THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Shaping Consciousness

A Written Accompaniment to the Thesis Exhibition

Dreaming With Open Eyes

by

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A PAPER

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ART

CALGARY, ALBERTA

AUGUST, 1995

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have viewed and read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, respectively, a thesis exhibition entitled "Dreaming With Open Eyes" and a supporting paper entitled "Shaping Consciousness" (an accompaniment to the thesis exhibition) submitted by Terry Dean Reynoldson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

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Abstract

This paper proposes an alternate ontology, "Reconstructionism", that reconciles transcendentalism and analyticism (traditionally polarized perspectives within western philosophy). I first explore the notion of spirituality as exhibited by our tendencies to abstract and conceptualize (or idealize) existence. Next, I examine two concepts of reality, Platonic transcendentalism and Kantian analyticism. The repression of speculative metaphysics by analytic empiricism has created imbalance within society, causing 'disenchantment' and a hyper-critical attitude among many (as exemplified by some deconstructive artists). Thus, I propose that we need a balance of mystical speculation and analytic inquiry to create new, more 'meaning-filled' ways of relating to the world. By combining speculation with empirical knowledge, I "reconstruct" a view of reality that seems more interconnected and meaningful. Lastly, I describe my sculptures and site-works as a reconstructive act in which abstract ideas balance concrete materiality to reveal 'the extra-ordinary' within 'the ordinary'.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my best friend and partner, Jennifer Roma Eiserman, whose encouragement and moral support helped me to "stay on track" through to the end. I would also like to thank my daughter, Allana Reynoldson, for her enduring patience and chocolate treats while I was working.

Of course this thesis would not have been possible without the participation of my supervisor, Ron Kostyniuk, and committee members: Ray Arnatt, Ann Davis, Gerry Hushlak, and Pat Lloyd. I would like to express particular thanks to Ray Arnatt who served as my interim advisor and who contributed a great deal to the writing of this paper by supplying me with excellent books to read.

Dedication

To my mother and father.

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I. Introduction.

Meaningfulness: What is the purpose of life? Why are we here? The meaning of existence is something that has, perhaps, always preoccupied people. Some declare, in nihilistic fashion, that there is no meaning in life and that it is complete and utter folly to look for some inherent significance within things. From this perspective, meaning is neither inherent nor guaranteed. Rather, it is the unique product of reason and invention; a concept conveyed through language and symbols that must be inserted into phenomena by an active, human agent with specific intentions. Conversely, others insist that meaning is an objective facet of 'Creation' that one may find anywhere, embedded within everything that exists. From this perspective, we need only open ourselves to new possibilities to discover the inherent meaningfulness of things. A pragmatist might take a position somewhere between these two views by suggesting that the significance of any experience depends on the perspective that one takes of a given situation. Accordingly, meaningfulness (of any kind) may or may not be present depending on the expectations of the individual.

One may relate each of these polarized sets of assumptions (that all things may or may not have innate meaning) to one of two philosophical views of existence: the Platonic; or the Kantian. The Platonic view suggests that meaning begins and ends in the transcendental; an aspect of reality that encompasses the Divine. From this idealistic view, a separate sphere of eternal exemplars serve as perfect prototypes for all that we know. The Kantian view, on the other hand, heralds the beginning of modernist deconstruction by suggesting that meaning is relative to individual perception and does not, therefore, exist independent of the viewer. The debate over whether everything is traceable to an unconditioned realm, as Plato claimed, or whether everything is conditioned, as Kant claimed, is an argument that pits the relative value or worth of speculation against that of empiricism. As ontological philosophies, each has something of value to contribute to our understanding of reality. However, the decision to adopt one approach while

excluding the other may have severe implications for the propagation of meaningful Being,[1] especially within contemporary society.

To support the assertion that we have lost our understanding of meaningful Being, some have pointed to the penchant that modern science and technology have for subjugating all other modes of investigation. Some claim that science and technology denigrate less rational (i.e., more intuitive) means of knowing the world through their exaltation of measured observation and logical analysis as consistent and reliable tools for discovering the true nature of things, and that this, ultimately, leads to an artificial separation of 'the self' from 'the other', or subjugation of the other by the self.

This highly analytic mode of interacting with the world, also known as Epicureanism, became entrenched during the Enlightenment when a renewed interest in humanism heralded the reemergence of logocentric philosophies. By placing logos (logic, or reason) at the very center of existence, logocentrism deemed that all notions which do not submit to the faculty of reason -- speculative concepts such as the nature of the Divine -- are less trustworthy than those aspects of reality which can be empirically validated. One might say that empirical-Mind displaced God as the ultimate center and reason for being during the Enlightenment. The unavoidable consequence of placing all of our faith in strict analyticism is that it makes the speculative approach of transcendentalism seem somewhat deficient as a method of getting to the 'truth' of matters. Many suggest that this preference has had severe consequences for society as a whole. They argue that, while pure empiricism is necessary if one is to achieve objective results in experimental situations, when applied to life outside of the lab it can drain existence of all meaning beyond that of the purely factual. In short, our adherence to analyticism to the expense of mysticism -- or the vanquishing of Platonic metaphysics by Epicurean analyticism -- has led to a situation in which deconstructive perspectives reign supreme while speculative understanding has all but disappeared. Consequently, our notions of what constitutes an 'ultimate purpose' in life are undergoing radical revision. We are rapidly turning from our

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[1] I have capitalized the word "Being" so that it might be read as an all-inclusive form of the verb "to be".

traditional conceptions of existence (as having innate meaning) to the consideration that existence is mostly meaningless. A situation, such as this, seems to have an all-or-nothing quality to it (either life has an ultimate purpose or it doesn't) and may not be justified as the most appropriate response to the complexities of our post-modern era.

In the following pages, I will consider these ideas with regard to my own concerns as an art-maker. I will argue that deconstruction is only one way of creating understanding (of the world, reality, etc.,) and that there is some rationale in balancing such an approach with a less analytic, more speculative approach. A synergistic perspective that combines analyticism with speculation may be termed 'reconstructive' and serves, I believe, to reconcile our modern/post-modern loss of individualized signification with our pre-modern notions of ultimate meaning.

I have divided this paper into six sections. The first section (this section) is a brief introduction of the material to be covered. It establishes a context for the main body of the paper and informs the reader about what to expect. In the second section, I deal with the notion of spirituality. In relation to this topic, I focus on the spirituality of transcendence; that is, the propensity that we, as humans, have for elevating things from the concrete/material to the abstract/intellectual. I relate two methods by which one may transcend the physical. The first is through the abstracting dynamic of Idealism in which Platonic thought and Kantian thought play central roles as mind-imposed ordering mechanisms for understanding the nature of reality. The second is through contemplation; a form of transcendence that appeals to the Neo-Platonic notion of 'idealized form' as found in things such as the Gothic cathedral. In the third section, I deal with the notion of meaninglessness as it relates to the philosophic deconstruction of human experience. In relation to Deconstructivism, I examine Kant's insights into the nature of Mind and how his notions of cognition lay the foundation for further deconstructive efforts by Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida. Anticipating the fourth section, I focus on the Kantian notion that it is impossible to know *things-in-themselves*; an idea that might inform our metaphysical notions of the Divine. In the fourth section, I consider "Reconstructionism" as an alternate ontology to Deconstructionism.

Reconstruction, as I envision it, balances reason with speculation to arrive at a richer, more synergistic view of reality. This perspective does not discount the value of either reason or speculation but, rather relies on the unique insights provided by each approach. Throughout the fourth section, I relate a number of reconstructive notions and explain how meaning evolves from these concepts. In the fifth section, I relate my own work to the ideas discussed and explain how specific pieces reflect the reconstructive philosophy that I have described. The last section concludes the paper by summarizing the material dealt with in the previous sections and suggests a way in which one might create balance by incorporating both analyticism and speculation into in ones conception of reality.

II. Spirit.

i. Spirituality and the Ideal.

Before beginning my investigation of Kantian philosophy and its impact on our notions of a divine (i.e., spiritual) realm, it is first necessary to explain what the concept of spirituality entails, as I employ it, and how such a notion might relate to the relativism of experience and to the Platonic ideal.

Many of us regard spirituality as a somewhat mystical concept related to religious things: The passion of prophets; the teachings of the Bible and the Torah; the fantastic legends and ceremonies of ancient cultures; and so on. Thomas Moore, an archetypal psychologist, suggests that although spirit may manifest itself in many ways, "The kind with which we are most familiar is the spirituality of transcendence, the lofty quest for the highest vision, universal moral principles, and liberation from many limitations of human life." (Moore, 1992: 240) Spirit, in this sense, is an impulse to move *beyond* the everyday and the ordinary, a desire to realize something superior to that which now exists. When understood in these terms, spirituality takes on a somewhat 'high-minded' quality, something out of reach to the uninitiated. The question arises: Is there a sense in which we all have access to spirituality and are, in fact, already immersed in such things?

Moore defines spirituality, in its broadest sense, as "...an aspect of any attempt to approach or attend to the invisible factors in life and to transcend the personal, concrete, finite particulars of this world." (Moore, 1992: 232) 'Spirit' and 'invisible' are two terms that seem to belong together, a parallel precipitated by myths, legends, and ghost stories; tales in which human or divine essence manifests itself through incorporeal or non-material means. By using the phrase, "invisible factors in life", Moore relates spirit to the incorporeal or cerebral aspect of being human; our propensity, that is, to circumscribe our experiences of the world with mind-generated representations of reality. Produced by the mind, concepts such as God, heaven, hell, etc., lay the foundation for philosophical questions about universal truth, the nature of

reality, and the possibility of absolute knowledge; teleological questions dealing with the creation of the universe, the meaning of existence, and the nature of God; moralistic questions concerning good and evil, right and wrong, and the many gray areas that lie in between; and other such areas of *abstract* thinking. The search for answers to these questions often points one toward the Ideal; the attempt, that is, to conceive of something in its highest state. It is in this way that one may view the transcendent impulse of spirituality as a lofty quest for the highest vision; the knight's quest for the Holy Grail, and so on.

In addition to its Arthurian character, spiritual transcendence (which includes the search for an ideal) also manifests itself in response to more immediate concerns such as when one produces an artifact. One may view the relationship between the Ideal and object/concept production in either of two ways: the objective/Platonic; and the subjective/Kantian. The first view, found in Plato's Timaeus, maintains that a perfect prototype of every object -- both known and unknown -- exists within a purely non-physical/non-mental sphere, an eternal realm of 'Intelligible Forms'. (Plato, 1944: 109-115)[2] Although this realm is non-mental, one can only access it through the intellect (i.e., reason), thus its description as a sphere of forms that are *intelligible*. Mathematics and geometry, being of the intellect (or, more specifically, as the idealization of perceived phenomena) are two such methods that one might employ to enter this realm. (von Simson, 1974: 34) In relation to object-production, Plato maintained that when a craftsman makes an artifact, such as a table or a chair, he/she uses reason to copy one of the perfect prototypes from the realm of Intelligible Forms. If this copy is successful, it will retain a measure of the divine essence that its perfect prototype embodied and will, thereby, be beautiful. Plato believed that because this higher realm of ideals is eternal and non-mental, it pre-exists creation and is, therefore, a reality *more real* than the one we know. As the exemplar of all that is seen and unseen, all that is now and soon-to-be, this mystical realm is the *ultimate source* of all possible worlds. By entering this sphere in search of an ideal, one transcends the concrete particulars of life and, thereby, glimpses the Divine.

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[2]Unless otherwise noted, all citations are taken from Taylor's translation of Plato's Timaeus.

In relation to art, Plato considered mimetic works to be the only kind of art possible and, as a result, viewed all such artifacts as debased creations that are much further removed from the Ideal than are the works of a craftsman. As far as Plato was concerned, crafted works -- such as a table or a chair -- are forms that derive directly from the intellect which, in turn, derives its forms from exemplars existing within the realm of Intelligible Forms. Mimetic artworks -- such as the painting of a table or a chair -- on the other hand, are copies of the craftsman's efforts and, hence, are not as true as are their models. From this perspective, a carpenter's work is closer to the Ideal and, thus, closer to the Divine than is the work of an artist. A mimetic work, in this sense, is a copy of a copy of a copy-- from the Ideal, to the intellect, to the artifact, then to the artwork -- a simulacrum three times removed from its divine prototype within the realm of Intelligible Forms.

Plato believed that since the demiurge (i.e., creator) ordered nature according to pre-existent exemplars, like a craftsman, an artwork that uses nature as its model -- such as a landscape painting or a sculpted bust -- is as far removed from the Ideal as is the painting of an artifact. Thus, Plato considered all artists to be "liars" and maintained that none of them are fit to reside within his theoretical republic.[3] One may ask: If Plato had considered art as having non-mimetic potential, as well as that of the mimetic, would he have felt differently about the artist's role in society?

As a matter of pure speculation as to how Plato might have viewed non-mimetic works, one may refer to the writings of Oscar Wilde, an artist who appears to have had Platonizing tendencies himself. Wilde's description of the character of art evokes a similar sense of the craftsman's ascension toward a Platonic ideal. His view of art is, however, very different from Plato's in one respect: Wilde viewed non-mimetic works as the "great archetypes" of life-in-general (a parallel to Plato's notion of mystical prototypes), whereas Plato

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[3]Plato did suggest, however, that artists may be tolerated inasmuch as their works are able to redeem the character of the viewer through their cathartic influence. (Cornford, 1941)

neglected to consider non-mimetic works.[4] In, "The Decay of Lying," Wilde describes non-mimetic art with words that conjure up images of mystery and magic. He writes:

> Art finds her own perfection within, and not outside of, herself. She is not to be judged by any standard of external resemblance. She is a veil, rather than a mirror. She has flowers that no forests know of, birds that no woodland possesses. She makes and unmakes many worlds, and can draw the moon from heaven with a scarlet thread. Hers are the forms more real than living man, and hers are the great archetypes of which things that have existence are but unfinished copies.
> (Werhane, 1985: 378)

Wilde's words, "hers are the great archetypes of which things that have existence are but unfinished copies", closely resemble Plato's description of a divine realm of Intelligible Forms. However, unlike Plato's artist, whose works are merely copies of copies of copies, Wilde's artist draws from an unconditioned realm; a realm, unto itself, of beautiful forms that are more real than living man. In doing so, this artist *real*-izes life's creative impulse in a way that is superior to any other mode of human expression. In accord with his belief that art constitutes a higher reality, Wilde maintained that "...Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life. This results not merely from Life's imitative instinct, but from the fact that the self-conscious aim of Life is to find expression, and that Art offers it certain beautiful forms through which it may realize that energy." (Werhane, 1985: 379) Thus, according to Wilde, the beautiful, non-mimetic forms that are the domain of art satisfies both the imitative and the expressive desires of Existence. From this perspective, one might conclude that mimesis is a debased form of expression, not because it is too far removed from a divine exemplar, but because it originates in the known world and not in what Wilde might have considered a Platonic realm. Rather than revealing the great archetypes of existence, mimetic works, according to

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[4]Perhaps Plato failed to consider non-mimetic works because mimesis was the dominant art-form during the Greek period. In Wilde's time, however, art had moved beyond mimesis and had developed an affinity for abstraction and non-objectivity.

Wilde *and* Plato, get bogged down in the unseemliness of life and nature. Such works are, therefore, not as originative as are their non-mimetic counterparts. Thus, Wilde's belief in the pre-eminence of 'the idea' moved him to assert that, "All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals." (*Ibid.,*)

In summary, the view that Wilde had of mimetic works was very similar to Plato's. The orientation of the mimetic work toward the Ideal was, however, different for each. The mimetic artist of Plato's model tries, unsuccessfully, to bring the Ideal down to the 'the real'. The mimetic artist of Wilde's model tries, unsuccessfully, to elevate 'the real' toward the Ideal. Mimetic art, in Plato's estimation, is essentially a lie and, therefore, unredeemable. Art's saving Grace, in Wilde's view, is its innate quality of expressive beauty; a characteristic that one finds primarily in non-mimetic works. It is tempting to conclude that, had Plato conceived of art as Wilde knew it, he may have given artists a more prominent spot within his republic.

ii. The Subjective Ideal.

Returning to the argument of the two views of idealism, the second view is derived from a reading of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason. This view contends that an ideal can only exist within the fixed, à priori cognitive framework of the human mind which, having been endowed with reason and intellect, is the only thing in the world capable of producing disinterested abstractions of reality. Ideals, in this sense, do not exist outside of the mind as Plato contended. Rather, they are *exclusively* the product of human beings and do not, therefore, constitute a *separate sphere* of idyllic forms.

Wittgenstein took this view much further by proposing that not only does information from the visible world have to be filtered through a mental screen to be cognized, but the nature of this screen is language-based. Wittgenstein theorized that grammatical rules direct all of our concepts and that these rules are established by convention. The truth of any proposition is, therefore, a matter of linguistics and norms of word usage rather than the discovery of any

inherent laws within observable phenomena. An ideal, in this instance, is a proposition, a language construction, whose truth-value can be proved or disproved by appealing to agreed-upon grammatical rules. Such theorems help one to build a world picture that, in the end, represents *a view* of existence. The most notable proponents of this perspective are deconstructivists such as Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida; philosophers who maintain that every bit of knowledge or understanding that one can ever hope to acquire or achieve can only occur through language.[5] Beyond the text, there is nothing or, so close to nothing that it is all a matter of semantics. The notion of a supernatural realm is, in this sense, fantastic word-play. A pragmatist might describe an ideal, in the spirit of Wittgenstein, as a *mental construct* that uses language to define the outer edges of an area encompassing a given range of possible actions. In relation to object-production, one adjusts these linguistic parameters in response to subjective criterion so as to delineate the scope of options -- technical, conceptual, etc., -- that best match ones intentions.

