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Line as the Essence of Becoming-Artist

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Abstract

Philosophy seems content to address the artist in terms of genius, history, standards, or to analyze his or her radical nature. But what is the *essence* of the artist? In this paper I argue that *line* is the essence of becoming-artist: the artist's privileged relationship with line is one of revisiting the nascent place of *form*, where bare line is the primordial instantiation of space and time, and that this repetition is paramount to existence through an unfinalizable anticipation of re-creation. Even if the initial void and point are more fundamental than the line, until the point begins to move, time remains fixed and space remains indeterminate, for there is no "you are here" when there is no other "there." This paper presents positions espoused by the philosophers Jean-Luc Nancy, Brian Massumi, Martin Heidegger, Giorgio Agamben, and Henri Maldiney to show that the artist's sense of anticipation drives the need to revisit the birthplace of form via essential line, while simultaneously exposing the errancy of art being defined as *mimēsis*.

Key Words: line, form, mimesis, rhythm, interruption

Introduction

To become an artist is not an event pinned to a date in history. Instead, if an artist is someone who is driven to create anew, "becoming-artist" is a process of constant re-visiting, re-vising, and re-envisioning. To say "becoming-artist" is a nod to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and their statement "we are made of lines. We are referring not only to lines of writing. Lines of writing conjugate with other lines, life lines, lines of luck or misfortune, lines productive of the variation of the line of writing itself, lines that are *between the lines* of writing" (1987, 194). Might line itself be the essence of becoming-artist? These "lines of writing" and "lines . . . between the lines" are indispensable elements of poetry, which operates as the cardinal collective noun of "art"—for all of the arts, as Martin Heidegger says, are "*in essence, poetry*" (1993, 197). It seems that the line hypothesis is not incidental, but instrumental to the artist.

My thesis is that line is the bare life and basic necessity that opens the availability of space and time to existence, and returning to that opening is essential to the continuum of becoming-artist. Here I present an unraveling of the essence of becoming-artist employing the "phenomenological method" as utilized by Heidegger and subsequent philosophers: pursuing a path through the evidence found in different discourses to reveal a more primordial and essential existential perception.

Threading an imaginary line through several authors' positions on time and space, form, truth, freedom, rhythm, and a need for understanding, I establish that bare line is the ground of the unending creative activity of the artist. Spurred by an enigmatic thesis of Jean-Luc Nancy, I begin with Brian Massumi's investigation into the essential and eventful power held by the mere thought of a single line in otherwise primeval space, which Nancy connects specifically to the line in art as an opening of experience. That opening then springboards to Heidegger's notion that a work of art creates a strife which holds open the chaos of un-truth as a rift enabling the possibility of truth. This exposition raises the question of how does such a rift beget pure form? Revisiting Heidegger's thesis on truth grants a clue through his reference to the fugue, which I connect to Giorgio Agamben's consideration of rhythm as the structure underlying form. Barbara Stafford sustains that although neurological experiments corroborate rhythm as the brain's coordinating factor, they do not solve the riddle of the how form results from rhythm. Agamben presents the elemental *interruption* of rhythm as the germinal force of form, a thesis reinforced by Henri Maldiney. Almost as a bonus, but with far-reaching implications, Agamben couples rhythm, form, and art to freedom and history by way of Heidegger. To differentiate the role of the artist in these monumental tasks, Nancy and Maldiney show that the rhythmic of form spur an anticipation of pleasure in the observer's understanding, and this understanding is what produces imitation or representation—disallowing the definitions of mimesis found in Plato and Aristotle.¹ In the end, Nancy shows that the artist's same sense of anticipation foments the impulse to revisit line, the birthplace of form.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that even the word "line" holds a pregnant place among the poetic arts. The artist is an artist because of the line (s)he makes: the drawn line, the line of sculpture, the line of dance, the actor's line, the musical line, the story line, the scribed line of poetry, the line of travel—the artist weaves all these lines of art through space-time with an intuitive distension.

Line Opens Time and Space

Nancy opens with a bold statement, "Drawing is the opening of form" (2013, 1), where "[f]orm is the 'idea,' recalling the word chosen by Plato to designate the intelligible models of the real" (2013, 5). Yet the standard argument is that any line is merely mimetic of all lines that came before. The key lies in the words *drawing* and *opening*, where the importance is the *process* that a mark opens: the power to open up a play of tension by dividing living space anew, creating a new vibrating potentiality. Drawing multiplies potential: by giving birth to a place of tension, it acts as a nursemaid to form.

