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PLAN

TEXTE

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> The work [of art] that gets accomplished is . . . the work which reaches its viewer and invites him to take up the gesture which created it. [1]

A Few Prefatory Words

1 At the heart of this article is a fairly straightforward assertion : that literature has a trans-verbal level at which it affects us as a work of art. Hence discussing a novel means bringing to the fore not only its overt narrative function but also its covert artistic function : a consideration of the work in light of its aesthetic intention. Following the phenomenological traditions of Roman Ingarden and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, I argue that aesthetic intention does not determine the significance of the art object, which is presumed to be dynamic

within a spectrum of meanings. Rather, aesthetic intention takes into account the circumstance of the novel having been actuated into form by an "artistic gesture." This "gesture" is not physical : it is a metaphorical motion referring to the artist's actuation of an aesthetic intention using one or another medium to give an artwork its perceivable form. In painting, this "gesture" can sometimes be traced through a work's visible brushstrokes or formal composition, but in literature such "gestures" can appear beyond the literal text and remain invisible even while they are experienced in the literary work. The conception of such a "gesture" is meant to incorporate the insights of literary and aesthetic theory, along with poststructuralism, in a critique that allows for structural analysis to also pursue a reconstituted significance. What appears below is more a program of the problem than a full treatment of its implications – a stretching of the canvas, so to speak. But I believe that the articulation of this kernel has a value in itself even if the full unraveling of the subject is yet to come.

The Expressive Gesture in Merleau-Ponty

2 The notion of gesture appeared in Merleau-Ponty's earliest published work, *The structure of sehavior* (1942), originally published during the German occupation of France. In a chapter on "The relations of the soul and the body," Merleau-Ponty wrote that, "since the soul remains coextensive with nature," acting upon the things themselves is for the subject "mak[ing] an intention explode in the phenomenal field in a cycle of significative gestures [2]". He then made the kind of enigmatic statement that followed his philosophy until his death in 1961 at the age of fifty-three :

> One can say [...] that the relation [...] of the intention to the gestures which realize it, is a magical relation in naive consciousness ; but it would still be necessary to understand magical consciousness as it understands itself. [3]

3 Already in this early thesis we see Merleau-Ponty undertaking an inquiry that he would follow through to the end of his life : to under-

stand the mystery of being on its own terms. Or, to put it slightly differently, to introduce mystery into knowledge. And the concept of the gesture is central to this linkage.

4 The notion of the "gesture" appeared repeatedly in Merleau-Ponty's following books and essays – in *The phenomenology of perception* (1945), "The war has taken place" (1945), "Cézanne's doubt" (1945), "A note on Machiavelli" (1949), "The child's relations with others" (1951), "Human engineering" (1951) – but it received its fullest treatment in artistic terms in the seminal essay, "Indirect language and the voices of silence" (1952). This essay is as important in terms of the historical circumstances of its publication as it is in terms of what it says about communication between human beings. In terms of gesture, he focuses on the various usages of language, writing that in order to understand speech "we have only to lend ourselves to its life . . . and to its eloquent gestures.[4]" Language "make[s] meanings exist as available entities by establishing them at the intersection of linguistic gestures.[5] " Analyzing a film of Matisse in the action of painting, he brings the gesture to bear on art : "By a simple gesture [Matisse] resolve[s] the problem which in retrospect seem[s] to imply an infinite number of data. . . Everything happen[s] in the human world of perception and gesture.[6] " Merleau-Ponty then describes the gesture as an "emblem[] of a certain relationship to being" – solidifying its symbolic significance[7].

5 He then puts forth a conception of historical contingency through the conception of a painter's practice : "the historicity of life . . . lives in the painter at work when with a single gesture he links the tradition that he carries on and the tradition that he founds.[8]" Thus he developed gesture into an embodied metaphor of that "magical relation" between the consciousness of mystery and the consciousness of understanding in and of the world :

> Already in its pointing gestures the body not only flows over into a world whose schema it bears in itself but possesses this world at a distance rather than being possessed by it. So much the more does the gesture of expression, which undertakes to delineate what it intends and make it appear 'outside,' retrieve the world.[9]

6 At the same moment that the gesture appears as the soul's intervention in what the consciousness perceives as the world, that same gesture also brings the world into the soul. It is a dialogue or a duality between consciousness and being which reaches beyond understanding into the very flux of experience. And it is this essential relation between what the consciousness beholds as the mystery of the self and what it beholds as the mystery of the world that the artist reifies aesthetically with every artistic gesture.

Ut Pictura Poesis : Art as a Communication About the World

7 Plato and Aristotle both use the analogy of painting to characterize the poet as a "mimetic artist." The same goes for Horace, who set down the famous and controversial formulation *ut pictura poesis* : "A poem is like a painting.[10] " This formulation has had an enduring influence on aesthetic thought, as Henryk Markiewicz has shown by setting down its history from the an-cients, to antiquity, through the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Romantic, and Modern eras across the Western world[11]. According to Markiewicz, however, while both *pictura* and *poesis* were often understood in terms of their pictorial or imaginational aspects, the actual statement related to "conditions for reception" and "the thesis that poetry – like the other arts – evokes sensuous presentations.[12]" Yet Markiewicz dismisses the juxtaposition of painting and poetry as a "free comparison" and, perhaps because of this, fails to comment on their relatedness in terms of aesthetic intention.