Unlike the Platonic view, this relativistic view of ideals suggests that they are located within the mind, temporal, and must, therefore, be different for everyone. At this point, it is necessary to differentiate between internal ideals (in the Kantian sense), and external absolutes (in a phenomenological sense). In regard to the existents within the observable universe, one may say that any truth that we may deduce about material existence is an imposed human concept, the veracity of which can be maintained only as long as it corresponds to observable phenomena. For instance, infra-red light has a longer wavelength than does ultraviolet, but the laws of light physics no longer apply once light enters a black hole and, hence, this generalization does not hold true in every instance. The deduced generalities that govern our collective experience of a common world may, therefore, represent absolutes within restricted applications but do not, in any case, constitute ideals. If one regards such rules within the context of individual inquiry, however, the theoretical propositions formulated to explain observable phenomena may be idealistic, but only in relation to the researcher's intentions (e.g., his/her desire to impose an irreducible theory upon some phenomena in order to harmonize theory with

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[5]See, Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy, Ed. Mark C. Taylor. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986.

observation). Thus, one researcher's ideal may not be the same as that of another because each approaches the problem from a different frame of reference. This is why one may consider the nature of light to be both wave-like and corpuscular: the intentions of the subject always plays an integral role in determining the outcome of a given line of inquiry.[6]

In relation to Kant's aesthetic philosophy, one cannot apply the notion of an ideal (of beauty for instance) to things that have some kind of interest outside of their own being. As an example, it is not possible to speak of an ideal flower, or an ideal flower pot, because such things are connected to concepts that are tangential to their actual existence, such as the practical uses they may be put to: a flower for smelling, or adorning a table, etc.; a flower pot for growing flowers, or for propping open a window, etc. In matters of art, the aesthetic judgment of a work requires that one disregard the work's subject matter, since subject matter often involves things beyond the work itself, especially in the case of a mimetic work. Thus, the concept of an aesthetic ideal as a product of the judgment of taste obliged Kant to introduce the notion of 'disinterested contemplation' into his description of the viewer/artwork relationship. The viewer must, according to Kant, approach an artwork with a detached and

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[6]This relativistic property may be even more intrinsic to the nature of matter than we imagine. Within the field of nuclear physics, researchers have found that the quantum nature of subatomic matter is such that a researcher cannot measure both the velocity and the position of a particle at the same time. Quantum theory predicts that a particle will, therefore, exist in an 'indeterminate' state until the researcher observes the particle, at which time its position or its velocity will become fixed in relation to the researcher's expectations. Dr. Schrodinger proposed an interesting mind experiment in which a researcher puts a cat into a box with a radioactive substance that controls a switch so that, whenever an isotope decayed, it would dispense a lethal amount of electricity (the contemporary version substitutes poison gas for electricity because it is considered more 'humane') thus, killing the cat. The indeterminate character of quantum mechanics suggests that the cat would be neither dead nor alive while it was in the box, but would exist in an indeterminate state. The best that a researcher could do, in a situation such as this, is to formulate a 'probabilistic' theory as to the current state of the animal. Others countered this notion with the assumption that, eventhough the researcher could not say what state the cat was in, the cat itself would know whether it was dead or alive. Einstein had similar problems accepting the notion of quantum indeterminacy and argued that "God does not play dice with the universe." (Morris, 1987: 225-227)

uninvolved state of mind (a state of disinterested interest) in order to formulate an aesthetic judgment of the work. In actuality, however, this feat is nearly impossible since the aesthetic appeal of a work is often inextricable from its subject matter. In relation to this paper, the important aspect of Kant's argument is not what constitutes an aesthetic ideal (such notions may be completely different for everyone anyway) but the fact that he seems to have taken a dichotomous view of things by suggesting that one must ignore the content of a work in order to formulate an aesthetic judgment of it.

In summary, one may take a comparison between the Platonic view and the Kantian view well beyond the question of whether or not a supernatural sphere exists and how such a realm might relate to the phenomenal world. What these two perspectives deal with, at bottom, is the nature of reality; that is, the manner in which we perceive the basic ground of our existence. The important distinction between the Platonic view and the Kantian view is that one perspective, the Platonic, sees mind as one manifestation (among others) of reality. The other view, the Kantian, sees reality as primarily a product of mind.[7]

At this point, several questions arise: What are the consequences of choosing one mode over the other? Does it matter at all which perspective one adopts? Must one choose one mode to the exclusion of the other? Could one incorporate both perspectives to create an 'enchanted' view of existence? In the following pages, I will briefly outline some of the issues related to these questions. For the moment, however, it is important to emphasize that ideals exist, regardless of which direction one approaches them from. By concerning oneself with the notion of an ideal, whether it be an unconditioned/Platonic ideal or a conditioned/Kantian ideal, one *abstracts beyond* the personal, concrete, finite particulars of this world and, in doing so, transforms the concrete/material into the abstract/intellectual.

Spirituality, in this sense, is a transcendent impulse that consistently manifests itself in our interactions with life, resulting, very often, in the

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[7]In the following sections I will provide a more detailed account of the Kantian view of cognition.

creation of works of art. At the risk of denuding the term of its narrower connotations, one might say, as Moore does, that "...spirituality is not always specifically religious. Mathematics is spiritual in the broad sense, abstracting from the concrete details of life...." (Moore, 1992: 232-33) To generalize to this degree allows the concept to subsume many things that would not otherwise be considered spiritual. Similarly, Moore suggests that, "The computer itself, in its refinement of the concrete particulars of life to digital mathematics and light graphics, is, for better or worse, a kind of spiritualization or disembodiment of matter." (*Ibid.,*) In relation to this paper, the meaning that I will attach to the term spiritual is, similar to Moore, broad enough to encompass things beyond orthodox religion: specifically, the intellectualization of phenomenal experiences through the disciplines of philosophy, science, and art. This does not, however, remove its esoteric associations. In my conception, things (such as artworks) that have a spiritual nature are, in one way or another, orientated toward the realization of an *extra*-ordinary dimension of reality: an aspect of the real that is not immediately apparent to our everyday awareness.

iii. The Ideal of Order and Harmony.

By relating reason and intellect to the Ideal and, in turn, by relating the Ideal to divine beauty, Plato implied that beauty is achieved through the idealizing activity of Mind; that is, the mind, in grasping the Ideal, creates the beautiful. Beauty, in this sense, resides within the intellectual abstractions of such things as mathematics and geometry: inventions of reason that personify the principles of order and harmony. Put simply, one may say that mathematical order and harmony possess a Platonic sense of beauty. The relationship between order, harmony, and art seems fairly obvious since such considerations serve as the very basis of many formalist works. Somewhat less apparent, however, is the relationship of order, harmony, and the artwork to spirituality.

If one can attribute transcendent/Platonic properties to mathematical order and harmony, then one may also attribute transcendent characteristics to

ordered and harmonious artworks. Frank Avray Wilson, an aesthetics philosopher, maintains that artworks possessing order and harmony elicit an experience similar to that of spiritual transcendence. Wilson equates transcendence with a "hyper-aesthetic" state and suggests that the foundation for this experience is the "high mind" (a phrase that parallels the term 'Platonic reason'). Wilson states that "...the high-mind, sensitive to order and harmony, provides the natural basis...for a humanly enhancing art [whose] highest possible reward is an ecstatic, totally involving and reassuring peak experience -- the hyper-aesthetic moment." (Wilson, 1981: 41) Many psychologists refer to this experience as "trans-personal" (meaning transcending the self or ego). Moore concurs that a certain kind of beauty may effect one by lifting one "...out of the confines of human dimensions...," but is less clear as to what kind of beauty accomplishes this. (Moore, 1992: 232-33) Instead of ordered and harmonious, Moore uses words such as "arresting, complex, and pleasing" to describe the kind of images that he considers beautiful. The vagueness of this description does not enable one to make a satisfactory comparison with Wilson. Regardless of the type of beauty (assuming there may be several), Moore suggests that the purpose of such phenomena is to facilitate "...the contemplation of timeless and eternal realities." (Moore, 1992: 278) This view of the transcendent character of beauty mirrors the Platonic notion that order and harmony reflect the timeless and eternal nature of the Divine. Both Wilson and Moore agree that beauty, whether it be ordered and harmonious or arresting, complex, and pleasing, is able to "...take us out of the rush of practical life..." and, thereby, provide us with extra-ordinary experiences.

James Joyce described the transcendent effects of beauty and the relationship of harmony and wholeness to such an experience. In A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man, Joyce writes:

> The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the (a)esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous stasis of (a)esthetic pleasure, a spiritual state very like to that cardiac condition which the Italian physiologist Luigi Galvani...called the enchantment of the heart. (Werhane, 1985: 387)

In describing wholeness and harmony (within an image) as qualities that evoke a spiritual state, and by paralleling such an experience to the enchantment of the heart, Joyce conveys an important aspect of beauty: namely, its capacity to elicit or instill extra-ordinary experiences. Although his choice of metaphors is different, Joyce's sentiment mirrors those of Moore and Wilson and also recalls the Neo-Platonist's fascination with the transcendent effects of harmony and wholeness. Thus, according to Joyce, wholeness and harmony are the supreme quality of beauty; a quality that both arrests and fascinates the mind, thereby creating the luminous stasis (enchantment, rapture, etc.) of a spiritual state.

iv. Gothic Beauty.

If order and harmony (the idealization of perceived phenomena) personify transcendent beauty, then such a relationship is nowhere more apparent than in those historical periods where a longing for transcendence inspired the creation of monumental works of order and harmony. Such is the marvel of Gothic Europe and its great cathedrals. In these structures, one finds an impressive connection between spirituality and the use of order and harmony. An investigation of medieval literature suggests that Gothic design drew its inspiration, at least in part, from the mystical theorems of the ancients (e.g., Pythagorus), the philosophy of Neo-Platonists (e.g., Plotinus),[8] and the aesthetic theories of medieval theologians (e.g., St. Augustine, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and Abbot Suger).

The nature of beauty, as medieval philosophers perceived it, centered on Plato's divine realm of Intelligible Forms. As described above, Platonic beauty is a measure of the divine essence existent within an artifact; a measure, that is, of how closely the artifact matches its mystical prototype within the realm of Intelligible Forms. Neo-Platonism of the medieval era was a revival of the

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[8]See,Readings in Ancient Western Philosophy. Ed. McLean, George F. and Patrick J. Aspell. New York: Meredith Corp., 1970. {Pythagorus: pp. 21-26; Plotinus: pp. 305-323}.

philosophy developed in Alexandria during the third century in which divine emanation was thought to account for the existence of beauty within Creation. Their emanation metaphysics, a blend of Oriental mysticism, and Judaism, contended that all of Creation emanates from a single, divine source and that the individual soul could be mystically united with this source. The Neo-Platonists of the medieval era maintained that, since order and harmony have the ability to "...raise the mind to the perception of ultimate truth," the creation and contemplation of such things is one way of uniting with the Divine (von Simson, 1974: 115). The transcendent beauty of ordered and harmonious matter led the Neo-Platonists to declare that the creation of such phenomena is the most noble of all artistic endeavors.

The School of Chartres adopted this philosophy and combined it with Christian theology to create a set of principles for cathedral construction. Their Neo-Platonic cosmology maintained that, because the demiurge (i.e., master designer or craftsman of the universe) used geometry to "impose order on nature",[9] geometry would therefore imbue cathedral design with a similar sense of cosmic-like perfection. In other words, medieval builders believed that geometrically designed cathedrals exhibit the same order, stability, and beauty that one finds in the heavens. Thus, the Neo-Platonists of Chartres adopted geometry as "...the undisputed method for building cathedrals..." during the Gothic era. (von Simson, 1974: 19-35)

In addition to the School of Chartres' contribution to medieval construction, St. Augustine influenced the Gothic aesthetic by taking a theory of musical consonance and adapting it to the design of cathedrals. To create these architectural canons, Augustine referred back to Pythagorus whose "number mysticism" elucidated the relationship between whole numbers. Pythagorus' insights established the principles of harmony and proportion which now serve as the foundation for harmonics in western music.[10] The mysterious appeal of

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[9]Astronomers deduced this conclusion from observations of the mathematical precision with which the sun, moon, and planets traced their paths through the sky.

[10]Other theorems that illustrate the proportional aspect of certain numerical relationships are 'The Golden Mean' and 'The Fibinachi Series' in which the

these numerical relationships inspired Augustine to develop a similar set of rules for architectural use. He theorized that, by applying the mathematical principle of musical ratios to architecture, one could harmonize the various parts within a building. He therefore recommended that cathedral builders use perfect musical proportions when designing their structures so as to achieve beautiful and harmonious effects. Such a method, he maintained, would result in the creation of a tectonic structure that exhibits 'cosmic-like' stability. (von Simson, 1974: 48)

The application of the principle of harmonic proportions is evident in structures such as Chartres cathedral were the elevation and inner dimensions reflect Augustine's musical ratios of 1:1, 1:2, 2:3, and 3:4. The use of these ratios creates a sense of harmony in which the proportion of each architectural element visually reinforces the presence of other features. August Rodin, when visiting France's cathedrals, described the effect that these ratios have on the viewer. Rodin writes: "The cathedral as a whole is composed with such knowledge of harmony that each one of the elements of the composition gives to all the others a formidable reverberation." (Rodin, 1965: 209) Rodin also observed the effect of harmonious ratios at Reims cathedral:

> I always come back to this word 'discipline' to define this sober and strong architecture. It reassures and satisfies me. What absolute knowledge of proportions!" (Rodin, 1965: 73)

Rodin believed that consonance in the Gothic cathedral is also the result of the use of simple forms. According to Rodin, "...simplicity signifies unity in truth." (Rodin, 1965: 127) This statement implies that the unity created by the cathedral's simplified forms accentuates the spatial integration of its parts. Cistercian architecture inspired the use of simplified forms in Gothic design. Influenced by the ascetic sensibilities of St. Bernard, Cistercian architects developed a preference for straight lines, simple and clear forms, and austere ornamentation. These characteristics reflect the monastic belief that church

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addition of two numbers in a sequence creates a proportional third, such as 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, etc.

architecture should be conducive to spiritual pursuits (such as meditation). St. Bernard was convinced that excessive amounts of distracting imagery and decoration would hamper spiritual contemplation. (von Simson, 1974: 43) Gothic ribs, therefore, rise unadorned and virtually uninterrupted from floor to ceiling (as seen at Reims) giving the space a "...self-assured structural logic." (Bucher, 1989: 225) As observed by Rodin, this 'elemental linearity' reinforces the relationship between architectural elements resulting in a strong and resounding impact on the viewer. He writes:

> My attention concentrates on these sides, so simple in their grandeur. I want to understand immediately yet I realize that to achieve understanding I must deeply modify myself, acquire more energy, more firmness. I must submit myself to a rigorous discipline.... The marvel...demands calmness and restraints, in a word Strength, being strong in itself. (Rodin, 1965: 150)

One may associate the experience of Gothic strength -- produced by the cathedral's geometric design, consonant parts, and unified forms -- with the ecstatic, Dionysian-like feelings of a spiritual experience. Originating with Dionysius' theology of light, this transcendent experience is a process in which the mind accesses spiritual things *through* the contemplation of earthly things (a process resembling that of Neo-Platonic mysticism). According to Dionysius the Areopagite, within all material objects there exists a spark of divine Light which is the source and sustainer of all life. To contemplate this spark leads one, ultimately, to see the Divine within all things. Earthly things are, in this way, analogous to 'stepping stones', the divine nature (or Platonic beauty) of which may lead one to spiritual enlightenment. Edwin Panofsky describes this dynamic as a process in which the mind ascends from base physical existence, through the senses, to a realization of "...the highest, purely intelligible sphere of existence." (Panofsky, 1979: 19) Medieval theologians termed this transcendent process an "anagogic experience."

One may refer to Rodin's observations of French cathedrals to expound on the nature of an anagogic experience. While contemplating the architectural elements of the cathedral at Melun, Rodin wrote:

> Suddenly it happens that in contemplating (these columns) ever more lovingly, I grow, I participate in their nature. Emanations of purity and of strength come to me from them. The youth of my soul revives. I receive baptism a second time and I emerge happier, more enamored of divine glory and of human genius. (Rodin, 1965: 104)

Abbot Suger, the designer of the Abbey of St. Denis, inscribed a description of anagogic ascension on two guilded bronze doors at St. Denis. Transcribed in De administratione, the verses direct the viewer's attention to the quality of the work. They read:

> Marvel not at the gold and the expense but at the craftsmanship of the work. Bright is the noble work; but, being nobly bright, the work should brighten the minds, so that they may travel, through the true lights, to the True Light were Christ is the true door. In what manner it be inherent in this world that this golden door defines: The dull mind rises to truth through that which is material. And, in seeing this light, is resurrected from its former submersion. (Panofsky, 1979: 47-49)

This description of an anagogic experience seems to relate quite strongly to Dionysian light metaphysics ("in seeing this light", etc.). It also clearly indicates that Suger believed the object's workmanship to be the essential characteristic that leads one to spiritual illumination. The fact that Suger dismisses the material beauty of the golden doors -- marvel not at the gold -- and, instead, directs the viewer's attention to the craftsmanship -- bright is the noble work -- suggests that Suger was speaking of those characteristics that are specifically related to the act of making (i.e., those qualities that arise from the artist's creation of the artifact, qualities such as order and harmony). Also, Suger's description of the work itself as being "noble" suggests that he regarded this *created* quality as a dignified and admirable feature; words that may also

apply to things that possess order and harmony. By being aware of this aspect of the doors, Suger believed that the dull mind would rise to truth and, thereby, be rescued from its former submersion. Suger's description of the transcendent effects of 'created beauty' leads one to conclude that such qualities (e.g., order and harmony) are particularly conducive to spiritual experiences such as anagogic ascension.

In summary, both Rodin and Suger describe the ecstatic state of anagogic ascension as an experience that is similar (if not identical) to the hyper-aesthetic emotions described by Wilson, and to the luminous stasis recounted by Joyce . Further, order and harmony (or other such products of reason) are the kind of qualities that induce these transcendent states; states that resemble the mystical experience of spiritual ascension as described by Dionysius the Areopagite. In short, an analysis of the Gothic cathedral reveals that its psychological impact is, in large part, due to its harmonious proportions, and simple, unified forms. The harmonious effects of such proportions are, moreover, informed by Neo-Platonic cosmology and Pythagorean number mysticism. One may, therefore, conclude that Gothic architects designed their cathedrals, at least in part, to evoke hyper-aesthetic experiences which are, at bottom, not unlike spiritual experiences. The transcendent effects of Gothic design allows these structures, as vehicles for the expression of spirituality, to be well suited to their function. In the words of Rodin, Gothic cathedrals are "...the scaffolding of heaven." (Rodin, 1965: 137).

v. Mystical Union.

The primary impact of Gothic beauty seems to be its ability to induce a contemplative state of mind which, as Moore and Wilson suggest, is the basis of transcendence. Mystics, philosophers, and artists speak of the connection between beauty and the "spiritualizing" aspect of contemplation. Among the many texts describing this relationship, is an illuminating passage by Delacroix. According to Delacroix:

> When contemplation appears, (*a*) It produces a general condition of indifference, liberty and peace, an elevation above the world, a sense of beatitude. The Subject ceases to perceive himself in the multiplicity and division of his general consciousness. He is raised above himself. A deeper and a purer soul substitutes itself for the normal self. (*b*) In this state, in which consciousness of I-hood and consciousness of the world disappear, the mystic is conscious of being in immediate relation with God Himself; of participating in Divinity. Contemplation installs a method of being and of knowing. Moreover, these two things tend at bottom to become one. The mystic has more and more the impression of being that which he knows, and of knowing that which he is." (Underhill, 1990: 330) [11]

Wilson also observes that "...beyond a certain limit, the observer of a particular phenomena in nature loses his individuality and merges with the phenomena; observation gives way to participation." (Wilson, 1981: 139.) This experience of mystical union is, in fact, one of the most common of spiritual experiences. It is a dissolution of the self; a merging of oneself with the object of ones attention until one experiences complete awareness of that object. At the moment that one achieves union, one has the impression that the self is no longer an isolated, individuated entity but, rather, a part of Existence itself. To covey an adequate sense of the context of my own work, it is necessary to examine the philosophical underpinnings of such an experience and how the Kantian and Platonic views of reality might inform ones understanding of this phenomena.

