

THE ALPINE FELLOWSHIP
EPHEMERA

VENICE
FONDAZIONE CINI
SUMMER 2016

Edited by Roger Scruton



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Fellowship

A charity project of the German Foundation
"Argosophia Stiftung"

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*Palladian Cloister, Fondazione Giorgio Cini
Island of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice*

Foreword

I have brought together, either in edited versions or in summaries, the material presented over three fascinating days, by those who participated in the Alpine Fellowship at the Fondazione Cini in Venice, in late August 2016. In addition to the speakers and a party of Draper scholars from NYU there were present artists, musicians and poets, and also the Venerable Tenzin Yingyen, who beautifully illustrated the religious significance attached in Tibetan Buddhism to ephemera. During the course of our meeting the Venerable Tenzin made a meticulous mandala of coloured sand, inviting us all to participate in its ceremonial destruction on our final evening, when the intense and meditative labour of three days was destroyed in a few seconds and timeless Nirvana was revealed in the fleeting now.

After introductory remarks from Alan Lawson and Jacob Burda, our meeting began with a play, the witty *Date Date*, by Matthew Orton, produced by Mike Lesslie, in which Anna Popplewell played the part of a vain young woman with a selfie stick, preparing to collect 'likes' on Facebook for her performance, as her date goes down on one knee to propose to her. It is only a game, a challenge from a competitive friend. But the date himself, played by Jack Farthing, refuses to accept that a proposal of marriage can be treated so lightly. The idea that this moment might be sucked into the stream of ephemera in his date's smartphone flicks a switch in him whose existence he probably had not suspected. We were presented with a vivid sense of the ephemeralisation that is taking over all aspects of modern life, and of the strange hankering for the permanent to which even this vain girl at last gives way, reduced to silence by a date who refuses to be a copy of a date.

I have arranged the talks that followed in three parts, according as they relate to art, science or philosophy. I have also included the elegant address that we were given by Pasquale Gagliardi, reflecting on our attempts to transform our fleeting feelings into permanent artefacts, and have added some thoughts on Chopin's Preludes, which were beautifully and intensely performed for us by Jeffrey Grice. In addition to Jeffrey's performance, John Burnside treated us to poems reflecting on time and transience, and King Charles sang his own lyrical and nostalgic love songs, accompanying himself on the guitar. I have not included John Burnside's poems: instead I have reproduced the remarkable letter that he sent by e-mail, describing the ordeal of his departure, expressing his thoughts about the event, and presenting a new poem meditating on its meaning. This letter provides a fitting epilogue to an inspiring set of reflections.

Roger Scruton

Introductory Remarks

Alan Lawson

Last year we talked about the self-portrait. One of the many things that came out of our symposium was the suggestion that the self is in some way permanent, being linked corporeally to a physical place. At the same time the sense of self is fluid, indeed can accommodate many selves simultaneously. The permanent self, the 'I', seems to be a generous bedfellow to a more ephemeral self that both acts upon the world and is changed by it. How these selves, 'the permanent and the ephemeral' to draw a crude distinction, cohabit is brilliantly illustrated in Herman Hesse's novel *Steppenwolf*. As Harry Haller is slowly unpicked he notes that the outsider self, the Steppenwolf, 'though much more aware than the average bourgeois of what becoming truly human entails, ... still closes his eyes to the truth, refusing to acknowledge that clinging desperately to the notion of self, desperately not wanting to die, is the surest route to eternal death'. This is because 'human beings are not already created entities but ideal figures that spirit demands we should strive to become, remote possibilities that are both longed for and feared.'

I'm interested in this idea of our 'selves' as ideal figures that are remote possibilities. There is a sense of permanence connected to an 'ideal'; a point of triangulation for our values and principles. Yet perhaps ideals are merely ephemeral conventions, generational, dictated by culture, class, or geography? Nevertheless, to align ourselves with a trajectory towards something potentially more permanent in the face of the vicissitudes of human desire has a certain appeal. Hence the allure of religion, whose principles and ideals link us to another life extending beyond our brief time on earth. We have amply seen the depths people are prepared to plumb in order to satisfy what they believe to be the normative requirements demanded by their religion.

Amongst all the factors involved in radicalisation, I suspect, the appeal of something permanent, plays a role.

The appeal of permanence is profoundly human; yet we live in a culture that increasingly raises the ephemeral experience to the level of religion or high art. Ephemerality and permanence appear to be in tension. Yet there are cultures that have embraced ephemerality as a part of what is permanent. Buddhism maintains that impermanence is one of the three marks of existence, and the Venerable Tenzin Yignyen is with us to illustrate this idea, by constructing, and then destroying, a sand mandala—a profoundly religious act in which time and the moment are both iconized and overcome.

Recently, walking through Florence I stopped at that familiar tourist spot next to the statue of Cellini, on the Ponte Vecchio. There was the dying light offering that honeyed view of the Arno, framing the Santa Trinità bridge, itself a frame for the fleeting light on the water and the flitting bats and swallows. So picture if you will, the buttresses of the bridge, the scrolls of marble, fading into the gloaming of an Italian evening. The ephemerality of light and mood, and also of man's attempts at framing it in stone. And in front of all this the sight of lovers fixing padlocks onto the railings that surround the Cellini statue. There surely is the rub. How to materialise the immaterial? How to make permanent the fleeting glance, the ardent but ethereal promise? These small votive offerings are to an ideal, they are an attempt to take the idea of 'love' and demand of it the strength of a brass padlock, executed in the sight of a bronze bust of Cellini, to whom a form of permanence has indeed been granted—through the enduring appeal of his artefacts.

Love and light have an enduring association in literature, art, and philosophy, and they are illustrative of our theme. 'O, swear not by the moon, th' inconstant moon..... lest that thy love prove likewise variable'. If only the lovers had had a brass padlock to hand. The silvery moon that Juliet rejects epitomizes the ephemeral. In the half-light of the moon, as at twilight or dawn, nothing is quite substantial—all is provisional, awaiting change.

In Tennyson's poem Tithonus stands at 'the quiet limits of the world' waiting for his Aurora—he being condemned to the unnatural permanence of existing eternally, but without eternal youth. The poet paints a Turneresque sky where the horses of Aurora 'shake the darkness from their loosen'd manes, And beat the twilight into flakes of fire.' Tennyson is at his best poetically when he is obsessing over death, over the ephemerality of human existence, fuelled by his grief over the untimely death of his friend Hallam. The poem begins:

*The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan.
Me only cruel immortality
Consumes: I wither slowly in thine arms,
Here at the quiet limit of the world*

Tennyson captures much of our topic in those few lines. Man dies, nature dies, and physical love (symbolised by the swan) dies, and yet it is the natural way of things. For:

*Why should a man desire in any way
To vary from the kindly race of men
Or pass beyond the goal of ordinance?'*

And yet we do. Our impending lack of a permanent future is variously a source of anxiety, of religious belief, or even more recently of scientific investment. (One thinks of Dmitry Itskov and his heavy financing of the technology that he hopes will allow us to live as immortal holographic avatars.) Thus, concurrent with our acceptance of ephemerality is our dogged desire to overcome it, to remain, to endure, to make of love a titanium padlock—at all costs to avoid letting it slip through our hands. And perhaps many people divide over this line: the appeal of permanence as a promise of another world, as against the making permanent of that which we love in this world.

And if this were not enough of a problem, the ephemeral is also beautiful. George Innes the great American landscape painter was famous for his evening paintings of fading light. And, like John Atkinson Grimshaw, he saw something in the melancholic hour. Within the quickly fading light is a beauty and sadness that run together. There is in it the promise of darkness and death, coupled to a radiance of light so beautiful that the spiritual might suggest itself to us. In George Innes' case this was distilled in the theology of Emanuel Swedenborg, which Innes adhered to throughout his life. His final paintings lose the realism that distinguishes light from the object on which it shines, and embrace a suffusion of light—a permanence, as it were, in the breakdown of things into light and colour.

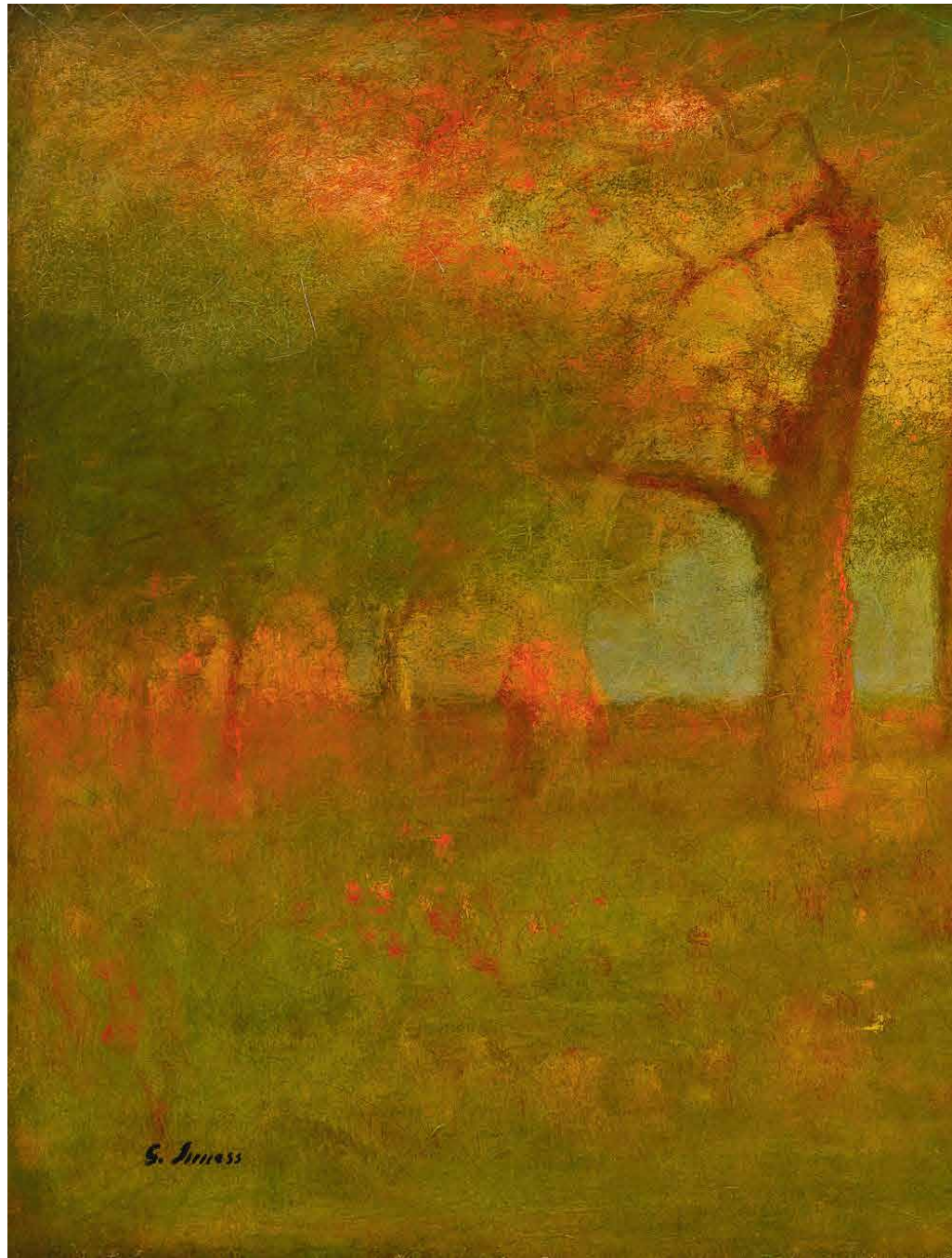
Alas we are not allowed to make twilight paintings any more, for fear of the charge of kitsch. But those of us who like to satisfy our guilty pleasures, do so because of the profound experience that it affords. Within the silvery obfuscated gloaming there is the wail of Tennyson's Mariana, 'I am a weary, a weary'. The sadness that ephemeral light affords reminds me again of Hesse, when Hermione (Harry's female alter ego) says to Harry 'we have no one to show us the way. Homesickness is our only guide.' And that is at least one aspect in which the ephemeral acts not as the antonym of permanence but as its mentor. Through the moods incurred by ephemeral moments of love or light we feel the sadness that evokes another, perhaps more permanent order, which is out of reach, or has gone: 'a sea in Greece where the Gods used to bathe before they died'. In Schaffer's *Equus* Dysart conveys the essential sadness of a life without worship, without the permanence of a pantheon of gods. Proust refers to it by way of the crumb of madeleine cake dipped in tea: 'and I began to ask myself what it could have been, this remembered state which brought with it no logical proof, but the indisputable evidence, of its felicity, its reality, and in whose presence other states of consciousness melted and vanished.' He goes on 'I want to try to make it reappear. I retrace my thoughts to the moment at which I drank the first spoonful of tea.'

There is in so much art and literature that sense of something lost, and of its felicity. This sense is very potent in humans, and we find it both in Atkinson Grimshaw, the painter of northern sadness, and in Edward Hopper's washed out, bored, and disconnected figures. 'Room in New York' displays the quintessence of all that had been lost in 1930's America: the night drawing in, the husband reading his newspaper caught up in utilitarian America, and his

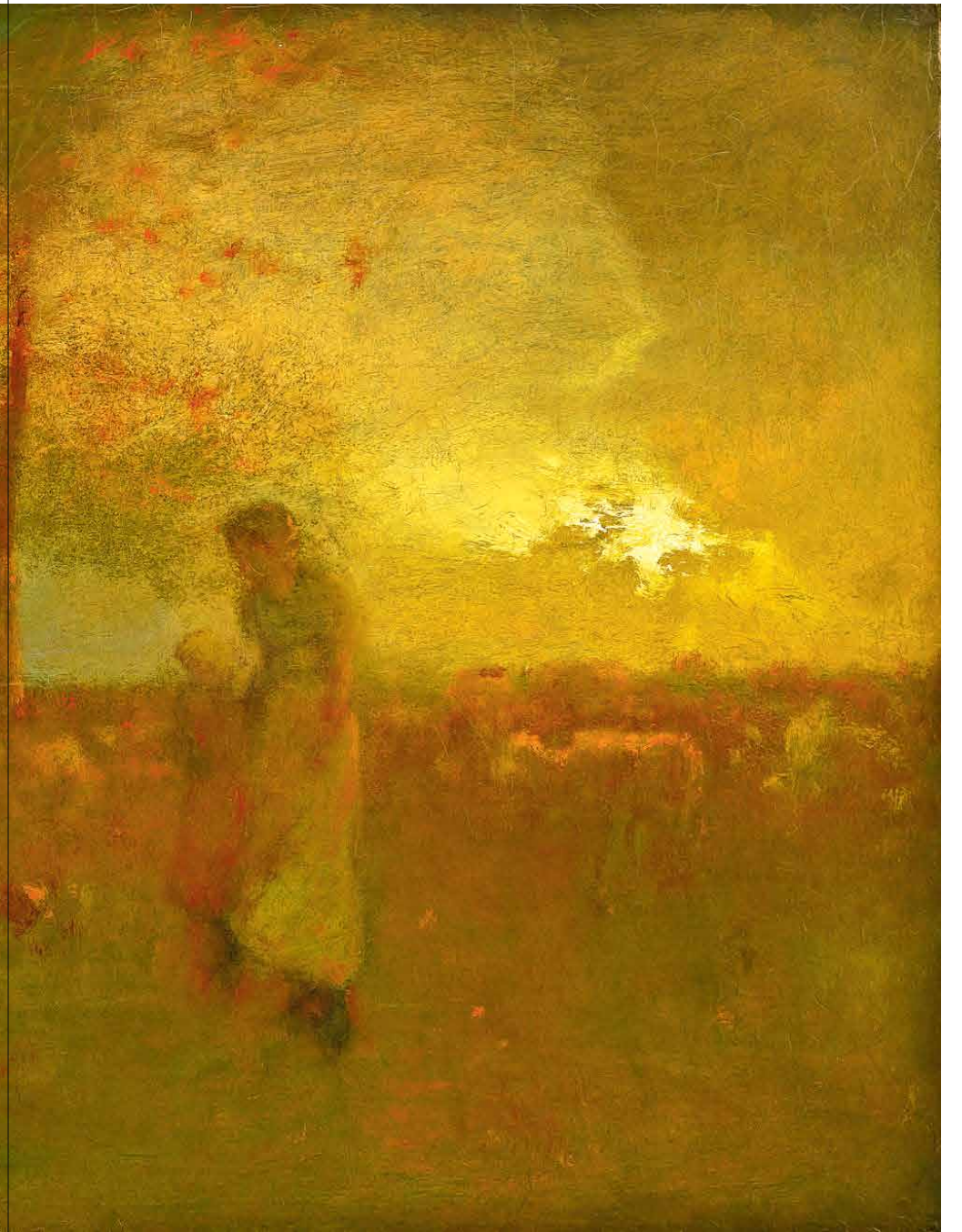


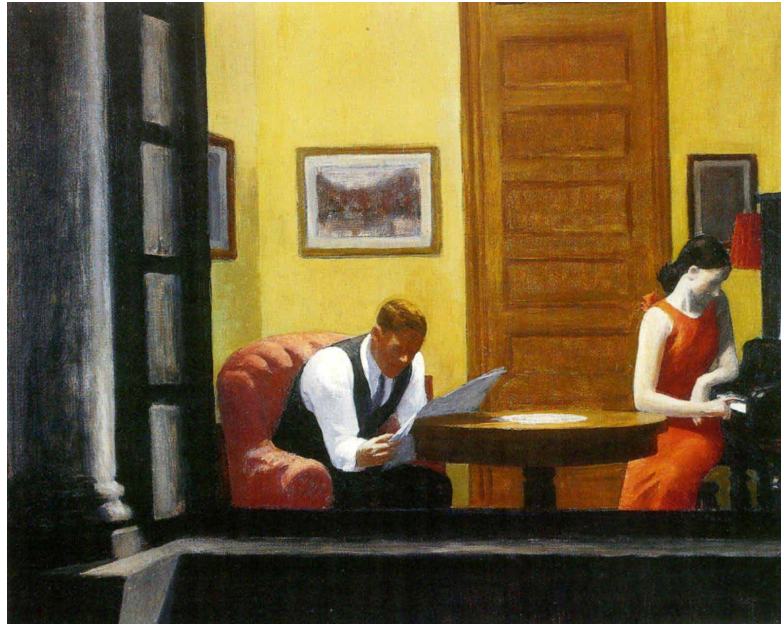
John Atkinson Grimshaw
The Lovers
Private Collection

next page:
George Innes
The passing storm



G. J. J. M.





Edward Hopper

Room in New York

Collection F.M. Hall, Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, USA

beautiful wife dressed elegantly, her arm touching the keys of the piano in a gesture of boredom. The landscape painting on the far wall is a nod to what might have been, what might still be. There is, I am suggesting, a whisper of the permanent within the very fabric of the ephemeral and this is the paradox I have come to as a painter.

Of course it is also quite feasible that I am merely indulging myself, as Peter Davidson notes, in his wonderful book, *The Last of the Light*, in which he

refers to ‘melancholia, the overwhelming English disease.’ However, as a painter I can tell you that it is not enough to have a motive, or an idea, or indeed something to say. To paint in the twilight again and again is only possible because of a love affair with that time of day. The end is exceeded by the means—it is the absorption in the moment and all its power that in a sense redeems time.

As the character Tarou notes in Camus’ *The Plague*, ‘Question: How does one manage not to lose time? Answer: Experience it at its full length.’ Yet Eliot states in his ‘Four Quartets’ that ‘All time is unredeemable’ and clearly to live in the material world is to suffer as Tithonus does, for whom Time’s ‘strong hours indignant worked their wills, and marred and wasted me’. The question of whether time can indeed be redeemed is beyond this introduction. Though clearly it is a preoccupation of Eliot’s:

Footfalls echo in the memory

Down the passage we did not take

Towards the door we never opened

Into the rose garden.

The iridescent rose garden suggests to me the melancholy I spoke of before, the longing for that which was, or could have been, for a state beyond the sufferings of the temporal world. Perhaps a conclusion I am lightly walking towards is that ‘permanence’ is not the antithesis of ephemerality but its goal—the lasting product of a life fully lived.

Introductory Remarks

Jacob Burda

Here at the Alpine Fellowship we have a bias towards questions that cannot conclusively be answered. This certainly holds true for this year's topic: ephemera and the nature of time. Some of the questions that we will be asking here over the next three days will have been asked by thinkers millennia ago, and the same questions will, in all likelihood, be asked by generations to come. If they lack definitive answers this is because they inscribe the space of human understanding, sitting at the border of what we can and cannot understand, and defining that border. As the writer Milan Kundera put it: 'A question with no answer is a barrier that cannot be breached ... It is questions with no answers that set the limits of human possibilities, describe the boundaries of human existence.'

This year's topic takes us to those boundaries, so that we try to stare across them and see only the reflection of our selves. Our topic takes us from the conception of time in early German romanticism right through to Gödel's and Wittgenstein's arguments about the limits of thought.

Let me begin with a few observations on what I take to be particular about our current experience of time. In order to understand time as it captures us today we must inevitably refer to technological innovations. The last few decades have seen drastic and unprecedented advances in our ability to store, process and share information. As a result my generation is more connected to friends and family than ever, has more knowledge at its fingertips than ever and can broadcast and share its experiences more quickly than ever.

If we think of our life as a horizon of possibilities, then technology has led to an indubitable broadening of this horizon: rather than having to summarize your

experience at this event, for example, you can use your smartphone to stream it to a global audience, a means of engaging with the world that, until recently, appeared utterly inconceivable.

But it is not just that technology dramatically increases our possibilities of action by continuously opening up new modes of engagement. It is also that, in a very curious turn of events, it has emphasized that these possibilities are possibilities for me, that they are mine. The evolution of the selfie, which we discussed at this very place this time last year, can be regarded as another expression of this ongoing growth in conscious subjectivity. As Gadamer has observed, the increasing objectivization of our worldview, of which the technological advances are a corollary, goes hand in hand with the growth of subjectivization, of the conscious awareness that this is my particular life to live, that these are my particular actions to take, and so on.

Yet, as the field of possibilities increases, something else remains constant: the amount of time that I am given to fulfil them. I find myself faced with the question of how to fit more into a limited and fixed amount of time. This means that I am asked to consider the way in which I relate to things around me. And it is at this point that the ephemeral, that which is transitory and short-lived, offers itself as a solution.

For in comparison with the permanent, the ephemeral lends itself to repetition, and so outstretches the quantitative dimension of the permanent: I can be engaged in multiple projects, can commit myself to more relationships, can cultivate more of my interests, etc. Understood thus, the ephemeral and the

permanent are both ways of relating to the world, but also in essential competition for the finite available space.

Critics admonish that a more ephemeral way of life implies a lack of commitment to one's core projects: we start more than we can ever finish, we live in relationships but never fully commit to them. In short, because we are trying to accommodate more experiences, we must necessarily reduce the intensity of each of them.

That thought already occupied the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre in his reflections on freedom. The proliferation of options, Sartre thought, was precisely not what freedom consisted in. He feared that we would stand nonplussed before abundant choice and know not what to do. It is the essence of decision to close off possibilities, and that, in the end, is what freedom consists in—the choice among possible worlds. If Sartre is right about this, then perhaps the age in which more than ever is possible paradoxically threatens to be the least free of all.

This consequence might be surprising, for it is the intent of technology to free up time by reducing inefficiencies, allowing us to focus on the things that really matter. It seems fairly uncontroversial to assume that, by and large, technology does indeed succeed in freeing up more time. But my experience of time will not necessarily reflect this change in objective time. It is perfectly conceivable that I feel more pressed for time as technology advances.

