**Sensory Knowledge and Art (2017)**

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**Abstract**

The primary intention of this book is to elucidate the relations between sensory perception and art as a form of knowledge. This enables us to understand how different kinds of art are given their meaning not only from observation, resemblance and reason but also from an artist’s sensitivity to the inner form of sensory experience as it is realized in perception, reflection, memory and imagination. By assuming a number of different points of view, Part 1 shows how the physical object and the act of sensory perception are logically interdependent, and I give my elaboration of this argument two kinds of emphasis. In the first place, it opposes all arguments that support a merging of the mental and physical, as in idealism, materialism, neutral monism and panpsychism. A conceptual distinction is observed because sensory perception gives the physical object its identity. This idea also implies that the physical object is only realized by sentient life - self-aware inner life and a world become possible simultaneously. The second emphasis concerns the mind-body problem, and towards the end of Part 1 I offer an argument which places this problem in a certain light by representing the brain not as a physical counterpart to inner experience but as essentially instrumental to perception and self-awareness, and related experience.

The argument in Part 2 is distinguished by a sense of continuity between the nature of sensory perception and the formal resources of artists in both physical and literary media. Hence, in a discussion of Titian’s *Assumption of the Virgin*, I indicate ways in which the painter conveys the inner experience and character of the figures in the painting by means of compositional design, light and colour, and thereby uses these and other sensuous resources to portray human life and experience. This is followed by a discussion of two sonnets by Shakespeare, in which the same general aim is pursued by using the literary resources of figurative language. Finally, a discussion of *Hamlet* shows how, in this work, the augmentation of figurative language by dramatic form strengthens the view that art can provide a form of knowledge that is based as completely upon intuition about our sensory experience as it is upon reason and observation. Just as my (true) perception of a cup as a vessel for drinking tea or coffee arises immediately from past experience, so the dramatist can see immediately from his or her past experience how a character might perceive things and behave.

**Introduction**

To begin with an account of how mental causation is integrated with materiality: speaking to someone is significant not simply as the transmission of thought, but also as an action, and this implies something more than interaction of mind and body. In such an action the intention is mental but also determined by physical circumstances, such as by who is saying what to whom - here the psychological merges with the physical identity of the individuals involved. Assume that the speaker is delivering a message: if the listener does not consider the speaker to be reliable then this affects the significance of the speech (as when the speaker is a toddler or rolling drunk) – of course the same condition applies when the speaker *is* considered to be reliable. Since a message must be about something that arises in a physical world, and physical agency affects the sense that can be made of what is said, mutual involvement of the physical and mental determines the speech and how sense can be made of it. For both the listener and the speaker, the body does more than simply transmit ideas by interacting with the mind. Furthermore, the one cannot be assimilated to the other, for if the mind must have a physical counterpart and vice versa, then for every event, action or object the mental must play its own part and so must the physical. Mutual involvement excludes the assimilation of one aspect to the other, and so an underlying physical order would require its own mental aspect; the mind cannot be represented in purely physical terms. Since theories in this sphere are dominated by attempts to fit mental causation into a world of physical causation a fiction incorporating certain general tendencies might act as a useful contrast to this argument.

The evolutionist prides himself on his fidelity to how things really are; the theory of evolution is pre-eminently an empirical theory. Anyone who disagrees with him will promptly be referred to the evidence of the senses. If, therefore, the senses do not tell us how things really are but mainly what promotes our survival, implying that mental causation is governed by physical causation, then the theory has a questionable basis in truth. To the extent that the theory of evolution is based not on the way things are but on what promotes our fitness to live, it cannot explain the divergence of our thinking from the way things are, and the theory cannot be justified. From an empirical point of view, either our sensory perception is more or less in touch with things as they are, and the fundamental components of understanding are generally reliable, or there is no possibility of understanding things at all, and this includes reasoning about the nature of understanding and sensory perception. Algorithms of the kind that express evolution as variation, selection and retention (Dawkins), or consciousness as perception, decision and action (Hoffman) are obviously indebted to sensory experience, which does not make them wrong but is inconvenient if you take the evolutionist’s view of sensory knowledge. These formulae are largely speculative and not achieved simply by reason. Moreover, in neither case do they specifically allow for the possibility of a being that reflects on its life and history and occasionally comes up with algorithms.

