INTENSE SINGULARITIES: DIETER ROTH'S AND HENNING CHRISTIANSEN'S PROCESSUAL AESTHETICS

LESLIE SCHUMACHER

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Abstract

This thesis examines the potential flux and indeterminacy within an aesthetic experience, with a particular focus on the works of Dieter Roth and Henning Christiansen. This study looks at the desires, forces, and energies that are at work in the aesthetic experience, and further, aims to evoke the nature of the intensities that are generated through each interaction. Informed by Jean-Francois Lyotard and Julia Kristeva, this research shifts the perspective from a fixed systematic approach that is concerned with the works objective qualities, inherent essence, or material properties, to a processual approach that works through the nuances, ambiguities, and energies that constitute arts vitality. Applying Lyotard's libidinal aesthetics to works of art whose materiality is transitory adds further complexity to an understanding of the energies and forces that are at work in an aesthetic experience, initiating a theory of perpetual flux, fragmentation, and singular intensities.

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Introduction

Thesis Outline

This thesis is a study of works of art that resist and operate outside of conventional aesthetic discourses to present the viewer with an intensified visceral experience. This resistance can take the form of unconventional systems of display that incorporate living entities, such as Dieter Roth's use of living organisms and ephemeral materials and Henning Christiansen's sound experiments and compositions. Furthermore, this resistance is also manifested in each artist's relationship to and articulation of language as a material form. These works of art offer insight into systems and forces of energies that are implicated in notions of affect, desire, and death and decay. The potential role of the visceral interaction between a work of art, a viewer, and an artist transforms the aesthetic experience and presents us with a work that challenges the way art is thought.

Rather than examining artists that disregard the complex dimensions of language, I will look at two artists whose construction and experimentation with linguistic forms manifest the unreliability and fluctuations of systems. By presenting language as a system that can deceive us or manipulate our perception of certain 'realities,' these artists present a perspective of the world that highlights the intensities that underlie everyday interactions and therefore, objects. Works of art have the unique ability to demonstrate these systems emerging. Through experimentation within these systems Roth and Christiansen are able to express a strong resistance to those same structures, exposing art's potential to simultaneously lead to creation and destruction.

Works of art whose physicality is subject to the forces and energies of nature vigorously employ these uncontrollable forces as a material aspect of the work, emphasizing growth and degradation as an integral part of the work and persistently engage in the world's constant flux. This accentuates the aesthetic experience as one that is full of potential, uncertainty, and libidinal energy; the viewer is brought into contact with a unique space that does not account for the rules and structures that linguistic spaces demand. These works of art become symptomatic of their historical timeframes and geographical contexts, but also continue to be relevant again and again as the meaning of a work of art is constantly subject to forces that exceed its capacity to control and designate its meaning.

Through this investigation of artists who operate outside of the conventional systems of art and bring the viewer into contact with an intensified visceral interaction, I will argue that the

aesthetic experience of the viewer is integral to works of art. I hope as well to develop new insights into understudied works of art. My reluctance to put the works I discuss into categories demonstrates the inadequacy and futility of classifying works of art through language. It is in this sense that the works of art shape and frame theories and concepts in ways that elude linguistic description. The complex relation between language and art produces an excess that is an integral part of aesthetic practice itself, which speaks to the importance of Christiansen and Roth's use of language and systems in their visual and sonorous works of art. Language informs works of art at least in some sense, for example as a mode of interpretation, but it is not language that gives meaning to art. The works of art that I examine show that art is prior to and in excess of language by demonstrating that language relies on a prior aesthetic in order to be sensible and appear structured. Through investigation of works of art that work through the codified structures and systems I will explore how art operates outside of the rules of reason. I hope that this thesis reflects my theoretical framework by "enter[ing] into a productive aesthetic exchange or reverberation where a text comes to supplement the art-work while the work leads and shapes a line of thought."[1] Furthermore, I maintain Jean-François Lyotard's position that there can be no discourse without the figural, that the figural is full of plasticity and desire, and that the "figure is both without and within."[2]

My exploration of the experience of works of art is divided into four parts, which are initiated by my experience of the art of Roth and Christiansen. In the methodologies and literature review, I lay the intellectual groundwork for discussions of Roth and Christiansen's work. In the first chapter, it is appropriate to explain and explore the relationship between discursive and figural realms. Following Lyotard's thought in *Discours, Figure* [*Discourse, Figure*] (1971), I explore the figural, both visual and sonorous, as '*extra-linguistic,*'[3] or beyond and prior to language, while maintaining a focus on linguistic manifestations in art. I also introduce Lyotard's idea of the figural in the sonorous arts in order to show the mutability of the figural. The second chapter focuses on the relationship between perception, desire, and works of

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[1] Guy Callan and James Williams, "A Return to Jean-François Lyotard's *Discourse, Figure,*" *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy* 12 (2011): 42.

[2] Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011)*,* 7.

[3] This term is borrowed from Lyotard's *Discourse, Figure* and Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language*, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter One.

art, through a discussion of works of art by Roth and Christiansen that employ structural systems to reveal the unpredictable nature of order. I introduce ideas drawn from Sigmund Freud's theories on desire, the unconscious, and primary process and discuss how it might operate in works of art. In the third chapter, I take on the task of exploring the sensory experience of works of art that are in constant flux. The interaction between viewers, works of art, and artists become unbound in the fluctuations of the materiality of objects. This includes an investigation into the subject of experience, looking at how desire, primary processes, and the unconscious operate in works of art and their respective connections to an aesthetics of 'intensities.' Bodies and environments become implicated in these processes of growth, disintegration, and decay, which emphasize the unstable, open, and processual nature of the world. The concluding chapter upholds the notion that works of art are 'singularities,' which are full of multiplicities and intensities that continually oscillate in space and gain depth through each interaction that is encountered. Despite advocating for the aesthetic experience as an intense and singular event, I am not reducing a work of art to one experience; rather, I am accounting for the forces which are already always active in any given system or structure. The appearance of stability in a work of art is only one possibility; I aim to evoke the fragmentary and partial energies that are inherent in the work, which have the potential to disrupt the system and energize multiple possibilities and interpretations.

Fluxus

Fluxus developed in the 1960s as a movement that was intent on challenging the fixed boundaries that were placed on artists at the time by encouraging experimentation in a variety of cross disciplinary formats, from musical concerts to experimental theatre, and from wall hung paintings to graphic posters to mailed scores. The primary goals of Fluxus were outlined by George Maciunas in *Manifesto* (1963), however, the diversity and differences among the artists associated with and recognized under the name Fluxus make its principles diverse and difficult to define. Its roots can be found in the works of 'avant-garde modernism,' which Owen Smith attributes to the Futurist, Dadaist, and Surrealist movements. These movements questioned the ideals of what is commonly considered modern art, through the deconstruction of the work of art as static object, and aimed to break down the distinction between art and life.[4] Common

[4] Owen F. Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1998), 3.

principles in Fluxus works of art are its emphasis on flux and flow, its protests against economic systems, its movement against the myth of the artist as genius, an emphasis on joy, and an effort to remove the idea that the art object is remote from life. As such, Fluxus introduces a number of vague and at times contradictory artistic principles that can rarely be considered 'absolute' truths for works of art or artists that have been identified with Fluxus.[5]

One of the influential figures in the development of Fluxus in North America was John Cage. His musical composition classes at the New School for Social Research in New York from 1957-59 introduced a number of artists, associates, and students to the use of indeterminacy, chance operations, and experimental formats. Experimentation in Cage's class led to the innovation of a number of artistic formats; for example, George Brecht's creation of the Event score, often a handwritten technique for the framework or instructions of a performance; theatre experiments led to Allan Kaprow's development of the term 'happening' in 1958, which describes an experimental performance, event, or situation;[6] and Fluxkits were invented by Maciunas in 1962, which are "small boxes of inexpensive materials assembled for personal use" that are often produced in multiples.[7]

At the same time, similar tendencies arose in Europe and other parts of the world.[8] The experimental theatre and poetry of La Monte Young, Nam Jun Paik, and Emmett Williams, along with the vanguard music of Karlheinz Stockhausen became benchmark for artists experimenting with performativity and the gestural in art.[9] Events at Mary Bauermeister's atelier in Cologne were a hub for international artists to explore and exchange ideas; important Fluxus experimentation and performances consider and investigate the relationship between the viewer and the work of art. These experiments challenged the idealized single-point perspective of a disembodied viewer by taking into account and interrogating the interpenetrative nature of vision.[10]

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[5] Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (California: University of California Press, 2002), xiii.

[6] Ibid., 2.

[7] Ibid., 34.

[8] Henning Christiansen, 55.

[9] Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 11.

[10] Ibid., 12.

The experience of Fluxus as described by Hannah Higgins suggests that "Fluxus works create a diverse experiential framework, one characterized by the dissolution of boundaries dear to Western epistemology, including the traditional distinction between subject and object on which much of Western philosophy was historically based."[11] This interpenetrative framework of experience is simultaneously rooted in the initial interaction between work of art and viewer, along with in later experiences that recall the earlier experience; this includes distorted memories and fragments of dreams, all circling back to a partial impression of the initial experience, which in turn generates new interactions.[12]

My admiration and interest in durational forms, ephemeral materials, and organic processes has led me to an examination of the work of Roth and Christiansen. However, it is not solely my attraction to the work of Roth and Christiansen that has motivated me throughout this process; I have also taken note that their work has seldomly been accorded key importance in histories of the Fluxus movement and is often omitted from histories of later twentieth-century art. This is perhaps a result of the radical theoretical implications of the work of Roth and Christiansen. Discerning the importance of their work requires a rethinking of foundational assumptions of conventional aesthetics; when perceived within the boundaries of conventional aesthetics, their work comes across as deviant, quirky, at once obsessive in its repetitiveness and slight in the satisfactions it provides. Rather than proceed from an art historical perspective, I situate Roth and Christiansen in a broader cultural context that considers many important shifts in ideas, theories, and beliefs that were taking place at the time.

Research on Fluxus artists tends to focus on the emphatic and radical spirit of the time, the immediate experiential aspects of the works, and the breakdown of the distinction between art and life.[13] This study aims to work through works of art as matters of energy, by bringing a psychoanalytic approach that takes into account the complexities of unbound forms and indeterminacy, rather than a unitary subject or object. By working through Lyotard's understudied libidinal aesthetics in relation to Roth and Christiansen, this study looks at the

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., xiv.

[13] See: Owen F. Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1998), and Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (California: University of California Press, 2002).

desires, forces, and energies that are at work in the aesthetic experience, and further, aims to evoke the nature of the intensities that are generated through each interaction.

The changes and flux that both artists explore reflect a shift in the conception of reality (to a process metaphysic), which has made their work of renewed interest to a recent generation of artists and scholars, myself included. The contemporaneity of both artists is reflective of the continual, ongoing, and mutable nature of their works through the implementation of ephemeral materials, the use of multiples, and various iterations of works, but also a result of the continual tensions that permeate their practices, as their works embrace atemporal and durational forms. Their works are simultaneously chaotic and structured, present and absent, visual and discursive, which continually initiates intense energies while enhancing the singularity of works of art.

Roth's and Christiansen's attitude towards art making and life illustrate a compelling practice of incorporating into artistic form the fluctuations and indeterminability that characterizes all reality. In accordance with Fluxus' main principle—the commitment to the dissolution of boundaries—it is difficult and perhaps redundant to attempt to contain any one artist or work of art into the category of Fluxus. However, at the same time it is also important to note the boundless influence that Fluxus principles have had on Roth and Christiansen, along with the profound influence these artists have had on Fluxus.

Dieter Roth

Dieter Roth presents a highly polemical artistic practice that is impossible to confine within logical and rational systems. He is variously described as a writer, diarist, poet, printmaker, filmmaker, painter, sculptor, collagist, musician, and composer. His work cannot be reduced to a specific medium or artistic movement, although many define his work in the categories of Fluxus, happenings, events, Neo-Dada, concrete art and poetry, process art, and object art; yet his works simultaneously reject any attempt at designation. Clear boundaries are impossible to identify as his works of art continually invoke the tensions between reality and the imaginary in his aesthetic explorations of uncertainty, fragmentation, and mutability. His nomadism bears an indication of his uncertain and transient view of life and art as analogous entities that have no borders. Similarly, his relationship to his name along with the various identities that he adopts hints at the ambiguity of his relation to organized structures. Roth often inscribed his works under pseudonyms including, but not limited to, Diter Rot, diter rot, Diter Rot, Dieter Rot, dieter roth, Karl-Dietrich Roth, Dieterich Roth, Dieterrot, Diter Red, *Otto Hase* [Otto Rabbit], *Max*

Plunderbauman [Max Junktree], and *Fax Hundertraum* [Fax Dogdream]. Julia Gelshorn notes that Roth was "more concerned with dispensing the clear assignment of name and person, of description and meaning, of title and subject, and keeping them in flux."[14] The inability to define Roth in many aspects of his life is an indication of the transiency and mutability of his ideas, writings, and works of art.

His artistic practice uses decaying materials, excess and accumulation, and the experimentation with and mutilation of language. Once described as a 'biblioclast' by Lyotard, his works present a perversion of linguistic systems and logic in his exploration and so-called defacement of the book.[15] Hans-Joachim Müller states:

> Every attempt to grasp his utterly incommensurable artistic practice in terms of logical developments, and demonstrate something like an organised (sic) structure or linear progression, is bound to miss the mark. The work, when viewed from an almost non-existent perspective along the passage of five decades, seems like a totally shapeless colossus — with poetic and artistic sections of equal stature, and countless graphic, sculptural, photographic, actionistic and diary-like chapters that interweave and interrelate. Nothing follows on from anything else, and never does the next page erase the last.[16]

Through his multifaceted and playful conception of the artist, the work of art, and the viewer, Roth instills a vitality that energizes the senses through his articulation of the nonsensical and irrational.

My discussion of Roth will examine a number of his works, each marking a departure from traditional aesthetic explorations.[17] His use of language, whether it be through manifestations of concrete poetry, books, his collected works, his sound works, or his diary-like assemblages, indicate Roth's conception of the dialectical relationship between language and figure wherein the two are constantly evolving and morphing into one another. The fluidity of his works are in constant motion as the inside becomes outside, the container becomes content, and

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[14] Julia Gelshorn, "Inside the Space Between Word and Picture: The Titles of Dieter Roth's Works," in *Dieter Roth: Balle, Balle, Knalle,* eds. Ulrike Groos and Sven Beckstette (Köln: Walther König, 2015), 62.

[15] Jean-Francois Lyotard, "False Flights in Literature," in *Toward the Postmodern*, trans. Robert Harvey and Mark S. Roberts (New York: Humanity Books, 1993), 125.

[16] Hans-Joachim Muller, "The impossibility of life and the possibility of art," Basler Zeitung, 8.06.98

[17] Malcolm Green, trans., "I'll Get Through: The Complete Obituaries of Dieter Roth from the German Press," (Obituaries, Seydisfjordur, Iceland: Dieter Roth Academy, n.d.), http://www.dieter-roth-academy.de/Essays/dieter-_i_ll_get_through.pdf, 21.

language becomes figure.[18] The flux that is present in his works are an effect of his persistent use of materials that decay, erode, and disintegrate, which are indicative of the conviction that all things total or 'real' remain in a realm that is indeterminate, fluctuating, and chaotic.[19] It is through his principle of fragmentation and flux that Roth's practice reveals the instabilities that underlie much of what is considered real. Desire permeates his transient practice to create an energy that is not bound up in conventional discourses, but instead creates works-in-progress that disrupt structured systems.

His practice and principles emphasize the concept that language acts as a veil that has the power to distort perspectives, while suggesting the disintegration of all objects. He challenges the idea that a set of properties can be identified as essential to a work of art—or that an aura surrounds it—through his derogative and critical titles, through material decay and destruction, and through the execution of multiples. Further emphasizing his belief that everyday anxieties and uncertainty should be considered, questioned, and eventually overturned.[20] However, his politics continually disintegrate, transform, and reestablish themselves, as his use of humor and excess brings forth the poetic nature of art. Language does not cease to be language when manifested in art; Roth's use of language shows that art exceeds and is prior to language. As mentioned earlier, in order for language to appear sensible and structured, it relies on a prior aesthetic. The aesthetic potentialities of his works of art perpetually renew themselves and provide the viewer, no matter their historical situation, with perpetually changing 'moments' of interpretation. By this, I mean that he offers a singularity that encapsulates the flow and flux of life and art by drawing the viewer into a 'labyrinth' of inconsistencies and allusions that elude linguistic description.[21]

Henning Christiansen

Henning Christiansen is a Danish composer and artist who presents a complex and dynamic practice through his engagement with concrete music, Fluxus events, happenings, poetry, scores to accompany his compositions, and an array of visual art including drawings, paintings, and

[18] Stefan Rippling and Barbara Wien, Dieter Roth, Tränen in Luzern/Tears in Lucerne (Lucerne: Edizioni Periferia, 2011), 48.

[19] Gelshorn, "Inside the Space Between Word and Picture," 56.

[20] Green, "I'll Get Through," 23.

[21] Ibid.

collages. His work also crosses over into language through his creation of a publishing house, as an editor of the periodical *Ø-bladet*, a writer, and a composer of film music for ABCinema.[22] His collaborative efforts span a number of genres, artistic outputs, and partners including Joseph Beuys, Bjørn Nøgaard, Lene Alder Patersen, and Ursula Reuter Christiansen.

Christiansen studied both serialism and twelve-tone music—compositions that use highly structured methods to manipulate musical components, but whose sound is irregular—at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen during his earlier years as a clarinet student. He later came to react against this type of music as his artistic output progressed from clarinetist to composer.[23] His early years as a composer were riddled with a rejection of authority, the skepticism of modernism, denunciation of the dominant traditions of the time, and the dismissal of "the elevated role of the artist."[24] Christiansen's artistic practice seems to derive from Fluxus, and perhaps to exemplify his dedication to flux, he often resists and questions their core principles.

His compositions rely on a number of unorthodox tools or instruments to produce sound, for example, the hammer is used as an instrument in several of his happenings and performances, and further becomes a visual motif in his paintings and drawings. Animals are also an important motif in visual and sonorous works; his use of animal sounds to create concertos demonstrates his close relationship with nature and chaos. His Fluxus-like performances incorporate an active viewer, along with the inclusion of unpredictable variables in each variation. Karin Hindsbo notes that performed scores were often "interrupted by textual readings, gesticulations and interactions with the audience."[25] Scores that were written in one language are often translated into other languages, and these new scores become appendixes to the original score. These appendixes, or 'memoirs' as Christiansen called them, include an array of writings, poetry, drawings, texts from famous authors, correspondences and letters; better understood as diary-like

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[22] Karin Hindsbo, "Preface," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed, Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 19.

[23] Karin Hindsbo, "Henning Christiansen - Composer of Time," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed. Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley, (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 52-53.

[24] Ibid., 55.

[25] Ibid., 65.

entries than a completed or whole work of art.[26] These transformations, which Christiansen readily accepted, are symptomatic of the principles that guided his musical compositions and in his later years, his visual art practice.

Christiansen's compositions attempt to remove subjectivity and emotional embellishments by reducing music to its most 'pure' form. However, it is apparent that his works are much more than simple or minimalist, as their concrete and rigorous construction is dependent on the active listener.[27] In his attempts to reject serialist techniques, which often alienated the audience, Christiansen included rests that allow for the listener to be involved in the composition. Instead of using limited variation of notes (minimalism) or the unpredictability of notes (serialism), he manipulates "the individual notes in rigorous form with built-in acoustic and temporal differences," to create a space of anticipation for an active listener.[28] Further, his writings make clear his differentiation between 'auditive form' and 'visual form,' a distinction that is manifested in his compositions.[29] The written score of the composition becomes displaced into the physical space of the audience, making the perception of the music's form different than grasping the form of a minimalist sculpture. In minimalist sculpture, the form is often stagnant while the viewer has the ability to move their position and perceive the object from different angles, whereas in auditive forms Christiansen states that: "You just manage to perceive the space as an empty space before this space is again filled by constructive sound."[30]

Christiansen's relationship to the audience is not determined by a set of predetermined rules, but is one that is based on experimentation, movement, and time. His compositions offer the audience a form of relentless movement and progression and are often made within parameters of precise objective systems. However, they are punctured with difference such that "a dynamic progression is established that tends towards ever-increasing heterogeneity in the course of the composition."[31] This twofold principle, of engaging in both precision and flux, is

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[26] Ibid., 66.

[27] Ibid., 61.

[28] Ibid., 62.

[29] See: Henning Christiansen, "a rose is a rose is a rose: On auditive and visual form etc.," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed. Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley, (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 91-93.

[30] Hindsbo, "Henning Christiansen - Composer of Time," 62.

[31] Ibid., 64.

one that is repeated throughout his oeuvre and demonstrates his dynamic relationship to systematic tendencies that are permeated with uncertainty:

> Henning Christiansen – the Fluxus guy. It's both true and false. It's true that at the beginning of the 60s he was deeply committed to Fluxus. But it's false to lock him into the attitudes of the Fluxus movement. He always kept moving. His whole output is typified by constant searching. Searching that has resulted, in a number of later works, in the first steps towards a brand new musical morphology.[32]

The morphology that Hans-Jørgen Nielsen posits, again, is twofold. It can be understood as a morphology in a linguistic sense as he constantly explores of how sounds relate to other sounds in a type of sonorous language, and through his efforts to overthrow formal convention in art. It can also be understood in a biological sense, as in his later years he embarks upon an artistic practice that explores the relationship between the structures of the world through his reliance on living organisms in the creation of his compositions.

Notes on Language as my Medium

Lyotard begins *Discourse, Figure* by asserting that this book is not one to be read, nor is it an addition to a flat and one-dimensional discourse filled with significations. It manifests a certain 'thickness,' density, and depth marking its difference from a text, one that instead strives to be seen.[33] Lyotard notes that his refusal to classify his analysis as a 'critique' of the structuralist concept of language is due to the reflexive tendency of critique; if he were to embark upon a critique, reading, or interpretation of linguistic theories he would merely be reducing his ideas back into the system that he is attempting to avoid.

Human language fails to capture the physicality, materiality, and experience of figural space, particularly in its attempts to attain—or replicate—the figural. As soon as one tries to rationalize or explain the experience of a work of art, the density and intensity becomes lost as the dynamic encounter is unable to be realized as an equivalent experience in the rational system of language. Using language to argue that discourse and the figural are not the same is a hard task to take on without reverting back to thinking inside the circular tendencies of the linguistic system. The role language plays in human thought, knowledge, and communication creates an

[32] Hans-Jørgen Nielsen, "After Zero," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed, Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 105.

[33] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 3.

endless circuit of reverting back to the medium of language in the formation of this thesis.[34] To think, understand, and experience without language is not my intention, rather I hope to resituate the way we think about perceptual experiences of the work of art.

Notes on Incompleteness

It is important to acknowledge that in writing about these works of art, I do not intend to reduce them to experiences that can be neatly described in words, rather I hope that this analysis will become yet another aspect of the work of art, and as such, an incomplete one. Because my conception of works of art is bound up in the idea that world is in constant flux, I do not want to engage in a complete, whole, or totalizing analysis, but aim to offer a way to look at the experience of artistic practices as fragmented 'realities' that are indicative of our changing cultural climate. By confronting and addressing these issues, I hope to mobilize a way of thinking of the experience of a work of art, whether visual or sonorous, as a phenomenon that is not bound by rules and structures and therefore operates in a space of chaos, disorder, fragmentation, and partial energies.

This incomplete and fragmented piece of writing is indicative of my approach to these works of art; it is not a means to an end, but rather an open plurality that is in constant flux. It is not my intention to think without language or theory, rather I am attempting to re-look at the way in which the aesthetic experience can be conceived of as a singularity, that is implicated in a multiplicity. It seems then, that it would be difficult to approach the complex systems of language and art through the method of language. However, I assert that the way to discuss a work of art, instead of distinguishing and designating its material form, or using language as a representation of its meaning, is to interpret works of art as interactions, and in borrowing the term from Lyotard (who borrows from Pierre Klossowski), interactions filled with 'intensities,' riddled with affect, feelings, and desire.[35]

[34] Ibid., 23.

[35] Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy,* trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 1993), 26.

Methodologies and Literature Review

Objectives, Methods and Sources

This thesis addresses questions that remain pertinent to a changing cultural climate and the intersection of the fields of aesthetics, linguistics, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis. Is language effective at representing the figural? Furthermore, does discourse constitute the subject? Aesthetic experiences tend to be considered subjective, differing through each individual's perception, and their physical position in space. How can aesthetic experiences be understood when an artist not only gives up control of the viewer's perception of a work of art, but also engages with materials that are exposed to the uncontrollable forces of nature? What constitutes the ideal status of an artwork? And more importantly how do we account for the force that allows for various interpretations of the same work of art? How do we rid a work of art of fixed ideas and meanings? When a work of art's mode of being and materiality is in a constant state of change, how do we come to understand the forces and energies that are active in the work?

This thesis re-examines the importance of the aesthetic experience by insisting that works of art affect beyond and in excess of the purview of language, while at the same time language furnishes their material and form. Roth and Christiansen work to make apparent the forces and energies that are at play are beyond human control and therefore illustrate that art does not belong in the categories that languages, discourses, and ideologies assign to it. I hope to not only account for the moment of interaction between a spectator and a work of art—which constitutes the viewer's immediate physicality in time and space—but to address the indeterminate and indefinable interaction(s) that continuously occur. Furthermore, through analysis of particular works of art, that incorporate living entities and ephemeral materials in their structures, I argue that there is potential for an intensified and transformative aesthetic experience.

The methods that I used to complete this thesis rely heavily on existing literature in the fields of aesthetics, linguistics, psychoanalysis, and phenomenology. As this thesis belongs to the humanities, it embarks upon a combination of interpretative methods that are positioned towards a theory of the aesthetic experience as one that is in constant flux. The grounding in aesthetic theory comes from my reflections on philosophers who theorize on topics of art, artistic expression, the figure, and texts. Linguistic theories guide my understanding of the relationship between the discursive and figural space. Phenomenology adds to an understanding of how the

subject—or viewer—experiences works of art that are so intense that they become inexpressible through language. Psychoanalytical perspectives are significant to my research as I embark upon an understanding of the aesthetic experience at work in the unconscious of the subject, riddled with desire, Eros, and the death drive.

Roth's and Christiansen's works of art constitute the key cases in my discussion of the aesthetic experience as a site of transformation and potentialities, which is further emphasized by their implementation of ephemeral materials. Each study relies on artistic exhibition catalogues, artist's writings, interviews, along with my own experience of the works of art that are fundamental to my thesis. Documents, exhibition catalogues, recordings, and other artifacts were retrieved from public libraries, museums, art galleries, and from the Internet. In addition, some of the sites of works of art were revisited. The visceral experience that initially prompted my investigation into each of these works of art remains central to the ideas discussed.

The main point of departure for my theoretical research has been Lyotard's *Discourse, Figure* and *Économie Libidinale* [*Libidinal Economy*] (1974), along with some supplemental writings, as I argue that works of art have the potential to affect beyond the purview of language. Lyotard's perspective and ideas are crucial to my analysis of Roth and Christiansen, two artists who I believe are demonstrative of the notion that works of art are filled with intensities and energies that surpass the ability to rationalize the aesthetic experience. Furthermore, they add to an understanding of works of art as libidinal, transient, and in continual flux. This is evidenced by the contingent and ongoing nature of a work of art, along with its relation to the drives and desire, its extensive relationship to negation, the resistance of placing their works in definitive concepts or categories, and finally, the intensified visceral experience these artists offer their viewer.

The philosophers, theorists, and artists that I rely on in this thesis share an important hermeneutic relationship with ideas concerning processes and uncertainties. This study works from the perspective that "aesthetics point[s] to the interconnectedness of perception, thinking, and feeling," and "offers a philosophical approach for inquiry of all kinds, striving for connections between and among disciplines, demanding continuous engagement in reflection and deliberation, and honoring all forms of inquiry as complex, creative, and developmental in

nature."[36] Through engagement in an aesthetics that accords importance to "process, placing value on experimentation, observation, deliberation, dialogue, and interaction," I have created a generative theoretical framework that enhances my initial experience and furthers my perception of the works of Roth and Christiansen.[37] This study moves towards a re-forming of the aesthetic experience as ongoing, open-ended, and in continual motion.

Maintaining the belief that insight must take into account conscious and unconscious sensibilities, a phenomenological approach to these works of art is inevitable. As noted in the *SAGE Encyclopedia of Research Methods*, "phenomenological understanding is distinctly existential, emotive, enactive, embodied, situational, and nontheoretic."[38] Applying this perspective to the aesthetic experience maintains a tension in the understanding of conscious and unconscious processes, universal and individual meaning, and linguistic and figural experience. Phenomenological reflection, which stems from Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl, attempts to demonstrate "how our words, concepts, and theories always shape (distort) and give structure to our experiences as we live them. But the living moment of the present is always already absent in our effort to return to it."[39] By examining the tension between unconscious and conscious faculties in relation to the lived aesthetic experience of the subject, I hope to re-activate an understanding of the work of art as ongoing, mutable, and transformative. How we come to think of the art object is determined by levels of conscious and unconscious thought is further explored through the psychoanalytic theories of Freud. As such, this study embarks upon both an objective and subjective study of the works of art discussed; subjective as this study is a result of my own feelings and instincts, and objective as I have attempted to make this writing about how we perceive and experience, rather than what I have perceived and experienced.