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[11]Mondrian also describes a similar sort of experience in some of his writings on "the new plastic painting." Mondrian writes: "But at the aesthetic moment of contemplation, the individual is no longer the individual." (Mondrian, 1987: 138) Robert Morris also recognized a similar state of experiencing reality and described it as the direct awareness of a moment (as opposed to a reflective awareness). (see, Robert Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated." In Sculpture, vol. 13, #2 [March - April, 1994], p. 26)

v. Summation.

The tendency to elevate a 'concrete fact' to an 'abstract idea' or, conversely, to bring an ideal down to the real, is a proclivity of Mind that many regard as "spiritual". This definition is, admittedly, narrow as it does not touch upon the unconscious or intuitive facet of spirituality (i.e., the more primal aspects of being human). For the purpose of this paper, however, it is important to establish a view of spirit that may shed some light on the prevailing ontology of western society: analytic rationality. By viewing spirituality as a function of Mind, one may better understand the divergent, but related notions of reality that inform our attempts to answer (i.e., to conceptualize) the 'big questions' of existence (e.g., God, the meaning of life, etc.,). Platonic idealism and Kantian relativism are both conceptualizations of reality, but each takes a different perspective of how things might be in actuality. The Platonic view is speculative and deals with transcendent notions in a conjectural manner; the Kantian view is analytic and deals with transcendent concepts in a more pragmatic fashion (as described below). While both perspectives deal with the nature of reality, they lead to different ways of viewing existence. From a Platonic view, the ordered and harmonious effects of a Gothic cathedral are explainable as the function of mystical processes. From a Kantian view, the psychological impact of such phenomena may be explained in a perfectly reasonable way without resorting to unprovable notions. (As we shall see in the pages below, Kant's perspective maintains that nothing justifies us in concluding anything more than what 'reason' might suggest in such matters.) Nevertheless, Gothic beauty does seem to support extra-ordinary experiences (e.g., Dionysian transcendence, or anagogic ascension) which may hint at something as yet unknown or not understood by reason alone.

III. Deconstructing Reality.

i. Introduction.

We are now in a position to examine Kant's philosophy and to consider how his analytic insights differ from the speculative ideas of transcendentalism. An understanding of the difference between analyticism and transcendentalism might offer some understanding as to why western thought has placed one perspective in a superior position to that of the other. In the following pages I will argue that supplanting transcendentalism with analytic reason has resulted in an existential view of reality where meaning does not extend beyond the empirical facts of existence. The resultant loss of meaning has had severe implications for contemporary society as a whole. First, however, it is necessary to place Kantian metaphysics into a historical context by exploring, in brief, the origins of analytic thought and the rise of scientific empiricism. It is also necessary to consider how Cartesian thought has influenced modern thinking and its either/or mentality. Once we have adequately explored these issues and some of Kant's ideas, we may then consider how deconstruction (our post-modern paradigm) fits into the picture.

ii. The End of Absolutes and the Age of Dissolution.

Social commentators, such as Suzi Gablick and Max Weber, recognize a prevailing sense of "disenchantment" permeating contemporary culture. This disenchantment, they argue, is the product of our Cartesian view of reality; a perspective in which subject and object are inherently and irrevocably separated from one another. David Michael Levine, a writer and sociologist, describes Cartesian thought as "...a metaphysics of isolated subjects and objects [which has] bequeathed to us a Self locked into a world of self-defeating, virtually schizophrenic dualisms." (Levine, 1989: 12) Levine goes on to define this world of dualisms as a situation in which the human is "...split apart into animal-being and pure rationality, nature and culture, body and mind, matter and spirit, inner and outer, subject and object, ego and other, individual and

society, public and private, feeling and reason." (*Ibid.,*) The experience of being human is, for most of us, an experience filled with contrasts and dualities. From our earliest beginnings, humankind has been split into male and female. Although we may have more in common with one another than we realize, sex-differentiation may be the most basic form of duality that we know. Beyond these two basic roles, the human experience is filled with opposites. In his book about masculinity and mythology (entitled Iron John) Robert Bly relates some opposites that Pythagorus recognized; opposites that include male/female, light/dark, the one/the many, the odd/the even, and so on. (Bly, 1992: 174) In regard to the opposition that seems to prevail between 'the self' and 'the other', one may interpret one's feelings of separateness and individuality as an acute consciousness of the self (i.e., self-consciousness). This state of Being may go back to the beginning of human history, as the book of *Genesis* claims. If one goes back only as far as classical Greece, however, one finds that the notion of a separate self relates to the philosophy of separating 'the one' from 'the many', 'the complex' from 'the simple', 'the good' from 'the evil', 'the known' from 'the unknown', and so on. One also discovers that this division of things within the phenomenal world was a necessary adjunct to the rise of early humanism; a philosophy that considered the individual self as an entity separated from and set above the rest of the natural world; an entity that exists as an end in itself.

This separation of 'the self' from 'the other' is an attitude that seems entrenched into our modern notions of existence. Suzi Gablick, a writer on art and society, suggests that the modernist outlook, in its most severe form, personifies "...the loss of belief in any system of values beyond the self." (Gablick, 1991: 29-30) Although it is difficult to define what a system of values might entail, the fact that individual rights and freedoms are cherished above all else in our culture indicates that the dissociation of oneself from others is emblematic of our westernized mentality.[12]

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[12]This aspect of our culture is encapsulated by the fact that certain civilian militias (white supremacists) are, at present, waging war on the government of the United States "in defense" of the individual freedoms that are written into the American Declaration of Independence.

In regard to Cartesianism, some believe that dualistic thinking leads to disconnection and isolation and is responsible for the dangerous chasms that separate us from one another, and humanity from the rest of the natural world. Some contend that dualism (or the belief in a separate self) is an attitude that sentences the individual to perpetual isolation from all that is not of the self and, invariably, preempts any sense of connectedness to a greater context. John Welwood, a psychologist, contends that the desire for psychic separateness (from others and the world) is a defense mechanism that armors ones ego against the "...groundless, open quality of our basic being-in-the-world." (Welwood, 1977: 78) Welwood suggests that without some sort of psychic armor, "We find that we cannot establish our ego securely, our self-identity keeps slipping away...." (*Ibid.,*) Hence, argues Welwood, one is driven to adopt a smaller, more narrow view of existence so as to keep ones ego safe from the perceived threat of dissolution and disintegration into the greater whole. Problems, however, arise when one makes "...a commitment to small mind...at the expense of the larger, expansive version that arises from the basic relatedness of self and world." (*Ibid.,*) Welwood explains that when one adopts such an attitude, repression, resistance, and defensiveness become "...ways of armoring ourselves against [the] relatedness that undercuts our notion of a separate self." (*Ibid.,*) Thus, maintaining a dualistic view of existence might help to reassure ones ego, but it does nothing to aid one in developing a positive and life-affirming view of existence. When considered from this perspective, the limitations of being human could be cited for the disconnectedness and intolerance that many people feel toward things beyond the self. Whether or not it is appropriate to blame Descartes, who merely recognized these limitations, it appears that one of the consequences of not feeling connected to things beyond the self is that one may cease to care about those things that do not have a direct impact on ones own well-being. Another consequence is that one may cease to be enchanted by the complexity, mystery, and wonder of existence (in its broadest sense) because one is always preoccupied with the *self*, trying constantly to keep ones guard up. One may interpret such a condition as a state of disenchantment.

Disenchantment, within contemporary society, seems to manifest itself as a pervasive feeling of malaise and meaninglessness among individuals.

Connected to this despondency, and forming one of the most distinctive features of modernity, is a fervent analyticism that seems to have the uncanny ability to transform our traditional sense of Being (our faith in 'unseen forces') into disillusionment and skepticism. Accordingly, our sense of separateness -- or heightened consciousness of self -- is reinforced by our highly cultivated ability to question and rationalize. Thus, the sense of drifting and lack of purpose that seem so endemic to our culture are attitudes that may originate in our wholehearted acceptance of pure analyticism to the expense of all other perspectives. Levine, among others, recognizes society's disenchantment as a "*dis*-ease" that is attributable to our analytic mindset. He writes:

> Our cultural fantasies have been channeled into sciences and technologies that require total objectivity and impose it everywhere. This has meant, in time, as Nietzsche already realized in his life span, the death of God and an increasing forgetfulness of Being, through its domination, reduction, and reification. The cultural experience of the death of God -- or, more broadly conceived, the end of absolute finalities -- has been a decisive factor in our pervasive sense today of drifting without purpose: our sense, that is, of homelessness and rootlessness. It has also meant the negation of any ultimate, transcendent source, any irrevocable guarantee of meaningfulness -- any unshakable foundation for knowledge, any absolute authority in truth, any fixed point of focus for the projection and mirroring of personal, social, and cultural ideals. We are compelled to live 'groundless' lives.
> (Levine, 1989: 13)

To place Levine's observations into context, it is necessary to first consider the origins of analytic empiricism. Once again, one may refer to ancient Greece to find the source of such thinking. Analytic empiricism originated with the teachings of Epicurus, a philosopher/scientist who advocated careful observation and reasoned analysis in getting to the 'truth of matters'. Epicurean philosophy dismisses the notion that divine power has some influence over perceived reality. Any phenomena that one can investigate, one

can understand under logical operations. In this regard, Epicurean philosophy is very pragmatic and encapsulates the classical Greek view of the universe as being "...essentially atomistic, divisible, isolatable, static, non-relativistic, and comprehensible by reductionism..." (Walsh, 1980: 222) Of particular importance is the example that Epicurus, with his highly analytic approach, set for later philosophers, scientists, and intellectuals.

Two thousand years later, the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century succeeded in resurrecting many of the ideals of classical antiquity. Humanism, with its logocentric and individualistic orientation, re-emerged as the guiding philosophy for most intellectual endeavors. The ontological groundwork laid by Descartes in the years leading up to the Enlightenment, provided a foundation on which Enlightenment thinkers, such as Kant, could build. The enlightened mind of reason and ratio, nurtured during this time, provided positivistic science with a criterion of values centering on the preference for impartial observation and objective analysis. (Jordanova, 1989) Thus, one may trace the analytic aspect of modern science back to the "...Greek quest for the ultimate cause and the ultimate truth." (Anderson, 1990: 210)

Today, most consider empirical science to be a mode of inquiry that offers an accurate and reliable reflection of the phenomenal world. It would not be an overstatement to suggest that science's reputation for accuracy and efficiency has elevated it to a privileged position within society.[13] In fact, science is respected to such a degree that other areas of inquiry (e.g., technology) strive to emulate the dispassionate rationality that is science's hallmark. One could say that science, in its adherence to pure analyticism, has become an exemplar of efficacy and reliability for a host of other disciplines and activities (such as the research and development divisions of industry and technology). (Jordanova, 1989) Gablick cites Peter Halley, a social commentator, who describes the influence that our rationally-oriented, technology-driven society has had on modern consciousness. Halley suggests that,

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[13]This statement is supported by the fact that much of our resources are directed toward scientific research.

> It is the essence of modern consciousness to be irrevocably structured by the technological aspects of industrial production. The individual of today transfers the engineering ethos of modern technology and bureaucracy to his personal consciousness and emotional life. This ethos, characterized by mechanicalness, reproducibility and measurability, produces in consciousness the traits of abstraction, functional rationality and instrumentality. (Gablick, 1991: 45-46)

The contribution of science to humanity's welfare is, for the most part, beyond disrepute. Suspect, however, is the applicability of analytic logic to life beyond the domain of science. One may argue, as Kant does, that we have no choice over our empirical interactions with the world (see below). If this is the case, then Cartesian metaphysics is a reasonable view of our condition as cognitive beings. We think, therefore, we are. How then does consciousness of the self lead to alienation from the rest of the world? Cartesian thought may, perhaps, accentuate the divisiveness between self and other by objectifying the phenomenal world to a high degree, but this condition of estrangement cannot be imposed on an individual. One must adopt a strictly analytic frame of reference, similar to that of science, if one is to experience life as completely objectifying and alienating. In this sense, Cartesian philosophy is not the problem; pure, analytic logic is the thing that alienates us from things beyond the self. Science, one may argue, needs the distance to achieve results that are as non-subjective as possible. But how, one may ask, can such an attitude benefit the individual? If one were to embrace analyticism to the expense of its existential counterpart, 'integration', one might very well impair ones appreciation for the mysterious, non-quantifiable aspects of existence; that is, the feeling of *being* on the earth and in relation to all that one experiences. Such a perspective may also diminish ones sense of transcendence in life; that is, the feeling of *becoming* something more than the sum of ones experiences.

In summary, although Cartesian duality describes the relationship that many of us have to things beyond the self, the totalizing objectivity that is so endemic to science is more specifically Epicurean. In relation to empirical science, the preference for Epicurean empiricism over Platonizing metaphysics

was a decisive event that heralded the end of absolute finalities (or, the death of God as Nietzsche viewed it). The imposition of Epicureanism to the expense of Platonism is, primarily, a product of Enlightenment thought. The scientific progress that began with the Enlightenment, saw a logo centric view of existence (where Mind is the center around which *all* things revolve) as a preferable ontology to the Platonic and Neo-Platonic notions of an ultimate reality (a separate sphere of Intelligible Forms). From this perspective, all that we know or all that we can ever know about reality is best obtained through rational, empirical means. Thus, by placing empiricism in a superior position to its counterpart, transcendentalism, we have come to rely more and more on an analytic approach to life, to the expense of non-analytic speculation and all of the potential insights that it might offer. In short, the death of God, or the end of absolute finalities, is the progressive realization, initiated by Enlightenment thought, that all truths are subservient to the intentions of the individual. Knowledge, therefore, must rely on empiricism and rational elucidation if it is to progress. These arguments lead to the unavoidable conclusion that truth, as a strictly relative property, can only be *provisional* (i.e., hypothetical and subject to 'improvement' or alteration). If there is no such thing as 'ultimate truth', then empiricism must continue without cessation; a belief that intellectuals such as Kant have held without reservation.

iii. The Kantian Perspective.

Returning to the Kantian view of reality, Kant elucidated on the empirical nature of Mind in his Critique of Pure Reason. His line of reasoning begins with the insight that the brain is the seat of consciousness within the human organism. Although Kant did not elaborate on the physiology of cognition, our current understanding of how the brain works supports all of Kant's claims. Present understanding asserts that awareness depends on the transmission, through the senses to the brain, of information (sensations) gathered from the observable universe. Evolution has designed the brain to receive electro/chemical signals from the senses *in an organized fashion* through, what

Kant referred to as, "an a priori cognitive framework". (Kant, 1900: 73)[14] Milton Munitz, a metaphysician, interprets this cognitive framework as a set of "universal mind-imposed ordering mechanisms." (Munitz, 1990: 75) One may suggest that these mechanisms are present within all members of the human race, insofar as evolution has predetermined the present state of the species' brain; that is to say that all Homo-Homo-Sapiens have similar cognitive functioning because of our common ancestry. Biology, therefore, has determined that each of us must filter everything we perceive -- whether by touch, taste, sight, smell, or hearing -- through universal, mind-imposed ordering mechanisms. In this way, and only in this way, can an individual cognize the phenomenal universe.

The argument that consciousness has a biological basis, and that it is also common to all members of the species, leads one to infer that reality *appears* to each of us as it does because our brains have been hard-wired by nature to perceive it that way. In essence, our mind-imposed ordering mechanisms dictate the kind of rules and truths that we discover because our interactions with the phenomenal world are of a certain kind. One may consider these rules to be 'laws' in the sense that they are applicable to the species as a whole, inasmuch as each member is governed by the same biologically predetermined mode of perceiving things. In other words, if experience informs one person that snow is cold, other individuals are equally capable of coming to the same conclusion.[15] Consensus among individuals regarding the meaning of specific

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[14]All further citations are taken from the Meiklejohn translation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason unless otherwise indicated.

[15]Categorizing experiences is a learned process that begins when we are young, continues throughout life, and requires language to function. One may suggest, as does Derrida, that experience is subservient to language and may even be dispensable. To assume, however, that the absence of experience does not impoverish the meaning of a symbol is unjustified. After thirty prairie winters, I can say that snow is cold, but I cannot say that it is hot because each word signifies a specific concept that either discloses or withholds some aspect of the nature of snow. Someone who has never experienced snow can never know which proposition is 'true' (whether snow is hot or cold) and must, therefore, rely on the symbols that I employ to describe the experience. He/she is subject to my understanding of the given symbol system and my ability (or inability) to use it. Thus, one may say that the inevitabilities that we recognize -- such as the coldness of snow -- are completely dependent on

phenomena can only occur, however, if there is agreement regarding the symbols that we use to convey our ideas. This is where language enters the picture. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore semiological arguments in any detail. For the purposes of the topic at hand, it will suffice to say that as a species, we do not *find* existent truths embedded within the observable universe (as Plato would have asserted) but, rather, *impose* language-dependent concepts on the things that we observe so as to develop some understanding (acquire knowledge) of them. In short, we perceive the universe and understand its contents they way we do because biology has made us what we are. Further, if our brains were wired differently then reality would not appear as it presently does.[16]

To continue Kant's line of reasoning, one may infer that without the aid of our purely subjective sensory apparatus and the concepts that it allows us to generate, one cannot acquire any understanding of a thing. Another way of thinking of this relationship between Mind and matter is that if everything depends upon the mind's à priori framework for its *real*-ization, then apart from (or without) individual cognition one cannot perceive any aspect of existence whatsoever. Further, if the nature of perception only allows us to know a thing as it appears to us, then we can have no knowledge of that thing *apart from* its appearance. Walsh agrees with this inference by maintaining that, "What can be known is the interaction between the observer and the observed and never the independent properties of the observed alone." (Walsh, 1980: 225) From this line of reasoning, one must conclude that it is impossible to know a thing in its true Being. To do so, one would have to cease being human and become god-like. To know a thing in itself, is to know a thing in its absolute entirety; to exhaust the infinite aspects of a thing's Being; to know as God knows; to have the 'Mind of God'.

