notions on loving the other outside of any faith-based construct.
In addition to a closer consideration of the between, this chapter unpacks works of art not only to argue what I call love in art, but also to examine long-held notions of love in terms of philosophy, history and religion. How do these align with or stack up against a theory of love in art?

**Middle ground**

In *Symposium* after Aristophanes’ speech, Agathon the playwright—whose latest accomplishment is being celebrated at the drinking party—chimes in with his interpretation on love. He portrays the god of Love in a grandiose and eloquent fashion, describing him as the happiest, gentlest, youngest, most beautiful and delicate god of all. Socrates notes the errors in his speech and in turn questions Agathon, deploying his usual disciplined manner of getting to the heart of these problematic assertions. His verbal interrogation results in Agathon’s rueful admission that he doesn’t know much about love at all. This disclosure leads Socrates to lay the ground for his relationship with Diotima,

Now I’ll let you go. I shall try to go through for you the speech about Love I once heard from a woman of Mantinea, Diotima—a woman who was wise about many things besides this: once she even put off the plague for ten years by telling the Athenians what sacrifices to make. She is the one who taught me the art of love, and I shall go through her speech as best I can on my own…

Socrates then recalls how Diotima cross-examined him about love. And in this elenchus, Socrates—like Agathon—comes to admit he is largely ignorant about Love.

There are a number of ideas put forth in Socrates’ recounting of his encounter with Diotima. Rather than the rhetorical superlatives of love’s qualities as described by Agathon
such as beauty and goodness, she emphasizes how correct judgment reflects an “in between” position,

“…Do you really think that, if a thing is not beautiful it has to be ugly?”

“I certainly do.”

“And if a thing’s not wise, it’s ignorant? Or haven’t you found out yet that there is something between wisdom and ignorance?”

“What’s that?”

“It’s judging things correctly without being able to give a reason. Surely you see that this is not the same as knowing—for how can knowledge be unreasoning? And it’s not ignorance either—for how could what hits the truth be ignorance? Correct judgment, of course, has this character: it is in between understanding and ignorance.”

“True,” said I, “as you say.”

“Then don’t force whatever is not beautiful to be ugly, nor whatever is not good to be bad. It’s the same with Love: when you agree he is neither good nor beautiful, you will not need think he is ugly and bad; he could be something in between,” she said.196

Diotima furthers her argument with the assertion that rather than a god, Love is a spirit, in between mortal and immortal. These spirits (of which Love is one) serve the purpose of go-betweens, running to and fro between gods and mortals. Diotima clarifies, “Being in the middle of the two, they round out the whole and bind fast the all to all.”197 In this way love is an incessant movement that is not anchored in any place.

The condition of being in the middle is commensurate with my thesis of the between in considering love in viewing a work of art. It may be said that to experience a work of art is in a way to judge it. But, unlike Diotima’s concern with “correct judgment” it does not always result in a reasoning or conclusion; rather it is between understanding and
incomprehension. As a result it prompts thinking and questions that expand cognitive borders for the viewer. The enlargement manifests in a movement akin to Diotima’s to and fro. A connection is made, and sometimes a rupture—a punctum—one that is open-ended. Love in art is something always between.

***

Socrates asks Diotima about the parentage of Love, “Who are his mother and father?” She explains that Love was conceived at a celebration for Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Love’s father is the god of invention, Poros (Resource), who was a drunken party guest that fell asleep in Zeus’ garden. Penia (Poverty) hatched a plan to lay with Poros as part of a strategy to relieve her own constant need. She subsequently became pregnant with Love. Since Love was conceived on Aphrodite’s birthday, he became her companion and helpmate. Socrates quotes Diotima,

“As the son of Poros and Penia, his lot in life is to be like theirs. In the first place he is always poor, and he’s far from being delicate and beautiful (as ordinary people think he is); instead, he is tough and shrunken and shoeless and homeless, always lying on the dirt without a bed, sleeping at people’s doorsteps and in roadsides under the sky, having his mother’s nature, always living with Need. But on his father’s side he is a schemer after the beautiful and the good; he is brave, impetuous, and intense, an awesome hunter, always weaving snares, resourceful in his pursuit of intelligence, a lover of wisdom through all his life; a genius with enchantments, potions, and clever pleadings.

He is by nature neither immortal nor mortal. But now he springs to life when he gets his way; now he dies—all in the very same day. Because he is his father’s son, however, he keeps coming back to life, but then the resources he acquires always slip away, and for this reason Love is never completely without resources, nor is he ever rich.

He is between wisdom and ignorance as well…"
There are a few things that are remarkable in Diotima’s description of Love’s lineage. First is the notion of poverty. To be poor is to have few material possessions and inadequate nourishment; the indigent subject is chronically disadvantaged in the physical ease of living. Love then is needy, displaced, in a state of chronic deprivation, and never has enough of anything. Yet in spite of this hardship Love is creative, able to strategize and able to procure the least of some things to get by; Love thinks things through. By way of example, Nancy states, “… ‘thinking is love’ is a difficult, severe thought that promises rigor rather than effusion.” Love does this by allowing for all of its possibilities and contradictions.

Diotima doesn’t specifically state this, but I imagine Love’s state of managing poverty is through a relentless pursuit of understanding based on formulating questions. To clarify, the act of understanding is defined as a process by which we come to know something. Certainly Socrates mastered this tactic. To ask questions, there are connections that must be made between ideas and observation. Connections come about in the constant activity of love. In Diotima’s telling Love operates in the between by going to and fro, always in movement; even the finality of death is overcome through resurrection. This is a situation of being open-ended.

There is an important correspondence between the primordial tale of Aristophanes and Diotima’s myth: love is not permanent. Love exists in a middle ground that is ceaselessly shifting. It may come, but is not anything to depend on; and when it does show up it is unstable and fugitive. It cannot be happily-ever-after yet it has a potential for joy as well as the prospect of sorrow. All is temporary. While the image-repertoire of love tends toward an
ideal—a state of perfection—love is better described as a flux between a number of states: the flawless character of a god, utter benevolence, pleasure, discomfort, our worst nightmare and our cruelest enemy.

All of this: thinking, wondering, impermanence, myriad feelings, temporality, making connections, flux, potential and open-endedness are hallmarks of my claim for the love found in art.

***

The film short five deep breaths (2003) directed by Seith Mann is an archetypal loss of innocence story; it is a fictional drama that takes place in an unnamed historically black college in North Carolina. The narrative focuses on the close friendship between high school buddies who become college roommates Banny (the protagonist) [Figure 2.0] and Mark. The two are celebrating their impending graduation when they learn about a violent assault on their mutual friend Chastity (an art student) by her boyfriend Kwesi.

To Banny’s surprise, Mark’s reaction to the news is to aggressively seek retaliation; he subsequently plans an attack on Kwesi, whom neither man knows well. Banny takes on the voice of reason arguing that the only appropriate thing to do is make sure Chastity is safe;
by getting otherwise physically involved is overstepping ethical boundaries. Banny’s objection includes the sober awareness that Kwesi has a gun and that someone may die if more aggressive actions are taken.

Still Mark is relentless in his plan. In spite of his better judgment, Banny finally agrees to help Mark; he feels strong loyalty to his best friend. A student group gathers to execute vigilante justice with makeshift weapons; they eventually locate and confront Kwesi in the basement of the college library. In an unexpected plot twist Mark balks at the last minute, and insists that Banny also abandon the plan. Taken aback by Mark’s change of heart, but at this point committed, Banny joins the group. A tense faceoff ensues and at one point Kwesi aims a gun at Banny’s head. During an intense exchange, Banny realizes that Mark is in a covert sexual relationship with Chastity. When a friend convinces Kwesi to put down the gun, the group quickly disperses. At the top of the stairs Banny confronts Mark who is waiting there,

Banny: You’re fucking Chas.
Mark: No, it’s not like that.

Mark hangs his head while Banny stares at him intently.

Mark: Look, I…I didn’t want you to think that… she was…this wasn’t the way it was supposed to be. I tried to stop you.206

Banny looks for a long moment at Mark then walks away. The friendship is over; Mark has betrayed the friendship with a lie—a deception that almost got him killed.
If amenable, the viewer enjoins the between while watching the story unfold and thinking about the characters. The unraveling of a friendship is at the heart of the narrative in *five deep breaths* and questions about relationships arise. For example, what is the reason for Mark’s vehement insistence on justice for Chastity? Why does Banny abandon his reasonable argument with Mark regarding a confrontation with Kwesi? What is the unexplained cause for the breakdown of communication between these good friends? The film is quick-paced and fraught with a tension that builds to the sustained moment of physical violence: the gun at Banny’s head. This is followed by the psychological “shooting” in the altercation of the two men at the top of the stairs. The latter is the *punctum* of the film; the prick of feeling as betrayal irreconcilably severs the two men. The viewer realizes that the feared death of a character is actually the demise of friendship.

A hallmark of the between is asking questions that arise from a middle ground of understanding and incomprehension. The film is in constant motion: the young men’s bodies and their gazes, the back and forth of their clipped dialogue, the reversals of expectation and plot; in synchronicity the viewer enjoins the action with the movement of thinking, an incessant to and fro of wondering. To reiterate Diotima, “But now he springs to life when he gets his way; now he dies—all in the very same day.” Resurrection is a metaphor in the film with the storyline reversals that speak to an aspect of ontological unpredictability as denoted by Heidegger’s thrownness. Every moment *Dasein* takes something away from the subject and delivers something else. At the end of the film new questions that move beyond the narrative take shape for the viewer: How do we understand the intersection of friendship and
subjectivity? What does it mean to be a friend? What is it we desire from friends? The love found in art offers the viewer a way to think about what and who we are.

*Five deep breaths* is a film about love, specifically the love found in friendship—what the ancient Greeks called *philia*. Aristotle wrote extensively about *philia*.²⁰⁷ He came to consider love in a grounded way compared with his teacher Plato. He departed from his teacher’s theory of Forms,²⁰⁸ which is emphasized in *Symposium* with the conclusion of Diotima’s dialogue with Socrates. Here she addresses the metaphysical goals of love at the highest level—its perfect apex,

“...If once you see that, it won’t occur to you to measure beauty by gold or clothing or beautiful boys and youths—who, if you see them now strike you out of your senses, and make you, you and many others, eager to be with the boys you love and look at them forever, if there were any way to do that, forgetting food and drink, everything but looking at them and being with them. But how would it be, in our view,” she said, “if someone got to see the Beautiful itself, absolute, pure, unmixed, not polluted by human flesh or colors or any other great nonsense of mortality, but if he could see the divine Beauty itself in its one form?”²⁰⁹

Beauty and love are entwined. To put this in Platonic context, Diotima describes the appreciation of beauty as a metaphorical ascension up a ladder: from the bottom rung of loving beauty (that is to desire boys,²¹⁰ wonderful sex, etc.) to the top: *loving Beauty*—the ideal of Beauty, which transcends the corporeal. In other words, beauty begins in the admiration and desire for a specific body, then praise for other bodies, eventually recognizing beauty existing outside the body in objects of knowledge, and ultimately understanding how to *be* beautiful.²¹¹ To actually be beautiful is the highest manifestation of what is beautiful. She explains that to “see” this final highest form of Beauty—to have insight into it—is to
give birth to virtue, and that this virtue propels the gods to love us, the only chance we have of being immortal.\textsuperscript{212} Since Plato is the author of \textit{Symposium}, his theory of Forms is the backbone of the dialogue, with the Form of Beauty as the highest in the hierarchy of love’s objectives. In this analogy beauty has the quality of a divine nature because it transports the lover to a mystic realm: untouchable, invisible, eternal and ineffable.

\textit{Symposium} is a fantastic and “generous”\textsuperscript{213} story that explains love, yet it is also problematic. Foremost because it espouses “a mastery over love”\textsuperscript{214} a situation that is realistically an impossible accomplishment. This assertion requires absolute command over a phenomenon that is hardly controllable by the self, since nothing about the subject—not feelings, understanding nor perception—is perfectly actualized. \textit{The love found in art claims no such mastery. Also, love in art is neither incompetent nor impotent}. Love in art is not slave or master. It is—as Diotima describes the spirit of Love—somewhere in the \textit{intermedius}, rounding out the whole and binding fast to the all.

Plato’s remark (via Diotima) regarding “the great nonsense of mortality” (quoted previously) dismisses the corporeal as a critical component of living. What do we have if not our very embodiment of self? Everything we know is filtered through the body; our body is designed to do just that. Life and everything contained in it, including love, is embodied and in constant physical and psychological adaptation to ever-changing circumstances. Plato avoids speaking about much of the experience we have of a being-in-the-world where everything changes all the time, including whom we love and why, or who loves us. Contrary to Plato’s unchanging view from the top of his ladder, \textit{the love found in art exults in difference}. 
Plato sets up an ideal that the goal of loving is concerned with beauty; that this climb is a linear trajectory, a straight route upward to a higher plane. The metaphor of the ladder is one of hierarchy to ultimate virtue with the summit fixed in an unchanging revelation. The notion of virtue is important in *Symposium*, but is the perfectly good fully relevant to love as an endpoint?

The metaphorical ladder in *Symposium* brings to mind a sculpture by Martin Puryear,\(^{215}\) titled *Ladder for Booker T. Washington*.\[Figure 2.1\] It is the form of an impossible ladder carved of wood; while it is thirty-six feet high it could not hold the weight of anything heavier than a kitten. It is not perfectly straight and parallel like a utilitarian ladder, but warped and tenuous. Since the bottom is physically wider than the top, it gives the viewer a misconception of extending beyond thirty-six feet in the same way Renaissance paintings create the illusion of deep space using perspectival techniques. Puryear states that the work was intended to have this “forced perspective.”\(^{216}\) In offering his audience an artificial standpoint, Puryear creates an ambiguity as to whether the ladder is false consciousness or concrete entity; this uncertainty places the viewer in a situation of wonder, of being between. Plato’s allegorical ladder is similar in that while it is a beautiful image of love’s aspirations, it is also
impractical as in the example Puryear’s *Ladder*. Both are devices employed to manipulate the viewer’s perspective.

Perhaps through loving, the discovery of the beautiful self—if that exists—is more characteristic of traversing a minefield rather than climbing a ladder. Let us imagine Puryear’s *Ladder* as the one Plato describes. Is it possible for the beautiful self to be a permanently static state? Once this beauty is achieved how is it maintained? (In Puryear’s version of the ladder the top is very narrow with not much room for movement.) Once ascended, can the self opt to descend? In other words, can immoral choices still be made? Does the subject continue to expand insights into the self or is the top of the ladder the endpoint of virtuous expansion?

Or—perhaps there is no goal of loving and beauty has nothing to do with it. Can love alone simply be without the qualifier of a beautiful self? In that case love may have nothing whatsoever to do with virtue. *Love in art is like this: it disregards matters of virtue. The love found in art is neither virtuous nor vicious.* It stands apart from conventional love; it doesn’t even merely stand because that implies stasis. Love in art is always in motion: walking, running, climbing, crawling, falling, sinking, swimming, flying, crashing, resurrecting. If and when love does stand it is at the least shifting its weight from leg to leg in *contrapposto*.

Virtue plays a role in *five deep breaths* with the abrupt loss of friendship between Banny and Mark. It is based on the virtuous standards that Banny held for Mark, and subsequently the lack of goodness demonstrated by Mark’s deceit. Yet equally as remarkable is that Banny abandoned his own code of honor by joining the avenging group that sought punishment for Kwesi’s assault on Chastity. He knew from the beginning it was not the
ethical thing to do. Alongside friendship, the examination of moral judgment is a significant idea of the film. Yet while the ancient theme of virtue continues to be located in works of contemporary art, love in art, as I am defining it, is not a narrative or a symbol. It may be closer to Heidegger’s notion of truth. His truth does not align with scientific knowing for research, or falseness as we think of it, but possibility.

Heidegger claims that truth is set to work in a work of art. How so? He used the example of Van Gogh’s still life of well-worn boots. It is not the painting by itself—a faithful representation of boots—that is about truth (mimesis) but the experience of the viewer with the artwork upon thinking about the boots. Heidegger describes his thoughts about the painting and what the boots may represent including the owner wearing them to work in a field, standing and hiking in them over damp earth, their eroded interior caused by extended use, the lonely walk home in the evening, the thought of having enough bread to eat. Heidegger has imagined another’s world based on his encounter with the painting; a meeting that conveys him out of his own everydayness. It decenters his subjectivity. This transport of imagining is commensurate with my argument for the between. In the film five deep breaths something similar happens because the love found in art is not confined to paintings or objects per se. The film decenters us from our own subjectivity into the actuality of Banny and Mark’s world, one that is falling apart and reconfiguring itself. This is not about beauty or pleasure, but something between them.

A key feature of friendship is how it contributes to mutually improving a good person’s actions. This is because it is not as much a shared activity as a collaborative one. For Aristotle the good is a cooperative activity; the pleasure in acting together
towards a shared goal brings the lasting happiness found in authentic friendship. Banny and Mark may have shared some memorable times, but they were not ultimately participating in a common cause for the good. In this way *five deep breaths* is a discourse on love that speaks to our “communal indigence” and the familiar possibilities inherent to it. The viewer notes conditions of neglect, faith, denial and disorder all of which—as Nancy would say—are possible and necessary in the immanent situation of traversing the other.

We also traverse works of art, which are there for the crossing. A way to consider the between is as a kind of collaboration between artist, artwork and viewer. Its collaborative aspect is that (for the most part) this intersection is voluntary. To make a work of art or to think about the art object (or performance) is based on *willingness* and sincerity to do so on behalf of the viewer.

***

In Platonic theory, the truest beauty is fixed and unchanging. The theory of Forms is like faith in a god; we cannot see it and it cannot be proven but we are informed it is perfect and Plato urges us to believe that is so. Aristotle saw the gods as models for human life but in his mature writings he placed emphasis on the empirical in philosophy rather than pure theory. In other words, what we understand about beauty or love can only come from our observation and experience, not from a universal concept.

As noted in *Symposium*, there is *erôs* in the sense of love of the body and there is also a greater broader desire for wisdom and beauty. This desire is not applicable to love in art since it is situated outside of virtue or the sensuous. Aristotle on the other hand was more
pragmatic in thinking about how life can be good and society better in terms of love. Like Plato, his is an ethical love but Aristotle emphasizes friendship (philia) rather than erôs. Nicomachean Ethics locates the virtuous dimensions of love found in various kinds of friendships all of which contribute to a satisfying life; he didn’t see how living without any friendships would create happiness. And he thought it good to have many friends. Aristotle describes three categories of philia: friendship based on utility, friendship grounded in pleasure, and—the most important of all—friendship centered on character. Aristotle surmised that to choose to embrace every aspect of a friend is the most authentic and most enduring type of friendship; it is friendship for the good of the two who share it. This wholesome relationship develops as friends become well acquainted. He states,

…Such friendship requires time and familiarity; as the proverb says, men cannot know each other till they have ‘eaten salt together’; nor can they admit each other to friendship or be friends till each has been found loveable and been trusted by each. Those that quickly show the marks of friendship to each other wish to be friends, but are not friends unless they both are loveable and know the fact; for a wish for friendship may rise quickly, but friendship does not.

In other words, authentic friendship is predicated on spending time together, trust and mutual goodwill. Importantly, Aristotle points out that friendship is the result of a subject’s character whereas love (erôs) is an “excess of feeling.” By asserting love as feeling, he quite radically disconnects from Plato’s theory of love as something ineffable. Because we are embodied beings, feelings are rooted in our corporeal existence.

Germane to Aristotle’s argument is that philia is connected to justice. This is because in all of its natures friendship is about how we treat the other in each and every manner of
interaction. This not only concerns relationships of utility and pleasure but marriage, family, neighbors and the greater community—extending to government. In this way Aristotle never ascends Plato’s ladder, but rather keeps his feet (and ours) firmly on horizontal terra firma. His love is an earthbound journey rather than a solo climb to a heavenly realm.

Compared with *Symposium*, the love defined and described by Aristotle eschews the gods completely and focuses on subjects as they are, devoid of punishments, promises and hopes that hinge on the heavenly. It is a matter of an actual loving of the whole versus Aristophanes’ “pursuit of wholeness.” In other words, love is not to be desperately sought and located, it is a matter of presence and duration. Love flourishes when the subject embraces the other fully by knowing them well over time. In Aristophanes’ telling, humans seek love from the other to relieve their pain or need; for Aristotle ideal friendship-love concerns only the other’s sake. Merging and possession are not goals of this love. And each subject is an independent whole, not a former half, or an incomplete.

Whereas the image-repertoire upholds the yearning of unconditional love *philia* is quite conditional. Simon May points out,

*Philia* is inescapably conditional on the excellences of character that we perceive in the other person. Since character is realized in concrete acts and desires over the course of a lived life, we love someone not just for dispositions that we detect in her but for how these dispositions are revealed, over time, in her actual life. Revealed in heroic actions or personal crises or pursuits like thinking, artistic creation and political leadership; and also revealed in ordinary everyday life; in eating, drinking, having sex, party-giving, even telling jokes—all of which can be pursued with varying degrees of excellence or baseness. 228
In other words, ideal friendship-love as character-based makes it a love that exists on and affirms the facets of the other’s nature as a whole.\(^{229}\)

Further contrast of Aristophanes’ tale of desire for completion demonstrates that for Aristotle love begins with the self, for the self. He argues that self-love is not an unwholesome character; it is not selfish.\(^{230}\) The subject wishes for the self the good, as they do for their friend. All the qualities a subject admires and seeks in the other are at home in the self; “…he is his own best friend and therefore ought to love himself best.”\(^{231}\) A component of self-love involves self-knowledge defined as a self-consciousness of one’s ethical excellence.\(^{232}\) The friend helps the other in their search for self-knowledge, which is a virtuous activity rather than a getting of some other benefit.\(^{233}\) Seen this way, the friend is another self in the sense of being a partner rather than a mirror.\(^{234}\)

Erotic flirtations aside, many of the friends gathered for the party in *Symposium* may be seen in just such an activity in their discourse on love. During a conversation with the late arrival of the inebriated party guest Alcibiades,\(^{235}\) Socrates makes a point to assert that to know the self is how we grow and flourish as beings.\(^{236}\)

I see some comparisons between Aristotle’s philosophy of friendship and love in art. Art—like friendship—also serves the subject to thrive and develop in *Dasein*. A subject first comes to locate love in an artwork via a willingness to engage with and spend time with it. In the manner of friendship, the subject may continue to engage with a work of art over time; this relationship is also a matter of presence and duration. Love in art—like friendship—has a contemplative aspect. If (or when) a connection with a work of art is made it is not based on a universal concept but on the subject’s experience with it and wonder about it. Love in
art is a kind of partnership or collaboration. Like friendship, art has a decentering effect since art shares itself, and invites sharing. Like friendship, this sharing may or may not result in self-knowledge or self-love.

How does friendship contrast with love in art? Love in art is not based in desire nor does it operate towards possession. While art contributes to a satisfying life, it is also capable of frustrating and disturbing. Love in art—like friendship—offers feeling such as happiness, but it can offer any kind of feeling including the feeling of deep dissatisfaction, distress or sorrow. When love in art does evoke feeling, it does not privilege it. In contrast to friendship, the love found in artwork cannot be held to any ethical standard because it does not concern virtue or justice. Unlike friendship, love in art is not preoccupied with wholeness since that is a concept that involves measure; love in art cannot be quantified.

***

With Aristotle love concerns an intact and vibrant life that is “at home in the world”\(^{237}\)—an “ontological rootedness”\(^{238}\) in an existence that is at the same time ontologically unpredictable. Through living we become aware that life changes all the time. Aristotle acknowledges that love with another may die without a chance of resurrection. Diotima asserts the homeless quality of love in her speech but this is not quite accurate. We can—ideally and at the very least—locate love in two sites: the self and a work of art. It does seem as if love may act homeless, but it always has a home. Love may reside there with the self-insights we accumulate and the relationships we develop with others, with the questions that emerge in the between when contemplating a work of art. I am not proposing that self-love or love in art is constant, because these loves are prone to the same instabilities as
everything else. At any rate, Aristotle suggests that ideally philia may develop and last for a lifetime, but that is not common; more typically love is altered or simply disappears. I suggest that the love in art takes on a similar characteristic.

The film *five deep breaths* offers the viewer a perspective for love in art. The plausible situation of Banny and Mark demonstrate how even the seemingly strongest friendship comes crashing down for reasons that involve the other, the self or both. It invites the viewer to enter a world of two young friends, in which we are temporarily situated between their world and our own. To dwell in this space is to think and raise questions about our own life and our own neglects, denials and disorders with others and subsequently about the responsibility we have in communal indigence. In other words, what it means to be.

**Love rules**

We cannot and will not discover love in most of the artworks that we come across. We cannot and will not be friends with most others who traverse our path. A recent work of art that addresses the crossing of other is Doris Salcedo’s Shibboleth, [Figure 2.2] which was a site-specific installation commissioned for the monumental space of the Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall in London. In situ for six months between 2007 and 2008, it consisted of a poured cement floor with fissures that meandered the length of the 458-foot space. The depths of the fissures varied but were as much as three feet deep.
Observing museum visitors at the Tate walk around in awe of the grandeur they projected onto the immense loftiness of Turbine Hall’s Modernist industrial space originally constructed as a power plant, inspired the conception of the work. Salcedo asserts that such an industrial space did not deserve this sense of wonder; it did not compare to the outstanding architectural achievements of Hagia Sophia or the Egyptian pyramids. She intended to create another perspective with *Shibboleth*, a word that references an ancient Hebrew term that served as a test of pronunciation to identify foreigners. By reconfiguring the Tate Modern’s floor, Turbine Hall became an unsafe place to walk around without caution; one needed to look down instead of gazing up at the lofty heights of the structure. By doing so Salcedo literally placed all visitors to the Tate Modern in physical jeopardy: a similar danger experienced by non-whites and immigrants as they cross borders into white Euro-centric culture. The multitude of crevasses in the Tate floor forced visitors to confront the boundaries of the abyss, to contemplate the crack in civilization between people that is racial and ethnic contempt. She states,

I wanted to inscribe in this modernist, rationalist building an image that was somehow chaotic, that marked a negative space, because I believe there is a bottomless gap that divides humanity from inhumanity, or whites from nonwhites. I wanted to address that gap, which I thought was mainly perceived in the history of modernity.
We may think of Salcedo as an example of a contemporary artist who provides horizontal access to love in art by laying down Plato’s metaphorical ladder. In redirecting the viewer’s gaze, she reminds us that in post-postmodernism, nothing and no one assumes a place of privilege. Love in art also assumes no such privilege.

How does Shibboleth provide its audience with an opportunity for the love found in art? The viewer who wandered across the floor of the Tate was forced to be concerned about their footsteps; in doing so they had a heightened and embodied awareness of how the ordinary everyday act of walking became a precarious situation. The artist imposed on the viewer a fear of something specific. At the same time Shibboleth holds an aesthetic of anxiety; since love in art is not (necessarily) concerned with security or sanctuary; Salcedo commands the viewer’s attention by deploying anxiety. This is not a particular anxiety, but one that is experienced when the subject becomes conscious of a mood of meaninglessness. The reader recalls that anxiety—as a calculated part of an artwork’s design—is a manifestation of love in art. Salcedo’s use of anxiety calls to the freedom toward a more authentic self. The visitor who undertakes to walk amongst the floor gaps is being-with and thinking-with, she is literally between safety and vulnerability. By being between she is present amidst the absences of ground.

How does Shibboleth concern love for the other who is rejected from community—the other who is mistrusted, feared or loathed in their difference? How does Shibboleth as a work of art offer love? Heidegger states, “In the projecting of understanding, beings are disclosed in their possibility.” The fractures in the floor, which recall the abyss, become a metaphor for the inestimable questions about the meaning of the other. The fissures are an
imposed negative space that calls for possibility. By asking questions the viewer opens to possibility for new ideas, and new awareness that includes consideration for the actuality of the other, who—in spite of differences—always is being-with.

Salcedo offers the viewer a potential for discovering meaning; Heidegger defines meaning as an intelligibility of something that maintains itself. He elaborates,

Only Dasein “has” meaning in that the disclosedness of being-in-the-world can be “fulfilled” through the beings discoverable in it. Thus only Dasein can be meaningful or meaningless.

In terms of a work of art, the meaning of something emerges from the viewer’s ability to “read” the work of art, to interpret its structure within context. Shibboleth as a whole, includes its placement in Tate Modern, in a city with a disproportion of native Brits and immigrants at this time in the beginning of the 21st century, holds such articulacy for the viewer that seeks to discover meaning within Dasein—what it means to be in the world at that particular time and that particular place. It must be said though that Shibboleth as idea has a universal quality that would hold the same meaning if installed in any major city at this time in the world.

Occasionally it serves viewers well to take on knowledge that contributes to their experience of a work of art. For example, Salcedo’s title of her artwork at Tate Modern is a word that has a compelling background. The word “shibboleth” is rooted in an ancient Jewish biblical story whereby the pronunciation of the word determined who was part of a clan and who was the enemy. The subject who was unable to enunciate “shibboleth”
correctly at a military checkpoint was killed. In modern usage shibboleth refers to the concept that members of out-groups cannot grasp the meaning or significance of an in-group’s time period, culture or idioms. Salcedo’s installation of Shibboleth raises the question of ethical responsibility to the un-friends regarded as “others:” the dissimilar beings that are categorized as human but judged by unknowable strangeness. The skin is a different color and their words are not understandable, their beliefs, values and clothing unfamiliar. Or perhaps they do not conform to prescribed expectations of gender or sexuality; their presence seems suspicious marking them as outsiders at the least and dangerous at the most.

***

Thus far this chapter unpacks the role of early philosophical discourse in various aspects of love including the beauty achieved at the top of love’s metaphoric ladder and the ethical duty between friends (the film five deep breaths) as well as strangers (the installation Shibboleth). Yet even more deeply rooted in human history—long before Aristotle and Plato—is the concretized formality of archaic religious laws. While the Greek gods have disappeared, other gods tenaciously call for human devotion. The monotheistic God of the Abrahamic traditions has made demands on the faithful via mandates in ancient scriptures. These also contribute to the image-repertoire in works of religious art that represent the love of God for His creations. In the pantheon of pious art we see nearly countless images of Christ, prophets and saints being rewarded (or punished) for performing compassionate miracles and modeling loving behaviors meant as didactic for devoted onlookers.

The foundation of Western love arises from two divine laws located in the sacred Hebrew writing of the Torah. Devarim is the fifth book of the Torah, referred to as The Book
of Deuteronomy. Here the faithful are commanded to love God wholeheartedly and
indefatigably. Deuteronomy 6:5 states, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all
your soul and with all your strength.” Vayikra is the third book of the Torah referred to as
The Book of Leviticus; 19:18 essentially stating, “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge
against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.” The
command to “love your neighbor” is a religious obligation. With regard to the latter, May
writes, “Love, we see here, has ethical force as a relation to the source of our being.”247 In
other words, according to God—who created humanity—love is a moral duty.248

The question, “Who is the neighbor?” is answered in Christ’s parable of the Good
Samaritan.249 This accountability takes away any freedom of which person you love since
there can be no preference. Yet Nancy asserts the command for unconditional love of
neighbor as impossible. He points out that to love your enemy is a position of absurdity
because we must think of the other as a subject without properties.250 I understand Nancy to
mean that we cannot mark them with signifiers such as Muslim, pedophile, Republican, poor,
etc. Devoid of characteristics, the subject stands as merely human being. Impossible? Nancy
states, “The law of love is precisely no law.”251 This is because love is beyond any law. In
other words, while religion has commandments and civil life many rules, edicts by definition
contain boundaries whereas love cannot be contained; rather, “it is an openness that remains
open.”252 This seems to be demonstrated in Jesus’ parable about the Good Samaritan where
an enemy who was despised by custom was shown concern and tenderness. Yet being a god
does not presuppose kindly love. Even gods who make the rules do so in a rather hostile and
unloving way, such as in the case of Zeus, who retaliated on his subjects by cutting them in half.

In addition to an ethical responsibility we also see the establishment of a hierarchy of love in these long ago laws. In Deuteronomy the edict to love God above all marks His supreme and absolute Being. Yet in Leviticus the commandment to love your neighbor is horizontal since a neighbor holds no authority over you. So we have at the same time, a hierarchical and non-hierarchical model for love at the onset of Western history and religion.253

At the same time, the present day assertion that love is uncontained and not able to be legislated, presumes that its antithesis is also open. Therefore we might also say, “The law of hate is precisely no law.” Admittedly this is a more difficult concept because subjects tend to want to live in a world that is tolerant and devoid of the violence that often accompanies hatred of others.254 Yet we do live in just such a world and Salcedo’s artwork calls attention to this predicament. Her general oeuvre addresses the universal condition of the subject’s inhumanity to the other. A native of Columbia, she is based in the capital city of Bogotá, and has been witness to the longstanding violence of the drug wars in her country. Her work tends to be based on experiences of victims of violence and she expresses the effects of this hatred in highly symbolic representations. Visitors to the Tate Modern during the installation of Shibboleth were not only placed in physical jeopardy but also emotionally displaced at the same time. They are unable to walk with untroubled confidence on a ground that was rendered hostile. In this way, Salcedo literally and metaphorically created a space of between: between familiar and strange land, between safety and danger, between belonging
and alienation, between stability and chaos. For audience members that were receptive to thinking about the artist’s intention and iconography of the work, it likely raised questions about this time-space conundrum. One of those questions may be: what ethical implications exist for other and myself?

In her previously noted quote Salcedo mentions the intention of marking a negative space. It seems she meant the museum as a space of criticism as opposed to aesthetic pleasure. The cracks in the floor as they form negative spaces—as voids—become a “thinking out loud” for what is at stake for politically displaced subjects and their experiences of outsider-ness. Shibboleth metaphorically connects subjects and in this way becomes another example of love in art. It provokes discomfort, contemplation concerning experiences of the other, what it means to leave home and be a stranger in a new place. In this way, for some visitors to the Tate Modern it may have also elicited previously unconsidered concern, care or empathy for immigrants.

***

Around the second century BCE the Torah was translated from Hebrew into the common Greek language of the Mediterranean. The creation of this document is known as the Septuagint and was carried out by a team of Jewish scholars from the twelve tribes of ancient Israel at the behest of Egyptian pharaoh Ptolemy II Philadelphus, who was compiling a great library in Alexandria. This translation was the beginning of a “global dissemination of moral law.” The various Hebrew words for love in the Septuagint were translated into the Greek idiom agape, a term the early Christians adopted to express an absolute, creative and excessive love. St. Paul’s first Epistle to the Corinthians, employs agape, in which the
highest ranking among the virtues is claimed: “…And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” Christian theology holds that God the Father offered his son Jesus Christ to the world as the ultimate sacrificial expression of love. Christ’s crucifixion on the cross was intended as the salvation of mankind, which had been in jeopardy since the Original Sin of Adam and Eve. As a component of the Christian faith, \textit{agape} is a comprehensive fatherly love that God possesses for mankind, which as a consequence extends to a love of one’s fellow man that—unlike Aristotle’s perfect \textit{philia}—is unconditional. Moreover, \textit{agape} is considered a giving or charitable love, as opposed to the egocentric love of \textit{erôs}. For Christianity, \textit{agape} becomes the supreme virtue because its essence \textit{is} God. This is expressed in the words of St. John the Evangelist, “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” All beings and the measure of their actions have genesis in love. This is marked as the establishment of a new Western morality: love as the touchstone of all virtue in which humans can finally “possess the power of the gods.” Within this divine capacity, there lies an idea of an equality of mortal and God. This is echoed in Levinas who asserts that the face of the other is where we hear the Word of God.

***

Finally, we turn to the genesis of love in terms of its roots in faith and as interpreted by the modern thinker Sigmund Freud. As stated, the duties of Western love begin with divine laws first seen in Hebrew scripture even before the great ancient Greek philosophers. They are the commandments to love God and your neighbor. The latter is a central principle of Western ethics within community. To love your neighbor is—ideally—what the early Christians termed \textit{agape}. In its boundless nature \textit{agape} is paradoxically an unattainable type
of love because to love everyone is an unachievable task. Freud addresses this demand of society; in response to the commandment ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself’ he writes,

The element of truth behind all this, which people are so ready to disavow, is that men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on them, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and kill him.267

Freud asserts that the love commandment is not tenable because the human tendency for aggression will always contend with reason. In other words, Freud assigns hostility as a default human state of being. Although convinced of humanity’s innate aggression, he does admit, “It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness.”268 For Freud the occasional expression of agape is a trade-off for our need to feel security and happiness.

Freud sees religion as an illusion, yet for many individuals their religious faith is a source of happiness. According to Freud, the seeking of pleasure and joy along with the absence of pain is at the heart of human endeavor. He believes the pain of our relationships with others is the cause of most of our misery. At the same time he insists it is better to join forces in the human community rather than choose the option of isolating the self. “Then one is working with all for the good of all.”269 Freud’s assertion for the good here lines up with Aristotle’s ethical philosophy of friendship-love. And he seems to have art in mind when he
notes that the pleasure we experience in an imaginative work frees our mind from anxieties. Some artworks do that, such as Giotto’s *The Ascension of Saint John the Evangelist*, [Figure 5.0] which aims for a religious audience. Yet other works, such as Salcedo’s *Shibboleth* do not liberate apprehensions, but compel us to *think* and to love through the experience of anxiety, to think love and to ask questions, to provoke the *punctum*, to expand the self.

***

Questioning is at the heart of love in a work of art. Love manifests in the between—the *intermedius*—the space/time in which the viewer begins to wonder. The scheme of a between is mentioned a number of times by the character of Diotima in Plato’s *Symposium*; the first time when she points out that an intermediate locus must be assumed in truthful judgment by the subject. Since love in art is not necessarily a judgment, the between dances somewhere along the continuum of understanding and incredulity; however, the span is indefinitely open and without an absolute at either end. As Nancy claims, the thinking of love should not yield to restraint, not contain itself to a certain kind of thinking. It reaches toward, but it does not reach. Art in love is always within reach, but reach as *extension*, movement, not destination.

Then, in a second mention of between-ness, Diotima tells of Love as spirit behaving as go-between for mortals and gods. This spirit is a fluttery force not anchored in any place, but fugitive, always-in movement, managing its immanent poverty through resourcefulness and creativity. If there is spirit in the love found in art, it is the dynamism of the cycle of resurrection and making connections in pursuit of understanding through asking questions.
Understanding as such is not based in the theoretical, but a process of coming to know.
Understanding is a condition of possibility, specifically the potential to disclose the being of *Dasein*, what it means to exist.\(^{273}\)

The willingness to think about a work of art is collaborative and cooperative, a giving of presence that offers itself to duration in the manner of loving a friend or adoring a Deity. Love has foundations in religion so its rubric arises from a relation with God.\(^{274}\) Yet love in art makes no claim for the Divine, religious laws, prayer, or scripture. Likewise, there are aspects of love in art that resemble friendship. Yet love in art has no claim for the friendly, companionship or the good.