This points to a distinction that has occupied many philosophers from Bergson to Heidegger, a distinction that flags the difference not just in degree, but

in kind, between time as it is apprehended by the human subject, and time as it features in the sciences. As Bergson has argued, time cannot be comprehended from the point of view of science alone. While time necessarily remains a fixed dimension in science, for the individual it is experienced as something flexible that speeds up or slows down. Causality is mapped onto physical time; but consciousness is spread out in duration, and comprehends the before and the after as part of the now.

The idea that time is something to be experienced also occupied the early German romantics. 'The real contradiction in our I', Friedrich Schlegel proclaims at one point, 'is that we feel at the same time finite and infinite.' The emphasis on feeling was important for the romantics, given the abstract treatment that the notion of time and infinity had historically received: the infinite in romanticism was different from the early Greeks' pre-critical ideas about flux and permanence, or the concept of God's 'infinite perfection' as this had interested the theologians.

Through their concept of the infinite the romantics were attempting, I believe, to describe a real feature of our experience; something that could be felt, and apprehended, by anyone. Their concept was closer to Kant's notion of the metaphysical infinite, arising from the fact that as an individual I am cast into a world that is fundamentally other than me. I encounter my own finitude amidst the world's infinity. Hence, for the romantics, the feeling of infinity is connected with a longing to transcend my limitations, to connect and integrate myself into a world from which I am spatially and temporally separate.

But the romantics also had what seem to me a very rich—as far as our modern purposes are concerned—take on ephemerality. Far from rejecting the ephemeral as that which lacks seriousness or commitment, they championed it precisely because it is something fragmentary, open, unfinished and unsettled. Life is never fixed nor settled, but always lends itself to continuous reinterpretation. An ephemeral relation to life means living in truth, for life simply is fleeting and fragmentary. The romantics went as far as modelling their whole philosophy on this insight, deliberately leaving large chunks of their work ‘ironically incomplete’, as they sometimes put it. ‘Only what is incomplete can be comprehended. Can take us further,’ Novalis famously wrote. In this sense the romantics were amongst the first who understood and anticipated—much more than their celebrated contemporaries, the German classicists—the direction that modern culture would take after them: the experience of the ephemeral, raised in our current culture to the level of religion or high art.

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I have so far simply assumed that time is a, or perhaps the, most fundamental dimension of our experience. And yet many philosophers, together with many schools of Hinduism and Buddhism, have argued that an experience of the world in terms of things past, present and future is itself an illusion, an imposition of the mind that captures nothing of the essential reality. For reality is eternal presence, and an experience of the world in terms of nostalgia or hope, of past or future, only imprisons us in illusion.

This challenges the very idea of time as the fundamental framework of our experience. Gödel’s beautiful proof about the incompleteness of mathemat-

ics held that there is no such thing as a finite base from which we could proof all truths of arithmetic. There was, in principle, no such thing as a complete framework, no set of all sets. The insight is echoed by Wittgenstein in his demonstration that the limits of language are the limits of the world: we simply cannot, Wittgenstein believed, attempt to look past the original point from which we are making sense of things. Doing so would imply positioning oneself outside the bounds of sense, in a region from which nothing can intelligibly be asserted. This is perhaps the attitude we must embrace when it comes to determining how fundamental time really is: there is an inbuilt indeterminacy, an inherent incompleteness, in the very form of the question.

The romantics phrased this by saying that the Absolute is in some sense indemonstrable, that there is always an aspect of it that eludes us, that the project of gaining full clarity about the Absolute is a kind of contradiction in terms. Wittgenstein followed this insight by introducing what came to be known as the showing/saying distinction, according to which we can perhaps be shown what the fundamental dimension looks like, but can never successfully say it. An analogy might help to make this clearer:

Suppose I consider my field of vision at any given moment. Then no matter how thoroughly I may describe what is in it, so long as that is all I do, I shall not be able to say anything about the eye with which I see it all. For I cannot see my own eye. That there is such an eye, however, or rather that there is a point of vision at the edge of the field, is something I am shown by how things are within the field, some of them being, for example, to the left, others to the right.

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And with this analogy of the field of vision, and philosophy's attempt to define the limits of what can and cannot be said, I want to bring this talk to a close. For uncertainty, positively understood, opens up the possibility for discussion and exchange in the most beautiful way. This is why I am excited about the next days to come. We will hear from people about the idea of time as it relates to technology, to science, to poetry, to art history, to literature, to music and to philosophy. Even if we will find no answers, Alan and I are proud to have assembled such an illustrious group to ask the questions.

People Die, Things Last.

Surviving through Artifacts

Pasquale Gagliardi

*Animula vagula blandula
Hospes comesque corporis,
Quae nunc abibis in loca
Pallidula, rigida, nudula,
Nec, ut soles, dabis iocos ...*

P. Aelius Hadrianus, Imp.

*Little sweet stray soul, mate and guest of the body, now you are ready
to descend into colourless, arduous, bare places, where you won't have
anymore your usual amusements ...*

28

The Emperor Hadrian wrote that short, inspired graceful lyric just before he died. I felt that the melancholic serenity with which the most powerful man of his age accepts the inevitable natural conclusion to his earthly story might create the right emotional atmosphere for the ideas I would like to put forward here today.

How do we cope with the awareness that our lifetimes are wholly ephemeral, and how do we try to transcend our finite boundaries in time? In this paper I will develop some ideas related to this theme, basically referring to three streams of research: Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*,^[1] George

Kubler's *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*,^[2] and my own work on artifacts and the aesthetic dimension of social life.^[3]

Is 'the longing for permanence' a universal human aspiration felt by everyone and in all periods in the history of humanity? This is a first preliminary question raised by Arendt. She believes that the longing for permanence is a consequence of the process of secularization and of the 'modern loss of faith' inevitably arising from Cartesian doubt, which deprived individual life of its immortality, or at least of the certainty of immortality. Individual life again became mortal, as mortal as it had been in antiquity, and the world was even less stable, less permanent, and hence less to be relied upon than it had been during the Christian era. Modern man, when he lost the certainty of a world to come, was thrown back upon himself and not upon this world; far from believing that the world might be potentially immortal, he was not even sure that it was real... At any rate, [he] did not gain this world when he lost the other world ...' (Arendt 1958: 320-321).

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[1] Arendt, H. (1958) *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[2] Kubler, G. (1962) *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

[3] Gagliardi, P. (1990) *Symbols & Artifacts. Views of the Corporate Landscape*. Berlin and New York: de Gruyter; Gagliardi, P. (2006) 'Exploring the Aesthetic Side of Organizational Life,' in *The Sage Handbook of Organizations Studies*. Stewart R. Clegg, Cynthia Hardy, Thomas B. Lawrence, and Walter R. Nord (eds). London: Sage.

Arendt then raises a second key point: is this longing for permanence an aspiration to immortality or to eternity? As we know, a central step in Arendt's argument is the distinction between 'the life of thought and the life of action,' *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa*, the first being concerned with eternity, the second with immortality. 'Immortality means endurance in time, deathless life on this earth and in this world as it was given, according to Greek understanding, to nature and the Olympian gods. The Greeks' concern with immortality grew out of their experience of an immortal nature and immortal gods which together surrounded the individual lives of mortal men. Imbedded in a cosmos where everything was immortal, mortality became the hallmark of human existence ...' (Arendt 1958: 18). 'The task and potential greatness of mortals lie in their ability to produce things—works and deeds and words—which would deserve to be and, at least to a degree, are at home in everlastingness, so that through them mortals could find their place in a cosmos where everything is immortal except themselves. By their capacity for the immortal deed, by their ability to leave non-perishable traces behind, men, their individual mortality notwithstanding, attain an immortality of their own and prove themselves to be of a 'divine' nature...' (Arendt 1958: 19). 'Yet it is decisive that the experience of the eternal, in contradistinction to that of the immortal, has no correspondence with and cannot be transformed into any activity whatsoever ... Theoria, or 'contemplation,' is the word given to the experience of the eternal, as distinguished from all other attitudes, which at most may pertain to immortality' (Arendt 1958: 20).

A third crucial concept in Arendt's thinking is that of the 'durability of the human artifice.' 'The work of our hands ...fabricates the sheer unending variety

of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice ... Their proper use does not cause them to disappear and they give the human artifice the stability and solidity without which it could not be relied upon to house the unstable and mortal creature which is man ... It is this durability which gives the things of the world their relative independence from the men who produce and use them, their 'objectivity' which makes them withstand, 'stand against' and endure, at least for a time, the voracious needs and wants of their living makers and users. From this viewpoint, the things of the world have the function of stabilizing human life, and their objectivity lies in the fact that—in contradiction to the Heraclitean saying that the same man can never enter the same stream—men, their ever-changing nature notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table. In other words, against the subjectivity of men stands the objectivity of the man-made world rather than the sublime indifference of an untouched nature...' (Arendt 1958: 136-137).

Lastly, I found interesting in Arendt's book the concept of reification and the distinction between repetition and multiplication. 'Fabrication, the work of *homo faber*, consists in reification. Solidity, inherent in all, even the most fragile, things, comes from the material worked upon, but this material itself is not simply given and there, like the fruits of field and trees which we may gather or leave alone without changing the household of nature. Material is already a product of human hands which have removed it from its natural location ... and the image or model whose shape guides the fabrication process not only precedes it, but does not disappear with the finished product ... it survives intact, present, as it were, to lend itself to an infinite continuation of fabrication. This potential

multiplication, inherent in work, is different in principle from the repetition... Multiplication multiplies something that already possesses a relatively stable, relatively permanent existence in the world' (Arendt 1958: 141-142).

Kubler, in his book *The Shape of Time*, refers to the same concepts—creation, repetition, and multiplication—when narrating the story of 'things, a term which encompasses all kinds of visual forms: ideas and objects, artifacts and works of art, replicas and unique examples, tools and expressions ... in short all materials worked by human hands under the guidance of connected ideas developed in temporal sequence.' Just as new things are being incessantly created, others are multiplying and spreading, while still others are discarded. They reveal patterns of invention, repetition, and selection, cycles of stability and change, chaos and order. 'From all these things a shape in time emerges. A visible portrait of the collective identity, whether tribe, class, or nation, comes to being. This self-image reflected in things is a guide and a point of reference to the group for the future, and it eventually becomes the portrait given to posterity' (Kubler: 1962).

As we have just seen, Arendt illustrates the relationship between things and the individual self, claiming that human beings 'can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table.' To my mind Kubler takes a further step forward by stressing the role that things play in the construction of collective identities.

Collective identity is what makes one specific social group recognizable and distinguishable from other social groups in the same species, be it a tribe, a

company, a local community or a form of social aggregation held together by a common interest in reaching specific goals or by shared beliefs and values. Even in opportunistic and utilitarian aggregations, the constituent differences of identity concern the basic beliefs, worldview, role in the world, and the values and basic assumptions consciously or unwittingly shared: in a word, they concern the 'culture'—in the anthropological sense—of the group in question.

The study of cultures both in traditional societies and contemporary organizations has long been influenced by the 'cognitive bias,' by the relevance given to beliefs and value assumptions, and in general to all sort of analytical knowledge. At the same time, the artifacts, i.e. the constituent elements in the so-called 'material culture,' have been considered and treated as subsidiary or secondary manifestations of a culture, even though they are its most obvious tangible manifestation. The interest of social researchers in the study of artifacts and space sprang from the growing awareness that the study of artifacts and of physical reality enables one to approach a basic human experience: the aesthetic, used here in the general sense, to refer to all types of sense experience and not simply the experience of what is socially described as 'beautiful' or defined as 'art.'

The analysis of artifacts in most cases implies the analysis of a fundamental category of experience: space. Every object possesses a physical edge, which circumscribes it and sets it off from other objects, a perceptible boundary which marks where it begins and ends; space defines the features of an artifact, its relations with other artifacts in the same setting and its meaning. On

the other hand, the perception of space is inextricably linked to the perception of 'things' which frame it and define its contours. The physical setting is not a naked container for social action, but a context that selectively solicits—and hence, so to speak, 'cultivates'—all our senses. This context refines some of our perceptive capacities (perhaps at the expense of others), enabling us to grasp minimal gradations in the intensity of a stimulus, and accustoms us to certain sensations until we become 'fond' of them, even if those same sensations may well be unpleasant in other contexts and for other people.

The wealth of associative and reactive capacities that people accumulate through living in a specific physical-cultural setting forms a set of patterns of classification, interpretation and reaction to perceptual stimuli that I proposed to call 'sensory maps', distinguishing them from 'cognitive maps' (Weick 1979). Cognitive maps can be conscious or unconscious but are 'knowable'; sensory maps are learned instinctively through intuitive and imitative processes over which the mind exercises no control, and integrated automatically into life daily.

There is a widely held opinion, even among anthropologists and historians of art, that artifacts are the illustration of a pre-existing worldview. But it is difficult to say whether it is ideas, which produce forms, or forms which generate ideas. I have to confess my leaning towards considering aesthetic experience basic, if for no other reason than that it takes place before (and often without) the intellect's conferring of unity on the data of sensory experience through concepts. Artifacts convey their own messages, often untranslatable into ideas, at least to the same extent as they demonstrate existing concep-

tions. In this sense, the relation between systems of meanings and systems of sensations is probably circular in nature.

Many authors (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton) have carefully analyzed the importance of the relationship between things and the development of the individual self. The things, we create, which we use and with which we surround ourselves, not only 'reflect' our personality, but often they are part of or an extension of the self, not in a metaphorical or mystical sense but in a factual and concrete sense. Things incorporate our intentions of control, and the self develops out of feedback to acts of control. In things reside the traces and memories of our past, the witness to our present experiences, our desires and our dreams for the future. Things tell us constantly who we are, what it is that differentiates us from others and what it is that we have in common with others.

Material reality is equally decisive, perhaps more so, for the collective identities. In fact, the existence of a social self which is not publicly objectified in forms which survive the coming and going of individual people and generations, and which embody a sharable vision of reality, is conceptually unthinkable. In an organization, ends are pursued, energies invested and ideas are made concrete in machines, products and places. In order to think and act, especially when they must reciprocally co-ordinate, social actors need an intelligible world. Things are the visible counterparts of this intelligibility, they indicate rational categories and hierarchies of values, and in this sense they collectively constitute an important system of communication, alternative and much more powerful than the language of words. Things pin down meanings, and contain

their fluctuations. They inevitably, incessantly convey the messages that they embody with the silent constant force of inertia. Actions, like thoughts and speeches, are contingent signs, destined to vanish if they are not reified. A brilliant idea left out of the minutes of a meeting can be irretrievably lost. Only things last. And it is probable that the bolder the convictions of a social group, the more it will be concerned to reify them, to immortalize them in lasting things, passing them on to succeeding generations through the language of the senses. From this point of view, the physical setting of every collective—the factory of a firm, the landscape of a village, the house of a family—with its formal qualities, i.e. with its sensorially perceptible qualities, is thus the most faithful portrayal of its cultural identity, and its enduring ‘monument’.

The worldview that the physical setting offers daily and uninterruptedly to the unconscious perception of members constitutes at the same time indelible testimony about the past and a guide for the future. Thus, it contains an implicit promise of immortality for the collective self, a public declaration that ‘something’ will survive as a super-individual and impersonal reality. The concern of French presidents to link the construction of grandiose monuments to their time in office unequivocally expresses their desire to contribute and define the form over time of ‘Frenchness’. On a smaller scale, the president of an industrial association—whose mandate was only three years—told me that all his predecessors (and he himself was following their example) had been concerned to leave behind some indelible trace of their brief occupation of the post by physically changing the shape of the presidential floor: thus waiting rooms, meeting rooms and offices changed form and aspect, shrinking and growing alternately, every time offering subtly different conceptions of a mi-

crocosm of roles and relations. In conclusion: Geniuses keep their own name alive through their works’ undying fame. Many people believe their individual selves deserve to survive through artifacts, which actually disappear with their makers, leaving no trace. But most people strive to satisfy the longing for permanence through the persistence of a collective identity—and of the enduring artifacts shaping it—, which they have contributed to construct and idealize during their lifetimes.

I would like to end these thoughts on the way human beings seek consolation for the fact that they must inevitably die by briefly recounting a personal story. My mother died a few years ago, at the age of almost 100 and right to the end she lived alone and was still more or less completely self-sufficient. During one of my last visits I asked her how she felt.

‘How do you think I feel? I only think about death,’ she replied.

I tried to console her: ‘No, mother! You should think about eternal life instead.’ She shrugged: ‘You know son, I don’t think I’m immortal...’

‘Mother, I wasn’t referring to the continuation of your earthly life, but the new life waiting for you in another world!’

‘My dear son, I must admit I’m beginning to have some doubts about that prospect...’

Part One

A

R

T

Art and the Escape from the Elusive Prison of the Present

Raymond Tallis

Thinking about the arts, and why they mean so much to us, requires us to acknowledge what I have called 'the wound in the present tense of human consciousness'. The present tense is at once inescapable and elusive. It is inescapable because whatever exists is in some sense present. It is always now. But it is also elusive and this elusiveness is connected with its inescapability. My thesis is that a work of art invites a perfected and connected attention, so satisfying a profound human hunger to be more fully, even entirely, there, to achieve what we might call existential plenitude. It is a response to the sense of the ephemeral.

The notion of art is baggy. It is possible in certain circles to make a reputation as an artist simply by presenting as art something that isn't art: what Julian has called *con art*, and I, more coarsely, art disappearing up its own ars. And there is, of course, more than one kind of art. It is reasonable to be sceptical about a theory that tries to encompass statues, novels, and symphonies, or ceramics, poems, and string quartets. Any such theory much be cast in very general terms and it won't help us evaluate individual works of art. I want to focus on the present, and on the distinctive nature and significance of the satisfaction that art might afford us when it is at its best and we are at our most receptive.

Art has had an important role in mediating between Man and God, the quotidian and the eternal. Church music, sacred poetry, painted visions

of God, His angels, the saints, and the after-life, have all played a crucial role, long after art became detached from its key role in ritual. However, my thesis is that of an atheist humanist and examines a secular society where Bach's 'the Glory of God' has been displaced by 'the benefit of my neighbour'.

The most tenacious idea about the benefits art may bring to the artist's neighbour is that art is in some specifiable sense useful: promoting social solidarity, helping us to get on better with each other, making us worthier citizens. There is the belief that art may make us behave better at the individual level—through the promotion of empathy, the education of the imagination—or at the collective level, in the furtherance of political ideals. Unfortunately, the evidence for art making us individually or collectively more virtuous is slender. The most ardent readers of literature, listeners to classical music, and visitors to galleries do not seem to behave strikingly better than the uncultured; there is no evidence that professional musicians, literary critics, and gallery curators, steeped in their respective arts, are latter day saints. And 20th century history in particular afforded us plenty of examples of the co-existence of high culture and sickening and systematic barbarity.

As for the political role of art, the rule seems to be that the better the art—the more nuanced and consequently more remote it is from an easy take on the issues of the day—the less effective it is as propaganda. And effective propaganda—which knows in advance what has to be said and how it should be said—is usually mediocre art.

And, by the way, the instrumentalizing idea that art should be valued on account of its contribution to the GDP, an idea captured in the ghastly phrase ‘the creative industries’ should be set aside. One word—‘poetry’—is sufficient to dispose of it. Keats’ greatness is not to be measured by his contribution to the Regency economy.

Digging a little deeper, we find a clue in Nietzsche’s assertion that ‘The creation of art is the only metaphysical activity to which life still obliges us’. And so I come to my thesis. The need that art meets arises out of what I have already characterized as ‘the wound in the present tense of human consciousness.’ We do not fully experience our experiences; as a consequence we may be haunted by the sense that our lives are somehow eluding us. This is of no importance when we are hungry, thirsty, afraid or in pain, or suffering the many woes humans inflict on each other; or even when we go about our daily business. Art finds its place not in the Kingdom of Means but in the Kingdom of Ends—where we seek life more abundant.

The need that art addresses has its roots in our curious condition: that of being creatures who have partly woken out of the state of being animals. Half-awakened, we are constantly engaged in making explicit sense of the world and of our fellow humans. This sense remains tantalizingly incomplete and stubbornly local. We may consequently be haunted by the feeling that we have not fully realized our own existence, not fully realized that we exist, not fully realized the scale and scope of what we are and of the world we live in. We remain trapped in a kind of existential hollowness.

Such hollowness may present itself in different ways, but it is most evident when we seek out experience for its own sake, as we do, say on holiday, our longest sojourn in the Kingdom of Ends. Then it is felt as a mismatch between the experience we actually have and the idea we had of the same experience that led us to seek it out. At the very simplest level, experience does not measure up to expectation. In addition to this feeling of not experiencing our experiences, those experiences seem insufficiently connected: as we move from one thing to another, often in increasing haste as if a rising curve of consumption could bring us closer to true satisfaction, they do not add up.

We may characterise this lack of connectedness in different ways: that we are always small-sampling our lives and our worlds, occupying a small part of the total of ourselves; that we have no overview on ourselves; or that we are condemned to live in ‘The Dominion of And’ or ‘The Kingdom of And Then, And Then’, in which we pass on from one thing to another, without ever arriving, without ever being fully at any of the times and places through which we pass. We are in danger of never having been fully there or never having fully grasped our being there because we cannot close the gap between what we are and what we know, between our ideas and our experiences and the life and world of which they are a part. Nor, finally, do we fully realise that freedom of which we as humans are, at least under favourable circumstances, uniquely capable.

How then does art address this wound in the present tense? In part, I argue, it does so through reconciling the sensory and imaginative dimensions of

consciousness, the particular experience of what is there with the general idea or ideal of what might be there, our abstract notions with concrete instances.

Art unites these adversaries through artistic form. In the case of works of art, which are composite and multiple, 'form' refers less to the outline than to the 'inner shape' or arrangement of parts. The arrangement is an orderly (or calculatedly disorderly) one: form in art is largely about (even in rebellion against) 'due shape, proper figure'; the form conforms to—or, more recently, refers to, plays with, undermines—a model, type or conventional pattern.

This doesn't say very much about how artistic form differs from forms encountered outside of art or, within art, about the difference between the great and the mediocre. But it will have to do for the moment. We may think of form in art as that by virtue of which things otherwise experienced or considered separately are brought together as one: that unity in variety which conveys the sense of sameness in difference. We may look beneath this to a sense of stillness underneath change, and to the Aristotelian idea of form as the moving unmoved. The common function or effect of formal features that unify across variety is to integrate experiences that would otherwise be separate—a mere sequence. Sometimes incongruous and disparate things may be brought together: outrageous couplings, dissonant discourses, disjunct objects, booty from the four corners of the empire of experience.

This permits something larger than moment-to-moment consciousness; something, in short, answering to the ideas that we hope to experience when we seek out experience for its own sake. A work of art is a concretely realised

idea—an idea as large as those that haunt our consciousness, anticipation and memory; larger than those ideas that are realised in ordinary experience, and which, as we noted, often undermine or devalue ordinary experience.

The formal structure integrates over time in music, over space in the visual arts and over a multidimensional hyperspace in referential, non-iconic forms such as literature. But how does this palliate the sense that our experiences are eaten away from within by the ideas of experience?

It is perhaps easiest to understand this in the most obviously formal of all the arts—music, an only weakly or secondarily referential medium in which form and subject matter are one. Think of the experience of a melody. Each note is fully present as an actual physical event and yet, because the music conforms to a form that shapes expectation and assists recall—through conformity to the rules of harmony, of contrast and symmetry, of progression and repetition—the individual note is manifestly and explicitly part of a larger whole. There is no conflict therefore between the form or idea of the music and its actual instants. Our moments of listening are imbued with a sense of what is to come and what has passed. The form to which the music conforms—that ties what has gone and what is to come with each other and with what is present—shines through its individual moments.

