

**THE EMORY
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Letter of Introduction

Dear Reader,

The staff of the Emory Philosophy Review is excited to present this year's journal. This is the third annual edition of the Review, which was recently created by philosophy students in order to foster the development of the humanities at Emory and provide a space for excellent students in philosophy and related disciplines to publish their work. As a peer-reviewed journal, the work contained within has been rigorously edited and reviewed by other outstanding philosophy students in order to produce exceptional undergraduate writing.

All of the work published in this journal was also selected to be read at the Emory Undergraduate Philosophy Conference, co-hosted by the journal and the Phi Sigma Tau philosophy honors society.

Please enjoy this year's edition of the Emory Philosophy Review.

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Skepticism and the Art World: An Investigation

Brian Wiora

In this paper, I will utilize the philosophical view of skepticism as a tool to compare the “external world” with the “Art World.” I will start by defining the properties of the Art World from an epistemological and metaphysical perspective. What can we know in the Art World? What even constitutes an Art World? I will then outline the skeptical problem with the external world, explicating specifically how skepticism presents a problem for making truth claims in the external world. I will then apply skepticism to truths in the Art World. Ultimately, I will conclude that the reasons we have for being skeptical of the truths in the external world are not applicable to the particular truths in the Art World.

There is much debate in the philosophy of aesthetics about what constitutes art itself. While certainly an important debate, it is not particularly relevant to the thesis of this paper. For simplicity, I will use the definition from the paper “Art as Form of Reality” by Herbert Marcuse¹, which states, “what makes a *work* into a work of *art*- this entity is the Form. By virtue of the Form, and the Form alone, the content achieves that uniqueness which makes it the content of one particular work of art and of no other” (Marcuse, 53). So, anything that is presented in the Form of art is art. This raises two questions. First, who decides whether something exists in the Form of art? For the sake of clarity, it is the role of the artist to determine whether a work is indeed a work of art. Thus, anything intentionally created as art is art. This would exclude anything that does not have an artist (nature, molecules, etc.) no matter how beautiful or even *seemingly* artistic it is.

¹ It would also be interesting to compare other conceptions of art to Marcuse’s. The advantage of Marcuse’s definition, in the context of the thesis of this paper, is its focus on the artist. Other definitions, of course, disregard the artist entirely. But even those theories would admit that most if not all art is created by artists. So, even non-artist focused definitions of art are compatible, but not particularly advantageous, to use as a definition of art in the context of the thesis of my paper.

Secondly, what exactly is the Form of art? This is where the idea of an “Art World” is necessary. Since art is intentionally created, the qualities and properties that a work of art contains are also intentional. Thus, we are able to evaluate aesthetic properties (color, texture, character) to make normative claims about art (good, bad, beautiful, ugly). But what we evaluate in works of art is not the way the depiction of the work of art itself, but the way it depicts concepts and objects in our reality. As Marcuse points out, “As part of the *established* culture, Art is *affirmative*, sustaining this culture; as alienation from the established reality, Art is a *negating* force” (54). Art objects are representations of real objects: a good painting of a tree is not good because it is tree-like; it is good because it creates a good *representation* of a tree (whether through realistic depiction or surrealistic critique). What Marcuse calls “culture” can be visualized, for the sake of understanding, as its own universe, full of these representations. This I will call the Art World.²

The idea is that each work of art exists in two different ways. There is the physical manifestation of the work of art: the painting on the sheet of paper, the stories in the Conan Doyle book, the movie on the DVD disc. And then there is what I will call the *representational* manifestation of the art: the tree, Sherlock Holmes, *Citizen Kane*. Claims about the physical manifestations (PM) of art might include “the paper is white and has green and brown paint on it,” “The stories are printed in Arial Font,” or “The movie disc is scratched.” The claims about the representational manifestation (RM) might include “the tree is green,” “Sherlock Holmes is a complex character,” or “*Citizen Kane* is a film about Charles Foster Kane.” The claims about PM

² This is not necessarily to be conceptualized as an alternate world with metaphysical properties. The only necessary and sufficient condition of the Art World is that it is a world where the existence of art objects are manifested in such a way that their existence functions independent of the real world (the world that we live in). It is easier though to visualize this world as the world that the artist creates with such properties that the artist gives them, even if it is the same metaphysical and epistemological properties that constitute the real world.

are claims about objects in the external world and the claims about RM are about those in the Art World. This, though, raises epistemological questions: what can we know in the Art World?

David Lewis' paper, *Truth in Fiction*, sheds light on this issue. Using the example of Sherlock Holmes, Lewis' work addresses how we can make statements of truth in the Art World. Sherlock Holmes, at least the one depicted in the Conan Doyle stories, is not a real person. But, as Lewis points out, "if I say that Holmes liked to show off...I have asserted an abbreviated version of the true sentence 'In the Sherlock Holmes stories, Holmes liked to show off.'" (38). These stories, along with all other works of art, exist in the Art World. And statements that describe and assess claims in the Art World, "are true if taken as abbreviations for prefixed sentences [such as the one above]" (38). An immediate worry for this interpretation is how much influence to give the work of art *as* a work of art in the Art World. For instance, the Sherlock Holmes stories are set in London, England. How much of our knowledge of real London should play into our understanding of Holmes' London?

Lewis answers this objection by stating that, "a fiction is a story told by a storyteller on a particular occasion...[where] different acts of storytelling [create] different fictions...The storyteller purports to be telling the truth about matters whereof he has knowledge" (39-40). Since art is defined by authorial intent, the answer to the above question depends on the artist's intention. London can look as realistic as it seems to be in Conan Doyle's stories or as dystopian as in Orwell's *1984*. What information of the external world we ought to use when evaluating fictions, or works of art more generally, is up to the artist. What is important though, as Lewis points out, is that "the worlds we should consider... are the worlds where the fiction is told, but as known as fact rather than fiction" (40). As long as Holmes' London exists in the Art World, it

is up to the artist to decide its properties. That is both the beauty, and potential flaw, of the Art World in the first place.

One query about the analysis of the Art World rises from the lack of knowledge of the artist and the artist's intentions. How do we know all of the relevant information to judge the quality of a work of art? If the artist does not create a vivid enough world, or if the work does not in some way speak for itself, it is not a *descriptive* problem with the Art World but rather a *normative* one of the work. If the art requires more context and it is not given to us, that is not a reason to doubt the qualities and properties of RM, but rather a fault of the artist for not including those details in PM. Simply put, art without the relevant information included *in* the piece is bad art.

To summarize, art is that which is intentionally created in the Form of art. A work of art is then evaluated in two separate realms, those qualities of PM and of RM. Qualities in RM exist in the Art World, where we can make truth-function claims about them based on the context provided to us in the work of art itself, as well as through the known artist's intentions. Of course, there are a whole host of unanswered epistemological questions about the Art World.³ But, we must answer the most basic one first: can we know what we think we know about it? Or, in other words, is what seems to be the case *actually* the case?

In the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes, the prominent philosopher of skepticism, addresses the concern with human perception. Typically, we almost always make assumptions about what we know, and what we think we can know, due to our sensory

³ It would be interesting to elaborate how Marcuse and Lewis interact. Ultimately, I think their interpretations on the way we evaluate art coincide, though clearly Marcuse is more interested in defining art (as opposed to evaluating it). Nonetheless, the analysis provided here is simply to depict what the Art World looks like and how we make evaluative judgments of it.

perception of the external world. We trust our senses as veridical sources of knowledge gathering.

But, as Descartes points out, “often in my dreams I am convinced of just such familiar events—that I am sitting by the fire in my dressing-gown—when in fact I am lying undressed in bed!” (Descartes 1). Sometimes our senses deceive us, when we are dreaming and even sometimes when we are awake and fully conscious. To address this dilemma, Descartes introduces his famous Method of Doubt which states that we should, “withhold assent from propositions that are obviously false, [and to] withhold it from ones that are not completely certain and indubitable” to the extent that “all I need, for the purpose of rejecting all my opinions, is to find in each of them at least some reason for doubt” (Descartes 1). But, when we utilize the Method, we find some concerning conclusions. It seems that we have reason to doubt our assumptions and our perception of the world around us cannot withstand total infallibility⁴. But, if we cannot trust what is most basic to us, can we really trust any knowledge-gathering source? Can we really know anything about the external world?

Since Descartes, this worry has been developed into a more structured argument. Scenarios relating to matrixes and evil daemons have replaced the simple dreaming thought experiment. The argument proposed by Hilary Putnam goes as follows:

1. I do not know that I am not a Brain in a Vat (BIV).
2. If I do not know I am not a BIV, then I do not know I have hands.
3. Therefore, I do not know I have hands.⁵

Extrapolate this argument out (from the skepticism about my knowledge of hands, to skepticism of knowledge of the brain, then of the body, etc.) and one arrives at a sort of

⁴ Obviously, there is more to say about Descartes’ Method. One question that this analysis begs is whether or not the deception of the physical world is deception of all knowledge. Descartes poignantly addresses these questions in the second and third meditations, relying on the cogito, a priori knowledge and then, from that a priori knowledge, the existence of God. But what is salient is how Descartes’ proposal in the first meditation extends a skeptical argument.

