

MADE FROM MOVEMENT:
MICHAEL SNOW'S *THAT/CELA/DAT*, MARIE MENKEN'S *ARABESQUE FOR*
KENNETH ANGER, AND RICHARD SERRA'S *DOUBLE TORQUED ELLIPSE*

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Author's Declaration

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Abstract

Made from Movement works towards a theory of art that is grounded in movement. Thinking through movement allows for consideration of the temporal presence and experience of artworks, and enables an approach to art that crosses aesthetic boundaries. This study is carried out through close hermeneutic studies of three distinct artworks: Michael Snow's video gallery installation *That/Cela/Dat* (2000), Marie Menken's 16mm film *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* (1958 – 1961), and Richard Serra's steel sculpture *Double Torqued Ellipse* (1997). Movement in these artworks does not appear merely as change over time or change of place, but rather as something that is coherent and consistent with itself but does not conclude itself, something that is in continual flux but does not try to achieve an end point, and something that holds forth and protects potent encounters with otherness. Movement, grasped in this way, is irreducible, generative, and tensile.

The particular approach to this study is drawn from Samuel Mallin's

phenomenological method of Body Hermeneutics. The method continues Heidegger's focus on singular artworks, and accepts that any particularly strong work of art is as worthy of careful study as any noteworthy work of philosophy or theory. Furthermore, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, the method works from a conception of human consciousness that includes our affective, moving-body, perceptual, as well as cognitive integrations with the world. All four of these distinct, yet overlapping, regions of consciousness are embodied, and thus require physical situatedness with the phenomena to be described. Hence, the phenomenological descriptions in the dissertation are developed from writing done in the presence of the artworks, and the themes of movement are drawn from the phenomena shown by the artworks themselves.

Through its embodied approach, and by working itself out through themes of movement encountered in three distinct works of art, *Made from Movement* contributes insights into topics of temporality, technology, language, femininity, perception, cinema, and art. In addition to offering critical writing on artworks by Snow, Menken, and Serra, the three hermeneutic studies also contribute philosophical reflection on the work of Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Irigaray, and Wittgenstein, among others.

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Introduction

1. Movement

This dissertation offers phenomenological studies of three artworks: Marie Menken's *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* (1958—61), Michael Snow's *That / Cela / Dat* (2000), and Richard Serra's *Double Torqued Ellipse* (1997). It centres on the way that each of these artworks offers key insights into the experience and nature of movement, insights that are made explicit through the way each artwork makes distinct *use* of movement. Though we may be more accustomed to thinking of these particular artworks in terms of cinema, sculpture, and installation, *Made From Movement* will demonstrate that it is highly productive to consider movement as integral to their artistic presentation. This dissertation aims to show that it is through the experience and consideration of movement that key insights of these artworks are made explicit. In addition to offering critical writing on these three artworks, by gathering these three particular pieces together, the dissertation aims to contribute to the understanding of artworks more generally and proposes that thinking through movement can help in expanding our ways of understanding movement and art.

The word movement carries with it many layers of meanings. This dissertation is primarily concerned with the tensions, continuities, and rhythms that constitute movement. This dissertation is not so much concerned with

movement as *change*, which, as will be drawn out below, implies too much of an atomistic, or object-focused conception of movement and thus is less helpful in relation to artworks. Movement as change still focuses on points – *a* changing into *b* – whereas this dissertation aims to demonstrate that in very distinct ways, each of these three artworks shows points or stages as inhering in movement's tension and generativity.

Arabesque for Kenneth Anger's unique use of movement shows how movement is primary to intelligible experience. Movement is the potency of sensibility and, rather than a destructive or muddling “force,” enables clarity. *That/Cela/Dat* works self-critically with the atomistic conception of time and meaning to show its inherent instabilities and illusions. This artwork also makes explicit the way that artworks appear between the work and the viewer; neither the subject side nor the object side can be isolated, or, if they can be, the artwork falls into a collection of fragments. The very tension and instability of subject and object allow the artwork to appear. *Double Torqued Ellipse* brings us in contact with an experience of movement that is generativity itself. This movement describes the coming into being of anything alive and the potency of creativity and spontaneity.

2. Irreducibility

One of the aspects of movement grappled with in this dissertation entails

the irreducibility of embodied encounters. Though each of the artworks studied in the following chapters shows irreducibility in distinct ways, in this introduction I would like to outline some of the general features of this range of movement. One of the things that these three artworks have shown me, which I am simultaneously working out in this dissertation, is how particularly noteworthy artworks can never be concluded or exhausted, neither through experience nor through reflection and theory. One can, I am suggesting, return to strong artworks again and again and they will continue to show new things, and continue to show further depths. Thus, the insights we can draw from exceptionally strong artworks, the approaches to speaking and writing about them, remain boundless, while simultaneously, each description of an artwork will necessarily remain incomplete. The strength of artworks is made evident by such irreducibility. Less strong artworks, I would like to emphasize, can still offer a great deal of insight and remain worthy of critical attention and exhibition, but over time it becomes apparent that their scope and depth is limited; they have a “saturation point.” I have found the three artworks in this dissertation to be remarkably strong artworks, which is to say inexhaustible. This has been revealed to me by my own experience and study of these artworks; I have spent at least sixty hours studying each. But the strength of these artworks is also evidenced in the way that artists, theorists, and curators continue to return to these works of art and continue to draw out new insights while continuing to be productively amazed by them.

We can get a certain sense of irreducibility when Hal Foster speaks of paradox in relation to Richard Serra's sculpture:

Yet the paradox remains: Serra insists that his work is strictly sculptural, while his best critics regard it as a deconstruction of sculpture.¹ Yet this paradox might be the point, for with Serra sculpture becomes its deconstruction, its making becomes its unmaking. For sculpture to harden into a thing-category would be for sculpture to become monumental again—for its structure to be fetishized, its viewer frozen, its site forgotten, again. In this light to deconstruct sculpture is to serve its “internal necessity”; to extend sculpture in relation to process, embodiment, and site is to remain within it. (2000 [1998], 179)

Serra's sculpture does not harden into a “thing-category;” and with this we could say that all three of these artworks also do not harden. Their unique insights keep both deepening and expanding. We can hear something of this in Martha

Langford's description of Michael Snow's body of work:

I might try to explain Snow's work to Snow by reminding him of certain persistent features, the families of resemblance within an unruly, expanding, and constantly self-recreating clan. These connections run far deeper than the modernist surface; they are more robust than any Structuralist skeleton; they scramble the codes of 'medium', though media are never 'mixed' but brought into reasonable proximity. [...] Snow's work breaks down by style, series, watersheds, ruptures: like any artist, Snow can be chronicled, though what is telling is the reluctance of historians and critics to do so. There is a barrier, or a distraction, or something more interesting to do, so that even Denis Reid whose knowledge of Snow runs back to the studio in his parents' basement, writes Snow's life in a mirror, laterally reversed from 1967 to 1951. (2001, 34)

Though in this description we find the way that Snow's work resists

1 Here Foster is referring most explicitly to writing by Yve-Alain Bois as well as by Rosalind Krauss.

categorization, Langford's writing also speaks to its ever deepening insights.

Though Snow may have been working on a certain range of themes and problems his whole life, his artworks never completely release their viewers. As Langford states, there is always “something more interesting to do” than categorize or chronicle.

With this dissertation I aim to contribute to the ongoing discussion and reflection on these artworks. My voice is one among many, and my hope is that I augment and offer some further insights and pathways into the irreducible depths of these artworks. Thus my claims herein must remain modest even while my aims remain ambitions and rigorous, particularly in light of this irreducibility. Not only do I aim to describe some of the ways in which these artworks show their irreducibility, but I must simultaneously approach them with respect for this irreducibility. Considering the plenitude, the irreducible unfurling of strong artworks, it remains important to approach them in non-reductive ways. To be clear, I am not trying to conclude these artworks or reduce them to texts, but in my writing to keep opening up to the uniqueness of each artwork.

Artworks show their irreducibility through the fact that they are not strictly ideas or concepts. That is, they work through perception, affect, gesture, as well as ideas. Because artworks draw in these different ways of knowing, we can never conclusively *say* what they mean. Immanuel Kant makes use of seemingly paradoxical phrases such as “purposiveness without purpose” and “conceptless

universal” in *The Critique of Judgement* to describe the way that artworks cohere (and have purposiveness) through their own particular presentations and cannot be judged in terms of *a priori* concepts. Upon careful consideration, most people would agree that artworks make their meanings through their specific presentations which includes their mediums, their cultural milieus, and the kinds of attention they petition from their audiences. And further, we can understand that these meanings come through embodied experience of the artworks. Specific artworks will work out their own presentations in highly distinct ways, but what I would like to suggest is that artworks pose a particular challenge to theorizing about them and discussing their meanings because they refuse to be dealt with strictly as objects or ideas. They can never be concluded or exhausted. As Gertrude Stein shows in her essay, “Composition as Explanation,” we reduce the power of artworks once we summarize them as classics at which point we no longer experience the way they irritate, annoy, and stimulate us:

The characteristic of a classic is that it is beautiful. Now of course it is perfectly true that a more or less first rate work of art is beautiful but the trouble is that when that first rate work of art becomes a classic because it is accepted the only thing that is important from then on to the majority of the acceptors the enormous majority, the most intelligent majority of the acceptors is that it is so wonderfully beautiful. Of course it is wonderfully beautiful, only when it is still a thing irritating annoying stimulating then all quality of beauty is denied to it. ([1926] 2001, 672-73)

Artworks as things “irritating annoying stimulating” remain irreducible. One of the challenges, then, is to find ways of writing about art, discussing art, and even

experiencing art in ways that do not relegate them to standardized categories or petrify their capacity for “irritating annoying stimulating.”

3. Temporality

In working to grasp movement in relation to artworks, it is helpful to consider Maurice Merleau-Ponty's assertion that time is real, not in an objective sense, but as the most basic movement of existence. The present is not an instant or absolute, but a field that continually gathers and spreads into past and future. Though the past, future, and present can be felt revolving together in the field of presence, it must also be clarified that the past and future each also real have a genuine presence of their own. As Samuel Mallin states in *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy*,

In opposition to an objective and analytic conception of time, Merleau-Ponty insists that time is not merely a uniform succession of nows or the following of one discrete and indivisible moment upon the previous moment, which was also exhaustively presented and in-itself. He counters this traditional model of time, which is the thematic and cognitive version of lived time, by showing that the present is not an instant but must be understood as our “field of presence” (1962, 416); that past, present, and future are three distinct dimensions of time; that the whole of time is contained in every present; and that time moves throughout its whole length, as it is essentially “lapse,” “flux,” or “*ekstase*.” (1979, 92)

The future is not empty. Rather, as Merleau-Ponty states in *Phenomenology of Perception*, “Ahead of what I can see and perceive, there is, it is true, nothing more actually visible, but my world is carried forward by lines of intentionality

which trace out in advance at least the style of what is to come” (416). What he describes as “lines of intentionality” are important in understanding the way in which the past is given in “retentions of previous presents” (Mallin, 1979, 92). According to Merleau-Ponty, time is an indivisible whole, and though past and future can be distant and indeterminate, they remain horizontally enmeshed with the present. Temporality's *ekstase*, its always being outside itself, and inherence in otherness must be considered in order to grasp Merleau-Ponty's conception of time. To quote Mallin again,

Merleau-Ponty tells us that we must discover time's *ekstase* in the present, for there we can see time revolving on itself. A present is time's positing of itself; but even while the posit is being performed, the inadequacy of this grasp becomes plain, and thus this present has already become a part of its own past history of such attempts. This inadequacy within time itself *is* the indeterminate future which is the tension within, or pressure on, this present both to abandon itself to the past and to leap out or burst forth (*éclater*) into a new and more tempting present. (29)

Within this temporality, inadequacy and indeterminacy are essential dimensions of the movement of time. Its *ekstase* is an indivisible movement of lapse, always reaching beyond itself and gathering back.

Merleau-Ponty's articulation of temporality also carries insight into the relationship between certainty and uncertainty, illusion and evidence. Given temporality's *ekstase*, its always being outside of itself, it is perpetually extending outside of the inadequacies of the present and retained past. In this way,

inadequacy, indeterminacy, corrigibility, and even illusion are integral aspects of temporality. The very recognition of illusion is grounded in the experience of correction in favour of evidence. But within temporality's movement as *ekstase*, evidence can only ever be partial and is essentially corrigible. Our primordial faith in the world, as well as temporality itself, is primarily general and ambiguous. As Merleau-Ponty writes,

In the very moment of illusion this possibility of correction was presented to me, because illusion too makes use of this belief in the world and is dependent upon it while contracting into a solid appearance, and because in this way, always being open upon a horizon of possible verifications, it does not cut me off from truth. But for the same reason, I am not immune from error, since the world which I seek to achieve through each appearance, and which endows that appearance, rightly or wrongly, with the weight of truth, never necessarily requires this partial appearance. There is the absolute certainty of the world in general, but not of any one thing in particular. (1962, 297)

In this quote we also see how illusion is not total, but portends the possibility of correction. Verification is not dependent upon our judgements and claims, which remain partial grasps of “the world in general,” but rather is presented upon the infinite horizon of temporality's *ekstase*.

One's body-image is also a mysterious cohesive whole that cannot be reduced to an empirical tallying of its parts. But the cohesion through separation of the total body image is also what grounds one's capacity to find significance in the world. In line with temporality's flux, the cohesiveness of one's body image always remains ambiguous and irreducible; it is not a transcendental picture, nor

is it a calculated whole. As Merleau-Ponty states, “If we are in a situation, we are circumvented and cannot be transparent to ourselves, so that our contact with ourselves is necessarily achieved only in the sphere of ambiguity.” (1962, 381). Ambiguity, irreducibility, and incompleteness are integral to the cohesion of oneself as an embodied and situated being in the world. This incompleteness is felt in the way that every explicit self-presentation can be felt as partial and remains only ambiguously sketched out, but such incompleteness can also open up to astounding insights. I will explore this aspect of temporality further through each of the main chapters.

As will be described in the following three art studies, temporality and time's generative movement remains important to our themes of movement and art. Menken's *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* presents a temporal field that remains entwined with the spread into invisibility and depth. In a highly self-critical way, *That/Cela/Dat* places striking emphasis on the present, continually bringing viewers back to the present as a point. But as these points shift meaning and move into ambiguity, it becomes possible for viewers to begin to feel “time revolving on itself.” We will also see how a temporal experience of Serra's *Torqued Ellipses* and *Torqued Spiral* helps us experience a movement that is generativity itself, a commingling of generality and spontaneity.

4. Method

Introduction to Body Hermeneutics

The central goal of this chapter is to introduce and outline some of the main aspects of the particular approach I have taken in studying and writing about *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, *That/Cela/Dat* and *Double Torqued Ellipse*. I will first describe the art hermeneutic method quite broadly, and I will then give an overview of current work being done using and adapting the Body Hermeneutic method. Expanding on this, I will then describe the method in more detail, drawing out some of its integral features such as cultivation, attunement, and safeguarding. Concepts such as the lived body and phenomenological situations will also serve to help describe the method's particular approach to opening up to artworks. Having outlined the method itself, I will then describe certain procedures for implementing the method. These procedures demonstrate one possible way of using the method, and they remain open to continual adaptation and change. The one way in which I have adapted the method and its procedures most significantly is in using it to study cinematic works, and thus I will conclude this section on method with reflections on the intersection of body hermeneutics, or what we might also call art hermeneutics and cinema.

Over the past four years I have been working through and adapting the Body Hermeneutic method developed by Samuel Mallin. As indicated by the method's name, this is a hermeneutic approach, aimed at drawing out and making explicit some of the implicit aspects of an artwork. Thus through this method I do

not claim to make totally new discoveries, but rather offer some embodied reflections on the phenomena that these artworks hold present. This is also a method that works through a very broad grasp of consciousness, one that includes our affects, gestures, perceptions as well as language and ideas. Whereas consciousness is commonly thought of as belonging strictly to our rational and linguistic capabilities, here we accept consciousness as the ways we are sensuously intertwined with our lived worlds. Mallin has developed this method primarily from the contributions of Continental philosophy, particularly Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Heidegger; these thinkers each offer philosophical insights into the lived body, and set bodily thinking on its way. Body Hermeneutics continues to draw out and develop this kind of embodied thinking; it is an approach that is drawn from the insights of existential phenomenology, but an approach that is continually altered and cultivated by the phenomena it encounters.

This method is one approach among many ways of studying and writing about art. Why have I chosen to work through a Body Hermeneutic approach? To answer this question requires not only a description of the method's process, but also of the kinds of openings it might yield. To begin, what remains most unique and salutary about the Body Hermeneutic method is that it offers a way to attune to the intelligence of the body. Such intelligence is relational, non-propositional, local, and situated. For those who accept that the truth content of artworks is non-

propositional, that is, that the meaning of artworks cannot be grasped through concepts, Body Hermeneutics offers a mode of encountering and discussing what matters to us but remains hidden to analytic or conceptual approaches. If we accept that strong artworks are coherent and meaningful, but cannot be grasped strictly through concepts, then we can begin to grasp how Body Hermeneutics can offer a helpful way into encountering and writing about art. My aim in studying these three artworks through Body Hermeneutics is threefold: I hope to have made a contribution to expanding² understanding of the three artworks studied herein, to expanding understanding the role of movement in art as a basic potent “substance,” and, finally, to expanding the use and practice of the method itself.

The question of how to write in close proximity to artworks is a central preoccupation of this dissertation. If we accept that artworks make use of “logics” which remain foreign and strange to the logic of rational thought, then it becomes necessary to find ways not merely to “translate” the particularities of artworks into academic language, but to allow one's descriptions and explications to be informed by these other disclosive regions. Body Hermeneutics, I have found, is immensely helpful in finding ways to write in close proximity to works of art, enabling ever expanding experiences of artworks and contact with their rich and astonishing insights. I accept that strong artworks show themselves bodily, that even the most cerebral artworks work through an embodied temporality which

2 My use of the word “expanding” reflects Mallin's use of the word in *Art Line Thought*. See, for example, p. 274.

show themselves through movement's defining tensions. The attunement to the distinct “logics” of perception, affect, gesture and cognition that Body Hermeneutics accords yields lived encounters with artworks which from the outset are things that we do not fully know how to “know.” Artworks can at first appear entirely uncanny, and one's mind often first goes blank in the presence of a strong work of art, but in this gap we can begin to reflect on the ways that one's body is already grappling with the artwork (with however much awkwardness or ease). Artworks each have their own logic; their unity is held by a necessary commingling of all their elements be they social, material, conceptual, perceptual, or temporal. Artworks set in motion things that cannot be said; they disrupt our habitual ways of being, thinking, knowing; they perpetually slip from our grasp when subjected to analytic scrutiny. Though it is certainly not the only approach, I have found Body Hermeneutics contributes a way to be perpetually open to what artworks have to offer and write in accord with logics that remain foreign, uncanny, and disconcerting to the logic of rational thought.

Current Work in Body Hermeneutics

In this section I will refer to some of the ways that Body Hermeneutics is being taken up and adapted in current scholarship, a body of scholarship I will also draw upon in the following sections further explicate the general approach of Body Hermeneutics as well as some of its provisional tenets. As mentioned above,

Body Hermeneutics is a method developed by Samuel Mallin, and to date its commitment is most fully worked out in his book *Art Line Thought*. In this book he states that his approach owes a great deal to that of “hermeneutic phenomenology,” but that he is also developing a different kind of thinking, one that is more aligned with the feminine and with nature than we are currently used to in Western culture (1996, 13). He introduces the method thus:

The approach of *Art Line Thought* is to think through and along with artworks (inspired by Merleau-Ponty on painting and novels, and Heidegger on poetry) in order to deepen contemporary questions. It does so by means of meditating on their overlap with concerns and questions about existence embodied in the lines of an artwork itself. I like to think of it as **de-lineative hermeneutics** or experimental phenomenology because it tries to draw out the lines of the phenomena held by the artworks, and aims to deal with the philosophical issues of these same phenomena very concretely and experientially. (1996, 13)

Body Hermeneutics does not apply exclusively to art; it also applies to writing philosophically about life situations where certain phenomena remain strong and present enough for extended study. This method is being used and developed in diverse ways to examine questions concerning medical ethics, philosophical exegeses, the logic of technology, and feminist studies to name a few areas.. Body Hermeneutics serves as the particular approach to drawing together poetry and philosophy in Ellen Miller's 2008 book, *Releasing Philosophy, Thinking Art: A Bodily Hermeneutic of Four Poems by Sylvia Plath*. Matthew King's book *Heidegger and Happiness: Dwelling on Fitting and Being* (2009) includes five extended Body Hermeneutic meditations that serve to bring

the reader into an encounter with Heidegger's work on being as well as on what King describes as “deep happiness.” Francine Wynn's recent paper, “Art as Measure: Nursing as Safeguarding” offers a reflection on the cultivating role of safeguarding in care for a dying person through a Body Hermeneutic of the sculpture *Abschied* by Käthe Kollwitz (2006, *Nursing Philosophy*). Wynn's contributions to questions of the relationship between mother and infant, pre-infancy, as well as critical reflection on Donald Winnicott's work, have also been worked out through Body Hermeneutics' embodied method. Helen A. Fielding has contributed insightful work on art, ethics, and technology through Body Hermeneutics, and she continues to develop the method particularly in relation to questions of sexual difference and otherness. Her recent publications that make use of the method include, “Multiple Moving Perceptions of the Real: Arendt, Merleau-Ponty, and Truitt” (2011, *Hypatia*), “White Logic and the Constancy of Colour” (2006, in *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty*), “This Body of Art: the Singular Plural of the Feminine,” (2005, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*), and “The Finitude of Nature: Rethinking the Ethics of Biotechnology,” (2001, *Medicine, Health Care, and Philosophy*). J. Keeping, in “‘Oh that this too, too solid flesh would melt’: a phenomenology of sadness in Shakespeare's Hamlet” and “Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world': a phenomenology of anger in Shakespeare's King Lear” works through the method to offer some rich insights into emotion, that potent and meaningful region of

experience that can be so challenging to describe. Keeping has also used Body Hermeneutics to explicate the phenomena of pre-reflective experience in “The Body in its Animal Being” (2007, *Philosophy Today*), and of dwelling spaces in “Between the Inside and the Outside” (2011, *Philosophy Today*). Astrida Neimanis is currently adapting the method in relation to some of Deleuze's and Guattari's contributions to philosophy and cultural theory, which can be seen in her recent papers, “Commuting Bodies Move, Creatively” (2008, *PhaenEx*), and “Becoming-Grizzly: Bodily Molecularity and Animal that Becomes” (2007, *PhaenEx*).

Body Hermeneutics has enabled some keen insights into realms of experience that evade or end up in paradoxical dichotomies by our usual, propositional forms of thinking and writing. For example, it has accorded unique insight into experiences of colour, which tends to be dissolved as a mere transient quality to rational thought, but which remains potent in lived experience (Miller, 2007; Fielding, 2006). Stephen Horne has written many essays on artworks using the method, and it has allowed him to contribute deeper understandings of photography in particular. And in his chapter, “Mallin and Philip Glass' 'The Grid'” John Marshall reflects on the method as well as the problem of working out reflection from *within* experience (2009).

The Method of Body Hermeneutics

Method as Cultivation, Attunement, and Safeguarding

If we accept that strong artworks are as unique as they are irreducible, we can then accept that we must approach each artwork on its own “terms,” allowing it to show us how to learn and know it. Thus any talk of method may at first strike us as confining or limiting, and may appear to close off the particular opening which we are striving to protect. This is a question that I must address if we are to proceed with any confidence into the following chapters dealing with specific artworks. Within this provisional introduction to method, it must again be stressed that Body Hermeneutics is a non-reductive method, perhaps better thought of as an approach or *way*. Luce Irigaray's use of the word “method” in *To Be Two* can help clarify what I mean by method:

A certain amount of method is required in order to remove both me and you, or us, from the passivity of perception. For example, what moves one of my senses can be found in the ensemble of my perceptions of you and thus, can lead – both you and me – towards an idea of you, a thought about you, a respect for you, much like a path which goes from the outside to the inside of you and, in a different manner, of me. (2001, 46)

Here Irigaray uses the word method to describe the way of protecting the space between two, a way of finding a bridge to the other without collapsing the “between two.” It is also a way of perceiving how we draw each other out of ourselves without reducing one to the other. Another aspect we can find in Body Hermeneutics is this kind of vouchsafe, a mode of protection and attendance to the uniqueness and strangeness of any situational encounter. Protecting the

irreducibility and invisibility of both self and other requires some method; it requires some rigour and cultivation and this is an aspect of what Body Hermeneutics enables. This method perpetually critiques itself and reflects on the provisional structures and ideas that we carry forward into our encounters with artworks. It may be obvious at this point that Body Hermeneutics does not attempt some kind of “naive” contact with the world, but rather one that is ever more attuned to what is, which is shown through the full intertwining and plurality of any situation.

The Lived Body

Our questions concerning the method centre around questions concerning the body. What is the lived body, and how does it differ from a biological or psychological conception of the body? How does thinking bodily help us attune to artworks; what is the “stuff” of bodily thinking? What are the four regions of the lived body, how do they differ and how do they show their reversibility? How do we relate to time bodily? In this introduction to method I can only begin to deal vaguely with these questions, for they must be asked over again and updated in relation to new situations.

If we accept that artworks cannot be grasped strictly through rational thought, or through ideas, we may then ask how we might approach an artwork bodily. From the outset we must distinguish this bodily approach from the body commonly conceived as biological or psychological. Such conceptions of the

body gain analytic distance from the body, and are respectively too objective and subjective to help us come to grips with the unique situations of artworks. We are here concerned with the lived body, the body that is fully integrated in the depth, complexities and contingencies of lived situations. Later in this section I will address the question of how we might move from such contingent locales to the necessarily abstract and thematic aspects involved in writing, but for now we might reflect on the body as our most basic “thematic” opening to the world.

Within Merleau-Ponty's extensive work on the lived body, Mallin has identified four regions of consciousness which adhere to the four regions of the lived body. These include the affective-social body, the perceptual body, the motor-practical (gestural) body, and the cognitive-linguistic body. These four regions overlap and “translate” each other, but they also remain distinct and work each according to their own “logics.” It must be emphasized that each region offers its own logic or mode of intelligence which remains separate from the other regions. We commonly equate intelligence with the logic reason, but within this model of the lived body, reason belongs to the logic of the cognitive-linguistic body, while the affective, motor-practical, and perceptual regions also carry their own distinct “logics.” Perhaps it would be better to use the word “logos” to refer to the distinct ways of working of each of the four regions. Logos helps describe how each region not only offers its own ways of ordering experience but also distinct ways of opening to and being captured by the world. That is, each region

has its own mode of intelligence which cannot be fully translated into the other regions even though the different regions overlap and integrate with each other. This is to accept that our emotions, perceptions, gestures, and articulations are intelligent, and that lived, embodied consciousness includes, but is not limited to, the intellect. Such a broad understanding of consciousness can help us come to grips with the ways and meanings of artworks. Let me describe the lived body further by roughly outlining the distinct logos of each region.

Motor-Practical Region

Heidegger's famous description of the phenomenon of hammering with a hammer in *Being and Time* draws out the unique logos of the motor-practical body.. Within this description we read the following:

'Practical' behaviour is not 'atheoretical' in the sense of "sightlessness." The way it differs from theoretical behaviour does not lie simply in the fact that in theoretical behaviour one observes, while in practical behaviour one *acts* [*gehandelt* wird], and that action must employ theoretical cognition if it is not to remain blind; for the fact that observation is a kind of concern is just as primordial as the fact that action has *its own* kind of sight. Theoretical behaviour is just looking, without circumspection. But the fact that this looking is non-circumspective does not mean that it follows no rules: it constructs a canon for itself in the form of *method*. (§69, p. 99)

Heidegger shows how practical behaviour, though it can not be equated with the logos of theoretical behaviour, does have its own "rules." The use of the hammer, the act of hammering, has its own logos separate from the concept of the hammer.

The Body Hermeneutic method can help us attend to the way that we

relate to artworks *practically*. What does the artwork show of praxis and how does this help us come to grips with the artwork's unique logos? The motor-practical body is the body that loves to move through space, the gestural body. It is the body caught up in action, motility, craft, athletics, dance, and production. For example, a first entrance into Richard Serra's *Double Torqued Ellipse* comes through the relationship between the motor-practical body and the sculpture's potent lines and volumes. That is, the piece shows itself and coheres through the experience of walking and moving through space, but also with the whole practical complex of rolling the steel, transporting, and constructing it.

Dancers most readily work with the particular intelligence of the moving body. We can hear dancer and choreographer Simone Forti describe the particular intelligence of praxis when she says,

The first day I met with the girls I talked to them about kinaesthetic awareness. I told them that as they watched me talk they could tell a lot about what was going on in me. They could do this simply by watching how I held myself, and at exactly what instant I shifted my weight. They could sense these rhythms and tensions, they could sense how what they saw, felt. (1974, 31)

Here Forti is describing how she approached teaching dance, how she worked to demonstrate and convey how the moving body carries forward its own way of knowing and communicating.

Affective-Social Body

The socio-affective body includes the interpersonal and emotive fields of

existence. Recent attention to the affective aspects of artworks attests to an awareness that our emotions are integral to the ways in which we make sense of art, but it remains challenging to write about especially considering the way emotions have been characterized as completely “subjective.” In *Heidegger and Happiness*, Matthew King shows how study of emotion, in particular what he articulates as “deep happiness,” can actually make evident and help us deal with difficult questions of existence, such as “what is fitting for human beings” (68-9).

The affective-social body is the emotive body and is marked by the movement of fleeting, transient emotions as well as deep moods or passions which remain strong and resonant. Passions can teach us a great deal about existence; Heidegger's work on angst, for example, opens up onto questions of being in time. The logic of the affective body is social, and can be understood as sexual in Freud's broad sense which is full-bodied and develops out of the dyad between infant and primary caregiver. The affective-social body is heterogeneous and relational; our emotions emerge from our relations with others. J. Keeping clarifies the particular region of emotions by emphasizing how emotions are directed and intentional: “When we say that anger has meaning, we do not mean that the word anger has a definition that we can look up in a dictionary. We mean rather that the emotion bestows a meaning upon the situation. Emotions are intentional. This means that they possess a *sens*, a particular kind of directedness” (2006, 483).

As we will see, descriptions drawn out through the affective-social region help engage with the phenomenal presence of the three artworks studies herein. A deep resonant joy of moving in space offers an integral aspect of how Serra's torqued elliptical sculptures show themselves. With *That/Cela/Dat*, Snow situates us with the deep angst we can feel through the way time *appears* to block us from pure presence and truth; this anxiety, palpably felt, allows the artwork to lead its viewers into an expanding experience of time. And *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* captivates its viewers not only through its stunning visual rhythms, but also through the deep sensual affection found in the intertwining of self and other.

Cognitive-Linguistic Body

The cognitive-linguistic body is the body that deals with the thematic aspects of existence. This is the realm of concepts, reasoning, and reflections. Cognitive-linguistic capabilities draw from the other three regions of existence, but, as Nietzsche made clear, cognition is also able to hide its dependence on the rest of the body. In note 492 of *The Will to Power* we read,

The relative ignorance in which the regent is kept concerning individual activities and even disturbances within the communality is among the conditions under which rule can be exercised. In short, we also gain a valuation of *not-knowing*, of seeing things on a broad scale, of simplification and falsification, of perspectivity. (271)

This allegory of the ruler who is necessarily kept ignorant of certain activities helps describe Nietzsche's insights into the way cognition works. It asserts and leads in its knowing, but this is dependent also on its capacity for *not-knowing*

and simplifying. But Nietzsche also shows how *embodied* cognitive behaviour, on the other hand, accepts ideas and thetic moments as provisional structures (§497, p. 273). Cognitive-linguistic capacities can help gather past experience and find our way in the present and future.³ That is, embodied cognition does not hold onto ideas as lasting or eternal, but grasps them as always partial and provisional. Michael Snow's *That/Cela/Dat* troubles the cognitive-linguistic will toward stability and a disembodied conspectus, and places cognition back within lived time. As this artwork shows, our cognitive-linguistic abilities have a unique relationship with time, and can cover over the reality of lived time by appearing to exist outside of the temporal flux of embodied existence and by changing time into one dimensional clock-time. This can be a source of great strength but also great illusion.

Perceptual Body

Perception includes seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching—very basic openings onto the world. Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* offers extensive work on the logos of perception and shows how reflection on this region can place us in contact with some of the most basic questions and natural

3 Or as Merleau-Ponty shows in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, one of the central differences between cognition and the other bodily regions is that cognition has the ability to keep only the conclusions it has reached in the past and carry them forward into new contexts. That is, rational thought does not need to complete the full derivations each time it encounters a similar problem, but rather can move on from the derivations it has reached in the past, using those conclusions to build new derivations. Body consciousness does not do this; though it sediments experience, it also carries all its “contents” with it (1962, 137).

dimensions of existence itself. It is not contentious to say that artworks work with and through our perceptual abilities, but to begin to describe the depth and meanings brought forward through perception becomes a challenging task.

We can hear something of the importance and distinction of perception as its own region of experience when in his essay, “On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and his Work,” John Cage says, “If you hear that Rauschenberg has painted a new painting, the wisest thing to do is to drop everything and manage one way or another to see it. That's how to learn the way to use your eyes, sunup the next day” (1966, 108). This description of learning to use your eyes demonstrates the importance of perception, but also art's capacity to attune and cultivate perception.

Though the logos of each of the four regions is distinct, they also overlap and continually “translate” each other. Artworks can manipulate and make great use of the mutability between the different regions of existence. The following three chapters will work to describe specific aspects of such mutability and translations between regions. In a certain way I can say that *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* gives us joy in visual caress, *That/Cela/Dat* gives us angst in word-images, and *Double Torqued Ellipse* gives us a liberated sense of how vision loves to move with the body as a whole.

Perceiving in Accordance

In order to introduce the experience of moving, thinking, perceiving and relating in accordance with art, I would like to return to Cage's essay on

Rauschenberg. Cage repeats something Rauschenberg said to him: “If you do not change your mind about something when you confront a picture you have not seen before, you are either a stubborn fool or the painting is not very good” (1966, 106). Here Cage describes the way that artwork can change and attune one's sensibilities, ideas, or ways of being in the world.