Of course, the music has its journeys—it manifestly is a journey from a beginning to an end—and in great music we feel as if we have travelled great distances to and through a remote paysage of sound. But the journeying is never merely en route: the unfolding of the form fills the present moment with the

past and the future, rather than undermining it with the past and the future. The leitmotif, recurring throughout the music like an involuntary memory, ties together the beginning, the middle and the end, making it all one. The retrospective light it casts on all that has gone before creates the feeling that we have been arriving all the time and that, indeed, we are arrived.

The perfected journeying that is music is continuous arrival. That is why, although it is so clearly intrinsically set out in time, it is a liberation from time: it has the forward movement of time, while uniting the away and the towards of time. And that is why, also, there are moments when, listening to music, we have the sense of enjoying our own consciousness in italics: like a hurrying river dilating into a lagoon, our becoming has dilated into being. And so we are invited to a perfected, undistracted attention. But music is connected. The sense of 'one damn thing after another' is thus palliated. We are liberated for a while from The Dominion of And. Meaning is replete. Meaning loses its '-ing'.

Let me illustrate this with a different art: literature, where a complex tale brings together a beginning, a middle, and an end. At its height, literary art can give us the sense of recovering an entire world, as EM Forster describes so brilliantly in his essay on War and Peace:

After one has read War and Peace for a while, great chords begin to sound and we cannot say exactly what struck them. They come from the immense area of Russia, over which episodes and characters have been scattered, from the sum total of bridges and frozen rivers,

forests, roads, gardens, fields, which accumulate grandeur and sonority after we have passed them.

Forster goes on to say that it is 'extended over space as well as time, and the sense of space until it terrifies us, is exhilarating, and leaves behind it an effect like music'. The space is, of course, a virtual space of signs.

There is an escape from the moment into a world, which also conquers elusiveness by gathering it up together. This access to an entire world is present also in visual arts. Consider a Rembrandt self-portrait. You see the man's life in the painted surface. As Shakespeare anticipated it: 'Thus is his cheek, the map of days outworn'. The 'And then, and then' of those days, is gathered up. The examples also illustrate how the experience of art, as experience (emotion, memory) cultivated for its own sake, not only lifts us up from the often self-emptying pell-mell of ordinary experience, but it enables us to realise to the full the potential freedom that our partial liberation from our biological destiny affords us. Our being freed from the constraints of the present moment is illustrated by the fact that we are uniquely apart from nature as well as part of it, distanced from that which surrounds us. This is taken to a further level when we look at the images of objects removed from the places where we might be obliged to act in response to them.

Consider what happens when the face is translated from the presence of a person to a portrait on a wall, or a landscape is lifted from the land to a gallery. This freedom is also exploited in virtual participation in the lives, worlds, and dilemmas of our fellow creatures through narratives that engage

our memory, knowledge, understanding, empathy and emotions. And in music it is there is the virtual causality—to use Roger Scruton’s phrase—that links one note, one chord, with another in the unfolding melody, a necessity that is an elective rather an endured necessity, an aesthetic necessity:

Because sounds are pure events we can detach them, in thought and experience, from their causes, and impose upon them an order quite independent of any physical order in the world. This happens, I suggest, in the ‘acousmatic’ experience of sound, when people focus on the sounds themselves and on what can be heard in them. What they then hear is not a succession of sounds, but a movement between tones, governed by a virtual causality that resides in the musical line.

For the present, I leave you with the thought that the purpose, or (if that sounds too instrumental), the significance, of art is to be found not in any practical use, but in its helping us to recover a wholeness from a world delivered in fragments as one damn thing follows another, and in permitting us the glimpse of a full realisation of our human freedom in the sense that we have arrived.

We are not, of course, saved by art. But art enables us to become from time to time what we, potentially, are. It gives us an image of what we might be.

The Immaterial Transcendent Space of Art

Julian Spalding

Paintings are projections of pictures in the mind. They exist physically in reality, which is one reason why they last, and also why they can be bought and sold. Painters can grow rich while poets starve solely because painters produce unique artefacts that can become vehicles for investment. Poets create memorable talk, which is about the least saleable substance in the market place.

Paintings can only be seen by other human beings. There is no evidence, as far as I know, that any animal has been deceived even by a painted illusion, and certainly none that shows that any creature, apart from us, appreciates the overall impact of a painting—sees it as a whole—the ability of a painting that so fascinated Leonardo, as he put it, ‘to generate a proportional harmony in the time equivalent to a single glance’.

Piero’s painting is a wonderful example of that sense of ‘proportional harmony’ that we can appreciate in ‘a single glance’. This picture existed in the mind of a man 500 years ago and it exists in our minds at this moment. That is an extraordinary transcendence of time, and therefore of death. But it is also a transcendence of our feelings of individuality and isolation, because

Piero della Francesca
Baptism of Christ
The National Gallery, London



this picture exists in all our minds at the same time, now. Of course our perceptions of it will be tinted by our personal perspectives: it will look different to a Christian or Muslim, Buddhist or atheist, but the essence of its meaning will remain the same. We all know we're looking at a painting not of violence and loudness but of stillness and silence.

Paintings are projections of mind's eye pictures whose meaning exists not out there in the material world but in the extraordinary, apparently immaterial but vitally important sphere of our collective consciousness.

There are many elements that come together to create this painting's powerful overall impact of quietude, of a moment stilled in time. I want to concentrate on one—the articulation of light. The rising pillar of the tree, the rhythmic angles of the legs and feet, the reflection of the sky in the water, the receding path and the angel's wing all help focus one's attention on the central, pale pivotal figure of Christ. His hands raised in prayer point up to the hovering white dove. A tiny detail, which you probably can't see is that the dove's pure white triangular beak, pointed down, is echoed perfectly in the triangular drip of water that is about to fall on Christ's head from the upturned bowl the Baptist holds. Piero has tried to capture the precise moment when Christ was filled with the Holy Spirit and began His Mission, the moment when, in Christian belief, the whole world was transformed by hope. Hence the glorious light.

There's another detail which you certainly won't be able to see, because it's been almost entirely lost in the original—rays of pure gold fall down from

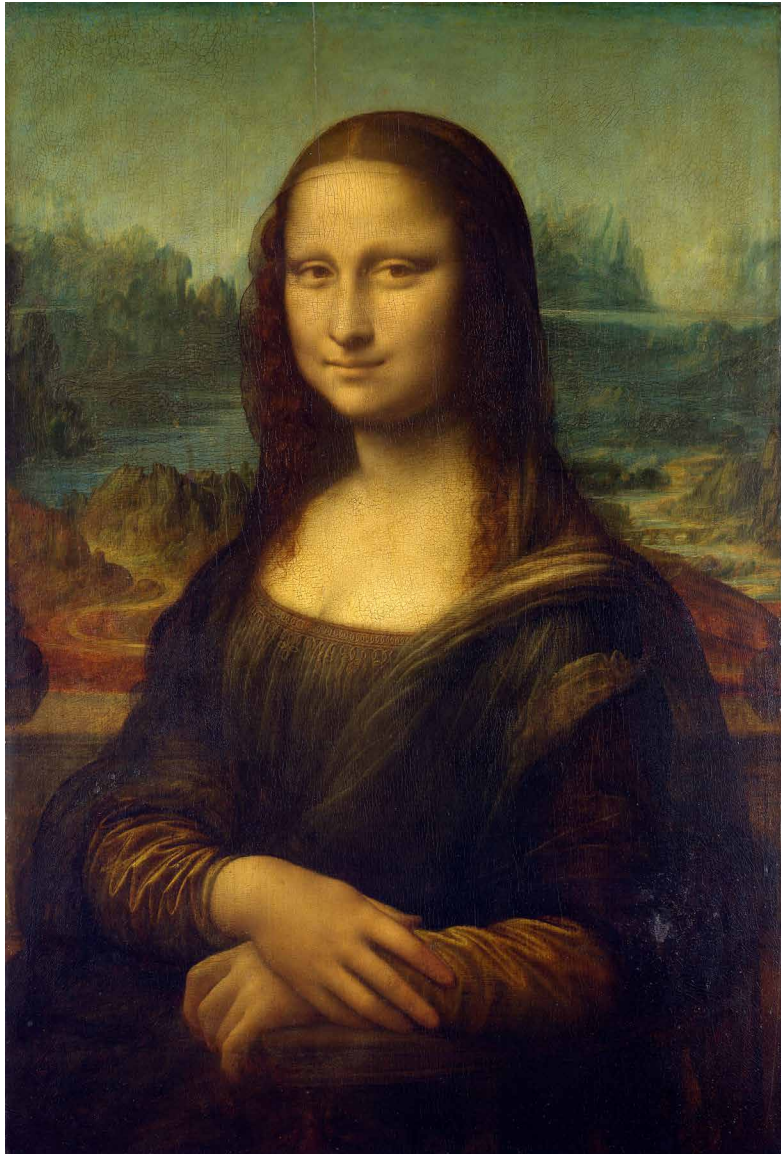
the dove and are projected out horizontally in the now almost invisible halo on Christ's head, for this is the moment that the world was filled with the spiritual light of God's truth, which descended from heaven and was distributed across the world. That world for Piero, as it was for almost everyone, everywhere at that time—that world was a flat, square, fixed earth located under the rotating hemisphere of heaven.

This eternal geometry gives this altarpiece its shape—a hemisphere above a square—and governs its internal composition and is a key to the instant impression the painting gives of a centralised stillness.

Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* was painted half a century later, a decade after Columbus had sailed, when people knew the world was round. It creates a very different overall sense of stillness.

It is almost impossible to see this painting today because it is hidden under an old discoloured varnish. We know the original painting underneath is in wonderful condition. A contemporary described seeing it when it was freshly painted, 'her eyes had that watery sheen always seen in life ... her nostrils were rosy and tender and appeared to breathe ... the opening of her mouth seemed to be not coloured but living flesh.'

It is still like that, underneath. If we can operate on an eye, we can certainly remove an old, decayed varnish put on centuries after Leonardo. The fact that we've been content to let the *Mona Lisa* be obscured by filth will be seen to be symbolic of an age that eclipsed the role of art.



Many factors contribute to the painting's impact, and I'd like to concentrate on just one: it's mistiness—the sfumato effect Leonardo was so famous for. This mistiness, so different from Piero's clarity, isn't just the effect of the discoloured varnish, I hasten to add; it's there much more brilliantly in the painting underneath.

The more Leonardo looked at the world—and he studied every aspect he could see, searching for the causes of appearances—the more he came to the conclusion that nothing was definitively defined, mystery receded everywhere before his gaze. This painting is darker than the Piero—again not just because of the varnish—but because it was painted on the threshold of the Enlightenment.

Leonardo had begun to doubt that God had created the world as we see it. The world wasn't radiated with God's light, as in the Piero painting, but eroded everywhere by darkness and doubt. Leonardo was on the point of discovering the immense age of the landscape, and the transformations it had undergone. The two sea levels at the back of this picture perhaps suggest this. The Mona Lisa is a remarkable evocation of a world in flux, a contained vision, you might say, of transience.

Velazquez' *Las Meninas* was painted fifty years after Galileo turned his telescope on the moon and discovered it wasn't an image of the Madonna, a luminous, watery sphere lifting souls to heaven, but a lump of solid rock.

Leonardo da Vinci
Mona Lisa
Louvre, Paris

Paintings are projections of pictures in the mind that have an overall, instantaneous impact, a completeness that lifts them out of time. What is the overall impact of this picture? You can't really appreciate it here, I'm afraid, but only in the Prado where its scale simply stuns you. The figures are nearly life-size—the painting is like a huge hole punched in the wall enabling you to look through to people standing in another room. One is the artist himself. Then, in that instant, you realise that though you thought at first you're looking at them, these people are actually looking at you. It's not just that Velazquez himself is looking at you, but he's painting you! You are in the picture, and no longer in another room.

Then another revelation follows. You are standing in the spot where the King and Queen are standing. You can see their figures, not yours, reflected in the mirror at the back. This is an extraordinary conceit, and most poignant for its time: to put a commoner in the royal place.

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The Enlightenment saw the erosion of all the old assumed hierarchies in nature and mankind. The brightest note in the painting comes from the higher room beyond, where a man glances back at the benighted interior, as if he were leaving the self-deluded occupants of Plato's cave. This painting is one of the world's profoundest meditations on transience, yet it is contained in a lasting glance.

From darkness to a very different sort of light—another room—another projection of a picture in the mind. Matisse's Red Studio, painted 250 years after Velazquez' *Las Meninas*—after scientists had finally stripped all illusions from appearances and shown that the universe is governed by forces we cannot see.



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Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velazquez
Las Meninas of The Family of Philip IV
Prado, Madrid



Henri Matisse
The Red Studio
MoMa, New York

It was then that something we misguidedly continue to call Modern Art was born, as if Modern Art was different in kind from the art of the past. This is nonsensical. All art is modern when it is made, and all art is a projection of a picture in the mind. And the art which lasts is that which transcends time, which lifts itself above its specific moment so as to express things that still matter to us.

This painting is no different in essence from Piero's Baptism. Both paintings depict imagined spaces full of light. And the light in both, I would suggest, is equally immaterial. The light in the Piero is clearly inspired by Christian belief. In the Matisse, this light is the artist's inspiration, generated when he is painting, the love he feels for living as fully as he can in the moment, the

intense red of his heightened awareness which enlivens everything, the walls, chairs and table, and makes the floor liquid to walk upon.

Here everything is consumed in the flames of feeling. And floating in this world of passion are his own paintings—more luminous projections of pictures in his mind. Only one window, on the left, shows ordinary daylight. It is muted, in comparison with the light in the mind. And in the centre of the picture stands a clock, for even time, in moments of rapture, can appear to stop, or, at least, be stilled, so the moment appears to be held for ever, in a brilliant work of art.

It is clearly absurd to call this painting 'modern' and the Piero not. Both are projections of pictures in the artist's mind and both are attempts to lift experience out of time. This is what all artists have always tried to do, whatever their medium: they try to capture experience without killing it. And by doing so, they triumph over death. That's why we value their achievements so highly. We build our civilisations on the lasting arts.

Marcel Duchamp claimed in the 1960s that he sent this urinal into an exhibition in New York in 1917 declaring that anything could be art if an artist said it was. He wanted, at the end of his life, to be acclaimed as one of the founding fathers of Modern Art—alongside Matisse and Picasso—but he had nothing truly original to show from that time. So he stole this work from the long forgotten poet and performance artist, Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, long after she'd died in 1927. Even though celebrated at the time, alongside James Joyce, in the famous radical magazine, *The Little Review*, Elsa, being a

poet, died in abject poverty, in and out prison for shoplifting, making, as she said, friends of rats.

Elsa only became a baroness on her third marriage. She was born plain Elsa Plötz in Swinemunde, Germany, in 1874. Her father was a builder, councillor and philanderer, who infected her mother with syphilis. She died in a mental institution, leaving Elsa with her inheritance—which, she said, was to fight.

Elsa sent this urinal in to an exhibition in New York as a blistering attack on America when it declared war on her beloved Germany in 1917. To her, the urinal laid on its back looked like a woman's pelvic girdle and womb waiting to receive a man's sperm. Its shadow also contained the profile of a pure white Virgin Mary—once seen you can't ignore or forget it. America had, unbelievably, declared war on Good Friday. She signed the sculpture R. Mutt punning on mutter—the German for mother. She was telling, with this gesture, the American Establishment, which she regarded as a gentlemen's club, symbolised by a gents, not to piss on her motherland, as her philandering father had done to her mother.

She punned brilliantly in German and English. R. Mutt, of course, also meant you are a mutt. The exhibition organizers had promised to hang every work of art submitted. They would be shown to be mutts if they hung the work and mutts if they didn't because they'd have broken their own rule. Everything fitted in this extraordinary visceral, visual attack—arguably the first great feminist work of art, and the first instance of concrete—in this case, porcelain—poetry.



*Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven/
Alfred Stieglitz/
Marcel Duchamp
Fountain*

Being a poet, Elsa couldn't care less what happened to the urinal after she'd made the gesture. This photograph was taken at the time by Alfred Stieglitz and it's the only record of her visual poem. Understood within the context of her life and a few other similarly powerful tactile poems that survive, this gesture has the imaginative and intellectual aura of all real works of art.

When he stole this creation from Elsa fifty years later, Duchamp stripped it of the wholeness of its meaning. His explanations of Mutt—that he'd bought it from Mott's, a bathroom store in New York, meant nothing and was anyway a blatant lie—Mott's was an upmarket showroom, not a shop—you couldn't buy anything from it—and it certainly never displayed a bog standard urinal of the type the impoverished Elsa used.

By declaring that anything could be art if an artist said it was, that art was just a thought in the mind and didn't have to be created or even seen, Duchamp not only hid his own deception and buried Elsa's genius, but also stripped art of any need to create a wholeness of meaning, any attempt to transcend time, and at same time denied the audience the right to criticise them for not doing so. The rape of art was complete. So the myth of conceptual art was born. Con art I call it, and it was founded on a con.

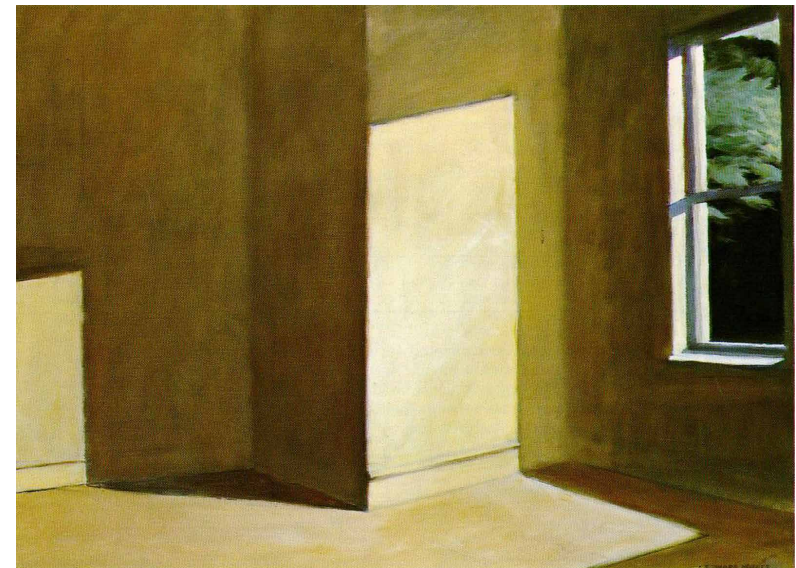
Of course this non-art couldn't exist without a containing, intellectual shell. Museums of Modern Art (a contradiction in terms, if you think about it) have set about filling the gap left by Duchamp. Their spaces provide the aura of transcendence that is rightly the property of works of art themselves. So their galleries have become full of transient ephemera while the real art of our times, that seeks to create a lasting vision, and which doesn't need museums to survive, has been pushed off the public stage.

62

Edward Hopper, during his life, was dismissed as a reactionary, but this painting, *Sun In an Empty Room* painted in 1963 is a projection of a picture in the mind, not a slavish depiction of something seen. It is a profoundly haunting image of human loneliness within the fleetingness of existence.

Modern art, in its panic to be different, has become increasingly superficial. You can't get much thinner than a cutting edge. We need to look for wholeness not newness in art.

One of the best painters I know working today, is the German, Peter Angermann. This painting, called *Hinten Fern*—roughly translated *Near and Far*, was painted in 2009. It is a projection of a picture in the mind. As such it is an image of anxiety, a very modern dilemma. How do you cope with other people's suffering, hate and pain, in your living room? The painting offers no solutions—it's not a programme for action—but a meditation on a common experience.



Edward Hopper
Sun in an Empty Room
Private Collection

63



*Peter Angermann
Hinten Fern
Galerie Sima, Nuremberg*

The reality of this painting is actually its surface. It's a painting of a television screen. You can see that by the channel logo in the top left. The painting is large—the figures nearly life-size. The screen reflects the family and the scene they are watching on TV. They are in the picture but also watching the picture. This is an impossible conceit but it works—quite how, I'm not sure—but it has something to do with the fact that we know a painted surface is unreal—it's a doorway into imaginative space.

In this imaginative space we can experience the dilemma we have all faced—how to relate to two realities, one near and one far. The short-cut cartoon rendering adds a layer of comic irony to the situation which prevents this tragic dilemma becoming in any way sentimental, and also it suggests the way we belittle things and make fun of them to cope with them. Angermann has painted an experience we all recognise, and lifted it out of time.

Time and Eternity in the Venetian Renaissance

digest of a lecture by

Andrew Graham Dixon

Venice came into being at the end of the Western Roman Empire, when power retreated to Constantinople and the people of the mainland sought refuge in the habitable mudflats of the Adriatic. It is a refugee city, built with enormous labour and devotion, using the sea as its walls: hence it is the only Renaissance city in which the palaces need no fortifications of their own. This has permitted architecture of a lace-like delicacy, in which each façade stands above its own shimmering reflection—the durable made ephemeral, and the ephemeral durable. Its spiritual orientation was, from the beginning, towards the East, and even today the Venetians do not really think of themselves as Italian.

We have a glimpse of what this has meant in the island of Torcello, once home to 125,000 people, now inhabited by 28. The cathedral there was, after the Doge's palace, Ruskin's favourite building. Above the apse we see the blue mosaic figure of the Virgin in a sea and sky of gold: we see just what the Eastward orientation has meant, for we are here in Byzantium. St Mark's is a clone of Hagia Sophia, and its shimmering interior is an icon of eternity, like the apses and domes of Byzantine churches. We are reminded of the source of Christian thinking about eternity, in Plato's myth of the cave: the eternal lies beyond time, a realm in which each thing is perfected as an Idea. God, becoming man in Jesus Christ, enters the temporal order in order to rescue us from time, taking us with him to the eternal home from which we fell.

The Italian Renaissance saw a shift from the Byzantine vision of an eternal sphere in which all is changeless, asleep in its own Idea, to the temporal sphere in which Jesus, as man, lived, suffered and died. The crucifix, and the bleeding form that hangs from it, replace the serene face of Christ Pankrator. One important source of this shift was the new spirituality of St Francis of Assisi who, growing up in the industrial city of Florence, surrounded by uprooted migrant labourers, became conscious of an unfulfilled spiritual mission. Hitherto churches had been Gothic monuments, taking decades to build. Francis needed churches that could be erected in nine months, and covered at once in instructive paintings. Hence arose the Franciscan chapel, the fresco, and the walls covered in the stories of suffering—the suffering that the congregation knew from its own experience, and which was a source of consolation when portrayed also as the suffering of God.

Andrew reflected interestingly on the impact, at this moment, of the Roman sculptures, sarcophagi in particular, which were being discovered beneath the cities, and which totally transformed the portrayal of the human form, as in Pisano's Baptismal font in Siena. He referred to the humanism of Petrarch, and the conception of time associated with it—time as a sequence of 'ages', rather than a perpetuum mobile of the present tense. The Renaissance saw itself as such an 'age', subsequent to the Golden Age of antiquity, and to the dark age when so much knowledge had been lost.

So understood, the Renaissance was never entirely embraced by the Venetians, who continued to look to the East, even while responding to the artistic innovations which inevitably came their way through their trading cul-



Giovanni Bellini
Sacra Conversazione
Church of San Zaccaria, Venice

ture. Frescoes were in any case never really possible in the Venetian climate, and oil paintings on canvas, as in Tintoretto's Scuola San Rocco, were the preferred idiom, even for the interiors of churches. (Oil painting came early to Venice, probably brought from Flanders in the course of trade.)