⁵ The BIV thought experiment has appeared in several works since Putnam’s. There are key differences between it and Descartes’ thought experiment. And as science progresses and we begin to understand more physical processes of the brain, no doubt this thought experiment will also evolve.

Epistemological Nihilism— we do not know anything about the external world. This argument is certainly valid, but is it sound? Intuitions flow both ways here: we think we have hands but also think there is a nonzero chance that our perception does not match reality. How does one resolve these competing claims, particularly with good reason to doubt the former intuition?

G.E. Moore, who could be the father of “common sense philosophy,” has an interesting reply. In his foundational paper, “Certainty,” Moore flips the skeptical argument on its head. His argument, essentially, is:

1. I know I have hands.
2. If I know I have hands, then I know I am not a BIV.
3. Therefore, I know I am not a BIV.

One might notice that the second premise, called the closure premise, is similar in both the Cartesian and Moorean argument. The ~~only~~ substantive difference, in fact, in these arguments lies only in how one evaluates the uncertainty of our own perception. This difference, in the field of epistemology, seems to be one of the most important distinguishing factors between the skeptics and anti-skeptics.

Moore’s response receives much criticism in the philosophical community. After all, the assumption Moore makes is that we are in fact certain of the validity of our perception. If Moore’s argument is true, or at least as obviously true as he thinks it is, then Descartes argument would have to be utter nonsense. After all, if we are convinced of our perception of the external world rather than worried about their inconsistencies, then Cartesian Skepticism would carry no intuitive weight. The fact that we do consider Cartesian Skepticism, and the fact that it is still

considered a foundational philosophical argument in analytic Western philosophy, makes the nature of the Moore's response, while interesting, at least unsatisfying⁶.

Modern Epistemologists have attempted to confront Descartes' argument head on. Many theories have attempted to salvage our knowledge of the external world, while simultaneously avoiding the method of doubt and the problem of our perceptual flaws. One particularly intriguing theory is that of Process Reliabilism (PR). The theory, as Christopher Hill presents in the paper "Process Reliabilism and Cartesian Skepticism," states that

S is epistemically justified in believing p [if] (i) S believes that p, (ii) S has this belief as the result of a cognitive process that is highly reliable, (iii) S is not in possession of any reliably formed beliefs that imply either that p is false or that the process mentioned in (ii) is unreliable, and (iv) S could not easily come into possession of any beliefs of the sorts mentioned in (iii)... (567).

This occurs where a reliable cognitive process creates beliefs that "are, as a matter of objective, empirical fact, quite likely to be true" (568).

PR seems complicated but it is actually a natural response to Cartesian (and for that matter, most kinds of) skepticism of the external world. Let me explain. Skepticism relies on the fact that the senses are unreliable. However, unless we are dreaming, or we misinterpret something, our sensory knowledge is often inductively right. What looks like a tree is often actually a tree, or at least a tree-like object. Furthermore, when we are wrong, there is a normally

⁶ Some philosophers are satisfied with Moore's response, citing evidence about the weight of sensory evidence over other forms of evidence. To them, I would ask whether or not, when their senses deceive them, they feel less concerned than they should (or at least than others do). It could be the case that these philosophers happen to have a psychological tendency to trust their senses more. Or maybe they have good reason to justify sensory knowledge on physiological grounds. But it seems hard to rationally construct Moore's argument with purely deductive evidence. So, one would not merely have to justify the weight of the senses, but also of inductive evidence more generally.

a good reason why we are wrong. This explains why most people are not plagued by the skeptical doubt like some philosophers are: it is just not very relevant to our daily lives.

PR explains this disjunction. We do not form beliefs from arbitrary observations, but rather through tested means. We use our eyes to see the tree and it is because we trust our vision that we form a perceptual belief of a tree. This explains why people, for instance, use eye glasses: to make our senses more *reliable*. We have the ability to recognize when our senses lead us astray and when they do we often do not trust them as knowledge sources. Even beyond sensory knowledge, we rely on sources of information that we have better reason to trust. We trust predictions by scientists more than those of psychics because they tend to be right more often⁷. In the same way, when we wake up from nightmares, we can say it is “just a dream” because they often do not correspond to the way things actually are. It is because these processes have proven more reliable that we can salvage knowledge and disregard Cartesian Skepticism as a philosopher’s fantasy. The tenants of induction are much more attractive than the weight of deductive reasoning.

As relieving for the anti-skeptic as that seems, the skeptic does have a troubling response at her disposal. There are several famous thought experiments that seem to disprove process reliabilism, several of which lie in “Epistemic Operators” written by Fred Dretske. One of the experiments goes as follows. Suppose that you are on a road trip and, unbeknownst to you, you drive through Fake Barn Country (FBC). In Fake Barn Country, there are many barn facades, disguised to look like real barns. However, in Fake Barn Country, there is also one real barn. As you drive, you happen to glance at the one real barn. Your vision has been reliable your entire life and it is not impaired in any way here. It seems that, according to process reliabilism, you

⁷ This claim relates to the way that certain kinds of individuals tend to justify claims. We trust scientists more than psychics because of the way they gather evidence and analyze it.

can know that what you look at is a barn. And you are right. Even the most basic definition of knowledge, that of a true justified belief, would indicate that you know that what you see is a real barn.

So, why is this a problem? It seems like it is a matter of luck that you are right, that you happened to look at the one real barn in Fake Barn Country. Had you looked at any of the other barns, you would have been wrong in asserting that you knew what you saw was a barn. And it seems like luck should not play a role in what you know. Remember, one of the advantages of PR was the fact that it explained why we do not stumble arbitrarily into our beliefs. It would be a contradiction, and a damning one at that, to try to say otherwise here. Furthermore, it seems like the problem could not be the reliable process itself. Your vision is not impaired and your sight has proven to be a reliable your entire life. The reliabilist either has to abandon their conception of knowledge or try to excuse luck in this scenario. Neither seems desirable for the tenants of process reliabilism⁸.

One objection to make, though, is about the context of the situation. Had you known you were in Fake Barn Country, you might not have been so certain that what you saw was a real barn. And, if you knew that amidst the fake barns was one real barn, you would seem to be inclined to suspend all judgments until you could further investigate. No process can be considered reliable in Fake Barn Country, no matter how inductively valid it has proven to be⁹.

The problem with this objection, though, is that it undermines the necessity for process reliabilism in the first place. The point of the thought experiment is that you do not know you are

⁸ It would also be interesting to analyze this objection in its relation to Descartes. Though the paper has shifted to the discourse of contemporary epistemology, it would be interesting to frame this in the context of Descartes' Method.

⁹ I restricted "process" here to only processes of the senses. There are other kinds of processes, but none of them would help gain evidence in FBC. The only kind of relevant evidence in sensory knowledge, particularly sight.

in Fake Barn Country, just like you do not know that you are not a Brain in a Vat. If we need more context for knowledge on a simple barn sighting, imagine how much more we would need for proof of the existence of the external world. It seems like process reliabilism, then, fails to confront the true problem that skepticism brings about: the failure of our perception *in the context of* our place in the external world. How could we even arrive at the right context to know whether or not we are a BIV? Chances are, we cannot¹⁰.

Even if we could somehow scoot around this problem and salvage some version of process reliabilism, there is an additional worry for modern epistemological theories. Recalling Descartes' method of doubt, we should constantly be reevaluating what we know and how we know it. No matter what theory we use or how valid it seems, there will always be a pervading skeptical worry that it is wrong. While intuitions often go both ways, very few people outside of Moore should have the certainty of the external world that is required to not, at least on some level, worry about its existence. Ultimately, we do have reasons to be skeptical of the external world. The question, though, is should we be worried about the Art World for the same reasons¹¹?

My position is that the truths in the Art World are not subject to the same skeptical worries that truths in the external world are. I believe there are two reasons why this is true. The first I will call *the argument from intentionality* and it goes as follows. Recall that art is defined by that which is placed into the Form of art that separates features of physical manifestation from

¹⁰ Notice that this objection also applies to Descartes' thought experiment. Even when we seem to wake up, there is no proper context given as to whether we are still dreaming or not. Any presupposition of "being awake" relies on the underlying notion that we can in fact be certain of our senses. Insofar as we have no certainty, there is no context that can help us get out of Descartes' dreaming argument either.

¹¹ The key to this final shift in the paper is whether we should be concerned for the same reasons. I did not consider any other reasons for epistemological doubt of the Art World, though there are many.

those of representational manifestation. That is to say when an artist creates a piece of art, he or she does so intentionally, and every element in that work is fixed through the eyes of the artist.