Related to this is the question of significance for survival – if life is not experienced as having some value in itself, or something that is akin to it (like experiential attachment to life), why should survival be a concern? Survival can only be of interest to a sentient being, and it can only be of interest because a sentient being has other interests. These are what give rise to significance of any kind; apart from these interests an evolutionary machine for the purpose of its own perpetuation, or the perpetuation of parts that sustain the machine, could have no significance. Evolution would be merely a dingleweed process. So while it may be shown that evolution lies behind our possession of the capacities that enable us to experience life as we do, this does not entail that they are there for the sake of non-sentient material for which, by definition, the possibility that anything is significant cannot arise.

What is not significant to itself can only be realized for the sake of what *is* significant to itself – nobody thinks that a jug of milk is there for the sake of the jug, or for the sake of the milk. A little reflection will show us that things are significant only to a sentient being of one kind or another, and only because a sentient being feels itself to be significant. (Because things are significant only to something that is significant to itself the world cannot be made simply from particles which represent the physical organization of sensible objects.)

Even from an evolutionist’s point of view it is necessary to see things as they are. For example, it would not be in the interests of our survival if we could not, in ordinary experience, discriminate between a twig and a scorpion; often it is necessary to see the object as it is before we can know how it could endanger us. This implies that in general we must see things as they are before we can know how they might affect our interest in survival.

One definition of seeing things as they are is the accurate perception of as many of the things around you as possible, but a stronger definition is seeing what is around you with some insight into what conforms to your interests and why it does so, including the interest of survival. Self- evidently, this is dependent upon sensory perception. Here we can observe an implicit recognition of the significance of the object, and that its constitution is determined by self-awareness; which has much more to do with the way things are than superficial characteristics such as size, shape, colour and so on. (The perception of everything that is going on around us would make learning impossible, as insight depends on attention to some things at the expense of others.) Hence there is not necessarily a conflict between seeing things according to personal inclination and seeing things as they are, and seeing things as they are without seeing into personal inclination is seeing very little of the phenomenon as a whole. In other words, it is necessary to follow the bias in sensory perception in order to discover how the constitution of the object is determined by personal inclination, and also to see into the nature of sensory perception.

These observations demonstrate clearly enough that an assimilation of mental causation to physical causation will not tell us the whole story concerning sensory perception and the constitution of the object. When mental causation is presented as simply the function of some kind of physical inclination (such as the inclination towards fitness to survive) an internal contradiction is unavoidable. This kind of enquiry is always indebted to sensory perception, and must be disqualified if sensory perception is seen only to serve a physical purpose. Thus, in order for the enquiry to be fully coherent it must recognize the significance of a desire for knowledge that is not merely physical inclination in disguise.

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When I see a physical object I am necessarily aware of *my* perception of it, and so awareness of myself is in the object that appears to me; the appearance of a physical object depends upon my spontaneous experience of the past. This kind of self-awareness is clearly evident in recognition, since when I recognize an object or a person I necessarily make a re-cognition, which identifies the object or person by means of contact with what I already know. It is only by sensing my past experience in the moment of perception that I recognize the objects around me, and a mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness makes this possible. Here and throughout this enquiry, ‘self-awareness’ means the continuous sense of oneself that is implicit in experience and accompanies all of our sensory perception. It does not refer to deliberate acts of introspection, but is nonetheless appropriate to what is intended; when somebody has an accident and exclaims, ‘I wasn’t paying attention!’ this does not imply that when we *are* paying attention to our actions we are fixedly aware of ourselves. We can be only fleetingly or hardly paying attention to ourselves when lifting the lid on a dustbin with one’s foot and discarding something, or perceiving a cup and reaching for it, or performing countless other ordinary actions; even so, self-awareness is fundamental to the action, and this is also true of simply seeing and hearing or touching, smelling and tasting things.

For example, a tuning fork is designed to produce a musical note and in this the musical self- awareness of the designer acts upon the materiality of the object, in how the substance, size and shape will create the right sound waves to produce that note. Conversely, Cynthia hears the thin, metallic and resonant sound of this instrument being struck and identifies it immediately as a musical sound. Comparing them from this point of view, the designer’s self-awareness acts upon the material and shapes it, while in Cynthia the material acts upon self-awareness in her recognition of the object as musical. To this we can add many other ways in which this involvement affects the nature of the object, as we will see in the examples that are used in order to develop the argument. In this respect, the object is not simply material but is determined by a spontaneous self- awareness in sensory perception of it, and its realization should be distinguished from a form of reasoning, like induction. Hence, by means of sensory self-awareness, sensory perception turns the material from what is unperceived into the physical object, and materiality in itself can only be inferred from the object.