The love in art does not privilege; it revels in difference and impermanence. It is not concerned with a beautiful body or a Beautiful Self but wonder about beautiful bodies and Beautiful Selves. It does not complete anything.\(^{275}\) There is no possession or desire yet all feeling is possible. It is not idealistic, nor heaven-bound, it exposes itself in the real-world experiences of the subject, their ontological unpredictability, thrownness in the mutability of *Dasein*. In its boundless generosity toward possibility, love in art climbs up or lays down metaphorical ladders or steps over or into cracks in the floor; it embraces or retreats from the other. Love in art is a crossing.
Chapter Three

Wonder-full

What is wonder? Why is wonder important to a theory of love in art? This chapter looks at the phenomenon of wonder, the starting point of thinking. Plato asserts wonder (thaumazein) as the beginning of philosophy; in a lecture series delivered at Notre Dame University in 1954, Arendt explicates on wonder and its meaning in early philosophy,

Thaumadzein, the wonder at that which is as it is, is according to Plato a pathos, something which is endured and as such quite distinct from doxadzein, from forming an opinion about something. The wonder that man endures or which befalls him cannot be related in words because it is too general for words. Plato must have first encountered it in those frequently reported traumatic states in which Socrates would suddenly, as though seized by a rapture, fall into complete motionlessness, just staring without seeing or hearing anything. That this speechless wonder is the beginning of philosophy became axiomatic for both Plato and Aristotle. And it is this relation to a concrete and unique experience which marked off the Socratic school from all former philosophies. To Aristotle, no less than to Plato, ultimate truth is beyond words.

Most important in Arendt’s quote is the idea of speechlessness—the wonder that renders the subject without words to express their thinking. Wonder is an experience possible in a work of art for the beholder. This occurs when mere words cannot explain the effect of the artwork on the subject in the moment of being-with and thinking-with.

Love in art is quite apart from any information obtained or opinions formed about a work of art. The starting point of love in art is thinking. Thinking is to silently question everything, beyond that initial experience of wonder. Thinking is the most essential of a subject’s actions; it opens the eyes of the mind. Arendt employs the original term “thought-
thing” to refer to a work of art. This expression stresses that thinking is essential to the experience of art. She is referring to the consideration of the subject contemplating a work of art, but the idea is equally applicable to the artist, whose thinking-with, questioning-with allows the artwork to come forth into the world. As wonder is beginning (archē) to philosophy, the artist’s thinking is genesis for the work of art. How does wonder manifest as love in art? Thinking about art is a manifestation of love based in wonder. By way of art we arrive at wondering: curiosity, contemplation or interest. A viewer’s response to an artwork can be emphatically wonder-full, inciting astonishment or marvel. It may just as likely be confusing or banal. How the artist moves a viewer to wonder is on a spectrum of possibility. The illustrations in this chapter offer some of the possibilities—such as art that appears enigmatic, grotesque, transgressive, contradictory or familiar.

One of the ways wonder is deployed in art is through myth. What is myth? In the first section of this chapter titled “the aesthetics of myth,” I take a close look at Nancy’s definition of myth and ideas about the significance of mythos for the subject. For Nancy myth is the origin of human history, an act of sharing that imparts meaning to being. What is the relationship between art and myth? Myth and art are both disclosed as inventive and visionary expressions. Nancy claims that new myths are always in development. New art is emerging too; myth and art are living, impermanent, open-ended phenomena that create connection between subjects.

In the first half of the chapter I consider the deployment of myth by contemporary artists Mariko Mori and Wangechi Mutu; both create artworks that contribute to an ongoing experience of mythos that incites wonder. Mori’s art practice draws from primordial myths,
which reveal meanings within the subject’s relationship to the natural world. In that disclosure, Mori aims to foster wonder as well as profound connections between subjects and the cosmos, very much in the same manner as Nancy envisions the sharing of primeval myth; in contrast to the recitation of myth, Mori is utilizing cutting edge technologies.

The future is a ground for wonder. Mutu creates mythopoeic art that reflects on long-standing cultural mythologies in addition to an imminent world. The transgressive, fantastical and chimerical figures that populate Mutu’s oeuvre hybridize Bakhtin’s notions of the carnivalesque, African symbolism and cultural ideologies, as well as the current revolution of science and technology represented by cyborgs in the concepts of Donna Haraway and in the contemporary philosophy of Afrofuturist aesthetics.

While I have so far spent much of this paper emphasizing the role of the viewer in the love found in art, the second half of the chapter takes a closer look at the love in art that emerges from the artist and art practice. In the section “two-in-one” I focus on prolific artists Kay Walkingstick and Vivian Maier. Thinking is largely transparent in the work of Walkingstick, a living painter who writes and speaks extensively about her practice. On the other hand the issue of thinking is a mystery in the photography of Maier, who died in obscurity and left behind no extant writing about her work.

What is the relationship an artist has with their art? Is this liaison also a manifestation of love in art—of wonder? Walkingstick deploys wonder as love in art in a subtle, personal yet complex way; I frame her practice with Arendt’s ideas concerning the “two-in-one” of thinking. Plato called this *eme emautō*, which means between me and myself. Duality is in fact an important part of Walkingstick’s practice; it is evident in two ways: the quiet interior
dialogue with the self that brings the paintings forth and the diptych format of the works. What happens in an artist’s studio? Most viewers only see the result of a finished work of art; they are not normally aware of the cognitive and physical processes that comprise its creation. *The work and thinking that takes place in the artist’s studio space lays the groundwork for love in art.*

The idea of “two” comes up in a different perspective for Maier who was an unheard-of amateur photographer in the second half of the twentieth century. The tens of thousands of negatives found only after she died reveal an artist of astonishing skill. The notion of “two-in-one” applies to her double life: she worked as a nanny while discreetly taking pictures of her world as an amateur street photographer. These images conjure wonder on a number of levels, not the least is the question, *what was she thinking?* Maier left behind little or no documentation about her work so there will always be wonder about her photography. Does the lack of information about Maier inhibit the possibility for love in art in her practice? Does her work stand on its own for love to be found in her work?

The works of both Maier and Walkingstick point to a critical intersection of life and art in their practice and imagery. In this section of the chapter I unpack Mikhail Bakhtin’s philosophy of “art for life’s sake” that stresses how human existence and creative practice are in a co-dependent relationship. I also will take a closer look at Heidegger’s ideas about art-making that describes less commonly held perspectives on the role of the artist in making art. *My intention in this chapter is to once again look towards the geneses of things to consider how love is the origin of a work of art.* I bind together the idea of thinking and
wonder as starting points for love in art not only for the viewer but also for the artist—the archê of artwork.

Aesthetics of myth

Nancy states that myths are fictions that establish the world; they are fundamental to community.279 Myths may be easily dismissed as irrelevant in the twenty-first century, yet he emphasizes the significance of their deep-seated origins: they are the palpable beginning of human history. He locates an imaginary setting of a speaker surrounded by other people in an earlier time. It could be on a hill or inside a cave, in front of a fire or a tree struck by lightning; there might be masks, laughter, or singing.280 We might imagine a sense of wonder is shared amongst the group. Nancy writes,

In the speech of the narrator, their language for the first time serves no other purpose than that of presenting the narrative and of keeping it going. It is no longer the language of their exchanges, but of their reunion—the sacred language of a foundation and an oath. The teller shares it with them and among them.281

This scene is repeated innumerable times over time and over the world. Myth is not dialogue, but foundational soliloquy; a message that imparts meaning.282 The telling and re-telling of myth as well as hearing it create an understanding of the world.283 In other words, the invention of myth is the origin of human consciousness and language.284
Myth is trans-historical; like gods, myths change or disappear.\textsuperscript{285} Yet subjects continue “mything”\textsuperscript{286} as Nancy states, and new myths are often in development; now as then myth may be deployed for the purpose of power.\textsuperscript{287} For example, in the case of Aristophanes’ myth the telling of it reinforced the power of the gods to their subjects. This power can be utilized in a way that is destructive, but in best practice it brings subjects together. What strikes me in the quote by Nancy is that we can also suppose the sharing of myth is analogous to the sharing of art. Both myth and art are creative, imaginative and expressive enterprises. Like art, myth is neither objectively true nor objectively false. As “reunion” it brings subjects into connection, a major component of love in art. As connection it is experience. As experience it becomes part of us—it is embodied. What we see and what we hear become part of our constitution and consciousness. Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes,

\ldots They [ideas] could not be given to us as ideas except in a carnal experience. It is not only that we would find in that carnal experience the occasion to think them; it is

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure3.0.jpg}
\caption{Mariko Mori, \textit{Primal Rhythm} (2011) Still from digital video of a site-specific installation in Seven Light Bay, Miyako, Japan. The Sun Pillar (left) comprised of layered acrylic was installed in 2011. The floating Moon Stone will be set in place at a future date. Image: Faou Foundation.}
\end{figure}
what we owe their authority, their fascinating, indestructible power, precisely to that fact that they are in transparency behind the sensible, or in its heart.”

For Merleau-Ponty thinking and the body are physically linked. Looking into the mirror or gazing at the other, we see a body but we do not see inside, the containment of a heart that beats, blood vessels that course through tissue and organ, nerves and cellular materials that inform the muscles, and countless other components of physiological life. Yet we know they exist. And in that knowing the subject experiences thought—although thinking cannot be seen either. It is the invisible heart of being. When we confront the artwork or listen to the myth we engage one or more of our tangible senses: sight, hearing, touch, olfactory and taste. These corporeal faculties are at one with our immaterial consciousness. (This includes wonder; after all, the idiom “a sense of wonder” indicates that an experience of wonder is manifested as a physical sensation in the body.) It is through thinking we assign memory and meaning to things; the capacity for memory (a component of consciousness) comes about from this body-world relation. In consciousness we experience wonder, a phenomenon of speculation. This experience is part and parcel of love in art.

Works of art—like myth—may establish a situation of wonder for the subject. Mariko Mori is a contemporary artist actively contributing to twenty-first century mything that animates the viewer’s sense of wonder. A work in progress titled Primal Rhythm [Figure 3.0] is a large-scale project off the small island of Miyako in Japan, almost 200 miles southwest of Okinawa Prefecture. This work consists of two site-specific parts. The tallest component of this permanent installation is the sculpture Sun Pillar, a phallic-shaped column approximately thirteen feet tall comprised of pressed acrylic. Pearlescent in hue, it weighs
three tons, and is erected on the site of a towering rock promontory in Seven Light Bay. Deploying eco-conservational methods with regard to the sensitive rocks and coral reefs in the surrounding waters, *Sun Pillar* was carefully put into place by hand. A second sculpture titled *Moon Stone* is not yet installed. It is designed as a nearly ten foot acrylic sphere on a stainless steel base equipped with light-emitting diode (LED.) It will float in Seven Light Bay and will constantly change hue based on the bay’s tides and the position of the moon.292

*Sun Pillar* and *Moon Stone* will interact literally and allegorically on the annual winter solstice293 when the shadow of the column directly crosses the sphere. Mori’s calculated placement of the work to achieve this mythopoeic effect evokes the ancient meaning of the solstice as a time of rebirth in which all parts of life are connected. The sense of wonder about the solstice permeates history; the significance of the winter solstice is seen in prehistoric artifacts from the Neolithic and Bronze Ages at diverse archeological sites such as Ireland, England, Egypt and Mexico.294

Nancy points out that within myth the transience of time is evidenced and myth discloses this phenomena.295 The winter solstice is marked as the moment in the life cycle that symbolizes ending and beginning. *Primal Rhythm* offers the viewer a situation for pondering how extant things are linked in the regenerative energy of life. With *Primal Rhythm* Mori upholds the “retelling”—the sharing—of foundational primeval myth but her artistic contribution is innovative in the use of twenty-first century technologies and materials. Like the ancients, Mori figuratively unites celestial and terrestrial. Through this and other monuments she plans to install into the specific environments of six continents, Mori aims to foster a profound connection—what she terms “earth consciousness”—for the
viewer. This awareness will ideally remind the viewers of their dependent relationship on the natural world (a one-way dependency since the world does not depend on humans) as well as the ongoing responsibility to protect and honor it. In the best-case scenario, love as experienced in Mori’s Primal Rhythm incites the viewer to wonder about our interconnectedness with the passing of time, the cosmos, the landscape and being-in-the-world.

While Mori offers an unambiguous intention and interpretation for Primal Rhythm, the assignment of meaning to a work of art is contingent because the artist’s intention for meaning may be (and often is) altered by the viewer. This is true of philosophy as well; art and philosophy share the characteristic of ideas. Merleau-Ponty asserts that, “… Philosophy, like a work of art, is an object that can arouse more thoughts than those that are “contained” in it…” This statement addresses the idea of an addition to something created. Once an artist or philosopher puts the artwork or the thought out into the world, the ideas, intentions and considerations that went into its formation expand when it reaches an audience. The observer/reader/listener adds their own thoughts about it, and this may comprise notions not originally intended by the creator. This occurrence is yet further addition, supplement or enlargement. The occurrence of expansion is critical to love in art. Can there also be a contraction? No, because although artworks and ideas are generally—and perhaps in theory—intended for the other’s consideration, they exist independent of another subject’s attention. If no one else sees it, hears it or reads it, the maker’s idea is not negated. The work takes on an undisclosed life of its own that exists in relationship with the artist. It remains an expression of love even if private. Yet aspects of this association can change over time as the
artist/philosopher develops new thoughts. In any case the future of the artwork and philosophical idea is perpetually open to possibility (indefinite openness.) Its existence cannot be finalized. While art and philosophy share this common ground, art extends even further. Art is idea but also—in most cases—a created object, musical score, text or performance. In this way it is another sort of addition because it brings forth a tangible phenomenon that is available to the senses along with consciousness.

It is this circumstance that calls up an extra something I am describing as love in art. Specifically it is the thinking and wonder prompted by the experience of art for the subject. A connection with art is made via the senses and consciousness. (Or perhaps consciousness is a form of one of the senses.) Typically the correspondence occurs indirectly within the triadic framework of viewer-artwork-artist. Yet some art is designed to offer a direct connection such as in the case of performance art or live music. No matter the context the effect is the same: the subject experiences an invisible interior expansion. Love in art is manifest in the asking of questions, wondering, and seeking meaning that opens the self to other possibilities as a kind of addition.

Arendt speaks of the action to ask “unanswerable questions” as necessary to forming meaning. To form meaning is a supplement. And the activity of wonder—although based on a connection with the work of art—leaves nothing manifest in its wake. It belongs to the subject’s consciousness as the “starting-point of thinking.” Unlike the monological intuitive myth, wonder is arguably an internal dialogue characterized by a to and fro; “all thinking is discursive.” Therefore it is reasonable to assert that the self is multiplied in
asking questions, as it is with love. There is the self who asks the question and the self that answers.\textsuperscript{302}

Something additional is offered by a work of art: an experience. While we are always \textit{experiencing} in that our senses and emotions are constantly engaged in the particular world around us—what Heidegger calls “facticity”\textsuperscript{303}—amidst the process of living—what he terms “thrownness”; for example the ontic moments of experience in which we smell the freshly brewed coffee, feel the cat rubbing against our leg, or glimpse bright blue sky beyond the window. Then some experiences are set apart; they are exceptional, fuller, an intense recollection that is relational as we are connected to them via a specific object or circumstance. For example, to have read the book that moved us deeply, to witness a beloved suffer and die, to revel in a moonlit celebration with friends. Experiences as such are singular and possess a brimming unity that is intellectual and emotional.\textsuperscript{304} It locates itself in conscious recollection; it emphasizes a poignant connection. This occurs in the experience of a work of art; for example, to behold the sight of Leonardo’s extraordinary \textit{Last Supper} in Milan is an example of an experience that offers profound love in art.

John Dewey points out that a component of experience is \textit{flow}. Specifically he writes, “In an experience, flow is from something to something.”\textsuperscript{305} This description stresses that experience is a kind of movement that applies to all experiences (including love in art), \textit{but here I focus on an encounter with a work of art that may manifest love}. For the artist it is the movement of thinking and making that plays out from conception to completion. The artist’s mind, body and tools operate (flow) together towards an end objective. During this creative process, the artist is constantly and consistently thinking about what needs to happen
in the work by asking questions; these may express concerns regarding design elements, quality of the media and content. The artist queries herself: what am I attempting to do here? What is the best way to do this? Is there another, better way? The artist is consciously sensitive to process—what they are doing and how they are doing it. The artist experiences wonder throughout making: this wonder is also the love found in art. The artwork eventually reaches a final form in the physical sense; for example, a painting or a video.

This sense of wonder in making art is constituent of an embodied undertaking that contains the component of love. How so? One consideration is Dewey’s assertion that the mastery and effort of the artist are vital, “Craftsmanship to be artistic in the final sense must be ‘loving’; it must care deeply for the subject matter upon which skill is exercised.” In this way the artist not only cares about the artwork, but also about the anticipated (yet unknown) audience that will experience it. For Dewey care aims at the pleasurable reception the viewer will have.

In this way he tends to be an idealist; today he might redefine art appreciation as a wider experience—something that is not limited to the agreeable. This is because art made
within the postmodern and post-postmodern context may be delightful or beautiful, but also disturbing, sorrowful or abject. Examples include the cognitive dissonance previously noted in Richard Drew’s *Falling Man*, [Figure 0.5] the incongruity of Martin Puryear’s *Ladder for Booker T. Washington*, [Figure 2.2] as well as the feminist, racially satirical videos, collages and sculptures of Wangechi Mutu.307

By way of a specific example, consider Mutu’s *Sprout*, [Figure 3.1] an inverted female figure with mottled skin seems to be growing from the earth. Designed in an almost square format, the figure occupies most of the visual field. In the manner of plant roots, her arms are embedded deeply in the ground and her legs are splayed with knees resting symmetrically on mounds of soil. Her lower legs have morphed into tree trunks with numerous branches springing small leaves; her sex is a nest adorned with pearls.308 Birds and butterflies perch or are in mid-flight. The figure’s face is a carved African mask,309 large black eyes staring blankly out at the viewer.

Similar to Mori’s *Primal Rhythm*, Mutu’s idea here is mythopoeic. *Sprout*’s subject is suggestive of the mythical Daphne310 in an upside-down birthing position. This image seems to hold multiple readings. The artwork’s title denotes a state of transition—rudimentary new growth. She is a vulnerable earth mother, an up-and-coming terrestrial goddess. In one review of the work *Sprout* is described as an allusion to the black female as the non-Western colonized subject, “pre-civilized, hypersexual and animalistic in nature.”311 I argue the image has other intentions. Mutu has placed pictures of animal parts into the collage.312 The medium of cut and pasted images, shapes and colors are used in such a way that the subtly fragmented surface suggests a sort of violence such as colonialism, gendered brutality, or
female genital mutilation. Elements of perceptual representation such as butterflies, birds and pearls further allude to the abundance of nature. In an art historical context the reproductive capacity for females is conventionally linked with the representation of the fecund landscape. Yet rather than bucolic fertile terrain Mutu may be suggesting that it is the female’s endless work to survive within the natural world that is at stake.

An alternative possibility is that the female body in Sprout refers to play and not work. I see a parallel in Mutu’s figure and Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque body, related to carnival time;\(^{313}\) it is represented as a body that eats, defecates and has sex that he refers to as “grotesque.”\(^{314}\) With its devouring and excreting orifices, the body exceeds its limit to misbehave upon other bodies. Clark and Holquist write, “The grotesque body is flesh as the site of becoming.”\(^{315}\) This image is in contrast to the composed, smooth, idealized Classical Greek statues of gods and athletes. We may compare those familiar Western sculptures with that of the ancient chthonic figure of Baubo.\(^{316}\) Another striking comparison is that the grotesque hybridizes with plant and animal forms joining with that of humans to create a new being.\(^{317}\) Clark and Holquist further write,

> Just as the carnival enacts the intertextuality of ideologies, official and unofficial, so the grotesque body foregrounds the intertextuality of nature. The grotesque is intertextually perceived at the level of biology.\(^{318}\)

This intertextuality contains contradictions and ambivalence, which is a component of carnival. The mask that Mutu’s figure wears may be a symbol of uncertainty, of “transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries.”\(^{319}\) Masks also produce ambiguity around identity. The question then becomes: is the figure Sprout (like Baubo) laughing under
her mask? In myth, Baubo takes on the role of a clown; there is reason to believe that what Mutu has given us is an upside down trickster, a goddess of ribald sensuality.

How does Sprout offer wonder, myth and the potential for love in art? Mutu synthesizes references to myth, African cultural ideologies, art historical genres and Western festival into her artworks. Her particular choices for the absurd representation of the figure are likely to provoke thinking that prompts the viewer to ask questions. What is this figure doing? What does this mean? Is it humorous or dark? This contemplation is an expansion on behalf of both artist and viewer. Mutu seems to have synthesized multiple mythical ideas, which are “embodied” in Sprout. She also undertakes to imagine myriad possibilities deployed in collage that call forth a thinking-with. These possibilities are open-ended as to what the viewer can feel or know.

By default the future is an unknown, so the possibilities are completely open-ended. Works by Mutu may reference aspects of history and myth, but at the same time they anticipate the future. In doing so she contributes to newer mythologies expressed in the aesthetics of myth. In fact, the title Sprout offers a clue to the nascent future. Mutu’s practice is part of the late twentieth century concept of Afrofuturism, an aesthetic realized in music, literature and the visual arts. Rather than a movement per se, it engages in broad philosophical examination and speculation; adherents position themselves in a critical perspective at the crosscurrents of race and technoculture as it affects the African diaspora and beyond. Noted practitioners include science fiction writer Octavia Butler, musician-composer-performer Sun Ra and singer-actress Janelle Monáe, along with film director Terence Nance.
In an article explaining the current significance of Afrofuturism, artist and academic John Jennings states, “Afrofuturism is not just science fiction based, but also about imagining different spaces of creative thought that doesn’t put you in an identity box.” In this way Afrofuturism does not emphasize characteristics of the subject in terms of racial, ethnic, gendered or religious beliefs; it moves beyond claims that postmodernism embraced. Important aspects of Afrofuturism are how it is simultaneously forward-looking while primordially mythopoeic, an open-ended aesthetic that is optimistic and emancipatory in nature; freedom is achieved via one’s imagination—an imagining based on wonder about an imminent time. Creative thinking on behalf of practitioners incorporates African cosmologies, Egyptology and the mythology of Dogon and Yoruba; the mythologies within these sources contain ideas about science fiction and mysticism. Yet Afrofuturists also embrace other resources that include,

…Shamanism, metaphysics, Hinduism, Buddhism, African traditional religions, mystical Christianity, Sufism, Native American spirituality, astrology, martial arts mythology and other ancient wisdoms typically funneled through an African or diasporic viewpoint.

Afrofuturism—like Mutu’s imagery—is a passionate bricolage that aims for the prospects of a future based on science and technology; it rules out slave trade, racism, or inequality of any kind.

“Science is about knowledge and power.” Haraway understands that science provides an avenue to develop strategies for how to mold the future. “There is,” she writes, “the possibility of overturning the order of things.” Haraway—who examines feminism
from the perspective of science and technology—asserts that we should mandate not only a rigorous approach for science but also a creative one as well.\textsuperscript{331} While Haraway is not grouped with Afrofuturist practitioners, within \textit{Simians, Cyborgs and Women} she writes at length about Octavia Butler’s science fiction that imagines the embodied subject in a technological world and claims Butler as a cyborg theorist.\textsuperscript{332} Haraway writes, “Science is our myth.”\textsuperscript{333} She goes on to address the cyborg’s agency,

\begin{quote}
Cyborg writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man. Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other.\textsuperscript{334}
\end{quote}

The notion of survival is rare in aesthetics. How will we (the artist, the viewer) persist into an uncertain (and likely violent) future? How will technology be a tool for survival? How will we thrive? In what ways will technology empower us? What about love? Slavoj Žižek informs us that the future will be the human mind working with the computer, not vice versa, as so often lamented.\textsuperscript{335}

Haraway reminds us that the silicon chip is a surface for writing.\textsuperscript{336} Writing as technology—as tool—is crucial to the struggle, but Haraway seems to overlook
examples of visual art (and perhaps music) in the role of change. Artworks, film and music cannot be ignored as types of apparatus for subsisting in and forming a new world order. Love in art is robustly manifested in Afrofuturist art. With its emphasis on aesthetics, Afrofuturists comprise an ethics of resistance to the harms inflicted in the past and persisting in the present. Their new world order requires a forward-looking posture rejecting any future that maintains injustice. If the sciences offer a social milieu free of a fixed and corrupted power structure, they will become a source of freedom.337

Haraway describes the cyborg as at the same time living being and machine, imagination and reality in a “post-gender world” without an “origin story.”338 In a mixed media work on Mylar, Non je ne regrette rien, [Figure 3.2] Mutu offers the viewer another (but much larger) hybridized chimera that consumes the visual field within a landscape format.

Like Sprout there is a violation of natural boundaries in the representation of

Figure 3.2 Wangeci Mutu, Non je ne regrette rien (2007) Ink, acrylic, glitter, cloth, paper collage, plastic, plant material and mixed media on Mylar, 54 ⅞” x 92 ⅝”. Image: Rubell Family Collection.
the figure. Unlike Sprout, Non je ne regrette rien does not refer straightforwardly to sexuality, because cyborgs replicate rather than organically reproduce.\(^{339}\) This monster does not sport a visible sex or unambiguously identifiable parts in the manner of Sprout. Instead the amalgam of representation is highly complex, comprising features that are manifold things: human, reptile, animal, machine part, weaponry, insect and plant life. It is also part pure painterly abstraction. An unwieldy cyborg, it appears to be suspended or to float weightless in an indeterminate atmosphere that hints at the sky.

Tiffany E. Barber refers to this image as “transgressive disfigurement” which is not based on wholeness but forms of transformation, either violent or unwanted.\(^{340}\) This may be the case, yet the title (I have no regrets) seems to refer to something less adverse, perhaps a voluntary change of bodily composition or even submission to the power of some inevitable cataclysm. Haraway makes a case for the possibility of enjoyment in the disorder of boundaries and for accountability in their creation.\(^{341}\) If so, then for Mutu’s freak there are no mistakes or accidents—or apologies. Mutu represents the body as “becoming-machine”: metamorphosis.\(^{342}\) Žižek asks, “How does the very identity of human mind rely on external mechanical supplements? How does it incorporate machines?”\(^{343}\) He sees the externalization of our capabilities via technology as liberating us to be more “pure” subjects,\(^{344}\) a radical form of subjectivity in which bodies can be swapped out for other options. What becomes of what we call identity in this scenario?

Cyborgs are likely to take on the appearance and status of an unimaginable (and therefore completely unprecedented) other. It is possible they do not have a face such as the one necessary for Levinas. After all, Haraway denies any innocence on behalf of the cyborg
as they are illegitimate creatures sans religious or patriarchal origin stories and therefore lack allegiance to a father.\textsuperscript{345} They exist outside any established or known system. They defy dualism, resist rules, dismiss psychoanalysis, laugh at the notion of a lack, and eschew identity. They do not signify class, gender or race—ideas that preoccupy subjects. Are they subjects? That answer is up for debate. Mutu’s choice of figuration in Non je ne regrette rien speaks to the blurring of hierarchy of all things living in addition to inert technologies. As the sum of their parts, cyborgs reach a limit at the same time they seek new limits, making it up as they go along.

How is love in art possible in such disjointed representations? The artist and the artwork form an extension toward the other. By this I mean that no matter how a work of art appears, if the viewer is willing there will be a crossing. When the viewer encounters the work, the viewer likewise wills herself toward the art, or she simply does not. Love in art must find itself on equal footing within the crossing of art, artist and viewer; this is not always possible. All artists and works of art beckon the viewer. Yet there are individuals who do not wonder at the stars in the night sky or think twice about a work of art. A connection is never assured; it can only will itself into being. But when it happens, this mutual willing-toward sets up the between—the space/time in which the viewer begins to wonder.

Arendt describes the will as, “…Sometimes identified with the heart and almost always regarded as the organ of our innermost self.”\textsuperscript{346} For Arendt, the phenomenon of the will is one of three basic, autonomous mental activities that include thinking and judgment.\textsuperscript{347} Compared with thinking, the will is not contemplative, nor argumentative; it operates on imperatives even when calling up thought or imagination.\textsuperscript{348} The will is not
desire, because desire indicates a lack; Nancy reminds us, “Desire is unhappiness without end...” The will—like love—is both noun and verb that signifies action, movement. And like love, the will is an engine of reach, of extension. Love in art is always a willful movement to connect through wonder and thinking. Yet love’s extension is not towards an end; it is not a project. This thinking does not presuppose knowledge; in the same way that wonder renders the viewer speechless, love in art defies claims such as the one staked by knowledge.

Two-in-one

Dewey claims experience holds the constituent of flow, a movement from something to something. Like experience, thinking is flow; the phases Dewey describes are sometimes ebbing and other times flooding; it plays out over time. Dewey explains,

Thinking goes on in trains of ideas... They are phases, emotionally and practically distinguished, of a developing underlying quality; they are its moving variations, not separate and independent...but are subtle shadings of a pervading and developing hue.

If we regard experience as something that develops and thinking as something that plays out in successive stages, then we can be assured that the aesthetic experience—both the making and the encounter with a work of art—is not a static one, nor is it necessarily finalized. Certainly the actual time physically spent in an aesthetic experience comes to an end. In many cases the work of art is forgotten; in other instances it escapes memory altogether. On occasion the viewer’s reaction to an artwork is outstanding as in the case of the punctum, and persists as an experience easily recalled in consciousness in the same way that the birthday
celebration or the friend’s death is quite memorable and evocative of emotion. *This is the occasion of love in art.* It is a love that is born in wonder and questions, which manifest as a form of care in its attentiveness to what it is contemplating.

This statement is true not only for the viewer but for the artist as well. In the studio the artist undergoes the flow of thinking in trains of ideas as well as in emotional and physical phases of developing a project. These activities are a means to an end. They are an unfolding of the art in the artwork.

Arendt considers artworks, which are traditionally constructed of palpable objects—what Heidegger calls its “thingly” quality—such as paper or paint, as “thought-things” because once completed their alteration into something new calls for another way of thinking beyond their original materiality and utility.\(^{351}\) To hybridize Arendt and Heidegger’s ideas, I employ the adjective *thought-thingly* to works of art comprised of objects that have properties and also originate in thinking. This synthesis becomes something that contains

![Figure 3.3. Kay Walkingstick *Four Directions Stillness* (1994) acrylic and wax on canvas, and oil on canvas, 36” x 72”](kaywalkingstick.com)
meaning in the artwork. By way of example, Kay Walkingstick’s painting titled *Four Directions Stillness* [Figure 3.3] is a diptych, defined as two panels placed side by side or physically joined. The left panel is comprised of acrylic paint and wax and the right side rendered in oil paint, both on canvas supports. When we deconstruct the artwork in terms of making, there are two corresponding perspectives, a kind of two-in-one. The first is to contemplate the time and thought that went into its conception. Second, to consider the physical labor of constructing the painting. More tangible is the latter—how we might independently imagine the original forms of the various media she assembled and organized within her studio space: a spool of woven canvas, wooden stretcher bars, ground pigments suspended in plastic medium or linseed oil, and beeswax. Many other studio tools were additionally utilized that may include measuring tape, nails or staples, brushes, scissors, a palette knife and mineral spirits. A combination of tools and physical labor brings the painting into being, but not because Walkingstick is genius, but a collaborator; she has partnered with these things. This collaboration has an emergent quality comprised of variations of movement—not separate or independent but entwined—that cause the paintings to appear. This is what Heidegger describes as *poiēsis*, “a poetic shepherding into being.” The painting comes to presence. Movements that comprise the making of the work bear the mark of care. *This is love at work in the artist’s studio* manifested in all elements of thought-thingly creation; rather than a master Walkingstick allows the openness necessary for a coming-to-being.

Generally the viewer does not take on an envisaging of what happens in the artist’s studio. The viewer who encounters the painting in a gallery or museum sees the finished
work and detaches it from the context of its mundane media and apparatus. For viewers the artwork is more than the sum of its physical parts; they may be subjectively moved to find meaning in what they see as its final form; they may be moved to love. That viewers may lack an awareness of the studio collaboration does not diminish the inherent love in the revealing of the artwork. We might reframe the word “artwork” as another way of saying “art is love at work.”

With regards to the time and thought at work on behalf of Walkingstick, it may be overly speculative to understand how she conceived the idea or to what lengths she mulled over the work’s general concept, unless she specifically reveals or otherwise documents this process. The point to be made is that Walkingstick’s thinking about the art she makes is a silent hermetic activity, the previously described speechlessness of wonder. Thought in terms of cognitive processes is a mute interior dialogue, what Plato called eme emautō: between me and myself. With this internal dialogue of contemplation, one is split into two.

Contemplating the meaning along with the physicality of the work itself is a kind of ownership. This means the viewer who ponders the artwork takes possession of it through a conscious relationship as part of the thought process. As mentioned earlier it is an activity that has an aspect of duality. Arendt writes,

...[I]t often appears in works of art...especially in Kafka’s early prose pieces or in some paintings of Van Gogh where a single object, a chair, a pair of shoes, is represented. But these artworks are thought-things, and what gives them their meaning—as though they were not just themselves but for themselves—is precisely the transformation they have undergone when thinking took possession of them. In other words, what is being transferred here is the experience of the thinking ego to things themselves. For nothing can be itself and at the same time for itself but the two in one that Socrates discovered as the essence of thought and Plato translated into
conceptual language as the soundless dialogue *eme emautō*—between me and myself.  

Part of Arendt’s assertion here is that thinking is transformative. As things that are thought about artworks are imbued with significance. A subject *thinks* them as special or set apart in some way. Arendt explains, “…what Plato somewhat later called ideas perceivable only by the eyes of the mind.” The dialogue with the self—the two-in-one—is always an opportunity to conjure meaning, an act that is perhaps the fullest and most creative expression of being alive. At the heart of thinking is a relationship with the self, one that is based on action. In this way the subject’s consciousness is never whole or in a state of conclusion, but always interacting within the self and therefore subject to continual change. Like a work of art, thinking has an emergent quality.

The notion of duality—a “two-in-one”— is perfectly expressed in facets concerning Walkingstick’s diptych and the artist herself, as singular being. There are a number of points to make all of which contain some measure of unity (one) and separateness (two.) First, Walkingstick is bi-racial: her father is Cherokee Indian and mother Euro-American. She has asserted that her dual identity informs the dynamic of the content for her art practice. Yet another kind of twoness presents itself within this personal discourse: she notes the double life of American Indians (such as herself) who negotiate their indigenous origins and ethos in the context of a powerful Euro-centric culture that negates those originary principles.

Like all artists Walkingstick conceives and plans her artworks via thinking—the interior dialogue within herself. As noted, the conception of the artwork is a continuous to-
and-fro flow that is the composite of thinking and making, including envisaging its figuration and symbolism, building the painting support as well as the process and application of various paint media. This phase holds a double aspect: the artist and the emergent painting in a discourse of care and connection.

As a diptych comes together yet another dialogue plays out in the relationship of the two symmetrical square panels comprising *Four Directions Stillness*, which begin to “speak” to each other in their difference. The left panel of is a flat abstraction that consists of an equilateral cross form that is a Cherokee symbol for the Four Cardinal Directions: east, west, north and south. The cross, which is outlined in green, is placed in the middle of an orange and pink field, whereby the acrylic pigments are layered in a heavy wax impasto that allows the colors a certain amount of transparency. Walkingstick explains her technique as building up the surface of the wax and pigment using her bare hands and then alternating scraping and scratching areas away.360 This haptic approach is how Walkingstick’s imbues the whole of the image—and the paint itself—with a kind of idiosyncratic meaning.361 The use of her two hands holds a double reference as the binary of left and right are reflected in the basic structure of a diptych.

The right panel depicts a lushly painted landscape of a cliff face seen from a distance, and employs a similar palette to the left panel with the same pinks and orange colors. The cliff occupies most of the composition; there is a narrow irregular band of pale sky above it and likewise an uneven band of purple-brown earth at the bottom. The use of neutral colors for the land and sky further emphasize the vibrant warmth of the principal color scheme. Together firmament and earth serve to give a sense of deep space to the landscape along with
a feeling of monumentality and the profound wonder at the passing of time embedded in the idea of rock. The undulating surface of the cliffs is suggested in the rendering of its deep vertical rifts that catch illusionistic sunlight and cast deep shadow.

While the painting is physically static, actual motion drives a discourse between the two panels. This motion commences with the eye of the viewer whose gaze goes to and fro, left and right and back again, from abstraction to representation. The left panel does not directly concern place or space but formal concerns of color and texture embellished with the ancient geometric cross. The right panel suggests a location, but a generic remote landscape devoid of overt symbolism at the same time hinting at a relationship with ancestral terrain.\footnote{362}

While each panel presents a different sense of space and image, they are united in color scheme, size and symmetry. They are two joined by one artist in dialogue with herself regarding the personal, historical and cultural. The panels are alike and different; they are at once separate and together; one does not privilege the other.

In Walkingstick’s \textit{Four Directions Stillness} we see two types of unity. The first is exterior and the second conceptual. With regard to the former, the two panels in a diptych are hinged, or otherwise joined together in a manner that keeps their relationship physically stable. As to the latter, the panels are united in ideas—consciousness—that are connected first by Walkingstick in the work’s thought-out creation, and subsequently by the viewer. The relationship between the panels themselves and that of artist and viewer to the artwork is a manner of dialogue: an interchange between two. \textit{Something fundamental to dialogue is the notion of between, a space that simultaneously unites and separates}. This concept applies to the viewer and to artwork in terms of love in art.
In an early essay Bakhtin addresses concepts of unity specific to the experience of a work of art as compared to the overarching experience of life. Basically he noted that when we think about a work of art, we are making a specific and unique effort. He used the term answerability to describe the specific form of interaction between two subjects or a subject and a work of art. Answerability is rooted in a shared response of self to the other, and in fact is based in an ethical responsibility to not ignore or deny the other. The subject not only concretely answers the other, but the self as well. This means that the artist has a moral obligation to carry out her creative work, to share her work with the viewer, and the viewer to consider the artwork. Outside of an ethical demand, answerability calls up a theory for love in art because it is also based on care. Walkingstick did not create *Four Directions Stillness*—or any artworks—in isolation and without concern; every step of the making process is imbued with answerability to the materials and work on her end as well as an anticipated audience. In the open realm of viewing a work of art, the diptych then answers the viewer and the viewer responds in kind. Answerability is immediately concerned with self/other relations and represents another concept of two.