Using a visualization of line as told by C. S. Peirce, Massumi seems to elaborate Nancy's argument. Imagine a totally empty space; then imagine scribing a simple line segment on that space. That incision has two formidable qualities, per Massumi, "Something new. First. And with it, simultaneously and indissociably, a Secondness: a visible separation . . . across an insubstantial boundary . . . Pure edge. . . A virtual line" (2011, 89). It is new both in its own virtual appearance, and in separating that which had been amorphous and unified. This newness begins to obviate the long-held association of art to mimesis, which is by definition never originary. Any virtual line sets up a separation or edge, and Massumi calls the line's eventfulness "the activity of relation" across itself (2011, 89), where the line sets up mediated spatiality by providing comparability. The line seizes the void and gives it direct referentiality from which all other places might be evaluated.

Why would a point not exhibit spatiality more primordially? Visualize one virtual point in empty space. Even if you move, or the point moves, that virtual spot *seems* to maintain its same distance, its same relation. It is not possible to discern whether the point is farther away or within grasp—one point cannot define spatiality. (If the mind's eye collides with the point, imagining the eye itself to be *another* point is what defines space.) Now visualize a line segment floating in that void. Moving around it, the shape of the line seems to shrink and expand, perhaps bending. In the mind's eye, the line is what first defines the appearance or perception of spatiality.

Massumi calls the process of line originating space "[e]dging into existence" (2011, 89). The line is a new continuity that forces a discontinuity upon its surroundings. This division sets up an activity of relation—some *thing* that mediates by providing a limit across which one can assess qualitative difference plus an immediacy of spatiality in making apparent that which the line is not. Line is both "open-ing" as an originating process of potential, and "open-ness" as a receptivity. Said another way, because the line serves two facets of the open function, it sets up difference in two ways: first the qualitative tension of comparing that which is on either side of the line, and second through contrast between the line and its holding-space. As for the latter, the line sets up an immediate forward-and-behind relationship, and Massumi points out that this "[c]ontrastive difference is *proto-figural*" (2011, 90)—it is formative. Furthermore, the same aspects of line that set up differentials in perception similarly set up before-and-after relationships (in a comparison, which is considered first?)—these are "double articulation" to Massumi (2011, 96). Thus line is as equally nascent of the temporal as it is of the spatial—"a singularly direct Seconding across the absolute limit of a time-like edge of no dimension," per Massumi (2011, 92). This relational activity across the line—while one's eyes dance in natural saccadic movement from one side to the other or from the line to its "other"—is manifest tension, a quivering reciprocating that sets up incipient space and the pulse of temporality. Massumi reverses an old assumption, "Euclidian space . . . and linear time are not foundations or containers of perception. . . . they emerge from experience" (2011, 94). Line opens the experience of time and space, not vice versa.

Line Opens Potential for Form and Truth

The perception of time and space opens the possibility for form through an experience of the proto-figural line—the edge, the cut, or the mark. Nancy shows that this raw experience is constitutive of and engendered by the creative act: "In the idea of *drawing*, there is the singularity of the opening—the formation, impetus, or gesture—of form, which is to say, exactly what must not have already been given in a form in order to form itself" (2013, 3). In saying "singularity," he is affirming that line is not mimetic; it is an originary and unique experience. Massumi agrees, saying that "[e]xperience always invents. Every perception is a creative activity culminating in the production of an event of change" (2011, 27). The open-ing that the line provides through activities of relating occurs at the level of *emerging existence*, while the open-ness that the line provides through spatial and temporal perception adds the *potential to synthesize* form. Through the simple, virtual, proto-figural line, one can observe the emergent *being* of form in its *becoming*.