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language-based concepts and cannot be understood outside of such systems; that is, every concept exists and is meaningful only through the agreed-upon signs and symbols that we use. Moreover, the depth (or completeness) of meaning, outside of first-hand experience, must vary from individual to individual.

[16]I use the word 'presently' to indicate that our fundamental conceptions of reality may change as the species continues to evolve.

In regard to Kant's insight that one can know no reality *beyond* the appearance of things, one may ask: Can we infer from Kant's line of reasoning that reality consists only of appearances; that is, of empirically perceived representations devoid of concrete Being? Kant sums up his own position by stating that,

> There is nothing actually given -- we can be conscious of nothing as real, except a perception and the empirical progression from it to other possible perceptions. For phenomena, as mere representations, are real only in perception; and perception is in fact, nothing but the reality of an empirical representation, that is, a phenomena. For I can say only of a thing in itself that it exists without relation to the senses and experience. But we are speaking here merely of phenomena in space and time, both of which are determinations of sensibility, and not of things in themselves. It follows that phenomena are not things in themselves, but are mere representations, which, if not given in us -- in perception, are non-existent. (Kant, 1900: 279)

In other words, because there is no way to step outside of the ordering mechanisms that are built into the very way that we perceive things, nothing beyond its appearance may be known about an object, action, or event. What we perceive as real are mere appearances which do not have any reality outside of our empirical mode of sense-collecting. Kant is not saying that things do not exist, but rather that the *appearances* that we take as *real* are non-existent if parted from perception. Things exist *in-themselves* apart from perception, but our empirical nature prevents us from knowing this true state of their Being. The fact that we can vouch for nothing but our empirical perceptions does not allow us to conclude that nothing exists beyond human perception. To do so would be absurd. Kant recommended, therefore, that it is necessary to consider things as concrete existents even if it is not possible to know these existents as *things-in-themselves*. In the Transcendental Analytic, Kant writes:

> That space and time are only forms of sensible intuition, and so only conditions of the existence of things as appearances; that, moreover, we have no concepts of understanding, and consequently no elements for

> the knowledge of things, save in so far as intuition can be given corresponding to these concepts; and that we can therefore have no knowledge of any object as thing in itself, but only in so far as it is an object of sensible intuition, that is, an appearance.... Though we cannot *know* these objects as things in themselves, we must yet be in position to *think* them as things in themselves; otherwise we should be landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearance without anything that appears. (Kant, 1900: 35-43, 156-172)

By suggesting that one must think things as things in themselves, Kant recognizes the paradox of his insight; that is, if one can know nothing beyond the appearance of a thing, one can vouch only for the existence of the appearance and not for the thing itself. Although it is impossible, due to the nature of human cognition, to know things in themselves, commonsense tells us that there *must be* something concrete attached to the appearance of a thing. Such a consideration seems necessary if one is to interact with the world of appearances in a way that does not deny the actuality of things in themselves. Since the act of thinking things as things in themselves (i.e., as concrete existents) requires belief beyond what we can vouch for, one could interpret Kant as recommending 'faith' as a necessary adjunct to our unassailable subjectivity. Thus, thinking things as things in themselves may be likened to an act of faith in which the subject transcends his/her empirical condition in order to interact with appearances in as reasonable a way as possible.

Kant also asserted that,

> Man is himself a phenomenon. His will has an empirical character, which is the empirical cause of all his actions. There is no condition -- determining man and his volition in conformity with this character -- which does not itself form part of the series of effects in nature, and is subject to their law -- the law according to which an empirically undetermined cause of an event in time cannot exist.
> (Kant, 1900: 310)

Thus, according to Kant, everything that we do is empirically determined by the chain of conditions that move from the empirically perceived phenomena of the external world to the internal responses of an individual. Nothing exists that is not empirically conditioned (i.e., existing without incident or connection to something outside of itself). Kant, therefore, saw reality as a homologous continuum of interrelated conditions; each condition being conditioned by some other condition within an endless series.

The notion that our subjective condition creates for us a world in which everything is subsumed under an empirical sense of reality seems plausible. If this is the case, then perhaps there is nothing that we can do about our Cartesian mode of interacting with the world. However, ones decision to impose objectivity on everything is merely a reasoned preference. In Cartesian fashion, one may choose to impose either a pure, analytic mode of reason, or one that is more speculative, such as transcendentalism. In his arguments of "The Antinomies," Kant asserts his preference for empiricism over that of transcendentalism. Kant's writings reveal that he predicated his preference on the belief that,

> ...empiricism...holds out to reason, in its speculative interests, certain important advantages, far exceeding any that the dogmatist can promise us. For, when employed by the empiricist, understanding is always upon its proper ground of investigation -- the field of possible experience, the laws of which it can explore, and thus extend its cognition securely and with clear intelligence without being stopped by limits in any direction. (Kant, 1900: 266) [17]

Kant's preference for an Epicurean philosophy -- a perspective that stressed the use of analytic reason grounded in an uncompromising empiricism -- over that of its speculative counterpart, placed his view of reality squarely within a Cartesian, either/or, framework. In other words, Kant himself utilized an à priori framework of pure, analytic reason while dismissing transcendental

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[17]To clarify the distinction between the empirical approach and the transcendental approach, Kant recalled the schools of Epicurus and Plato. (Kant, 1900: 267-68)

speculation as "dogmatic." Further, he seems to have considered empiricism as being superior to dogmatism because it does not impose finalities. Kant explains why empiricism does not impose finalities by first describing the method of reasoning used by the dogmatist whose intellectual propositions "...can exhibit completely *à priori* the entire chain of conditions, and understand the derivation of the conditioned -- beginning from the unconditioned." (Kant, 1900: 265) In other words, the transcendental idea may describe reality, initially, as a chain of conditions but its arguments are of the speculative sort which, invariably, rest on an unconditioned, non-empirical basis. Possessing a speculative orientation, such arguments are naturally drawn toward containment and resolution and, as such, impose the kind of finality that common understanding can most readily incorporate. Through its imposition of finalities, dogmatism provides popular and practical interest in matters of a cosmological nature; an interest in which one finds "(t)hat the world has a beginning -- that the nature of my thinking self is simple, and therefore indestructible [immortal] -- that I am a free agent, and raised above the compulsion of nature and her laws -- and, finally, that the entire order of things is dependent upon a Supreme Being, from whom the whole receives unity and connection...." (*Ibid.,*) As reassuring as this view might appear, Kant claims that it is, in fact, a vain and vacuous attempt at theory. Any thesis that begins with "..the conception of an absolute...," he maintains, "...is highly gratified to find a firmly established point of departure for its attempts at theory; while in the restless and continuous ascent from conditioned to condition, always with one foot in the air, it can find no satisfaction." (*Ibid.,*)

In contrast to this thesis, is the "antithesis" of pure reason grounded in empiricism. According to this approach, "..we must rise from a given beginning to one still higher; every part conducts us to a still smaller one; every event is preceded by another event which is its cause; and the conditions of existence rest upon other and still higher conditions, and find neither end nor basis in some self-subsistent thing as the primal being." (*Ibid.,*) Thus, the empirical approach leads one into a continuous and self-perpetuating ascent (descent) into ever tightening circles of rational elucidation based on quantifiable fact. Regardless of how tightly spun an empirical proof can be, however, common understanding still senses the hollow core of dry, un-inspiring fact that sits at

the very center of the analytic approach. When given the option, those who desire something beyond quantifiable fact will, therefore, choose speculative reason and its transcendental musings to the analytic alternatives.

Kant could not understand why people should prefer transcendentalism to the empirical approach and considered it "...very extraordinary that empiricism should be utterly unpopular." (Kant, 1900: 268) Kant's unswerving faith in the superiority of empiricism to that of transcendentalism prompted him to suggest that "(w)e should be inclined to believe that the common understanding would receive [empiricism] with pleasure -- promising as it does, to satisfy it without passing the bounds of experience and its connected order; while transcendental dogmatism obliges it to rise to conceptions, which far surpass the intelligence and the ability of the most practiced thinkers." (*Ibid.,*) Kant goes on to offer an explanation as to why people might be drawn to transcendental philosophy. The secret, Kant suggests, is that by holding a transcendental view of reality,

> ...the common understanding thus finds itself in a situation, where not even the most learned can have the advantage of it. If it understands little or nothing about these transcendental conceptions, no one can boast of understanding any more; and although it may not express itself in so scholastically a manner as others, it can busy itself with reasoning and arguments without end, wandering among mere ideas, about which one can always be very eloquent, because we know nothing about them; while, in the observation and investigation of nature, it would be forced to remain dumb and to confess its utter ignorance. (*Ibid.,*)

This is not a very flattering description of the speculative approach. Since Kant was very clear about his preference for one perspective over the other, one may take his argument as being, perhaps, a bit biased. Is there another reason why common understanding should prefer the notions of transcendentalism over those of empiricism? Rather than an instrument of "indolence and vanity," as Kant saw it, the preference for transcendentalism among the common understanding may indicate a deeper yearning in society

for the numinous[18] qualities of Existence. Perhaps what Kant noticed was a generalized dissatisfaction with the purely rational approach of empiricism. Perhaps, as may be the case today, people need 'the poetic' and 'the mysterious' as well as 'the rational' within their conceptions of reality. Perhaps such a combination is necessary in order to maintain some sense of balance and equilibrium in life.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that Kant was completely dogmatic in his rejection of transcendentalism. He did, in fact, warn of the dangers of dismissing the transcendental idea altogether. According to Kant, "...if -- as often happens -- empiricism, in relation to ideas, becomes itself dogmatic, and boldly denies that which is above the sphere of its phenomenal cognition, it falls itself into the error of intemperance -- an error which is here all the more reprehensible, as thereby the practical interest of reason receives irreparable injury." (Kant, 1900: 267) Thus, it appears that Kant saw some virtue in allowing common understanding to have its way, if only for the sake of keeping empiricism unsullied by the dogmatism that makes transcendentalism seem so unattractive. Those who place their faith in speculation alone may, however, be destined for disappointment. One is reminded of the two characters in Samuel Beckett's "existential play," *Waiting for Godot*, who, despite all evidence to the contrary, continue in their unwavering belief that their friend Godot will eventually appear.

iv. Still Waiting for Godot.

Among the writings of Frederick Nietzsche, is an inquiry into The Birth of Tragedy within art. In this text, Nietzsche discerns two fundamental characteristics within art, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, and puts forth the notion that the "aims of art" (Greek tragedy in particular) mirror identical drives within nature. The Apollonian aspect of Greek art, Nietzsche suggests, has properties that one may attribute to dreams. Nietzsche goes on to place

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[18]The word numinous, as I use it here, derives from the Latin word, 'numen', meaning spiritual.

the act of dreaming within the context of contemporary society and its analytic empiricity. He writes:

> And we, completely wrapped up in this illusion [waking reality] and composed of it, are compelled to consider this illusion as the truly nonexistent -- i.e., as a perpetual becoming in time, space, and causality -- in other words, as empirical reality. If for the moment, we do not consider the question of our own "reality," if we conceive of our empirical existence, and of that of the world in general, as a continuously manifested representation of the primal unity [Existence], we shall then have to look upon the dream as a *mere appearance of mere appearance*, hence as a still higher appeasement of the primordial desire for mere appearance. (Werhane, 1985: 323)

Nietzsche's account of the dream as a mere appearance of mere appearance implies that the continual and unassailable subjectivity of the individual, our perpetual becoming, is a state of Being comparable to that of dreams. He also suggests that dreams are a higher appeasement of the primordial desire for mere appearance and, as such, are somehow superior to empirical reality. By suggesting that we have a primordial desire for mere appearance, Nietzsche implies that we are innately drawn to the "...beautiful illusion of the dream worlds, in the creation of which every man is truly an artist." (Werhane, 1985: 320) This aspect of the dream, its illusory quality, elevates it above waking reality because, according to Nietzsche, it obliterates the "horrible truth" of existence; namely, the disconnectedness we feel through our empirical perspective of the world. Nietzsche suggests that dreaming allows us to overcome this disconnectedness because, "In our dreams, we delight in the immediate understanding of figures; all forms speak to us; there is nothing unimportant or superfluous." (*Ibid.,*) Through the illusion of the dream, as through the rapture of Dionysian intoxication, one loses sight of empirical reality and its "omnipresent obtrusiveness." (*Ibid.,*) In a state of dream-contemplation, one transcends ones own subjectivity and experiences the "pleasurable illusion"; the state in which one becomes aware of "...that mysterious ground of our being of which we are the phenomena... " (Werhane, 1985: 323) In other words, in the dream state, one may experience a more

connected sense of self; connected, that is, in a primordial way to the experiences of the dream world.

In regard to horrible reality, Nietzsche maintained that the realization of our empirical existence has opened up countless horizons of possibility in terms of humanity's evolution toward complete self-determination. No longer encumbered by the fetters of objective verities (absolutes), we are now free to shape reality to our liking. Each individual is now the architect of his/her own destiny. This existential view of reality leads to the notion that our existence is, ultimately, inexplicable and that each of us is completely responsible for his/her own life; that is to say that our purpose for being here is groundless (without reason) and that we are, literally, on our own. Not only have we tasted the fruit from the tree of knowledge, but we've philosophically devoured the whole thing: fruit, tree, garden, God, and even each other. All that remains are manifestations of ones own mind, a universe as insubstantial and transitory as the phantoms that inhabit ones dreams. From such a perspective, reality assumes a somewhat illusory quality (Nietzsche's notion of mere appearance) in which hopelessly isolated individuals try to cope within an unknowable and indifferent universe. Meaningfulness, from this perspective, can be nothing more than the project of individual initiative. It is not an inherent feature of Creation, nor is it intrinsic to our Being. In short, meaningfulness within contemporary society has ceased to be a feature that a divine Creator embedded within Existence.

The notion of a creative agent or omnipotent being has, in fact, become an untenable explanation of how we came to be. Kant explains that "..the conception of an absolutely necessary being [God] is a mere idea, the objective reality of which is far from being established by the mere fact that it is a need of reason." (Kant, 1900: 331) Kant explains that such a notion is a need of reason because "...although experience presents the occasion and the starting-point [of understanding], it is the *transcendental idea* of reason which guides it in its pilgrimage, and is the goal of all its struggles." (*Ibid.,*) From this perspective, the idea of God is nothing more than a concept that we use in order to explain the contents of experience that may not otherwise have explanation (i.e., those occurrences that are mysterious or inscrutable; the

invisible factors of life as Moore defines them). As explained above, rather than viewing the transcendental idea as a positive thing (as a goal that impels activity), Kant considers such notions to be inhibitive because they are the product of speculative reason instead of the product of pure reason. "Theoretical cognition..", Kant explains, "...is speculative when it relates to an object or certain conceptions of an object which is not given and cannot be discovered by means of experience." (Kant, 1900: 355) Thus, the unprovability of God's existence makes this notion speculative. As such, it inhibits understanding rather than helping it. God, and all other such transcendental ideas, according to Kant, serve "...merely to indicate a certain unattainable perfection, and rather limits the operations than, by the presentation of new objects, extends the sphere of understanding." (Kant, 1900: 331-32) The ideal of pure reason, on the other hand, is something that "...cannot be termed mysterious or *inscrutable*, because the only credential of its reality is the need of it felt by reason, for the purpose of giving to the world of synthetical unity." (Kant, 1900: 333) Thus, to be useful as a method of extending understanding, an ideal "...must, as a mere idea, be based on the constitution of reason itself, and on this account must be capable of explanation and solution." (Kant, 1900: 333-34) Thus, Kant asserts that,

> ...everything in the sensible world has an empirically conditioned existence, and that in no one of its qualities can it be unconditionally necessary; that for every member in the series of conditions we must expect, and as far as possible seek, an empirical condition in some possible experience; and that nothing justifies us in deriving an existence from a condition outside the empirical series or even in regarding it in its place within the series as absolutely independent and self-sufficient. (Al-Azm, 1972: 153)[19]

In short, Kant would never have considered it appropriate to stand around waiting for Godot. Instead, he might have decided to go looking for Him or, even better, to go looking for 'signs' of Him.

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[19]Taken from book I, chapter II of *The Transcendental Dialectic.*

In summary, by differentiating between the ideals of pure reason and the ideals of speculative reason, and by assigning the transcendental idea to the latter category, Kant dismisses transcendentalism as a line of inquiry that has no basis and, therefore, retards understanding. In essence, what Kant is saying is that there is no justification for speculating on the possible nature of anything that cannot be empirically perceived (such as the existence of God). Thus, God, immortality, and all other cosmological questions must remain mere questions because there is no way to gain empirical knowledge that would answer them. This perspective encapsulates the modern view of reality and represents a definite departure from the pre-modern notions of God; a perspective where the Divine's character is mysterious but not, necessarily, inscrutable (in the sense that one may come to understand God through His works; or, through the process of spiritual ascension). The pragmatic end of Kant's line of reasoning engenders the conclusion that we, as a species of cognitive beings, must consider ourselves to be completely on our own simply because we can never prove anything to the contrary. From such a perspective, it is easy to infer that existence is, essentially, meaningless (at least in a traditional sense).

Perhaps this is where society experiences its disenchantment. We recognize the subjectivity of individual experience, but disengage such recognition from a deeper appreciation for the essential unknowability of things. In dwelling on the concrete nature of existents to the exclusion of their numinous character, we have diminished the mysterious and inexplicable aspect of existence. Instead of being enchanted with the mystery of things in themselves, we rely too heavily on our empirical mode of interacting with existence and, thereby, philosophically transform the world of concrete existents into a world of appearances. Reality is, consequently, *drained* of its numinous qualities. Given this loss of our "traditional sense of Being"[20] -- a sense of concrete existence inextricably attached to and oriented by a numen-filled reality -- and its replacement with the current sense of Being -- a sense of illusory existence set against and apart from an unreliable reality -- it is not surprising that many of us find ourselves drifting without purpose, homeless and rootless, living groundless lives.

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[20]Traditional in the sense of being pre-dualistic, or Eden-like.