One of the capacities of artworks that I find most powerful and compelling is the way in which they can put us into situations that reconfigure our habitual or accustomed stance on the world. Art can, and often does, simply break open accepted ways of thinking and doing, but it can also offer astounding insights through its wake. As Merleau-Ponty shows in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, our bodies are always seeking a cohesive grasp on the world. Our bodies are of the same stuff as the world, and are always entreating a most coherent intertwining of grasping and being grasped by the world. The body wants constantly to maximize its integration into the world. And as Merleau-Ponty states in *Eye and Mind*, “Things have an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence” (1964b, 164). In all situations we must take up some kind of an embodied stance. In most cases we do this in accordance with what we have learnt through experience and absorbed through our culture along with a certain facticity of being a particular human.

When we are in situations where our habitual stance or approach is inadequate and we begin to take up a new perspective or stance, we could say that

we are in a potent and “creative” situation. Here we must overcome the novelty of the situation to find a way to grasp or attune to the situation. Artworks have the capacity to place us in situations where our accustomed or habitual stances are thrown into disequilibrium and we need to perceive, think, or move differently. This can initially be repulsive since it can be uncomfortable to be left without recourse, to be dumbfounded. But one of the gifts of artworks is that they are able to hold us in complex situations, allowing us to adapt and attune to what they have to offer. So, if we “stick with it,” as *That/Cela/Dat* explicitly encourages us to do, we are able to expand our habitual worlds through artworks. We begin to look less *at* the art object, and instead begin to “see according to it.”

In his phenomenology of painting in *Eye and Mind*, Merleau-Ponty states, “I would be at great pains to say *where* is the painting I am looking at. For I do not look at it as I do at a thing; I do not fix it in its place. My gaze wanders in it as in the halos of Being. It is more accurate to say that I see according to it, or with it, than that I *see it*” (1964b, 164). Merleau-Ponty describes the way in which artworks resist objectification, and instead place us in situations whereby we might be able to see in accord with its “logics,” or the phenomena it holds present. In this experience we can be gripped by a distinct shift in experience. The particular artworks I study by Snow, Menken, and Serra take hold of common experiences such as reading, walking, and looking and through them create a clearing or opening within which we can begin to gain expanding experiences of

these common abilities. By estranging us from these common abilities, these artworks place us in contact with deep questions of meaning and existence.

Situations

Merleau-Ponty's key concept of situation is helpful in describing the multiple and interwoven ways in which artworks present themselves. Situations are known through this intertwining, through our shared structures with the world (structures that allow us to open to otherness), and through the way the otherness of the situation makes these structures always appear corrigible and indeterminate.⁴ Situations, as we have seen, according to Merleau-Ponty also manifest through the four distinct, but overlapping regions of embodied experience: the perceptual body (eg. seeing, hearing, touching), the gestural body, the affective and social body, and the cognitive-linguistic body. I would like to suggest that it is helpful to consider *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, *That/Cela/Dat*, and *Double Torqued Ellipse* as situations rather than objects. These artworks situate us in unique ways: cognitively, perceptually, linguistically, affectively, spatially and gesturally. The concept of situation also allows us to consider the ways in which artworks show us the inherent tensions of their mediums, exhibition sites, and structures. Furthermore, I will begin to show with the help of these three studies that movement may be the temporal thread, the tension, that holds together all of these aspects of an artwork, while simultaneously harbouring

4 See Chapter One in Mallin's *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy*.

its irreducibility.

Procedures for Doing Body Hermeneutics

Mallin has made explicit a set of guidelines or procedures that help put into practice the method I am adapting. If we work through a description of some of these techniques, the method itself will become clearer as will the descriptions and phenomenological approach of Body Hermeneutics.

The guidelines involve working through a set of steps in order, which are then repeated. The first step is that of asking questions and involves writing out the questions one would like to ask of the artwork. A great deal of reflection and anticipation goes into working out these questions, and one must approach this step with focused attention, continually working to clarify the questions. These questions are aimed at opening oneself to the unique meaning of the artwork but also reflecting on the “constellation” that one is carrying into an encounter with the artwork. That is, the method does not assume that we can approach an artwork in some kind of a naive or neutral way, but that we carry our sedimented pasts with us into the encounter. As Mallin states, “philosophical reflection must bring its constellation of the current issues that beset it to the artworks before their meeting can provide a new source for future thought” (1996, 15). Further, through repeated sessions with the artwork, one is able to clarify and articulate new questions as the artwork teaches one how to enter its particular sphere. Preparing

oneself in this way helps provide focus to the encounter with an artwork; enables critical reflection on the ideas, assumptions and expertise that one brings to an artwork; and assists in attuning oneself in new ways to an artwork. It can be likened to preparing oneself for an important meeting with a particularly wise person from whom one hopes to learn a great deal. It must be noted, however, that once one is in the presence of the artwork, the questions must be set aside and one does not refer to the questions during the session with the artwork. The procedure of asking questions is part of the continual process of opening up oneself in relation to the artwork and reflecting on the important questions and concerns that one brings to its situation.

The second step involves a silent meditation or “dialogue” with the artwork which extends for about forty-five minutes to an hour, enough time to roughly sketch out some of the artwork's phenomena. During this step one begins to open to the artwork, to learn its particular ways, to “see according to it” (Merleau-Ponty). One cycles through the four regions, noting how one is relating to the piece affectively, perceptually, gesturally, and conceptually. During this step, one does not write anything down, but works to open to the artwork's particular situation and begin to note any phenomena that continue to gain in strength and clarity. As Francine Wynn describes:

This descriptive process unfolds as we bodily attune to the work, are moved by it, and bend towards it. It is best not to read the titles, the written description of the artist's work, or to listen to audio tapes but,

instead to spend time with the work learning to see and feel and move and think according to it. It is surprisingly difficult to linger alongside an artwork since we are so accustomed to speeded-up experiences. Time passes slowly as we try to attune ourselves bodily to the work and begin to see according to it as colours get brighter, shapes more clear, or we sense the weightiness or destabilizing effect of a large sculpture (the sculptures of Richard Serra or Joseph Beuys come to mind) which might induce a dizziness or heaviness. (2006, 39).

In the third step one begins to write, noting and describing any of the insights that might have come forward during step two and also continuing to move through the four regions. One writes about a page per region, working to describe the different ways that the artwork shows itself. This step usually lasts for one to two hours. Over time, and through repeated sessions, one will begin to note that certain impressions do not last, whereas certain insights continue to remain present and gain clarity. For example, certain emotions turn out to be rather fleeting, whereas others gain in strength within the situation of the artwork and show up as deep passions available for reflection. The angst involved in extended encounters with *That/Cela/Dat* is one such passion, a deep, resonant emotion that, through attendant reflection, most viewers would agree, undergirds the encounter with this artwork. This deep angst exists in tension with the witty twists of the text's playful text.

The three steps briefly outlined above together comprise one session and such sessions are repeated multiple times. In order to maintain subtle and continual opening, focused attention, and rigour, usually one can perform no more

than two sessions per day. The chosen artwork may not stand up to such extended study and cease to yield deeper insights after a few sessions. This is where the relative strength of an artwork will show itself. As noted above, one of the marks of strong artworks is their irreducibility and inexhaustibility. In light of this, any insights and meanings drawn out from the artwork will necessarily remain incomplete and partial, but, for all that, are often astonishing and even life-changing.

About halfway through the overall time spent studying the artwork – perhaps a minimum of eight such sessions – one begins to study the larger body of critical writing on the artwork. The artist's writings, as well as the breadth of critical and art historical writing on the artwork and artist, is consulted, noting where one's own reflections resonate and conflict with what others have experienced. Reading these critical texts and reflections will help raise new issues that the artwork itself will need to resolve. This is one of the ways that the procedure of asking questions continues to expand and deepen through returning to study the artwork many times. The artist's own writings can be extremely helpful in the process of describing the artwork, finding ways to communicate its unique insights, and reflecting on art more generally; but it is also important to continue to try to understand what artists say in relation to the lived experience of the artwork. That is, artists are often overwhelmed by the demand of critics to discuss their work in the current theoretical frameworks and, like cognition in our

time, end by totally distancing the work from its bodily and existential meaning. Accepting this, studied in close relation to experience of the artwork, the artist's statements can often productively help opening oneself to the artwork in new ways and in finding ways to communicate the artwork's unique insights.

In the more formal writing phase, one begins writing from the notes gathered during the sessions with the artwork. The notes themselves are not included, but rather, one works to extrapolate the insights drawn from the sessions, finding ways to communicate these insights to a larger audience. As one continues to explicate the implicit and rich depths of the artwork, any available theory, philosophy, or scholarship can be drawn upon in order to help clarify and communicate the artwork's meanings. There is no “hard and fast” rule. These are guidelines for apprentices that need a kind of discipline but they loosen as one finds one's own style and gains experience. Once again I must emphasize that Body Hermeneutics is a non-reductive approach to studying and writing about artworks. The aim of the method is to cultivate a way to open to the unique and irreducible depths of the artwork and to find a way to articulate and reflect upon some of what the artwork shows.

To reduce the artwork to any one theory, philosophy, or aesthetic school or historical movement is to erase the artwork's uniqueness as well as its presence as an artwork (always at least partly situational and material). Strong artworks do not illustrate concepts, ideas, or theories, but rather, each artwork offers its own way

of knowing and being. Concepts, ideas, and theories can help us communicate the unique situations of artworks, but can also stand to be adjusted in relation to the presence of the artwork. In light of this, we are constantly asked to hyper-reflect or throw into question any conclusions we make about the artwork as well as the means by which we reach these conclusions.

Writing Philosophically Bodily

This is primarily a philosophical method aimed at describing the unique phenomena brought forth in artworks. These are phenomena that most would agree maintain strong presence if the artwork is given “concentrated attention,” to quote from *That/Cela/Dat*. Body Hermeneutics demands a great deal of time be spent with the artwork, and during this time, through the rigour of the method, transient reflections, what we often refer to as entirely “subjective” associations, fade. Or, if they linger, they prove not to be relevant in the final writing phase which aims to explicate some of what the artwork shows of existence, our ways of dealing with our lives and our communities.

In this dissertation, though at times my writing makes its way along the corridors of the personal and the poetic, these modes of writing are meant to serve as a way into the shared world of the artwork. In my articulations, I make use of various metaphors and analogies, meant to bring us closer to the artworks and the phenomena made present through the artworks. At times my writing about these artworks also includes descriptions of the gap between the ways that the artworks

first eluded me and what was later more “truthfully” disclosed. These descriptions are not meant to narrate my personal experience of the artworks, but rather show how in certain ways these artworks work to estrange us from certain commonplace attitudes that we all share and open or attune us to other ways of being. Furthermore, when I make use of the first person, I am referring to my own particular lived body, complete with all its own sedimentations that are carried forth into any situation. Again, these find their way into the text in an attempt not merely to lay out a personal narrative, but, like in dialogue, to find a way into describing and reflecting on some aspects of our public worlds.⁵ As we will discuss later, the three artworks studied herein make use of the thickness of relationality (*Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*), shared experience (*That/Cela/Dat*), and pre-personal openings to the world (*Double Torqued Ellipse*). Further reflection on relations between the personal and the public, the one and the many, singularity and plurality, will be left to the following chapters. For now I can simply mention that these contraries show an ongoing struggle in writing in relation to art and must be renewed in any encounter with a strong work of art.

Body Hermeneutics and Cinematic Arts

One of the ways that I have been working to expand this art hermeneutic method most significantly is through its adaptation to cinema. With the exception

⁵ See Fielding's 2011 paper, “Multiple Moving Perceptions of the Real: Arendt, Merleau-Ponty, and Truitt” for a full explication of reality as the shared realm of the actual.

of Helen A. Fielding's Body Hermeneutic study of a selection of Bruce Nauman's films in her book chapter, "White Logic and the Constancy of Color" (2006), the method has not been used to study cinematic artworks. One of the challenges of writing bodily in relation to the cinema has to do with its presence on a two-dimensional, representational plane. But it is important to distinguish between cinema as craft and cinema as art; it is within the latter that we can find potent reflection on the kind of retraction that occurs in the process of representation.

Cinema, the body, time, and movement

It is not difficult to apprehend that movement is integral to the cinematic arts, but can cinema do more than depict movement and manipulate time as an animating quality? Can movement in the cinematic arts be more than the representation of movement? Is this aspect of what helps distinguish cinematic arts from the craft of cinema? Through an embodied and phenomenological approach, I work out some of these questions through the following three chapters. If movement in art is to be grasped as more than the representation of movement or as change, then I propose that a situational approach to movement may prove helpful in describing the expanding presence of movement in art, particularly the cinematic arts. I submit that the following three artworks have a great deal to show regarding these questions. In this section, in order to help lay the groundwork for questions of movement, time, and embodiment in the cinema,

I will turn briefly to the work of Vivian Sobchack, Tom Gunning, and Gilles Deleuze. These thinkers have made important contributions to theorizing the cinema, and though this section does not provide a full overview or critique of their work, it can help outline some of the important phenomenological, historical, and philosophical features of cinematic movement.

One of the difficulties found at the intersection of cinema and questions of embodiment is that the cinema at first appears to have very little to do with the lived body. For example, it becomes difficult to reflect on perception because of the way cinematic images seem to turn perception inside out and do our seeing and hearing for us. As *That/Cela/Dat* shows, it is not possible to see an image as a material object at the same time as see it as an image *of* something. Through its representational presence, cinema can easily distance viewers from embodied engagement in the present, particularly through the way it takes us elsewhere in time and place. It inhabits embodied (subject-side, noetic) perception with disembodied (object-side, noematic) perception, what Irigaray might call “sensation” (2001, 45), a distinction that will be further explored in the chapter on *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*. In the broadest sense, the content of the representational photographic image is perception itself, and as will be described later, Menken was keenly aware of this aspect of cinema and draws cinematic sensation back into contact with embodied perception.

But cinematic sensation is, of course, not equal to embodied perception.

Vivian Sobchack has worked on deciphering the difference between the human body and the film body in her book *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (1992). She outlines her phenomenological project in this book as follows: “to radically reflect upon the general structures that always emerge particularly and contingently as the entailment of the lived-body and the world in cinematic acts of perception and expression” (8). For Sobchack, the film experience is directly felt and sensuously available to the viewer. She argues that through the reversibility of perception and expression in the film experience, as we watch the expressive projection of an “other’s” experience, we, too, express our perceptive experience (9). The cinema transposes what would otherwise be the invisible, individual, and intrasubjective privacy of direct experience into the visible, public, and intersubjective sociality of a language of direct experience—a language that not only refers to direct experience but also uses direct experience as its mode of reference (11). Thus, for Sobchack, cinematic language is one that is pre-reflective and draws on embodied experience. More recently, in “Is Any Body Home?” an essay included in her collection of writings *Carnal Thoughts* (2004), Sobchack works through questions of the difference between the body-object as it is imaged and the embodied subject. She states, “In a culture like ours, so preoccupied with images of bodies and bodies of images, we tend to forget that both our bodies and our vision have lived dimensions that are not reducible to the merely visible” (2004, 179). Thus Sobchack remains committed to describing

what is sensuously and sensibly manifest in image culture. She draws on Merleau-Ponty in her work, to articulate her interest in the materiality of the body, the reversibility of perception, and expression. However, on the question of reversibility Sobchack's understanding moves away from a close study of Merleau-Ponty. She proposes a conception of reversibility that has to do with a certain frustration of embodied sensing directed toward the world onscreen which then reverses back into the lived body of the viewer. That is, the intentionality of the viewer “rebounds” from the images and reflexively turns back to the sensing body of the viewer (1992, 10; 2004, 76). As Susan Jaeger makes clear in her review of *Carnal Thoughts*,

It is more consistent with Merleau-Ponty's views to say that intentional grasps are constituted by different configurations of our various perceptual abilities and synaesthetic responses; this leads to different perceptual styles, for example, a cinematic perception that can be compared with the way we view live performances. Both styles of perceptual experience are constituted by partial grasps of the object because all intentional grasps are partial. According to Merleau-Ponty, human perception, including scientific knowledge is always partial. (2006, 131)

Though Sobchack has contributed compelling reflections on the conditions of embodiment in relation to moving image culture, her departure from or misunderstanding of Merleau-Ponty underscores how easy it is, in relation to cinematic images, to forget the two-dimensional space constructed by the logic of representation. It is also easy to forget the way that we carry sedimentations of past experience forward into any new and creative situation. To open and reflect

bodily on a situation is not to achieve a kind of naive contact with the world. But even as it carries past experience and is permeated by culture, the lived body, as I am working to describe in this dissertation, can help us attend to how we *do* deal with our situations and help cultivate more respectful and fuller contact with our worlds. We will return to this point again through Deleuze's idea of cliché.

Given cinema's representational character, we can see how it makes sense to work toward a semiotic theory of cinema; cinema, like words, makes use of our capacity to overlook the immediate, material “sign” to focus on things that are not currently present. Images are signs in this way. And yet, within the semiotic field, the cinematic image will only show up as representational. It does not allow us to reflect on the affective aspects of the cinematic image, and it also places meaning strictly at the conceptual (cognitive) level. It also does not allow us to attend to the gap between cinematic sensation and embodied perception; it does not recognize this gap. And as I will describe, *That/Cela/Dat* muddles the visual and the verbal and demonstrates the interpenetration of these categories that ontological film theory would hold in distinction and semiotic film theory would collapse. For particularly strong cinematic works such as *That/Cela/Dat* and *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, semiotic theory is not able to engage with the way such works make use of, and critically reflect on, their particular situations of presentation to show themselves.

The emergence of new media forms of moving images has called into

question definitions of the cinema that lean heavily on sign theory, particularly the idea of the index. Is there any continuity between film and new media? In his article, “Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality” (2007), Tom Gunning proposes that to move away from defining the medium of film along lines of its indexical qualities – its photographic impressions of reality – involves a turn towards understanding the importance of movement in cinema. Gunning proposes that consideration of film as a medium of movement also allows for a continuity between cinema and new media. As Gunning points out, to define cinema's medium through its indexical nature excludes certain film genres such as animation, and also proposes a rather artificial cut between cinema and new media since new media remains much less tied to the photographic image. Gunning's paper offers a discerning overview of the idea of the index in relation to the cinematic medium, tracing its development through Eisenstein, Epstein, Dulac, Kracauer, Bazin and Metz. In his consideration of Metz, (who is so well known as a semiotic film theorist), Gunning turns to one of Metz's early essays, “On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema.” Within this essay, which Metz introduces as “phenomenological,” Metz asserts that it is movement that enables viewers to participate – perceptually and affectively – in the cinematic image. Gunning goes on to demonstrate how it is salient to theorize movement in working through questions concerning the distinctive characteristics of the cinematic medium as well as the ways it overlaps with other mediums. He states,

I am offering only a prolegomena to a larger investigation: my comments here aspire to be provocative rather than definitive. Motion, I am arguing, needs to be taken more seriously in our exploration of the nature of film and our account of how film style functions. At the same time, giving new importance to movement (or restoring it) builds a strong bridge between cinema and the new media that some view as cinema's successors. (48)

In some sense this chapter picks up on Gunning's provocation.

It should be noted that throughout his paper Gunning uses the words movement and motion interchangeably. Through my descriptions of *Arabesque* for Kenneth Anger I work on differentiating between movement and motion. As I aim to demonstrate in the chapter on *Arabesque*, this film becomes present through the tensions between different kinds of cinematic movement including the somatic gestures of the artist, the kinetic motions of the camera, dynamic qualities of the moving image, and incitements of visual phenomena. I use the word motion to describe the rhythms and mechanisms of the camera. I open up the word movement more generally to describe the distinctive overall tensions that allow for particular motions and things to gain clarity. Movement, as I am working it out in this dissertation, may be considered as an artwork's inherence and cohesion in temporality's inexhaustibility.

The question of movement and cinema no doubt elicits reference to the work of Gilles Deleuze, a philosopher who has had major impact on, and who has contributed significantly to, the intersection of cinema and philosophy. However, what I have learnt of movement from these artworks, and what I aim to

demonstrate of movement in the following chapters, has remained distant from the way that Deleuze articulates movement and time in his two volumes, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, and *Cinema 2: The Time Image*. In these books Deleuze articulates a progression from the movement-image to the time-image.

Summarizing all too briefly, we could say that the movement-image is the indirect representation of time, and instantiates images that are conservative. “The 'régime' of the movement-image bespeaks a process of regulation that Deleuze ascribes to a 'sensory-motor schema,' a neural network that 'affectively' contains the image-flux: the images are procured are recognizable, capable of being linked to other images along a methodical, and ultimately normative, chain” (Flaxman 2000, 5). It is in the the time-image, which arises out of the movement-image, that Deleuze sees the creative future of the cinema. The time-image reflexively turns in on itself and embraces the immanently conservative and clichéd aspects of the movement-image. New cinema signs arise out the time-image. As Deleuze states in *Cinema 2*:

There is a new breed of signs, *opsigns* and *sonsigns*. And clearly these new signs refer to very varied images – sometimes every day banality, sometimes exceptional or limit-circumstances – but, above all, subjective images, memories of childhood, sound and visual dreams or fantasies, where the character does not act without seeing himself acting, complicit viewer of the role he himself is playing, in the style of Fellini. (1989, 6)

Within Deleuze's trajectory between the movement-image and the time-image, both *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* and *That/Cela/Dat* would be understood as

time-images. Both show time's movement and work with the limits of cinematic technique. Even the way Serra's Torqued Ellipses open up questions of the smooth plane of the screen can relate to the reflexivity of the time-image. However, it is Deleuze's conception of time itself that fails to help us move further into our current questions of movement and the three art studies in this dissertation. For example, in *Cinema 2* we read, "If we take the history of thought, we see that time has always put the notion of truth into crisis" (1989, 130). Or in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze states, "The agonizing aspect of the pure event is that it is always and at the same something which has just happened and something about to happen; never something which is happening" (1990, 63). This description emphasizes a conception of time as unreal and essentially empty, and thus only shows a narrow aspect of the experience of temporality made present in the three artworks studied herein. As I will work to show in the following chapter, such a conception of time is actively and critically estranged from the viewer in experiencing *That/Cela/Dat's* unique cinematic situation. Through *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, time and movement are shown to offer clarity and depth and are not merely inhibiting or deteriorating features of existence. And through the way that experience of *Double Torqued Ellipse* unfolds through temporal perception, creativity—the bursting forth of anything new—shows itself in the flux between generativity and generality.

Before moving on, however, it is worth considering Deleuze's critique of

embodied thinking. As Helen Fielding's work shows, Deleuze's critique of the conservative nature of perception and embodiment needs be taken seriously.

Fielding states,

this phenomenological body that Merleau-Ponty so carefully describes as one that moves into and takes up the world is not unproblematic. While film for Merleau-Ponty had the potential to reveal the bond between subject and world, for a thinker such as Deleuze, this is precisely the problem with phenomenology. Deleuze identifies the phenomenological body with the sensory-motor schemata that he associates with clichés. (2009, 86)

We can read Deleuze's critique of the phenomenological body as clichéd in

Cinema 2 when he says,

A cliché is a sensory-motor image of the thing. As Bergson says, we do not perceive the thing or the image in its entirety, we always perceive less of it, we perceive only what we are interested in perceiving, or rather what it is in our interests to perceive, by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs and psychological demands. We therefore normally perceive only clichés. (1989, 20)

Though this discussion is part of philosophical debates which extend beyond the preview of this dissertation, what we can heed here is an emphasis on the need to attend to the fully situational nature of the cinema, and the ways it can critically reflect on culture, technique, and technology. In relation to this, the method of Body Hermeneutics does offer helpful ways into critically reflecting on the “interests” and “demands” that we carry into situations. The method helps work through the way our grasp on any situation is always partial, but that partial grasp can lead into expanding and opening our ways of understanding our situations.

Furthermore, the aspects of cultivation and safeguarding brought forward in the method assist in an ongoing process of attunement which develops through praxis, socio-affective relations, perception, and thinking.

5. Technique

Of the experience of viewing Marie Menken's films Stan Brakhage stated, "She made me aware that I was freer than I knew" (1982, 92). Such a statement is apt to describe the experience of all three artworks studied in this dissertation. They are freeing, and they are so by working with the limits of structures, logics and technologies that tend towards narrowing and restricting experience. The questions concerning clichéd experience raised in the above section open questions of how we might be freer and more open to what is. In this section I will briefly introduce the ways that the following three art studies work against the background of technology, what Heidegger in "The Question Concerning Technology" shows as the greatest danger to existence.

It is worth noting that all three of these artworks distance themselves from traditional craft and handiwork. *That/Cela/Dat* was made through digital processes, *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* mechanical, and *Double Torqued Ellipse* industrial. We still see each artist's distinct style come through each of these artworks, but these styles push through the anonymous and regularizing forces of technological production. As noted, these artworks are all situations, and as such

they also meditate on their modes of production. Their modes of production integrate into the very “subject matters” of the artworks. These artworks, all in distinct ways, make use of standardized modes of production, and in doing so also work out questions of technique and technology. Some of these questions are shared in the philosophy of technology.

One of the challenges encountered in the philosophy of technology, and one which is shared by thinking through art's movements, is the way it is irrevocably caught up within the realm it aims to study. Thinking itself is a technique manifesting itself closely with the techniques of speaking and writing, and thus philosophical reflection participates in techniques. Even though philosophy has contributed a great deal to deciphering the limits of thinking from within thinking, and the limits of language from within language, we are faced with something new. Technology as we now encounter it cannot be contained within the technique of thinking, nor within the realm of specific technological objects or technological systems. As Jacques Ellul outlines in his description of the aims of a philosophy of technology:

The term *technique*, as I use it, does not mean machines, technology, or this or that procedure for attaining an end. In our technological society, *technique* is the *totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency* (for a given stage of development) in *every* field of human activity. Its characteristics are new; the technique of the present has no common measure with that of the past. ([1964] 2003, 182)

And so, we are faced with a serious challenge. We are dealing something new,

something that permeates every field of human activity, and we have no way of isolating our object of study. And further, technology has come to *matter* to us in the full sense of the word; questions of technology permeate so many of the ways we currently work to make sense of our communities and lives.

As will be drawn out in more detail in the following chapters, this dissertation also aims to show how *That/Cela/Dat*, *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, and *Double Torqued Ellipse* work themselves out by making use of certain logics of technicity. These are logics that tend to alienate us from experience, but these artworks work with the limits of these logics to open and expand lived experience in relation to them. As we will see, Snow works with propositional logic and analytic, correspondence approaches to meaning, but as an artwork *That/Cela/Dat* pulls us back from tacit participation in these logics, allowing us to experience meaning in a more expanding way. Menken works with the logics of the film camera, making explicit many aspects of the cinematic image that tend to remain invisible – the frame lines, the chopping motion of the shutter, its monocular lens. But rather than merely exposing these things, *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* draws them into the rhythmic lines of Menken's artwork. Serra works on a massive and monumental scale, and he works with the technological capacities to manipulate, engineer, and construct far beyond human scale. Though such scale tends to intimidate, dwarf, and show human existence as inadequate or feeble, in *Double Torqued Ellipse* we can experience lightness and a certain buoyancy while moving

with a sculpture that we know weighs many tons.

Thinking too is a technique, and as the so-called “linguistic turn” made explicit, thought and language remain immersed within the thickness and resistances of their own parameters. The ways of “doing thinking” demonstrated by Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty offer productive ways into using the techniques of thought to reflect on the phenomena of technique more generally. The work of these thinkers also demonstrates how encounters with difficult and paradoxical questions can actually participate in openings for genuine thinking. For example, as Heidegger works on the question of the nature of art in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” he states,

What art is should be inferable from the work. What the work of art is we can come to know only from the nature of art. Anyone can easily see that we are moving in a circle. Ordinary understanding demands that this circle be avoided because it violates logic. [...]

Thus we are compelled to follow the circle. This is neither a makeshift nor a defect. To enter upon this path is the strength of thought, to continue on it is the feast of thought, assuming that thinking is a craft. (1971, 18)

Heidegger shows how the point at which we encounter paradox or circular logic, that is, the point where rational thought begins to wobble, is the feast of thought as *craft*. And turning to Merleau-Ponty, in one of his descriptions of space in the *Phenomenology of Perception* his writing opens up onto an amazing description of the awareness and vitality of the limits of cognition:

Space and perception generally represent, at the core of the subject, the

fact of his birth, the perpetual contribution of his bodily being, a communication with the world more ancient than thought. That is why they saturate consciousness and are impenetrable to thought. The instability of levels produces not only the intellectual experience of disorder, but the vital experience of giddiness and nausea, which is the awareness of our contingency, and the horror with which it fills us. (1962, 254)

This is an incredibly dense description from Merleau-Ponty, but what I find useful is his demonstration of “doing thinking” which abides closely with contingency, even as it remains impenetrable to thought.

One of the criticisms against many of the philosophers who have contributed to the philosophy of technology (Heidegger, Ellul, Grant, and Jonas for example) has to do with the question of determinism. How can one consider human freedom given the totality of the technological system? Upon close reading we can see how the above mentioned philosophers do leave room for instances of human freedom. However it also becomes clear that such spontaneous events of human creativity give us the farthest horizon, rather than the knotted core of the dynamic movement of technology which is the focus of the philosophy of technology. But in relation to our questions of artworks, it is productive to note how the accusation of technological determinism rests upon the notion that technology is “neutral,” which is to say that technology is just there to be used as a means to an end. In some sense, the prevalence of this view only goes to underscore Heidegger’s description even further. The logic of Enframing⁶

6 In his essay “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger describes how the logic of “Enframing” which dominates our current conception of technology (and our epoch in

depends upon and fosters the conception of the neutrality of things—that objects can exist without any “inherent” being, but are only apprehended as resource. The movement of Enframing progressively interrogates and challenges all things and beings to be reduced to this kind of resource, having presence only through instrumental use value. I would like to suggest that an understanding of technology as neutral operates according to an instrumental form of logic, that its talk of “neutrality” and “equality” leave us open to the perpetuation of an instrumental disregard for otherness.

The question of “determinism” in technology resonates somewhat distantly with the question of “medium” in art. Rosalind Krauss' term “technical support” is helpful in considering the way that artworks can work with, relate to, and reflect upon their materials. Krauss states,

If traditional art required artisanal supports of various kinds—canvas for oil painting, plaster and wax for bronze casting, light-sensitive emulsion for photography—contemporary art makes use of *technical* supports—commercial or industrial products—to which it then makes recursive reference, in the manner of modernist art's reflex of self-criticism. (2011, 213)

All three of the artworks studied in this dissertation make use of technical systems to show themselves, and as particularly strong works of art, reflect critically on these systems. Krauss' term “technical support” helps describe the commercial

general), transforms everything into a standing reserve, a reserve of goods, energy, and resource just there for our use. All of nature and also the objects we make then come to be considered only in terms of what they can be used for. Enframing is so enveloping that all of our thinking becomes an instrumental evaluation of everything with which we come in contact. We will return to the question of Enframing in Chapter 3.

and industrial aspects of the techniques used in the making of these artworks – what is already there, or ready-made. These artworks show how these supports impose limits, but also make use of these limits to expand experience.

Considering the question of technology further, we can see how the belief in progress gives ground to the conception of technology as neutral. The idea that technology will be able to solve the problems of technology, that we continue to progress as humans, and that technological advancement is an integral part of this progress, is, of course, a teleology. Adherence to this notion of destiny helps enable technological “advancement” increasingly to gain independence from ethical and political considerations since, if it is to be the saviour of us all, it must be allowed to progress along its own course—which we may not always understand, but which we must trust. In his essay, “Canadian Fate and Imperialism,” George Grant states, “Like all civilizations the West is based on a great religion—the religion of progress. This is the belief that the conquest of human and non-human nature will give existence meaning” (1969, 77). One of the ways to maintain the presence of this teleology, or at least to cope with it, is to bend increasingly to the demands of our technologies, through, for example, the continued nurturing of calculative reason in ourselves and the translation of all phenomena into causal logic.

In all three of my chapters' art studies, we may be able to see how movement, in its broadest experience, unravels the myths of progress. In all three

artworks, movement is integral, present, and palpable, but the viewer does not “get anywhere.” Movement, as I work to describe it, enables coherence, but this is a coherence that remains within movement's productive tensions and dissolutions.

Alternately, we could begin to question how we might develop techniques through which our technologies might increasingly bend to us. Certain philosophers have been contributing strong work in this area, such as Andrew Feenberg's *Transforming Technology: A Critical Theory Revised* (2003). This book offers a thoughtful negotiation between resignation and utopia, toward a more democratic transformation of our technologically mediated institutions. However, such reflections still throw us back to a more basic problem. If we are going to negotiate a way to live well with technology, we are going to have to face the question of what it is that we *want*, which points us to the even scarier ontological question of who we *are*. This is a scary realm of questioning because, particularly in Western culture, our answers to such questions have proven to be so poor. I would like to offer that part of the problem in the West is that we have only attempted to answer this question through rationalist cognitive means, which gives undue preference to transcendentals as purely abstract meta-structures, and masculine subjectivity (Irigaray 2002, 24). Instead of casting off the questions of “final cause,” we might better recast our feeble techniques for dealing with it. Our modernist and post-modernist solution to the problem of telos has been to place it off limits. However, such a move, rather than resolving the difficult relation

between destiny and thinking, has rendered us passive and dependent in relation to our technological systems. What I hope this difficulty will begin to show is a way toward thinking through teleology which does not give in to the blockages of causal logic, and if this does begin to emerge it may not appear like the teleology we have known. How might we grapple with the question that George Grant puts forward, “what is human being fitted for?” This may have more to do with opening up space for humans and things to come forth into their own (*poiēsis*), rather than a pushing forth into the future.