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[36] Lisa M. Given, ed, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (New York: SAGE Publications, 2008), 13.

[37] Ibid., 14.

[38] Ibid., 616.

[39] Ibid., 617.

Literature Review

Linguistics

Linguistic theories often emphasize language's communicative and expressive functions,[40] its capacity as a formal system of representation,[41] or its ability to structure human thought. Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics present the arbitrariness or unmotivated nature of the linguistic sign and determines that signs are activated and given value by their position within this network of relations. However, poststructuralist approaches challenge this conception of the linguistic sign and instead attempt to formulate an alternative conception that can account for the dense relationship between objects in reality—in particular works of art—and language. Lyotard asserts that there is continuity between a sign and the object it designates; "every object as such presupposes speech, the power of nullification that the latter wields over what it designates. The object derives its *thickness* from this speech. The word that designates it and that makes it *visible* is at the same time what strips it of its immediate meaning and deepens its mystery."[42] His theories take into account practices—such as art, music, and poetry—that are extra-linguistic and bring the viewer into an intense experience that cannot always be articulated in discourse.

To account for the experiential aspect of language he introduces the visible as an element of thought and discourse. Rather than place discourse and figure (sensory-images) in flat opposition to one another, their relation to one another is based on difference, which is an attempt to account for 'thickness' and depth in language:

[40] See: Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, [1956] 2002).

[41] See: Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris (Chicago: Open Court, [1916] 1986).

[42] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 82.

> Words or linguistic units are not signs through signification, nor are they signs through designation, rather they produce signs with the objects they designate (make visible) and signify (make intelligible), and from which they are separated; presence and absence together become world on their margins. Motivation is the other of discourse, its other assumed to exist outside itself, in thing-signs.[43]

Designation introduces the possibility of an outside, an external '*sensory field*' that is continuous and whose margins remain unbound in a heterogeneous place.[44] The motivation that Lyotard initiates in his linguistics takes account for the phenomenal space of the figure and the sensible, where the 'use' of language acts as a disruption and distortion of the system of oppositions that structural linguistics places on language.[45]

In order to maintain the perspective that the figural, whether visual or sonorous, is something that exceeds and is prior to language, Lyotard's revision of the subject and aesthetic experience informs and frames my study of Roth and Christiansen. Lyotard presents an account of aesthetics that focuses on exceptional and intensified experiences that cannot be solely expressed in terms of linguistic signs or identity. John Mowitt describes Lyotard's *Discourse, Figure* as thought proceeding "from an attentive engagement with the phenomenology of experience to an ambitious meditation on the psychoanalytic account of the subject of experience, structured by the confrontation between phenomenology and psychoanalysis as contending frames within which to think the materialism of consciousness."[46] Exploring the perspective that the experience of art falls beyond the category of linguistic signs, but maintaining the notion that an aesthetic experience must account for both the visual and the linguistic elements of experience, I explore works of art that use both structured systems and ephemeral (and to some degree chaotic) elements to elicit a greater potential for a visceral aesthetic experience.

Against structuralist methods, Lyotard's *Discourse, Figure* offers an aesthetic theory that aims to think beyond linguistics. His engagement with phenomenology and psychoanalytic theories of the subject of experience locate desire, emotion, and the senses at the forefront of his analysis. His approach to aesthetics is dependent on the theories of Jacques Lacan, Karl Marx,

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[43] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure,* 83.

[44] Ibid., 36.

[45] Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 13.

[46] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, xv.

and Freud through his exploration of the desiring subject of experience and the material world.[47] Marxist theories of production and economy become a crucial point of divergence for Lyotard, as he uses phenomenology as a tool to subvert thinking through Marxism, that is, to attempt to "think within Marxism in the precise place where it is not thinking,"[48] and thus, offers a way to rethink the theological grand narratives of capitalism.[49] Lyotard believes that the critical power of art lies in the immanent fluctuation of desire, a fluctuation that takes the form of a libidinal economy. Around the same time, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari also embarked on an attack on Lacanianism, which describes desire as a site of reproduction and representation; rather, Lyotard, Deleuze and Guattari refute this claim by arguing that desire is a site of production, similar to that of a factory.[50]

For Lyotard, the intersection of historical materialist and psychoanalytic theories of aesthetic experience manifest themselves in theories of consciousness. Historical or dialectical materialists posit that aesthetic experience is expressed when an artist consciously seeks to stylize and represent lived social relations through signifying forms. Psychoanalytical theorists differ in that they put emphasis on familial relations; they believe the aesthetic experience is represented in the repression of the consciousness of artists.[51] Lyotard suggests that art's task is to emphasize what representation fails to make conscious, to "assert the presence of what escapes representation."[52] Therefore, art and aesthetic experience exist beyond mere representation becoming not only a site of production, but also an expression of production that accentuates aesthetic labour as its subject.[53] This type of thinking does not negate reason, nor does it celebrate the irrational; instead it displaces understanding as it attempts to create a space for an aesthetic experience that encounters "a nondialectical Marxism, that is, a Marxism for

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[47] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, xv.

[48] Ibid.

[49] John Rajchman, "Jean-François Lyotard's Underground Aesthetics," *October* 86 (1998): 12. doi:10.2307/779104.

[50] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, xx.

[51] Ibid., xxii.

[52] Mario Perniola, *20th Century Aesthetics: Towards A Theory of Feeling*, trans. Massimo Verdicchio (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 55.

[53] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, xxiii.

which communism is not *the* future but rather *has* a future."[54] In his attempts to think outside of the scope of language-bound critique, Lyotard investigates the importance of the work of art through its "charge in affects"[55] and its "deployment of libidinal investments."[56]

Discourse and Negation

Negation is an important aspect in linguistic theories and dialectics, and is often considered a determining factor in the relationship between reality and language, a thing and a concept. In Hegelian dialectics, negation is the foundation of all determinate identity, which can only properly be understood in terms of double negatives, or *Aufhebung* ['sublation'].[57] Hegel's dialectical method determines that a double negative, a concept and the contradiction or negation of that concept, produces a "*unity of distinct determinations*."[58] In Western thought, something can never be its opposite; Hegel critiques this by determining that a double negation in fact is possible through the idea that everything is inherently contradictory. The relationship between A and B is dialectic; and the ground of all being is actually realized in the double negation, which is "the Absolute."[59] Therefore, polarities become relationships that although negatively constituted are actually affirmed by each other; double negation for Hegel is the basis of reality.[60] The Hegelian dialectic is predicated on the idea of determinate negation, which is characteristic of his belief in an autonomous, idealist, and totalizing system.

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[54] Ibid.

[55] Robert Hurley, "Introduction to Lyotard," *Telos* 19 (Spring 1974), 126.

[56] Jean-François Lyotard, "Adorno as Devil," *Telos* 19 (Spring 1974), 136.

[57] Double negatives, as described by Hegel are: "But the *many* are each one what the other is, each of them is one or also one of the many; they are therefore one and the same. Or, when the repulsion is considered in itself then, as the negative *behaviour* of the many ones against each other, it is just as essentially their *relation* to each other; and since those to which the One relates itself in its repelling are ones, in relating to them it relates itself to itself. Thus, repulsion is just as essentially *attraction*; and the excluding One or being-for-itself sublates itself. Qualitative determinacy, which in the One has reached its determinateness-in-and-for-itself, has thus passed over into determinacy *as sublated*, i.e., into being as *quantity*." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. T. F. Geraets, et al., (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1991), 155.

[58] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. T. F. Geraets, et al., (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1991), 131.

[59] Ibid., 135-9.

[60] Michael Heizer and Mark C. Taylor, *Michael Heizer: Double Negative* (New York: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1991), 14.

Theodor W. Adorno's theories in *Negative Dialektik* [*Negative Dialectics*] (1966) deny the Hegelian universal and totalizing field. He believes there is a sinister logic in Hegel's idea of negation and instead inverts the affirmative tradition of dialectics that attempts to find something positive through negation.[61] Adorno's materialist approach to dialectics looks for the negative; where the identification of a thing with a concept is not thought of as positive, nor is it thought methodically or logically.[62] *A priori* structure and concepts can no longer be the sole determinate attribute of things, objects, or subjects. That is to say, the definition of an object does not accurately and wholly represent the thing it conceptualizes. The individual—or object, or thing—"is both more and less than his general definition."[63] Adorno's reading of negation emphasizes that the interpretation of the negative is not universal or definable. While Adorno's conception of negation challenges Hegel, there are aspects of Adorno's thought that are further criticized by Lyotard. His conception of negation opposes Hegelian universalization and affirmation in dialectics,[64] and Adorno's 'theological' or 'Judeo-Christian' concept of negation. Lyotard disapproves of Adorno's idealist tendency to place art's 'critical power' in the "transcendental character of the aesthetic as such."[65]

In *Discourse, Figure* and *Libidinal Economy,* Lyotard locates art's critical power in the variability and processual nature of desire.[66] Lyotard's conception of negation is relevant to his understanding of language and visual forms. Kiff Bamford points out the roles that negation plays in Lyotard's conception of the relationship between the discursive and the figural:

> [T]he negation on which Saussure bases his system of language as opposition within a closed system of differentiation; the negation by which phenomenology establishes the object through 'distanciation' and the psychoanalytic form of negation described by Freud. All three have a significance for Lyotard in that they reveal the dominance of discourse at the expense of the marginalisation of the figure but it is the latter that has

[61] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London: A&C Black, 1973), xix.

[62] Ibid., 144-5.

[63] Ibid., 151.

[64] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure,* 144-5.

[65] Ibid., xix.

[66] Ibid., xx.

> a particularly deep-seated correlation with the figural-as-desire through the workings of the unconscious.[67]

The role that negation plays is in Lyotard's account of desire is not solely based on an absolute difference, but rather is "a necessary part of activating difference," which is closely associated with his conception of the *différend*.[68] This activation reveals that although the art object is part of an established order of the *dispotif* or the 'set-up' there is a transformative potential in the mobility of the primary processes and libidinal energies that works to distort and transform these representations.[69]

Julia Kristeva further explains these ideas in her discussion of poetic language and her emphasis on the processual nature of language. Her thought introduces new ways to think about the subject in relation to language and thought. Rather than locate secondary thinking prior to primary thinking, she contends that unconscious thought comes before conscious and rational thought, and therefore before language.[70] Furthermore, her processual conception of the subject becomes integral to thinking of how the aesthetic experience manifests itself in the primary processes of the subject.

Psychoanalysis and the Subject

Freud's psychoanalytic theories of the subject are fundamental to my interest in how a viewer experiences and perceives a work of art. Freud's thought proceeds from a place that is skeptical of a totalizing and conscious reality that is fundamental to every human. His conception of the world focuses on the irrational, unconscious, primary forces that unfailingly disrupt and destabilize the vital pulses of humanity. This concentration on the unconscious reveals the importance of the imperceptible in the figural. He rejects the claim that all knowledge is based on precepts, formed from factual data obtained by our perceptual organs; to the contrary, he

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[67] Kiff Bamford, *Lyotard and the "Figural" in Performance, Art and Writing* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 54.

[68] Ibid., 60.

[69] See: Jean-François Lyotard, "Painting as a Libidinal Set-Up," in *Textes dispersés I: esthétique et théorie de l'art* [*Miscellaneous Texts I: Aesthetics and Theory of Art*], trans. Vlad Ionescu et al., (Brussels: Leuven University Press, 2012), 76-101.

[70] Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 2.

insists that there are forces and energies that are invisible that are just as important to understanding human nature.[71]

Based on this, he argues that an artist does not create a work for a viewer believed to possess universal knowledge; unconscious thought is always in process in the subject. The gesture that prompts an artist to produce the work is a force or energy that is a result of the workings of the unconscious faculties. It is an event that cannot be reduced to simple explanations, as artist Kai Althoff states: "But in the moment of making, the object you muster gains power over you and sometimes indeed this power may stem from the highest entity, from all that is beyond words and for a human to grapple."[72] This prompts my investigation into the nature of the force of the unconscious, full of energies and intensities, as it is transferred into a work of art, which is a site of potentialities. Subsequently, the energy that is in a work of art initiates the pulsional energies in the viewer through each interaction; the subject's primary knowledge in the world comes from their experiences, which includes forces and energies that are at play beyond any perceptual, sensible, measurable, or graspable realities.

The Work of Art as an Object

Although I am attempting to avoid defining and reducing works of art to a number of set 'detectable qualities' or sensible properties, similar to the work of object-oriented ontologists, it is not my intention to rid objects of their potential effects, remove the human from relations in the world, nor consider fluctuations and energies as objects. This trend in philosophy is one that attempts to call for a decentering of the human through an advocation of 'objects,' which according to Graham Harman, are "unified realities – physical or otherwise – that cannot fully be reduced either downwards to their pieces or upwards to their effects."[73] The championing of objects over humans has 'three major tenets' which Andrew Cole determines: "everything is an object," "no object relates to any other object, because the universe itself is devoid of all relation," and "all objects are equal and, ontologically speaking, on the same plane."[74] In Harman's *The Quadruple Object* (2011) he makes a distinction between "the real object" and

[71] Stuart Sim, *Lyotard Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 44-45.

[72] Kai Althoff quoted in: "Kai Althoff: and then leave me to the common swifts," (press release, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2016).

[73] Graham Harman, "Art Without Relations," *ArtReview* 66 no. 66:(September 2014), 144-47.

[74] Andrew Cole, "Those Obscure Objects of Desire: Andrew Cole on the Uses and Abuses of Object-Oriented Ontology and Speculative Realism," *Artforum International* 53, no. 10 (2015): 320.

"the sensual object,"[75] which Cole contends is similar to Kant's conception of relations in the noumenal and phenomenal world, the very correlational theories that Harman is attempting to eradicate.

> Now, one might say that Harman has simply extended the Kantian forms of possible experience to objects, which thus experience other objects in multifarious ways. That would be partly right, for—according to this philosophy—objects themselves have experiences, as you will see below. But there's more: The fact that we can also think these object relations means that the relations are already thinkable—already correlated to our minds and thus already something we know about the world. The much maligned "correlationism" that object-oriented ontology hopes to expunge from its thinking is in fact its preeminent feature.[76]

In Cole's discussion of the contradictory nature of the philosophies of object-oriented ontology and speculative realism, he points to the importance that Kant's lectures on metaphysics might offer these theorists. The resemblance between Kantian forms of 'possible experience' and Harman's 'ten modes of relation' are brought forth throughout his analysis, as he argues for the ineffective and inadequate nature of object-oriented ontology as whole.[77]

> There's really no need to overturn the concept of relation in the cursory manner of the object-oriented ontologists, because there's already plenty in the history of philosophy since Aristotle to instruct us that relation is not always human or correlational, reciprocal, or even fixed or permanent, or anything more than a "moment" of relating that's always vanishing by dint of becoming and decay.[78]

Object-oriented philosophers have a tendency to account for a 'charisma' in a work of art, a term that might be conflated with the 'vitality' that I advocate; however for Timothy Morton charisma is not only a force in a work of art, but alludes to some sort of agency in the art object and all objects for that matter.[79] The extension of consciousness to objects, through the exploration of an object's 'primitive psyches'[80] that Harman and others call for, is not a task that I intend to tackle, nor is it relevant to the purposes of exploration of these works of art, which I have marked as significant for the effects and affects that they generate. Works of art are thus no longer

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[75] Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Alresfod, United Kingdom: Zero Books, 2011), 49.

[76] Cole, "Those Obscure Objects of Desire," 321.

[77] Ibid., 322.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Timothy Morton, "Charisma and Causality," *ArtReview* (November 2015), 189.

[80] Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 103.

evaluated or analyzed for their object-like qualities, but can be thought for the dynamic potentialities, energies, and processes that they engender.

The Work of Art as a Process

Works of art when considered static and fixed objects in space have a transcendent quality which places importance on the physical object. Plato's view of reality in his theory of forms determines that objects have essential ideas or concepts attached to them; these ideas constitute a higher form of being. His theories are centered on the idea that the universal qualities of things are unchangeable and static.[81] Aristotelian substance metaphysics places identifiable things at the center of reality; his theories uphold "the primacy of substance and its ramifications," which places the thing at the center and their causes derivative, once again perceiving the world in static categories.[82]

According to Alfred North Whitehead, for both Plato and Aristotle "the process of the actual world has been conceived as a real incoming of forms into real potentiality, issuing into that real togetherness which is an actual thing."[83] As such, there are many theorists who place importance on the processual qualities of objects, and therefore posit that works of art are sites of energy and intensities that are in continual motion. Process philosophy places importance on the object, not in a final product but in the ongoing processes and interactions that it has the potential to endure or activate. Nicholas Rescher's thought, which draws on Whitehead's process philosophy, offers an introduction to thinking of reality not as static and totalizing, but introduces temporality and change into the conception of the world. This introduces processes, events, and occurrences in the world as central to understanding reality; the processes that are at work in reality are an effect of "fundamental forces and the varied and fluctuating activities they manifest."[84] The dynamic nature of the world is constituted by the belief that the potentiality of

[81] See: Plato, "Book VI," in *The Republic: The Complete and Unabridged Jowett Translation*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Vintage Classics, Random House, [ca. 360 BC] 1991), 461-476.

[82] Nicholas Rescher, *Process Philosophy: A Survey of Basic Issues* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 4.

[83] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 137.

[84] Rescher, *Process Philosophy,* 5.

processes are fundamental to things, and that "categorical properties of things are simply stable clusters of process-engendering dispositions."[85]

Towards a Libidinal Aesthetics

In *Libidinal Economy* Lyotard formulates the notion of the tensor, the event, or the singular, for developing his process philosophy. The ideas he develops take up content found in Deleuze and Guattari's attack on Marxist ideas of capitalism, labour, and production and Freudian psychoanalysis in their seminal text *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. L'anti-Œdipe (Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia)* (1972). At the convergence of Marxist and Freudian traditions is Deleuze and Guattari's careful consideration of desire and schizophrenia and their 'libidinal materialist' account of psychoanalysis. Their aim is to disconnect desire from lack, forming a careful consideration of desire as a positive force, "conditioning the social field of its entirety rather than being conditioned by a subject's lack or deprivation."[86] Lyotard's libidinal theories "aim primarily at discovering and describing different social modes of investment of libidinal intensities."[87]

Lyotard attempts to get rid of any formal type of critique and negation, which he believes is founded upon static forms and is a result of thinking in opposites; instead he offers a theory that is "a perpetual displacement, an eternal turning rather than a splitting: 'drifting by itself is the end of all critique' [. . .] Instead of fixing territories, setting up shields, or installing garrisons, libidinal investments traverse the entire metamorphic range of these unlimited displacements."[88] This eternal circuit of the 'libidinal band' is in ceaseless motion; as it turns it may 'momentarily and provisionally' associate with other authorities, however, these unconscious fragments no longer seek to be reunified in a 'proper body.'[89] Representation, predicated on a lack, is no longer necessary, as Lyotard states, "rather *be inside and forget it*, that's the position of the death drive."[90] The figural works like the unconscious and the dream-work by resisting any form of negation, and highlighting difference (evoking Lytoard's notion of the '*différend*'):

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[85] Ibid., 7.

[86] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy,* xxiv.

[87] Hurley, "Introduction to Lyotard," 124.

[88] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, xxix.

[89] Ibid., xxx.

[90] Ibid., 3.

> [O]pposition, the bar (between conscious and unconscious), is itself the work of the unconscious, a simple disintensification, with positive difference a (disjunctive) synthetic intensification. The great ephemeral skin is the libidinal materialist (dis)solution of figural difference and conceptual opposition as polymorphous (hence 'ephemeral'), material (hence 'skin') intensity.[91]

The tensor accounts for the fragmentation and displacement of the libidinal flows in signification. It enables the circulation of intensities and energies of the unconscious (in the form of affects, emotions, and so on) as signs attempt to replace something that is absent. It is:

> Lyotard's wish to reintroduce into the sign a tension that prevents it from having either a unitary designation, meaning or calculable series of such designations or meanings (polysemia) is an attempt to block this movement of referral and remain as faithful as possible to the incompossible intensities informing and exceeding the sign.[92]

The singularity of the tensor invokes a multiplicity that accounts for the fragmentation and displacement of a work of art. An aesthetic experience does not exist as a totalizing or absolute given, nor does not have ascribed meanings; but it requires the tensor to allow for ambiguities in intensity and energetic fluxes that engenders an immeasurable amount of interpretations.[93] Lyotard's conception of the singularity of the tensor slows down the libidinal band to allow for a linguistic description of an experience; however, the heterogeneous nature of works of art encompasses an aesthetics that is in continual motion and flux. The aesthetic encounter is a site of potentialities that are a product of the intense flows of energy and forces of the unconscious. The presentation of a work of art might appear as relatively stable and structured; yet this stability merely enhances the instabilities that are present in the work. The forces of generation and destruction create a tension that propels the libidinal band into endless motion.

The Art of Roth and Christiansen

Often when speaking of the figure's resistance to language, theorists talk about artists who attempt to remove the referent or signified and make the content of the work the medium itself. Art critic and theorist Clement Greenberg categorized this as a 'pure' art, whose exemplar is instrumental music; as it is free from any form of imitation, devoid of empirical content, and composed primarily of instruments rather than music that uses language to portray emotion.[94]

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[91] Ibid., xv.

[92] Ibid., xiv.

[93] Ibid., 56.

[94] Clement Greenberg, "Toward a Newer Laocoon," *Partisan Review* 7, no.4 (1940): 304.

This music is "an art of immediate sensation," and was groundbreaking due to its powerful nature as "an art in itself."[95] For painting, a 'pure' art means examining paintings that are devoid of imagery or recognizable objects and are merely composed of paint, colour, or brush strokes. For poetry, this means highlighting poems whose meaning is not dependent on words as signifiers for other things, but are composed of language devoid of its communicative function.[96]

Although works of these sorts attempt to rid themselves of any referential quality, it is clear that even artists who use the materiality of their medium are *not* devoid of a referent. In mediums whose form has linguistic qualities, for example poetry, happenings, actions, and artists' books, the content of a work of art maintains its referential qualities even as it attempts to evade them. Greenberg believes that this type of resistance and negation of signifiers comes from the attempt to remove language or a subject from a work of art, yet it is clear that resistance and negation comes in much more nuanced ways than a simple omission of the object of conflict. Although Greenberg's focus on form leads to a privileging of art forms that are medium specific, it also highlights the intense effects and flows of energy that are found in the formal qualities of a work of art, i.e. in the colour, line, or sound. This leads to thinking from the perspective that that the coming together of form through integration and tension becomes the basis of aesthetic experience.[97] By highlighting the idea of a pure art, Greenberg celebrates art that incorporates and activates flows of energy that are present in abstract forms.[98] It is the site of these tensions that forms the basis of my analysis of how an aesthetic experience is thought. When one attempts to overthrow a system, such as language, through use of the same system that it attempts to undermine, the tensions and intensities that are at play within the system becomes more apparent.

In discussion of the extra-linguistic quality of works of art, rather than place importance on Conceptual art where ideas or concepts become more important than aesthetics or on

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[95] Ibid.

[96] Kiene Brillenburg Wurth, "Sounds Like Now: Music, Avant-Gardism and the Post-Modern Sublime," in *Music and Literary Modernism: Critical Essays and Comparative Studies*, edited by R. McParland (Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 2008), 15-16.

[97] Tania Ørum, "Minimal Requirements of the Post-War Avant-Garde of the 1960s," in *Neo-Avant-Garde,* ed. David Hopkins (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 151.

[98] David Hopkins, "'Art' and 'Life' . . . and Death: Marcel Duchamp, Robert Morris and Neo-Avant-Garde Irony," in *Neo-Avant-Garde,* ed. David Hopkins (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 29.

Minimalism which attempts to remove the referent from a work of art; the artists that I discuss do not emphasize language rather than the visual nor the visual rather than language, but depend on an ambiguity of meaning which is effect of the incommensurable nature of the discursive and the figural.[99] This irreconcilable relationship—one that is based in difference rather than opposition—is made manifest in their works through their playful use of linguistic and visual processes to demonstrate the underlying tensions and the complex nature of textual and visual space.[100] Roth and Christiansen mutually implicate language, image, and sound in a powerful space that opens up new ways to think about works of art in their capacity as heterogeneous, full of potential, and in perpetual motion. Their innovative and unorthodox uses of language throughout their artistic output is demonstrative of their ability to expose and reveal the uncertainty that is present in the functions of organized structures. The works of art that I discuss act as a vehicle for discussion of intensities and flow of energies that are present in art, leaning towards a theory of flux.

For these works, there is no ideal atmosphere that the work can be viewed in, but rather it is this constantly transforming state that encourages the viewer to experience a work of art over and over again. Often the tendency towards destruction in works of art is examined for pedagogical purposes in the form of ethical, theoretical, and aesthetic conservation and restorative practices,[101] for archival purposes and museum collection management,[102] or through study of technological advancements that result in obsolete technologies.[103] Destruction in art is also often associated with art that mutilates the human body or through infliction of pain (ie. Vienna Actionists and some body/performance art practices),[104] auto destructive art,[105] works of

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[99] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure,* 95.

[100] Lyotard states, "Difference is not opposition. The former constitutes the opacity that opens doors for the order of reference; the latter upholds the systems of invariances in the plane of the signifier or signified." Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 74.

[101] See: Ursula Schädler-Saub and Angela Weyer. *Theory and Practice in the Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art: Reflections on the Roots and the Perspectives*. London: Archetype, 2010.

[102] See: Bruce Altshuler. *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013.

[103] See: Vivian van Saaze, *Installation Art and the Museum: Presentation and Conservation of Changing Artworks* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013).

[104] See: Stephen Barber, *The Art of Destruction: The Films of the Vienna Action Group* (New York: Creation Books, 2004).

art that revolt against the mechanisms of the institution, and is acknowledged in ecological art and earth art practices.[106] However, this study examines the use of transient materials in works of art as sites of both creation and destruction, which leads to the generation of new works. The mode of being of a work is therefore in constant flux, both in its materiality and in its capacity as a field of energy that is constantly reactivated by any number of interactions. Rather than attempt to translate an artist's intention for their work, this study hopes to be able to discuss the works in terms of the complex and uncontrollable change that they endure.

The perpetual force and intensity that I experience with each aesthetic interaction, whether it is through an in-person experience, through photos, recordings, or documentation, through the trace of fragmented memories and unclear dreams, along with every other iteration that I have failed to name, is what interests me most about Roth and Christiansen's practices. It is this energy that I believe exceeds explanation or definition, and that impacts the figure's inability to be rendered equivocal through linguistic representation or through other systems of signification. Rather than speak about the 'essence' or rather 'aura' of works of art, I hope to engage in a dialogue that enhances the aesthetic experience as an ongoing heterogeneous and anomalous interaction.

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[105] See: Gustav Metzger, *Damaged Nature, Auto-Destructive Art* (London: Coracle, 1997).

[106] See: Amanda Boetzkes, *The Ethics of Earth Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

Chapter One: The Paradox of Discourse and Figure

The Problematic of Representational Thinking

For some theorists, representation is the most fundamental aspect of critique; this mode of Enlightenment thinking emphasizes the function of representation as an instrument of reason and structure.[1] Representation in these theories comes in many forms, through both linguistic and visual systems, yet there are many theorists who deny these claims; they no longer a believe in the accuracy of signifying systems to portray the external or internal world ('reality') and the 'objects' in it. For the purposes of this study, the figural is explored as something that is extra-linguistic or beyond representation. The figure, as theorized by Lyotard, works to distort representational boundaries that are put in place by signifying systems, through its power to affect beyond the functions of discourse. Lyotard's aim is not to place the discursive in opposition to the figural, but to show the potentialities and energies that are at work in the figural that cannot be thought through representational thinking.

My investigation of the relationship between the figural and the discursive focuses on Dieter Roth's and Henning Christiansen's complex use of language in their visual and sonorous works. Rather than negate any form of linguistic referent in their works, Roth and Christiansen present instances of the figural that portray the intense relationship between the two spheres. In doing so, they introduce works of art that bring the viewer into a realm that is difficult to articulate through language, and as such, displace normative conceptions of aesthetic discourses and ideologies.

The paradox surrounding an aesthetic discourse or ideology lies in the complexity of thinking of the visual and the discursive simultaneously. The notion that these artists create works of art that exist outside of or reject aesthetic discourses is more complex than a simple negation or resistance; the term aesthetic discourse implies a tension between visual and discursive space that will be further interrogated throughout this chapter. The examination of the tension between the realm of the figural and the discursive that I embark upon is founded on Lyotard's theories in *Discourse, Figure*, where the visual spatiotemporal order is irreducible, yet interrelated, to discursive systems.[2]

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[1] Mary Slaughter, "The Arc and the Zip: Deleuze and Lyotard on Art," *Law and Society* 15 (2004): 231.