In this sense, it is not our empirical condition that we need to concern ourselves with, but the fact that we tend to dichotomize everything into either/or categories. If analytic reason dismisses absolutes, then we tend to want to banish such notions from our frames of reference and, instead, identify completely with the alternative view. There does not seem to be any desire to bring the two together. Walsh agrees that our usual modes of perceiving reality are severely limited and inadequate and that this may be due to the nature of perception itself. He suggests that "...our usual perceptual limitations tend to produce consistent yet unrecognized distortions no matter where we look." (Walsh, 1980: 222) He goes on to describe these distortions as "...tendencies to solidify, dichotomize, separate, oversimplify, concretize, and to under appreciate the extent of continuous flux, impermanence, interconnectedness, and holistic consistency of the universe." (*Ibid.,*) In other words, our normal manner of perceiving reality limits our concepts of how things might actually be. One may apply this observation to the dogmatist as well as to the empiricist.[21] In short, our perceptual limitations put us in the paradoxical position where our reliance on empirical analyticism (to make sense of the world) also makes it difficult for us to believe in anything beyond that which is empirically given. This does not, however, mean that there can be no other ways of knowing reality. As Gablick observes,

> The death of the spirit, the amputation of the soul, the sense that all our gods are dead: these are the messages we have been programmed to give and to receive by our culture, which works by legitimizing certain ways of knowing and disqualifying others....The loss of myth, the assumption that the only ways of knowing are logical and linear, has resulted in a profound loss of moral orientation and meaning for life.

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[21]This limitation may not, however, be unassailable. Walsh and other psychologists recognize the "consciousness disciplines" of East and West as practices that are devoted to overcoming the limitations of human perception. Such practices as Yoga and Zen primarily employ the methods of consistent and sustained meditation to achieve a contemplative state of mind. Such states may allow one to experience life in an immediate and profound way, realizing the full extent of each experience from one moment to the next as though each moment were constantly created anew.

> Archetypal themes give form and meaning, but as a culture, we have fallen out of meaning, leaving only the dreariness of calculated, mechanical process. (Gablick, 1991: 46)[22]

Nevertheless, as Kant experienced, there is a desire within common understanding to move beyond the analytic approach and enter a realm of reasoning (the province of archetypal themes) that is more speculative than analytic. The question arises: Can one balance calculated, mechanical process with more intuitive ways of knowing to construct an inclusive perspective of reality? Before answering this question, it is necessary to first consider the consequences of meaninglessness as it relates to our deconstructive tendencies.

v. Meaning and Meaninglessness.

Both Levine and Gablick see meaninglessness as a destructive tumor growing on the collective consciousness of our empirical civilization. Levine suggests that this "cancer of the spirit" has caused a myriad of social problems, all of which relate back to the groundlessness of our existence and the loss of our traditional sense of Being. Levine explains that,

> Suffering through the death of God and the traditional sense of being, our society has increasingly experienced itself as living in a historical condition of extreme abandonment and deprivation. We have failed somehow, to grow *beyond* the culture of ego-logical narcissism. Not surprisingly, symptoms of collective depression have begun to constellate: emptiness, deadness, despair, narcotization. The culture of narcissism has led us to nihilism, the negation of meaningful Being; and

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[22]Gablick is reiterating notions that Max Weber had of society's tendency to choose one view to the exclusion of another. Gablick writes: "Our prevailing sense of disenchantment, a legacy from the modern industrial age, is not simply a matter of the intellect; by now it has been woven into our personalities, attitudes and behaviors. As Max Weber claimed, mysticism was out of tune with modern societies, so if ever mysticism reared its head, something was going awry." (Gablick, 1991: 46)

> this, in turn , has been felt as a deep sense of immeasurable, unnamable loss: a loss as Heidegger interprets it, "of Being", a cancer of the spirit...around which our collective depression has slowly begun to form. (Levine, 1989: 14)

Levine paints a gloomy picture, to say the least. Such a description may, however, be a more accurate representation of the current state of our world than we would like to admit. Levine's notion of an ego-logical narcissism at the base of our culture is interesting and merits further investigation. Such a phrase seems to imply a generalized philosophy focusing on our culture's preoccupation with 'I'; that is, with the state of self-absorption that centers the world in relation to the self. By suggesting that we have somehow failed to grow beyond this philosophy, Levine implies that such a state is like a stage of growth (like adolescence) that is necessary for a time, but must lead one to a new stage of development or understanding. In failing to grow beyond this stage, nihilism and the negation of meaningful Being are now predominant. According to Levine, all of this can be traced back to the death of God (the loss of absolute finalities) within our culture. As discussed above, the death of God was the inevitable result of acquiring new insights into the nature of the human condition. That stage in our development, however, should have led us to a new form of understanding. It didn't. Somehow, we failed to live through it; to situate our new-found insights about humanity within a greater context, a context beyond the self. Now, we must cope with emptiness, deadness, despair, and narcotization.

In relation to Art, an increasing number of deconstructive artists are questioning the notion of meaning and meaninglessness through a hyper-critical form of art-making. At the fore of deconstructive art are those, such as Sherrie Levine, a photographer who re-photographs other artist's prints. These artists often use their work to debunk modernist myths. Levine's work questions the notion that 'good' works of art must also be original and, in doing so, exposes the futility of originality within our post-historical context. By taking old ideals apart and exposing their presumptuousness, deconstructive artists, like Levine, focus on the textual -- contextual, subtextual, hyper-textual -- aspects of art. Their works often touch on issues and ideas that are

generated within the literary-based disciplines of history, philosophy, social theory, and criticism. Such works often expose the inadequacies and paradoxes of linguistic structures and, thereby, emphasize the problemics inherent to metaphysical ideas. In doing so, they reveal the omnipresent shortcomings of our language-dependent concepts and the hidden, or underlying assumptions therein (i.e., those things that always go unsaid). Writers, such as Burger, applaud the critical attitude of this approach and go so far as to suggest that "...the only chance of meaningful action in modernity is whole-hearted engagement with meaninglessness." (Burger, 1991: 14) As pointed out in the preceding section, the proponents of deconstruction -- Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard -- owe a great deal to the insights of Wittgenstein and Kant.[23] One may consider deconstruction, in this sense, as primarily a method of asserting the subjective nature of human experience and the essential non-existence of the absolute. As mentioned above, deconstruction deals with the textuality of ideas; that is, the use of grammatical rules (symbol systems established through convention and norms or word usage) to covey the multi-layered meanings within text and experience. Jerome Bruner encapsulates the spirit of the deconstructive attitude by suggesting that,

> The moment one abandons the idea that "the world" is there once for all and immutably, and substitutes for it the idea that what we take as the world is itself no more nor less than a stipulation couched in a symbol system, then the shape of [any] discipline...alters radically. And we are, at last, in a position to deal with the myriad forms that reality can take -- including the realities created by story, as well as those of science.[24] (Bruner, 1986: 105)

The danger here, it would seem, is that if one were to dwell on the myriad of possible meanings attached to the abstract symbol without giving due consideration to a specific meaning, one might disengage appearance from

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[23]See, Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy, ed. Mark C. Taylor. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986.

[24] By substituting the word 'any' for the word 'the' (in reference to psychology), I have taken the liberty of assuming that Bruner would apply this sentiment to disciplines other than those mentioned.

concrete Being and, in so doing, enter a never-ending spiral of conditional affectation; a world of illusion and self-absorption. From such a perspective, the question of what is 'real' becomes redundant. Nothing is real. All is mere appearance relative to context, dependent on concepts, and constantly subject to alteration. With this in mind, one may argue that if we fail to augment our analytic tendencies with an appreciation for the certainty that absolute finalities can offer, then existence in general could become (or perhaps, has become) little more than a collective dream in which free-floating signifiers hover in mid thought, occasionally bumping into signifieds, but without sticking so that, all-in-all, nothing has particularized significance.

vi. Summation.

Nietzsche's observation of the death of God, in addition to Levine's observation that meaninglessness is a firmly entrenched ideology within contemporary society, are insights that suggest that our deconstructed notions of reality are somehow lacking in their usefulness as instruments for finding purpose in life; that is, as instruments of meaning-building. Our current notions of existence, and how we relate to it, rely quite heavily on the insights of thinkers such as Kant. Kant's thesis asserts that our physiology places Mind in an empirical relationship to the objects of perception. Essential to this thesis is the realization that we can know nothing of a thing other than how it appears to us (i.e., we can never know a *thing in itself*). This insight leads to the realization that if perceptions are the only reality one can know, and if perceptions do not exist apart from the individual mind, then all 'truth' is completely relative to the individual, in which case, there can be no absolute finalities in our collective (or individual) search for understanding. In other words, our empirical condition eliminates any terminus in the degree to which we may acquire insights regarding an object's perceived properties. We can, according to Kant, formulate an indeterminate amount of understanding about the appearance of a thing, moving from one condition of its existence to another ceaselessly. We cannot, however, know that thing in its true Being. If this is the case, then it would be very hard indeed to submerse oneself in a world that lacked absolute finalities without getting that niggling feeling that one could lose ones sense of

self in the process. Thus, our empirical mode of perceiving reality (our unassailable subjectivity) seems to be a condition that accentuates the basic "groundlessness of our being in the world." As mentioned above, the threat to ones ego that this 'groundless feeling' evokes, forces one to take a much smaller view of existence which, in turn, disconnects one from those things that are not of the self (in a Cartesian-like split between subject and object) and diminishes the meaning within lived experience.

How then do we reconcile the need to feel connected to a greater whole (assuming this is a need that most people feel) with the nature of our own Being? In reply, one might suggest that our philosophical outlook has much to do with the way that we respond to such a situation. Some may find meaning/purpose in taking things apart, conceptually, to expose their underlying structure. Others might find meaning/purpose in putting things together, conceptually, to create new structures. Still others may find some combination of the two to be the most appropriate response. In the following pages I will examine the later solution, and will show (in the last part of the paper) how it relates to my own work as an artist.

IV. Reconstructing Reality.

i. Introduction.

We are now in a position to consider whether or not speculative reason has anything to offer. If it does, then it would, perhaps, be beneficial to retain some transcendental propositions to augment our analytic tendencies. By doing so, one might be able to reconstruct a more 'meaning-filled' view of reality. First, however, it is necessary to examine the artificial divisions that we have created between the various spheres of substantive reason. I will argue that there is commonality amongst the disciplines because each one helps us to further our understanding of the world. In reference to the discipline of art, the sculptures of Jozsef Toth help us to further our understanding of reality in regard to both 'the known' and 'the possible'. He accomplishes this feat by balancing a speculative attitude with a pragmatic sensibility. Similarly, one may suggest that a balance of mystical speculation with analytic inquiry in other areas of lived experience can result in the creation of new perspectives and new ways of relating to the world. Perhaps, a certain amount of 'day-dreaming' is necessary if one is to fend off the ever-present menace of meaninglessness.

ii. Reconstruction and the Systematization of Experience.

> *But, to me, religion is more than the mumbling of a creed. It is the meaning of all that is unexplained and doubtless inexplicable in the world. It is the adoration of the unknown force which maintains the universal laws and which preserves all types of beings; it is the sunrise of all that in nature which does not fall within the domain of sense, of all that immense realm of things which neither the eyes of our body, nor even those of our spirit can see; it is the impulse of our conscience towards the infinite, towards eternity, towards unlimited knowledge and love -- promises perhaps illusory, but which in this life give wings to our*

thoughts. In this sense I am religious. If religion did not exist, I should have had to invent it.

-- *Rodin*[25]

Returning to Kant, one may ask whether or not it is necessary to dismiss speculative reason merely because it breaks down under the rigors of logical analysis. It seems presumptuous to dispose of transcendental ideas simply because they constitute a class of propositions that may never be proven. In defense of transcendentalism, one may argue that the existence of such notions today is indicative of a *need* within the human psyche for speculation. In reference to Darwin, if notions such as God did not somehow contribute to the survival of the species, they would have died out long ago. Counter to this, is the argument that we may now be seeing just such an extinction of 'passé beliefs'; an argument that is supported by the apparent decline of interest in formal religions worldwide. There is, however, a sense in which this is not the case.

As explained above, spirituality may take many forms. As Moore points out, all of our attempts to "...approach or attend to the invisible factors in life and to transcend the personal, concrete, finite particulars of this world..." may rightly be called spiritual. (Moore, 1992: 232) From this perspective, our propensity to abstract and systematize experience so as to develop coherent and non-contradictory representations of reality is a spiritual need that is met not only by formal religion but also by such things as philosophy, math, science, and art. All are inventions of human spirit and, as such, are important not for the truths that they reveal (truth, after all, may be nothing more than a human invention), but rather for the *insights* into our own Being that they provide. In this sense, the pure, analytic reason that Kant based his thesis on is as transcendent and, therefore, as spiritual as are the celebrations of the Eucharist at Christian masses, and as necessary. Both forms of reason -- the former relying upon pure reason, the latter upon speculative reason -- help us

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[25]Quote taken from Paul Gsell's interview with Rodin, published in 1957 by the Philosophical Library, New York. This translation found in: Auguste Rodin: Rodin on Art and Artists. Trans. Mrs. Romily Fedden. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1983, p. 80.

to formulate concepts so that we may deal with life in the most efficacious way possible. To concede to Kant, however, one must admit that perhaps he could be more certain of his analytic inferences than would another person of the speculative inferences that faith might allow. In the end, however, the conventions of language are as arbitrary and as relative as are the doctrines of religion. Both are products of the mind and, as such, are equally valid. The notion that conceptual inventions -- such as art, science, philosophy, etc., -- help us to structure reality, is an idea that may shed some light on the nature of reconstruction. Further, there may be some justification in suggesting that, regardless of the stated objectives of a given sphere of inquiry, all of our disciplines have, at bottom, the same basic intentions: to make sense of the stuff of life. If this is so, then each discipline is connected (in one way or another) to all other disciplines. How?

Before considering the interrelatedness of some of the various disciplines, it would be helpful to first examine the divisions that we have created. In The Anti-Aesthetic, Jurgen Habermas cites Max Weber who explains that eighteenth century Enlightenment thought separated "substantive reason" into three autonomous spheres of inquiry: science, morality, and Art. (Foster, 1989: 9-10) Leading up to the imposition of this separation, there may have been many instances of cross-over between the various disciplines. For instance, a spiritual leader, knowing of the numinous aspects of existence, might also have had knowledge of medicine and the healing arts and, therefore, would have fulfilled a "shamanic" role within society. Today, however, experts attend to problems that are specific to each discipline. Generally speaking, questions of truth are dealt with by scientists; normative rightness is the domain of religion and philosophy; authenticity and beauty are under the auspices of art.[26] Each sphere may be subdivided many times over into ever

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[26]Weber also suggests that this separation of various aspects of human endeavor led to an oppositional relationship in which the various disciplines 'alienated themselves' from one another and from 'life-in-general'. Art, for instance, "...alienated itself from life and withdrew into complete autonomy." (Foster, 1989: 9-10) In, The Reenchantment of Art, Gablick points out that one of the modernist ideals of art focuses on individual freedom and expression in which the artist seeks "...freedom from community, freedom from obligation to the world and freedom from relatedness." (Gablick, 1991: 7)

smaller areas of expertise. Art, for instance, can be broken down into commercial art, folk art, the decorative arts, fine art, etc. Fine art, can be broken down into performing art, visual art, etc. Visual art can be broken down into painting, drawing, sculpture, etc. Sculpture can be broken down into axiomatic structures, marked sites, site-constructions, and sculpture-proper. Sculpture-proper can be broken down into its various modes of making -- additive, subtractive, combined -- and into its various material preferences: steel, wood, found materials, etc. Finally, each of these areas can be broken down into their formal constituents: figurative, abstract, non-objective, etc. An artist may, if he/she wishes, concentrate on an extremely narrow area of expertise. Thus, it would seem that the distinctions that we make between various disciplines (and the ever smaller distinctions therein) are artificially imposed delineations; necessary, perhaps, to enable individuals to deal with a manageable portion of the vast amount of information that is specific to each area and to investigate that area in greater depth and detail than would otherwise be possible. There may, however, be some rationale in combining (re-combining) the insights of one sphere with those of another.

In relation to science and its preoccupation with objective fact, one may suggest that the scientist's empirically derived insights are actually 'conceptual creations' and, as such, are as arbitrary and conditional as are the propositions of any other discipline. Errol Harris, a science commentator, cites Husserl to support the argument that "...scientific objectivity is not...primary and fundamental knowledge of an independent world, but...a construction of the knowing subject." (Harris, 1975: 86) Harris places this insight within a Kantian perspective by stating that "...not only is subjective experience intrinsic to mind, it is also originative of and prior to objectivity." (Harris, 1975: 85) Further, as Heidegger points out, all science operates within a predelineated field that is fixed by recognized professionals operating within a given historical period. The assumptions supporting this field, moreover, "...cannot be rationally justified, because they are prior to all questions and all answers to questions and thus to all rational supporting argument." (Harris, 1975: 87) Further, assumptions -- such as the notion that all phenomena is

explainable in terms of causation -- are, essentially, the product of taste.[27] (Harris, 1975: 85-87) In short, the current understanding of science is an altered perspective in which

> ...the old classical notion of science as objective knowledge has dissolved away altogether. Fact and observation have become derivative of theory, theory is a subjective invention, standards of truth and accuracy dependent upon both of these are relative to the historical epoch....In science, the human mind constructs a world view in its own way, prescribing its own standards and methods. The canons which are accepted in any period depend on taste just as they do in art and literature, the criteria of acceptance or rejection being primarily aesthetic in all three. (Harris, 1975: 89) [28]

Accordingly, the notion that scientific objectivity ultimately rests on subjective criterion is an insight that transforms empirical science from an instrument of truth-gathering into an instrument of insight-making; similar, one may say, to that of philosophy, art, and religion. Thus, there may be no justification for

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[27]The phrase "matters of taste" (with regard to contemporary science) refers to such things as the researcher's desire to create irreducible theories that match observed phenomena as accurately as possible.

[28]Even though philosophy has proved scientific objectivism to be impossible, some philosophers recognize a need for the 'truly objective' within science. Many of the benefits of scientific inquiry, they argue, depend on *considering* its insights to be objectively valid and, therefore, universality applicable. This assumption, moreover, may be necessary to other forms of conceptual systematizing. As Harris points out, "Unless we acknowledge, at least in principle, some objective conception of truth, no statement can legitimately be made and no position either held or defended. Some account of objectivity which will stand is therefore imperative or epistemology as well as science goes by the board." (Harris, 1975: 90) This sentiment parallels Kant's assertion that, eventhough we cannot know things in themselves, we must yet "think them as things in themselves." At first glance, the notion that we must consider (i.e., make believe) science to have objective validity flies in the face of all that we have learned of the unassailable condition of our own subjectivity. There may, however, be some rationale behind such an idea. Objectivity may allow one to incorporate science's insights more readily into ones mental representations of reality. After all, we do seem to trust objective analysis more than its subjective counterpart.

adhering to a strict, analytic view of reality. On a related note, one may ask: How are insights made?

