

On Falling in Love with the Musician

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One fine evening – with enough luck – we may find ourselves caught up in affection for a lone musician who takes the stage. This is a peculiar kind of rapture; an intentionality focused on the musician and her song that together fill up our perception and overflow it, shutting out the rest of the world. It is a moment – and again with enough luck, *only* a moment – where we are not thinking of the song (even if it is an original composition), but the song and the performer. This is the light [*visibilité*] of the world as it dims, focusing into a spotlight and ushering you to the bar where you rush to grab your new muse a pint of red ale because – once her set is done – you want to dwell with her, in her world, and nowhere and with no one else.

Merleau-Ponty noted that the task of all philosophy is to pursue the question of essences.¹ Now, I question the essence of this experience of falling in love with a musician, the essentials of this moment of panic wherein you look to the musician and want to come up with something more original than “I love you.” This is not some Husserlian method of direct agreement wherein we ascertain the necessary or sufficient eidetic essences of falling in love with an artist, first by perceiving our falling in love; then by remembering our falling in love; then by imagining our falling in love; and ultimately going home alone because no one wants to share in our almost Dr. Seussian process of noetic *calculatus eliminatus*. Rather, this is the phenomenologist’s perceptual stream of being in the world as he places a pint and a note on the table, settles a few tabs, and marches off into the night in pursuit of a new understanding of what the hell just happened.

In falling in love with the musician, the musician and the music reveal themselves together. This is an experience of intense *inclination* toward the artist; the world slopes down before you as you struggle to hold yourself back before the artist, and not necessarily the music itself. I may find myself *loving* Schnittke’s piano concertos, but I am not *in love* with them (though, admittedly, we spend many a night studying together). This being said, the artist cannot be considered as an artist without the work of art. Phenomenologists unite in this point: Heidegger² and Merleau-

¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012), lxx.

² Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 85.

Ponty³ both assert that the artist is not defined by some ability to make art, but are instead defined as artists by their work. It does not matter whether the artwork is the disclosure of truth in a particular moment in the history of being as such, or merely the unfolding of the artist's freedom in time and space; the artist who produces no works is not an artist and not deserving of our appreciation, no matter how magnificent their latent talents may be. However, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty's respective accounts of artwork are formulated on the basis of history – or perhaps historicity. While these phenomenological accounts of the artist and the work of art are still relevant, we must question the necessity of historicity and temporality in our infatuation for the artist.

As far as a perceptual account of falling in love is concerned, historicity is irrelevant to consciousness at the moment of the fall. This is not to say that this moment, or any of the agents therein, are *ahistorical*. It is impossible to argue that the musician's capture of her audience is possible without history, be it the history of music, of the people involved, or of the venue. Considered on the basis of the perceived experience, every temporal *present* shares horizons with the past and future, and 'solicits' their mutual recognition. We perceive that the present cannot have happened without the past, and the future cannot have happened without the present.⁴ However, our perception of the past lacks the quality of "*haecceity*" or *givenness* that the present carries, and for this reason the present dominates our perceptions.⁵

Directing our intentionality to the musician, we shut out history just as we shut out the crowded bar around us, pushing everything to the background of our experience. The musician is the only thing with *givenness*, the only thing that is "here" or even "new," for this is our undertaking of a new perspective of them. The instrument the musician plays is historical, but experienced in a new way, like a familiar neighbourhood after we discover a new path or shortcut. The song the musician plays may be a cover or a deliberate allusion to a historical artist, but while we perceive this history in the backgrounds of our apprehensions, we only pay attention to what is *new* or *different*, for these are what our consciousness assigns *haecceity*. I love *this* because it alludes to Bach but is given to me *now*; I love how *this* cover interprets that part of the song. Even if the musician performs a mere reproduction of historical art, we direct our love to the musician because of *their reproduction*, and not because of the historical original. Just because we love someone does not mean we love her parents.

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, ed. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 77.

⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 71.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

Can the fall – into love or otherwise – be brought forth by sheer talent? As the artist plays, they follow a sequence of chromatic notes that constitute a song. The song’s performance, however, does not exist before the musician plays it. The song may exist as sheet music, or perhaps merely a composition in the musician’s head, but the *experience of music* – that which we hear primarily with our ears – does not exist before the artist performs it. The musician works at a speed beyond that of the given temporality of the experience itself. The player does not strike one note, hear that same note and, confirmed in her progress, play the next note. The player instead brings the notes into existence at a speed wherein she must account for notes that do not exist yet.

