

# Sincere Artifice : Sublime Invasion

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Anna MacDonald

## OUTLINE

### **Inspiration : Interruption:**

The following collection of thoughts is composed of learned, dreamed, lived and unlearned intuitions, which celebrate inspiration as a complete grace, which like the sublime, necessarily invades, undoes and outdoes the human will.

### **Introduction : Sincere Artifice**

What does sincerity have to do with art?

### **Grace and the Sublime**

Analogies of Kleist and Kant

### **In between the In between**

The Puppet and the Divine (Kleist)

Greatness and Wretchedness, Lost in the Cosmos (Pascal)

### **The brink of Interruption**

### **Negative or Not:**

Kant's "negative Lust," masochistic or not?

Human ritual explored

Personal history explored

### **The Question of Intent**

### **Serious Play**

### **Examining the Veil**

### **Estrangement of Body and Mind**

### **Conclusion**



## ABSTRACT

*As a graduate student attending the Maryland Institute College of Art I have begun to perform with my installations as a means of investigating sincerity and play as possible and essential coefficients to the practice of art. This paper explores relationships between inspiration and intention. Grace and the sublime are discussed as forms of inspiration, which may not be produced by acts of human intention. However, the body of work developed in partnership with this paper presents serious play as a sincere and readily available means of receiving exposure to grace and the perceived sublime. Beginning with analogies from Kleist's, "Marionettentheater," and Kant's, "Analytic des Erhabenen, grace and the sublime are discussed as conditions which provoke the artist's longing to feel a direct relationship between Logos and Corpus– Word and Flesh– logic as a sensual body who's art of origin is not restricted to artifice.*

*The format of the project merges literary analysis based on Professor Nägele's course: Rucksicht auf Darstellbarkeit with observations and actions from my own life and studio practice in an attempt to further the growth of a connective tissue between public discourse, private thoughts and performed deeds. Some attempts have been made to maintain clarity and cohesion, however the presentation of ideas resembles an evolving conversation between literary analysis and personal testimony*

## INTRODUCTION : SINCERE ARTIFICE

What does sincerity have to do with art? Art attempts representation of ideas (significance) through a production or reproduction of signs, which together in context form a mythology. The fertility of art, its evocative delivery of meaningful signs, depends on a mythological materialization. But like Freud's elusive dream-work constructed out of urges, which exist in their original form only in the unconscious world, the original substance of any creative act perpetually resists direct representation. In relation to their sources, art objects, artistic processes, and relational aesthetics of artistic events exist as translations, as recapitulations, as interpretations and in fact as interruptions of the original fabric of the *Traumarbeit*—the dream-work. The germ of any given idea, its initial point of inspiration itself, is irreproducible in the materialistic terms of artifice. So if there is no perfect manifestation, where does sincerity belong in the system of artificial representation—of indirect manifestation? Why should it matter to artists, and how does it present itself in our art?

Based on examples of contemporary artists, and my own art-making experience, I have begun to believe that sincerity belongs to a type of art making, that celebrates a relationship to a source of inspiration (however indefinable or indescribable) more enthusiastically and persistently than it does its own perpetuation. The process of translating the source and the resulting translation (representation), which that process yields admit that they cannot outdo or replace the inspirational substance in magnitude or desirability. Sincere art-making recognizes itself as a legitimate form of expression, but admits substitution as its primary means of communication. Sincerity belongs to a type of making that acknowledges and values the uncertain and unobtainable origins responsible for inciting it. The following collection of thoughts is composed of learned, dreamed, lived and unlearned intuitions, which celebrate inspiration as a perfect grace (a complete grace) which like the sublime, necessarily invades, undoes and outdoes the human will (intention).

The most immediate art  
that can be practiced,  
is a form of serious play  
(an infinite game)  
which does not occupy itself  
by displaying effort  
for effort's sake  
(nor for the intellect's sake)  
rather, it is an invocation of  
(or flirtation with)  
the sublime.

The act of invoking the sublime  
is the act of *being* invoked.  
It coincides with a certain  
(unprepared)  
surrender of will  
to the perfect  
(persuasion)  
which invades it

To experience the sublime is  
to acknowledge one's proportions  
in relation to the infinite.

And in sensing the infinite  
in all directions,  
Both its "mathematic quantity" and  
its "dynamic quality"  
(magnitude)  
one begins to apprehend the limits  
of one's comprehension,  
and

One becomes a witness  
to the undoing  
and outdoing  
of one's greatest intentions.