Nancy further attaches the creative act to the artistic act: "the thought of form forming itself . . . of the *formative force* of this very form . . . is what constitutes the drawing of art or the art of drawing" (2013, 12). He is not insisting on material substance in the line-as-formative-force—it can still reside in the mind: "this art . . . that constitutes the element, moment, or dimension [is] not of formalized but formative, ostensive, and dynamic *thought* across all artistic fields" (2013, 12, emphasis added). In fact, to Nancy, materiality introduces a constraint, because "*Matter* . . . is the name of form's resistance to its deformation. It is not a formless 'content' that form comes to mold or model but rather the thickness, texture and force of form itself" (2013, 7). And it is not any particular form or forming that constitutes art, but the relational, potential aspects that underlie form's synthetic force as visualized most primordially by the line in empty space.

Certainly, Heidegger's work paved the path for Massumi and Nancy. Thus the opening and openness created by the fertile force of the primordial line also occur in an approach that Heidegger takes to the problem of the formative force when he stipulates that "the question of the origin of the work of art becomes a question about the essence of art" (1993, 144). And to find that essence, he specifies that "we must consent after all to go into the activity of the artist in order to arrive at the origin of the work of art" (1993, 183). Not only does he assign the importance of the artistic *process*, here he also secures the connection between the artist's act of creating and the impact left within the creation, ready to foster experience afresh via emerging existence. And, in fact, he reiterates Nancy's and Massumi's claim that a newly created thing-as-being is never an act of mimesis when he ties *truth* to the work of art: "The establishing of truth in the work is the bringing forth of a being such as never was before and will never come to be again" (1993, 187). Because Heidegger also asserts that "[t]he work's becoming a work is a way in which truth

becomes and happens” (1993, 185), to understand from where the emergent something springs, first it is necessary to understand what Heidegger means by “truth” in relation to this potential.

Much like the emptiness that houses the virtual line, the concept of truth makes sense only in comparison to that which truth is not. He declares, “Truth is un-truth, insofar as there belongs to it [un-truth] the reservoir of the not-yet-revealed, the-un-uncovered, in the sense of concealment” (1993, 185). And emergent truth naturally strains against untruth, much like the tension of the primordial line which determines spatiality and temporality within what had been indeterminateness. Heidegger corroborates, as follows:

Truth is the primal strife in which, always in some particular way, the open region is won within which everything stands and from which everything withholds itself that shows itself and withdraws itself as a being. . . . The openness of this open region, that is, truth, can be what it is, namely *this* openness, only if and as long as it establishes itself within its open region.² (1993, 185-86)

The ongoing “primal strife” for Heidegger functions the same as the line’s eventfulness as an ongoing “activity of relation” for Massumi. And similar to the virtual line, Heidegger grants a visualization of the strife which must continue to inhabit the open region:

Strife is not a rift . . . as a mere cleft is ripped open; rather it is the intimacy with which opponents belong to each other. This rift carries the opponents into the provenance of their unity by virtue of their common ground. It is a basic design, an outline sketch. (1993, 188)

This intimate rift that is both separating and amalgamating is Massumi’s “unsubstantial boundary” which shares the sense of the “convivial edge of emergence” (2011, 88). Like Heidegger, Nancy commingles the “sketch” with the process of opening, as follows: “Drawing is the opening of form . . . opening in the sense of a beginning, departure, origin, dispatch, impetus, or sketching out, and opening in the sense of an availability or inherent capacity” (2013, 1). The implied incompleteness or unfinalizability of the sketch, *sketching*, corresponds to the “Something new” of Massumi: the continual becoming, emerging, or birthing of form through the open region that the line, the rift, or the drawing-sketch helps to visualize.

Truth, then, to Heidegger, transfers from the openness of the open region to the sketching of form that the rift of tensional strife makes possible: “Createdness of the work means truth’s being fixed in place in the figure. Figure is the structure in whose shape the rift composes itself. This composed rift is the fugue of truth’s shining” (1993, 189). Although Heidegger uses the word “fixed,” he does not mean that truth is finalized or realized in the figure (form)³—instead the figure offers a *potential* for truth, much the same as a gene might make available a characteristic when combined with other factors in a future generation.⁴ Nancy further points out the logic of truth’s unfixed availability when he says “the truth of the thing cannot be presented for once and for all, given that to present it . . . is already to remove a part of its own capacity for opening” (2013, 25).⁵ And although Heidegger uses the word “structure,” Maldiney points out that “[a] form is not a structure: it does not have the constancy of a pattern but that of a constitutive transformation” (2007, 23). In his emphasis on “transformation,” we can see that line opens potential for form and truth. What might the process be with which pure tension as set up by the primordial line or rift resolves into the sketch of form?