This implies that materiality is intrinsically receptive to self-awareness as it occurs in sensory perception. Accordingly, certain physical elements (like space, time, movement and light) are media of sensory perception and they complement the mutual involvement of materiality and self- awareness in the realization of the object. Therefore, the conception of a physical object as a ‘combination of sensible qualities, such as extension, solidity, weight and the like’ (Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, 37) should be expanded to include the combination of media of sensory perception, and, contrary to Berkeley’s theory that only ideas constitute the object, the media are media for the sensory perception of materiality as it is realized in the physical object.

It should be obvious that this view avoids the assimilation of mental causation to physical causation that we find in materialism, or its reverse (as we see in Berkeley), and it has definite implications for the true representation of human life and experience. In this connection, self- awareness actively shapes the object and effects more than a simple correspondence between what is material and past experience (that I recognize a thing only by perceiving it as similar to things I have seen before). Even in the example of recognition that has been given, knowing that a sound is musical includes a particular intuition of its significance; here contact with one’s own experience affirms its value, and this is all the more evident when we recognize a piece of music. The argument, therefore, implies an active shaping of the object in the act of sensory perception – so that realization of the object is also a physical assertion of significance.

In keeping with this account, an understanding of the object in ordinary terms is not simply an ascription of its properties; it usually figures the significance of the object from a particular point of view. Generally, I would not describe a fence as tall and solid without intending to convey the idea that these properties helped to make the object suitable for its purpose. Similarly, my description of an acquaintance as deceptively friendly and high-minded could not be taken as a mere enumeration of his qualities; in both cases the characterization represents the object in relation to its possible significance to my audience. Moreover, this figurative use of natural language is typical of our conception and understanding of people and things, and parallel to the physical assertion of significance in our realization of the object in sensory perception.

Most important to this argument is that the language that we know from engagement with the life to which we belong is also parallel to the realization of the object in being generally truthful. The ocean, for example, can legitimately be a physical object in different ways according to how it is perceived by, say, a surfer, an explorer or a marine biologist; while the figurative aspect of a description need not be merely an opinion. It might well be true that by being tall and solid the fence is suitable for its purpose and that my acquaintance’s being only apparently friendly and high-minded is the case and therefore significant to my audience. Moreover, in this light the figurative use of language in our ordinary conception of ourselves and the world is important to the true representation of things. It is only by making use of such figurative language that insight into reflective life is possible (as opposed to the language of strictly physical relations, as in physics and chemistry).

Hence the powerful representation of reflective life in action occurs in works of art in which the physical assertion of significance is reflected in a use of figurative language or a similar form, such as that of music, painting or sculpture. By portraying the phenomena, art is able to bring a greater clarity and insight to our understanding of ourselves and the world. Of course, this is also an assertion of significance, and, by belonging in this way to the phenomena it portrays, art is continuous with our realization of the physical object. In the second part of this book an attempt is made to illuminate, in works by Titian and Shakespeare, the complex fusion of sensory knowledge and constructive thought that is natural to a reflective being.

**Part 1**

*Sensory perception is incompatible with the idea of a purely physical object, and knowledge of a physical object is dependent upon sensory perception. There is a contradiction in the idea of a purely physical object. To make sense of something is to see it as being significant in some way, and therefore the object is determined by what is significant to the perceiver. Thus a true understanding depends upon our seeing how sensory perception itself determines the constitution of a physical object.*

**The physical object**

Making sense of things is possible only for a sentient being, and this suggests that things make sense only by being assimilated to a life that already makes sense to the perceiver. In order to perceive an object, a sentient being must recognize something or identify it in some other way that conforms to experience, and this implies that the constitution of the object is determined not only *in* the act of perception but also *by* the act of perception. For example, the identification of an unfamiliar piece of music as a sarabande by Bach, or of the harmonious colours in a previously unseen painting as Venetian, can be made by a sensory intuition in the listener or viewer. Thus there is, in sensory perception, a sense of oneself that simultaneously assimilates something to what is known to the perceiver and realizes an object in response to other unconscious inclinations, such as desire, anxiety, curiosity and belief. To the listener or viewer who does not make the relevant identification the object has a different constitution – even though, being physically the same, it is understood as being the same piece of music or painting.