## GRACE AND THE SUBLIME

Preparation for the sublime occurs when one permits one's self to retreat or rather, to be wooed, into a remote center of gravity, abandoning (subjecting?) one's outer extremities (including those called the ego and superego) to be infused with a more complete grace that flows out from the most vital focal point, as from one of Kleist's puppets in *Marionettentheater*. "Denn Ziererei erscheint, wie Sie wissen, wenn sich die Seele (*vis motrix*) in irgend einem Punkte befindet, als in dem Schwerpunkt der Bewegung"<sup>1</sup> For affectation appears as you know, when the soul (*vis motrix*) is located in some point other than the movement's center of gravity. Kleist unfolds, as it seems, his parable on grace by feeding one metaphoric anecdote into another; reserving his last fold for a representation of the human predicament concerning grace. To represent this predicament, Kleist lays the human dancer's struggle to achieve gracefulness despite gravity parallel with theology's representation of original sin—the 'fall from grace.' Speaking through his dancer, "Mr. C," Kleist sums up the, "organischen Welt," *world of animate matter*, " with the following remark, "die Reflexion dunkler und schwacher wird, die Grazie darin immer strahlender und herrschender hervortritt"<sup>2</sup>...*as self-consciousness becomes dimmer and weaker, to the same extent gracefulness manifests itself more and more radiantly and dominantly*. Drawing upon the structure of a concave mirror, Kleist further illustrates the inverse relationship between self-consciousness (or willfulness) and grace as a condition that situates the human being hovering at an infinite focal point somewhere between the puppet and the divine.

findet sich [ ], wenn die Erkenntnis gleichsam durch ein Unendliches gegangen ist, die Grazie wieder ein; so daß sie, zu gleicher Zeit, in demjenigen menschlichen Körperbau am reinsten erscheint, der entweder gar keins, oder ein unendliches Bewußtsein hat, d. h. in dem Gliedermann, oder indem Gott<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kleist 74

<sup>2</sup> Kleist, 77

<sup>3</sup> Kant, 77 – 78

The artist attempts to intuit meaning through material, but finds buried in his intuition, false intentions. If he regards them sincerely, he may gather many clues concerning his uncertain place between sets of unknowns: the puppet and the divine, the planned and the un-plannable, intention (effort) and the undoing of intention (surrender). To behold the sublime is in an instant to sense deeply the extremes of these realities– that of the puppet and that of the divine, joined into a singular force tugging at one's physical, psychological and spiritual substance.

#### BETWEEN THE IN BETWEEN

In his *Pensées*, Blaise Pascal describes a dichotomy between man's greatness and man's wretchedness which shares similarities to Kleist's dichotomy. Pascal describes man's condition of inbetween as "lost in the Cosmos,"

Let us then realize our limitations. We are something and we are not everything. Such being as we have conceals from us the knowledge of first principles, which arise from nothingness, and the smallness of our being hides infinity from our sight.

Our intelligence occupies the same rank in the order of intellect as our body in the whole range of nature.

Limited in every respect, we find this intermediate state between two extremes reflected in all our faculties. Our senses can perceive nothing extreme; too much noise deafens us, too much light dazzles; when we are too far or too close we cannot see properly; an argument is obscured by being too long or too short; too much truth bewilders us. I know people who cannot understand that 4 from 0 leaves 0. First principles are too obvious for us; too much pleasure causes discomfort; too much harmony in music is displeasing; too much kindness annoys us...

We feel neither extreme heat nor extreme cold. Qualities carried to excess are bad for us and cannot be perceived; we no longer feel them, we suffer them. Excessive youth and age impair thought; so do too much and too little learning.

In a word, extremes are as if they did not exist for us nor we for them; they escape us or we escape them (Kreeft, 124).

If we may *not*, as Pascal describes, feel the extreme in its fullness with our own sensual equipment, we *may* however certainly feel the limits of our perception of the extreme, and therefore *sense* the extreme (or the sublime) as an emotional invasion of that edge.

Pascal goes on to say that our inability to feel extremes, "...Makes us incapable of certain knowledge or absolute ignorance" (Kreeft, 124). Nevertheless, dichotomies such as divine versus puppet, great versus wretched, sublime versus beauty are irresistible to us. Language facilitates comparative analysis that presents ideas as if extremes were the basis for all we know, or rather as if the imagined extreme is more certain to us than that which falls within the scope of our immediate sensibilities. Even as we cannot visit the extreme, we rely on our concepts of it (our imagined extreme) in order to describe things within our experiential reach. And we tend to speak and write more confidently about what lies beyond the edge of our comprehension, because as we gain experiential knowledge of an object, subject or event, the less we trust words, particularly prose, to translate our experience in full.