Rhythm is the Essence of Form

Nancy asks, “How *exactly* does it form itself? What is its particular energy? What is its force and how does it come into being?” (2013, 64). Heidegger hints at a rhythmic essence as the formative force when he says, as mentioned above, “This composed rift is the fugue of truth’s shining”—if “fugue” means a theme and involutions compositionally woven together in a polyphonic line of *counterpoint*.⁶ He does not carry the metaphor further, however. Agamben’s strategy analogizes this allusion to musical shape by singling out a specific characteristic of rhythm as the originating force of form in art. Recalling that the primordial line as rift sets up a tension or strife in the opening place of form, then the pushing and pulling inherent in the immediate opposition of void and line, of un-truth and truth, is a vibratory oscillation with the potency to become rhythm.

The concept that rhythm structurally underpins art dates back at least to the Greeks, as Agamben gesticulates toward Aristotle, who says in *Poetics* “in the case of the arts I have mentioned . . . the medium of imitation is rhythm, language and melody, but these may be employed either separately or in combination” (Aristotle, 3-4).⁷ Similarly, in Plato, Socrates identifies “that a song consists of three elements—speech, harmony, and rhythm” (2004, 80). Likewise and much more recently, Nancy quotes a comment by Maldiney:

“In a drawing, each mark [trait] belongs to the whole space and conspires with all others in the *rhythm* of empty and full space before elucidating any figurative proposition. The ‘formal dimension’ is the dimension according to which form forms itself, in other words, its rhythmic dimension.” (Nancy 2013, 23-24)⁸

Agamben, still following Aristotle, develops the concept further, “rhythm is *structure*, scheme, in opposition to elemental, inarticulate nature” (1999, 95). He supplements by saying, “[s]tructure then, like *Gestalt*, is a whole that contains something more than the simple sum of its parts” (1999, 95). Note, however, that the transition from strife to

rhythm is the same problem as the transition from chaos in nature to order or scheme—*something* happens, and this something is formative or creative of a newness, generative of the “Secondness” mentioned by Massumi, and whose birth is “form forming itself” to Nancy. Moreover, Agamben declares, “this ‘something else’ must exist in some way” (1999, 96). Has brain science identified this “something”?

Experimentation and monitoring seem to suggest a correlation between rhythm as a forming force and natural electrical functioning in the brain. Stafford relays that “studies have shown that even single neurons are endowed with rhythms, suggesting that the timing of their pulsing activity within neuronal networks could represent information” (2007, 72). She, like Massumi, incorporates the known saccadic flurry of the physical functioning of vision into her query. But in the end, she admits “there are numerous competing hypotheses about how these vibrating, network voltage ripples get coordinated into a coherent whole” (2007, 191). Although science anticipates that rhythm is the essence of form, how does rhythm function?

Interruption is the Essence of Rhythm

According to Agamben, the singular pulse of vibratory rhythm grants the essential, structuring power to first fashion a sense of form in art, by introducing divisibility into the internal sense of a continuous flow of time while simultaneously sublating the purely temporal through a consistent sense of “here and there.” In other words, one pulse so foregrounds the internal sense of being present in space as to make the continuum of time momentarily stop.⁹ Thus, the magic of rhythm both “gives *and* holds back” (Agamben 1999, 100, emphasis mine)—its gift of the *instant* is like providing a mediated status of what-is-now, and its postponement of the *infinite* is like providing an immediated sense of always-being-somewhere. Agamben explains, as follows:

[W]hen we are before a work of art . . . we perceive a stop in time, as though we were suddenly thrown into a more original time. There is a stop, an interruption in the incessant flow of instants that, coming from the future, sinks into the past, and this interruption, this stop, is precisely what gives and reveals the particular status, the mode of presence proper to the work of art We are as though held, arrested before something, but this being arrested is also a being-outside . . . in a more original dimension. (1999, 99)

Rhythm is the gift of originality in time-space. Interruption, that which sets rhythm in motion and which first occupies the open space of form, is the essential formative force of form, or the “event of change” for Massumi. Nancy concurs, “the truth is the point of a moment of interruption of the movement and opening up of sense” (2013, 6). So, in both cases of space and time, the ability to sense rhythm—comprising interruption—is what gives grasp to a first-order stability from an otherwise unmeasurable, indivisible chaos. But, according to Agamben, this grasp is not merely a *Gestalt* of a particular work of art or its compositional unity:

By opening to man his authentic temporal dimension, the work of art also opens for him the space of his belonging to the world, only within which he can take the original measure of his dwelling on earth and find again his present truth in the unstopable flow of linear time. (1999, 101)

Note that this “present truth” is the same as Heidegger’s truth occurring in the open region, as presented above.