Briefly, insight-making begins when the facility of reason attempts to connect new perceptions to pre-established notions so as to develop a coherent and non-contradictory concept of existence; a process not unlike that of scientific inquiry. Kant described the manner in which the mind systematizes experience. He writes:

> If we review our cognitions in their entire extent, we shall find that the peculiar business of reason is to arrange them into a system, that is to say, to give them connection according to a principle. This unity presupposes an idea -- the idea of the form of a whole (of cognition), preceding the determinate cognition of the parts, and containing the conditions which determine *a priori* to every part its place and relation to the other parts of the whole system. This idea accordingly demands complete unity in the cognition of the understanding -- not the unity of a contingent aggregate, but that of a system connected according to necessary laws. (Kant, 1900: 361)

Thus, according to Kant, our understanding of reality is the result of a process in which Mind systematizes our cognitions of the phenomenal world (perceptions) according to a determinate principle, an idea. This unifying idea exists *prior to* the information that we take in and serves, through the facility of reason, to connect new insights to the rest of the mind's diverse bits of understanding. The result is a whole and unified system of understanding based upon the necessary laws that the mind has inferred from its interactions with existence. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine meta cognitive learning in depth, common sense suggests that when one encounters new and discordant perceptions, the facility of reason, so as to maintain a harmonious and concordant view of reality, may respond in a number of ways. It may: 1.) shelve (i.e., ignore) the contradictory information while it investigates the situation further; 2.) modify (i.e., rationalize) the new information so as to fit it into the existing cognitive structure; 3.) reassess the determinate principle so that the new information may be imported, intact,

into the cognitive framework; or 4) employ a combination of any or all of the above. Anything less, one may argue, would result in mental chaos or insanity. This view of cognition may explain why it is so difficult to consider absolute finalities as existing alongside empirical infinitude and why so many of us tend to choose one to the exclusion of the other. If, on the other hand, one has a determinate principle that involves the notions of wholeness and balance, one might find it difficult to accept one view while dismissing the other without creating imbalance. Accordingly, the task of finding wholeness and balance amongst discordant views of reality requires that one take insights from many different sources -- from Art, philosophy, religion, anthropology, biology, physics, mathematics, etc. -- and connect them to one another through one of the methods discussed above. In this way, one may discover some underlying unity amongst diversity, and some sense of order amidst apparent chaos.

Thus, one might say that empirical science serves to *enhance* our common conceptions (as well as our common misconceptions) about the world. Its value is not found in the facts that it proposes, but rather in its ability to extend the mind's capacity for understanding. The same may be said of Art, religion, philosophy, etc. It is in this sense that the aims of these disciplines are an *extension* of the aims of the individual mind in its search for conceptual unity and wholeness. Harris agrees with this view and suggests that science augments the "schematization processes" of the individual mind as it goes about the business of formulating theories about existence. He writes:

> Theory is schematization, organization of experience, which begins in perception and is developed through common sense practice. The perplexities and contradictions arising out of common sense notions give rise to scientific investigation, and science is no more than a further process of systematization. It [science] is systematic thinking and its goal is complete unification, complete integration of diverse phenomena, without conflict or contradiction. (Harris, 1975: 91)

Walsh holds a similar view to that of Harris. Walsh states that "...the aim of modern science is...to transcend our usual perceptual limitations in order to

obtain more accurate and sensitive knowledge of the universe." (Walsh, 1980: 222) One may argue that if a systematic representation of reality, such as the one that science proposes, is to have application for more than one person, then there must be consensus regarding the validity of its insights. From a linguistic perspective, those things that are said to be generally valid are simply those things that we agree upon to have broad applicability. It is necessary, therefore, that there be some amount of consensus among researchers as to the 'truth value' of certain insights. In this way, empirical science can assert its observations to be a reasonably accurate reflection of our common world until such time that new insights necessitate changes to the original propositions. The rationale in asserting that some insights have broad application is that by doing so, we might consider our collective perceptions of existence as constituting, in total, a "...comprehensive, all-inclusive, coherent, and unified system of harmonious experience of a common world." (Harris, 1975: 94) It is in this way that science, in concert with the other disciplines, helps to extend our mental representations (concepts) of the phenomenal world beyond the limited scope of our own individual interactions with it. Thus, although ultimately subjective and temporal, notions that we generally agree to have broad applicability are helpful to the individual in forming a world-view that is compatible with that of others.[29]

Similarly, one may consider epistemology to be an extension of the mind's systematizing activity. Alfred North Whitehead, a philosopher-mathematician, coined the term "process metaphysics" to describe an epistemology in which God is continually changing along with everyone and everything else. Whitehead, in comparing his notions to those of orthodox religion, observes that our usual conception of God as a fixed and unchanging reality is a notion that is "...inseparable from our strange habit of thinking that reality ha(s) to have some existence outside consciousness." (Anderson, 1990: 210) This sort of god, Whitehead observes, is the god of the "...Greek quest for the ultimate cause and the ultimate truth." (*Ibid.,*) Whithead writes:

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[29]Thus, we come back to the question of ideals but now, with new insights to guide us, we find that ideals are not only transcendent, but may also have a relativistic aspect. Apart from being the product of individual speculation, transcendental ideals, in the reconstructed sense, are also the product of interaction and consensus of the self with others.

> The notion of God as the "unmoved mover" is derived from Aristotle, at least so far as Western thought is concerned. The notion of God as "eminently real" is a favorite doctrine of Christian theology. The combination of the two into the doctrine of an aboriginal, eminently real, transcendent creator, at whose fiat the world came into being, and whose imposed will it obeys, is the fallacy which has infused tragedy into the histories of Christianity and into Mahometanism.[30]
> (Anderson, 1990: 86)

Anderson, in explaining Whitehead's concerns, points out that the "vicious separation of the flux from the permanent(t)" within our culture is an aspect of the fact that we have placed, in Cartesian fashion, "the concept of an entirely static God, with eminent reality, in relation to an entirely fluent world, with deficient reality." (Anderson, 1990: 91) Rather than thinking of God as a static and *never-changing* presence, Whitehead's model envisions God as a fluid, and *ever-changing* presence; that is, as the systematic elevation, through reason, of the finite to the infinite. Essentially, this approach is the systematic process of orienting the Divine to the world in accord with our continually changing frames of reference. Thus, Whitehead's method of systematization is reconstructive in the sense that he brings together the notions of relativism and God, notions that seem incompatible at first. In doing so, he seems able to balance current theories about the relativistic aspects of phenomenal reality with a progressive notion about the nature of God. The determinate principle that he employs is one that allows our empirical orientation to remain intact while changing the traditional concept of God as unconditioned Being or Principle to one that is conditionally determined. In doing so, Whitehead achieves conceptual harmony and unity, but in a 'blending' sort of way. By modifying one concept to suit the other, Whitehead strikes a balance between God and the ever-changing aspect of empirical reality. However, by changing the nature of God so that our empirical orientation might accommodate Him, some of the original tension (vitality) between these two notions dissipates.

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[30]Quote is taken from Whitehead, Alfred North. "God in the World," in Ewert Cousins, ed., Process Theology. New York: Newman Press, 1971.

Nevertheless, as a method of locating meaning within existence, Whitehead's notions are extremely useful.

iii. Art and the Possible.

One may also consider Art, in its deconstructive and reconstructive modes, as another attempt to create conceptual unity within lived experience. Among its numerous fascinations, Art, by revealing 'the paradoxical' and 'the possible' within existence, helps to extend our understanding of a common world. With respect to the possible, artists such as Jozsef Toth take a regenerative approach to reality and explore possibilities for finding meaning within ordinary things. Working on the stony beaches of Vancouver, Toth's sculptures consist of rocks of various dimensions balanced upon one another, with the point of contact often being as small as several millimeters across. In describing the evolution of his work, Toth explains that he was "..doing it as a hobby until [he] recognized the art in it."[31] The notion that one can find art in something that was not originally intended as art, implies that art is not restricted to official 'art-making situations' but may, in fact, occur anywhere if one is open to new possibilities; that is, to new ways of seeing familiar things. Art, in this sense, is not a thing; it is closer to a way of seeing the world; the capacity, that is, to experience ordinary things in an *extra-ordinary* way. In explaining the view that he has of his work, Toth states that, "There is definitely something spiritual about it; it touches a chord in your soul....It's like the rock is communicating with you, telling you how to find the balance...."

Ed Varney, an artist, critic, and curator, places Toth's work within a wider context that includes other individuals engaged in similar activities. Varney suggests that, "On the one hand, you can't really tell the experienced practitioners from the amateurs, but...it can be considered a form of temporary public art....You get a sense of gravity and balance and...it says something about the way we think about the static point in a turning world."

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[31]From an interview with Chris Dafoe, the "Western Arts Correspondent" for *The Globe and Mail*. May 13, 1995. (All quotes concerning Toth are taken from this article.)

The interesting aspect that Varney brings up is the fact that one cannot differentiate between the rock-balancing that Toth engages in and the efforts of an "amateur". Implied in this statement is the expectation that art should be segregated from general interest by containment within a *recognizable* area of activity (Art), and attended to by recognized professionals (art-makers). This distinction is, however, of little consequence to artists such as Toth. Toth's concern is not to create signature pieces that bear the imprint of his own individual ego, but to engage in something that has meaning for himself as an individual and which might also have meaning for others. To that end, Toth gives workshops to teach others how to balance rocks and is planning a project for the UN headquarters in New York. Chris Dafoe explains that, "Toth sees the [UN] project as a way for rock balancing to change the world -- as it has his life." As idealistic as it may sound, the ascetic notion of changing the world through humble means points to a distinctive feature of what Gablick would call "the reenchantment project": the desire to communicate to others the potential that exists for finding meaning within the known world by looking at old things through new eyes. This way of thinking seems to gravitate, as if by magic, toward consideration of the things that *could be*. Thus, Toth recognizes his art -- a form of making that anyone can engage in -- as a way of reaffirming the possible within existence. In Toth's words, "You look at the rock and you think it's impossible to balance it. And when you see that it's not, it changes your perspective on everything."

Toth's work is not one of moralistic condescension; motivating others toward moralistic change is better achieved through politics or religion than it is through Art. Rather, his interest seems to spring from a genuine concern for things beyond the self, and a desire to situate himself and his work within a greater context; a context that includes some aspect of life beyond the studio. He also wants to share with others the discoveries that he makes along the way. Instead of preaching Toth shows others, by example, how to see the world in an enchanted way.

Answers are not necessarily the aim of such an enterprise. Rather than coming up with definitive and everlasting solutions to the perplexities of Being, the reconstructive approach offers insights as to how one might interpret

(integrate into ones meta cognitive framework) the phenomena of life. Like science, its notions may be useful until such a time as observation, practice, and theory no longer coincide. Thus, reconstruction offers *a view* of existence that does not prevent one from generating new insights that might further ones schematization of experience. Rather, the open-ended aspect of reconstruction allows one to discover for oneself -- through personal involvement in ordinary situations -- the potential significance of things *beyond* the self.[32]

Thus, by incorporating new perspectives into ones world view, deconstructive and reconstructive art together serve (along with philosophy, epistemology, science, etc.,) in the process of meaning-building. This does not, however, explain how an artist actually goes about the business of reconstructing meaning. To shed some light on this dynamic, it may be helpful to refer to Gablick.

iv. Reenchanting the World.

As discussed, our separation of various disciplines, in a generalized sense, is an artificial and arbitrary one that hides their basic interrelatedness. Gablick relates this notion to modernity's specializing tendencies and describes the attempt of some artists to unite/reunite various spheres of experience as "shamanic." She writes:

> Trying to make meaningful art in a society that doesn't believe in anything requires breaking down the rigidity of specialization, the segregation of functions and activities, both within the personality and within the community as a whole. It means reintroducing the artist in his role as shaman -- a mystical, priestly, and political figure in prehistoric cultures who...(was) a visionary and a healer. The shaman's function is to balance and center society, integrating many planes of life-experience, and defining the culture's relationship to the cosmos.... The

[32]By allowing the individual to find meaning for him/herself within the ordinary and the everyday, reconstruction reveals a somewhat democratic character.

> artist as shaman becomes a conductor of forces which go far beyond those of his own person, and is able to bring art back in touch with its sacred sources; through his own personal self-transformation, he develops not only new forms of art, but new forms of living. By offering himself as a prototype for a new creative mode -- that of a self without estrangement, able to transcend the world without negating it -- [such artists] show us how we might actually achieve the possibility of a society that would maximize personal autonomy *and* social relatedness at the same time. (Gablick, 1984: 126)

Gablick's description of the artist-as-shaman suggests that, by integrating many views (or perspectives) of life, the artist develops new ways of relating to the world and, in doing so, reconnects him/herself to a context beyond the self. The wedding of art with religion and philosophy is one such way that an individual might integrate various planes of life-experience. Within the psyche, such integration may take the form of a union between the need to find meaning within existence, and the need to *real*-ize that meaning in concrete form (e.g., through art-making). According to Gablick, these unitive experiences lead, invariably, to new forms of living. By performing this unitive function, the artist reclaims his/her shamanic role of visionary and healer and, in doing so, re-consecrates Art. Thus, Gablick's description implies that Art's original function, its sacred source, was to transform reality (in the service of society) by wedding various aspects of existence to one another. The idea that Art can create new forms of living by uniting/reuniting various planes of life experience, is an idea that imbues Art with the ability to locate meaning within existence.

It would, however, be a mistake to assume that the reconstructive approach advocates a return to a pre-modern or archaic state of Being. Rather, reconstruction recognizes the value of current insights but tries to balance these insights with traditional wisdom; that is, it tries to unite analytic inquiry with mystical speculation. As Gablick suggests,

> It is not a matter of trying to *imitate* an archaic cultural style so much as fostering psychic mobility -- opening oneself up to a range of visionary

> experience in a culture whose mindset has made the very idea of other worlds unthinkable.[33] (Gablick, 1991: 47)

Gablick goes on to suggest that, "Ritual, drumming, monotonous chanting, repetitive movements, are...an integral way to make a direct hit on this 'dreaming' aspect of the psyche." (*Ibid.,*) The notion that the psyche has a dreaming aspect is very poetic and relates quite nicely to Nietzsche's notion of the creative character of the dream-world (see above). Kant, however, would dismiss such notions as far too speculative to be of any value. Nevertheless, the notion that other worlds exist and that all we have to do is foster psychic mobility in order to experience them, gives some insight into the reconstructive approach. Gablick refers to this process as "dreaming forward" and equates it with the goal of "...ceasing to be hypnotized by the rational bias of Western society...." (Gablick, 1991: 48)

Gablick goes even further and suggests that we must "...[die] to the world of rationality, while awakening to powerful archetypal forces in the visionary world...." (*Ibid.,*) The idea that we need to stop ourselves from being hypnotized by rationality seems sound enough. However, the recommendation that we die to rationality in order to foster psychic mobility seems a bit presumptuous. One could argue that if one were to do as Gablick suggests, one would create a state of disequilibrium that is no better than the kind that we have at present; a disequilibrium that, instead of being filled with meaninglessness, is filled with all kinds of meaning that others cannot relate to. In other words, if one does not maintain some sense of balance, then one might find oneself convinced that he/she has been abducted by UFO's and turned into a yucca plant.[34] As enchanting as such an experience might be, ones family and friends are more likely to retreat from such notions than they are to share in them. Thus, reconstruction differs from many of the fundamentalist approaches to reenchantment in that it questions the notion that one has to give up

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[33]My emphasis.

[34]An individual related this occurrence, with great sincerity and conviction, to the Canadian investigative journalists from the television show W5. The episode was aired in April, 1995.

rationality altogether in order to gain new insights of the phenomenal world. In this way, balance is infinitely preferable to an either/or situation.

Medard Boss describes an ideal middle ground that I would call reconstructive. Boss describes a state of Being that has "...the capacity for perceiving the presence and meaningfulness of whatever appears, the capacity for responding meaningfully to the perceived significance of...phenomena in a way that corresponds to their significance." (Boss, 1979: 220) Although the meaningfulness of any experience is relative only to the viewer, the rational elucidation of that experience may open familiar doors through which others may then enter. In instances such as this, rationality finds its place alongside transcendentalism. As a foundation for making art, such an approach would encourage the artist to examine many relevant issues and perspectives to create a unitive and inclusive representation of reality; a representation that is neither nihilistic nor fundamental. In this way, the artist might reach beyond his/herself to discover new ways of relating to the world; ways that are meaningful instead of meaningless, inclusive instead of exclusive, restorative instead of nihilistic.

In summary, one may consider the systematic connection of insights to one another (aided by the various spheres of substantive reason) as a generalized attempt to harmonize theory with lived experience and, thereby, to extend our understanding of a common world. Reconstruction goes one step further in search of affirmative meanings upon which to orientate ones theories. Reconstructive activities, such as the Toth's rock-balancing, allow one to *real*-ize some of the meanings that are possible within lived experience. In short, deconstructive analyticism is not enough on its own; we also need speculation to maintain a sense of balance in life. Balance, moreover, allows all facets of our creative existence to wed themselves to one another. All experiences -- from our individual perceptions of the world to our collective attempts to elucidate such perceptions -- combine to form an ensemble of interrelated bits of wisdom. Mind, in turn, is the conductor, par excellence, of a symphony of diverse but interconnected insights. It is, as Walsh suggests, a case in which "...the brain and the remainder of the universe constitute a coherent whole." (Walsh, 1980: 224)

v. Reconstruction and Transcendentalism.

In the same way that cognition interconnects all spheres of substantive reason, nature may interconnect all of the objects of empirical investigation. Walsh describes this interconnectedness as a situation in which,

> ...any object, if examined by any perceptual mode with a sensitivity enhanced to sufficient degree either by direct training or by scientific instrumentation, might be expected to present a picture of its inherent nature as...dynamic, fluid, impermanent, holistic, interconnected, inter-dependent, foundationless, self-consistent, empty, paradoxical, probabilistic, infinitely over-determined, and inextricably linked to the consciousness of the observer." (Walsh, 1980: 225)

Reconstruction, as the act of locating meaning through the conceptual systemization of diverse insights, is a perceptual mode that presents the world in similar terms to those used by Walsh. However, as an inclusive approach, reconstruction does not eliminate the possibility that some things may be static, permanent, and unconditioned (i.e., absolute). To deny, absolutely, that there are no absolutes is to be guilty of the same fallacy of the dogmatist (to borrow Kant's term) who asserts, absolutely, that everything is predetermined. Thus, reconstruction does not deny the possibility that absolutes exist; neither does it deny that things, as we know them, are interconnected and relative. Toward the extremes, reconstruction 'imagines' the existence of an absolute, unconditioned state against which the relative, conditioned universe exists. To exclude or minimize this possibility would be to fall into the either/or mentality that may be the cause of disequilibrium within our Cartesian culture.