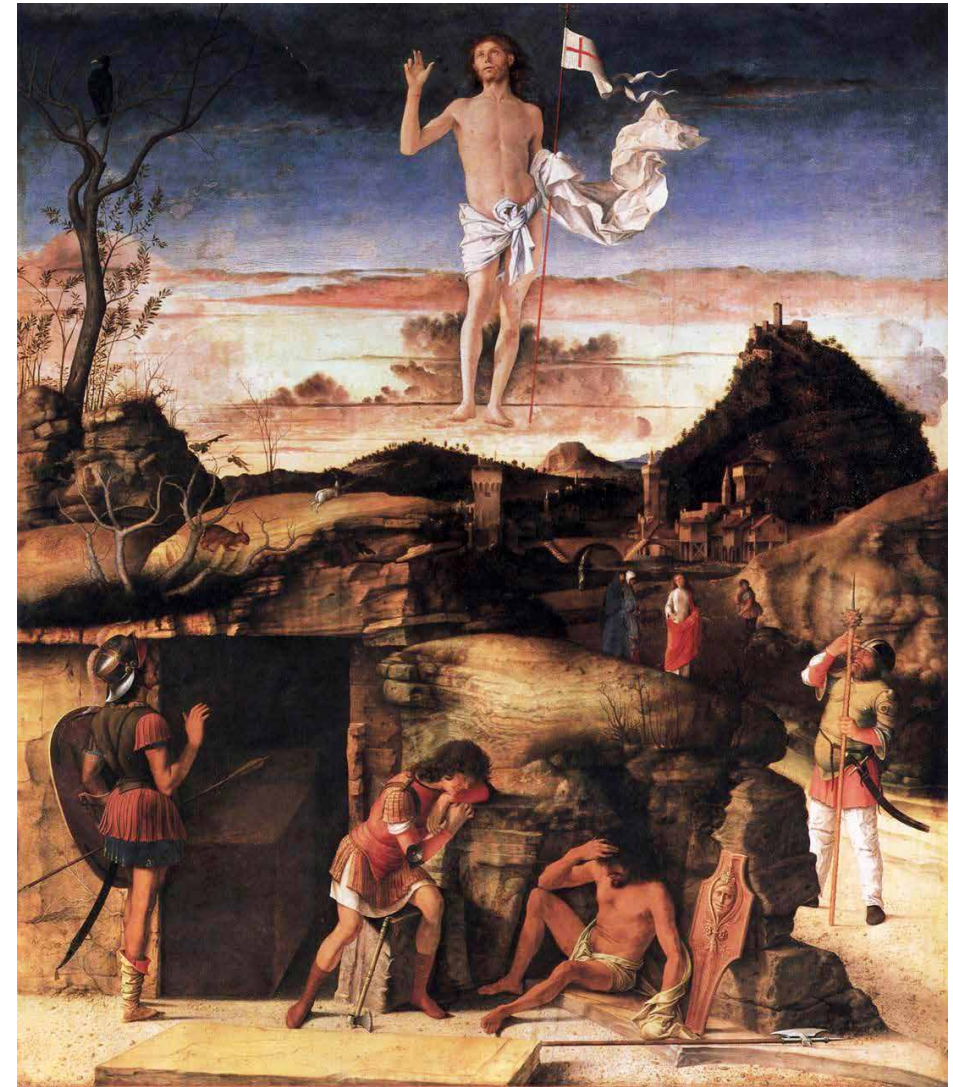
Andrew showed the survival of the Byzantine conception of eternity in two great Renaissance painters, Titian and Bellini, in both of whom realistic human figures are placed within an eternal-seeming frame. Thus in Titian's famous Assumption in the Frari we see the Virgin ascending from the temporal world into the golden reaches of the divine, where cloudy forms of cherubim swirl obscurely. The sky above the Virgin's head is a painting of the ineffable—a transfiguration of a Platonic Idea into light and colour.

This effect is yet more poignant in the oil paintings of Bellini, upon some of which Andrew focused in the concluding sections of his talk. In the Madonna and Child with Four Saints we see a marked contrast between the saints, who hold the books that symbolize their thoughts, and who show in their robes and features that they have moved into their solemn poses, and the Madonna and Child in the centre of the painting. The Madonna is seated beneath a golden semi-dome, in the light of a Byzantine eternity, her blue robe motionless and the child looking outwards as though from another world.

The effect is even more apparent in the altarpiece from San Zaccaria, in which the floor in the painting picks up the pattern of the floor in the church, inviting the worshipper to walk into the painting. This work is a

sacred meditation that puts the observer inside its own frame. And in it we see that the Madonna and Child are just slightly out of focus, suggesting that they do not really inhabit the place where we see them, but are held somewhere behind it, in an eternal place of their own—unlike the accompanying saints, who are crisp, life-size, part of the place where we, the worshippers, are standing.

Andrew concluded with reflections on another Bellini, of Christ's Resurrection, which can be found in a Berlin Gallery. He described this painting as a 'crucifixion in reverse', the risen Christ being portrayed at the very height where a crucified Christ would hang, above a mound like the hill of Golgotha, with the human figures assembled as though beneath a cross. In this reverse crucifixion the body is perfect: not the wounded, dying God, but the resurrected and eternal God. And in the dawn sky, painted here as it was never really painted again before Turner, we see the light of hope. This is the dawn that will release us from time. In its serene simplicity, such a painting lifts us from the world of ephemera into its own spiritual eternity.



Giovanni Bellini
Resurrection of Christ
Picture Gallery of the National Museums in Berlin

Ou sont les aromes d'antan?

Wine, the Ephemeral and the Evanescent.

Harry Eyres

1. Michelangelo's snow sculpture

'Piero de' Medici'—says Vasari in his life of Michelangelo—'who had been left heir to his father Lorenzo, often used to send for Michelangelo, with whom he had been intimate for many years, when he wanted to buy antiques such as cameos and other engraved stones. And one winter, when a great deal of snow fell in Florence, he had him make in his courtyard a statue of snow, which was very beautiful...'

Apparently this happened on 20 January 1494, when Michelangelo was 18. Maybe Michelangelo's snow sculpture was the best thing he had ever made. Of course, within a few days, possibly hours, it melted and no one could remember precisely what form it had taken. No photographs then. Someone might have sketched it, but we have no record of that.

The story of Michelangelo's snow statue or snowman challenges some of our deepest prejudices or preconceptions about art and artworks. We seem to have a prejudice against artworks which have a short life, which are ephemeral or evanescent (I'll come back to that distinction later). We cannot take them as seriously as productions intended to last centuries or millennia.

2. The aere perennius thing

The last poem of Horace's first three books of odes, Odes 3.30, begins, exultantly, with these words: 'Exegi monumentum aere perennius'—I have raised

a monument more lasting than bronze. These little poems, he's saying, looking back over the collection, are the opposite of ephemeral: they are going to last longer than the famously incorruptible metal, of which sculptures (not snow-sculptures) are made. There's an element of boastfulness, of braggadocio, and also of irony: how can these modest little utterances, just words, which are no more than breath, be longer-lasting than bronze or mightier than the pyramids?

Shakespeare and other love sonneteers translated the aere perennius thing into the language of love, as in Shakespeare's Sonnet 65:

*Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o'er-sways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?
O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out
Against the wreckful siege of battering days,
When rocks impregnable are not so stout,
Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays?
O fearful meditation! where, alack,
Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
O, none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.*

This is just as much about love as about art, or even more so; the real worry is about the fleetingness and corruptibility of love. Art, in this case poetry, is in the service of love; it can become like amber, fixing and preserving the fleeting winged creature otherwise doomed to die in a day. Other poets celebrating beauty and love, such as Francois Villon in his 'Ballade des dames du temps jadis', ballad of the ladies of times gone by, with its refrain 'Où sont les neiges d'antan', have a more resigned sense of their essential fleetingness. Where are the snows of yesteryear, where are the famous beauties of the past...Melted, or disintegrated, like the corpse of the Prince's great dane Bencidò in Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard*, preserved in vain by his daughter then, in the devastating final image of the novel, falling through the air as dust.

3. Defiance of and anxiety about time

You don't need to be Martin Heidegger to see that behind the aere perennius thing, lurk defiance of time, anxiety about time. Horace sums up what art, not to mention human beings, have to contend with when he speaks about 'the innumerable series of years and the flight of time.' He puts it more ruefully when he addresses his wealthy friend Postumus in the famous 'Eheu fugaces' poem —alas how the years slip by, and there is no stopping them.

Time, for Horace, for Shakespeare, for Marvell, for other love poets, is the great devourer. Everything goes into the maw of time. Nothing comes out, or nothing remains—except, just possibly, art. Art is the only bulwark or sea-defence against this devouring tide. The architectural, sculptural, literary glories of Athens are what will survive to bear witness to the culture.

Even here, though, anxiety does not go away. How permanent are these art works anyway? Half of the Parthenon was destroyed by Venetian artillery when the temple, turned into a mosque, was being used as a munitions store by the Turks in 1687. 'Many ingenious lovely things are gone,/That seemed sheer miracle to the multitude,' Yeats lamented in his poem '1919', in a time of great violence and destruction (what price Palmyra, what price the Bamiyan Buddhas, what price the great souk of Aleppo?).

The Italian renaissance sculptor Tullio Lombardo, born in Padua, working here in Venice, wrote that a sculpted altarpiece will be a 'memoria sempiterna' unlike a painting which is 'cosa caduca et instabile', a transient and unstable thing. There is a hierarchy even among artworks about which is more permanent, more time-defying.

Time has the last laugh. In October 2002 Tullio Lombardo's great marble statue of Adam—the first monumental marble nude statue since antiquity, predating Michelangelo's David—fell from its wooden pedestal in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and broke into 28 recognisable pieces and hundreds of small fragments. As the Renaissance progressed painting assumed a higher place in the hierarchy of the arts than sculpture.

Or do the poets have the last laugh? In some ways their works corrupt least of all, and can be committed to memory; 'the words of a dead man/ Are modified in the guts of the living', as Auden put it in his elegy *In Memory of W.B. Yeats*.

4. Dramatic and Performance art: art as experience

Here we need to take a step back, or sideways. Art is not just about or contained in objects, art objects; perhaps even more importantly it is about or resides in experience, artistic experience, or shared experience. You may remember that Shared Experience was the name of a leading fringe theatre company in Britain in the 1980s. Theatre (with live music) is perhaps the preeminent art of shared experience. A theatrical experience is a unique event, even if it is part of a long run.

If you've had any experience on the other side of the footlights, you know that every performance and every audience is completely different. You sense that from the beginning of the show; this audience is sluggish, cold, this one is alive, alert; this one is friendly, this one is hostile. Actors are constantly adjusting—improvising if you like—even if they are speaking the same lines and following the same movements. Of course they are, because they are part of an emotional, even spiritual continuum with the audience. You can't act as if the audience wasn't there. Some classical pianists try.

But how does all that fit with art's longing or need for permanence? There is nothing permanent in essence about a theatrical performance, or a live concert. I say in essence because of course such events can now be recorded. Doesn't that change everything? Well only up to a point, Lord Copper.

5. The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

I take a short detour into the world of Walter Benjamin and his famous essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Benjamin argued

that new media and means of reproduction had radically changed the nature of art, destroying the aura of the unique, ritualistic artwork and replacing it with something much more mobile; a reproducible artwork which came to meet you halfway. 'The choral production,' as he put it, 'performed in the auditorium or the open air, resounds in the drawing room.' Not only the nature but the purpose of art would be changed: art would become radically politicised, aimed at changing the unfair power relations of capitalism.

This is more about uniqueness than ephemerality, but the idea of the artwork coming to meet you halfway still has resonance (certainly for me as I love to listen to live Proms in the kitchen at home), even if Benjamin's hopes for the politicisation of art have still to be realised.

6. Wine as an art of ephemerality and evanescence

I have come a long way round but I have finally reached the subject of wine, or wine and art. I suggest, tentatively, that it might be worth giving consideration to wine (and cuisine) as examples of ephemeral or evanescent artforms.

Now there are formidable obstacles here—perhaps even greater than those which faced the people in Florence in the winter of 1494 who wanted to hold on to Michelangelo's snow sculpture, to give it some lasting form and credibility. The most obvious perhaps are connected with the fact that here we are in the realm of what have been called the 'lower senses' of taste and smell.

If there is a hierarchy of art-forms (though one that changes as we have seen) there is a certainly a hierarchy of senses. Taste and smell—and perhaps

touch—come below vision and hearing. They are ‘animalistic’, associated with simple needs and embarrassing bodily functions.

Even worse, for our purposes, they are extremely difficult to describe and almost impossible to notate, and record. The vocabulary of taste and smell is notoriously limited. If you are a wine writer you lie awake at night trying to think of a simile for ‘minerality’. Some wine writers have given up on all that and confine themselves to giving wines marks out of 100 (though as with American students these days mysteriously no-one ever scores less than 80). But just think how exciting art criticism would be if it confined itself to giving paintings marks out of 100!

7. Wine and time (temporality)

I’m not sure it’s right to say wine is ephemeral. Once you open a bottle, to be sure, it is pretty ephemeral; it will probably be consumed within hours, at most a couple of days. But that bottle may have rested undisturbed in a cellar for decades.

Wine ages. Ageability is what gives certain wines—fine Bordeaux, vintage port—special status and collectability. But just think what those two words mean. What other artwork or object of aesthetic appreciation—to sidestep the perhaps unnecessary debate about whether wine can be a work of art—can be said to age: that is to mature, to improve with age, ultimately to perish?

Those terms are not usually applied to paintings, sculptures, musical masterpieces, dramas, etc. These are perfect at the moment of completion and

can at best only hold that perfection. Perhaps certain buildings acquire an attractive patina with age. Dramas and musical masterpieces and poems are, to be sure, constantly being reinterpreted and so in a way can be refreshed. And there are works such as Beethoven’s late quartets that are only properly appreciated decades or centuries after they were composed (as Beethoven himself predicted)—but even that doesn’t mean that they mature with age, or just age.

We age, unfortunately. We lose our smoothness of skin, our elasticity, even our mobility and eventually our faculties. No pious observance or ritual can put paid to wrinkles, as Horace said in his ode to Postumus, who hoped that his wealth and religious piety might stave off the deprivations of time (of course, Horace was writing before the time of Botox). Those are the brute facts that make us run to art, to something that will defy time, preserve some part of us, our love maybe, in immortal amber or aspic. *Non omnis moriar*, cries Horace: not all of me will die.

Wine is embarrassingly like us. The lifespan of a fine wine can be as great as that of a human being. It shares our frailty, our fluidity—maybe also our transient glory. That frailty and fluidity are what we have tried to defy and counter, from the time of Horace onwards, with our immortal works of art. But what if we were to allow ourselves to draw closer to, to consider more seriously, artworks or objects of aesthetic appreciation that embrace time, and time’s passing, instead of defying it?

8. Evanescence

There is in fact a distinction to be made between ephemerality and evanescence. Ephemeral means 'for the day'; a daily newspaper could be considered a classic ephemeral phenomenon. It will not last for more than a day (usually), but for that day it can have a robust presence. Evanescence goes further in that it implies that the experience of something includes the sense of its fleetingness, that it is, literally or metaphorically, constantly in the act of slipping from one's grasp.

Wine might be the classic case of this. Our neglected senses of taste and smell are intrinsically connected with evanescence. It is much harder to grasp and retain an 'image' of what we taste and smell, as compared to one of what we see or hear. As we sniff the bouquet of a wine, we are on the trail of something subtle and elusive, almost impossible to pin down. We might feel we have a firmer grasp with taste, but that too lasts a very short time and is constantly changing, as the wine meets different parts of our sensory apparatus and is itself changed by the passing of time and contact with the air.

9. Art, time and memory

What tastes and smells lack in terms of clear definition, they gain in evocative power. Smells and tastes may not represent anything, but they certainly evoke feelings and memories. After all, was it not the taste of a madeleine cake dipped in tea or tisane which opened the door to the treasure-house of memory which became Proust's *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*?

With an evanescent art-form like a theatrical or musical performance, a snow sculpture, a wine or a great culinary experience (if we admit those into the realm of art), memory is clearly going to be of especial importance. My sense is that the question of mechanical recording or reproduction which we mentioned earlier is essentially a red herring. If there was a device which could precisely record the experience you had tasting or drinking a wine, what difference would that make? I think it would be a distraction from and a denaturing of the experience.

Wine and food are enjoyed in intimate settings, on the whole; there are of course such things as grand public feasts but these are often not the most satisfying gastronomic experiences. Wine and food are enjoyed and shared with friends; they are a medium of friendship.

Horace once again got to the heart of the matter in a series of odes on the subject of wine. Here's my translation of Horace's greatest wine ode.

Odes 3.21

*Your time is up, my faithful aged
 Margaux, contemporary, my twin—
 just think of it, you were vintaged
 the year of Supermac's shameless spin,
 that 'you've never had it so good' guff—
 oh come, descend: old friend
 Jim has called for smoother stuff.*

*Heaven knows what havoc or ferment –
what vehement argument
or crazy love obsession
or merciful slumping
into snores you have in store.*

*Though philosophically inclined
and aptest to peruse
abstruser tomes by Plato
I know my friend will not refuse
a little tippie of the warming kind
not scorned by stern old Cato.*

*In vino veritas, they say; you,
venerable vintage, have the subtle knack
of mellowing tough nuts; such a dusty
bottle can unlock from the most crusty
the best-kept secret and release the craic.*

*And that's not all; you can restore
to a desperate mind the balm of hope;
give strength and sustenance to the poor
man faced with all the aftermath of war;
one wee dram and he'll feel potent as a Pope.*

*Your presence brings diviner traces –
goaty Bacchus and the gorgeous Venus,
if she's willing, and the gang of Graces,
so slow to untie their virgins' girdles,
all dance around us while we drink till dawn.*

This ode sums up everything Horace thought was important about wine, which means most of what he thought was important about life, and art. First, friendship: the ode is addressed to his old comrade-at-arms from the battlefield of Philippi, Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus. Friendship is about differences as well as similarities and closenesses. Messalla Corvinus was a very different character from Horace, one senses—crusty and difficult where Horace was warm and voluble.

This leads on to the second thing, philosophy. Wine is a philosophical thing, as well as a sensuous, even riotous one. That is to say it helps us to live well, however strange that notion may seem.

Third, divinity—wine is a commerce with the divine. This may seem even more far-fetched. But this is what Horace is saying in the final stanza. Wine, the right wine, and as we will see this is no ordinary wine, takes us beyond ourselves, to magical places. Wine, as the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset recognised, is not just vino, something you glug in a bar, but vino divino, something which transports you to another realm.

Which brings us to the fourth thing, mortality. Perhaps the most important and moving words in this wonderful poem are the first three, 'O nata mecum'. This special jar of Massic (one of the top Roman wines) was vintaged the year Horace was born, the year of consul Manlius, 65 BC. Wine is born with us and dies with us. It is not aere perennius, more lasting than bronze, as the poetry will prove to be.

Wine is not aere perennius, far from it, but it leaves warm memories, traces in the heart. It can even change people; it is of course a kind of drug. This is the message of Isak Dinesen's great fable *Babette's Feast*—the tale of a refugee French chef, Babette, marooned in a community of gloomy Scandinavian religious fanatics who hold the things of this world in contempt and live for the world to come. For twelve years Babette works as a cook for two spinster sisters, Philippa and Martine, daughters of the founder of the sect, both great beauties in their youth.

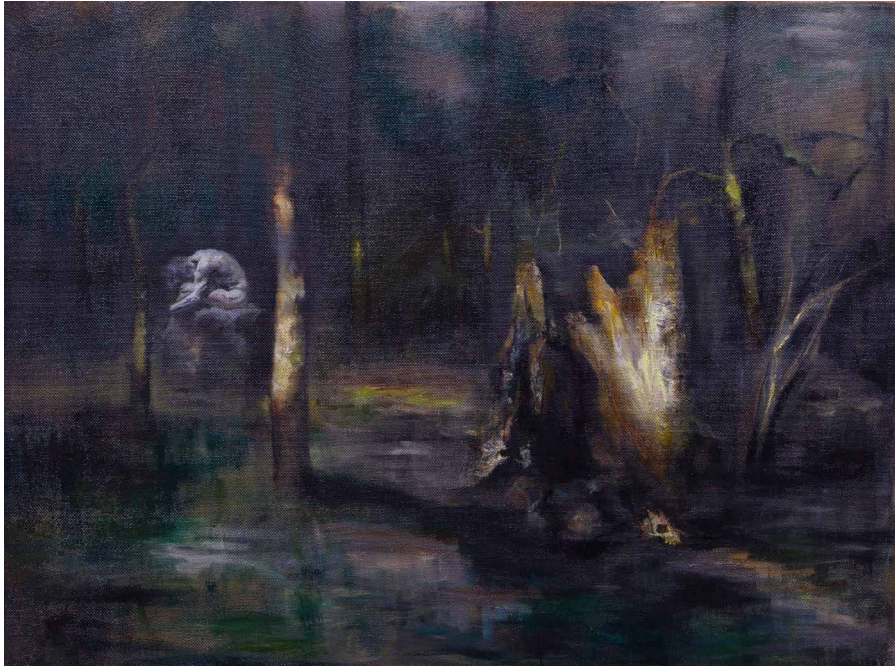
Babette wins the lottery and decides to give a feast, up to the highest Parisian standards, for the puritanical burghers of Berlevaag. They do not really know what she is up to, as crates full of delicacies arrive, and they do not know what they are eating and drinking—except one character, General Loewenhielm, former suitor of Martine - but as the turtle soup is succeeded by the cailles en sarcophage, and the fine Amontillado gives way to the Veuve Clicquot 1860 and the Clos Vougeot 1846, they sense something has happened, something has changed. Old grudges and enmities magically dissolve; old loves revive. People have been made human. And only an artist could have made that happen—in this case the artist-chef Babette, who makes a heart-changing wonder out of the mortal, the perishable, the evanescent.

Unfortunately it turns out that Babette has spent all her winnings on the feast. Instead of being rich, the sisters lament, she will be as poor as before. Babette responds with something like scorn. 'I am a great artist!' she exclaims. 'A great artist, mesdames, is never poor.' The good-hearted Philippa tries to console her: 'In Paradise you will be the great artist that God meant you to be!' Maybe she had still not got the point.

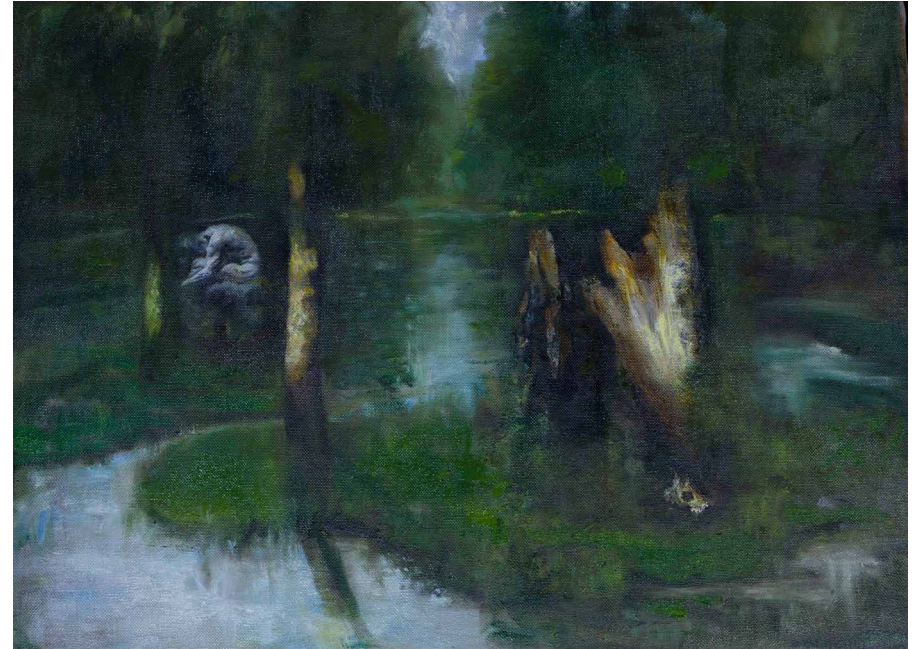
WORKS BY SOME OF THE ARTISTS ATTENDING
THE ALPINE FELLOWSHIP MEETING.