Along with material form there must also be a psychological source for the object, and because the constitution of the object is determined *by* the act of perception there is a mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness. In the reflective life of a person, moreover, the constitution of the object is determined in accordance with experience of a life that is valued in itself, and therefore the object must include the physical assertion of some kind of significance. Hence, as an auditory object in which highly organized sounds and self-awareness transform one another in the listener’s experience of it, the piece of music asserts the significance of being, among other things, a sarabande by Bach. This type of analysis can also be applied to a sensory intuition that the painting is Venetian. So, while it is possible to imagine a purely physical object, just as it is possible to imagine a creature that lives on its own continuously self-renewing body, it is impossible (for different reasons) to make sense of either.

To illustrate these ideas we should notice at first that we do not perceive an object in isolation. Take the ordinary occasion of looking down a street and observing one object after another. This clearly involves much more than perceiving a series of discrete objects in random succession; we are more likely to form a visual sense of the space and its most prominent objects in certain places and at certain intervals within it. Thus, with an overall image in mind, we might move from one object, a bicycle, to another, a tree, and then (immediately) back to the bicycle. We will certainly do this with absolute confidence that the bicycle will be in the same position, and unchanged. This is because, along with its other properties, we will have seen the bicycle as a stable object in surroundings that will not change suddenly and unpredictably. The initial perception of it will have led us to assume a perceptual stability in the object and its surroundings (now the object is not just physically situated, it *belongs* where it is). Here we see evidence of the mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness, since the object is not simply physical but physically stable in keeping with our expectations, and this experience of perceptual stability in the object is suggested by our sensory reaction if the bicycle had vanished. We might spontaneously look for a sign that explained the disappearance.

This shows that in sensory perception something belongs in its place because it has been recognized, and in this respect recognition creates an important property in the object. It plays an essential part in how the object is realized in an intelligible order of things; so the sentience implied in recognition is necessary to the identity of the object. This can be extended to include cases in which knowledge is inferred from experience, such as knowing that the earth belongs in an orbit of the sun. Many objects of sensory experience have to belong in their place before such an inference can be made. So while the laws of nature are not invented by sentience, the possession of a world in which things belong in their place depends not only on those laws but also on recognition and therefore self-awareness. Hence the constitution of the physical object is determined both by the laws of nature and by an unfathomable self-awareness (in the realm of sensory perception self- awareness is not wholly definite and precise, but is significantly elusive and obscure).

We can see this claim more clearly by considering the necessity for causal relations in experience and in nature. For example, in seeing a cup as a vessel for holding tea or coffee I implicitly sense an intelligible order of things to which the cup naturally belongs; it is part of a manifold that includes many other objects, such as the drink in question, the table, the room or situation, and time or occasion among other things. That causal relations depend upon this sense of an intelligible order of things can be extended, moreover, to what are normally thought to be strictly physical relations, like the interfusion of electricity and magnetism in the constitution of light. This interfusion is necessary in the sense that a separation of the two essential elements would remove the light altogether. But the necessity is not simply physical, as it also depends upon the sense of intelligible order that can only be realized in experience or anticipated in the prospect of experience. If sentience (or its possibility) is excluded there is no longer anything necessary about the interfusion of elements in the constitution of things. The word necessity implicitly means necessary to a sense of intelligible order, and this depends upon recognition.

In keeping with this kind of recognition, to someone who is familiar with bicycles, the material aspects of the bicycle, its solidity, adaptation to the human body and mobility are realized as its usefulness and vice versa (the same point can be made of these material aspects and the aesthetic appeal of the object). To an observer who had never seen a bicycle these material aspects would not be given the same significance by past experience. The inner life of the perception would be different and so therefore would the object as a phenomenon. Not only is the object differently perceived, because it is realized by the act of perception the bicycle has a different constitution for the two observers (it is only as a general kind of physical object in those surroundings that it is the same). To the observer familiar with bicycles, they convey us smoothly and effortlessly over the ground, moving in harmonious co-ordination with the movement of one’s own body. In this respect we should distinguish between the object as having a reference that is common, the person or thing being significant to everyone in the same way, as in ‘We all saw Roger’ or ‘Let’s take the train’, and the object strictly as a phenomenon, which has a different constitution in every case, since here the physical assertion of significance is never quite the same and can be very different. The idea that the physical object is realized by the significance that it has for a sentient being is obviously contrary to our normal understanding. In this we mistakenly assume that the object is a stable thing that is merely seen in different ways according to the different sensory faculties and interests of sentient beings. Rather, it is defined by the significance that it is given by an act of sensory perception, and this definition must vary with the sentient being in question.