The condition of "in between," potentially in between an infinite set of infinities, overwhelms the human mind. In attempts to relate to anything, the mind wants to fashion for that thing a partner, or counter-partner, so as to anchor it into a seemingly definable system such as the linear continuum from smallest to greatest. But the question remains whether the rudimentary foundations of anything is really a thing at all. Perhaps the smallest and greatest "thing" is one and the same, i.e., not a "thing," at all, but a "relationship" in a multidimensional continuum of infinite relationship. Can I tell you in words what a thing is without comparing it to something that strikes me as non-thing? Can I tell you in words what relationship is without trying to conceive of a non-relational partner for it? I do not know

It appears as if Kant would also be hard-pressed were he required to redeliver his critique of the sublime without frequent comparisons to beauty. The pattern of coupling prevails throughout *Analytik des Erhabenen*; for within almost every dichotomy that Kant establishes, he pulls out another pair of concepts, which he uses like antagonistic muscles to push and pull against each other, for example: “mathematisch-Erhabene” against the “dynamisch-Erhabene”<sup>4</sup>, “quality (magnitudo)” against “quantity (quantitas)”<sup>5</sup>, “Auffassung (apprehensio)” against “Zusammenfassung (comprehensio aesthetica)”<sup>6</sup> etc... My friend Jason Randolph, a math teacher to theater students, describes this as “dividing to understand.” He explains “...It is like trying to understand a circle or the space inside a curve by dividing it into smaller and smaller squares. It’s called a Reimann sum.” This analogy illustrates how we do not understand even simple and proximal forms (within the so called limits of reason and personal experience) without translating them into other facts; but indeed we cannot know another fact without comparing it (translating it) back to the original or yet into another thing...on and on in the direction of the extreme and the infinite. Kant calls this a striving of the imagination, “...ein Bestreben zum fortschritte ins Unendliche, in unserer Vernunft aber ein Anspruch auf Absolute Totalität als auf eine reelle Idee liegt...”<sup>7</sup>

Though he uses comparison as a method of disseminating and articulating, Kant effectively demonstrates the limits of comparative analysis, when it comes to the sublime. An original concept, such as an idea of beauty, is not experienced as a point on a continuum, but as a relationship of comparative relationships. No aspect of our daily existence is known to us as a separate thing, but as a resonance, as a fluctuation between and among many things. On the other hand the concept of the sublime is unique in that it represents, “eine Größe, die bloß sich

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<sup>4</sup> Kant; SS 24, second paragraph

<sup>5</sup> Kant; SS 25, first paragraph

<sup>6</sup> Kant; SS 26, third paragraph

<sup>7</sup> Kant, SS 25; paragraph 7



selber gleich ist.”<sup>8</sup> It is not possible to produce the sublime because as Kant points out, “we soon perceive that it is not permissible to seek an appropriate standard outside itself, but merely in itself.”<sup>9</sup> Here we have an invitation to wonder... How is it possible to *intentionally* represent the sublime, if not through any means other than itself? Though the sublime, as Kant classifies it, exists as a “faculty of mind”<sup>10</sup> it is not singularly produced by the mind. In the case of the sublime, the human mind performs the role of host rather than producer. Because the sublime is non-comparable, it is not conceived by the mind, but conceives itself out of an interruption to the comparative production, which the mind cannot otherwise interrupt on its own accord. The sublime must be said to represent itself through us. It must produce itself somehow. The role of the artist in representing the sublime, is therefore primarily one of receptivity (fertility), and not one of production or effort for the sake of production. The sublime, and perhaps also Kleist’s image of grace, appear to produce themselves in spite of the efforts and intentions of the artist. But Kleist suggests at the close of his puppet theater parable that one might converge with paradise, or revert to the divine grace through partaking in a further “taste” of knowledge. Müßten wir wieder von dem Baum der Erkenntnis essen, um in den Stand der Unschuld zurückzufallen? Allerdings, antwortete er; das ist das letzte Kapitel von der Geschichte der Welt.”<sup>11</sup> Besides suggesting that knowledge (enlightenment) is the instrument that will eventually draw the human being back to the state of perfect grace (paradise), Kleist’s conclusion seemingly implies this journey as a self-chosen and intended one. That is to say, the artist might conceivably regain his “innocence” or his gracefulness by conscientiously returning to the event of his fall and partaking more fully in the fruit of his fall, so as to build a body of experiential knowledge which will enable him to feel more deeply, respond more appropriately, and eventually, converge his will with that of the infinite– the most complete grace– the only complete grace. It’s true the artist does want

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<sup>8</sup> Kant, SS 25; paragraph 6

<sup>9</sup> Kant; translation: James Creed Meredith

<sup>10</sup> Kant, SS 25; paragraph 6

<sup>11</sup> Kleist, 78

to fall and continually taste the substance of his fall to know what and where he is so that he may know where and when to progress, but the Artist does not manifest grace and the sublime by intending to, but by putting him or herself in the line of fire, which interrupts and incinerates the soul's intentions. Perhaps it is not the return to knowledge that leads to perfect grace, but the invasion of perfect grace that completes knowledge. In response to Kleist's conclusion, Kant's analysis, and also in response to my work in the studio, I keep returning to a body of questions: How can I be involved with the sublime? How can I participate in a complete grace? If I cannot produce these, can I provoke or *invoke* them? How can I put myself in the line of their fire? How can I invite them to inspire me more completely?