SEVERAL OF THE ARTISTS RESIDING WITH US WERE
HARD AT WORK ON PAINTINGS, SCULPTURES
AND PHOTOGRAPHS INSPIRED BY OUR THEME.
NOT ALL OF THEM WERE WILLING TO SHOW THEIR
UNFINISHED WORK TO A WIDER PUBLIC,
BUT THE WORKS THAT FOLLOW GIVE SOME IDEA OF
HOW THE ARTISTS AMONG US UNDERSTOOD
THE PRESENCE OF EPHEMERA IN A WORLD WHERE
PERMANENCE BECKONS FROM AFAR.

I went to the woods, I
Alan Lawson
oil on linen, 2014



I went to the woods, II
Alan Lawson
oil on linen, 2015



'I went to the woods, i' was painted over an autumn when my mother was sick with cancer. It was some kind of attempt to find solace perhaps, to make sense of our place in this world. The painting reflects the mood I was in. Painting this old tree trunk I was visited by wrens, nutcrackers, roe deer. Over the winter my mother died, I read Tolstoy's 'Three deaths'. In the Spring I took the painting back out to the woods and painted over it. 'I went to the woods, ii' was made. The painting reflects a brighter mood perhaps, spring can do that: gold crests, wagtails, and dippers returned, and some sense that nature might be a redeeming force, a way of slowing time perhaps, and maybe a sense of the permanent within the order of the fleeting seasons. The original painting is still present underneath, like all grief, a permanent feature of life, but its potency diminishes, life adds layers, new patinas, new colours.

And the ice melts and seas rise—Portrait 3
Alan Lawson
Plaster and Wax Sculpture, 2016



The title is taken from a line of poetry by Gillian Clarke. I was initially attempting to explore the idea of global warming through a simple sculpture of a head. What could be more fitting? We are the central protagonists in this drama. There seems to be a collective apathy towards climate change perhaps because it has become so overtly politicised, thus the head is lying down. The sculpture is in plaster and finished in wax, to mimic both marble and ice. The former being the classical medium for sculpture and the latter a fragile, ephemeral substance. The inside features of the portrait are different to the outside features which is an admission to my not knowing who exactly the 'I' is. Ultimately the sculpture becomes a type of cenotaph to modern man and his lack of meaning.

Alpine Waves
Roeland Verhallen
Photograph, 2016



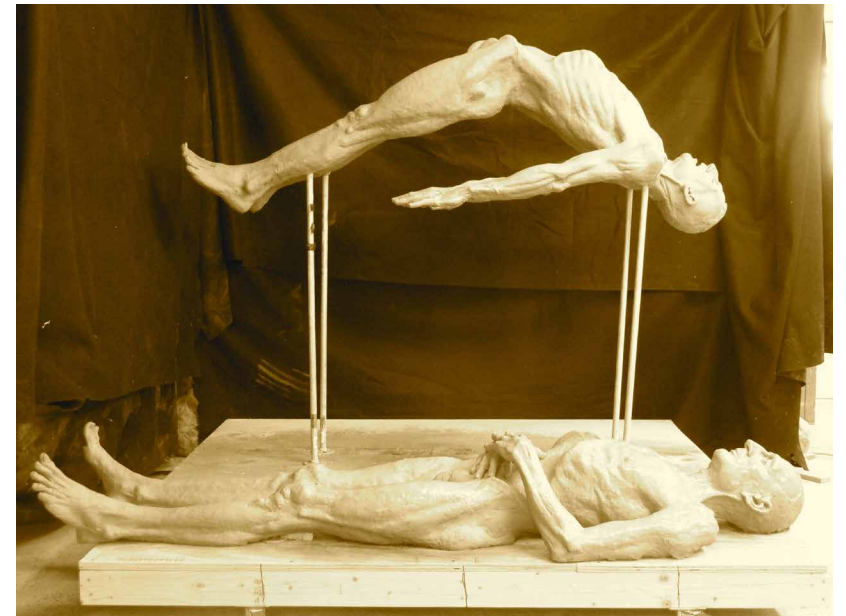
The photograph of the water is a double-exposure, of water in Venice and of water in Amsterdam. Arguably the same: the two photographed bodies of water are connected, and each water molecule remains the same, yet the overall shape of the water is constantly changing. Is this the ultimate form of permanence, or of impermanence?

The Marriage of Atheism and the Sacred
Marc Vinciguerra
Clay to be fibreglassed, 2016



The limbs are falling but the ribcage is ascending making a final balance in the body between the ephemeral that cannot verticalize it self and the ribcage that ascends gracefully in the light of eternity, lifting the rest of the reluctant body.

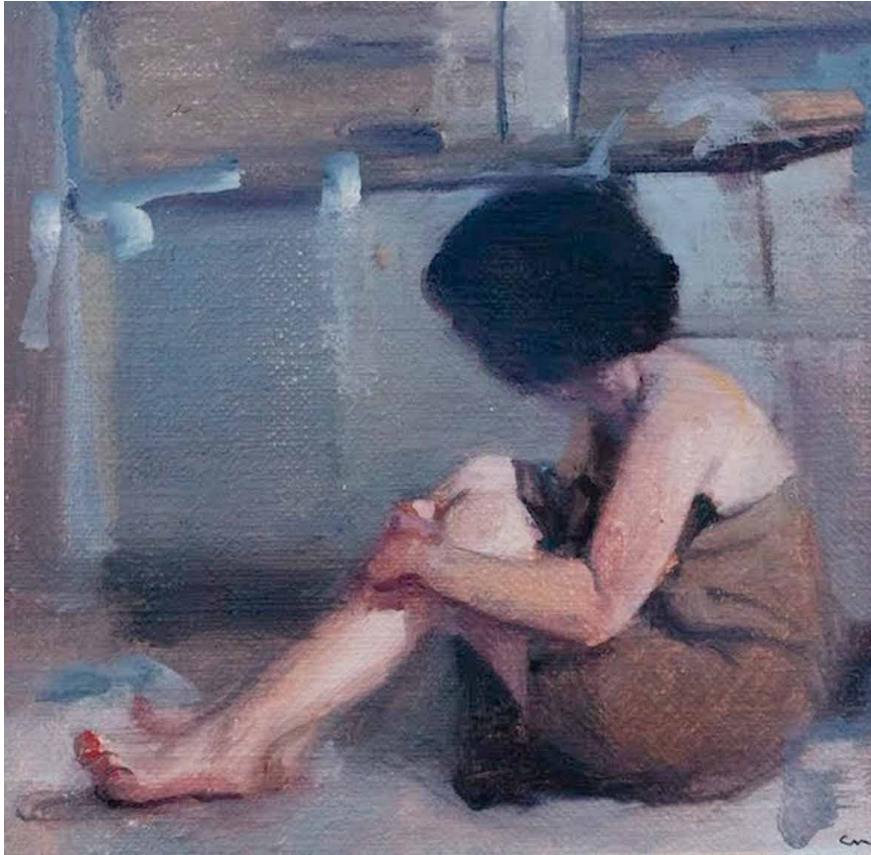
Central Panel of the 'Triptych of Secular Transcendence'
Marc Vinciguerra
Clay to be fibreglassed, 2014/2016



The second image is another statue, the body lift it self up or is lifted by a metaphysical force, this is the separation with the ephemeral and the beginning of possible total absorption in what is not finite.

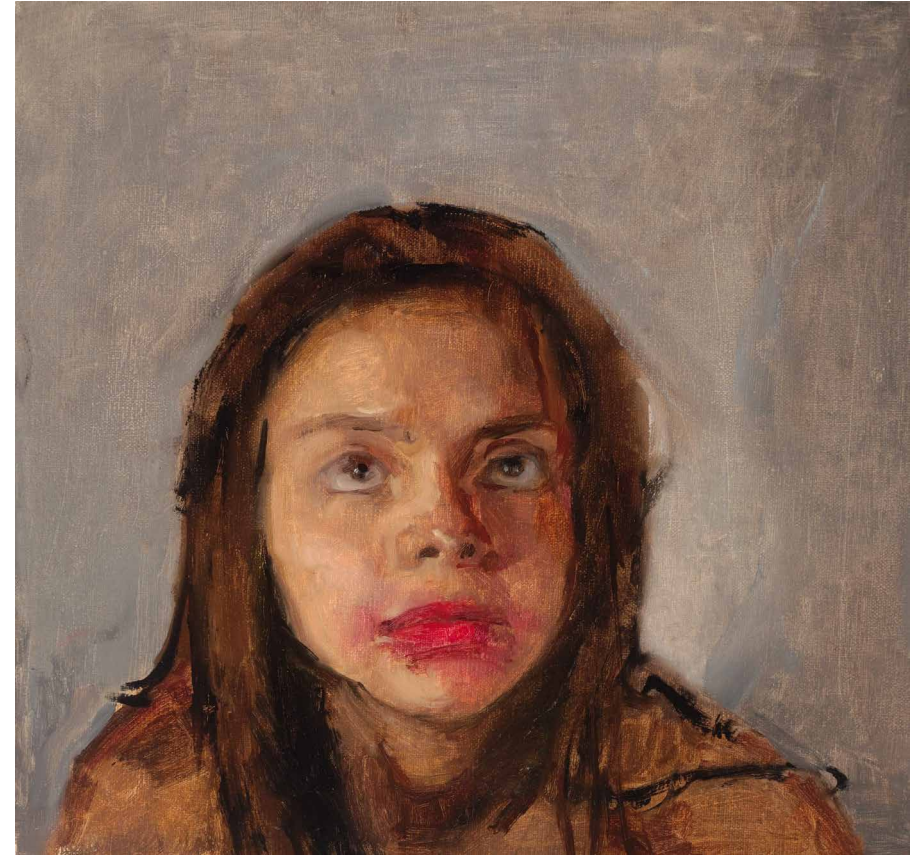
Untitled
Sara Sisun

4" x 4" oil on linen. A study of my mom sitting on her bathroom floor.



Lipstick
Sara Sisun

8" x 8" oil on linen. A portrait of my sister with lipstick smeared.



These paintings are forms of what Titian called poesie—little poems of light. They attempt to capture a glimpse or a transition of a moment felt in time.

Sara Sisun

A Few Thoughts on Ephemerality

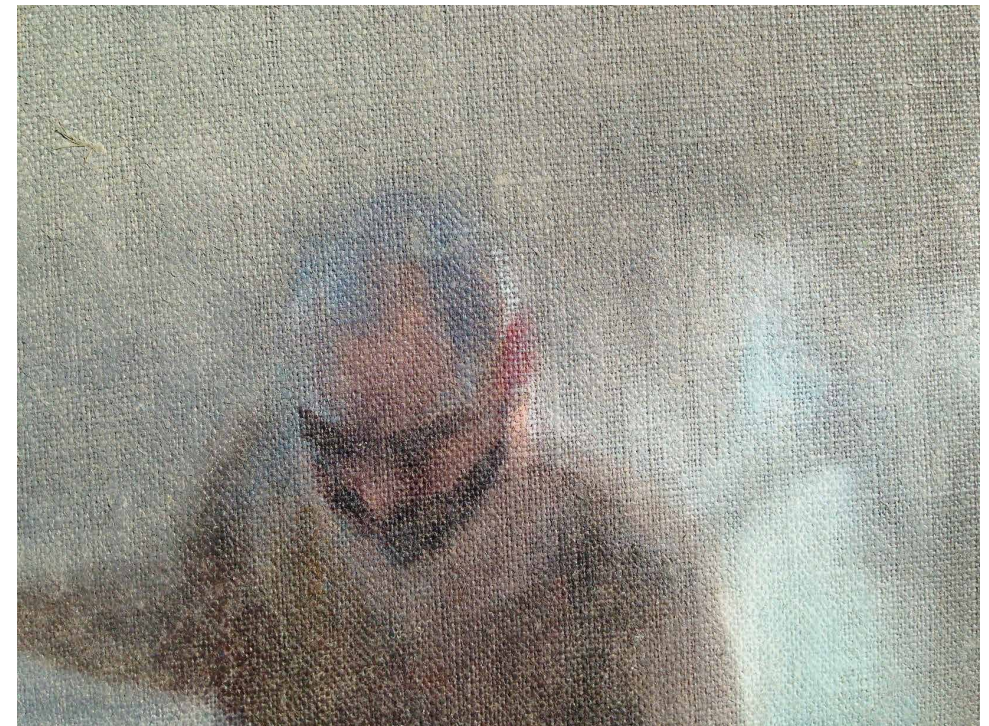
The Oxford English Dictionary defines ephemeral as, ‘a transitory experience.’ In Medieval Latin, the word specifically referred to insects that lived only for a day. This is perhaps the crucial quality of ephemerality—the hint of death. Not to be confused with the blank face of death itself; it is the luscious feeling of each moment having deferred death, postponed it a little longer, sweetly appreciated what it means to feel, touch, consume, embody, experience. Art tempts us by pretending immovability; the work of art often pretends immunity to change. Art offers the opposite of the swiping speed of Facebook, politics, or Amazon.com. The work of art shifts over time, changing by chance and beyond our control, and it outlives. It outlives both in memory and in form. The work of art draws conscious attention to the almost tangible ephemeral. Contemplation requires noticeable stillness. A space here arises in stark contrast to everyday busyness.

Kant would have called this moment disinterested, but I’m not sure it is. I have a deep, personal interest in the singularity of my own death. Kant is no doubt right that aesthetic pleasure is ultimately subjective in the sense of being rooted in a personal experience rather than in the external world. But philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Gadamer have argued against taking subjective experience, the personal, as an entirely private realm. Ernst Gombrich explains that there is no ‘innocent eye,’ what an artist sees is always shaped by tradition, training, culture, and disposition. The spectator is

Found Photo Iceberg

Sara Sisun

8" x 10" oil on linen. Painted from a collage of found photos.



infected with that view, and it seeps into culture, and through culture, back to the artist. In the sharing of the work of art, the boundaries between inner and outer are blurred. Art becomes a mirror of transition: from ourselves, into other, and back again. It becomes a place where we share an experience. Ephemerality hints at a shared hope that all things, like the work of art, are a transition and not an end.

I am to make my paintings look effortless, as though they have appeared in a flash and may disappear just as quickly. The paintings presented here in particular engage with a moment that is passing. Titian called studies like these poesie—little poems of light. They are meant to reflect the empathy for value, color and time.

Part Two

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Perception and the Moment.

Several of those present were from scientific or technological backgrounds, and it was gratifying to discover the way in which our discussions spilled over into some of the deep scientific questions about time, finitude and one-sided boundaries, such as the questions referred to by Jacob Burda in his opening remarks. Raymond Tallis's career as a neurologist and gerontologist has not impeded him from expressing himself as a novelist, philosopher and literary critic. As his talk displayed, he moves freely between the realm of empirical psychology and that of artistic meaning. Others present addressed scientific questions more directly, and we were expertly primed for this by Kia Nobre, who introduced us to fundamental observations in the psychology of perception, showing the extent to which what we see is determined by what we are looking for and by the categories that we bring to it.

However ephemeral our experience, it is indelibly marked by the search for what is permanent, and by the concepts and kinds that inform that search. The fleeting impressions of Hume and the empiricists are a fiction, and as Kia's examples showed, all perception aims beyond the moment, towards the long-term knowledge and safety of the perceiver. We enjoy ephemera only because we understand them as instances of things that endure through time, and time for us is not a sequence of infinitesimal moments but a constant scanning, a moving forward of the 'specious present', in which the immediate past and the immediate future are welded together. Kia's reflections were

taken forward by Luciano Floridi, to explore the deep problems of personal identity in an age of information overload. We are, he suggested, the last generation on earth to remember the systematic way of relating to each other through analogue devices. All future people will live their lives before a digital mirror, holding in their hand the instrument from which the 'digital gaze' targets and transfixes them. Inevitably the concept of self-identity will suffer a radical metaphysical shift, away from the temporal continuity that once defined us, towards the momentary assembly of dots on a screen.

Luciano's talk has been recorded on video. Here, as a fitting substitute, he has kindly provided us with a shorter but equally fascinating set of reflections.

Luciano Floridi

PICTs as Technologies of the Self

Some time ago, I met a bright and lively graduate student, who registered with Facebook during the academic year 2003-04, when she was a student at Harvard. Her Facebook ID number was 246. Impressive. A bit like being the 246th person to land on a new planet. Such Facebook ID numbers disappeared from sight in 2009,^[1] when Facebook adopted friendly usernames to make it much easier to find people. The change was necessary because, in a few years, the Facebook planet has become rather crowded, as the aforementioned student has been rapidly joined by hundreds of millions of users worldwide. Half a billion was reached in July 2010; the billion mark was passed in October 2012.

The previous story is a good reminder of how more and more people spend an increasing amount of time broadcasting themselves, digitally interacting with each other, within an infosphere that is neither entirely virtual nor only physical. It is also a good reminder of how influential Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are becoming in shaping our personal identities. They are the most powerful technologies of the self^[2] to which we have ever been exposed. Clearly, we should handle them carefully, as they are significantly modifying the contexts and the practices through which we shape ourselves. Let me explain.

In the philosophy of mind, there is a well-honed distinction between who we are—let us call this our personal identities—and who we think we are—call

this our self-conceptions. Needless to say, there is a crucial difference between being Napoleon and believing yourself to be Napoleon. The two selves—our personal identities and our self-conceptions—flourish only if they support each other in a mutually healthy relationship. Not only our self-conceptions should be close to, and informed by, who we really are. Our actual personal identities are also sufficiently malleable to be significantly influenced by who we think we are, or would like to be. If you think you are confident, you are likely to become so, for example.

Things get more complicated because our self-conceptions, in turn, are sufficiently flexible to be shaped by who we are told to be, and how we wish to be perceived. This is a third sense in which we speak of ‘the self’. It is the social self, so elegantly described by Marcel Proust^[3] in the following passage:

But then, even in the most insignificant details of our daily life, none of us can be said to constitute a material whole, which is identical for everyone, and need only be turned up like a page in an account-book or the record of a will; our social personality is created by the thoughts of other people. Even the simple act that we describe as ‘seeing some one we know’ is, to some extent, an intellectual process. We pack the physical outline of the creature we see with

[1] Users still have Facebook ID numbers, which can easily be found by using online services such as <http://findmyfacebookid.com/>. Mine for example is 556011030.

[2] The expression ‘technologies of the self’ was coined by the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984).

[3] Proust (1996), *Overture*.

all the ideas we have already formed about him, and in the complete picture of him which we compose in our minds those ideas have certainly the principal place. In the end they come to fill out so completely the curve of his cheeks, to follow so exactly the line of his nose, they blend so harmoniously in the sound of his voice that these seem to be no more than a transparent envelope, so that each time we see the face or hear the voice it is our own ideas of him which we recognise and to which we listen.

The social self is the main channel through which ICTs, and especially interactive social media, exercise a deep impact on our personal identities. Change the social conditions in which you live, modify the network of relations and the flows of information you enjoy, reshape the nature and scope of the constraints and affordances that regulate your presentation of yourself to the world and indirectly to yourself, and then your social self may be radically updated, feeding back into your self-conception, which ends up shaping your personal identity. Using the previous example: if people think and say that you are confident and you wish to be seen by them as confident, then you are more likely to conceive yourself as being confident, and so you may actually become confident.

There are some classic puzzles about personal identity. They are linked to continuity through time or possible scenarios: are you the same person you were last year? Would you be the same person if you had grown up in a different place? How much of yourself would be left, if you had your brain implanted in a different body? To someone used to ruminating about such questions the whole phenomenon of the construction of personal identities online may seem frivolous and distracting, a sort of 'philosophy for dummies', unworthy of se-

rious reflection. But in the real world, such a construction is a concrete and pressing issue to a fast growing number of people who have lived all their adult life already immersed in Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, Flickr, and so forth. To them, it seems most natural to wonder about their personal identities online, to treat them as a serious work-in-progress, and to toil daily to shape and update them. It is the hyper-self-conscious generation, which facebooks, tweets, skypes, and instant-messages its subjective views and personal tastes, its private details and even intimate experiences, in a continuous flow.

Hyper-self-consciousness

Maintaining an updated and accurate presence online is not an easy task. Nor is it taken lightly. According to a study by the Pew Research Center^[4] published in 2012, in the US, teenage girls send an average of 80 texts a day, followed by boys, with 'only' an average of 30. And if you thought that emails were 'so last week' because today it is all about SMS text messages, then it is time for one more upgrade. In 2012, instant messages on chat apps, such as WhatsApp, overtook SMSs for the first time, and by a wide margin: an average of 19 billion instant messages were sent daily, compared with 17.6 billion SMSs. In 2013, nearly 50 billion instant messages were expected to be sent per day, compared with just over 21 billion traditional SMSs.^[5]

[4] Lenhart (2012).

[5] Source: Informa, *OTT messaging traffic will be twice volume of P2P SMS traffic this year*, Press Release, 30 April 2013, available online.

Never before in the history of humanity have so many people monitored, recorded and reported so many details about themselves to such a large audience. The impact of so many gazillions of micro-narratives of all sorts and on all subjects is already visible. For example, they have already changed how we date and fall in love. Geosocial networking applications that allow users to locate other users within close proximity and on the basis of profiles and preferences—such as Grindr (to find, befriend and date gay, bisexual, and bi-curious men) and Tinder (a matchmaking app that facilitates anonymous communication for dating and networking)—are popular. And according to a study conducted by the electronics retailer PIXmania in 2013,^[6] tweets are the preferred way to start a relationship in the UK. It takes on average 224 tweets to start a relationship, compared to 163 text messages, 70 Facebook messages, 37 emails, or 30 phone calls. And once in a relationship, more than a third of interviewed couples admit to exchanging saucy texts and explicit pictures with each other, so-called sexting. It all starts and ends at a distance, as ICTs are also the preferred means to end a relationship: 36% do it by phone, 27% by text message, and 13% through social media. Meeting in real life to say goodbye is so old fashioned.

Most significantly, given our topic, the micro-narratives we are producing and consuming are also changing our social selves and hence how we see ourselves. They represent an immense, externalised stream of consciousness, which the philosopher and psychologist William James (1842–1910) would have found intriguing:

[...] consciousness, then, does not appear to itself as chopped up in bits [...] it is nothing joined; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the meta-

phors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let's call it the stream of thought, consciousness, or subjective life.^[7]

Today, consciousness is still a stream. But it does appear in bits, not James' bits, of course, but rather the digital ones of social media. Nothing is too small, irrelevant or indeed private to be left untold. Any data point can contribute to the description of one's own personal identity. And every bit of information may leave a momentary trace somewhere, including the embarrassing pictures posted by a schoolmate years ago, which will disappear, of course, like everything else on this planet, but just more slowly than our former selves will.

Some Jeremiahs lament that the hyper-self-conscious, Facebook generation, which is constantly asking and answering 'where are you?' on the Google map of life, has lost touch with reality. They complain that such a new generation lives in virtual bubbles where the shallowest babbles are the only currency; that it cannot engage with the genuine and the authentic; that it is mesmerised by the artificial and the synthetic; that it cannot bear anything that is slow-paced or lasts longer than a TED talk;^[8] that it is made up of narcissistic, egocentric

[6] Carter (12 September 2013).

[7] James (1890), vol. I, pp. 239-43.

[8] TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) is a global set of conferences in which speakers are given only a few minutes (the maximum is eighteen, it is usually much less) to present their innovative ideas engagingly.

selfies (self-taken photographs usually posted online); that it is a generation incapable of responsibility because everything is expected to be erasable, revisable, and reversible anyway (one way of reading 'the right to be forgotten').