[2] Vlad Ionescu, "Figural Aesthetics: Lyotard, Valéry, Deleuze," *Cultural Politics* 9 no. 2 (2013): 145.

Representation in the Discursive and the Figural

For Lyotard, representation impedes or binds energy, which becomes symptomatic of any system that attempts to regulate and attain structure.[3] In his exploration[4] of Marx, he claims that there is a tendency within capitalism that does not allow for it to be complete, unified, and totalizing. This is due to Marx's incomplete investigation of capital, which Lyotard believes is reflective of capitalism itself; the constant yearning to be complete and whole becomes impossible, as it is perpetually unfinished and in flux. Capitalism is structured similarly to language and thought, in that it is an organizing and structuring entity, attempting to produce a framework for a system that is unified; as such, capitalism attempts to transform any fluctuating energy into '*bound*' energy.[5] But in its attempts to attain a homogeneous society, one that is based on an organic totality, capitalism becomes riddled with heterogeneous fluctuations and disorder. This is because capitalism is continually morphing and transforming, bringing forth multiple perspectives.

Similarly, in the representational system of language, Lyotard finds an energy that is not regulated by these structures. He posits, "One could call an event the impact, on the system, of floods of energy such that the system does not manage to bind and channel this energy; the event would be the traumatic encounter of energy within the regulating institution."[6] In the figural there is a something that affects beyond, or in excess of the representational systems of language and capitalism (of course, poetic language is figural too). Affect, emotion, and desire from the libidinal drives permeate the figural in an act of 'dissimulation.'[7] The heterogeneity that the figural produces is referred to by Lyotard in a number of ways, most notably as a singularity, a

[3] David Bennett, "Lyotard, Post-Politics and Riotous Music," *New Formations*, no. 66 (2009): 47.

[4] I use the term exploration with caution, as Lyotard would find this term quite problematic. His problem with engaging in 'critique,' 'reading,' and 'interpretation' is that in deliberately attempting to distance oneself from a certain mode of thought, you are implicated in the system you are attempting to avoid. See: Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure,* trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011)*,* 3.

[5] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, 22.

[6] Jean-François Lyotard, "March 23 (Unpublished introduction to an unfinished book on the movement of March 22)," in Political Writings, trans. Bill Readings and Kevin Paul Geiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 64.

[7] 'Dissimulation' is a term used by Lyotard to describe how energy and affect works within structures to disrupt and destabilize a system. It takes into account that systems attempt to bind energies, yet also shows how energies distort systems. This demonstrates the multiple possibilities and potentialities that are at play within any given system. See: Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 1993), 50-3.

difference, the tensor, and an event. The 'radical specificity' of the singular cannot be rationalized under the system of representation; its heterogeneity lies in its difference from any other event.[8] By implicating both the force of language and the visual in their works, Roth and Christiansen invoke these notions of fragmentation, partiality, and ideas in flux.

Poetic Language

In some formal linguistic theories, language is regarded as an object, one that is determined by prescribed structures, logic, and calculation. Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics establishes terms that account for the various aspects of linguistics. '*Langage,*' or the order of language, in the broadest sense is based on the logical rules, mathematics, and grammar of collective and unified signifying systems. '*Langue,*' or the language-system, refers to the specific language that the subject speaks, it is the experience of language.[9] '*Parole*' is an individual speech act or the use of language, is the gestural and subjective act of speaking.[10] These linguistic principles posit that meaning in language is found in the relationship between signifiers, and thus form a structure of meanings that make up language. Bill Readings points out, in his discussion of structural linguistics, that: "Meaning arises as an effect of the internal functioning of the linguistic structure rather than by virtue of language's grip upon the world or the world's entry into language."[11] It is the gap between discursive structures and the visual world that Lyotard attempts to fill through his discussion of figurative space.

Both Lyotard and Julia Kristeva refer to the externalities that exist that are separate, outside of, or rather different than language as the '*extra-linguistic*.'[12] The development of a type of linguistic theory that takes into account extra-linguistic practices, such as art, poetry, and music, comes in opposition to a number of formal linguistic theories. Some structuralist theories acknowledge that these extra-linguistic practices are irreducible to language, yet continue to put them in the categories of signifying entities. This makes it difficult to think of works of art as in

[8] Readings, *Introducing Lyotard*, 3.

[9] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 26-7.

[10] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,* trans. Thomas Gora et al. (New York: Columbia University Press), 68.

[11] Readings, *Introducing Lyotard,* 8.

[12] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 54. And Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 285.

continual process, as structural linguistics places emphasis on the work of art as a closed and complete entity or object, comparable to a signifier.

For Kristeva, 'poetic language' is not solely characterized by its deviation from the normative functions of language, for that would be a rather simplistic and reductive answer to a problematic that is rooted in a much larger issue.[13] Deviation implies, at the very least, that there is a related object that exists prior to the deviation; in other words, poetic language is the effect of a deviation in language. She counters this approach by advocating for the potentialities and possibilities of language emphasizing that "all other language acts are merely partial realizations of the possibilities inherent in 'poetic language.'"[14] In order for poetic language to deviate from language it must come after language, but Kristeva points out that much like primary processes preceding consciousness, poetic language precedes language.

Her conception of poetic language is rooted in her idea of the 'writing subject'—similar to the 'subject of enunciation'—which emphasizes the fact that the artist, poet, author and so on, is heterogeneously implicated in the output of texts that they create.[15] This is not to say that their consciousness is responsible for their output or that they have full authority over meaning in a work, but stresses that the forces of primary processes and the unconscious are implicated through the writing subject. The non-conscious, which is out of reach of conscious and unconscious processes, is also present in the writing subject. This encompasses presumed ideologies that are taken as true and valid, "not realizing that instead of being truths they are elaborate constructions that serve whatever group, class, or party is holding power. The process is a complex one, for the writer is also conscious of being situated in a moment of history, acted upon and reacting to (and perhaps against) historical forces or currents."[16]

According to Kristeva, there are two trends in linguistic theories that she posits are *modalities* of the same signifying process; she identifies them as 'the semiotic' and 'the

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[13] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 2.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Kristeva has a chapter in her book titled "The Phenomenological Subject of Enunciation." The *subject of enunciation* comes from Husserl and Benveniste, which Kristeva posits, "introduces, through categorical intuition, both *semantic fields* and *logical*—but also *intersubjective—relations*, which prove to be both intra- and trans-linguistic." See: Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 23.

[16] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 8.

symbolic.'[17] Semiotics, most notably theorized by Saussure in his account of linguistics, is separate from Kristeva's theorization of the semiotic; just as the symbolic is not synonymous with Lacan's symbolic realm.[18] Kristeva's semiotic focuses on the so-called 'motivated' relation between signifier and signified by replacing the idea that there is an an arbitrary relation between the two. She attributes this line of thought to Melanie Klein, a psychoanalyst, who takes into account the Freudian theories of the unconscious, primary processes, and the drives, by linking them to the articulation of language. The psychosomatic realm of the pre-Oedipal subject is accounted for as a subject prior to language, but these theories fail to account for the developed-ego, or the post-Oedipal subject, "and his always symbolic and/or syntactic language."[19]

The symbolic trend is indebted to linguist's Émile Benveniste, Antoine Culioli, and Edmund Husserl, who introduce the subject of enunciation, or the phenomenological subject. Kristeva points out that this linguistic theory "places logical modal relations, relations of presupposition, and other relations between interlocutors within the speech act, in a very deep 'deep structure.'"[20] These theorists take into account that the subject is aware of the deep structures of language, which are composed of semantic, logical, and intercommunicational categories.[21] Structured categories also encompass the historical linguistic shift; through the subject who 'means' linguistics becomes permeated with heterogeneous categories, such as philosophy, phenomenology, aesthetics, and so on. Kristeva posits that the symbolic order considers signification as an ideological production that relies on the rational principals of both semantics and logic.

Kristeva states that these two modalities, that of the symbolic and the semiotic, make up the signifying process; they should not be viewed as two opposing trends in linguistics, but rather are both implicated in linguistic processes:

> These two modalities are inseparable within the *signifying process* that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse (narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry, etc.) involved; in other words, so-called 'natural'

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[17] Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 24.

[18] Noëlle McAfee, *Habermas, Kristeva, and Citizenship* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), 35.

[19] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language,* 22.

[20] Ibid., 22-23.

[21] Ibid., 23.

> language allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and the symbolic. On the other hand, there are signifying systems that are constructed exclusively on the semiotic.[22]

Rather than the subject linearly, homogeneously, and chronologically moving from the pre-Oedipal semiotic realm to the post-Oedipal symbolic realm—which stems from the dependence on theories of the transcendental ego—the subject enters into a space of dialectic, oscillating between the semiotic and the symbolic. This fluctuation is constitutive of a subject who is continuously 'in process'; her idea of the subject in language is therefore exposed to social and cultural norms. The subject disengages the transcendental ego from the theoretical assumptions that constitute the subject of psychoanalysis by "opening it up to a dialectic in which its syntactic and categorical understanding is merely the liminary moment of the process, which is itself always acted upon by the relation to the other dominated by the death drive and its productive reiteration of the 'signifier.'"[23]

By highlighting the notion of *le sujet en procès* (the subject-in-process), Kristeva makes clear the failures of earlier psychoanalytic theories that place too much importance on formal and closed notions of the subject's psyche, as the transcendental ego. Her processual thought "bears possibilities for disrupting the traditional philosophical notion of the unified, univocal, self-identical subject and all discourses that rely on the positing of such a subject."[24] Any definitive and absolute break between the semiotic and symbolic orders becomes blurred as she introduces the 'thetic' stage, which is a porous and penetrable 'skin,' allowing the subject to traverse in a sort of dialectic relation between the semiotic and symbolic orders.[25] Lyotard also eludes to the skin his libidinal aesthetics; the great ephemeral skin releases the figural from representational opposition and creates a polymorphous and penetrable skin that allows for the signs duplicity.[26]

Her emphasis on rearticulating the subject as one that is constituted by this heterogeneous dialectic has helped shape my understanding of the relationship between works of art and language. This dialectic is visible in art (poetry, music, theatre, visual arts, and so on) as it

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[22] Ibid., 24.

[23] Ibid., 30.

[24] Sina Kramer, "On Negativity in Revolution in Poetic Language," *Continental Philosophy Review* 46, no. 3 (2013): 467.

[25] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language,* 52.

[26] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, xv.

"becomes an explicit confrontation between jouissance and the thetic, that is, a permanent struggle to show the facilitation of the drives within the linguistic order itself."[27] Works of art exist in a space of "heterogeneous contradiction between two irreconcilable elements—separate but inseparable from the *process* in which they assume asymmetrical functions."[28] Here, Kristeva points out that language is not what is restrictive, rather it is how language is understood that becomes limiting; language presents itself as a processual and continuous operation. Through the use of language as a tool to show the constraint of its own logic the works of Roth and Christiansen bring the viewer into a space of the transgressive and extra-linguistic by introducing the "vehemence of drives through the positing of language."[29]

Language-Games

A great part of Lyotard's thought on language is dominated by Ludwig Wittgenstein's writings in *Philosophische Untersuchungen* [*Philosophical Investigations*] (1953). Wittgenstein's efforts to understand the principles that dominate linguistic structures become integral to Lyotard's perspectives on the regulation of types of words, languages, and discourses. He puts into practice Wittgenstein's philosophical concept of 'language-games' as a way of critique. The Wittgensteinian notion of language-games suggests that there is a misunderstanding in how the use of terms are regulated and also, in the notion that words correspond to reality. Language-games offer an attempt to revert us from the tendency of philosophical uselessness, which Wittgenstein believes comes from trying to understand terms through governing principles.[30] His attack on essentialism is carried out through an assault on set definitions and his belief that the capacity to understand how a term gains meaning is dependent on assumptions that are not necessary. He argues that a word's meaning does not come from the social realm or the private realm, but is a result of its use.

The conviction that an idea, concept, or thing has essential qualities, forms, or definitions is refuted, for example the term poem is often defined by a number of set attributes, one might be inclined to say:

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[27] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language,* 81.

[28] Ibid., 82.

[29] Ibid., 83.

[30] David G. Stern, "Logic and Language," in *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 42.

poems . . . rhyme
poems . . . have a set number of syllables in each line
poems . . . are written with a set rhythm
poems . . . are articulated through language[31]

Yet, these set definitions are not absolute, as there are poems that do *not* rhyme, do *not* have a set number of syllables in each line, are *not* written with a set rhythm, and are *not* articulated through language. Wittgenstein disrupts the notion that meaning correlates to a term and that each term refers to an essence; instead he offers the idea that any term has a variety of meanings united though having a family resemblance to one another. There is no essential property possessed by all objects (and only the object) that a term refers to, but all of them have a family resemblance to one another, which becomes clearer through use. He attacks the idea that meaning is based on the naming of objects by questioning the notion of what a definition should be and how we come to understand a concept. For Wittgenstein, "the ostensive definition explains the use—the meaning—of the word when the overall role of the word in the language is clear."[32] It is clear that poems are not united by a set of determined attributes, but are united by each poems resemblance to another, much like the familial relations of parents to their children, an aunt to their niece, or a sister to their brother.

This mode of thought brings forward the libidinal energies and investments through the vital aspects of language, highlighting the irregularities and deviations that occur when meaning is at play during the '*speaking*' of language.[33] Here, Wittgenstein elaborates on the various types of words, sentences, phrases, and structures of language and illuminates the multiplicity of language-games, for example: "Constructing an object from a description (a drawing)," "Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements," or "Translating from one language into another," are all instances of how language might be used.[34] Language-games are not meant to create a new set of regularities in language, but "are rather a set up as *objects of*

[31] Wittgenstein discusses the understanding of a poem in *Philosophical Investigations;* however this list is merely my own example for the definitions of a poem. See: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen: Zweite Auflage* [*Philosophical Investigations: Second Edition*], trans. Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2001), 144.

[32] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen: Zweite Auflage* [*Philosophical Investigations: Second Edition*], trans. Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 14.

[33] Ibid., 11.

[34] Ibid., 11-12.

comparison which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language by way not only of similarities, but also of dissimilarities."[35]

Lyotard's discussion of language and language-games, in *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* [*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*] (1979), begins to look at the way that language is regulated by types of discourse and further interrogates how certain conceptions get fixed in language. Lyotard aims to destroy 'meta-narratives' or 'grand narratives' by evoking the plurality of language-games, which he argues are contingent on family resemblances, rather than reducible to a resolved narrative and determinate judgments. Lyotard distinguishes between modern avant-gardes and the postmodern in his reflection on the Kantian sublime. He posits that modern art alludes "to the unpresentable through visible presentations,"[36] which introduces to the faculty of the imagination the notion that there is something hidden or absent in what one sees, or rather, a difference in what is conceivable and what is presented. The modern invokes pleasure through its recognizable form, while invoking the unpresentable through nonvisible content.[37] On the other hand, rather than merely alluding to an unpresentable, postmodern art is "that which in the modern invokes the unpresentable in presentation itself."[38] The general ideas that are employed through his exploration of language-games and the postmodern are also employed in certain aspects of *Discourse, Figure* and *Libidinal Economy*, through his examination of the energies and forces that flow through both discursive and figural spaces.

Both Wittgenstein's and Lyotard's thought initiate an exploration of the blurred lines between modes of understanding and knowing through language, and the contingent relationship of figural and discursive spheres. In acknowledging Wittgenstein's thought, it must be noted that both Roth and Christiansen were well aware of Wittgenstein's philosophies. Christiansen advocates for music that follows game rules and structured systems, however he simultaneously initiates chaotic and indeterminate elements in his compositions. Roth was particularly unconvinced and dissatisfied by Wittgenstein's thought in *Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung*

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[35] Ibid., 50.

[36] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985* trans. Don Barry et al., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992) 11.

[37] Ibid., 14.

[38] Ibid., 15.

[*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*] (1921) – a piece of writing that precedes *Philosophical Investigations*. This is demonstrated by his graphic etching with the incongruous title: *Warum der wittgenstein ein asket sein muß und warum der rot kein philosoph sein kann (Why Wittgenstein has to be an Ascetic and why Rot cannot be a Philosopher)* (1966).

It must be emphasized that Roth's apathetic attitude towards Wittgenstein is rooted in his disdain for Wittgenstein's earlier piece of writing (the *Tractatus*) in which he posited that language has the ability to accurately explain and represent the world. Wittgenstein presents this representational thinking through his picture theory of language, where a statement gains meaning through its ability to be 'pictured' in the world.[39] For Roth, the questions of governing principles that Wittgenstein presents in the *Tractatus* are in fact answered with a new set of principles that are once again predicated on ontological structures, rather than on the abstract potentialities and processes of matter or material. Roth critiques Wittgenstein's reliance on categories by implying that his thought still subjects works of art to rational and ordered systems that are a product of deduction and 'chains of proof.'[40] As Terry Eagleton suggests in his discussion of the *Tractatus'* influence on modernist philosophy and works of art:

> [T]he *Tractatus* secretes a self-destruct device within itself: he who understands these propositions, Wittgenstein remarks abruptly at its conclusion, will recognize that they are nonsense. For the *Tractatus*, absurdly, strives to articulate what it itself has placed under the censorship of silence—the relation of language to the world.[41]

The contradictory gesture that Wittgenstein proposes here is symptomatic of much of modernist art, which is the inclination to find truth in its own medium. This tendency within Wittgenstein's thought becomes clear through his self-reflective interrogation of language as his medium of expression.[42]

Through close analysis of the later Wittgenstein—the Wittgenstein of language-games—and Lyotard's subsequent use of language-games as a mode of critique, it is evident that there are

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[39] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C.K Ogden (New York: Harcourt, 1922), 4.

[40] Green, "I'll Get Through," 55.

[41] Terry Eagleton, *Wittgenstein: The Terry Eagleton Script; The Derek Jarman Film* (Worcester, England: The Trinity Press, 1993), 5.

[42] As noted earlier, for the most part, Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* contradicts and neglects the ideas that he first presented in the *Tractatus* and perhaps would serve as an adequate solution for Roth's problems with Wittgenstein's earlier piece of writing.

more similarities between Roth's works of art and their respective understandings of representation than it appears at first glance. Roth derided Wittgenstein's earlier deductive style of writing, where each phrase has the potential to act as determinative claim and therefore an isolatable truth (as did Wittgenstein). The function of language-games for Lyotard is to show that representation, and therefore language cannot be totalizing. His emphasis on the fragmentation and mutability of language and language-games becomes critical to the understanding of how representational systems are deceptive and cannot be reconciled with a totalizing regime or mode of thought. Lyotard's peculiar use of the *différend* becomes important to discussion of Roth and Christiansen. His conception of the *différend*, a conflict between fragmented phrases that cannot be resolved through the regulated structures of representation, shows the emptiness and indeterminacy of any sort of governing principle. The irreconcilable nature of Lyotard's conception of language-games and representation might be seen as an adequate response to Roth's critique of Wittgenstein's thought.

Roth's Writing in Language

Language, in particular written language, plays a large role in Roth's vast artistic oeuvre, as he explores both the 'materiality and mediality' of articulated language, thought, and writing.[43] Indeed, he has stated numerous times that he is a writer first, and artist second. The material manifestations of writing in the form of Roth's diaries, essays, and notebooks are essential to understanding his practice as an artist, but more specifically, are important in the discussion of the ideas and principles that underlie many of his works. This writing does not simply include language, but is a combination of various thought processes including parenthesis, convoluted uses of punctuation, drawings, breaks or interruptions, and other markings, which demonstrate the interrupted, uninhibited, ongoing, and revitalized nature of his works.[44] Proofs, trials, and misprints are integrated into his works, demonstrating the potential and processual nature of works of art as they are always open and changing. By accepting value in a work of art, in all of its stages, Roth brings forth a conception of art that is not relegated to a particular moment or time, but is continually reactivated with each interaction it endures.

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[43] Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer, "Writing Writing, Narrating Narrating: Dieter Roth's Self-Reflective Writing Process," in *Dieter Roth: Balle, Balle, Knalle,* eds. Ulrike Groos and Sven Beckstette (Köln: Walther König, 2015), 231.

[44] Ibid., 232.

At times, it seems as though Roth's writings serve the purpose of materializing his thoughts and present the viewer with a type of ego-exploration in the form of self-reflection, yet at other times, it becomes clear that writing serves as Roth's window into the world, one which he sees as in continual flux. The 'messages' he reveals to the reader are never clear and succinct, but present fragmented, encrypted, and therefore, hard to decipher expressions of language.[45] His writing as a material form surpass and transgress the rules of language and present an uncertainty that cannot be controlled by the authority that language presents. Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer posits that for Roth: "Despite the uncertainty associated with its use, language is revealed to be a structure that provides access to the world and lends order to writing, yet cannot be controlled."[46]

The content of much of Roth's writing is a self-reflective process; he reflects on his role as author, engages in ego exploration through expansion of the unconscious, reflects on the mediality and materiality of writing itself, and embarks on an exploration of language as a system that regulates writing.[47] These themes are manifested in a number of his works, appearing in his essays, diaries, pocket calendars, and books as handwritten records of his thoughts about writing itself. He addresses "the questionable assumption that printed texts were preceded by a process in which thoughts were translated into writing or a handwritten state (via whispering, speaking, saying, cursing)."[48] For Roth, writing becomes a process that is not based on the rules of language, but is rooted in the interaction between the mind, the eye, the ear, the hand, the pen, and the paper. These manifestations of forms of writing are symptomatic of his beliefs in the blurred boundaries between the processes that take place inside the body—the thinking and hearing of language—and outside the body—the writing and speaking of language. The unbound energy in this interaction is performative in nature; as the hand performs the gesture of writing from the inner mind to the outer world, the boundaries between the unconscious and conscious become blurred.[49]

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[45] Ibid., 232-3.

[46] Ibid., 231.

[47] Ibid., 232-3.

[48] Ibid., 231.

[49] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 55-7.

Roth's obsession with the "formation and dissolution of the individual," is apparent in his use of metaphors, in which the idea of an inner and outer ego become ambiguous.[50] There is no longer a distinction between self and other, interior and exterior, as he presents the figure of the 'cloud' in a number of his written works, which is permeable, yet still bears the trace of an outline or outer structure. This metaphor is how Roth sees the process of writing, as a verbalization of emotion and affect that pours into the outer world, yet is still subject to the impermeable 'surfaces' that act as their container.[51]

"Speaking" or Articulation of Language and its Sonorous Counterpart

Language as articulated matter or material finds its place in the struggle for the transcendence of the musical act, that is, in the sense that articulation works in an analogous way to the structure of composition. In order to achieve emancipation from rules and organized structures, which according to Lyotard is the role of the postmodern, the composer must exceed the structures that are inherent to music and sound. "If it were necessary to identify what is at stake (but what *is* at "stake" here?) in the struggle of music for space-time-sound, we would find it not so much on the side of the subject, but on the side of language."[52] To extract the inaudible from sound-matter and articulated language as such, the composer must either over-articulate (Pierre Boulez) or break free from articulation (John Cage). Cage's aleatory experimentations attempt to "escape from articulation (and from composition, which is the supreme form of it) by having recourse to 'silence,' to contingent, to the event, to the unforeseeable encounter of a piece of piano music and a 'noise' from the subway in the street."[53] A sort of spontaneity emerges in these exercises as the composer attempts to free the audible from its ideological and conceptual restraints.

It can be said that the human's ability to communicate and understand one another is somewhat dependent on language in its various modes, for example, the *speaking* or articulation of language, the *reading* of language, and the *writing* of language. It is through these various manifestations of discursive practices that the visual, acoustic, and gestural aspects of language become apparent. These sensory materializations of the linguistic sign are imperative to an

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[50] Meyer-Krahmer, "Writing Writing, Narrating Narrating," 232.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Jean-François Lyotard, "Inaudible. Music and Postmodernity," in *Textes dispersés I: esthétique et théorie de l'art* [*Miscellaneous Texts I: Aesthetics and Theory of Art*], trans. Vlad Ionescu, Erica Harris, and Peter W. Milne (Brussels: Leuven University Press, 2012), 215.

[53] Ibid.

investigation of how the figural and discursive, and therefore both visual and sonorous arts, are mutually implicated and contingent on one another, similar to the skin-like thetic stage that Kristeva posits and the libidinal skin that Lyotard posits.

The acoustic manifestation of the linguistic sign, that is the *speaking* of language, demonstrates the vital attributes of language that are filled with the affect and emotion of the speaking subject. The systematic and rational aspect of language comes from the rules of written language that do not allow room for error and inaccuracies. Thinking of language through its linear modality constrains the subject as language discriminates between right and wrong, or more specifically grammatically, syntactically, or semantically correct or incorrect. As such, languages strict regulations do not always allow room for variation in structure or mode of expression. In the investigation of figural phenomenon, whether visual or sonorous, a more important aspect to consider is the intersection of how the subject makes sense, or nonsense, of a sensory experience through linguistic and vital impulses.

There is a particular tendency in all arts to address works of art to the senses and therefore the human body, in the sense that the viewer, listener, experiencer, and so on, is affected by the sensations. The mind is also affected by the sensible elements; Lyotard posits that a paradox between the mind and body has no relevance to the aesthetic experience.[54] Art, as such, supposes a manifestation of thought in the body of the viewer, "a body which is immediately an affected thought."[55] The body senses a work of art and is immediately informed and affected by it; in fact, Lyotard insists that the body uncovers its affectivity through works of art. Works of art provide a sensible arrangement to the thought-body, but also offer a kind of immanent presence that transcends the work and the sensibilities of the body. In works of art, the invisible is implied through the presentation of the visible and the inaudible is implied in the audible. Dieter Roth accounts for the relationship between the speaking of language and the writing of language: "If we regard speech as literature, perhaps we could call it a better form of literature—it's simply read with the ears rather than the eyes."[56]

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[54] Ibid., 211.

[55] Ibid., 213.

[56] Dieter Roth quoted in: Ulrike Groos and Sven Beckstette, eds., *Dieter Roth: Balle, Balle, Knalle* (Köln: Walther König, 2015), 206.

The articulation of language has the unique condition in that it is addressed with a particular destination in mind. The presupposed relation between an addresser and a destination is a given in the articulation of language, which is due to designation and the 'pronominal functions' in human language –i.e. I, you, he and she.[57] These pronouns refuse fixed signification, and are thus circumstantial and dependent on the subject of enunciation. In addition, any articulated phrase is also open to another undetermined recipient that the subject does not have control over, i.e. someone overhearing a conversation. That being said, in the act of *speaking* language, although it is open to a number of thought-bodies, the subject is under the assumption that the recipient has the ability to understand the same language and respond through speech.[58]

It follows from this, that the conception of a physical material does not suggest the same relationship that the articulation of language implies between addresser and addressee. 'Material,' a concept that comes from Aristotle, implies a certain possibility of usage: "Material is that matter to which the hand and the thought of the maker come to give a form."[59] Rather than assume some sort of presupposed knowledge between the addressed, an ability to understand on the end of the receiver, or a *given*, matter in the arts is not addressed directly to thought or to bodily sensibilities. Matter always implies something that is neither thinkable, nor sensible; it is concerned with the realization of its greater potentialities.

Art is a singular act [*geste*] that is affected by the sensibilities of a thought-body. Lyotard states that the paradox of art "consists in giving to this thought-body a perceptibility as a sensible and moving arrangement, certainly, but one that suggests the 'presence' in it of an act [*geste*] that exceeds the capacity of this thought-body [. . .] There is in the work a remainder which defies ordinary reception or perception and which will defy all commentary."[60] Art, and music as such, disregard the difference that Lyotard makes between "*body-language* and *articulated-language.*"[61] Music has the tendency to attempt to exceed the sonorous inclinations and predispositions of the human body that are a product of both nature and culture. But, in doing so,

[57] Lyotard, "Inaudible. Music and Postmodernity," 217.

[58] Ibid., 215.

[59] Ibid., 217.

[60] Ibid., 213

[61] Ibid., 219.

music confines the sound-matter within conceptual musical ideologies and languages, by presenting a code to be deciphered to the addressee's (listeners) in the form of various musical rhetoric (harmony, melody, timbre, and so on). Similar to visual artists who attempt to present the unpresentable, sonorous artists push "to the extreme its 'stake' in the aporia constitutive of all music: to make heard that which escapes in itself all hearing, to address what is not addressed."[62]

In the sonic arts, the sonorous-matter is *not* concerned with being formed into sonorous material in order to be delivered to a destination with a particular addressee, but on the other hand, manifests itself as immaterial. As such, matter in the sonic arts is bound up in the energies that extend our conception of the inaudible; "The work of art bears witness to the fact that objects do not exist, that they are filtered traces, encoded and decoded by our bodily sensibility and languages, traces of a power that exceeds them."[63] The thought-bodies apprehension of art is not determined by the knowledge of a specific language, but is prior to language; language might be better understood as a mode of interpretation of art.