*As one lost between intention and helplessness— between the divine and the puppet— between greatness and wretchedness... what are my means of access to inspiration such as the sublime and grace? What are my means of creating meaning or is the meaning, which I want to realize already realizing and creating me?*<sup>12</sup>

The awareness of one's simultaneous "greatness" and "wretchedness" is certainly the artist's perpetual state. If he is honest he knows that he is a balancing act between seeming impossibilities. The artist cannot make anything absolutely novel, nor can he absolutely repeat anything that has been made before. Or, perhaps the artist may approach the edge of the perfectly novel, or the exact replica, but only as he is consumed into the perfection of his objective. It is necessarily a fatal objective, because as Pascal points out, though perpetually drawn to the edge, man's physical and mental capacities cannot tolerate the extremes.<sup>13</sup> Exposure to the sublime within the mind may be survived, but only as a "brink" of perfection, or rather as an emotional interpretation (representation) of the brink of terrible perfection. To imagine that brink I look back into Kant's analysis for clues...

#### THE BRINK OF INTERRUPTION

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<sup>12</sup> notes from thesis journal

<sup>13</sup> Kreeft, 124

The sensation of the sublime well deserves the word “awe” in that it enacts itself as a singular force capable of inspiring pleasure and contentment as well as terror and infirmity. Together these emotions account for the unique sensation of proportion and perspective in relation to a larger universe characteristic of the sublime, as opposed to the reality man builds up everyday for himself by feeling and building only upon relationships to that which stands in his or her own immediate scale of time and space.

The sublime, “an emotional state discoverable in the mind,” attracts and obsesses the artist because it offers a means of delivery from artifice via a momentary delivery from intention and essentially pride and or will. This delivery is both terrifying and relieving. Kant describes it as a sudden interruption of the forces that sustain life, “...Einer augenblicklichen Hemmung der Lebenskräfte,”

jenes aber (das Gefühl des Erhabenen) eine Lust ist, welche nur indirekt entspringt, nämlich so daß sie durch das Gefühl einer augenblicklichen Hemmung der Lebenskräfte und darauf sogleich folgenden desto stärkern Ergießung derselben erzeugt wird, mithin als Rührung kein Spiel, sondern Ernst in der Beschäftigung der Einbildungskraft zu sein scheint. Daher es auch mit Reizen unvereinbar ist; und, indem das Gemüt von dem Gegenstande nicht bloß angezogen, sondern wechselsweise auch immer wieder abgestoßen wird, das Wohlgefallen am Erhabenen nicht sowohl positive Lust als vielmehr Bewunderung oder Achtung enthält, d. i. negative Lust genannt zu werden verdient. (Kant<sup>14</sup>)

...the feeling of the Sublime is a pleasure that only indirectly, being brought about by the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful, and so it is an emotion that seems to be no sport, but dead earnest in the affairs of the imagination. Hence charms are repugnant to it; and, since the mind is not simply attracted by the object, but is also alternately repelled thereby, the delight in the sublime does not so much involve positive pleasure as admiration or respect, i.e., merits the name of a negative pleasure.

Because of the momentary “check to the vital forces”<sup>15</sup> represented by the sublime, the artist is delivered into: the experience of a direct emotion, such as humiliation or terror that cannot coexist with the otherwise persistent false impersonations and learned behaviors associated with that emotion (performed humility and

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<sup>14</sup> Kant, SS 23; second paragraph

<sup>15</sup> English translation, James Creed Meredith

fear). So it is not just an interruption to the life sustaining forces that determine the emotional reception of the sublime in the mind, but an interruption to the mind's operation of performing learned and superficial representations of emotions. Seemingly, "kein Spiel, sondern Ernst in der Beschäftigung der Einbildungskraft zu sein scheint," the event which inspires the sense of the sublime within the mind's stage is comparable to a short circuit from the experience to the least filtered form of emotion as the dream-state might circumvent narrative detail in accessing a raw emotion.

Therefore, though it may appear masochistic, implying: "the pleasure of being subjected to pain or humiliation,"<sup>16</sup> Kant's implication here of "negative pleasure" is not necessarily masochistic per se. For example, consider that it is not the repulsion itself that delights, i.e., the direct experience of humiliation, but the singular moment of interruption from the daily execution of learned performance— the brief dismantling of the layers of removal that provokes pleasure. This process of removal or interruption leads to an absence that is pleasing because it convinces without comparative analysis— without, metaphor. It delights the imagination with a sense of directness between material and meaning, similar to the way that the dream-state provides access to a more direct emotional state. Like the sublime, it is what it is. Perhaps the "negative Lust," Kant describes may alternately be described as an attraction to the laps of artifice, i.e.: a lapse of false ownership of the beautiful, a lapse of the persistent forced-translation of dreams and urges into artificial categories, a lapse of: pride, intent and controlled effort.