There might be some truth in all this. In 2013, Instagram contained over 23 million photos tagged #selfie, and 51 million tagged #me.^[9] Still in 2013, a search engine such as Statigram indicated that the #selfie had more than doubled (52 million) and the #me almost tripled (144 million). However, in the end, I am not convinced by the Jeremiahs, for two main reasons.

First, because the supposedly genuine and the authentic too tend to be highly manufactured cultural artefacts. What we consider natural is often the outcome of a merely less visible human manipulation, like a well-kept garden. Indeed, we have had such an impact on our planet that geologists now speak of 'anthropocene'. 'Nature' is often how a culture understands what surrounds it.

And second, because social media also represent an unprecedented opportunity to be more in charge of our social selves, to choose more flexibly who the other people are whose thoughts and interactions create our social personality, to paraphrase Proust, and hence, indirectly, to determine our personal identities. Recall how the construction of your social self (who people think you are) feeds back into the development of your self-conception (who you think you are), which then feeds back into the moulding of your personal identity (who you are). More freedom on the social side also means more freedom to shape oneself.

The freedom to construct our personal identities online is no longer the freedom of anonymity advertised by Peter Steiner's famous cartoon, in which a dog, typing an email on a computer, confesses to another dog that 'On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog'. Those were the nineties.^[10] Today, if one is or behaves like a dog, Facebook, Google or at least some security agency probably knows about it. Rather, it is the freedom associated with self-determination and autonomy. You may no longer lie so easily about who you are, when hundreds of millions of people are watching. But you may certainly try your best to show them who you may reasonably be, or wish to become, and that will tell a different story about you that, in the long run, will affect who you are, both online and offline. So the online experience is a bit like Proust's account-book, but with us as co-authors.

The Jeremiahs may still have a final point. They may be right in complaining that we are wasting a great opportunity, because, still relying on Proust's metaphor, what we are writing is not worth reading. They are disappointed by our performance as authors of our own self-narratives. But then, they have a picture of the past that is probably too rosy. Couch potatoes have been watching pictures and making small talk about their cats and the last holidays, in front of the wall of Plato's cave or TV screens, well before Facebook made it embarrassingly clear that this is how most of humanity would like to spend its hard-earned free time anyway. Aristotle

[9] *BBC News* (7 June 2013).

[10] Peter Steiner's cartoon was published in *The New Yorker*, 5 July, 1993.

knew that a philosophical life requires leisure. Unfortunately, the converse is not necessarily true: leisure does not require philosophy and may easily lead only to entertainment. The result is that, as we learn from the Choir at the beginning of *La Traviata* by Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901):

Giocammo da Flora.

E giocando quell'ore volar.

[We played at Flora's,

And by playing, time flew.]

Giuseppe Verdi, La Traviata,

Atto Primo, Preludio, Scena I, Coro I.

Science, Technology and the Pursuit of Stability.

Digest of a talk by
Daniel Dewey

Mortality is the focus of our deepest anxieties, and increasingly scientists and philosophers are turning their attention to the possibility that the normal causes of death—disease, ageing, accidents—could be overcome. The question is, should we want this? Leon Kass, in 'L'Chaim and its Limits', argues that we should not want this, since much that we value is predicated on our finitude. Still, by lasting longer we will get to know ourselves better, to speak more openly to each other and to expand and enhance our choices. We need good reasons for not aiming at this improvement to the human condition. Of course the benefits will be unevenly distributed, but let us put aside issues of justice and the wider societal impact, and simply ask what we should want and why.

It is reasonable to want to overcome life-threatening diseases, and also ageing, neither of which seem to bring compensating benefits. Weirder speculations about the possibility of enduring as cyborgs, or software programs to be uploaded into other bodies, should not deter us from considering the benefits that would come from vanquishing bodily decay. Of course immortality is, literally, inachievable, since the universe is finite in both space and time. But what people have wanted is long life—large numbers seem larger than infinity, which doesn't feel like a number at all. (Does it make sense to want the years of your life to stand in one-to-one relation with a proper subset of themselves?)

Daniel rehearsed the possibilities—living as long as the time elapsed since the Council of Nicea, as the time elapsed since the Neolithic age, and so on. There seems to be no way of grasping the distinctions here. Nevertheless there is a real dispute between the immortalists, who wish to endure, and the mortalists, who welcome finitude. The first are criticised as naïve, optimistic, and simplistic, the second as world-weary, pessimistic and over-elaborate in their demands.

Daniel rehearsed some of the questions at issue in the dispute between these two. For the immortalists it could be said that healthy life is usually good, and choice likewise, and the good of these things does not diminish with their increase. There is, Daniel pointed out, a techno-immortalist mindset, arising from Bacon's project of effecting all things possible, and this is a constant spur to research. The mortalists respond by saying that life is less good than you think, that the prospect of death has benefits, that we may choose unwisely and in any case aggregate welfare is not what it is all about. A long life could lead to boredom, uncertain health, exhaustion of the world and of the self. The immortalist responds by pointing to the benefits of an expanded world, opportunities for culture-making, the enhanced freedom that comes from longevity.

In the end, Daniel was inclined to say, the crucial question concerns death. Is it true, as Leon Kass, Bernard Williams and Simone de Beauvoir all in their several ways argue, that death can benefit us? Kass, for example, believes that love and the sense of beauty depend on death's presence in our consciousness, and both he and Williams see certain indispensable virtues (courage, charity,

justice) as bound up with our frailty and finitude. But Daniel implied, those virtues might not be worth the cost, and in any case death is not a day-to-day motivator of our actions. Daniel concluded by suggesting that the immortalist has a secret weapon in this debate. By extending life we don't abolish death; instead we bring it within the sphere of human choice. We can choose to die, and by acknowledging this we rescue death from nature and make it part of the life of freedom.

Part Three

PHILOSOPHY

Transience and the Constancy of Existence

Mark Wrathall

Here are two sweeping generalizations about the trajectory of Western culture:

1. In western philosophical and Judeo-Christian thought, the transitory and ephemeral have traditionally been devalued; the eternal has been privileged. The eternal is the positive ideal, the departure from which constitutes the failure of the temporal world.

- And so, consequently, the tradition holds our purportedly eternal aspects (our minds, souls, spirits) to be what's really important about us.

- When it comes to the relative valuation of the transitory vis-à-vis the eternal, much more important than the explicit beliefs that people hold or the arguments and theories they articulate are the affective weight that each carries—where is our heart, our longing, our feelings? What shapes our dispositions?

2. This affective privileging of the eternal over the temporal has come under increasing pressure in the modern world as our practices become more and more this-worldly. Alan beautifully referred to this in his opening remarks. But we could say more, about the genealogy of the affective reorientation. For instance, we could recite the story of the way teleology has been banished from explanation; the way the natural / supernatural distinction is drawn, and the supernatural is dismissed; the way comparatively less effort, time,

and resources are devoted to practices meant to prepare us for eternity. Our concern with both social institutions and personal improvement focuses on flourishing within the bounds of mortal life—between birth and death. The *Art of Dying* (*Ars Moriendi*) no longer tops the best seller list.

So the situation is this: for much of the history of Western culture, we humans have intuitively understood ourselves as (in the words of Kierkegaard) 'a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal'. That is, we were thought to be immortal souls that somehow fall into time, and for a season (at least) have our being measured by time. As belief in the immortal soul is undermined, we are left with a sense of ourselves as wholly contained in and measured by time. For many, of course, this sense manifests itself as melancholic or nostalgic longing for the days when we could think of ourselves as eternal beings.

One of my favorite passages in *The Brothers Karamazov* captures this affect. Dmitri announces to Alyosha that he 'feels sorry to lose God.' 'What do you mean, 'sorry to lose God?'' Alyosha asks. Dmitri replies: 'Imagine: inside, in the nerves, in the head—that is, these nerves are there in the brain...

(damn them!) there are sort of little tails, the little tails of those nerves, and as soon as they begin quivering... that is, you see, I look at something with my eyes and then they begin quivering, those little tails... and when they quiver, then an image appears... it doesn't appear at once, but an instant, a second, passes... and then something like a moment appears; that is, not a moment—devil take the moment!—but an image; that is, an object, or an action, damn it! That's why I see and then think, because of those tails, not

at all because I've got a soul, and that I am some sort of image and likeness. All that is nonsense! Rakitin explained it all to me yesterday, brother, and it simply bowled me over. It's magnificent, Alyosha, this science! A new man's arising—that I understand.... And yet I am sorry to lose God! . . . But what will become of men then . . . without God and immortal life?

As is so often the case, Nietzsche clearly, concisely expressed an alternative and more optimistic affective response. In a note dating from Autumn 1887, Nietzsche wrote: 'Against the value of the eternally-remaining-the-same (of Spinoza's naiveté, Descartes' also), the value of the shortest and most ephemeral, the seductive flash of gold on the belly of the serpent Vita [life].'

And again, in *The Gay Science* §341, he refers to the 'tremendous moment', 'a single particular moment so tremendous that, having experienced it, you would be willing to endure everything else again just to have it once more.'

Shifting this kind of affective attraction was one of the central elements in Nietzsche's project of a revaluation of all values. Nietzsche wasn't alone in this changed orientation. The last century or so has seen the emergence of a variety of arguments—not just from philosophers—in support of the proposition that, because human beings are essentially constituted by temporality and transitoriness, we are inherently unsuited for eternity.

In my remarks today, I want to try to map out some of the conceptual terrain that such arguments traverse.

First, I want to try to get clear about what precisely it means to say that something is essentially temporal or transitory—that is, in time. Second, I'll

look briefly at a couple of ways of drawing the line from being temporal beings to being unsuited for eternity.

I want to start with a brief description of two distinct time phenomena—that is, two different ways in which the experience of time becomes salient. I think taking each as a paradigm of time leads to a slightly different way of analyzing how time structures our activities in the world. (I won't have time to discuss the third phenomenon—kairotic time, or the experience of being seized by the 'flash of gold on the belly of the serpent Vita'.)

Time Phenomenon number one: Reckoning with time. You're sitting in the cloisters of the San Giorgio monastery, enjoying good food and drink, interesting company, and scintillating conversation, but you're also mindful of the fact that you speak tomorrow, and you haven't yet cut your paper down to size to fit into the program. You glance at your watch, and start calculating how much sleep you'll need, how long it will take you to perform a quick edit on your paper, and calculate accordingly how much longer you can stay at the table before excusing yourself for the night.

Time Phenomenon number 2: Finding the time. Relations with your partner have been off for a while. Her professional career is taking off and she's increasingly engaged by and enthusiastic about her work. Your mother recently died, and you've been preoccupied and melancholic. You're growing apart. You want to do something romantic and spontaneous to get things back on track, but you know that in order for it really to work, you'll need to find just the right moment, when both of you can set everything else aside and just be together.

Now to some of you, those might not sound like different time phenomena at all. Finding the time, you might say, is simply a matter of reckoning with time—of calculating how much time you’ll need to do your spontaneous romantic getaway right and scheduling it in. But ‘finding the time’ involves an element of receptivity to powers beyond your control that ‘reckoning with time’ does not. All that ‘reckoning with time’ requires is that time be datable (that is, specifiable by reference to objective events and environmental features) and measurable. ‘Finding the time’ has a place for dating and measuring time. But it also sees that there are not just amounts of time but different kinds of time, right and wrong moments (in Heidegger jargon, time is ‘significant’). And it recognizes that while time is public in a broad sense (so that we can coordinate our activities with each other), it also has a distinct character depending on the way our individual projects, activities, and dispositional sets poise us or dispose us differently toward the present and the future.

Heidegger argues that the philosophical tradition has, by and large, focused on the way time shows up when we’re reckoning with time. Consider for example Aristotle’s widely influential account of time in the *Physics*. Aristotle identified two criteria of being in time, which he seemed to regard as necessarily co-extensive. Something is ‘in time’ according to Aristotle if:

1. it is contained by time; and
2. its being is measured by time.

1. Contained by time. Something is contained by time in Aristotle’s sense if it is surrounded by time, meaning there is time before and after it exists’

Thus, for Aristotle, sempiternal things (like the heavenly bodies) ‘exist when time exists’ (221a11) but they are not ‘in time’ because there is no definite span of time that characterizes their existence. By contrast, ‘things which are subject to perishing and becoming—generally, those which at one time exist, at another do not—are necessarily in time; for there is a greater time which will extend both beyond their being and beyond the time which measures their being’ (221b26-30).

2. Being is measured by time. Something’s being is measured by time if the kind of organization that time brings is definitive of the thing as the thing that it is. What is the kind of organization that time brings to the world?

- A. Time is dependent on change; no change, no time (218b21ff). It is only against the background of one thing changing that we can discern stasis—relative lack of change in another thing.
- B. Change, and thus time, is continuous (219a9ff). It’s analogue, rather than digital. Time isn’t composed of atoms of duration—it’s a single continuous dimension.
- C. Time brings all changes into relationship to each other. Aristotle: ‘time is present equally everywhere and with all things’ (218b13). Thus, time organizes our experience of the world by allowing us to recognize relationships between distinct objects undergoing distinct changes. It’s a kind of medium that renders diverse changes comparable.
- D. We apprehend time by marking out or ‘numbering’ ‘now’ moments, and time is ‘what is bounded by the ‘now’ (219a29).

E. The now moments are numbers in the sense that they have an ordinal (but not cardinal) relationship to each other—if I say ‘now - now - now—now’, the change at the fourth moment is not twice as much as the change at the second moment; nor is there necessarily twice as much time that has elapsed when the 4th moment is marked as there was when the 2nd moment was marked. But the ‘now’s’ mark out the moments in succession: 1st comes first, 2nd comes second, 3rd comes third, etc. As Aristotle puts it, ‘time is just this—number of motion in respect of ‘before’ and ‘after’ (219b1).

F. Thus, time makes one change measurable relative to another change—as I mark out now moments in one change (the movement of the sun through the sky, or the hands of a clock), I can use the units thus marked out as a metric to measure the other change (say, the presentation in the lecture hall).

So the being of a thing is measured by time when it is of such a nature as to come into being and or go out of being, and while it exists, it undergoes changes in an orderly succession.

Aristotle concluded that a mark of things that are contained in and measured by time is that they are ‘affected by time’: ‘A thing, then, will be affected by time, just as we are accustomed to say that time wastes things away, and that all things grow old through time, and that people forget owing to the lapse of time, but we do not say the same of getting to know or of becoming young or fair. For time is by its nature the cause rather of decay, since it is the number of change, and change removes what is’ (221a30-221b3). Aristotle’s view is, then, essentially an account of the time of ‘reckoning with time.’

Let’s draw the line here, connecting this view of us humans as reckoners with time to the question of our suitability or lack thereof for eternal life. To be essentially a time reckoner is to be a being whose life (and the existence of everything around her) is organized into sequential, datable, and measureable processes of growth, corruption, and decay. If that’s what we are essentially, then philosophers like Bernard Williams have noted ‘what a good thing it is that we are not [immortal]’ (Bernard Williams, ‘The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality’, in *Problems of the Self*, 82). This is because we are psychologically dependent, on Williams’ view, on having lives that proceed along more or less regular courses through predictable stages of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and eventual demise. As a result, the psychological effects of extending our current form of existence infinitely into the future would be unfortunate. Williams claimed, for instance, that after a few centuries of repeating the same activities over and over again, we inevitably would grow intolerably bored with our existence. Thus, Williams concludes, to be prone to death is to be *felix opportunitate mortis*—‘lucky in having the chance to die’ (Williams 1973, 100).

In her novel *All Men are Mortal*, Simone de Beauvoir takes a slightly different tack, suggesting that the real threat to our psychological well being posed by an infinite continuation of life is not so much boredom as indifference. While indifference and boredom are often treated as synonyms, one can see their distinctness in situations where I am indifferent about which of several activities to engage in but bored by none of them. I might, for instance, be indifferent about whether to spend Saturday afternoon watching a football match or riding my bike, but find both alternatives fun and engaging. Indif-

ference threatens not so much my enjoyment, but the significance of the activities in which I engage. If I'm truly indifferent, it simply doesn't matter that I chose to watch the match instead of ride my bike. Of course, an immortal has more time than we do to get bored with many things that seem to us inexhaustibly interesting. But, de Beauvoir suggests, certain activities and affairs (falling in love, participating in political turmoil and intrigues, etc.) could continue to engage an immortal no matter how many times he or she had participated in previous similar affairs.² The true threat posed by immortality on her account, then, isn't boredom. It's a growing indifference that threatens to strip every decision of its weight or significance. From the mere fact that 'I could not risk my life' any longer, de Beauvoir believes, I eventually would become indifferent to many things that were previously of paramount significance.

Moreover, once de Beauvoir's protagonist Fosca has seen human affairs repeatedly cycle through the same patterns without any genuine progress—something that apparently takes only seven or eight centuries—he loses the ability to either fear or hope for the future. He grows increasingly indifferent to the choices he makes—and thus existence loses for him the very character that makes it worthwhile. Thus de Beauvoir ends her novel emphasizing the immortal Fosca's envy of his mortal companions, who, in virtue of the fact that non-existence was a genuine possibility for them, 'knew . . . that it was important to be alive.' I've taken de Beauvoir and Williams as emblematic of thinkers who have reassessed the value of eternity by looking at the how important it is to us psychologically that we are subject to time. But human beings are not merely in time in the way a rock or a tree is in time—that is, our being is defined by

time not just because we are born, die, and change in between. Our being is defined by time because we are the beings who mark time and thus bring a temporal order to the world in the first place. And the temporal order we bring goes beyond uncovering the continuous sequentiality of change.

In conclusion, a few words about Heidegger's view, and how this leads Heidegger to a different account of our essential unsuitedness for eternity. For Heidegger, experiences like those I described in terms of 'finding the time' provide us with a more complete phenomenal basis for understanding the nature of time. Heidegger follows Aristotle in emphasizing that time involves a counting or marking of now-moments that makes it possible to measure the passage of time by comparing one change against another. Heidegger describes this as the 'datability' of time. Time is:

- A. Datable = specifiable by reference to environmental events and features. He also follows Aristotle in thinking that time discloses the world as subject to change in a way that is continuous and sequentially ordered. This is because, Heidegger argues, time is:
- B. Spanned = stretched between a past that is retained and a future that is anticipated. But Heidegger argues that time, in addition is:
- C. Public = now moments are shared, and we can coordinate our activities with respect to them. Finally, in virtue of the character of the shared public world and the particular projects or ends we are pursuing, Heidegger argues that time is disclosed as:
- D. Significant = times are differentiated into moments which are appropriate or inappropriate for certain activities.

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Disclosing a sequence or trajectory of now moments thus has the character of an 'interpretation' (where Heidegger means interpretation along the lines of the way an artist interprets a role in a play or a musician interprets a score—it is not a matter of putting something into words so much as enacting a possibility in a particular concrete context). So, Heidegger claims, 'time which has been interpreted has by its very nature the character of 'the time for something' or 'the wrong time for something' (414). Insofar as we are aware of the passage of time right now, on Heidegger's view, we aren't merely numbering the change and tracking sequential movements. We are also experiencing the weight of our past, anticipating the future, and thus seeing now as a moment that solicits us to respond in some ways and precludes us from responding in others. Thus, drawing on experiences like those I described as 'finding the time,' Heidegger arrives at an account of humans as essentially temporalizers. He means by this that it is fundamental to our structure as human beings to disclose or make manifest time as having a structure that is independent of us, but that can be disclosed in a variety of ways depending on one's particular stance toward the world.

'The time which has been made manifest reveals that structure with which we have earlier become acquainted as significance, and which constitutes the worldhood of the world. As 'the time for something', the time which has been made manifest has essentially a world-character. Hence, the time which makes itself manifest in the temporalizing of temporality is what we designate as 'world-time'. Now for the first time, the time with which we are concerned can be structurally and completely characterized: it is datable, spanned, public, and belongs as structured in this way to the world

itself [i.e., it is significant]' (414) Thus human temporalizing is finite in two respects: first, the way time shows up is not fully up to us; we can't master or control it (I was trying to gesture toward this element of passivity when I described the experience of time as 'finding the time'). In addition, temporalizing is finite because the character of the moments we disclose depends on the particular way we take up projects (future), and we can only pursue one set of possibilities at a time.

Human finitude, Heidegger argues, 'does not amount primarily to a stopping, but is a characteristic of temporalization itself' (330/378). That is, the opposite of temporality for Heidegger is not sempiternity; it would be to exist without an experience of projects, dispositions, and appropriate and significant moments. This means that the fact that I happen to occupy some discrete span of time (the span that's carved into my gravestone) is not the important sense in which my being is 'measured' by time. Rather, my being is measured by time because I exist as a temporalizer, as a being that makes sense of the present by retaining the past and anticipating the future. My finitude as a temporalizer is a function of the fact that I can only coherently mark out time (i.e., make sense of the present) by committing to some definite set of possibilities while giving up on others. This moment is temporalized for me by my commitment to being a philosopher, by my having waived the possibility of being an attorney that was open to me when I graduated from law school.

The more coherently and definitely I commit to being a particular individual, the more I embrace the 'finitude of existence,' and it is that commitment

that 'snatches one back from the endless multiplicity of possibilities which offer themselves.' The upshot for me as a being who is essentially in time is this: the more fully I commit to some particular way of being in the world, the more constant I make my existence, the more fully I embrace my finitude, the more moments will show up as significant for me as an individual.

But the cost of a passionate commitment to one way of being in time is to heighten the risk that I will find myself in a time that doesn't allow me to be me. But accepting that risk—'anticipating death,' in Heidegger's parlance—is the only attitude that will 'give a human being its goal absolutely, and shove existence into its finitude.' The more finite we make our lives, the more focused we become, the more meaningful events are, the riskier life is. To fully embrace the temporality of human existence is to reduce the distance between cases where I would stop being me and I would stop being.

The True Movement of Time

Sebastian Gardner

The main thing I want to convey is the sheer difficulty of understanding time—the reasons why it may be thought to pose an especially deep philosophical problem, which invites radical metaphysical solutions, one of which, Schelling's, I'll describe briefly at the end.

Augustine's puzzlement

There is, on the face of it, a clear difference between being able to think and talk about things in time, and being able to say what time itself is.

Being able to talk about things in time requires, at the most primitive level, a language with words like 'now', 'then', 'yet', and so on, and tenses for declining verbs; and, at a higher level of sophistication, in order to give events objective positions in time, we need some system of reference which defines units of time (hours, minutes, days of the week) and relates these to natural phenomena (the seasons, the position of the sun, atomic clocks, or whatever).

All of this is unproblematic.

Saying what time is, by contrast, in the distinctive and demanding sense peculiar to philosophy—saying what time is 'essentially' or 'in itself'—generates the consternation recorded in Augustine's famous statement, which I assume resonates with everybody: 'What, then, is time? If no one ask of

me, I know; if I wish to explain to him who asks, I know not.'^[1] Augustine implores God to help him understand 'this most entangled enigma', as he puts it.

Augustine is led to raise the question, interestingly, not by thinking about the circumstances of human knowledge or human existence, but by thinking about God—who, as an eternal being, must have existed before the world was created, which provokes Augustine to wonder what God was doing, so to speak, before Creation.

It might be thought, however, that Augustine's puzzlement is unnecessary. This would be the view of many contemporary philosophers, who will point out that there are several obvious things that can be said about time, implied by what's already been said: Time is a fundamental 'dimension' of things in the world, alongside space; time is capable of being measured and mapped with a system of dates; temporal facts can be described by means of tensed verbs and words like 'now', and so on. (To which might be added the several propositions from Aristotle which Mark has already referred to: No change without time, no time without change, and so on.)

So why is this not enough? Why can't we claim to know time fully, just by virtue of knowing how to talk about things in time? Why think there is anything more to be known? Is Augustine perhaps puzzled by time only

[1] *Confessions*, Ch. XIV, Sect. 17.

because he attempts to understand the world from the standpoint of God? (A mistake which modern philosophy has cured us of—or so it will be said.)