Perception in Christiansen's Sound Works

Christiansen's relationship to language and structured systems is one of profound complexity that is determined by his conception of the relationship between perception in the ear and the eye, and the subsequent link between visual and auditory forms. For Christiansen, a composition is structured like a language, where the audience should be given the chance to predict and make sense of the structure of the work. This is evident in his compositions through his use of structured systems and game rules, however it must also be noted that his compositions do not rely solely on 'pure,' objective, and unemotional elements. As his compositions progress, a subjective interpretation is initiated in the viewer that is unstable and in flux; the intensities that are at work provoke a dissonance that cannot be resolved as a unity. The score might be thought of as a whole, however the sonorous elements and the temporal aspect of sound are offered in fragmented or tenuously integrated wholes, instigating a sort of poetic language that oscillates between structure and chaos. Both 'non-sounding' and 'non-musical' elements are seemingly present in Christiansen's audible works; this plurality does not constitute a unity, but situates the

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid., 221.

multiple singularities on different tracks that make up a fragmented musical profile which comprise Christiansen's compositions.[64]

Diedrich Diederichsen makes clear in his discussion of Fluxus music, and Christiansen in particular, there is a tendency in describing music to announce what it is not, rather than characterize what it is. While it can be said that Fluxus opposes serialism and totalizing compositions, these models are not wholly rejected, but their parts become what constitutes Fluxus music and performance:

> This means, then, that Fluxus—in a slightly reductive formulation—arises as a concrete negation of serial music and the *Gesamtkunstwerk,* but neither with the aim of wholly abandoning the idea of determination and thus subjectivity, nor by way of a rejection of the impulse to integrate art and life, which on the contrary is radicalized.[65]

The inclusion and exclusion of certain elements of music of past styles and movements, allows Christiansen to transcend the boundaries of historical styles (in composition and performance). This composition principle, one of energies of flow and flux, allows for a cause-and-effect relationship that eschews any type of absolute meaning or "a priori revealed truth for the work."[66] Bjørn Nøgaard explains the disorder that is inherent in many of Christiansen's performances: "Language as sound liberated from the meanings we no longer believe it has, so in principle we can misunderstand one another – creative chaos."[67]

This chaos and structure is brought to a point of tension that evokes Kristeva's conceptualization of the thetic stage, where the orders of the semiotic and the symbolic exist like a seesaw, penetrating one another at a point akin to a skin like organism. The relationship between language and structure in Christiansen's works are explained by Thomas Hvid Kroman:

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[64] Diedrich Diederichsen, "Components, Contrasts and Concatenations," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed. Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 172.

[65] Ibid., 173.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Bjørn Nørgaard, "To Play To Day," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed. Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 470.

> This demythologization is effected in practice through an accentuation of the non-referential, non-expressive and 'flat' material character of language, by means of an appropriation of foreign linguistic material and the use of game rules, templates and systems for structuring the linguistic material.[68]

Through structure, Christiansen evokes the instability of language; the constant oscillations of elements in his compositions are indicative of the instability that Lyotard locates in language. Furthermore, the intricate nature of his compositions elicit intense energies in the viewer:

> There is a special poetic effect in the apparently monotonous and banal actions. Instead of the passive contemplation that prevails in art, Fluxus thus makes an effort to activate the viewer and furnish him or her with the Fluxus view, whereby the small inconsequentialities of everyday life suddenly turn out to consist of a great diversity of expression and forms.[69]

The everyday materials that Christiansen employs to connect art and life are full of energies and intensities that provoke a forceful response in the viewer, one that disrupts the regulated framework of representation, and points to the singularity of a work of art.

[68] Thomas Hvid Kroman, "Quintessentially Low-Key," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed. Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 142.

[69] Mikkel Bolt, "Objective Problems and Impersonal Qualities," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed. Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 309.

Chapter Two: Desire in the Figural

The Eye and Perception

Artistic practice and aesthetic experience are at the core of the tension between Marxist theories of production and Freudian theories of desire. Lyotard's theories in *Discourse, Figure* are based on the divergence between discourse, which has a linguistic form, and figure, which resists the structural relation of language/*gestalt*/representation. This difference (better thought of in terms of the *différend*) is not one that can be reduced to opposition, but instead, it depends on the relationship, interaction, and tension between the discursive and the figural; the two become mutually implicated. For Lyotard, discourse is associated with language, signs, and semiotics, which are attributed to structured and codified thought. It is this type of structural system which operates through opposition, whose meaning and value is dependent on a number of linguistic rules that are contingent on the negative relation of one word to another word, or signifier to signified.[1]

The linguistic system [*langue*] relies on the force of the negative to assign connotative and denotative concepts and meaning to terms. These relations are fixed and stable, however it is worth emphasizing that the concept is also always at work in its conceptual dynamism, its metonymic relation to other terms is constantly in motion, where it moves forward and backward, it grazes the exteriority of terms, yet fails to achieve them. The signs labour is always at play as its numerous meanings are always present; oscillating until the negative relations between terms brings the so-called meaning to the forefront.[2] For Lyotard the system of language is flat and does not account for the density that exists in the space between the body of the viewing subject and the outside world.[3] Discourse is not purely language in its spoken form, but refers to any instance of reducing energies and forces to regularity and structure. Art, in relation to discourse, becomes that which must resist being categorized and codified into linguistic systems, illustrating the indeterminacy of signs. Lyotard posits that semiotics is nihilistic,

[1] Ionescu, "Figural Aesthetics," 144.

[2] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, 48-9.

[3] Ionescu, "Figural Aesthetics," 146.

"nihilism proceeds by signs; to continue to remain in semiotic thought is to languish in religious melancholy and to subordinate every intense emotion a lack and every force to a finitude."[4]

The figural refers to the visual and the sensible, which Lyotard associates with desire and density; language attempts to bind and constrain the figural though representation. However, through the work of desire, the figure resists being designated into the determinate classifications of signs and instead the figure suggests a relation to the desiring subject. The figure engages the desiring body of the subject with its desired object; sense here is conceived as a material form, something to be felt and seen rather than read. Therefore, the figure affects outside of the purview of language as languages *différend;* the figural is a 'spatial manifestation' that cannot be flattened by textual space.[5]

Both discourse and visual presentation rely on negation to create value in their respective terms or objects, however they do so in different ways. Discourse generates sense through regulating the negative space between signs, it is in this process that negation gives value to linguistic terms; "The meaning of the word depends on the negative relation between signifiers."[6] Inherent to visual presentation is the capacity to arrange objects according to a similar set of rules; however, the figural does not operate at the same rhythm and under the same rules as discourse.[7] The production of sense in the figural is activated through the engagement of the desiring body with the sensual experience of signs, that of the object in space. In vision, the concern becomes tangible, dense, and plastic; negation is apparent through the desiring subjects' ability to distance themselves from objects in the external world.[8] Desire here is closer to a force that resists or negates the structured regularity of linguistic systems, it is "always an unbalanced excess [. . .] the figural is the effect of the volatile desire working through the space of presentation; it disturbs its membrane; it transforms its limits like a force affecting a material."[9] It becomes apparent here, that desire is manifested as an energy and force that determines the presentation of objects.

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[4] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, 49.

[5] Ibid., 7.

[6] Ionescu, "Figural Aesthetics," 145.

[7] Ibid., 146.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 148.

Visual perception becomes an intensified sensory experience that can be understood in two ways, through the discursive eye and the desiring eye. The discursive eye attempts to decipher significations, struggling to understand and rationalize textual space; it is not yet struck by the forces of desire. The eye, in this instance, perceives objects as text, and is dependent on the mind to decode the signs. On the other hand, the desiring eye of the subject is confronted with visual space that no longer fits into codified and readable structures. The eye freely moves across the surface of the objects and images—and as Lyotard points out, instances of graphic text and line;[10] these visual forms are unrecognizable and are unable to be categorized through linguistic systems.[11]

MUNDUNCULUM

Roth's experimentation with language and the visual is manifested in his works of art that make sensible the pre-existing dissociation of the semantic function of language and the words themselves; he allows words to be freed from meaning and be recognized for their visual and phonetic elements. Julia Gelshorn describes Roth's persistent engagement with openness, mutability, and the indefinable:

> Roth borrowed Concrete poetry's tack of not using language as something linearly readable but instead approaching the simultaneity of a picture so that it could be explored with the senses and spatially—including in the literal 'unfolding' of the text in book objects.[12]

In the 1960s, Roth began assigning verbal significance to his drawings in his creation of a visual system akin to that of an alphabet, where letters correspond with images or pictograms. Roth manipulates the relationship between the visual and verbal through creation of a 'system' of drawings in his extensive series *MUNDUNCULUM: Ein tentatives Logico-Poeticum, dargestellt wie Plan und Programm oder Traum zu einem provisorischen Mythebarium für Visionspflanzen. BAND 1: Das rot'sche VIDEUM* [MUNDUNCULUM: A tentative logico-poeticum, represented as plan and program or dream for a provisional mythebarium for visionary plants. VOLUME 1: Rot's VIDEUM] (1967). Twenty-three icons—a heart, a light bulb, a hat, a motorcycle, and so

[10] Here, I am referring to the poetry and illustrations that Lyotard associates with the figural. See: Jean-François Lyotard, "The Line and the Letter," in *Discourse, Figure* trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 205-32.

[11] Ionescu, "Figural Aesthetics," 147.

[12] Gelshorn, "Inside the Space Between Word and Picture," 57.

on—represent letters or letter combinations. His codex, or key for the graphic 'alphabet' were later made into rubber stamps, allowing him to 'write' visual poetry through his stamp drawings.

A collected volume of the poetic drawings, titled *MUNDUNCULUM*, was made using this visual system of rubber stamps. In the text from the insert of the book *MUNDUNCULUM*, Emmett Williams describes the variation and mutability that is executed by Roth:

> Diter Rot has a higher regard for direct presentation than any writer I know. His quest for objectivity—an objectivity made tangible and visible by the introduction of a third dimension in writing—is so compulsive that he has never written *about* anything since his coming of age as an artist.
> I remember my discovery of this new dimension in his books of the fifties. I have not yet recovered from the shock.
> Of:
> Blank pages that take on meaning from the other pages with writing on them, from the reader, from the environment;
> pictures with cut-out holes superimposed on texts, hard to "read", but a new way of *seeing* the printed word;
> the symmetric and asymmetric exploitation of letters, signs, and words, blueprints for a new poetics;
> his essay on a collagist consisting of words and phrases collaged from the leftovers of the very magazine in which the essay appears (in four "languages");
> the writings in his personal and unscientific phonetic system, in which the shape of the word is sacrificed to sound and sense blow-ups of seven-eighths-of-an-inch-square bound books cut from newspapers, illustrating the "quantitative" approach to advertising ("Quality in business is a subtle way of being quantity-minded.") ;
> and one of the predecessors to the stamp-pictures of MUNDUNCULUM, an alphabet made from photo-portraits the vowels females he likes, the other letters men he doesn't like, lower-case letters youthful portraits, upper-case grown-up.
> And now Wittgenrot (or is it Rotgenstein?) has created a whole new world, the illustrated record of a cosmos that exists by and for itself, in which everything can be anything, including, of course, itself. The stories from this world are a visual fiction. The visual fiction, however, has been metamorphosed into a fictual vision. The vision is the fiction, and the fiction the vision.
> The structure has become the texture. The ikon meets the logos.
>
> Emmett Williams New York City October 1966.[13]

Roth's creation of a system of language exploits all the properties that are inherent to linguistic interpretation. The meaning of these representations is not translatable into ordinary language, but becomes dependent on the viewer and the environment in the experience of the poems.

[13] Emmett Williams quoted in: Dieter Roth, *Mundunculum*: *Ein tentatives Logico-Poeticum, dargestellt wie Plan und Programm oder Traum zu einem provisorischen Mythebarium für Visionspflanzen. BAND 1: Das rot'sche VIDEUM* (Köln: DuMont Schauberg, 1967), front insert.

In 1968, he expanded this investigation into a multiple, *Stempelkasten* [Rubber Stamp Box], a boxed set of twelve rubber stamps, which are a variation of his initial alphabet, along with two ink pads, and an instruction manual written by Karl Gerstner.[14] The stamp collection encouraged the viewer to use the motifs to create their own compositions, poems, or drawings. A similar codex is offered, however the logic of the alphabet is not a given by Roth, but becomes multivalent, as it is dependent on the viewer to draw their own readings of the stamps. The displacement and condensation that is apparent in Roth's stamp drawings become even more intensified, as viewers are able to apply their own patterns, alterations, and principles to this mutable medium. The flux that permeates Roth's evocative linguistic system mirrors his belief in the transience of representational systems:

> 'You see an image and find a word for it, let's say a name. But the images in your mind are constantly changing, in flow. Words are like that, too.' But this is not a contradiction because images have a 'name of their own' or a proper name—they are themselves—as long as they aren't given a name (a word) and as long as no one tries to define them. The moment you try to fix meaning, it slips away. 'As soon as you represent something, it disappears in the representation . . . Every word is a cloak of invisibility.'[15]

Although he offers a codex or key, that might seem to indicate how to decipher his images, it is clear that "the poems resist all efforts at definitive translation."[16] Distortion and condensation are at work, as the images are open to an evolving amount of interpretations; different orientations, arrangements, combinations, and layers create an excess of meanings. For example, the image of the motorcycle elicits multiple interpretations in Roth:

> I continued doing variations on this image until I saw that I was actually drawing a scrotum . . . Then gradually this image began to recede and another took over. That's where the motorcycle comes in, it's the same basic form, d'you see? . . . Look, like a limp penis. If you turn it around it looks like a heart.[17]

As noted by the artist, the forces that are apparent in the figural are continually transforming and actively display the mutability of desire. This is demonstrated through Roth's use of multiple

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[14] Dirk Dobke, ed., *Roth Time: A Dieter Roth Retrospective* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2003), 86.

[15] Dieter Roth quoted in: Stefan Rippling and Barbara Wien, *Dieter Roth, Tränen in Luzern/Tears in Lucerne* (Lucerne: Edizioni Periferia, 2011), 51.

[16] Sarah Suzuki, ed., *Wait, Later This Will Be Nothing: Editions by Dieter Roth* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 19.

[17] Dieter Roth quoted in: Sarah Suzuki, ed., *Wait, Later This Will Be Nothing: Editions by Dieter Roth* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 19.

meanings one icon, which represents excess and an evolution of emotion; one icon has the capacity to represent "freedom, sexual failure, and love."[18] For Roth's version of an alphabet shows his complex relationship to language; a system that can be undermined and displaced at any moment depending on its interpretation.

His interest in Ludwig Wittgenstein's work, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, prompted Roth to embark on this series where he explores "the semiotic nature of language."[19] The *MUNDUNCULUM* series becomes Roth's outlet for exploring the dense relationship between language and the outer world. The subtitle of the book references Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, which affirms language's capacity to picture the states of affairs that make up the world. For Roth, this is a complex relationship, where logical systems and rationality are unable to represent what is present in the material world. Roth notes the relationship of the *MUNDUNCULUM* poems and the basis of Wittgenstein's thought in the *Tractatus*:

> The complex interaction of text and visual information, which makes use of the principles of symmetry, mirroring, and repetition, . . . challenges the reader to explore the host of cross-references in a kind of overarching overall view.[20]

Underneath the poems there appears to be a logical semantic system, while at the same time they elude any rational and closed interpretation.

As mentioned earlier, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* sets out to define the relationship between language and reality or what is perceived in the outer world. He achieves this through a series of declarative statements, numbered logically under seven main propositions. In the *Tractatus*, he posits a picture theory of language, which points to Roth's divergence from his philosophies. Wittgenstein's representational theory can be understood as a theory of truth that accounts for the validity in a linguistic propositions relation to objects in the world. Words and sentences do not contain arbitrary signs; each proposition forms relations among their atomic terms, which mirror the relations among the atomic terms that constitute states of affairs (in the world). Wittgenstein asserts this by arguing that a propositional sign must be a model for what it represents; in other words, a statement becomes a fact or a truth when its spatial arrangement can be 'pictured' in the

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[18] Suzuki, ed., *Wait, Later This Will Be Nothing,* 19.

[19] Dobke, *Roth Time,* 76.

[20] Dieter Roth quoted in: Dirk Dobke, ed., *Roth Time: A Dieter Roth Retrospective* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2003), 86.

world. Anton Ehrenzweig notes Wittgenstein's error in thinking of language—and images for that matter—in a precise and objective 'one-to-one' relationship with reality:

> He assumed—rather naïvely as a painter would think—that a picture consisted of elements whose structure could be analysed and matched against reality in an objective way. He hoped that the logical structure of language had a similarly precise relationship to reality.[21]

The principal role of logical formations becomes apparent in Wittgenstein's conception of representation: "What any picture, of whatever form, must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it—correctly or incorrectly—in any way at all, is logical form, i.e. the form of reality."[22] This potential and possibility for language to represent pictorial forms reveals that for Wittgenstein, propositions are made up of the same objects that they represent in the material world. David Stern posits:

> In Wittgenstein's terms, the objects that make up the proposition must have the correct logical form—that is, they must have at least the same possibilities of combination as the objects they represent. In this way, the logical structure of the world would be mirrored in the logical structure of language.[23]

Roth's critique of Wittgenstein is manifested in his invention of a visual system that offers what appears to be a key for decoding and logically solving the pictorial poems that he presents. Although a codex is offered, the icons' prescribed meanings are not fixed, and the mind is able to decipher the images in its own way. Furthermore, the system becomes riddled with desire and affect, as the arrangement of the stamps that Roth uses in his poems render them morphed and distorted, making them difficult to designate within the system he provides. Multiple impressions, layers, and superimpositions of the stamps transform into images that are impossible to define within his alphabet system. The stamp drawings multiply, condense, and are displaced by a surplus of meanings that escapes Roth's attempts to designate a letter to an icon.[24] The pictograms are transfigured in a space that is not ruled by discursive systems; through designation of the rubber stamp images as 'poems' Roth brings the visual and the discursive into

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[21] Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art: A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination* (California: University of California Press, 1971) 40.

[22] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 11.

[23] David G. Stern, "Logic and Language," 39.

[24] Sven Beckstette, "'I'd love to be able to master this form':Dieter Roth's Awareness of Form," in *Dieter Roth: Balle, Balle, Knalle*, eds. Ulrike Groos and Sven Beckstette (Köln: Walther König, 2015), 32.

an intense and dense space that dislocates the viewer's notions of universality and logic in language. Desire manifests itself through a complex displacement and transposition of the textual and the visual; as the viewer attempts to translate the stamp poems, any logical relation between the codex and the image become blurred and confused.

In MUNDUNCULUM, the indeterminate nature of the poem is continually worked over by the force and intensity of the figural; Lyotard posits:

> Desire does not manipulate an intelligible text in order to disguise it; it does not let the text get in, forestalls it, inhabits it, and we never have anything but a worked over text, a mixture of the readable and the visible, a no man's land in which nature is exchanged for words and culture for things.[25]

The perpetual exchange between linguistic and figural is realized in Roth's system of indeterminacy. Roth's system attacks Wittgenstein's theory of language; even when a naming system is provided, it is full of deceptions and contradictions. The multiple works that are involved in his MUNDUNCULUM series:

> [A]ssaulted the postulated validity of established semiotic systems and disputed the existence of an intersubjectively comprehensible visual language. He challenged the supposed clarity of signs with a strictly subjective approach. In addition, Roth refused to make any value judgments. He was much more interested in the ambiguities ('faints'), contradictions, and oppositions that 'probably live only in language.'[26]

Works of art are full of ambiguities that are unable to be decoded by the system that is put in place. Desire and affect condense and distort any textual readings of the poems in order to present the viewer with images that are dependent on their own interpretation, rather than through the semiotic system has been assigned to it.

As mentioned earlier, Wittgenstein's later text *Philosophical Investigations* offers a distinct theory of language that can be thought of as a rejection of his earlier thought. His subsequent theory introduces the idea that the potential of language lies in its usage. Meaning is dependent on family resemblances rather than a word's ability to represent an object in the world; languages form is no longer understood as mirroring ontological form. Roth's linguistic experimentation introduces a threshold between structure and disorder, which is further demonstrated by the use of word play in the titles of his works. The drawing *Hier ist was, hier ist nichts* (Something is here, nothing is here) (1964/65) is made with the rubber stamps and offers

[25] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 270.

[26] Dobke, *Roth Time,* 92.

an example of how Roth's work was influenced by Wittgenstein's thought. The drawing suggests a reclining figure, which is surrounded by asymmetrical areas of colour and fragmented images. This allows Roth and his viewer to embark upon an "ongoing exploration of the ambiguity of symbols when they are combined, arranged, rotated."[27] Gelshorn further explains this unstable relationship:

> As much as Roth distanced himself in *Mundunculum* from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (as has been repeatedly observed), he also used his picture title to tackle criticism subsequently leveled by Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*, when he pointed out that language went far beyond the 'ostensive teaching of words' and the naming of objects. *Hier ist was, hier ist nichts* emphasizes unmistakably that language only functions as part of an activity (in this case the physical reversal or walking around the picture) and hence only in puns which—depending on usage—are able to repeatedly generate new meaning. In contrast to Wittgenstein and his systematics, Roth went much further in the exploration of linguistic ambiguity by aiming at the very asymmetry of symbols and an infinite variety of meaning: 'IN THAT WORLD . . . EACH PART SHOULD BE ABLE TO DISPLAY ANY OTHER PART' is the task he set himself in *Mundunculum*. Whereas at one end, Wittgenstein's statement formulated in *Tractatus* that 'A name means an object. The object is its meaning' stands as the sharpest antithesis of this undertaking, at the other end is Roth's concept of 'swinging' and 'swaying.' He asked viewers to adopt this as their manner of reception for his own works in the catalogue text for his Zurich exhibition at Galerie Ziegler in 1975 (referring to himself in the third person): 'Swaying (actually an oft-repeated swinging) can perhaps be experienced as a discrepancy of what one thinks Roth's pictures are supposed to show and what they actually contain. Alternatively, swaying addresses the question: Can I see anything in the pictures or can't I?'[28]

The inconsistency that is present in the linguistic and visual aspects of Roth's works initiate the constant struggle between order and disorder, which places his works of art in continual motion. The work has no set definition, and therefore oscillates in a realm that cannot be explored solely in linguistic terms or solely as a visual manifestation. The meaning of the work is not concerned with obtaining some sort of valid truth, but is deeply rooted in Roth's understanding of the relationship between language and the world. This sense of ambiguity and open-endedness is manifest in many of his other works. As he states at the beginning of *Copley Book* (1965): "IT IS EVERYTHING | AND THIS MOST OF ALL: EVERYTHING BECOMES LITTLE | BECOMES IT LEAST OF ALL."[29] In keeping with his motto, Roth's works resist interpretation

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[27] Gelshorn, "Inside the Space Between Word and Picture," 65.

[28] Ibid., 66.

[29] Dieter Roth quoted in: Matthias Haldemann and Udo Kittelmann, *And away with the minutes: Dieter Roth und die Musik* [*and Music*] (Luzern: Edizioni Periferia, 2015), 24.

and analysis, weaving the viewer through a web of inconsistencies and contradictions, he appears to be open and honest with the viewer, while at the same time conceals vital information and 'leads us astray.'[30] From his extensive collaborations to his interest in reception as a form of production, his works of art never cease evolving.

***Perceptive Constructions Opus 28* – Perception through the Desiring Ear**

Perception in the sonorous is reliant on the ear in two ways; through the discursive ear and desiring ear. The discursive ear listens for the distinction between the spoken words, sounds, and signifiers, in an attempt to associate signifiers with terms, make sense of linguistic variables, and interpret the auditive forms. The desiring ear is challenged with chaos and flux, as it aims to make sense of irrational and distorted sonorous materials; these materializations can better be thought of as aspects of the extra-linguistic.[31]

Henning Christiansen's vast artistic practice is reinforced by his interest in the relationship between the eye and the ear, as outlined in his essay "en rose er en rose er en rose er en rose. Om auditiv og visuel form m.m." ["a rose is a rose is a rose: On visual and auditive forms"] (1967) originally published in the journal *ta*.[32] His writings show that the eye plays a large role in his understanding of how the ear organizes the sensory information that it perceives. For Christiansen, concretist compositions operate through a mechanized structure and are "marked by objective constructions where the constructive principle is the very idea of the work – its content."[33] However, through variation and instances of indeterminability on behalf of the listener, it is clear that there is another force, which must be accounted for that is at work beyond structured compositions.

Perceptive Constructions Opus 28 (1964) is a concretist and constructivist composition that is made up of four musical parts. The composition progresses in a 'regular' structure of vertical, horizontal, vertical, horizontal. In each of these logical constructions there is an ensuing

[30] Ibid., 21.

[31] Ionescu, "Figural Aesthetics," 147.

[32] Tania Ørum, "A Trail of Roses: Stein's Legacies in 1960s Art," in *Gertrude Stein in Europe: Reconfigurations Across Media, Disciplines, and Traditions*, eds. Sarah Posman and Laura Luise Schultz (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 237.

[33] Hindsbo, "Henning Christiansen - Composer of Time," 61.

violation to that same system.[34] Christiansen makes apparent that language and composition share similarities in their roles as organizing structures and through their attention to systematic and fixed patterns of expression. Interruption plays a large role in Christiansen's conception of composition as he creates a musical language that is indicative of his understanding of the experience of spoken language. For Christiansen, the perception of auditory forms differ from visual forms, in that their structures require an active listener and the experience of a sound is dependent and contingent on the listener. As such, the listener's capacity to perceive independent sound objects and the compositions overall form is not a predetermined given.[35] For Christiansen, the variation between structured form and irregularities in auditive forms engage the listener and require both effort and time in order to experience the work. As Christiansen posits, *Perceptive Constructions* presents "*multi-track* simplicity," which is based in difference.[36] This difference is one of singular intensities, an event that is unable to be repeated again, but gains vitality through its later interaction. Anton Ehrenzweig posits the profound power of reinterpretation and the singularity of experience, which enables our own unconscious to continually react to works of art: "The immortality of great art seems bound up with the inevitable loss of its original surface meaning and its rebirth in the spirit of every new age."[37]

Space and Object, the first vertical segment in Christiansen's composition, has a structure that is presented in the form of 'sound-columns', which Hans-Jørgen Nielsen describes as "fence-like."[38] Each column is composed of a sound object—a chord—that is ten seconds long and is presented fourteen times. In between each of these columns is a space—a rest—of ten seconds. The gaps—the *spaces*—between the columns—the *objects*—function as a space for the disappearance of the sound object, while at the same time allow room for anticipation of the next sound object.[39] The columns alternate between two forms, the first has a clear interval structure with defined difference; the interval goes "from unison to augmented forth; the interval is

[34] Hans-Jørgen, "After Zero," 106.

[35] Hindsbo, "Henning Christiansen - Composer of Time," 62.

[36] Ibid., 63.

[37] Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, 77.

[38] Hans-Jørgen, "After Zero," 106.

[39] Hindsbo, "Henning Christiansen - Composer of Time," 62.

emphasized either by the volume or by the dropping out of some or all the other notes."[40] Every second time the notes ("G – C – C sharp – E – F sharp"[41]) are played by two instruments, but with an instrumental variation. This systematic composition is disrupted by Christiansen's concern with symmetry:

> The first and last column both have the full complement, because I was interested in overall formal symmetry. It was therefore necessary to drop one full statement. This happens just after the unison, which however, by a compromise, at the same time functions as a full consonance. For me it happens in the relationship between the object, which changes from time to time, and the mute, non-participating space.[42]

The second segment, *Next Point*, works horizontally within a system that has four parts; a violin and cello play each part, which have a fixed time of sixty seconds in length. The other instrumentalists are "paired in changing combinations, play short fragments, one after another, for a specified number of seconds."[43] Each part is played with its own structure; the breach of system works through a deviation in the structure of time: "Against this fixed division of time the wind instruments work with variable time."[44]

The third segment, *On the Line,* is vertical in structure and is marked by a single sound column. The column is attenuated eight times; in fixed time intervals each of the eight instruments gradually stop playing. As the instruments subside, the viewer is left to hear the pure sound of the last performing instrument. This system is then riddled with the inconsistencies of the gong and the cymbal; their indeterminate pitches and infringement of any time system distorts and blurs the form of the columns. Their irregularity and unpredictability combined with structured and logical composition are symptomatic of Christiansen's interest in organic forms in music.

The fourth segment, *Point Blank*, is horizontally determined structure that instructs each instrument to play a short phrase. Chaos ensues, as each instrument repeats the phrase over and over again for six minutes, yet each performer is able to determine the timbre and the tempo of

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[40] Hans-Jørgen, "After Zero," 106.

[41] Ibid., 106.

[42] Henning Christiansen quoted in: Hans-Jørgen Nielsen, "After Zero," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed, Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 106.

[43] Jean Christensen, *New Music of the Nordic Countries* (New York: Pendragon Press, 2002), 47.