#### NEGATIVE OR NOT

If each of the above examples may be understood to exert limiting effects on the human capacity to exist and communicate sincerely, the human "Lust" or urge for a lapse in such things may not be entirely "negative,"

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<sup>16</sup> Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary

particularly in the case of the artist. This remains arguable despite historic evidence that continued exposure to events that elicit recollection of the sublime culminate in a termination of, rather than a mere check to, the so called, "vital forces." For example, the history of untimely death among artist's of all media reflects an attraction, perceived or not, to the mental liberties experienced in the sublime. Unpacking the details concerning the history of fatal attraction to the felt sublime points to the early presence and power of ritual in personal and cultural identity formation. Consider the symbol of the flame that passes through the torn bodies of animals to seal the covenant between Yahweh and Abraham, or also from the book of Moses, the poetic image of the burning bush. The flame is combustion –the consumption of one material into another substance. Ultimately it cannot be known, touched, or felt for what it is without changing what it touches into itself. The Judeo-Christian faith heritage (as well as that of many other cultures) is filled with references to God's truth and perfection as that which when fully exposed is not merely incomprehensible, but deadly to man. On the other hand, that same truth and perfection is credited throughout the Old Testament narratives and New Testament as a force of life (the spoken Yahweh is literally a breath), desirable to the point of irresistibility and capable of permeating both the finite and infinite domains. The Arc of the Covenant within the Holy of Holies symbolizes the link, or interface between the finite and infinite; the only way to approach it without assuring sudden death was through ritual.

The human affinity for ritual is complex; however, one of the significant dynamics of ritual to frequently emerge across cultures is the attempt to fulfill a desire to touch perfection, nirvana, or absolute truth –Veritas. Since perfection or Truth, like the sublime, persist in asserting themselves (its self ?) within the human mental faculties as that which is impossible for humans to produce, ritual evolves in part as a human effort to invoke the Veritas to produce itself in them. Rituals then may begin in part as a means of pulling away from the 'worldly'

distraction, so that one might become more perceptive and receptive to an invasion of the perfect, deemed 'otherworldly.' This might otherwise be described as creating a channel. If the perfect may not be produced, perhaps it may be channeled; if it may not be touched, perhaps in the right conditions it might extend its unique touch. In this dynamic, the practice of ritual becomes a form of disempowerment as a primary means of fulfillment. The sacrifice (abandonment) of self-power in order to be empowered by an unknown, has provoked artists in similarly zealous and fatal ways as it has provoked religious enthusiasts. As one who practices both religion and art, I will now speak regarding my own newly-realized fascination with the sublime.

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Born in 1979, I grew up at a small international Christian college preparatory school on Long Island, New York, where my parents have taught for 30 years. As a child I disappeared into the campus woods for hours without anyone calling the police to search for me (save for one occasion). In 1989, at the age of 9, during my father's sabbatical from teaching, my family traveled several months through Europe, followed by a month each through: India, China, Australia, and New Zealand. Six months of this year was dedicated to a service project in the Solomon Islands, where my father built wooden ships, churches and public relations, while living with the Melanesian Brothers. For me the Solomon Islands was a critical introduction to alternate concepts of home, culture, religion and ritual. The Melanesian children taught me *Pijin English* and *Kastum*.<sup>17</sup> I began nursing sick animals back to health and developed a strong belief in the healing ability of my touch. I also learned to make my own toys, tools and to invent communication by means of *shared play*. The practice of shared play and the pleasure of designing my own tools, particularly the use of my own body as a tool, have remained among the most integral assets to my work and working process.

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<sup>17</sup> *Serious Play ... Sincere Artifice*, page 12

Returning to the sublime... I nearly drowned three times during my childhood. Even so, I continued to delight in, and seek out complete immersion experiences. The first time I almost drowned, I remember looking up from the bottom of a pool at the beautiful light filtered by the undulating legs of swimmers. My mother jumped over a fence to rescue me. She was dressed for a wedding (the plunge made her dress see-through; I remember it clinging to her body). Afterwards my whole family sobbed together in a lady's bathroom. The second time I almost drowned, I was taken by a wave that was four times my size. The third time I collided head-on with a swimmer who wandered into my lane as I dove off a starting block. I remember the moment after impact as a sensation of bouncing backwards into a silent state of drifting as if my body had been suddenly unzipped from itself.<sup>18</sup> In addition to fear and tension, each of these breathless, violent, or temporarily paralyzing episodes recalls a sensation of peaceful surrender. In each case I was mesmerized by a simultaneous sense of uncontained energy and of floating contentment. My irrational delight in the experience of absolute abandonment correlates with my personal interest in concepts of the sublime.