That smudge in the corner of the painting, or the camera visible in a shot of a film, exist in a work of art as much as characters and objects do.

The Cartesian Skeptic's primary worry is that of uncertainty. How can we know what we see is what actually exists? While certainly a problem for certain objects and truths in the real world, the saving grace for art in this regard is the artist. He or she defines and describes the work to its full extent. In a painting of Fake Barn Country, the artist can tell us which is the one real barn—because he or she created it! Intentionality, thus, resolves any uncertainty in a work of art. Where process reliabilism has to rely on processes that are often, but not *always*, reliable—the artist can provide a Moorean certainty that we do have hands in the world of the piece.

One objection to the argument from intentionality is that of disagreement. Say two people look at the same painting on the wall. One believes that it is a painting of a tree and the other believes it is actually a painting of man with tree-like qualities. Suppose the artist is not available, either through death or inaccessibility. Can we then know whether it is a painting of a tree or of a tree-like man? It seems like uncertainty has entered into the Art World after all. Another way to conceptualize this objection is to consider whether or not the artist's intention is fully manifested into the work, such that it is apparent to the viewer. If it has, then there should be no disagreement (or the disagreement is an intended effect of the artwork). But, if there is, it seems to defeat the ability of the artist's intention, even if we have external knowledge of it, to save the Art World from the skeptical doubt.

However, reconsider the argument from intentionality. The argument does not say that artists create *clear* art or art that can be easily comprehended. In fact, often the opposite is the case (postmodernism, surrealism, etc.). Maybe disagreement from the audience was the *intention* of the artist. Or maybe the work of art is just poorly painted, such that ambiguity arises. It is not

the fault of our epistemological processes but rather of poor artistic skill that there is uncertainty of the Art World. The point is that it is the artist's world, and the fact that there are multiple interpretations does not mean we are skeptical of the existence of features concerning representational manifestation in art. So, if disagreement arises about the representational manifestations of a work of art, we should instead claim that the artist failed in a certain way such that those features did not fully manifest from the intention of the artist. We should not, though, claim that the Art World suffers from epistemological doubt on this ground. That would be incorrect.

The second argument against applying skepticism to the Art World is the *argument from representation*. When the skeptic applies her argument to truths in the Art World, the argument would go as follows. If, in the external world, we cannot know whether we are a BIV, then that applies to everything in the external world *including* those works of art. We should be just as uncertain about what we think is a tree and what we think is a painting of a tree, because we are still using sometimes unreliable processes when looking at both objects. All truths in the Art World are thrown out the window once we try to comprehend them in the same way we try to understand objects in the real world.

The flaw with this objection is its conflation of qualities of physical manifestation and representational manifestation. The skeptic is right that the qualities of physical manifestation are subject to skeptical doubt. But the qualities of representation manifestation do not exist in the same entity as those of physical manifestation. They exist as representations, either of a truly external world or one in a vat. Maybe we can be uncertain *how* we know the painting of the tree represents a tree. But all representations, by nature, are fixed. Any attempt to undermine this fact is an attempt to redefine what art is. As long as art is an intentionally placed representation in the

Form of art, skepticism of the external world plays no role in evaluating the truths in the Art World.

To understand the *argument from representation*, consider the following thought experiment. Imagine a painting that was a plain sheet of white paper in a frame. There is no paint and the artist in fact never touched the sheet of paper. However, by framing the work and by calling it a painting, the artist has intentionally created it, putting it in the realm of the Art World. The skeptical worry about this work is that any knowledge we have about this work comes from unreliable processes, including the artists' intentions (so the argument from intentionality serves no aid here). What's particularly salient about this work though for the skeptic is that it seems like no reliable process, if there even is such a thing, could tell us much about this work. There is no color, no texture, none of the facets of most pieces of art.

This is where the argument from representation comes in handy. What is true about the fact that there is no color or texture of this work is only true if we only consider the physical manifestation of the artist's work. However, there are plenty of features concerning representation manifestation of this work that are beyond the skeptical doubt. There is, for instance, the emptiness *represented* by the whiteness of the piece. Even if we are unsure of the existence of whiteness in the real world, we cannot doubt emptiness as it exists in the Art World. And, more importantly, we can still make truth claims about the features concerning representational manifestation. Because it exists in artwork, not as whiteness but as emptiness, that feature concerning representational manifestation is preserved through an a priori process, as a concept. We do not need sensory experience to make claims about the emptiness of this painting in the art world. It is *represented* as whiteness, not constructed by it. In this sense, the

argument from representation and by extension the theory of the Art World more generally can thus defeat the skeptical worry, independent of the argument from intentionality¹².

What then are we to make of the Art World? We know it can withstand the brute force of the skeptical objections, certainly far greater than our world can. The intentionality of the artist combined with its representational nature yield a more explainable world. One has to wonder what implications arise from this conclusion. Is the Art World more valuable because it can withstand the objections? Is it more tangible? Or, does the absence of a skeptical worry, the absence of doubt and suspicion, yield a world far less interesting than our own?¹³

¹² Further discussion of this topic most notably includes what to do in circumstances where the artist herself is unaware of her intention, and thus does not manifest it in the work of art. That, of course, cuts against the grain of most definitions of art, especially (like the one provided by Marcuse) if it focuses on the intention of the artist. In those circumstances, when a muddled intention produces art, one has to infer knowledge of this work from the PM properties, which are subject to unreliable processes. A more careful examination of this issue is necessary.

¹³ As far as I know, this is the only existing paper on Process Reliabilism in the context of aesthetics. I would be interested in seeing what Process Reliabilists would respond to its application in this context, and specifically what they think of the claim that the Art World does not suffer from the same faults as perception of the real world.

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Reconfiguring Ethical and Epistemic Traditions:
A Critical Analysis of White Male Epistemic Hegemony
and Power Relations that Underlie Testimonial and
Hermeneutical Injustice

Iman Williams

When placed in conversation with “The Periphery Perspective of the Post 1492 Ex-Slave-Labor Ultimate Human Other Archipelago: W.E.B. DuBois’s Double Consciousness, Frantz Fanon’s Skins/Masks, and the Reverse

Paradox” by Sylvia Wynter, “White Ignorance” by Charles Mills, “The Souls of Black Folk” by W.E.B. Du Bois, and “Black Skin, White Masks” by Frantz Fanon give us an occasion to think the relation between the ethical aspect of epistemic practices and power relations. More specifically, Du Bois and Mills critique the ways in which the white supremacist ideology that underlies epistemology produces a symbolic order that brackets out a kind of epoche. Anglo-American epistemology emerges as a Cartesian discourse that eclipses a particular set of subjects with its egalitarian conceptions of society.

I am interested in what is at stake when cognizers of epistemology produce theories of knowledge that are presupposed by a culture wherein racialized and gendered violence and subordination function as anomalies. Sylvia Wynter suggests that what persists is an articulation of human as man while Mills claims that the framework used to produce theories of knowledge is flawed insofar as it marginalizes domination and its implications. I will provide an analysis of the mechanisms used to generate and sustain white male epistemic hegemony; however, my paper is primarily concerned with elucidating its implications toward a more adequate description of epistemology and ethics vis-a-vis a more adequate articulation of the human.

The spatiotemporal configurations of white supremacy that attempt to circumscribe Black people, such as the Veil, as constituted by W.E.B. Du Bois, have cognitive consequences. *The Souls of Black Folk* opens with a refrain that Du Bois is deliberately confronted with during his encounters with non-Black people. He writes, “Between me and the other world there is ever

an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil (7)?” Du Bois collapses the conditions of linear temporality by introducing each chapter with spiritual hymns that apprehend the conditions that Du Bois experiences and outlines in the text. That the spiritual hymns are interposed by the interior voice of Du Bois alludes to the question of split subjectivity inasmuch as the interior subjectivity of Du Bois is informed by and in conversation with his ancestors who have traversed the conditions that Du Bois is presently confronted by. The refrain that emerges in this scene- “How does it feel to be a problem?”- is a means by which to situate Du Bois outside of a traditional symbolic order. Not only does the ideology that presupposes this refrain reify Du Bois but it is also the line of demarcation that separates Du Bois from “the other world”.

Where, then, is Du Bois situated? What space(s) does Du Bois inhabit? It is important to note that the question is never actually posed. Rather, Du Bois apprehends the question before and without it being posed because Du Bois has access to the interiority of his oppressors. Like Du Bois, Fanon is interested in the ways in which white supremacist ideologies transmute into gestures that reify Black people. In *Black Skin, White Mask* Fanon says the permutations of white supremacy that is embedded in language, “To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization” (18). Fanon argues that being is entwined with gaining knowledge of the culture of the colonizing forces and gaining access to their interior

subjectivity. However, despite how much knowledge an oppressed figure has of their oppressor, the oppressed figure will never be able to assume personhood. That is not to say that the function of the collective white gaze is not to see and recognize Fanon's personhood. Rather, the function of the gaze is to figure Fanon into a dreaded object. He writes, "Whereas I was the one they should have begged and implored, I was denied the slightest recognition? Since the Other was reluctant to recognize me, there was only one answer: to make myself known" (95). This scene is occasion to interrogate the function of the collective white gaze. Fanon suggests that while white onlookers see him and other black people, the function of the gaze and the act of looking is not to understand or recognize that which is being looked at. It is the precise opposite.