Time must be represented as a line

So here begins an argument for why time poses a difficulty of understanding, which means that there must be more to be known about it.

Everyone will agree that time can be represented as a line, a single straight line without thickness, and without definite beginning or end.^[2] In fact we must model time on a line if we are to think of events in the world, or in our own mental life, as occurring in an objective order. Thus Kant: ‘For in order that we may make inner alterations [i.e. successive changes in our mental states] thinkable, we must represent time figuratively as a line, and the inner alteration through the drawing of this line (motion), and so in this manner by means of outer [spatial] intuition make comprehensible the successive existence of ourselves in different states.’ The thought here is, simply: Of course, in order to think that I am now in this room, I don’t need to ‘represent time as a line’; but in order to think that my being in Venice comes after my boarding a flight to Venice, and so on, I do need to represent time as a line,—implicitly, if not explicitly.

Some anthropologists have disputed this, arguing that the linear way of representing time is distinctively western and modern, a way of thinking about nature that reflects a certain, optional, proto-scientific approach to reality. Primitive or so-called traditional societies, it has been claimed, conceive time in radically different ways—they think of time instead, it has been said, as a

matter of instantaneous alternation between discontinuous conditions, defined by different activities, giving and receiving brides, agricultural tasks and so on. What we would call moving through time becomes something more like a change of settings, as a light switch may be on or off.

But I think it’s clear that the claim is extremely weak. In order to use these characterizations in a way that counts as thinking about time, rather than thinking about other things (e.g. social positions), the linear picture is presupposed.^[4] These societies must have the representation of time as a line, whether or not they theorize and systematize it in the way that we do.

Time must be represented as a line in/with movement

The mere use of a line, however, is of course not enough to capture time. To characterize time simply as a line would imply that it is some sort of fourth spatial dimension, additional to the three dimensions of Euclidean space. In order to differentiate time we add that it involves movement in a way that space does not. Time flows, time passes, and so on. Kant makes this clear when he adds that we must represent ‘the inner alteration through the drawing of this line (motion)’. And it was implied by Mark’s characterization of time for Heidegger as involving ‘spanning’ and ‘stretching’.

[2] Which is not to say, as positively infinite.

[3] Edmund Leach’s idea; see Anthony Gell, *The Anthropology of Time*.

Now the question (Augustine's) is this: What, then, is the particular way in which time moves? What is the nature of the 'movement' we're intending to represent when we take the drawing of a line as a representation of time?

Movement appears to be once again a spatial notion: if something moves, then it goes from being at one place ('over here') to being at another ('over there'). But obviously the movement of time cannot be of same kind as the motion of a body changing its position in space. That would get things the wrong way round: it's only because of time and its movement, that we are able to think of bodies as changing their spatial position ('change of place' presupposes the passage of time).

Here it might be said: Well the movement of time is *sui generis*; it's movement alright, but of a distinctively temporal kind, not of the same kind as bodily motion. That we can't define it is really no embarrassment—rather it's exactly what's to be expected when we bump up against utterly basic features of reality. Again, if Augustine found time puzzling, then it's because he started with a 'prejudice' or preconception—if you start in eternity, then time is bound to be a bit of a shock to the understanding (but so too will various other things that don't admit of definition—the sensation of pain, colours, the taste of coffee).

The problem: the movement of time = ?

Let us grant that the movement of time is non-spatial and *sui generis*. A new problem emerges.

When we talk of the movement of time, there are two different things we may

have in mind. Our thought might be that things move in time. Alternatively it might be that time itself is moving, that time is characterized by its intrinsic dynamism. That is, we might be thinking either that things travel forward in time, making their way from future to past; or, instead, we may be thinking that time itself is the movement from future to past. If we say the first, then we're thinking of time as the medium through which things move. If we say the second, we've said that time itself is what is in motion.

Both ways of thinking are of course completely natural to us. On the one hand we say that the mandala endured from yesterday until today, that the works of the Renaissance have endured throughout the centuries—where things are pictured as progressing, making their way, from one date to another, in the way that things change their position in space. And on the other hand we also talk of time's arrow, the flight of time; time waits for no man, and so on.

Now the problem is that neither characterization of the movement of time, taken on its own, is adequate.

If time sweeps along, bearing things with it, then things are carried along by time, and their relation to time is constant and motionless—just as people standing on a train looking down at their feet do not perceive the train or themselves as moving.

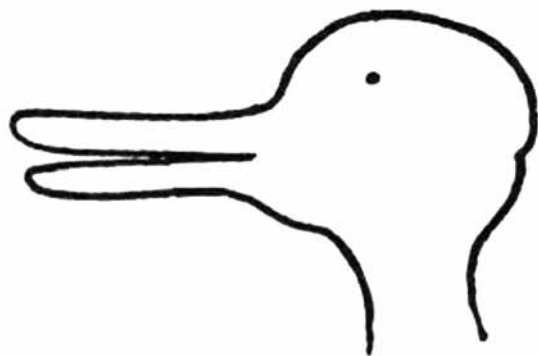
In order for things to endure in time, or at any rate, in order for us to be conscious of time as passing, there needs to be a framework in relation to which things change their temporal position.

But if time is that framework, then time is reduced to space. The framework needs to move, but if it moves, then we move with it; in which case we are, so to speak, standing still (no time is passing).

Each model offers itself as correcting the other, supplying what is missing from it, and this would seem to imply that they are jointly necessary. Now it's quite true that both are needed. But the problem is that they exclude one another, in the sense that, if we use the one, then necessarily we put the other out of play.

(And if we superimpose the two models, saying both that the framework is moving and that we're moving within it, we're no better off: we have two defective representations, not a single unified adequate representation.)

The difficulty may become clearer if we compare our need to use incompatible images in order to represent time, with the familiar duck-rabbit:



If I look at the duck-rabbit, I can see either the one or the other: the drawing invites me to see a duck or to see a rabbit, but not to see both at once—I'm not required to see a duck that is a rabbit, or to see a duck as a rabbit.

But in the case of time that's exactly our situation: we need to represent time as a line along which we are moving (a ruler), and also as something which is itself in motion (an arrow in flight). We can look at the duck without feeling any need to see the rabbit, but we can't think of things as subject to the flow of time without also thinking of time as flowing; and if time flows then the things that it bears along are not passing through time, but rather fixed in it, like flies in amber.

(Kant runs the two together when he switches from 'time must be represented as a line' to 'must be represented as the drawing of a line'.)

Here is a much more elegant statement of what I take to be the problem by Merleau-Ponty (a French philosopher in the tradition of and heavily influenced by Heidegger): 'We say that time passes or flows by. We speak of the flow of time [...] Time presupposes a view upon time. Thus, time is not like a stream; time is not a fluid substance. This metaphor has been able to survive since Heraclitus up until today because we surreptitiously place in the river a witness to its flowing. Now, from the moment I introduce the observer, depending on whether [i] he follows the flow of the river {in a boat} or [ii] whether he observes its passage from the riverbank, the temporal relations are reversed. [ii:] In the second case, the masses of water that have already gone by do not head toward the future, they sink into the past; the still-to-come

[l'«à-venir] is on the side of the source, and time does not come from the past. The past does not drive the present into being, nor does the present drive the future into being; the future is not prepared behind the observer, it is planned out in front of him, like the storm on the horizon. [i:] If the observer is now placed in a boat and follows the current, it can certainly be said that he descends with it toward his future, but the future is in those new landscapes that await him at the estuary, and the flow of time is no longer the stream itself, but is rather the unfolding of the landscapes for the moving observer.

Thus, time is neither a real process nor an actual succession that I could limit myself simply to recording ...' (*Phenomenology of Perception*)

What makes the river analogy appear adequate is that we picture the things carried along by the river in relation to the unmoving river banks. But our experience of time involves no river banks: we are immediately conscious of time's passing without having to contrast it with the stillness of eternity. So the river analogy is confused.

Three options

Where does this leave us? It means that our representation of time—of time itself, rather than things in time—is inconsistent, and that we only succeed in convincing ourselves otherwise because we oscillate incoherently between two ways of modelling time. So we must consider ourselves to have failed to grasp time 'in itself'.

We find ourselves at, it seems to me, one of those extraordinary points that one comes to in philosophy where a decision has to be made on which a great

deal will be found to depend. Or, put the other way round, which option you go for will depend on what you think about other issues of a philosophically fundamental kind. There are, I think, three options:

1. Affirm the dynamism of time, but deny its reality: Augustine, Berkeley, Kant.
2. Affirm the reality of time, but deny its dynamism: scientific realism.
3. Affirm the reality and the dynamism of time: Schelling and Hegel.

The first can be explained quickly. If we have failed to grasp time in itself, then that is simply because, it may be suggested, there is no such thing. Time does not exist in itself. It does indeed contain an appearance of movement, but that is because time 'itself' is a mere appearance. And once we appreciate that time exists only as appearance, we stop expecting to be able to comprehend it. So we can rest content with Kant's formula. Representing time as the drawing of a line doesn't capture the essence of time, but that is because it has no essence.

Philosophers who take this option, at least in Western philosophy, typically think that it costs us nothing to derealize time: on the contrary, it is a way of making room for the things that really matter to us. What makes it acceptable to deny the reality of time—to embrace the first option—in the view of Kant, Augustine and Berkeley, is that we do, they believe, have access to the eternal, independently of our awareness of the temporal world. The eternal—God, the moral law—provides the value of temporal existence.

The second option we have already described. Since we've been led into paradox, and nothing real can contain a contradiction, we should (so it may be

argued) retrace our steps and acknowledge that a mistake was made when we agreed that the movement of time needs to be essentially different from that of space. We should have said that time is, just as theoretical physics and any number of naturalistically inclined philosophers tell us, merely another mathematically describable dimension in which things are extended. It differs from the familiar Euclidean dimensions in various ways, including irreversibility—what goes up must come down, but what gets older cannot get younger—but none of these differences require us to postulate a *sui generis* movement of time.

If against the naturalistic view someone protests, But how can it be that the movement of time of which I'm immediately conscious is an illusion!?, then the answer will be: But there are many things that seem to be given in immediate consciousness that can be shown to be illusions—as Kia Nobre showed us, with regard to perception. Perhaps the very fact that they are 'immediately given' is a reason for considering them suspect!

Before I try to explain the third option, let me just say why one should hesitate before accepting the second.

It implies, on the face of it, that when people live their lives, this process, which engages us so fully, and which seems to involve crediting the dynamic of time with full unqualified reality, is something taking place, as one would ordinarily put it, only in one's head.

I know that many people when confronted with this thought feel no worry: So what if time exists only in the human imagination? Since there is no al-

ternative, we can carry on as before with a good conscience. Nothing has changed for us.

But this equanimity is peculiar. If one asked a person in ordinary circumstances which they think really in itself matters more, the life of a character in fiction or the life of a real person—Which is more important, the fate of a real person or that of Anna Karenina?—the answer would come without hesitation. And yet, if time is a product of imagination, then the lives of real people are just as fictional as Anna Karenina's, albeit in a different way. To both real and fictional people the future appears open and not yet existent, but in fact both inhabit stories that have already been written out all the way to their conclusions.

So the worry is that, although it may make no difference to practical existence in the sense that, whatever the metaphysical status of time may be, if I want to arrive on time then I've got to leave on time, it does make an all or nothing difference to the value of being the kind of thing that has a practical, temporal existence.

Time = God

Finally, option three—which requires that dynamism be essential to time, and that time qua dynamic be fully real, despite the paradox that it contains.

I said that Augustine prayed to God, whom he took to be eternal, to help him understand time, but what he should have asked instead, Schelling argues, is what God would need to be like in order for time to issue from him—as it

must have done, in some sense, if it is to have reality. If time is real, then it must make sense to God. If God provides for its possibility, then God must be of a nature that is consistent with the reality of time.

This may sound as if we are dragging God down into time, which we have admitted we do not understand, but there is a logic to the strategy. If we think of eternity as 'utter stillness', then (Schelling argues) we do God and ourselves a disservice. We deprive him of life and personality: indeed we make him unconscious, unable to recognize himself as eternal. And we also guarantee that the existence of the world, and of time, has no solution. And that the world, ourselves included, can have no relation to God. Eternity cannot, therefore, be a sheer featureless blank.

What is required is that we attribute to God not of course the very same temporality that we and the world occupy and which clocks measure, but something akin to it, something with the same shape, something similarly articulated into past, present and future, or which exhibits analogues of those dimensions.

Why will this count as a solution to the problem of understanding time? Well, if we can understand why God should exhibit tri-dimensionality, that is, if there is a reason in the very nature of Godhood why God should produce that structure—or rather produce himself as having that structure, since of course, if God has some analogue of temporality, then it cannot have been imposed on him, but must stem from him—then we will have come to an end of explanation. God brings explanation to an end, so if we can understand how

and why temporal structure belongs to his being, then we have understood all there is to understand about time.

And this is a challenge that Schelling believes he can meet. Here I will need to compress a lot, at the risk of obscuring Schelling's ideas. Schelling thinks that an adequate conception of God must attribute to him a complexity which standard theological accounts deny him. God must be thought of as bringing himself into being or (if that sounds too wilfully paradoxical) as giving himself actuality.

Now in being conscious of time, Schelling supposes, we are aware of a conflict or collision of two movements or principles, one of which has the character of contraction and the other of expansion, corresponding to the dimensions of past and future respectively. And the very same principles, on Schelling's account, also define God's free coming-into-being or self-actualization: the movement of contraction whereby God gives himself selfhood is followed by his outward expansion into a world, to which he as it were gives himself. They have furthermore, according to Schelling, an analogy with forces and elements of nature, namely gravity and light (Schelling thinks it more than an analogy, but we can leave that aside), and a semi-moral character: contraction represents the drive to close up into selfhood (which is not itself evil but provides its ground in God's creatures), while expansion represents the will to love and revelation. (We now see that Schelling is after all a Christian, though of an undoubtedly strange sort.)

Schelling allows us to think that, simply in virtue of being conscious of time in the distinctive way that makes us free beings with lives to dispose of, we

exist within and participate in God—in a higher sense than things are in or subject to time. The perplexity that we feel when we attempt to grasp time is therefore entirely appropriate, and by no means the result of word-trickery or confused thinking, or a reflection of our cognitive limitations: it is what must be felt when we attempt to contemplate God directly.

Time and music

One of the most remarkable and enduring ideas to have emerged from classical German philosophy is that philosophical insights are mirrored in works of art, which are able to present to us, in an immediate intuitive form, the same fundamental structures and features of reality that we seek to describe in the cold grey vocabulary of metaphysics. If reality consisted in organized matter, this would imply that works of art are in the same business as natural science, and the claim would be absurd. The thesis of idealism, however, is that materialism is false and that the ground of all things, though not mental in the usual sense, has an essential affinity with what we finite beings call mind, and therefore also with value.

The topic of music and its interpretation in post-Kantian philosophy is a whole other topic, but the general idea which recurs in the writings of Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer and others of the period, in a variety of different forms, is that music, by virtue of its non-representational and purely formal nature, is metaphysically privileged.

Recall that the task of making sense of time, as Schelling defined it, was to conceive an order lying behind and giving rise to—by differentiating itself

into—the sequence future-present-past; and that, since this sequence-and-differentiation is a properly dynamic matter—something that must be thought (to vary but not eliminate the paradox) to happen continually—the relevant order cannot be spatial or lifelessly mathematical, but must consist in living activity.

Now in music too we find, it may be said, essentially the same thing. Musical works—in virtue of the specific kind of unity which they form through the combination of harmonic relations, rhythmic organization and melodic elements, encountered nowhere else in our experience—cannot be resolved into any mathematical, logical, or other non-temporal structure, nor into a mere sequence of physical events, nor (for good measure) into any mapping of the former onto the latter. And here too, as in the case of time, we find no alternative to talk of movement, if we are not to lose sight of the phenomenon, that is, what we actually listen to: the ‘metaphor’ is indispensable, hence cannot be mere metaphor. What might be said, therefore, is that in the ‘tonally moving forms’ of music (tönend bewegte Formen: Hanslick’s famous phrase) we are able to hear the true movement of time which philosophy attempts to grasp in pure thought, and therefore also, if Schelling’s metaphysics of time are correct, that music allows us to witness and participate in the infinitely diversely modulated moments of divine creation: these become, in musical apprehension, no longer simply the forms in which we live, but forms known on their own account in which our value and that of all things is assured.

A Brief History of Immortality

Selina O'Grady

Woody Allen once quipped: 'I don't want to achieve immortality through my work; I want to achieve immortality through not dying. I don't want to live on in the hearts of my countrymen; I want to live on in my apartment.' Over the centuries we have found different ways to console ourselves for our mortality: permanence through art, fame, family. But, as Woody Allen pointed out, it is never quite enough. What we want is personal immortality.

Yet the idea of personal immortality, in its egalitarian form anyway, is a surprisingly late development in the history of religions, and one that, despite the enormous comfort it offers, also has its serious drawbacks and dangers. Learning to accept mortality is the theme of the earliest piece of literature that has survived, the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, written some 4,000 years ago. 'When the gods created mankind, death they dispensed to mankind, life they kept for themselves', the goddess Shiduri tells the eponymous hero Gilgamesh.

Gilgamesh progresses from refusal of death, to acceptance of death, to recognition of its inevitability, and finally to a view of how to live a good life in its shadow. In the process he goes from tyrant to human to civilised king. Fear of death, acceptance of mortality and the humanising and civilising process go hand in hand—it is the profound insight of the epic. Gilgamesh is a warrior king, but a tyrannical one whom the gods decide must

be taught how to rule justly. They therefore create Enkidu to be his counsellor. Enkidu is a child of nature, brought up by gazelles. He is taken to the city of Uruk where he meets King Gilgamesh whose beloved friend he becomes. Both brave and skilled warriors, together they achieve great feats. But in their hubris, they insult the goddess Ishtar, who decides to punish just one of them—Enkidu falls mortally ill. Gilgamesh is inconsolable and refuses to accept that Enkidu has actually died until a maggot drops from his decaying nostrils.

Only then does Gilgamesh become afraid that he too will die, 'never to rise again for all eternity', and determines to find the plant that gives immortality. Which, indeed he does, only for it to be stolen by a serpent who lurks in Mesopotamia's Garden of Eden just as it would do 1500 years later in the blissful garden of Genesis. (In this, as in much else, including the story of the Flood, the Book of Genesis borrows heavily from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.)

And so Gilgamesh learns that immortality exists, but not for humans. Accepting that he must die, he must learn to relish and find his meaning in this life. 'Let your belly be full, enjoy yourself always by day and by night, make merry each day, dance and play day and night,' the goddess Shiduri tells him.

But this is not a solitary hedonism. Thanks to the love he had for Enkidu, Gilgamesh has been humanised, civilised, and learns to love, to care for his subjects. He has moved from being an individual, exercising his droit de seigneur on young virginal brides, to being a person, connected to his community. Returning from what he now recognises was a fruitless quest for

immortality he looks with satisfaction on the city walls he had had rebuilt to protect his subjects. He would not live on, but his walls would, and thanks to the security they would provide, his community would live on. The permanence of his city walls was immortality of a sort.

It was in the knowledge and acceptance of mortality, that Gilgamesh learned to concentrate on improving this life. The compensation for death is civilization. 'He came a long way, was weary, found peace', says the epic. Gilgamesh had found peace, consolation, in permanence, something that would exist beyond his death. It is a sort of beyond, though as Woody Allen laments, not as good as the real thing—as immortality.

The ancient world almost universally seems to have accepted that immortality—at least blissful immortality—was reserved for the privileged few: for the gods themselves, for the semi-divine, and for divine earthly rulers such as the pharaoh, who could also extend the privilege of immortality to his elite. Warriors too could be part of the privileged elite who made it to paradise. This immortality had nothing to do with good or bad behaviour—it was solely a question of status.

The history of immortality is to some extent a history of the democratisation of immortality. For the ancients paradise was aristocratic. It had nothing spiritual about it. It was the physical world made eternal and packed with the best the material world had to offer—the immortals of ancient Egypt got pastries, a favourite Egyptian delicacy, jewels, wine and sex, rather as the Islamic paradise is emphatically material—where cushions, fine clothes, wine,

and women are plentiful (a heaven designed for heterosexual men—and for lesbians, perhaps).

But of the ancient cultures we know of, all seem to have shared the same resolute acceptance that for the majority of humanity there was a sort of life after death but it was an immortality devoutly not to be wished for. For the Mesopotamians, the Chinese, the early Hebrews, the Greeks and the Romans any life was preferable to the shadowy, dreary half-life that those who had once lived would endure. Hades was where the living dead were sad impotent shadows squeaking like bats in the gloom. Every underworld was a place of shadows and darkness.

The Jews showed no interest in personal immortality at all, judging by the total absence of references to it in the Torah (written around the 8th century BCE). They have their Hades, Sheol, but no heaven or hell. Only God and celestial beings 'eat of the tree of life and live forever'. The writers of the Book of Job (probably 6th century BCE) were equally uninterested in personal immortality. The faithful Job is never offered the consolation that he will be recompensed in the next world for the sufferings God forces him to endure in this. The dead, he proclaims, 'shall not awake nor be raised out of their sleep'. And the authors of Ecclesiastes (which may have been written any time from the 5th to the second century BCE) counselled placing full value on the fruits of this world, since life on earth is the only real life to be had. In fact Ecclesiastes echoes almost word for word the advice to fill his belly and relish this world that the goddess gave Gilgamesh. The Ancients seem remarkably free of the need for these sorts of illusions.

But if there was no consolation in personal immortality, there were consolations to be had, as there were for Gilgamesh, in the prospects of permanence. Yaweh offers Abraham permanence through the continuity of the group—the family, or tribe. ‘And I will make of thee a great nation ... Unto thy seed will I give this land.’ Abraham may die, but Isaac and Ishmael and their descendants will found nations and those nations will be peopled with his progeny. God’s promise to Abraham is in fact remarkably close to the permanence that the Dawkins religion of evolution implicitly has to offer. Abraham’s selfish gene is a good one, he is reassured—it is promised survival.

The Greeks and Romans were equally convinced that they too would live on through their descendants. But they also believed that they could live on through something totally immaterial, their good name. That good name would be preserved by art, in songs and poems. It is thanks to Homer’s art that ‘I did not die’, says Achilles (in the ‘Ode to Echo’); that ‘Patroklos is mine’, that ‘my Ajax is equal to the immortals’, that Troy ‘gained glory and did not fall.’ It is through art that time present, time past and time to come are conjoined, that Achilles has both died a warrior’s death and yet perpetually lives. It is Permanence of a new sort not offered to Abraham or Gilgamesh. It is the permanence of a place in a poem, in this case earned through glorious death.

(It is no coincidence that the God of the underworld is often associated with civilisation; the *Epic of Gilgamesh* had made the link between death and civilisation in about 2100 BCE. Gilgamesh was the restorer of social and religious order after the Flood, rebuilding temples, wells, and mountain

passes—he also becomes God of the underworld. Orpheus, and his prototype the Egyptian god Osiris, are both gods of the underworld and also gods of music and song, the inventors of agriculture and viniculture.)

Woody Allen is convinced that permanence through fame is no compensation for the loss of being alive in the world. The Greeks and Romans were never sure. It is the choice that the divine silver-footed Thetis offers her son Achilles in the Iliad: ‘Remain here and fight at the siege of Troy, forgo all home-coming, yet win endless renown; or sail home to my native land, lose fame and glory, but live a long life, and be spared an early end.’ If Achilles decides to give up on home-coming, then he can expect ‘endless renown’ through the songs that poets will sing about him. But he is well aware that nothing ‘can recall a man’s spirit once the breath has left his lips’.