8 Henry James, on the other hand, asserts in "The art of fiction" that "the analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist is . . . complete.[13] " He continues :

> Their inspiration is the same, their process (allowing for the different quality of the vehicle) is the same, their success is the same. They may learn from each other, they may explain and sustain each other. Their cause is the same, and the honour of one is the honour of another. Peculiarities of manner, of execution, that correspond on either side, exist in each of them and contribute to their development.[14]

9 Nowhere does James point to verbal and visual analogies. It is in their "inspiration" and "process" and "success" and "cause" – all elements belonging to the artistic process rather than mimetic function – that literature and painting are the "same." For James, the analogy between painting and literature is not, as Auerbach might have put it, in their both being representations of reality, but in their analogous germination and emergence as works of art.

10 Painter Mark Rothko, an active writer on the subject of art, maintained that a work of art "is a communication about the world to someone else.[15]" Apologizing for using a "vocabulary [that] was formed a good time before [his] painting vocabulary was formed," he offers this "recipe for a work of art" :

> 1 - There must be a clear preoccupation with death [. . .] Tragic art, romantic art, etc.
> 2 - Sensuality. [. . .] It is a lustful relationship to things that exist.
> 3 - Tension. Either conflict or curbed desire.
> 4 - Irony. This is a modern ingredient [. . .]
> 5 - Wit and play . . . for the human element.
> 6 - The ephemeral and chance . . . for the human element.
> 7 - Hope. 10 % to make the tragic concept more endurable.[16]

11 Painting is not a representation of these elements, it is made up of them : they are its "ingredients.[17]" Tragedy, romance, tension, conflict, desire, sensuality, lust, irony, wit, chance, hope – these elements sound like the repertoire of a novel rather than a painting : certainly a Rothko painting. That is because in *Oedipus*, for instance, the tragedy is apparent in the relationship of the represented actions whereas in Rothko's *No. 8* (1952) it is abstracted into the relationship between lines, shapes, and colors. And while Rothko takes recourse to the *modesty topos* to explain his use of these non-painterly terms, his training as a painter along with his prolific writings on art suggest he does not lack vocabulary – painterly or otherwise. Rather, he may have been apologizing for the circumstance that in painting itself there is no equivalent for tragedy – there is only the abstract and difficult notion of "tragedy in painting."

12 Rothko continues by saying that the resulting picture is "involved with the *scale* of human feelings[,] the human drama, as much of it as

[he] can express."[18] That is, his paintings are an "expression of the human drama" and as such are a "communication about the world" in which the human drama unfolds. And this way we are exposed, perhaps, to the non-pictorial underside of *ut pictura poesis* : as painting is a communication about the world, so poetry is a communication about the world. Yet their similarity is not strictly mimetic but rather relational and aesthetic-intentional – each in its own way but both as mediums of art.

The Flesh of Art

13 As an artist the novelist is united with the painter insofar as they both participate in the practice of art as "the provocation of a search for meaning that is constrained by the work of art without necessarily being determined in its results.[19]" Their media of execution are obviously different and yet throughout the history of Western aesthetic thought they have been and continue to be coupled : even after it has become clear that neither one need necessarily deal with what we recognize as pictures or images. What they share, I have argued, is an artistic function, which can be so central to a novel that we find Joseph Conrad referring to *The arrow of gold* (1919) as "a piece of creation depending . . . on actual brush-strokes" and "a new departure in [his] art.[20]" When Conrad describes literature in painterly terms, just as when Rothko describes painting in literary terms, they are not merely using convenient images to express something that has not yet been properly conceptualized. They are using the kind of metaphorical language that, as Lakoff and Johnson wrote, "may be the only way to highlight and coherently organize [specific] aspects of our experience" – using aspects that are apparent or experienced overtly in one art form to discuss analogous aspects which are unapparent or experienced covertly in the other[21].

14 The use in literary criticism of metaphorical language that conjures up painting – like "brushstrokes" and "portraits" – alerts us to other notions borrowed from music and archi-tecture, theater and dance, as well as newer art forms such as photography and cinema : motif, tone, pace, rhythm, arch, structure, foundation, scene, frame. A narratological term like *focalization*, for example, may be considered to have photographic and even cinematographic overtones. Again, when

we borrow terms from one artistic form to describe properties in ano-ther it is not because these art forms always have overtly perceivable similarities but because some art forms reveal certain properties, giving them their apparent form, while being made up of other properties that are inherent in them formlessly. A novel may reveal tragedy more apparently than an abstract painting – but that does not mean that painting has no tragedy. Our borrowing of terms from one artistic medium to describe another is not a question of convenience or lack of terminological specificity : it is a reflection through a seeming metaphor of how we actually experience those arts.

15 It would seem, then, that all forms of art share an unspecified cluster of general pro-perties that reflects the artistic function in various ways : the ephemeral nonconcrete quality of *artness* [22]. This artness arises from the intentional aesthetic imitation, simulation, and/or replication of the way we sense or perceive the world, cognize it in terms of what we call experience, and then organize this "experience" in various forms. Yet, like significance, this artness is neither fully determined by the artist nor fixed within the concrete material form in which the artwork appears. Rather, it is the halo that arises from an intentional aesthetic object whose significance transcends the strict bounds of the intentional act that led to its coming-into-being. Different forms and traditions of art are invoked by artists through whom, among many other elements, this artness is embedded in the work of art.