The encounters described by Fanon and Du Bois are instantiations of the ways in which whiteness situates itself as a transcendental norm and denies the subjectivity of Black people. Furthermore, Fanon and Du Bois outline the fundamental epistemic disjuncture wherein double consciousness enables Black people to have a more veridical perception of the interior subjectivity of white people. On the other hand, white people, due to their refusal to see Black people or acknowledge their subjectivity, tend to produce bad faith and misrepresentation. This epistemic disjuncture emerges in Robert Audi's "Epistemology" inasmuch as Audi does not provide an analysis of the implication for social cognition of the legacy of white supremacy. White epistemic hegemony manifests itself in a myriad of ways including but not limited to the erasure of the history of structural discrimination that has left whites with differential resources and its consequent advantages. This mode of collective social memory or amnesia transfigures into discursive spaces, textbooks, official holidays, monuments, etc. Further, the colorblind ideology, which functions as a refusal to acknowledge the historicity and materiality of white

privilege, promotes an individualistic approach to the study of knowledge inasmuch as it necessitates a decontextualized and ahistorical approach to epistemology.

In considering the politics of epistemic practices, it is important to note that one's perception is mediated by their racialized experiences. Race and racialized experiences thereby affects one's cognition, perception, memory, and testimony. Indeed, testimony, which is relational, involves the selection of one voice over another. What is at stake when the voices of people of color have been collectively silenced? This silencing can, of course, be instantiated by the genocide of aboriginal people, Palestinians, Black people, the systematic oppression of trans folk, gender-queer and gender non-conforming folks, disabled people, the criminalization of Muslims, immigrants, poor people, incarcerated people, people experiencing homelessness etc. These communities are not only vulnerable to state injunction but their presence and humanity is often denied inasmuch as people refuse to see or hear them. In other words, our racialized experience does, in fact, influence what and how we see as well as what precisely we choose to remember. An individual or collective refusal to see or hear marginalized people has cognitive consequences in that the claims of marginalized people will get undermined. For example, when Keith Lamont Scott was murdered by the police in Charlotte, North Carolina, the police released a statement claiming that they tased and then shoot Scott because he was armed and "posed an imminent threat". Most Black people already knew that this was a lie; however, testimony from Black people is and has always been undermined so our claims were given less credibility than the police. That is, of course, until Keith Lamont Scott's wife, Rakeyia Scott, released the video she recorded of her husband getting shot. The video that Rakeyia released proved something that most Black people already knew, the police gave a false statement. Rakeyia can be hear saying to the police, "He doesnt have a gun. He has a TBI. Hes not going to do anything to you guys. He

just took his medicine.” This mode of testimonial injustice can, unfortunately, be applied to numerous extrajudicial killings of Black people. It is clear that epistemic trust has been and continues to be tied to social positionality and power.

A presupposition that is central to moral philosophy and epistemology is a conception of the moral self as an isolated unconditioned being. The subject appears in the work of Emerson, Nietzsche, Aristotle, and Kant as a man, presumably white, that is disentangled from a kind of sociality or social situation; a man to whom the Other appears as a threat. For instance, Friedrich Nietzsche, A German philosopher and essayist of the late 19th century, claims that in order to be an exemplary individual one must affirm themselves and actualize their potential through self-instruction. Nietzsche provides an anecdotal story to support this claim wherein the subject, Zarathustra, spends ten years in the mountains before waking up one morning and descending from the mountains and proclaiming that “God is dead”. This proclamation is an attempt to disavow the notion that there is a single omnipresent force that has the capacity to access or traverse every individual's interiority. Zarathustra urges everyone to rethink the ways in which they think about their present conditions and their present life as opposed to the hereafter. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche claims that the ways in which people assign value and meaning to their lives is not generative because it is grounded in conventional structures and ideologies. He thereby introduces the concept of the *ubermensch* or the overman, which serves to reorients one's relationship to the earth. More specifically, Zarathustra offers a critique of man and his propensity to adhere to conventional modes of being by arguing that man is overcome by feelings of contentment and fear, which inhibit him from becoming overman. Zarathustra states, “Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman—a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping.”[4]

Zarathustra describes man as a liminal figure that is suspended by the possibility of failure and destabilizing the status quo.

According to Nietzsche, religious ideologies and structures have led “men” to necessitate self-preservation, which Zarathustra is at odds with. Nietzsche is interested in those that have the desire and will to go under for the sake of cultural progression. He states, “No shepherd and one herd! Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into a madhouse.” Furthermore, in *Self Reliance*, Emerson anticipates that the messenger or “madman” is ahead of their time. As such, the messenger or “madman” does not appeal to the masses; rather, the messenger appeals to what is yet to come. Like Emerson, Nietzsche notes that individuals that disrupt the social order are, more often than not, pathologized. In this case, Zarathustra, a well-meaning individual that is interested in introducing the concept of the overman to a market place and reconfiguring our relation to the earth, gets ridiculed. For instance, after taking it upon himself to prepare a burial for the tightrope walker who everyone left to die, a man walks up to Zarathustra and states, “Go away from this town, Zarathustra, there are too many here who hate you. You are hated by the good and the just, and they call you their enemy and despiser; you are hated by the believers in the true faith and they call you the danger of the multitude.” This may seem like a digression in a paper that is primarily concerned with providing a critical reading of traditional epistemic and ethical practices; however, considering the role of the individual isolated subject that reappears in these traditional philosophical texts will help us address the issue with white male epistemic hegemony. In other words, philosophers like Nietzsche and Emerson critique the collective, problematize the Other, and valorize the individual subject whose ethical system and epistemology are, according to Nietzsche and Emerson, the most rational.

Sylvia Wynter is interested in the counterhuman, a project that critiques the overtly imperial and colonial liberal monohumanist premises. In “The Periphery Perspective of the Post 1492 Ex-Slave-Labor Ultimate Human Other Archipelago: W.E.B. DuBois’s Double Consciousness, Frantz Fanon’s *Skins/Masks*, and the Reverse Paradox”, Sylvia Wynter returns to the work of W.E.B. DuBois and Frantz Fanon to remind us that the hierarchically stratified triadic system of labor is a principle of domination that is bound with classificatory systems of differential degrees of being human. What Wynter’s finds curious is that it is only through the abolition of slavery, which was precipitated by the Haitian slave revolution, that Black people were made to embody what Wynter’s refers to as a “wholly human Other status.” She writes, “Modeled on the natural organism, the Western bourgeoisie’s liberal monohumanist self-narrating descriptive statement had therefore, as the condition of its post slavery enactment, logically called for all peoples of black African descent were cast as the naturally dysselected Native/Nigger figure, ostensibly bioevolutionarily situated between apes and humans. This is a figure barely evolved and wholly subhuman that is Other to the fully evolved, thereby only True Human Self and its genre-specific mode of symbolic life that is optimally incarnated in the Western bourgeois liberal monohumanist homo economicus.”¹⁴ What Wynter is bringing to our attention here is that even after the 13th amendment, Black people were not able to achieve unitary subjecthood or cede to a classically gendered binary; rather, Black people were situated in a liminal space wherein they were neither enslaved objects or wholly human. The ex-slave periphery archipelago from which Wynter claims Du Bois and Fanon write from, is characterized by the duality, amalgamation, and foreclosure that is demanded of marginalized people when, if all possible, they try to acquiesce to the realm of the human. This fragmentation destabilizes the subject and gestures towards another articulation of what is the human is and should be. In other

words, the split subjectivity that people of color, particularly Black people, are forced to perform, complicates the the Western bourgeois subject that is conceived by theorists such as Nietzsche, Emerson, Aristotle, and Kant.

Simply put, the Institutionalized hierarchical order which forces Black people to mimetically adopt white *masks* emerges from the work of people like Nietzsche, Emerson, Aristotle, and Kant. If Black subjects are not considered human unless or until they adopt white masks, then when and how will Black subjects be considered rational subjects with the capacity to know? Insofar as privileged discursive spaces in and outside of academic institutions practice a kind of erasure and effacement of Black subjects and other marginalized and underrepresented people, they will continue to be considered socially dead subjects who will encounter testimonial and hermeneutical injustice since epistemic trust has an irrepressible connect with social power. As Du Bois, and Fanon point out, the history of privileged discursive spaces in and outside of academic institutions practicing an erasure and effacement of Black subjects and other marginalized and underrepresented people hinges on a kind of ethical conduct or politics that underlies normative epistemic practices. The mimetic desire and the adoption of the white mask, Fanon suggests, is an attempt for Black subjects to realize themselves as truly human in non-self-aversive terms. Fanon writes, “The black [subject] must wage war on both levels: Since historically they influence each other, any unilateral liberation is incomplete, and the gravest mistake would be to believe in their automatic interdependence. Besides, such a systematic tendency is contrary to the facts. This will be proved. Reality, for once, requires a total understanding. On the object level as on the subjective level, a solution has to be supplied.” Fanon proposes an ethics that calls on the Black subject to destabilize the colonizing Western world-systemic societal order, which, as Wynter notes, from its institutional origin led to their

collective alienation as subhuman Other. Reorienting what we understand as human changes and demands the change of the conceptual grid through which one perceives.