[44] Hans-Jørgen, "After Zero," 106.

the phrase. The individual phrases collide with one another at undetermined points, as the instruments create an expansive and "restless passage of time [. . .] And because of the transparency of the vocabulary, it will always be possible to follow these collisions."[45] The potential for this simple structure is expanded as the performers create a mutable soundscape where, "no two moments sound the same."[46]

Christiansen's engagement with an attentive listener is emphasized in this piece as he experiments with the expectations of the listener by extending the frameworks of space and time.[47] His works engage the listener, as opposed to both serialism (which offers abrupt unpredictability) and minimalist sound (which offers little variation through meditative sound). His emphasis on form has to do with what Christiansen posits is the difference between auditive and visual form. In visual forms, the audience has the ability to move around in space and perceive the objects from various angles while not losing sight of its overall form; whereas in auditive forms, one does not have the capacity to remember the overall form and its objects in the same manner. Because of this difference, Christiansen presents an auditive form that brings space into its construction by presenting:

> [W]orks with flat, anonymous forms that are repeated with significant differences in a system that is displaced out to the listener; for example *Space and Object*'s alternation between columns with a full sound and interval structure, interrupted by equally long spaces, expresses work with both scale and space, which are brought into play in relation to the listener's expectation.[48]

Christiansen creates these compositions so that the viewer has a chance to discern their structure, similar to perceiving the form of a sculpture in space. According to Christiansen:

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[45] Ibid., 107.

[46] Erling Kullberg quoted in: Karin Hindsbo, "Henning Christiansen - Composer of Time," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed. Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley, (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 63.

[47] Hindsbo, "Henning Christiansen - Composer of Time," 62.

[48] Ibid.

> In the course of 1964 I wrote/drew/organized the composition *Perspective Constructions* with the idea of situating the music in space so that the sound could be perceived as an architectural structure. At first I thought that the time problem – that music involves a passing (away) of time – would be an obstacle to what I wanted to do. But then it occurred to me that there is also a time problem when you see. You can't see everything, from the front and the back, all at once. The mind's eye and the 'mind's ear' have the same imaginative capability.[49]

Christiansen does not leave the composition open to chance, as is popular in many Fluxus musical scores, but creates an intentional and rigorous plan of events for each segment of the piece. The structure of Christiansen's compositions that make up *Perceptive Constructions*, introduce a "repetition of difference,"[50] which employs two structures in one composition, allowing unpredictability and control at once. The rests function as a space of anticipation for the listener, therefore "two things [are] at play: the in-between spaces and the system of sounds based on repetitions with significant differences."[51] His deviations act as a marker of objective difference that is devoid of a center or dramatic tensions and narratives, which is most often indicative of European music. The compositions are not closed or absolute works and the viewer is not able to assume the organization of each segment or the overall form.[52] Here, the intensity lies in his intentional creation of a 'readable' composition, depicted against these subtle, yet penetrating instances of deviation that are up to the viewer to make note of and interpret. Time is used as marker of the overall pieces and the individual fragments, establishing space in the compositions through the use of time as a crucial framework for the form.

The establishment of time and duration as a crucial factor is in direct opposition to the qualities that art historian Michael Fried champions in modernism, which he praises as the instantaneousness and presentness of modernist works of art. Fried critiques the 'literalist'—most notably Minimalist—interest in including the viewer in the space of the work of art. He believes it brings a sense of 'theatricality' and 'duration' in a temporal and spatial sense into the

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[49] Henning Christiansen quoted in: Klaus Gronen, "Fluxus Meets Joseph Beuys," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed. Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley, (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 419.

[50] Hindsbo, "Henning Christiansen - Composer of Time," 63.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Hans-Jørgen, "After Zero," 107.

works, as the viewer's endured experience and perspective brings meaning to the piece.[53] According to Fried: "Literalist sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work."[54] He believes that the spectacle of a work of art replaces its aesthetics, while the viewer's presence becomes the focus of the work.

Henri Bergson's conception of time is relevant here, as Christiansen presents a work that has a continuous flow, where time becomes a lived and experienced phenomenon, rather than one that is solely understood spatially. Bergson's conception of duration is "succession without distinction, an interpenetration of elements so heterogeneous that former states can never recur."[55] Duration provides the basis to Christiansen's *Perceptive Constructions*; the work is a dynamic process that is in continual flow.[56] The past, present, and future are all bound in Christiansen's compositions, each having an effect on the works state and form.

For the viewer, the present itself vacillates between past and future, following the Bergsonian idea that there are two forms of recognition or perception: automatic or habitual perception and attentive perception. Habitual perception takes place on a horizontal movement plane, but attentive perception operates on a different level that brings the viewer "*back* to the object, to dwell upon its outlines."[57] The perceived 'object' (or sound) and the viewer permeate one another, as past experiences of the viewer, for example memory-images or dream-images of the viewer might have an effect on the sound. The two forms of perception coexist as the audience's recognition of a sound unites with the perceived sound that is deliberately being concentrated on, to create another circuit that encircles the first. This heterogenous concept of time is present in *Perceptive Constructions*, as there is a "'preservation' of the past and an 'anticipation' of the future."[58] This heterogeneous space is opened up to the viewer as works of

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[53] Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 166-67.

[54] Ibid., 153.

[55] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. Frank Lubecki Pogson (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2001), xi.

[56] Hindsbo, "Henning Christiansen - Composer of Time," 64.

[57] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1913), 118.

[58] Hindsbo, "Henning Christiansen - Composer of Time," 64.

art are experienced through space and time as interpenetrating energies rather than as physical entities. The spaces that the artist, the work of art, and the viewer occupy become interactively fused through the abandonment of fixed perspectives. As a result, all three are constantly changing, revolving, and thus transformed over time.

Subject of Experience

Phenomenological philosophers Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty take up the topic of vision and modes of knowledge. Their conception of how the subject comes to know the world is based on two modalities of the mind. One comes to know what is true or valid through the empirical experience, which is calculated, logical and sequential primarily in the form of words, numbers, or symbols. The other way of knowing is through the phenomenal mind of an embodied subject, which comes in the form of the sensations, including images, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch.[59]

Lyotard's theoretical framework is indebted to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, who proposes that the subject's initial experience of the world is somewhat chaotic; and consequently, the information that the senses receive must be given order and structure. His phenomenology suggests that the embodied subject finds the manifestation of truth in the material world, rather than the transcendental and spiritual realms.[60] Moreover, Merleau-Ponty goes on further to insist that there is a 'chiasm' or intersection between these realms generates a space that can be characterized by depth. The embodied subject moves in this space in order to gain an individual perspective of the world, but is also aware of the other perspective that she is not able to grasp simultaneously.[61]

Merleau-Ponty maintains a link between the sensory and language, whereas Lyotard contends that language and perception form an *Entzweiung* or split from one another. His distance from phenomenology lies in his belief that language cannot recover the oscillation of the sensory, it "denies the singularity of the enunciation."[62] The singularity of the speaking subject cannot be recuperated simply in the system of language. In visual perception, there is a plastic

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[59] Merle Flannery, "Research Methods in Phenomenological Aesthetics," *Review of Research in Visual Arts Education* 6, no. 2 (1980): 25-6.

[60] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure,* 5-6.

[61] Callan and Williams, "A Return to Jean-François Lyotard's *Discourse, Figure,*" 43-4.

[62] Ionescu, "Figural Aesthetics," 146.

tension that involves the desiring subject as viewer; the term 'viewer' for my purposes, includes but is not limited to the seer, hearer, reader and perhaps most importantly, the subject of the aesthetic experience.

Desire as lack, *Wunsch-desire*, or *wish-desire*

Freud introduces two extremities in our conception of desire. On one hand there is *Wunsch-desire* or *wish-desire,* which "entails negativity; it entails dynamic; it entails teleology, a dynamic with an end; it entails an object, absence, a lost object, and it also entails accomplishment, something like wish-fulfillment. All of this produces a set-up which requires us to consider meaning in desire."[63] The second category of desire is introduced in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920)*,* which offers a theory of desire based on the primary processes, or *libido-desire*. Lyotard's discussion of negativity and desire rests on Freud's conception of *wish-desire*, where the rupture between the pleasure drive and signification is illustrated by adopting Freud's example of the prelinguistic child as his subject.[64] This split is bound up in the "symbol of negation," which is the:

> [T]ransmutation of the drive into desire as it passes into language, and the fact, essential for the analyst, that the negative judgment—the grammarian's No, and the analysand's denial—is like a repetition of the negation constitutive of judgment, a repetition of the pulsating of the drives, perhaps, but rerouted through the negativity of transcendence, through the play of language.[65]

The separation of the prelinguistic child and mother is fundamental to the split between language and the figural, for the child is the subject who comes to understand the world through desire in a purely visual form. The separation is the foundation for all forms of linguistic negation; the linguistic subject incessantly desires to recuperate their identity prior to this split. The child's relationship to the mother as lost object of desire is based on a complex tension: "The pulsing between eaten-introjected and spat-expelled does not determine a relation with the breast. Instead it marks the pleasure-ego's rhythm—non-cumulative and non-referred, oscillating between

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[63] Jean-François Lyotard, "Painting as a Libidinal Set-Up," in *Textes dispersés I: esthétique et théorie de l'art* [*Miscellaneous Texts I: Aesthetics and Theory of Art*]*,* trans. Vlad Ionescu et al., (Brussels: Leuven University Press, 2012), 77.

[64] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 126-8.

[65] Ibid.*,* 126.

release and tension and governed by the principle."[66] This tension is bound up in the invisible force of desire that remains at work in the separation between mother and child.

However, this split "constitutes all relations to the object—it is here that desire plays a central role because it is this energy that determines the presentation of any object."[67] Lyotard maintains there is a relationship between textual and figural space, although it is one that is predicated on difference:

> Between opposition and difference lies the difference of the space of the text to that of the figure. This difference is not of degree; it constitutes an ontological rift. The two spaces are two orders of meaning that communicate but which, by the same token, are divided. Rather than space of the text one should speak of *textual* space; instead of space of the figure, *figural* space. This terminological distinction is meant to underscore the fact that the text and the figure each engender, respectively, an organization specific to the space they inhabit.[68]

The relationship, between the experiencing subject and the presented object of experience, is one that is marked by this split and distance. The space that emerges between subject and object, that of the *différend*, is the locus where desire attempts to 'recuperate' the object of presentation. To determine the place of the figural within an image one must see the places where structure and order are destabilized, where the force of desire has created an excess of sense that cannot be read. Lyotard states: "The work of desire results from the application of a force on a text."[69] Therefore, for Lyotard flat and structured linguistic terms gain meaning and depth through their temporal and spatial relations to sensual experience.

Representation results from the force of the negative and an absence; it requires an exclusion. It is "a placing outside which takes place inside (which constitutes the inside). Whatever name is given to the absence just positioned, it is theological *by virtue of that very position*."[70] Within this 'theatre' of representation, the force of desire that is more powerful than desire-*Wunsch* [*wish*] or desire as lack, is the desire in the regime of the primary processes and libidinal investments, which Freud refers to as *libido-desire*.[71]

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[66] Ibid., 125.

[67] Ionescu, "Figural Aesthetics," 148.

[68] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 205.

[69] Ibid., 239.

[70] Geoffrey Bennington, *Lyotard: Writing the Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 14.

[71] Ibid., 15.

Desire in the Figural

The figural, a perceived object in space, is one that cannot be reduced to signification, it is "the visible insofar as it is *lost* [. . .] which places the articulation of the designated or the image with discourse in the field of desire."[72] The link that Lyotard maintains between the order of desire and the figural is derived from Freud's thought on the unconscious and primary processes. As Bill Readings notes in his discussion of Freud in Lyotard's writings: "The primary processes of the unconscious function as figures for the rational and conceptual workings of the secondary processes of conscious discourses."[73] Consciousness is controlled by language and rational thought, whereas unconscious processes are controlled by figural distortions that aim at "disrupting not merely the ordered representations of consciousness, but the space of those representations built in preconscious revision."[74]

Lyotard draws on Freud's characteristics of the processes that constitute the dream-work in his explanation of how desire works in the figural. Condensation, displacement, figurability, and secondary revision constitute the operations that are essential to the dream-work. Desire works in the dream through 'transgression.' The subject's preconscious memories endure obstructions and shifts that render these images unintelligible in the dream, where desire "expresses itself in disordered forms and hallucinatory images."[75] Lyotard explores the role of desire in the mechanism of the figural by distinguishing its three components, the *image-figure, form-figure,* and *matrix-figure*. The *image-figure* belongs to visible realm, but can be compared to dreams and hallucinations; the *form-figure* can be considered in the perceptible realm, but acts more like a blueprint that is rarely noticed by the eye; and the *matrix-figure* is invisible, understood as 'primal phantasy' that nevertheless is a figure because it violates any discursive structure, as its engagement with the unconscious is undeniable.[76]

For Lyotard, the spaces of the real and imaginary are present simultaneously; desire works in the figural where reality and pleasure principles are not pure alterities, nor are they

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[72] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure,* 284.

[73] Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics*, 34.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Jean-François Lyotard, "The Connivances of Desire with the Figural," in *Driftworks* ed. Roger McKeon, (New York: Semiotext(e) Inc., 1984), 57.

[76] Ibid.

dependent on each other's nonexistence. Rather, they are both constituted by each other; desire, and therefore works of art, do not solely exist in the realm of fantasy, but inhabit reality in its attempts to eliminate the trace of discourse:

> The forming of a 'real' object is a test corresponding in the subject to the constitution of the reality-ego. Reality is never more than a part of the imaginary field that we have agreed to relinquish and from which we have agreed to decathect our phantasies of desire. This section is surrounded along all of its borders by the imaginary field where wish-fulfillment by phantasy is perpetuated. The relinquished part itself shows scars of the struggle over its occupancy between the pleasure principle and that of reality. 'Reality' is not the fullness of being as opposed to the void of the imaginary, since it preserves some lack within itself, and this lack is of such importance that in it—in the rift of inexistence at the heart of existence—the work of art takes place. The artwork is real, it can lend itself to being named and manipulated before witnesses, assuring them there is indeed, here and now, a painting or statue. But it is not real [. . .] in front of the image's powerful consistency, reality is so fragile that in the contest between the two expanses, of the artwork and of the world in which it is placed, it is the first that seduces and attracts the second to it [. . .] Not only does the presence of artworks attest to the object's absence and to the world's scant reality, but the absence that is 'realized' in them pulls toward itself the given's purported existence and reveals its lack.[77]

It is here, in this heterogeneous space, that works of art operate similarly to the dream-work, in space that is both present and absent, visual and discursive, real and imaginary; as Readings suggests, a work of art is "a present object of cognition and a lost object of desire."[78]

In the figural, as in the dream-work and primary processes, energy becomes unbound and distorted by condensations and displacements. These processes work to block the secondary processes, those of "perception, motility and *articulated language*."[79] For Freud, unpleasure is a charge of energy and pleasure is a discharge of energy; through the constant release and absorption of energy, the subject's psychical system works to maintain energy at a consistent level. The infantile condition—which as Freud insists, remains the adult's condition—is the model for how desire works in the subject. The process of obtaining the satisfaction of need and the discharge of energy through pleasure of a sensory object is explained through Lyotard's account of desire:

> Desire thus is born through "anaclisis" (attachment); sexuality as a search for pleasure is buttressed by the instinct of self-preservation, which can be satisfied only through

[77] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 281-2.

[78] Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics*, 36.

[79] Lyotard, "The Connivances of Desire with the Figural," 61.

> the specific action of a specific organ; it grasps the instinctual aim (satisfaction) and its object (the organ of the specific action) as the means of pleasure. Desire develops as a power for pleasure disconnected from the satisfaction of need.[80]

These descriptions of desire, pleasure, and primary processes are fundamental to the disparity between the figural and reality. Freud maintained that reality is "a bound set of perceptions that can be verified through activities of transformation and signified in bound sets of words, i.e. verbalized."[81] Therefore it can be understood that objects are considered 'real' if they are communicable through language and practice. However, the figure cannot exist in this realm, as often there are no words to describe it, which Lyotard connects to Freud's analysis of the dream-work and the primary processes. The figure, and works of art in general, are not represented as something pure or as a form of reality (transformable or linguistically communicable), but belongs to the sense formations which surpass the need to be linguistically communicated and are charged with the workings of desire.[82] Lyotard states of the figural: "these sense formations are effectively present in the gaps of reality, if one can so speak, precisely in places where the testing of reality through its practical transformation, hence its verbalized signification, do not intervene."[83]

To destabilize the obstacle we face when a work of art is considered reality, Lyotard argues that figural object, which includes plastic and musical expression, should not be professed as "a text, not be presented as an object transformable by practical activity, nor as an object communicable in language, as discourse."[84] This is because when the figural is couched in linguistic terms, it becomes another phenomenon. When figural objects are presented as reality through discourse, "one is dealing with an ideology in the Marxist sense of the term; when figural reality is given as something other that what it is, when it is given as reality, one can speak of ideology in so far as the fulfillment of desire is functioning."[85] The link that is maintained here between the function of a work of art and Marxist ideology is based in art's task

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[80] Ibid., 59.

[81] Jean-François Lyotard, "Notes on the Critical Function of the Work of Art," in *Driftworks* ed. Roger McKeon (New York: Semiotext(e) Inc., 1984), 69.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., 70.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid., 69-70.

to dismantle internal structures by deconstructing societies' narratives, which attempt to present a totalizing existence.[86]

Rather than a work of art being an object that can be transformed by human activity, and as such transformed into a linguistic space, works of art obtain a transformative quality and create an aesthetic experience that surpasses linguistics and semiotics by producing an intensified sensory experience. Desire operates in an unbound and irrational manner to disrupt any linguistic systems that attempt to claim the figural, although the figural might take the form of an image, figure, or letter. The poet's expression is no different than the painter's, the sound artist's, or the composer's; as the unconscious disrupts and transforms the systematic principles of discourse through the phantasm.[87]

Concrete Poetry and the Rebus

Perhaps a suitable point of departure for the discussion of desire in Roth's concrete art and his graphic works is Lyotard's discussion of the rebus. The function of the rebus, which uses images to signify words or phrases, results from its similarity to desire and the dream-work; the rebus holds heterogeneous capacities, as it is inherently visual and linguistic. The rebus presents an instance where the function of the eye is unclear, does one consider the image a text or the text an image, moreover, how does one 'read' at all? Lyotard speaks of the force of desire as readable and visible, and posits that the paradox of the figural is that it does not destroy the text, but deconstructs it.[88] The simultaneous manifestation of image and letters creates disorder and uncertainty, as words are treated as figures; they become unreadable and undecipherable in the figurative realm as there is no structured rule that holds power over the rebus. There is no common logic that can solve a rebus. Readings suggests, the rebus and the dream-work are "figural writing that cannot be inter-preted or translated but must be *transposed*, from graphic to

[86] Lyotard uses the example of Pop Art, whose function he argues was "to take objects that look real, objects about which people are in agreement, that they value, through which they communicate, advertising posters or cars, for example—and to deconstruct them. To take these objects that are the objects of the social reality in which we find ourselves and to meticulously paint them in a realist way, but on a two-dimensional screen. To represent a car in this fashion, for example, is already a deconstruction, for in this mode of representation, there is, for us, now, an irony that is already a critique; some Pop artists have used this rather sophisticated device." Jean-François Lyotard, "Notes on the Critical Function of the Work of Art," in *Driftworks* ed. Roger McKeon (New York: Semiotext(e) Inc., 1984), 72.

[87] Callan and Williams, "A Return to Jean-Francois Lyotard's *Discourse, Figure*," 46-7.

[88] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 305.

plastic, visible to phonetic."[89] The rebus is a space of contention, where semantic consistencies and figural distortions oscillate; yet, the figural maintains a force that is unattainable by language:

> The figural can only affect the discursive space through plastic transgressions of the signifier in its materiality and, just like the dream-work, involves condensation and displacements. The figural is a force metamorphosing word into image, the read sign into the visualized picture.[90]

Similar to the rebus, concrete poetry operates by including both visual and linguistic elements, rendering any designation of its being or essence, as either language or the figural, indistinguishable. The form and shape of the linguistic elements becomes important in determining the meaning or significance of the poem. In addition to the importance of typographic elements, an emphasis is put on the sound and syncopation of the words, transporting concrete poetry into its audible form. Tania Ørum's suggests the performative and theatrical functions of concrete poetry:

> Concrete poetry thus emphasises the materiality and the performative acts of language: the ways in which the sound of words, the visual shape of letters and their distribution on the page perform elementary effects often overlooked in the conventional literary focus on the content and the communicative functions of language. And these performative dimensions of language are often stressed by the actual performances of texts as sound compositions or visual choreographies.[91]

Concrete poetry, which takes its proponents from Concrete art, focuses on visual appearances and "reduced language to its basic elements and focused [. . .] on the relationship between lettering and background,"[92] placing equal significance on spatial arrangement of the poem and its aesthetics.[93] For Roth, experimentation with the verbal and the visual is taken one step further, as he removes meaning from language in order to show the unstable and transformative nature of language and brings poetry into the 'materially concrete.'[94] His poems are constructed through

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[89] Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics*, 38.

[90] Ioenscu, "Figural Aesthetics," 149.

[91] Tania Ørum,"Minimal Requirements of the Post-War Avant-Garde of the 1960s," in *Neo-Avant-Garde,* ed. David Hopkins (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 151.

[92] Ulrike Groos and Sven Beckstette, eds., *Dieter Roth: Balle, Balle, Knalle* (Köln: Walther König, 2015), 96.

[93] Suzuki, ed., *Wait, Later This Will Be Nothing,* 9.

[94] Daniel Birnbaum, "Dieter Roth," *Artforum International* 42, no.1 (2003): 220-21.

the use of letters to create a 'visual poetry' rather than by placing existing poems in a graphic layout.[95] Roth's way of treating texts does not rely on simplification; as Roth states

> you mustn't long for phonetic writing picture writing is good too what i do is a mixture of both maybe part phonetic writing + part visual or optic ideas + parts that could be called makeshift or swimming practice.[96]

His exploration of the fluidity of language-image-sound is marked by these dense verbal experiments, as he explores the playful interaction between the verbal and the visual along with the permeable and uninhibited nature of letters and images.

Roth's graphic works—similar to Christiansen's concretist compositions—although constructivist in nature, introduce a multiplicity of meanings through his experimentation of the medium. At first glance, these manifestations of Constructivist art, such as Roth's artist's book *bok 1956-59* (1959), seem to come from a Modernist impulse, but his experimentation with the separation of language and meaning is indicative of an art that is more radical than a purely optical abstraction.[97] In *bok 1956-59*, various approaches to concrete poetry were employed:

> [R]epeating punctuation marks arranged to form corner-spanning vectors; the dissection and reconstruction of a fixed group of letter to make actual (*tomato)* or nonsense (*otatom*) words; the use of typographic elements to emulate a landscape; a page sprinkled with seemingly randomly paced *o*s.[98]

Typographic elements move in multiple directions, both horizontally and vertically, as well as using mirroring techniques to produce inverse and reverse versions of characters of the alphabet (*d, p, b, q*). The works are subjected to multiple transformations and layers that inhibit the viewer from any linear attempt at 'reading' the poem.[99] Linguistic and figural value remain in the same realm, where language is divorced from its ascribed meaning and is unbound from the methodical correlation between signified and signifier.[100] The condensation that is at work in

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[95] Dobke, *Roth Time,* 48.

[96] Dieter Roth quoted in: Dirk Dobke, ed., *Roth Time: A Dieter Roth Retrospective* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2003), 42. This usage of lowercase letters with little punctuation was used by Roth as an artistic device, which attests to his openness to multiple readings on behalf of the viewer. From a Letter to Daniel Spoerri, n.d. (fall 1959). Roth Archives, Basel. Original text: "du must nicht zur lautschrift zurücktrachten bildschrift hat auch gutes was ich tu ist aine mischung baider kannsain taile der lautschrift + taile bildicher oder optischer ideen = teile di man notbehelfe oder schwimübungen nenen könte."

[97] Danto, "Dieter Roth," 281.

[98] Suzuki, ed., *Wait, Later This Will Be Nothing,* 11.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid., 12.

Roth's concrete poetry parallels the figural in its resistance to the conventions of the discursive sphere:

> Condensation should be understood as a physical process by which one or more objects occupying a given space are reduced to inhabiting a smaller volume [. . .] To crush the signifying or signified unities against each other, to confuse them, is to neglect the stable gaps which separate the letters, the words of a text, to disregard the invariant distinctive graphemes of which they are composed, ultimately to be indifferent to the space of discourse.[101]

Here, desire permeates the works through a force that renders the poem unreadable to the rational mind through its density and intensity; letters are presented to the eye that do not fit neatly into categories of sense and order, but present a language that is broken down and chaotically reconstructed.

Ehrenzweig notes in his discussion of syncretistic vision and analytic gestalt vision, that in vision (and hearing), the unconscious is more powerful than consciousness, as it is able to absorb and scan fragmented elements for what they are, rather than attempt to give order and create a totalizing and absolute image.[102] Although it appears that we are presented with chaotic and scattered elements (spatial or temporal sequences), when the eye or the ear scan the content of a dedifferentiated form, it is the faculties of the mind that determine whether they perceive chaos or structure: "If they are capable of yielding to the shift of control from conscious focusing to unconscious scanning the disruption of consciousness is hardly felt. The momentary absence of mind will be forgotten as the creative mind returns to the surface with newly won insight."[103] It is only when the conscious faculties react to creativity and dedifferentiation that we are impressed with a feeling of chaos and indeterminacy.

If we perceive Roth's poems and drawings from this point of view, we are able to recognize that the features of the primary processes at work in works of art also characterize the subject. Through the faculties of unconscious vision, which precedes conscious vision, we are able to appreciate and accept the multiplicities that are present in the event. Indeterminacy must be embraced to allow for unconscious scanning, while the narrow focus of consciousness is abandoned. The viewer's capacity to perceive one of Roth's poem's is dependent on the primary

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[101] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure,* 244.

[102] Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art,* 33.

[103] Ibid., 35.

processes, as rather than match an icon to a letter or sound to create a linear thought, the viewer is challenged the task of interpretation of affect, open structures, and unpredictably. Although his work appears as a game system, with answers to a solvable problem, what is more important are the 'subtler irregularities' of the work.[104] The unconscious of the viewer "can handle the 'open' structures with blurred frontiers which will be drawn with proper precision only in the unknowable future."[105] The playful interaction between the verbal and the visual is found in many of Roth's later works, as he explores the permeable and uninhibited nature of letters and images. This type of disorder and distortion is a result of the desire that is at work in the primary processes, which suggests the potential for destruction in creation.

[104] Ibid., 43.

[105] Ibid., 42.

Chapter Three: Repetition, Accumulation, and Excess

i. Theory and its Implications

Vitality, Flux, and Intensities

Dieter Roth's and Henning Christiansen's engagement with transient materials present works of art that continually change, that have no original or rather, the original holds little importance, whose mode of being is continually altered, and whose presence in time and space is in constant flux. These attributes bring new perspectives to examining works of art, as their being is no longer a question of reproduction or technology, but of vitality, fluctuation, and energies. This chapter will examine how accumulation, ephemeral materials and sites, growth, decay, and destruction, point to the processual nature of works of art, and thus, lead to an art that is filled with vitality. As with most innovators, Roth's and Christiansen's works of art provoke an intense response in their viewers of both immense attraction and at times, repulsion. Their originality and force lies in the ability to cross boundaries—or rather break down boundaries—and create works of vital and libidinal energies; creating interactions which live on past any particular space or time, subject or object. There is no meaning or value that is embedded in the text and subsequently transposed into the viewer. If anything, the works succeed in creating a sense of misunderstanding, ambiguity, hysteria, decay, and excess; which is brought to life in many cases through the use of ephemeral materials and culmination of experience. As such, both Roth and Christiansen present works of art that in themselves are vital and are not relegated to certain designation or character, but continue to grow, expand, decompose, and reactivate throughout time.

This is not to say that the decay and destruction is ever controlled by an artist; for example discolouration of Michaelangelo's fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the erosion and salt growth and the processes of entropy on Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), or rust on Richard Serra's metal sculptures are subject to forces that are beyond the artist's capacity to control. Almost every art material is bound to erode or decay in some shape or form; however, for Roth and Christiansen, in distinct ways, the decay becomes a material aspect and force in the work. For many works of art, preservation and restorative practices play a key role in ensuring the integrity of the work, along with creating the belief that the present state of a work of art is similar or equivalent to its 'original' state. Yet for Roth and Christiansen these practices are not important because there is no ideal state for the works as they continually accumulate an

array of additional materials, objects, and therefore states. The artist's lifelong commitment to collaborations leads to works that have no boundaries and are in constant flux, mirroring the transient nature inherent to life and death.

Roth's and Christiansen's practices involve an accumulation of materials and objects that are not always considered a part of a work of art. This comes in the form of posters, scores, essays, poems, drawings, editions, multiples and so on; however, these are not supplements to the work nor do they serve as documentation or explanation, rather they are the work. Therefore, the work is always already fragmented, partial, and in process, never able to achieve an ideal state because of its constant becoming. The work is instigated again and again as a viewer interacts with an image, a recording, a painting, or a drawing. An experience of one variation of the work operates in a vicious circle with the experience of another; the experience of a fragment is just as valid as the experience of a 'whole' (although it is important to highlight that my conception of works of art is that they cannot be whole). Yet, of course these experiences are not the *same*; works of art present an instance that is singular, yet are full with a multiplicity of potential interactions. What each experience involves holds little importance for an artist or a work of art.[1] Different (re)configurations of a work of art elicit different responses, just as different viewers bring diverse perspectives; these active forces are circulating within this ongoing process of materialization.[2] Just as the work is constantly changing, so is the world around a work of art—socially, politically, economically and so on—and therefore, the experiences of each and every viewer that come into contact with that work.