This question of how we might act and think freely enlarges in relation to questions of *telos*. Paradoxically, however, the development of technology has appeared to be more concerned with a negative conception of freedom than with an assertive conception of freedom. Thinking through technology shows us that to a certain extent we grasp freedom as being liberated from having to make a choice. For example, thermostats give us the freedom from having to constantly consider and adjust room temperature; codes of politeness give us the freedom from having to put creative energy into every social interchange and freedom from discomfort in unfamiliar social settings. Indeed, the first use of the word “cyborg” was articulated along these lines of freedom from having to make a choice—the engineering of a self-regulating environment which would respond to the physical needs of astronauts. In this way technology participates in our process of habituation, and the need to “have a world.” That is, habituation and

automation give us a certain freedom *from* making certain negotiations, giving us freedom *to* focus in other ways. That is, I must be habituated to, or relatively “at home with”⁷ a range of concepts and ways of being in order to move freely and gain the possibility to work creatively.

But how are we to respond when our techniques for habituating ourselves in the world, for freeing ourselves from choice and uncertainty, begin a process of dehiscence from our capabilities to think and act creatively? That is, what is the fate of human freedom when we face a world which is increasingly not fitted for us? This takes place on two levels: one, there appears to be little correlation between technological advancement and human happiness, and two, the technological system is making demands on us that we find increasingly unpleasant (showing up in increased mental health disorders such as attention deficit and anxiety disorders). Increasingly the world *matters* to us less. The objects and situations in our lives take on the appearance of surfaces without depth, “simulacra” so to speak. How might this be tied to an imperialist logic which insists on defining objects and things as bearers of properties without any recognition of the vast reduction that takes place within such a process? It is at this point that we can also begin to grasp the way in which the passive and active aspects of freedom easily reverse upon each other. This phenomenon is resonant

7 A quote from Heidegger is helpful here: “From earliest times until Plato the word *technē* is linked with *epistēmē*. Both words are names for knowing in the widest sense. They mean to be entirely at home in something, to understand and be expert in it. Such knowing provides an opening up. As an opening up it is a revealing” (1977, 13).

with the reversals of pleasure/unpleasure, eros/thanatos that Freud marks out in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. To summarize briefly, pleasure is freedom from stimuli, whereas un-pleasure is subjection to stimulation and agitation. However, pure pleasure would result in complete stasis and thus a death-state. And yet the pleasure principle does not give up easily to the reality principle; it continually floods the human subject, its stimulation of un-pleasure also caught up in an element of eros in its expression of libido. This problematic lays bare the struggle of human freedom; we are caught in something that drives forward at the same time as it drives back. In order to gain *alterity* I must be able to be well with all that *alters* me. I need a sense of my own being, not as a list of identity markers, but as a living entity, in order to be well with others (humans and non-humans). But I simultaneously need to be *granted* that possibility of gaining a sense of my own being through all that surrounds me.

The problem of accumulated guilt may also contribute to the over-development of the passive side of freedom which then takes the form of un-freedom, stasis, and automation. When we restrict ourselves to only thinking in causal and instrumental terms, we take up a position of inferiority to our machines. As Heidegger states,

the instrumental conception of technology conditions every attempt to bring man into the right relation with technology. Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as a means. We will, as we say, “get” technology “spiritually in hand.” We will master it. The will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more

technology threatens to slip from human control. (1977, 5)

Indeed, as our technological systems speed up and become more robust, our human techniques for dealing with them appear to become increasingly slow and error-ridden. This conception holds particularly well if we allow ourselves to be measured by the logic of technē. As a group, humans are also facing increasing collective guilt in relation to the instrumental definition of technology. I say “as a group” because, as globalization is a part of the process of technologization, so the movement of technology is pushing us more and more to ask about the nature of human kind in global terms. But, as a group defined according to instrumental properties, we are accumulating terrible guilt in our instrumental “abuse” of technology. Instead of expanding upon the perceived wonders of the opportunities granted us through technology, we frequently use it to unmake entire ecosystems, cultivate apathy, and perform other destructive acts. If we blame the technological systems for this, we admit that we have lost our freedom, but in blaming ourselves, we carry a massive burden of inadequacy. Alternatively, we could try to model ourselves to become as ambivalent toward human suffering as is the logic of technology. Certainly technological mediation does assist in the process of disaffection from the world. And yet, the presence of disaffection has not yet covered over the reality of human suffering or even our awareness of the prevalence of such suffering.

This is where the question of otherness asserts itself most strongly. How

can we regain an affective, contingent investment in the world, and how might we find a way to do this which does not simply render ourselves open to manipulation through instrumental techniques? Indeed, the work of philosophers such as Carl Mitcham and Don Ihde, who provide phenomenological descriptions of being-with techniques, points to the need for a stepping back from our engagement with our techniques in order to grasp the otherness of the things and beings with which we are engaged. The work of Irigaray is powerful in developing ways toward opening to otherness, contingency, and difference. As she states in *To Be Two*,

Technology uses the language of the neuter; a disincarnate language, a universal language which pretends to be valid for everyone, beyond our differences. Such a language already speaks through machines and more quickly and more correctly than we do, and this represents a challenge for our bodies, our hearts, our thought. (107)

In order to re-inscribe difference into experience, we are in need of a fuller sense of the otherness of the things and beings with which we share a world. And rather than turning to further disciplinary techniques for respect for the other, Irigaray's conception of the necessity of "auto-affection" in *The Way of Love*, opens up a restorative way to otherness that also begins to tear at the logic of instrumental reason. Auto-affection helps describe the safeguarding and cultivation of oneself required to open and attend to the other. Irigaray states, "An encounter between two different subjects implies that each one attends to remaining oneself. And that cannot amount to a simple voluntarist gesture but

depends on our ability for ‘*auto-affection*’[...] Without this, we cannot respect the other as other, and he, or she cannot respect us” (xiv). I would like to offer that instead of techniques of cognitive self-discipline in relating to technology and to others in the world, which perpetuate the accumulation of guilt, “auto-affection” implies a much more expanded conception of relating to the world. Cognition can hide its limits by speaking *about* love, but it does not contribute to this act unless it falls in line with the emotive body. Auto-affection is learned through the flesh. It is from this point that I would like to begin to participate in developing techniques for “doing thinking” in continually expanding ways.

6. Made from Movement: Three Studies

Why bring these three artworks together? They seemingly have so little to do with each other, and indeed it is true that they remain entirely distinct. Of course it can be noted that all three artists lived in New York in the 1960s and moved in some of the same circles. Serra and Snow knew each other, and Serra even helped spread Snow's film *Wavelength* to a larger audience (Snow 1994, 61; Krauss 1999, 24). But these details do not help bring the artworks themselves closer together.

In a sense what I am doing in this dissertation is making a “prop piece,” to

borrow a description from Richard Serra's work.⁸ I am leaning descriptions of these artworks against each other in a way that makes evident different aspects of each one. Phenomenological description also leans into this midst, and helps work out my main themes of movement. In another way, bringing these three artworks together can be understood as akin to the intermediality that we can find in Snow's body of work. How do movement and time appear in strikingly similar and different ways in different creative situations? How do similar questions regarding time and movement work themselves out in different ways in these artworks? Furthermore, learning from the way that Menken draws together different rhythms such that these rhythms remain unique *and* evidence each other, we can begin to consider how these artworks as a group show different rhythms of movement. Together, these three artworks may allow us to encounter different features of movement beyond the narrow conception of movement as change, force, or upwelling release.

As I aim to describe, *That/Cela/Dat's* explicit words shift, empty, and fade right before the very eyes of its viewers. It estranges the act of reading, *delaying in it* so that viewers can reflect upon what it is to experience meaning in art.

That/Cela/Dat's distinctive overall movement situates its viewers within an

8 See Krauss, 2000 [1986] for a description of Serra's "prop" pieces. She states, "In *Prop* the process was a function of a relationship between the two elements of the work, working against each other in a continuous labor of elevation. It was this constantly renewed tension, active within the object at each moment, necessary to the very prolongation of its existence, that Serra located a special aspect of his vocation as a sculptor" (107).

experience of corrigibility, showing how this participates in its presence as an inexhaustible work of art. In my descriptions I will work to show how even though corrigibility appears merely as a flaw or negative relational force within an atomistic conception of time, one of the things this artwork does is show the potency of corrigibility.

One of the striking aspects of *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* that I will draw out in my study is the way it shows how certain forms, figures, and rhythms appear in movement that remain implicit or hidden within focused stillness. This film shows the clarity and fullness of seeing in movement – not just impressions of movement or evidence of movement, but forms that appear in movement, are made from movement. Through the film, movement begins to appear as a potent and generative field for perception itself that allows for depth and invisibility.

And in Serra's *Torqued Ellipses*, I will draw out descriptions of generativity, that potent intermingling of spontaneity and generality. I aim to show how these sculptures help us experience a movement that is generativity itself, and reflect on natality. Generativity is not just change in place or even just the upwelling force of energy release, but as we may see, it is the coming into being of anything alive, what we find so striking in creativity and originality.

Together these three artworks also help show how thinking through movement offers a productive approach to reflecting on artworks more generally. Questioning along lines of movement allows for that which remains implicit

within experience of artworks to become more explicit without erasing the temporal nature of particularly noteworthy works of art.

Chapter One

That/Cela/Dat (2000) by Michael Snow

1. Introduction

Upon entering the gallery room that holds Michael Snow's *That/Cela/Dat* one encounters an intricate composition of single words appearing and disappearing from three screens. A digital projector shines its light-writing onto an opposing gallery wall; this large projection is flanked by two smaller video monitors. The artwork presents a fifteen minute video loop of a text in three languages (French, English and Flemish) shown simultaneously on the three screens (fig. 1). Rotating from one screen to the next, the different languages systematically swap places after each fifteen minute duration. Snow worked out the timing of the piece with such precision that the words “that,” “cela,” and “dat” always show up at the same time across the three screens. The artwork's presentation of single words on each of the screens draws attention to each word, but these individual words can also be grouped together and read as sentences. Each word in *That/Cela/Dat* is also expanded to fit the screen width so that short words become enlarged, and long words become attenuated. These size variations along with the presentation of single words, set an irregular pace of reading and estranges its viewers from representational meaning.

In this chapter I will describe what will be discussed as *That/Cela/Dat*'s distinctive overall movement. In most basic terms, this movement expands through tensions between the will toward grasping explicit, denotative meaning, and the delaying of this will. I aim to describe the way that this distinctive overall movement coheres in a field of presence and inheres in a sphere of ambiguity; I also aim to show that this is how *That/Cela/Dat* holds itself together and reveals itself as a particularly solid work of art.

In order to introduce this study, I will begin with a description of the phenomenon of delay, a particular movement that will help initiate the following study of this artwork's distinctive overall movement. I will then introduce some of the main themes of the chapter as well as the procedures for drawing out these themes.

Delay

A whole knot of phenomena open up in the many layers of delay in *That/Cela/Dat*. This is most explicitly asserted in its phrase, “the | tradition | of | painting | to | which | this | belongs | can | be | summarized | as | follows: | delay.”⁹ *That/Cela/Dat*'s presentation of the word “delay” draws its viewers through at least three distinct phases of experience. First, viewers encounter the

9 Throughout this chapter, quotes from the text will be shown in a sanserif font in order to more closely resemble their presentation in the artwork. The bars between words serve to indicate the breaks between shots and to remind the reader of the piece's cinematic presentation.

word's referential meaning, then viewers actually experience being delayed or detained, and finally through this detainment viewers can begin to perceive the physical markings that comprise the word “delay.” These phases are made present through the artwork's particular cinematic and temporal situation and, as we shall see, involves a kind of *this – that* movement. This section's meditation on delay serves to begin phenomenologically to describe *That/Cela/Dat*'s distinctive overall movement. Furthermore, it serves to equip the reader with a particular meaning of “delay” – one grounded in a potent and ambiguous statement from Marcel Duchamp – which will continue to resonate throughout the rest of the chapter.

First “delay” appears as a summary word, a conspectus of the piece, a summary of its place in the history of art. It is a mysterious summary, provocative of a clue to “getting” the piece. But it is not common to talk about the “delay” tradition in painting; we are much more accustomed to talking about abstract expressionist, or realist, or cubist traditions. Does the idea of delay in the tradition of painting have meaning and does it correspond in any way to this artwork? What does this presentation of words on screen have to do with painting or cinema or art at all for that matter? Outside of poetry and prose, are words not terribly reductive within the realm of art? As *That/Cela/Dat* provokes, “You | might | ask, | why | would | anyone | want | to | make | made | a | thing | like | this, | not | once | but | twice, | and | really, | wouldn't | a | book | be |

better?” Or, “Is | this | art?” Such questions might linger as the word “delay” remains on screen for an extended duration. But as “delay” continues to hold on screen, viewers are held in a temporal experience of delay, staring at the word, delayed in reading. One cannot read ahead to find out if the next set of words will help clarify the relationship between painting and delay and this artwork. Through this extended hold, the presence of the word transforms from the assertion of a proposition to the detainment and holding back through which one can feel an experience of delay. Within this experience of being held back, the push toward making sense of this word, anticipation of denotative meaning, becomes palpable.

Perhaps this is the way in which this artwork participates in the tradition of painting. It holds its viewers in an experience of delay in the unique way that paintings can – drawing out certain phenomena for experience and holding the viewer's attention in an unresolved state of contemplation. But this experience of delay almost contradicts the text's asserted idea of delay, the promise of a summarized conclusion. The idea of delay pushes toward categorizing the artwork within art's history, whereas the experience of delay is a kind of lingering and a hindrance to progress, a hindrance to reading a satisfying summary. In this way, the artwork situates its viewers within tensions between the use of the word “delay” as a concluding idea and the experience of delay as a kind of lingering detainment.

This tension does not resolve itself, but rather transitions into yet another

phenomenologically tangible experience of “delay.” As the word continues its persistent hold on screen it also gradually ceases to refer outside itself and instead draws perception to its physical presence. Its white letters grow hard against the dark background and the word begins to appear as a set of diacritical markings. Attentive viewers now begin to regard the shapes of the letters and the clean lines projected in cool white light. “Delay” transforms into a physically present object – a bold configuration of electric light on a hard, flat screen. These shifts in presence and meaning are made phenomenologically palpable as the viewer is held in a potent experience of delay. As the video continues, the word then slips away, disappearing from screen and becoming a passing point. Following a brief black “blink,” a new word appears on screen: “This” which is followed by “is” and then “dry.”

From this initial description of “delay” we can see how *That/Cela/Dat* makes phenomenologically present a shifting between *reading* the referential meaning of a word to *seeing* or *looking at* its physical presence as projected light on screen. As will become apparent throughout the chapter, the particular way *That/Cela/Dat* situates its viewers in flux between words' references and physical appearances opens up larger questions concerning meaning, time, and what it is to understand a work of art. For now it is worth noting that even as this artwork captivates its viewers in truly witty and beguiling word plays, as it draws attention to the actual, physical presence of words, viewers can also begin to experience

just how “dry” this physical presence is. As the word “delay” is detained, its viewers are detained with it and experience an attenuation of referential meaning.

Indeed, all of this is very dry. One may be inclined to ask, *so what* if the piece brings viewers to attend to the physical presence of words? Their physical presences may be more “actual” but simultaneously much less significant, less amusing, and much more “dry.” Is Michael Snow just being capricious? Is he simply displaying the illusive and slippery qualities of words? Or is he perhaps working out the *dry* conception of art that Duchamp proposed in his departure from painting? Duchamp states: “I wanted to go back to a completely *dry* drawing, a *dry* conception of art” (1989, 130).¹⁰

Certainly words are uncanny objects; even though they stand right there in front of us they tend not to show themselves but rather possess us with their referents. Within this artwork, the strange presence of words does come to the fore as viewers can begin to experience the way that words are simultaneously both here and not here. *That/Cela/Da*'s words do show themselves. This

10 This quotation from Duchamp is taken from a 1956 interview with James Johnson Sweeney. Here they discuss Duchamp's shift from painting *Nude Descending a Staircase*, No. 2 (1912) to *Chocolate Grinder*, No. 2 (1914):

JJS: Well, what was different in your point of view here than in any normal still life of a chocolate grinder? Was it a mechanical interest, it that it?

MD: Yes. The mechanical aspect of it influenced me then, or at least that was also the point of departure of a new form of technique. I couldn't go into the haphazard drawing or the paintings, the splashing of the paint. I wanted to go back to a completely *dry* drawing, a *dry* conception of art. I was beginning to appreciate the value of the exactness, of precision, and the importance of chance. The result was that my work was no longer popular with amateurs, even among those who liked impressionism or cubism. And the mechanical drawing for me was the best form for that dry conception of art.

showing intertwines with a drying out of experience. But this artwork does not leave its viewers with merely an impoverished or negative experience of meaning. The experience of dryness participates in the potency of delay; for it is within the tensions of delaying that the artwork enables its viewers to feel, as obviously and tangibly present, the will toward locating fixed denotative meaning. As much as the piece immerses its viewers within and even provokes this habituated willing, it simultaneously delays and estranges viewers from the will toward explicit meaning. The artwork troubles viewers' attempts to grasp it as a whole, delaying in this to the point where it can lead viewers to a fuller experience of time, meaning, and art. This is the meaning behind that.

The rich ambiguity of one of Marcel Duchamp's notes on his artwork *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, (commonly referred to as “The Large Glass”) can help fill out the phenomena of delay in *That/Cela/Dat*. During the eight years (1915 – 1923) that Duchamp worked on his “Glass” he kept extensive notes which were intended to be displayed along with the artwork. In one of these notes Duchamp gave “The Large Glass” a “kind of subtitle:”

Delay in Glass

Use “delay” instead of picture or painting; picture on glass becomes delay in glass – but in glass does not mean picture on glass—

It's merely a way of succeeding in no longer thinking that the thing in question is a picture—to make a delay of it in the most general way possible, not so much in the different meanings in which delay can be taken, but rather in their decisive reunion “delay” - /a delay in glass as you would say a poem in prose or a spittoon in silver. (1989, 26)

Duchamp's note emphasizes the fact that his "Glass" is not a picture, not an "image" on a representational plane. Delay *is* the artwork. Here we also encounter delay in glass as suspension, holding motion in arrest. This note seems to encourage a certain kind of approach, a way of encountering the artwork; the viewer's act of perceiving is also delayed in glass, apprehended, and made strange. But this delay in glass also involves a kind of translation or ekphrasis, where certain elements are transposed out of their habitual modes of expression into estranged forms, like a "poem in prose" or a "spittoon in silver." Certain logics are thrown into relief, suspended in a realm where their perpetual motions and self-enclosed systems are no longer surrounded by the conditions through which their motions make clear, logical sense. What we see in the glass, what in the strict sense is visibly *there* and looks so much like a picture, is almost the *least* of its presence as an artwork. The invisible movements, pressures, longings, and loiterings spread out the palpating present of this "delay in glass." As the artwork holds its viewers in this unresolvable experience of delay, the explicit markings of the artwork become a vague outline of the more general hindrance-of-progress or the continual attempt of a coherent system to try to function even though it has been caught in a realm where the major tenets of its logic do not translate and are continually turned back on themselves.

That/Cela/Dat also situates its viewers with invisible overall movements and pressures of indeterminacy and ambiguity. *That/Cela/Dat*, like the *Large*

Glass is not a picture in at least two senses. Firstly, it does not “picture,” refer, or represent some original object or scene; it is not a “sign” of some hidden meaning. Secondly, its most explicit and determinate appearances are almost the thinnest veil of its presence as an artwork even though it perpetually provokes its viewers to attempt to form a *picture* of it as a whole. Through this, it deftly leads its viewers into a more expansive experience of art.

As will become apparent later in the chapter, delay, in all its meanings, presence, and experiences also takes on a key role in describing *That/Cela/Dat*'s distinctive overall movement. In addition, the word “troubles” also takes on a special role in this chapter as a kind of subspecies of delay: *That/Cela/Dat*'s situation troubles the will toward wholly explicit meaning.

This | is | art

Even though *That/Cela/Dat* looks so much like it is just words, it is not; it is art. As we will see, it shows itself clearly as an artwork as *delay*. It *uses* words and explicit, declarative language, but it does so in such a way that it estranges its viewers from their habitual approaches to finding meaning. Correspondence approaches to reading, of locating *that* as the meaning hidden behind *this*, are thrown into relief. Viewers become situated such that they both *use* a denotative approach to reading *and* begin to *watch* themselves using it. As I will demonstrate, *That/Cela/Dat* shows its viewers a *picture* of the *will* toward

explication; this *will* shines back at its viewers as something palpably present.

In this chapter I will also work to describe how *That/Cela/Dat's* self-discussion opens up the question of what it is to understand a work of art. One of the ways that this artworks does this is by throwing correspondence approaches to art interpretation out of joint. The ambiguous place of the artist's voice in the work does not allow its interpretation to rest as a correspondence between the artist's intentions and the artwork. Nor do dry facts about the work add up to a description about the work as a whole. As I will demonstrate, this artwork also sets up its viewers to be able watch themselves in the experience of art interpretation. *That/Cela/Dat* presents an *image* of its own interpretation and in this process it slackens the links between reading and art. Because the meaning of artworks can never be separated from actual experience, it can be tempting to conceive of the significance of artworks as entirely subjective. Therefore it can often seem best to restrain talk of art to seemingly more objective realms such as the artist's intentions, what the artwork depicts, the artwork's place in history, or discussion of technique. Even though these strategies can appear to respect the fact that artworks must be experienced, *That/Cela/Dat* helps us experience them as attempts to locate meaning behind or beyond the artwork that remain tied an analytic correspondence conception of meaning.

In this chapter I will also draw on linguistic and philosophical concepts to help show the ways in which *That/Cela/Dat* estranges its viewers from cohering

with linguistic meaning. As we will see, Lambert Zuidervaart's term “art talk” (*Artistic Truth*, 2004) will help describe the ways that this particular work of art critically reflects on what it is to understand a work of art. And Mallin's concept of “autocritical art” (*Art Line Thought*, 1996) will help describe the way *That/Cela/Dat* situates viewers so that they can both use, and watch themselves using, a correspondence approach to truth. Furthermore, describing this piece as autocritical will also help show how it both uses and delays its viewers in an atomistic conception of time.

I aim to show how *That/Cela/Dat* refuses to be grasped as a whole even though it at first appears to be graspable in such a way through a tallying of its assertions or a summary viewpoint. But, as we will see, as viewers “stick | with | it,” as the artwork overtly encourages them to do, the will towards cohering with meaning – the longing to be immersed, or be at “home” in its significance – becomes palpable. It is within the experience, I would like to suggest, that *That/Cela/Dat*'s distinctive overall movement coheres. In the *present tense* situation of this artwork, its individual, explicit assertions show their corrigibility; they shift and empty their meanings right before the very eyes of the viewers. Such corrigibility *appears* as a flaw, marking out the impossibility of logical certainty, but also the impossibility of pure presence in art. But corrigibility in this artwork simultaneously becomes evident as productively participating in the irreducibility of the artwork. Individual words do protrude, and do express

explicit meanings, but they remain wrapped in the distinctive overall movement of *That/Cela/Dat*. In their detained and shifting expressions they do not merely exhaust themselves, but are continually drawn back and returned to the artwork. *That/Cela/Dat* situates its viewers within an intertwining of reading, looking, delaying, projecting, waiting, writing, attending, leaving, picturing, referring, showing and hiding, through which viewers can begin to face time's inexhaustible movement. Within *That/Cela/Dat*'s distinctive overall movement viewers can begin to feel time revolving on itself. Furthermore, this distinctive overall movement shows itself in the present tense situation, a present that cannot be grasped as a whole but does cohere as a field of presence. Considered in this way, *That/Cela/Dat*'s situation is a continual explicating through this movement, holding together through this movement, maintaining of irreducibility through this movement, and insisting on corrigibility through this movement.

2. This is the meaning behind that

On one level *That/Cela/Dat* appears completely to lay itself out in plain language; it invites its viewers in through explicit text and witty play with words. In this way it appears to be ready-made for discursive interpretation or semiotic analysis, and yet it simultaneously turns these approaches to interpretation back on themselves. In this section, an initial description of the way *That/Cela/Dat* shows itself as a text will serve to outline what the piece *says* about itself.

Secondly, I will examine the way this artwork “autocritically” *shows* the traps of discursive approaches to meaning and art. That is, I will phenomenologically describe the way this artwork takes hold of the will towards discursive and denotative approaches to interpretation, delays this will, and within this delay relates its viewers back to the potent ambiguity which is so important to this artwork's rich field of presence and distinctive overall movement.

That/Cela/Dat's self-descriptions

That/Cela/Dat contains descriptions of its own history, physical descriptions, instructions on how to access the artwork, assertions of the artist's intentions, discussion of the way the artwork alludes to other artworks, statements about what the artwork *is*, and philosophical reflection. Viewers do not need to read or discuss outside of *That/Cela/Dat* to find such information since it states all these things, one word after another. For example, it informs its viewers that in 1982 the author of *That/Cela/Dat*, Michael Snow, made a 45 minute 16mm film called *So Is This*. In 1999 Thierry De Duve, the curator of the exhibition *Voici*, asked Michael Snow if he would make a new work that would continue the theme

of *So Is This*.¹¹ And as *That/Cela/Dat* states, “This | is | that.” *That/Cela/Dat* also explicates the artist's intentions by quoting from *So Is This*: “Sometimes | the | author | of | this | film | is | present | when | his | films | are | screened | and | can | thus | answer | questions | about | them.” But *That/Cela/Dat* goes on to state that even when the author is not present to respond in his own voice, this artwork will be able to respond to questions the viewer might pose to it.

Indeed, if one asks for a physical description of this artwork, *That/Cela/Dat*'s text gives clear answers: it is constructed out of white words on a black background. The words are projected one after the other on “this” surface, the gallery wall or surface of the video monitors, each word remaining on screen for a specific duration. Or if viewers ask how this piece participates in the history of art, they are met with a quotation from Magritte: “Ceci | n'est | pas, |

11 Since 2000 this piece has been included in the following exhibitions: *Solo Snow*, Le Fresnoy, France, Curated by Louise D  ry, February 10 – April 24, 2011; *Recent Snow*, Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto, Canada, December 11, 2009 – March 7, 2010; *Smile Machines*, curated by Anne-Marie Duguet, part of Transmediale.06, Akademie der K  nste, Berlin, February-March 2006 ; *Instant Snow*, Centre Pompidou, France, October 30, 2002 – January 2, 2003; *Michael Snow Almost Cover to Cover*, Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, September 22 – November 18, 2001, and John Hansard Gallery, Southampton UK, April 23 – June 8, 2002; White Box, New York N.Y., October 16 - October 27, 2001. I studied *That/Cela/Dat* in the *Recent Snow* exhibition at the Power Plant in Toronto, an exhibition of gallery video works by Michael Snow that included *The Corner of Braque and Picasso Streets* (2009), *Piano Sculpture* (2009), *Condensation: A Cove Story* (2008), *SSHTOORRTY* (2005), and *Solar Breath (Northern Caryatids)* (2002). With the exception of *SSHTOORRTY*, all of these pieces were made specifically for gallery audiences, and thus remain distinct from Snow's theatre film and video works.

évidemment, | une | pipe! | © | RENE | MAGRITTE, | 1935.¹²” And as noted above, *That/Cela/Dat* informs its viewers that the tradition in painting to which it belongs can be summarized as follows: “delay.”

That/Cela/Dat states all of these things, instructing its viewers on how to approach the piece, telling them not to read out loud but in silence, going on to note that silent communal reading is not a common activity, but one that we might engage in while reading signs in a train station, or in church, or perhaps while reading the instructions to wait for the light to turn green before crossing the street. This kind of reading is both “private” (silent in one's own head) and “public” (all reading the same thing in the same space at the same pace).

That/Cela/Dat is entered through reading, and the text often reflects on the act of reading; it notes how letters in reading are “overlooked,” how even when certain letters in a word are switched around we are still able to read the “intended” word, how we are also able to read words printed upside down and backwards, and how certain letter configurations are shared amongst *That/Cela/Dat*'s three languages though the literal meanings are different. It tells us that it is a loop to which we can return at any time; it will continue even while we are not reading. From the

12 The quotation draws from Magritte's painting, *La trahison des images*, (1928–29, The Treachery of Images / The Treason of Images), only Snow has inserted an additional word: évidemment. *That/Cela/Dat*'s English text states, “This | is | not, | obviously, | a | pipe.” Such a phrase can be taken in a number of ways. On the one hand it could mean that *it is not obvious that this is a pipe*, which is to say that there is no obvious evidence that this is a pipe. Such a meaning leaves room for an indefinite or obscure way in which this *is* a pipe. On the other hand, it could be asserting, *obviously this is not a pipe*, adding emphasis to the fact that this is not a pipe.

text the viewer is also informed that its author hopes that “you” will not find this piece “banal,” that “you” will “stick | with | it” longer than the ten seconds that the average ambulatory gallery audience usually gives an artwork of average size. *That/Cela/Dat* also makes statements regarding the fact that there are many other interesting artworks in this exhibit, that it must work to maintain the attention of its viewers, but that they are free to leave this artwork at any time.

Metaphysical assertions regarding the temporality of *That/Cela/Dat* are also stated in plain text, such as “teleology | of | the | Eternal | Return” and “Reincarnation” and “Cosmic | this.” On many occasions *That/Cela/Dat* gives short, declarative statements regarding what “this” is:

This is electric light, projected on this.
This is art.
This is not.
This is a universe!
This is fact.
This is dry.
This is feminine and you are masculine.
This is an algorithm.
This has no beginning and no end.
This is explicit.
This is language.

On the one hand, *That/Cela/Dat* is an easy piece to “get,” as plain as the writing on the wall. It appears to say everything there is to say about it, and to say it with more wit and precision than anyone else could. *That/Cela/Dat* is already available in words in three languages, and thus appears to save us the task of “translating” it into literary terms. In attempting critical reflection on the piece, it

appears that we could, *so to speak*, simply mouth back the words of the piece. This work appears to take the characterization of Snow's work as cerebral to the very limit, its smart self-referential assertions revolving perpetually in the conceptual realm. Yet the more time spent with *That/Cela/Dat*, the less discursive sense it seems to make. As soon as one interpretation appears to be stable, the inverse is also shown to be true as different levels of “meaning” intertwine and beat against each other.

Art Talk

As the above section describes, *That/Cela/Dat* takes on common topics of art discourse, openly discussing the artist's intentions, its reliance on the audience to relate to the piece, its medium, and the conditions through which it is manifest. But viewers are inclined to wonder how these topics of discussion function since they are also the very stuff of the artwork. The way *That/Cela/Dat* discusses and presents itself phenomenologically opens up questions concerning what it is to understand a work of art.

This section will serve to describe how *That/Cela/Dat* enables a meta-reflection on the ways that art conversations contribute to forming an artwork and giving it place in the world. I will begin with a phenomenological description of the way the piece appears as a “sign” pointing to some hidden meaning beyond itself, while at the same time the artwork thwarts this attempt to locate such referential meaning. Drawing on Lambert Zuidervaat's term “art talk,” I will

describe how this artwork phenomenologically troubles the relationship between artist, artwork, and language. I will then make use of Samuel Mallin's concept of "autocriticality" to help explicate the way this artwork situates its viewers in a highly reflexive experience of art, language, and meaning.

A strong presence of Michael Snow's style comes through *That/Cela/Dat*, and even through the artwork's silent words, one is able to "hear" the artist's "voice" quite clearly¹³. Not only does he quote himself by quoting sections of text from *So Is This*, but his "signature" sense of humour – layered with puns, sharp wit, and multiple meanings – comes through in *That/Cela/Dat*. The piece seems to present an intimate view of the artist's intentions for making the work, but through its unique presentation it simultaneously delays and troubles the connections between artist, discourse, and artwork.

The equivocal place of the artist's voice in *That/Cela/Dat*

13 *That/Cela/Dat* situates viewers so that they might be able to feel the way that written words can produce intimate connections and audible interior "echoes" within its viewers. For example, it both shows and comments on the way capitalized words seem "LOUD." *That/Cela/Dat* goes on: "Speaking of sound, let us all now mutely join our mental voices, mutually together in silent song. Here we go: 1, 2, 3, 4 "Some where o-ver the rain-bow skies are blue..." clap clap clap." Judy Garland's voice comes through quite audibly. It is not simply that one "thinks of" Garland, but experiences an interior echo of her voice. Furthermore, it is interesting to note Snow's play with voice in *That/Cela/Dat* in relation to the following description of "hearing" Hollis Frampton's voice as Snow prepared a text in honour of Frampton after his death: "I had been talking, on the telephone, with Susan Krane, the curator of the Hollis Frampton exhibition, who had graciously asked me to give the talk which you are now hearing and are, I hope, about to hear. I had hesitantly agreed and after other details we said our goodbyes and hung up our phones. As I sat back to reflect nervously on the decision I heard Hollis's wonderful laughter being played back in my memory.

He was certainly what used to be called a gentleman and though he could be caustic in his comments, the laughter I heard was a sort of laughter I shared - after all, I thought it!" ([1984] 1994, 241)

phenomenologically opens up questions of authorship and art interpretation. The piece overtly plays with the ambiguities of authorship and voice, distances the text from the artist by referring to Snow in the third person, and refuses to allow its viewers to “solve” the piece through a literal matching of its meaning with an explicit articulation of the artist's intentions. It can be tempting in the interpretation of artworks to construe the artist's statements of intention as the “hidden meaning” veiled behind the “sign” of the artwork; according to this common attitude, if one can match her or his perceptions to the content of the artist's statement, one “gets” the artwork. In this case, the artist's words comprise a large part of the artwork. The written text is also something separate from the artist that goes on without him, while at the same time the artist remains recognizable in this piece. All of these things are true, but they shift between being more or less determinate at different points in the temporal presentation of the piece. A distinct phenomenon of *That/Cela/Dat* is that though it discursively tempts its viewers, it phenomenologically does not allow them to fall into the “illusion” that the artwork is the mere outward expression or communication of the inner “self” of the artist.

In a certain respect *That/Cela/Dat* shows itself as an icon of highly reflexive art discourse. One of the reversals performed by *That/Cela/Dat* is its placement of language about itself, language often used to circumscribe the art experience, at the very centre of the experience of this artwork.