White male epistemic hegemony delegitimizes the knowledge that is produced and disseminated by marginalized communities by figuring them as Other or subhuman. We need to conceive of alternative ethics and thereby an alternative mode of epistemology that takes positionality and socialization into account, since everything is socially mediated. We need a theoretical framework that does not seek to truncate or disregard altogether the ontological status and epistemic potentiality of marginalized communities. A social epistemology, as opposed to white male epistemic hegemony, will take into account subject positions and the ways in which one's epistemic situation is or has been informed by prevailing power relations, domination and subordination. An ethical framework that refuses to reify the Other will produce an epistemic system that is more rational and just by virtue of refusing to reify the Other and by refusing to foreclose the possibility of participating in testimony, a practice that constitutes the practical core of what it is to know. This ethical framework relies not only upon the Other to, as Fanon suggests, end the colonizing world-systemic societal order, but also relies upon the hearer to be virtuous by detecting and correcting the prejudice in their credibility judgments. Ultimately, testimonial and hermeneutic justice emerge as intellectual and ethical virtues that demand, as Wynter may suggest, a critique of the architectures of colonial juridical-economic power that sustain the articulation of human that is central to traditional moral philosophy and epistemology.

Reconciling Materiality and the Non-Human within Performativity

Alex Yoakum

One of the core foundations of queer theory is a fundamentally fluid ontology in which boundaries relating to sex and gender are not fixed or static. Ontological rigidity based on the ‘science’ or ‘naturalness’ of sex and gender for any given individual is discarded and replaced by a theory of performativity where gender is constituted by interpellations, and performative utterances that prop up particular categorizations related to identity. This theory of performativity can be attributed to Judith Butler, whose work helped drive queer theory in a new direction. One key issue that haunts Butler’s notion of performativity is a lack of concern for the non-human in the foundations of her theoretical approach, which may be a correct criticism since she is concerned with certain bodies, particularly human bodies, and their relationship to regulatory power and particular ontological categorizations. Another criticism is leveled at the attention she pays to discursive forms of representation and actual embodiment and materiality. Many criticize her as privileging the level of discourse over that of materiality altogether, since she views the body as a site of cultural inscription, where the body somehow becomes passive in the process of signification. An alternative view offered by Barad extends performativity to all living and non-living matter, reformulating the status of matter as something *that matters* and is no longer passive in the process of signification. I evaluate the veracity of this critique of performativity and conclude that Butler’s notion of performativity sufficiently addresses the question of materiality through citationality, which considers the way particular bodies are materialized and compelled morphologically. Finally, a reading of Butler vis-à-vis Derrida links performativity to the question of the non-human and addresses Barad’s critique of linguistic focus.

Butler’s theory of performativity is highly influential within the realm of gender and sexuality studies since it emphasizes the lack of fixity regarding gender and sexual identities.

The first notable component of performativity is a rejection of the stability of identity categories as such, and rather, views identity as something fundamentally unstable and a result of discursive formations. Departing from Foucault, she writes that, “maintaining a body prior to its cultural inscription” and thus, “assum[ing] a materiality prior to signification” makes it impossible to submit the body itself to a Foucauldian genealogical investigation (Butler, 130). Like most post-structuralists, Butler is very skeptical of anything that could be regarded as ‘prediscursive’ or ‘natural’ for this quality of naturalness has justified the repression of identities that lie on the margins. Instead, it is important to shift our focus to how particular discursive formations and power itself sets the intelligible boundaries of the body. Rather than identity being empty or fundamentally open to determination in an existentialist sense, the limits of the body coincide with the limits of the social. For Butler, “[the] limit of the body is never material,” but instead the surface of the body is, “signified by taboos and anticipated transgressions,” as such, the limits of the body are the limits of, “the socially hegemonic” (Butler, 131). Drawing from Kristeva, Butler argues that abject beings that exist on the margins inform our conception of otherness and confuse the distinction between inner and outer. In order for these two worlds to remain distinct, “the body would have to achieve an impossible impermeability” in which, “this enclosure would invariably be exploded by precisely that excremental filth that it fears” (Butler, 134). Thus, the stability of the subject is premised on a form of subjectification that renders these two worlds as distinct-- when the inner truth of gender identity does not correspond to the contours of a particular body then the stability of that categorization becomes challenged.

This is the point in which performativity comes into play. If identity is not something that is naturally bestowed, or, if the subject is not something that is pre-discursive, then the subject is created by particular discursive formations. Based upon this, “acts, gestures, and desire produce

the effect of an internal core,” which, as performative, reveal that essences, “are fabrications manufactured and sustained by corporeal signs and other discursive means” (Butler, 136).

Performativity thus suggests that there is not a predetermined essence or quality that precedes the discursive constructions of gender and sex-- rather, that the realm of the discursive sustains these practices by creating the subject and compelling the constructed subject to conform. There is no gender core, but rather, “acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desire create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core,” which is purposefully maintained for, “the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (Butler, 136). Butler borrows from Foucault’s notion of regulatory power, in which the subject is not created prior to different forces, but is a direct result of this interplay of forces and compelled to comport one’s body to legitimize the institution of heterosexuality. Performativity offers a way out since it reveals that these gender or sex categories themselves are fabrications. For Butler, the act of drag, “implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself--as well as its contingency” (Butler, 137). To quickly conclude, performativity articulates the instability of gender and sex categories and their fundamental fluidity. Performativity is a means of subverting the dominant mode of heterosexuality where gender and sex are rigidly assigned and leave little room for fluidity.

One problem that may seem to pervade the notion of performativity is the anthropocentric focus on the human body and Butler’s lack of concern for the non-human in the theoretical foundations of performativity. Indeed, Butler is only concerned with a notion of intelligibility that informs and creates the human subject, what it means to for a subject to be less than human, and thus unintelligible and ungrievable. Some attempts have been made to expand the circle of performativity to include and articulate the position of the non-human. Among these

accounts, Karen Barad's reformulation of performativity with a post-humanist lens is the most interesting and effective. Drawing from queer theory and physics, she articulates a fundamental shift from performativity to an agential realist account. In this account, "all bodies, not merely human bodies, come to matter through the world's performativity- it's iterative intra-activity" (Barad, 2011). In her view, there are not single entities as such, but rather identity and materializations are entangled phenomena. One cannot simply separate the material from discursive formations in this account, because they are co-constitutive in that the material *affects* the discursive.

The result of this move from Butler's account of performativity to Barad's agential realism is that traditional notions of identity, causality, and difference are challenged. Indeed, the concept of "intra-action... marks an important shift reopening and refiguring foundational notions of classical ontology" (Barad, 2011). Instead of differentiation occurring through a mediation between self and an exterior other, intra-action suggests that identity is an entangled phenomena where differentiation is caused by agential cuts, the "exteriority-within-phenomena"; identity is thus "diffracted through itself" (Barad, 2011). Barad analyzes *Pfiesteria*, a microscopic living organism responsible for the death of a large number of fish. Her analysis focuses on the double-nature of its identity- as possessing both categorizations of an animal that feeds off of other living creatures, and plant matter that photosynthesizes. At its core, it is a living existence refusing to be conceptualized in a rigid way that also poses a quandary for classical notions of causality since an entity cannot be two things at once. What this organism reveals is, "a mode of causality as iterative intra-activity" that hinges on non-deterministic causality (Barad, 2011). Further, her analysis extends to the quantum level of the atom. Regarding quantum leaps between energy levels where photons are emitted, another

discontinuous relationship is revealed. Rather than an electron moving *between* energy levels, it appears in the new energy level. In order for the photon to be emitted, “it will have to already wind up where it was going before it left” (Barad, 2011). Such discontinuity furthers the idea of a fundamental instability and entanglement of “spacetime matters.” The performativity of matter itself is also revealed through a double slit experiment. One can analyze whether something is a wave or particle based on the diffraction pattern as a result of putting the entity through the slits- if there is an interference pattern it is a wave. An interesting conundrum results when some entities, such as light, possess the qualities of both depending on the observational apparatus. What is made apparent is that the identity of a given entity is not ontologically rigid, but that, “ontology changes depending on the experimental apparatus used to determine its nature” (Barad, 2011). The theoretical foundations of performativity and agential realism seem to resonate since they both suggest the fundamental instability of particular ontological categorizations. Indeed, the application of agential realism to living and non-living matter definitely resonates with Butler’s theory of performativity.