*Like perfection the sublime resists human intention and production even as it invades the human host, opens windows to new mental capacities and regularly preoccupies the human fascination with impossibilities.<sup>19</sup>*

#### THE QUESTION OF INTENT

Sincerity and grace (like perfection and the sublime) also strike me as that which can be received, but not produced. For example, I have tried very hard to be graceful, but the harder I try and the more effort I apply to trying, the more apparent my wanting becomes. As Kleist points out through his "Mr. C," wanting to be graceful and trying to represent an image of grace highlights my willfulness and limitations more profoundly than any hint

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<sup>18</sup> see "journey and release," *Serious Play ... Sincere Artifice*, page 9

<sup>19</sup> notes from thesis journal

of gracefulness. It is similar with sincerity. The more one becomes attached to the idea of being perceived as sincere, the harder it is to sincerely be or do something. The tension between compulsive desires to represent one's self-substance without artifice, and the artless nature of sincerity that resists performance, is a real and daily human frustration. My understanding of this struggle has suggested to me the idea that the sincere act of art begins not with an act of effort and determination (intention of production or performance), but with an act of depletion an interruption that serves as a preparation, an invocation or invitation for the unknown inspiration to undo and outdo what intention remains...and so create within the artist an authentic *appetite* or *need* for sincere holistic intention.

*I long to intend the infinite, or to have my longing tied to an infinite cause of something. But perhaps the infinite has never ceased intending me already since beyond the infinite. Perhaps then my intentions should be a work of prayer to the infinite to interrupt my presence with it's own.<sup>20</sup>*

#### SERIOUS PLAY

During the spring of 2005 I began to document a series of unplanned events that involved play. In the midst of these events I felt a very strong urge to honor the idea of beginning with an invocation. I also desired to feel my whole body involved in the negotiation of relationships between matter and concept. I refer to my responses to these urges as "performative research" because the resulting collection of short films documents questions into the nature of serious play. I began asking questions by engaging in acts which mimic rituals that developed early in my childhood, such as making up languages in the bathtub, swinging from trees, and imaginative role playing inspired by interactions with other living organisms in the environment of their natural habitat. *Accidental miracle*, represented in the stills (shown opposite) was my response to an urge to hang upside down. The act provided me with a way to experience a new freedom of motion that was made

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<sup>20</sup> notes from thesis journal



possible by restricting myself in another motion (the binding of my feet). The event demonstrates and celebrates the workings of the body and its ability to use tension productively. Incidentally the event climaxes with an unplanned accident. This accident marks a moment where I began to directly consider that I am incapable of performing sincerely without also abandoning myself to something uncertain. Since the event of my accident, I have tried to explore the idea of becoming a vessel for communicating sincere transformation by submitting myself to becoming a reference for something more powerful and simultaneously more subtle than human effort –more precisely, something that cannot be controlled or summarized by human effort.

*It is difficult. I forget too soon how to let go of what I just found, how to let it lay and work in me without a name, without an explanation, without a guided praxis. The trick is to remain on the brink of nearly almost finding, and to let that brink between the already and the not yet create a resonance. The resonance between the already and the not yet is the place and the voice of the eternal present—the active word, the divine...<sup>21</sup>*

As a result of my performative research<sup>22</sup> I want to witness the undoing and outdoing of my own intentions. I want to let the uncertain origins of inspiration use me in order to spread delight in themselves and I want to receive something unique about the art of vessel-hood—the art of receiving what resists effort and production. Sincere or serious play has very much to do with opening one's self up to delight. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that one must *be* opened up. Delight and self-consciousness may coexist, but there is a potential moment when delight occupies a critical percent of brain activity such as to enable the possibility of quite nearly forgetting one's self. I have interpreted being opened up as the process being made into a vessel, but not an "empty vessel," rather one that channels indefinable sources of delight into tangible evidence.

*The moment when the clay lump spinning on the wheel becomes a vessel is the moment when the external presence guided into the flesh dislodges its organization. Material that was locked inside becomes stretched into the new skin of an internal exterior. This new skin has renewed opportunity for responding to sensual-spiritual events as novelties, like the child who has yet the benefit of first-time experiences. Without the violent interruption of its own will, the adult sensuality rarely affords this*

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<sup>21</sup> notes from thesis journal, "A Present Remnant" *Serious Play ... Sincere Artifice* p.58 - 78

<sup>22</sup> *Serious Play ... Sincere Artifice*, p.122 - 161

*luxury of novelty.*

Interrupted, dislodged, undone, broken open, consumed...these adjectives quite nearly describe the mind-body organism in its state most susceptible to holistic and truthful transformation. By truthful I do not only mean lacking in: disguise, theatricality, pretense or guile. I mean truthful as in perfect and complete transformation. I mean, sincere artifice. I mean grace.

