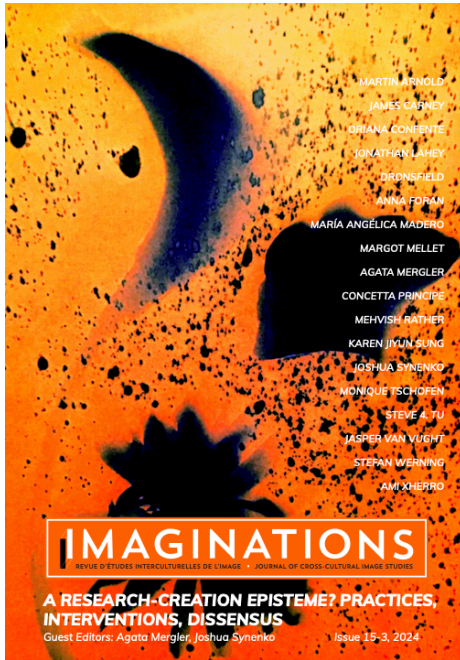


# IMAGINATIONS

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## A Research-Creation Episteme? Practices, Interventions, Dissensus Editors: Agata Mergler, Joshua Synenko

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## THIS ESSAY HAS A SOUNDTRACK

MARTIN ARNOLD

“This Essay Has a Soundtrack” really does have a soundtrack. It is a piece of music composed, performed and recorded by the author that uses a processed version of the essay as its score. The recording of the composition is offered as a possible musical accompaniment to reading the score. While this places such a reading within the field of research-creation, the essay actually engages this field more through speculating about the essay form as a fluid, open, indeterminate and unsubstantiated thing that can, as Adorno puts it: “blow open what cannot be absorbed by concepts.” This engagement with the poetic, aesthetic potentials of the essay serves as an entrance to touching on aesthetic theory more generally, in contact with Montaigne, Adorno, Born, Menke, Seel, Lyotard, Culler, Cazdyn, and Trinh Minh-ha among others. While the essay suggests

« Cet essai a une bande sonore » a véritablement une bande sonore. Il s’agit d’une pièce musicale composée, interprétée et enregistrée par l’auteur, qui utilise une version traitée de l’essai comme partition. L’enregistrement de la composition est proposé comme un accompagnement musical possible à la lecture de la partition. Bien que cela place une telle lecture dans le domaine de la recherche-création, l’essai s’immerge dans ce domaine davantage en spéculant sur la forme de l’essai comme une entité fluide, ouverte, indéterminée et non fondée, qui peut, comme le dit Adorno, “ouvrir ce qui ne peut être absorbé par des concepts”. Cette réflexion sur les potentiels poétiques et esthétiques de l’essai sert de point d’entrée pour aborder la théorie esthétique de manière plus générale, en contact avec Montaigne, Adorno, Born, Menke, Seel, Lyotard, Culler, Cazdyn, et Trinh Minh-ha, entre autres. Tandis que l’essai suggère que le lectorat devrait

readers should search for and experiment with alternatives to the translation and interpretation of metaphors when thinking research-creation, the author, does this more as a performance, banging around in-between the thought of others, rather than as a sustained, cogent argument.

chercher des alternatives à la traduction et à l'interprétation de métaphores, et expérimenter avec elles lors de la réflexion sur la recherche-crédation, l'auteur le fait davantage en tant que performance, en se déplaçant entre les pensées des autres, plutôt que comme un argument cohérent et soutenu.

### [Download audio](#)

**T**his essay really does have a soundtrack. I composed it, performed it, and produced a recorded version of it through electronic/digital technology. Please refer to endnote #1 now and, if you wish, follow the instructions to get the soundtrack going before you read on.<sup>1</sup>

That I am a composer of music, variously notated, as well as an Assistant Professor in the Cultural Studies department of a Canadian university, bears on the constitution of this essay; more on that below. That this essay has a soundtrack, also qualifies it to be a piece of what Canadian academics would categorize as research-creation; more on that below as well. But first:

This essay does aspire to be an essay. It aspires to be an essay worthy of the name this form has been given since Michel de Montaigne turned a French verb into a noun with the writing, publishing, and (significantly) near-continuous revising of his *Essais* (*Les Essais* in modern French; in English: *Essays* or *The Essays*) in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. “Since Montaigne, the literary essay has been founded on uncertainty. As has often been pointed out, “to essay” means to try out or to experiment – to give something a go without being sure of the result” (Russell 154). When reading criticism of Montaigne’s essays they are variously described as tentative, non-conclusive, open, indeterminate, digressive, indirect, exploratory, haphazard, fragmentary, partial, and so on. David Russell also mentions that “Montaigne himself peppered his essays with confessions of his own inadequacies”

(155). I do not invoke an aspirational affiliation with Montaigne's essays *only* by way of offering an excuse for the digressions, polyvalent tangents, loose ends, ungainly proportions, tangled references, flagrant compressions, truncations and fragmentations, drifting detours, incomplete speculations, discursive spillages, and uncertainties and (certainly) inadequacies you will encounter in this essay. Thinking about the form of the essay as imagined together with Montaigne and other critical thought that draws on his subtle provocations allows a way into a discussion of the provisional topic of this essay: complexities around thinking research-creation.

If this essay did not have a soundtrack would it still be a piece of research-creation? I guess the answer is "possibly," but a more emphatic argument could be made for an essay by Montaigne: R. Lane Kauffmann writes: "It is the literary and rhetorical quality of his style that gives Montaigne's essays their air of epistemological openness and indeterminacy" (*The Theory of the Essay* 16). And Kara Wittmann writes:

"The Montaignean essay offers a form of aesthetic knowledge that attracts philosophers and critical theorists looking for "a particular kind of inquiry that is neither poetry nor philosophy but a mix of logics, dislogics, intuition, revulsion, wonder"" [quoting Retallack, Joan. *The Poethical Wager*. University of California Press, 2003, p. 4] (80).

It is its relationship to the rhetorical, the literary, the poetic—that is, the aesthetic—that allows for the possibility that the Montaignean essay may enter the scope of the term research-creation. But before pursuing this potential, some clarification of terms seems in order (any digressions that ensue notwithstanding).

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Canada's federal research funding agency, defines research-creation as:

"An approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, schol-

arly investigation, and experimentation. The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media (art forms). Research-creation cannot be limited to the interpretation or analysis of a creator's work, conventional works of technological development, or work that focuses on the creation of curricula." (Definitions 1)

I think this definition is suitably vague enough to work as a starting point for a wide variety of activities. I would question the term research-creation; I cannot think of any kind of reporting on/response to the outcomes of intense searching (i.e. research) that would not be creative.<sup>[^2]</sup> However, SSHRC makes it clear that what the term actually covers is the combination of *artistic* creation and more traditionally produced academic research (I suppose they were looking for something a bit less on-the-nose than "arts-based research," as it is often called in the United States, but more suggestively poetic than "practice as research" or "practice-based research," preferred terms in Australia and the United Kingdom). It is not the project of this essay to examine possible combinations that could fit the SSHRC definition or work through (even a bit systematically) the possibilities and problems that can arise from pursuing this mode of research within any version of the Academy one might formulate. There are scholars who are doing that work and have been for some time.<sup>2</sup> What I am concerned with here is questioning the implementation of terms like art/art forms/artwork/artistic expression/artistic meaning/etcetera as if they are generally understood (if malleable and moveable) givens. My concerns here are broadly political, even if they are manifested more through essaying political resonances than incisively advocating for any agenda. One way to continue is to carry on thinking about the essay.