*We may think of answerability as another configuration of love in art that is at hand in both the making and viewing of art, because it not merely a form of care it is also way to make a connection.* Yet it is not an association based on understanding or even agreement; it is possible but not necessarily so. In fact, the outstanding aspect of dialogue for Bahktin is based on the open-ended search for meaning on behalf of the subject in the face of sustained uncertainty that neither the self nor the other does not (cannot) completely satisfy; therefore
the ongoing phenomena of dialogue. To reach an absolute conclusion is the dead end of discourse, therefore the self continues to contemplate possibilities.

Bakhtin understood life and the world as unpredictable. Earlier in this chapter I state that artworks and ideas are generally intended for the other’s consideration. If it happens that no one else experiences the artwork, its idea is still not revoked because it takes on an undisclosed life of its own that exists in relationship to its maker and a prospective audience. In this case the future of an art-philosophical idea is perpetually open to possibility: to seeing, to contemplation and to experience. A contemporary demonstration of Bakhtin’s argument for art’s capriciousness is the abundant work of previously unknown and recently discovered American street photographer/nanny Vivian Maier.366 [Figure 3.4] Writer John Maloof367 was seeking old photographs for a book in progress and inadvertently discovered at an auction house a large and astonishing trove of negatives and undeveloped film by the obscure Maier shortly after her death. He subsequently located more of Maier’s negatives and film in storage units after investigating her identity. Gathering and examining much of the more than 100,000 negatives along with numerous boxes of Maier’s personal items hoarded over her lifetime, Maloof then took on the enormous task of developing her prints and established an
archive. He continues to research their origins and has sought out and interviewed Maier’s previous employers and the (now grown) children she cared for.

Along the way he established that Maier was a self-taught photographer who earned an itinerant living as a nanny and housekeeper. While she carried her camera around in public and ardently photographed her subjects, she maintained a discreet profile in terms of her live-in domestic jobs, even using bathrooms as inept darkrooms. The picture of her character is inconsistent. By some reports, she was a beloved nanny; according to others she possessed a dark, off-putting and occasionally violent demeanor. The point of agreement between people who knew her was that Maier was an eccentric individual who was very much a loner with a strong and complicated personality. She possibly had a deep-rooted fear of males, yet they are often the unwitting or complicit subjects of her photographs.

Figure 3.5. Vivian Maier, 1954, New York, NY. Photograph. Image: pbs.org

1954, New York, NY [Figure 3.5] is a black and white photograph that reflects an unremarkable moment in mid-twentieth century urban life. Maier has captured two young boys one of them shining the other’s shoes near a corner a busy city street in front of a picture window store display. Maier records the moment when the white child having his shoes cared for looks up and directly into the camera lens. He has the expression of someone caught by surprise to see someone taking his picture; the shoe-shiner remains unaware of
Maier. In the background are two Caucasian men, one also shining the shoes of another; they nearly mirror the foreground pair. The man having his shoes shined is wearing a white fedora with a business suit and seems to be staring directly at Maier taking the photograph. Beyond him passersby bustle along.

This photograph depicts a chronotope of the 1950s in the largest city in the United States. As an image of a public space, it represents a historically specific idea of what it meant to be a subject at this particular time and place. The discovery of Maier’s works offers twenty-first century subjects a way to engage with a time and place unknown or forgotten. Sidewalk shoe-shiners are a rare sight in New York today as are fedoras. Maier relentlessly roamed urban avenues with her camera at the ready; there is a sense of engagement with her subjects, yet she kept her distance (more or less) physically and emotionally. For whatever reasons, she captured on film a gaze, a moment, a feeling, a style, a location and a gesture tens of thousands of times. We can never know for sure exactly why, but as viewers of her art we may begin to wonder.

By reports Maier was exceedingly private, opinionated in her liberal political views and felt particularly connected to the poor. She could be overly strident and unreasonable in her demands on others. She travelled the world as an independent woman; she documented herself in hundreds of self-portraits.\textsuperscript{368} Maier apparently had no overt ambitions as a professional artist; she did not exhibit her work and in fact did not show anyone her photographs let alone seek to exhibit them publicly—-with one exception. Maloof discovered correspondence between Maier and a shopkeeper in Saint-Bonnet-en-Champsaur where she
had lived as a child. She offered to have him see her pictures in the hope he might reproduce
them for sale. Apparently this suggestion did not pan out.

In his research Maloof sought out the feedback from prominent photographers Joel
Meyerowitz and Mary Ellen Mark who critically appraised Maier’s vision and technical
abilities such as framing and lighting. They note her work for its mechanical mastery and
authentic sensitivity to human nature on par with celebrated twentieth century photographers
Diane Arbus and Lisette Model. Yet unlike these renowned artists Maier did not seek
any recognition for her talents; she seems to have been driven to take photographs purely for
her own pleasure—or perhaps—as an effort to drive away personal demons. In this way she
stands in stark contrast to Walkingstick (and most artists) whose work is developed with an
audience in mind.

How is Bakhtin’s notion of answerability applied to Maier’s art? How does Maier’s
art practice demonstrate a theory of love in art? Deborah J. Haynes elaborates on Bakhtin’s
position of “art for life’s sake” in which he emphasizes the intersection of life and art. She
writes, “Even if we do not know the artist’s name, a work of art… is an example of the
artist’s action in the world.” Based on the astonishing number of Maier’s works, her
lifetime endeavor to take photographs is now well established. This very large oeuvre of her
work speaks to her essential love of taking pictures.

Art for life’s sake is at odds with the traditional Western philosophy of L’art pour
l’art (“art for art’s sake”) that arose in the nineteenth century in France. At that time L’art
pour l’art was a nonconformist value that divorced the affiliation of art from didactic or
ethical purposes and pronounced art making as an autonomous motive. In consideration of
art for life’s sake, Bakhtin stresses the importance of life and art as a *co-dependent* relationship; art is an extension of life’s profound possibilities in both actions of creating it and of viewing it. Love in art is a boundless generosity toward possibility.

I suspect Maier understood that on some level. The fact that she did not discard or destroy her images, negatives and personal mementos may indicate her understanding (even if unconscious) of the possibility of their future deployment to some purpose. Her *willful saving reveals a love for her artworks*. I further imagine the Maier took so many photographs and kept all this things because they represented her understanding of being in the world with others. The majority of her images are the faces of people in the midst of ontic being: doing things (playing, working, resting, looking) in public spaces (museums, parks, streets).

Are Maier’s photographs an example of Nancy’s notion of transcendence? For Nancy transcendence is a constant arrival and departure, an “incessant coming and going”375 He writes,

> What is offered is the offered being itself: exposed to arrival and to departure, the singular being is traversed by the alterity of the other, which does not stop or fix itself anywhere, neither in “him,” nor in “me,” because it is nothing other than the coming-and-going. The other comes and cuts across me, because it immediately leaves for the other: it does not return to itself, because it leaves only in order to come again. This crossing breaks the heart: this is not necessarily bloody or tragic, it is beyond an opposition between the tragic, and serenity or gaiety. The break is nothing more than a touch, but the touch is not less deep than a wound.376

This passage in an enigmatic way speaks to Maier’s oeuvre, a body of work that reflects all matter of subjectivity. Nancy reframes transcendence as “the crossing of love.”377 Looking at Maier’s pictures that capture thousands of crossings—an ocean of other, which binds us
together in shared sense of existence. In this way Maier’s work is about love. This love is not about promises, unity or merging with the other; it is about what is “infinitely inappropriable” because we are finite singular beings. By photographing others in their crossings, she captured moments that mark her connection to each subject no matter how ephemeral the moment. This includes the many and myriad self-portraits in which Maier recorded herself in public and private spaces: reflections in mirrors and windows as well as cast shadows. There is a speechless wonder to be found in her work for those seeking to find it.

Heidegger would describe Maier’s photographs as poieis in that she allowed something to emerge and in that revealing the viewer might grasp something about what it means to be human. His modern idea of techne is a companion term to poieis. Techne was understood in ancient Greece as a kind of knowledge but deployed in modern times as a term that indicated a mode of production. Heidegger redirects the meaning to its earlier use—techne as poieis—bringing-forth. He writes,

> From earliest times until Plato the word techne is linked with the word episteme. Both words are terms for knowing in the widest sense. They mean to be entirely at home in something, to understand and be expert in it. Such knowing provides an opening up. As an opening up it is a revealing.

Certainly Maier became expert in her art practice and was at home in it. This is not to say she was a genius, but that her relentless efforts were always made in striving for the openness that would allow a happening of truth—defined as possibility for Dasein. She was constantly testing her own limit. Something else Heidegger states is cogent to Maier’s work,
It is precisely in great art—and only such art is under consideration here—that the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge.381

He is not saying the artist self-destructs but that she becomes insignificant in the bringing forth of the work. Contrary to the prevailing status of celebrity artists, the artist must maintain humility. This statement knocks down the preconceived notion of the artist as mastermind and focuses on the primacy of the artwork itself. For Heidegger, art—not the artist—is the origin of the work of art. Heidegger’s perspective contributes to my argument about love in art. *Technē exists alongside love on behalf of the artist; both technē and love partner as a poetic shepherding of art into the world.*

***

Art is a philosophy of love in action in which something happens that begins in wonder and proceeds with thinking. Thinking in turn, launches the questioning essential to love in art. *Thinking about art is a manifestation of love based in wonder.*

This chapter approaches the question of love in art through wonder and the subsequent thinking and questioning it prompts. Here I consider two possibilities for wonder: the artist’s studio work as a ground for love and artworks that take on the theme of myth.

Nancy’s explanation of myth begins with the sharing of fictive narratives between ancient subjects. As myth is an ongoing phenomenon, contemporary artists deploy myth as an aesthetic, not only in a trans-historical sense but also in a way that anticipates the future as a ground for wonder.
The saying, “a sense of wonder” gives a clue to the embodied experiences that wonder offers. Thinking launches wonder. As the heart of being, thinking is the transparency behind the sensory body-world relation along with memory and consciousness. The connection made with art takes place within mind and body for both viewer and artist.

Myth is often based in notions of time; artworks based in an aesthetic of myth may intend to evoke wonder at time’s passing; this is the case in Mori’s mythopoetic installations that engender a contemplation of the viewer’s experience of time on Earth. Alternatively, the figures seen in Mutu’s collages invite wondering about a future that is not earthbound, and whereby the subject becomes blurred by science and technology. Whatever the artist’s project may be, the unifying idea is the subject’s being-in-the-world, a world that is grounded in being-with others. Wonder questions what it means to be and is the conduit for an expansion the subject undergoes in awareness of being.

Like art, myth is imaginative and expressive; it brings subjects together in the manner of sharing. In decentering the self as well as in thinking, the self is configured as a two-in-one: the self that asks the questions and the self that replies. The dialogue with the self is an open-ended search for meaning. This pursuit establishes a subjective enlargement that is a component of love in art.

Dewey’s claim for the flow of experience underscores the movement of love found in art that begins with wonder and under the directive of the will. This flow is engendered in a mutual willing-toward; the artist initiates this movement in the studio while care is manifested in the work. One way to think about this care is through Bakhtin’s call for
answerability, which is the attention put into thinking, making and engaging with the work of art as deliberate acts of responsiveness.

The artist’s role is that of midwife who is thinking and questioning while designing and building the artwork with care and towards connection. Thinking and art both evince emergent qualities. As midwife, the artist is a collaborator of the thought-thingly coming-to-being called a work of art. Heidegger names this care-full emergence (bringing-forth) of art \textit{poiēsis}. Yet even if the artwork is never shared outside the artist’s studio it remains an expression of love. This is particularly evident in Maier’s photographs since their discovery is an act of fate. In contrast, Walkingstick’s studio practice reaches toward her anticipated audience. In either case art is grounded in an action that lovingly coaxes it into being. Both artists demonstrate the action of the artist in the world: art for life’s sake.
Chapter Four

Indefinite Openness

In this chapter I return to contemplating the direct relationship an artist fosters with a viewer as an expression of love in art. The first section (“presence”) describes the record-breaking performance by Marina Abramović at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in the spring of 2010. In a work titled *The Artist is Present*, [Figure 4.0] Abramović maintained a silent presence in the museum’s atrium that included the collaboration of 1500 successive participants over three months. How does an artist come to presence in a work of art? In what way does presence become what Butler called “indefinite openness”?382

The representation of physical and mental anguish in art has a long history. Yet what about the manifestation of actual pain purposefully taken on in performance art? The second section “the aesthetics of pain” reflects on Abramović’s practice in which hurting herself is a

---

**Figure 4.0.** Bird’s eye view of Marina Abramović’s *The Artist is Present* (2010) in Marron Atrium at Museum of Modern Art in New York. Photo: New York Times.
recurrent motif. How does an artist’s intentional discomfort substantiate a claim for love in art? Is there a purpose for violence or suffering in art? What role does the *punctum* have in artworks that contain actual pain? Here I also consider the history of performance art within the 20th century that deploys the body as medium in response to the nonobjective sensibilities of abstract expressionism. Reflecting upon the prototype performance *Challenging Mud* (1955) by Kazuo Shiraga in Japan—as well as other performances by Abramović—I further consider how an aesthetic of suffering puts forward a claim for love in art by way of self-imposed pain.

The third section titled “zero space” considers the discursive inter-subjective engagement vital to a loving relationship between artist-performer and viewer with a focus on the face-to-face encounter in *The Artist is Present*.

The final section called “risky business” unpacks notions of collaboration and complicity in performance art. Risks taken by artist and viewer in live performance raise questions about the uncertainty of being as well as the authorship of performance. What is the limit for an artist in live performance? How does the reach of an artist engender love in art?

**Presence**

I have defined love as an expansion of the self that occurs as a viewer’s response to an artwork. Performance art can act as a unique means for this dilation because it creates a time in which thinking and questioning on the part of viewer and artist happen in synchronicity. By way of example, artist Marina Abramovic undertook a real-time artwork
at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City as part of her major retrospective in 2010. The performance consisted of Abramović sitting silently across from a voluntary participant, with eyes frequently locked in a mutual gaze. Titled *The Artist is Present*, this audience participation performance took place in the spacious Marron Atrium between March 14th and May 31st in uninterrupted duration for seven and one half hours five days a week, and on Fridays for nine and one half hours. (Sunday was a day of rest.) The accumulated time logged for the performance by the final day totaled more than seven hundred hours; the total number of participants was 1566.384 *The Artist is Present* broke the record for longest performance in a museum.385

A large square area in the middle of the atrium was cordoned off; in the center of the space sat Abramović on an unpainted wooden chair.387 She would take this seat immediately before museum hours commenced and remained seated until closing. On the wall behind her chair, a simplified hand-drawn calendar indicated the months March, April and May; at the end of each performance she would mark off the day. Abramović wore high-necked, long-sleeved, floor-length voluminous unadorned gowns that were color-coded according to the current month: blue, red and white. Her long dark hair was braided and pulled forward over one shoulder.
Directly across and a few feet from Abramović, a similar chair accommodated museum visitors who chose to act as participants. [Figure 4.1] Volunteers queued on the outside of the partitioned area and waited for their turn to take this seat. Participants spanned ethnicities and occasionally included children, curators, artists and celebrities. Some sat in the chair for a few minutes; others for hours or even all day. 388 A number of people returned to the seat multiple times over the three months. The sitter determined the duration of a sitting, although one reporter writes that time constraints were eventually imposed due to increasing numbers of individuals who wished to participate. 389

The sustained wordless gaze between Abramović and her participant was the most striking element in viewing the performance. Sometimes smiles were exchanged; more often there were mutual tears; gazes tended towards an emotional intensity that periodically seemed to embody sadness. Occasionally an indicative hand gesture was made—such as a hand over the heart. In the few minutes between participants Abramović would hang her head, chin on chest, and close her eyes. Now and then she would rub her face with her hands. Videos and photographs document these temporary moments of fatigue and retreat into her self. Yet each time a new participant took the seat, she would raise her head and open her eyes mutely indicating her full attention to the sitter. The artist always returned to presence: awake and aware in this immediate and corporeal relationship. By being present, she is being-with by which Abramović offers her participant an open-ended connection, a situation of love.
The aesthetics of pain

In *The Artist is Present*, Abramović’s persistent return to availability with each new participant may be considered a reanimated arrival of love achieved via a re-openness of self. Indeterminate feelings on behalf of artist and viewer cross with unspoken thoughts and questions, not only between Abramović and the sitter, but also with the audience observing the interactions in the museum. All are involved; all are thinking, some (perhaps) self-questioning. Is this situation of contemplation an act of loving? I argue that it is because everyone is offering their time to be present, and in the case of the artist, more than that.

This particular performance caused Abramović to endure an extended period of physical pain and psychological sacrifice, demands she placed on herself for the sake of the work. This election of pain is a pattern Abramović exhibits in her work as an artist. She attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade in the late 1960s and completed post-graduate studies at the University of Zagreb in 1972. In addition to teaching, she maintains a life-long and global career as a performance artist. From the beginning, her work has

![Figure 4.2. Photographic documentation of Marina Abramović’s Rhythm 10 (1973). Image: elevarte website.](image-url)
consisted of performance pieces in which her body is used to extremes of hunger, danger, self-mutilation and exhaustion. Her first performance took place in Edinburgh in 1973. Titled *Rhythm 10* it was based on a Russian drinking game in which Abramović employed a succession of knives that were repeatedly jabbed in a fast-paced rhythmic manner between the splayed fingers of her hand, palm side down. [Figure 4.2] The stabbing gestures and patterns were counted in various numeric sequences. Abramović also implemented a recording device that captured and played back the sounds of the game; she would then repeat the sequence to mimic her original actions. By the end of the performance she had cut her hand twenty times.

The ideas of *Rhythm 10* include gesture, ritual, time (past/present) and consciousness; all of these persist in her oeuvre of performance work, including *The Artist is Present*. Notions of gesture, ritual and time are relevant to the subject’s everydayness; simply put, gesture is a way to communicate something with the body such as a wave goodbye or shake of the head to indicate refusal. Ritual is part of a pattern such as the habit of making coffee in the morning or taking the post-dinner walk, the *passeggiata*. Regarding time, the clock and calendar are elemental standards by which we structure and progress through life’s activities, a measurement by which something starts and stops. Along with consciousness these comprise a conceptual unity about how we go about daily life. In terms of a work of art, it is at once different and the same. The examples at hand here are the performances of Abramović, in which forms of ritual and gesture are set apart, compressed and amplified or exaggerated at the same time. In setting them apart the viewer (perhaps) understands them in a different way. Bakhtin, in his contemplation on the nature of time, rejects the conventional
perception of time as a unit that is anticipated, arrives and retreats into the past. Instead he emphasizes the “presentness” of the moment that holds promise and possibility. With this perception of time, we are offered responsibility and options. *In this way each moment contains indefinite openness for the subject.* What typically occurs when we think about the past? We tend to only reflect upon what happened rather than how that time held this potential. In performance art whereby we observe an action in real time, the approach of the viewer might be to think of that time as the “open present.” Works of art call for a different kind of thinking on behalf of the viewer—an effort—what Bakhtin termed answerability, discussed in Chapter Three.

That Abramović includes actual bodily pain—or the potential of it—to her performances provides for yet another layer of thinking about gesture, time and ritual. Seeing the performance or watching a video of her work provokes a kind of wonder, albeit wonder that is based in existential anxiety. Authentic pain is not something objective, but utterly situated in the subjective, always a marker of our finite condition. Pain is something typically avoided as both an actual condition and in thought, yet Abramović embodies it in her art. This departs from philosophy that tends to remark upon how to avoid pain. Nancy describes joy (something we think of as the opposite of pain) as *beyond satisfaction* to an overflowing state. He writes,

> To joy cannot contain *itself.* Joy is not even to contain joy itself, nor the pain that consequently accompanies it. The joy of joying does not come back to anyone, neither to me nor to you, for in each it opens the other.
It seems that the same things Nancy explains about joy can also be said about pain. Pain in many ways does not contain itself; we recognize it in others. Pain holds vulnerability, it also open us up to others. Pain (like joy) is also an extremity of presence, an exposure.

Abramović’s performances are acknowledgement (and even affirmation) of the menacing situation of pain. *Rhythm 10* and other artworks that include the contemplation of pain put into place a decentering—a rupture—of our everyday insulation.

***

American performance art begins in earnest in the early 1960s with artists that included Carolee Schneemann, Allan Kaprow and Yoko Ono. Performance as an expanded field of art arose out of the avant-garde practices of the mid-twentieth century in a search for “aesthetic reevaluation.” Contemporary artist Mary Kelly explains, “During the 1960s artistic practices attempted to repudiate the notions of genius, originality, and taste, by introducing material processes, series, systems, and ideas in place of an art based on self-expression.” The self-expressive art Kelly refers to—American abstract expressionism—was the post-World War II poly-stylistic movement that supplanted social realism’s political agenda, which addressed urban conditions for the working class and poor. Abstract expressionism’s widely diverse approaches contained evocative, personal and emotional nonobjective imagery in the medium of paint and—to a lesser extent—sculpture. The splattered action painting of
Jackson Pollock is a good example, as is the energetic brushwork of Willem DeKooning and Barnet Newman’s vertical blankets of color. Abstract expressionism was a male-dominated genre, yet women made equally important contributions. Two cases in point: the sweeps of poured and puddled acrylic pigment on Helen Frankenthaler’s canvases and Lee Krasner’s lively use of collage.

In general, abstract expressionist works were typically larger-than-life expanses of non-pictorial painted canvas that hung on the white walls of New York galleries. While oftentimes emotive in tone, abstract expressionism consolidated hegemonic formalist principles touted by the prominent critic Clement Greenberg. Foremost was medium specificity, which he believed lent autonomy and originality to painting divorced from subject matter. For Greenberg, the nature of an art’s medium distinguishes its singularity as a work of art; he refers to this as “purity” but in the sense of “self-definition with a vengeance.” In other words, what an artwork is made of comprises the essence of its integrity. For painting, this would be the immanent two-dimensionality upon which paint is applied. It was this striving for the empowerment of painting that made inroads for the development of performance art.
Greenberg claims a major departure of Modernists from Old Masters was that the space of the latter was intended as a false consciousness in which the viewer could walk around in the illusionistic planes of linear perspective, whereby the space of the former was restricted to “travel only with the eye.”

We come to an idea of what Greenberg means by examining the classical composition of Raphael’s *Betrothal of the Virgin* [Figure 4.3] which is carefully organized in mathematical perspective as an apprehension of near and deep space behind the picture plane, using the placement of figures in relationship to architecture and distant landscape. Whereas Kandinsky’s *Composition VI* [Figure 4.4] has some indication of depth with overlap of shapes, colors and lines, but essentially precludes any mental stroll beyond the picture plane. Considering Greenberg’s ideas about the flatness of painting, it is interesting to see how Abstract expressionism generates in ways that he (likely) did not anticipate, particularly in terms of performance art in which the three-dimensional body is reframed as the essence of robust self-critical tendency.

A prototype performance work that arises from the principles of abstract expressionism is *Challenging Mud* [Figure 4.5] by Kazuo Shiraga, a founding member of the Gutai Association in Japan. The Gutai was a radical group of post-war artists whose...
manifesto in part promoted a kind of aesthetics of destruction that would go “beyond the borders of abstract expressionism.” Their debut took place at a plaza in Tokyo as part of the First Gutai Art Exhibition. In this work Shiraga dove into one ton of mud situated in front of the exhibit entrance and used his body to wrestle the muck into sculptural shapes. Namiko Kunimoto describes the performance in an essay on Shiraga,

Challenging Mud was engineered from a heaped mass of mixed, viscous grey matter – stone, cement, sand, gravel, clay, plaster and twigs – intentionally worked into an extremely dense consistency to allow only a degree of constrained movement. When Shiraga, dressed in a loincloth, heaved his body onto the mess, the detritus lacerated his skin. As he became dirtied by his own actions, the definition of his figure against the medium became increasingly diminished.

Shiraga went beyond Pollock’s expressionistic technique of throwing paint onto the canvas with a stick or Frankenthaler’s poured pigment since his field of action fully embodied the making of an artwork. It also served Greenberg’s mandate of medium specificity as Shiraga’s body literally merged with the medium. With Challenging Mud, the artist’s engagement with the material is alarming in its rawness. That the blood from his wounds mingled with the mud is particularly profound.

The self-imposed wounds upon his body by the mud bring to mind the cuts endured by Abramović in Rhythm 10 or the painful pooling of her blood caused by prolonged sitting in The Artist is Present. A critical element of Shiraga’s approach to art is the concept of shishitsu, a term which translates to mean “innate characteristics and abilities.” (This is not a philosophy related to Abramović’s practice.) In his writings he describes shishitsu as an essentialist philosophy concerning the psycho-corporeal aspects of the self as transfigured.
forms over time.\textsuperscript{409} Shishitsu is obscure and nothing seems to be written about it outside of Shiraga’s own papers. It is not clear if this is a concept he invented, or an existing ideology shared by others at the time. Shiraga believed shishitsu to be an inborn, personal and unique energy that dynamically determines inter-subjective difference in that it shapes the self as a reconciliation of flesh and spirit, the conscious and unconscious.\textsuperscript{410} Shishitsu, like existentialist philosophy, is the notion that our actions ultimately mold who we are. Shiraga believed that it is a person’s existential duty (especially the artist) to express their shishitsu to the greatest extent possible since art is the action of the highest expression of individual creativity.\textsuperscript{411} A statement by Shiraga is included in the accompanying text for a 2012 exhibition of his paintings at Axel Vervoordt Gallery in Hong Kong,

One has to dare to imagine and undertake something senseless. A dimension in which something that now appears senseless will no longer be senseless […] One will feel as if one had entered a dimension, which is neither rational nor irrational. It is a world of an endless cave, a zero space […] There one enjoys all possible spiritual games and one becomes fuller and fuller. When at last rationality like emotion surpasses every human phenomenon, the difference in the quality of each person will come to light clearly.\textsuperscript{412}

Shiraga’s statement that senselessness provides potential for the subject is important because this is what Abramović does in \textit{The Artist is Present}. It can be argued that she creates a “zero space” that cannot be judged as anything other than what it is: a dimension for singular contemplation that is open to any possibility. The human construct of zero is neither a positive nor a negative value; it merely serves as a point for something—or nothing—to happen. I suggest that this is love.
Shiraga’s assertion also raises a few questions. The Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of senseless has a number of variations, including purposelessness. Is there a purpose— a reason, a ground—for violence or suffering in art? In particular, what can we make of Shiraga’s and Abramović’s performances of self-inflicted pain? It may be argued that to consciously hurt the self in a performance for no predetermined, explanatory reason is in itself senseless.

Immanuel Kant saw art as purposive without purpose; purpose defined as the deliberate design of an object or an intended outcome of an action. Kant explained that while art may seem to have an objective, part of its beauty—or the experience of the beautiful—is that any purpose of art is actually undetermined. Although Kant was analyzing how we judge artworks such as painting or sculpture as that which is beautiful, we may apply his investigation to contemporary art by expanding the meaning of aesthetics.

Kant appropriates Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten’s redefinition of aesthetics as we understand it today. In the mid-eighteenth century Baumgarten borrowed the term from the Greek word aisthēsis meaning sensation and feeling. Thomson elucidates how Heidegger considered this genealogy of modern aesthetics,

...Just as logic (conceived as the science of thought) seeks to understand our relation to the true, so aesthetics (conceived as the science of sensation or feeling) seeks to understand our relation to the beautiful.

In other words, we may comprehend aesthetics as an appraisal of the visually beautiful, but also as a method of appreciation for the ethos that underlies a work of art, including performance. In this respect one of the ways we consider *The Artist is Present, Rhythm 10*
and *Challenging Mud*—any art performance that embodies physical or mental suffering—as belonging to a category of the aesthetics of pain. This aesthetic certainly has a protracted history in representational art; consider the Assyrian reliefs that decorated the palace of Ashurbanipal, Nineveh in the fifth century BCE in which an exquisitely carved lioness dies at the hands of the king in his chariot on a royal hunt. [Figure 4.6] The moment depicted in the relief shows the creature’s torso shot through with arrows; its hind legs paralyzed, yet still drags itself forward in a wretched final attack. Other representations of pain abound in Renaissance and Baroque artworks of crucifixions and martyred saints, but Francisco Goya produces some of the most powerful in the early nineteenth century with his *Disasters of War* series. In a series of eighty-two intaglio prints, Goya illustrates graphic scenes of torture, rape, executions, castrations, dismemberment and famine that occurred during the French occupation of Spain under Napoleonic rule. [Figure 4.7] These two examples differ from the intent of representing pain in contemporary art. *Dying Lioness* was propaganda for the king’s prowess to his subjects and enemies; the prints comprising the *Disasters of War* series was Goya’s effective statement about man’s inhumanity to man. Yet both set precedents on the power communicated by images of pain in art. Most of us would not make a claim that pain is beautiful. However, pain is a universal and fundamental human sensation and feeling. The source of pain is always the body; even if we are not suffering at any given moment, pain is
perpetually in the background, always in the memory or somewhere in the potential of our experience. We recognize it in others and know it can happen to us too. We might say that pain is a polyphonic phenomenon; the idea of pain offers a unity between subjects. In the case of performance art, it is an aesthetic that is at once unifying and dividing; something shared but not necessarily experienced at the same time. In every sense the aesthetics of pain present powerful opportunities for thinking love. In this way it decenters and expands the self as a way of knowing the other, even if that other is a stranger.

***

Kant further determines that works of art are not to be judged by any set of rules, but the impact on our feelings and senses. This returns my argument to the notion of the punctum in which an artwork produces an acute sensation whereby feelings cross with questions on
the part of the viewer. By taking on singularly illogical (and painful) tasks in their performances, Shigara and Abramović impel questions that are otherwise unconsidered and offer the onlooker an opportunity for an expansion of the self by way of contemplation. It is noteworthy that Heidegger saw thinking as having a correspondence to art,

What art is should be inferable from the work. What the work of art is we can come to know only from the essence of art. Anyone can see we are moving in a circle...Thus we are compelled to follow the circle...To enter upon this path is the strength of a thought, to continue on it is the feast of thought, assuming that thinking is a craft. 419

When we are feasting we are beyond the ordinary; we are in abundance. For Heidegger this bounty of thought is circular; and this notion of roundness is compelling. The shape of a circle has no beginning or end; its boundary is capable of expansion or shrinkage. A circle—the O—brings to mind Shiraga’s description of the zero space as a dimension of contemplation. Heidegger tells us that the thought provoked by a work of art is something that does not contain scarcity because it is about asking questions. He continues, “In order to discover the essence of the art that actually prevails in the work, let us go to the actual work and ask the work what and how it is.”420 He suggests that inquiry that arises from an artwork is a surplus. And while performance art is a genre beyond the scope of Heidegger’s epoch, it is interesting to imagine how he might have addressed its experience and what questions he would have asked.

The genre of performance art directly enjoins artist and viewer in a thinking-with; there is no mediatory art object. Since I was not a witness to Challenging Mud, my experience is indirect and dependent on photographic documentation of it. This image evokes
a human genealogy of violence: the blood and gore of childbirth, earth’s reclamation of the body at death, or our species’ slithery emergence from a primeval ooze. Yet consideration of context here is critical: *Challenging Mud* takes place in 1955, only ten years after the United States and Japan were engaged in a savage conflict in which Shiraga personally experienced the devastating effects of World War II. In a 1998 interview with Gutai scholar Ming Tiampo, Shiraga shares his eyewitness account,

> I just saw people covered with blood. I just saw war victims and Osaka burnt to the ground. A lot of people, totally smeared with blood, soot, and mud were coming to Osaka castle for help.\(^{421}\)

The mingling of his blood with the detritus of the earth echoes a powerful identification with the land of Japan. Thinking about the horror Shiraga witnessed along with the actions he took, his performance provokes questions and feelings. Does *Challenging Mud* somehow coalesce our knowledge of—and participation in—powerful experiences of war, childbirth, death and human evolution? Is this performance a metaphor for how the subject grapples with the overwhelming traumas of life? Or is it a reenactment of what he witnessed, the playing out of a personal psychological trauma? The actual act of wrestling with mud was senseless—a synonym for the unconscious—yet it produces a *punctum*, a prick of feelings which connects viewer to artist; it yields consciousness. The *punctum* itself contains some degree of emotional pain. In this way, a *punctum* can be a component of the aesthetics of pain. Shigara’s performance moves the unconscious into awareness by embodying the metaphysical implications of an abiding human struggle that ranges from highly personal to
universal. The coagulation of consciousness and discomfort marks our finitude; this is part
and parcel of the aesthetics of pain.

The aesthetics of pain obviously come with a sacrifice on behalf of the artist who
elects this avenue of discourse. Abramović prepared her body with yoga and other rigorous
exercises for a year in anticipation of the grueling toll it would take to sit virtually motionless
many hours a day, for seventy-two days. Six months in advance, she adopted a vegetarian
diet in order to better control her digestive and excretory functions. She did not speak with
friends or attend social events for the duration of The Artist is Present. Pre-performance she
strictly controlled her food and liquid intake, making sure to fully hydrate in the evenings.
Nonetheless she experienced pain in her legs, shoulders and arms from extended sitting, as
well as problems with her eyes. In The Artist is Present, Abramović’s performance embodies
the idea of physical and mental endurance; by her own admission the prolonged immobility
was “difficult, extremely difficult.”

Considering an ethos found in the aesthetics of pain, Kelly elaborates,

The art of the ‘real body’ does not pertain to the truth of a visible form, but refers
back to its essential content: the irreducible, irrefutable experience of pain. The body,
as artistic text, bears the authenticating imprint of pain like a signature; Vergine
insists, ‘the experiences we are dealing with are authentic, and they are consequently
cruel and painful. Those who are in pain will tell you that they have the right to be
taken seriously.’

Abramović’s pain is chronicled in the documentary about her performance and her
performance art retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art (also titled The Artist is
Present). In addition to her own ascetic preparations during the year leading up to the
exhibition, Abramović trained thirty-nine artists for five re-performances of a number of her original artworks. All of the works contained significant efforts of endurance and the experience of pain.

For example, *Luminosity* was visually striking yet challenging to view given the awkward pose of the performer. [Figure 4.8] This work consisted of a bicycle seat mounted ten feet above the audience on a gallery wall and straddled by a nude artist. The artist’s arms and legs were splayed outward, reminiscent of a pinned butterfly. If one spent time in the gallery observing the work, it became apparent that the up and down movements were so controlled in the arms of the artist that they were almost imperceptive. In an interview with six artists hired to re-perform Abramović’s works in her retrospective, performer Gary Lai reveals the hardships that the artists underwent in their daily performances, “People came into the resting space crying, or fainting and falling. If someone felt like they would faint, the stage manager would come into the ‘green room’ asking for someone to replace them.”425 Another artist Abigail Levine commented, “*Luminosity* was the most theatrical in my experience and the most difficult to perform.”426

Suffering is a theme that stubbornly runs through Abramović’s oeuvre. In a performance that took place in Copenhagen titled *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be*
Beautiful [Figure 4.9] she stands nude for fifty minutes while grooming her hair with a metal comb in one hand and a metal brush in the other, chanting “Art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful.”

At some point her face and scalp begin bleeding, her hair becomes broken and damaged and she grows exhausted. In an interview about this performance Abramović states,

I never create art to be decorative. I don’t like this idea of aesthetic beauty—a beautiful frame, nice colors that will go with the carpet. To me art has to be disturbing. It has to ask questions and have some kind of prediction of the future within it. It has to have different layers of meaning.427

In this piece, the stereotypically feminine act of brushing hair turns violent. Human hair is a loaded cultural signifier, carrying notable weight for women, particularly in certain religious and cultural practices. Abramović’s twofold act of simultaneously combing and brushing, not only puns with her double title but also drives home the relentless striving for a feminine ideal in Western culture at the same time it remarks upon the emphasis of the beautiful in the art world. Again the punctum produces feelings and questions. What is the relationship between beauty and suffering? In particular, the relationship between beauty, suffering and women?

The Western tradition for an ideal of beauty reaches back twenty-five hundred years to ancient Classical Greece where it is expressed in mathematical formulas applied to
sculptures of Olympians and gods intended to convey notions of the perfectly beautiful. In Plato’s seminal dialogue *Symposium* as well as in his Theory of Forms, love and the beautiful are linked. By his reasoning beauty is unachievable in the visible world; beauty exists merely as a perfect Idea, not something that can be located in the human body, or a work of art, or representation. Abramović’s *Art Must Be Beautiful; Artist Must Be Beautiful* is a nod to Plato in this way. Perfection is not achievable in either love or the corporeal; only the idea of perfection can be absolute.

Abramović’s self-abusive combing and brushing can be compared to Shiraga’s *Challenging Mud* in its senselessness and futility. The long-standing and entrenched Western ideals of the beautiful cannot be brushed away; the pain immanent in an unachievable ideal is equally inescapable.

**Zero space**

Performance art, which employs the artist’s body as the medium intends (in part) to negate the traditional gallery-controlled commodification of artwork; its agency is anti-formalist. Body art is a category of performance art in which the artist’s body (nude or costumed) is employed sometimes to an extreme as in the examples of Abramović and Shiraga. The use of the artist’s body as “universal object” becomes indistinct from the artwork as original, actual, ontological experience. Modernist Greenbergian notions of disinterestedness and distancing are not germane to the inter-subjective engagement of the body in performance. In describing the phenomena of body art, writer and curator Lea Vergine states,
The public is needed to complete the event; it must be involved in a collective experience that leads it to reconsider its quotidian existence and the rules of its ordinary behavior… The relationship between public and artist becomes a relationship of complicity.431

There are two points in her statement that I want to address. First, I will consider Vergine’s premise of the immanent relationship between viewer and artist; secondly her notion of complicity.

Inter-subjective engagement is, of course, vital to The Artist is Present in which the artist-viewer encounter holds an unspoken discourse. The Oxford English Dictionary notes that the etymology of the noun discourse arises from the Latin discursus meaning the action of running off in different directions;432 in other words, to and fro, a term expressed in the aforementioned model of Armstrong’s hermeneutic spiral. In The Artist is Present—like many of her works—Abramović uses her body to make a direct demand on the viewer and likewise the subject directly enjoins Abramović in being-with and thinking-with. In The Artist is Present the metaphysical movement of thinking links the artist and viewer in an ephemeral moment that is open-ended. This linking of the two subjects in this moment is what I call the between.