Barad’s extension of performativity to not only the realm of the non-human but also to non-living matter itself, is a revolutionary reformulation of Butler’s theory of performativity. However, Barad does not adopt this theoretical tool without some reservations; she is heavily critical of the status of materiality in the notion of performativity that privileges the level of language (as distinct from discourse) over the body, and matter itself. Barad accuses Butler and Foucault of merely viewing matter as something passive, awaiting signification. In a footnote, Barad claims that, “Butler’s theory ultimately reinscribes matter as a passive product of discursive practices rather than as an active agent participating in the very product of materialization” (Barad, 2003). For Barad, matter itself is a form of becoming, a “stabilizing and

destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity” (Barad, 2003). Agential realism requires one view matter itself as something active in the process of signification. Matter is no longer a thing that exists absent historicity or that is waiting to be signified. However, this should not be confused with the idea that somehow materiality matters to the extent that it supports particular discursive practices, but rather, “matter comes to matter through the iterative intra-activity of the world in its becoming” (Barad, 2003). What this implies is that matter neither takes precedence nor is passive, but, that material and discursive formations themselves are conjoined; they are inseparable. As a result, Barad argues that performativity is better able to take into account the status of non-humans, and matter itself, through an agential realist account. The result is a shift of focus from human bodies to bodies generally in all layers of its existence, including, “the very atoms of [a body’s] being” (Barad, 2003). Bodies are represented as material-discursive phenomena where the distinction between human and non-human are obscured. Barad claims that human-centric notions of materiality and performativity miss the point since materializing practices already implicate a distinction between human and non-human that is unaccounted for (Barad, 2003). As such, her main thesis is that agential realism’s focus on the iterative intra-activity of all living matter, where matter is informative in discursive formations and materializations, does not foreclose the question of differentiation between human and non-human.

Barad’s extension of performativity and simultaneous critique of it attempts to reveal serious flaws in the foundations of Butler’s theory. Her main concern is that it is too anthropocentric to answer questions pertaining to the status of non-humans. Her reformulation of the material-discursive in performativity is such an attempt to enable non-humans to be included into the performative calculus. However, I argue that Barad misinterprets Butler’s notion of

materiality within performativity. Certainly, a reductionist view of Butler's theory of performativity sees that it focuses on a form of linguistic constructionism that makes completely irrelevant the question of embodiment and materiality. However, this reading is wildly inaccurate and does not give Butler's theory enough credit. The first issue that arises is a fundamental mischaracterization of the extent to which Butler adopts the theoretical devices within constructivism. Secondly, Barad too quickly dismisses the importance of the further development of performativity by Butler through adopting the Derridean device of citationality. Finally, I address the underlying skepticism of the "semiotic turn" in critical theory that Barad is troubled with through a close reading of Derrida vis-a-vis Butler.

Firstly, Butler dismisses the thesis of pure constructivism for it does far too little. Indeed, she claims that, "the debate between constructivism and essentialism thus misses the point of deconstruction altogether," since the thesis that 'everything is constructed' leaves out, "the constitutive force of exclusion, erasure, violent foreclosure, abjection and its disruptive return" (Butler, 1993). Indeed, Butler does express a form of skepticism to the absolute claim of construction, since it poses a willful subject that exists to initiate activity pre-discursively. Instead, Butler calls for a return to materiality and a rejection of predominant modes of construction. The alternative Butler poses is precisely a "return to the notion of matter, not as a site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter" (Butler, 1993). This seems exactly what Barad calls for when she claims that performativity is not a form of "linguistic monism," but rather contests the power of language to determine ontology (Barad, 2003). Rather than leaving the status of matter untouched, Butler brings the question of matter to the forefront of her theory of performativity. Instead of presupposing a material sex that somehow signifies gender, or a

gender that somehow informs sex categories, her main question is how sexed materiality is produced and produces particular discursive formations. This even seems to include Barad's critique of classical causality since this implies that, "construction is neither a single act nor a causal process initiated by a subject and culminating in a set of fixed effects" (Butler, 1993).

Secondly, Barad's only direct mention and critique of Butler's theory of performativity in regards to materiality claims that matter itself is not merely a form of citationality (Barad, 2003). The concept of citation is an important one for understanding materiality and power within Butler's work. Butler draws from Lacan's psychoanalytic theory in order to derive the hegemony of the symbolic law and thus the law of sex itself. Butler equates Lacan's assumption of symbolic law to an act of citation, and argues that, "the sexes, are only known through the approximations they occasion" (Butler, 1993). What this implies is that the power of the law of sex is entirely contingent on the process of citation, a reiterative structure that gives power to this law insofar as it is produced as law. Accordingly, the law is, "no longer given in a fixed form prior to its citation, but is produced through citation as that which precedes and exceeds the mortal approximations by the subject" (Butler, 1993). Given this, Barad's critique is that citationality is merely a reiterative structure in which matter becomes passive since it is seen as conforming to some discourse that exists outside it and thus actively marks passive matter. Her emphasis is on matter as an active agent, and her visualization of Butler's theory is that materiality is merely conforming to some cultural artifact that is the "law of sex" or "symbolic law." However, the power of citation itself is not merely conforming to the idea of discursive power. Rather, Butler remarks that, "what we might call materialization will be a kind of citationality, the acquisition of being through the citing of power, *a citing that establishes an originary complicity with power in the formation of 'I'*" (Butler emphasis added, 1993). Thus,

materiality is not passive, but is a *materializing process* that is informed by and simultaneously informs notions of power and differentiation. Discursive practices are no longer separable from material practices- discursive practices are simultaneously material. Further, the notion of materiality as process articulated through citationality exposes the limits of constructivism, since if the limits of sex are determined through discourse then some bodies are constructed and others are not (Butler, 1993). Thus, it is necessary to theorize whether the materialization of abjection forms an outside, constituting bodies that are not at the margins. Agential realism cannot give an account of constitutive exclusions and the abject. If all phenomena are characterized by iterative intra-activity, then there cannot exist any materializations anterior to the material-discursive and thus agential realism cannot give a full account of abject materializations. As such, this foregrounds the basis of an effective political and material strategy of resignification according to Butler, in which one, “[politicizes] abjection in an effort to rewrite the history of the term,” which is crucial for creating a community in which, “queer lives become legible” (Butler, 1993).

Finally, it is worthwhile to address and explain Barad’s deep-seated skepticism of the semiotic or linguistic turn. She begins one of her articles with the claim that, “language has been granted too much power” in which everything turns into, “matters of signification” (Barad, 2003). Particularly, she wants to get rid of the need for mediation between experience and the empirical world as such. Furthermore, she remarks that, “mediation has far too long stood in the way of a more thoroughgoing account of the empirical world” (Barad, 2003). In the process of disregarding semiotics and adding preference to the phenomena of the empirical world, she completely breaks away from the deconstructive method that she invokes. A reading of Butler vis-à-vis Derrida clarifies the role of the non-human in a theory of performativity as well as the non-human structure of grammar and language itself.

Derrida takes up the question of the animal in many of his writings, but more directly and extensively so in his later works. His proclaimed purpose is to question and complicate the distinction between humanity and animality. As such, he attempts to address the “singular” mode of distinction between human and the animal. Derrida multiplies and thickens the lines of difference, since he regards the distinction between human and animal as multiple rather than singular. This is illustrated by the fact that one cannot easily lump a cricket and a whale into the same category and maintain that each vastly different animal has a similar relationship to humanity as such (Derrida, 2002). It appears easy to see that difference becomes organized according to material and discursive lines. Moreover, the very category of animal itself seems to be performative at some level- as the lines of difference are multiplied, so too is the concept of animal itself revealed as a fundamental fabrication of discursive formations. The question of “who am I following” recalls an “irreducible ambiguity,” that an, “animal’s signature might yet be able to erase or cover its traces” because all traces can be erased, it suggests that in no way does it mean that, “man or animal can of his own accord erase his traces” (Derrida, 2002). What Derrida is trying to complicate here is the level of difference between human and animal that relies on a notion of response and having particular signs at one’s disposal. What is revealed is that the trace cannot be erased of one’s own accord, the signs that encapsulate one’s existence cannot simply be shrugged off. The level of language, thus, cannot be a means of differentiation from the non-human. Barad’s skepticism of a semiotic focus is thus baseless, since deconstruction as a strategy shifts the lines of difference away from classical notions of differentiation of the human from animal.