In his book *Artistic Truth*, Lambert Zuidervaart introduces his term “art talk” as follows:

Once Kant had described aesthetic ideas as creative intuitions that exceed the grasp of ordinary thought, the relation between art and language became a contested topic in Western aesthetics. It is common knowledge, and a basis for much of analytic aesthetics, that language usage pervades experiences of art. Viewers, listeners, and readers talk about art, write and read about it, watch videos and television programs about art, read reviews, listen to their acquaintances talk about art, and so forth. Let me introduce the term “art talk” as a way of summarizing all these sorts of language usage. (2004, 68)

Zuidervaart introduces the term “art talk” to help delineate the “various ways in which language is used in the experience of art” (134). In defining art talk, Zuidervaart makes a further distinction between “art conversation” and “art discourse.” The former consists of relatively straightforward and unproblematic discussion of an artwork aimed at reaching an understanding, whereas the later moves into a more reflective mode whereby aesthetic validity becomes an explicit topic. Art talk often moves seamlessly between conversation and discourse, and the implicit claims to aesthetic validity that come up in conversation often become the explicit strains of art discourse. Zuidervaart states that “Conversations about art address, among other topics, the artist’s intentions, the audience’s interpretations, and the artwork’s internal demands” (134). *That/Cela/Dat* also offers a semblance of a discussion, particularly through its constant use of context-specific words such as “this,” “that,” “you,” “it,” and “now.” As Michael Snow stated in an interview with George Clark, *That/Cela/Dat*’s text “ has a lot

of references to where it is and the people that are reading it. It is a kind of discussion with the spectator and it is specially aimed at 'you'" (2009, 11).

Following Zuidervaart, we could see that *That/Cela/Dat*'s "discussion" also enters the realm of art discourse, though in a rather complicated way since this use of language brings along questions of whether it is valid for an artwork to claim its own validity from within and by means of propositional assertions. Very quickly our thinking here could end up in a kind of recursion whereby we describe *That/Cela/Dat* as a conversation about art discourse and discourse about art conversation. At this point Zuidervaart's point about the reflexivity of art discourse is helpful:

Because the artworld has developed as an institutionalized setting for promoting aesthetic processes, art is a crucial site for the aesthetically laden pursuit of cultural orientation. That in itself gives art a certain reflexivity, making it a place where aesthetic processes can themselves be explored, interpreted, and presented. As a constituent of art's institutionalization, art talk makes such reflexivity palpable by serving simultaneously to help find one's way in art and to help find one's way in aesthetic matters outside art. (72)

Like Duchamp's ready-mades, *That/Cela/Dat* places its viewers in a situation whereby they might begin to reflect on how they make sense of art, and on the conditions which allow viewers to designate art objects as such. The common objects that constitute the ready-mades like the plain language of *That/Cela/Dat* are already explicit and so defy explications or interpretations that centre on the beauty or hidden aesthetic qualities of the artworks. Instead, these

artworks take hold of the process by which viewers orient themselves in relation to artworks, making this process palpable, but also enabling viewers to reflect on larger questions concerning the way that we participate in meaningful experience.

The idea of “cultural orientation” in Zuidervaat's writing has to do with the way that cultures find direction, and one of the tenets of *Artistic Truth* is to disclose how “artistic truth arises at the intersection of aesthetic validity, cultural orientation, and art talk” (100). For the purposes of our descriptions here, the way that art's institutionalization contributes to the doubly reflexive processes of art talk helps begin our reflection on *That/Cela/Dat*. Like any particularly solid work of art, *That/Cela/Dat* participates in questions of *what is art*, but additionally *That/Cela/Dat* reflects on the way that language works for and against deciphering these questions. Further, *That/Cela/Dat* reflects on the relationship between discourse and the will towards explication and validity. In this light we could say that *That/Cela/Dat* makes art talk palpable as well as the structures and conditions that give it its reflexivity. One of the strengths of Zuidervaat's term “art talk” is the way it includes all the speaking, listening, and writing that is part of the art experience. This leaves room for consideration of the way language is an integral part of how we make sense of art and how we come to understand artworks. Language is woven into the way that artworks take up place

and identity in the world.¹⁴

But the relationship between art and language is highly contested. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into this debate, but I will roughly outline a few of the issues. One of the ways that artworks “help find one's way in art” is to show how irreducible they are to “art talk.” In fact, we could say this is a major theme particularly in modern and post-modern art. Colour field painting, for example, defies verbal and photographic representation. Duchamp's ready-mades disclose the way institutional “art talk” produces art objects. To mute all talk is one of the “games” that art plays, but in strong artworks this is not simply a frivolity or expression of novelty; it is a defence of the very existence of art. In this way art continues to demand to be experienced and not merely referred to; its very significance comes through situational experience.

And yet “art talk” continues to pervade art experience, through gallery announcements, catalogues, statements about the artwork's defiance of “art talk,”

¹⁴ The way that language becomes integrated into the experience of artworks, which are often primarily non-cognitive and non-linguistic, can be limiting for artworks and can also be a source of frustration for artists. Though it is important for artworks to be discussed and written about, the talk can sometimes replace the artwork. It is tempting to claim to know an artwork from its art talk (and its representations). Even if people do not claim to know the artwork from its talk, the talk can come to overshadow the artwork – it can be summarized in a certain way that then comes to be the only aspect of the work that people perceive. For example, artworks can be known as the first to accomplish a certain technique or the first to break a certain custom. An artwork's “firstness” is a part of the art talk, but this status can quickly become integrated into the artwork's “identity” as well as its validity. Snow addresses questions of “firstness” in *So Is This*:

Next there have been several films or videotapes that concentrate on texts, for example, Richard Serra, Tom Sherman, John Knight, Paul Haines and Su Friedrich have made excellent use of texts. The author would like to have been first but it's too late. Priority is energy. In some respects, this is first. Obviously this is not the first time that this has been used for the first time. (Snow, [1982] 1994, 218)

conversations, and so on. Even artworks that are most difficult to talk about are pointed to in language. In *Artistic Truth* Zuidervaat argues for a way to talk about art that does not reduce art's disclosure to propositional or correspondence theories of truth. *That/Cela/Dat* also troubles the search for meaning as a correspondence between the artist's articulated intentions and the realized artwork, or between the artwork and its referents; one of the ways it does this is to present itself as a likeness of the very mode of articulation that tends to make these kinds of reductions.

On one level, *That/Cela/Dat* troubles the relationship between art and language by presenting itself as a semblance of “art talk.” In a certain sense it completely covers itself over with “art talk.” From this angle we could say that *That/Cela/Dat* troubles the analytic tendency to take the summary or the representation in place of situational experience. Can there be public and shared meanings of artworks even though these meanings necessarily emerge from direct experience? In light of the inherent struggle between public and private that comes along with descriptions of meaning in art, it can often seem best to restrict art talk to physical descriptions, art history, artist's intentions, and techniques. However, *That/Cela/Dat* exposes such restrictions as attempts to locate meaning behind or beyond the artwork that remain tied an analytic, correspondence conception of meaning. *That/Cela/Dat* give a dry, “factual” account of itself. But these facts do not add up, and there is no artwork hidden behind the talk since the

words *are* the artwork.

Autocriticality

Let me begin by describing a distinct phenomenological aspect of *That/Cela/Dat*, one which any attentive viewer would certainly agree becomes tangible when in the presence of the artwork. I often had the feeling that the words on screen were barring me from experience and were hiding the art object or abstract principle to which they refer. I wanted to break through the flat screens and experience that which was being withheld from me. Perhaps there I would find the aesthetic object to which all these words applied: the signified, the represented object, the idea. I wanted to see *this* but these words kept getting in the way, cluttering and confusing a coherent view of *that*. It can seem that all the words that compose *That/Cela/Dat* are actually veiling the art object or core concept that they describe. It offers the semblance of something that points outside of itself in the way that signs and symbols commonly point to meanings and facts beyond themselves. In this way, *That/Cela/Dat* appears as a textual account, a “reading” of an artwork that is not currently present. Or it at least appears as an artwork that can be *read*. But I was simultaneously aware that the conception that something lay hidden beyond the screen was only an appearance and *that this is all there is*: “This | is | a | universe! | What | more | could | anyone | ask | for?” What I could ask for is a place outside of the artwork's incessant temporal presentation from which I could gain a total grasp of this

“universe;” I could also ask for a means by which to tally all of the aspects of “this” and thereby formulate a summary idea of the artwork. The will to hold the entire text in my memory or to study its script in its entirety became palpable; I found myself constantly striving towards an outside position on this “universe” from which I could grasp it as a whole. But *That/Cela/Dat* continually refuses the “bird's eye view” it so astutely provokes while it simultaneously makes use of the limits of denotative meaning to keep expanding the viewer's experiences of language and art and meaning.

It is likely becoming apparent that this artwork, like so many works by Snow, is highly reflexive, continually turning in on itself and making use of its own conditions to show itself as a work of art. As Martha Langford states in “Michael Snow: Screen Writing,”

Snow's cinematic languages are resolutely uncommon, in their emphasis on aspects of their cultural form and its tools that have somehow been naturalized into neglect. What he does in effect is denature them by making their form-building functions more visible, audible, and palpable. (2010, 11)

That/Cela/Dat not only reflects on itself but also on all of the features of its situation, including the ways its viewers try to make sense of it. The term “autocritical,” borrowed from Mallin's *Art Line Thought*, and helps describe the way a work “criticizes itself, its environment, the viewer and the artist by means of just carrying itself out as an artwork” (1996, 422). On the one hand, *That/Cela/Dat* looks like plain discourse, and what it discusses is itself. But

within the piece's peculiar cinematic situation, the more the viewer reads, the more the text reflects back on what it is to find discursive meaning in general. Thus each word and sentence not only refers to common definitions, but simultaneously autocritically reflects on what it is to refer. How do we read referential meaning? How do artworks refer? What is meaning? *That/Cela/Dat*'s separate phrases convey literal meaning but the amalgam of these phrases simultaneously thwarts the possibility of resolving into a conspectus. The kind of language used by *That/Cela/Dat* can be described as dry and explicit and its sequential presentation of single words can easily be deciphered into declarative statements, questions, and promises. Though it does play with duration and temporal slippage of meaning, it cannot be described as poetic language. Its wit is engaging and funny, but it does not carry us away into the realm of entertainment. Even though its meanings remain clear and straightforward, it does not build an analytic argument. *That/Cela/Dat*'s unique cinematic situation delays its viewers in finding meaning. Viewers are not able to read the way they are accustomed to reading; that is, this artwork troubles the way viewers *want* to read and this wanting becomes palpable.

Furthermore, though this artwork refuses the possibility of resolving into a literal meaning, its viewers cannot completely escape from reading it. The perpetual appearance and disappearance of words from the screens keeps viewers within the piece; there is no external standpoint from which to reflect critically on

this artwork or to escape its temporal succession. Thus *That/Cela/Dat*'s unique cinematic situation allows viewers to experience and reflect on what it is to find meaning by participating in a delayed experience of that very process, a process which is inescapably temporal. As we will see, this artwork also autocritically reflects on atomistic conceptions of time and meaning; it delays its viewers within an atomistic framework. What is the relationship between time and meaning? What is the temporality of cinema? *That/Cela/Dat*'s presence as an artwork is shown autocritically, that is, from within its temporal self-reference, its play with the ambiguous voice of the artist, its gallery context, its cinematic form, and the participation of its viewers.

The concept of autocriticality will assist my subsequent phenomenological descriptions demonstrating how the piece pulls its viewers back from assumptions about time and meaning and art. For now this term helps indicate a way into describing *That/Cela/Dat*'s distinctive overall movement, a movement that coheres, but cannot be grasped as a whole or from an external vantage.

That/Cela/Dat demands to be read and demands a declarative approach to meaning while at the same time it delays its viewers to the point where they can begin to watch themselves attempting to hold onto explicit meaning.

3. The logic of language and the logic of art

Let me describe to you some of the ways that *That/Cela/Dat*'s meanings

become prismatic, how the work opens up gaps between what it says and what it does, between its articulations and its physical presence, and between its determinate and indeterminate appearances. Though it must be emphasized that this artwork presents itself through an actual cinematic situation, this section will serve to outline some of the ways that it works with language to draw attention back to its physical and temporal presence. Concepts drawn from linguistics and the philosophy of language such as deixis, sense *versus* reference, use *versus* mention, and translation will be borrowed to help describe the way the piece pulls its viewers back from tacit acceptance of denotative meaning. In the next section, which offers the first major phenomenological study of this artwork's unique situation, we will see how this tacit acceptance finds heritage in our capacities to “overlook” the concrete for the meaningful. In this section we will first examine the ways that *That/Cela/Dat* troubles the logics of denotative meaning.

Deixis

That/Cela/Dat's text is full of words such as “this” “that” “you” and “it,” words that continually renew their referents in relation to context and time. The prevalence of these words emphasizes the specific site of the presentation of the artwork, and also draws out the contextual relationship between words and things. Like the word “this” in *So Is This*, *That/Cela/Dat* also plays with the multiple directions that the words “this” and “that” can point in any given instant. Their meanings become prismatic, pointing at the screen, the electric light, the cosmos,

people (both actual and intentional), the visual appearance of the word, general categories etc. Indeed, the words “this” and “that” act as the “fingers | of | language.” In *That/Cela/Dat* the word “this” remains most prevalent, but “that” is also given special status as the words “that” “cela” and “dat” always appear simultaneously on the three screens. The moments where the words “this,” “that” and “you” indicate things that are physically present, such as the viewers or the gallery wall, also emphasize moments where words seem to fasten themselves to the world. In these moments words and things meet, but then loosen their clasp as the words and our attention shift to something else and “this” turns into “that.”

In linguistic terms the pronouns “this” and “that” are called shifters,¹⁵ indexical words,¹⁶ and deictics.¹⁷ The designation “shifter” highlights the way these words shift their referents according to their contexts; “index” particularly draws out the way they carry a direct indication or impression of their referents; and “deixis” more generally emphasizes the act of pointing carried out by such words. The idea of the index has been drawn on extensively in film theory to help define the cinematic medium particularly through alliance with photographic imagery.¹⁸ In her article, “The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity,” Mary Ann Doane draws out a distinction between two aspects of the index. She

15 See Jakobson, Roman. “Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb” in *Selected Writings*. Vol. 2. *Word and Language*, 1957 [1971].

16 See Peirce, C.S., “Division of Signs” in *Collected Papers*, 1932 [1897]

17 For a compelling study of deixis and the digital, see Evans, “Concerning the Digital” (2003).

18 See Gunning’s “Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality” (2007) for an overview of the concept of the index as it relates to the history of cinema.

demonstrates that though Peirce's concept of the index as imprint or trace has been important in defining the cinematic medium, his concept of index also contains the idea of pointing. Through this distinction she notes the temporal tension held within the concept of index: when it is exemplified as an imprint or “footprint” a certain pastness is emphasized; when it is described as pointing, it exhausts itself “in the moment of its implementation and is ineluctably linked to presence” (2007, 136). She goes on to cite how Snow's film *So Is This* uses indexicality in the sense of an imprint – most clearly seen when it presents flashbacks of its own prior sequences. But more importantly, it is the “ironies of the word 'this,' its refusal of a stable signification and the urgency of its appeal to an impossible presence that are at stake” in the film (137).

Let me begin to outline how *That/Cela/Dat*'s presence as a digital cinematic piece made for a gallery setting¹⁹ allows for a rich reflection on deixis. The root of both “digital” and “deixis” is *deik*, a direct showing (Evens 2003, 61). At the intersection of deixis, digit, and digital, this artwork plays with direct showing in many marvellous ways. It presents itself through single units: words, instants, individuals. Its dryness attenuates the distance between embodied

19 Snow is attuned to the kind of attention with which a gallery artwork contends: “I construct differently for a seated audience than I do for an ambulatory one. Like it or not, a gallery exhibition is a stroll. Works designed for the commitment of a cinema/theatre can't be shown within a gallery because they have a temporal structure with a beginning, middle and end. Even with a separate room in a gallery, and an announced schedule of screenings it can happen that few visitors might see a film in its entirety.” (Snow, 2001, 19)

gestures and linguistic gestures, and even overtly highlights the gap between human digits and the deictic fingers of language. Tempting deductive reasoning, it also draws in the sense of “deictic” as it is used in logic – a deduction that directly demonstrates its conclusion. Furthermore, this artwork presents a digital “translation” of the 16mm film *So Is This*. The way that the “digital age” makes everything instantaneously available can also be understood to foster a kind of attention that cycles at the level of deixis – look at this, and now this, and this – and curtails the onset of contemplation and reflection. The experience of viewing art in a gallery as a promenade also resonates with what we might call a deictic mode of attention, moving from one unique “this” to the next every ten seconds (on average, as *That/Cela/Dat* informs). This artwork skillfully grabs onto deictic experience and delays its viewers there.

Ostension

Literal meaning is also thwarted by the gap *That/Cela/Dat* carves out between what the text *says* and what the artwork *shows*. For example, it says that it will consist of single words shown one after the other, but it then places “[two words]” on the same screen. It says that the words will all be white on a black background, but the background colour often shifts between shades of grey, light blue, and at one point it displays the word “DAY” in black letters against white. *That/Cela/Dat* even goes so far in breaking this “rule” as to show a full screen of red light and a full screen of blue.

This tension between saying and showing brings experience of the piece to the activities, structures and assumptions that integrate into finding meaning. It is as though the piece is urging us to see how “reading is *that*,” “art is *this*.”

Let me draw on Wittgenstein's aphoristic style to make this point clearer.²⁰

In *On Certainty* Wittgenstein makes extensive use of ostension to show how language use disrupts the question of certainty concerning true and false statements. The force of many of the pithy statements in this book are asserted through indexical words and ostensive definitions; particularly the words “this” and “that” – often italicized in Wittgenstein's text – stand out as pointing gestures. Take the following examples,

§28 What is “learning a rule”? - *This*.

What is “making a mistake in applying it”? - *This*. And what is pointed to here is something indeterminate.

§47 *This* is how one calculates. Calculating is *this*.

§268 “I know that this is a hand.”—And what is a hand?—“Well, *this*, for example.”

20 Snow has noted his interest in Wittgenstein at points throughout his life, for example, in his 1972 interview with Andree Hayum Snow states, “I see you have *The Blue and Brown Books ... On Certainty* by Wittgenstein. It's really a riot. It's really very funny. It's about how impossible it is to be certain. [...] I don't feel as tortured by it as he did because his job was to try to be certain. I think it's an aspect of our existence that's interesting to discuss and that's no more or less relevant than any other. Sometimes, I just break up laughing reading Wittgenstein. It's very tragi-comic. Thinking of how funny philosophy is partly was the background of *Rameau's Nephew*. Anyway, that sort of relates to the whole thing about information. At the same time, what medium information is presented in has its own aspect. In this case it's a visual aspect. Like photographs are visual.” (85). And in discussion with John Du Cane in 1973, Snow stated, “I've been interested in Wittgenstein for quite a long time and that kind of thing has been background to part of it in a way. But also the language has a plastic nature” (88). More recently, Snow let me know that *On Certainty* is a work of philosophy that stands in close relation to *So Is This* and *That/Cela/Dat* (email correspondence, December 2010).

§280 After he has seen this and this and heard that and that, he is not in a position to doubt whether...

These words draw attention to the difference between what can be said and what can be shown. In §47 Wittgenstein emphasizes that one does not learn to calculate by first learning the definition of calculate, but rather by doing what is calculating. Avoiding the assertion of an analytic proposition, Wittgenstein uses the word “this” to point to the way that calculating is defined by the act of calculating. We know it because *this* is what it is. At the limits of propositional language, at the limits of what is knowable in propositions, odd sentences begin to appear and the word *this* takes on an active role. The word helps make explicit activities that may be obvious in practice but conceptually invisible – the structures and activities we are already tacitly engaged in to make meaning possible. *That/Cela/Dat* also uses the words “this” and “that” to bring into relief certain tacit assumptions we make regarding the processes of finding meaning in art and in time.

Through *That/Cela/Dat*'s stretching, expanding, delaying movement of “this” into “that” and back again, we are able to see what is in front of us, not only the material elements that form the artwork, but also the “rules” we are accustomed to using when trying to explicate challenging phenomena. Michael Snow, responding to questions following a screening of *So Is This* stated,

What you see is what's important. I'm saying that to be of any value, a work of art is a structure or construction, and it may generate

meanings, it may provoke meanings – and I'm interested in that – but I don't think there's any value in trying to make a work that's just a carrier of meanings. [...] I think the structure should provoke meanings, but it shouldn't be made as a carrier of meanings, because then you don't see what's in front of you. You don't live it. (1984, 26)

In *That/Cela/Dat* viewers are held in a situation of delay whereby they can begin to “see what's in front” of them and to “live it.”

Translation

Shifting between languages also enables further slippages. For example, I would at times read the Flemish word “je” as the French word “je” and vice versa, confusing “you” and “I,” compounding the shifting relationship between the piece and its viewers, and emphasizing the way the piece is related to by its viewers.

That/Cela/Dat's text draws attention to the fact that the same letter configurations can be different words in different languages; “het” and “the” are the same word, composed of the same letters in different order. English and Flemish share the word “is” but the inverse, “si,” is the French conditional, “if.” Reading between these three languages can open up slippages between tenses and meanings.

That/Cela/Dat goes on to state that the word “this” is common in all languages, though the meaning of it belongs to those who read.

Sense and Reference

“This” and “that” can also point at the same thing, but with different emphasis or different sense, showing how the same object can have different names and descriptions associated with it and how different words can show up

different aspects of the same thing. In *That/Cela/Dat*'s phrase “this | is | that”, following Frege's distinction in “On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*,”²¹ we can say that both “this” and “that” share the same referent, but have different senses. “This” refers to *That/Cela/Dat* as it is experienced in the present gallery context, and “that” refers to *That/Cela/Dat* as the artwork that was made in response to Thierry De Duve's curatorial request. Among other things, in this sentence the distinct senses that “this” and “that” bring to *That/Cela/Dat*, differ along a temporal line. “This” carries the sense of the determinate and actual artwork, and “that” as it existed on the horizon of suggestion and possibility. What once was a request is now an artwork, or what once was a 16mm film is now “reincarnated” as a video installation. “That” has become “this,” but “that” still inheres in “this.” As *That/Cela/Dat* states, “this | is | not | now | what | it | used | to | be.” I will return to the temporal lapse between “this” and “that” later, but staying with the theme of sense and reference, we can also see that where Frege shows how more than one name can converge on the same referent, since *That/Cela/Dat* tends to

21 For more on the distinction between sense and reference, see Gottlob Frege's paper, “On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*,” first published in 1892. One of Frege's major contributions to the philosophy of language is the distinction between *sinn* and *bedeutung*, commonly translated as “sense” and “reference” or “sense” and “denotation.” In the above mentioned paper Frege demonstrates how different names and nouns, though they may share the same referent, can do so in different senses. As he states, “The *Bedeutung* of 'Evening Star' would be the same as that of 'Morning Star', but not the sense” ([1892] 1997, 152). Both these names refer to the planet Venus, but they do so in different senses, different ways of conceiving the same thing. Furthermore, words and phrases can also have sense without a *Bedeutung*. Frege states, “It may be granted that every grammatically well-formed expression figuring as a proper name always has a sense. But this is not to say that to the sense there also corresponds a *Bedeutung*. The words 'the celestial body most distant from the Earth' have a sense, but it is very doubtful if they also have a *Bedeutung*” (153).

name by ostension (pointing), its act of “naming” splays out to multiple referents. “This,” “ceci,” “dit,” “that,” “cela,” and “dat,” are the subject and/or object of many of *That/Cela/Dat*'s sentences, and we could also say they are the subject and/or object of the entire piece. Thus, the different senses that “this” and “that” bring to the heterogeneous situation of the artwork, the way they offer distinct senses, and the way they gesture differently becomes important in grasping the piece. “This” and “that” can point to the same thing with different senses, but they also constantly shift their referents and can refer to almost anything we can imagine or can separate from our surroundings.

That/Cela/Dat's trilingual presentation also opens up reflection on the way different languages can share senses. Quite obviously, all three languages share a word for “this/ceci/dit” and “that/cela/dat,” but we can also catch glimpses of such sharing in other words such as “meaningless/insignifiant/zinloos.” More obscurely, though, we can also grasp an inkling of the way that the different modes of expression in these different languages also alter the shared sense of the text(s). For example, “of | this | building,” “dans | cette | édifice,” and “van | dit | gebow,” all share the same referent, but with different senses, particularly considering the variation between prepositions in the phrases. Or, take the following phrases that all share the same sense, but wherein word order as well as the word for the third-person pronoun also slightly shifts the shared sense of the phrase(s):

What	Que	Wat
more	peut-on	kan
could		men
anyone	espérer	nog
ask	de	meer
for?	plus?	verlagen?

That/Cela/Dat's presentation in three languages shows how translations share the same senses, but also offer many shifts in sense through variations in vocabulary, phrasing, word order, and verbosity. Two different modes of "sense" are now beginning to emerge. In the first mode, following Frege, we can see that "the same sense has different expressions in different languages or even in the same language" (153). In the second mode, through *That/Cela/Dat*, we can glimpse how these different expressions also hold different senses. But because I cannot read *That/Cela/Dat*'s three screens and languages simultaneously, I am only able to grasp an inkling of the different trans-lingual senses. That is, in addition to the fact that the words keep appearing and disappearing, two of the screens always remain somewhat peripheral in my attention and my vision, so I cannot conduct an intertextual comparison between the three languages. I found myself wanting to be able to hold all three screens and all three languages clearly in my vision and my cognitive grasp, but the texts kept eluding me. This second

mode of sense remains obscure and indeterminate in *That/Cela/Dat*.²² But of course, discussion of the difference between languages is a discussion of the difference strictly between words rather than a difference between sense and reference since these words share no outside referent or object. That is, we are not here dealing with an “original” text that has been translated into two other languages (even if this is the way Snow worked, it is not how the piece is presented). The Flemish, French, and English texts say the same thing and in this way they share the same sense. But they also say it in different ways and in this way bring different senses to their shared sense. Their shared sense, however, cannot be taken as a *Bedeutung*; there is no thing to which this shared sense refers, nothing by which we can analytically judge their truth-value. In a footnote to his mention of the difference between “aesthetic delight” and “the attitude of scientific investigation,” Frege states, “It would be desirable to have a special term for signs intended to have only sense. If we name them say, representations [*Bilder*], the words of the actors on stage would be representations; indeed the

22 The skewing of the optimal visual and conceptual perspective is something Snow has addressed in other of his artworks, for example, in 1970 he made *Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film*, which he describes in the following way: “A film (by Snow) of projected slides of paintings (by Snow) with verbal description - dates, media, size etc. - (by Snow), *Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film* situates the spectator-camera as a fictional viewer seated extremely obliquely to the screen of the slide show, forced to see a parallelogram rather than the projected rectangle. This distortion is increased by another - a gradual sinking slowing of the sound, getting lower and lower, and a gradual depressing darkening of the image till the screen is black. A negative parody of boredom slides the spectator from his fictional “side seat” to the one he is actually in. The voice later gradually speeds up till it’s a comic abstraction as the image brightens and brightens. One never really sees the ‘paintings’ and the film thus becomes . . . itself.” (1971b, 74)

actor himself would be a representation” (157, ft F). In a broad way, *That/Cela/Dat*'s text as a composition can be obscurely understood as something “intended only to have sense.” It must be emphasized that *That/Cela/Dat*'s individual words and phrases, by remaining in the realm of explicative, declarative language (not prose or poetry as we are accustomed to finding in artworks), do continue to refer, but the text as a whole does not.

My study of the difference between sense and reference has brought us to a point where we can see how *That/Cela/Dat* is not a representation even though it is full of representations and projects itself onto a representational plane. Put another way, I could say that *That/Cela/Dat* is not a picture even though it shines back to us from a picture plane and realizes itself through our capacity to look through pictures to their referents. The sense/reference distinction helps describe the way that *That/Cela/Dat* displaces denotative meaning while remaining firmly planted within our capacity for and will towards denotative meaning.

That/Cela/Dat “sets us up” to look for hidden meaning behind the sign, but shows this habitual stance as a skewed approach to finding meaning, particularly when it comes to artworks.

Use versus Mention

One of the challenges in describing *That/Cela/Dat* is that though it is easy to quote from the text, these quotations loosen from the act of *showing* and tend more toward merely *saying*. The logical distinction between *use* and *mention*

helps describe this distinction. As a clear example, in the sequence “The | word | at | the | end | of | this | sentence | is | meaningless,” the word “meaningless” is both used and mentioned. That is, this word simultaneously refers to both the concept of having no meaning *and* the word itself.²³ In order to maintain this distinction in academic writing when a word is mentioned rather than used, it must be given special designation. Thus if I want to say the word “blue” has four letters, I must set the word in quotation marks; without this designation I would be using the word to make the nonsensical assertion that the colour blue has four letters. Through this distinction we can see that each word presented in *That/Cela/Dat*'s unique cinematic situation is both *used* and *mentioned*, viewers both *read* the meaning of the word in relation to other words in the text, but also *look at* the word itself. Furthermore, the act of reading itself becomes both *used* and *mentioned* as viewers move into experiencing the piece not merely as a text but as an artwork.

Portending Possibility

One phenomenon that remained prevalent in my experience of

That/Cela/Dat was that I would *first* read the words and *then* as they held on

²³ In section §4, “Use versus Mention,” in *Mathematical Logic* (1951) Quine illustrates this distinction through the following example:

- (1) Boston is populous,
- (2) Boston is disyllabic,
- (3) 'Boston' is disyllabic.

Only (1) and (3) are true, whereas (2) is false. In order for the statement “‘Boston’ is disyllabic” to be true, the name must be put in quotes. Setting the name in quotes distinguishes mention of the word from its use. In (1) the name is used, not mentioned, and therefore does not need to be enclosed in quotes (23).

screen I would begin to look at them at a separate idea and object.²⁴

In order to help explicate some of the tacit coherence between reading and meaning from which *That/Cela/Dat* estranges its viewers, I will turn to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological description of reading words. He states in *Phenomenology of Perception*, “The word is then indistinguishable from the attitude which it induces, and it is only when its presence is prolonged that it appears in the guise of an external image, and its meaning as a thought” (1962, 235). Upon “first impression” words are indistinguishable from embodied meaning. As Merleau-Ponty shows by example, the word “warm” “shown to a subject for too short a time for him to be able to read it [...] induces a kind of experience of warmth which surrounds him with something in the nature of a meaningful halo” (235). *That/Cela/Dat*'s presentation of words such as “cooking,” “warmth,” “fire,” and “exit,” offer a brief glimpse of portending with possibility while then distancing such possibility through its durations and cold white light. Merleau-Ponty goes on to state, “Before becoming the symbol of a

24 Michael Snow has been working with this phenomenon for some time now. In his 1966 text, “Around about *New York Eye and Ear Control*” he writes, “Starts with Words. Words flat on screen which is Flat. Words don't have much visual space unless you're asked to see that” (25). And in his text that covers the LP jacket of *Musics for Piano, Whistling, Microphone and Tape Recorder* (1975), he states, “The 'image quality' of this text can be examined: Read this and then look at it. Those are very different activities. When looked at it is meaningless. No jokes now. Something that can be read cannot be meaningless. Stressing the 'look' may tend print towards 'visual art' forms but when it arrives it has become 'picture' not 'sign.' Nevertheless it is a peculiarity of language that it can claim that a picture can be 'read.' The reverse is difficult. A dictionary of picture-meanings would have to be in print not in pictures, an inter-language dictionary, a translation, finally a rendering not of meaning but of possible language equivalents. . .” (175-76).

concept it is first of all an event which grips my body, and this grip circumscribes the area of significance to which it has reference” (235). What Merleau-Ponty shows is that prior to seeing words as signs we are gripped with significance, not as an empirical sensation, but as a “rough sketch” of the meanings they portend. My body (understood broadly as an intertwining of perceptual, emotional, gestural and cognitive-linguistic capabilities) roughly prepares me for the actualizing of the possibility presented in the word. It is through prolonged presence of the word that the word-sign separates from the “attitude which it induces” and its meaning appears “as a thought.”

That/Cela/Dat places the possibility of portending with words at a distant limit; it can be *felt* as a kind of longing to cohere with and flow easily with *That/Cela/Dat*'s text, but it is perpetually curtailed by the artwork's particular cinematic presentation of words.

4. Relax | and | read

If reading is an experience of decoding and synthesizing the meaning behind signs, then drawing attention to the physical presence of words should not interrupt one's grasp of meaning. That is, if reading is an act of cognitively synthesizing the meanings assigned to arbitrary sets of markings, then adding emphasis to these arbitrary markings should not disrupt the act of reading. But

experience of *That/Cela/Dat* shows such emphasis clearly to interrupt reading and through this it installs its viewers in a situation whereby they might experience a much broader and continually expanding experience of meaning.

While spending time with *That/Cela/Dat* I often felt it to be somewhat like a virus; it would empty out and take over my reading “mind” to realize itself. It captures my capacity to read and then firmly sets the pace and order of reading; any reading “mind” would do. I often wanted to be able to store *That/Cela/Dat*’s phrases so that I could synthesize them later, or to hold the entire trilingual script/score in view so that I could fully comprehend its complex web of references. I could remember and anticipate some of its phrases, but it would charge on, keeping me firmly planted within its composition of durations. In a way, this piece can appear as rigid, dry and “uncaring,” but upon extended study – and this is where it shows itself as a remarkable artwork – it is a trustworthy guide into the angst we can feel in relation to an increasingly indifferent, dry, and regularized “world,” one that is not much for us, a world that has become a “that.” In this way *That/Cela/Dat* is entirely *for us*, which is to say, an entirely human situation pushing towards a more expansive experience of meaning than the information hidden behind the sign.