T. W. Adorno wrote "The Essay as Form" between 1954 and 1958. He only mentions Montaigne once, and then, he is quoting someone else. However, he does this in the context of one of his most dynamic assertions concerning the essay:

"Doubt about the unconditional priority of method was raised, in the actual process of thought, almost exclusively by the essay. It does justice to the consciousness of non-identity, without needing to say so, radically un-radical in refraining from any reduction to a principle, in accentuating the fragmentary, the partial rather than the total."Perhaps the great Sieur de Montaigne felt something like this when he gave his writings the wonderfully elegant and apt title of Essays [...]" [quoting Max Bense, "Über den Essay und seine Prosa," Merkur, No. 3, March 1947, p. 418] (157)

I have read many articles that incorporate ideas ostensibly taken from Adorno that acknowledge how problematic it is both to attempt to condense, summarize, or in any way encapsulate his thought, and/or to attempt to extract ideas from the always-complex set of contextual relationships and compound interconnections Adorno inevitably puts forward. I join them in this acknowledgement. With that in mind, I pull in Adorno to raise the stakes around thinking the essay as fluid, open, and unsubstantiated. The "consciousness of non-identity": the resistance to thinking something *is* something, where the somethings either side of "is" are thought in *essence* to be the same ("identity" comes from the Latin root *idem* "same"). To think something *is* something is a kind of closure; it defines (from *de-* (expressing completion) + *finire* "finish" (from *finis* "end")). Moreover, it is based on a principle (from Latin *principium* "source," *principia* (plural) 'foundations')—that from which the essay refrains; as Kauffmann puts it: "[In]The Essay as Form" [t]he essay is said to reject the identity principle upon which all systems are based - the epistemological assumption that their network of concepts mirrors the structure of reality; that subject and object, the *ordo idearum* and the *ordo rerum*, are identical. What motivates identity thinking, in Adorno's view, is the urge to dominate or control reality [...]" ("The Skewed Path" 77). Of course, Adorno goes much further in asserting the political motivations Kauffmann refers to:

"[The essay] is being crushed between an organized science, on one side, in which everyone presumes to control everyone and everything else, and which excludes, with the sanctimo-

nious praise of “intuitive” or “stimulating,” anything that does not conform to the *status quo*; and, on the other side, by a philosophy that makes do with the empty and abstract residues left aside by the scientific apparatus [...] The essay, however, has to do with that which is blind in its objects. Conceptually it wants to blow open what cannot be absorbed by concepts [...]” (Adorno 170)

Throughout “The Essay as Form” Adorno accuses “science” of foreclosing more open, sceptical, critically exploratory, continuously free-flowing thought. I think he really is calling out actual institutions of “organized science,” but I read “science” here as functioning more as a metaphor for any kind of instrumental reason that constructs foundations and principles that ground and support social-cultural power-structures. And Adorno does not stop with chiding any philosophy that buys into “science’s” prescriptive and proscriptive rationality by treating that which is remaindered by science as empty and abstract residue; he implicates some (organized) philosophy in his accusations:

“The essay does not strive for closed, deductive or inductive, construction. It revolts above all against the doctrine - deeply rooted since Plato - that the changing and ephemeral is unworthy of philosophy; against that ancient injustice toward the transitory [...]” (158)

So how can the essay attempt to be open/perpetually in-motion/transitory; how can it “blow open what cannot be absorbed by concepts?” The title of “The Essay as Form” proposes Adorno’s answer: it attempts this through form. But not form as preexisting structure, a container that content is poured into; maybe, rather, a kind of formless form<sup>3</sup> that emerges from the essayist’s flow of thought, that is that flow; it is form imagined as a kind of dynamic rhetoric, where the flow of thought is as impactful as its apprehended, discursive, communicated meaning. Kauffmann says: “While the systematic philosopher employs rhetoric as a supplementary device to summarize the results of his thinking, the essayist does not separate the conceptual and the rhetorical moments of thought” (“The Skewed



Path” 80). Adorno ups the ante in setting what is at stake in the relationship between rhetoric and systematic thought:

“If the truth of the essay gains its momentum by way of its untruth, its truth is not to be sought in mere opposition to what is ignoble and proscribed in it, but in these very things: in its mobility, its lack of that solidity which science demands, transferring it, as it were, from property relationships to the intellect. Those who believe they must defend the intellect against the charge of a lack of solidity are the enemies of intellect: intellect itself, once emancipated, is mobile. As soon as it wants more than simply the administrative repetition and manipulated presentation of what already exists, it is somehow exposed; truth abandoned by play would be nothing more than tautology. Thus historically the essay is related to rhetoric, which the scientific mentality, since Descartes and Bacon, has always wanted to do away with; that is, until, appropriately in the age of science, rhetoric decayed and became a science *sui generis*, the science of communication.” (168)

As ever with Adorno, there is too much to unpack here. But, putting aside what he might mean by “truth,”<sup>4</sup> I would underline Adorno’s thinking of rhetoric as being intrinsically mobile and radically playful. He also positions a version of rhetoric (one potentially embodied by the essay) as opposed to a version of communication, communication as a science, solid. This is not to deny rhetoric’s historical connections to communication. Adorno continues:

“Of course rhetoric has always been a form of thought which accommodated itself to communicative language. It directed itself to the unmediated: the substitute-satisfaction of its audience. Yet the essay preserves in the very autonomy of its presentation, through which it distinguishes itself from the scientific mode of communication, traces of the communicative with which science dispenses. The pleasures which rhetoric wants to provide to its audience are sublimated in the essay into the idea of the pleasure of freedom vis-à-vis the object, freedom

that gives the object more of itself than if it were mercilessly incorporated into the order of ideas.” (168)

So yes, there is a history of rhetoric functioning in its typified manner: servile to communicative language, providing a pleasurable entertainment instrumentalized to persuasively emphasize (“summarize”) the meaning the rhetorician is attempting to communicate. But the essay enables rhetoric—figures of speech—to exceed, spill beyond, the ideas it means to communicate. It is here where experiencing the rhetorical becomes aesthetic experience.