It would be instructive, at this point, to reconstruct (using pure and speculative reason) a view of reality that includes the notion of an entirely static, permanent, and unconditioned state. Returning to Kant, speculative reconstruction of his insight (that we can have no knowledge of things in themselves) is such that it may lead to a terminus in the chain of conditions

that constitutes empirical reality for us. According to Kant, Mind, in contemplating the various qualities and characteristics of an existent's appearance, comes upon insight after insight in the empirical chain of conditions until it reaches the *thing in itself*. Kant suggested that the infinitely conditioned character of appearances prevents one from ever reaching the thing in itself because there would always be other conditions to consider. Thus, one may suggest that Kant's notion of a never-ending chain of conditions applies only to the empirical aspect of reality (appearances), and not to the things of which we can have no knowledge (things in themselves). One may make an equally valid argument for the proposition that one cannot say for certain that, given sufficient time and resources, one could never come upon an end in the chain from conditioned to condition; it would, after all, take only one instance to disprove the rule. In mathematics, for example, a simple postulate states that the sum of two primes will always equal an even number. This is, however, unprovable since no-one could ever apply this theory to every prime integer that might exist (including the ones that approach infinity in length). (Morris, 1987) Thus, one can assert that there is no end in the empirical chain of conditions *only to the same degree of certainty* that one can ascribe to the notion that there might be a terminus at some point. The argument verges on the paradoxical, and should not prevent us from further speculation. Setting this argument aside, one may suggest that, all empirical attempts to gain understanding break down at the point where Mind tries to discover the thing in itself. At this point, Mind is forced to recognize, not its limited capacities, but the unknowable condition of that which is beyond it. If we ignore, for the moment, the chasm that separates appearance from the object in itself, we may consider the realization that we can never know a thing in itself as an absolute terminus in the chain of empirical conditions; a break, if you like, that allows the mind to rest in the knowledge that, at a certain point, one can learn absolutely nothing more about an object.

Retaining the distinction between object and appearance need not, however, be unproductive. Munitz expands on Kant's insight about the basic unknowability of things in themselves and suggests that one can apply such an insight to our

notions of Existence.[35] To explain how Existence is fundamentally unknowable *in itself*, Munitz first discards Platonic creation-metaphysics in favor of its theistic counterpart. As described above, the Platonic view maintains that the demiurge imposed order on nature and, in so doing, created the known universe. This creationist perspective asserts that the universe, in its 'uncreated' form, *already existed* as raw material which the divine Craftsman then *transformed* into Creation as we know it. The universe, according to this view, is order imposed on pre-existent phenomena. The traditional theistic view differs from the Platonic in that theism concerns itself not only with the ordering of existents within the observable universe, but also with the notion that *anything should exist at all*. From this perspective derives the notion of *creatio ex nihilo* (the creation of something out of nothing). According to this view, the Creator not only ordered the material universe but also brought it into being. Munitz explains that "...the concept of 'nothing' is consequently a distinctive feature of western theology." (Munitz, 1990: 52) Several books of the Old Testament allude to the notion that God created something out of nothing. One verse, for instance, asks us to "...look at the earth and sky and everything in them, and consider how God made them out of what did not exist...." (2 Maccabees 7:28)[36] These words imply that before God's act of creatio ex nihilo, there was neither space, nor time, nor material. In other words, before Creation, there was nothing.

Although Plato believed the world to be order imposed on pre-existent phenomena, he did suggest, in Timaeus, that time *began* with the creation of the material universe. Plato states that "...time was generated together with the universe, that being produced together they might together be dissolved, if any dissolution should ever happen to these." (Plato, 1944: 133-34) Plato then goes on to suggest that time itself is a mere *facsimile* of its divine prototype, which he describes as "permanent being." According to Plato, "...time was

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[35]For the purpose of expediency, when I refer to the notion of 'existence in itself', I will use a capitalized version of the term existence. Thus, the word 'Existence', will refer to a state *beyond* that of concrete Being (the state that we recognize as belonging to ourselves and to other existents within the phenomenal universe). In this sense, Existence is that aspect of reality that is *apart from* the quantifiable properties of the phenomenal universe.

[36]Taken from The New Jerusalem Bible. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1985.

generated according to the exemplar of an eternal nature,...permanent being, through the whole of eternity." (Plato, 1944: 133) As a mere copy of the exemplar of permanent being, time, as we know it, is imperfect. Hence, if the universe were to dissolve, time would also dissolve. The eternal exemplar, however, would remain intact according to Plato.

Modern Physicists, such as Stephen Hawking, seem to reiterate this aspect of Plato's theory by suggesting that time -- in addition to matter and space -- was produced within the first millisecond of the "Big Bang." Likewise, they suggest, if gravity were to reverse the expansion of the universe, thereby causing it to collapse in what they call the "Big Crunch", then time would cease. The notion that time is a created thing, whether created by a divine Craftsman as Plato assumed or by a quantum fluctuation as modern physicists assume, implies that time is *not* eternal but may be uncreated (dissolved) at some future point in the history of the universe. The idea that time can be made and then unmade, perhaps an infinite number of times over, seems to imply that time exists within a larger context: a sort of 'eternal ground', upon which, time has its being; or toward which, time vainly aspires.

The thought of an eternal ground does not come easy. No sooner has one grasped a sense of it, than it immediately slips away. To make such a notion stick in ones mind, it may be necessary to imagine what things might have been like *before* the birth of the universe. Another problem immediately presents itself: the notion of a time *prior* to the beginning of the universe can only be a relative notion because the terms 'prior' and 'before' are linguistic symbols that are inextricably linked to our concept of time. If time began with the creation of the universe, then there may have been no 'before' of which we can intelligently speak. Setting this logistic hurdle aside, physicists assume that prior to the Big Bang, nothing -- not time, not energy, not matter -- existed. Some theories allow for the presence of a single, dimensionless point of infinite energy that was infinitely dense. Other theories maintain that not even this existed and that everything came into being as the result of a "quantum fluctuation." This theory suggests that a space bubble formed *from nothing* and then began to expand at which point a quantum fluctuation occurred creating a rift in space-time. (Morris, 1987) From this rift emerged

all of the matter and energy that now exists in the universe. Still other theories propose that a quantum fluctuation occurred as an expanding space bubble "split off from a mother universe". (*Ibid.,*) There may be many such mother universes, each one existing without any knowledge of the others. In any case, reason tells us that if the universe *came into being*, in whatever manner, then prior to the Beginning -- of time, energy, and matter -- there was nothing *except* the infinite, ever-present *potential for Being*.

To support the proposition that there is an eternal ground (an ever-present potential for Being) upon which time now exists, one may appeal to its corollary; namely, the statement that if there was *no* potential for being, then the universe would not be. But the universe is; we know this because if it was not, then we would not be here to say that "it is." It is safe to say that the universe might not have been. If its initial expansion rate had been too fast, gravity would not have been strong enough to pull gases together to form galaxies and stars. If its initial expansion rate had been too slow, gravity would have pulled everything inward long before galaxies and stars could have had a chance to form. Physicists refer to this scenario as the "Big Burp". (*Ibid.,*) Suppose, for a moment, that one of these scenarios did occur. If the universe had not been, it would not prove that it could never be. Although we would not be here to consider these arguments, the ground upon which what might have been, would still be. In other words, with or without the universe, the potential for its creation would remain. Many universes, perhaps an infinite number, may in fact have already come and gone without us. In any case, the fact that we are, indicates that there *is* potential for Being rather than nothing at all; not just for us and the rest of the material existents within the universe, but for the universe itself. This insight brings us to the reasoned conclusion that before the Big Bang, all that existed was the ever-present potential for Being: *Existence itself.* Munitz uses the term "boundless existence" to describe this "...fundamental aspect of reality 'beyond' that of the universe." (Munitz, 1990: 53)

The concept of boundless existence encapsulates the kind of experience that mystics and metaphysicians refer to when they speak of eternal and ultimate reality. Scotus Erigena referred to such a state as God; Meister Eckhart

referred to it as the "Godhead"; the Spanish kabbalists referred to it as "Ein-Sof" (meaning 'infinite'). (Munitz, 1990: 58-61) To define boundless existence as an ultimate, eternal, permanent, and unconditioned state, is to use terms that can also apply to our notions of God. Further, as Munitz suggests, the concept of boundless existence signifies a "*...total absence of form or intelligibility.*" (Munitz, 1990: 64) In other words, the ever-present potential for being is a state *opposite* to the one that we experience. It is the mirror of our finite Being; a state of *eternal non-being.*[37]

This unfathomable aspect of Existence is similar to the Neo-Platonic conception of the Divine; that is, the eternal, transcendent aspect of reality which, for us as temporal beings, is utterly unknowable. In contrast to theism, however, one need not focus on an object of religious attention to acquire a sense of boundless existence. As Munitz points out, "...an awareness of this dimension of reality is available to human beings apart from any adherence to a theistic creational metaphysics." (Munitz, 1990: 53) One need only acquire a sense of the boundless, unconditioned character of eternal non-being; the eternal ground that always *supports existence* but never needs support itself. The concept is difficult and somewhat evasive. To make it a bit more intelligible, Munitz phrases it this way: The question of why there is existence rather than *nothing at all* is a question that defies all attempts to answer it. Regardless of how many new insights that science achieves in relation to individual features of the observable universe, and even if science were to devise an equation that explained the fundamental nature of the observable universe, the fact that there is Existence instead of nothing at all will remain forever beyond the grasp of our understanding. (Munitz, 1990: 192-208) Simply put, the *presence* of the observable universe may be explainable, but boundless existence is not. Thus, one comes up against an absolute terminus in the empirical chain of conditions that represents our reality. It is a finality beyond which our empirical nature will not allow us to transcend; a terminus

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[37]Eternal non-being does not imply a state of absolute nothingness. Absolute nothingness is a concept that signifies a complete negation of potential. The phrase eternal non-being is a term that implicates the notion of potential through conceptual linkage with the phrase "finite being". Eternal non-being, in this sense, is the permanent potential for being, or Existence in its boundless and unconditioned state.

that, nevertheless, allows us to maintain some notion of the Divine and, perhaps, a small modicum of faith.

vi. Divine Union.

Returning to Kant, the reconstructive potential of Kant's insight that we can only know a thing as it appears to us is such that it may lead one to a deeper understanding of the fundamental unity of Mind, consciousness, and Existence. To make this connection, one must first recognize that the phenomenal universe cannot be cognate without Mind; an insight that reveals the indivisive relationship between Mind and cognition. It is, in fact, senseless to separate the two; that is, it makes little or no sense to talk about cognition without Mind, or Mind without cognition. Further, the primary constituents of cognition are appearances[38] which, in turn, are inseparable from the objects of perception. Thus, one may come to understand Mind as indivisible from the object of its perception because without Mind, appearances dissolve into non-existence and the object ceases to be (at least as far as the observing subject is concerned). Likewise, without the object (the locus of ones perception) Mind has nothing to which it can anchor itself. This is reality for us. Rather than being forever isolated from all things beyond the self, the unitary construction of reality allows us to say that Mind and all of the objects of its perception are intimately connected and interrelated. Thus, beyond deconstruction and its amplification of the boundary between self and other, a reconstructive perspective reveals that Mind, appearances, and the phenomenal universe are inseparable from one another; that is, all are inextricably bound together through cognition and cannot be considered in isolation without doing harm to our notion of reality. This insight seems to be an existential fact of our Being.

Others have come to understand the intimate relationship between the phenomenal universe and Mind. Walsh takes such a view by stating that "..the environment can only be known through the brain.... All observation is a function of the consciousness of the observer and thus the known universe is

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[38]The term appearance, in this context, includes all of the properties that our senses allow us to experience: smell, sound, texture, etc.

inextricably linked with consciousness rather than being separable into consciousness and objects of consciousness." (Walsh, 1980: 224) Hence, Walsh concludes that, "The brain and the remainder of the universe thus constitute a coherent whole; they cannot be separated and studied independently without constituting an artificial and distorting duality that hides their underlying unity and interconnectedness." (*Ibid.,*) One may take this notion a bit further by suggesting that if Mind, appearances, and the objects of perception are inseparable from one another, then Mind may be nothing less than the *extension* of existence *into consciousness.*

vii. Summation.

In summary, by understanding Mind as that which binds us to the universe of observable existents, inextricably connected to and indivisible from it, and our constructions of art, science, and philosophy as further, conscious extensions of the whole, our empirical existence ceases to be meaningless. Instead, our experience of an ever-changing reality which, paradoxically, has boundaries beyond which Mind cannot ascend, is the expression of a self-consistent universe that is unitary and divinely whole. Like life's yearning for itself, we, as cognate beings, are existence's yearning for consciousness. If one can consider God to be the ever-present potential for being, the supporting field for existence, and we and other self-conscious entities are the means by which existence achieves consciousness, then we may, in this respect, consider ourselves as the 'empirical instruments' of the Divine within time and space. Thus, a reconstructed view of Kantian metaphysics allows one to retain, and even emphasize, some notion of meaning, beyond the self, within existence.

V. The Work.

i. Introduction.

The purpose of the preceding sections was to establish a context against which the following pages may be read. The arguments I have put forth, and the ideas I have tried to develop should not be considered an explanation of the works that I describe below but, a *philosophical framework* designed to support the ideas that my work embodies. My goal is not to provide a definitive definition of the work, but to give a *sense* of what it is about; a sense, that is, of its relationship to concepts beyond that which is provable, and its connection to the unseen elements within that which is visible.

ii. Shaping Consciousness.

> *It is a general belief that we (artists) live only through our senses, and that the world of appearances suffices us. We are taken for children who, intoxicated with changing colours, amuse themselves with the shapes of things as with dolls. We are misunderstood. Lines and colours are only to us the symbols of hidden realities. Our eyes plunge beneath the surface to the meaning of things, and when afterwards we reproduce the form, we endow it with the spiritual meaning which it covers.*
>
> -- *Rodin*[39]

A recurring element within my work is its penchant to wed the non-material idea or abstraction with the material object or substance so as to emphasize the distinct qualities and properties of both. Implicit in this is the attempt to highlight the unique character of an object in relation to the generalized character of certain ideas or concepts, an example of which are my marked stones. In these works, I have inscribed mathematical shapes -- squares, circles, parallel lines, etc., -- into the surface of each stone, leaving the rest of

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[39] Rodin on Art and Artists, 1983, p.80.

the object unaltered. In total, a modest portion of each stone is actually manipulated. One may argue that it is necessary to work all of the material; to transform the object, in its entirety, into something better (i.e., more admirable than the stone in its original condition). The term 'better', however, can only have relative meaning since any criterion that I apply to this notion is invariably subjective (i.e., a judgment of taste). In other words, how can one say that a stone, in its unaltered state, is less worthy of ones admiration than a stone that has been completely transformed, when equally valid arguments may be made to support either case? In the end, all depends on individual preferences. Thus, rather than trying to change a stone into something better, or into something other than what it is, I prefer to allow it to *be what it is*, at least inasmuch as the work will allow. In short, my intent is not to 'change' these objects into something other than what they are; to do so would be to impose an arbitrary judgment (of taste) on the stone to the degree that the stone, as it is, becomes inconsequential to the work. What I am after, rather, is retention of the object's 'is-ness' and the incorporation of this aspect of its Being into the artwork as a primary element. Further, if I were to deny the actuality of the object in itself and completely transform it, I would destroy that aspect of the object that makes it unique; that is, the object would cease to exist as an individuated entity and would, instead, become homogenized material devoid of the original object's history and identity.[40] One could argue that anything that I do to the stone, short of leaving it entirely alone, would be enough of an alteration to change it from one state of Being into that of another. There is validity to this argument. In degrees of change, however, the less drastic the alteration, the greater the retention of the object's original character. In the end, what I am after is some degree of balance between the original character of the object and its altered state.[41] The desire to retain the

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[40]The notion that something in one state is mere material, while in another state it becomes an object, is a matter of semantics. If one were to place a ten-ton boulder in amongst dozens of other ten-ton boulders, that boulder may be said to be part of a field (i.e., undifferentiated material support for something else). However, to somehow distinguish that object from other 'like objects' is to emphasize it as containing a unique history and identity; to establish it as 'fact against a field'.

[41]This process is not an elevation of what is seen to what is not which, according to Joyce, would result in the 'idealization of nature' and the creation of "bad art".

object's is-ness and to balance this with my own *intentions*, is, of course, one of personal preference and relates to the meaningfulness that I see within the object itself.

Since my intent is not to destroy an existing object in the creation of something new, an alternative approach would be to handle the object in such a way that I bring to awareness some of the qualities or characteristics that are intrinsic to it. One of the most powerful methods of disclosing the fundamental is-ness of something is through contrast. As mentioned in the preceding sections, our dualistic orientation is the unavoidable condition that we, as self-conscious, empirical entities, must endure. How we choose to deal with this condition, however, depends on the individual. One could spend ones whole life becoming adept at transcending ego-boundaries and merging with phenomena (like a Yogi); or one could learn how to 'cope' with the terminal condition of being human. In this sense, maintaining a Cartesian perspective of the phenomenal world need not be an obstacle to meaning-building if we maintain balance between opposites and recognize their underlying unity. If one acknowledges that dualism might very well be the natural order of things -- the way things are and the way they *need to be* -- and that one cannot change this fundamental aspect of our Being no matter how hard one tries, then one may eventually free oneself to fully experience the dynamism and energy that is intrinsic to opposites. From this perspective, instead of merging opposites into an undifferentiated whole, one may, in fact, choose to emphasize their individual characteristics so as to highlight the tension that exists between them.

To fully experience the energy that is inherent to opposites, Robert Bly, an author and archetypal psychologist, recommends that we position ourselves between them and then "...stretch out our arms and push the opposites as far apart as we can, and then live in the resonating space between them." (Bly, 198 : 175) From Bly's point of view, if one desires to maintain the tension that exists between such things as matter and Mind, one would not combine them until they became a single entity, but would instead bring them together and allow each to be what it is. The reconstructive act of bringing matter and Mind together is, in this sense, an attempt to experience both in their full Being while

allowing neither one to dominate. For this reason, I approach my sculptures with the determinate principle (or intuitive desire) of balancing the abstracting tendencies of Mind with the actualities of concrete phenomena so that both may be experienced as fully as possible. This is the primary feature of much of my work and seems to occur with or without conscious effort.

The union of stone with mathematical shape is, therefore, not the sort that Burger describes as a disillusionment of the subject "...in favor of an immediacy in which all opposites are blandly dissolved...." (Burger, 1991: 5) The state that Burger envisions is a 'watering-down' of Being in which one element dilutes the efficacy of the other; like mixing complimentary colours to create a neutral gray that retains little of the original character of its constituent elements. The kind of unitive experience that I am discussing is more analogous to the effects that one achieves when placing one complimentary colour *next* to another; the contrast holds both in a dynamic state of tension in which neither colour loses its original properties. Instead of bland disillusionment, juxtaposition emphasizes the richness and vibrancy of each. It is like a marriage in which both partners guild one another through complimentary interaction. Jose Arguelles, an aesthetics philosopher, explains that a wedding such as this is "...synergistic, and not at all like adding two and two and getting only four." (Arguelles, 1975: 286) It is the synergistic effect of uniting contrasting and complimentary properties and ideas that provides my carved stones with their tension and dynamism. It is the unseen force that animates each piece.