Pace of reading

One of the unique aspects of *That/Cela/Dat* is the way that it sets the pace of reading. The phenomenon of reading *That/Cela/Dat* is very unlike reading text

on a page where one can easily move through the text, skimming forward or cycling back to grasp the meaning of the text. When reading *That/Cela/Dat*, I can only see one word at a time, and the duration of each word is different so I am not able to read at my own pace. The precision with which Michael Snow worked out the timing of the piece is clearly visible by examining *That/Cela/Dat* 's English, French and Flemish script/score, the first pages of which are mounted on the gallery wall near the title card. Each word as well as each time/space between words was assigned an exact duration (fig. 2). The timing was meticulously calculated so that the words “that” “cela” and “dat” always appear in unison across the three screens. But though the duration of each word was precisely designated, its overall pace is not repetitive or rhythmic, but undeniably stochastic. Phenomenologically it throws my habitual approach to reading off balance. The pulsing of words on and off of the screen, the administering of phrases and paragraphs through single word units both, force me to attend to each word one after another as each word hits and holds the screen. The experience of reading at *That/Cela/Dat* 's irregular and drawn-out pace remains unpredictable and uncomfortable. This is emphasized by the point where *That/Cela/Dat* , in contrast, breaks out into “song” and it encourages its readers to join their silent, mental voices: “Some | where | o | ver | the | rain- | bow | skies | are | blue”. The timing of these words matches the familiar cadence of Judy Garland's singing voice and I am able to flow within the familiar arch and trajectory of this line,

highlighting the irregular phrasing of the rest of *That/Cela/Dat*.

Easy to read individual words

We have here another phenomenon, and most viewers would agree that *That/Cela/Dat*'s individual words remain clear and easy to read. Even though *That/Cela/Dat* estranges me from my habitual overall approach to reading, it is not difficult to read its single words. *That/Cela/Dat*'s font, vocabulary and sentence structures make it simple to read provided I accept the restrictions that this artwork places on my reading and let go of trying to locate meaning at some point behind or beyond the artwork. As soon as I enter the gallery, I am drawn to the English text regardless of which screen it is on at that moment, and I begin to read; it is not something I decide but rather something that seems to happen, similar to reading the text on a billboard or passing signs. English is my “mother tongue,” and so I am able to understand the English words with ease. But I also read the French and Flemish, sounding out the phonetics even as I encounter words I do not understand, which is to say that I find myself reading even when I do not grasp the meaning of certain words. Even when *That/Cela/Dat* presents words upside down in English, I read without difficulty. *That/Cela/Dat* draws further attention to the capacity to read by the fact that even when letters in a word are switched around, I am able effortlessly to read the intended word. The text both demonstrates this by misspelling certain words (eg. in Flemish eesrte=eerste, latsate=laaste) and describes (“Research | has | shown” ...) the

fact that as long as the first and last letters remain in the correct place, we are able to read the intended word rather than the phonetic spelling which obtains up to the point where the rearrangement forms another known word. For example, when the letters that form the word “this” are rearranged we can end up with, “This | is | shit.” As noted above, a similar thing can occur when reading between languages: at times I would overlap the meanings of “this” and “say” since the letters “dit” form a word in both Flemish and French. *That/Cela/Dat* simplifies the reading process, but simultaneously slackens the tacit and proximal relation between reading and locating meaning.

Tension between the unit and the whole

It is essential for me to emphasize that within *That/Cela/Dat*'s unique presentation as an artwork, I experience a palpable tension between the ease with which I read the individual words and the struggle with which I continually try to grasp the text as a whole. The words are clear and easy to read, and I do immediately begin to read the single words without making any conscious effort to do so, but it also enforces a strange cadence and emphasis to my act of reading. I am held back from reading the way I continue to want to read: I want to tally the statements into a conclusive argument, I want to grasp all three languages at once, I want to read ahead, and I want to form a clear view of the text as a whole. My reading becomes ungainly, unusual. Even though I often know which word will appear next and though I remember what has gone by, single words continue to

burst onto the screen in their unusual timing, and I often find my self laughing along with the text's unexpected turns.

Holds

A crucial next step in our understanding of the artwork is to describe the way it phenomenologically delays its viewers so that they begin to see according to its distinct logic. *That/Cela/Dat* holds and withholds the experience of reading, *delaying in it* to the point where it becomes strange, and through this it slackens the links between reading, meaning, and art. I will begin to describe this as the way *That/Cela/Dat* unfolds through multiple different kinds of “holds.”²⁵

Other than one fast-paced section where the only word I can make out is “algorithm,” the words generally hold on screen longer than I need to read them. The text holds my attention in place with its presentation of one single thing after the other. It also holds my attention on “in-between” words that tend to remain unnoticed while reading, particularly as it expands short words to fit the width of the screen. The words hold preserved meanings for a duration and then let those meanings go. The piece withholds me from a comfortable reading pace and from finding literal meaning in the text. It also withholds me from the fullness of perceptual experience and the words appeared as cold bars on the screen. All of

25 I borrow this use of the word “holds” from Michael Snow's description of one of his films that is also composed of a series of stills held on screen for different durations: “*One Second in Montreal* (22 minutes, black and white, silent, 1969) whose essence is thirty black-and-white still photos held on the screen for varying lengths of time in a choral pattern of longer and longer holds, the holds gradually accelerating till the last hold is a single frame” ([1971b] 1994, 64).

this coalesces in delayed experience. My perpetual attempts to locate meaning through propositional and correspondence approaches are thrown into relief, estranged in a realm where their insistent motions are no longer surrounded by the conditions through which they can make clear, logical sense. This is art, and I begin to see according to its own particular coherence.

Through this system of holds I end up actually *seeing* the words. At the first appearance of a word, I read it, but as it is held on screen I no longer “overlook” these markings of white light to their meanings, but rather stare at the physical appearance of the words. As I am drawn over to the perceptual qualities of the words, I notice that I am no longer reading. I experience a fluctuation between reading and looking as I feel myself constantly entering (reading *this*) and separating from the text (looking at *that*). Through this I begin to notice how the act of reading, like words themselves, is also overlooked; it is such a habitual and tacit stance on my usual surroundings.

It is important to note that the experience of separating from the words enables me to reflect on how easily I cohere their meanings. I am firstly immersed in the word's intentional meaning, and then after it holds on screen it loosens its meaningful grip on me. I experience the transformation from *use* to *mention* as an emptying of significance. Perceived as markings of projected light, these words are “empirically” actual and observational, but their significance is “dried out.”

What is the actual presence of representational objects? The intertwining

of fact and illusion is a strong theme in Snow's work, and as we have seen, *That/Cela/Dat* also works on this through its movement between “overlooking” and “looking at.” When I am reading I am drawn into the text; I am not here, but rather “over there” in the text's meaning. When I separate from the text I am “here and now” in the room with the physical word, but paradoxically I am also not present since I have separated myself from meaningful experience. While reading, my “presentness” is contained in the act of reading, while the content of reading also takes me “somewhere over the rainbow.” The more engaged I am with the text the less I am engaged with my present situation, the less I am “here and now” since I am in the imaginary, intentional realm of the text. However, when I look at the words rather than let them carry me off somewhere, I am also not “in the now” since I have separated myself from meaningful engagement and my experience is “dried out.” In this fluctuation between cohering with and separating from intentional meaning, I begin to grasp the ambiguous presence of words; their physical, “objective,” presence is less real to me than their imaginative, intentional significance. That is, through their extended holds, the words lose their ambiguity and become explicit units and instances. But this loss of ambiguity is also a drying out of meaning.

Indeterminacy

Having described the perpetual shift between reading (overlooking *this*) and looking (at *that*) it is now crucial for me to describe how this artwork places

its viewers within an experience of flux between determinacy and indeterminacy. What is of interest here and what is placed at stake in *That/Cela/Dat* is the way words grip us with significance and only secondarily do they appear as external signs. And yet, in the tension between a word's significance and its physical sign, I also increasingly feel the indeterminacy of the significance of these words. That is, the first contact with each word is more significant to me than its determinate physical presence, but even that initial contact with significance remains highly indeterminate. Let me turn again to the artwork to describe this phenomenon more fully. *That/Cela/Dat*'s talk of “cooking | and | warmth | in | human | history” wraps me in a vague sensing towards warmth while it then rapidly distances me with its cold white light. *That/Cela/Dat* unfolds in a series of both pulses of changing words and prolonged presences whereby I experience a flux between being gripped by their significances and separating to see the “external image” of the word. “This | is | a | projection | of | fire | (photons)”. My experience of being gripped by a word, such as the slight tension commingled with the sudden appearance of the word “FIRE,” then fragments into both an isolated object and temporal instance. The vague feeling of urgency that accompanies the abrupt appearance of the word “FIRE,” shifts into the perception of white light in a cool, grey gallery room. The indeterminate rough outline of urgency becomes a highly determinate set of markings and an idea. The indeterminate feeling of fire, becomes a highly determinate experience, not of fire, or anything close to fire, but

of the stark, dry, material presence of this artwork. The idea of fire remains ambiguous, vague, and incomplete, and within the delaying I experience in this artwork, this indeterminacy becomes tangible.

The unique experience of reading that *That/Cela/Dat* expands also emphasizes its situational character – its intertwining of “subject” and “object,” “form” and “content,” “wholeness” and “separation,” and ambiguity and determinacy. These polarities do not remain separate or solidify, but rather, perpetually weave into each other. This becomes particularly clear through the movement between “overlooking” and “looking at;” *That/Cela/Dat* matters to me, grips me, through the perpetual meshing of artwork-object and viewer/reader-subject. I am both active and passive in my encounter with the piece; it takes over my capacities for reading and looking, but I also fill out its significance.

Though *That/Cela/Dat* cannot be grasped as a transcendental picture, nor as a calculated whole, it does, through experience, cohere as an artwork. The separation of words, instants, and highly determinate moments can be felt as an emergent process, and their emergence is a movement *into* the artwork's distinctive overall movement. Ambiguity, irreducibility, and incompleteness are integral to the cohesion of this artwork as delay. This incompleteness is felt in the way that every explicit self-presentation in the artwork is always partial and remains only ambiguously sketched out. *That/Cela/Dat* displaces primordial cohesion with meaning to a most distant horizon; it is an extreme, far off limit

which I can barely perceive, but which I feel in my continued push towards grasping meaning.

That/Cela/Dat estranges me from cohering with the possibilities portended in words, and thus slackens my movement towards finding significance and “understanding.” This is how the piece shows itself as an autocritical work of art. Even within *That/Cela/Dat*’s strange linguistic and temporal “logics” *I long to, and continue to try to move toward being at home in its significance*, even as that movement is perpetually curtailed. Both *That/Cela/Dat*’s language and mode of presentation are so explicit, denotative and “dry” that the kind of indistinguishable connection between words and significance that I momentarily experience upon the initial appearance of a word becomes palpably estranged from me. The vague hints I get of it with the appearance such words as “warmth,” “GREEN” and “LOUD” emphasize how distant this experience is from a full and embodied experience of meaning through language.

As mentioned, *That/Cela/Dat*’s text is not creative language in the sense of poetry or prose. The hard grey surfaces of *That/Cela/Dat*’s context, its white light and smooth font, its declarative assertions, and its stochastic “pace” flatten and dry out my movement toward finding significance. In dis-ambiguous forms of language such as propositional and analytic arguments, it is indeed the case that meaning is the information hidden behind the sign and I find meaning by synthesizing the information into a whole. It is also the case that one of the logics

of Western culture is to continue to remake our world so that all meaning can be accessed through dis-ambiguous explication and thus the process of finding information located behind signs and the synthesis of this information into a conspectus has become habitual. Many of our environments and contexts, if emptied of their denotative or referential meaning we would find very dry and boring, thus further enforcing the conception of meaning as symbolic. But *That/Cela/Dat* demands of its viewers to “see what's in front of you” (1984, 26), which involves not only the physical context but also the tacit structures within which we are so accustomed to finding significance.

5. The “Now” Shines Back as a “Picture”

Considering the way that *That/Cela/Dat* refuses an accumulative literal meaning through the denotative aspects of its words, it is helpful to consider how this artwork works with discrete, determinate shots and moments, which is to say, units. Words more generally in this artwork are experienced as cinematic units, units of meaning, and units of time. Through this emphasis on units the artwork autocritically reflects on an atomistic metaphysics. Each unit and instant appears as obviously present, but simultaneously critiques the assumptions by which any unit appears as most basic and incorrigible. As *That/Cela/Dat* carries itself out as an artwork, and as viewers begin to perceive according to its own peculiar “logic,” the assumed stability and incorrigibility of units begins to appear strange

and even absurd.

Before going on it would be good to discuss some misconceptions regarding time and presence. This will help lay groundwork for the following section aimed at describing the importance of indeterminacy and ambiguity to *That/Cela/Dat*'s distinctive overall movement in more depth. My purpose is to move towards describing this artwork's distinctive overall movement.

Now

As is likely becoming quite clear, this artwork continually draws its viewers' attention back to what we commonly conceive of as the “now.” The insistent repetition of the word “this” keeps *re*-presenting what is immediate and proximate, and “that” points the near future or recent past of “this.” In Michael Snow's own words,

The primary accomplishment of this work is that it is a subtle composition of durations. Sentences are presented on the screen, one word at a time and always within the same framing limits. One word at a time emphasises the pictorial nature of the projection and makes for a spectral participation in the nuances of the work's timing and prophetic participation in what might be coming up next. There are 30 frames per second in video (actually it's 29.97!). In the sentence “This is electric light” for example, “this” is on the screen for 120 frames, or four seconds. *That/Cela/Dat* is related to a 1982 film *So Is This*. Since making the film I'd continued to think about and to make notes on its basic subject, which is the word “this” (the most present tense word there is... stronger than “now”). (2001, 15)

This question of the present is a difficult one, and in *That/Cela/Dat* we experience two apparently opposed conceptions of the present that interrupt each

other. As the text claims, “This | has | never | been | anything | else. | There | really | is | only | one | this.” On the one hand, “this” is the entire artwork, a complete composition that pulls itself together through self-reference and self-presentation. As stated above, we do not need to read outside of *That/Cela/Dat* to “get” it. Further, its constant displacement of literary meaning also demands we conceive of it in a more general way, as a temporal composition of words like we might perceive the movement and lines of a piece of music. However, rather than the performed realization of a composition, here it appears that the score or script has been set in time, isolating each word so that we can no longer flow with it as a composition. Repetition of the word “this” as well as the presentation of the text in single, isolated words, insists on the present as an immediate, proximal moment and does not let me hold the piece as a whole. Furthermore, we also are not able to enter fully or experience these “now” instants as pure presences since the words also form their meanings through their relationships with other words and things. Repetition of the word “this” also insists on the present as a passing instant, an unattainable “now” that keeps slipping away.

That/Cela/Dat's insistent pounding on the present moment beats against the text's relational and contextual meanings which extend into past and future. Particularly the word “this” both insists on the present moment *and* is only meaningful in relation to other words and things. The prominence of the word “that” emphasizes what is no longer proximal – what is separating and slipping

away. Within the situation of the artwork, the flux of time becomes palpable: the way that “this” present situation shifts into “that” which is past, or the way “that” which is anticipated moves into “this” given moment. *That/Cela/Dat* continually provokes an image of the “now,” and as it does so, it allows us to feel the pull of the future and past. And yet, these relational meanings are also continually deferred and negated. *That/Cela/Dat* makes statements and promises about what might happen later in the piece which do not necessarily turn out to be “true.” It also negates or affirms some of its own statements, revising the past in terms of the present. The intervals between words and phrases produce meaning, but also deteriorate, negate and shift propositional content, so we are pushed once again to try to grope for a more general grasp on the piece. As I will describe again later, the way that *That/Cela/Dat* weaves together these “conflicting” conceptions and experiences of the present are integral to its situation as an unresolvable and irreducible artwork. It is also this irreducibility that works to expose the limits and restrictions of some of our misconceptions of time. *That/Cela/Dat* works with these limits, binding them together in a potent situation. I will return to the irreducibility of this artwork, but for now I will describe some of the narrow conceptions of time it manipulates.

Cinema and Presence

The concept of presence in art and film is also beneficial in gaining a

fuller understanding of *That/Cela/Dat*'s unique cinematic situation. As Annette Michelson writes in "Toward Snow," ([1971] 1987)

The entire tradition of the independently made film, from Deren and Anger through Brakhage, had been developed as an extension, in American terms, of an avant-gardist tradition of the twenties in Europe, distending the continuity, negating the tension of narrative. Grounded in the experience of Surrealism and of Expressionism, its will to destroy narrative was an attempt to situate film in a kind of perpetual Presence, one image or sequence succeeding another in rapid disjunction, tending, ultimately in the furious pace of single-frame construction, to devour or eliminate expectation as a dimension of cinematic experience. (175-76)

Michelson cites Brakhage as the one who worked this approach to presence with the most intensity. She goes on to say that Snow's films offered a distinctively different approach by bringing expectation back into cinematic experience:

"Snow, in re-introducing expectation as the core of film form, redefines space as being what Klee, in fact, had claimed it was: essentially 'a temporal notion'"

(176). This distinctive aspect of Snow's work, was particularly striking in his 1967 film, *Wavelength*, but continued to be expanded in later work.

What pertains to this chapter is the way Snow's films work within a certain preoccupation with presence that has developed through the work of film artists. But rather than working towards singular, immersive presence, Snow works out presence in relation to expectation.

As *That/Cela/Dat*'s temporal situation makes evident, expectation has a futural and potential aspect to it, but it is also palpable in the present. A particular

comment Snow made about *So Is This* resonates:

it's centered around *this*, which has a lot of futurity and conditionality... but those things are here and now too. So that if it's suggested to you that something will happen on the screen, that's not what is important – it's the suggestion that is important... Even though it describes a whole bunch of films and possible audiences... but I think that uncertainty is certain, formally. (1984, 28)

Snow's work brings in experience of how the past and the future *are* in the present. And as I am working to describe, *That/Cela/Dat* also shows how the present spreads into the past and the future. But before we move on we will examine this notion of presence a bit further.

In his chapter, “Michael Snow Presents *Presents*” in *Image and Identity* (1989), R. Bruce Elder relates the preoccupation with presence in art to shifts in philosophical conceptions of presence. One of the aspects of Elder's argument in this chapter shows how Snow's films *So Is This* and *Presents* (1981, 90min) offer a critique of the “metaphysics of presence.”²⁶ The term “metaphysics of presence” is drawn from Jacques Derrida's work, and describes the metaphysics that dominated Western culture from Plato to Hegel. What is important to note is that

26 See Chapter 12 of *Image and Identity*, “Michael Snow Presents *Presents*.” As Elder argues in his writing on *So Is This*, the film seems to be “saying that, as Plato had claimed, written language really is characterized by distance, misunderstanding and insincerity” (1989, 318). Elder demonstrates Snow achieves this through,

His frequent use of indexical terms [...]. The frequent use of the conceit that the film, and not its author, is the source of the text [...]. The frequent use of direct address and its characterization of its audience raise the issue of its discourse being accessible to all sorts of people [...] The various untruths the film asserts suggests that written language can state falsehoods without being subject to cross-examination [...]. (318)

In this way, it appears that Snow is demonstrating a mistrust of writing. However, as Elder argues, by showing the present as always permeated by the memory and anticipation, Snow's film is a Derridian “deconstruction” of Plato's warning.

such a metaphysics identified Being with absolute presence and therefore was characterized as eternal and transtemporal. Absence and non-being were thus conceived of as derivative, and not fully participating in the self-presentation of Being as full presence (198). As Elder argues, such a conception of Being had consequences for art, and particularly in the nineteenth century when the metaphysics of presence was beginning to disintegrate under the weight of positivist philosophy, followed by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and much later Heidegger; art was called on to defend Being as presence. To this end, “representation was eliminated, inasmuch as the being of the representing token is involved with that of an absent other” (298). Further,

The entire being of the work of art was to be grasped in the immediate present. This meant that no reference to any historical or mythological past was to be made. And, for arts like the cinema, whose very essence is temporal, this also meant that the very being of the artwork would be given in the moment – that it would be totally given in the instant. No part of the work would spill over from the living present into the past or future. Tactics used to accomplish this included the development of forms which wholly consumed the viewers' mental resources in perceptual acts so that no experiential past or future would be drawn into the experience of the work through the apperceptive acts of recollection and anticipation.(299)

Both *That/Cela/Dat* and *So Is This* work out questions of presence in art. But in distinction from the above artistic strategies, they work on presence through extensive use of representational forms – words pointing and referring outside their own formal presentations. Further, these artworks make extensive use of the “apperceptive acts of recollection and anticipation.” They continually bring the

viewer back to the present, but in doing so, show how the present is constantly imbued with past and future.

Instantaneous

But as much as *That/Cela/Dat* shows the illusory aspects of presence as absolute Being, it equally unravels the conception of time as a series of discrete units or “now” instants. The way that *That/Cela/Dat* shows that we can never escape the past and future seems to work equally well in undermining this conception of time since the past and future continue to shape the present, even if this is negatively defined as the intervals or relations between these units. It is possible for *That/Cela/Dat* to undermine both the conception of presence as pure Being and presence as a “now” since these conceptions are inversions of the same thing. The absolute presence of Being returns or “reincarnates” as the absolute presence of the instant, both of which remain forever out of reach since we are not able to escape the influence of time. Whether the present is understood as pure Transcendence or as a precisely calculated unit, the human condition of being in time appears to exclude us from the present. This relationship to time also appears to exclude us from being able to “say everything” or to “figure out what it all means” since we can neither achieve a transcendental conspectus, nor grasp the sum total of all the relations between instances.

But does this then mean that both time and meaning are illusions we project onto the world or synthesize in our thoughts and desires? We can

experience through *That/Cela/Dat* that even though things disappear, they are not “gone.” Even when I turn by back on *That/Cela/Dat* “it | will | still | be |here.” The words, even when they are not on screen, shape and modify the single word that is now present. This word inheres in the composition of the rest of the words. And yet, once this word exits the screen, I no longer have it actually before me and its presence becomes less determinate. For example, the word “not” loosens its hold over the word “EXIT” in the phrase “This | is | not | an | EXIT” particularly as “EXIT” is delayed on screen. The negation fades, but it is not completely gone; the fact that it was asserted makes the prolonged duration of the word “exit” a humorous inversion of the negation. But is this strictly a matter of memory? It is easy for me to grasp how *That/Cela/Dat* is still there even when I am in the gallery adjacent to it, but what about words, are they “still there” only in my memory? Snow's own writing helps articulate this problem more clearly. In a 1972 interview with Andree Hayum, Snow stated,

Well, information has so many levels. We describe our minds as being divided up so that you can say that one aspect of it is imagination and another aspect, history or memory. Of course, we can't operate at all without memory. That's very important. On the other hand, there really isn't ever anything except now and one is carrying this residue which makes it possible to go into the future. But all the contents of the mind that deal with the past can be described as fantasy in that they're unprovable. ([1972] 1994, 85).

In this quote, Snow articulates one of the basic presuppositions of our time; that past and future are necessary, but are also merely residue or the immaterial

contents of the mind. As Sam Mallin states, in *Art Line Thought*,

It is a prime and basic illusion of our age that only the present, as a mathematically defined instant, has real presence and that therefore, it is impossible that either the past or future could have a genuine presence of their own (one which in fact must fully occupy, in explicable and unaccountable ways, the inexhaustible depths of any living present field or engaging moment). (1996, 440)

If past and future are merely traces, residues, or projections, then the only “part” of time that is fully real is the present. Further, the way that the “apperceptive acts of recollection and anticipation” remain essential to the significance of linguistic meaning – the relationship between words and things – involves a kind of “fantasy” and also inhibits us from accessing the real, which is “now.” Snow's prerecorded voice stated in his “speech” for the opening of *Boucherville*, *Montréal, Toronto, London 1973*,

Probably millions of people have entertained the crazy notion of trapping the *now*. But of course as soon as you jump at it, it turns into *then*. That's obvious. We can only speak of now as a bracketing of a time period, not as a point. The only way to experience it as a point is to dispose of the word and live the sense of it²⁷ ([1973] 1994, 96).

Words in particular get in the way of the “now” since they rely on reflection and possibility. As much as the meaning of *That/Cela/Dat*'s text is perpetually delayed, put off in a promise of future resolution, hidden behind its word-signs, the prominence of the words “this” and “that” also emphasize a certain pastness of the text. The word “this” can only refer to that which is already evident, that

²⁷ Exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada in 1973. For the opening Snow played a tape recording of his speech and lip-synched to the words (Snow [1973] 1994, 92).

which has already been identified or marked out. Thus, to grasp “this,” I must have already been prepared to recognize that to which “this” points. The word “this” has an aspect of picking out or picking up that which has already been thrown ahead by the recent past, or by the given context. We could say that the word “this,” deals only with the realm of the explicit, recognizable, representable, and “that” which has already has been accounted for. But, most significantly, through *That/Cela/Dat* I feel a kind of withdrawal of the “now” from the word “this.” *That/Cela/Dat* brings me to experience “this” as a “that” which has already been and which will again transition into a “that.” The artwork's paradoxical phrase, “Teleology | of | the | Eternal | Return” echoes through this aspect of the artwork. This is a loop. Meaning is continually deferred to the near future, but in this loop the same signs continue to “recur” and refer to itself. One of *That/Cela/Dat*'s movements is a kind of winding in on itself. As much as the words “this” and “that” point outward to a multiplicity of things, all of these things continually return to itself.

Field of presence

Accepting *That/Cela/Dat*'s wholeness as a field, we can now grasp this as a field of presence. *That/Cela/Dat*'s field coheres also in the way it forms one present. This present is not an instant nor is it restricted to positively defined presence as absolute and eternal, but rather a field that continually gathers in and alters its lines of possibility (which is also the very stuff out of which the artwork

is made). *That/Cela/Dat*'s presence as a field can be grasped in a number of intertwining ways: a delay in words, a clearing that discloses the way denotative meaning defers the present to a near future, a clearing that shows up how habituated we are to locating denotative meaning behind the sign, and a clearing that shows up how this habituation inheres a temporality that denies the actuality of past and future. Within this field, the logic of denotative meaning ceases to function properly. *That/Cela/Dat* works with the limits of this logic to disclose the way the dominance of denotative meaning inheres in an attempt to erase time and that time becomes an increasing and persistent problem within the logic of denotation.

6. Well | to | hell | with | that | here's |

The indeterminate and ambiguous presence of words becomes even more palpable in relation to a brief moment of perceptual release in *That/Cela/Dat*. The dryness of words becomes particularly pronounced in contrast to the experience of pure red and blue fields that momentarily fill the screens when *That/Cela/Dat* breaks its own assertion that it will be entirely composed of white words on a black background. Suddenly it states, “Well | to | hell | with | that | here's | [red] | GREEN | [blue].” The red and the blue, instead of words are full screens of colour. I began to notice that even if I was looking away when the colour red appeared, my head would jerk over to face the screen even before I

could reflect on what it was that caught my eye. Particularly my perceptual experience of the blue was anything but dry. After the duration of the explicit white words against dark, I had the experience of diving into and soaring in the vastness of the blue. I came to look forward to and long for the return of the blue field for this experience of release and perceptual pleasure. My experience of the blue field was a full perceptual experience, not something I could “overlook,” and not something I could access through reading. The blue field also could not be translated like the “GREEN/GROEN/VERT.” The difference between the [blue] and the “GREEN” was striking. Perception of the blue was exhilarating for me, and perception of the words was interesting, but I felt it withholding me from the fullness of sensual experience. The word “GREEN” that held the screen between the colours red and blue, did fill me with a vague feeling of brightness, but in contrast to the blue I felt its vagueness as its letters then showed up hard and cold against the screen.

Of course this also an instance of *That/Cela/Dat* doing something in opposition to what it *says* it is going to do. It is also an instance of *showing* colour rather than *referring* to colour, like “| two words |” shows two words. But

strikingly, it is firstly a perceptual experience and only secondarily does it refer.²⁸

This is the inverse movement of the appearance of the words, where I see the reference first and then perceive the markings. The other difference is that these colours held significance on their own in the very perception of them.

This sequence expands the distinction between “overlooking” and “looking at.” My reading and “perceiving” of the word “GREEN” extends along the same line as my perceiving and “reading” of the blue, but they are distant from each other. *That/Cela/Dat* installs its viewers in a unique situation that estranges them from both perceptually and linguistically meaningful experience. The pressure of this “dry” experience is integral to the artwork's situation. *That/Cela/Dat* stretches out the line between reading and looking and perceiving, but also shows how these inhere in each other and inhere in the commingling of artwork-object and viewer-subject.

The colours appear differently than the words, and they also disappear differently. I long for the return of the blue for the perceptual experience, the relief and fullness it brings. The disappearance of the blue shares in something of

28 As a sequence, the [red] GREEN [blue] do still refer: these are the three colours of the component video signal, the prime colours of the digital pallet. Even more abstractly, these colours reference the parameters of the digital colours available through the digital video projector. Following Duchamp, we could say these colours are “readymades.” In “Apropos of 'Readymades,’” Duchamp concludes his statement as follows: “A final remark to the egomaniac's discourse: Since the tubes of paint used by the artist are manufactured and ready made products we must conclude the paintings in the world are 'Readymade aided' and also words of assemblage” (1989, 142). I can guess that if a colour replaced the word GREEN, it would have been the digital colour R:0-G:255-B:0-H:120°. But in this sequence the references come after perception, and only through each colour's referential relation to the other two.

the appearance of the “GREEN”, that is, they share in a kind of indeterminacy. Both the off-screen blue and the “GREEN” are “horizontal entities,” to borrow from Merleau-Ponty's terminology. That is, they both do not have the high degree of determinacy that the on-screen blue has, or the presence of the colour green could potentially have. They remain vague outlines; and yet, even in this absence, they have presence in *That/Cela/Dat*'s situation. But the levels of indeterminacy also vary. The “GREEN”, even in its on-screen presence, never achieves the same bursting forth as the blue. Conversely, the blue maintains more of a vast beyondness that the “GREEN's” presence as a word circumvents. We are beginning to understand here that indeterminacy is not simply a quality of objects, concepts, and perceptions, but the very field through which determinacy finds its grip.²⁹ Even though *That/Cela/Dat* unfolds through highly explicit and determinate units and instances, it does not resolve itself and cannot be resolved into a determinate whole either as an object or as an idea. It shows its viewers how words are most meaningful in the indeterminate realm of possibility and that as highly determinate objects they lose their potency. But *That/Cela/Dat* insists on bringing words into presence as highly determinate focal points, not only through their holds on screen but also in their mode of explicit, denotative

29 Mallin's explication of the indeterminacy of horizontal entities in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*: “One of Merleau-Ponty's most important characterizations of the horizontal entity's generality is that it exists only 'within a certain degree of indeterminacy' (French, 382). He means by *indeterminacy* that these entities merely circumscribe, or delimit within the world, a possible set of vague alternatives which are themselves ultimately indeterminate” (1979, 38).

language. In this way, *That/Cela/Dat* curtails the indeterminacy and ambiguity by which words might find their fullest expression. These words cannot spread into infinite reference or into the fabric of the text.

But through the very activity of curtailing the possible meaning of individual words as well as the possible cumulative meaning of denotative assertions, *That/Cela/Dat* pushes situational experience of this artwork back into the realm of indeterminacy and ambiguity. This is one of its strengths. In this potent situation *That/Cela/Dat* enables viewers to feel how it is characteristic of the will toward explicit, denotative meaning to curtail the ambiguity and indeterminacy through which we experience significance. *That/Cela/Dat*'s individual words do still share in indeterminacy; they do so by presenting vague potentials but even more so by showing their corrigibility, the way their meanings shift and alter in time. The indeterminacy viewers can experience in *That/Cela/Dat*'s distinctive overall movement is its inexhaustibility and irreducibility, the way it inheres in time.

That/Cela/Dat's text keeps its viewers in the realm of the near future, of possibility, of suggestion. As an artwork, which is to say, as an actualized situation, *That/Cela/Dat* delays its viewers such that they might experience this potentiality in the present tense. Within this present tense situation, the individual, explicit assertions show their corrigibility, which appears as a flaw that marks out the impossibility of certainty and the impossibility of entering the “now,” but this

is also their participation in the irreducibility of the artwork. The individual words do protrude, and do express explicit meanings, but they are wrapped in the distinctive overall movement of *That/Cela/Dat*, which is delay. In their beguiling and shifting appearances the words do not merely exhaust themselves, but are continually drawn back and returned to the artwork. Furthermore, this protruding, disappearing, and returning shows the distinctive overall movement of *That/Cela/Dat* that holds it together and allows us to experience it as a cohesive work of art. It does not cohere in the sense of a “whole,” for as has been demonstrated, *That/Cela/Dat* resists “wholeness” as a conspectus or the solution of its parts. *That/Cela/Dat*'s distinctive overall movement can be felt as a field in which time's flux becomes palpable. Inadequacy, indeterminacy, corrigibility, and even illusion are integral aspects of this distinctive overall movement. We could say that *That/Cela/Dat* explicates itself through this movement, it holds itself together through this movement, maintains its irreducibility in this movement, and maintains continual adjustment in this movement. Or we could say that *That/Cela/Dat*'s situation is a continual explicating through this movement, holding together through this movement, maintaining of irreducibility through this movement, and insisting on corrigibility through this movement.

Both *That/Cela/Dat* and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy place special emphasis on the present; it is through the present that we can see time revolving on itself. *That/Cela/Dat* continually brings us back to the present as a point, but

autocritically, through this distinctive overall movement also spreads out a field of presence through which the intertwining of past, present, and future might be presented to its viewers. From within this experience the “now” shines back as a “picture” of the will towards an atomistic ontology. As delay, this artwork leads its viewers into a continually expanding experience of time, meaning, and art.

Figures

Figure 1. *That/Cela/Dat* exhibited at the Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels, 2000.
Images courtesy of Michael Snow.