This is granted to the musician given the temporal nature of perception – as we noted before, the horizons of the past, present, and future stand in equal recognition of one another such that each contains the other. As we gaze upon a lamp, we immediately perceive the unseen side of the lamp as *present*, but invisible.⁶ As the musician plays her song, the horizon of each note contains within it the next note, the future note that the present note promises just as the present note was promised by the last. The musician senses the future; she perceives how it “ought to be” based on the present. History obscures consciousness here; the musician is able to perceive the imminent future because of her classical training in music, her learning the performed piece, or her composing the performed piece. However, she does not predict the next note based on a particular recollection of the song. The musician does not perform in conformity to a memory, but rather in reverence to an event in that very moment – an event we refer to as the song. The formal essence of the song does not pre-exist the song; rather, the form emerges as the song is *performed*.⁷ As the piece is reconstituted for the musician by her perception of time and the event, the song is not founded on history; instead, history is founded upon perception.

We must remember that the musician’s being in the world is that of a “back-and-forth of existence” that traverses between being a perceiving body and deliberate action.⁸ The musician has a body that her entire mind invades and envelopes, and while this is the body that produces music, the musician remains ignorant of her body insofar as she fixes her intentional arc upon her song. Upon hearing one wrong note, the musician’s consciousness may be thrown out of the song and into the world as a human body holding a guitar. It is here that consciousness must retreat back into congruency with action; the musician must fix upon her song anew and, as far as she is concerned, cease to be a body once again. Intention is fixed upon not only the notes of the song, but the tactile sensations of the fret board as her fingers are assured of their correct placement by a certain tactile comfort. Even as the artist

⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

throws herself into the future, her perception is dominated by this textured world that exists alongside her song. The world is not one substance divided into mind and extension, but rather one event divided into the harmonious attributes of touch and musical chroma.

The phenomenology of talent brings forth the experience of falling in love, but not in the reflective sense as described above. Having reviewed our notion of the musician as being in the world, it is at once ecstatic and terrifying to realize that what inspires our affect is the being of consciousness as it travels through space, across the strings and up and down the frets, all the while producing musical harmonies. Though beautiful, this is not what grips us in the moment of the fall. The musician triggers our fall into affect through her ability to phenomenalyze. Returning to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty's respective notions of artwork as disclosure – as well as our own experience as cultured beings in the world – we will agree all too readily that art has the ability to reveal different worlds to us.

Cézanne, as Merleau-Ponty argues, offered the world a unique lesson in disclosure when he sought to reveal the world without its idealization. The face, painted like any other object, seems inhuman to us because our lived experience is what brings objects to life.⁹ We follow the gaze of another and know what they see; we follow the reach of another and know their goals. We follow the actions of another, look them in the eyes, and know when they are lying to us. It is without this ability to grasp the mind of another that the face of Cézanne jolts us from our idealized reverie. In his disclosure of a world of perspective without the *lived* perspective, Cézanne similarly marks himself out as an artist – that is, as someone who discloses the world to us differently.

The musician brings into daylight a new world for those of us who fall. We awake in the sunlit morning with our arm around them. We laugh through a late breakfast and walk along the waterfront. We go our separate ways because the world institutes obligations for us, but this separation means nothing to us, because we both live within the same world, under the same sunlight that the musician sings. We reunite in the evening and listen to Schnittke. We sleep, knowing the world will not change until we wake up.

Such is the musician's illusion. It is not an illusion in that it is false, but rather an illusion in that it is merely a singular narration of the same perceptual world that we already share with the musician. The perceived world shows itself as itself within something else – this something else being the song. Certainly, we do not necessarily live within one perceived world – I may live in a world where Schnittke is beautiful, and you may live in one where his work is discordant and crass. Percepts

⁹ Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," 79.

differ, but participation in perception is common to all human beings – this is what marks the very possibility of artistry, the ability to disclose our world to others. We fall for the musician because of her ability to reveal, but we walk home alone because we rest assured in our own ability to disclose. The break, the hinge, the difference between our experiences certainly assures us that our perceptions differ, but the fact that everyone perceives at all is universal, and difference only contributes to the myriad ways of bringing the world into daylight.

Works Cited

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