But before I speculate about aesthetic experience and “art forms” (hearkening back to SSHRC)—the differences and interweavings of these terms—I want to put forward something of the complexity of this undertaking up front. In her article “On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity,” anthropologist and musicologist Georgina Born writes:

“Music is perhaps the paradigmatic multiply-mediated, immaterial and material, fluid quasi-object, in which subjects and objects collide and intermingle. It favours associations or assemblages between musicians and instruments, composers and scores, listeners and sound systems – that is, between subjects and objects. Music also takes myriad social forms, embodying three orders of social mediation. It produces its own varied social relations – in performance, in musical associations and ensembles, in the musical division of labour. It inflects existing social relations, from the most concrete and intimate to the most abstract of collectivities – music’s embodiment of the nation, of social hierarchies, and of the structures of class, race, gender and sexuality. But music is bound up also in the broader institutional forces that provide the basis of its production and reproduction, whether elite or religious patronage, market exchange, the arena of public and subsidized cultural institutions, or late capitalism’s multi-polar cultural economy.” (7)

I do not take the above as a definition. Rather, it is an incomplete set of associations that point to how radically heterogeneous the assemblage that gets called “music” is. And, while words like “fluid” and “immaterial” might seem specifically applicable to discussions of music, I would argue that, with some editing of particular terms, all of the above could be applied to the experience of any culturally designated art form (we have already seen words like “fluid” and “immaterial” applied to the quasi-Montaignean essay). In “Listening, Meditation, Event,” Born expands on the above:

“Musical experience entails and proffers relations between objects and subjects; indeed it construes what might be called a musical assemblage - a series or network of relations between musical sounds, human and other subjects, practices, performances, cosmologies, discourses and representations, technologies, spaces, and social relations. Music is never singular, but always a multiplicity; it exists only in and through its multiple and changing mediations, in the guise of such assemblages. There is no musical object or text - whether sounds, score or performance - that stands outside mediation; just as, we might say, there is no musical subject that exists prior to an engagement with the musical object in the act of listening. Yet it is perhaps uncontentious to suggest that for most listeners a significant musical experience is one in which the listener, entangled in a musical assemblage, feels and finds herself transformed.” (87-88)

When we discuss any so-designated art object/ work/ form/ discipline/ practice/ praxis/ milieu/ history/ evaluation/ etcetera, we are talking about some subset of potentially endless constellations of “multiple and changing mediations.” But when we think about anything like transformation emerging from entanglements with these fluid assemblages, we are thinking about aesthetic experience.

I am worried that in what follows I might seem to be separating thinking about the aesthetic experiences that can emerge from engaging the presentations of artists (i.e. artworks) from the multiplicity of cultural, historical, social, and personal mediations—the endless

(and endlessly engaging) morass of ecological meanings<sup>5</sup>—these presentations also embody. In particular I am worried about anything that smacks of Romantic (or modernist for that matter), numinous transcendence. To my mind, there is a kind (or maybe many kinds) of otherness to aesthetic experience, but I am attracted to thinking that imagines these differences playing out as a part of an imminent, lived world. Indeed, contemporary German philosopher, Martin Seel, stresses that aesthetic experience is ubiquitous and perpetual, and often does not involve the presentation of art.

In his book, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, Seel writes: “A red ball is lying on a green lawn. Everyone who can see and speak and doesn’t happen to be color-blind can see *that* it is thus” (26). This is the start of an extended passage that puts forward all kinds of observations, impressions, recognitions, speculations, extrapolations, itemizations, and categorizations about and around the ball and the lawn and the ball and the lawn together and whose ball it is and whose lawn it is and their uses. In the throes of this he states:

“We can treat a ball in many different ways without treating it aesthetically. The question of the sensuous composition, of the inner constitution, or the appropriate use of a ball or any other perceivable object can be posed and answered without aesthetic intuition. Of principal importance in the aesthetic encounter is not the ascertainment of a visible and an invisible constitution, the investigation of an essence, or optimum use. Frequently, they are of no importance at all. In no way are they necessarily of importance. We do not have to look for the theoretical or practical determinateness and specification of something in order to encounter it in aesthetic attentiveness.” (26)

Seel continues to propose the possibility of the emergence of aesthetic engagement in this situation, as a multitude of different aspects of it take hold of perception and reflection. And reflecting on this, he says:

“Everything together is at the focus of reflection here. This reflection too is aspectlike, for we perceive this or that facet of the ball, thus perceiving the ball as this or that; but the reflec-

tion is not aspect-bound. It goes beyond a perception ascertaining this or that, and not only because it pays attention to qualities that can be discriminated conceptually not at all or only with great difficulty, as is the case with the color nuances of an object, for instance. It also pays attention to a feature diversity of objects that cannot be exhausted conceptually. Not only the conceptual inaccessibility of the nuances of the sensuous phenomenon is responsible for this inexhaustibility, nor only the impossibility of a complete characterization of all of its sensuously discernible features. Over and above these there is a conceptual incommensurability that follows, first, from a simultaneous reception of various aspects of the object and, second, from a consideration of their momentary appearance. Aesthetic perception is directed at the concurrent and momentary givenness of its vis-a-vis. Here it is a matter not of grasping the individual qualities of an object, but of their *interplay* here and now (in this light, from this standpoint, or from this change of perspective).” (27)

Seel is not describing some kind of aesthetic perception/reflection here, but rather the emergence of aesthetic experience from a particular mode of perception/reflection of the same aspects of the ball-lawn situation that could also be treated non-aesthetically. It’s a perception/reflection that focuses, with particular attention, on happenings: the *momentary interplay* of simultaneities. However, the aesthetic event that is given rise to is not only conceptually inexhaustible—uncontainable by any representation that would define it as objectively complete—but is incommensurate with conceptual representation. Seel also speaks to these ideas in an article titled “The aesthetics of appearing,” this time in relationship to aesthetically experiencing a plastic bag blowing in the wind:

“When I observe the flight of a plastic bag aesthetically, I observe the flight of a plastic bag – and the intensity of my observation is in no way diminished by the fact that I know what kind of object I actually see. Aesthetic appearing is not primarily an appearing of something; [...] it is not grasped in the role of something or as a sign for something else. All anticipation

[Vorschein] or semblance [Anschein] in the field of aesthetics is to be understood in terms of an appearing that does not merely serve the function of a revealing or illuminating representation." (19)

In his book, Seel does suggest something of the complexion of the not-something that he conjectures is appearing in aesthetic experience. He describes it as resonance or rustling—the perceivable, immanent, affective trace of the unrepresentable: “we live through phases of an acoustic or visual resonating, of an occurrence without anything recognizably occurring, something that can be followed sensuously but not cognitively apprehended. Sensuous perception here goes beyond the limits of epistemic consciousness (*Aesthetics* 9). When he experiences the flight of a plastic bag aesthetically, it is the plastic bag and its aerodynamics he is cognitively apprehending, along with whatever he *knows* contextually about this describable (that is, representable) occurrence. But simultaneously, he is experiencing a resonance that does not belong to these aspects, that is the *transitory* rustling of an” occurrence without anything occurring.”

Further along, Seel does go further in suggesting what is at stake—again, in a broadly political sense—with aesthetic resonating:

“In attentiveness to mere resonating, an encounter with formless reality takes place. The real, which is otherwise perceived in this or that form and is ascribed this or that meaning in this or that form, appears here without these forms and without the meaning usually associated with them. What was previously located in a social or cultural order, what previously had an existence that could be anticipated and fixed, now reveals itself in a submeaningful appearing. In this way, there occurs for perceivers an encounter with the limits set on the shaping, understanding, and availability of the world - one can also say, an encounter with the limits of one’s own, uniquely historical, uniquely cultural world. Reality reaches appearance in a non-graspable version.” (*Aesthetics* 145)

As we found with the politics I ascribed to Adorno's statements regarding the rhetorical form of the essay above, Seel is proposing the aesthetic—in this case imagined as experiencing the resonance of an appearing in which *no-thing* appears—as a break with the graspable, historically and culturally mediated, that is, discursively rational world. And, as was suggested in our encounter with Adorno (a suggestion that will be taken up below), one of the effects of aesthetic experience is to encounter a limit to rational knowledge.