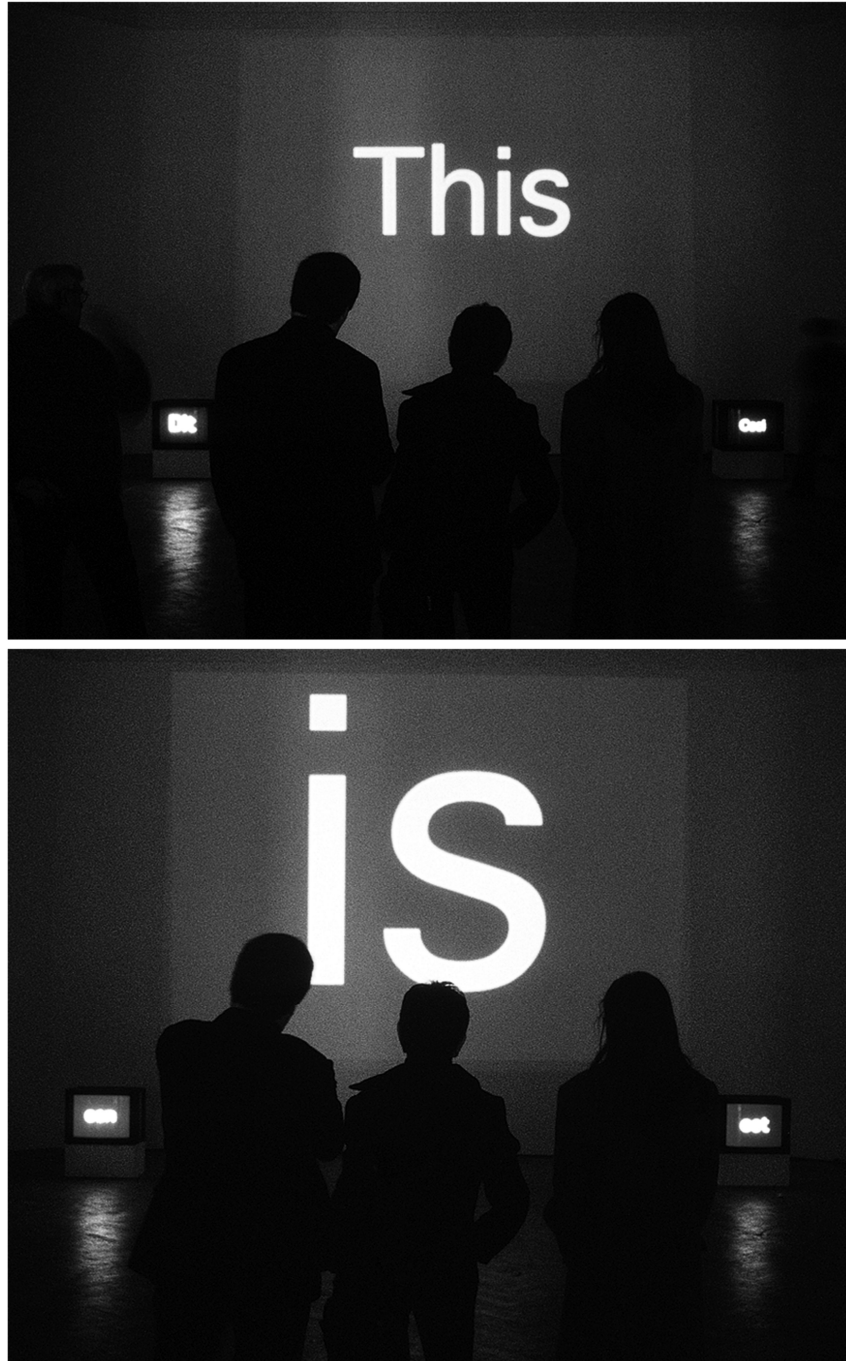


Figure 2. First pages of the English, French and Flemish script/score

MICHAEL SNOW
 "THAT" -
 FEB 2000

150
 Ceci ²⁵ n'est ¹⁰ pas ³⁰ évidemment ²⁰

30 10 60
 une ¹⁰ pipe, ¹²⁵ la ¹⁰ other ¹⁰ words: ²⁰ this ¹⁰ is ¹⁰

35 20 60 30 50
 not ²⁰, obviously ²⁰, a ¹⁰ pipe. ²⁰

120 40 30 30 30 20
 This ²⁰ is ²⁰ electric ¹⁰ light, ²⁰ projected ³⁰ on ²⁰

120 30
 this ³⁰

20 20 20 35 60 15 25 60
 On ¹⁰ the ¹⁰ other ¹⁰ hand, ²⁰ this ²⁰ is ¹⁰ not ²⁰, now,

20 20 15 15 30 60
 what ¹⁰ it ²⁰ used ¹⁰ to ¹⁰ be. ³⁰ However: ²⁰

90 20 25 15 60 90 20 25 60
 This ¹⁰ is ¹⁰ art. ³⁰ This ²⁰ is ²⁰ not. ³⁰

10 20 10 10 10 40 15 30
 The ¹⁰ word ²⁰ at ¹⁰ the ¹⁰ end ¹⁰ of ¹⁰ this ²⁰ sentence ³⁰

15 90
 is ¹⁰ meaningless. ³⁰

20 15 20 15 15 20 15 50
 Some ⁵ of ⁵ you ⁵ are ⁵ not ⁵ looking ⁵ at ⁵ this. ³⁰

35 30 35 40 35 50
 That's ⁵ OK. ¹⁰ Some ⁵ are ¹⁰ Thanks. ²⁰ This ²⁰

15 35 40 20
 is ¹⁰ promising, ¹⁵ isn't ¹⁰ it? ³⁰

120 30 20 20 35 30 20 35
 This ²⁰ surface ²⁰ is ¹⁰ on ⁵ the ²⁰ wall ³⁰ of ¹⁵ this ²⁰

30 20 35 30 20 35 30
 building ²⁰ in ²⁰ the ²⁰ city ³⁰ in ²⁰ the ²⁰ country, ²⁰

25 35 20 20 40
 etc. ²⁰ This ²⁰ is ²⁰ a ²⁰ universe! ²⁰

20 20 20 25 20 20
 What ²⁰ more ²⁰ could ²⁰ anyone ²⁵ ask ²⁰ for? ³⁰

10 30 30 10 80

4/63 - = 2 min 31 sec. + 10/11

Supra points

« Cela/That » ①

Ceci n'est pas, évidemment, une pipe! (C) RENE MAGRITTE, 1935.

Ceci est de la lumière électrique, projetée sur ceci.

Par contre, ceci, n'est pas, maintenant, ce que c'était. Toutefois : 40

Ceci est de l'art. Ceci ne l'est pas. 60

Le mot à la fin de cette phrase est insignifiant. 45

Certaines personnes ici ne regardent pas ceci. Ça va. Certaines personnes le regardent. Merci. Ceci est prometteur n'est-ce pas? 30

Cette surface est sur ce mur dans cet édifice dans cette ville dans ce pays, etc. Ceci est un univers! 30

Que peut-on espérer de plus? 60

end ENG. PAGE 1

En ce moment de nombreuses activités se déroulent ici en même temps. Il y a beaucoup de choses à regarder. L'auteur cherche à piquer votre curiosité, attirer votre attention, vous inviter à vous consacrer exclusivement (et profitablement espère l'auteur) à ceci, pendant quelques minutes. 30

Cependant, vous êtes libre de parler ou de marcher, il va sans dire, vous n'avez pas besoin de ceci pour vous dire cela. Ne vous sentez pas obligé de regarder ceci, putain, vous avez vu cette fille! 60

De plus il y a beaucoup d'œuvres intéressantes dans cette exposition. Celle-ci en est une parmi tant d'autres. Néanmoins elle est spéciale d'une certaine façon. 60

Même si vous tournez le dos à ceci, ceci sera toujours ici. Même si vous regardez autre chose, ceci sera encore ici, dans l'espoir que vous y reviendrez. 30

all 5 spaces became 2

end ENG. PAGE 2

synch misignant Merci.

synch DASTAIN!

Page 1, French Script/Score, *That/Cela/Dat*. Image courtesy of Michael Snow.

150 30 30 1 60 30 60 60 30 40
 Ceci n'est pas, évidemment, une pipe! © RENE MAGRITTE, 20
 30 20 20 20 40 25 25 30 30 50
 1935. In andere woorden: dit is, uitafwaard, geen pijp. 40 50
 120 40 30 30 30 30 30 30 30 30
 Dit is electrisch licht, geprojecteerd hierop. [op dit]. op dit scherm
 20 20 20 35 60 15 25 60 10
 Aan de andere kant, dit, is niet, nu, wat het was. Maar
 30 40 60 20 20 45 30 30 10
 toch: 40 60
 120 25 60 145 60 50
 Dit is kunst. Dit niet. 60
 10 20 10 30 10 40 10 40 15 40 90 30
 Het woord op het einde van deze zin is zinloos. 45
 20 15 20 10 20 10 10 10 15
 Sommigen onder jullie zijn niet aan het kijken hiernaar. [naardit.]
 23 35 20 30 50 50 50 50 45 50 15
 Dat is OK. Sommigen wel. Dankje. Dit is veelbelovend. 15
 40 30 30 30 30 30 30 30 30 30
 niet? 30 30
 120 30 20 20 20 30 20 30 20 35 30
 Dit oppervlak is op de muur van dit gebouw, in deze stad, 120
 20 30 25 35 20 20 70
 in dit land, enz. Dit is een universum! 20
 20 20 20 20 25
 Wat kan men nog meer verlangen? 60 end ENG page 1
 7 10 8 8 7 10 8
 Op dit ogenblik vinden hier op hetzelfde moment talrijke
 10 7 8 10 8 10 8 10 10
 activiteiten plaats. Er is veel om naar te kijken. De
 15 10 5 10 5 5 10 10 10
 auteur probeert om je interesse op te wekken, je aandacht
 5 10 5 8 15 5 15 4 5 10
 te trekken, je te vragen dit in beschouwing te nemen,
 10 4 5 5 5 30 4 8 10 10
 exclusief en voor een paar minuten (en met succes, 4 hoopt
 5 10 20 20
 de auteur). 20 20
 15 15 5 5 10 5 5 10 5 10 10
 Het staat je vrij om te praten of wat rond te lopen. 15
 15 10 5 10 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
 onnodig te zeggen dat je dit niet nodig hebt om je dat te
 15 10 8 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10
 vertellen. Voel je niet verplicht om hiernaar te kijken. 20
 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
 wou! wou! wou! wou! wou! wou! wou! wou! wou! wou! wou! wou!
 20 8 8 8 10 8 5 8
 Bovendien zijn er veel andere interessante werken in deze
 10 10 10 30 5 5 8 5 5 8 10
 tentoonstelling. Dit is er maar één uit de velen. Maar
 5 6 7 5 15 10 10
 het is wel een beetje speciaal. 60 50 10

Chapter Two

Arabesque for Kenneth Anger by Marie Menken

1. Introduction

In 1965 P. Adams Sitney interviewed Marie Menken and asked her for whom it was that she made her films.

Q. Who is your audience?

A. Mostly people I love, for it is to them, that I address myself. Sometimes the audience becomes more than I looked for, but in sympathy they must be my friends. There is no choice, for in making a work of art one holds in spirit those are receptive, and if they are, they must be one's friends.

Q. Did you make your dedicated works (*Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, *Bagatelle for Willard Maas*, and *Dwightiana* for Dwight Ripley) for a general audience or just for those individuals?

A. I'm surprised you left out *Visual Variations on Noguchi*. Of course, I have a feeling about these people and somehow created, cinematically speaking, what moves them or what has moved me, having what I thought was an insight into their own creative work. A general audience can be reached if I am a good communicant, and if not, it is my loss, and then maybe, it was just for those intended. I might say I was quite personal in my approach to all four of the above-mentioned films, an extravagance for those who had true feeling in their creative work. (9)

Marie Menken shot *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* while travelling in Spain with her friend and fellow filmmaker, Kenneth Anger, after they met at the Brussels World's Fair in 1958. She shot the footage on 16mm colour film using an

exceptionally small hand-held camera. As Anger explains, “she didn't want the bigger, heavier camera. She liked this little thing that she could hold in one hand; so while she was dancing around the columns and the fountains, I would occasionally be behind the camera, guiding her, so that she wouldn't bump into something” (40). Anger's description of Menken “dancing” with her camera gives an indication of the importance of her embodied gestures in making this film. Just four minutes in length, the film offers a dense and profound meditation on perception, rhythm, and movement.

In the title of the film the word “arabesque” can be grasped as demonstrating Menken's dancerly arabesque movements with her camera as well as cinematic depictions of the arabesques on the walls of the Alhambra. The later portion of the title brings up the question of friendship. We could understand this film as being *for* Kenneth Anger since he was there with Menken when she shot it, and indeed, Menken wrote in the program notes for the premiere of the film: “Resting in Granada after shooting in Spain, I made this film for Kenneth as a thank you note for helping me. Animated observations of tiles and Moorish

architecture in the Alhambra.”³⁰ Others have also seen Menken's film as a response and in some sense a challenge to Anger's 1953 film *Eaux d'artifice* (Sitney 2008, 33). Brakhage also notes that Menken regarded Anger as having an intrinsically “Moorish” quality, and thus the Alhambra provided an apt locale for a portrait of her friend (1994, 9). This aspect of portraiture in Menken's work that Brakhage describes is something he says she pioneered; she found a way to make portraits in film, not by taking a picture of a subject, but by filming “the things that these people would love, or did love” (1989, 45).

Additionally, I would like to suggest that the way Menken very often made her artworks *for* particular people also can be understood as her showing how she was inhabited by the vision of others. This concept of inhabitation as that which remains separate but also intimately intertwined in one's perceptions can also be seen in the subtle rhythms, patterns, and tensions that drew Menken to filmmaking. In the interview with Sitney she offers the following reflection on how she first got started as a filmmaker: “The twittering of leaves when I was

30 Though the film was not completed with titles by John Hawkins and music by Teiji Ito until 1961, it premiered at a retrospective of Menken's films at the Charles Theatre in New York in December of 1960. *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* was included in Part One of the retrospective, which consisted of a number of films Menken considered to be still in progress including *Eye Music In Red Major* (1961; 5:30 min., 16 mm, Color, silent), *Bagatelle For Willard Maas* (1958–1961; 5:30 min., 16 mm, Color, silent), *Sidewalk* (1966; 6:30 min., 16 mm, B/W, silent), and *Here and There with My Octoscope* (1962). Part Two included the finished films *Glimpse of the Garden* (1957; 5 min., 16 mm, Color, Sound), *Hurry! Hurry!* (1957; 3 min., 16 mm, Color, Sound), *Dwightiana* (1958–59; 3:30 min., 16 mm, Color, Sound; Music: Teijo Ito, Pictures: Dwight Ripley), and *Visual Variations on Noguchi* (1945; 4 min., 16 mm, B/W, Sound, Music: Lucia Dlugoszewski). (Program guide for the screening archived at Anthology Film Archives).

bored in class as a child, and the delights of moving my feet in the silhouette against the lights of the window.” And as she goes on to state, “I just liked the twitters of the machine” (1965, 10).

Arabesque for Kenneth Anger can appear to be a rather chaotic, muddled, and even amateurish film until we begin to perceive that the “contents” of the shots are not objects, but rather clusters of light, rhythm, texture, and vision itself. Whole new forms appear as the camera sweeps across patterned surfaces. It makes sense to discuss this film in terms of camera movement since in every shot we feel a particular kind of movement accented by the quivering and rippling of Marie Menken's embodied movements. That is, we feel Menken's bodily movements and gestures in every shot as the film presents a “peripatetic perception³¹” of the Alhambra of Granada. But as we will see in this chapter, these descriptions of camera movement also open up questions of movement more generally as the tension in which details, lucid moments, and the overall film find cohesion and clarity.

The central aim of this chapter is to draw out the distinctive overall tensility that can be felt in this film through the meeting of varying rhythmic lines that evidence different aspects of each other. At the outset, let me indicate this general movement as tensility or tensile movement to help distinguish it from the film's

31 The term “peripatetic perception” is borrowed from Richard Serra and describes “how one perceives and experiences space, place, time and movement” particularly through walking (Serra, 1994 [1978], 29).

somatic movements, kinetics, rhythms, dynamics and incitements. These latter, varying kinds of movement out of which *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* is made will be delineated in order to grapple with the film as tensivity.

We know from the critical writing and descriptions of Menken's films what importance movement serves in her body of work. Though critical writing on Menken's work is limited, descriptions of Menken's distinctive camerawork, particularly her use of movement, come up in a diverse range of sources. As Parker Tyler writes in *Underground Film* (1969), Menken's camera “demonstrated the nervous, somewhat eccentric, rhythmic play of which the camera as itself a moving agent is possible” (160). In his chapter on Menken in *Eyes Upside Down* (2008) P. Adams Sitney states that Menken “pioneered the radical transformation of the handheld, somatic camera into a formal matrix that would underpin an entire work in the films she made between 1945 and 1965” (23). In *Film at Wits End* (1989), Stan Brakhage states that “In the history of cinema up to that time, Marie's was the most free-floating hand-held camera short of newsreel catastrophe shots, and *Visual Variations on Noguchi* liberated a lot of independent filmmakers from the idea that had been so powerful up to then, that we have to imitate the Hollywood dolly shot, without dollies – that the smooth pan and dolly was the only acceptable thing. Marie's free, swinging, swooping hand-held pans changed all that, for me and for the whole independent filmmaking world” (38). Melissa Ragona, working to expand critical thought on Menken's work beyond the

purview of her influence on other film-makers, highlights Menken's camera movements as performative events open to chance operations, and offering kinetic extension of the static plastic arts. In “Swing and Sway: Marie Menken's Filmic Events,” Ragona states, “Her handheld camera produced a frenetic vertigo on sculptural, architectural, natural, and domestic objects, while her play with animation stretched the borders of film frame and event” (2007, 23). And in “Myth, Matter, Queerness: The Cinema of Willard Maas, Marie Menken, and the Gryphon Group, 1943–1969,” Juan A. Suárez highlights the fragmentary aspects of Menken's camerawork. He states, “She cut into reality in order to reveal intricate configurations indiscernible to the unaided eye. By stopping the camera every frame or every few frames, she disassembled motion to reassemble it again in gradual increments” (2009, 80).

This chapter aims to contribute to this understanding through a close examination of different kinds of movement of *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, while simultaneously describing how they echo and show different aspects of each other. The film's movements cannot be separated and delineated without being mistreated. This is the case not only because these movements show up through the tension between each other, but also because description of *kinds* of movement or movement *of* things deflects attention away from movement itself and back into the more staid territory of thetic moments or objects. Furthermore, how can one speak of movements without relegating them to the realm of an

animating force or transient quality of objects? I wish to enter these contradictions while maintaining focus on the tension-cohesion *between* any delineated aspects of the film.

In order to support this study of *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger's* distinctive overall movement – its tensility – this chapter will work out descriptions of rhythmic lines that roughly adhere to three different fields of movement. The first is “somatics” which, as I will describe, gets at movement's sinuous repetitions, hesitations, adjustments, and the way forms find clarity in movement. It will become apparent that Menken's bodily gestures and unique camerawork remain prominent in these descriptions. Here I will draw on P. Adams Sitney's insight into Menken's cinematic style, what he calls her “somatic camera.”³² The second section in this chapter forms under the heading “incitement.” I have chosen to use the word incitement to describe the way sensuous surroundings draw ourselves out of ourselves, or the way the details of the world captivate and engender our perceptions. As will be described, the movement of incitement is a drawing out or drawing towards, and can perhaps best be introduced through reference to the way a flower harkens a bee or the way the warmth of the sun unfolds the petals of a flower. Incitement in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* will be worked out through descriptions of the way the film phenomenologically interweaves seeing with tactility and caress, and allows room for the invisible. And the third section,

32 See “Marie Menken and the Somatic Camera” in *Eyes Upside Down: Visionary Filmmakers and the Heritage of Emerson* (2008).

“kinetics” will draw out the distinctive lines of the camera's mechanisms, its periodicity, repetitions, and representations. Motion is the better word to describe the propulsion of the camera and projector, but as I will work to demonstrate in this chapter, Menken draws camera motion back into movement's potency.

Though these three rough fields of movement will help delineate some of the film's significant features, the film's coherence as an artwork must be worked out through the film's distinctive overall tensivity. That is, phenomenological descriptions of the film will continually return to the way the midst of rhythmic tensions holds the film together, which is to consider the way the film is made from movement.

2. Somatics

As a first entrance into this film, let me begin to describe some of its distinctive camera movements. In many ways this film is a stepping and gliding dance through the Alhambra; we can feel the pulse of Menken's strides and the caress of her graceful movements along the palace's ornate arabesques, tessellations, and archways [fig. 3]. The film ends with a side view of a jet of fountain water which simultaneously offers a release and an echo of the sensuous abundance of the film. At the beginning of the film the camera hovers over a shimmering pool of water that holds the shifting reflection of flat rooftops and shining turquoise sky. This is a brief moment, a breath, before the camera traces

out the edges of these courtyard rooftops in swooping gestures that follow the path of a bird in flight. The camera alights again, this time, close on a rippling and undulating surface of water. The contrast between brief hovering, hesitating, adjusting moments where the camera alights on a textured surface, and swooping, arching gestures, marks out one of the basic movements of the film. We can see this movement as one borrowed or learned from birds³³, a movement that stretches between the stages of flight and of alighting on surfaces and is rhythmically punctuated by the flapping of wings. Inside the palace, the camera traces out the edges of the textured archways, and then briefly slides over and alights on a mosaic detail.

Another distinctive camera movement is marked out through Menken's use of pixilation, or shooting a single frame at a time. For example, a cluster of single frame shots flutter around the sculpted lion beasts that encircle one of the fountains. A pixilated sequence also marks out an encirclement of windows around a domed ceiling. And a string of single frames also delineates the enclosure of the courtyard seen from a stroll around its periphery. Pillars segment and beat out a certain rhythm of this peripatetic presentation of the courtyard, a rhythm that also echoes the chopping motion of the camera shutter [fig. 4]. These strings of single frame shots mark out visual rhythms of repeated forms which we

33 Or as Sitney describes, "The spiraling flight of a pigeon among the rooftops of the Alhambra provides her with an initial rhythmical figure and a metaphor for her wildly eccentric camera movements" (2002, 160).

may find helpful to describe as the feeling of running one's fingers along a string of beads.³⁴

The film draws its viewers in to experience many echoes between the different shots and movements. The variegated edge of the archway echoes the rippling water and the variegated edges of the courtyard rooftops. The swooping birds in flight echo the curved movements along the contours of the archways. The segments and repeated forms of the single frame sequences echo the repeated geometries that make up the palace's archways, its relief sculptures, and intricate mosaics. We can see how these fragments continually overlap and develop out of one another. Contrast between swooping and hovering movements also draws out the way certain patterns and clusters appear differently in motion than in a more steady view. When the camera swings over certain mosaic patterns, a kind of depth appears as certain shapes lift off and flow in synchronous movement like the movement of a school of fish or flock of birds. Slight shifts in focus and jiggling camera movements also echo the undulating reflective surfaces of water. These vibrating surfaces also seem to resonate and synchronize with the music's textures of guitar strings, flute, and castanets. Highly textured and rhythmic, both the visual and musical layers intermingle in a contrapuntal composition.³⁵

Through these initial descriptions that include shimmering water, flapping

34 As we will see, this artwork's emphasis on film as strips or strings of frames resonates with Menken's particular approach to editing. As Brakhage describes, "She would hold the strips of film in her hand and very much as she would strands of beads to be put into a collage painting" (1989, 41).

wings, embodied breath, hovering stillness, repeating patterns, interlocking mosaics and a segmenting shutter, we can begin to see the film as a coalescence of interlocking rhythms. These rhythms both echo and contrast with one another. The camera movements are borrowed from the surroundings rhythms, repetitions, and arching lines, but simultaneously make evident these rhythmic lines and undulating patterns as well as the sinuosity of embodied perception.

One of the striking aspects of *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* is the way it contrasts perceptions in movement with alighting on detail. Certain forms, figures, and rhythms show up in movement that remain implicit or hidden within focused stillness. In a particularly enticing sequence, a cluster of little star or flower-shaped windows transform into what can be described as an array of dancing, shooting stars. The camera pauses momentarily, showing the cluster of window lights, only to dive back into swirling and s-curve movements. Beams of light pivot in relation to these movements as these shifting points of light refract and spread out through the camera lens and onto the surface of the film [fig. 5]. These movements are playful, delightful, and deeply sensuous³⁶. In the moments of alighting pause I can see more exactly, and grasp the textured pattern, but they also hold a kind of retention of the pleasure of motion. These movements are so

35 Vocabulary borrowed from music is often helpful in describing Menken's work due to its rhythmic complexity. And indeed, as Sitney points out, the titles of many of Menken's films draw from music (2008, 28). Brakhage also makes use of the language of music – melody, bass, song - to describe Menken's particular approach to film-making (see esp. "Marie Menken" in *Film At Wits End*, 1989).

sensuous and the pleasure is in the movement itself, like that of running one's hand through sand or a jar of beads. This is a deeply visual pleasure that inheres in movement; moments of arrest only heighten the joy of a continual return to movement. The rhythmic patterns of the arabesques, mosaics and tessellations are shown to inhabit Menken's moving camera while they are simultaneously shown to find heredity in the pulsations of peripatetic perception.

Menken's "Somatic Camera"

How might the cinema camera, with its predilection for a smooth, steady, monocular gaze be used as an instrument to reflect upon embodied vision? How does the sinuous regularity of bodily rhythms clash and synchronize with the precise repetitions of the camera's mechanisms? How might the logic of the camera as an instrument of capture and possession be folded back on itself to show how embodied seeing is enticed by detail and sensuously drawn outside of itself?

P. Adams Sitney's description of what he terms Menken's "somatic

36 Menken's ability to draw out and respond to the deeply sensuous nature of her surroundings is explicated in one of Stan Brakhage's description of Menken's film *Visual Variations on Noguchi* (1945): "...and this film is very sexy. I mean, never was photographed wood so pornographic, right down to the pimples. She just, this woman who waited, took no lovers and waited for Willard [Menken's husband] hopelessly clear through to the end, to work his way through his homosexual period, as she always hoped, which he never did, goes into this studio and creates this sex dance, among these pieces of shaped wood, and the way, and moved so that they moved thus, not with, but here's where if you can feel that, even just in memory, you'll understand the total lack of vulgarity, and that's hard" (6). This description is from a presentation of Menken's films that he gave at the Innis Film Society on November 19, 1992, and which was published as "Stan Brakhage on Marie Menken" in *Film Culture* (Issue 78, Summer 1994).

camera” offers insight into the way the jolts and quivers in her films are not merely evidence of inept or careless camerawork, but are integral to her cinematic style. These incongruities, what Sitney describes as “the awkward split-second hesitations at the beginning of shots and the tiny shifts of direction and rhythm that may first strike us as accidents” (2008, 45), became the foundation of Menken's “cinematic poetics” (46). Her distinctive approach to working with the camera also included rapid panning, sudden stops, handheld pixilated sequences, and the playful animation of static objects. Menken's somatic camera not only evidences the artist's bodily presence in the filming process, but also draws attention to the sensuality of embodied perception itself. Sitney elucidates the development of Menken's somatic camera within the heritage of Emerson's aesthetics:

The artists of the American avant-garde cinema not only inherited the massive legacy of Emersonian aesthetics, they assumed as well the major native revisions and dilations of Emerson's thought. The most formidable and pervasive of these was Whitman's insistence on the centrality of the body—not solely the transparent eyeball, but the complete corpus with a strong emphasis on binocular vision, as well as an utterly un-Emersonian celebration of genital sexuality. (2008, 21)

Sitney's location of Menken's style within the Emersonian tradition is helpful in grasping the importance of the body in Menken's films and the passion entwined in her particular style. We can see how subtle shifts and hesitations found in the hovering, alighting shots in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* along with the sweeping, blending movements emphasize embodied seeing. These movements

echo the perpetual movement of the eyes as well as the location of seeing within the moving, gesturing body. Sitney also demonstrates how Menken's film-making resonates with Whitman's delight and wonder at somatic vision. Her moving camera also finds consonance with Charles Olson's poetics – finding rhythm through the subtleties and energy of embodied breath and perception rather than imposing a prescribed and regulating rhythm.³⁷ As Sitney states, Menken's cinematic style

is also analogous to the equally Emersonian somatic theory of poesis Charles Olson was developing at nearly the same time: his emphasis on breath and proprioception corresponds to Menken's identification of the camera with the body in motion and her cultivation of the respiratory and nervous agitation of the handheld camera even in its quietest moments (47).

Through this we can grasp how Menken's camera techniques are not only part of an independent approach to film-making, but that her somatic camera emerges from within a particular concern for the conditions that mark embodiment – its instabilities and sensuous qualities – and wonderment at the pulsating presence of life's inevitable thrust.

Let me return again to a particular sequence in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, one which will help describe the importance of somatic movement to the film's presence as a situation. Just after a sequence of hovering shots that jump cut progressively from a slightly out of focus wide shot of a mosaic to a sharply

37 See for example, Olson's essay "Projective Verse," in *Human Universe*, 1967.

focused detail of a star shape within that mosaic, the film moves into a sliding back and forth movement over another mosaic. As the camera shifts direction we can see this mosaic as a tessellation of hexagonal shapes and arbelos-like shapes against white. The star and arbelos-like shapes blend and appear to move in a synchronized way, like a flock of birds [fig. 6]. As the camera begins to make more radical swooping gestures, the dove-like shapes take flight and soar. Sitney's description also draws out the birdlike qualities of this sequence: "She sweeps so quickly over the high arabesque windows through which a bluish white light pours that they seem to take wings. Then, pushing the avian metaphor, she suggests the image of flocks of birds zigzagging in flight by rocking the camera over the field of tiles" (33).

3. Movement's Tensity

Consider the *between* nature of movement, the tension-cohesion through which this "flock of birds" appears. The description of the above sequence in terms of aviation, wings, and forms taking flight, is, of course, a metaphorical one. This metaphor helps describe what so easily appears before us, and furthermore, it can help us see how Menken is drawing out themes of light and flight throughout the entire film. But before going further into these themes, it will be important to take into account the perceptual, non-thematic and non-metaphoric aspects of this movement. Perhaps it is fitting to now ask how this movement

itself might be described more fully. Within this movement, perception of depth also becomes heightened. In movement these shapes blend and appear to lift off from the white background, and the tiled surface appears to become fluid, almost viscous. Not only does this movement evidence the body, Menken's somatic presence, but it also begins to show the distinction and fullness of seeing in movement. This is not only an impression of movement, not just evidence of movement, but these forms appear in movement – were made from movement.

Momentarily distancing ourselves from metaphor and the thematic aspects of our descriptions, we can begin to grasp how it is crucial that Menken realized *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* on film. This is not only an impression of movement, or a dynamic image, but rather, light reflecting off the tessellations making direct impressions on the celluloid surface. Menken's hand is not visible in brush-strokes or craft, but through the tension between her movements and the mechanisms of the camera. These forms take shape amidst the tensile meeting of tessellation, Menken's somatic movements, and the camera's kinetic mechanisms. These “birds” make their appearance from the midst of movement. Moreover, *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* continually brings us back to the differing rhythms, logics, and temporalities of these different kinds of movements. It is in the tension between these different movements that *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* coheres.

It is helpful at this stage to consider the importance of movement to human perception. What *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* makes palpable is how in

moving vision, certain details remain more indeterminate, while other features actually become more determinate. Through the experience of the film viewers can begin to feel how moving vision actually draws out certain distinct features; it is not simply a fuzzy or muddled version of a steady gaze, but rather offers its own kind of clarity.

Merleau-Ponty's writing on the importance of movement to tactility is helpful in describing the perceptual forms that cohere in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*:

There are tactile phenomena, alleged tactile qualities, like roughness and smoothness, which disappear completely if the exploratory movement is eliminated. Movement and time are not only an objective condition of knowing touch, but a phenomenal component of tactile data. They bring about the pattering of tactile phenomena, just as light shows up the configuration of a visible surface. Smoothness is not a collection of similar pressures, but the way in which a surface utilizes the time occupied by our tactile exploration or modulates the movement of our hand. (1962, 315)

The importance of exploratory movement that Merleau-Ponty describes in relation to tactility is helpful in describing the kind of vision that *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* presents. It is a moving vision, the kind of seeing we experience while walking, one that glides over textured surfaces. Within this exploratory movement perception draws out distinctive details. The film shows certain visual phenomena that disappear without movement; movement here is a potent component of seeing and alighting on detail that can be productively understood as inhering in this movement. Movement and time are not just added qualities, not

just animating features of static objects, but are the very stuff of *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*.

The importance of movement to perception is made palpable through the tensions between Menken's embodied gestures and the cinematic "vision" of the camera. One of the things that becomes evident through close study of the film is that movement distinguishes embodied perception from the cinematic in striking ways. Strictly on the side of the cinematic image, movement does appear as what might better be called motion, as merely an animating or dynamic force, whereas for embodied perception, movement is primary. Menken's film pushes cinematic motion and embodied movement against each other to make a most amazing contrapuntal composition. The tension between these kinds of vision is integral to *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger's* presence and cohesion as a particularly remarkable work of art.

4. Incitement

The fact that it is Merleau-Ponty's description of the importance of movement to the intelligence of touch that resonates with *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* takes on further depth as the film's movements also take on the phenomenological presence of a tactile caress. This moving-seeing is embodied seeing and as such remains entwined with the gestures of the body as well as other modes of sense perception, particularly that of touch. There is a way in

which the visual content of the film draws these surfaces into the hand, or, in which vision here becomes an extension of touch. The overlap and reversibility between seeing and touching remains prominent in the film. We see through Menken's bodily gestures, her steps, her arching movements, her breathing, and her exploratory seeing. In this way, her camera becomes as closely aligned with touching as with seeing, and it is within movement and time that these perceptions overlap.

The film repeatedly presents sweeping-to-pausing movements over the sculpted relief patterns of the palace's walls and pillars. These movements are akin to running one's hand over the textured surfaces in a kind of caress. The camera pans down and across the intricately carved arabesques of the palace walls. A pan down the rippled surface of a pillar allows these undulations to pulse and vibrate along the edge of the frame line. These serpentine surfaces are so enticing and so appealing that they simultaneously draw out this tactile seeing-touching. What I am working to describe is the way that *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* situates us so that we can actually perceive the kind of seeing that remains enmeshed with touching and gesture, and the way that “sinuous regularity³⁸”

38 I am borrowing this term from Stan Brakhage's description of Menken's film *Hurry Hurry* in his presentation of Menken's films at the Innis Film Society in 1992, published in *Film Culture*. He states, “What she did in her real desperation, which she knew there was no solution for is she sang this song, that has this bass of these flames, and this bass is a bass beat, that's fairly regular at first and keeps reverting to this sort of sinuous regularity and then against which is played the variations of these whipping tails of these semen” (1994, 7).

actually draw out this kind of perception. That is, the film does not merely present tactile images, but reflects back to its viewers the fecundity of moving tactile seeing.