#### EXAMINING THE VEIL

It is in his broken-into moment that man finds himself closest to reflecting a perfect manifestation of his inspiration. But it is more accurate yet to avoid saying that man, "finds" himself, because finding implies searching and searching is driven by the will and the will is what the sublime must invade to situate its self in the seat of the human self, or I should say where the human self was previously situated. After what Kant's calls the, "check," to the vital sensibilities, when the will returns, it tries to reclaim the moment through reflection. It attempts to interpret (re-invent) the truthful moment into a temporal, rational language. But this is no more precise than recalling one's own dreams, or translating a Rembrandt painting into a football match or negotiating the relationship between body and spirit. So here is where artists and philosophers turn their attention from the dream and the interpretation of the dream (from inspiration and the object of inspiration) to the persistent "veil" that separates them. But again, when looking to experience the veil itself- man cannot resist trying to comprehend the layers of obscurity at the edges of his own apprehension. So here again, by his stubborn will to understand, man forges a translation of circles into smaller and smaller squares as if performing Reimann's sum, until he is lost in the particulars of in between. "Reading of the veil" is of course no less of an interpretive act riddled with substitution and false dichotomies than is attempting to read what lies behind the veil. The famous dichotomies forged in the western tradition of enlightenment are the separation of body and soul, and

the separation of rational and irrational. The tradition of western enlightenment has created for itself an unsolvable veil as it determines to manifest a language of reason out of separations. It attempts the negotiation and representation of the irrational in terms of the rational.

#### ESTRANGEMENT OF BODY AND MIND

The irrational presented in rational forms and terms (categories of reason) has contributed to the deeply-felt estrangement in the western mind between mind and body. Since the European enlightenment, mind and body have been consistently emphasized as counter parts and even as opposites or separate beings, not only separate from each other, but also from nature. "And what makes our inability to know things absolute is that they are simple in themselves, while we are composed of two opposing natures of different kinds, soul and body..." (Kreeft, 125). In the work of his *Pensées*, Pascal's seems to herald the voice of enlightenment, questioning the philosophers' language responsible for muddling up body and mind.

... nearly all philosophers confuse their ideas of things, and speak spiritually of corporeal things and corporeally of spiritual ones, for they boldly assert that bodies tend to fall, that they aspire towards their centre, that they have inclinations, sympathies, antipathies, all things pertaining only to things spiritual. And when they speak of minds, they consider them as being in a place, and attribute to them movement from one place to another, which are things pertaining only to bodies (Kreeft, 125 – 126).

Descartes' dualism between mind and body appears overt here in Pascal's negotiation of man and nature (man and the universe) but he continues in such a way as is more sympathetic to the confusion of "mind and matter;"

Instead of receiving ideas of these things in their purity, we color them with our qualities and stamp our own composite being on all the simple things we contemplate.

Who would not think, to see us compounding everything of mind and matter, that such a mixture is perfectly intelligible to us? Yet this is the thing we understand least; man is to himself the greatest prodigy in nature, for he cannot conceive what body is, and still less what mind is, and least of all how a body can be joined to a mind. This is his supreme difficulty, and yet it is his very being. (Kreeft, 126).

Here Pascal quotes his predecessor, St. Augustine: "The way in Which Minds are attached to bodies is beyond man's understanding, and yet this is what man is."<sup>23</sup> Peter Kreeft, points out that if we accept Descart's "mind-body dualism," as Pascal appears to do, "...We are as alienated from our own being as from nature. We are, in fact, no longer nature at all, only spirit plus artifice, ghost plus machine, an angel in a box."<sup>24</sup> Though inaccurate and deceptive, in a sense this separation, or dualism, may be a necessary evil. The complete otherness and separateness of mind (*Seele*) from body does not ring true, yet partial delineations between body and mind, may be useful in preparing the human being to realize that one thing is not 'one thing,' rather a vibration, frequency, or verve between many things.

Nothing is just one thing  
And when we go to that thing  
(the empty vessel, the carved out heart)  
It holds the ten thousand things

Tao (the way) produced the One.  
The One produced the two.  
The two produced the three.  
And the three produced the ten thousand things."

The way is nothing (is just one thing)

In contrast to the above Taoist statement, western tradition often pits mind against body not only as separates, but as *opposites*. This extent of dualism is fallible, for what separates realities and modes of reality for us is not represented by walls but a veils, which themselves are not external obstacles, but fabric with ourselves as nature and "the ten thousand things" are also fabric with ourselves.