When Seel refers to “mere resonating” he is talking about the apparitional rustling one encounters in situations not directly intended as art events. He does recognize that there is a difference between aesthetic events that arise from situations like those described above and that which happens when one is presented with an art-work, culturally designated as the potential locus for an aesthetic experience. Key to this difference is that they are intentional presentations:

“Works of art are *constellational presentations*. Presentations are constellational when their meaning is tied to a nonsubstitutable rendering of their material - nonsubstitutable in the sense of not being replaceable by any other combination of elements.” (Aesthetics 95)

I take “nonsubstitutable” to mean radically particular and specific, that is, non-translatable. When the constellation, the cluster of related elements, that constitute the artwork are experienced aesthetically (which is not a given; any artwork can be treated as non-aesthetically—materially, historically, personally, subjectively, etcetera—as a red ball or a plastic bag can), that experience cannot be represented in any other way, cannot be abstracted as being an iteration of a meaning (even a numinous one) that exists outside of the specificity of the presentation. Seel's book is very much about artistic resonating, which he introduces this way:

“Up to now I have spoken only of mere resonating, not yet of artistic resonating. [...] When I stated earlier that the perception of resonating is an encounter with formless reality, then this should not be equated with an unformed reality, because in the resonating of art we are concerned exactly with a form

of formless appearing. In contrast to the resonating of nature or of the city, the resonating of art is an arranged resonating and its perception an arranged encounter with a resonating. [...] However it is set up, resonating transpires in the work of art as a dissolution or nonoccurrence of acoustic, linguistic, figurative, choreographic forms; expressed in terms of the theory of production, it transpires as forming beyond the formation of forms. The work reveals itself as the formation of a formationlessness from which the work's forms stem, in which they disappear, against which they must assert themselves." (152)

Probably obviously, "a form of the formless" and "the formation of a formationlessness" has me thinking about the form of the "Essay as Form."

While this is still a cursory (and, no doubt, inadequate) encounter with Martin Seel's thought, the time and space I have given to it here is largely because, even as such, it offers an alternative to thinking of aesthetic experience as grounded in the apprehension of the creative expression of a maker. Moreover, Seel's alternative extends to engagements with works of art, thought of as presentations of forms of an appearing formlessness. Seel posits this as the case regardless of the artist's rational intent or conscious beliefs, assuming that, in any case, an artist is presenting a work in hopes of aesthetic experience happening for others.

Of course, conceiving of the aesthetic as being somehow *other* to coherent, rational, discursive knowledge (whether disinterested in, antagonistic to, transcendent of, etc.) is nothing new in European and post-European thought (it goes back, at least, to Plato, including his often vexed relationship to the affective powers of rhetoric and poetry, practices he links together). However, despite this, it seems to me that there remains a belief in these traditions that art is still in some way a medium for self-expression and that someone can somehow use it to *say* something. Thinking about the artwork as a polyvalent assemblage (of the cultural, the historical, the social, the personal—all the aspects we encountered in the Born quotes), this belief is not



totally wrong: everything about an art event that can be *not* treated aesthetically can carry discursive meanings that can be grasped, interpreted, and understood (the environmental meaning of the artwork). But (following thinkers who inspire my thinking around my experiences with aesthetic events) the aspect of the assemblage that makes art art—what Seel calls a resonance of appearing—does not communicate meanings.

“It is not that something appears to us in the work of art, but rather it is the art work that appears (to us). In this context, fireworks become paradigmatic for Adorno of what the aesthetic object is in the process of appearance: “Fireworks are apparitions par excellence. They are an empirical appearance free of the burden of empirical being in general, which is that it has duration: they are a sign of heaven and yet artificial; they are both a writing on the wall, rising and fading away in short order, and yet not a writing that has any meaning we can make sense of.” [quoting Adorno, *T. W. Aesthetic Theory*, translated by C. Lenhardt, Routledge & Kagen Paul, 1984, p. 120] (Menke 152)

That’s from *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida*, written by German philosopher, Christoph Menke. It links to Seel’s aesthetic of appearing and it brings us back to Adorno, here (apparently) celebrating the transitory aspect of fireworks. But do not think that describing an aesthetic event as not having “any meaning we can make sense of” implies that the artifact is nonetheless the medium for a meaning, just one that we cannot make sense of. Indeed, this quote is extracted from a dense passage where Menke works through Adorno’s arguments for why aesthetic experience is *not* a kind of epiphany, a revealing of a mystical, if ineffable, meaning. Elsewhere, Menke, with Derrida and Adorno, rebuts the concept of polysemy as it applies to aesthetic experience—the idea that the incomprehensibility of art arises from it having a multiplicity of multidetermined meanings. Among more specific critiques, a problem put forward with conceiving of art as epiphanic or polysemic is that it still focuses on meaning, that it views understanding as a product. In both Adorno’s and Derrida’s projects, the stability and

definitiveness of meaning is profoundly called into question. Menke sees both (in different ways, with different trajectories) as presenting understanding as a provisional, tenuous process that never reaches a conclusion, that never grasps a fixed, unified meaning. Of course, functional communication does exist between humans, but Menke, with Adorno, calls that “automatic”: “automatic repetition” of the known functioning as “automatic understanding,” an understanding that only exists within the preexisting limits of preexisting knowledge. Menke writes:

“In automatic understanding, identification is a result; in aesthetic understanding, by contrast, it is a process. [...] The automatic enactment of understanding is either totally atemporal or totally temporal in the sense of mere repetition; its processuality disappears in the result of the process. By contrast, in nonautomatic enactments, processuality is constitutive; whereas automatic understanding is summed up in the act of identifying its object, the nonautomatic enactment of understanding is irremediably temporal. The time taken in its processual constitution does not disappear, but persists.” (31)

I think it is significant that Menke shifts to discussing the “enactment of understanding,” rather than understanding per se, because in the context of his book, what aesthetic understanding could be is a necessarily unanswerable question. Aesthetic experience, because it defies re-presentation, can only be thought negatively, in terms of how it is *not* reason. And it is the “negativity” of the aesthetic in relation to rational understanding, instrumental reason, and definitive knowledge, that allows us to consciously register its difference from those conditions.

“Aesthetic experience is the experience of the failure of automatic understanding and, in this, the self-producing superabundance of the aesthetic object vis-à-vis every act of understanding. The fact that, as Derrida sometimes puts it, an “overpowerfulness,” an “autonomy,” or a “surplus” [quoting Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, 1978, pp. 73, 178, 289] vis-à-vis the

definition of its functional meaning inheres in the aesthetic object in its meaning-averse materiality is not a quality of all objects, but a quality they first achieve in the process of the aesthetic deferral of understanding. And they first achieve this superabundance of meaning in this movement because it is first this movement that breaks with nonaesthetic automatic processes, which reduce signifiers to their meaning function. They first become autonomous as the objects of an experience that has separated itself from the automatic processes of understanding by releasing in it a processuality that subverts every meaning-generating result." (69-70)

The aesthetic subverts meaning-generation. And given the intertwining proposed here of rhetoric and the aesthetic, while I do not doubt that "rhetoric has always been a form of thought which accommodated itself to communicative language," this proposal suggests how wildly subversive this accommodation could potentially be. The essay (as form) can be considered an example of this uneasy coexistence.