We can now ask how this kind of vision, entwined with touch, gesture, and movement, opens up and leaves room for the invisibility of things. That is, it leaves room for depth, volume, and the irreducibility of otherness. We shall have to relate these unique perceptual biddings of *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* to the film's overall tensility, but for now we will explore the in-tension of tactility. Close-up shots of clustered niches appear the perfect fit for a thumb, finger or tongue [fig 7]. These little grooves echo the forms of the archways and curved entrance ways, inviting and drawing in. In order to help expand and communicate my descriptions of the mode of perception made palpable through the film I would like to suggest that its camera movements show an affinity with the intelligent movements of a blind person's hands, exploring, encountering, and “visualizing” a particular locale. Upon close and repeated viewings, I found it increasingly helpful to describe the camera's movements in line with the sensitivity, intelligence and inquisitive touch of the tongue, and through un-sighted vision.

Sinuous regularity as I am using and adapting it here helps capture the tactile rhythms we find in the natural world such as the patterned lines of a spider's web, the repeated segments of a pine cone, undulations of water, or embodied breath. The filigree of the arabesques echoes the sinuous regularity found in nature, textured patterns that are so enticing to the eye. Tessellations also echo the captivating incitement of natural patterns only with more exactitude and precise repetition than sinuosity. The cinematic image, with its flickering coloured light, and modulating patterns, can also be grasped as echoing sinuous regularity in a precised form – not only for its patterning, but also for its capacity to captivate vision.

Grooves, recesses, and concave shapes define many of the surfaces and spaces in the film, drawing out sensuous, exploratory perception. I would like to suggest that the way the film presents textured surfaces and concave spaces can be aptly described through the sensitive, exploratory movements of the tongue.

Titus Burckhardt describes the architectural configurations of these grooves in his book *Moorish Culture in Spain*:

Another feature of Moorish ornamentation are the spatial forms known as “stalactites” - *mukarnas* in Arabic. Basically they consist of a niche, that mediates between a dome and a corner of the walls supporting it. [...] The Granadan craftsmen divided up entire domes into *markarnas* cells, into a honeycomb whose honey consisted of light itself. The magical effect of these formations consists not least in the way in which they catch the light and filter it in an exceptionally rich and satisfactory graduation of shadows, making the simple stucco more precious than onyx or jade. (1972, 207)

These cells, ripples, and stuccoed surfaces incite sensuous perception, drawing vision outside of itself. Through the film, movement begins to appear as a potent and generative field for perception itself.

Between Seeing and Vision

What is the overlap and distinction between seeing and vision? How does the visual phenomenon of the cinematic work for and against and with human perception? What is it to be inhabited by the cinematic? In what ways do cinematic images extend, conflate, expand and reduce our capacities for vision? In what ways do seeing and vision inhere in perception more broadly and relate to invisibility? On the horizon of these questions is a further exploration of the ways

Arabesque for Kenneth Anger relates its viewers back to the invisibility of things even though it shows itself through the highly visual medium of the cinematic.

Through a slight detour, this study of invisibility in the film will be expanded through an exploration of the intelligence of touch, particularly that of the tongue and its connection to visualization. The mutability between vision and touch and the phenomena of tactile vision that becomes so prominent in the film, can perhaps be described through the ways the tongue can act as an agent of sight for the blind. A new technology called BrainPort³⁹ is being developed to assist blind people to see through the sensitivity of the tongue. Camera glasses worn by BrainPort users image whatever is in front of them and these images are then “translated” into a kind of pixel grid that rests on the user's tongue. The person is then able to “visualize” his or her surroundings through the topographical presentation on the tongue. This example serves to help describe the kind of moving perception in which *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* coheres, a kind of perception that inheres in the overlaps and mutability between seeing, touching and gesture.

In his essay, “The Mind's Eye: What the Blind See,” Oliver Sacks also presents some interesting descriptions of the overlap between different modes of perception. In this essay he explores distinct kinds of visualization experienced by individuals who were sighted and then became blind later in life. John Hull lost

39 See BrainPort Vision Technologies <http://vision.wicab.com/technology/>

his sight at age 48, and three years after that he also lost his ability to visualize and he entered what he terms “deep blindness” (26). As he released himself to this “deep blindness” he describes how he also began to perceive more deeply. Zoltan Torey was blinded in an accident at age 21, but he remained determined to maintain his ability to visualize and he became extremely adept at holding visual imagery in his “mind” to the point where he was able to move freely and confidently on his rooftop as he replaced the eaves troughs on his multi-gabled home (29). Sabriye Tenberken became completely blind at the age of 12, and though she always had a strong sense of colour and synesthetic perception, this became heightened after her blindness (31). Dennis Schulman, who lost his sight in his teens, describes his perception of his Braille notes as visual, not tactile (32), and Arlene Gordon, even after thirty years of blindness says that her eyes become tired after listening to talking books since this remains a highly visual experience for her (33). And finally, Jacques Lusseyran, in his memoir, describes how after he was blinded as a child lost his visual memory of familiar faces and surroundings, but after a period he began to develop a strong sense of visualization, a kind of inner seeing. All of these descriptions of vision by people who are blind point to the ways that vision can be connected to other modes of perception. These experiences of vision, though integrated with imagination, are also intimately connected with lived experience and are not merely inner hallucinations. These experiences open up questions of what is it to see and how

our capacities for vision relate to sight, and Sacks reflects in his essay:

[Dennis Schulman] felt that he had become far more sensitive to others' emotional states since losing his sight, for he was no longer taken in by visual appearances, which most people learn to camouflage. Voices and smells, by contrast, he felt, could reveal people's depths. He had come to think of most sighted people, he joked, as "visually dependent."

In a subsequent essay, Lusseyran inveighs against the "despotism," the "Idol worship" of sight, and sees the "task" of blindness as reminding us of our other, deeper modes of perception and their mutuality. "A blind person has a better sense of feeling, of taste, of touch," he writes, and speaks of these as the "gifts of the blind." And all of these, Lusseyran feels, blend into a single fundamental sense, a deep attentiveness, a slow, almost prehensile attention, a sensuous, intimate being at one with the world [...] This is very close to Hull's concept of "deep blindness" as infinitely more than mere compensation but a unique form of perception, a precious and special mode of being. (36)

Though we can read in these reflections and descriptions certain critiques of narrow conceptions and uses of sight,⁴⁰ what is helpful in the study of *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* is descriptions of a "deep attentiveness" and "deeper modes of perception and their mutuality." Descriptions of distinct ways that different blind

40 The ways that vision has become aligned with and narrowed to the parameters of rational thought, a distanced and analytic mode of vision, has been explored at length by a number of thinkers. For example, Marin Jay's *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-century French Thought* (1993) offers a broad survey of the question of vision in relation to enlightenment and clarity of thought. In *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (1999), Jonathan Crary demonstrates how human attention came to be conceived of as a problem amidst modern culture's development of technologies aimed particularly at capitalizing on visual attention. In her book *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (2002), Laura U. Marks proposes what she calls "haptic visuality" and "haptic criticism" to restore vision and thought to embodiment and material contact. This is all to say that questions concerning the ways that different techniques of thought and different technologies cultivate and change our perceptual abilities, open up a vast area of study. This meditation on *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* comes up against such questions, but seeks to continually return to questions concerning movement.

people experience vision opens up questions of the connection of seeing to other senses and also opens up questions regarding the different ways that sighted people see and visualize. Through Sacks' study we can grasp that it is possible to experience vision without seeing. *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, of course, remains visible, but it also reflects back at us the way that seeing can remain enmeshed in an “almost prehensile attention.”

The repetition of the words “deep” and “depth” in the above paragraphs also echoes an important aspect of the kind of vision presented in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*. The film presents surfaces less as definitive boundaries and more as viscous membranes that open up to indeterminate depth.⁴¹ The surfaces of the water reflect back and shine with light, but they also undulate with volume and a mysterious depth. The film pans across windows that glow with halos of over-exposed white light on the surface of the celluloid [fig 8]. The windows are membranes between inner and outer; they bulge with light and present soft, refracted constellations on the floor of the inner space. The intricate scripts, symbols and patterns on the walls of the palace present a mysterious past. They harken back to rituals and meanings from a medieval culture which can now be vaguely traced out in an ambulatory journey through the temple's paths and

41 Jonas Mekas' descriptions of Menken's films resonates: “There are moments in *Arabesque* and in *Notebook* that are among the most inspired sentences in filmic poetry. Does Menken transpose reality? Or condense it? Or does she, simply, go direct to the essence of it? Isn't poetry more realistic than realism? The realist sees only the front of a building, the outlines, a street, a tree. Menken sees in them the motion of time and eye. She sees the motions of heart in a tree. She sees through them and beyond them” (1972, 47).

archways. In one particular moment when the camera alights on a mosaic detail, the camera's focus fluctuates, briefly liquifying the tiled surface so that it ripples like the surface of a pool of water. The camera then lightly jiggles and shifts before the film cuts to a close pan down an arabesque. In my descriptions I am drawing together distinct meanings of depth – as temporal past, as volume, as mystery – which are not the same; they are distinct regions, but they share in an irreducible spread into otherness. Depth as irreducibility is not overtly “visible” but it is perceptible in these quivering, wavering and fluctuating surface movements.

Light in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* is the most basic field of seeing, but light also appears to bulge right out of the depth of things. Sunlight marks out distinct shadows on the arabesque reliefs and it also radiates in the turquoise of the sky. The fountain jets and rippling pools of water appear to be full of light, not just reflections. In this film as with many of Menken's other films, she photographs light and colour as subjects in themselves, not just the property or transient quality of things. She directs her camera at sources of emanating light; she frames and focuses so that colour fields and luminescence take precedence

over imaged objects.⁴² The moving camera also blurs the light and colour on the surface of the celluloid. The sequence of swirling, spinning star windows unleashes the bulbous fulness of light; light, like gushing water, bursts out of transient shapes and forms. Droplets on a shallow pool of water release circular ripples of light. A pan down from a pair of smaller windows to a pair of larger windows show these openings as tumescent with light as soft flares splay across the film's surface. The pairs of windows seem also to echo binocular vision, drawing attention to the fact that embodied seeing is a mutuality between two. The patterned membranes of the windows also sculpt and shape the light into constellations of soft circles that fill out the dark recesses of the interior spaces. We feel Menken “walking across galaxies” as she steps from one constellation to the next. The camera movement shows up the pulse of Menken's strides as these patterns of light slide into frame. In many ways the film draws attention to light membranes: eyes, windows, water, celluloid, colour. These membranes are simultaneously active and passive, both receiving and shaping light, and such emphasis on light membranes resonates with the cohesion of moving tactile

42 Certain of Menken's films, including *Eye Music In Red Major* (1961; 5:30 min., 16mm, Color, silent), *Moonplay* (1950–62; 5 min 16mm, Color, Sound), *Lights* (1964–66; 6:30 min., 16 mm, Color, silent), and sections of *Notebook* (1940–62; 10 min., 16mm, Color and B/W, silent) are composed of footage of direct light sources such as Christmas lights or the moon. In a grant application to the Ford Foundation in 1963 Menken describes her filmmaking in the following way: “I have been a dedicated artist all my life and film-making was a natural evolution while I was engaged in painting, particularly since I was primarily concerned in capturing light, its effect on textured surfaces, its glowing luminescence in the dark, the enhancement of juxtaposed color, persistence of vision and eye fatigue” (copy of the grant letter held in the Menken file at Anthology Film Archives). For more on Menken's cinematic play with light see Sitney 2008, p. 44; and Ragona p. 27.

seeing in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*. These membranes are not equivalent in their in-tensions of light, but their coalescence situates viewers with the fullness of perception and the way it harkens to the irreducible invisibility and depth of things.

Irigaray's distinction between sensation and perception in her essay "To perceive the invisible in you" in *To Be Two* (2001) is helpful at this point. Sensation, according to Irigaray, is more quantitative than qualitative, and tends to reduce the other to object, a collection of properties. Sensation can be fully immersive and engaging, but it also easily erases perception of what must remain hidden from its sensing. Perception, on the other hand, can be cultivated to protect the invisible in the perceiver as well as in the other perceived. Perception continues to hold in awareness that which remains in excess of sensation. As Irigaray states:

To respect you: to perceive you through the senses, leaving an extra cloud of invisibility. I perceive you, but what I perceive is not the whole of you, and the whole of me is not perception. I perceive what is already apparent. I perceive it with my eyes, my ears, my nose, my touch, my taste. What can I say of what is not perceptible in this manner? What I feel in excess of it—to whom does this belong? (2001, 46—47)

She goes on to show that this belongs to the *between two*. Of course, for Irigaray, the primary way in which we perceive the *between* is through interpersonal relationships. She offers a way of considering this between in relation to artworks both in the process of making and in perception. *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*

shows how vision that always remains partial, remains productively so, safeguarding and leaving room for invisibility and depth. As an artwork, this film does not try to escape temporality's flux, but remains irreducibly entwined in time's movement, which is to say it also allows its viewers to experience the depth and invisibility of movement.

It is also crucial to describe how the experience of scale captivates the viewer in compelling ways within the kind of perception made present in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*. I am not suggesting that the film makes touching visible, but that it draws out the mutuality and mutability between touching and seeing. This kind of perception inheres in movement, even movement of softest breathing and slightest hesitating. In a coarse way it could be expressed that one knows how to see texture and depth by what one's hand and tongue have taught. The caressing, swinging, stepping and hesitating camera movements draw the rippling, vacillating, vibrating surfaces into my hand and mouth. Simultaneously, the filigree, colour and rhythm of these surfaces and openings draw my sensing body out to meet them. Like the way a flower attracts a bee with all its sensuous colour and luscious forms, so too these tactile movements and luminescent depths draw out the fullness of perception, as a kind of deep attentiveness. I do not maintain perspectival distance from objects,⁴³ but perceive myself as filling these

⁴³ As Juan A. Suárez describes more generally, “Menken's films are based on a fragmentary style of visual perception that refuses global perspectives and privileges isolated details” (2009, 78).

spaces the way my tongue fills the groove of my mouth or water pools and spreads. More distant surfaces are drawn in close, into my “mouth” and into my “hand.” I feel the ridge of the bevelled rooftop, my tongue fits into the hollows of the arabesques, my hand flows over the rhythms of the tilings. In this film, as in many of her other films, Menken draws out the deeply sensual nature of her surroundings, and one of the ways she does this, is by situating seeing within embodied perception. If we try to maintain a more distanced, analytical view of the film, it will show up as a merely amateurish tourist film. I begin to perceive space and intervals between things as thick and viscous, and in a way my “body image” fills these spaces with variations of exploratory movement.

Scale and the relation between inner and outer horizons is also an aspect of the Alhambra's architecture, tessellations, and arabesques. The way that Menken draws these aspects into her film demonstrates another way in which she is inhabited by her situation. The jump cuts from the vast mosaic of diamond-shaped tiles to the inner detail of the star shape show both the cohesion and contrast of the inner and the outer. Beginning from a wide soft-focus general view, the progression inwards shows what appeared as punctuating dots to be little stars that echo the star shape seen throughout the Alhambra's architecture and mosaics. An upward-facing spinning shot of a vaulted “stalactite” ceiling, appears simultaneously as a close view of a dappled water, an array of spinning stars. The cut to a close view of a shallow trough of water radiating with circular

ripples emphasizes this correlation between the vast and the detail, the close and the distanced. Close-up steps from one to the next constellation of window light on the floor, also draws in close the vast, unfathomable light of the sky. Rippling water and the multiplicities of stalactite niches also gather in and palpate with the vastness of light. The serpentine details of the arabesques interweave with the grace of the palace arches and reverberate in the peripatetic dance of Menken's camera. This drawing together of inner and outer horizons, of the palpating detail with vast cosmic rhythms, echoes the Islamic emphasis on harmony. As Titus Burckhardt describes in *Moorish Culture in Spain*:

[...] the arabesque with its rhythmic repetition serves quite a different artistic purpose than does pictorial art. It is a direct contrast to it, as it does not seek to capture the eye to lead it into an imagined world, but, on the contrary, liberates it from all preconceptions of the mind, rather like the view of flowing water, fields waving in the wind, falling snow or rising flames. It does not transmit any specific ideas, but a state of being, which is at once repose and inner rhythm. [...] The arabesque developed from the plant tendril belongs to the law of pure rhythm – hence its unbroken flow, its opposing phases, the balance of its filled-in and open forms. The arabesques of the Alhambra combine abstract palmettes with stylized flowers and geometric interweavings – tongues of flame, jasmine blossoms, and snowflakes, unending melody and divine mathematics – or spiritual intoxication and spiritual sobriety combined, to use the terminology of the Islamic mystics. Hieratic inscriptions are inserted or interwoven into all this, and sometimes gentle, intersecting arches emerge from their strokes like the diffused glow of candlelight. (1972, 206)

The sinuosity between inner and outer also interweaves with the fluidity of perception in movement and alighting on detail. Here too, *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* presents indeterminate flux and determinate pauses as inhering in each

other. There is a constancy between them, but they also do not reduce to the same.

5. Kinetics

All of the visual, tactile and temporal rhythms in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* work together to form the polyrhythmic presence of the film, but they also maintain their own irregularities or distinct features. The camera-body rhythms of stepping, breathing, and looking, though explicated through repeating pulses, are not identical to each other or entirely regularized; they are simultaneously worked out through intimate movements of adjusting, hesitating and modifying. The swinging, swooping, and spinning camera-body movements are also permeated with little pauses, pivots, and adjustments. These sinuous movements continually transform and bend the highly regularizing motion of the camera shutter and intermittent motion of film through the camera gate.⁴⁴ Menken often moves “too quickly” for the camera to register clear images. Particularly the swinging motion of the camera over tessellations makes evident the relative speed of the camera shutter. Though this echoes the general and ambiguous flux of embodied or peripatetic vision moving through architected space, this blurring and vibrating is also an “artifact” of the meeting of frames-per-second and interwoven

⁴⁴ A quote from Michael Snow resonates with the rhythmic features of the film camera described here: “Film cameras and projectors are members of the clock family” (2004, 99).

geometries.⁴⁵ In a way we could think of these meetings of pattern and rhythm as a kind of moiré patterns, a phenomenon in which overlapping grids make new patterns that often appear to vibrate. Moiré patterns are often considered to be noise or artifacts in film, video and photography, but like the inclusion of hesitating movements, these “noisy” qualities show up the way these different patterns modify each other, pushing seeing in and of the film toward intrasensory perception. The spinning shutter whirrs across interlocking tessellations and arabesques. We cannot actually see the shutter, but its patterning effect becomes perceptible. Furthermore, the lines and ripples of the Alhambra's textured surfaces also vibrate along the edges of the picture frame⁴⁶ as the camera continually pans

45 Juan A. Suárez makes the point that in addition to Sitney's description of Menken's camera as “somatic” it is also “surgical.” He asserts that her camera “is also disembodied and surgical—it reduces the body to its bare material substratum and, at times, bypasses the body completely, creating perceptions that could only be technologically generated” (2009, 78).

While I am also working to demonstrate how Menken makes evident and tangible the technological motions of the camera, intrinsic to the way they become so tangible in this film is through the way they appear in tension and in relation with Menken's embodied movements. Menken's movements with the camera simultaneously make visible both her particular embodied gestures *and* the mechanisms of the camera. Through this we feel the artwork's tensions simultaneously as anonymously technologically generated *and* as uniquely personal (style). This counterpoint appears and inheres in movement itself. The capacity to bring together disparate elements, allowing them each to maintain their own distinctions through relational tensions is an aspect of much particularly rich art. For example, in Snow's *That/Cela/Dat* viewers are able to experience themselves *using* an atomistic approach to time *and* watch themselves using it; these different logics and rhythms remain separate but simultaneously evidence each other.

46 Sitney also notes Menken's sensitivity to the film form: “at a time when most of her contemporaries were invoking the Dionysian imagination in their invented imagery, Menken was exploring the dynamics of the edge of the screen and playing with the opposition of immanent and imposed rhythm” (2002, 160). And as Brakhage points out in his presentation of Menken's film *Hurry Hurry*, the rhythmic complexity of her films is best seen at the edges of the frames (1994,8).

and swings. These vibrational lines are also typically considered artifacts to be avoided in cinematography aimed at artifice, but in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* these lines trace out the palpating caress of tactile seeing.

The chopping, grabbing, and intermittent freezing motions of the camera are also made explicit through the “pixelated” or single-frame sequences. The encirclement of sculpted lions flutters by in quick single-frame montage and the lion faces appear to overlap. These twelve lions stand as the defining presence in the centre of the Court of Lions; water spouts from their mouths and they collectively hold a large shallow basin on their backs. The camera “looks” close into each of these stylized faces in rapid succession, so that they appear as what can be described as a collective force of benevolent protection. Through this kind of camera work we feel the jump or gap from one frame to the next. These jumps and flickers most often remain unnoticed when the camera runs at twenty-four frames-per-second, but with pixelation these gaps quite easily felt. In another pixelated sequence near the end of the film, a walk around the outer corridor of the Court of the Lions, the pillars between the corridor where Menken walks and the interior space appear as an external shutter. The pillars fragment and flicker our view of the interior patio where the twelve sculpted lions hold the fountain basin on their backs. Pulsing across the film frame, the pillars appear as an external equivalent of the chopping motion of the shutter and the intermittent motion of the strip of film through the camera gate.

Menken, who edited the first cut of her films by looking at the strips of film (rather than looking through a viewer), dealt with film as celluloid strips of frames. Strips of film reveal frames of subtle variations in pattern and then shifts to streams or washes of light⁴⁷. Brakhage describes Menken's style of editing in

Film at Wits End:

She would hold the strips of film in her hand and very much as she would strands of beads to be put into a collage painting. She would hang the film strips on clothespins and, after much meditation and often without running them through a viewer at all, would cut them together. Finally, of course, she would view the film over the projector because, as she once pointed out to me, "You cannot judge back-and-forth movements very well looking at the film strip – unless they are very fast in-and-out movements." (1989, 41).

The common logic of the camera, a logic that *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* and Menken's larger body of work unravels, is more closely aligned with Irigaray's defining of sensation. Its temporality becomes "reactive." In "To perceive the invisible in you," Irigaray writes:

Perceiving, if it is cultivated as such, is part of becoming together. Sensation, instead, loses the other, even the world: it takes pleasure in them but without remaining with them, and thus forms an atemporal being, or rather, a being for whom time unfolds only beginning from the intensity of experience, above all, of suffering. The subject remains alone with the history of his affections, of his sensations, a history which he remembers, recounts, and repeats. The subject does not construct an active temporality, a temporality-with, but becomes reactive, saturated with intensity, without freedom, without space for

⁴⁷ Film strips in some ways share appearance with the sinuous regularity of the natural world and the exact repetitions of the Alhambra's tessellations. Each film frame is an exactly repeated rectangle forming a strip of little "tiles," but camera movement or movement within the shot offers variance between frames forming more sinuous patterns along the strip of film.

initiative or creation. (2001, 45)

The cinematic image itself, of course, is not capable of the kind of perception that Irigaray describes here. As my study of *That/Cela/Dat* makes clear, moving images, no matter how “dry,” orient viewers towards representation, illusion, and a narrowed experience of time; *That/Cela/Dat* allows its viewers to reflect autocritically on these aspects of the cinematic by situating them in what Irigaray describes above as an “active temporality.” Moving images, most generally construed, tend to participate in what, following Irigaray, we can describe as “sensation.” The capacity for moving images to foster sensation finds explicit expression in the attraction and intensity of entertainment industry films.

Arabesque for Kenneth Anger shows itself as a particularly noteworthy work of art in that it makes use of cinematic intensity, sensation, and pleasure, but it does so in such a way as to draw its viewers back to experience the depth and irreducibility of perception. The film's flickering light and colour inheres in the way the details of one's locale incite the capacities to see; sensation is drawn back into the fullness of perception, depth, and movement itself.

Filmography: Marie Menken

This list of Menken's films has largely been gathered from the file on her held at Anthology Film Archives. The information here has also been check against P. Adams Sitney's list in *Eyes Upside Down* (2008), Melissa Ragona's chapter on Menken in *Women's Experimental Cinema* (2007), and Martina Kudláček's list of Menken's films found on the web site for her documentary film, *Notes on Marie Menken* (<http://www.notesonmariemenken.org>). Menken often reworked her films and screened different versions of the same film, so it is difficult to provide definitive details regarding her work.

Visual Variations on Noguchi

1945 | 4 min. | 16 mm | b&w | sound

Glimpse of the Garden

1957 | 5 min. | 16 mm | colour | sound

Hurry! Hurry!

1957 | 3 min. | 16 mm | colour | sound

Dwightiana

1957 | 3.5 min. | 16 mm | colour | sound

Arabesque for Kenneth Anger

1958–1961 | 4 min | 16 mm | colour | sound

Bagatelle for Willard Maas

1958–1961 | 5.5 min. | 16 mm | colour | silent

Eye Music in Red Major

1958–1961 | 5.5 min. | 16 mm | colour | silent

Notebook

1940–61 | 10 min. | 16mm | colour and b&w | silent

(Consists of nine parts: Raindrops, Greek Epiphany, Moonplay, Copycat, Papercuts, Lights, Nightwriting, The Egg, Etcetcetc)

Mood Mondrian

1958–1962 | 5.5 min. | 16 mm | colour | silent

Moonplay

1950–62 | 5 min | 16 mm | colour | sound

Go! Go! Go!

1962–64 | 11.5 min. | 16 mm | colour | silent

Drips In Strips

1963 | 2.5 min. | 16 mm | colour | silent

Wrestling

1964 | 8 min. | 16 mm | b&w | silent

Lights

1964–66 | 6.5 min. | 16 mm | colour | silent

Sidewalks

1966 | 6.5min. | 16mm | b&w | silent

Andy Warhol

1964–65 | 22 min. | 16 mm | colour | silent

Watts With Eggs

1967 | 2.5 min. | 16 mm | colour | silent

Excursion

1968 | 5 min. | 16 mm | colour | silent

Figures

Photographs by Angela Joosse. Film print courtesy of Anthology Film Archives.

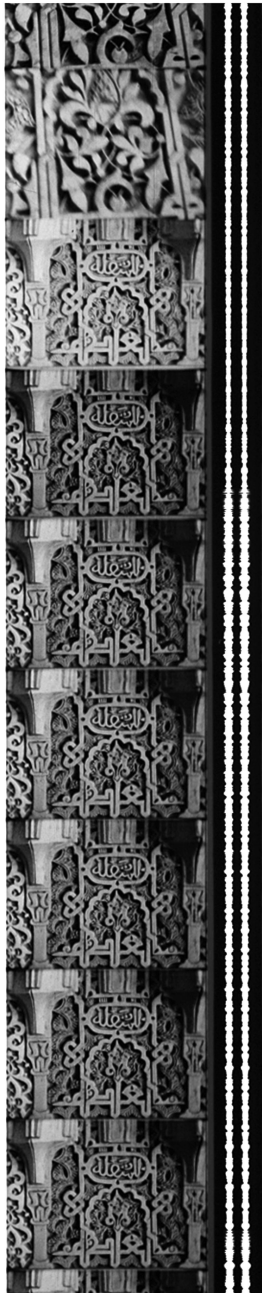


Figure 3

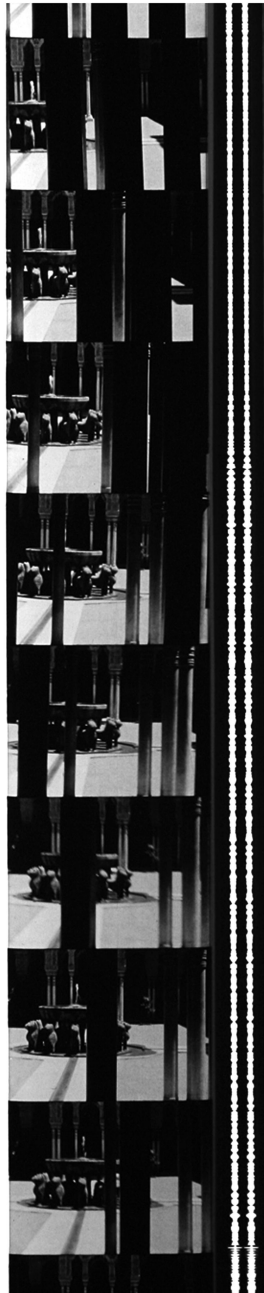


Figure 4

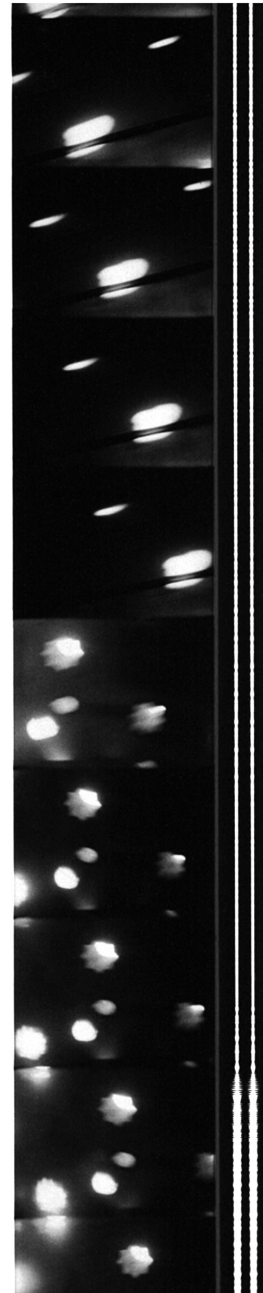


Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

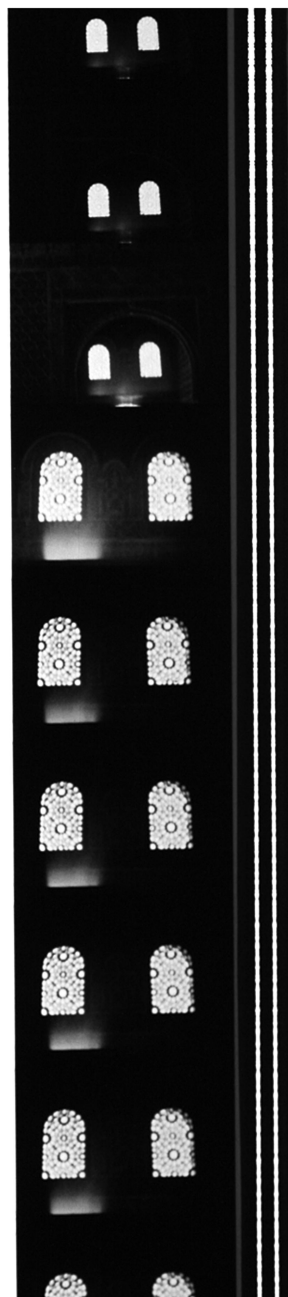


Figure 8

Chapter Three

Generative Space in Richard Serra's Torqued Ellipses and Torqued Spiral

The primary characteristic of both the temples and stone gardens was that the ambulatory paths around and through them were circular. The geometry of the sites prompted walking in arcs. The articulation of discrete elements within the field and the sense of the field as a whole emerged only by constant looking. The necessity of peripatetic perception is characteristic of Myoshin-ji. [. . .]

Six weeks in the temple and gardens opened the issues of how one perceives and experiences space, place, time and movement. (Serra, 1994 [1978], 29)

The relationship of time, space, walking, and looking—particularly in arcs and in circles—constitutes the only way you can see certain Japanese gardens. (Serra, 1997, 29)

1. Introduction

In 1970 American sculptor Richard Serra spent six weeks in the Zen gardens in Kyoto, Japan. As he often mentions in interviews, this was a formative experience which continues to resonate throughout his artwork. Richard Serra's *Torqued Ellipses* and *Torqued Spiral* are provocative of curvilinear movement through space. Four of Richard Serra's torqued sculptures are sited together in one gallery space at the Dia Art Foundation in Beacon, New York. These include *Torqued Ellipse II* (1996), *Double Torqued Ellipse* (1997), *Torqued Ellipse I* (1996), and *2000* (2000) which is a torqued spiral. Each of these sculptures is

made of two-inch thick sheets of weatherproof steel which stand about thirteen feet high and range from around twenty to thirty-five feet across.⁴⁸ Visitors are able to walk around and also inside these torqued elliptical and spiral forms. Though this chapter does consider these sculptures as a group, its primary focus is the *Double Torqued Ellipse*.

A great deal deserves to be written about the *Torqued Ellipses* and *Torqued Spiral* in terms of the history of art. However, my approach here is focused on the embodied experience of these artworks. I spent fourteen days in the presence of the sculptures working to describe what remains present phenomenologically evident through experience of these sculptures. All of the phenomenological descriptions in this paper are drawn from the writing I did in the presence of the artworks. Like the artworks, my writing also follows fugal, curvilinear paths, working out a certain trajectory only to burst open and begin again. In my articulations, I make use of various metaphors and analogies, meant to bring us closer to the artworks and the phenomena made present through the artworks.

This chapter reflects on what is the nascent body, the body that connects us constantly back to our birth which is fundamental to the phenomenological body that Merleau-Ponty speaks of in *Phenomenology of Perception*.⁴⁹ As a result, this chapter will open up to questions concerning the nature of generativity itself,

48 The overall dimensions are as follows: *Torqued Ellipse I* (13'1" x 29'11" x 20'7"), *Torqued Ellipse II* (12' x 29' x 20'5"), *Double Torqued Ellipse* (Outer ellipse: 13'1" x 33'6" x 27'1", inner ellipse: 13'1" x 25'11" x 20'11"), *2000* (13'7" x 42'6" x 35'5").

that fecundity and potency of life. What is there, with my mortal born body by which I am able to articulate experience? What are the movements, the rhythms, the weight entwined in my capacity to know, to hold and be held in the maternal and bodily meaning of artworks? From the moment of my birth, conditioned by my embodiment, I experience an outward movement or push of certain perceptual capacities and capabilities which I cannot claim as due to a personal choice or acquired skill, what Heidegger would call one's thrownness or facticity. How does this nascent body cohere with the perception and experience of such artworks, but also with the capacity to reflect and articulate meaning? How does generativity connect with the generality of existence, but also create an opening for creativity and most profound uniqueness?