16 Painting might be said to imitate our organization of sight through visual signification, poetry our organization of impressions through language, music our organization of sound through harmony, dance our organization of motion through movement, architecture our organization of space through construction. The novel might be said to imitate our organization of events through narrative as expressed in language, theater our organization of action through drama, which incorporates both the narrative and performative functions, and cinema the organization of sight and sound through audiovisual means, creating the art form of moving photography and often combining it with the narrative and performative functions [23]. All of these arts can be understood as imitating the coming to terms with time, process, and change.

17 Yet our real-world experience, along with our real-world organization of that experience, is not always split into clear-cut categories : we sometimes organize space through smell, or events through sound. We also "see" things that do not involve sight, as when Socrates says that "[p]eople who don't see well are often quicker to see things than people whose eyesight is better," or when Henry Miller, in an essay reflecting on his own practice as a watercolor painter, writes that "being blindfolded, you develop the tactile, the olfactory, the auditory senses – and thus *see* for the first time [24]." The separate senses are located in a single body, and can be experienced as distinct yet simultaneous sensations – that is, distinguishable yet interconnected by the *flesh that senses* and the *(un)consciousness that processes* those sensations. In the same way, the separate arts are not determined by the categorical exclusion of apparent forms : a painted object is experienced visually but, since it is created in time and by the proxy of touch, it also preserves those non-visual sensations within itself as an artwork. As intentionally aesthetic applications of the mimetic function – which is an imitation of what is observed in the world – the arts, even when they are experienced (or sensed) as distinct art forms, are connected by the aesthetic equivalent of what Merleau-Ponty called the flesh of the world : the flesh of art [25].

Distinguishing Literary Mimesis from Aesthetic Intention

18 Studies of literature, through Auerbach and beyond, relate more often to its mimetic function as "representation of reality" than to its artistic function as "aesthetic intention." Yet the mimetic function is missing from Gérard Genette's definition of an artwork : "the specific and, therefore, defining feature of works of art is . . . that they proceed from an aesthetic *intention.* [26]" Indeed, as Thomas Pavel has argued, "while it is right to see mimesis as essential for understanding what fiction is, it is nevertheless wrong to see mimesis as adequate for understanding what fiction does. [27]" The question I want to pose, therefore, is what it means to discuss the novel in terms of its artistic function : reaching beyond "*mimesis* as *fiction*" or the "*simulation* of imaginary actions and events" to the transverbal elements that make the novel a literary work of art [28].

19 The conflation between aesthetic intention (art) and mimesis (imitation) stems in part from Plato's seeming elision, in *The republic*, of the inherent value of the artistic (aesthetic-intentional) act. Since Socrates compares the effects of painting to the effect of a mirror – collapsing both the power of the craft involved in the creation of a painting and the intention involved in holding up a mirror to the world [29]. He expresses this refusal not in terms of intention, but in terms of mimesis, since in his context the representational arts are necessarily mimetic. Hence Socrates's rejection of the mimetic function is often assumed to be a rejection of the artistic function – conflating two nonidentical notions. *The republic* is not, however, Plato's only statement on either the poet or artistic intention. In *Phaedo*, Socrates, awaiting execution, himself appears as a poet : "what induced you to write poetry," Cebes asks Socrates on a visit to his prison cell, "you who had never composed any poetry before, putting the fables of Aesop into verse [30]." The words "put into verse" are a translation of "enteinas tus logus" – incorporating the ancient Greek word most closely resembling present-day "intention" : "*enteinas* [31]." So Plato's dialogues do include the articulation of an actuated aesthetic intention outside of the mimetic function.

20 Aristotle not only inherited this notion of aesthetic intention, he also reinforced it by including the Socratic dialogues in his examples of "literary representation [32]." But for Aristotle, too, this intention was fused with pictorial mimesis : "if someone daubed [a surface] with the finest pigments indiscriminately," he writes, "he would not give the same enjoyment as if he had sketched an image in black and white [33]." There are two pairs of element being compared here – fine pigments and black and white, on the one hand, and daubing indiscriminately and producing an image, on the other. The weight of the distinction lies just as much, if not more, on the difference between *indiscriminate daubing* and *(deliberate) sketching* – which again are questions of aesthetic intention and not mimesis [34]. So while the two are fused within a single expressive act they still have disparate essential qualities.

21 For several weeks upon understanding this I roamed the halls of our university, grabbing unassuming colleagues by the shoulders, and asking : *What is mimesis* [35] ? ! ? With those who did not immediately run away, or else suggest that perhaps I should "speak to someone,"

the issue of mimesis in literature was usually left at the conventional discursive level : mimesis as imitation, representation, mimicry, copying, or, in one case, the impression of an action or image. Yet René Girard conceived of mimesis in non-pictorial terms with his notion of "mimetic desire [36]." This notion goes a long way toward conceptualizing literary mimesis as something other than the presentation of images that signify possibly-existing objects, sensations, or situations. It also emphasizes the primacy of perception that is integral to the application of the mimetic function. And while it does not take into account the possibility of a pre-mimetic nature with desires of its own, what it does clarify for us is that there is a potential mimetic link between observing the world and introducing the actuation of an intention into that world. It thus suggests that rather than the representation of an image or action, mimesis can act as a medium for actuated intention.