In his discussion of form as “constitutive transformation,” likewise mentioned above, Maldiney also finds rhythm to be the key to forming form, but he cautions against envisioning this rhythm in the vernacular sense of a pattern denoting repetition. Instead, he upholds for the essential case that “[a] rhythm is never to be seen as a cadence” (2007, 24). This clarification helps to situate Agamben’s “interruption” as the seat or foundation of rhythm. Maldiney further develops the relationship between rhythm in art and both the “present truth” and “belonging to the world” that Agamben identifies, tying the rhythm in art directly to Heidegger: “Rhythm arises in the opening as long as the opening opens itself in itself in the form of those nothings that are its rifts or faults This definition of rhythm is that . . . of the unconcealing of truth. . . . because to unconceal is to arise” (2007, 27). “Rhythm” here means the essential and singular pulse which stands as the formative force of form.

Rhythm Worlds the World

This pulse that admits form carries a great impact. In line with Heidegger’s affirmation that “[t]he essence of truth is freedom” (1993, 123), Agamben connects the interruptive character of art to the artist’s practice as a fertile process born of freedom: “Only because [man] is capable of . . . the power of pro-duction into presence, is he also capable of praxis, of willed and free activity” (1999, 101). To draw the bare line is not only to exercise freedom, but to bring forth or produce an opening to the possibility of truth and freedom. Stafford supports the connection between the artist’s creation and free will, saying that “[w]hat we broadly call art . . . is a principal example of . . . willed perception imaginatively and publicly working on the world” (2007, 202). Humanity’s fundamental existence as Heidegger’s “being-in-the-world” is the basis for understanding Agamben’s sweeping statement on rhythm:

[Rhythm] . . . holds *epochally* the essence of man, that is, gives him the gift of both being and nothingness, both of the impulse in the free space of the work and of the impetus toward shadow and ruin. It is the original *ecstasy* that opens for man the space of his world, and only by starting from it can he experience freedom and alienation, historical consciousness and loss in time, truth and error. (1999, 100)

Interruption, as the essence of rhythm, implies form and also our very existence, *presence*, opening us to truth and freedom, history and the world. It (re-)sets us into the essential dimension of being-in-the-world. The rhythm found in art yields this existentiality.

Through the evidence of this originating and essential rhythm also comes an understanding of two important and widely overlapping implications regarding mimesis: first, how mimesis originates in the observer, rather than in the work of art itself; and second, how mimesis functions as the momentum impelling the needful possibility to understand. Nancy puts forward that “mimesis is the instrument of recognition and identification” (2013, 62). Mimesis is garnered through the participation of human consciousness, or being-in-the-world, in comparing new rhythm-as-interruption to that-which-interrupted-before. To engage with such comparison is to engage with memory, producing the “habit” that Massumi describes as the process of abstraction (2011, 94). Maldiney adds that “[r]hythm is not objectifiable, it is not representable . . . we are ‘of rhythm’ . . . we are not only engaged with it, but that we exist rhythmically” (2007, 27). Mimesis is important, but the impact of the work is not due to derivative imitation.¹⁰ As Heidegger says, “[t]he truth that discloses itself in the work can never be proved or derived from what went before” (1993, 200). To “exist rhythmically” is to exist mimetically—the ongoing rhythmicity of forms in the work of art spur the relational, habitual mimetics of existing. Nancy connects these forces of rhythm, disclosedness, form, engagement, and the incipient tension of line in art, as follows:

Ultimately, mimesis is nothing other than a *rhythmicity* of appearance through which the mystery—or the evidence—of the rising or suspension of form in general is known, is recognized, and participates. In all its possible forms—a line traced by a pencil, by a dancer, a voice, or an editing console—drawing/design must be understood as engaging a *rhythm*, setting in play a beat, a differentiation, a displacement, folds, and connection of the indistinct. (2013, 70)

The artist generates the line of art; line’s formative force interrupts or breaks open the possibility of understanding-as-truth; thus, interruption nurtures a rhythmicity of cognitive mimesis underlying the possibility of understanding.