A first entrance to these sculptures that few would deny is that they are “accessible” and “interactive” artworks. But when I state that the Torqued Ellipses and Torqued Spiral are accessible, what I mean to say is that there is a sense in which one's body already knows what to do in these spaces. Far ahead of cognitive reflection, one's moving-body is “already there” gripped with the

49 In an early interview with Liza Bear, Serra stated that “one of the things that you get into as you become more in tune with articulating space is that space systems are different than linguistic systems in that they're nondescriptive” (36). One's embodied experience of movement through space, though intelligent, remains distinct from linguistic articulation. In face of the challenge of how to write in close proximity to experiencing articulated space, this chapter makes use of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. No other philosopher is more helpful in coming to grips with how the body itself understands phenomena like perception, movement, and emotion. And Richard Serra was, of course, familiar with Merleau-Ponty early on in his work as a sculptor. For more on the relationship between Merleau-Ponty's thought and Richard Serra's sculpture see Rosalind Krauss's article “Richard Serra: Sculpture” ([1986] 2000), especially pages 125-133.

meaning of these spaces. In such a way, Merleau-Ponty's teaching in the *Phenomenology of Perception* that our bodies have "already sided with the world" or are "synchronized with the world" is made explicit (216). This is the nascent self which is already in tune with the world. I could say that these sculptures are "already there," sided with my body that loves to move in and through space. But what is the nascent body, and how is this made phenomenologically present with these Serra sculptures? This is where the work of this chapter begins.⁵⁰

2. Initial descriptions

Let us start by sensing out the sculptures in broad terms before turning to the specific phenomena they reveal and to which this paper is dedicated. I will frequently describe how my movement with these sculptures becomes present to me as a kind of dance. Walking alongside the torqued, curved walls can be disorienting and even dizzying. My sense of balance constantly wobbles and readjusts along with the perpetual flexing undulations of the steel walls. I feel as though I am tipped, dipped and spun about. The walls too, particularly the "outer" wall, or exterior surface, which curves away from me, seems to spin and roll. The "inner" wall, or interior surface, which wraps around me, has the undulation of an

⁵⁰ My simultaneous purpose here is to hermeneutically clarify both Serra's sculptures and Merleau-Ponty's key but difficult texts on the given generality and born generativity of one's bodily life. My aim is to create a chiasm between the artworks and the texts by which they make present the limit situation of one's birth as well as the generativity which carries one forward in one's ownmost existence.

ocean wave. My movement with these sculptures engages in a constant cycling between inner and outer spaces. This inner/ outer movement is most prominently held in the *Double Torqued Ellipse*. My footsteps circumscribe the outer limit of the elliptical vessel, its surface spinning beside me and rolling off ahead of me. I experience this outer wall primarily as a swaying, vibrating line. This line is drawn along the “horizon” where the curve of the steel plate falls out of my view. It sways out over my head and then reclines back away from me in relation to its torqued volume. When I am in the very centre of the *Double Torqued Ellipse* the surface of the sculpture spreads and stretches out in an expansive field around me. This inner space wraps around me and it is in here that I most clearly feel the pull of the torque held in these walls as they continue to stretch and contract even as I stand still.

Most striking and unique to the *Double Torqued Ellipse* is the experience of walking along the corridor formed by the fitting of one torqued ellipse inside the other. We shall see how it reawakens the nascent and generative body. As I move along the corridor I simultaneously experience the spinning/ rolling away of the outside of the inner ellipse, and the spreading-stretching of the inside of the outer ellipse. Here I am led by the peeling away of the swaying line of the inner ellipse and the expanding plane of the outer ellipse, a dehiscence of line and plane.⁵¹ The vertical lines and planes of the sculpture, which continually fall off

51 See Merleau-Ponty's description of the ambiguity of binocular vision, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.232, 262.

from my view, dominate my field of view and bend my habitual horizontal horizon.⁵² The straight vertical and horizontal lines of the large gallery room accentuate the swaying lines and disappearing surfaces of the sculptures. As I move, I am caught between the swaying, rolling-away movement of the inner ellipse and the spreading-stretching of the outer ellipse. The corridor-nature of the space between the two ellipses draws me irrepressibly forward; like the movement of life itself this is a space where I find myself on-my-way.

3. Peripatetic Perception

It took me almost a day of walking before “finding” a fluid movement with these sculptures, an experience which became disclosive of the nature of generativity. This came with a strong visceral sensation of being led by a cord in the centre of my body as I moved through the corridor of the *Double Torqued Ellipse*, a strange umbilical-like experience. This sensing of being “corded” was complimented by my vision becoming much more diffuse and slackened, and it cohered with discovering and allowing myself to move in “ac-cord-dance” with these sculptures. This experience held and remained present for the rest of the ten days that I spent with the Serra sculptures, and settled into a deep resonant

52 I note an interesting correspondence here between my experience in the Torqued Ellipses and the way Serra describes the piece he made after his return from Japan. As Serra states, “On returning to the U.S., I built *Pulitzer Piece: Stepped Elevation* (1970—71), which is comprised of three very large plates embedded in the ground over three acres. They act like barometers in the field, and function as surrogate horizons. You have to walk the entire field in order to see them. That piece was made directly in response to having lived in Kyoto” (1997, 28). The Torqued Ellipses also create “surrogate horizons.”

experience of “prenatality” and “birth,” our main themes.

When one enters the room of sculptures, one is quickly drawn into a close proximity with one of these large sculptures. One cycles around its limit and then expands into its interior volume of space. The surprise at how open yet full these inner spaces appear never seemed to diminish for me, and fed my developing sense of the plenitude that is characteristic of any kind of generativity. The anticipation built up by my circling the exterior of the space, always being drawn around a bend, made me almost expect that I would find something lurking within the interior. But these spaces remain smooth and open like a vowel sound in my mouth. They hold an opening space present. This fullness of space pushes against the sides of the sculpture like the way water warps the sides of a flimsy bucket; the flexing walls appear to bear a great volume even though the space is simultaneously so open. I notice that others share my inclination to spread arms wide and “glide” across the surface of the steel. Situated with these sculptures I am drawn to movement made evident both in my own gestures and in feeling the churning tension held within these walls of steel. As I walk around the periphery of this interior space, my face turned upward and my body bending with the flow of the stretched steel, I experience an unfurling like the primordially generative movements of a flower bending and turning to face the warmth of the sun. Other times I stand in place and find my body turning and swaying with the torqued curve of this interior. Or I walk in figure eights or spin in the centre. Children

often become quite excited when they enter the interior spaces of these sculptures. They run around the periphery, jump, and put their arms out and spin.

Richard Serra has reflected that when moving with the Torqued Ellipses, “It’s hard to keep track of where you think you are going because the curvature of the volume is constantly changing. You become implicated in the tremendous centrifugal force in the pieces” (1997, 22). Since there is no one vantage point from which to grasp these sculptures in their completeness, no one optimal distance, you find yourself walking in curvilinear patterns amidst the bending walls stretched high. As I walk around the outside of the *Double Torqued Ellipse*, the wall constantly curves away; it gently rolls off ahead of me. This rolling off is also a leading forward; I am led around the curve, pulled around the bend. This curved line is enticing for my moving body and synchronizes with my body’s love of movement in articulated space. The blurring “horizon” line ahead of me corresponds with the slackening of my vision as noted above. In fact, the more focused my vision, the more prone I am to feelings of vertigo or dizziness. I cannot hold onto this line as I move, it rolls away, and so I am more comfortable allowing my moving body to guide me.

These sculptures reintegrate my sense of vision with my moving body, what Serra calls “peripatetic perception” in his above description of the Zen gardens. Vision becomes loosened from its capacity for pointed focus and much more closely aligns with the motor-body. Indeed, in my walking I become aware

of the synæsthetic aspects of perception. Vision and hearing remain integral to my movement; if I shut my eyes or cover my ears I move less easily, but I am not able to use vision and hearing to give discrete location to objects in space. Rather, these senses fall into accord with the much more transient nature of my moving body. My sense of touch also aligns with this experience; I feel the wrapping/unwrapping of these metal surfaces around me. My sense of smell becomes heightened as I become more aware of how these curved walls hold pockets and tendrils of scent. I can sense where other visitors have been as I pass through enclaves holding traces of perfume or cologne.

After spending some time in walking meditation around the insides and outsides of these sculptures I inevitably experience a deep state of calm, but it is a joyous calm, again, like the resonant joy of dancing. This calm joy is lasting and intoxicating. I feel the intoxication of my movement in space and carving out of space through the constant readjustment of my balance in partnership with the flux of the torqued, curved flow of these rolled slabs of steel. Thus the sense of intoxication comes through the emotional as well as the moving-body's experience of this sculpture. But it is not a loss-of-control form of intoxication, but rather a letting-go-of-control experience of intoxication, more aptly described as a meditative state or as a state of alert calm. These sculptures gift to me a kind of synæsthetic walking meditation, an experience which correspondingly enables further reflection on the experience of these artworks.

4. Generative Movement

Perhaps it is becoming clear that the Torqued Ellipses and Torqued Spiral help us experience a movement that is generativity itself, that is to say, the coming into being of anything alive, what we so value in creativity and originality. That is to say, here, art meditates on these qualities of generativity itself and lets us participate in this mediation. I must move in order to take the sculptures in, and it is only through my movement that they cohere. It is certainly true that *I* move through gallery rooms at Dia, but I begin to experience how I both initiate and receive this movement. Here, however, among these torqued figures, I *feel* my movement with force; that is, the experience of moving comes to the fore of my experience instead of being a mere means to it. These sculptures also heighten my awareness of any pauses in my movement. When I pause, they continue to move, or hold a powerful gesture of movement which I feel as a dynamic wave.⁵³ Generativity is not just change in place or even just the upwelling force of energy release. Let us see if we can articulate it with the help of these sculptures.

What does it mean that these sculptures embody generative movement? *I* am the one that moves. They stir up movement in me along with a heightened alertness to that movement. Perhaps I must shift and say that they present generative movement *in me*. But let me stress again that I do not simply follow

53 Often I found this reminiscent of the potency held in *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* (1832) by Katsushika Hokusai.

out a law of kinetic motion as does a ball rolling from one place to another, or from a state of unrest to a state of rest. I act through a certain “spontaneity” that is self-generating which the ball does not have. And yet the impulse to move in this space is so strong that in part I do have an experience of carrying out a contained motion. The situation of my body in relation with these torqued sculptures is filled with movement energy. But though it can be said that my movement includes kinetic energy, a movement from one place to another, this description falls short and even dismisses and misses the nature of the energy and movement involved in the experience of Serra’s Torqued Ellipses and Torqued Spiral. My movement with the sculptures comes forth in my ability to walk and balance, but also erupts through a certain incitement-to-move in me. Though I am the spontaneous source of my own movement, I also have a sense of this as being beyond the complete grasp of my own volition. Here, Merleau-Ponty’s words become exceptionally helpful and clear. As he states in the *Phenomenology of Perception*:

Each time I experience a sensation, I feel that it concerns not my own being, the one for which I am responsible and for which I make decisions, but another self which has already sided with the world, which is already open to certain of its aspects and synchronized with them. Between my sensation and myself there stands always the thickness of some *primal acquisition* which prevents my experience from being clear of itself. I experience the sensation as a modality of a general existence, one already destined for a physical world and which runs through me without my being the cause of it. (216)

Through this I can begin to describe in another way how these sculptures present

generative movement in that they catch me up in a world that is exceptionally well geared into my “self” which is “synchronized” or “already sided with the world.” This “self,” already open to certain aspects of the world, is my body. The sculptures perform a phenomenological reduction to the actual phenomena that we usually repress, or at best remain preconscious. Not only do these sculptures synchronize with my body’s openness and capacity to synchronize with the world, but they also allow me to attend to these experiences and glimpse of their phenomenal presence.

Let us start again, as one always does both in being drawn into these sculptures and in doing hermeneutics. These sculptures install me in a specific situation. The sculptures themselves are not moving in a kinaesthetic sense, but in their active standing, the way they hold space, and the flow of their curves, their suggestive movements are very quickly taken up by my moving body. This implied movement is not something experienced through a representation or at a distance, but rather is carried out in the flesh of my present movements.⁵⁴ Perhaps in a similar way I experience being led by the Torqued Ellipses and Torqued Spiral. I am “conducted” by them. Similarly, these sculptures seem to hold movement in them somewhat akin to the way a musical score holds music. Here, I

54 In a description of the way in which lighting in the visible world leads our gaze, Merleau-Ponty states the following: “When I am led through a strange apartment towards its owner, there is someone who knows on my behalf, for whom the unfolding of the visual spectacle has a meaning, and who moves towards a goal, and I entrust or lend myself to this knowledge which I do not possess” (310).

experience an open score with which I can perform endless variations and interpretations. I experience a certain “transparency” in moving with these sculptures that is like the way in which a capable conductor “hears the music” when she or he studies a sheet of music. Yet these sculptures do not require the same technical capacity as demanded by a musical score, and so may better be described as the experience of an appreciative listener without musical education. My moving body quickly takes up the situation of the waves and curves in the sculpture, and “plays them out” through the pattern of my footsteps and the shifting of my balance in accord with the sculptural lines and spaces.

The curved steel walls and planes do not make use of any kind of system of standing *for* something else. They stand on their own and for themselves. It is also well known that these are non-representational, non-illusionistic artworks. Yet how is it that I encounter these sculptures as engaging me in a flood of meaning as if caught up in the steps of an ancient dance which I know without having learnt it? Why is this fullness of space also encountered as a fullness of bodily meanings? These walls contain an implicit movement for me, but they also synchronize with something connected to birth in me. Let me turn again to Merleau-Ponty again to help describe the phenomena of birth and generativity made evident through the experience of moving with these sculptures. In the section on temporality in *Phenomenology of Perception*, he states,

Our birth, or, as Husserl has it in his unpublished writings, our

'generativity', is the basis both of our activity or individuality, and our passivity or generality—that inner weakness which prevents us from ever achieving the density of an absolute individual. We are not in some incomprehensible way an activity joined to a passivity, an automatism surmounted by a will, a perception surmounted by a judgement, but wholly active and wholly passive, because we are the upsurge of time. (428)

Merleau-Ponty helps explicate how it is that birth is both individual and general, and it is within the movement of time that this apparent paradox makes sense.

Temporality's movement, which is not the movement *of* something, but the flux amidst past, present, and future, is, as I am working to demonstrate, a necessarily generative movement. Though past carries forward into the present and future, the folding between these three aspects of time is ever new and unique. Generativity gets at this most basic movement, simultaneously active and passive, singular and general. The moment of one's birth, its presence as both unique and necessarily hidden makes evident this basic movement.

5. Reservoirs of Movedness

Let me return again to the sculptures to describe how they help us experience generative movement, that is to say, the coming into being of anything alive, what we find so worthy in creativity, spontaneity, and innovation. In order to continue to expand these main themes, I will now describe the tensions between markedly different experiences of space made present through the Torqued Ellipses. The gap between the space of the gallery room that houses the

sculptures and the space of the sculptures themselves calls attention to vastly different kinds of experience and production of space. The building which is now the Dia: Beacon Riggio Galleries, was built in 1929 to serve as a Nabisco factory.⁵⁵ The room in which Serra's Torqued Ellipses and Torqued Spiral stand used to function as the space where trains would pull in to load and unload goods required for the factory. Its massive metal doors, heavy trusses, and vast floor space all echo industrial modes of production and large-scale engineering also integral to the making of the sculptures.

If we consider both the gallery space and the spaces of the sculptures in relation to Heidegger's conception of the standing reserve— a reserve of goods, energy, and resource just there for our use — of course, this gallery room fits this conception more closely than the sculptures. In his essay "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger describes how the logic of "Enframing" which dominates our current conception of technology (and our epoch in general), transforms everything into a standing reserve, a reserve of goods, energy, and resource just there for our use. All of nature and also the objects we make then come to be considered only in terms of what they can be used for. Enframing is so enveloping that all of our thinking becomes an instrumental evaluation of everything with which we come in contact.

In addition to its presence as a former factory space, the gallery room is

⁵⁵ For a brief history, see the Dia Beacon web site
<http://www.diabeacon.org/exhibs/bindex.html>

much more of an instrumental space; it serves the purpose of presenting the artworks and does not call attention to itself. And yet, as a gallery, the instrumental purpose of this once-factory space has been transformed into one which allows artworks to shine forth, and in this way has been somewhat shaken free from the logic of Enframing. And, as Heidegger teaches us, artworks offer the slight possibility of saving power in face of the great danger that everything, including ourselves, might become transformed into a standing reserve. Indeed, Serra has expressed happiness with the way in which this room stands back from the sculptures and does not try to compete with them. One of the reasons Serra likes Dia's conversion of the Nabisco plant into a museum is that "the building doesn't have any big architectural signature on it." (quoted in Tomkins, 2002)

Somewhat paradoxically, however, the notion of the "standing reserve" came up for me first in relation to the sculptures themselves. These sculptures actively take up and playfully unravel the instrumental logic which informs and forms the standing reserve. It is true that powerful industrial machines are used to roll and form these massive plates of steel, machines that are otherwise used to make ocean freight-liners. Yet the sculptures throw the dominant instrumental thrust of this process "out of play" by yielding to the production of "useless" spaces.⁵⁶ These sculptures foreground the activity of standing. One cannot help

⁵⁶ Serra often emphasises that art is purposefully useless. This point often comes up when he is distinguishing sculpture from architecture. As Serra argues, the utilitarian demands placed on architecture prevent it from being an art (see for example, Frederick Teja Bach's interview with Serra, p. 33; or Tomkins, 2002).

but be struck by their massive size and the fact that they stand without any external supports, but their torqued walls appear to hold a potent volume that presses out and churns within these spaces. The way these sculptures stand appears vigorous in relation to the fullness of their interior spaces; they stand uniquely and independently and they also hold forth a dynamic gesture in this standing. In this same gesture they gently undo or bend the logic of Enframing.

Let me show you how these walls of the *Double Torqued Ellipse* are literally pregnant with space, and how they hold and protect this space, which is relevant to our main themes of how these artworks make available one's nascent or born body. In spite of my knowledge of the weight of this sculpture, it has the appearance of lightness and elasticity. The walls still show the stretch marks of rollers used in their production, yet these markings appear in gentle waves on the skin of the steel. It was crucial for me to feel that the weight I experience is held in the volume of the open space, not primarily just in the physical steel.⁵⁷ The steel forms actually appear buoyant as one moves around them, but within the interior the volume of space feels as though it bears a gravitational load and a centrifugal force. This volume of space pushes and stretches the walls of this

⁵⁷ It is interesting to note that in making the torqued sculptures Serra began with the space rather than the plate of steel. He states, "The interesting aspect for me in developing the form was that in the past, I had always started with the plate. By starting with the material, you're starting from the outside: you're constructing a space. In most of the work that preceded the Torqued Ellipses, I was forming the space in between the material that I was manipulating, and I was focused on the measure and placement of the work in relation to a given context. In these pieces, by contrast, I was starting with the void, that is, starting with the *space*, starting from the inside out, not the outside in, in order to find the skin" (1997, 13).

sculpture which expand to accommodate and protect this open space.

These sculptures are reservoirs of space. However, they are not reservoirs like warehouses of stored-up goods; they actively hold movedness as well as a potent (useless) opening. Within these spaces I feel, as obviously and palpably present, movement's poignant tensions as well as its spread into potentiality. The movedness held in these open spaces is not the disciplinary or programmatic push towards motion found in many public spaces; though large and “weighty” these potent openings restore grace, dignity, and creativity to movement. The way in which these sculptures hold and reserve non-instrumental space, what might be called a sacred space, is also part of the way in which these sculptures participate in the question of what is art. How does the non-instrumental capacity of artwork “synchronize” with my nascent body?

This opening of a fecund non-instrumental space seems to be of the same “stuff” as my moving body that already “knows what to do,” that holds my nascent capacity for movement. As Merleau-Ponty helps us answer many of our previous questions about how this inert sculpture can be so full with movement: “Space and perception generally represent, at the core of the subject, the fact of his birth, the perpetual contribution of his bodily being, a communication with the world more ancient than thought” (254). Space which is freed from the instrumentality of being *for* something else coheres with the *I* which can see the blue of the sky. These sculptures powerfully foreground a space and a self which

do not stand *for* anything other than what they are. This is, I believe, the *generality* running through us that Merleau-Ponty speaks of which enables “a communication with the world more ancient than thought.” Something general or “universal” opens up through this highly material, bodily, and local experience of being with these sculptures. These sculptures make palpable a general field of movement but also the potency of movement yet to be determined. I do not mean to suggest that I am biologically *determined* to *react* to this space in this way, or that these sculptures are somehow *programmed* with potent movement. My curvilinear movements are as “useless” as the spaces held by these steel walls. In fact, the cohesion of my body and these sculptures—the “uselessness” of this movement/space—defies such deterministic or programmatic thinking. What shakes me is the potency, the generativity, of this body/sculpture space. I am held in wonderment, not in the sense of admiration or being impressed, but in the sense of being embraced with care. I am gifted movement. This is felt as a restoration of the dignity of my own movement through the cohesion of my sensing body with this generative space. These sculptures restore a regal, stretching high to my walking, my posture, my movement. I stand tall as these sculptures gently open me to this grace and self-respect. So many of our public spaces and structures are designed to intimidate and monumentalize that it might at first seem that these large sculptures should also serve to intimidate. These sculptures are so impressively large, but instead of dwarfing or disciplining me, they stretch me out

and restore beauty to my stance.

Is this the cohesive and opening power of artworks? Within the experience of these sculptures what also becomes evident is that one of the ways in which they participate in defining the limits of art is through this commingling of generality and specificity. Artworks are singular and unique and they must always be experienced, which is to say, their meanings always come through a present situation. What remains singular and unique about an artwork is not merely innovative techniques or difference from other things in the world, but also the fact that this uniqueness comes through a “present tense” situation, to borrow a phrase from Michael Snow.⁵⁸ This aspect of originality and creativity resides in the way that every present (not as an instant, but the folding together of past, present, and future), is necessarily singular, but it is through temporality's spread into generality and ambiguity, that such originality is possible. The uniqueness of any artwork also remains entwined with the fact that it cannot be reduced to representation or a purpose outside of its own unique presence, just as the birth

⁵⁸ I would like to bring what I am working out here about art into relief with a quote from Michael Snow. “In 1972 a book which I designed was published called *Cover to Cover*. And when I was contacted about the possibility of doing this book, I started thinking about bookness. What have books been? What is a book? And so I made a singular book which is very booky, and even though it had its genesis partly from thinking of a definition of bookness, it is a *unique* book. There really isn't anything else like it. And I think this is an interesting paradox.” Here Snow lays out the paradox of the singular and the general in art. I am suggesting that this conceptual paradox instead appears as a productive tension when we consider how uniqueness resides in generality and how generality inevitably gives way to uniqueness. Generativity discloses this commingling of general and specific. (Snow quote from a public talk given on Thursday, April 8, 2010 at the Experimental Media Congress in Toronto).

and life of an individual cannot be reduced to such ends. Within the experience of generativity in the Torqued Ellipses, what also becomes evident is the way artworks more broadly, can remain open and potent; they share in the general and irreducible movement of time. This is to say that the irreducible truths and meanings of artworks never cease to be temporal.

6. Natality

The “fact of my birth” too is a cohesion of generality and specificity. In one sense it is something that happens to me, and in another it is the decisive moment of my personal existence. The “fact of my birth” is a limit situation, as is my death, marking off the beginning and end of my existence. And yet my birth and death also appear as vague horizons; they are limits, but I have a sense of how they fall off from my perception. As Merleau-Ponty states, “I can comprehend my birth and death only as prepersonal horizons” (216). My birth and death also participate in the generality of existence, in the generativity of existence. My birth is both entirely unique, and entirely anonymous; that is, it is both singularly my own *and* the vague horizon where my existence spreads fully into overall existence. Generality finds its ambiguity in the inexhaustible flux of past, present and future; but this movement of time simultaneously gives way to the uniqueness and originality of any present situation. Sensations too are each entirely unique, like my personal existence. “Each sensation, being strictly speaking, the first, last

and only one of its kind, is a birth and a death.” And yet each sensation also presents a horizon of generality: “it arises from *sensibility* which has preceded it and which will outlive it, just as my birth and death belong to a natality and mortality which are anonymous” (216). A horizon is the point at which experience and sensing fall off beyond me, and yet I feel its presence. As I move around these large sculptural bodies, I experience an always-beyondness which I can never overcome. I am constantly pulled by a horizon which always peels away from me. In that falling off or beyondness, in that falling into disappearance, I gain a vague sense of what continues in general beyond the specific instance. It is a mysterious, almost-beyond, like the intertwining of light and dark between light and shadow. Its mysterious quality contains a certain “magic” – like the “magic hours” which emerge at the beginning and end of each day. My birth and death also mark the mysterious slipping away of my existence, which also give me some inkling of the generativity of existence, which is a generality of all life.

In moving with these sculptures I have the experience of moving with bodies much larger than my own. At times I seem to move with ocean liners, or I swim with a pod of whales, or I orbit around large planetary bodies. As my elliptical patterns of movement travel from light into dark and back again, I feel a shifting from day into night. In a way, my movement becomes a journey of many

moons.⁵⁹ These giant bodies are gentle in their movement, accompanied by the buoyancy or weightlessness of their passage through water or outer space. Through this I come to understand weight as a shifting category which flexes in accord with the medium in which any body is held, through which it moves. This revelation also reverberates with a certain weightlessness I feel with these sculptures; I often have the sensation of flying or swimming in my cycling movements. This may be heightened by the fact that a “vertical horizon” dominates my perceptual field—thus, in a sense I “hover above” these surfaces since my “horizon” has been tilted. As Richard Serra relates of his own experience of the Torqued Ellipses, “Each plate weighs twenty tons, each sculpture forty tons, yet they don’t seem heavy. Because of their movement, there’s a certain weightlessness to them. You don’t sense their heaviness or the gravitational load. They seem to spin” (1997, 18).

I feel held and caressed in the gentle curves of a maternal body and the contours between walls resemble the feel of a birth canal. As I feel the elastic pull of these torqued steel walls, I also sense a kind of tidal pull in these sculptures. This swaying pull on my body and perpetual renewal of my balance occurs most strongly in the corridor of the *Double Torqued Ellipse*. As my body is inclined to do, I enter the corridor to the right (and I notice most other people are also drawn

59 This elliptical rim/line morphs the surrounding grids of the gallery room into cycle shapes. Thus all straight lines are “cut with a sickle” or gathered according to the bending scooping lines of the sculptures. The room becomes entirely transformed or eclipsed by the elliptical lines and torqued volumes of the sculptures.

right instead of left). My interior sways and stretches with the swaying and stretching of the walls around me. I feel caressed and wrapped by these undulating walls. My footsteps form a regulating rhythm as I cycle through this space; this is a lilting rhythm since the stride of one foot is slightly longer than the other along my elliptical path. All of this coalesces in a rocking, lullaby rhythm and motion. Often I am drawn to softly hum single notes as I move through the corridor. I feel the vibration of my voice from my body, but it also echoes in many variations in the corridor. My voice comes back to me, wrapping all around me, diffused like making sounds under water. This is a powerfully affective experience; I am immersed in the sound of my voice both from within and without. As I move through the corridor, it becomes narrow and constricted just before I reach the opening. I enter a deep shadow and the walls contract around me, squeezing jostling me before I am released to cycle again. All of this contributes to the ever congealing experience of prenatality and birth: the shifting of my balance, the diffusion of my voice, the presence of a large, wrapping, caressing body, my sensations of being in water, the cording at the centre of my body, immersion in the large, curved interior space, the passage through the corridor, and particularly the contraction of that corridor before I am released into the exterior space. Serra likely did not have this overtly in mind when he created the *Double Torqued Ellipse*. However, the articulation of my experience through natality, through renewal, birth and rebirth continued to resonate throughout the

long days that I spent with these sculptures.

Serra too seems to have been floored by the mysterious movement of the Torqued Ellipses:

That's what's strange about this work—and I have no way of explaining it—the volume of the space you're in seems to be physically moving. You can say it's just the result of the skin moving in and out, but you actually sense the space as moving. Now, that may be illusionistic, but it's not something I could have anticipated. It's not that I'm not interested in it, I just don't even know how to program such a space. I'm definitely interested in it once it has occurred. I still feel vulnerable about these works, because I'm not sure of their readings. (1997, 22)

The shape and size of the Torqued Ellipses and Torqued Spiral are provocative of movement for my motor-body, particularly as I walk around their exteriors and corridors. When I surface in the interior spaces, I am startled by the bounds of my body in the open volume. Even so, even as I pause in the interior volume, I still feel the whirl of the torqued space. Thus movement flows through me in the activity of my continuous walking, but it is also engendered in the walls and planes around me. Through my movement with these sculptures I experience a chiasm⁶⁰ of my sensing nascent self, and my decisive individual self. Likewise, when I am led by my moving body (my auditory and visual senses diffused and slackened) around the corridor of the *Double Torqued Ellipse*, I experience

60 In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty writes, "... the idea of *chiasm*, that is: every relation with being is *simultaneously* a taking and a being taken, the hold is held, it is *inscribed* and inscribed in the same being that it takes hold of" (266). For more on chiasm and art see "Chiasm, Line and Art (A Justification)" in *Art Line Thought* Mallin (1996).

inklings of questions of where I might be and where I might go next and whom else I might suddenly encounter. In this way, I experience a self-conscious reflection on the temporality of this movement of life. Meanwhile, in order to move in accord with the sculpture, I must let my “nascent body,” my “natural self” come to the fore in my situatedness with these torqued sculptures. It is this foregrounding that is articulated in Serra’s interchange with Lynne Cooke:

RS: The first person who said that these pieces had nothing to do with looking was Peter Eisenman. He said they were generated totally by body movement. I hadn’t distilled it down to such a limited idea of how they function, but in some sense it’s true. You have to pay attention to where you’re going, but—

LC: —but your body is already—

RS: —reacting without even thinking about it. All one’s movements are instinctual in order to navigate the space because you can’t locate the distance of the plane that moves as you move. From one step to the next, you find that it’s no longer moving away from you, it’s moving toward you, and it’s no longer behind you, it’s over your head. (1997, 30)

Though I would argue against Eisenman to say that these pieces do indeed have something to do with looking, a kind of looking that is aligned with the nascent body, the above interchange does point to the anonymous and general (“instinctual”) side of the generative temporality of our existence. Serra’s use of the words “illusionistic” and “instinctual” in reflecting on these sculptures, offer glimpses of what could more fully be described as the way in which the

phenomenological body and these sculptural lines and spaces “gear into” each other, or “synchronize” with each other. From this anonymity and generality arises not only my sensing of the world, but also the cohesion of the wholeness of myself and the spontaneity of my movements, my individuality (freedom). In this way Serra’s sculptures are also a revealing. Not only do they bring presence to my nascent body, they also bring presence to my ability to reflect on that body (which always remains somewhat hidden).

Post Script

Borrowing from *That/Cela/Dat*'s style, we might say in these final pages: this is not a conclusion. It would work against this dissertation's attempts at a non-reductive approach to try to offer a final word on these three artworks. Like the experience of following the *Double Torqued Ellipse*'s curvilinear paths, we can be reminded that reflection on these artworks must continually curve back, burst open, and begin again. Or, as *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* shows, the unresolved tensions between things can actually allow for clarity that any attempt at fixity would obscure.

But in these pages we might reflect on irreducibility in art, or on the way these artworks in particular can never be concluded or exhausted. One of the things that these three artworks as a group can show is that the way that they appear in movement and are made from movement vouchsafes such irreducibility. Movement, grasped in this way, is potent, generative, and tensile, not merely change or a dynamic quality. As such, the use of movement as artist's "material" within these artworks allows them continually expanding presences.

Of course, meditation on movement is not the only way to approach these artworks, and a great deal more can be written from other perspectives. But thinking through movement does help us look less *at* the art object, and instead begin to "see according to it" (Merleau-Ponty 1964b, 164). Through movement

the “wholeness” of each of these artworks does not form through their bounded physical presences or themes, but through their distinctive temporal logics. All three of these artworks take hold of common human abilities such as reading, looking, and walking, but then open these experiences to entirely particular unfoldings. Movement in *That/Cela/Dat* appears as a spread into indeterminacy and ambiguity; movement in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* appears as tension; and movement in *Double Torqued Ellipse* appears as generativity. Provisional assertions can be ventured at the intersection of these potent forms of movement drawn out from these three artworks. Movement is the palpable presence of temporality's flux. Movement allows for the reversibility of categories we might otherwise hold in distinction, enabling the singular and uncanny presences of artworks. Movement in art ensures the temporal unfolding of an artwork's particular meanings, safeguarding these meanings as sinuous, situational, and plural. And perhaps thinking art through movement can help each artwork remain, in the words of Gertrude Stein, “still a thing irritating annoying stimulating” ([1926] 2001, 673).

More personally, I also can say that this unlikely grouping of artworks has been motivated by my position as a maker. Movement is particularly inescapable in the cinematic arts, but I wanted to explore how an artist might work with movement in ways that do not reduce it to a mere quality or ordering of time. My

study of movement in art, not only as a way of productively reflecting on art, but also as an artist's material, helps in expanding my own conception of the range of “materials” with which an artist might work. Each of these three artworks takes hold of movement in distinct ways. They do not ignore or try to escape temporality's inexhaustible thrust, but work with its potent tensions, ambiguity, generality, and generativity to form their own irreducible presences. *Double Torqued Ellipse* remains unique in its folding together of its inner and outer horizons, and its gentleness within massive scale. It shows how art is a non-instrumental opening, a reservoir of “useless” space, and a commingling of generality and generativity. *That/Cela/Dat* translates itself over and over again, allowing its viewers to feel an entirely peculiar spread into indeterminacy. This artwork estranges the act of reading, *delaying in it* so that viewers can reflect upon what it is to experience meaning in art. *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* gives us a singular meeting of the rhythms of film camera, artist's body, rippling light, and tessellations. From within this artwork, viewers can experience time and movement as the safeguarding of the invisibility and depth of things. Tensions amidst these three artworks gathered together in this dissertation do not resolve themselves but keep expanding, allowing me continually to draw out further reflections on art and movement and meaning.

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