22 But intention can be actuated in terms of phenomena other than drives such as desire. It can also manifest itself as creative expression which is actuated in one or another form. And just as the replication of identical genetic makeup does not create two "identical" human beings, so the "imitation" of a form does not create an "identical copy" of that form. Rather, when a form is imitated, it creates a new instance of that form. Given intention, that new instance has the potential to become an iterative original, just as gymnasts learn their movements by imitating a teacher yet become masters by introducing their own intention into this imitation and bringing it to athletic heights. Hence within the word "imitation" there already lies all the potentiality of simulation, repetition, extension, adaptation, elaboration, refinement of a variety of phenomena that appear as the expression of human being in the world.

23 Paul Ricoeur intimates the iterative function of mimesis within our lives when he writes that repetition "means the 'retrieval' of our most fundamental potentialities, as they are inherited from our own past, in terms of a personal fate and a common destiny [37]." For Ricoeur this "repetition" is synonymous with narrative as "authentic" or "genuine" historicality, whereas I would maintain that narrative is only one of several forms of organizing experience that can be potentially repeated [38]. Hence the function of "establish[ing] human action" extends into repetition of a variety of creative forms [39].

24 One such form is the novel, which incorporates the mimetic function in terms of the nar-rative form. Yet the novel is also fiction, which is an imitation of the mimetic function – mimesis to the second degree – and creates a "real" function of its own order [40]. Moreover, the novel is also linguistically mimetic in the sense that, through the "vehicle of *mimesis*," it turns language in literature from "an instrument" to a "means of creation [41]." The linguistic, narrative, and fictional functions are all fused within the novel, and are all turned into means of creation through the mimetic function. And so literary mimesis, rather than the imitation or representation of an image, becomes a medium for aesthetic intention.

A Novel Is – and Is Not – a Narrative

25 In a slim volume titled *The architext*, Genette, at that time still one of the central figures of so-called classical narratology, made this curious assertion : "we know that a novel is not solely a narrative and, therefore, that it is not a species of narrative or even a kind of narrative [42]." Genette had set out to clarify some issues in genre theory by revisiting the Aristotelian method and tracing out the way in which it came to be gradually misrepresented over the history of Western literary criticism. And yet this brought him to the assertion that a novel is not a "species" or even a "kind" of narrative. At that point, he stopped further inquiry into the issue : "this is all we know," he wrote after the lines above, "and undoubtedly even that is too much" – a dramatic termination to an equally dramatic claim [43].

26 Genette eventually did explore the implication of this claim and defined a "literary work" as "a (verbal) object with an aesthetic function" and literature as "a genre whose *works* constitute a particular species defined by the fact that, among others, the aesthetic function is intentional in nature (and perceived as such) [44]."When the "aesthetic function is intentional" it becomes an "artistic function." Yet that the findings of *Fiction and diction* were relegated largely to literary analysis, without an exploration of aesthetic theory. Genette eventually set upon a series of aesthetic explorations in *The Work of art* (1997) and *The aesthetic relation* (1999), expanding in many ways on the legacy left by both Nelson Goodman and Ernst Gombrich, but

never bringing its findings to bear on the novel as a literary work of art.

27 Since a work of art is an *actuated* intentional aesthetic object, the question of form is paramount to its coming-into-being in the world. Indeed, Niklas Luhmann argues that in art "a form can be used as a medium for further formations" – that is, a form can be the vehicle of a work of art for new iterations of the imitated form [45]. Taking David Herman's broad account of narrative as "a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change," it should follow that a novel is such a "coming to terms" in narrative form [46]. In the novel, aesthetic intention is actuated through, among other things, the imitation (repetition, application, adaptation) of the narrative form, creating a literary work of art. Genette's claim that a novel is "not" a narrative, then, seems like a provocative way of implying that it is, rather, the imitation of a narrative, used as an artistic medium, highlighting its aesthetic rather than mimetic function. What he seems to say, essentially, is that novel is not a narrative the way that a painting is not a pipe [47].

28 Indeed, Nietzsche claimed that Plato "bequeath[ed] the model of a new art-form to all posterity, the model of the *novel* [48]." And as we saw, Socrates believed that, aside from educational or hymnal verse, the literary arts should be diegetic. The notion that the novelistic art form reflects Socrates's preference for the diegetic form fits well with Genette's taxonomy of the novel as narrative discourse. But narrative discourse, whether "real" or "fictional," is nonetheless an application of the mimetic function in terms of form [49]. And the imitation of a form is not "fictional" : it is a new instance of that form regardless of whether its events and actions are "simulated" or happened "in fact." And Aristotle foregrounded the mimetic function within the diegetic form by including the Socratic dialogues in his designation of literary representation. So by imitating (repeating, applying, adapting) the narrative form, oral or written, a novel itself becomes a narrative. What we end up with is the claim that a novel is "not" a narrative because it is a work of art alongside the claim that it "is" a narrative by dint of imitating the narrative form.

The Paradox of Art

29 An artwork's meaning, according to Luhmann, depends largely on *formal* differentiation : "a medium – the material of which the artwork is crafted [. . .] – can be used as form, provided that this form succeeds in fulfilling a differentiating function in the work [50]." A novel, which is a work of art, is nonetheless a reformation of the narrative form : our gateway to both its aesthetic signification and its spectrum of significance vis-à-vis the world. What this illustrates is our experience of a novel as an oscillation between its narrative function and artistic function, as well as its alternating meaning effects and presence effects [51]. It thus reveals to us that the pro-cess of appreciating a novel as an artwork has at least two uncollapsible phases.