Rhetoric involves figures of speech. This may seem obvious, but what might constitute a *figure* of speech turns out to be a dizzyingly complex site of speculation. It involves (at least) the shapes, the forms, the lines, the volumes, the weights, the temporality, the multi-sensed rhythms, the multi-sensed material density, and the multi-sensed resonances of discursive thought/language and its components. French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard wrote *Discours, figure* in 1971 (published in English in 2011 as *Discourse, Figure*). And while it variously explores the complex antagonisms at play within the radical differences the two terms set in motion, it resolutely avoids constructing a dialectical relationship between them. Not even a negative dialectic, following Adorno, where there is no synthesis available between the two terms, no potential for a new knowledge to emerge that could encompass and reconcile their difference in a previously unimaginable way. Lyotard proposes a more incommensurable relationship, but one where the processes of the figural and the discursive are inextricably bound. Bill Readings, in his

remarkable book, *Introducing Lyotard*, provides a glossary of terms that is helpful here in furthering this (very limited) introduction of just a bit of Lyotard's thought:

"DISCOURSE: The condition of representation to consciousness by a rational order or structure of concepts. Concepts or terms function as units oppositionally defined by their position and relation within the virtual space of a system or network, a space that Lyotard calls textual or perspectival. The calculation of such relational positions is the work of ratio, or reason. The condition of discourse apprehends things solely in terms of the representability by or within its system, as meanings or significations that discourse may speak." (xxxix)

I find this gloss works well when thinking about discourse in any context, not only in relation to Lyotard's thought. However, the indication that Readings gives as to how one might think the figural in relation to Lyotard is more rarified:

"FIGURE: The figural is an unspeakable other necessarily at work within and against discourse, disrupting the rule of representation. It is not opposed to discourse, but is the point at which the oppositions by which discourse works are opened to a radical heterogeneity or singularity. As such, the figural is the resistant or irreconcilable trace of a space or time that is radically incommensurable with that of discursive meaning." (xxxix)

Together, these glosses suggest why, for Lyotard, you cannot think discourse and figure dialectically: "If the rule of discourse is primarily the rule of representation by conceptual oppositions, the figural cannot simply be opposed to the discursive. Rather, the figural opens discourse to a radical heterogeneity, a *singularity*, a difference which cannot be rationalized or subsumed within the rule of representation" (Readings 3). Readings tends to refer to heterogeneity and singularity together in their relation to the figural; back to the glossary:

"SINGULARITY. The radical specificity of events, their radical, once and for all 'happening' or eventhood, and hence their het-

erogeneity or sheer difference from all other events. To put it another way, singularity is what is lost in translation.” (xxxiv)

The figural is what is in the perpetual process of *appearing* in aesthetic experience. Yet, like Seel’s apparitions, Lyotard stresses that the figural is invisible—an active, *singular* presence *at work* (in motion) in given perceived representations, whether they are figurative (a red ball on a green lawn) or textual, whether presented as visual or audible or haptic or a combination together and with the other senses. And like Seel, Lyotard finds in art a *presentation* of the processes, the *processuality*, of the figural. Near the beginning of *Discourse, Figure*, he discusses the noise of discursive utterance that one encounters and attempts to organize and discipline while trying to understand the message being *said* by discourse. Then he writes:

“What cannot be tamed is art as silence. The position of art is a refutation of the position of discourse. The position of art indicates a function of the figure, which is not signified – a function around and even in the figure. This position indicates that the symbol’s transcendence is the figure, that is, a spatial manifestation [space being perceivable by multiple senses] that linguistic space cannot incorporate without being shaken [Readings’ translation reads”overthrown”], an exteriority it cannot interiorize as *signification*. Art stands in alterity as plasticity and desire, a curved expanse against invariability and reason [or perhaps “against that ancient injustice toward the transitory,” invariability’s other], diacritical space. Art covets the figure, and “beauty” is figural, unbound, rhythmic.” (Lyotard 7)

Throughout *Discourse, Figure*, Lyotard is concerned with figural appearing in visual art forms, especially painting. However, he does spend a substantial amount of space and time on rhetoric, in particular the metaphor (and its relationship to metonymy). As with Adorno, he acknowledges metaphor’s ability to accommodate its functions to the furtherance of communicative discourse. Against this, Lyotard proposes the figural, the poetic, the aesthetic potentials of metaphor:

“[Metaphor] achieves poetic status not when it refers to an already scripted language [*langue*], or in any case to a code generally accepted by the speakers, but when it transgresses it. Such a transgression does not consist in the shift from ordinary language (of signified 1) to the supposedly affective language (of signified 2), but instead in the use of operations that have no part in language 1.” (318)

This last bit is crucial: for Lyotard the poetic does not produce other (affective) meanings; rather its mobilization of other operations serves to deconstruct the processes of meaning signification in communicative discourse, making its “processuality” apparent in the wake of the transgression of the “automatic understanding” of “language 1,” along with the transgression of the assumption of some other significant (affective) meaning emerging from the interpolation of a supposed “language 2.” Readings picks this up:

“Metaphor [...] is only figural when there can be no retranslation of its excess back into ordinary language, when it is an excess over meaning (signification), rather than just a surplus of meaning. Thus for example, [William] Blake’s sick rose<sup>6</sup> is figural insofar as it resists being decoded as merely a multiplicity of significations (lost innocence plus venerable infection plus corrupted church, etc., etc.). [Here Readings links to this endnote:] “This insistence on the opening of a radical heterogeneity to the literal order of meaning by the figural is closely parallel to Derrida’s distinction between the effect of dissemination opened by the trace in which meaning both multiplies (re-seeds itself) and is radically dispersed (recedes) and the polysemy or simple accumulation of literal meanings in rhetorical language that is the object of traditional formalist criticism.”]” (24)

Metaphor is figural as long as it continues appearing as a singularity—persists in its radical specificity as an event, and resists giving up its event-ness to translation/retranslation/interpretation. This then is the crucial problem manifested by metaphor: it can be wildly, untamably figural—a rogue process at play within an aesthetic experience

of resonant appearing—or it can serve as the epitome of an expressive, meaningful creative device, positioned for a hermeneutic approach to aesthetic meaning to interpret.

Jonathan Culler speaks to this issue in the context of an essay discussing the ascendancy of the metaphor as a focus of burgeoning research and interrogation within academies and institutions devoted to literature:

“Of all the figures metaphor is the one that can most easily be defended or justified on cognitive grounds [...] Whatever may be true of other figures, metaphors generally make claims that could in principle be restated as propositions, albeit with difficulty and prolixity. Doubtless for this reason, metaphor has long been thought of as the figure par excellence through which the writer can display creativity and authenticity: his metaphors are read as artistic inventions grounded in perceptions of relations in the world.