Although wordless, Abramović’s performance nonetheless creates a discourse between artist and participant predicated on a mutual gaze and the parallel thoughts of Abramović and the sitter. These thoughts are not shared in the way an audible dialogue would be, and therefore present metaphysical questions of communication. What is actually going on in this contrived situation? Is manipulation of either party in play? In a Facebook
and Twitter question and answer interview post-performance (documented on the Museum of Modern Art’s website) Abramović considered why participants become so emotional,

So, when you enter the square of light and you sit on that chair, you’re an individual, and as an individual you are kind of isolated. And you’re in a very interesting situation because you’re observed by the group (the people waiting to sit), you’re observed by me, and you’re observing me—so it’s like triple observation. But then, very soon while you’re having this gaze and looking at me, you start having this invert and you start looking at yourself. So I am just a trigger, I am just a mirror and actually they become aware of their own life, of their own vulnerability, of their own pain, of everything—and that brings the crying. [They are] really crying about their own self, and that is an extremely emotional moment.433

This statement makes clear that Abramović sees her role as a mediator on behalf of her participants. Is this what is actually happening? It should be pointed out not all participants in The Artist is Present cried or demonstrated distressed emotion. Some smiled and appeared delighted; some were stoic, some impassive.

Vergine rightly points out that the meaning of the encounter between artist and spectator is dependent on “recognition on the part of the spectator.”434 She states,

The artist needs to feel that others are receptive to him, that they are willing to play the game of accepting his provocations and that they will give him back his ‘projections.’ It is indispensible that the public co-operate with him, since what he needs is to be confirmed in his identity. The behavior of the spectator is a gratification for the artist just as the behavior of the artist is a gratification of the spectator. When the public allows itself to be used, the artist has found an ‘other’ who is willing to give him reassurance in the fantasy or utopianizing world that he is attempting to make visible, and the experiment works the other way round as well.435

As a documenter of at least sixty performances for which Vergine analyzed patterns and outcomes, her critique stands with some amount of impunity. Cooperation of the viewer with
the artist is essential; it seems reasonable to give credence to the assertion that there is mutual gratitude. Yet is the notion that the performance artist requires validation an absolute? Did *The Artist is Present* provide a space of fantasy or utopia? Is it necessarily idealistic for Abramović to provide a time and space of self-reflection to her audience? Is a “projection” always in play? It is possible, of course, but exceptions and considerations must allow for other possibilities.

While it is credible that the predominance of performance artists (and all artists) demands an audience, I would argue that it is not part and parcel that the artist requires a *confirmation of identity* from her viewers. Like any skilled professional, the artist knows who she is; to suggest the artist makes art to gain validation is too broad a claim. Would Vergine claim a lawyer or graphic designer needs their clients to confirm who they are? Artists make art for many reasons; to feel valued may be one—or none—of them.

That Abramović sets up a space for reflection in the face-to-face encounter cannot be disputed; however, by Vergine’s account this would be a utopian or imaginative situation. For *The Artist is Present*, that is a possible scenario, but not the definitive one. Vergine’s claim here negates individual agency on the part of the artist, the viewer or both. It also denies the open-ended possibilities of the viewer’s experience. Isn’t it possible that while the viewer may come away with one perception of her experience at the time of performance, other insights or ideas may take shape, and form a different perception in the future? How we remember things—our self-reflections—is susceptible to change.

In a videotaped post-performance interview of *The Artist is Present* by the Museum of Modern Art, Abramović reflects on her experience,
...You know I never could imagine that amount of emotions I experienced in the piece. It was like—it was something to do with pure love—giving to the total strangers. And I think that this piece, you know, really changed me on a quite deep level. I’m not the same as I was before. It’s just some really profound experience, and kind of lifting my consciousness...my spirit is different.\textsuperscript{437}

Here Abramović identifies love as an outcome of the between. She does not elaborate any further about this idea specifically; in fact, it seems apparent that this experience is intense and largely escapes verbalization. It is not a love that is singularly idealistic, pleasant or provides security; instead it offers contact. This idea conjures up a statement by Nancy in which he negates the idea of love as resolution, “Instead of this law of the completion of being, one would want to deal only with a moment of contact, at once eternal and fleeting.”\textsuperscript{438} In the \textit{Artist is Present} this connection is shared with Abramović and the audience at large, and—more directly—with her sitter.

In the same interview, Abramović asks Paco\textsuperscript{439} (who is in the audience) about his experience. Paco is the most frequent of participants; he sat with her twenty-one times during the course of the performance, one of which was for the duration of seven hours (the entire day of a performance of \textit{The Artist is Present}.) She tells the audience that although she never actually talked to him, she feels she knows him intimately because he spent the most time with her over the course of the three months.\textsuperscript{440} She asked him to explain why he returned to the space “over and over again.”\textsuperscript{441} Paco replies he had anticipated the retrospective because he was attracted to her work. He describes the first time he took the chair across from Abramović,
I came and sat with you without expectations, and of course I had the curiosity and excitement of sitting. But then I sat with you for the first time. It was like diving into an ocean of light. I immediately felt comfortable with you, I felt like I knew you and there was no questioning about...like, yeah, I could feel the audience and feel the energy...but I’m a very distracted person by nature and always looking around and I was amazed also to be able to have that concentration sitting in front of you.442

He describes going a second time to the museum with the plan of seeing the re-performers. When he noticed no one was standing in line for *The Artist is Present*, he decided to take the chair again although not intending to keep the seat until closing time, and then taken by surprise to find he had been sitting for seven hours.

> It was your magnetism and your commitment to the piece. And I really felt transformed from the very first sitting. And I know that’s what brought me back. It was a healing experience, cleansing, letting go, and at some point it was very painful because it was very emotional. But it was always very luminous, and you know, it was just amazing... 443

These descriptions on behalf of Paco and Abramović allow for some insight into the ontological space-time of the between which grants the to and fro of thinking. In the case of the performance *The Artist is Present*, the between takes place simultaneously with Abramović and her sitter/audience and contains the notion of an interval. This is not a space that can be observed or documented in real time, but one that is nonetheless substantiated by way of a personal reflective discourse of what happened in their shared silence. To unpack the between further, it can be compared to the Japanese aesthetic sensibility called *ma* (the character 間.) Essentially it conflates the objective idea of a particular space with the subjectively experienced aspect of that place in a particular situation.444 For example,
consider a specific place of a window in a room combined with the sense one feels while observing moonlight streaming through that window. In other words in 間 (ma) an objective space is imbued “with an additional subjective awareness of lived, existential, non-homogenous space.”445 This self-consciousness is the between. When Abramović and Paco sat across from each other, there was the space of the Marron Atrium in the museum and there was their individual consciousness of thinking during this period. (The same applies to the audience observing Abramović and her sitter.) And then everyone’s continued thoughts as they recall that place, that experience and reflect on and question it in time. In performance art, we might consider the between as a zero space of thinking love that is unique to that viewer and the artist occupying that place and triggering feeling.

Risky business

Now returning to Vergine’s first quote, in which the description of viewer and artist is noted as a “relationship of complicity.”446 To be complicit is to be involved in something wrong. The Artist is Present pulled viewers and participants—as well as Abramović’—out of their everydayness. (It could be argued that art in any medium has that potential.) For the interim the performance put into place a new code for sitting with someone in which a silent gaze replaced customary conversation. There was no pretense about what was going on. Yet Vergine’s use of the term complicity brings a cynical spin to Abramović’s intent. Would collaboration be more apt? The notion of collusion and audience brings to mind the idea of theater in which actor and onlookers are collectively occupied in a narrative that is based on dramaturgy rather than performance. In the dramatic arts a fixed narrative is normally rehearsed; an actor is playing someone other than her authentic self. Abramović is adamant
that performance can never be rehearsed because it is veritable experience. Whereby acting
requires practice—a pre-enactment—performance may necessitate disciplinary exercises in
which the body (and mind) becomes prepared but does not hinge on a predetermined
script. In this way we understand performance as a situation that is open to unanticipated
possibility.

A performance by Abramović addresses Steinweg’s definition of ontological
unpredictability or being’s capriciousness and her work embodies this in acute ways.
Through performance she creates a tension based on the open-endedness of what might
happen. For example, will she faint? Will one of the participants do something untoward? In
this way Abramović blurs the authorship of her performance; she does not control what will
transpire or a final outcome since this depends on the collaboration of viewers.

Most of the participants in The Artist is Present were not disruptive but a few did
exhibit unexpected behaviors. For example, an aspiring performance artist suddenly and
completely disrobed; another individual put on a mask he had concealed in his jacket. In a
sense this blurring of an end is a contradiction of Abramović’s definition of performance as
“research for mental and physical answers.” What solution she seeks exactly is not clear;
answers of any kind seem antithetical to her work in light of her declared openness to
ontological unpredictability.

While The Artist is Present includes the design of ontological unpredictability, an
earlier Abramović performance amplifies the volume on this tension and acutely indicates the
magnitude of unknowing. Rhythm 0 [Figure 4.10] was a six-hour performance in which she
completely opens herself to being’s volatility. At Galleria Studio Morro in Naples, Italy,
Abramović laid out seventy-two objects on a table that included “…A rose, perfume, piece of bread, grapes, wine, and there was objects like scissors, nails, metal bar, and finally a pistol with one bullet.”

She indicated in the instructions that the onlookers should also consider her an object; they could do anything they wanted to her for the duration of six hours, and she would take full responsibility for their actions. So here she deliberately and consciously set herself up for an undetermined outcome.

Abramović recalls that she wanted to take the risk of an audience member killing her because it would take her to a new mental limit. She was curious as how the gallery participants would handle this self-determination and what breaking point would be reached. Abramović assumed an impassive posture and flat affect for the performance. At the beginning, gallery-goers engaged in playful manipulation, even kissing her.

But as time went on, the participant’s actions escalated to abusive behavior by cutting her skin, laying her on a table and placing a knife between her legs, hooding her head, and cutting off her clothes.

Photographic documents of the performance show a mostly male audience; in an interview with Judith Thurman for The New Yorker magazine, Abramović recalls that while men were the active participants in the abuse of her person, some women encouraged their
Finally a man loaded the gun, placed it in her hand and aimed it at her neck, with a finger on trigger. A gallerist then seized the gun and threw it out the window. It is alarming to consider that this artwork might have ended in harm or even death, yet Abramović had indicated her awareness of that potential scenario.

Abramović’s consciousness of the uncertainty of being is an acknowledgement of indefinite openness. Here I return to the Introduction in which I noted Butler’s declaration of indefinite openness as a temporal unfolding of love. Butler indicates that love never reaches a “final form” because it is endlessly developing in ways that cannot be known. This assertion conflicts with commonly held ideas about love: the notion that love will be (eventually, ideally) perfectly fulfilling and complete. Yet Nancy reminds us we can only reach toward love, we can never reach it; love is simply a movement. In life and love as well as art, we are always situated in a place of unknowing; the immanent riskiness of being negates any certainty outside of our eventual death. Between our consciousness of the present and the moment of our future death, there is a gap comprising the lacuna of indefinite openness. I argue that a work of art and the crossing of feeling and thinking it evokes concerns this gap for both viewer and artist. This case can be argued for Rhythm 0 in which Abramović creates a work in which she consciously constructs a risk in order to move towards a limit. Nancy locates the idea of limit in Plato’s Symposium; that “philosophical Eros”—the divine rung at the very top of love’s ladder—is not only the summit of an ideology of love but paradoxically a situation of distress and fragility which is necessary to “the experience of the limit, where thought takes place...” Nancy elaborates,
In the Symposium, Plato broaches the limits, and all his thinking displays a reticence or reserve not always present elsewhere: it broaches its own limit, that is to say, its source; it effaces itself before the love (or in the love?) that it recognizes as its truth. Thus it thinks its own birth and its own effacement, but it thinks in such a way that it restores to love, to the limit, its very task and destination. Philosophy is not occupied with gathering and interpreting the experiences of love here. Instead, in the final analysis, it is love that receives and deploys the experience of thinking.\textsuperscript{455}

For Nancy the love is a movement that throws and catches. We understand what Abramović intended in reaching for a limit by imagining her at the top of a perilous ladder, at once triumphant and utterly vulnerable.

Vergine claims that body art’s bottom line holds an infinite and unfulfilled demand for love. She describes this love as,

…The need to be loved for what one is and for what one wants to be — the need for a kind of love that confers unlimited rights — the need for what is called primary love. This is what gives the art its dimension of inevitable delusion and failure. This unobtained love is what transforms itself into the aggressivity that is typical of all these actions, events, photo-sequences and performances. It is also redirected to other versions of the self, and the self is doubled, camouflaged, and idealized. It is turned into love of the romance of the self. This avid need for love becomes narcissism in the fetus that we continue to be, but to be loved in this way is the only power that might once again give sense to the lives of so many of us.\textsuperscript{356}

There are two parts of this statement to consider in regard to love and art. The first is “need” and the second is “aggressivity.” Regarding the latter, I am not convinced that Abramovic’s performances—or any body art—\textit{universally} hold elements of aggression. This notion arises from a Freudian frame in which subjects are at baseline antagonistic beings, whose tendencies are channeled into creative activity as a sublimation of their inherent hostility. It is
an argument not completely unreasonable, but neither is it totally convincing. Instead, there are many possibilities for a work of art as to why it was made and how it functions. Escalating aggression in *Rhythm 0* is a blatant and compelling aspect of the performance; however the objects Abramović chose to lay out did allow for—and encourage—the possibility of both harm and tenderness. What were the gallery goers thinking in their choice of actions? There doesn’t seem to be any documented evidence of that so we are left to wonder. Perhaps it doesn’t matter because in the end Abramovic’s reach for the limit is the most important legacy of the work.

Vergine’s assertions also contain the thread of need, meaning that body art contains a *requirement* of love that is sabotaged in its efforts because of its primacy. In order to buy into Vergine’s notion of primary love, we necessarily subscribe to the hierarchy of love in Plato’s *Symposium* or the theories of Freud, in which life is immanently a struggle between *eros* and death.457 Now in the twenty-first century, we may understand the ancient metaphorical ladder of love as merely a manner of *reaching*; there is no summit to conclude its range and no rung on it is more or less important than any other. Contemporary art reframes love as non-hierarchical, as both delusional and authentic, as something that fails at the same time it flourishes, at once obtainable and elusive. Love is *between* these binaries where it is open to indeterminacy, where thinking and questioning guarantee only the opportunity for contact and presence. The performance art of Abramović offers a particular perspective of love in that this presence happens in real time.

***
In performance art thinking and questioning happen in synchronicity with the viewer and artist; both offer the time to be present. The present-ness of the moment holds promise for unlimited choices. This open present is a kind of freedom and suggests another mode of love in art.

By expanding an understanding of aesthetics to include consideration of the ethos within a particular artwork, the subject broadens an outlook that fortifies the experience of the artwork. Pain, although a subjective condition, is an extremity of presence used by the artist to make a connection in art. The universal of pain is a shared aspect of being. By constructing a situation for the contemplation of pain, the artist allows for a rupture of the viewer’s everyday insulation. In this way, pain or its representation in art is never senseless but a way of relating to the other; it decenters. It is similar to the Heideggerian anxiety discussed in Chapter 2, defined as mood that discloses what it means to exist.

It is important to remember that performance art is veritable experience in real time and as such opens itself to immeasurable possibilities and ontological unpredictability in a way that escapes painting and sculpture. That the performance artist may elect to undergo a rigor demanded by embodied suffering and that the viewer accedes to observe or participate in that experience is an expression of love. In this mutual undertaking, the between becomes an important ground of love for thinking. This ground manifests a self-conscious thinking that coalesces objective space with subjective experience. In this way there is indeterminate openness whereby there is an ongoing unfolding of love. Love in performance art is not guaranteed with a tender kiss, a slap to the face or a gun to the neck; these experiences are merely crossings, which are indefinitely open.
Chapter Five

Pure Knowing

Thus far I have unpacked an aesthetic of anxiety, myth and pain. In section one of this chapter, I now consider the “aesthetics of joy.” What does joy in art offer beyond feelings of delight? What is the viewer’s relationship to the venerated artists and artworks of long ago, still admired and sought out? I begin by recounting the well-known ekphrastic writings by Stendhal upon his visit to Florence in the early nineteenth century, particularly the frescoes of Giotto. His reaction to exploring the Renaissance art of the city reflects the experience of unbounded joy that prompts questions: What is the role of embodiment in the subject’s ecstatic response to art? What is the relationship between thinking love and the body? Here

I examine the embodied connection a subject has experienced with a work of art through the lens of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and other philosophers.

Is it possible to completely lose a sense of self in contemplating a work of art? The second part of this chapter “without will” addresses the experience of strong emotions or actual physical signs that overtake the viewer when engaging with art. Is this occurrence related to love in art? A few syndromes have been identified that trigger symptoms in viewers in which they become overwhelmed to the point of a loss of control. This brings forward questions about the viewer’s will in relation to art as postulated by Arthur Schopenhauer. He asserts that when a viewer is engaged with a work of art there is a subject-object collapse that renders the subject will-less. How does Schopenhauer’s theory of will reconcile with thinking love in art?

In previous chapters, I take up the categories of Western loves philia and agape; I also touch upon erôs. In the third section titled “out of Eden,” I suggest that in addition to elements of classical erôs we find that love is evident in how we think of art that addresses sex, desire and the body, as well as the questions that arise by thinking love. As discussed in Chapter One, erôs is a manner of love based in sexual attraction and desire. In what ways does erôs influence a theory of thinking love in art? How does a representation of the nude body factor into thinking love? The first example under consideration is the collaboration of Yoko Ono and John Lennon. These artists broke ground in the second half of the twentieth century as a couple who took on a number of creative projects in which they deployed their bodies along with technology as a site for epistemic shifts of thinking. Next, I examine the current collaboration of Breyer P-Orridge, a couple who present radical possibilities for a
committed partnership between lovers, one that *rethinks* the body via surgeries as well as prescribed gender roles. Lastly in this section, I discuss contemporary artist Shigeyuki Kihara, who uses he/r body through a postcolonial lens in order to address the rupture of gender performance instigated by Western missionaries in he/r native South Pacific culture.

What role does memory play in thinking love in art? How does the autobiographical nature of an artwork figure into thinking love? In what ways does confession affect the artist-artwork-viewer crossing? Self-disclosure is a genre of literary art that goes back to Saint Augustine in the fifth century; it is universally popular today in reality television shows. In the fourth section “aesthetics of confession,” I consider British artist Tracey Emin and French sculptor Louise Bourgeois who utilize their personal experiences as a point of departure for their multi-media artworks.

In confessional art, artists frequently reveal painful experiences; but anger and disappointment are merely a few of myriad aspects comprising a subject’s life. In the final section of this chapter—“the will to presence”—I continue to reflect on Emin’s studio practice, but in the way it announces an *affirmation of life*—what Nietzsche calls the will to power. How does Nietzsche’s philosophy manifest in a work of art? What are the choices for action the subject has in dealing with life’s challenges? In what way does the artist’s sharing of a particular identity and private experiences contribute to thinking love in art?

In this final chapter, I also address attributes of the conventional loves *erôs* and *storge* to possibilities for thinking love and art. Additionally, I stress that love in art is at the same time *an act of love.*
Aesthetics of joy

In 1817 a French writer who went by the name of Stendhal emerged from Santa Croce in Florence after looking at its Renaissance art that includes frescoes by Giotto. In a retrospective book recounting his Italian journeys he describes his euphoric feelings upon spending time in the church,

I was in a sort of ecstasy, from the idea of being in Florence, close to the great men whose tombs I had seen. Absorbed in the contemplation of sublime beauty I reached the point where one encounters celestial sensations. Everything spoke so vividly to my soul. Ah, if I could only forget. I had palpitations of the heart, what in Berlin they call ‘nerves.’ Life was drained from me. I walked with the fear of falling.

This passage by Stendhal is oft quoted as the quintessential ecstatic experience of seeing great art. His overwhelming sense of awe seems to touch a limit that evokes the Kantian sublime. Yet the statement is also understood that Stendhal was overjoyed. Nancy describes joy as abundance—beyond pleasure—in which the subject is in a state of excess. Nancy writes, “…Joy offers being itself, it makes the being felt, shared.” In other words joy affirms existence for the subject. And it not only sanctions being, it also allows for participation in the world. In the case of Stendhal the joy of experiencing great art became—for a brief time—a nearly unbearable-ness of being. What is this extraordinary moment? Nancy asserts,

It is the question of presence: to joy is an extremity of presence, self exposed, presence of self joying outside itself, in a presence that no present absorbs and that does not (re)present, but that offers itself endlessly.
Nancy’s phrase “self exposed,” suggests a vulnerability of being that occurs when we deeply participate with the world. In Stendhal’s case, he was interacting with Renaissance masterworks and monuments housed in historical Santa Croce. With this participation he is fully present in that moment for which there is a crossing of subject and art. Stendhal gives himself over to the viewing experience to the point that it overflows his being. (Consider Nancy’s phrase again, “…No present absorbs…”) That moment of time—that acute present—is so much that the subject experiences an overabundance of feeling. Nancy’s use of the word “endlessly” returns us to the concept of indefinite openness, which allows the subject a boundless movement towards a limit never to be reached.

While Nancy’s reference to joy in the quote noted is framed with the subject in relation to the other, I want to stress that art also offers potential to provide such a bountifulness. The presence he describes—the “extremity of presence”—is applicable to a viewer who encounters art—the crossing of the self and art. Here the notion of presence is important in terms of the artist. While Stendhal was present, obviously the master artists were not. With objects such as painting and sculpture the artist is the absent other, the artwork their trace. Artworks stand in proxy long after the artist is gone and in this sense their offering is infinite. This offering is an act of love in art. For example, while Giotto lived 500 years before Stendhal, the frescoes he so lovingly and carefully created still have the power to enjoin the contemporary onlooker. Viewers before and after Stendhal continue to make pilgrimages to see the profound and long-standing legacy of masterpieces in sacred places, palaces and museums throughout the world, what we may think of as missions of joy. The journeys too, are acts of love in art. These places hold potential to joy—the word
Nancy considers the “verb of love.” However, joy is but one possibility for thinking love (the burst), which is being in relation with an artwork and the artist that created it.

There are other potentialities that preclude joy such as grief or wonder. In any case, the open-ended moment of thinking-with is a form of presence and Nancy claims that a magnitude of presence “opens the other.” This is vital; again, Nancy is referring to two subjects in relation, but I assert that the artist is the absent other and the artwork stands in proxy for the artist. This is a unique presence because it contains absence. As absence-in-presence it nonetheless remains a crossing, which may result in an opening marked as the punctum—the piercing of the metaphysical heart. The ingress of the punctum allows the subject to flourish in a way that nothing else can. Its occurrence produces a penetrating sensation whereby feelings cross with questions on the part of the viewer. Yet while Stendhal recorded his feelings, what questions he considered remain uncertain.

Giotto’s The Ascension of Saint John the Evangelist in situ at Santa Croce provides a good example for Stendhal’s experience of the punctum as we might imagine it. The principle figure of John in the center of the composition simultaneously defies death and gravity by leaving the earthly world for a heavenly domain. He is enveloped in diagonal rays of golden light, which illustrate his movement towards the celestial realm. Giotto’s Saint John is in a transport of joy—Nancy’s verb of love—that can be compared with Stendhal’s moment of “celestial sensations” as an ecstatic moment of thinking love. The term celestial offers the idea of the boundless, timeless realm—an astral plane of indefinite openness—forever beyond bodily reach. At the same time Stendhal’s feelings of “palpitations” of his heart suggest an embodiment of presence.
Joy (and other poignant emotions) is not only experienced in the mind, but throughout the body as well; we recall Baumgarten’s claim of aesthetics as a science of sense perception, a combination of sensation and feeling. Yet Baumgarten regarded sight and hearing as belonging to the realm of the mind, dismissing the body as a place for authentic experience. Adrienne Dingerink Chaplin writes,

Therefore, despite his re-evaluation of sense-perception as a legitimate form of poetic or artistic knowing, Baumgarten still remained trapped in a dualistic anthropology and never developed a proper aesthetics of the body.

In other words, Baumgarten holds on to the Cartesian split of mind and body, as did Kant who restricted the body as the locus for corporeal appetites. However, contemporary thinking in the philosophy of aesthetics brings together philosophical argument and science, which integrates how we understand the experience of creative work. Chaplin makes clear,

In recent years this attitude to the relation between art, the senses, and the body has undergone significant changes. Many of those changes have been informed by recent developments in cognitive science and evolutionary psychology. Part of that research consists of an exploration of the link between our cognitive make-up and the making and appreciating of art. The underlying assumption shared by these scholars is that, despite immense historic and cultural diversity, there is a universal biological basis for these phenomena. Art, both as a practice and as an experience, belongs, as it were, to the hardware of human nature.

In other words, art not only springs from some essential aspect of the human animal’s constitution, but is also part and parcel of a lived (embodied) human experience that informs how we know the world. Merleau-Ponty notes,
Man taken as a concrete being is not a psyche joined to an organism, but the movement to and fro of existence which at one time allows itself to take corporeal form and at others move towards personal acts. 476

What I understand Merleau-Ponty to say is that the subject’s body and thoughts function in a constant exchange—a back and forth—of action, attitude and focus; they are not working strictly in synchrony. What a subject is doing (in terms of the body), thinking about and feeling is changing moment to moment. This sustained movement marks the body’s relationship with itself as well as others and objects. As noted in the introduction, the idea of to and fro recalls Armstrong’s interplay in reading and from that the extension of an idea for reciprocity in an aesthetic experience: viewer and artist/artwork enjoin in a shifting and unpredictable movement of thinking. The thinking of art is a helical conveyance—a to and fro—within the space of between that involves interpretation by way of questioning, of thinking love.

One or more of the five 477 bodily senses are in play when connecting with a work of art. These culturally mediated sensibilities are critical to how we understand and navigate the world. Certain works of art emphasize particular sense perceptions more than others. Optics is, of course, vital for most visual and lively arts, but creative work also involves other sense organs such as hearing and touch. For example, a performance or recording of Rhapsody in Blue by George Gershwin is an aural experience. As Frances Dyson explains,

Sound surrounds. Its phenomenal characteristics—the fact that it is invisible, intangible, ephemeral, and vibrational—coordinate with the physiology of the ears, to create a perceptual experience profoundly different from the dominant sense of sight. 478
In the same way the auditory apparatus liaises with the brain to hear, the physiology of optics and the nerve receptors in our skin do likewise for sight and touch. Maurice Merleau-Ponty reminds us that the idea of music is impossible without sound; in the same way paintings manifest color. He writes,

A novel, poem, picture or musical work are individuals, that is, beings in which the expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed, their meaning, accessible only through direct contact, being radiated with no change of their temporal and spatial situation. It is in this sense that our body is comparable to a work of art.

The idea of art as a kind of being possessing singularity in the manner of a subject is compelling. Yet a work of art without the crossing by a subject radiates nothing. It is the discrete subject who activates the potential in the work by thinking-with. As Heidegger suggests, “…let us go to the actual work and ask the work what and how it is.” Yet again we see the importance of inquiry; Heidegger suggests that the origin of a work of art begins with asking questions for both viewer and artist.

These questions arise from more than just the machinations of the mind. Merleau-Ponty framed the bodily senses as consciousness; the body-subject perceives as the senses interface with each other. Stendhal’s experience at Santa Croce included synchronous sense perceptions. We might imagine that his joyous adventure was not limited to gazing at and examining the classical architecture, paintings, sculptures, and grave monuments, but also hearing the ambient sounds of the church and the echo of his footfall as he walked over marble floors. He may have been mindful of the scent of hot wax from devotional candles and the pungency of lingering incense, or whiffed the old varnish of oil
paintings. Did he notice dust suspended in visible columns of light as it raked through the windows? Perhaps he ran his fingers over the warm plaster walls and smooth cool stone carvings. He may have contemplated what Heidegger calls their “thingliness”—their essence—what makes them what they are, and the process of their creation. Was he alert to the way he moved through the various spaces of the church? Cool shadows cloaking dim corners, the simultaneous height and weight of Brunelleschi’s dome rising over his head and the elaborate wooden rafters in the lofty nave that make a person feel small. All of these “inter-sensory correspondences” would have heightened Stendhal’s consciousness of his experience in the church. It is through the body a subject has access to the world on a day-to-day basis, but an encounter with art (i.e., visual and audio) is a particularly special moment.

Chaplin writes,

Art, whether in Lascaux or the Louvre, can capture this affective primordial contact with the world that tends to get lost, both in the usual hum-drum character of our day-to-day affairs, as well as in scientific abstraction. However, in the aesthetic experience, humans respond to forms, shapes, and colors in such a way that they begin to take on a life of their own and open themselves up to metaphoric meaning.

As body-subjects crossing works of art, we are affected bodily and imaginatively by aesthetic experience. Santa Croce, as an aesthetic whole, makes the absent present for the art pilgrim at the same time all the senses are in high gear. Merleau-Ponty describes the body-subject as a “synergic system” based on movement in which all its undertakings are integrated in order for the subject to be in the world. The ceaseless movement of the body-subject in its synergy result in our total consciousness.
This notion of movement in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological philosophy is important to my argument of thinking love in art. We recall that Nancy stated, “Love is the extreme movement beyond the self of a being reaching completion.” Although love does not complete anything, this remark stresses the action of connection between subjects; I further suggest this effort at contact takes place between a viewer and a work of art or artist. (Merleau-Ponty points out that the meaning of the word “between” is understood because of the condition of our embodiment.) Connection with art manifests a particular kind of love that arises from the metaphysical movement of thinking; it occurs as part of the questioning process on behalf of the viewer. My argument finds some footing with Merleau-Ponty; he recognizes the critical phenomena of questioning as it involves the senses on behalf of the body-subject,

The passing of sensory givens before our eyes or under our hands is, as it were a language which teaches itself, and in which the meaning is secreted by the very structure of the signs, and this is why it can literally be said that our senses question things and that things reply to them.

In other words, to ask questions is a whole-body phenomenon and not confined to a mental action. As stated earlier, the thinking of art is a helical conveyance—a to and fro—within the space of between that involves interpretation by way of questioning.

Merleau-Ponty goes on to point out that vision and movement are ways of entering into a relationship that exceeds mere thought. In thinking art, a culmination of movement results in the moment of an inexpressible revelation whereby the artist indirectly (as in the case of Stendhal) or directly (as in the case of Abramović or deRobertis) enjoins the other
who is present to the artist’s work. I believe this connection is love—an exceptional kind of
love found in a work of art.

I further suggest that Nancy’s explanation of “extreme movement” as love can be
considered in a fundamental way in terms of the body. The word movement is a vast and
comprehensive notion that describes the holistic inter-sensory integrative correspondences of
the body. Along with our consciousness of thought and sense-abilities, there is virtually
ceaseless motion of bone, muscle and tissue that is the infrastructure for the profuse minutia
of our bodily physiology: the conveyance of blood through internal organs and vessels, the
complex actions of digestion and excretory functions, perspiration traversing the skin, the
demise and reproduction of countless cells, the exchange of gasses in the respiratory system,
and the synapses of trillions of nerve endings. Elements of the physiological body are
literally in movement at all times. Considering all these roles, the negation of body
movement signals the absence of life. Movement is a certainty of being. I suggest then, that
Nancy’s statement of love as extreme motion is not only in excess of the self as realization,
but within the self as well. Love is an embodied act.

**Without will**

Over the course of the introduction I note that works of art are traditionally
considered in terms of sensations such as those romantically described by Stendhal. This
passionate and idealized notion of *eros* (desire) has persisted in Occidental thought since the
ancient Greeks and reached an apex in Romanticism. Yet I argue that love in art deviates
from this view. Art does of course evoke feeling, but it also provokes *questions* in the viewer,
though not necessarily answers. It is these questions that expand cognitive boundaries. This thinking is a mode of reaching that gives us the opportunity to thrive—no more so when we are contemplating a work of art. This manner of flourishing—this thinking-with—is a kind of love. Yet Nancy reminds us that love is never a fulfillment but a “promise always disappearing.” Like our emotions, the blood traversing our vessels, the neurons that are gained and lost daily in our brains, love in art is transient.

Classic love (affection or desire as felt and expressed for others and objects) is generally connected to feelings of some kind, pleasurable or otherwise. We feel deep affection for our pet, adore our lover, and cherish our grandparent. When the dog bites, the lover abandons us, or the grandparent dies, love holds the potential to disappoint at the least or devastate at the most. Euphoria becomes melancholy. Yet Nancy asserts that all loves are equivalent. Abandonment is no less love than devotion and tenderness; contact was made. Art potentially provokes feeling too, which can be intense. In addition to the example of Stendhal, this was evidenced in the strong emotions experienced by participants in Abramović’s *The Artist is Present* performance at the Museum of Modern...
Art described in Chapter Four. [Figure 5.1] In the late twentieth century Italian psychiatrist Graziella Magherini identified an acute and overwhelming grappling of feeling she named Stendhal Syndrome that affects some individuals while looking at works of art. The symptoms include breathlessness and feeling faint; at an extreme these effects induce a temporary psychosis requiring brief hospitalization.494

Another state of emotional arousal associated with looking at art is identified as Rubens Syndrome in 2001 by the Roman Institute of Psychology.495 This condition is manifested by impulsive sexual pursuits triggered in onlookers after viewing ancient Greek sculpture or paintings by artists such as Caravaggio or Rubens. An article in ARTnews notes,

The researchers, who completed the project last summer, say that the Rubens Syndrome is a spontaneous response to the beauty of art and that those that are afflicted by it do not enter a museum with sex specifically on their minds. The report observes that a viewer calmly taking in a work of art is particularly predisposed to erotic suggestion, and unsurprisingly, classical scenes depicting mythological romps hold greater sway than abstract pictures.496

According to Dissanayake, “…Responses to works of art unequivocally indicate that they may be as sensuous and physical as any human experience.”497 She elaborates,

To modern biological thinking, of course, a feeling as physical response is no more or less bodily than an idea, a perception, a memory or a thought. A “mental” or “emotional” apperception of color, shape, or process is comprised of physiochemical, neurophysiological events.498

Still, the overall findings prompt questions about art as a conduit for some of existence’s basic issues such as death and erotic desire.
Both Rubens and Stendhal Syndromes are connected to physical symptoms and strong feelings. A predecessor to Merleau-Ponty, the nineteenth century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer is remarkable for his attention to the subject’s body-mind connection that earlier philosophers overlooked. He considers how the world that surrounds the subject’s body corresponds with its inner domain such as thoughts and feelings. In the former, there is the phenomenal world of sensation—everything that is apparent: objects that can be physically seen, touched, and heard via the senses. For Schopenhauer this phenomenal world exists as (what he calls) ideas. Phenomena are not, however, experienced from the “inside” with the exception of our own body, which possesses a duality of inner and outer states. For example, a person caresses a lover’s hair or skin yet cannot know the other’s thoughts or feel the other’s pain or pleasure. Nevertheless the lover is aware of her own body as an object, in addition to her own thoughts and sensations. It is through sensation or reflection that subject knows the world.\textsuperscript{499}

This dual aspect is both phenomenon and thing-in-itself.\textsuperscript{500} Schopenhauer postulated that all living things\textsuperscript{501} possess this inner and outer experience but only the subject has reflective consciousness—will—that is manifested in both dimensions.\textsuperscript{502} His explanation is broader than the conventional notion of will as a component of a subject’s free choice of action.

But it has now become clear that what enables each one of us consciously to distinguish the idea of our own body from all other ideas which in other respects are similar to this idea, is that our body appears in consciousness in quite another way in \textit{toto genere} different from idea, and this we denote by the word will; and it is just this double knowledge which we have of our own body that gives us information about it, about its activity and its response to motives, and also about what it suffers as a result of outside intervention; in a word, about what it is, not as idea, but over and above
that, what it is in its self. We have not such direct information about the character, activity and tolerance of all the other real objects.\textsuperscript{503}

In other words, the subject can only know its own will, not that of others. Additionally, the will drives the subject towards objects to satisfy its cravings for what is missing or unavailable to it. These yearnings are anything we want or need, such as to buy a book or take a vacation. In the case of Stendhal, a journey to see great Italian Renaissance art was one of these longings. A key component of Schopenhauer’s argument is that the one phenomenon in the world that has pushback power over a subject’s will is the aesthetic encounter.

Schopenhauer believes that as a subject contemplates art this thoughtfulness provides an opportunity to escape the ubiquitous needing and wanting that is part and parcel of a being in the world. Art offers a momentary avoidance of suffering that comprises the relentless and ranging desire to gratify it. Schopenhauer writes, “He ceases to consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither of things, and looks simply and solely at the what.”\textsuperscript{504} In other words, idea and will drop away. Looking at art is a situation that allows the subject to transcend the will, to become will-less in the face of something completely knowable: what Schopenhauer refers to as the “pure subject of knowing”.\textsuperscript{505} This knowing has an antecedent in the Platonic Idea\textsuperscript{506} for which there is subject-object collapse.\textsuperscript{507} Pure knowing offers liberation from serving the will and a forgetting of individuality. This particular knowledge permits the subject to comprehend something without a sense want or need—without a sense of the self. Schopenhauer explains, “It is then all the same whether we see the setting sun from a prison or from a palace.”\textsuperscript{508}
Devoid of will the “pure subject of knowing” contemplates a work of art and grasps ideas in an unadulterated manner. For Schopenhauer the aesthetic experience is generally music, painting and sculpture but in the twenty-first century we recognize that performance, dance, film or a book also provide metaphysical transport. Schopenhauer suggests that the only way to wholly perceive something is for the subject to completely lose a sense of self. In this way the subject is de-centered. He writes,

He does not allow abstract thought, the concepts of the reason, to take possession of his consciousness, but, instead, gives the whole power of his mind to perception, immerses himself entirely in this, and lets his whole consciousness be filled with the quiet contemplation with the natural object actually present whether a landscape, a tree, a crag, a building, or whatever it may be. He loses himself in this object…he forgets his very individuality, his will, and continues to exist only as the pure subject, the clear mirror of the object, so it is as if the object alone were there without anyone to perceive it, and he can no longer separate the perceiver from the perception, but the two have become one, because the whole consciousness is taken up with one single sensuous picture.