30 Considering not only the narrative but also the artistic function of the novel can improve our use of critical mechanisms involved in the apprehension of the novel's spectrum of significance :

> The medium of art is present in every artwork, yet it is invisible, since it operates only on the other side – the one not indicated – as a kind of attractor for further observations. . . .

> One may well imagine an artwork that has . . . a precise congruence of two inverse forms that overlap one another. . . . The formal asymmetry necessary for observation is cancelled in symmetry. One can only oscillate between the two sides. . . We have, in other words, the precise image of a logical paradox . . . [T]he meaning of such a figure – of its form – must be sought in the clue that allows for unfolding this paradox and reintroduces asymmetry into the form [52].

31 In the case of the novel, I would argue, the "visible" or overt side is the narrative whereas the "invisible" or covert side is the artistic. This notion is further complicated by the fact that the narrative form is in turn made apprehensible through the medium of language (which is itself in turn made apprehensible through the written trace). As we saw above, and as can be seen in numerous other theorizations, literary language is distinct from directly signifying or propositional language [53]. The novel, as a covert artistic medium, "artifies" its overt medium of expression – language – turning it into literary language.

But it is still artistic even when its language is made simple, suggesting that its deeper artistic qualities can lie in something other than language. We can look at the example of Philip Roth's *Deception* (1990), in which an author named Philip Roth interviews various lovers in his writing studio. This short novel has little or no expository text and consists almost exclusively of dialogue. The language imitates spoken language so that its literariness is deemphasized. The stakes are also unclear because the cha-racters discuss each other rather than the problematic of their shared situation. The novel's artistic gesture appears at the end – with the last dialogue. The author conversing with his wife has discovered his notebooks full of conversations with women and confronts him about his infidelity. The author insists that these dialogues are fictions made up while sitting alone in his studio. The wife does not believe him – the conversations seem too real. The novel's bare language and syntax foreground Roth's artistic gesture : his construction of a literary work wherein the tension comes from the very question of whether literary mimesis represents actual or invented reality. The "invisibility" of this artistic gesture comes from there being no linguistic marker for this actuated aesthetic intention. At no point does the text tell us that the author is putting his marriage in danger by writing so well. These stakes only appear in the scene where they are portrayed – the novel's effect on its readers coming from the structure of the dialogues rather from any of the actual language that appears on the page. To do this Roth has to use his linguistic craft to downplay the literariness of his prose. By doing this, Roth's manages to emphasize the artistic gesture's emergence from the narrative form : the novel's deeper covert artistic medium. Not every "artistic" aspect of a novel is necessarily covert in this way. An "aesthetic intention," which leads to an artistic gesture, can also be actuated in its overt language. The "aesthetic" relates the immanence of the linguistic medium and the "intention" to the immanence of human consciousness. The artistic gesture can be made "visible" though linguistic craft – which is indeed an art of its own and expressed in the novel's overt medium. But aesthetic intention appears before it is actuated in either language or form.

A painterly way of conceiving of this might be to compare the way that the nearly universal symbol of the figure of a person might be

painted on a restroom door, and the way that an artist, say Picasso, might use paint to create the figure of a person. These are not two different uses of the same language – one is directly communicational whereas the other is indirectly communicational. The aesthetic intention found in Picasso is embodied in his "artistic gesture." Its source, however, is in his consciousness. It is present in, but never identical with, the visible artwork. This aesthetic intention is appreciated and apprehended through its material trace – the way that a detective might search for proof of intention in a crime based on clues left behind by the criminal. We can never see the intention. But we can see its effects on the material manifestation of the work. Thus the figure of a person on a bathroom and the figure of a person in Picasso are different – we see traces of aesthetic intention in Picasso that aren't usually present in the case of a bathroom entrance. And if we do see a bathroom entrance that moves us in the way that Picasso might, then again we have an aesthetic experience which raises the possibility of intention.

33 The artistic gesture also allows us to appreciate the aesthetic value of its medium and form outside its specific use by one or another artist. Just as paint is still paint both on a bathroom door and a Picasso canvas, so language is still language both inside and outside of literature. But when it is used as the medium of an artwork, it makes apparent a potential that is not always actuated in everyday use, giving us literariness and painterliness. This is the circumstance of art beyond the artist : its artness. This "artness" is perhaps one reason that we store so many paintings (and artifacts) in museums and novels (and histories) in libraries : every instance of actuated artness, even outside artworks, makes us aware yet again of the singular way in which such basic material can be used as an expression of and communication about the world.

The Artistic Gesture

34 Françoise Meltzer invoked embodied language in her study on the confluence of painting and literature, where she uses the phrase "mimetic gesture [54]." Yet her study focused on "the way literature . . . attempt[s] to recast, reedit, in verbal form, something both visual and fundamentally nonverbal [55]." Where I am curious to follow Merleau-

Ponty's prompt to "compare the art of language to the other arts of expression, and try to see it as one of these mute arts" – to explore the transverbal quality of the literary work of art itself : the presence effects of literature [56]. Broaching this fundamental issue – the novelist's "artistic gesture" – I would like to clarify that when I use the term "gesture" in relation to the novelist, I do not mean the novelist's banging ten fingers on a keyboard repeatedly in various combinations or moving a quill. Rather, I am referring to the novelistic equivalent of Conrad's "brushstroke."