Roth's works of art are constantly revisited, as he adds annotations alongside his already written and visual works; clarifying, revitalizing, amplifying, and attenuating what has been produced before, or as Ira G. Wool notes, Roth's accumulation of "annotated anecdotes,"[3] adds to his excessive and never-ending oeuvre. These accompaniments are not mere supplementary addendum to an original 'essential' work, but are the work. These additions make it hard to

[1] Henning Christiansen, "a rose is a rose is a rose: On auditive and visual form etc.," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed. Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley, (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 92. And: Dirk Dobke and Laszlo Glozer, eds., *Dieter Roth: Unique pieces* (London: Hansjörg Mayer, 2002), 10-3.

[2] Deirdre Heddon and Jennie Klein, *Histories and Practices of Live Art* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 91-2.

[3] Ira G. Wool, "Homage to Dieter: A Rot(h)iana of Annotated Anecdotes," in *Dieter Roth* (David Nolan Gallery, 1989), 8.

relegate his works of art to a fixed state. For Roth, materials that are constantly subject to fluctuations; his works with foodstuffs, animals, and waste, are integral to his artistic output and constitute his relationship with structure and disorder. Art historian Harald Szeemann notes of Roth's relationship to chaos and nature:

> There are two fundamental possibilities available to an artist: to negate, stripping away until nothing remains, or to accumulate, to embrace additively until one has reached the limit of fullness. The subversive, at times contrarian Dieter Roth-loving and caustic, chaotic and precise-[has] pursued both paths at once.[4]

His artistic output oscillates between order and chaos, which points to the tension in his works that are a result of nature, life, and death.[5] Not only do these materials inevitably decay and transform towards an organic state, but as a result they are constantly shifting and dynamic, defying the limits of time and space as works of art never cease living, working, reacting, and transforming. Furthermore, Roth's intensive collaborations with his peers allows his work to live on, change, and grow even after his own death.

For Christiansen, ephemerality and vitality constitute many of his works; the fleeting nature of time-based performance and the unpredictability of the human body become integral aspects in his art. For recorded compositions, performances, and happenings, the physical medium of the recording apparatus—vinyl, magnetic audiotape, and some electronic forms—are unstable in themselves; all of these materials are prone to erosion and loss of integrity. Furthermore, Christiansen's manipulation of the tape in the machine leads to minor changes each time the recorded tape is played, which stresses the transitoriness of sound waves. However, this is not what is most important to the nature of his works of art; the ephemeral and impermanent nature of performance art and music, along with its temporal and transient qualities is manifested in many of his works, becoming an acoustic ecology regardless of the medium. As a result, the disintegrative effect of decomposition is also apparent in his compositions through the use of ephemeral, transformative, and natural materials. As Christiansen notes himself about the nature of actions:

> The action is precisely the way to get back to the primal, to try out your ideas at the edge of the art establishment with the expensive technology. You set yourself up, very

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[4] Harald Szeeman quoted in: Daniel Birnbaum, "Dieter Roth," *Artforum International* 42, no.1 (2003): 221.

[5] Suzuki, ed., *Wait, Later This Will Be Nothing*, 8.

> personally, and try to resolve something primal for yourself and for a usually-small audience of alert, extremely attentive people.[6]

Christiansen's recycling of sounds, intensive collaborations, additional notes, scores, and diagrams initiates a phenomenon in constant flux. Diedrich Diederichsen points out about temporal works of art in general and Christiansen in particular:

> In music, theatre or film, time-based artistic works of very long duration or with irregular temporal segmentation have at several junctures, and not least recently, aroused a certain amount of attention [. . .] The suspension of both the sense of something new and the sense of repetition, the avoidance of both the feeling of single scenes and the feeling of a period is a mixture of intuitive and constructive acts [. . .] Christiansen makes music that turns Fluxus art's translation of music and drama into open time-related and life-related artworks back into music without depriving it of any of its worldbound and inconclusive nature. After all, he often performs the music in conjunction with non-sounding temporal actions. What he does is thus not to translate back, but to transform something that has already been transformed once or several times. Nevertheless the musical element of this new aggregate arise not only from the transformed materials, but also from quite different, often older sources and even from nature (in the extended meaning of the word that also includes 'second nature').[7]

The suspension of time, dedication to repetition, and use of everyday materials initiate the transformative potentials of Christiansen's soundworks, as they circulate to generate new sounds. Nature becomes a significant motif in much of his later works, as his artistic practice circulates around notions of the uncertain and uninhibited order of nature, along allusions to life's confounding open-endedness.

Hubert F. van den Berg points out the two ways that nature has come to be understood in philosophical terms. The first is nature as a description for phenomena, both organic and inorganic, that are not inhibited by humans. The second way nature is understood as an "umbrella term for the existence (in a diachronic sense), for the development, the emergence, transformation, birth, growth, decay etc. of these objects, the aspects of their lives, and all the ontogenetic processes involved."[8] Thinking of these works of art as arrangements of natural

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[6] Henning Christiansen, "From Action to Production," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed. Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley, (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 451.

[7] Diederichsen, "Components, Contrasts and Concatenations," 173-174.

[8] Hubert F. van den Berg, "Towards a 'Reconciliation of Man and Nature'. Nature and Ecology in the Aesthetic Avant-Garde of the Twentieth Century," in *Neo-Avant-Garde,* eds. David Hopkins (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 377-8.

material, in the second sense, leads us to an exploration of works of art as vital, open, and processual phenomena that are subject to the transformative powers of external occurrences.

The Processual Nature of Reality and Works of Art

Underlying my claim that works of art have transformative potentials, are the theories that Nicholas Rescher discusses in *Process Philosophy: A Survey of Basic Issues* (2000). His study of the processual nature of the world and our understanding of the real has profound implications on how language, the subject, and the aesthetic experience are thought. Rather than conceive of reality as a fixed and static object in space, he proposes that reality is dynamic, which has its roots in the idea that being and becoming are in a continual process of change.[9] For the process philosopher "temporality, activity, and change—of alteration, striving, passage, and novelty-emergence—are the cardinal factors for our understanding of the real."[10] Understanding time-bound elements as constituting the real is important in process philosophy, rather than objects being central to the real, its processes are fundamental and 'things derivative.'[11]

The processes that a thing engenders, through its interactions and engagements with other substances are brought to the forefront, while any conception of universal attributes resolves to the background. Rather than designate all things (ie. poems) as having a set of attributable properties, process philosophy looks towards existence as a variety of spatiotemporal occurrences that are transient as opposed to totalizing:

> By their very nature as such, processes have patterns and periodicities that render them in principle repeatable. After all, to say that an item has structure of some sort is to attribute to it something that other items can in principle also have. But, of course, structure, though repeatable ("abstractable"), is itself not an abstraction–it is something that a concrete item concretely exhibits. Abstraction does not *create* structure but presupposes it.[12]

This conception of reality has many aesthetic implications, which constitute a reflection of a change in the notion of reality itself. In process-oriented thinking, works of art are no longer static entities or objects in space that are separate from the viewer, but can be considered for their fleeting and transformative potential, through each interaction they undergo. A work of

[9] Rescher, *Process Philosophy*, 5.

[10] Ibid., 6.

[11] Ibid., 7.

[12] Ibid., 10.

art, can thus be activated or re-activated at any moment through its processual capacities in the form of an image, a memory, a recollection, a dream, or any other cognitive processes that interact with the dynamic object. In a manner similar to Ehrenzweig's theorizations on the primacy of unconscious vision, the abstract unconscious qualities of an entity precede any imposed conscious structure.

Subject-in-process/on-trial

Julia Kristeva's view in *La Révolution Du Langage Poétique* [*Revolution in Poetic Language*] (1974) reinforces the connection between language and the subject through her belief that the "subject is an effect of its linguistic practices," and since it is the subject who uses language as a process, then the subject must also be in process.[13] Lacanian psychoanalysis presents the subject as a 'divided unity' that is constituted by an absence and is subsequently driven by desire as lack. Although it takes into account Freud's split theory of unconscious/conscious processes, the positing of a social subject is based in the restriction of drives and 'social censorship,' which constitutes a 'unitary subject.'[14] Kristeva introduces *le sujet en procès*, the subject-in-process/on-trial which attacks the static unitary subject of psychoanalysis; it could be said that the subject has no being, as it is continually on trial, and therefore in motion. The unitary subject has the potential to be dissolved by the 'process of *signifiance*' (signifying process), through its 'semiotic' operations, the multiplicity of the 'preverbal drives' and its pulsations.[15] This site of perpetual motion of the subject and the sign is represented by the notion of the 'semiotic chora'; Kristeva posits:

> [B]ut it should not be supposed that it is constituted by a break (castration); it is more pertinent to see it as functioning by way of the reiteration of the break or separation, as a multiplicity of ex-pulsions, insuring its infinite renewal. Expulsion rejects the discordance between the signifier and signified to the extent of the dissolution of the subject as signifying subject, but it also rejects any partitions in which the subject might shelter in order to constitute itself.[16]

Negativity, therefore, orders the subject-in-process and the signifying process, because of its constant resistance to subjective unity. "The term negativity, or the sense which we give it,

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[13] Noëlle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2003), 37.

[14] Julia Kristeva, "The Subject in Process," in *The Tel Quel Reader*, eds. P. French and R.F. Lack. (London: Psychology Press, 1998), 133.

[15] Ibid., 134

[16] Ibid.

functions only to indicate the process exceeding the signifying subject in order to link it to 'objective' struggles in nature and society."[17] This negativity dissolves the static law's of communication that are imposed on the subject; the subject is now ruled by an "*affirmative negativity, a productive dissolution.*"[18] The perpetual movement that constitutes the subject initiates an excess of negativity, which is not determined by opposites, but "an infinitesimal differentiation of the phenotext."[19] The subject-in-process does not use the signifying process to represent "a reality posed in advance and forever detached from the pulsional process, but that he or she is experimenting or using the objective process through immersion in it and re-emerging from it via the drives."[20] Through negativity the expulsion of the structured signifying process produces multiplicities and potentialities in both the subject and the sign.

The symbolic function of the signifying process is to place the subject within determinant structures, which work to block their drives. The semiotic function of language is found in the unconscious and instinctual drive, and precedes the subject; it is the 'heterogeneity of meaning,' anterior to signification, yet moves within it.[21] The significance of Kristeva's designation of the functions of signification is her assertion that the primary processes (the 'semiotic' operations), precede the structures that attempt to make a unitary subject. The relationship between these two functions do not facilitate a break, but their differences are mutually implicated; they flow through one another to make up the signifying process, and thus, constitute the subject-in-process.

Kristeva's conception of poetic language mirrors the subject-in-process through its capacity to deconstruct representational meaning through its connection to unconscious drives. As noted earlier, poetic language multiplies and fragments discourse, which leads to the heterogeneity of the subject:

> Because of its specific isolation within the discursive totality of our time, this shattering of discourse reveals that linguistic changes constitute changes in the *status of the subject* – his relation to the body, to others, and to objects; it also reveals that

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[17] Ibid., 139

[18] Ibid., 138.

[19] Ibid., 142.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 148.

> normalized language is just one of the ways of articulating the signifying process that encompasses the body, the material referent, and language itself.[22]

Poetic language initiates a similar type of fragmentation and indeterminacy through its processual and instinctual nature; it does not accept the governing principles of the symbolic, and therefore initiates an expulsion that is closely linked to the primary processes of the subject-in-process.

> The subject-in-process is always in a state of contesting the law, either with the force of violence, of aggressivity, of the death drive, or with the other side of this force: pleasure and jouissance.[23]

The nature of the signifying process is constituted by 'a heterogeneous contradiction,' where the sign, and therefore the subject, are both static and multiple simultaneously.[24] This splitting and the tension of energies is what initiates motion in the semiotic chora:

> [T]his pulsional mobility, after accumulating, reaches a moment of arrest which immobilizes the body. The fragmented body, of which each part is experienced as the whole, loses its structured unity, and, in clinical schizophrenia, also loses the signifying structure capable of reunifying it in the sign system.[25]

The open and fragmented nature of both the subject-in-process and poetic language in Kristeva's theory leads us to examine works of art as contingent phenomena that exists in relation to the experience of the viewer, site, and artist. This perspective illuminates the ongoing and mutable energies of works of art; the works are activated through their ephemeral and indeterminable energies that are subject to fluctuations that are a product of the works ongoing interactions. Works of art are thus constantly open and subject to the changing forces and energies of life act upon them.

Jean-Luc Nancy's theorizes about works of art as implicated in a never ending process that is vulnerable, fortuitous, and indeterminate; "the work of art is always also a meaning at work beyond the work [*a l'oellvre all-de/a de l'rellvre*], as well as a work working and opening beyond any meaning that is either given or to be given."[26] Nancy's discussions on 'world-

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[22] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 15-6.

[23] Kristeva quoted in: Noelle McAfee, *Habermas, Kristeva, and Citizenship* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), 69.

[24] Kristeva, "The Subject in Process," 152.

[25] Ibid., 152.

[26] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World, Or, Globalization* (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 54.

forming' become relevant to works of art that use nature as both a material and as an active force in the processual nature of the work. These works of art point to processes of expansion in humanity while at the same time reflect a world of continual suppression; Nancy suggests that "the world is destroying itself,"[27] and as a result "everything takes place as if the world affected and permeated itself with a death drive that soon would have nothing else to destroy than the world itself."[28]

Roth and Christiansen's engagement with ephemeral natural materials reveals that the potentiality of structures emerging and growing simultaneously becomes the potentiality of destruction and resistance. In the use of materials that are intentionally filled with vitality, works of art are open to a force that has the ability to destroy the materiality of the object in the world. In the figural, desire is constantly at work to surpass and transcend any set-up that is imposed on the object as a field of energy.

Desire as lack

In Platonic terms, there is a distinction between the sensible and the intelligible; there are things in the world that appear to the senses and there are *ideas*, "which form the prior condition and transcendental truth of those appearances."[29] As a result of this distinction between appearances and their inherent *ideas*, representation becomes predicated on an unseen or an absence; there must always be something that is lacking in representation. Therefore, in these terms, desire is constituted by an absence and therefore operates in the realm of *wish-desire*. For Platonic thinkers, it follows that desire is often thought of as a productive force that works towards knowledge and ideas of the world and is therefore positive. However, through this desire, there is a simultaneous tendency to look towards what is absent or lacking, which constitutes a certain type of nihilism and negativity.[30] Keith Crome and James Williams posit:

[27] Ibid., 35.

[28] Ibid., 34.

[29] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Lyotard Reader and Guide*, ed. Keith Crome and James Williams (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 28.

[30] Ibid.

> [W]hilst such a determination of desire accounts for the possibility of the human world, it also entails a violence and negation of that world. Driven beyond itself, human desire looks towards a certain transcendent absence that devalues the world at the same time as it renders it knowable, and it is this that constitutes its nihilism.[31]

Lyotard's complex understanding of signification and representation leads him to suggest this is a limited conception of desire. Lyotard believes there is a problem in how we gain knowledge of the world in the above terms; "the problem is that desire is reduced to its positive side, that is, the knowledge that arises from it, and the consequence of this reduction is played out in history as nihilism."[32]

If the world and the objects in it are only there to become knowable, and thus to be acted upon by humans, then human existence enters a realm of rationality and calculation. Lyotard criticizes this view on the grounds that he believes attaining knowledge becomes useless if the human being is only able to act upon the world as a passive entity. He attempts to recapture our understanding of desire by demonstrating how desire also allows us to respond to things in the world that are beyond representation and knowledge. His account maintains the intensities and energies that are present in the world; as such the world and everything in it is processual, mutable, and fluctuating. His puts forth an account of desire as "an active passivity—that would allow us to be responsive to what is other than knowledge, and which would allow us to be open to and affected by the world in a way that does not devalue it and reduce it to a mere utility."[33]

It is important to note Roth's and Christiansen's profound interest in philosophy, and their subsequent application of these theories to their life and work. Roth and Christiansen's outlook on life, which is inseparable from their view of art and aesthetics, involves a sense of respect and admiration for extended durational forms and the organic, which includes an appreciation for fluctuations in energetics, thermodynamics, and unbounded forms. Their contemplative approach to transience, open-endedness, and processual forms is embodied throughout their practices in both visual and auditive works. Lyotard's analysis of Freud's conception of *libido-desire* illustrates the energies of desire at work in aesthetics, and in particular connects the approaches of Roth's and Christiansen's aesthetics to the singularity of a work of art.

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 29.

[33] Ibid.

Libido-Desire

Lyotard's discussion of primary processes in *Libidinal Economy* posit the two regimes or energy systems at work in *libido-desire*, that of *Eros* and the *death instinct* or *drive*, ideas which originate in Freud's pulsional theory.[34] In these regimes of the drive, there are forces of energy, flux, and transformation in a 'psychic or mental apparatus,' which are characterized by repetition.[35] Eros and the death drive might appear to have contradictory functions, but this interpretation is misleading; a more suitable understanding of the drives would be to consider their relationship as consisting of 'interpenetrative' functions, as the energies of Eros and the death drive are incompatible, yet inseparable from one another.[36]

Repetition in the energy system of Eros is understood through the principle of constancy, unity, and order in a particular system. In the regime of Eros and the reality principle repetition is manifest as a constancy, which is the product of the active force of desire in the libido, where a system is established, set into motion, and produces specific outcomes. In the regime of the death drive, there is repetition to the extent that the energy works to disrupt constancy and unity and create a dissonance; there is a tendency towards the division between the representation and what it represents, repetition according to the 'great Zero.' In other words, there is "repetition according to a reference to another thing than the apparatus of which we are speaking."[37] Repetition in the apparatus, in accordance with the death drive, expends the forces of desire and flows of energy without concern for the regulations of the apparatus. The distortion and displacements that take place in libidinal investments have no concern for temporal and spatial orders, but rather the unconscious intensities are in continuous motion and their desires can never be satisfied. Iain Hamilton Grant notes:

> The 'crisis' of *Libidinal Economy* is a perpetual displacement, an eternal turning rather than a splitting: 'drifting by itself is the end of all critique'. Instead of fixing

[34] Ibid.

[35] Freud's conception of the psychic apparatus according to Lyotard is "also the body, or even zones of the body, elements, organs, or partial organs, of the body." Jean-François Lyotard, "Painting as a Libidinal Set-Up," in *Textes dispersés I: esthétique et théorie de l'art* [*Miscellaneous Texts I: Aesthetics and Theory of Art*], trans. Vlad Ionescu et al., (Brussels: Leuven University Press, 2012), 79.

[36] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, 17.

[37] Lyotard, "Painting as a Libidinal Set-Up," 79.

> territories, setting up shields, or installing garrisons, libidinal investments traverse the entire metamorphic range of these unlimited displacements.[38]

Once again, desire is duplicitous, where negativity and positivity are continuous; yet depend on difference rather than opposition. The repeated modules might be mistaken as forms of constancy and Eros, however upon closer inspection, repetition in the work is not homogenous. A subject's experience of something can never be wholly duplicated, which suggests an investment in the forces of decay and disorder that in turn become transformative as they generate new forms.

In *Libidinal Economy*, Lyotard revisits Freud's conception of desire as lack, as explained by the child who suffers from desire as a lost object through separation from their mother, and expands this theory by asserting that it is predicated on the idea that there is a sort of unification or a totalizing instance between the mother (producer of nourishment) and child (consumer). However, the lack that the child experiences and their subsequent desire is deceptive, as there can never be a totalizing connection between mother and child, there are only partial exchanges:

> [A]s soon as there is someone, an instance which passes for the place of totalization, the unification of several singularities, of several libidinal intensities, one is already in the great Zero, one is already in the negative; and one is already in distress, since this instance onto which these singular *jouissance*-deaths will be beaten down, the mother or whatever equivalent, is on the one hand never *given,* there is never a connection *onto her,* there are only scraps, partial metamorphoses, and thus nostalgia begins with the production of this unitary instance; and on the other hand, such an instance devalues, annihilates, inevitably cleaves the intense signs that are libidinal commutation, disaffects the adjoining lips-tongue-nipple, the connections neck-shoulder, fingers-breast, since *instead* of being passages of abundant intensity, these metamorphoses become metaphors of an impossible coupling, these commutations just so many allusions to an elusive ability to enjoy [*pouvoir-jouir*], these incomparable, fiercely singular signs just so many common, universal signs of a lost origin.[39]

The child constructs this 'theatre' of totality as constituting their pleasure, and therefore the supposed separation of the child and the mother governs their understanding of dichotomies of presence/absence, subject/object and pain/pleasure. This instance of supposed unification is returned to again and again in regards to events, although it was never a synthesis, "but an intense libidinal zone."[40] For Lyotard, the boundary between these zones is better thought of

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[38] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, xxix.

[39] Ibid., 23.

[40] Ibid., 25.

through the analogy of the libidinal band or skin, where instances of singularity and difference permeate the skin in a chaotic manner. *Libido-desire* is an intense and energetic flux that displaces the flows of libidinal investments:

> Lyotard links this latter sense of desire [*libido-desire*] to Freud's description of the 'polymorphous perversity' of the child or infant, in which there is simply a diverse, endlessly displaced flow of libidinal intensity, over a surface that is lacking nothing. Consequently, Lyotard is able to claim that it is not lack that produces desire, but a certain organization and disintensification of desire, of libidinal energy, which produces a set-up, a *dispositif,* dominated by absence.[41]

The child's apparent loss is a gain; the subject (child) and the object (mother's breast)—*the this and the not this*—"are put in place under the name of *complementarities* whereas the movement of the segment, by slowing down, sediments them, centrifuges them."[42]

In representational thinking, these dichotomies appear as opposites; however, for Lyotard, these instances of signification and identification are caused by the slowing down of the libidinal band that allows the intensities to appear in the form of designation. The libidinal band or the unconscious works like a 'vast Moebian skin,' where it is rotating in continual, yet aleatory, motion due to the energies and intensities that are constantly charged and discharged.[43] Each event or singularity that takes place appears as a 'communicable trace,' which emerges through the effects of the primary processes displacement of the secondary processes.[44] Here, 'reality' is processual and full of potentialities that can be fulfilled or denied at any moment.

The repetition that is at work in a work of art is a product of both Eros and the death drive. This can be understood through Freud's theorization that in the subject there is a tendency to return to both pleasure and trauma in a memory of an experience. Similarly, in creation and production there is a tendency to return to destruction and disorder. In an organism, an object, an apparatus, or a partial body, both Eros and the death drive are at work, exerting their energies and intensities through forces of desire.[45] These investments of energy are manifested in mental events and memories of an experience in the conscious mind, but there are also desires that are

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[41] Lyotard, *The Lyotard Reader and Guide*, 29.

[42] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, 25.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Lyotard, "Painting as a Libidinal Set-Up," 79.

not acknowledged, energies that are at work that are unable to cross the threshold into consciousness.

Singularity and the Tensor

For Lyotard, if the idea of a totality has a negative function then its "corresponding positive term is, rather, *singularity.*"[46] Singularity, in Lyotard's sense, does not reduce an object or a thing a "single principle or meaning or cause (the great Zero),"[47] but is thought of akin to events which are unrepeatable, while at the same time full of multiplicities:

> [E]very intensity, scorching or remote, is always *this and not-this,* not at all through the effect of castration, of repression, of ambivalence, of tragedy due to the great Zero, but because intensity pertains to an asynthetic movement, more or less complex, but in any event so rapid that the surface engendered by it is, at each of its points, at the same time *this and not-this.* If no point, of no region, however small, can one say what either is, because this region or this point has not only already disappeared when one claims to speak of it, but, in the singular or atemporal instant of intense passage, either the point or the region has been invested from both sides at once.[48]

The tensor acts as a permeable surface in aesthetic moments, one that does not resolve differences, but which allows for multiplicities and fluctuations of energies. In signification, the tensor works as a site of tensions that allows for multiple interpretations and fluctuations in meanings. Rather than subordinate intensities and energies by representing something that is absent, the tensor opens up the sign into a heterogeneous network that allows for the ambiguities of 'energetic influxes.'[49] Similarly, in a work of art, the tensor is at work, allowing for differences and sites of intense singularity:

> [*E*]*verything is a sign or a mark, but that nothing is marked or signified*, that in this sense, signs are signs of nothing, not in the sense that they refer to a zero which would be what causes them to signify, but in the precise sense in which we have spoken of tensor signs: each thing and part-thing being on the one hand a term in a network of significations which are unremitting metonymic referrals, and indiscernibly, on the other hand, a strained singularity, an instantaneous, ephemeral concentration of force.[50]

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[46] Bennington, *Lyotard: Writing the Event*, 9.

[47] Ibid., 27.

[48] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, 15.

[49] Ibid., 56.

[50] Ibid., 69.

The transformative power of creation therefore works not to create a logical totality or meta-narrative that might resolve the tensions that are at work in aesthetics, but rather, this place of tension is a singular force that involves a multiplicity. Works of art are a site of paradoxes, rather than fixed structures, which demonstrates the processual and mutable force of Lyotard's aesthetics. When thought of as a heterogeneous and multiplied energy, the unique and indefinable force of a work of art is initiated into constant motion. As such, a work of art without an interpreter oscillates in space like the tensor, until a human interrupts, and slows down the tensor in a singular intensified moment.

Energy in the Death Drive

Desire manifests itself in both regimes as 'transformable energy'; and therefore, desire as both productive and destructive forces are positive discharges of libidinal investments.[51] This energy is the same energy that acts in accordance with the regulations of the system of desire in the regime of Eros. As such, the energy has the ability to be move, transform, distort, and deconstruct upon dissipation. The energy in the death drive is difficult to express positively in discourse, because language itself is situated within a regulated discourse, which places deregulation in opposition to regulation. Lyotard, when speaking of the libido under the regime of the great Zero, states:

> [T]he libido according to the other regime: here, we will call it a 'non-regime' because in this discussion we are speaking in a system of discourse which is also a regulated system, and because, we are consequently only able to speak negatively of this other regime (which is not regulated). We can only say that the energy which circulates according to this other regime is disordering, disorganised, deconstructing; we can only say it is dead (which is what Freud says). We can say only negative things about it, but this is because we are in a place from which this regulation by the zero or infinite of the drive can appear only as deregulation. In fact, this energy is the same, and it is no less positive than that which is channelled in the networks of the system.[52]

As such, the energy in the death drive might better be thought of in terms of an 'excess of positivity' rather than a negation of positivity.[53] It is not a lack that produces desire in the subject, but it is desire that "produces a set-up dominated by lack."[54]

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[51] Lyotard, "Painting as a Libidinal Set-Up," 79.

[52] Ibid., 81.

[53] Lyotard equates this idea to Nietzsche's "excess of *jouissance*." See: Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Painting as a Libidinal Set-Up," in *Textes dispersés I: esthétique et théorie de l'art* [*Miscellaneous Texts I: Aesthetics and Theory of Art*], trans. Vlad Ionescu, Erica Harris, and Peter W. Milne (Brussels: Leuven University Press, 2012), 81.

Geoffrey Bennington posits the continuity in Lyotard's conception of desire as *Wunsch* and desire as *libido*; "this positivity, knowing no negation, is inaccessible as such to language, which depends, constitutively, on negativity: in general, it is unrepresentable *except* insofar as it seems to disrupt the ordered theatre of representation."[55] The mutability of the set-up, energy that has the ability to act as both a producer and a disruptor, determines that representation and the death drive cannot be mere opposites, but exist in a realm of continuity. For example, if representation—i.e. linguistic signification—is a product of the force of libidinal energy, then it cannot be in opposition to desire as *Wunsch*, but "its apparent opposition to that energy is also part of the energy itself, one of its transformations."[56] Here, we can see that the libido and the energies that are at work do not oppose or contradict representation, but representation itself is libidinal.

If our conception of the energy that is at work is understood in relation to energy systems that are subject to thermodynamics, then a more amplified understanding of the processes that Lyotard is referring to must be interrogated. It takes an investment in energy to sustain order just as it takes an investment in energy to resist order. Invested energy is manifest in the life drive as organization and binding of energy and in the death drive as expenditure and discharged energy. The functions of the energy at work in the drives highlight the potentialities and the processual quality of the object:

> It is not at all a matter of *cleaving* the instances *in two*, this is the so-called 'labour' of the concept, it is, on the contrary, a matter of rendering their confusion always possible and menacing, of rendering insoluble the question of knowing whether a particular *Gestaltung* is an effect of life rather than death, if a particular flood, pulsional unbinding, is suicidal rather than therapeutic from the point of view of the apparatus which endures it, whether, on the contrary, a particular stasis, a particular fixation, a particular crystallization of a stable *dispositif* is amenable to palliative orthopaedics of mortiferous entropy.[57]

Order and disorder—conscious and unconscious energies—in the system are the result of these investments, this is not a duality, but a duplicity. The indiscernibility of the tensions on the libidinal band or skin that Lyotard illustrates is due to the forces of intensity that create motion in

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[54] Lyotard, *The Lyotard Reader and Guide*, 27.