What strikes me in this passage is how Schopenhauer could just as well be describing the climatic moment in the sexual act, in which lovers amidst their jouissance elude their sense of self and merge as one. It is not so far-fetched to have an experience of art that is analogous to sexual rapture, in which the occasion of having desire fulfilled allows us to forget the world of reason and responsibility for a short time. (Yet—Rubens Syndrome triggers the desire to sexually act out, so this situation is in conflict with Schopenhauer’s theory of pure knowing.) Is sexual ecstasy and contemplating art comparable situations in terms of the pure knowing subject? Does pure knowing preclude any possibility for asking questions? Is Schopenhauer’s theory incompatible with thinking love in art? As an embodied subject, is it possible to completely lose the sense of self?
Out of Eden

In modern art history a number of couples have pioneered creative work born through mutual love, but even fewer combine romance with socio-political statements intended to make a change in epistemic norms. Arguably the most famous is Yoko Ono and John Lennon who originated a series of Bed-Ins in the late twentieth century as the onset of their robust activism for world peace. Bed-Ins were public performance/protest/media events that took place on two separate occasions in 1969. The first one was staged after their clandestine marriage in Gibraltar when they set up in a suite at the Amsterdam Hilton. [Figure 5.2]

Dressed in matching white robes, Ono and Lennon conducted interviews with dozens of invited reporters while lounging in a king-size bed for twelve hours daily over seven days. (The reporters initially expected the couple to have public sex.) The walls of the hotel room were covered in drawings, posters and hand-painted signs that called for peace and love. Lennon and Ono consciously exploited their celebrity via twentieth century state-of-the-art technologies (television, radio and newsprint) to globally disseminate their political agenda. Anthony Fawcett, who was Lennon’s assistant at the time, recalls this statement by Lennon,
Yoko and I are quite willing to be the world's clowns...if by so doing it will do some good. I know I’m one of these ‘famous personalities.’ For reasons only known to themselves, people do print what I say. And I’m saying peace. We’re not pointing a finger at anybody. There are no good guys and bad guys. The struggle is in the mind. We must bury our own monsters and stop condemning people. ...We’re trying to make Christ’s message contemporary. What would he have done if he had advertisements, records, films, TV and newspapers? Christ made miracles to tell his message. Well, the miracle today is communications, so let’s use it.516

Lennon’s emphasis on the technology of media points to their fully conscious utilization of it. While the critics at the time were harsh, their Bed-In photographs were featured on the front page of newspapers all over the world. Riding the wave of sensation caused by the performance in Amsterdam, a second Bed-In took place two months later.517 During a stay at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal Ono and Lennon conducted sixty interviews with print and radio press over ten consecutive days.518 It is difficult to overlook how the passionate erôs that Ono and Lennon shared made this deployment of their political activism all the more striking.

Already public personas (at once doted on and derided by the media) they made their bodies accessible with the Bed-Ins spectacle. Only a year before they had also broken new artistic ground with the release of their first experimental album titled Two Virgins.519 The record cover featured a photograph of Ono and Lennon standing frontally nude with their arms casually around each other. [Figure 5.3] (The back cover was a photograph of the nude couple from the viewpoint of their rear but looking over their shoulders at the camera.) The
ordinariness of this unembarrassed image is striking in that neither Ono nor Lennon is idealized. There is an unreserved quality to the photograph, which was a double self-portrait taken by the couple with a timer. Considering the direct manner in which they peer out of the picture plane towards the viewer, the question arises: who is viewing whom? Ono and Lennon’s photograph levels the viewing field of difference; there is a loss of mystery—at the same time, questions arise as two artists bare their bodies to the world in an unprecedented fashion.

The most astonishing thing is their willful choice to be naked this public way. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger comments on the function of the naked human form in the everyday world as an unexceptional phenomenon,

Their nakedness acts as a confirmation and provokes a very strong sense of relief. She is a woman like any other: or he is a man like any other: we are overwhelmed by the marvelous simplicity of their familiar sexual mechanism.520

Berger’s statement reflects a basic element of embodied being we may apply to Ono and Lennon’s extraordinary photograph. *Two Virgins* can be seen as offering the viewer comfort, or a sense of wonder or recognition, or a feeling of sameness or ambivalence, or the insight possible in fully seeing the lived body of the other. This is certainly an act of love. And yet seeing (or being) a Western naked body is culturally regarded as shameful.

This notion of body shame is a relic from the Platonic argument that taking on corporeal form is a deviance from the perfection of the ideal later incorporated into Christian values.521 This idea is visualized most obviously by way of the exposed and disgraced
representations of Adam and Eve after they indulge in forbidden desire in the Garden.\textsuperscript{522} The doctrine of the fall is “the foremost shame narrative in Western culture.”\textsuperscript{523}

By way of example, Massacio’s version \textbf{[Figure 5.4]} of this myth represents the moment they are striding out of Eden beyond an architectural gate, chased and threatened by an airborne and armed angel (not shown.) Adam covers his face in humiliation reflecting an internal sense of shame, symbolic of the expression “a loss of face.” Conversely, Eve shields her breasts and pudendum (a nod to the classical \textit{venus pudica}); she has a self-consciousness of sexual degradation for the first time. Her facial expression emphasizes an existential suffering. Sally Munt further points out the elements of their legacy, “What we see in the Creation Myth is that the origin of human experience, individuation and desire resides in a locus of shame, and it is out of that shame, separation and loss that sexual differentiation occurs.”\textsuperscript{524} Out of Eden we are exiled from a primordial place of flawless morality (ideal Platonic love) and become aware of the self as split internally at the same time different from the other. This echoes the primordial tale of Aristophanes in Plato’s \textit{Symposium} in which humans were divided in half by the god Zeus as punishment for their undisciplined behaviors. Adam and Eve’s existential rupture—psychically and physically—is the object of our endless discontent and unmet desires. What we might take away from our status as subjects permanently out of Eden is that the genesis of shame is an “interruption of love.”\textsuperscript{525} In the

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{masaccio-expulsion.jpg}
\end{figure}
primordial story of humankind’s fall from grace, original love was fixed—an always already. Afterwards love becomes movement and attempts at connection—a redundant effort of reattachment to self and others but nonetheless unpredictable and precarious.

The act of shamelessness in creating the full frontal nude album cover for *Two Virgins* was in itself an action of risky business. That Ono and Lennon presented themselves *au naturel* to the world without shame was without precedent. (In the twenty-first century it has become common for performing artists to be seen by the public nude in film and photographs but in the 1960’s it was largely unheard of.) The notion of shame for Merleau-Ponty is an expression of ambivalence as embodied consciousness. He states,

> Usually man does not show his body, and, when he does, it is either nervously or with an intention to fascinate. He has the impression that the alien gaze which runs over his body is stealing it from him, or else, on the other hand, that the display of his body will deliver the other person up to him, defenceless, and that in this case the other will be reduced to servitude. Shame and immodesty, then, take their place in a dialectic of the self and the other which is that of master and slave: in so far as I have a body, I may be reduced to the status of an object beneath the gaze of another person, and no longer count as a person for him, or else I may become his master and, in my turn, look at him. But this mastery is self-defeating, since, precisely when my value is recognized through the other’s desire, he is no longer the person by whom I wished to be recognized, but a being fascinated, deprived of his freedom, and who therefore no longer counts in my eyes.

Here Merleau-Ponty asserts an “either/or” scenario: a stare by a subject upon the nude figure as irresistible or disgraceful. Does this apply to *Two Virgins*? Given their stated agenda Ono and Lennon did not intend to fascinate their audience. With unabashed access to their bodies, they hoped to offer to viewers a statement about the personal and the political. They were obviously self-conscious, and in that awareness they intended the audience to come to their
way of seeing their position. This effort does not concern subjugation. Is this a *tender* version of the master-slave dialectic? The Hegelian idea of the master-slave dialectic is often used as a model for a social struggle whereby matters of obedience, conflict or dependence are at stake.\(^527\) It is also used to describe the internal striving of a subject’s consciousness. Ono and Lennon put forward what might be considered a sacrifice of the personal and private to effect change: their immodest and natural bodies as currency, a trade off for the ethical good.

Shame is defined as holding some degree of a painful emotion that arises from dishonoring the self or as the consequence of an offense of decency.\(^528\) If there exists some degree of unacknowledged shame, is it a reasonable price to pay for provoking social change? Ono and Lennon challenge the viewer by questioning the meaning of obscene. They suggest that what is authentically dishonorable or indecent is *not a photograph* of naked flesh or exposed genitals. Is war and intolerance of difference the greater transgression? Their blatant image was a loaded signifier that in a number of ways heralded a new era of thinking about love and openness. We might think of their art and performances as an ethics of love.

The *Two Virgins* album cover\(^529\) addresses not only the ban on the exposed body, but also the prohibition of interracial relationship and pre-marital sex, both of which were largely taboo at the time. Irigaray has something to say about effecting change in thinking,

What being is in its reality compels us to the questioning of value that Nietzsche calls for as the challenging of our tradition and a possible access to the new epoch of thinking… Consciousness, not as a simple knowledge of nature, of things, of objects, but as *knowledge of oneself and of the other*, going as far as to respect the unknowable and the mystery, becomes the chance for an entering into presence that has not yet occurred: that of the human as such.\(^530\)
Irigaray calls upon Nietzsche, who urges the subject to ask questions about ethics that are assumed over time. He explains tradition as a form of obedience on behalf of the subject to long held conventions that consist of rules and directives. To be a moral person is to comply with upholding tradition; to be evil is the opposite—to resist those same customs. Nietzsche points out that traditions were developed to sustain and protect community, and although the reasons for conventions are lost over time, preserving their practices nonetheless becomes morality. In this way upholding tradition is a command made upon the subject, “without thinking about oneself as an individual.” In other words, there is a demand for the sacrifice of subjectivity when observing tradition for the sake of the greater community. Yet Nietzsche did not see morality as a “one size fits all” phenomenon. To think and act as an individual is the consciousness to which Irigaray refers.

Making a stake for individuality Lennon states,

…The picture [Two Virgins] was to prove that we are not a couple of demented freaks, that we are not deformed in any way and that our minds are healthy. If we can make society accept these kind of things without offense, without sniggering, then we shall be achieving our purpose.

Ono and Lennon’s performances and photographs are an extension of their hearts to their audience via the presence of their bodies. And through their art the viewers (perhaps) are brought closer to them as beings, not merely abstract ideas. The Two Virgins image succeeds in this objective; Lennon assures us that he and Ono are merely human—a latter-day Adam and Eve, out of Eden after the fall—fig leaves willfully put aside. All of these actions are
deployed with the image of their naked bodies to invite the viewer to think love. Irigaray reframes a primordial scenario for the contemporary couple,

...Rapture of return to the garden of innocence, where love does not yet know, or no longer knows, nudity as profane. Where the gaze is still innocent of the limits set by reason, of the division into day and night, the alternation of the seasons, animal cruelty, the necessity of protecting oneself from the other and from the God. Face to face encounter of two naked lovers in a nudity that is more ancient than and foreign to sacrilege. That cannot be perceived as profanation. The threshold of the garden, a welcoming cosmic home, remains open. There is guard but love itself, innocent of the knowledge of display and of the fall.536

In other words, Irigaray claims that love denies and forgets the unholy or possible harm; love is outside of logic. The space of love for the lovers is accessible, a space with no history, and perhaps no future. Love is confined to the present, and always entering into presence.

Berger reminds us that it was only after original sin that, “Nakedness was created in the mind of the beholder.”537 With the exception of being naked alone, to be naked in front of the other is to be exposed—unprotected and vulnerable. But what is it to look at the naked other? Elkins writes that seeing another’s genitals is to see a “force”538 that always brings some measure of sexual thoughts, realized or not. He further notes the overwhelming experience of viewing the other’s body,

Something about the body has this power, as if it has weirdness and unnamable force in reserve. In the entire field of vision there is nothing more affecting than images of the body, nothing more puzzling, nothing that is potentially more purely incomprehensible.539
This force may be a matter of our imaginations. Butler asserts the body as a cultural sign that is never liberated from some element of fantasy. Perhaps we are hardwired for those ideas; this might explain the phenomenon of Ruben’s syndrome. Elkins does not directly reference the ideas of Schopenhauer, yet they seem relevant here. Does Elkin’s idea of “force” correspond to Schopenhauer’s theory of the will to life as an unconscious and unquenchable biological power?

Importantly, Elkins addresses possible questions and feelings raised by the viewer of the body that is depicted throughout art history as far back as the athletically ideal marbles of the ancient Greco-Roman world. Questions that arise for the viewer are not articulated aloud, they move under the conscious mind in a loving engagement with the image or work of art. In this way the *Two Virgins* photograph and other artworks that depict the body have the potential to deliver a version of the *punctum*. The *punctum* itself is a force that is unseen but always felt in the way of emotion.

With the mass reproduction and distribution of the stark representation of their un-idealized bodies, Lennon and Ono made a radical effort to effect social change. (This in turn led to the Bed-Ins whereby they used their clothed bodies to subvert the media’s expectation of a sexual liaison in the marital bed.) Ono and Lennon were part of the movement in the late 1960’s marking the rising trend of postmodern thought. For example, as vital innovators in popular culture, Ono and Lennon breach traditions of Western society dominant since the Victorian age, and deconstruct master narratives about the body that includes a lack of shame in exhibiting their bodies. In the earlier part of the decade, other socio-political changes were afoot such as the Civil Rights movement, and by the mid-sixties the
Women’s Movement\textsuperscript{543} and Gay Liberation\textsuperscript{544} were growing social phenomena. These campaigns in tandem with pop culture were part of a tsunami of social change in North America.

It was a time ripe for transgressive acts in the face of social biases. By giving access of their bodies to the public, Ono and Lennon offer a salutation of love, described by Nancy as,

\dots A moment of contact between beings, a light, cutting, and delicious moment of contact at once eternal and fleeting. In its philosophical assignation, love seems to skirt this touch of the heart that would not complete anything, that would go nowhere, graceful and casual, the joy of the soul and the pleasure of the skin, simple luminous flashes of love freed from itself.\textsuperscript{545}

What particularly resonates in this quote is how a connection between subjects can manifest the \textit{jouissance} of the spirit and the delight in the body all at once. We can see why the ancient Greeks believed the body and spirit are one\textsuperscript{546} since the subject may locate love that is shared with the other’s body and soul.

***

By the end of the twentieth century another couple took the potentiality of body to a more radical level deploying ever more powerful tools of technology. Like Ono and Lennon they intended to effect social change. Breyer P-Orridge\textsuperscript{547} is the title of the collaboration of artists Genesis P-Orridge and Jaye Breyer. Thinking about their work, I am reminded of Nancy’s formula of convention, “Love is the extreme movement beyond the self of a being reaching completion.”\textsuperscript{548} However, the self is never complete. Therefore a keyword in this
statement is “reaching,” deployed as a verb, as in to 
extend something such as part of the body (a limb) or 
to offer or give something such as support or 
sympathy to another. In the case of Breyer P-
Orridge, reaching takes place on a number of 
unprecedented levels.

A number of informative interviews are 
available, yet the 2011 award-winning documentary 
The Ballad of Genesis and Lady Jaye [Figure 5.6] 
directed by Marie Losier best chronicles the 
compelling love story and radical life alliance of 
artist-performers Genesis and Lady Jaye. The 
legacy of Breyer P-Orridge is how s/he takes performance art to groundbreaking limits 
rooted in mutual devotion. They deviate from the progressive heterosexual commitment of 
Ono and Lennon because their work challenges the hegemony of socially determined gender 
roles and patriarchy.

British-born Genesis is an influential figure on the punk and post-punk music scene; he founded and performed with industrial bands COUM Transmissions, Throbbing Gristle and Psychic TV, which are renowned for merging performance art with music. He 
also collaborated with beat poet-novelist William Burroughs and with Brion Gysin, a 
painter and sound poet. Genesis met his soul mate Jaye an American nurse, in the early 1990s 
in New York City. As he tells it, it was love at first sight and an intense, romantic, creative
alliance ensued until her death at age thirty-eight. What makes their union noteworthy in terms of a historical and artistic partnership was the undertaking of a series of gender-bending acts they took on as part of a venture they called *Creating the Pandrogyne*. Genesis states,

> My project is not about gender. Some feel like a man trapped in a woman’s body, others like a woman trapped in a man’s body. The pandrogyne says, I just feel trapped in a body. The body is simply the suitcase that carries us around. Pandrogyny is all about the mind, consciousness.

Genesis makes a claim here for a Cartesian mind-body split; however, I want to point out their project is a shift of thinking about gender that is deployed through the bodies of he and Jaye. Their venture sought to “deconstruct two separate identities through the creation of an indivisible third.” This third identity came about through a series of cosmetic surgeries each underwent to take on a shared physical appearance; they further assumed the common name *Breyer P-Orridge*. In essence, their intention as a pandrogyne is a fully embodied act.

The term “pandrogyne” is coined by Genesis to break the cultural construct of the gender binary man/woman. Their intention was to achieve an ideal hermaphroditic state in not only their physical resemblance, but also the way they lived life and carried out collaborative projects, which included music, performance, painting, photography and writing. A biological hermaphroditic condition by its very nature establishes the sexual implausibility of a singularity according to Butler. Foucault points out that the corporeal canon in the determination of an absolute single sex identity is entrenched in modern Western practices; this constructed belief serves as touchstone of truth and pleasure. Referring to Foucault’s publishing of Herculine Barbin’s journals, Butler points out that
intersex individuals give rise to, “… a convergence and disorganization of the rules that govern sex/gender/desire.” This rupture is a key aspect of Breyer P-Orridge’s project in regards to their unique objective of a quasi-hermaphroditic state and the blurring of their sex.

To clarify, the American Psychological Association defines the noun sex as either one of three possible biological categories into which humans, other animals and other living things are divided, based on their reproductive characteristics and functions. The categories are female, male and intersex. If we accept that sex is a biological classification of the natural sciences, then how do we consider the intentions of Breyer P-Orridge as a female and male with fully intact single sex reproductive characteristics? The significance of Breyer P-Orridge’s collaboration is an intentional breach of social norms, even if merely symbolic.

In constructing a genealogical critique of how we might understand the so-called norms of sex and sexuality today, Foucault deploys the term “anatomo-politics” in his text The History of Sexuality. This word (along with the similar-meaning “bio-politics”) identifies how techniques of power deriving from all levels of society are imposed upon the bodies of citizens that comprise the state. He identifies anatomo-politics as a power play put into place during the eighteenth century in Europe as a strategy of capitalism to maximize the work force, since a robust population insured a plentiful supply of laborers. The breadth of the state’s authority on its citizen’s bodies further imposed a hierarchy of sex resulting in social limitations, segregation and legal consequences for failure to comply with bio-political laws set in place. (This included death sentences.) Importantly, these accumulated policies over time became standardized,
In other words, sex develops as an established political and social issue following a span of ever-pervasive government controls. What started as an effort of population regulations extended to all other aspects of the sexed body; it persists today as so-called foundational beliefs that go beyond the reproductive (or non-reproductive) potential of a particular body. Current anatomo-politics are related to discriminatory practices of pay and hiring based on a subject’s sex, as well as laws about and access to women’s birth control, men’s virility pharmaceuticals, medical treatment and research, education, marriage, personal sexual practices and sexual orientation. Anatomo-politics additionally take a long reach into faith-based laws like the interpretation of Holy Scriptures; it is entrenched in popular culture for matters such as sports and dress codes. Essentially there is no aspect of politics and society not affected by a subject’s classification of sex at the time of their birth. To complicate things further, intersex subjects—as stated above—destabilize the fixed binary frame of male-female. This subversion is exactly the aim of art and performance of Breyer P-Orridge. Before I return to he/r example, I will briefly consider the differentiation of the terms sex, gender and marriage as an existing framework of conditions so the reader may better appreciate Breyer P-Orridge.

It is determined that a subject may be born with one of three possible biological reproductive states; now the question of gender becomes apparent. Gender (as defined by the American Psychological Association) refers to the attitudes, feelings and behaviors that a
given culture associates with a person’s biological sex. Gender, then, is a bio-socio-political construction for the most part. (For clarity, the use of the terms sex and gender will be differentiated here since gender is also commonly used as a marker indicating a category of sex.) Charles Darwin’s highly influential evolutionary theory on the human animal included the differences between the sexes as well as a causal explanation for roles of the sexes in society. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin wrote explicitly gendered descriptions of humans, “Man is more courageous, pugnacious and energetic than woman, and has more inventive genius…” and “Woman seems to differ from man in mental disposition, chiefly in her greater tenderness and less selfishness...” Darwin asserted a marked discrepancy between the two primary sexes (male as antagonistic and smarter; female as caretaker) and that this “natural” phenomenon plays out over the course of human evolution.

Since the nineteenth century more contemporary considerations complicate matters of biological difference regarding how the sexes are gendered. For example, human size: males are generally larger—taller, heavier—and stronger than females. In addition there is physiological evidence that females and males have neuro-endocrinological deviations. While these studies are not conclusive, it cannot be ruled out that the construction of gender is rooted in some measure of an organic component.

In addition to biotic make-up, it is further possible that gendering the sexes has roots in rural and agricultural social history. After the age of prehistoric hunting and gathering, the establishment of organized agriculture took place in the Orient around 8000 BCE and traversed the Occident. Fisher points to the ancient farming technology of the plow (about 3000 BCE) as responsible for pivotal changes in the roles of males and females in growing
food. The loss of this capacity may have contributed to the onset of a more subservient status in the community. The earliest subjugation of females is recorded in Mesopotamian law codes dating to about 1100 BCE that indicate their status as private property along with statutes that forbid abortion, adultery, monogamy and divorce for failure to bear children. These laws did not apply to the males for the most part. Given this ancient chronicle of bias, was there ever a time for human beings that sex was not marked as gendered?

Fisher argues that research into various societies existing over time demonstrate that what is symbolically powerful within that society determines its gendered practices. Currently in the United States, the contestation of gender is in play for conservative legislators committed to bio-politics, as well as feminist theories, the LGBT community, and the social marking of the feminine, masculine and androgynous in pop culture. Butler states,

…The problem that sexual difference poses, namely the permanent difficulty of determining where the biological, the psychic, the discursive, the social, begin and end…Sexual difference is neither fully given or fully constructed, but partially both.

So how to approach this highly complex and apparently never-ending argument of gender? Invoking the writings of Irigaray, Butler elucidates the importance of asking questions in the face of ongoing gender bias,

Irigaray makes clear that sexual difference is not a fact, not a bedrock of any sorts, and not the recalcitrant “real” of Lacanian parlance. On the contrary it is a question, a question for our times. As a question, it remains unsettled and unresolved, that which is not yet or not ever formulated in terms of an assertion. Its presence does not assume the form of facts and structures but persists as that which makes us wonder, which remains not fully explained and not fully explicable.
It is remarkable that we are invited to think about gender with wonder—to be curious and doubtful. In asking questions we also might consider the difference in the agency of questions: are they deployed to discredit or stimulate the discourse?\textsuperscript{583} In some cases making queries challenges authority and thwarts the formulation of an absolute. In other cases it reveals unconsidered possibilities and new horizons. Once posed, questions may need to be repeated; it is often the case when answers are not forthcoming. Yet, questions must persist. Philosophy’s beginnings are problem-based; as Socrates knew well, questioning uncovers assumptions and analyzes complex issues about how the subject thinks about life. Like art, we might think of philosophy as an undertaking of joy, Nancy’s verb of love. Philosophy as love of knowledge corresponds to thinking love in art. There is wonder, doubt, reassurance and confusion; all experiences are authentic.

This brings us to the question of marriage, one of the oldest documented practices in human history. Friedrich Engels\textsuperscript{584} explored the history of marriage in the nineteenth century. Marriage is defined as the relation between persons married to each other: the condition of being husband and wife in a contractual bond.\textsuperscript{585} Although the connotation of the word “husband” is shifting at this time, it remains largely defined as the male head of the household, the master.\textsuperscript{586} As master, he holds authority and sits in a place of primacy. In this language is expressed the notion of gendered sexes, hierarchy and possession that at the least displaces the expectation of mutual, romantic love which is also attached to the conjugal union. The official liaison of marriage between genders disregards the female’s identity
Irigaray’s critique of marriage iterates some cogent points: the subservience of both sexes to the state, religion, and capitalistic gain at the detriment of sexed subjectivity, as well as the lack of equality in legal and cultural arenas. Yet some of her other assertions can be argued. Her grounds concerning the conjugal state are predicated on a few things: heterosexuality, hetero-sociality, pair bonding,\textsuperscript{589} legitimacy and an emphasis on difference as a solution to gender bias. In the same way that gender demands questions, so does the belief in and practice of marriage. What are viable alternatives outside of marriage, contracts, monogamy, state ratification, entitlements, divorce\textsuperscript{590} and difference? Is it possible to have a discourse about marriage that is not state-centered, outside of reproductive relations, not limited to heterosexual orientation, or that is inclusive of combinations beyond two?
Philosophers and artists “play with ideas” by asking questions. Earlier it was noted that Heidegger proposes the origin of a work of art begins with asking questions and I argue that love in art is also launched by inquiry. Dissanayake, who approaches art with a bio-behavioral view, coined the term, “making special.” She understood the evolution of art as something that humans did as a “biologically endowed predisposition” set apart from everyday activities and likely derived from play, a behavior marked by make-believe, imitation, improvisation, surprise and ambiguity. To play is to step outside of the mundane and exercise athletic abilities, strategizing skills or imagination. Like play, art and philosophy offer an “as-ifness”; the imagined potential of something that stokes innovation or discovery. This is another manifestation of wonder.

Feminist scholarship carried out since the second half of the twentieth century determines that European colonialism with its Western customs and attitudes about the sexes, affects indigenous societies that were once largely egalitarian. (Although perhaps the
better term is *equalitarian* since egalitarian is a term deployed to indicate equality between *males.* The contemporary artist Shigeyuki Kihara creates compelling artworks that address the colonial consequences indicated by Fisher. A Samoan multimedia artist, Kihara’s work explores gendered identity exploiting he/r own body and that of he/r indigenous traditions. In 2004 – 2005, Kihara created a sepia-toned photographic triptych of a full-length self-portrait titled *Fafa’afafine: In the Manner of a Woman.* [Figure 5.7] The setting for all three photographs is the same shallow space: a woven grass wall behind a chaise, framed by some tropical potted plants. In the first image Kihara, bare-breasted, long hair falling past he/r shoulders, is semi-reclining on a Victorian-style fringed velvet chaise wearing a grass skirt and a long necklace. He/r alert gaze is aimed directly at the viewer. Kihara’s pose is identical in the other two images, except in the second photograph s/he is nude in the manner of a female, and in the third, s/he is also nude, but he/r penis is visible on he/r thigh. It is this third photograph that subverts the viewer’s expectation; the contraindication of a presumed sex is startling; the viewer may wonder, “What is actually going on here?”

In Samoan culture, there is a third gender called *fafa’afafine* and the term roughly translates in English as “to do as a woman.” *Fafa’afafine* are individuals born male but possessing the “spirit” of woman and live as a liminal sex that is a part of the community fabric of Samoan culture as well as throughout the South Pacific. (The counterpart is the less common *fa’atama* for females who embody a so-called masculine essence.) The mothers decide these gender roles for their children when they are a young age, typically based on the child’s tendency toward behaviors not congruent with their gendered body, for example, if a boy shows a preference for feminine or a girl for masculine activities. As Butler
noted, gendered roles are based on specific values in a given culture. The history of *fafa’afafine* and *fa’atama* long predate the colonization of the traditional communal Pacific Island cultures, which was significantly modified by Western Christian missionaries who converted indigenous communities. In doing so, they imposed Western attitudes of gender, white/non-white, heterosexual/homosexual binaries embedded in Judeo-Christian ethical systems. Kihara’s self-portraits give us three separate views of the same subject, and seen altogether they rupture preexisting codes and categories that prescribe fixed binaries.

I see Kihara’s work as especially play-full in its ethos; it is based on the as-if-ness that Dissanayake attributes to play in which an opportunity for the viewer to discover something occurs. It does so in two ways: (1) the image of Kihara’s semi-reclining nude pose mimics long-standing archetypes in Western art history that concern the male gaze of the artist upon the female other, including Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (1538), Manet’s *Olympia* (1863), and Gauguin’s *Te arii vahine* (1896). Like *Olympia*, Kihara’s confrontational gaze that stares back at the viewer is disarming. S/he shows he/rself to the invisible gaze of the viewer with the intention to be acknowledged as fully worthy of recognition. (2) S/he is invites the viewer to consider the hidden possibilities of a body and a culture. In this way s/he (loosely) reimagines the classic childhood game of “hide and seek.” *Fafa’afafine: In the Manner of a Woman* is a compelling declarative statement about Kihara’s particular cultural identity.

The image of the body (or the ban on its representation) plays a central role in many social, religious and political ideologies. Nineteenth century colonizers of Samoa mandated the covering of indigenous “exotic” bodies with Western clothing; at the same time they
would exploit these bodies by taking naked photographs for ethnographic documentation. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this popular portrait genre disseminated the colonial myth of the South Pacific female as uncivilized and sexually available. Kihara’s staging of the photograph implicates how he/r self-portrait—with its assertive gaze out at the viewer—challenges us to question the immanent double standard of the colonial photographs. Employing the same representational tactics of her ancestor’s Western colonial subjugators, Kihara creates images that communicate a new possibility: that of an in-between gender, which disrupts the sex/gender binary. In doing this, Kihara subverts what Foucault refers to as the “insistence of the rule” by which he means power. He writes,

> Power is essentially what dictates its law to sex. Which means first of all that sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden. Secondly, power prescribes an “order” for sex that operates at the same time as a form of intelligibility; sex is to be deciphered on the basis of its relation to the law. And finally, power acts by laying down the rule: power’s hold on sex is maintained through language, or rather through the act of discourse it creates, from the very fact that it is articulated, a rule of law.

By making art that transgresses prevailing rules, Kihara actualizes Foucault’s mandate that we build an “analytics of power” that denies law as a template and protocol. S/he also constructs a new visual language in *Fafa’afafine: In the Manner of a Woman*. Like *Two Virgins*, Kihara’s image beckons a newer, kinder, more insightful Eden. He/r representation of he/r body is an act that allows for a conception of “sex without the law and power without the king.” In other words, the self’s existential power lays down independent directives. Kihara’s work reclaims power that is centered on a value system of the equalitarian, an equalitarian that extends beyond the sex/gender binary.
I love Kihara’s photograph and I enjoy showing it to others to see their reaction, to watch them think through what they are seeing. I recognize the love that motivated Kihara to make this art, the expression of tenderness and pride for he/r South Pacific roots and for he/r self as progeny of that abiding culture. It compels us to ask questions such as, “What if we didn’t assume there are only two ways to be?” Using the very mark of her otherness as a tool, Kihara reclaims the fa’afafine body that stakes a claim for another kind of beauty and identity that goes beyond the established “two.” It offers the viewer another perspective on how we may regard subjects who live outside the binary of sex in community. Fafa’afine: In the Manner of a Woman is a work of art that beckons us in thinking love by generating questions that contemplate otherness and sexual being, gender and history.

Kihara’s sly rupture concerning expectations of sex and gender is a powerful critique of he/r culture’s traditions and its colonial past, whereas Breyer P-Orridge offers a commentary on contemporary concepts of marriage and gender. Genesis and Lady Jaye were legally married but their partnership is marked with actions that challenge the conjugal template. In addition to the objective of creating the notion of the pandrogenous synthesized Breyer P-Orridge, the couple took on this project as a testimony of love for each other and their desire to truly become one. To do this they chose the avenue of sameness, as opposed to the difference espoused by Irigaray. This mirroring can be seen in their photographic collage Two in One We Go [Figure 5.8].
While Breyer P-Orridge decided not to remove or alter their individual genitalia, they both underwent breast implants and plastic surgery to their faces. They often dressed alike, although Genesis seems to have a preference for drag attire, while Jaye dresses in either stereotypical male or female garb.

Freud surmises that in our confusion about sex we have, “…an instinct to a need to restore an earlier state of things.” Is Breyer P-Orridge’s collaboration an attempt to return to some primordial state of being? In a previous era (and in a number of non-Western cultures still the case) what couldn’t be understood in science was explained in myth. The primal story recounted by Aristophanes in Plato’s Symposium illustrates that human beings were originally three sexes: female, male and androgynous. (See Chapter One.) The collaboration of Breyer P-Orridge recalls Aristophanes’ ancient tale that serves as an account of lovers’ strong and irrational desires to merge into one to feel complete. On more than one occasion Genesis describes this feeling with Jaye. In an interview with The Guardian s/he states, “…You know that moment when you meet someone and think: ‘I want to eat you; be immersed in you?’ It began like that…”

The blurring of Jaye’s and Genesis’ genders is a declarative socio-political subversive act of subjectivity that tests the boundaries of what is perceived as masculine or feminine.
traits. Creating the Pandrogyne questions reality, something Butler takes on in her text Gender Trouble. She discusses the notion of one’s anatomy as never fixed because of a continual flux of possible variations for the human body. These include drag, cross-dressing and bodies that are pre or post-operative, transgendered or transsexual. Butler writes,

> When such categories come into question, the reality of gender is also put into crisis: it becomes unclear how to distinguish the real from the unreal. And this is the occasion in which we come to understand that what we take to be “real,” what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact a changeable and revisable reality.605

Butler insists that we be aware of what is plausible and what is authentic; this realization generates discourse that will bring about political and social change with regard to the erroneous notion that existing gender norms are a fixed universal truth.

Breyer P-Orridge is an ongoing performance, which contains a dialogue of difference and speech acts606 that destabilize existing hegemonies, primarily phallogocentrism (the privileging of the masculine in the construction of meaning.) This undermining of constructed gender is Butler’s major project in Gender Trouble. The strategy Breyer P-Orridge and Kihara take on is self-defining, and self-recognition is an act that determines gender and sex. Butler asserts gender identity as endlessly deferred, constituted vaguely within time via a “stylized repetition of acts.”607 For example, the breast implants of Breyer P-Orridge may be a way to consolidate a sharing of a sexualized maternal body, but could also be removed at some point to reject that very same idealization. The subject is always becoming, ceaselessly practicing being the person the subject wants to be.
This notion of becoming is shared by Nancy who asserts, “To be born means precisely never to cease being born, never to have done with never fully attaining to being, to its status, to its stance or to its standing, and to its autonomy.”\textsuperscript{608} Nancy describes the human subject as never fixed but always in flux at the same time the self moves toward death. The thought of finitude is the thought of the sublime.\textsuperscript{609} This notion of the sublime is given in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, where he asserts that the sublime (a subjective state of mind) results in an aesthetic encounter with nature in which subjects are markedly affected in their perception of formless and limitless power.\textsuperscript{610} As I understand Nancy, his concept of the sublime is related to the *other* in terms of death and love, rather than aesthetics. Nancy addresses these phenomena in terms of abandonment. He writes, “To be abandoned is to be left with nothing to keep hold of and no calculation.”\textsuperscript{611} This same idea is connected to the abandonment experienced in love.\textsuperscript{612} With *Breyer P-Orridge* it would seem—rather poignantly—their merging is a way to stave off this unavoidable abandonment. Of course, it does not succeed physically, but it does keep Genesis and Jaye together as conceptual art. The absent is present as Genesis carries on the original intention of the project since Jaye’s death in 2007. *Breyer P-Orridge* holds—to borrow a phrase from Irigaray—“a wisdom of the relation with the other.”\textsuperscript{613} It is what Arendt calls a “thought-thing” that evokes questions about two people who love and the breadth of that action. What begins as *erôs* becomes thinking-with and being-with; it lives on as art, as *punctum*, love as action and expansion of the self. *Breyer P-Orridge* is an open-ended living assertion of *thinking love*. 
Aesthetics of confession

Marcel Duchamp is said to have remarked that he would like to grasp an idea as the vagina grasps the penis. This prurient aphorism brings to mind the works of Tracey Emin, a contemporary multi-media artist known for her sexually charged images and explicitly personal subject matter. Her works are pervaded with ideas that reveal the female libido as a robust force, in the manner of Schopenhauer’s will to life, a drive not concealed in the posturing of modesty or inhibition. He asserted the sexual appetite as the most powerful and purposeful of the subject’s life, an expression of self-preservation. For Schopenhauer the sexual act is not a trifle, it is the eternal wellspring of love in addition to a concrete exhibition of physical gratification, or what he calls “possession.” His theory is in a relationship with Emin’s art because her work espouses a philosophy of sex rooted in the substance of one’s sexual experiences.

Emin’s most known work (and one that launched her career) is My Bed (1999) [Figure 5.9] an installation consisting of her (actual) rumpled and soiled double bed surrounded by trash that accumulated following a few days she spent in it. At that time she was undergoing a serious depressive episode set off by a failed romantic relationship. The detritus includes blatant references to careless self-indulgent and wanton sexual acts: condoms, KY Jelly, panties and sheets stained with various bodily fluids, vodka bottles, and
cigarettes, among other such items. The work is autobiographical, a conceptual self-portrait, but one that is hardly idealized or self-aggrandizing. Instead the work displays what many would view as questionable personal choices, a period of low self-esteem and lack of self-control. Critics have described My Bed as confessional, but what does that mean?

To confess is an action that consists of a form of disclosure about something previously secret or unknown. It contains implications that are legal (the admission of guilt for a crime) or religious (the divulgence of sins to a priest.) In the latter, confession is deeply embedded in faith, particularly the Catholic sacrament of confession. In this private rite the devout formally admit sins they have committed to a priest on a regular basis. Confession serves to cleanse the soul of impurities in order to receive other sacraments such as Holy Communion and to gain admittance to eternal life in heaven upon death.

Confession is also part of a modern literary genre in which a first person, autobiographical self-disclosure is part of self-examination and self-awareness in the expression of writing, as well as the search for—and construction of—identity, not predicated on absolution. Antecedents to the literary confession are St. Augustine’s Confessions (397 – 400 CE) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s wholly secular Confessions (1769.) In Tolstoy’s spiritual autobiography A Confession (1879 – 1880) he contritely exposes his past sins against fellow men,

I cannot think of those years without horror, loathing and heartache. I killed men in war and challenged men to duels in order to kill them. I lost at cards, consumed the labor of the peasants, sentenced them to punishments, lived loosely, and deceived people. Lying, robbery, adultery of all kinds, drunkenness, violence, murder - there was no crime I did not commit, and in spite of that people praised my conduct and my contemporaries considered and consider me to be a comparatively moral man. So I lived for ten years.
These examples are all male authors, yet female writers have also contributed their share of the confessional genre. Margery Kempe’s Book (1438) is a spiritual autobiography that professes her experiences of torment by the devil, sexual pleasures and feelings of jealousy. Sylvia Plath, whose collection of poems in Ariel (1965) was composed largely in the months before her suicide. Its poems divulge the depths of depression she suffered for most of her adulthood.

The literary confession is the private voice given a public forum; it is a form of a “time machine,” or a type of subjective postmortem. It is a representation of experience.

In addition to the tradition of narrative text, confession is played out in popular culture with so-called “reality” television shows that highlight drama and personal conflict; the cast (who are typically not celebrities, but ordinary individuals like the viewers themselves) often revels in details of their transgressions face-to-camera in a segment referred to as the “confessional.” This trope is fashionable in television programming; it offers unscripted and candid commentary in which anything may be confided by the confessor. For the viewer there is the lure of (what appears to be) a lack of censorship, a subsequent feeling of suspense that the cast member will offer some utterance of unmediated “truth.” In this respect, the testimony of the confessor engenders something like a sense of voyeurism in viewers, a way for broadcast companies to connect with and insure a viewing audience.
Emin’s *My Bed* has much in common with the phenomena of reality television and confessional literature. In a sense the artwork brought Western pop culture to the high-end art market—à la Warhol—by exploiting a prevailing and widespread fascination with confession in the late twentieth century. Warhol appropriated images from pop culture (movie stars and politicians) as well as commercial consumer goods (soft drinks and soup.) Emin’s work certainly connected with a number of audiences in the three cities it was exhibited. Reactions and critical press varied from unbridled enthusiasm to embarrassed discomfort, and Emin became regarded as the monomaniacal bad-girl artist of the late 90’s art scene. Her later artworks corroborated her inclination to leave no private behavior concealed.

