

JORDAN KOKOT

The Phenomenology of Time-Consciousness in Art: Merleau-Ponty, Temporality, and the Rupture of Freedom

Dissertation Abstract

Readers:

First Reader: Daniel Dahlstrom, Silber Professor of Philosophy (Boston University)

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Abstract:

My dissertation focuses on unpacking and applying a series of claims made by Merleau-Ponty about the phenomenology of temporality in the last third of his seminal *Phénoménologie de la perception*, with the aim to provide a characterization the structure and significance of art and aesthetic experience. Inspired by Alva Nöe's *Strange Tools*, I argue that we can see aesthetic practices, in part, as ways of experimenting with and reconfiguring human organizational and experiential capacities. As the central character of human experience is its temporality, it follows that one of the foundational capacities that is reconfigured in art is temporality. To demonstrate this point, I apply resources derived from Merleau-Ponty to analyze and three works of art: Katsushika Hokusai's woodcut *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, Terrence Malick's film *The Tree of Life*, and Anne Carson's poem *The Glass Essay*. From these investigations I develop several novel concepts, useful for the evaluation of the temporal characteristics of the art/experiencer relationship, most notably, "temporal layering," which amounts to a more sophisticated understanding the protentional and retentional structure of temporality. Finally, I reverse the direction of analysis by investigating how the act of creating works of art itself reconfigures our sense of time. I borrow from Alfred Schütz, László Tengelyi's, and Toni Morrison to argue that we can understand creative moments as special sorts of epiphanic events at the edges between provinces of meaning, where the poet, as a disruption of her ordinary sense of time, can experiment with the possibilities of lived temporality.

Keywords: Time, Art, Phenomenology, Creativity, Temporality, Merleau-Ponty

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