The material significance of belonging to a place is far wider than suggested in the example just given. An edifice like the Eiffel Tower owes its identity to its location as a landmark in a particular city, and so could not be the same physical object if it were in another city, in the middle of a desert, or at the bottom of an ocean. It is evident, moreover, that this is related to other ways in which mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness affect the identity of the object. For example, it is in the self-awareness of millions that the Eiffel Tower possesses its cultural significance, and so material features, size, form and proportion, iron construction and relation to other aspects of the physical layout of the city affect its cultural meaning. Conversely, self-awareness in the expectations of millions makes an implicit demand for these material features in a monumental structure. Materiality and self-awareness can be seen to shape each other in the realization of this object and myriad others like it. This is contrary to the idea that an object is a material thing that is overlaid by cultural significance of certain kinds.

For a person, the solidity of a granite rock is realized in its being an obstacle, its being traversable, the quarry for a tool or weapon, or a prominent object in a landscape. The assimilation of the object to our life and experience also realizes its materiality. Therefore, without sensation, in the present or the past, or as anticipated in the future, there are no physical properties. Furthermore, in making sense of properties we see into how they make sense, and this entails our relating them to other things in our life and experience – pragmatic and aesthetic perceptions of an object make sense of its material properties; knowing the purpose of a chisel is interwoven with the perception of its metal shaft and sharp cutting edge. In this connection, a chisel is seen as a physically solid and sharp edged tool, and not as a solid and sharp edged object that can be employed as a tool. To someone who knew nothing about the use of a chisel it would be significant in some other way, perhaps as a tool with some unspecified uses. Similarly, to someone who knew nothing about the bicycle it might appear as a mechanical object of mysterious purpose. If, in other words, the object does not appear in keeping with the use for which it is intended some other sense of its significance will inform our perception of it, and this kind of abstract understanding will determine its form.

To give an example that highlights the abstract nature of significance: the promise of continuity that suffuses the objects outside my window is physical but cannot be seen as a specific property attaching to a particular object. On a brilliantly clear day the atmosphere can be saturated by a reassuring sense of continuity, while in grey, attenuated light we might feel a withdrawal of the sense of continuity, a sense that things might end. Similarly, the appearance of a person that is reassuring reflects the interfusion of physical features by the abstract properties that are given to the object by perception.

The physical assertion of significance can be seen in my knowledge of a glass egg by means of the sensation in my own hand. Here the sense of the object lies principally in my involvement with my general state of being, such as aesthetic attraction to the object and curiosity about it, and this interest makes an essential contribution to the realization of materiality. Remove all interest and I have no interest in my own sensations and therefore recognize no object of a certain size, volume, surface, weight and shape. There will be no object of which sense is made and no phenomenon, only the incipient object that is latent in my past and possible future interest, and also in the interest of other sentient beings. The incipient object is the primarily physical aspect of an object, but is also constituted by the mutual involvement of materiality and (the prospect of) self- awareness. In this connection, the solidity and hardness of an object are not only material, they depend for their realization on the sensation of my own body that is created by its resistance to the object. This means that they are created by my interest in my general state of being and feelings; the glass egg is hard and solid because it is physical but its being so depends, among other things, upon the self-awareness which includes the sensation of my hand (this experience of oneself in our perception of an object applies equally, if less obviously, to the other senses).

Moreover, in so far as the object is only fully realized in the sensory experience of a sentient being, such physical modes as size, weight, volume, solidity, surface and shape are also media of perception, along with movement, light, space and time, and others. Since every act of perception is individual, the physical modes cannot simply be properties of the object. For example, in my experience of a room that is quite still, cool and dim, and has the scent and feeling of an unfathomable past, movement (in this case its absence), temperature, light and time interact as media of perception. They will not interact in the same way for someone to whom the past of that room is well known, for that person the constitution of the object will be different. Past experience can determine the constitution of the object only because many physical modes are also media of sensory perception; in this example time, scent, movement, temperature and light are media through which inner motivation passes spontaneously into the object and determines its character for the perceiver. Conversely, it is only under the influence of an act of perception, and its assertion of some kind of significance, that various media of sensory perception coalesce in a realization of the physical object. Otherwise, to offer another example, the road, buildings, trees and sky before me in the street could not be harmonized with each other. The spatial depth that gives solidity and scale to these objects is illuminated and enhanced by the reflection of light and colour, and by the rhythmical contour of a landscape that is either locked into its form by an overcast sky or given a feeling of freedom and movement by an open sky. Here the interaction of light, space, size, shape, volume, contour, surface and movement is essential to the object.