An even earlier work forthright with confessional content is *Everyone I Ever Slept With 1963 – 1995.* [Figure 5.10] It was a readymade tent in which Emin had appliqued the names of individuals she had *literally* slept with, including family members, lovers, friends, fetuses, and of note—herself. The total of names appliqued is one hundred and two.
Yet it is a tent for one; and the viewer must physically crouch down to look into the tent or actually crawl into the tent to examine the hand-stitched names in rectangular block text affixed to the interior surfaces of the tent. This particular bodily engagement on behalf of the viewer lends to a kind of intimacy that is congruent with the concept of the work: both as a handcrafted labor-intensive piece and as an exhaustive recounting of an experience of many varieties of closeness. *Everyone I Ever Slept With* creates an equalitarianism of relationship that ranges from casual street sex to the uncommon—yet touching—idea of a pregnant mother sleeping with her unborn children.

This kind of tenderness further demonstrates the equality of loves as asserted by Nancy. Both *Everyone I Ever Slept With* and *My Bed* concern the action of sleeping, in which the subject is always in a state of vulnerability, a similar defenselessness found in love. Nancy determines that love by its nature contains susceptibility to “all the possibilities of love.”634 He also asserts that love requires an unlimited generosity to these prospects since there can be no hierarchy or a type of love that is ruled out.635 Emin’s *Everyone I Ever Slept With (1963 – 1995)* in particular subscribes to Nancy’s philosophy. The carefully embellished tent envelops all of Emin’s loves for the first thirty-two years of her life. Whether that love was the spontaneous hustle of the sexual act on a city street, or slumber in the intimate milieu of grandmother’s home; all is the same; nothing is privileged. As Nancy asserts, “…All of love is possible and necessary.”636 With *My Bed* love is messy and miserable yet love nonetheless.

Another consideration in comparing the two works is the implication of time. With *My Bed*, the time span of its implied narrative is a few days following a romantic breakup, in
comparison with the thirty-two years of *Everyone I Ever Slept With*. Both contain

indefiniteness for the viewer who experiences the works in unpredictable ways. Some of this
may depend on personal experience and the inclination (or disinclination) to think about what
Emin has done. Thinking love is being in a relationship with an artwork and the artist that
created it, even if this relationship is fleeting. On the other hand, there may be some viewers
who are profoundly affected by Emin’s work and for a long time will dwell upon it and ask
themselves questions about it. They may establish an abiding memory of it, even if they
never actually see it again. Memory then forms the basis for a relationship, or (perhaps)
memory is in itself a form of relationship the subject has with the self.637 Merleau-Ponty
asserts that, “…Any memory reopens time lost to us and invites us to recapture the situation
evoked.”638 Our memories are ours; no one else can take them from us.639 Our ability to
remember is what informs our very singularity. Merleau-Ponty sees this recovery as a portal
to the other or to the past.640 In this way—possessing a memory of an artwork—the
individual manifests a potential for love in her questioning. This love is shared indirectly
with the artist-maker such as Emin who exposes herself through the art. She gives viewers
access to her experiences, which are variously loving and cruel, sweet and embarrassing.
Foucault points out that the act of confession (in the West) is a practice that constructs truth, at least since the thirteenth century CE. He writes,

We have since become a singularly confessing society. The confession has spread its effects far and wide. Its plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one’s crimes, one’s sins, one’s thoughts and desires, one’s illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one’s parents, one’s educators, one’s doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things that would be impossible to tell anyone else, the things people write books about.

Foucault’s statement here helps to elucidate how this phenomenon has permeated popular culture. While many contemporary visual artists (like Emin) create autobiographical works of
art, Louise Bourgeois is noted to be the pioneer who established the genre of confessional art. Richard Dorment, a writer for the British newspaper *The Telegraph*, seems to have been the first to give Bourgeois that accolade while writing about her death in 2010.

His explanation includes mention of her work *Maman* [Figure 5.11] a three-story high sculpture of a spider that is symbolic of the esteem she felt for her mother, a person she considered the family protectress. Bourgeois made this statement about the work, which was commissioned by the Tate in London,

*The Spider is an ode to my mother. She was my best friend. Like a spider, my mother was a weaver. My family was in the business of tapestry restoration, and my mother was in charge of the workshop. Like spiders, my mother was very clever. Spiders are friendly presences that eat mosquitoes. We know that mosquitoes spread diseases and are therefore unwanted. So, spiders are helpful and protective, just like my mother.*

Does this quote contain confessional content? What determines *Maman* as confessional art is not clear to me; but Bourgeois cogently attributes autobiographical meanings to this work and other artworks as well. In the case of *Maman*, the sculpture is a creative expression of familial love: *storge*. And while spiders have their positive qualities, not many viewers will react to a giant spider form with such benevolent feelings. *Maman* actually betrays a striking ambiguous aspect since real life spiders can be menacing, even poisonous (when used as a trope in horror movies they are downright frightening.) Bourgeois surely would have known that.
While *Maman* is an arguable example of mother love, it is well documented that Bourgeois carried within herself a life-long ambivalence towards her father, who by her own reports was a cruelly critical and domineering parent who was unfaithful to Bourgeois’ mother. The disclosure of her lingering anger has a confessional quality, because it is perceived to contain an inability (or refusal) to forgive a parent; a trait that may be considered a personal shortcoming—but it seems important to be clear what is indicative of confessional art when compared to other types of autobiographical expression.

A work completed by Bourgeois twenty-five years earlier than *Maman* that clearly contains confessional content is *Destruction of the Father*. [Figure 5.12] This large mixed media nonobjective work reflects a memory of a family meal that concludes with a gruesome fantasy. Paul Gardner elaborates in his monograph on Bourgeois,

*Destruction*, which is alternately titled *The Evening Meal*, is a menacing installation that lets viewers witness the end of a violent act. “At evening supper, she says gravely, “the father is eaten up by the children.”

*Destruction of the Father* shares with *Maman* an ominous appearance, but it is more arcane. It is constructed of plaster, latex, wood, fabric and a red light. Its uneven bulbous and bumpy forms possess a haptic quality that brings to mind the inside of a monster’s mouth (gums, tongue and teeth) or the desolate environment of a primeval cave. The repetition of these
forms both unifies the installation’s composition, at the same time lending unity to the idea that incited it. *Destruction of the Father’s* milieu is at once haunting and visceral with obvious references to digestion and blood (the work is drenched in red light which reflects off the fabric in the manner of membranes). The idea of blood recalls physical violence but also the blood tie between parent and child. In fact, Bourgeois casted pieces of animal limbs (lamb shoulders and chicken legs) in plaster to create the sculptural forms before making latex molds. She elaborates on the imagination of the work, which comes from a memory of the family meal and a fantasy of revenge,

There is a dinner table and you can see all kinds of things are happening. The father is sounding off, telling the captive audience how great he is, all the wonderful things he did, all the bad people he put down today. But this goes on day after day. A kind of resentment grows in the children. There comes a day they get angry. Tragedy is in the air. Once too often, he has said his piece. The children grabbed him and put him on the table. And he became the food. They took him apart, dismembered him. Ate him up. And so he was liquidated. It is, you see, an oral drama! The irritation was his continual verbal offense. So he was liquidated: the same way he had liquidated his children.

This fantasy of eliminating a parent at a family meal calls up Freud’s theory about the totem meal and the primal father. In Freud’s postulation, eating the primal father is not merely murderous; it is at the same time an act of identification and a manner of taking on his power. It is an action underscored by ambivalence; in some ways it echoes the master-slave dialectic whereby matters of duty and dissension are at stake in a struggle for power. It seems as if love—as we typically understand it—would not be part and parcel of *Destruction of the Father*; instead, it is about anger or hatred. Yet again, we must remind ourselves that the idea of love in art is not necessarily a sentiment of the sweet or tender; instead love it is a
shape shifter. Its form is open to all possibilities, what Nancy calls “indefinite abundance.” In this way love in art is always a gesture of generosity even when the viewer experiences unloving sensibilities.

The will to presence

A prolific artist, Emin’s artworks comprise photography and video, drawings of masturbation, provocative or tender aphoristic texts set in neon, as well as handmade books and blankets. Her works reveal to viewers the universal notions of erôs at the same time they engender thinking love in a manner that is outside sexual desire. By way of example, one of my favorite works by Emin is her first film titled Why I Never Became a Dancer (1995). Using a handheld camera and Super 8 film, it begins with Emin narrating a voiceover that reminisces about growing up in the seaside resort of Margate during the 1970s. With her recollection we see grainy jump shots of Margate that include close-ups, panoramic vistas and aerial views of buildings, sidewalks and beaches. The montage also zooms in on numerous other familiar sights of a shore town: seagulls, restaurant menus, signage as well as the general honkytonk of a working class tourist village. She recalls the freedom of being in her mid-teens in Margate where early experiences of sex were essential to her carefree exploits. Her numerous sexual partners were young men; the sex was uncomplicated (sometimes pleasurable and sometimes not) and furtive liaisons took place in alleys, parks or on the beach. Emin considered sex at the time as education, adventure and escape from the grim reality of her adolescent life.

By the time she was fifteen years of age she had grown bored of casual sex and turned to using her body in a new way: disco dancing—the pop culture craze sweeping the
Western world in the late 1970s. For Emin dancing was a new source of independence and freedom. In 1978 she entered a prestigious disco competition at a Margate nightclub in which she believed she was favored to prevail. Winning the contest offered the chance to escape Margate and go to London. As she was dancing in the big event, part of the clapping onlookers begin to loudly chant, “slag” a local colloquialism (equivalent to the American use of the noun slut.) Her harassers were a group of town men most of whom had had sex with her in the years before. As their shouts overwhelmed the music, Emin felt defeated and humiliated; she abruptly left the dance hall and Margate.

At this point in the film, the narration by Emin changes from reminiscing to the present moment. Emin specifically names her abusers, and announces, “Shame! Eddie, Tony, Doug, Richard! This one’s for you.” Disco music fades in replacing her voice, and the camera cuts to a grinning Emin, wearing cut-off blue jeans and a red blouse, dancing joyously around a bright airy London studio to the upbeat song “You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real).”

This closing scene of a happy prancing grown-up Emin is jubilant—in the act of dancing she embodies joy. In the beginning of this chapter, I write about the aesthetics of joy, which offers the possibility of thinking love by allowing the subject to deeply participate in the world. In this way joy asserts a will to presence.

Another will is also evident in *Why I Never Became a Dancer*. It is a fantastic example of what Nietzsche would describe as saying, “yes” to life: the will to power. This will is a key concept in his philosophical arguments; he describes the will to power in terms of individual resilience to life’s suffering. He claims, “A living thing seeks above all to
In other words, in the face of the torment Emin endured as a result of her juvenile sexual relationships and ultimate social humiliation, she triumphs by overcoming them to become an artist, to create films that demonstrate her ability to (literally) bounce back from emotional trauma. While largely confessional in nature, the work also ultimately expresses Emin’s personal optimism and confidence. By sharing hope, courage and resilience, Why I Never Became a Dancer offers a connection of love to the viewer as an exemplar of what is possible in the survival of life’s hardships. This tenacity is the will to power.

Nietzsche locates the greatest expression of the will to power in the creative aspect of the self; an expressive drive that fuels the subject to overcome life’s inevitable difficulties. Heidegger remarks that Nietzsche’s will to power is an attempt to answer the metaphysical question of “What is being?”659 We should consider this question of being as it concerns something beyond the idea of mere existence. For Heidegger all living things possess existence; however, humans take on the significance of Being (with a capital “B”)—the question asking, the contemplation—of what it means to live. While the specific question “What is being?” cannot be answered,660 the thinking of being’s uncertainties is essential, what Heidegger terms Being. In other words, the human being is concerned with Being.

Nietzsche saw Being as the action of becoming in which the will dominates.661 This action—the will to power—is a subjective appraisal and reevaluation of how things should be—what we think of as values. In the example of Why I Never Became a Dancer, Emin asserts an “ought” for herself: to not let others determine her identity. This is what Heidegger
refers to as “resoluteness”\textsuperscript{662}; it is that decision by someone “to choose a kind of Being-one’s-Self”\textsuperscript{663} independent of anything that happens in one’s past. He explains,

\ldots\textit{Will, as resolute openness} to oneself, is always a willing out beyond oneself. If Nietzsche more than once emphasizes the character of will as a command, he does not mean to provide a prescription or set of directions for the execution of an act; nor does he mean to characterize an act of will in the sense of resolve. Rather, he means resoluteness—that by which willing can come to grips with what is willed and the one who wills; he means coming to grips with a founded and abiding decisiveness.\textsuperscript{664}

Emin’s artworks demonstrate just this resolute openness. In fact, I assert that (most) artwork is made with such a demeanor: making art is a decision of action that involves to a greater or lesser extent, an approach of openness or transparency that risks a disclosure of secrets at the least and utter failure at the most. The unpredictability of disappointment is inherent to the process since \textit{art is meant in some way to be experienced by others}. Art is dependent on the other. This simultaneously is an extension of the artist’s self and her vulnerability towards an audience that is at all times based in uncertainty. Yet the possibility of dismissal does not deter the artist from doing what she does. Eighteenth century French Romantic painter Eugene Delacroix\textsuperscript{665} declares, “Finishing a painting demands a heart of steel: everything requires a decision, and I find difficulties where I least expect them\ldots. It is at such moments that one fully realizes one’s own weaknesses.”\textsuperscript{666} And contemporary artist Jasper Johns\textsuperscript{667} admits, “I assumed everything would lead to complete failure, but I decided that didn’t matter—that would be my life.”\textsuperscript{668} The open resoluteness of an artist persists regardless of personal shortcomings or consequences. It is an imperative to master the self; at stake is the commitment to be an artist. Heidegger notes, “In willing we come toward ourselves, as the
This authenticity of self is where he locates freedom. This includes the freedom to love; the freedom to offer love in the act of art.

Heidegger clarifies that Nietzsche’s theory of will is one of feeling, one that arises from the multiplicity of our emotional lives. Emin’s artworks are starkly impassioned. They are based in her sexual experiences and in her search for connection with the other, for love. Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology of Perception* explains that one’s particular sexual narrative is life’s foundation. He writes,

In so far as a man’s sexual history provides a key to his life, it is because in his sexuality is projected his manner of being towards the world, that is, towards time and other men. There are sexual symptoms at the root of all neuroses, but these symptoms, correctly interpreted, symbolize a *whole attitude*, whether, for example, one of conquest or one of flight.

This idea of a “whole attitude” is apt in the case of Emin; as stated, her oeuvre is based on her sexual life. It falls into the aforementioned example of conquest since she doesn’t flee the opportunity to engage erotically with the other. Merleau-Ponty points out that just as we see with the eyes and hear with the ears, we connect to other’s bodies via our own sexual appetite. The body and its actions serve as a route to what is outside of our personal existence. Seen this way, Emin’s deliberate erotic expression is an important *connection* to others, yet not merely this way. We may understand Emin’s initiatives as Schopenhauer did, as the will to live to create the next generation, or we may see it as a way of being present in the world, a *will to presence*. Merleau-Ponty notes, “…existence realizes itself in the body.”
Emin’s artworks may be understood as mannered, yet at the same time they consist of recurring gestures that speak to her robust sexual energy in an uninhibited emotional framework. Although Emin is not a performance artist, I read her work as presenting us with a marked performative aspect, particularly that of narrative confession. In the same way that Butler understands gender as comprised of a stylized repetition of acts, Emin’s confessional art may offer a similar succession of undertakings that over time establishes a distinctive character. While this identity is constructed through the art, it nevertheless springs from personal experiences and convictions. Yet as construction it is similar to what Butler determines as “a compelling illusion, an object of belief.” While Butler addresses the concept of gender, all identity is manufactured over time. In the same way gender identities are formed by various social mandates and prohibitions, Emin’s artwork functions similarly in terms of a sexual identity. The works poke and prod sexual female taboos, expose the socially shameful, exalt powerful urges of sexual appetite. The art she makes is constituted by her reality—but as she herself acknowledges—a truth that is subject to change. For example, in a 2010 YouTube interview concerning her 2009 one-person exhibition titled Those That Suffer Love at White Cube Mason’s Yard, she remarks upon how her empirical awareness of aging affects the work,

Being forty-six, now nearly fifty…I feel I’m losing a lot of my sexual energy or it doesn’t matter to me. Ideas seem to be mattering to me a lot more. I’m really frightened about this because sex is always what’s always gotten me up in the morning. Ever since I was a teenager, sex is what’s made me go out there and search the world, and just—you know—the ardor of life. And now without that what am I going to do? I mean I still make love, and I’m in love, but it’s that sexual energy I’m talking about. Some women could be seventy before they feel like this, but I’m starting to feel like it now. Is it because I started having sex really young—did I burn myself out? Or am I going to die young? I don’t know. Or am I just going to become one of these totally spiritually bound people that no longer refer to lust or anything
like that, and I just live on a different kind of plane? I don’t know, unless I am an old lady. I have no idea. But at the moment that is the subject I’m dealing with. So *Those That Suffer Love* is also my own loss of sexual energy and I'm referring to that. Maybe it's a transient feeling or maybe its forever, I don’t know but that’s what I’m dealing with. So it’s quite funny that people find the upstairs room really sexy when actually what I'm doing is questioning that sex, or just saying goodbye to it.\(^{677}\)

The questions she poses are touching in their openness and vulnerability. In this statement Emin consciously opens herself up to ontological unpredictability. She also addresses the notion that she is likely to change her artwork and her way of being in the world as a result of becoming older. Over time Emin constituted certain beliefs about herself and her art is made (and in a sense performed) in that mode of belief. The bottom line is that altogether nothing is ever fixed, the body, gender, and meaning included—what Butler terms “*social temporality.*”\(^{678}\)

Emin provides a compelling example for the role of human will and aesthetic contemplation in contemporary visual art. As described earlier, it reflects Nietzsche’s theory of the will to power, a creative and transformative action that propels us to *be more.* For the artist, the decision to create “is a way of life.”\(^{679}\) The artist brings forth something that did not previously exist and provides its audience with new standards, “the ground upon which all valuation of the future is to stand.”\(^{680}\) Because of this Nietzsche asserts art as the greatest expression of the will to power.

***
Nancy reminds us love cannot be contemplated at a distance. We are always already in it. He also writes, “…that love is always present and never recognized in what we name ‘love.’” Therefore we may consider that love is inscribed in our actions. Love acts: journeying, wondering, viewing, embodying, crossing, joying, suffering, protesting, avenging, negating, affirming, exposing, reaching, desiring, shaming, caressing, fornicating, sleeping, forgetting, encountering, avoiding, playing, asking, enjoining, replying, ignoring, altering, showing, hiding, losing, disappearing. Willing. Being. Thinking. Loving. All of these verbs are associated with the artworks I have addressed in this chapter.

Love in art is not confined to the mind as thought or feeling. Love in art is a series of actions that are embodied. We are looking or hearing or in some way experiencing the art to begin thinking about it. What we think, how we feel and our actions are integrated into the whole experience of art. Although the artist’s actions and intentions are different than the viewer’s, it does not negate the bottom line of love. What may be different is the ethos, which comprises the making of and appreciation of the work. (In addition to “aesthetics of joy” and “aesthetics of confession” the subtitles in this chapter could have also included “aesthetics of shame” or “aesthetics of gender”.)

In this chapter I establish the theoretical punctum of love in art that is felt with joy as much as with pain. Described by Nancy as the verb of love, to joy is expressed and located in art as one of myriad ways for an artist to reach for a limit, and like pain is an extremity of presence. An aesthetic of joy in art contains the idea of the viewer decentered, another avenue of participation in the being-with world. The same may be said of the aesthetics of pain and confession. Emin’s video Why I Never Became a Dancer conflates the two and fully
offers love in art to the viewer by way of enacting her heart-breaking experience and the joy of overcoming. *As such the work not only offers love but also is at the same time an act of love.*

Emin’s artwork illustrates quite cogently Nietzsche’s will to power—the *yes* to life. The will to power’s most powerful expression is seen in creative works. We see this in the collaborations of Ono/Lennon and *Breyer P-Orridge*, the photographs by Kihara, as well as the sculptures by Bourgeois. *To say yes to life is as love is to Being.*

Schopenhauer—a major influence on Nietzsche—claims a reality behind what appears to us. The *world of ideas* takes precedence over mere representations (what we can see or touch) because reality is actually our *will*: an unconscious force found everywhere in nature and necessary to our human survival. This Schopenhauerian will is outside time and space, yet it drives us. These desires result in ceaseless ongoing conflicts and struggles that we attempt to overcome. As mentioned previously, Schopenhauer makes one exception: viewing a work of art momentarily suspends our default position of subjectivity to a state (however brief) that is *will-less*, eternal and objective. Because art gives us this unique opportunity of transcendence, Schopenhauer sees the artist as a genius, but to appreciate a work of art also requires genius. He writes, “We must therefore assume that there exists in all men this power of knowing the Ideas in things, and consequently setting aside their personality for the moment...” At the same time, he acknowledges that an artist can appear crazy in this ability, because in making art, they turn their back on what is necessary or pragmatic in everyday life.
I’ll return here to Emin’s *My Bed*, which from a functional standpoint may be considered absurd, utterly unnecessary; the brilliance of it is that by taking her abject bed out of context—by dislocating it—she allows us to see the domestic and sexual in an imaginative way. She also shares a slice of personal life history, a situation of Being. In a Heideggerian view, this is Art (with a capital “A”) because it brings forth a truth applicable to the realm of Being and kindles us to think outside of our routine ways of reckoning the world. Nancy states, “…We are always in our Being—and in us Being is—exposed to love.” Through art, love is always offered to us.

Schopenhauer further asserts that nothing that happens in human life should be excluded from art. *My Bed* consists of elements that reflect how the behaviors of humans as sexual beings are linked in common kinship and how sexuality (no matter the predilection) is a universal. Emin as artist reveals something about human nature; Schopenhauer believes that this is art’s role. This *revealing* is an act of love in art by Emin.

An artist asserts her will to presence—and her will to power—and a viewer takes notice. When—as the viewer of art—the subject puts aside her concerns and desires for a moment in the manner of Schopenhauer, might this be a manner of love? I argue it is; we may call this pure knowing. I’ve borrowed the term “pure knowing” for this chapter from Schopenhauer’s argument because it seems to best describe (so far) what I am arguing as a particular kind of love in art. The adjective pure alludes to the sense of authenticity.

Art possesses a wonderful ability to take us out of the everyday. I see this as an expression of love that uniquely arises in works of art. It is the *connection* that Nancy stresses in his theory of love, which is ironically at the same time an unknowing.
Schopenhauer notes, “The artist lets us see into the world through his eyes.”687 Within this aesthetic experience we have access to pure knowing,

The liberation of our knowing lifts us wholly and entirely away from all that [will]...we are only pure subject of knowledge; we are only that one eye of the world which looks out from all knowing creatures, but which in man alone can become perfectly free from the service of the will.688

We are always in a state of knowing, which is always already there in being. All experiences constitute knowing. In the presence of a work of art, whether visual artworks, a musical concert, a performance of dance or a work of literature, we stand in an exceptional relationship of focus. That moment or hour—whatever amount of time it lasts—transcends the ontic, which is characterized by our multiple needs as we move through any given day. This amounts to an almost endless list of preoccupations. Schopenhauer understands that it is uniquely the work of art that temporarily liberates us from all such claims. It is in this situation that the viewer knows something in a way that no other distraction provides. This particular knowing is an act of love in art.
Coda

“Love arrives, it comes, or else it is not love.”

Within this dissertation I hope to have laid the ground for the phenomenon of love in art as another configuration of love.

The reader will recall that Heidegger saw thinking about art as a “feast of thought.” In a lecture on Nietzsche as a metaphysical thinker, the idea of a feast comes up again, this time in the context of abstract thinking. He quotes Nietzsche, “‘For many, abstract thinking is toil; for me, on good days, it is feast and frenzy.’” Heidegger continues,
Abstract thinking a feast? The highest form of human existence? Indeed. But at the same time we must observe how Nietzsche views the essence of a feast, in such a way that he can think of it only on the basis of his fundamental conception of all being, will to power. “The feast implies: pride, exuberance, frivolity; mockery of all earnestness and respectability; a divine affirmation of oneself, out of animal plentitude and perfection—all obvious states to which the Christian may not honestly say Yes. The feast is paganism par excellence.” …Feasts require long and painstaking preparation. This semester we want to prepare ourselves for the feast, even if we do not make it as far as the celebration, even if we only catch a glimpse of the preliminary festivities at the feast of thinking—experiencing what meditative thought is and what it means to be at home in genuine questioning.692

Love in art is a kind of frenzied feast, an embodied experience of presence that reaches for a limit. Thinking love in art is a banquet of wonder for artists and viewers who come to the table of questioning…or else it is not love.

The topic of thinking love in art has boundless potential. Where does it go from here? One possibility is to consider love in art in terms of an ethics of care. This branch of ethics emphasizes the moral locus of caregivers and subjects being cared for. An ethics of care challenges deontological or consequentialist standards as well as disinterestedness as a philosophical position. Instead, it is attentive to fostering connections among individuals and values emotion. How is the work of the artist a form of care for the viewer? Another possibility is to broaden the scope of thinking love in art to include consideration of artworks and philosophies outside of the European tradition. For example, how is my thesis negated or enlarged if examined through the lens of Indian or Chinese thinking and works made within indigenous cultures?

For all my research and thought over the past few years, this dissertation topic cannot be tied up with a neat bow. There are inherent problems because a theory of love in art is just
that—a creative hypothesis. It cannot be proven; it is not truth. Yet I propose it should be taken as seriously as other forms of love available to us. Perhaps this is an overconfident undertaking because the topic of love is fraught with difficulties, a wholly speculative issue that at the least overwhelms.

***

Marlene Dumas’ enigmatic painting *Waiting (for meaning)* [Figure 7.0] is an example that demonstrates how a work of art creates a situation of love that begins in wonder for the viewer. It is a small painting that depicts a sparsely composed arrangement in which a dark nude figure lays passively supine on an indistinct object covered by a white fabric edged with pleats. In a foreshortened diagonal, the figure’s head is set back from the picture plane, arms stretched behind its head, legs dangling at the knees. The milieu surrounding the figure is nondescript with the “air” painted in shades and tints of blue-gray. Dumas’ paintbrush marks are economically applied and she leaves the details ambiguous. The sex of the figure, facial features and whatever it lays upon are indeterminate. At first glance, I thought perhaps it was a bed but lengthwise it is too short and height-wise very tall. Then I considered a table or hospital cart of some kind. Finally I perceived with a little shock it indicates a child-size coffin.

Is this painting an allegory? What does it signify? Who has died? Is the reclining figure the parent of the child? Or is the figure a specter of the child who never had the opportunity to grow up? Why is the figure nude? What about the title—*who* is waiting for meaning? A child’s death is always irrational; how do we make sense out of the senseless?
Why do we try? Must we wait for meaning or actively seek it? What does meaning mean?

These questions run through my mind as I wonder about this painting.

Love has happened in this work of art for me as viewer. The love found in art is not desire nor is it unconditional; it will not complete me. As viewer of *Waiting (for meaning)*, my attitude is cooperative and collaborative; I offer my presence to the work for some amount of time; in this way love in art has aspects of being friendly or devoted. My attention is a form of care.

Upon first seeing Dumas’ work I began to wonder about it. Wonder is the action of curiosity, contemplation or attentiveness. Plato asserts that wonder is the starting point of thinking; I extend his idea to assert that wonder is also the starting point of thinking love in art. This wonder is a movement in thinking hosted by the between in which questions begin to form. To reiterate Arendt, “The wonder that man endures or which befalls him cannot be related in words because it is too general for words.” The idea of speechlessness is important to wonder; art often communicates in a manner that cannot be expressed via spoken or written language. The wonder I am describing here is an experience possible in a work of art for the beholder, occurring when mere words cannot explain the effect of the artwork.

Thinking about art opens the eyes of the mind on behalf of the viewer; it is a crossing. In this crossing the between is a space/time distinctive to the dynamic engagement with an artwork; the between—or *intermedius*—is a liminal space of absolute potential that is elicited by a will-full and conscious participation on behalf of the viewer towards the artwork (as
object) or artist (as performer.) The invisible enterprise of wondered thinking elicits the questioning essential to love in art.

In an essay written for the catalog that accompanied the exhibition *Women Artists: elles@centrepompidou*, Avital Ronell writes about a colleague who takes a dissimilar route in thinking about something,

To put it in shorthand, we could say that she is on the side of knowledge whereas I am captivated by non-knowledge and the anxiety that it provokes in our existence. My taste orients me toward speculation, theoretical inquiry of the risk-taking kind, and obsessive questioning. Rarely am I result-driven, as in business, nor do I always come up with an answer that might obliterate the question, put it to rest. I like to leave the question where I found it, there, dead or alive, still somehow blinking.

Ronell wryly evokes the visual of a question as a thing, stubbornly maintaining a semblance of existence. The mental image of a question by some means subsisting indefinitely—no matter what—resonates with me. I am reminded of Socrates with his endless and persistent questions aimed at his interlocutors. It seems—like Ronell—he wouldn’t let those questions just perish. Dumas’ painting realizes much the same thing: the question of what the painting means and the question of meaning does not go away.

In the introduction to this dissertation I note that Lyotard saw questions as the bedrock of thinking, at the heart of thinking. Questions are a manner of thriving, particularly in the time and space that art opens up for thinking. Yet questions that are born from thinking about art are largely unfinalizable, in the same way that Bakhtin insists upon the unfinalizability of the self.
Arendt notes, “By posing the unanswerable questions of meaning, men establish themselves as question-asking beings.” Love in art factors into the futile but inevitable search for meaning, in other words, what it means to be human. Ultimately the meaning of Dumas’ painting is not realizable; in other words, I will always be waiting for meaning. Yet while “waiting” I open myself to the experience of love found in a work of art.

***

My primary argument in this dissertation is that there is a particular love to be found in a work of art. While I have just described the experience of the viewer, love is both felt and expressed by the artist-maker albeit in a different shape than the viewer’s encounter.

While the artist’s thinking is genesis for the work of art, love generated by artists in their work does not come from a lack, romantic desire or physiological drive, or from vengeance. That is not to say these concerns (or another agency) are not present in the liminal or unconscious realm of the artist’s self. Yet such issues are not the engines behind love offered in their work; instead, love in art is an action performed by the artist. These movements are the artist’s thinking-with and questioning-with along with the physical efforts that create the art object or performance. This is what Heidegger calls poiēsis: a bringing forth by the artist—a poetic midwifing. While I cannot speak for Dumas’ actions and thoughts when she created Waiting (for meaning), I can imagine what they may be. Even if we do not have the facts concerning an artist’s studio processes, we can be confident that love is inscribed in her actions. This is because movements of thinking and questioning along with creative work generated by the artist are an expression of care and concern within the self-other relation. Bakhtin refers to the care and attention exercised by the artist as a
deliberate undertaking of responsiveness; what he calls answerability. This idea is represented in that the artist has a moral obligation to carry out creative work through a practice of thinking joined with materials used in particular actions, and to share her work with the viewer. Yet I maintain that if—for some reason—the work does not gain an audience, it does not negate the love founded in its creation. Once made, a work of art exists as always open to the possibility that someone other than the artist will experience it. Life and world are unpredictable; love in art is a boundless generosity toward possibility.

In the creation of art, the artist open-heartedly thrives within care. In Dasein, we are always already in care: care for our self, for others, for art. Heidegger sees this care as an action of immanent responsibility, although we may be deficient in our expression of it on occasion. This action is a willful diligence taken on by the artist as a manifestation of love in art. Whatever the artist’s project, the unifying idea is the subject’s being-in-the-world, a world that is immanently being-with others. Making art is a decentering activity since the art made is typically intended as an experience of being-with.

***

Love in art is necessary in the same way all loves are essential. Bakhtin’s theory of “art for life’s sake” emphasizes the relationship of being and art as mutually dependent; as such it concerns the artist and viewer’s actions in the world. The intersection of art and life is at once an expression of personal creativity and social standards. Dumas’ Waiting (for meaning) embodies this theory, even if the viewer does not quite comprehend all the nuances of the work. As Haynes explains in regards to Bakhtin’s notion of the “aesthetic event,” the viewer must go beyond projecting the self into a work of art. In other words, while we
initially offer the self to the work of art through answerability, we withdraw and return to our own unique position as recharged. Morson and Emerson note,

 Properly performed, the aesthetic act in daily life involves a reassumption and a reconfirmation of one’s own place after the other is encountered. Rather than fuse, we produce something new and valuable.701

In thriving, the act of creating and creation itself is profusion, “…the creative is not a lack but plentitude, not a search but full possession, not a craving but a dispensing, not hunger but superabundance.”702 Love in art is not about merging, as with a lover, but about thriving and expanding the self. It is a feast of possibility, of yes to life, of indefinite openness.
1 Kristina Van Dyke and Bisi Silva, ed., *The Progress of Love* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012, 15. The three exhibitions were curated by Van Dyke an African Art specialist) and Silva (the founder and artistic director of the Centre for Contemporary Art in Lagos, Nigeria) in response to the Menil Collection’s effort to expand the role of African art and programming.

2 Ibid., 16.

3 Valérie Oka (born Abidjan, Côte d’Ivorie 1967) is a mixed media contemporary artist whose work addresses human relationships and that examines issues of gender, the female body, African colonial history, and race relations. It is not clarified how the guests are selected to participate in the performances of *In Her Presence*. I am also unable to determine who prepares the food.

4 [https://www.flickr.com/photos/valerie_oka/sets/72157649948855671/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/valerie_oka/sets/72157649948855671/) (accessed March 10, 2016). This quote was taken from Oka’s Flickr page where photos and a description of the performance are described.

5 *In Her Presence* is not by conventional art standards a “masterpiece.” A point to be made here is the idea that art must not be necessarily famous to in order to be included in the discourse of a philosophy of aesthetics or a theory of love in art. I further want to note that Oka carries on a certain “social” tradition of art that is seen first in Fluxus happenings mid-twentieth century and later in relational aesthetics, particularly with the innovation of Rirkrit Tiravanija’s performances, which are grounded in an active program of human relations by way of serving modest repasts to gallery-goers. Oka takes it further in that beyond sharing food and discussion a creative act is put forth amongst the participants.

6 Phenomenology is the study of the structures comprising experience and consciousness asserted by Edmund Husserl (born Germany, 1859; died 1938.)


8 Ibid., 55.

9 Ibid. Emphasis mine.

10 I want to stress the word *may* because love in art is not a foregone conclusion. An experience of love is not guaranteed.

11 Credit for the term “anti-structure” in this context goes to Sigrid Hackenberg.


14 Ibid., 68.


16 Jean-Luc Nancy’s essay “Shattered Love” is included in his key text *The Inoperative Community* which—as pointed out by Christopher Fynsk in the Foreword—deconstructs Heidegger and assembles a “new thought of difference” as the immanent heterogeneity within community. Nancy’s writing here addresses justice, freedom and community—themes that underpin ethical and political thought. Nancy defines the political as a *tendency* of community rather than its organizing efforts. He stresses its communication (writing) as an imperative, writing as a conscious action of sharing, what he calls “literary communism.” It entails a responsibility to think to open up new perspectives. Nancy understands community
as the ground of social being and a political space; he insists his reader rethink and question the premise of freedom and community; these actions are necessary forms of engagement. Nancy offers a philosophical questioning that may be considered a productive action although he refrains from offering forthright recommendations for what definitive measures may be taken. It is through questioning new understandings about community may emerge. The philosophical and political are arguably indissociable; for example the striving for a state that achieves the maximum of social justice is a political ideal. Nancy’s position concerns the relation of the subject to the socio-political space. “Shattered Love” includes the noun and verb of love as part of the difficult struggle and debate within that space as modes of engagement. My thesis of thinking love in art parallels Nancy in that questioning arises from a relation of art, artist and viewer. Like Nancy’s ideas of love in community, love in art may be a site for argument and discourse. In contrast to Nancy’s political writing, is thinking love a nonproductive form of community? The making and viewing of art cannot be outside of community and therefore productive even if it cannot be measured or verified. Artworks affect us; how much or how little cannot be determined since they are so utterly subjective. What I want to stress is that making and viewing art along with thinking and questioning are means of engagement. My argument—like Nancy’s for love amidst the inoperative community—emphasizes relation and questioning.

17 James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, 203.
18 Ian James uses the term “postphenomenological” in emphasizing Nancy’s efforts to think outside of existing philosophical terrains of phenomenology. While influenced by them Nancy tends toward what we might think of as an anti-structure. This is reflected in his language, which departs from the use of visual metaphor in phenomenological semantics. James stresses the break with phenomenology and other schools of thought is also noted in Nancy’s emphasis on the fragment as opposed to the whole.
20 Ibid., 9.
21 Ibid., 205.
22 Ibid., 215.
23 Ibid., 216.
24 Ibid., 216.
25 In his explanatory text on Nancy, Ian James discusses at length the philosopher’s concept of sense, which takes place in the body as a site of existence. James identifies Nancy’s idea of sense as a critical break with phenomenology. Sense extends the subject’s body: a consciousness of and meaningfulness given to bodily abilities—what we might think of as the intersection of body and soul. Soul here is not a religious term, but one that indicates the potential for thinking. To elaborate a bit more, it is not only what the subject can understand, but an excess which is ungraspable: the time and space that goes beyond accessibility yet contains the potential for thinking, which allows for construction of meaning. It is this possibility that leads me to propose the notion of thinking love in art as a point of contact, what Nancy terms “touch”—or exposure and which may be considered as a manifestation of thought beyond embodiment: the body as extension of soul/thought. At the same time that touch is a manifestation of contact it is also separation because touching is also recognition of limit or rupture.
Emphasis mine. Jean-François Lyotard (born France, 1924; died 1998) was a philosopher and teacher. His interdisciplinary writings included critiques of aesthetics, politics, language and postmodern cultural thought.

Socrates (born Athens, 470 BCE; died 399 BCE) was a classical Greek philosopher and perhaps the originator of Western philosophical thought. If he wrote anything down, it does not survive. What is known about Socrates is based on the texts of his students Plato and Xenophon.