“In privileging metaphor and making it the heading under which to discuss figurality in general, one thus asserts the responsibility and authenticity of rhetoric; one grounds it in the perception of resemblances in experience, in intimations of essential qualities. One represses or sets aside rhetoric as a non-referential play of forms by taking as representative of rhetoric or figure in general a figure whose referentiality can be defended.” (191)

Culler is choosing to set aside the aesthetic potentials of metaphor here to focus on its exemplary propensity to be subsumed by hermeneutic aesthetics versus other (less currently fashionable) figures of language (although elsewhere in the book (p. 208) he does engage complexities that arise from attempting to restate, that is, interpret, Baudelaire’s *Spleen*—“I am a cemetery abhorred by the moon...”). But in presenting the privileging of metaphor as meaningful, cognitively graspable, interpretable signification as a repression of nonreferential play, Culler connects with one of the initial impulses I had while wondering what to write about in this essay, the ob-

servation that much of the discussion around research-creation ends up presenting art work as discursive metaphor (perhaps figurative, but non-figural), “whose referentiality can be defended.”

I’ll plead-the-essay and leave the pervasiveness asserted by that observation unproven. And, nonetheless, I would like to address a few issues adjunct to it. First, I would say that most (maybe all) art-making can be considered research, whether the maker thinks it is or not. All art presentations are created in a milieu, a cultural field, within a cultural-historical episteme that govern creative possibilities and the creative choices (materially and methodologically) that can be made within. Emphatic searching (that is, research) around how one’s work connects to contexts that precede one’s endeavours and in which they will take part, is required regardless of the ideology one adheres to. Second, all the historical/ cultural /social /individual /etcetera that any given artwork mediates and takes part in—all of those infinitely interconnected loci—can be explored, studied, and speculated on, cognitively and discursively. Everything in and around art presentations/situations that is *not* aesthetic experience can take part in broader research directed at any of the environments that any artwork is meaningfully a part of. However, if this essay was a manifesto, what it would assert is that art presentations cannot function as mediums to *say* something that can be abstracted, translated, and interpreted to be coherently integrated into some broader discursive meaning. That does not mean that we cannot discursively engage with aesthetic experience—this essay, on various levels, tries to do this—but the engagement is radically provisional. Menke addresses this:

“Aesthetic experience can only be expressed in interpretive speech in such a way that this speech suspends the impression of giving an adequate reproduction of the properties of the object of the experience aroused by the continuity of its statements. The basic principle of aesthetic interpretation is thus an unsublatable simultaneity of “blindness” and “insight.” (7) Only by having a blind spot (and showing this) can interpretations relate to aesthetic objects in their negativity vis-à-vis all understanding and express aesthetic experience; it is



only the blindness of interpretations that makes insight into the aesthetic possible. Correct (and correctly understood) is only that interpretive speech that—in the articulation of a textual reading—reveals itself also to be a “misreading”—that fails to grasp the aesthetic due to the illusion of continuity among its statements.” [Endnote 7 reads: *Blindness and Insight* is the programmatic title of one of Paul de Man’s collections of essays. The explanation for the title is found in the text in this collection entitled “The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida’s Reading of Rousseau”] (111)

Then, if there is a purpose to talking about aesthetic experience, it is to present a blind spot, deconstruct the illusion that discourse and lived experience—not only aesthetic experience—are continuous and coextensive. The statements of this deconstruction are only useful if they somehow express a specific, particular *not*-understanding.

It seems to me that the “illusion of continuity” between meaning and affect is very much in play in some conceptions of rhetoric, so much so that, in the context of how rhetoric is traditionally understood, it is hard to think of a direct connection between speech and figure as illusory. Integrating figures of speech into discursive statements really can be persuasive, really can contribute to galvanizing agreement around what feels like shared understanding. But if this essay was a manifesto I would assert that there is a joy beyond pleasure (against my better judgment, I would be tempted to say *jouissance*, following Barthes’ usage), if subtle to the point of non-recognition, in being carried away in the unsayable, invisible flux of the resonance of appearing. This joy-that-is-not-pleasure is incommensurable with cognitive understanding and therefore the two are *not* mutually exclusive. They can be simultaneous, but, if they are thought of as continuous and coextensive with each other, that is an illusion. That is, certainly one can vigorously interrogate how and why Baudelaire might be “a cemetery abhorred by the moon”—and I can imagine that activity being pleasurable—but it is incommensurable with the affect that can come from being inside the resonance of the initial, *singular* transgression of meaning that metaphor presents. The illusion of

continuity is why similarly slinky polyrhythmic grooves can seem equally “persuasive” while occurring simultaneously with Marvin Gaye singing about the tragedies of civil injustice and global strife (*What’s Going On*), seduction and sex (*Let’s Get It On*), global environmental catastrophe (*Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)*), and the pain of love gone wrong and lost (*I Want You*). This does not preclude the existence of ensconced conventions that allow materials used in art works to be apprehended symbolically, as indices of culturally understood meanings and feelings. For example, musical soundtracks are full of them: musical textures—melodies/ harmonies/ rhythms/ timbres/ amplitudes—that let you know whether what is happening (or about to happen) is happy, sad, poignant, scary, etcetera; but these responses, these understandings are culturally and historically pre-conditioned and are ubiquitous, generic, and essentially facile. When a specific soundtrack gets under your skin, it’s because it is *singular*. (By the way, how is reading this essay simultaneously with listening to—or, at least, hearing—the soundtrack working for you? Is anything happening?)

Maybe because of my deep engagement with popular song, another favourite example of the discontinuity between, the incommensurability of discursive meaning and aesthetic experience is the use of rhyme (especially end-rhyme) and metre in poetic language. They can be thought of as figures of speech, but I have not encountered them being discussed as rhetoric. I think this is because, rather than being taken as creative artifice added to meaningful statements to heighten their affect, they exist, on the one hand, as preexisting limits (sure, you can say something, but it has to have a particular sound—it has to rhyme—and it has to flow in a particular rhythm that will prescribe the words you choose outside of their meaning) and, on the other hand, as a specific phenomenal event, a *singularity* that cannot be abstracted, that would be lost in translation. The transgression of meaning inherent in shaping language to rhyme and metre in song is so ubiquitous that its transgressive nature is practically unapprehensible. Maybe this has something to do with the specific sound and flow of the words taking part in the sound and flow of the music rather than the common assumption that the music

is supporting the meaning of the lyrics. The transgression becomes more apparent when metre and rhyme take part in forms more closely linked to discursive and narrative meaning. Discussions of, for example, Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism*, Bertholt Brecht's versification of Marx and Engels' *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (the *Manifesto* rewritten in hexameters), or Sally Potter's film *Yes* (where the dialogue flows in rhyming iambic pentameter), could ensue, but not here and now.

So what can art—presentations of situations intended for singular aesthetic experience—have to do with discursive accounts of rational research? Positioned as a dualism, probably the answer is: “nothing.” However, if one thinks of the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic, the figure and discourse, as incommensurable heterogeneous processes at work in the formation of a human psyche,<sup>7</sup> but nonetheless processes that each variously interpenetrate the other's workings despite their incommensurability,<sup>8</sup> then one can view any creative production (remembering Whitehead's formulation of creativity as the creation of new possibilities of experience, discussed in endnote # 2) as intrinsically hybrid, singular events that are nonetheless assemblages of various kinds of psychic activity, unconscious and conscious.