[55] Ibid., 25.

[56] Ibid..

[57] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, 27-8.

the band.[58] Therefore, the forces of production and destruction in a work of art do not exist as opposites; rather the forces are mutually implicated into this transformed site of generation.

Mutability of the Set-Up

Desire in the regime of Eros is marked by its tendency towards production, creation, and generation of energy; it is the production of certain effects, a process that transforms energy in accordance with the rules and regulations of a particular apparatus. In Marxist theory, this is demonstrated by the idea that labour power underlies the system of capitalism. Under this theory, labour power enters into a regulative economic exchange, subordinated to the law of value. The energy of labour power thus works within the framework of capitalism; it operates within the law of values, it is "the division into units and the commutability of these units according to an extremely simple category, which is the equality of values (or quantities of energy or work)."[59] The set-up of capital works similarly to the energy and flows that are bound, organized, and put to work by the set-up of painting, and all other art forms for that matter. The problem of Capitalism is not a question of meaning, rather it is based on the transformation of energy and furthermore, the exchange of units of energy.[60] Lyotard attributes the connection between desire in the libidinal and the political economy to Freud's conception of how desire works:

> The important thing is energy insofar as it is metamorphic, metamorphosing, metamorphosed; for example, take the way in which the dream thoughts come to be transformed, manipulated, arranged, undone, broken, put back together, fiddled about with, squashed into manifest content; or again take the way in which energy comes to pass from a kinetic state of activity to a quiescent state.[61]

Capitalism, the production and exchange of goods, is connected to the production of intensities, which enables the flows of desire. The importance of how energy works in capitalism is consistent with the set-up's 'site of inscription' in a work of art; for painting there are multiple modalities of where this inscription takes place. The various forms, materials, supports, mediums, configurations, and places that have come to be categorized under the institution of 'painting' are explored in depth by Lyotard, for example, a canvas and paint; the body as paintbrush; the photographic apparatus, light, and film, and so on. These set-ups are organized

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[58] Ibid., 29-30.

[59] Lyotard, "Painting as a Libidinal Set-up," 81

[60] Ibid., 85.

[61] Ibid., 81-83.

connections of energy, channeling and regulating the entry and disbursement of energies and intensities in 'chromatic inscription.'[62] These modalities of painting, must be renounced, broken down, and multiplied to rid painting of its class, institutional, and structural functions, but as Lyotard posits that through a dilution of the 'pictorial region' and a deconstruction of its elements, energy will always be present.[63]

> Thus, on the one hand, repeating itself, this energy infinitely repeating positions, investments, insofar as they are captured in its set-ups; but also, diluting these set-ups, diluting the arrangements, the investments of energy, putting everything back into play by way of excess, liquidating all this, confounding it: energy both as order and disorder, as Eros and death drive, and both always together.[64]

The potential dissolutions of paintings elements is immense, however, it might be said the dilution of a work of art will lead to a dissolution of 'meta-languages' or theoretical discourses of art in general whose modality must "inevitably be linguistic."[65] In pictorial space there is a constant dilution, disordering, and energetic flux, which is simultaneously given order by analogous linguistic set-ups. There are two processes at work in the same apparatus, but it is not of concern to understand the meaning of these theoretical set-ups. Lyotard states that we must in turn:

> [T]ransform the energy at stake in what we call painting [. . .] in a type of *liquefaction*, in a kind of aleatory production [. . .] rather than attempting to resolve the question of painting in the sense of arresting its meaning, we would have to dissolve the question, in the sense of undoing its states, including theory as a 'stasis.'[66]

In linguistics there are numerous set-ups that are contingent on the multiple modes of enunciation, along with different tenses and the perspectives of the subject of enunciation. These modalities and aspects of linguistic enunciation have a grid like structure that control "*the direction of the energetic fluxes on the inscriptive field of language, which thus determine the binding of the libido with language as a surface of inscription,*" producing the effects of meaning.[67] This libidinal energy is then transformed and circumscribed into different modalities

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[62] Ibid., 93.

[63] Ibid., 83.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid., 89.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid., 97.

of language, for example, a novel, a myth, a play, a film script and so on. The language-like set-up or object results from "*a metamorphosis of libidinal energy into objects (here language), that is, concretions of quiescent energy.*"[68] Works of art when thought as a field of energy have the ability to ignite energies in both the conscious and unconscious mind of the viewer. The effect of this energy is transferred from the subject who encounters the set-up into "affects, emotions, corporeal inscriptions."[69]

The Tensor, Composition, and Silence

Lyotard's aim in *Libidinal Economy*, much like Deleuze and Guattari's in *Anti-Oedipus*, is to release desire from the binding structures of oppressive forms, such as the social forces of the workplace, the state, and the economy, and to liberate the flows of life into a cultivation of new intensities and energies.[70] Intensities are achieved by what Lyotard calls the 'tensor,' which are manifested in works of art; rather than find an end point in a fixed definition, like in signification; art acts as a vessel for the generation of 'libidinal effects.'[71] As Douglas Kellner and Steven Best posit in their discussion of *Libidinal Economy*, the tensor is similar to Kristeva's notion of 'semiotic,' the bodily drive that articulates language, "except that Lyotard is more interested in the proliferation and intensification of libidinal effects rather than merely the multiplication and dispersion of signification."[72]

The effects of the libidinal economy on aesthetic productions create intensities that either block or facilitate the flows of intensities and desire through their deficiency of intention and prescribed meaning. In Lyotard's writing, he provides a number of examples in art and politics that elucidate how intensities and flows of desire are liberated from the boundaries of representation. Cage's aesthetics are a valuable example for Lyotard's discussions of tensions and intensities in music, which he attributes to facilitating the intensities of noise and furthermore, provide libidinal effects.[73]

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[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Victor E. Taylor, and Gregg Lambert, eds, *Jean-François Lyotard: Politics and History of Philosophy*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 252-3.

[71] Ibid., 253.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Jean-François Lyotard, "Several Silences," in *Driftworks* ed. Roger McKeon (New York: Semiotext(e) Inc., 1984), 92.

Lyotard's discussion of silence and sound is based in and around Freud's conception of desire in relation to Eros and the death drive. Lyotard contends that "Eros composes music" in a regulated and systematic manner, whereas the death drive operates on an inaudible level, it is not heard, but is marked by its randomness, intense compulsions, and silence.[74] Lyotard posits, "this is because it is libidinal economy's deafness to the rules of composition, to the hierarchy of the organism."[75] Composition stays within the borders of regulated intensities as the death drive disrupts through excessive tensions that do not fit within these boundaries, these tensions account for "what Klossowski calls *intensities*, Cage *events.* Dissonances, stridences, positively exaggerated, ugly, silences."[76] Similar to articulated language, sound is bound through secondary processes insofar that it has no value as sound-matter, but is valuable because of its potentiality of relations within a system; the scale, the composition and rhetoric in which it is a part of, and the instrument that is used to produce the sound are all active components in a web of conceivable relations.[77]

Lyotard's statement "Composition is a desensitization of material," brings the hearing body into his discussion about the perception of sound or noise.[78] Desensitization refers to the notion that the body's sense and emotional response to a composition is diminished as its repeated exposure to the sound composition as a structured system becomes recognizable. The phenomenological body is the site or the threshold where sounds transform into music, where the liberated becomes bound, and where noise becomes sonorous, it is "a body that composes, a body possessed with Eros."[79] As such, composition works much like language, through a creation of boundaries and structures that produces a sort of musical-language, where the body is the site or 'filter' where noises are transformed into music. Yet, recognition of noises by the body is not always certain; through dissonances or tensions in scale, harmony, melody, notes,

[74] Ibid., 91.

[75] Ibid., 92.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid., 93.

pitch and so on, the body is unable to convert the noise into music, and therefore is faced with response filled with intensities and flows.[80]

When recognition is not immanent, the 'sensitization' of the subject to the sound material is tremendous, "requiring the virtual destruction of the filtering device (stimuli shield, says Freud)."[81] In this case, the body does not have a method to decipher and measure the flows of sound. Rather than perceive the composition as a whole and unified structure, 'intense singularities' work to facilitate and block the flows of energies and desire creating an intensified experience that surpasses consciousness. As mentioned earlier, these singularities take on multiple designations in different contexts, the event, intensities, tensions, but all point back to a singularity that is circumstantial; "no unity, no comprehensive unity, no composition is made with *this* sound, *this* singular intensity, but rather *in spite of* them. To hear this event is to transform it: into tears, gestures, laughter, dance, words, sounds, theorems, repainting your room, helping a friend move."[82] It is also significant to note that this singularity that Lyotard speaks of is not devoid of duration, but is bound up in the fragments of tensions and flows that it engenders.

Music as a device filters the flows and energies of sound, where libidinal investments act similarly to the structural grids in language, binding flows of certain noises and energies. Tensions in structured compositions are present, but rather than allow for a free flow of energies in the composition, the intensities are 'resolved.' The dissonances in this case are intentional and 'prepared,' which restores the composition into recognizable form for the listener, highlighting the structure of the overall composition. The transformation of the libido as energy into an overall totalization is reminiscent of the *fort/da* game that Freud posits. In the game, Freud's grandson tosses and retrieves a cotton reel, which is symbolic of the child's separation from their original libidinal investment with their mother. It is here that Lyotard asserts that desire as *Wunsch* is posited through the child's resolution of their displeasure, through charges and discharges of energies and intensities. Absence is the structuring entity of the game, and therefore shapes meaning of the event. Keith Crome and James Williams posit the relationship between the mother and child:

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[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

> Yet, in this instance, the account presupposes the very ordering of desire it seeks to explain, since the symbolic representation can only be instituted by pain and lack if the mother is already perceived as a person, a something separate from the child; and for that the child, too, must already be a totalized unity, an organised body, rather than the polymorphously perverse flux of libidinal energies that, elsewhere, Freud claims it is.[83]

As such, the dissonance, or displeasure, is resolved through totalization; "the dissonance is prepared: it is only subtraction," for the child's articulation and "repetition of *fort!* is dependent upon the repetition of *da*!"[84] Here, the desire that is at work is in the regime of Eros, it is universal, regimented by absence, and therefore becomes 'subjugated to knowledge.'[85]

Similarly, through hierarchies in sound of classical music, the ear is capable of resolving a dissonance through its anticipation of the next chord and prediction of the resolution and totality of the sound space. This resolution is how depth is constituted in the audible realm, whereas in visual space, the eye works across the figural to make sense of the images that it is receiving. In the audible, the ear works across the sonorous to make sense of the noise it receives, but the workings of desire and the death drive create dissonances that cannot be resolved, which creates intensities and a sense of unease. Lyotard notes the multiple set-ups that attempt to regulate these intensities:

> Surfaces of inscription (canvas stretched in its frame, stage set, tonal framework, offices and chambers of political deliberation and decision), these surfaces are themselves flows of stabilized quiescent libidinal energy, functioning as locks, canals, regulators of desire, as its figure-producing figures.[86]

A reflection on the work of Christiansen and Roth demonstrates the energetics of *libido-desire*, and the work of the death drive, which creates dissonances that are at work in the set-up in audible and visual art.

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[83] Lyotard, *The Lyotard Reader and Guide*, 30.

[84] Lyotard, "Several Silences," 96.

[85] Lyotard, *The Lyotard Reader and Guide*, 30.

[86] Lyotard, "Several Silences," 98.

ii. Henning Christiansen

Christiansen's Use of Repetition

In Henning Christiansen's *Perceptive Constructions*—which was discussed in detail in the previous chapter—the listener is confronted with what one might be tempted to call a structured or regulated system, through repetition in the form of ten seconds of sound and ten seconds of rest. Although this repetition can be thought of in terms of its practical and rational structures whose drive and energies seem focused on maintaining regularity of the system, upon closer inspection the repetition reveals the inconsistencies that are present in the composition.

Through repetition of a system that includes both sound and silence, the listener is confronted with a field that tends to be understood as a predictable pattern that is decipherable and that can be made sense of. However, this sense does not account for the desire that is at work in the primary processes of the mind; through instances of careful repetition on behalf of Christiansen, the listener is confronted with an onslaught of inconsistencies that are at work in the ordered system. Diederichsen notes, "It may be that the notes are repeated, but this duplication itself is never repeated in the same way."[87] The repetition that is at work here is evidence of the persistent effects of the energies of the death drive on the musical composition.

The work, which is initially perceived as a unity and totality, moreover, one that can be comprehended by the least compelled or 'knowledgeable' viewer, is permeated by intensities that are at work beyond consciousness. The death drive permeates the work, as the repetition of sound and silence insert the external environment into the work; much like in Cagean aesthetics, other phenomena have an impact on what sound is heard and how it is heard. As Geoffrey Bennington suggests in his discussion of libidinal aesthetics "the death drive disrupts constancy and tends towards the unsettling of unity – towards zero or the inanimate, towards infinity, (towards a reference point other than that of the apparatus in question)."[88] This disruption of order becomes what allows other phenomenon to effect the work; the death drive is constantly at work to bring forth chaos. The repetitions allude to the inconsistencies of repetition in the sense that there is a slight change of structure of the chords on behalf of Christiansen; it also points out inconsistencies that are a result of human error, a repetition can never be the same.

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[87] Diederichsen, "Components, Contrasts and Concatenations," 174.

[88] Bennington, *Lyotard: Writing the Event,* 24.

Christiansen refers to Gertrude Stein's poems and writings in his text "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" where he discusses the relationship between how the ear and the eye perceive auditive and visual forms. For Christiansen, "The longer the form is repeated, the clearer become the factual micro-deviations among the performers, and the deviations the listeners themselves attached to it."[89] His discussion of various visual and auditory works that use structure and repetition in their form enhances his conception of the aesthetic experience. Christiansen, referencing Stein's famous sentence "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," states:

> For the ear a repetition is not a repetition is not a repetition is not a repetition is not a repetition is not a repetition is not a repetition.[90]

The sentence appears as a monotonous repetition; however, it can be read through several perspectives. Nielsen perceives the first half as a statement concerning reality, whereas the latter half might be understood as a comment on the linguistic makeup of reality.[91] The sentence taken as a statement about reality becomes an instance of purity for Christiansen, not a totality, but a purity in the sense that it instigates a reaction in the viewer and an 'interesting resistance' that activates a repetition of difference.[92] Rather than seeing this sentence as a mere reduction of purity, the sentence might be better understood through Nielsen's interpretation of Stein's sentence:

> Nielsen does not conclude that such linguistic patterning reduces communication and content. Instead he reads the sentence as a philosophical statement about language and reality, as well as about what is endlessly the same and endlessly different. And thus the text is seen to voice an entire ontology, which in its utter simplicity, exemplifies the poetical power and philosophical depth of Stein's writing.[93]

The poetic power that Christiansen elaborates on is derived from the inconsistencies that are brought forth in the repetition. The addition of the word 'not' in his version of Stein's sentence elicits a nuanced, yet effective understanding of how the ear perceives. The ear experiences sound as immaterial, unable to be perceived as a total composition. As a result, the mind has the difficult task of distinguishing between a sound played in a moment that has passed and the next

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[89] Christiansen, "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," 92.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ørum, "A Trail of Roses," 237.

[92] Christiansen, "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," 93.

[93] Ørum, "A Trail of Roses," 237-8.

sound in a sequence of notes, highlighting the transitory element of sound. Christiansen notes the complexity that is present in a presumably simple composition:

> But, as I perceive it, it is a multi-track simplicity: after all, not everyone experiences a note or a line in the same way. So in this simplicity itself there is an indirect compositeness which in my ears is much more interesting than a purely external complexity. This is a law of nature – the greater the simplicity, the greater the indirect fascination.[94]

This sort of fascination and intensity creates a strong connection to the death drive, as the apparent simplicities are riddled with energies that reinforce the inconsistencies that are present in a repetition. Collaborator Bjørn Nøgaard attributes the opening up of both time and space to Christiansen's text as he compares audible repetition to Poul Gernes' painted visual repetition:

> This gave the performance a space – a space in which everything could be elements, the simplest possible order in time, like Poul's stripes, or when you made a ground out of a material at the school and drew a cross over it – order and chaos.[95]

The work of Eros maintains constancy in *Perceptive Constructions*, ten seconds of music and ten seconds of rest; the repetition of this pattern appears as a regulated system. The death drive in this particular system appears as a disruption of this system, it is the flows and fluxes of energies which allow for infinite circulation and deconstructions that allude to the irregularities in repetition. The viewer is confronted with a composition that provokes a type of energetic reaction and libidinal investment. The energy in the regime of both Eros and the death drive activate a vital response, one of order and chaos, where energy is transformed and manipulated through "return, repetition, dysfunctions, blockages, stases" in the apparatus.[96] The death drive directs the apparatus towards a purgation of the system that attempts to support its constancy and emancipates this regularity by its inclination towards an organic material or primary state.

to Play to Day, opus 25

Inherent to the medium of performance art is the reliance on the human body as a site, a material, or an element in the work of art, along with its temporal aspects and its reliance on theatricality and representation. For performance artists, the focus shifts from the final work to the processes of the body and human gestures; "from passive visualization to action, and amidst this process

[94] Christiansen, "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," 91.

[95] Nørgaard, "To Play To Day," 468.

[96] Lyotard, "Painting as a Libidinal Set-Up," 81.

the artist's body materialized as a visual element."[97] The body, in Christiansen's works, can be understood as serving two purposes; as an orchestrating role in the performance and as a form of visual material. This not only challenges the notion of a work of art as an elevated object in space, but also implements "the artistic subject as an acting presence."[98] These processes are in continual motion as the artist's body is both active and passive, present and absent; oscillating to create the dynamic and temporal structure of the performance. It is difficult to distinguish between whether Christiansen's contribution should be recognized for its compositional or its visual properties.[99]

It is impossible to discuss Christiansen's artistic practice without mentioning his vast contributions to actions, happenings, performance, theatre, or demonstrations. The ephemeral, impermanent, and often times fleeting nature of these events, along with the temporal aspects of music and performance in general, point to Christiansen's complex and dynamic relationship to art and aesthetics. Klaus Gronen posits the relationship between Christiansen's implementation of objective and subjective time:

> Christiansen influences the recipient's subjective experience of time with his musical resources such as the alternation of sound and silence, persistent repetitions or intense, enduring sounds. Objective, measurable time is thus broken down by sound. This means that the subjective perception of time is accelerated by very fast sequences or extended to an extreme degree by long, persistent sounds and repetitions.[100]

Furthermore, Christiansen's use of various sites for the performance of his compositions and his subsequent appendices to the performance, highlight the instability that is present when relying human performers as an aspect of the work. The accumulation of subtle variations of the performance initiates the ongoing nature of the work, as the composition appears to be dormant after the performance yet can be re-activated at any moment.

Stein's writings hold great influence for Christiansen's artistic practice; her experiments with syntactic patterning over the content of language in her compositions remained highly significant to how Christiansen treated composition throughout his career. Tania Ørum suggests

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[97] Sanne Kofod Olsen, "Henning Christiansen's Hybrids," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed. Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley, (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 343.

[98] Ibid., 344.

[99] Ibid., 345.

[100] Gronen, "Fluxus Meets Joseph Beuys," 427.

a number of instances that Stein's writings have an impact on Christiansen; his concert piece *to Play to Day, opus 25* (1964), his orchestral composition *A Rose for Miss Stein* (1965), his essay "a rose is a rose is a rose: On auditive and visual form," and a series of performances with his wife *Very Fine und Sein* and *Very fine and mine – kissingpiece* (1994).

The title *to Play to Day* is borrowed from Stein's *Play* (1911); Christiansen's Fluxus style score is written for piano, orchestra, and vocalists; these music elements are interrupted by "textual readings, gesticulations and interactions with the audience (such as throwing caramels)."[101] It has performed a number of times and within each framework are subtle variations; for example it existed as a composition score as early as 1964, it was first performed on Danish radio in 1966, it was performed in front of an audience, and later, partial elements of the action would be performed in collaboration with other artists. Additional texts were added by Christiansen to the piece under an appendix titled *to PLAY to DAY – from my memoirs*, along with various translations into other languages (the original score appeared in English), drawings, handwritten materials, and poems.[102] These various versions of the performance allude to the ongoing nature of the work, as an apparatus that is re-activated through each interaction; it is a dynamic and enduring progression.

Typical of a Fluxus performance, it is difficult to list all of the movements and elements in the score. Rather, it is more important to illuminate the oscillating presence of both chaos and order in the set-up, along with the investment of libidinal energies that are crucial to the ongoing vitality in his compositions. Carsten Juhl, in his discussion of Fluxus and the historical timeframe from which it emerged, determines that the form or the set-up of Christiansen's works are of secondary importance to the investigations. He attributes this to the continual motion and energies that traverse his works:

> Henning Christiansen's investigations have to do with such a preparatory bubbling and rumbling, the absolute opposite of an orchestrated parade, and so not an assemblage or an admonitory manifesto either. But ongoing investigation, ongoing thematic transformation, ongoing transfers, conversions, exchanges.[103]

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[101] Hindsbo, "Henning Christiansen - Composer of Time," 65.

[102] Ibid., 65-66.

[103] Carsten Juhl, "The Squaring of Fluxus," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed. Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley, (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 490.

The musical element of the piece might be perceived as a fixed structure, however the texts, gestures and audience participation add an uncontrollable aspect, full of distortions that contribute to the libidinal investments at work in the piece. These distortions do not conceal the force of libido-desire in the figural, rather the force is "energy that folds and crumples the text and makes an artwork out of it, a difference, that is, a form."[104] Each musical movement has a single word that is assigned to it, akin to a signifying system; for example, "Men" (But), "Hvad" (What), "Når" (When), "Traktor" (Tractor), and "Kavaleren"(Bachelor).[105] The composition titles are reminiscent of Stein's portrait poems in *Tender Buttons: objects, food, rooms* (1914); the titles appear to have no linguistic connection to the musical movement, just as Stein's texts were not descriptive of the object mentioned in the title. For example, it is difficult to represent "But" in a musical composition. In only one instance, does the title refer to the graphic image that is on the score; in the score for "Tractor," the musical bars form images that are similar to imprints of tractor wheels.[106] However, the titles tend to "function[] more as formal syntaxes based on the minimal or concrete titles," where the title refers back to the same musical movement.[107]

Repetition is present in the composition through repeated intervals that correspond to each movement's title. Certain titles are only performed once, while other titles are repeated in between movements. After the performance of the composition on the radio, Christiansen activates the performance as a text in the form of a poem in his appendix to the performances, *memoirs*; he records the order of the titles (capitalized) and inserts "enigmatic" phrases (not capitalized):

> HOW and PEWTER and WHAT and LETTER and WHAT and COAT and WHEN and FIVE, ten, fifteen no advance? and BUT and PULPY and BUT and HIGHLY and BUT and OPPORTUNISM and rollers and tumblers and toddlers and jumpers and BUT and WHEN and BACHELOR and M.D. complete satisfaction guaranteed or forfeit the baby and HOW and BONZO and BUZZARD mousetraps, rap traps, party liners, spouses, compatriots, allies, and WHAT and ATHENIAN and moreover and SO and ATHENA complete confusion and WHEN and MENTIONABLE and BUT and HOW and INGATHERING and WHEN and SEESAW clothes horse and WHAT and MORNING it gets early late this evening and HOW and TRACTOR and WHEN

[104] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 9.

[105] Hindsbo, "Henning Christiansen - Composer of Time," 66.

[106] Tania Ørum, "A Trail of Roses," 241.

[107] Hindsbo, "Henning Christiansen - Composer of Time," 65.

> and INEXHAUSTABILITY and BUT and and and and and and and if ever and wherever and whenever insofar as in case not unless.[108]

Variations of this text are created for other performances of *to Play to Day*, as there are deviations in the order and form of the composition each time the work is performed. The improvisations in the performance interrupt the formal makeup of the compositions, where a title corresponds to a piece of music. In the score, the pianist is instructed to perform various actions, for example "show the audience such alarm-clock and count,"[109] and read aloud texts, for example "Ask the audience: Any Question? If there are any question [sic] then cast a caramel to the questioner. If there are no questions. Then Eat the Caramels Yourself."[110] There is the potential for deviations in the performance due to the audience and the performers participation. For example, the score gives the performers some discretion in tempo, at times they are able to choose how many times a movement is played, and due to the scores handwritten and ambiguous form the performance becomes open to interpretation.[111] The energy that is at work in the piece is open to forces that exceed Christiansen's control; the energies and fluctuations in the piece are a result of the death drive, which works to distort and deconstruct the regulatory set-up that is the score of the performance.

The instructions in a performance, the score in a piece of music or the set-up, act as a template for how the performance will be enacted. Nicholas Rescher's discussion of the processual quality of nature involves a consideration of the musical score:

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[108] Ibid., 66.

[109] Quoted from the score for: *to Play to Day*. See: Henning Christiansen, "to Play to Day (Opus 25)," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed, Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 48.

[110] Quoted from the score for: *to Play to Day*. See: Henning Christiansen, "to Play to Day (Opus 25)," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed, Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 49.

[111] See: Henning Christiansen, "to Play to Day (Opus 25)," in *Henning Christiansen: Komponist, Fluxist og uden for kategori* [*Composer, Fluxist and out of order*], ed, Karin Hindsbo, trans. James Manley (Højbjerg: Foreningen HC, 2011), 45-50.

> Although processes themselves are always temporal, they can in general be given a temporal representation. Thus the mathematical process for solving an equation can be represented by a formalized instruction sequence, or a process of musical performance can be represented by the score that specifies how the performance is to go [. . .] the score of a piece of music conveys the instructions in line with which a process – the performance that realizes it – can be produced by players proceeding to do the appropriate things.[112]

As such in a score where the processes are indeterminate, the possibilities of the performance become multiplied and thus its spatiotemporal framework leaves room for variation unfolding over time.

Rather than importance being placed on a singular event that is happening in time, the action transforms the notion of time in music; Christiansen's compositions place significance on the idea that "musical activity happens in time, and at the same time music has a potential to 'absorb time.'"[113] This circular tendency is constitutive of Bergson's heterogeneous interpretation of time; rather than time understood as a linear progression, it becomes 'unhinged'(according to Deleuze).[114] This interpretation of time is explained by Karin Hindsbo in her discussion of Christiansen's conception of 'lived time':

> We are thus operating here with a time that is not subordinated to movement and 'quantifiability', but which manifests its own dynamic nature. This time is not produced by a series of moments where one supersedes another, but is to be conceived differently. According to Deleuze we are "too accustomed to think in terms of the present". As a result we regard the present as the existing, and the past and the future respectively as something that once existed and something that does not yet exist. But here we make the mistake, according to Deleuze (and Bergson) of confusing being with being present. The present *is* not, it is pure becoming, whereas the past has ceased to act, but not to *be*. In "lived time" the past and present thus for Deleuze (and Bergson) do not denote 'two successive moments, but two elements that *co-exist*.[115]

The past "does not cease to be" and the present "does not cease to pass by," instigating a circular view of time; the libidinal band has been set in continual motion.[116] The accumulation of various iterations of the performance highlight the ongoing and contingent nature of the work, not a

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[112] Rescher, *Process Philosophy*, 24-5.

[113] Hindsbo, "Henning Christiansen - Composer of Time," 67.

[114] Ibid., 68.

[115] Ibid., 67.

[116] Ibid.

totalizing performance relegated to a particular time and place, but a processual entity whose energies are in continual flux.

The temporal fluctuations that are present in a work of art initiate a duplicity that is symptomatic of many of Christiansen's works of art. *to Play to Day* sets in motion a concrete progression of time. In the radio version of the performance, a tape recorder plays Christiansen's voice reading aloud: "I am number one, I am number two, I am number three, I am number four,"[117] and so on; this movement presents a sequential and linear understanding of time, in the regime of Eros. However, the voice is often masked and obscured by other movements in the piece. Simultaneously, the work sets in motion deviations in the set-up that are displaced to the audience and the performers; "we find two opposing yet interwoven motions: one away from the subject and yet towards it, and one towards the subject and yet away from it."[118] Through reliance on the audience and the performers as elements of the performance, the score ignites the energies of the death drive that work to distort and displace the regulatory set-up of the performance. As a result, the score has no ideal state as a result of the uncertainty of the participation of the audience and performers, the fluctuations and variations in the framework of the work ie. score, performance, appendices, drawings and so on, and due to a temporal structure that is set in continual motion.

GREEN-EAR-YEAR

A discussion of Christiansen would not be sufficient without mention of his yearlong performance, titled *GREEN-EAR-YEAR* (1984), which prompted his lifelong dedication to nature. During the length of this performance, Christiansen often painted his ear green, which was a call to listen to nature; in addition to a green ear, his works from that period, including drawings, sketches, and performances with recurring green motifs, all urge the viewer to "listen to what is out there."[119] *GREEN-EAR-YEAR* has an inconceivable amount of subsidiary elements, iterations, and instances and that are impossible to list in this short analysis. This period of his production is, at the very least, an indication of his belief in highlighting the transformative materials through his musical and visual use of animals and plants.[120] It is in these

[117] Ibid., 68.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Hindsbo, "Preface," 20.