The most interesting contribution Derrida’s work offers for performativity is the non-human characteristic of language-- iterability and auto-affection, or, the capability for one to be

instantiated into language and one's ability to affect oneself. Derrida speaks of the autobiographical animal, and he begins an attempt to define or give substance to this concept. The autobiographical animal cannot be defined in the sense in which humans are defined against other animals, such as the political or rational animal, or in the sense that some living beings have a penchant for those particular things (Derrida, 2002). Instead, he understands that there are certain connections between the 'I' and the animal at the level of grammar and language. One can use 'I' to refer to oneself; simultaneously, 'I' can refer to anybody in particular, but any injunction of this implies that one is a living animal (Derrida 2002). Moreover, the animal is understood in terms of its "auto-motricity" or its "sensibility." This is an important revelation since, "this auto-motricity as auto-affection and relation to itself is the characteristic recognized as that of the living and of animality in general," before one invokes the criterion of rationality to differentiate the 'I' from animality (Derrida, 2002). This is exactly the ability for the animal and living material to trace itself and to become autobiographical. An important conclusion is suggested here: at its core, the iterative structure of language is also non-human, for, self-referentiality and auto-affection are qualities of all living existences. Even though animals lack the tool of language to verbalize these traces, the autobiographical act, the linguistic act as auto-affection cannot be strictly regarded as human. This has an important implication in terms of Barad's critique of Butler. The focus on the semiotic or linguistic understanding of reality does not detract from an understanding of the materiality of living beings. If, according to Barad, all levels of existence, including the non-human, are a result of iterative intra-activity then language too possesses this iterative and "non-human" characteristic. We thus cannot separate matter from language or discourse altogether. As such, Butler's theory that focuses on citationality as a

practice better captures this picture since it focuses on the performative in its iterative and reiterative structure.

Barad's critique of Butler's theory of performativity is thus baseless since the practice of citationality adequately addresses matter without relegating it to a passive role. Matter is both constituted by and constitutes the law or norm that governs it. Citationality reveals that matter is in a constant process of being materialized rather than being already given. Barad's extension of performativity to the level of the atom and to the non-human is outstanding, and is an accurate depiction of how performativity can potentially include bodies that no longer follow the contours of human morphology. Despite this, agential realism is not an adequate alternative to Butler's theory of performativity and squanders the deconstructive strategy it borrows from Derrida. Instead, performativity vis-à-vis Derrida recognizes the fundamental inhuman aspect of language and of life itself, which seems to suggest that the differentiation between human and non-human is at best only performative to begin with. As such, queer performativity seems to inform and critique the stability of not only gender and sexual categories, but the stability of predominant notions of humanity.

Aristotle and Aquinas on Interpreting Images

Jennifer Norwalk

I. Introduction

Images pervade the philosophical undertakings of ancient and medieval thinkers. This relationship is unsurprising: poetic wisdom gave birth to philosophical wisdom, and despite significant variation in form, the latter maintained the essential visual and descriptive qualities of the former throughout early philosophical history. This history developed sequentially, with early philosophical images establishing a tradition that later images would follow. Adapting Charles Sanders Peirce's notions of Firstness (immediacy), Secondness (opposition) and Thirdness (mediation) to the first philosophers, of the Greek colony of Miletus, Thales' Firstness in the sameness of water logically and chronologically preceded Anaximander's Secondness in the difference of the bounded world and the unbounded, the *apeiron*, which similarly preceded Anaximenes' Thirdness in the sameness and difference of a mediating principle (*Aer*) that is both bounded and unbounded. Images often serve a Firstness role in inquiry, as they are what is experienced first and most directly. As such, an understanding of philosophical images must precede an understanding of more advanced theories: Firstness must precede Secondness and Thirdness. While research often addresses the logical, ethical and religious consequences of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, little thought has been given to the implications of how these philosophers respond to Firstness, or images. This paper speculates how Aristotle and Aquinas might interpret relevant philosophical images.

II. Aristotle on Parmenidean Images

Parmenides' images flow and breathe with dynamic balance. Parmenides begins his poem: "the mares which carry me as far as my spirit ever aspired" (28B1.1-2), evoking the image of a strong, sure-footed, powerful, and specifically female force of movement. The femininity of

these mares (not stallions) is important: these mares are the vehicle through which the youth will arrive in the world of the goddess, mothering his re-birth in the path of Truth as his biological mother birthed him in the mortal path of Opinion. The path of the mares is distant and “far from the beaten path of humans” (28B1.28-19), yet “renowned.” This image both distances the journey of the youth from the ordinary, everyday path of Opinion and elicits the following question: if this path of Truth is not “renowned” by humans, which it likely is not given that it is far from them and that they wander with an “aimless eye” (B7.6), then for whom is it renowned? Perhaps this route is “renowned” for beings of knowledge, since the goddess only brings a “knowing mortal” (28B1.5) along the path. While the youth is “knowing,” the mares are “wise” (28B1.7); the youth has not yet encountered the Goddess and therefore has not received her wisdom. The mares are eager for the youth to receive this wisdom, as they “strain the chariot” (28B1.9), using their mighty strength to advance the youth along his path.

Parmenides then presents the image of an “axle in the center of the wheel” (28B1.10). This image introduces a dynamic balance that will remain prominent throughout the duration of the poem; the wheel and axle system performs effectively only when both parts are rotating together in harmony. The balance of the axle and wheel triggers “the bright sound of a musical pipe” (28B1.11) and, as noted by Pythagoras of Samos, music, too, is a system of *harmonia* (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 7.94-95). While the wheel in itself possesses balance through the axle-wheel system, the chariot as a whole only maintains balance because of “two rounded wheels at either end” (28B1.12-13), suggesting that complementarity is implicit in a balanced or harmonious whole. The balanced whole of the chariot thus combines the Same introduced by Thales, in the same axle-wheel system, and the Different introduced by Anaximander, in the opposition of the opposite wheels, to produce a harmony of the Same and

the Different that integrates both. In combination, this harmony produces an unbounded chariot that transcends the path of Opinion and leads to the path of Truth. Parmenides presents the image of the “daughters of the Sun” (28B1.13) and in the same line follows with “the house of Night,” once again providing a complementarity of opposites embedded in the path of Truth. In addition to reinforcing the importance of balance, this image also notes a passage from darkness into light. This passage mirrors the journey the youth is making: light represents the path of Truth, and darkness represents the path of Opinion. Indeed, the Daughters of the Sun only lift their veils and reveal their faces once they have passed into light.

Once the youth nears the goddess, Parmenides evokes images of restriction, including the “gates of the roads of Night and Day” and “avenging Justice” holding keys (28B1.18-21). This restrictiveness is especially potent in contrast with the previous image, in which the maidens expose themselves by lifting their veils: a clear juxtaposition exists between the open image of the maidens and the closed-off images of gates and keys. Interestingly, the means for overcoming this restriction is an act of persuasion: “the maidens beguiled her [avenging Justice] with soft words and skillfully persuaded her to push back the bar for them quickly from the gates” (28B1.22-23). This beguiling embodies what Parmenides means by “the path of Persuasion” that “attends to truth” (B2.5); the maidens’ “skillful persuasion” allow the youth to receive Truth, which is itself “well-persuasive” (28B1.39).

Aristotle might say that Parmenides’ images are the first, immediate principles that are initially clear and better known to us because they are with what we are most familiar. In his account of induction (*epigogē*) at *Posterior Analytics* II.19, he posits that there is a distinction between “cognition of the immediate principles” and the knowledge of truth derived from them, and specifies that from images there arise three possibilities: “there is knowledge of each”; there

is “knowledge of one but something else of the other”; or “the states are acquired rather than [innately] present in us without our noticing them” (*Post An.* II.19b.20). Aristotle concludes that our perception of images generates memory, and repeated memory generates experience. From here, he transitions to discuss the relationship of images to inquiry.

Parmenides’ images relate to philosophical inquiry in that they can be explained by Aristotle’s four explanatory causes (*aitai*), commonly known as the “four causes.” Parmenides’ images are explained by material cause insofar as they are formed by elements, such as the letters that comprise the sounds heard in the recitation of the poem (parts of the whole); they are explained by formal cause insofar as there is a form of the image (essence), such as the form of the mares or the wheel and axle; they are explained by efficient cause insofar as Parmenides’ wisdom created the images (principle of change or stability); and they are explained by final cause insofar as the images have a purpose or function (*Phys.* III.20.195b). We can therefore use Parmenides’ images to understand Aristotle’s causes, and in doing so progress our understanding of the nature of explanation itself, by moving from what is particular to Parmenides’ images to what is true of all images. Further, we may speak of images as having potentiality and actuality. For example, we can say that Parmenides, or Parmenides creating his images and our comprehending them, is the principle of creating the images (*Phys.* III.5.195b).

We can also interpret Parmenides’ images using Aristotle’s notions of form and matter. He would state that the nature of an image is the form (*morphos*) of that image. Like substance, images are comprised of both matter (*hylo*) and form (*morphos*), but because the form in-forms the matter it is the form that determines the image’s nature. While the matter of the image may change (for example its quality may degrade, its location may change based on its ownership, or it might be read rather than recited orally; cf. *Cat.* IV.25.2a) the essential form of the image

remains constant. The form of the image is therefore the *ousia*. Further, the form of the image is the image essentially, while the matter of the image is the image coincidentally. Intelligibility is thus in the form of the image. The nature of the image is born in human mind, which imitates the Divine mind, the unmoved mover.