The essay (as form) is already an example of this kind of assemblage. It is a site of transitory, fragile experimentation. I am thinking of the experimental in the way it is discussed by filmmaker Trinh Minh-ha. Trinh is ostensibly a maker of ethnographic documentaries (they would offer provocative examples of what research-creation might or could be). However, these films do not operate or register within the representational conceits of the documentary film milieu. They are profoundly, if subtly, experimental. In an interview, when asked why she “wanted to merge experimental with documentary filmmaking,” Trinh replied:

“I have never thought of them as being separated.”Experimental” for me is not a genre nor an approach to filmmaking. It is, in a way, the process of unmasking readymades, or more commonly put, of making visible what remains invisible (ideologically, cinematically) to many, including oneself; what does

not correspond to the established codes and is not always known in advance to the spectators as well as to the filmmaker. If “experimental” is a constant questioning of the relationship between the filmmaker and the filmmaking, then it cannot be separated from the material, whether one chooses to call this material documentary or fiction.” (“Questioning Truth and Fact” 183)

Awareness of the figural and sensitivity to the incommensurable appearing of its resonance can help unmask readymades. The essential invisibility of aesthetic processes can by their otherness, their negativity, expose preconditioned codes that are only hidden because they are automatically understood. But the point of the “constant questioning” Trinh refers to is not fundamentally critical. Elsewhere she writes:

“As the philosopher Gilles Deleuze remarks, our civilization is not one of the image, but rather, a civilization of the cliché. We often read images on the level of metaphors and perceive meaning as something there, already existing. What seems more difficult is to see an image as image, without metaphors, with its excess, its radical or unjustifiable character. To find again, to restore all that one does not see in the image [or sounding gesture] is not simply to parody the cliché or to correct it. Rather it implies disturbing the comfort and security of stable meaning that leads to a different conception [...] in which the notions of time and of movement are redefined, while no single reading can exhaust the dimensions of the image [or sounding gesture].” (*When the Moon Waxes Red* 110-111)

Of course, I added “sounding gesture”; this passage had a crucial effect on the way I imagined making music.

I’m sure you have noticed my essay is made up of a (probably inordinate) clamour of voices (often uneasily made to collaborate, often interrupted) other than my own—and often, voices speaking about other voices. I asked toward the beginning if this essay could be consid-

ered research-creation if there was no soundtrack. The answer would be yes if a reader could somehow dance with the ungainly rhythm of this performance of me reading, of me banging around, perpetually rebounding, in a space activated for me between these voices. The answer would be yes if, along with the noise of me *trying* to add my (certainly inadequate) voice to the discursive noise of my readings performed here, some kind of untamed silence (following Lyotard) also emerged.

I also collect these voices here because they all, in different ways, contribute to the methodologies I employ and praxis I act out in experimenting with musical situations in the context of the cultural fields I work in. How others say things matters to my music-making and fuels my own discursive engagement with it. As such, the soundtrack to this essay is as much a radiation of these other voices as are my discursive attempts, my tries, at bringing them together more-or-less rationally. These voices (and many, many others) give me permission to think music and music-making away from metaphor, away from reified meanings and meaning-making (reified as ineffable/ numinous/ transcendent but meanings nonetheless). These voices suggest (discursively) material possibilities for sharing music-making in which presentation and performance are not confused with the pretence that I'm saying something graspable/ holdable/ intentional. The relationship of this soundtrack to this essay is not supportive or persuasive—any rhetorical impacts it might add to reading this essay-of-me-reading are in excess, more figural tangents in play. The soundtrack is made from this essay but it is not *about* this essay and the discourses it puts in play. And it is not exemplary: it doesn't sound *like* the ideas I am essaying (it is not a metaphor).<sup>9</sup> I actually find it hard to read the essay while the soundtrack is playing, even very softly; I find I get distracted and just attend to the music. However, that's only a problem in the context of discourse; figurally it is another singular assemblage to be experienced (and maybe reflected on discursively; or not). And maybe another set of potentials (maybe less distracting?) would arise if I read the essay out loud along with the soundtrack. Or if someone else read the essay out loud and I lis-

tened to it together with the soundtrack. This might call for research-creation.

I won't pursue these potentials here. But I can think of at least one other who has experimented with such listening situations. And it seems fitting in an essay filled with so many different voices to finish with yet another reference, this time to someone else's (sure, let's call it) research-creation. And I really am leaving you with a referral more than a further discussion.

Eric Cazdyn is a theorist who also presents situations intended to enable singular aesthetic experiences. For at least the last ten years many of these situations have involved the Blindspot Machine. In part it is an apparatus involving four video cameras mounted on an automated tripod, each pointed in a different direction 90 degrees away from the other, slowly panning in a circle. But that is not all the Blindspot Machine is:

"Since the initial experiment, I have continued to build and rebuild the Blindspot Machine. It is still composed of four video cameras and an automated rotating head and it is still intended to make blindspots, rather than to expose them. In this way the Blindspot Machine is diametrically opposed to surveillance: whereas surveillance desires to make everything visible, the Blindspot Machine desires not to make everything invisible, but to make room for something else.

"One of the things for which the Blindspot Machine makes room is the very way we understand what a blindspot is in the first place.<sup>[^11]</sup> And how we might experience it. It took me several years to realize that the Blindspot Machine is not the apparatus itself. It is, rather, a totality. And like all totalities (contrary to how they are often understood), it is unrepresentable, dynamic, and open. This machine as totality is composed of various elements: 1) the materiality of the multi-camera rig; 2) the films that the rig generates; 3) the live overnarrations that accompany certain screenings of the films; 4) the concepts of, and the arguments about, the blindspot and associated categories; and 5) the written documentation of the

project itself, including this chapter. This chapter, therefore, is not about the Blindspot Machine, it is part of the Blindspot Machine.” (Cazdyn 243)

An early version of the Machine was presented at Western University in late 2014; the name of the presentation was “The Non-Coincidence of the Future.” And this version of the Machine includes a soundtrack-of-sorts that I composed and played in.

That’s what I’m referring you to; a video document of “The Non-Coincidence of the Future” can be found online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5QRmTVlWKw>

I asked Eric once what he thought the soundtrack was doing in the “The Non-Coincidence of the Future.” It didn’t seem to be a burning question for him. Maybe the word “incommensurable” was spoken... I think we both thought that it somehow worked, that it was part of something happening (I’ll say now that I think of it as part of the singularity of the event that is this version of the Blindspot Machine). But at the time we were (or, at least, I was) fine with not understanding quite what that meant.