Coupled within this rhythmicity of recognition also lies a impulsive thrust of *expectation* to understand new forms; and rhythmic mimesis generates anticipation for the pleasure inherent in understanding. An anticipation-of-pleasure is evident not only in the reception of the artwork, but also in the practice of the artist as becoming-artist. Nancy notices that this “[d]esire—with its pleasure and/or/pain . . . is the referring . . . of being to itself. . . an ‘unsatisfaction’ that always transports itself further” (2013, 28). Both the expectation-of-pleasure in creating art and the expectation-of-pleasure created by observing the work of art are self-referrals of being,¹¹ because in both, art’s unfinalizability points to our never-ending thirst for understanding.

To further bind the two effects of mimesis, the artist’s activity, and this notion of self-referential being, Nancy explains their relation to the pleasure of participation:

Mimesis proceeds from the desire of *methexis*—of participation—in what plays out before the birth of the world; in its profound truth, *mimesis* desires to imitate the inimitable ‘creation’ . . . the inimitable and unimaginable uprising . . . of being in general.” (2013, 64)

To draw the line, then, or to make art is imitating-by-participating in the pleasurable (re-)creation of self-as-being, just as to be stopped by art’s interruptive power is experiencing its (re-)creative presencing of the “more original time” of Agamben. Pleasure is found via participatory *re-cognizing* being, understanding being *as being*. “This repetition, for which drawing constitutes the opening and strange necessity, nurtures a pleasure whose essence is repetition itself,” confirms Nancy (2013, 26). The artist confronts and employs this essential rhythm with every gesture of creation, and the affirmations here clarify Deleuze and Guattari’s claim that “[b]ecoming is never imitating” (1987, 305).

Moreover, the difference between “any” line and the line made in service to the formative force of art is embodied in the artist’s commitment to a vocation tangled in a rapprochement with bare, primordial line. In the continual process of becoming-artist, line generates the artist’s own participation just as the artist’s participation generates the line. To draw even the first line is to re-establish the tension or irruption necessary for an opening for truth, to generate the possibility of free will for others to grasp, and to exercise personal freedom in the gesture. Nancy recalls Heidegger’s “intimacy” of the line or rift that presents an opening for truth: “The fever of drawing, the fever of art in general, is born of the frenzied desire to push form right to the limit, to make contact with the formless” (2013, 78). The ritual-like return to the nascent space of form drives “becoming-artist” to mark the worlding of a world.

Challenges

To address “desire” begs for Sigmund Freud’s view. After all, line easily virtualizes the positive phallus, and edge likewise the negative in the mons. Freud treats the activity of the writer-artist as an exercise of “his innermost secret,” (1989, 441), following the convention of the artist-as-genius. Nancy notes that “[w]ith the invocation of genius . . . Freud does nothing more than repeat . . . the circle of classical (and romantic) aesthetics” (2013, 232). Even Heidegger objects, saying “[m]odern subjectivism . . . immediately misinterprets creation, taking it as the sovereign subject’s performance of genius” (1993, 200). Elsewhere Freud analyzes the writer’s craft, saying, “he bribes us by the purely formal—that is, aesthetic—yield of pleasure . . . an *incentive bonus*, or a *fore-pleasure*” (1989, 447), where fore-pleasure is the erotic tension prior to the discharge of such tension (1989, 281). The importance of such discharge

must not be underestimated: “for [Freud] the purposiveness . . . of ‘terminal’ pleasure largely dominates the whole, and that, in general, Freudian pleasure has an end, in other words, a goal and end term (‘discharge’ or relaxation)” (2013, 46), observes Nancy. Although Freud’s characterization might relate such tension to art’s rhythm, the required release would demand that art be teleological. Nancy picks up on this problem: “the gesture of art in general . . . does not aim for the repletion or discharge of a tension but rather the opening and revival or resurgence of an intensity” (2013, 27). Moreover, when Heidegger says, “*Art is then a becoming and happening of truth*” (1993, 196), recalling that open-ing (thus also becom-ing) is an originating process of *potential* means that art is unfinalizable because of its ever-becoming status.