III. Thomas Aquinas on Cimabue's *Maestà* (Figure 1): a philosophical speculation imitating the form of the *Summa Theologica*



Figure 1. Cenni di Pepe, called Cimabue, *Maestà*, 1280, Lourve Museum. The image addressed in the following section refers to this important painting.

First Article

Whether the image itself, or the way it was created, is more important?

We Proceed Thus to the First Article:—

Objection 1. It seems that the image itself is more important. For the image proceeds from self-evident principles (*ST I.Q.1.2.obj 1*). But the way it was made is not self-evident, since it is not evident to everyone. On first glance, one recognizes the subject of the image, the Madonna and child, but not the brushwork, unless trained as an art historian. Therefore, the image is more important.

Obj. 2. Further, the way the image was created deals with the stylistic choices of the individual artist. The image itself was replicated throughout the art of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (*Stoclet Madonna*, Duccio di Buoninsegna, 1295-1300; *Madonna and Child*, Giotto, 1320; *Madonna and Child with Saint Peter and Saint John the Evangelist*, Nardo di Cione, 1348) and is not a matter of personal style, but a commonly understood symbol. Therefore, the image is more important.

On the contrary, the philosopher says “the form is the nature more than the matter is” (*Phys. II.5.193b*). Matter (*hylo*) and form (*morphos*) determine the image, and the form in-forms the matter. Since the way the image was created informs the subject of the image, the way the image was created is the form. Therefore, the way the image was created is more important.

I answer that, the way the image was created is more important. The matter of the image may change: the human face and features of Mary and Jesus (material cause) change depending on artist and location (18th century Ethiopian paintings depict Jesus with darker skin and Ethiopian dress, but still include a golden halo and place Jesus in the center of the composition). The essential form of the image, however, remains constant. The form (*morphos*) is the image

essentially rather than coincidentally. Since the nature of the image is born from the image of the Divine mind, the nature of the image must also be Divine and good. Although the way the image was created is invisible to us, “the Apostle says ‘The invisible things of Him are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made’” (*ST I.Q.2.2.contrary*). The way the image was created reveals the Divine through an *a posteriori* demonstration of its effects. The effects of the image are better known to us than the cause, because we are imperfect beings and are therefore incapable of understanding the perfection of pure Divinity. As Aquinas writes, “when an effect is better known to us than its cause, from the effect we proceed to the knowledge of the cause” (*ST I.Q.2.2.answer*), and we accordingly proceed to the knowledge of the Divine through the effects of images.

Reply Obj. 1. While the pattern of the brushwork is not evident to everyone, the effect created by the brushwork is evident. Not everyone “who hears the word ‘God’ understands it to signify something than which nothing greater can be thought” (*ST I.Q.2.1.reply obj 2*), but the importance of the Madonna and child can be universally understood through their centrality, large scale, and placement on an intricately crafted wooden throne. Further, even without recognizing the Divine subjects, Divinity can be inferred in the upward Heavenly point of the pentagonal frame, perfectly aligned with the head of the Madonna.

Reply Obj. 2. The Madonna and child symbol may be repeated throughout art history, but it is the stylistic choices of the artists that create a recognizable image. In nearly all Madonna and child paintings, the Madonna is draped in blue adornments, the baby Jesus encircled by a golden halo, and both central and larger in scale than any other figures present. It is because of these stylistic choices that the Madonna and child motif is recognizable across time and distinct geographical boundaries.

Second Article

Whether the image is Godly?

We Proceed Thus to the Second Article:—

Objection 1. It seems that the image is not Godly, for “its principles—namely, articles of faith—can be doubted” (*ST I.Q.1.5.obj 1*). Since science seeks to provide an account of nature, it must follow that its principles are true to nature. The principles of this image are not true to nature: the proportions of the Madonna and child are illogical with the scale of the surrounding figures, and it appears that the head of an adult was removed, shrunk, and haphazardly placed on the body of baby Jesus. Therefore, the image is not Godly.

Obj. 2. Further, “it is the sign of a lower science to depend upon a higher, as music depends upon arithmetic” (*ST I.Q.1.5.obj 2*). But the Godliness of the image depends upon that which is Godly in itself. Since that which is Godly follows from “something greater than which we can conceive of nothing” (*Pros. 2*), the image cannot be Godly, because something greater (that which is Godly in itself) can be conceived. Therefore, the image is not Godly.

Obj. 3. Further, that which befits the lowest science seems not to befit Godliness, which holds the highest place of all. But “to proceed by the aid of various similitudes and figures is proper to poetry, the least of all the sciences” (*ST I.Q.1.9.obj 1*). The image makes use of various similitudes, including the six angels, imperfectly similar and devoid of true symmetry, lining the sides of the composition. It is not fitting for that which is Godly to make use of such similitudes. Therefore, the image is not Godly.

Obj. 4. Further, the Image is “of God essentially, and not personally.” (*ST. I.Q.35.1*) An image is “derived from imitation, which implies ‘before’ and ‘after.’ But in the Divine persons there is no

‘before’ or ‘after’” (ST. I.Q.35.1). The image thus cannot be of the Divine persons. Therefore, the image is not Godly.

On the contrary, “It is written (Osee xii. 10): “I have multiplied visions, and I have used similitudes by the ministry of the prophets” (ST I.Q.1.9.contrary). But to put forward similitudes for Divine purposes is to use images to achieve Godliness. Therefore, the image is Godly.

I answer that, the object of the image is that of which it principally treats. In this image the treatment is mainly about God; the child Jesus and his mother Mary occupy the center of the composition and appear larger than all surrounding figures, creating a hierarchy of scale that establishes the Madonna and her child as the principal subjects. Additionally, perfectly round, golden, balanced halos circle the heads of five figures (four angels and the baby Jesus), placing the image in the Divine realm. The angels, who assume human form, are not perfectly symmetrical (evident in the angle of the head-tilt and direction of gaze). Their Divine features, including their halos and alternating blue and red wings, are proportional. The Divine is therefore made available to us through images. It is befitting that Godliness be conveyed through images, because the philosopher says that inquiry begins with immediate principles that are initially clear and better known to us. The image puts forward Divine and spiritual truth by means of comparisons with material things because material things are clear and better known to us, and “for God provides for everything according to the capacity of its nature” (ST I.Q.1.9.answer). The angels and Madonna and child, although Divinely perfect, are presented in imperfect form, because humans are imperfect. An imperfect human is incapable of grasping Divine Perfection in Divine form, but through corporeal images even the imperfect may understand the essence of Divine perfection.

Reply Obj. 1. The image is true to nature, not in the physical proportions of the figures, but in the essence of the proportions. Since God is “something greater than which we can conceive of nothing” (*Pros.* 2), it follows that the image of baby Jesus and his mother should be greater in scale than all surrounding figures. The physical proportions may appear to dominate the essential proportions because of the weakness of our intelligence, “which is dazzled by the clearest objects of nature; as the owl is dazzled by the light of the sun” (*Metaph.* ii. lect. i).

Reply Obj. 2. This image in a sense depends on Godliness in its purest form, but only insofar as to makes its teaching clearer. For it receives its Godliness not from the painter, but immediately from God. It therefore uses images not because of its own defect or deficiency, but “to the defect of our intelligence, which is more easily led by what is known through natural reason, to that which is above reason” (*ST I.Q.1.5.reply 1*).

Reply Obj. 3. Poetry “makes use of metaphors to produce a representation, for it is natural to man to be pleased with representation” (*ST I.Q.1.9*). But the image makes use of metaphors as “both necessary and useful” (*ST I.Q.1.9*) because man is incapable of understanding that which is Godly unless introduced through that which is most familiar.

Reply Obj. 4. God is His own existence and His own essence, because “we call God the first efficient cause” (*ST I.Q.1.3*). The image draws on the essence of God: his Divine essence in the halo, his wisdom in his adult face, his role as our guide in his right-handed two-finger point, and his role as teacher in the scroll grasped gently in his left hand. Since his essence is also his existence, the image is Godly.

IV. Conclusion: The Image as an Act of Dynamic Balance

In both Aristotelian and Thomistic interpretation, images serve as proponents of a dynamic balance. While an Aristotelian approach understands images as a balance between that which is

most familiar to us and that which is true essentially, and a Thomistic approach understands images as a balance between an imperfect human understanding of the Divine and the essence of Divine perfection, both rely on such harmonies to paradoxically achieve an understanding of that which is incomprehensible. Although this meaning is contextual and will inevitably vary depending on the recipient of the image, the essence of the image remains the same and evokes that which transcends its materials. The essence thus becomes immortalized through images, achieving the perfectly Divine through that which is imperfectly human.