[120] Diederichsen, "Components, Contrasts and Concatenations," 174.

terms that we can understand Franscesco Cavaliere's belief in the connection between the ear and nature:

> For me it is a kind of spell that is operated when one colors his ear. Christiansen created a magic potion that attracts all the sounds with green properties. He makes us almost imagine that anything coming into contact with the painted auditory organ takes the same color, transforming itself; a sort of inner mutation triggered by that gesture reflected in the body.[121]

The potential of the green ear is apparent as it has an impact on anything that it comes into contact with; the energies and forces of the ear are in a circular motion with the energies and forces of the sonorous green matter in nature. Green in this sense is the source of life.[122]

One of Christiansen's most recognizable traits that came out of this happening was his 'green violin,' which represented an aesthetics and art production that was oriented towards nature. The violin could be considered a ready-made object "inasmuch as it had been removed from the realm of musical instruments and placed in the context of object-based visual art,"[123] this being a result of Christiansen's alteration of the colour of the violin, but also its lack of strings. This call to the processual nature of the world is manifested in a number of his works from this period: "He integrated sounds of nature in his compositions to make nature audible, and called these works 'Musik als grün'" [Music as green].[124]

As a result, out of this period came a number of nature-oriented compositions, such as *Symphony Natura, opus 170* (1985), which was partially recorded in the Rome zoo in collaboration with Lorenzo Mammi; it was both "a symphony for and with the animals in the Zoological Gardens in Rome."[125] This composition is a combination of electronic recordings and animal sounds, in which the recordings of piano and other musical instruments were added onto the recordings of the animals at the zoo. The work is a site of transformation "from unarticulated

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[121] Franscesco Cavaliere quoted in: "FRANCESCO CAVALIERE/TOMOKO SAUVAGE (I/D/Jap/F) Green Music," Xing, accessed January 16, 2017, http://www.xing.it/media/5600/orig/5519_press_release_cavaliere_sauvage_1812017.pdf.

[122] Gronen, "Fluxus Meets Joseph Beuys," 418.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Hindsbo, "Preface," 20.

noise to 'natural sound,' from birdsong and everyday ambient sounds to classical instrumental music."[126]

The tension between natural sounds and electronic sounds, nature and culture, are akin to the transitory skin that Lyotard posits of the tensor. Mark Harwood's text describes the inner workings of Christiansen's *Symphony Natura*:

> First of all, I think of Bruckner's great symphonies modelled after nature, from the days of flourishing orchestral culture, great feelings and gazing into the soundscape. Which was always the landscape of a concert hall and musicians dressed up as penguins, many violins. Originally most ideals of instrumental sounds were derived from animal voices or other sounds of natural phenomena. The violins, for instance: someone found out that stretched out, dried bowels could produce sounds, there is a funny saying: "My bowels are crying". The recordings taken from the Rome Zoo and reworked were then played back via a multi channel, 8 speaker set up to the very animals originally recorded. Another recording was made of the response they made to the playback of their own voices resulting in the final work of 'Symphony Natura.'[127]

Through Christiansen's intense and meticulous relationship to nature and recorded works, and through his persistent repetition of sounds, it is evident that his works never cease, and exist in a continual state of flux. Christiansen reworks sounds over and over again, as he instigates the same material in multiple compositions, performances, and recordings to show the transitory and mutable nature of sound. This reveals that although sound can appear fixed in a composition, it's happening as a mutable force can be re-activated at any time; the adaptable and relentless energies of sound are constantly at work.[128]

Klaus Gronen posits the profound relationship that Christiansen has with everyday materials and sounds:

> The manifestation was the point of departure for further reflection by the spectators, who were supposed to be made aware by this 'disillusionment' of the psychological mechanism ingrained by experience and the dominant worldview. Things that in themselves were readily comprehensible were forced into a new context, and prompted the viewers to revise their way of perceiving the world, to take a view of things that extended beyond the normal and opened a path into the realm of the creative imagination.[129]

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[126] Gronen, "Fluxus Meets Joseph Beuys," 418.

[127] Mark Harwood, "Nature and Culture: An Introduction into the Music of Henning Christiansen," *Surround* 2: (April 2014), accessed January 16, 2017

[128] Gronen, "Fluxus Meets Joseph Beuys," 425-6.

[129] Ibid., 427.

The path that is cleared by Christiansen is one of intense tension between mathematical ordered principles and an impulsive individual subjective experience of time. The tension between these two realms is activated as his works bring to life the energies and flows of objects and events that are often relegated to the background. These mundane objects and banal activities—like throwing a stone or hitting a hammer or flipping a light switch or hitting a coffee cup—stimulate the viewer to think about these objects and events in a more complex and attentive way.[130] The potentials of the animals and the everyday materials come to life in his works, as the viewer examines the sound material and attempts to see what lies beneath its surface.

[130] Bolt, "Objective Problems and Impersonal Qualities," 309.

iii. Roth

Literaturwurst

Lyotard explains that the life and death drives that are at work are continuous, and that the multiplicities of investments of energy are duplicities. Production and destruction in works of art, through the use of ephemeral and organic materials, are subject to these investments in energy. The tensor is exemplary of works of art that are both ordered and chaotic, which transform into a continual site of generation; a site of intensity that is particularly illustrated in the work of Roth. His tendency to use materials that are in flux, where an active component of their generation and growth is the same component that leads to their destruction and disintegration, constitutes his reliance on both Eros and the death drive.

Perhaps Roth's most profound artist book project is *Literaturwurst* [*Literature Sausage*] (1961-1974). His first *Literaturwurst*, was given to his friend and artist Daniel Spoerri; later, he tried to sell the idea as a Fluxus multiple to George Maciunas, but his offer was declined. The 'sausages' are made from traditional recipes, including herbs, spices, and intestine casings; but in place of meat, Roth uses shredded books. The labels from the cover of the book were cut and pasted onto the sausages. This series is an ironic means of "processing" language or text; Roth plays with the destruction of books and magazines as a form of food. The sausage motif introduces the idea of literature as a form of nourishment; the physical fuel of food draws parallels to the consumption of books, which opens up the possibilities in "ingesting and digesting information."[131] The idea that the literature can be digested, similar to an actual sausage also points to languages destruction: "they are ingested, but then they are excreted. In Roth's eyes, nothing lasts; it all ends up as shit in the end."[132] Roth's peculiar use of books suggests his interest in the dissolution of boundaries: "By traditional definition, a book is a relatively stable object—a text on a sequence of pages bound together—but in Roth's hands it was freed from any constraints."[133]

The books that Roth engages with indicate that he either did not like the book, or he envied the book because of the successes of the author. As Roth states of his lifelong loathing for Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Friedrich Schiller, whose writings Roth turned into sausages, "I

[131] Suzuki, ed., *Wait, Later This Will Be Nothing*, 22.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid., 10.

was so full of the envy of these guys that I thought, I will get them—I will get at them. And I think that I almost did this consciously. I am getting at them now. I am writing away these books, just to spite them."[134] In accordance with Roth's complex relationship to chaos and order, it is typical that Roth create works that are full of contradictions and constant negotiations; one might gather that many of the texts used in the *Literaturwurst* might be the effect of jealousy combined with admiration.[135]

During the end of the 1960s, Roth returned to the idea, creating twenty-five more sausages. In the 1970s he expanded the content of the sausages to incorporate prominent German magazines and newspapers. The *Literaturwurst* series climaxes in the creation of *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegels Werke in 20 Bänden* [Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Works in twenty volumes] (1974), which incorporates the entirety of Hegel's collected works. In it, Hegel's collected 'library' is reworked into a butcher shop window display, turning books into sausages. The sausages were hung in a wooden frame in two rows, which is reminiscent of a butcher's window display or "a slaughterhouse." Each of the labels from Hegel's collected *Werke* were pasted onto the coinciding *Würste*, which is indicative of Roth's uneasy relationship with language as a system that structures our experiences:

> [T]he titles of the works are not merely denotative or connotative, but also form an indispensable part of the works' content and concept. Their linguistic aspect transforms the reading of the formal and material aspects into a joke, the point of which, ironically, is to expose the absurdity of the formal process. Roth evidently used the titles in order to highlight a conceptual reversal in his production and to make a decisive break with both rational design principles and restriction to the purely concrete that was experienced visually.[136]

Formal process and logic become inhibited by Roth's implementation of materials that are bound in a process of decay and rot. The structure of the novel is one that will be in continual flux, it is no longer a text to be 'read,' but an image to be seen, experienced, and digested.

The slaughterhouse, which represents an animal's demise, is also the source of nourishment for humans. It is a place of tension between destruction and production, the life and death drives; where the function of one cannot be removed from the other. One of Hegel's

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[134] Dieter Roth quoted in: Sarah Suzuki, ed., *Wait, Later This Will Be Nothing: Editions by Dieter Roth* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 22.

[135] Suzuki, ed., *Wait, Later This Will Be Nothing*, 16.

[136] Gelshorn, "Inside the Space Between Word and Picture," 60.

famous ideas in his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* [*Lectures on the Philosophy of History*] (1837) introduces the concept thinking of "History as the slaughter-bench."[137] At the same time, Hegel also puts forth that history is the growth of reason, which would be a site of contention for Roth. By parodying Hegel's written works in a slaughterhouse motif, Roth continually mocks Hegel's very elaborate and positive system.

Lyotard's discussion of the 'perversion' of the book, in his text "False Flights in Literature," includes a reference to Dieter Roth, whose engagement with books and literature alludes to important associations of the textual and the figural through the creation of an object full of intensities. Lyotard poses the question: "What happens when you biblioclasts start treating the surface of inscription, a surface that is precisely what is repressed in writing, especially since the advent of industrial printing?"[138] Here, Lyotard alludes to the dilution of the set-up, as Roth generates new works through his unique and playful use of literature. The tension between the formal literature of Hegel and Roth's *Literaturwurst* becomes apparent as the original book is enclosed in a skin that sets the book into a downward spiral of openness, creating a book that facilitates growth. The book is no longer held with high regard as a respected piece of literature, but is set in motion as an object that exhibits living change.

The support, or set-up, that once held the book together, is no longer significant; the intensities and force of the figural render Hegel's syntax, unreadable. Lyotard notes the relation between discourse and the figural in the distortion of the book: "The book indiscriminately serves as a vehicle for both. It is not itself a libidinal object: it is the procurer, the 'go between' for passions and reasons."[139] The referential function of the discourse and the figural are displaced and challenged as Roth's *Literaturwurst* remove the practical and diverse functions of Hegel's collected works. This formation of a 'book-object' is set in motion as the *Literaturwurst* "surge forth as a surface that hides, designates, and even signifies nothing."[140] The immense surface of the book extends to include not only that which it comes into contact with—the herbs,

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[137] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1902), 22.

[138] Lyotard, "False Flights in Literature,"125.

[139] Ibid., 126.

[140] Ibid.

spices, sausage casings—but spreads to include the impulses from the mind to the eye of every subject that come in contact with it.

Transformative Potential of Organic Materials

According to Lyotard, in all of the art forms there are set-ups which regulate and structure the form or materiality of a work of art, yet the forces of the intensities that are at work disrupt and distort these set-ups. This is exemplified most readily in Roth's works with foodstuffs; in the 1960s he introduced organic substances into his objects, multiples, and graphic works.[141] This actively introduces time as an aspect of his work, as they are left in a state of flux and decay; the unpredictable nature of decay as an aspect in his works serve to question aesthetic ideals, as he emphasizes beauty in the nature of destruction and uncertainty.[142] Chocolate, cheese, milk, bananas, spices, and meat are foods that are constantly revisited by Roth, making visible the processes of change and transitoriness that pervades his aesthetics.[143] Roth himself notes the beauty of decay in discussion of his graphic works with sour milk:

> Subsequently I always pour sour milk over pictures that aren't beautiful or that don't work out. Sour milk is like landscape, ever changing. Works of art should be like that – they should change like man himself, grow old and die.[144]

Roth's *Staple Cheese (A Race)* (1970), an exhibition of thirty-seven suitcases filled with unwrapped cheese at Eugenia Butler Gallery in Los Angeles, emphasizes not only the inclination towards death and the organic in its processual form, but highlights the multi-sensory elements of decay. Included in the exhibition were wall-mount 'cheese races,' where various cheeses were pressed into the top halves of plastic panels, and were allowed to drip to the bottom of the support in order to win the race.[145] As the cheese rotted, it emitted not only a foul smell, but emitted a gaseous substance, the effect of which was similar to that of laughing gas.[146] The ongoing effects of the work, in the form of both visual and nonvisual elements, address the

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[141] Dirk Dobke and Laszlo Glozer, ed., *Dieter Roth: Unique pieces* (London: Hansjörg Mayer, 2002), 203.

[142] Ibid., 204.

[143] Danto, "Dieter Roth," 282-3.

[144] Dieter Roth quoted in: Ira G. Wool, "Homage to Dieter: A Rot(h)iana of Annotated Anecdotes," in *Dieter Roth* (David Nolan Gallery, 1989), 10.

[145] Dobke, *Roth Time*, 130.

[146] Wool, "Homage to Dieter," 13.

inability to locate an original state of the work, as it circulates in continual flux. The rot that permeates the work is continual, in motion, and is an effect of the processual force of nature.

His numerous works in chocolate also exude a great intensity in decay and rot; this might be due to chocolates unstable state and its strong connotation to both desire and repulsion, life and death "given its unmistakable resemblance to excrement."[147] Among his works with chocolate, often in the form of multiples, are: *Kleiner Gartenzwerg als Eichhörnchenfutterplastick* [Small garden gnome as squirrel-food sculpture] (1969) a chocolate sculpture that was meant to be eaten by squirrels; *Karnickelköttelkarnickle* [Bunny-dropping-bunny] (1972) a sculpture that looks like a chocolate bunny, but is made of rabbit droppings; *P.O.TH.A.A.A.VFB* [Portrait of the artist as a *Vogelfutterbüste* (birdseed bust)] (1968) a self-portrait of the bust of the artist as an old man cast in birdseed and chocolate; and *Löwenselbst* [Lion self] (1969) a bust of the artist as a lion case in chocolate. Furthering his use of chocolate, in the 1990's he revisited his self-portrait series in *Selbstturm* [Self tower] (1994) and *Löwenturm* [Lion tower]; here, room-height glass shelves were stacked with five chocolate busts and each successive shelf bore the weight of shelf above.[148]

The original idea for the self-portraits came from James Joyce's novel *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), whose contents Roth rejected as kitsch; he believed Joyce was too sentimental and further condemned the valorization of the artist as a genius.[149] The format of the title is also reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp's readymade, *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919) – whose title has a similar function to the rebus. When pronounced in French offers a parodic defacement of the Mona Lisa (when said aloud it sounds similar to 'Elle a chaud au cul,' roughly, 'She has a hot ass,' which might elude the reason she is smiling). In order to further denounce Joyce, someone who championed youth, Roth created a self-deprecating bust that envisioned his future as an old man, one filled with inevitable transformation, decay, and rot.[150] In classical art, a traditional bust would be constructed in marble or another somewhat stable medium, as it is meant to

[147] Suzuki, ed., *Wait, Later This Will Be Nothing*, 24

[148] Dobke, *Roth Time*, 256.

[149] Ibid., 116.

[150] Suzuki, ed., *Wait, Later This Will Be Nothing*, 25.

withstand the test of time.[151] However, the inevitability of the death drive and its distortions is readily visible in Roth's work as due to multiple forces in nature, the bust are in a continual state of flux. As noted in the catalogue for the exhibition, "Fluctuations in room temperature, insect activity, and changes in humidity expose the sculptures to a steady process of decay [. . .] the ravages of time should not be arrested."[152] The motif of digestion recurs in these works, as the birdseed is eaten by birds, digested, and excreted into a new form; as a result, the work of art enters a transformed state that is again uncontrollable and lives on beyond the material decay of the 'original' object constructed by Roth. "Referring to inevitability of his own aging and bodily decay, Roth reminds us again of the unstoppable power of rot and the inevitability of destruction."[153] Here, the certainty of destruction in turn, generates new works of art.

Roth's embrace of destruction and rot in his works is most apparent through *Schimmelmuseum* [Mould museum] (1998) in Hamburg. The museum, an extension of the Dieter Roth Museum, is located in an abandoned coach house that was intended to be demolished to create more space for Roth's private museum. Instead, the building reactivated Roth's interest in decay and rot; the building is a testament to Roth's dedication to "the process of decomposition as a formative element."[154] Roth preserved a considerable amount of the interior deterioration; he emphasizes the peeling plaster and mould by placing frames around parts of the walls: "For Roth, the tiled, wallpapered, or painted sections of the wall, with their traces of use and deterioration over the past ninety years, were 'found pictures.' They too are subject to change, simply through the corrosive effects of mildew in the damp room with no climate control."[155] The works of art that are housed in the *Schimmelmuseum* are dedicated to Roth's decay art and dominate much of the space; *Selbstturm* and *Löwenturm*, which are recreations of his sculpture *P.O.TH.A.A.A.VFB*., along with new iterations of his portrait towers, such as *Zuckerturm* [Sugar tower] (1994). His old decaying works transform into new works that exist in never-ending flux, "The cracking and collapse of some of the glass shelves due to the weight of the material stacked

[151] "wait later this will be nothing: editions by dieter roth," MoMA, accessed January 16, 2017, https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2013/dieter_roth/index.html.

[152] Danto, "Dieter Roth," 283.

[153] Suzuki, ed., *Wait, Later This Will Be Nothing,* 25-6.

[154] Dobke and Glozer, *Dieter Roth: Unique pieces,* 19.

[155] Dobke, *Roth Time,* 258.

above them also belongs to this process [. . .] The towers are left to deteriorate at the artist's own wish, and as a result their appearance is steadily renewed."[156] This renewal, due to the consistent work of the death drive, is the site of destruction and creation, a tension that is forever oscillating. Other works of art in the 'museum' include his spice works, which are landscape drawings using spices, along with a chocolate kitchen and a sugar kitchen, which are used by Roth to make the casts, but are also works of art in themselves.[157]

Laszlo Glozer's vivid description of the house demonstrates the intensity of Roth's project, while alluding to the ambiguities that pervade his art:

> Decay is blossoming. Porous, brittle, discoloured – after a short while the patina of decay infests the chocolate objects. The sugar casts 'perspire'. A tall compressed object cut in half is crumbling away. Fissures and increasing erosion enrich the large, volcano-shaped 'heap'. This, however, does not reveal anything about the outcome, or about the total stretch covered until the decay is final. On lifting a glass cover, a pungent odour emanates from a piece of cheese over thirty years old. The samples on the walls display decay in varying degrees, spanning the last hundred years.
>
> This environment is a time warp, and in this sense it is indeed a museum of the decay presented here, kept in a state of suspense and aesthetically utilized as a monumental tableau of evanescence. Roth's pity description 'Schimmelmuseum' alludes to the organic transformation processes, to the teeming life within the house, even if mould is actually the least prominent phenomenon.[158]

The ideas that pervade his works are transformed into new forms through his relentless repetition; his artistic output recycles, revisits, reabsorbs, and reactivates the energies and flows that are his works. "Roth chooses a process-based approach with an open-ended outcome; the portrait figure can shall virtually repeat itself endlessly, without limitation, as long as the tower sustains, and beyond."[159] The accumulation that is present throughout the house along with his incessant use of the portrait motif show the transformative nature of his works; they are not fixed entities that are to be housed in a museum, but are living works of art.

Gardenskulptur and the Transitory Nature of Aesthetics

Paradoxes permeate Roth's works of art through application of materials that exude life and death, and growth and decay; however, these tensions are not fixed opposites, but are

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[156] Ibid., 256.

[157] Ibid., 257.

[158] Dobke and Glozer, *Dieter Roth: Unique pieces,* 30.

[159] Ibid., 29.

multiplicities presented through a singular tensor. Lyotard's conception of the duplicity of the tensor works to initiate two outwardly contradictory functions into generators of new works of art. Roth's processual aesthetics are highlighted as the change and flux of the sculpture is apparent at each passing moment. Roth's belief in the transience of all matter highlights the processual capacity of aesthetics, "the sketches, design, and video documentation of the construction become part of the work of art, in what might be considered a self-contained system of recycling."[160]

Roth's portrait bust, *P.O.TH.A.A.A.VFB*., is demonstrative of the forces of the libidinal investments in works of art as it is transformed into another open-ended work of art, his *Gardenskulptur* (1970-?). Over the next thirty years Roth and his son Bjorn worked on the sculpture, transforming, adding, and revising its form and content. He also allowed for natural change that occurred by its relentless exposure to the earth's atmosphere around it. Works of art cultivate their own life, as Peter Rainer comments:

> The piece, which continues to change and grow, has almost developed an organic life of its own, as if it were constantly adding and shedding cells and skins. When the work is exhibited, Roth's son and collaborator, Björn Roth, brings along the workshop where *Gardenskulptur* is reassembled and monitored—and, not surprisingly, that workshop is part of the art.[161]

The drawings, sketches, and all other objects that might relate to work of art were placed in and around the sculpture, so that its growth was both a result of natural and human intervention. It is impossible to describe each and every change that the sculpture endured; however its current size, in relation to the single portrait bust, might indicate the growth that has occurred over time (130 feet in 2000). Over the years, *Gardenskulptor* has been taken down, reinstalled, and moved multiple times, but the processes of change are apparent in each iteration. Roth himself called the garden a "dis- and re- assembly project,"[162] allowing for fluctuations, additions, and subtractions, which are reflections of the sites where the sculpture was housed. The open-endedness and indeterminacy of its evolution is even more apparent through Roth's incorporation of others into his artistic processes. Unlike most artists, Roth allowed for his assistants to add to his work at

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[160] Dobke, *Roth Time,* 159.

[161] Peter Rainer, "Things Fall Apart," *New York Magazine,* April 12, 2004.

[162] Dieter Roth quoted in: Dirk Dobke, ed., *Roth Time: A Dieter Roth Retrospective* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2003), 242.

their discretion, and before his death, handed the project over to his son Björn, who has now recruited his own son, Oddur, to assist in its longevity.[163]

Roth's engagement with the ephemeral materials, the use of multiples, his numerous collaborations, and various iterations of works initiates growth, decay, and excess, and decenter the idea of a single object in time and space. His acceptance of atemporal and durational forms initiate works whose energies disrupt unity and create a dissonance that is a place of tension between destruction and production, the life and death drives; where the function of one cannot be removed from the other. The vitality and flux that is apparent throughout his practice is one that is due to the work of the libidinal investments that permeate his works.

An aesthetic experience that is vital, open, and in process, puts the work of art in direct contact with the transformative energies of external occurrences. This is true of the intense emotion that is felt when viewing, listening, thinking, or speaking of a work of art. The multiple temporalities of experiencing an event are an interwoven process. The work of art as experienced in-person, through documentation, videos, or recordings, through dreams or memories, or through discourse, is continually collapsed, distorted, and re-activated through the force of desire on the libidinal band. Temporal instances do not constitute a work, rather, duration and atemporality allow for vitality, fluctuation, and energies; each event is open to intense reception and has more potential experiences than any structure can afford it. As such, no singular interpretation can accurately capture events or aesthetic experiences; the unbound force of the figural continually produces intense affects, perpetual displacements, and energetic potentialities.[164]

[163] Ibid., 244.

[164] Lyotard, "Inaudible. Music and Postmodernity," 213.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

The Singularity of Works of Art

Upon embarking on this project, and throughout my writing process, it was my greatest intention for the focus of this discussion to be on Lyotard's libidinal aesthetics in relation to the works of Roth and Christiansen. His aesthetics, whose greatest power might be that it is devoid of a central focus and therefore devoid of a mechanism for interpretation, is one that shares many of the same elements as the works of art I have discussed. However, as I have come to read and re-read, think and re-think the vast impact of his discussions, I have come to realize that that project is one that surpasses my ability. As such, my work progressed into a study of *Discourse, Figure,* the foundational work of *Libidinal Economy*, which has proved to be no less demanding, but has allowed me to explore aspects of Lyotard's libidinal theory that I might not have understood otherwise. As this writing along with my ideas about works of art remain open-ended and processual it is only sensible that I close, or rather, suspend my discussion where I began.

The most profound and perhaps intense discussion that I have come across relative my interest in the works of Roth and Christiansen and the ideas that they engender comes from Lyotard's discussion of the tensor in his libidinal aesthetics. This discussion is found in Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy,* which is a work that acts out his frustrations with modes of critique and the limitations of structures through the implementation of flows of energies and intensities that pervade his writings. His book is not only an indication of his beliefs, but puts into practice his ideas about the force of disruption of structures through his rather intense and sometimes violent shifts in thought and discourse. One of the difficulties with Lyotard's thought, especially with *Libidinal Economy*, results from the nearly insurmountable challenge of thinking and writing clearly about Lyotard's aesthetics without succumbing to the lure of recasting its key ideas as representations and presenting them discursively. Lyotard does not merely want to create another critique, for that would be reverting back to thinking through theory, but aims to show the intensities that pervade theory and to evoke theories underlying forces.

Although his work does not provide a solution for the problems that have been presented, I believe his writing and thought is indicative of the way that works of art and aesthetics in general can be thought. Much like in a work of art, the flux and potentialities of his writing are not rooted in meaning or definitions, but generate an influx of energies that involve the workings of the primary processes. His pulsational approach to writing, along with the thrust of his line of

thought is akin to the integration of a sense change and flux that both Roth and Christiansen so readily embrace. Iain Hamilton Grant offers a description of the unbounded leaps that Lyotard's thought takes:

> Lyotard's vertiginous text is articulated by the accelerating aleatory sweep of the tensor sign, sketching the very ephemerality of its ungraspable flight. Lyotard's sentences may be long, but they are intensive rather than extensive.[1]

This sense of progression and movement in Lyotard's thought is one that I have attempted to trace in the works of art discussed, suggesting ideas for how we might come to understand the processual nature of a work of art that is in perpetual flux. The ambiguity of meaning that these works present is not one that I set out to solve, but it is the energetics and affect that I have attempted uncover and trace how its processes might work.

Roth and Christiansen present bodies of work that initiate complex relationships with language and structure, and as a result of this experimentation are in a continual state of flux. Roth's experiments language as a structuring entity, introduces the deceptive nature of language, one that is continually working within the paradox of discursive and figural realms. Christiansen's introduces structure and order into his compositions to demonstrate the inconsistencies that are present in the audible realm along with the subject's inability to perceive the composition as a whole or totalizing entity. Their implementation of structure to show disorder is reminiscent of the workings of desire in both discursive and figural realms.

Furthermore, Roth and Christiansen's connection to the primary processes, and their subsequent implementation of the energies and forces that the unconscious demands, create a wavering sense of unease and instability, which is initiated through their works of art. The dense relationship between chaos and structure that both of these artists evoke demonstrates the impact that desire, Eros, and the death drive have on works of art and a subject of experience. The desire that is at work in the drive is both the effect of constancy and disorder, a tension that is perpetually generating new works.

Freud's theorizations on libido-desire, introduce vitality into works of art, which are no longer perceived as a static entity, but processual and variable, full of energy and forces which continually precipitate new events. Lyotard's conception of the singularity of an event, when applied to works of art, introduces a new way to think about the nature of process and change,

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[1] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, x.

rather than a fixed object or event in time and space, works of art are a singularity that resists and distorts any attempt to reduce it to a universal meaning; it is unbound. Stuart Sim notes the nature of the events intensity in his discussion of Lyotard's conceptualization of a singularity:

> For Lyotard, an event is an occurrence that is not consistent with any pre-given system's attempt to place it, organise it, within a meaningful logical structure and closed system of meaning. The event cannot be bound in and explained away, but rather resists, escapes and overwhelms those theoretical systems (such as dialectical materialism) that attempt to account for the event's uniqueness and intensity as a singularity, through recourse to a pattern or narrative of undifferentiated unity whereby any effect is always attributable to a cause.[2]

In an attempt to come to terms with Lyotard's thought, without reducing any event to a resolved unity, my explorations have sought to further reflect on the effects that processes of change, repetition, and flux can have on a work of art, a subject of experience, an artist, and our conceptualization of aesthetics as such. Rather than place importance on the meanings of the works I have presented, my aim is to generate new discussions for how we can understand the continual and processual nature of works of art, along with the effects of the primary processes on works of art, subjects of experience, and artists.

And so, it is quite fitting that my paper continually generate new questions, a process that is symptomatic of thought whose main aim is towards the acceptance of theories of change, processes, and flux. Since my conception of a work of art is dependent on its continual state of motion, it becomes senseless and unproductive to attempt to conclude this paper with some sort of universal statement about works of art, or aesthetic experiences, or aesthetics in general. Moreover, what is most important to my conception of works of art is the acceptance of processes of change and indeterminability and to highlight the perpetual expansion and potentiality of works of art, rather than an attempt to understand or instill meaning in the work.

[2] Sim, *Lyotard Dictionary,* 191.

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