The tradition of western reason insists on emphasizing its separateness. It strives to delineate itself from: the universe, from beasts, from ourselves (mind and body). Western enlightenment is the tradition of drawing lines

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<sup>23</sup> Kreeft, 126

<sup>24</sup> Kreeft, 135

between this and that, in such ways as set particulars at war with one another more successfully than in relationship to one another. It presents a decapitated Logos. Western enlightenment calls for a severance of ideology (good from bad, right from wrong) rather than a furtherance and communion of ideology. But here above, by delineating between western and nonwestern enlightenment, I have just performed an example of how the human understanding derives conclusions through procedures of division—. How ironic and close to madness is the act of putting the irrational into the terms of the rational! But is it reason that tells me so? I do not know; but every time I massage arguments out of daily experience so as to compose a system of comprehension or logic, I find that I have build an intermediate dichotomy which serves to diminish rather than enhance my capacity to *practice* that logic intimately. I feel dulled to a certain sensitivity of intuition. This reminds me of Kleist's remark, "...As self-consciousness becomes dimmer and weaker, to the same extent gracefulness manifests itself more and more radiantly and dominantly."<sup>25</sup> I would like to suggest that Kleist's comment, may be inverted to read: As self-consciousness intention becomes more developed, asserted and glorified, to the same extent does gracefulness become dimmer and weaker. It is simply astonishing and in many ways ridiculous to attempt working out the particulars of grace, of the sublime, and of the union of mind and body here in a paper, in English. If what I want most is for grace, the sublime, and the union of mind and body to assert themselves in me and live themselves out through me, I must be able to "dismount" from the practice of scholarship, but also from my applied identity as an "artist." On the other hand, I also cannot cease being the "thinking reed" as Pascal calls it. In order for my will, or the rational core of my thinking reed, to receive and be transformed by grace, in order for me to be awake to the sublime, I must be invaded. I keep coming back to this place, this feeling that, "lost in the cosmos" is a holistic mind/body condition that affords understanding by amassing incomplete layers of comparative analysis. Perhaps this is why I crave and pursue

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<sup>25</sup> Kleist, 77

physical experiences such as physical play, as doorways into the emotional state of the sublime, because in this event the mind and body together are invaded as a holistic organism. In addition to the undone layers of performed intent, mentioned earlier in this paper, the perceived sublime attracts because it fulfills a desire to be and feel one's self as a single whole thing. When momentarily invaded by the sublime, the invaded participant senses his or herself as a whole organism, albeit one at risk of being extinguished, were the inspiration to last a second too long.

## CONCLUSION

No pure thing (even a pure concept) is available to the mind without requiring of the mind a fabrication, that is, an artifice of representation. The sublime, therefore, as object or event, can neither be felt exactly nor directly, but must be felt as a retrospective piecing together of a gap, a momentary pulse of withheld substance. In retrospect the gap is terrible for one senses one's proportions and feels infinitely lost between greatness and insignificance. It is also terrible for one senses by the interruption that one is lifeless without some vital force that to know in full would mean certain death. On the other hand, it is exhilarating to feel the return of the vital force and to feel it so clearly as a vital force rather than consequential circumstance. The momentary laps of intent that is the sublime is necessarily momentary or it becomes intent again. That is why the artist drifts for hours, days, years... through fits of intention that he may invoke .0003 seconds of the sublime. Those seconds do not afford time for human intent, but through them, the amassed intent of any number of years finds itself undone. For any artist the final undoing of one's own intent is a death, but for the sincere artist, it is also a rebirth, because he or she has been suspecting him or herself of parody and flippancy since the beginning. This artist will continue to dedicate his or her next lifetime's intent to a singularly felt moment of undoing. **Sincerity** and **grace** (gracefulness) are not something one can produce or achieve, but something one can want and

receive, though wanting sincerity and grace(fullness) generally has an inverse effect on receiving them. Receiving grace requires obedience and surrender to that which is truly sincere and full of grace. Even when the artist wants to obey he or she must lay aside the objective wants to receive the unknown more directly. Like grace, the sublime is a form of pleasure that does not tolerate false parody's of pleasure. The sublime therefore both extinguishes and ignites the artistic spirit in one breath, or rather, in one momentarily withheld breath. It inspires and transforms by interrupting the habits of the whole body-soul organism.

*The boundary between mind and materials represents the threshold that has to be crossed for dreams to become real. Art is taking a perfect vision and forming it incompletely (but as close as possible) in imperfect materials. But better we practice the other way too, beginning with materials and working then towards a vision. In other words, emptying the mind of everything but the next small step, the next intuitive material adjustment. The mind loves to be deceived, why deny it its pleasure? By deception I don't mean fooled but guided blinded. Traversing darkness is where we meet our dreams (faith is a guide) why shouldn't sculpture be the same way? the plan can be written after the fact. Indeed it becomes a perfect plan. it could be written like this: gathering, absorbing, listening, feelings, thoughts are collected to full capacity (stretching capacity) until the breaking point where order(ing) is a necessity. Sculpture provides the framework and structure for ideas to coexist— not just survive but speak, build, sing and uplift one another. when you demand of yourself what to dream, how can you dream it at all? Where is the darkness to feed the vision? It is hard to make one fulfilled with the body between the sense and the shadow. Body becomes tool and material both touching directly the mind, directly the senses, directly the earth (materials), and directly the spirit. the body is the center point. The divisions are invented as if the skin felt nothing at all.*

Jason Randolph, Rinehart School of Sculpture, MICA 2006

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