Plato’s dialogue The Apology recounts the story of how the Oracle at Delphi revealed that Socrates was the wisest man in Athens; however, Socrates was puzzled by what this meant because he did not think that he had an excess of wisdom that did others did not also possess. He therefore went about questioning the wisest men in Athens and those with the highest skills; eventually it occurred to him that by admitting his own ignorance—an admission others avoided—he understood the Oracle’s sly allegation was that Socrates alone was willing to acknowledge his ignorance while others would not.

Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1978), 6. Hannah Arendt (born Germany, 1906; died 1975) did not consider herself a philosopher because her thinking took on a wider view of humanity than offered by philosophy. Her writings are concerned with political theory including power, violence, democracy, and totalitarianism.

Luce Irigaray, The Way of Love (NY: continuum, 2002), 120. Luce Irigaray (born Belgium, 1932) is a contemporary Continental philosopher, psychoanalyst, and linguist. Much of her writing concerns ethics between the sexes and feminist theory.

Jean-Luc Nancy, “Shattered Love” in The Inoperative Community (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 84. Jean-Luc Nancy (born France, 1940) is a contemporary philosopher and teacher. His extensive and broad writings contain themes of politics, Christianity, art, culture and community.

Daoism (sometimes referred to as Taoism) is an indigenous Chinese philosophy. One of its fundamental concepts is the process of reality (dao means “way”) and how it is always
changing. The familiar symbol of ying/yang is Daoist icon that represents balanced internal
ergies that create harmony.

47 Weimin He, The Mystery of Empty Space: An Exhibition of Twentieth Century Chinese
Painting, (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archeology, Oxford University, 26 July –
16 October, 2005.)

48 Rachel Whiteread (born Essex, UK, 1963) is a British artist sculptor and first female to win
the Turner Prize in 1993.

September 13, 2014). Aarseth describes a temporary exhibition of Whiteread’s Ether (1990)
at the museum between November 2013 and February 2014.

50 Arendt remarks that while thinking is soundless it is never silent.

51 Arendt, The Life of the Mind, 71.

52 Jean-Luc Nancy, Being Singular Plural (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000),
5.

53 Ibid., 29.

54 This essay titled “Love" is a surviving fragment written by Hegel in 1797 or 1798.

13, 100 Notes – 100 Thoughts No 066, (Hatje Cantz: Ostfilden, 2012), 7. Judith Butler (born
Ohio, 1956) is a contemporary Continental philosopher and gender theorist. Her writings
span topics of politics, queer theory, feminism, and ethics.

56 Ibid., 6.

57 G.W.F. Hegel, “Love” in On Christianity: Early Theological Writings by Friedrich Hegel,
trans. T.M Knox (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 304. In this fragment Hegel is
describing love as something that can only happen between two equals who are in no way
opposed to each other. For Hegel (like Kant) understanding is intuitive and sensory;
knowledge is rational action.

58 Martin Heidegger (born Germany, 1889; died 1976) was a philosopher in the Continental
tradition known for his thinking on ontology through phenomenological analysis. He is
considered one of the greatest philosophers in the twentieth century.

59 Lain D. Thomson, Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity (New York, NY: Cambridge

60 Ibid., 85.


62 Karim Benammar, “Absence of Community,” in Who is this we? Absence of Community
(Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1994), 31 – 43. Benammar (born Germany, 1966) is an
independent philosopher and Heidegger scholar.

63 G.W.F. Hegel, Hegel’s Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art (Oxford: Claredon Press-Oxford,
1975), 281.

64 Ibid., 283.
69 Plato (born Athens, 429 BCE; died 348 – 347 BCE) was a student of Socrates and turned to philosophy as a career after Socrates was accused of corrupting the youth of Athens and subsequently put to death in 399 BCE. Plato eventually established the Academy, considered to the first school of higher education.
70 Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 80. In his discussion of the history of aesthetics, Heidegger is remarking upon form and content. While form is limited, matter is not because it reveals beauty in its idea. *Ekphanestaton* is the Greek term for how the idea manifests itself in a kind of shining in the artwork.
72 Ibid., 45.
73 Richard Drew (born 1946) is an Associated Press photojournalist.
75 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 55. Emphasis original.
76 Ibid., 59. Emphasis original.
77 Nietzsche’s pronouncement that “God is dead” in *The Gay Science* is an indictment of how society can no longer depend on the Christian religion as an absolute moral compass in the light of modern rationalism and science. From an optimistic standpoint, Nietzsche is commanding society to reinvent and reexamine ideas about right and wrong. The philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (born Germany, 1844; died 1900) was influential figure in Western thinking in terms of religion, ethics, art, and history.
79 Hélène Cixous writes in “Laugh of the Medusa,” “We have no womanly reason to pledge allegiance to the lack.”
80 Nancy, “Shattered Love,” 82.
81 Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 60
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., xi.
85 Butler, “To Sense What is Living in the Other,” 6.
86 Levinas, *On Thinking of the Other*, 108.

Ibid., 20.

*Symposium*, like all of Plato’s works, is written as dialogue. Socrates famously never wrote anything down; it is through Plato’s writings that we come to know and understand much of the historical Socrates.

The male characters in Symposium who deliver speeches on love are all contemporaries living in Athens during Plato’s time. They are: Phaedrus, an Athenian aristocrat; Pausanias, a legal authority; Eryximachus, a doctor; Aristophanes, a comic playwright; Alcibiades, a military general and Agathon, a tragedian.

Diotima of Mantinea seems to be the only character in Plato’s *Symposium* that is not documented historically. Yet, since all the others were living individuals, it is not impossible there was a Diotima-like factual figure. It has been suggested that Plato’s female philosopher was actually Diotima of Aspasia who was a lover of Pericles, the great Athenian statesman and orator known for his military exploits and who oversaw the design and building of the great Acropolis.

Plato, “Symposium,” 47. My summary is a much abbreviated telling of Aristophanes’ speech.

The round shapes of humans recalled their provenance: males were descendants of the sun, females the earth and androgynous the moon.


To abridge this legend: Adam and Eve are the first two human beings (sexed as female and male) created by God the Father; they lived in Paradise, often referred to as the Garden of Eden. There they existed with God’s other creatures (animals, insects, etc.) in a state of harmony and plenty with nature, essentially as innocent, immortal perfect beings. In the Garden, the only tree they were forbidden to eat from was the tree of the knowledge good and evil. Satan in the guise of a serpent tempted Eve to taste its fruit, which she shared with Adam. Subsequently, they were punished and forced out of Eden. Because of this punishment they suddenly knew shame, had to work to survive, reproduce and came to know physical death. There are two versions of the story of Adam and Eve. In the first (beginning Genesis 2:4) Eve is described as a literal offshoot of Adam, who was created first. She is made to keep him company. A later version, one that is attributed to Jewish scholars around the sixth century B.C.E., has the two on equal footing.

In the Catholic Church as well as many other Christian faiths, Original Sin brings about the requirement of the sacrament of Baptism for infants, in order to remit the wrongdoing passed on by Adam and Eve.

the theory there is no “self” or “truth.” Instead, poststructuralists scrutinize how knowledge is constructed by heterogeneity of meanings via textual analysis.

To elaborate further: for Lacan there are three orders of human experience: the Imaginary, Symbolic and the Real. The Symbolic is part of the structure of the psyche that is essentially the social order and language of the world into which the subject is born. As such it is word-based. A subject accepts the Symbolic by way of the Name-of-the-Father, which are the rules and constraints placed upon the subject within their social order. (The Symbolic is in alignment with Freud’s explanation of the superego.) The Imaginary order is the register of visual recognition—images. The Real is an amorphous ground that is retrospective in that it is the subject’s experience before language. An artist might imagine this as the blank piece of paper before he draws upon it. Art historian Steven Z. Levine points out that Lacan’s triple archetype (the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic) offers a multi-faceted way for us to experience a work of art. Additionally, I think that Barthes’ notion of the image-repertoire falls under the Imaginary and Symbolic orders. In this essay, I will capitalize Real, Imaginary and Symbolic when referring to Lacan’s theories.


A word about desire and drive for the subject in Lacanian theory: Lacan’s definition of desire is singular, in that for the subject there is one cause for desire, what he calls the objet petit a. This is an unattainable (but changeable) object outside of the body. Steven Z. Levine describes it as a vestigial ghost of the Real. On the other hand, Lacan’s definition of drive is at the heart of his theory of sexuality. Drives are not instincts, which are based in biology. For example, being hungry and eating fulfills the instinct to eat. In contrast the drive is a cultural construct based in language; all drives are sexual. A drive can never be satisfied, does not have a particular goal so it circles around an object. The repetitive circuit of the drive is a source of pleasure for the subject. Freud described two drives in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: the death drive and life drive (erôs.) The two are dualistic: the death drive is a destructive tendency and the life drive is a pursuit of unity. Lacan deviated from Freud in that he pronounced all drives as manifestation of the death drive.

Baptism—sometimes referred to as a christening—is a ritual carried out by many Christian religions in which babies (or believers of any age) take a life-long pledge to uphold and follow ecclesiastical doctrine. (In the case of infants, their godparents take this vow on their behalf.) The rite typically involves either the immersion in water or the pouring or sprinkling of blessed water over the head. It is considered to be a form of rebirth as well as atonement for the Original Sin of Adam and Eve.


Ibid., 69.

Sigmund Freud (born Austro-Hungarian Empire 1856; died 1939) was an Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis is a specialized treatment for neurotic symptoms created by Sigmund Freud. It may be described as a kind of theoretical detective work that aims to relieve manifest symptoms of emotional illness. The analyst is the individual providing treatment to the analysand, or patient. Psychoanalysis investigates the way someone thinks, bringing to consciousness entombed childhood traumas and permitting insight into psychological problems. By listening to the analysand’s dreams, fantasies and memories, the analyst
uneartns the reasons for the patient’s presenting symptoms (i.e., nightmares or depression), which are primarily symbolic reactions to the repressed memories or wishes.


Ibid., 7. Emphasis original.

Hippocrates of Kos (born Greece, 460 BCE; died 370 BCE) was a physician in the Age of Pericles and claimed as the “Father of Western Medicine.” He is credited as being the first doctor to assert that diseases occur in nature, not due to superstition or punishment of gods. Internet Classics Archive, “On The Sacred Disease by Hippocrates,” MIT website. [http://classics.mit.edu//Hippocrates/sacred.html](http://classics.mit.edu//Hippocrates/sacred.html) (accessed July 24, 2013).


The role of the caudate nucleus was a surprise discovery by Dr. Helen Fisher and her research team during fMRI scans of volunteers who were in love.


This is a theory postulated by Dr. Paul MacLean (born New York, 1913; died 2007) in the 1960-70s. He was an evolutionary neuro-anatomist and researcher at the National Institute for Mental Health. He referred to the reptilian brain as the R-complex.

The genesis of the R-complex is the fish and amphibians that evolved into reptiles 250 million years ago.


Ibid., 47.


Reptiles are markedly different from mammals in that the latter not only bear their offspring but also take care of them and even defend them, unlike the seemingly indifferent reptile that lays its eggs and slithers off.


Levinas, *On Thinking of the Other*, 33.

Ibid., 167.

Ibid., 103.

Ibid., 21.

Ibid., 35.

Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*, 60.

Ibid., 60. Emphasis original.

The four lobes are frontal, parietal (top), occipital (back) and temporal. The latter is on the left and ride sides. A human has the largest neo-cortex-to-brain percentage of all mammals; it endows the ability to reason.


The Wernicke area deciphers the meaning of inbound speech; Broca’s area allows us to put our thoughts into words. In terms of evolution, Broca’s area developed around 1.8 million years ago giving early *Homo habilis* (the earliest known species of the genus *Homo*) the brainpower to communicate verbally.


Ibid., 31.
Put in very general terms, the ego is an element of Freud’s tripartite schema of mental processes. The other two are the id and the superego. The id represents the instincts such as the sexual drive, nourishment and self-protection. (This certainly coincides with what we know about the function of the brain’s R-complex.) The ego, which means “I” in Latin, is attached to consciousness/knowledge and unconsciousness. It helps the subject to determine what is real and figure out the world it lives in; it is the part of our mind that employs common sense or logic. The ego acts as a kind of “middle man”; it negotiates the demands of the id with the expectations of society, which is internalized by the superego. The superego is the mental apparatus that represses the drives and desires of the id by assimilating parental and cultural demands.


Mickalene Thomas (born Camden, New Jersey 1971) is an artist who focuses on lush and elaborate acrylic and enamel paintings embellished with rhinestones, which feature portraits of black women, interiors, and landscapes often appropriated from the art historical canon. She is also a filmmaker, collagist, and photographer.

Gustave Courbet (born France, 1819; died 1877) was an outspoken Realist painter who contentiously rejected the prevailing Romanticism upheld by the French Academy in the mid-nineteenth century art world. An Ottoman diplomat living in Paris had commissioned *The Origin of the World*. The painting joined his erotic collection of artworks.

This painting was commissioned by Egyptian-Turkish diplomat Kahlil-Bey who was an ostentatious art collector living in Paris. The Musée d’Orsay notes that his personal art collection was a “celebration” of the female body. The choice of the word celebration of the male gaze upon the female body in twenty-first century discourse may not serve as the best description because it is misogynist in contemporary context.

The “male gaze” is a term coined by Laura Mulvey in her well-known essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975).

Blouin Art Info, “Mickalene Thomas on Motherhood, the Mirror Stage, and Her Brooklyn Museum Show,” Blouin Art Info website.


Thomas in an interview with Sean Landers for *Bomb*, Summer 2011.

Blouin Art Info, “Mickalene Thomas on Motherhood, the Mirror Stage, and Her Brooklyn Museum Show,” Blouin Art Info website.

18, 2015). Also of note: Vodou Drapo are handmade spirit flags embellished with beads and sequins sewn onto fabric, which are unique to Haiti. Thomas’ use of rhinestone alludes to this practice.

145 Meret Oppenheim (born Berlin, 1913; died 1985) was a Surrealist artist. Annie Sprinkle (born Philadelphia, 1954) is a former porn star and sex worker. She eventually received an undergraduate degree in photography and went on to earn a doctorate in Human Sexuality. She identifies not only as an artist, but considers herself a sex educator.

147 Public Cervix Announcement has been performed in over a dozen countries and Sprinkle estimates over forty thousand viewers have directly gazed at her cervix.

148 It seems necessary to note here the important feminist theoretical text by Luce Irigaray titled Speculum of the Other Woman originally published in 1974. In it she asserts how the discourse of philosophy since ancient Greece does not include females. Similarly, psychoanalysis excludes the female in its position of the one-sex (male) model. In other words, the mirror held up for the male reflection is denied to the female within patriarchal discourse.

149 The idea of ocular-eccentric brings to mind the erotic activity of peep shows. A work of art that also takes on an ocular-eccentric viewer’s position is Marcel Duchamp’s enigmatic Etant donnés (1946 - 66) permanently installed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art since 1969. To briefly describe: the work is located in a small, secluded space adjacent to the Duchamp gallery. The room is empty except for a thick wooden door with a peephole. Only one viewer at the time can peer through the opening; what he sees is a diorama-like scene of what appears as an anonymous naked female with splayed legs laying supine in a grotto. She is holding aloft a lantern. Duchamp worked in secret for the last twenty years of his life to construct this mixed media assemblage. As a former resident of Philadelphia, it is possible that Sprinkle is familiar with this artwork.

150 Simon Critchley (born England, 1960) is a Continental philosopher and writer.


152 Heidegger’s concept of Dasein is fundamental to his thinking. I am here now. What does it mean to exist? Dasein is established by the subject’s existence in the world. Heidegger was interested in the subject’s relationship to the world that always includes others who shape that relationship. The subject can never be considered alone in Dasein.


154 Ibid.

155 Mood is the subject’s disposition to Dasein.

156 Heidegger differentiates fear and anxiety. Fear is an emotion felt in response to something specific such as a threat. It could also be the apprehension of taking a test or a snapping dog that lunges toward you. Heidegger states in Being and Time, “What anxiety is about is completely indefinite...Anxiety ‘does not know’ what it is anxious about.”

157 Dasein is propelled into existence. Once there, the subject is inescapably in the throes of life’s unpredictability within the continuum of birth to death. Heidegger calls this “thrownness.” Bolt remarks that thrownness is “at the base of our anxiety.”
By documented accounts I cannot locate an interview or statement in which Sprinkle admitted to feeling anxiety in her performance. In fact, by her own report she experienced what reads as a kind of jouissance. Likewise, I have not found documents describing participant’s various responses to Public Cervix Announcement. Yet it is fair to say that certainly many collaborators in the audience likely experienced varying amounts of anxiety with regard to Sprinkle’s constructed voyeuristic relation within the performance.


Deborah de Robertis (born Luxembourg, 1984) is a performance artist and photographer.


Ibid.

Bolt, Heidegger Reframed, 5.


VALIE EXPORT (born Austria, 1940) is a multi-media artist working in performance, film, photography, sculpture and animation. She prefers her name be spelled in capital letters.

While EXPORT is quoted in a 1979 interview with Ruth Askey as claiming to have a gun, Amelia Jones notes in a later interview she denied ever saying that. Whether or not there was a gun (or a simulated one) is a key question because its absence would certainly recast the effect of the performance on the witnesses – as well as EXPORT’s own intentions. A gun is a straightforward symbol of unmitigated violence. Its presence certainly would affect how the viewers would react to her demands, which would be perceived as a threat with the sight of the weapon. The absence of a gun changes the scenario rather drastically. Her “weapon” then becomes her verbal challenge along with her exposed crotch. She poses no real threat of bodily harm, only psychological violence upon male fantasies. Since the subsequent photographs reflect the use of a gun in her composition, I pursue the notion that a gun was implemented in the Munich cinema performance.

VALIE EXPORT, “VALIE EXPORT [interview with Ruth Askey]” in Elles@centrepompidou, ed. not noted. (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2010), 63.

Heidegger, Being and Time, 180 - 181.


I use the term “reviewer” to denote the contemporary individual reading that describes EXPORT’s performance in various sources and in this essay.

Heidegger, Being and Time, 57.

Ibid. Emphasis mine.
Amelia Jones, “Genital Panic: The Threat of Feminist Bodies and Parafeminism,” in Elles@centrepompidou, ed. not noted. (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2010), 290. After the war, in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir’s opus The Second Sex appeared as a key text in the feminist movement. Amelia Jones (born North Carolina, 1961) is an art historian and art critic specializing in feminist art and body/performance art.

There are apparently no witnesses and no visual documentation of EXPORT’s Munich theatre performance. It exists in textual descriptions, some of which conflict in nature.

 Ibid., 294. Emphasis original.

Female circumcision (female genital mutilation) comes to mind.

Ibid., 294. Emphasis original.

In her essay on Genital Panic, Jones discusses Simone de Beauvoir’s famous anti-essentialist quote, “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.”

It seems important to further elaborate on Courbet’s Origin of the World particularly in the context of his agency as a painter. He was a leader in Realism, a movement that was most potent in France and aimed to offer an objective representation of the world in contemporary life. A self-conscious political radical of the left, Courbet famously said he would not paint an angel since he never saw one in his insistence on truth in art. Realists painted both proletariat and prostitutes in their concern for social justice; the latter may be the subject in Origin of the World. In this way Courbet’s artwork ethically rises above the venus pudicas of earlier artists, but at the same time the underlying motivation of his patron Kahlil-Bey cannot be ignored as contributing to the tradition of the objectification of the female nude in art.

Judith Butler, Gender Trouble (New York: Routledge, 1990), 38.

Sheela na gigs are architectural medieval carvings of female figures melodramatically exposing their outsized vulvas. They are typically found on churches and castles and believed to serve an apotropaic function.


five deep breaths, directed by Seith Mann, Stonegate Productions, 2003. Length: Twenty-one minutes. This premiered at Sundance Film Festival. The video can be viewed at http://www.shortoftheweek.com/2012/06/29/five-deep-breaths/

Nicomachean Ethics (334 – 323 BCE) is Aristotle’s best-known text concerning ethics. It may have been based on lectures he conducted at his Lyceum. He considered ethics as something practical as opposed to theoretical.

Socrates’ method of elenchus is noted in this cross-examination of Agathon. This is the sole part of Symposium in which Socrates’ dialectic method takes place.
As mentioned in an earlier note, Diotima may or may not be a historical figure, but she certainly acts as literary device for Plato’s dialogue. She serves as an authority on love.


Ibid., 62.

Ibid., 63.

Aphrodite is the Greek precedent to the Roman goddess of love Venus.

Plato, *Symposium*, 63 - 64. Plato (a devoted student of Socrates) wrote *Symposium* in such a way that it is difficult not read this narrative without interpreting his language here as love prose describing his teacher. Socrates was known as a rather unattractive fellow who did not wear sandals and eschewed personal hygiene. He was “tough” in that he frequently and skillfully engaged in elenchus with other men in the agora (town center.) He didn’t really have a formal job and depended on others for income. And he was a relentless seeker of wisdom.


Diotima’s description of Love’s destitution does not mention fear, but dread is a psychological consequence of poverty. A subject who does not know where their next meal comes from is always afraid.

“Loss of innocence” is a theme seen in literature, poetry, film and other narrative genres of popular culture. It is marked by a (typically young) subject’s sudden awareness of wrongdoing, evil and suffering in the world.

five deep breaths, directed by Seith Mann.

Aristotle (born Stagira, 384 BCE; died 322 BCE) is one of the extraordinary philosophers and scientists of ancient Greece. At age eighteen he joined Plato’s academy in Athens and stayed for twenty years. He eventually travelled and explored other lands and went on to tutor Alexander the Great and kings-to-be Ptolemy and Cassander. Upon his return to Athens he became involved in empirical studies, which resulted in a total break with Plato’s theory of Forms. He established his own school called the Lyceum. Unfortunately most of his writings survive only in fragments, in contrast to his teacher Plato whose writings largely exist intact.

Plato’s theory of Forms is the bedrock of his teachings. Platonic forms are defined as aspects of reality that are not visible to the eye or experienced in any physical aspect. They are unchanging, eternal, absolute entities and the only thing that is completely knowable. The Form of the Good is the source of all subsequent Forms such as knowledge and truth. The theory of Forms is first introduced in Plato’s dialogue *Phaedo*, which describes the final days of Socrates before he is put to death for corrupting the youth of Athens.

Love in ancient Athens was fairly complicated and almost completely homoerotic to
greater or lesser extent. Nearly all of love and erôs in Symposium must be understood in the
context of the Athenian social custom of paiderastia, which was the socially regulated sexual
relationship between a mature upper class man (erastês) and a teenage boy (erômenos.) This
erotic predilection had nothing to do with what we think of today as sexual orientation.
Sexual relationships were underscored by the role of man as teacher of virtue (arête) to the
boy. The teen was expected to be the passive recipient of sexual intercourse between the two.
When the boy developed the beard of a full grown male, the relationship was terminated (if
not, he may be forced to lose his citizenship.) Greek men were then expected to marry, have
children and eventually take on the role of erastês.
Marriage was an arrangement for social and economic benefits. Males typically married
much younger females, if they were not solely sexually attracted to men. Women in general
were not included in much of Greek life outside the home. Greek married men were not
expected to be monogamous; they had dalliances with their slaves or engaged with
prostitutes, which was a legal profession.
What we might think of nowadays as flirtations, romance and seduction actually took place
between erastês and erômenos or men and their courtesans. See C.D.C. Reeve’s introduction
to Plato on Love for a more detailed account of ancient Greek sexual conventions.

Ibid., 72 – 73.
Nancy “Shattered Love,” 85.
Ibid.

The sculptor Martin Puryear (born Washington D.C., 1941) works in traditional wood
media using long-established techniques to create reductive and meditative objects. The long
parallel sides of the Ladder for Booker T. Washington were cut from a single thirty-six foot
tree. As Puryear describes it, the work’s title was secondary to its original motivation and in
fact did not name it until completion. He comments that viewers tend to be more interested in
the wall label in the museum that explains the historical figure of Washington than the work
itself.

Art21, “Martin Puryear on Abstraction and ‘Ladder for Booker T. Washington,”
Art21 website. http://www.art21.org/texts/martin-puryear/interview-martin-puryear-

Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in Basic Writings, ed. David Farrell
Ibid., 162.
Zena Hitz, “Aristotle on Self-Knowledge and Friendship,” Philosopher’s Imprint 11,
Ibid., 10.
Nancy “Shattered Love,” 83.
Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, translated by W. D. Ross (ebook: Batoche Books, 1999),
127.
Ibid.
David L. Norton and Mary F. Kille, Philosophies of Love (Totowa: Rowan and Littlefield
Publishers, 1988), 231. The first two (utility and pleasure) are grounded in getting something
particular from the other. For example, in the former it might be a friendship that arises between a teacher and a student or between colleagues in the workplace. The student has a conscious wish to learn as much from his mentor as possible about her specific knowledge in a subject. A utilitarian nature is located in the collegial spirit amongst job associates apropo to keeping the business robust. On the other hand subjects whose relation is limited to meeting at the sports bar to drink while enjoying televised athletic games describe an example of a pleasure-based friendship. A further example is a subject involved in a sexual liaison for physical gratification. For Aristotle, utility and pleasure are not necessarily permanent, and do not include the whole of the other; rather, parts of the other are constitutive of the primary nature of the relationship. This is to be expected because—practically speaking—most people we know or meet will not become a true friend. People change as well as circumstances: a student graduates and no longer requires the teacher; a colleague moves to another city; a drinking buddy decides to be sober and stops going to the bar; the lover grows bored and a more titillating conquest appears. It is possible—although rarely so—that a friendship of utility or pleasure will develop into a more solid relationship of loving.

225 Ibid., 130
226 Ibid., The idiom of “eaten salt together” may refer to the mutual hospitality two friends share in a long-term relationship.
227 Ibid., 133.
229 Aristotle is not opposed to *philia* in the erotic relationship as long as the sexual desire is mutual and one is not using the other merely for his or her pleasure at the expense of the other. In this is the case it is not the model *philia*, but a transient friendship based on utility.
231 Ibid.
232 Ibid., 18.
234 Ibid., 10.
235 Alcibiades was part of the Athenian military and an orator. In *Symposium*, his role marks a change in the previous speeches, from the topic of love to one that praises Socrates. C.D.C. Reeve points out that there is an element of satyr play in Alcibiades’ discourse. Satyr plays were a form of ancient Greek tragicomedy that is related to modern burlesque. This switch of trajectory in *Symposium’s* narrative seems to bump up against the love ladder constructed throughout Plato’s poetic action from sacred to salacious.
238 Ibid.
239 Doris Salcedo (born Columbia, 1958) is a contemporary sculptor and installation artist.
240 The Tate Modern occupies the site of the former Bankside Power Station, which was in operation between 1947-1981. After its conversion in 2000, it measures almost 325 feet in height.
While I appreciate and admire Salcedo’s intention with *Shibboleth* and the notion of redirecting and reconsidering the gaze, her statement is problematic in that she denies viewers a choice of ideas or opinion about grandeur in architecture, and she ranks architecture in terms of what merits a sense of awe. Who decides what merits wonder? The fact is most people will never witness Hagia Sophia or the Great Pyramids or other such world heritage sites. Perhaps even a former power plant is deserving of awe.


This legend is located in the Book of Judges, Chapter 12 (the seventh book of the Hebrew Bible) and the Old Testament of the Christian bible. The story concerns a military conflict that took place around 1370 BCE – 1070 BCE between the Gileadites who defeated the Ephraimites. The latter group did not have the phoneme “sh” in their dialect and their outsider status was determined by their inability to pronounce “shibboleth” at military checkpoints at the Jordan River.


The Good Samaritan is a parable told by Jesus Christ to his disciples and noted in the New Testament in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus told the story in answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor?” The parable tells the tale of a Jew travelling alone between Jerusalem and Jericho, who is assaulted, robbed and left for dead lying on the ground. Both a Jewish priest and a Levite (a member of the Israelite tribe of Levi) pass him without interest. Eventually a Samaritan comes upon the injured man, cares for his wounds, and transports him to an inn for recovery. Part of the significance of the story is that the Jews hated the Samaritans and vice versa. Therefore, Jesus is interpreted here as saying that your neighbor includes your enemy.


According to Simon May, pre-Platonic Greek philosophers considered love a significant human and cosmic force, but did not insist upon love’s ethical significance.

Perhaps an example of how hatred proliferates unrestrained in the world as I write is the example of *Daesh* (a current acronym of their adopted name al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham) the descriptor for the Islamic State also called ISIL or ISIS. This fast-growing group of extremist militants wreaks havoc of unrestrained destruction and killing in their quest for a totalitarian state throughout various world sites.

Paul the Apostle (born 5; died 67) originally known as Saul of Taurus was not one of the
twelve apostles of Christ. He preached the gospels of Christ and is significant for his
writings, called the Pauline Epistles in the New Testament that are foundational texts for
early Christians.
Paul, 1 Corinthians 13:13 (New International Version). The original Greek ἀγάπη (agape)
was used by St. Paul (about 53 – 57 CE) in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, which
more completely reads: If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I
am only a resounding gong or clanging symbol. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can
fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but
have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the
flames, but have not love, I gain not nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy,
it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered,
it keeps no records of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It
always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails. But
where there are prophecies, they will cease: where there are tongues, they will be stilled:
where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part,
but when perfection comes the imperfect disappears. 11 When I was a child, I thought like a
child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see fact to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.
While this passage imposes a nearly impossible list of mandates for loving fellow beings,
Norton and Kille point out it underscores the essence of a love that stresses the benevolent
act of loving, rather than the situation of being loved.
My use of the term “fatherly” acknowledges that all three of the Abrahamic religions are
all rooted as a strictly patriarchal apparatus.
St. John the Evangelist is believed by Christians to be one of Christ’s twelve apostles who
lived in Ephesus and was never martyred for his beliefs. The authorship of a number of his
texts is debated.
1 John 4:8 (NIV).
May, Love: A History, 87. May also mentions that Protestant reformer Martin Luther saw
human and divine love as completely distinct. Human love is flawed and incapable of fully
loving God or one’s neighbor.
Emmanuel Levinas, On Thinking of the Other: entre nous (New York: Columbia
University Press, 1998), 110. Levinas (born Kaunas, Lithuania 1906; died 1995) was a
philosopher and Talmudic scholar who developed a theory of ethics as it concerns the
intersubjective relation, specifically the face-to-face encounter.
In Freud’s 1929 essay Civilizations and Its Discontents he unpacks the tensions that occur
between society (authority) and a subject (freedom.)
Sigmund Freud, “Civilization and Its Discontents” in The Freud Reader (New York, NY:
Ibid., 751.
Ibid., 730.
Dissanayake elaborates further on this theory in her essay *Art for Life’s Sake*. She changes the paradigm of how we may think about aesthetics—particularly of “art for life’s sake”—in an essay that regards art from what she considers as the broadest possible perspective: the “palaeoanthropsychobiological view.” It is well established there exists the universal and trans-historical tendency for subjects to make art, yet currently in the United States art is being regarded as something nonessential, elitist or irrelevant to contemporary concerns, an expenditure that need not be implemented for present day education of students nor a cultural imperative for society. Dissanayake’s argument states that art is necessary for humans at multiple levels of life. Just like a bird is programmed to build its nest, somewhere along our human evolutionary journey, our DNA is imprinted with an aesthetic disposition. The human behaviors of making and viewing art have a part in human life. They are practices that evolved because it is vital in some way to life itself. Dissanayake takes the stand that the creating, viewing and enjoyment of art is not simply a cultural phenomenon, but a ubiquitous human behavior based in bio-evolution; it serves selective value in the evolution of the human species. Dissanayake’s argument for art is critical in that it parallels the idea of the human need for love that is disclosed by current technologies discussed in Chapter One. With the embodied need for love and art established by scholars, the argument that a philosophical position that love is engendered in art is viable.

272 Ibid., 86.
273 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 140.
275 Ibid., 92.
278 Haynes, *Bakhtin Reframed*, (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2013), 12. Haynes writes about Bakhtin’s insistence that art and life answer each other. In other words, art serves a role in our life in terms of enriching it and life fundamentally upholds the creative efforts of making art. Ellen Dissanayake elaborates further on this theory in her essay *Art for Life’s Sake*. She changes the paradigm of how we may think about aesthetics—particularly of “art for life’s sake”—in an essay that regards art from what she considers as the broadest possible perspective: the “palaeoanthropsychobiological view.” It is well established there exists the universal and trans-historical tendency for subjects to make art, yet currently in the United States art is being regarded as something nonessential, elitist or irrelevant to contemporary concerns, an expenditure that need not be implemented for present day education of students nor a cultural imperative for society. Dissanayake’s argument states that art is necessary for humans at multiple levels of life. Just like a bird is programmed to build its nest, somewhere along our human evolutionary journey, our DNA is imprinted with an aesthetic disposition. The human behaviors of making and viewing art have a part in human life. They are practices that evolved because it is vital in some way to life itself. Dissanayake takes the stand that the creating, viewing and enjoyment of art is not simply a cultural phenomenon, but a ubiquitous human behavior based in bio-evolution; it serves selective value in the evolution of the human species. Dissanayake’s argument for art is critical in that it parallels the idea of the human need for love that is disclosed by current technologies discussed in Chapter One. With the embodied need for love and art established by scholars, the argument that a philosophical position that love is engendered in art is viable.

280 Ibid., 44.
281 Ibid.
283 Nancy, “Myth Interrupted,” 44.
284 Ibid., 45. Emphasis original.
286 Ibid., 45.
287 Ibid., 46. Barthes here uses the examples of Nazi fallacies about race and origin deployed to an extreme political means. This is an example of when myth is retooled to an ideology. In his essay “Myth Today” Barthes addresses the ideological nature of a culture’s myth.
286 Ibid., 271.
287 Faou, “Primal Rhythm,” Faou website. [http://test.faou.eburo.org/cms/projects/primal-rhythm/](http://test.faou.eburo.org/cms/projects/primal-rhythm/) (accessed April 18, 2016). Mariko Mori (born Japan, 1967) works in new technologies to create video, photography and sculpture. She is based in New York City. As part of her practice, she established Faou Foundation in 2010 as an educational and cultural non-profit. The mission of the organization is to create six site-specific projects each in unique ecological settings across six continents. These sustainable art installations are intended to highlight the beauty of their surroundings and more deeply connect the viewer to the environment through a raised consciousness of how humans share the planet with other living things.
288 The acrylic is the type used in construction of large-scale aquariums.
289 Mori’s *Moon Stone* will be on view seven months annually; during Japan’s typhoon season it will be placed in storage.
290 On winter solstice the earth is at furthest axial tilt away from the sun for the Northern Hemisphere; it is considered the first day of winter. Religious and secular celebrations of both summer and winter solstice have maintained significance over many millennia and countless cultures. These are seen in structures and artworks as long ago as the Neolithic era.
291 The prehistoric monument of Stonehenge (3000 – 2000 BCE) is located in southern England and is a World Heritage site. There standing stones are aligned circularly with the sunset of the winter solstice. The even older site of Newgrange (3000 – 2500 BCE) in Ireland is a large circular earth mound with a stone passageway and interior chambers. It was designed so that light floods one of these spaces on sunrise of the winter solstice. When lit, intricate spiral carvings in the rocks are revealed. The entryway to Egypt’s temple complex at Karnak in northern Luxor (building began around 2000 BCE) is also aligned with the rise of sun on winter solstice. In Mexico’s Yucatan, the stepped pyramid of El Castillo (9th to 12th century CE) at Chichen Itza is designed by the Maya so that on winter solstice the rising sun seems to roll up the western edge of the structure, peaks at the summit and then rolls down. Mythological speculation and folk tales flourish for sites as such and indicate the globally revered intersections of astronomical events and mythology.
295 Ibid., 62.
296 Ibid., 143.
297 Ibid., 201.
298 Ibid., 185.
299 Barbara Bolt explains facticity as not a correspondence of fact or truth, but as a relation to the possibilities enabled by our thrownness, which is the flux of life.
300 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Putnam, 1934), 206. The unity Dewey speaks of is the quality that saturates the experience as a whole, such a grief or intense pleasure.
301 John Dewey (b. Vermont, 1859; died 1952) was a philosopher, psychologist and educational
reformer. *Art as Experience* (1934) is an influential text and stands as his major contribution to writing on art.

305 Ibid.


307 Wangechi Mutu (born Kenya, 1972) is a contemporary mixed media artist currently living in New York.

308 Mutu’s use of pearls is a compelling allegory. In work of art, pearls may represent something rare, beautiful and valuable. It occurs to me that by using the image of pearls to embellish the vaginal area, Mutu is obliquely referring to the hateful practice of female circumcision (also referred to as FMG: female genital mutilation) in her native country of Kenya, specifically performed upon the Maasai (before they marry) and Kiyuku girls; babies as young as a few months old may be circumcised. This procedure involves cutting away with a blade some or all the external female genitalia. Helen Fisher in *Anatomy of Love* explains the rationale of female circumcision as a tactic that aims to “curb the high female libido.” The female sex drive is perceived as seductive in various cultures as well as in the Muslim faith. Not confined to Kenya, it is also extensively practiced throughout a number of countries in Africa, Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

309 African masks are a common feature of Sub-Saharan cultures in Africa for use in tribal rituals, ceremonies and social events. Usually carved of wood, they tend to have spiritual/religious meanings in which the wearer is imbued with a special status. Sometimes this status involves taking on an identity other than human, or mediates spirits between the human and supernatural world. Mutu’s representation of the mask may allude to the in-between nature of her upside-down figure.

310 Daphne is a figure from Greek mythology, a spirit in the form of a naiad (fresh water nymph.) There are numerous legends about her. The most prominent tale describes her as a beautiful female not interested in romance—in fact a sworn virgin—who prefers to hunt in the woods. But the Olympian deity Apollo, vengefully struck with a gold-tipped arrow by the god Eros, becomes intent on possessing Daphne’s love. Desperately fleeing his relentless pursuit, she calls for the help of her parents (her father is the river god Peneus and her mother Gaia the primordial goddess of earth) one of whom transforms her into a laurel tree in order to spare her virtue.


312 Collage is the application of glued pieces of paper to a surface, likely first used in China as early as 200 CE. The technique has been further documented as in use by tenth century Japanese calligraphers. In medieval Europe application of gold leaf to religious icons indicates a form of collage. Pablo Picasso and George Braque established the modern use of collage as art practice in the twentieth century with the implementation of synthetic Cubism. I argue that Mutu works in the tradition of Dada artist Hannah Hoch (born Germany, 1889; died 1978) who pioneered photomontage as an art style that prefigures Surrealist art. (Dada was a subversive and revolutionary art movement that emerged as a critical backlash to World War I—a horrific event that resulted in the deaths of sixteen million Europeans.)
photomontage, cut up photographs or reproductions of photos are pasted to paper to form satirical and absurd images. Hoch used juxtapositions of various representations to critique the socio-sexual construction of females in early twentieth century advertising. Mutu’s collages focus on the contemporary female black body to address issues of colonial history, cultural identity, and gender discrimination in addition to the innovative potentials found in Afropfuturism.