35 Yet for the painter, too, the notion of the "artistic gesture" or the "brushstroke" has more than one signification. As Aurora Corominas, working on the cinematic representation of Vincent van Gogh's pictorial practice, has put so well : "[t]he artistic gesture of a painter is deployed in the work process and preserves the two original levels of gesture in the act of pictorial creation." She continues :

> The external level in the bodily aspect, the physical effect of the gesture, of the line changing the material, of the process and the technique used. The internal level related to conscious and unconscious thought with the postulates of artistic thought and the emotions, [and] with the inspiration that produces the gesture and decides when it is complete. Both levels of artistic gesture, internal and external, flow together in the action that produces the work [57].

36 What is especially useful about Corominas's conception is its dual signification of both constituting intention (conscious and unconscious) and its concretizing instance as a physical effect. In the case of the novel it is harder for us to "see" such an effect because the decisions that organize both the linguistic and the narrative "space" do not leave a "physical" trace – they are concretized as verbally rendered events.

37 Accordingly, the notion of a "gesture" in literature was introduced by Jan Mukařovský in terms of the "semantic gesture." But while the gesture is fixed in a semantic trace, its originat-ing intention is aesthetic. Mukařovský was well aware of this fission and also fathomed its paradoxical nature, along with its connectedness to aesthetic phenomena from non-linguistic artworks. "[T]he semantic gesture . . . unifies the contradictions, or 'antinomies,' on which the semantic structure of

the work is based," he wrote, adding that it "takes place in time" like "the perception of every work, even a visual work[58]." And from the text of an earlier article it seems that he might have started out with an idea closer to an "artistic" gesture before formulating it as "semantic" : "The choice of artistic means and the manner of their application to a work of art is controlled by a certain methodical principle, that – being without concrete content by itself – determines the specific character of the work of art as a semantic construction[59]." Here Mukařovský conceptualizes quite precisely the relationship between the non-concrete aesthetic intention that instigates the artistic gesture, and the semantic construction that this "gesture" affixes into in a literary work of art such as the novel.

38 What we gain when we let go of the gesture's "semantic" signification is a conception of literary artists as more than semantic creatures – just as painters are more than pictorial creatures. What writers and painters share is not a tendency to create images but a common practice of aesthetic intention and creative expression (which, as we saw above, includes both conscious and unconscious elements) as a medium of communicating to others about the world. Calling writers literary artists does not mean they are not *also* or even *largely* linguistic creatures. It means that they are not *solely* linguistic creatures. This means that the literary works of art that they produce are not solely semantic objects. They are also aesthetic objects[60]. And as such they are actuated into form through aesthetic intentions – or "artistic gestures."

39 Genette hints at the possibility of such a gesture when, in reference to *In search of lost time* (1913), he writes that "*no* speech acts belong to Marcel Proust, for the good reason that Marcel Proust never takes the floor[61]." Rather, he "constructs" that "floor" through his artistic gestures, leaving a textual trace in which a signification is embedded, and from which arises the apprehension of a novel. To return to Pavel : whatever literary fiction "does," it does it not as a speech act but as art. Yet our only way to "reach" this art is through the narrator Marcel's fictional speech acts. This brings us back to the "figure of the logical paradox," which in the last analysis is merely two sides of the same object that cannot be observed simultaneously but can be perceived as coextant through our oscillating observation and reflection in time[62].

40 The paradoxical or unstable ontological status of the novel as both artwork and narrative makes each instance of a literary work a living example of the fusion between two nonidentical principle systems : narrative and artistic. These two realms remain separately embedded within a single antinomic whole : one "visible" and the other "invisible." Hence a literary work's literariness is found not so much in its language (its artistic medium) as in its artness (its being-art). Structuralism and poststructuralism are helpful in identifying the elements of a work of art, recognizing the way they are organized, and ultimately reconstructing the traces of actuated aesthetic intention – the "artistic gestures" that constituted the artwork. Our retracing of these artistic gestures helps us conjure up the significances folded (intended) into them – reformulating the novel from narrative back into a literary work of art.

41 A holistic conception of the novel, then, seems to take place in supra-semantic realms. Its communication is neither linguistic nor pictorial – it is more likely emotional and perhaps even what we call spiritual. And reflecting on a novel's non-narrative aspects allows us to think about it in ways that are sometimes more apparent in other arts. As, for example, when Henry Miller, again reflecting on painting, writes that "a line . . . if followed back to the original impulse, can reveal all the emotions of the heart [63]." For if we can identify a novelist's "lines" we may more fully be able to reconjure and extend not only the narrative that is given to us lin-guistically, but the very artistic gestures that put it there : giving us direct and even conscious access to the "emotional dimension" that is at the core of our aesthetic appreciation [64].

NOTES

1 MERLEAU-PONTY, Maurice, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," *in The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, TOADVINE Ted and Leonard LAWLOR (eds), Evanston, 2007, 252.

2 *Ibid.*, 8.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*, 244.

5 *Ibid.*, 245.

6 *Ibid.*, 247.

7 *Ibid.*, 255.

8 *Ibid.*, 263. This understanding was then carried out in terms of its political significance in the next work he published, *The adventures of the dialectic* (1955).

9 *Ibid.*, 267.

10 Horace, "On the art of poetry," in Murray, Penelope (ed.), *Classical literary criticism* [trans. T. S. Dorsch], Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1965, 91.