What a sentient being knows is vastly greater than what happens to be on its mind, and so, in relation to immediate experience, almost all of what we know is but an aid to direct perception, memory and imagination. Sensory perception, memory and imagination depend, therefore, upon the assimilation of a cognitive sensation of immediate circumstances to an ocean of prevenient knowledge that is unseen. As this knowledge is instrumental to perception and is not the object itself, we cannot, without self-contradiction, claim that this knowledge is stored physically; it is only realized in the perception of things from the perceptible form of an incipient object. Within the act of observing something there is also an action that is both invisible and immaterial. In other words, while I know the object to be my perception of it I do not see the act of perceiving it, except in so far as its constitution is determined by my perception.

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*Sensory Experience and Reflective Life*

This analysis of our realization of the object as a physical assertion of some kind of significance implies that there is an affinity between sensory perception and reflection. For example, conscious deliberation can be the resource for a critique or revision of sensory perception; such a development might be seen in Hamlet’s reaction to personal disillusionment. The need to see benevolence and sincerity his mother’s face lies behind a shift in how he feels about her when his trust is betrayed; a sense of her that has been based largely on sensory perception is revised by a disenchanted analysis of her behaviour. In experience of this kind, reflection is a natural extension of sensory perception as a mode of understanding.

In art, where reflection is concerned with inner experience and sensory perception is an essential element in what is being portrayed, thought is characterized by a fluid exchange between the two modes of understanding, along with related feelings and inclinations. Hamlet’s first soliloquy is almost a demonstration of the exchange, and also shows that true insight is by no means assured by deliberation and analysis. In works of art it is possible for belief that is based on conventional reflection to be opposed by a wider vision that is created by insight into how self-awareness affects our understanding of things. This kind of vision is characteristic of art as the portrayal of reflective life in action.

As experience is the realization of our concern with a life that is valued in itself it cannot be separated from knowledge of ourselves and the life in which we participate. A being for which life is valued in itself cares about its own integrity and the coherence of its various elements, and therefore sensory perception is both a mode of understanding of its own and a basis for reflection upon oneself and others, and for reflection upon a common life. Sensory perception and sensory intuition are built into the fabric of original feeling and experience, and are extended by reflection and reason; these modes of understanding are essential aspects of reflective life and they both affect our conception of it.

To give fuller expression to these ideas: a life that is valued in itself is one for which clarity of vision is a natural concern. Such clarity is essential to the evaluation of things that makes it possible to live reflectively, and this implies that perceptual and reflective modes of understanding have this concern at their heart. In reflective life, therefore, the purpose of experience is not merely to serve biology, or to promote our physical and psychological well-being; it also explores the ways in which a life that is valued in itself can be organized and modelled in the interest of that life. In the light of this, we can surmise that the ideas about sensory perception in this essay are significantly related to the nature of reflective life. For example, we have seen ways in which interplay between the two modes of understanding serve our vision and powers of evaluation, and there is more to be said about the natural development of understanding that lies within sensory perception in action. In particular, the act of perception has been shown to imply a development in the measure of what makes sense in the experience of a reflective being. When the bicycle has been seen a few moments earlier it now *belongs* in a certain place in a certain way, and this new perception is a measure of what now makes sense to us. An imperceptible growth in the sense that we make of things suggests that there is, within the nature of experience itself, an exploratory evolution that is related to clarity and so to a refinement in our conception of how things may be significant. It also suggests an explanation of how an infant slowly acquires, by repeated acquaintance with people and things, the capacity to make sense of them and give definition to the object.