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## NOTES

1. The easiest way to access the soundtrack is to go to my Soundcloud page: <https://soundcloud.com/martinarnold>. There you will find a track called *Essay OST*. Once you have a playback system ready to go, and keeping in mind the advice below, push play and return to reading the essay with the soundtrack going. If you wish to listen to a higher fidelity recording than the Soundcloud stream and you are set up to play back digital soundfiles, you can find a .wav file of the soundtrack available for download at: [https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/b1ez8d3j857vy1yucqdcz/AMl4WmWw\\_ekyTb\\_w8\\_sO5mM?rlkey=ps6osw2lso5zi6t744duf1gky&st=7cfd7qf1&dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/b1ez8d3j857vy1yucqdcz/AMl4WmWw_ekyTb_w8_sO5mM?rlkey=ps6osw2lso5zi6t744duf1gky&st=7cfd7qf1&dl=0). (You will probably need to cut and paste that entire url into a browser address window; links that are split by line-breaks often do not make live the full url). I recommend you use the highest fidelity stereo playback system you can access. This can involve high quality speakers or headphones, although the experiences of the work-as-a-whole will be very different depending which of these options you choose. Experiment with the volume of the playback. Try to have the soundtrack be as loud as possible without it distracting you from understanding what you are reading in the essay. This might mean that the soundtrack will be playing very quietly. This is absolutely fine; just keep in mind that the amount of sonic material that you hear will diminish after the volume goes below a certain threshold. This diminished experience of the soundtrack is completely valid for my purposes here. However, at some point after you have completed listening to the piece as a soundtrack to your reading of the essay, you might be interested in listening to the music at a higher volume just to check out more of what is sonically present on the recording. You might finish reading the essay before the playback of the soundtrack is completed. It is completely up to you whether you listen to the music until it is over or you turn it off when you are done reading. If you choose the former option, do not turn up the volume; keep listening to the music as it was while you were reading. I suppose there is a possibility that the soundtrack would finish before you have done reading the essay; that is not a problem, just keep reading until you are finished. [^2]: Rather than ar-

gue for the creativity involved in, for example, pure maths, the formulation of labour histories, or treating depression (not to mention creating meals or playing almost any skill-based game), I would offer the following quote from Steven Shaviro's book (significantly titled for the essay at hand), *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics*:

"As Whitehead says,"a new idea introduces a new alternative." It offers us a new way of approaching and understanding experience. In doing this, it is itself a new experience; and it also makes additional new experiences possible. [...] If philosophy is an adventure, involving the creation of new concepts, this is because every aspect of life and thought already is (and always must be) creative. Whitehead insists that creation is not a rarity [...]" (149)

↩

2. In particular, I would recommend *Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and "Family Resemblances"* by Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk (Concordia University), written back in 2012.↩
3. I am daring to emulate Adorno's turns of phrase when he proposes the essay as "radically un-radical" and "methodically unmethodical."↩
4. I cannot imagine Adorno agreeing with me (really, on anything), but I would like to think "truth" in this context as connected to a proposal by another complex thinker (waiting for me to hit-and-run, down the road of this essay), Jean-François Lyotard: "[Truth] does not speak because the truth is not the signification of a state of affairs by means of concepts: the truth is precisely what resists signification, reduction to the concept, articulation within the flat and transparent space of the arbitrary oppositional structure of the *langue*" (Readings 30).↩
5. See Clarke, Eric F. *Ways of Listening: An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning*. Oxford University Press, 2005: "Ecology is the study of organisms in relation to their environment, and the approach to perception presented in this book is characterized as ecological because it takes as its central principle the relationship between a perceiver and its environment. [...] My main aim is to discuss the ways in which listeners interact with the general auditory, and more

specifically musical, environment: to discuss listening to music as the continuous awareness of meaning, by considering musical materials in relation to perceptual capacities” (5). “My primary focus is contemporary listening—the experiences of listeners at the start of the twenty-first century. But those listening attitudes and practices did not just appear from nowhere: they have their own history and have come about by means of a historical process that continues to exert its influence” (9).↵

6. *The Sick Rose* by William Blake:

O Rose thou art sick,  
 The invisible worm,  
 That flies in the night  
 In the howling storm:  
 Has found out thy bed  
 Of crimson joy:  
 And his dark secret love  
 Does thy life destroy.

Poetry Foundation. [www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43682/the-sick-rose](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43682/the-sick-rose). Accessed 11 August 2024.

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7. In *Discourse, Figure*, Lyotard digs deeply into psychoanalytic theory, mobilizing Freud in a very unorthodox manner often versus the linguistic reading of Lacan (my introduction to Lyotard was a chapter of *Discourse, Figure* that was the only portion of the book translated into English until 2011: appositely titled “The Dream-Work Does Not Think”). Also, if this was a different (at least, longer) essay (and I was a different thinker), I’m convinced that thinking with Julia Kristeva’s *Revolution in Poetic Language* would enhance the discussion at hand; it would probably involve some kind conversation between Kristeva’s

formulation of the pre-linguistic, pre-subjective semiotic *chora* and Lyotard's invisible but inferred figure-matrix.↔

8. As Bill Readings says: "For example, clarity in speech consists in banishing the interference of rhetorical figures which give rise to ambiguities, yet 'clarity' is itself a rhetorical figure, a metaphor for the absence of metaphor. Figure is not a simple exteriority that cannot be interiorized as knowledge, but is the opacity or disturbance that marks the operation of representational interiorization as an operation, a process" (23).↔
9. It might seem strange that what follows is an endnote. I'm going to describe a bit of how the soundtrack was made and its material relationship to the essay. This description matters because without voices like the ones presented here, I wouldn't think it could be engaging to experiment with the kind of listening experiences offered by methodologies like the ones I'm about to describe. That the essay is, in a sense, the score for the soundtrack matters materially *not metaphorically*. This description happens by the way, but as an aside, thus the endnote. So by the way: the seven pitches of a post-European major scale starting on C (the white-notes of a piano) are given letter names in German: C, D, E, F, G, A, and H. In English, the pitch named H is named B; in German the note-name B designates the pitch that in English would be called B-flat. So German offers distinct letter names for eight pitches in total versus the seven offered by English. To make the score for the soundtrack I removed all the letters from my completed essay except for C, D, E, F, G, A, H, and B. Reading them in order as note-names, I performed and recorded four versions of two different prescribed but indeterminate playing procedures, two on melodica and two on tenor banjo. I performed the procedures for one hour and nine minutes each time because that's how long it took me to read the essay out loud when I recorded me doing that. The electronic effects one hears emerging in the soundtrack came about by me fading in two tracks of the recording of me reading vocoding the four tracks of instrumental music mixed with two different vocoder settings. Vocoding is an electronic process that uses the real-time analysis of the timbral/spectral attributes of one sound (in this case, me reading my essay out loud) to filter/signal-process the timbre of another sound (the mixed recordings of me playing the musical tasks based on the order of letters in my essay). These processes don't need to make sense or require further explanation in this context. Here what matters is that they evince a very different set of creative ideas and methodologies

than those I was exposed to when my first composition teacher asked me what I wanted to say with my music. [11]: I think the blindspot has something to do with the blindness of interpretation Menke discusses above. But I could be wrong. Cazdyn writes:

“We think we know what a blindspot is. It is what we cannot know, what we cannot see, what we cannot represent. From human anatomy to aesthetics, from philosophy to psychology to politics, the blindspot, we think, is the missing element that structures the visible, the thinkable, the feelable, the actable. But this definition-as-lack is not what the blindspot is. The blindspot is not some transhistorical category with a singular function. It is, rather, nothing but the dominant ideology of what the blindspot is at any given time. And today, the blindspot – the dominant ideology of the blindspot as that which is missing – is the deadliest weapon used by those in power. [...] And now we are left with a question: if to expose, to conceal, and to disregard the blindspot are equally debilitating, equally reactionary, then where does this leave us regarding the blindspot at our current historical moment? I claim that all the dominant discourses of the blindspot today make us docile and weak political subjects. They drive us crazy. They reproduce what is and squeeze dry what can become. But they are also things that never remain still, both the blindspot and the concept of the blindspot. Therefore, they can also become something else, they can make room for their own radical potential.” (242)

Those are fragments of a necessarily unfinished argument.↔