Achilles eventually plumps for fame. But once in Hades, he regrets his choice. ‘I should choose, if I could live on earth, to serve as the bondsman of another ... rather than be lord of all the dead who are no more’, he tells Odysseus when Odysseus, a visitor from the living world, congratulates him on his continuing fame and his rule in the underworld. It is only when Odysseus tells his comrade in arms that he can be proud of his son, who has followed in his father’s footsteps and become a valiant warrior, that Achilles’ gloom lifts. Achilles is consoled by the same medicine that Yaweh had offered Abraham. When the two men part, Odysseus to return to the world of the living, Achilles to the underworld, Odysseus watches him ‘taking long strides across the asphodel meadow’—a wonderfully poignant image of heroic acceptance of the consolations of mortality

Odysseus of course makes the opposite choice. He chooses homecoming. When the beautiful goddess Calypso offers him a sip of ambrosia, the drink of the gods that will give him immortality, Odysseus refuses. He wants to see his son Telemachus, his dog Argos and his wife Penelope. He wants real material permanence, not the intangibles of fame conveyed through art, or even the immortality of the gods.

So far in my story, the non-immortals of the ancient world, the humans, looked for the consolation of permanence by living on through their descendants, the work they left behind, or their place in the epics written about them. It is not until the late 5th, 4th century BC that the Greeks began to believe in an immortality that was not just for the very privileged few. For Plato, that entails total severance of soul and body. The body rots and dies but the soul can live forever, though it needs another body in which to do so.

According to the priestess/philosopher Diotima, whose views are recalled by Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*, we satisfy our desire for immortality by creating—'by always leaving a successor to replace what decays.' That creation is either in the physical form of children or in the mental form—of 'Thought, and all other human excellence'.

Although Diotima likens the creators of mind-children to the creators of real children, she is in no doubt that the creations of the mind are far finer. More than that, through their mind-children, creators can gain immortality by attaining true knowledge, the knowledge of Beauty and Goodness. But that knowledge cannot be attained by our senses alone because this world is

illusory, ever changing and ever decaying. The seeker of truth must embark on a journey of knowledge, progressing up the 'Ladder of Love' from knowledge of the particular instances of physical beauty, to the beauty of minds, to the beauty of institutions and customs, to an increasingly generalised understanding of beauty until he arrives at the contemplation of, 'Beauty', 'Goodness', the immutable perfect absolute archetype (the Form), which finds its imperfect instantiations in the ever changing ever decaying world.

This journey earns the seeker after truth 'the friendship of the gods and that makes him, if anyone, immortal' (note the scepticism in her caveat: 'if anyone' ...). The physical creations, the children of flesh and bones have been left far behind; they have no value. The merely material and the homely pales into insignificance in comparison with this spiritual summum available to those who aren't bought off by Yaweh's promise to Abraham. The individual entity has become merely a stepping-stone to grasping the truth, to attaining the ideal.

In the *Odyssey* Achilles had achieved immortality, or at least permanence, through his own fame and its replication in his child. For Diotima, only the acquisition of the mind-child of Truth might confer immortality. Diotima and Plato-Socrates introduce an important and potentially fatal turn in the yearning for permanence. Gilgamesh, Abraham, Achilles and Odysseus are all lovers of life. They want more of it—like Woody Allen.

Diotima and Plato believed that the soul of every human is immortal, or at least can live forever by being reborn in a succession of other mortal bodies.

Reincarnation is a sort of half-way house between living on forever in this world and living on for ever in an afterlife. But that prospect of immortality is bought at a great cost: it requires the severing of the soul from the body. The living, breathing, material world becomes something to be distrusted, despised, rejected. Truth and reality lie beyond it. The body, as part of the material world, corrupts and rots; the spirit is imprisoned within it and must be free of the body in order to soar to the truth.

The tree of eternal life becomes the same as the tree of knowledge (in the Garden of Eden, the two are separate). But to eat from its fruit, you have to give up a belief in the value of living in this world. Diotima and Plato answer Woody Allen by denigrating what he wants. Don't mourn the loss of this life, because it is not worth much anyway.

The Platonic conception that ties immortality to the idea turns the Ancients' conception of the relative value of life and death on its head. The Ancients valued this life and knew that the sort of immortality that is mankind's lot is far less desirable. Shadowy half-life is to be shunned at all costs. The Platonic view makes the living world the half-life; life becomes a preparation for death.

Of course, the denigration of this world is particularly appealing to those who find it an ordeal. (The primacy of this world presents far less of a problem to the elite, for whom it is on the whole satisfactory, cushioned as they are from the bitterness of life by wealth and status; the aristocratic Sadducees for instance, had no use for personal immortality.)

It was not until the first century BC that the Jews, or at least the Pharisees, the populists of Judaism, who were trying to wrest control of Judaism away from the Sadducees, introduced the idea of personal immortality. That was partly due to the introduction into Judaism of the Platonic division between the material, perishable body and the spiritual, eternal soul. But more importantly, the notion of personal salvation was in response to the Jews' despair at the might of the Roman Empire. Rome's control of Palestine—confirmed by the disastrous Jewish revolt which ended in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple in 70 CE—seemed to be fatally undermining God's promise that the Jews' homeland would be restored to them. The disappointment of lived reality led the Pharisees to develop a theology of personal salvation after death: here was a realm in which Yaweh would make things good again.

Heaven, 'dwelling near God's throne', 'free from the load of the body', was in store for righteous Jews, says the Book of Wisdom, written probably at the time of the emperor Augustus. But the Judaic belief in personal immortality was not then and still is not now as important to Judaism as Yaweh's promise to the community. (Judaism is not focused on the question of how to get into heaven. It is far more focused on how to live a consecrated life in this world.)

Christians under Paul's leadership followed the Platonic line. Life was to be lived in preparation for the next world. Paul, indeed, expected that the world would end in his lifetime. He never did live to see the end of the world, and Christians slowly relinquished the conviction that it would hap-

pen any day soon. But the Pauline tradition, inherited from Plato, of denigrating the material world, and therefore all things bodily—especially the sexual—the male disgust of women, ‘the cesspool into which men fall’, as one early Christian father put it—that disgust with the physical continued, and does so to this day.

Islam by contrast is in some ways refreshingly physical. Despite its views on female modesty, it has little of the Platonic suspicion and later Christian disgust with the physical. In fact, Islam believes that the material world, as God’s creation, is perfect. There is no original sin. Once we have all submitted to Allah, this world will achieve perfection. The heaven described in the Quran promises rich clothes, perfumes, endless supplies of food and wine with none of the ill effects of satiation or intoxication. (In the hadiths, the sayings and deeds attributed to Muhammad and his companions, the jihadis—the warriors for Islam—even get their 72 black-eyed virgins immediately at death since they alone of mortals jump straight to paradise rather than languishing in some sort of Hades while they wait for the day of judgement.)

The idea that every soul is immortal is, of course, a wonderfully democratic one. But paradise for everyone has its problems. In the hands of the Christians, that platonic promise of immortality, involving as it does the denigration of this life, becomes political. It is a small step to go from ‘If this life disappoints, don’t worry, there is something better’ to ‘Now that you believe that there is something better for you, you won’t rebel if this life disappoints’. This is the sense in which Marx argues that the Church of Christ, by being

‘the heart of a heartless world, the soul of soulless conditions’, actually prevents the improvement of life. Consolation becomes a management task for elites—a way of creating quiescent subjects.

Marx’s programme became the programme of the 19th and 20th centuries: rather than place the ideal in an imaginary afterlife, place it in this world which we can build for our descendants and even actually inhabit ourselves. This has become the dominant attitude to death. It gives us national health services, huge scientific efforts to prolong life, going all the way to Silicon Valley’s Methuselah Project whose faithful believe that the first human to live to 500 years old has already been born.

It looks increasingly possible that we can massively extend the duration of our lives. But we in the secular Western world have given up on the idea of an Afterlife. This world is all we’ve got. Now that we have lost our belief in the afterlife, are we reverting to the Ancients’ view that in face of death we must all the more relish this life, and try to improve this world rather than prepare ourselves for some other world?

The problem for us secular Westerners is that we are no longer innocent. We have been corrupted by Platonised Christianity, by the idea of an eternal bliss,—so blissful it was virtually indescribable—and one that was available to everyone. We are now trying to create that vision on earth, but inevitably it will fall short—consumer goods inevitably cannot give us the satisfaction, the true bliss, of the ineffable. We want to eat of the tree of happiness as well as of the trees of immortality and of the knowledge of good and evil.

Inevitably we are disillusioned with our earthly paradise and our resultant dissatisfaction will naturally contribute to the nihilism that always lurks on the edge of our awareness of our mortality. And so we flaunt our knowledge of the transience of our life. This is clear in the emphasis art now puts on the ephemeral. A mocking of immortality and of our desire for it, and a mocking of the permanent too. The artwork is made to be eaten, to be dismantled, to decay. Perhaps this is in its way as heroic as the epitaph with which so many Romans stuck their thumbs up at death: 'I was not, I am, I am not, I care not'. Except that there is something childish or adolescent about it—a petulant rebellion against a non-existent God whose death has deprived us of immortality and left us with nothing but the fleeting moment.

We have travelled many dead-ends since Enkidu was sent by the gods to civilise us. We late Mesopotamians now have to relearn to love this world, with all its materiality, and to love it for its very transience.

The Point of Intersection of the Timeless with Time

Roger Scruton

We live from moment to moment, but not all of us live in the moment; and not all of us live for the significant moments, which are significant as moments, coming into being and then passing away. In an attempt to make sense of the way in which moments can be significant the Greeks made a distinction between two experiences of time: *chronos* and *kairos*. In *kairos* time events flow together in a kind of knot or climax: a point in time that is not just part of the unending sequence of 'and'. The look, as in *Tristan und Isolde*, the kiss, as in Dante's description of Paolo and Francesca, the moment when the arrow leaves the bow, as in the return of Odysseus to Ithaca. *Chronos* time is the time of 'next'; *kairos* time is the time of 'now!'

In a similar way we often refer to moments in and out of time, or 'timeless' moments—so much so that the phrase has become a tourist brochure cliché. The idea of such moments has its roots in religion; but it was picked up by the romantics and made central by the idealists to their conception of aesthetic experience—the moment of 'standing back', when eternal significances shine through the now. It gives some substance to the claim that our ordinary ways of seeing things, and of experiencing their temporal order are in some way illusory. It forms part of the aesthetic reworking of Plato's myth of the cave. Adroitly used, it enables an intelligent priest, like Father Pavel in my novel *Notes from Underground*, to persuade his congregation that, in the moment of epiphany, they see the world as it truly is, being otherwise lost in illusion.

A similar idea underlies Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence. In one of the Zarathustra poems he writes 'Alle Lust will Ewigkeit; will tiefe, tiefe Ewigkeit.' In that line he is evoking a specific idea of eternity, not as an infinite extension in time, but as an infinite depth. It is as though the moment opens a door downwards into the depths of being, and in that way the moment becomes an icon of eternity. (The expression 'time is the icon of eternity' is Plato's, in the *Timaeus*.) Even if we agree with Selina O'Grady, that immortality is unavailable and the desire for it illusory, we might think that there is this other kind of eternity, which is given in the moment and not after it—or after anything.

Can we make sense of this? I am led to consider the significance of repetition and recurrence in religious rituals. Rites must be performed exactly, as they always have been and always will be. This is happening now because it happens eternally. The priest brings the congregation to a kind of threshold, where they look across from this mundane happening to its eternal replica. People are shocked and disturbed when rituals are changed, because this returns them to ordinary *chronos* time. They fall from the iconised 'now' into the commonplace 'next'.

Repetition is therefore of special significance in religious experience: not mechanical repetition or stereotypy, but a conscious sense of doing this now because this is what is always done. In a sense you are raising your action to another level, in which it is no longer you who are doing it, but the spirit, the *pneuma*, in you. You are joining yourself and your action to past and future generations, and to something that occurs timelessly. That is why the mark-

ing of times is so important in the religious way of life, and why people in our civilisation have often furnished themselves with 'Books of Hours'. Rilke wrote a Book of Hours (*Das Stundenbuch*) in his early efforts to capture the religious way of being without submitting to the Christian God:

*I love the dark hours of my being.
My mind deepens into them.
There I can find, as in old letters,
The days of my life, already lived,
And held like a legend, and understood.*

Repetition of this kind does not only raise the temporal individual to the level of timeless things; it brings the timeless down into time, so that it becomes a 'real presence'. This is what Nietzsche seems to have noticed, and it is part of the complicated experience that Wagner strives to deliver in *Parsifal*.

Having said that, it is clear that we cannot rest there. We modern people long for the timeless, just as our ancestors did. But we cannot rest with repetition, with doing over and over the same thing as everyone else. We want to extract the meaning from the moment, to force it to come clean, to declare itself, to say what it contains for me.

One way of proceeding is to invoke the 'transcendental'. At the 'moment in and out of time' we stand at the edge of our world, facing out beyond the boundary. About the transcendental, nothing can be directly said. The temptation nevertheless has been to go on trying to say it, to 'eff the ineffable', as Beckett puts it.

It is as though we have reached the one-sided boundary, while trying to tunnel to the other side. Kant, ingeniously, believed we could manage this feat, by renouncing pure reason in favour of its practical equivalent, thereby coming to a kind of acquaintance with the eternal through the categorical requirements of the moral life. Schopenhauer gave his own equally ingenious account of the matter, with his theory of the Will as thing in itself.

Is it not enough, however, just to stand at that window, not wishing or able to pass to the other side, but seeing reflected in it all that occurs behind us? This is one way of understanding how life comes together, is ordered, rescued and transfigured in a work of art. As in tragedy we see moments brought to the edge of what is possible—to the extremes of will, suffering and negation—which nevertheless achieve order and meaning. These moments seem to stand in the light of the transcendental, even if not being in any other sense a part of it.

Anthropologists have for over a century emphasized the importance of rites of passage in sealing the unity and solidarity of the tribe, and in all communities these rites have the character that I have described—a kind of collective ballet, in which the tribe shuffles up to the window and, looking into the unknowable void beyond it, sees its own reflection transfigured and made whole. This feeling survives in all of us, and was nicely illustrated by Matthew Orton in *Date Date*, which showed the reluctance of an ordinary postmodern boy to treat the moment of proposal as a happening in chronos time.

It is to such moments that we should look, I believe, in order to understand the crucial concept through which ordinary people make sense of the transcenden-

tal—the concept of the sacred. This idea contains within itself the aspiration that we share, which is to reach through the boundary, to seize what lies beyond it, and to make it our own. That is what we mean or ought to mean by the ‘eternal’, and my way of describing it suggests that the eternal can be seen in another way from the traditional account of it—not as endless time, but as a revelation of the depth of being now.

We see this most clearly in the presence of death. When animals die something goes out of existence—the individual dog or horse. But this is only a rearranging of atoms, as the principle of their cohesion ceases. When a human being dies something else is lost: the ‘I’ is extinguished, and the I does not belong in this world but on its edge. It is the horizon where the other resides and from which he observes me, and his death is something that does not occur in chronos time, but on the very edge of things, the edge where he is. It is the paradigm kairos moment. The moment is sacred, as is the body that remains thereafter, the body from which the I has fled.

We attempt to understand these kairos moments by providing them with a religious context. But religion is not our only way to grasp them and to possess them as our own. Like Ray Tallis I believe that art has a role in completing and transfiguring our experience. And it does this, in part, by consecrating what it touches—by lifting it out of chronos time into the sphere of sacred moments: those points of intersection of the timeless with time.

It is in this way, I think, that we should explain the peculiar sense of peace and reconciliation that attends the experience of tragedy. Those things that

most disturb us—mortality, death and suffering—are refashioned by tragedy as sacred, illuminated by the eternal in us. Wagner referred in this connection to *Erlösung*, redemption, and Proust to *la recherche*, the reaching back and rescuing of time. In tragedy the brief life of the hero is redeemed from its transience, just as the pure subject, the I of self-consciousness, is rendered meaningful and in a sense everlasting by the memory architecture of Proust. In both artistic ventures we are endowing the individual with an absolute value, by showing him in another relation to time than the quotidian relation of ‘next’.

Those thoughts are obscure, I know, and I am always trying and failing to clarify them. But let me conclude with a few observations about the first person singular. I am a subject, not an object: the I is a point of view on the world, not an item within it. And this is how we see each other, as so many holes in the backcloth of empirical reality, through each of which there shines a pinpoint of light. From this we gain a sense of the subject, the I, as having a depth of its own—it lies always behind and beyond the objects in which we search for it, always vanishing over the horizon. The I is not the ‘bundle of impressions’ of Hume, since experiences come to it wrapped into the now—not next, next, next, but here, now, always, to use Eliot’s suggestive phrase. That is why Bergson thought of subjective time—*la durée*—as somehow incommensurate with physical time. And it is why, when death catches up with the other person, and the I that was the focus of our care is extinguished, we refuse to accept that he has gone, that the next moment is a moment without him. On the contrary, this kairos moment seems to show us that chronos time is a kind of illusion. At the point of intersection of the timeless with time, time disappears.

EPILOGUE

We left the Isola S Giorgio with a sense that ephemera are also symbols of lastingness. As the Venerable Tenzin invited us to join in demolishing his patient labour of three days he reminded us of a precious feature of the human condition, which is that we, transient as all other existing things, nevertheless have the capacity to stand back from time and reflect on its nothingness.

No ephemera are of greater significance than the *Preludes* of Chopin, which Jeffrey Grice played for us with great power and pathos. These evanescent pieces, some only a few bars in length, are among the greatest of all works in the romantic repertoire—each the meticulous presentation of a single musical idea. They are not, like the preludes of Bach's Forty-Eight, preludes to something else, but preludes to themselves. Jeffrey aptly compared them to images held between parallel mirrors, framed by infinite reflections, each a *mise en abîme* that resounds in its own voice to infinity. To hear them in their entirety is like turning the pages of a complete Encyclopaedia of moods, a dictionary of ephemera through which we learn what lasts: 'ruins, stray eagle's pinions, all disorder and wild confusion', as Schumann wrote of them.

Let us give the last word to John Burnside who, on arriving home in Scotland sent the following letter in the wake of our discussions.

Dear All

Fondazione Cini felt like a ghost museum when I left San Giorgio last Sunday, (though not as early as the poem suggests, (see below): that *flamme rose* was from last year). I didn't know, then, that I was heading out to an adventure I'd have preferred to avoid, (plane delayed just enough to force a layover in Paris at one of the worst hotels I have had to bear for a long time—well, in Europe, at least) and then, next day, more delays that kept me travelling until late Monday evening. Giving me the occasion, if nothing else, to think about time and ephemerality and, of course, its complementarity, enduring, (or recurring, or persistent) being, from the *ewig* at the end of *Das Lied von der Erde* to a remark by the Reverend J.G. Wood to the effect that life trumps time, (when I got home, I found the relevant passage in my copy of *Common Objects of the Country*, and it rang out in my mind as an echo of our weekend discussions: 'All created things in which there is life, must live for ever. There is only one life, and all living things only live as being recipients; so that as that life is immortality, all its recipients are immortal.')

Isn't that a wonderful notion: 'as being recipients'?

All of which, in turn, put me in mind of a poem by Thomas Hardy:

In a museum

I

*Here's the mould of a musical bird long passed from light,
Which over the earth before man came was winging;
There's a contralto voice I heard last night,
That lodges with me still in its sweet singing.*

II

*Such a dream is Time that the coo of this ancient bird
Has perished not, but is blent, or will be blending
Mid visionless wilds of space with the voice that I heard,
In the full-fugued song of the universe unending.*

Such is the process by which poems are fleshed out (for me at least) that all this thinking needed a sufficient period of reflection to absorb the somewhat bereft sensation I had, leaving San Giorgio, partly because I missed some talks that I'd looked forward to hearing, and partly, rather obviously, because the wonderful hospitality and companionship provides such a recuperative break from the normal routine, but mostly because something seems to happen when I set foot on the island, and it feels like the rest of the world, with its demands, its irritating economies and its crassness, falls away. A little like the moment when, sipping at his lime tisane—a tea, perhaps, but certainly not coffee—our Prou-

tian hero effects a small recompense from the wheels of clock-time; I offer this digression for reference to those who, like me, have been sipping at various tisanes for decades now, with only occasional relief from time's slings and arrows:

Mille petits détails inutiles—charmante prodigalité du pharmacien—qu'on eût supprimés dans une préparation factice, me donnaient, comme un livre où on s'émerveille de rencontrer le nom d'une personne de connaissance, le plaisir de comprendre que c'était bien des tiges de vrais tilleuls, comme ceux que je voyais avenue de la Gare, modifiées, justement parce que c'étaient non des doubles, mais elles-mêmes et qu'elles avaient vieilli. Et chaque caractère nouveau n'y étant que la métamorphose d'un caractère ancien, dans de petites boules grises je reconnaissais les boutons verts qui ne sont pas venus à terme; mais surtout l'éclat rose, lunaire et doux qui faisait se détacher les fleurs dans la forêt fragile des tiges où elles étaient suspendues comme de petites roses d'or—signe, comme la lueur qui révèle encore sur une muraille la place d'une fresque effacée, de la différence entre les parties de l'arbre qui avaient été «en couleur» et celles qui ne l'avaient pas été—me montrait que ces pétales étaient bien ceux qui avant de fleurir le sac de pharmacie avaient embaumé les soirs de printemps. *Cette flamme rose de cierge, c'était leur couleur encore, mais à demi éteinte et assoupie dans cette vie diminuée qu'était la leur maintenant et qui est comme le crépuscule des fleurs. Bientôt ma tante pouvait tremper dans l'infusion bouillante dont elle savourait le goût de feuille morte ou de fleur fanée une petite madeleine dont elle me tendait un morceau quand il était suffisamment amolli. [my italics]*

Anyhow, I am taking far too long to introduce the modest fruits of my journeying and pondering (and a tiny smidgeon of mental fight). So, here

it is—I call it a draft to spare my blushes—with many thanks to The Fellowship, (and I'd be glad if you shared this with anybody you think might find it of interest.)

Cette flamme rose de cierge

*Die liebe Erde allüberall blüht auf im Lenz und grünt
Aufs neu! Allüberall und ewig blauen licht die Fernen!
Ewig... ewig...*

Das Lied von der Erde

Leaving San Giorgio this morning, early enough
that daybreak was that flamme rose de cierge,

I wanted for nothing - save, perhaps,
an afterlife where everything I've lost

could happen as a film does: not
slow-motion, but deliberate enough

that I could take it in.

This was the whole intention, not to stay,

only to linger a while, which is
to dwell.

I would never have tired
of rain, or the blue in ice.

I would never have tired
of glaciers, or alpine meadows.

Then, on the boat to the airport, a strange light
glossing the lagoon,

I saw a heron walking in the reeds,
walking, not still, which made it seem

more ghostly, and more itself: the blue in its plumage
blue as the blue in ice.

The boat moved quickly, veering from the shore,
sending up gulls in its wake, so I failed to see

the heron find its spot and start again,
unfinished, always, as all live things are,

wall lizard, egret, lime flowers, yellow-legged gulls,
hunter and hunted, born out of water and light.

Aye
John

(John Burnside)

Group photo Cini
Roeland Verhallen
Photograph, 2016



Photographing as a way to preserve—because we know our memory to be fallible, because we relish the power to arrest time (while deftly denying the error of this notion), because we cannot bear how each moment irrevocably must pass. So we take a group photograph, but what does it capture? Only the exterior. It seems that the painted crowd in the background is more accurately portrayed than the crowd in the foreground, for the former was thought about with care. The lazy, mechanical photograph only records the physical, without any concern for what is inside—an often far from revealing approach. Is this the permanence we are looking for?



The Alpine
Fellowship

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