A second critique might arise along the lines of Paul Virilio’s comment that “Death is an interruption of knowledge. All interruptions are” (2008, 47). At first glance, Virilio seems to say that interruption stops knowledge, which would counter the thesis here that treats interruption as an opening of a more original space and time leading to a possibility of truth-as-understanding. Virilio continues, “And it’s because there is an interruption of knowledge that a time proper to it is constituted” (2008, 47). Through the ordination of a time “proper” to death, we can see that Virilio’s interruption is actually equivalent to Agamben’s “stop” to time—both allude to a nullification of continuous time. The difference between the former’s sense of death and the latter’s sense of presence is that whereas Virilio’s stoppage remains in a “common” understanding of time, Agamben’s rhythm-as-interruption gives and holds back by incorporating both the death-like, concealing, and common “fall into the flight of measurable time” (1999, 100) along with the revealing presencing of more original time.

A final question might ask if this thesis is merely a return to Modernism, such as in Roger Fry’s analysis of art: “The first element is that of the rhythm of the line with which the forms are delineated. The drawn line is the record of the gesture, and that gesture is modified by the artist’s feeling which is thus communicated [sic] to us directly” (2003, 80). The problem with Fry’s assumptions are twofold. First, as Maldiney points out, “the word is not the truth of the cry” (2011, 379), which means that the art object cannot establish the truth of the artist’s feeling. Second, Fry assumes, as Maldiney puts it, that “the dimension of the real is the communicative dimension of experience” (2011, 379), which is contrary to the “openness” of the formative force of art in that such a statement limits the experience of the work to a communication. Instead, as Agamben stipulates, “in gesture, there is the sphere not of an end in itself, but of a kind of mediation that is pure and devoid of any end” (2007, 155); that is, gesture or line is not a means-to-an-end, but a mediator of difference. In sum, Fry’s words indicate a teleological, purposeful existence for both the artist’s work and the work of art—that the artist seals his feeling into the work as a communication, but such a purpose then leaves out the possibility for new truth to unfold from the artwork over time.

For the same reason that art’s truth is never finalizable, becoming-artist is a continual and ever uncertain process. Becoming-artist is an ongoing desire to bring forth the possibility of truth and freedom through form—by revisiting *line* that in its essential and primordial state instigates spatio-temporal presence. Nancy associates the artist’s gesture to human thought in general:

[A]rt is nothing other than the ultimate . . . endlessly played out resurgence of division and distinction—that the gesture by which a world forms *itself* is distinguished in itself. That . . . this gesture might be thought of as a religious creation, or that it is questioned in a scientific mode . . . or that it might be the object of metaphysical speculation—ultimately, all of that matters little in relation to the ways in which artistic gesture is thought in act, and in an endlessly renewed act. (2013, 95-96)

The artist’s gesture, whether putting an eye to the camera, a word to the screen, a note on the staff, or a chisel to the stone, exposes the primordial line and re-visits the nascent place of form. Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the priority of line and its full connection to being-in-the-world:

Becoming everybody/everything (*tout le monde*) is to world . . . to make a world By process of elimination, one is no longer anything more than an abstract line It is by conjugating, by continuing with other lines . . . that one makes a world. (1987, 280)

Not only does the becoming-artist experience his or her own possibilities through the pressured anticipation of opening that is endowed in bare line, this drawing is the sketch that binds we humans with our possibilities as world and as history by bursting through the banality of the everyday via multiply interruptive traces.

Conclusion

Through uncovering the primordial line’s essential relationship to experience, strife, truth, and rhythm, I have presented how that same line in art is an interruptive force that generates not only form, but *presence* in recognizing our freedom, our history, and our necessity for understanding. Agamben also connects the revealing rhythm of art when he offers, “Only because [man] attains, *in the poetic act*, a more temporal dimension is he a historical being, for whom, that is, at every instant his past and future are at stake” (1999, 101, emphasis added). This relation of art to historical being lends understanding to Hegel’s assertion that “art brings before us the eternal powers that hold dominion in history” (1993, 11). Nancy knits the “line” of art and history that traces antiquity to the present:

It is not by chance that early humanity has left us testimonies of intense drawing activity—tracings, engravings, graffiti or scratches, hand-drawn lines, scorings of figures, rhymes, outlines, or incisions.