11 Markievicz, Henryk, "Ut pictura poesis… A history of the topos and the problem," [trans. Uliana Gabara], *New Literary History*, 18 (Spring 1987), 535–558.

12 *Ibid.*, 536.

13 James, Henry, "The art of fiction" (1884), www.wsu.edu, accessed 28 February 2013.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Rothko, Mark, "Address to Pratt institute, November 1958," in *Writings on Art*, New Haven : Yale University Press, 2006, 125.

16 *Ibid.*, 125–26.

17 *Ibid.*, 125.

18 *Ibid.*, 126.

19 *Ibid.*, 126.

20 Aubry, Jean (ed.), *Joseph Conrad : life and letters*, New York : Doubleday, Page & Co, 1927, 213.

21 Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we live by*, Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1980, 156.

22 In the tradition of our Russian Formalist forebears it would be called *iskustnost'*, which is differentiated from *iskustvennost* or artificiality. Genette has introduced nearly the identical term in French – *articité* – which Pier nonetheless translates as "artistry" (Pier, John, "Gerard Genette's evolving narrative poetics," *Narrative*, 18 :1 (January 2010), 8-18, 14). However, I believe that "artness" is more oblique than either "artistry" since it is distinct from the artist's effort. The distinction is clearer in Russian,

where literary studies have developed a critical term for artistry – *khudozhestvennost*. The term, as used by Karen Stepanian, appears in Marian Schwartz's translation as "artisticness" : "I believe that even the concept of artisticness in Russian literature is different from the commonly accepted concept of artisticness" (Stepanian et al., "Erotica and literature (from editorial discussions)," *RussianStudies in Literature* 30 (Summer 1994), 17. While the use of "artisticness" gives *khudozhestvennost* the proper critical tone, the word is nonetheless translatable as "artistry." What I am referring to, however, is not the artist's artistry (*khudozhestvennost khudozhnika*), but the ephemeral quality of art's artness (*iskustnost' iskustva*) – its being-art. As "artness" the term has also appeared in Howard Saul Becker's *Art worlds*, Berkeley : University of California Press, 1982, 153, Fenner, David E. W., *Introducing aesthetics*, Westport : Greenwood, 2003, 66, and De Bolla, Peter, *Art matters*, Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 2003, 138.

23 It is interesting to note that fictional narrative cinema lies somewhere between the novel and theater : it is performed by actors, as in theater, but their performance is fixed within the overt medium, as in the novel. It should be noted that twentieth century artistic experimentation largely dealt with the questioning or conscious undermining of all these cognitive organizational tendencies.

24 Miller, Henry, *The waters reglitterized*, Santa Barbara : Kapra Press, 1973, 38.

25 David Abram describes Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "flesh [*chair*] of the world" as "the mysterious tissue or matrix that underlies and gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of its spontaneous activity" (Abram, David, *The spell of the sensuous*, New York : Vintage, 1996, 66). Richard Kearney distills Merleau-Ponty's position vis-à-vis art into a claim that "the flesh of art is invariably indebted to the bread of life" (Kearney, Richard, *Anatheism : returning to God after God*, New York : Columbia University Press, 2011, 90).

26 Genette, Gérard, *The aesthetic relation*, Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1999, 1.

27 Pavel, Thomas, "Fiction and imitation," *Poetics Today*, 21 (Fall 2000), 521-541, 521.

28 Genette, Gérard, *Fiction and diction*, *op. cit.*, 1993, 7.

29 Plato, *The republic* [ed. G. R. F. Ferrari, trans. Tom Griffith], Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2000, 315.

30 Plato, “Phaedo” [trans. G.M.A. Grube], *in Complete works*, ed. John M. Cooper, Indianapolis : Hackett Publishing, 1997), 52. This accords with Socrates’s preference, articulated in *The republic*, for nonmimetic poetry in the form of educational or hymnal verse. Consider this in relation to Thomas Pavel’s suggestion that “the nonmimetic impulses involved in ‘analogical’ modeling deserve more attention” (“Fiction and imitation,” *art. cit.*, 528). These nonmimetic impulses include the aesthetic impulse since it involves the question of how best to organize its elements.

31 In Crane, Gregory R., *Perseus Digital Library. Perseus 4.0 : Greek Word Study Tool*, www.perseus.tufts.edu, accessed 5 March 2013.

32 Aristotle, *Poetics I* [trans. Richard Janko], Indianapolis : Hackett Classics, 1987, 2.

33 *Ibid.*, 9.

34 In this sense, Aristotle already presumes the possibility of abstract art, since in theory his comment means that one can make indiscriminate marks in black and white, and also discriminately daub fine pigments on a canvas – which is a fairly basic but clear way to describe Abstract Expressionism.

35 Gunter Gebaur and Christoph Wulf suggest that the very “posing of the question leads to error.” (In *Mimesis : culture – art – society*, Berkeley : University of California Press, 1995, 309.)

36 According to him, mimesis is rooted “in a third party . . . whose desire we imitate in the hope of resembling him or her.” Girard, René, “Mimetic desire in the underground : Feodor Dostoevsky” [trans. James Williams], *in Mimesis and theory*, Stanford : Stanford University Press, 2008, 246.

37 Ricoeur, Paul, “Narrative time,” *Critical Inquiry*, 7 (Autumn 1980), 169–190, 183.

38 *Ibid.*, 180, 184.

39 *Ibid.*, 180.