With this in mind, it seems appropriate (if not necessary) that I emphasize a stone's character -- its concreteness, materiality, and history -- by setting complimentary properties -- abstraction, non-materiality, and non-history -- next to it. In relation to the object's history, one may say that the ordinariness of a stone's appearance is such that it connects the object to 'the everyday', while the marks on its surface -- the scars, scratches, chips, and cracks -- convey a sense its connection to the past. From this perspective, its weather-worn contours evoke a sense of the larger context of our planetary evolution and the eons of geologic time that have elapsed in forming these objects. Deeper consideration of the stone's *every*-dayness -- its connection not just to

the days of the present and recent past, but to all the days that stretch back to the formation of the earth -- imbues the stone with a sense of temporality and actuality and, perhaps, even a sense of sacredness.[42] In carving a shape into the stone, I add another mark, a self-conscious mark, that then becomes a part of the stone's history.

In contrast to the stone's history, is the mathematical shapes that I carve into these objects. As mentioned in the first section, one may consider the intellectual abstractions of geometry to be the *real*-ization of something idyllic. In Platonic terms, the square and circle are transcendent exemplars for things within the phenomenal world; that is, they exist as intelligible prototypes for things that aspire to mathematical perfection. In a Kantian sense, mathematical forms, similar to those of Euclidean geometry, come closer than anything else to giving an à priori sense of space. (Kant, 1900: 32-35) Thus, shapes such as the square and the circle seem to transcend all place and history. They seem to have an unconditioned quality. They appear to exist apart from other conditions in an eternal space that contrasts with the finitude and history of concrete matter. By incorporating these idealized shapes within

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[42]One may argue that the mere *desire* to incorporate an object's history into the artwork is not sufficient reason to imbue the piece with 'meaning beyond that which is visible'. In other words, if all that the viewer sees when he/she looks at the stone is its 'crude appearance' (i.e., its scarred surface), then any notion of the object's connection to a larger context is lost. This is a completely reasonable observation, however, one can no more anticipate the reactions that a viewer might have than one can control them. In the same way that many of us associate beauty with 'the lofty', many of us also associate ugliness with 'the lowly'. Oscar Wilde contemplated the relative worth of beauty within objects, and the reaction that such characteristics evoked in others. In the preface to, The Picture of Dorian Gray, Wilde states that, "Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault. Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For those there is hope." (Werhane, 1985: 380) To Wilde's words, one could add: Those who find beautiful meanings in ugly things are the open minded. From these we should learn.

As 'opinionated' as Wilde's words seem, they do reveal the fact that individual aesthetic preferences are varied and impossible to anticipate. The best that an artist can accomplish, given these circumstances, is to do what is required of the work with the hope that others might get some sense of the intent behind it.

the crude materiality of natural stone (and other unrefined materials), I create situations in which the precision of the mathematical shape (the abstracted concept) contrasts and compliments the imprecision of the material object (phenomenal reality), and vise versa. From this perspective, the unconditioned shape embodies the principle of order and harmony and contrasts with the conditioned stone which, in turn, embodies the notion of chaos and circumstance. It is in this sense that one may consider my carved stones to be 'abstract idea' set beside 'concrete material'.

In short, the meaning that I am constructing with my carved stones is of an extra-ordinary kind. By placing a mathematical shape on a stone whose organic contours are marked with the history of its Becoming, I am emphasizing the contingency of presence (the stone) within the context of conscious Being and the quest for something ideal (mathematical perfection). On a more transcendent level, the wedding of matter with Mind is an attempt to *real*-ize the infinite unknown (Existence) that exists apart from and as part of the finite known (the phenomenal world). It is an *attempt to envision* the counterpart of temporal Being: eternal non-being.

iii. Site-works.

My site-works also unite matter with Mind in the attempt to emphasize the nature of both. The work entitled *Earth Circle*, for instance, consists of a perfectly circular vault, measuring four feet across by four feet deep, filled with leaves and embedded within an eight-ton pile of discarded loam. One may associate earth (or dirt) to the baser, more material aspects of existence. The earth sustains us by providing sustenance and the raw materials that we need for our survival. We grow food in the soil, extract minerals from it, harvest the plants that it produces, and depend on the air and the water that are part of the planet's eco-system. But, at the same time that the earth sustains us, it also reminds us of our failings and mortality. One of the associations connected to a pile of earth is its use in burials. Death is feared by most not because of its connection to pain and suffering but because of its unknown aspects. In mythic terms, we conceive of a place beneath the earth -- Hades

or Hell -- where all of the darker aspects of human nature -- the evil, cruelty, and madness -- are drawn. The earth, in this sense, symbolizes both a birthing and an abode to all that is base to being human. But, viewed from space, the earth is a nearly perfect sphere: the most economical of all naturally occurring forms, and the most irreducible of all geometric shapes. Again, one may consider geometry and mathematics to be among the loftier achievements of Mind. These inventions stand out in the way that they strive for ideal resolution, harmony, and perfection. Reduced and simplified to its most essential components, the beautiful equation abstracts something very close to 'truth' from the physical world. These marvels of human genius exemplify our ability to observe, elucidate, abstract, and then apply the insights that nature presents to us; it is the spiritualization of physical reality. Thus, the pile of loam surrounding a perfect circle presents a unitive thought of what it means to be human: the spiritualizing mind coexistent with animal being; the self-conscious entity coexistent with primordial Being. It is the acknowledgment of both our animal nature and our aspirations toward perfection and transcendence. It is not a submission of one to the other, but a harmonious coexistence in which one cannot survive without the other. The circle needs the dirt to be seen; the loam, in turn, is nothing but a pile of dirt without the circle.

From another perspective, a certain amount of tension existed between the work and the site itself. I executed the work on a construction site near the University of Calgary Art Building. The relentless construction that was going on while the piece was in existence evoked a sense of chaos, disorder, and confusion. Hour after hour every day during the life of the piece, heavy earth-moving equipment lumbered across the site, scooping up thousands of tons of broken concrete, asphalt, and soil and depositing them into dump-trucks. Amidst the confusion, the transformed pile of loam stood in quiet solitude. Its static green circle, tranquil and serene, seemed untouched by the surrounding devastation. The seeming incongruity of a perfect, green circle set against frenetic activity created a sense of tension in which each element contrasted and complimented the other. The physical intensity of the demolition emphasized the cerebral quality of the circle. The calmness of the circle, in turn, emphasized the violence of the activity. Each element seemed to stand

out and become *more real* in relation to the other. The overall effect was one of nearly hypnotic tension and balance between 'raw physicality' and 'ethereal Mind'.

Intellectual abstraction need not, however, be confined to static and orderly shapes. Geometric shapes are appropriate when dealing with organic objects and sites that do not have regularized features but, when dealing with spaces that are highly regularized, a different approach is necessary if one is to maintain some sense of balance within the work. For this reason, some of my works use abstracting principles to introduce a sense of controlled chaos to an otherwise orderly environment. The site-work entitled, "Marking Space, Time, and Mind", is a work that transformed the outside deck at the University of Calgary Art Building. On this site, measuring 70 meters long by 10 meters wide, I rearranged existing concrete slabs (the deck floor) according to a systematic formula so as to transform the two dimensional surface of the deck into a three-dimensional space.[43] To execute the piece, I sequentially elevated the two opposing edges of successive pairs of blocks until I had created incremental spaces between all pairs. Once I had raised a number of blocks in a smooth transition from horizontal to approximately 60 degrees, I then lowered succeeding pairs of blocks from the highest (center) point of the configuration until they re-merged into the horizontal field. I repeated this procedure three times, varying the number of blocks each time, along an axis running from one end of the deck to the other. The result was three upward surging rifts or openings, each different from the next, cutting an organic-shaped line through the grid-like field of blocks. Thus, through the systematic application of a mathematical principle, I was able to introduce an element of dynamism and energy into an otherwise static and lifeless environment.

One may argue that it is not necessary to use something as intellectualized as a mathematical formula to create a chaotic situation; pure randomness would result in something far more chaotic. There is some validity to this criticism,

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[43]The formula that I used when elevating the blocks was $n = x + 1$ (n represents the elevation for the two opposing edges of a pair of blocks; x represents the amount of elevation of the previous pair of blocks; 1 represents the thickness of one block). The formula for lowering the blocks was a simple reversal: $n = x - 1$.

however, the problem with allowing the chaotic element to become completely haphazard (undirected) is that one risks losing the sense of purposiveness that seems built into the automating principle of mathematical design. Without getting too far off topic, automation is when one aspect of the work demands that the artist follow a certain course of action -- one condition necessitating another, and another, and so on -- toward the inevitable completion of the work. In this sense, a work that is made according to a systematic mode of making, is a work that dictates its own needs; that is, automation allows the work to 'make itself' according to its own inner logic and chain of necessities.[44] Thus, my use of a mathematical principle imbued the new, chaotic element of the deck with a sense of purpose, intent, and necessity, whereas random alterations without an underlying logic would have given the chaotic element an accidental, unintended appearance. As a result, the dynamism of the rifts contrasted and complimented the static aspect of the grid, while an underlying sense of purposiveness -- a sense of self-consistent necessity -- unified and held everything in tension.

By allowing the work to make itself, I removed, to a large extent, the arbitrary judgment of taste that I would have had to use in deciding how the piece should look. In this sense, the work was based on something beyond the self; that is, on something other than the ego-based facility of aesthetic preference. One may argue that in choosing to automate the work, I was asserting an aesthetic preference. This is true, but the aesthetic choice that I made was one that allowed the piece to center itself in relation to something *beyond* myself as its maker: mathematics. In a Platonic sense, I was the agent that altered pre-existent phenomena according to the necessary laws dictated by the work itself. In doing so, I reconstructed a new kind of order that one might call "ordered disorder."

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[44]Robert Morris refers to this concept of 'letting the piece make itself' as automation, and suggests that it provides the artwork with a sense of purposiveness that is beyond that of aesthetic judgment. (see, Robert Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated." In Sculpture, vol. 13, #2 [March - April, 1994], pp. 22-29) This idea relates back to the works of Duchamp who believed that Art must be based on something more compelling than mere taste if it is to ever have an impact beyond the sphere of aesthetics. Thus, Duchamp created the 'automatic artwork' using found objects. (*Ibid.*,)

iv. Summation.

I have provided only a few examples of my efforts to reconstruct meaning through my work. These example are, nevertheless, representative of my work in its broadest sense. My desire to balance matter with Mind, to allow each to be what it is, and to revel in the tension that results, are all desires that spring from a deeper need; a need to orientate myself to the world in ways that emphasize the tangibility of the things that are real, as well as the reality of the things that are intangible. My work as an artist is, in this sense, the effort to construct new (but not unknown) meaning with familiar things. I have described this approach as reconstructive in the sense that it deals with things as they are, while locating meaning within the resonating space that exists between divergent phenomena. The primary aims of this approach are balance, unity, and tension. In short, the goal of my reconstructive efforts is to bring together various phenomena and perspectives so as to create something that is vital, alive, and greater than the sum of its parts. This synergistic feature is, invariably, present within each work.

VI. Conclusion.

The subject/object duality that we experience seems to be an inborn feature of being human. We exist as empirical subjects in relation to an objective world. We can no sooner overcome this 'split' between self and other than we can overcome the condition of being human. The notion that our subject/object duality is based on language-dependent concepts is true, but one may argue that regardless of what symbol system we employ -- whether it be language or something other than language -- we will always find ourselves up against the fact that we are empirical subjects who must interact with phenomenal existence in a biologically determined, empirical way. Thus, Cartesian metaphysics, as an ontological concept, recognizes one of the innate conditions of being human: dualism. To change this condition would require that one bridge the duality between subject and object and come to "know things in themselves" which, as Kant argues, is utterly impossible. To do so one would have to become god-like, in which case, one is no longer human. Only in this way could one bridge the division between dualities. Recognizing our unassailable subjectivity may not, however, put us at a disadvantage. Who wants to be god-like anyway?

To reconstruct a meaningful view of reality means to find some commonality within diverse and dualistic concepts. Having this as a determinate principle might move one to embrace the dualities that life offers and, perhaps, emphasize them so that they contrast and compliment one another. From such a perspective, being human and experiencing an unassailable split between subject and object could allow one to retain notions such as God and eternity while experiencing conditioned reality to its fullest. From this perspective, transcendental concepts -- immortality, eternity -- are valuable because they provide a contrast for the known aspects of reality -- mortality, temporality -- and allow us to make greater sense of things through comparison. To eliminate either the analytic or the speculative aspect of reason would do irreparable harm to a meaningful and comprehensive view of existence. Thus, Reconstructionism hypothesizes that by placing diverse things together without trying to make them a single entity (wedding, or unification without subsumation), one is able to maintain the energy and

dynamism that is inherent to opposites. According to this view, dualities need one another so as to be intelligible as individualized entities. The 'problem of dualisms', in this sense, is really a problem of uneven or unbalanced concepts where one idea overpowers another to the point of annihilation.

Paradoxically, a reconstructed view of reality suggests that an inherent unity underlies all things. As explained above, the inextricable connection that Mind has to reality -- in which things in themselves need Mind to be *real*-ized -- implies that Mind may be the *extension* of the phenomenal world into consciousness, in which case, we might consider ourselves as interrelated, through Mind, to the rest of existence. Further speculation leads to the notion that we are, perhaps, the cognitive 'coming-into-Being' of Creation. Notions such as this, provable or not, may aid one in balancing an ego-centric view of existence, where the self is the center around which all things revolve, with a gnosis-centric view of existence, where God is the center around which all things revolve. In an interconnected model, the self revolves, with all other things, around a common center of unknowable purposiveness. By considering such a notion, one may find a way to achieve equilibrium between the analytic and the speculative approaches to reality. Analyticism is necessary to investigate the concrete existents of the phenomenal world; transcendentalism is necessary to investigate the abstract notions of spiritual existence. Although we may be able to function with one or the other, by including both one discovers a much richer, more meaning-filled reality.

Thus, one does not have to overcome ones dualistic perspective of existence; such a feat may be impossible anyway. To *locate* meaning in life, one may keep a dualistic view of existence, but one must also keep an equilibrium between dualistic concepts. Deconstructive ontologies move too far in one direction; pure transcendentalism moves too far in the other direction. A reconstructive ontology, on the other hand, borrows from deconstruction and transcendentalism to find an ideal center and, thereby, achieves a unitive balance between theory and Being. This is one of the primary features of my work as an artist: to locate meaning within familiar things by balancing concrete actualities with the more ephemeral aspects of existence *beyond* appearances.

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SLIDE LIST

1. *MFA Installation View,* 1995.
   Nickel Arts Museum.

2. *Granite #1*, 1995.
   Stone
   14" high x 29" x 25"

3. *Granite #2*, 1995.
   Stone
   21" high x 32" x 25"

4. *Granite #3*, 1995.
   Stone
   23" high x 33" x 25"

5. *Granite #4*, 1995.
   Stone
   18" high x 33" x 22"

6. *Granite #5*, 1995.
   Stone
   22" high x 38" x 22"

7. *Granite #5* (detail), 1995.
   Stone
   22" high x 38" x 22"

8. *Granite #6*, 1995
   Stone
   16" high x 28" x 26"

9. *Limestone #1*, 1995.
   Stone
   18" high x 25" x 21"

10. *Limestone #4* 1995.
    Stone
    25" high x 23" x 23"

11. *Limestone #3*, 1995.
    Stone
    25" high x 41" x 33"

12. *Sandstone Line*, May to September , 1994.
(Situated on the West Hills housing development site in southwest Calgary. West view)
Sandstone
15 m x 3 m x 1 m high

13. *Marking Time, Space & Mind*, October, 1994.
(Situated on the northeast deck of the U of C Art Building. Southeast view.)
Displaced patio blocks; three units
60m x 10m x 50 cm high

14. *Marking Time, Space & Mind* (detail).

15. *Earth Circle*, July, 1994.
(Situated in parking lot #1 at the U of C. Northeast view.)
Leaves, steel, dirt
3 m high x 4 m in diameter

16. *Earth Circle* (detail).

17. *Lawn*, May to September, 1994.
(Situated on the West Hills housing development site in southwest Calgary. North view.)
Sod
3m x 1m

18. *Lawn* (south view).

19. *Displacement*, February, 1995.
(Installed in the courtyard of the Royal College of Art in London, England. East view.)
Displaced patio blocks; three units
10m x 20m x 30cm high

20. *Displacement* (detail).

Terry Reynoldson, 1995
MFA Installation View

1

Terry Reynoldson, 1995
Granite # 1
stone, 14" high x29"x25"

2

Terry Reynoldson, 1995
Granite # 2
stone, 21" high x32"x25"

3

Terry Reynoldson, 1995
Granite # 3
stone, 23" high x33"x25"

4

Terry Reynoldson, 1995
Granite # 4
stone, 18" high x33"x22"

5

Terry Reynoldson, 1995
Granite # 5
stone, 22" high x38"x22"

6

Terry Reynoldson, 1995
Granite # 5 (detail)
stone, 22" high x38"x22"

7

Terry Reynoldson, 1995
Granite # 6
stone, 16" high x28"x26"

8

Terry Reynoldson, 1995
Limestone # 1
stone, 18" high x25"x21"

9

Terry Reynoldson, 1995
Limestone # 4
stone, 25" high x23"x23"

10

Terry Reynoldson, 1995
Limestone # 3
stone, 25" high x41"x33"

11

Terry Reynoldson, Sept.94
Sandstone Line
sandstone, 15x3x1m

12

Terry Reynoldson, Oct.94
Marking Time, Space & Mind
patio blocks, 60x10x.5m

13

T.Reynoldson,Oct.94:detail
Marking Time, Space & Mind
patio blocks, 60x10x.5m

14

Terry Reynoldson, July 94
Earth Circle
leaves, soil, 3x4m. dia.

15

Terry Reynoldson, July 94
Earth Circle (detail)
leaves, soil, 3x4m. dia.

16

Terry Reynoldson, Sept.94
Lawn (north view)
sod, 3x1m

17

Terry Reynoldson, Sept.94
Lawn (south view)
sod, 3x1m

18

Terry Reynoldson, Feb.95
Displacement: RCA, London
patio blocks, 10x20x.3m

19

T.Reynoldson,Feb.95:detail
Displacement: RCA, London
patio blocks, 10x20x.3m

20