. . . [W]ith our ancestor's drawings, it is the essence of a formative force—at once musical, choreographic, chromatic, and poetic—that is inscribed and transmitted to us, like the inaugural gesture of a monstration through which man has drawn himself and destined himself. One could even say—destined himself to draw (himself), to renew and multiply without end the sketch that man is. (2013, 16)

Our humanness in this becoming, this coming-to-exist-in-the-world, is made known *to the human self* most assuredly through the essential bare line that becoming-artist continues to visit, and *visit upon* the world.

Notes

¹ In the *Republic*, Plato defines mimesis as “to make oneself like someone else in voice or appearance” (2004, 74), and he also lists painting as an imitation (2004, 301). Imitation jeopardizes truth, has the power to corrupt otherwise good people, and can be used only by the wise philosopher-rulers of Kallipolis. In contrast, Aristotle sees imitation, if constructed well, providing a beneficial catharsis. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle says “*plot* is an imitation of an action” (1996, 11), and “those who imitate, imitate agents” (1996, 5)—that is, they stand in for people who plausibly might have experienced such a plot. In both Plato and Aristotle, both the author of tragedies and comedies (the artist) plus the agent-presenter-actor of those words (the performance artists) would be considered imitators, but not the audience.

² In this difficult passage, Heidegger sets up parallel notions of tension in and of the strife: first in terms of the *place* where the “open region” is “won”—that is, where “everything stands” as opposed to where “everything withholds itself”; and second in terms of *truth* and *un-truth*—that is, between “[everything] that shows itself” and “[everything that] withdraws itself as a being.”

³ Heidegger prefers “figure” to “form”: “[f]orm and content are the most hackneyed concepts under which anything and everything may be subsumed” (1993, 153).

⁴ Heidegger’s thought seems to correspond to Hegel’s notion that art “in itself points beyond itself” (1993, 11). However, when Hegel speaks of “form,” it is not in the sense of a Platonic idea, but instead in the sense of a sensuous or plastic shape; to Hegel, “the emptiness of content which characterizes the Platonic idea is no longer satisfactory” (1993, 25).

⁵ Immanuel Kant exposes this availability or potential for truth in the figure in his “purposiveness” characterization of art—where it seems to have a purpose, or end, but such a purpose does not actually exist. Thus the realization of the truth of the work of art is interminably postponed.

⁶ Even the word “counterpoint” as the musical organization of the fugue connotes that something beyond a point is necessary to found the opening of form.

⁷ Although this essay defends line and art as non-mimetic, Aristotle instead defends imitation as something as natural as rhythm or music. However, Aristotle’s sense of universal affect does not seem to take into account the continuous change that time effects.

⁸ The source for this quotation of Maldiney by Nancy, *Art: The Illumination of Being*, is only available in its native French, *L’art, l’éclair de l’être*, and was not immediately available for referencing.

⁹ If “retrogression” is read as “sublation,” Kant seems to recognize the same sublation of time by space in his “Analytic of the Sublime,” in which he describes “the manifold in unity” saying, “the comprehension of the successively apprehended parts at one glance, is a retrogression that removes the time-condition in the progression of the imagination, and renders *co-existence* intuitable” (2007, 89).

¹⁰ Heidegger agrees that art is not mimetic. In his introductory analysis of Van Gogh’s painting of a pair of peasant shoes, he maintains that “[t]he work, therefore, is not the reproduction of some particular entity . . . it is, on the contrary, the reproduction of things’ general essence” (1993, 162).

¹¹ Heidegger’s definition of “projection” is self-referential, as follows: “As projecting, understanding is the mode of being of Dasein in which it *is* its possibilities as possibilities” (2010, 141), where “it” and “its” refer to Dasein (cf. n14).

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About the Author

Deborah Bouchette is an artist and writer who draws, and is drawn to, edges. Her dissertation asks the question "ever since Plato disavowed the poets from his ideal city, where is the place for the artist?" For the first part of her life, Deborah managed high-tech development and localization projects across multi-national companies. She is happy now to be in her "right mind."