40 This is the “fictive” order. See Pavel, Thomas, *Fictional worlds*, Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 1986 ; Iser Wolfgang, *The fictive and the imaginary*, Baltimore : John Hopkins, 1993 ; and Schaeffer, Jean-Marie, *Why fiction ?* [trans. Dorrit Cohn,] Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, 2010. Consider also Clement Greenberg’s claim that “Avant-garde culture is the imitation of imitation” (in Taylor, Mark C., *Disfiguring*, Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1992, 166) ; Robert Weimann claims that “the nature of reality is explored by the imitation of imitation” (in Pauline Kiernan’s

Shakespeare's theory of drama, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1998, 94) ; and Slavoj Zizek's claims that "human language proper only counts when fiction counts for more than one reality . . . That is why Lacan is right when he points out that a Platonic supra-sensible Idea is an imitation of imitation" (in *Less than nothing*, New York : Verso, 2012, 46).

41 Genette, Gérard, *Fiction and diction*, *op.cit.*, 6.

42 Genette, Gérard, *The architext : an introduction*, Berkeley : University of California Press, 1992, 71.

43 *Ibid.*

44 Genette, Gérard, *Fiction and diction*, *op.cit.*, vii.

45 Luhmann, Niklas, *Art as a social system*, *op. cit.*, 2000, 109.

46 Herman, David, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge companion to narrative*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2007, 3.

47 I am of course referring to René Magritte's *The treachery of images* (1928–29), with its well-known image of a pipe and painted phrase "this is not a pipe" in French.

48 Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *The birth of tragedy* [ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs], Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1999, 69.

49 See "Fictional narrative, factual narrative," in Genette, Gérard, *Fiction and diction*, *op.cit.*

50 Luhmann, Niklas, *Art as a social system*, *op.cit.*, 109.

51 This is based on Hans Urlich Gumbrecht's claim that "objects of aesthetic experience . . . are characterized by an oscillation between presence effects and meaning effects." In *Production of presence : what meaning cannot convey*, Stanford : Stanford University Press, 2004, 107.

52 Luhmann, Niklas, *Art as a social system*, *op.cit.*, 118–19.

53 See Ingarden, Roman, "Quasi-judgments," in *The literary work of art* [trans. George. G. Grabowicz], Evanston : Northwestern University Press, 1973, 167-81. Genette invokes Aristotle in "set[ting] up a distinction between two functions of language : its ordinary function, which is to speak (*legein*) in order to inform, interrogate, persuade, order, promise, or so forth, and its artistic function, which is to produce works (*poesis*)," *Fiction and diction*, *op.cit.*, 6. Luhmann puts it slightly differently : in literature, he writes, "the

words are used as a *medium*, rather than for the purpose of expressing an unambiguous denotative meaning," *Art as a social system*, *op.cit.*, 25.

54 The quote appears in the following context : "The textual portrait . . . is at once the mimetic gesture of writing . . . and the moment when 'otherness' . . . grants us a better perspective on the 'home' of literature" ("Introduction," in Meltze, Françoise, *Salome and the dance of writing : portraits of mimesis in literature*, Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1987, 11).

55 *Ibid.*, 2.

56 Merleau-Ponty, *Reader*, *op.cit.*, 248.

57 Corominas, Aurora, "The artist's gesture : an initial approach to the cinematic representation of Vincent van Gogh's pictorial practice," www.iua.upf.edu (2001), accessed 1 March 2013.

58 Mukařovský, Jan, "Zamernost a nezamernost v umeni", *Studie z estetiky*, Praha 1966 [1943], 89-109. Quoted in Kees Mercks, "Introductory Observations on the Concept of 'Semantic Gesture.'" This positions counters the split between temporality and visuality in Lessing's *Laocoön*. Luhmann offers a similar take : "the work's built-in temporality must be experienced as a reconstruction of its incompletion. . . . one needs to reconstruct the work's contingencies and the way in which they limit one another," *Art as a social system*, *op. cit.*, 30.

59 Mukařovský, Jan, "Semanticky rozbor basnickeho dila : nezvaluv absolutni hrobar", *Studie z estetiky*, Praha 1966 [1938], 272-286. Quoted in Kees Mercks, "Introductory Observations on the Concept of 'Semantic Gesture.'"

60 Ingarden, Roman, *The literary work of art*, *op.cit.*, 371–72.

61 Genette, Gérard, *Fiction and diction*, *op.cit.*, 34.

62 In this regard, it is interesting to revisit Ludwig Wittgenstein's parenthetical but monumental comment that "[e]thics and aesthetics are one and the same" (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, [trans. David Pears and Brian McGuinness], London : Routledge, 2001, 86). The paradoxical nature of his comment seems to reflect well the analogous paradox of art : like aesthetics and narrative, aesthetics and ethics may be two parts of a single antinomic whole. The expression of this paradox also appears in Bakhtin, who articulates a similar twofold formulation on the level of "life" and its aestheticization : "my own life, within its own context, lacks any aesthetic weight with respect to plot or storyline . . . its value and meaning are located on a completely different axiological plane" (Bakhtin, Mikhail, "The author and hero

in aesthetic activity," in *Art andanswerability*, [ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov], Austin : University of Texas Press, 1990, 106).

63 Miller, Henry, *The waters reglitterized*, *op.cit.*, 41.

64 Genette, Gérard, *The aesthetic relation*, *op.cit.*, 55.

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