313 Carnival time is a time of freedom and becoming that involves eating, drinking and the wearing of masks.


315 Ibid., 303.

316 Legend has it that Baubo made the grieving Demeter (the Greek goddess of the harvest who was the mother of Persephone, abducted by Hades, king of the underworld) laugh by exposing her genitals. Representations of Baubo widely vary, but generally she is a plump, naked, bawdy figure exposing her vulva and laughing, sometimes in the squatting position, similar to Mutu’s figure.


318 Ibid., 304.

319 Ibid.

320 The term Afrofuturism was coined by author and cultural critic Mark Dery in an essay titled “Black to the Future” in 1994. Dery (born Massachusetts, 1959) is one of the first writers of technoculture. (A neologism, it describes the interactions between and politics of technology and culture.)

321 Writer Octavia Butler (born Pasadena, 1947; died 2006) was a recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship. Her works are noted for introducing characters and plot lines that break the norms of gender, race and class into the genre of science fiction.

322 Sun Ra (born Alabama, 1914; died 1993) was a groundbreaking jazz musician, composer, performer, poet and “cosmic” philosopher known for his experimental music. The latter concerns his claim to be an alien from the planet Saturn who is on earth for a mission of peace. Ra is considered a pioneer of Afrofuturism.

323 Janelle Monàe (born Kansas City, 1985) is a self-proclaimed Afrofuturist recording artist and actress.

324 Videographer Terence Nance (born Texas, 1982) directed *An Oversimplification of Her Beauty* in 2012 as well as other experimental films and music videos that take on Afrofuturist perspectives.


327 Ibid., 80.


329 Ibid., 22.
330 Ibid., 23.
331 Ibid., 19.
332 Ibid., 173.
333 Ibid., 81.
334 Ibid., 175.
335 Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 16. Žižek (born Slovenia, 1949) is a contemporary philosopher noted for his idiosyncratic style.
336 Ibid., 153.
337 Ibid., 19.
338 Ibid., 149 - 150.
341 Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 150.
342 Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies*, 16.
343 Ibid.
344 Ibid.
345 Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 151.
347 Ibid.,
348 Ibid., 155.
351 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 49.
352 Kay Walkingstick (born Syracuse, New York 1935) is an American Indian whose contemporary paintings address her identification with her Cherokee heritage. The Cherokees are a Native American tribe who originally lived in the southeastern area of the United States.
354 I use the word “may” because a subject is just as likely to find nothing compelling about Walkingstick’s painting. The response to a work is always a subjective one that cannot be argued.
357 Ibid., 170.
358 Walkingstick began to address her American Indian roots in her artwork in 1975, the year she earned her graduate degree in painting from Pratt Institute.
In Native American indigenous cultures, most aspects of the tangible world are imbued with spirit, which renders the land sacred and the people’s identity with that land immutable. Pit River Indian Jaime du Angulo states, “Everything is alive. That’s what we Indians believe.” (“Indians in Overalls,” Hudson review, II, 1950, p.372.) From this perspective land is not to be dominated by humans but cared for.

The Bakhtin early essay I refer to here is “Art and Answerability” written in 1919. A brief work, it was his first published critique. In later years, Bakhtin expanded upon answerability when analyzing Dostoevsky’s literature. His writings went on to consider concepts of dialogue and the dialogic. This went against the standard model of dialectical thinking of an either/or in favor of both/and located in a dialogical perspective. See Clark and Holquist’s, Mikhail Bakhtin.

Vivian Maier (born New York City, 1926; died 2009) was an unknown and peculiar individual who worked quietly as a nanny and home caretaker for most of her adult life in New York and Chicago.

John Maloof is not only the individual who discovered Maier’s work, but he went on to become co-director of the documentary film Finding Vivian Maier (2013.) He is the chief curator of her oeuvre, and editor of the book Street Photographer (2011). Maloof is also one of a collective in partnership with School of the Art Institute of Chicago that has established the Vivian Maier Scholarship Fund for female students in need of tuition assistance.

Although born in the Bronx, Maier lived most of her youth in the small village of Saint-Bonnet-en-Champsaur. She spoke fluent French; her mother was French-born, her father Austrian. (Maloof tracked down a surviving maternal family member in the French Alps.) She returned to New York at age twenty-five originally employed in a sweatshop; later she made a move to domestic work in the Chicago area.

Joel Myerowitz (born 1938) is a prominent street and landscape photographer who pioneered the use of color film in the nineteen-sixties. His work is in major collections throughout the United States.

Mary Ellen Mark (born Philadelphia, 1940; died 2015) was a well-known photojournalist, a Fulbright Scholar and has published numerous books documenting her works.

Diane Arbus (born New York City, 1923; died 1971) was a photographer and writer known for her pictures of people who live in the margins of society such as midgets, circus performers, nudists, and the disabled residents of institutions. She was the first American photographer to have her works exhibited as part of the 1972 Venice Biennale.


Lisette Model (born Austria, 1901; died 1983) was an American portrait photographer who taught photography at the New School in Manhattan. Her students included Diane Arbus. See Maloof’s film Finding Vivian Maier (2013), produced and co-directed with Charlie Siskel.
Marina Abramović (born Yugoslavia, 1946) is a pioneer of contemporary performance art. A number of sitters sat multiple times, one of whom took the chair twenty-one times and subsequently had that number tattooed on his arm. The Artist is Present is the longest performance carried out by Abramović, and the lengthiest ever hosted by a museum. In each corner of the area were large spotlights along with a video/photography crew who documented the event with individual portraits of sitters, noting the length of time they sat in the chair. MoMA has published a slide show of images for each sitting. See: Museum of Modern Art, “The Artist is Present, Marina A Abramović,” MoMA website. Security was a heavy presence throughout each performance day. Attendance by visitors and intended participants was typically dense; the daily audience stood or sat on the floor outside the perimeter. A supervised queue formed along one side of the rope for participants. A number of determined individuals slept on the sidewalk outside of the museum overnight in order to gain early access to the queue.

I was in attendance one of the days of this performance in May. Although I intended to participate, an individual ahead of me took the seat for an extended amount of time, precluding my ability to personally engage with the performance. 

Christopher Bourne, “Review: Marina Abramović The Artist is Present,” ScreenAnarchy website. I cannot verify this reporter’s assertion.


Ibid.
Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 56.

Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 77.


Ibid., 107.


Mary Kelly (born 1941) is an American conceptual artist, writer and professor of art at the University of California, Los Angeles.


Social realist content generally addresses urban environments and the political left. Social realism should not be confused with Soviet Socialist Realism, a major school of figure painting and other artistic media in the earlier part of the twentieth century. Social realism has its origins in mid-19th century European Realism in which painters were critical of oppressive social structures, especially concerning the working class and poor. See *Art in Theory 1900 – 2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, 431.


Ibid., 777.

Kazuo Shiraga (born Amagazaki, 1924; died 2008) was known for action paintings with his feet and performances of live art Happenings, such as *Challenging Mud*. He was an influence to Allan Kaprow and Yves Klein as well as Fluxus.

Gutai Group was founded in 1956 and dissolved in 1972 with the death of its founder Jiro Yoshihara. The term Gutai translates to mean “embodiment.”

Namiko Kunimoto, “Shiraga Kazuo: The Hero and Concrete Violence,” *Art History* 36, Issue 1, (February 2013): 169. In Tokyo, the third Yomiuri Independent Exhibition in 1951 included abstract painters Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Jean Dubuffet. Kunimoto asserts that a kind of international competition was in play between Japanese and Western painters; Japanese artists did not want to seem derivative of their Western counterparts.

Namiko Kunimoto is an art historian with a specialty in modern and contemporary Japanese art as well as professor at The Ohio State University.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid. This statement was published in *Gutai*, no. 6, July 1, 1956.

Immanuel Kant (born Germany, 1724; died 1804) wrote the seminal text *Critique of Judgement* (1790) that considers the power of aesthetic judgment.
Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (born Germany, 1724; died 1762) was an early-to-mid eighteenth century philosopher.

Thomson, Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity, 47.


The Artist is Present (2012) is a major release film directed by Matthew Akers and Jeff Dupre.


Janet Kaplan, “Deeper and Deeper: Interview with Marina Abramovic” Art Journal 58, no. 2 (Summer, 1999), pp. 6 – 21.

Amelia Jones, Body Art/Performing the Subject (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 5.

Mary Kelly, “Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism”, 1061.


Ibid., 909 – 910.
Projection is defined as a subject attributing qualities (usually unpleasant) onto others that the subject actually possesses. For example, if a subject feels unconscious hostility towards another, the subject perceives that person as being hostile towards them.


Paco’s surname is not officially noted.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid. Ma embraces multiple aspects of space: one-dimensional, two-dimensional and three-dimensional. For the purposes of my elaboration of between, there is also 時間 or ji-kan, which concerns the abstract fourth dimension, or time-place. It acknowledges that a subject’s experience with any space is contingent on time so that the Japanese concept of time is “space in flow.” Gunter Nitschke writes, “The dual relation of ma to space and time is not simply semantic. It reflects the fact that all experience of space is a time-structured process, and all experience of time is a space-structured process.”


These visitors were quickly contained and ejected from the chair by museum security. The man that donned the mask acted passively yet had an alarming appearance and demeanor; this was recorded in Aker’s film The Artist is Present.


Ibid. Emphasis mine.


Stendhal is the pseudonym of Marie-Henri Beyle.
Giotto di Bondone (born Florence, 1266/67; died 1337) was a painter and architect and is considered first in a line of outstanding Italian Renaissance artists.


Ibid., 107.

Ibid. Emphasis original.

The Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence, built in 1294, is the burial place of Michelangelo and Galileo among other notable Florentines. Brunelleschi designed its famous dome in the fifteenth century. In addition to Giotto’s frescoes, art housed in the church include works by Cimabue, della Robbia, Donatello, Gaddi, Orcagna and Vasari.

In the Translator’s Preface of Derrida’s On Grammatology, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes, “Derrida’s trace is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience.” The notion of trace is germane to the philosopher Jacques Derrida (born Algeria, 1930; died 2004); it is difficult to describe succinctly because like much of Derrida’s concepts it is evasive and open-ended. Therefore I offer a few possible ideas for thinking about trace.

The words you are reading right now may be considered an example of the trace. By the time you read this, I have long finished writing, now absent from the original action of typing, yet these words remain present to you. They are a re-presentation to you of my original action of typing on a computer keyboard to a document on the screen. The meaning in these words may or may not be communicated to you as I intend; but nonetheless you will possibly find some significance in them.

The trace is any tangible mark (or sound) that has potential for communication. In the example of painting this could be a brushstroke or a pencil line laid down on a support that is understood to represent something. In Giotto’s fresco colors, lines and shapes he used to comprise the visual signs are a system of marks that serve to convey meaning to the viewer (his intended meaning or meaning constructed by the viewer independent of Giotto’s intentions.) The meaning of the work is tied up in many things, such as context, that would include who made it, the time it was made (early Renaissance), and where it was made (Florence, Italy), and so on, but for Derrida context can be much wider and is never fixed. It is also subjective, based on the viewer who is having the experience of the work of art in his own context. For example, consider the differences for a visit to Santa Croce for Stendhal (a French writer in the nineteenth century) versus an American graduate student in the twenty-first century. There are obvious (and presumed) differences in the two experiences such as the state of the art conservation, the ability to touch the artwork, the amount of visitors in the church, and so on. Giotto’s work on the wall in Santa Croce was created long ago, but the viewer of his frescos observes the physical trace of the original action of painting. In that action he was present; he is now absent of course—yet what we perceive is the trace of the absent presence of Giotto.
As I write this, the New York Times reports the so-called jihadist group known as Islamic State (ISIL) has demolished several important ancient sites in Palmyra, Syria. It occurs to me that the willful annihilation of antiquities (architecture and sculpture of world heritage sites) or the deliberate destruction of any art that no longer belongs to the artist becomes an exception to my argument. Deprived of them, subjects are forever denied access to a potential crossing. In this case, the concept of presence-in-absence (the trace) is negated since it creates a permanent unavailability of the artist or architects’ offering. Perhaps this intentional violence upon art is the contradiction of love because it denies further opportunity for abundance on behalf of the subject. In fact, it permanently silences the echo of the artist.

I want to point out that most artists do not make it into the canon of museum collections or art history texts. In her essay “Photography’s Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View” published in *Art Journal* in 1982, Rosalind Krauss critiques the space of exhibition as determined by modern art history. She asserts that museums sanction the call as to what and who is worthy of being displayed in museums and how that work is catalogued.


By way of a brief explanation: Kant’s account of aesthetic reflective judgment is judgment that seeks to locate unknown universals for given particulars. In other words, aesthetic reflective judgments are always determined by a person’s feelings—they are subjective and not liable to agreement by others. Kant determines four varieties of reflective judgments: the agreeable, the good, the beautiful and the sublime. The agreeable are subjective judgments made via purely sensory means; examples include, “The cookie is sweet” or “Your skin is soft.” In this way Kant posits that agreeable judgments are based on the senses confined to the body such as smell, taste, and touch. On the other hand the beautiful and sublime (also subjective judgments) and the good (an objective judgment that is ethical) are judgments occupying the mind and bracket out other interests.


In his book *The Object Stares Back*, contemporary art historian James Elkins (born 1955) makes an argument for eight senses rather than five. One is a sense of temperature in which we experience feeling cold or hot without using a sense of touch. Another is our innate sense of gravity whereby we recognize instability/stability in a given situation. Finally, Elkins employs the term proprioception; this is the body’s instinctive sense of its own position. Within the meaning of proprioception Elkins brings the notion of empathy into play, defined
as the body’s sharing of an involuntary sensation. For example, the physical reaction we have to another’s painful injury, such as flinching.

478 Frances Dyson, *Sounding New Media: Immersion and Embodiment in the Arts and Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 4. Frances Dyson is a professor of techno-cultural studies at the University of California, Davis.

479 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 174. There are of course a number of philosophers, composers and sound artists that expound upon auditory theory. I only wish to touch upon sound here as an example outside of the (solely) visual arts.


482 Body-subject is a term used by Merleau-Ponty to drive home his point that the mind is inseparable from the body.


484 Ibid., 381.


489 Ibid., 372.

490 Ibid., 159.

491 Romanticism was the primary aesthetic movement in the nineteenth century. As a response to the earlier ideals of reason upheld during the Enlightenment, Romantics emphasized emotion and imagination. Cornel West points out that desire for the Romantics took the form of an idealistic wholeness to life and the world and the desire to return to a lost past.


493 Ibid., 99.


496 Ibid. Rubens Syndrome seems to affect more viewers exponentially than Stendhal Syndrome since the study found evidence that 20 percent of two thousand visitors acted on their sexual excitement in the museum.


498 Ibid., 30.

499 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea* (London: J.M. Dent, 1995), xx. Taken from the introduction by David Berman. Arthur Schopenhauer (born Poland, 1788; died 1860) was a philosopher interested in what motivated people, including love.
What Kant calls “thing-in-itself”; Schopenhauer renames “will.”

Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation [Volume I] (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969), 36. Note: I am using two different translations of Schopenhauer’s text. Schopenhauer notes that all animals have degrees of consciousness. He claims that what separates non-human animals from humans is that non-humans live solely in the present whereby humans live in past, present and future; even preparing for a time beyond their death. Plants, on the other hand, lack consciousness and merely possess life. Of course Schopenhauer’s assertion here must be kept in context. What human animals know about other forms of life changes all the time and if Schopenhauer knew what we know now—for example, about evidence of ethical non-human animal behavior—his theory might be likely to change.

Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Idea, 3. While there are various modes of newer philosophies about animals and consciousness in the twenty-first century, I am only deploying Schopenhauer’s original writings to make an explanatory point here, and will not delve into contemporary thought about non-human consciousness.

Schopenhauer’s thought here is related to Plato’s Theory of Forms since it is to transcend the world of things to get to Idea.

Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, vi. The translator E. F. J. Payne writes this in the “Translator’s Introduction”: “Our knowing consciousness says Schopenhauer, is divisible solely into subject and object. To be object for the subject, and to be our representation or mental picture are one and the same. All our representations are objects for the subject, and all objects of the subject are our representations.”

Yoko Ono (born Japan, 1933) is an avant-garde artist originally associated with Fluxus and continues as a long-term peace activist.

John Lennon (born England, 1940; died 1980) was a singer-songwriter and co-founder of the Beatles band. Along with his second wife Yoko Ono, he was a committed peace activist. He was a prolific drawer, although formally untrained.


Lennon’s visa to gain entry to the United States was repeatedly denied, in part because of his openly critical views about the Vietnam War to media as well as his 1968 conviction for
possession of cannabis. A film titled *Bed Peace* was made during the Montreal Bed-In. Yoko Ono released this film in 2011 to YouTube.


Apple records released *Two Virgins* in 1968. While its avant-garde music was generally not well received by either the public or critics, it was a sensation for its cover art.


The fall (or the fall of man) is a doctrine of theology construed from Genesis Chapter Three in the Old Testament. While there are numerous religious telling and interpretations, the common Christian narrative is that as the first human beings created by God, Adam and Eve existed in the Garden of Eden: a paradise where the pair lived in perfect harmony free of wants or need. In this innocent state they were naked but unashamed. Yet, as Sally Munt points out Adam and Eve were on “probation.” After being tempted by Satan in the guise of a serpent, they disobeyed God’s command that forbid them to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Banished from Eden as punishment, the fall is understood as the transition of original human innocence and obedience to that of guilt and permanent shame in the naked body.


[524]  Ibid.


[527]  David A. Duquette, “Hegel: Social and Political Thought,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy website.  [http://www.iep.utm.edu/hegelsoc/#H4](http://www.iep.utm.edu/hegelsoc/#H4) (accessed July 17, 2015). What is now referred to as “master-slave,” Hegel termed “lord and bondsman.” He used this thought experiment to address the complex process of recognition of the self, recognition by the other, and mutual recognition that is germane to history and personal experience.


[529]  Thirty thousand copies of the album import sanctioned as pornography were seized at Newark International Airport in January of 1969.


[532]  Ibid., 125.

[533]  Ibid.

[534]  Ibid., 134. Emphasis original.


Ibid., 147. Emphasis mine.


In this text the *History of Sexuality: An Introduction Volume I*, Michel Foucault marks the Victorian era as imposing a conservative cultural change on Western social mores especially as it relates to the body and sexuality. This was the reign of Queen Victoria of England from 1837 to 1901. The Victorian age was highly moralistic, imposing rigid expectations on the role of women as “pure” domesticated beings; at the same time it was harshly critical of prostitution. There were a number of moral reform movements in effect. Foucault recounts that married heterosexual couples were the locus of society and the expectation to produce children was compulsory. Prior to the Victorian era, sexual topics and behavior were not stifled for the most part. Foucault writes, “At the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness was still common… Sexual practices had little need of secrecy; words were said without undue reticence, and things were done without too much concealment; one had a tolerant familiarity with the illicit.”

The modern Civil Rights movement was a political effort to extend liberties to African-American citizens still oppressed 100 years after the Emancipation Proclamation (1863.) The Supreme Court negated “Jim Crow” separate-but-equal laws in 1954. Public protests and civil disobedience over the next ten years resulted in the Voting Rights Act (1965) and the Civil Rights Act (1968.)

It seems important to note the context that led up to Ono and Lennon’s radical position. The struggle for American women’s entitlements began in the eighteenth century with regard to property rights. The modern Women’s Movement gained serious traction throughout the twentieth century and in the 1960s with the federal Equal Pay act (1963.) In term of women’s bodies, *Griswold vs. Connecticut* (1965) legalized the use of contraceptives for married women. In 1967 an executive order by President Lyndon B. Johnson expanded affirmative action policies of 1965 to protect women from discrimination in education and in the workplace based on their gender.

“Gay pride” as we know it today began in the U.S. in the late 1960s. Gay activists formed organizations for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered activism. These groups staged social protests and parades in large cities known as Gay Liberation marches, and were particularly robust in New York City and San Francisco. In 1969, the year Ono and Lennon held their Bed-Ins, outbursts of violence in a Greenwich Village bar called the Stonewall Riots marked a turning point in political and social history for gays.

For this essay, I italicize the title of their collaboration in an attempt to clarify identities within the narrative.


Marie Losier (French, birthdate unknown) is a filmmaker.

Genesis P-Orridge (born Great Britain, 1940) given name Neil Andrew Mergson. For the sake of clarity, I will use the name of Genesis when referring to P-Orridge.

Jacqueline Breyer (born 1969; died 2007) Breyer also goes by the name Lady Jaye. Although only Genesis survives, the “idea” of their combined identity continues to be acknowledged and honored by Genesis in his deliberate and ongoing use the pronoun “we” and “s/he.”

bell hooks, “Understanding Patriarchy” in The Will To Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love (New York: Atria Books, 2004), 18. There are many definitions of the term “patriarchy.” I am using the word as bell hooks defines it in her essay “Understanding Patriarchy,” as follows: “Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak especially females and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence.”

Punk is an anti-establishment genre of rock music that emerged internationally in the mid-1970s. Post-punk grew out of the initial punk rock movement in the late 1970s as more experimental with an artistic style.

William Seward Burroughs II (born 1914; died 1997) was an American postmodernist writer and a key figure in the Beat Generation in the 1950’s.

Brion Gysin (born 1916; died 1986) was a British Surrealist painter, sound poet and performance artist.

Jaye Breyer died of complications from stomach cancer.

Marie Losier, “Note of Intent” from downloadable booklet and director’s statement for the film The Ballad of Genesis and Lady Jaye. Italics mine for emphasis.

Ibid.


Butler, Gender Trouble, 32.

Michel Foucault, Herculin Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-century French Hermaphrodite (New York: Pantheon, 1980), vii. To put the intersex plight in genealogical context, Foucault goes on to note that up until the French Renaissance and Middle Ages, an intersex person was sanctioned legally and medically as both sexes. Eventually the father or godfather of the hermaphroditic child had the choice of which sex to assign at the time of baptism. Yet at the time of marriage, the hermaphrodite was free to change that issuance, the catch being that they were forever indentured to that choice under penalty of law. Foucault points out that it was the lack of options for changing sex that gave rise to later vilification of intersex people, some of whom were put to death for engaging in sexual activities outside existing heterosexual norms. Over generations, biological theories and religious beliefs informed secular laws that cemented the notion that a
subject could possess only one sexual identity. Foucault points out this absolute removed any possibility for free choice by the intersex subject; if a person was intersex an “expert” permanently determined their social and legal sex.

564 Herculine Barbin (French, 1838 – 1868) was determined to be a female at birth. In 1860, s/he was examined by a doctor and found to have a small vagina in addition to undescended testicles and a penis. Subsequently, s/he was officially reassigned the male sex and later committed suicide. After discovering the memoirs of Herculine Barbin in the 1970s while doing research for The History of Sexuality, Foucault later published them with the title Herculin Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-century French Hermaphrodite.

565 Butler, Gender Trouble, 32.

566 At human birth, biological sex is determined by five factors: the absence or presence of a Y chromosome, the gonads (testicle, ovary) the type of sex steroid (androgen, estrogen, progesterone) internal reproductive organ (uterus) and external genitalia. The indication of a male or female sex is generally predicated on all five factors being present, but a combination of the factors can contribute to an intersex condition. A male is the physiological sex that produces sperm via the testicles and possesses a Y (XY) chromosome and a greater amount of testosterone. The female holds two X (XX) chromosomes, (typically) a pair of ovaries, a uterus, a larger share of estrogen sex steroid, and at puberty mammalian glands around the nipples that can produce milk for their infants. In true hermaphroditism the subject has both sets of chromosomes: XX and XY and both testicular and ovarian tissue are present. In pseudo-hermaphroditism, the subject has the genetic makeup and gonads of one sex but develops secondary sex characteristics that are different from what would be expected on the basis of gonadal tissue.


568 Ibid., 145.

569 Ibid.

570 Behavior that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender-normative; behaviors viewed as incompatible with these expectations constitute gender non-conformity.

571 Charles Darwin (English, born 1809; died 1882) was a naturalist and geologist famous for his theories of evolution and sexual selection.

572 It is important to note the contributions of Antoinette Brown Blackwell (American, born 1825; died 1921) one of the first women to critique Darwin, although not known until the 1970s. Her text is titled The Sexes Through Nature (1875). Blackwell’s position was that women were different from men, but equal; Darwin had used the male sex as the standard for the normative half of the species.


574 Ibid., 416.

575 Helen Fisher, Anatomy of Love, 189. Fisher also notes that prominent neurologist Paul Broca who weighed autopsied brains in 1861, compared female to male. He found female brains to be lighter in weight, seen as further proof of less intelligence. Broca did not take into account the average smaller body size of the female body.
For example, Fisher notes studies of increased levels of testosterone and serotonin found in male brains of humans and monkeys show evidence as a possible explanation for a general tendency towards aggressive and dominant behaviors.

Ibid., 286 – 287.

Fisher, *Anatomy of Love*, 279. Fisher goes on to note that the ancient treatment of women as chattel is evident in India, China, and Greece.

Ibid., 218. Power—like all symbols—is a construction by humans.

LGBT is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered.


Friedrich Engels (German, born 1820; died 1885) was a social scientist, writer and philosopher as well as a co-founder of Marxist theories with Karl Marx. He notes in his text *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State* that the oldest form of sex partnership is group marriage, whereby males and females lived together and communally raised their offspring without prohibitions on monogamy. Later scholarship refutes this assertion of a primal hord arrangement, although our closest animal relatives (bonobos and common chimpanzees) live in groups in which sexual kickbacks are standard behavior for all manner of erotic liaisons. (Including homosexual acts, which in the chimp world are not uncommon.) According to Engels, it was the development of the “pairing marriage”—a linking of two individuals—that is the onset of restrictive precepts for females. Pair bonding is identified as a hallmark of normative human behavior. The binary marriage that Engels describes involves a male and female with the expectation to sire children; it coincides with the establishment of farming production and property (tools, animals, household goods), and eventually the mandate of female monogamy that secures a child’s patrimony. (In the group marriage, males did not know who their biological children were, but females were able to identify their offspring.) It was during the time of pairing marriage that father right supplanted maternal inheritance. Engels describes this event in a strongly worded passage, “The overthrow of mother right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children. This degraded position of the woman, especially conspicuous among the Greeks of the heroic and still more of the classical age, has gradually been palliated and glossed over, and sometimes clothed in a milder form; in no sense has it been abolished.” (Engels notes that it was anthropologist Johann Jakob Bachofen who employed the term “mother right” in describing this family unit, although he is quick to point out that “rights” is a problematic term since at this stage of human history legal entitlements were not relevant.) In spite of his dramatic language, Engels sheds harsh light on the contemporary situation of subjects who are not male, and the likelihood that the inception of patriarchy is bound up in historical materialism. Engels does not examine sex out of the male-female binary; hermaphroditic subjects are never mentioned. Fisher points out that there is no archaeological substantiation of any primeval matriarchal society that would sanction mother right. So Engels is only partially correct. She agrees that
there is an immediate relationship between financial assets and social control, which is congruent with Foucault’s thesis.


588 Irigaray, *i love to you*, 23.

589 While pair bonding (monogamy) is prevalent in the West, it is a practice that is not a universal. Fisher maintains pair bonding as a distinctive feature of the human animal, yet it is not practiced across-the-board—in fact, the practice of Western monogamy is statistically small in comparison with non-Western customs.

590 According to the American Psychological Association, currently 40 to 50 percent of marriages in the United States end in divorce. Subsequent marriages have an even higher fail rate.


592 Play is not only for humans, but is observed in other animals as well.


595 Eissler’s choice of the word equalitarian is based on the idea of equal social relations between men and women, as opposed to only men and asserted by “rights of man” philosophers such as Rousseau and Locke. I would further suggest that equalitarian extends to the intersex subject. Riane Eissler (born Vienna, 1931) is a cultural historian and evolutionary theorist. See Riane Eissler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988).


597 Ibid., 3.

598 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 83.

599 Ibid.

600 Ibid., 90.

601 Ibid., 91.

602 Jaye and Genesis consciously decided not to surgically interfere with parts of their body that gave them pleasure, although Jaye did have her breasts enlarged at the same time that Genesis received breast implants.


605 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxiv.

606 A speech act is an utterance that contains a performative function in language.


Ibid., 69.

For example, while viewing video footage of the Japanese tsunami of 2011, I am struck by its horrific destruction, aesthetically moved at the spectacle of the sea advancing upon the land with such unthinkable potency; my imagination has touched a limit.


Ibid., 41.


Tracey Emin (born Britain, 1963) is a contemporary multi-media artist. She was one of an original group of artists called the YBAs (Young British Artists) in the late 1990’s.


Ibid., 265. It is important to point out that this “possession” does not concern mutuality. It is disturbing that Schopenhauer notes this includes cases of rape. He essentially justifies rape as an act that (at bottom) that serves to preserve the continuance of the human race. This theory brings up many questions and presents problems, since for Schopenhauer the act of rape seems to be no different than sexual intercourse between two consenting adults. In other words, the idea of having a choice of whom you engage in sex with is negated for the propagation of the species. Also of note, is that Schopenhauer does not include mention of same-sex sexual relations, which of course throws a monkey wrench into his theory.

Emin’s *My Bed* was shortlisted for the Turner Prize. In addition to London, it was exhibited in Tokyo and New York.

The size of a double bed symbolizes erotic partnership.


The sacrament of confession is described in footnote number 7, Chapter 2.

Augustine of Hippo (born Algeria, 354; died 430) was an influential philosopher and theologian. *Confessions* is an autobiographical book that tells the story of his nefarious youth and subsequent conversion to the Catholic faith.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (born France, 1712; died 1778) was a philosopher and composer whose writing shaped eighteenth century Enlightenment thought. His *Confessions* is also autobiographical but is strictly a frank narrative of his experiences and feelings devoid of spiritual content. It was published posthumously. Daniel Mendelsohn writing for the New Yorker (January 25, 2010) about the genre of memoir had this to say about *Confessions*, “When Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s ‘Confessions’ appeared, shocking the salons of eighteenth-century Paris with matter-of-fact descriptions of the author’s masturbation and masochism, Edmund Burke lamented the ‘new sort of glory’ the eminent philosophe was getting ‘from bringing hardly to light the obscure and vulgar vices, which we know may sometimes be blended with eminent talents.’ (The complaint sounds eerily familiar today.)”

Leo Tolstoy (born Russia, 1828; died 1910) is a novelist renowned for fiction such as *War and Peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1877). *A Confession* is a non-fiction work based on his spiritual awakening to the teachings of Christ that includes nonviolence and asceticism, an epiphany that prompted him to renounce his aristocratic lifestyle. Of note, Tolstoy also
was a devotee of Schopenhauer’s writings; *A Confession* contains quotes from *The World as Will and Representation*.


625 Margery Kempe (born England, 1373; died unknown year) is an English Christian mystic. Her *Book* was dictated because she was illiterate. It is considered to be the first autobiography in the English language.

626 Sylvia Plath (born Boston, 1932; died 1963) is an American poet and writer.


628 Pettman, *Love and Other Technologies*, 55.

629 I would be remiss if I did not at least mention psychoanalysis in this topic of confession. While psychoanalysis has a confessional component, Freud dismisses the idea that the “talking cure” is solely an act of cathartic disclosure; however, psychoanalysis is contingent on truthfulness by both analyst and analysand. Through free association the patient is expected to submit to complete candor in order to bring to consciousness repressed material. As Chloe Taylor points out in her book *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy of the ‘Confessing Animal’* (Routledge, 2009) Freud’s patients were mandated not to keep any secrets from him, to admit to any and all transgressions, real or perceived. Therefore, it can be said that psychoanalytic confession in terms of full and unmitigated disclosure on behalf the analysand is a crucial part of healing process.

630 Examples of early television productions where the confessional is used include MTV’s *The Real World* (1992 – present) and *Road Rules* (1995 – 2007), *Survivor* (1997 – present). Other popular and long-running shows are *Cops* (since 1989) and *Taxi Cab Confessions* (since 1995). Shows such as *Project Runway* (2004 – present), *Amazing Race* (2001 to present), *The Bachelor* (2001 – present), and *Big Brother* (2000-present) often highlight various modes of competition between cast members in addition to the confessional. Talk shows are another genre of television in which confession plays a part. Programs such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (1986-2011), *Dr. Phil* (since 2002), *Jerry Springer* (since 1991) focus on guests who reveal sometime shocking autobiographical details.

631 This was not only due to the sensational reaction of viewers to Emin’s artworks, but also because she became a controversial personality in the British media after walking off a live television interview in 1997 in an angry and admittedly inebriated state. The show was a conversation about the Turner Prize selection that year. Since then she is frequently in the British media for her attendance at cultural and celebrity events, promotion of various consumer products, and regular talk show guest; all of this has sustained Emin as a popular art celebrity. She has consistently demonstrated herself to be an outspoken and opinionated individual in countless interviews in video and print.

632 Emin’s *Everyone I Ever Slept With 1963 – 1995* was destroyed in a London warehouse fire in 2004. Emin elected not to recreate the work.

633 Applique is a needlework technique in which small pieces of fabric are attached to larger fabrics to create surface patterns and design.


635 Ibid.

636 Ibid.
“In “Civilization and Its Discontents” Freud states, “...In mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish—that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable circumstances (when, for instance, regression goes back far enough) it can once more be brought to life.”


The exception is disease (Alzheimer’s, dementia) or brain injury that can certainly steal the power of recall. I make the observation that my father—who suffers ever-increasing dementia—continues to appear physically as he is an older man, but his memory has been slowly rubbed out, and in this erasure he exists now merely as a body minus the animation of spirit that is based on memory. It occurs to me his relationship with the self is mortally impaired. If his memory of love is irreparably damaged, is his capacity to love viable? Can he consciously experience love now?


Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 58.


Louise Bourgeois (born France, 1911; died 2010) was a French-American sculptor. Shortly before her death she was engaged in a collaboration with Tracey Emin titled *Do Not Abandon Me*. Bourgeois initiated the project by painting on paper the silhouettes of male and female torsos in gouache. The sixteen paintings were then given to Emin who drew on top of the figures adding sexual details, other figures and sometimes handwritten text. The finished works were printed on fabric in a limited edition, which were exhibited in 2011 at Hauser & Wirth Gallery in London. The collective content of the artworks address sexuality, identity and intimacy.


Sigmund Freud, “Totem and Taboo” in *The Freud Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1989), 499 – 501. Freud describes the totem meal as a primordial clan ceremony celebrating the ritual slaughter and eating of a specific animal (totem animal), which was normally a forbidden act. The consumption of the totem animal provides a sense of identification with it. Through this rite the clan acquires a numinous state. Putting a psychoanalytic spin on this hypothesis, Freud proposes the mythic figure of the primal father—a violent and possessive man—in place of the totem animal. The father is killed and eaten by his sons, who resent his power over them at the same time they envy and admire
him. Freud’s thesis concerns only males, not females, yet the comparison to scenarios of the Bourgeois family evening meal and the primordial totem meal is undeniable. Bourgeois was very familiar with—and critical of—Freud’s writing.

650 Ibid., 500.


653 Early nineteenth century painter JMW Turner was fond of painting the skies of Margate, a seaside British town east of London.

654 Emin’s parents (who were not married) owned and operated an inn called Hotel International in Margate. Emin’s family—her parents and twin brother—lived at the hotel. They were social outsiders due to their mixed races and unconventional relationship. Emin’s father is Turkish; her mother English; the Emin children were considered bi-racial by the locals who were a white majority.

655 Emin’s childhood was emotionally complicated and punctuated with numerous traumas, which included sexual abuse at the hands of her mother’s lover beginning at the age of ten. When she was eleven, a stranger on the beach sexually molested her. She was raped at age thirteen walking home from a Margate dance hall called the Top Spot on New Year’s Eve. This crime was never formally reported to authorities although she did tell her mother who did not take legal action; subsequently Emin never received medical or psychological treatment.

656 It should be noted that the dance competition took place at the same location of her New Year’s rape two years earlier: The Top Spot. Yxta Maya Murray has written an essay published in the California Law Review (2012) that examines Emin’s art in terms of rape trauma in a fascinating study titled, “Rape Trauma, The State and the Art of Tracey Emin.”

657 “You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real) is a 1978 pop hit by American disco singer Sylvester James.


659 Heidegger, Nietzsche, 4.

660 Heidegger did not draw upon any religious doctrine or concepts. He brackets out the question (or the answer) of God as not relevant to his philosophy.

661 Heidegger, Nietzsche, 7.

662 Heidegger, Being and Time, 314.

663 Ibid., 314.

664 Heidegger, Nietzsche, 41. Emphasis mine.

665 Eugene Delacroix (born France, 1798; died 1863) was a prominent Romantic painter.

666 Clint Brown, Artist to Artist: Inspiration and Advice from Artists Past and Present (Corvallis, OR: Jackson Creek Press, 1998), 99.

667 Jasper Johns (born 1930) is an American artist loosely associated with Pop Art or Neo-Dadaism.

668 Brown, Artist to Artist, 101.

669 Heidegger, Nietzsche, 52.
Ibid., 53.


Ibid.

Ibid., 185.

Ibid., 192.


Ibid., 520. Emphasis original.


Ibid., 132.


Ibid., 93.

Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, 118.


Ibid., 145.

Ibid., 133.

Ibid.

Ibid., 121.

Ibid., 121.


Ibid. 5 – 6. Emphasis original.

Nietzsche emphatically asserts, “We possess art lest we perish of the truth.” (*Will to Power*, 435.)

Marlene Dumas (born Johannesburg, 1953) is a painter and writer currently living in Amsterdam.


Avital Ronell, “A Diary of Injuries,” in *Women Artists: elles@centrepompidou*, 230.

Ronell (born Prague, 1952) is a continental philosopher and professor at New York University. Earlier in her career she had a practice as a performance artist.


The title of the work is (perhaps) a way to let the viewer “in.” For example, in the case of *Waiting (for meaning)* the title gives the viewer a clue as to what Dumas intends, or perhaps indicates a slice of a narrative. (Titles may be quite ambiguous.) Ultimately the artist relinquishes any control about what the title means upon exhibition, because viewers bring their subjectivity to engaging with the work.


Bibliography


Butler, Judith. "To Sense What is Living in the Other: Hegel's Early Love." *dOCUMENTA 13 100 Notes - 100 Thoughts 066,* 09 12, 2012.


Evangelist, John the. BibleGateway. 


*five deep breaths.* Directed by Seith Mann. 2003.


Murray, Yxta Maya. "Rape Trauma, The State and the Art of Tracey Emin." *California Law Review* (Berkeley Law Scholarship Repository) 100, no. 6 (December 2012).