A more complex illustration of this natural and imperceptible growth will demonstrate how such experience is directly related to apprehension. As an object of immediate experience, an intricate painting, or sculpture, or musical composition can appear at first to be opaque and obscure. However, with repeated (sensory) acquaintance the work can become more and more intelligible as improvement in our sense of the object changes our perception of it. Because the improvement is imperceptible it is not easy to analyse this process introspectively, but it is possible to discern a pattern of change in some cases. For example, a progression towards understanding can be evident in the gradual clarification of certain passages in a difficult piece of music, and these passages can then act as a form of guidance for the clarification of neighbouring sections of the piece until the whole is coherent to the ear. When, moreover, this point is reached it is almost impossible to recall the piece as it sounded in the earlier stages of listening to it – a clear perception of the piece seems to cancel out the preliminary stages. The point of this example is to show that transformations of the object can be attributed specifically to the purposeful self-awareness that is unseen in acts of perception. Therefore, it should be stressed that the intelligibility in this kind of experience is aesthetic, and is akin to the power over us that a face might have, or a striking atmospheric effect in a city or landscape. Usually we do not put this into words and might be unable to do so, though the ability to put it into words is evidence that we have acquired some aesthetic understanding of a piece of music, a painting or sculpture.

Whatever biological explanation might be provided to account for this elucidatory element, self- awareness in sensory perception indisputably serves the experience of a life that is valued in itself as an end in itself. However, it should not be assumed that elucidation in this case is a simple clarification of ourselves and the world in which our lives take form. The child whose sensory perception of his mother gradually strengthens the impression of her benevolence and sincerity may, like David Copperfield, lose the power to examine her character (a possibility which does not support the idea that self-awareness in sensory perception is simply a function of our biology). In our experience of a work of art elucidation does appear to be positive, but it should be remembered that the point of such elucidation is to serve the interests of a life that is valued in many, and often conflicting, ways – difficulty in a piece of music (and therefore the need for elucidation) does not make it illuminating; the piece could merely appeal to the inclination to see difficulty itself as a sign of depth. The most that we can claim is that in some cases reflective life is served by art that is genuinely illuminating, and that this follows from its power to respond to our fundamental need for a clear understanding of ourselves and the world.

**Phenomena and the Elements of Sensory Knowledge**

*Media of Sensory Perception and the Constitution of the Object*

For most of us sensory knowledge is continuously informed by its involvement in a vast ocean of unconscious thought and experience, and this ocean of thought and experience is, in essential respects, non-physical. Thus the mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness and can be inferred from analysis of the physical object. If, for example, the architecture of a building creates in our perception of it an immediate feeling of the tradition and history of the place to which it belongs, then this suggests that meaning and significance arising from self-awareness informs the physical object. An interest in one’s own experience will show that this example is only a more obvious instance of what is wholly pervasive in sensory perception, even though our everyday encounter with things can obscure its significance. Our attention to the form of experience can show the object as determined by the perception of it, and this provides us with evidence of a further aspect of sensory perception, its media.

Though physical in nature, as media of sensory perception light, space and time, and other media are not physical in the sense that an object is physical. Rather, they act as agents for a realization of the object, in support of the mutual involvement that has just been suggested. At the same time, they play a substantial part in the constitution of the object, as it is easy to show. If light enables us to see an object then the object must be defined in certain ways by its response to light, and so on – properties that are derived from the media are integrated into the object by the sensory perception for which they are media. Space makes it possible to see into a garden, which makes the garden a spatial object, and it is spatial in accordance with our perception of space. The same condition must apply to the perception of space in any sentient being, and therefore to any perception of a spatial object (including the ‘perceptions’ of memory and imagination).

The materiality of a physical object is, among other things, an arrangement of the media of sensory perception. When an arrow is released the air through which it moves, its movement through the air, the material of which it is made and other physical conditions are media of sensory perception. Thus materiality and self-awareness determine each other because light, space and time, etc are simultaneously physical and media of sensory perception. The medium helps to realize the object and determines its constitution, and is itself distinctively realized in it. For example, light may be realized in combination with the sea, and produce a visual object that is an ensemble of light and water under certain conditions, such as an overcast sky. Here the medium of light may be combined with various media of sensory perception, like space, time, atmosphere, shape, movement, density, consistency, volume and surface texture – to which significance is given by the self-awareness of a sentient being.

This is one way in which light can appear, and there are, of course, many other ways involving other combinations, and therefore other appearances of light. But there is no direct perception of light or of the other media, because in being media for the realization of objects they cannot themselves be objects. Divorced from the object, materiality in this connection refers to the potential interaction of the media with self-awareness, and we experience light not in its illumination of an object from which it is separate, but in its realization by contact with other media of sensory perception.

Energy is also a medium of sensory perception, and when sunlight touches an undulating plain it is realized in the tone, colour and luminescence of contour, how this contour lies in the landscape, and the harmony of sky and surroundings and how they are touched by light. When energy is realized in the turbulence of a storm space, light, tone, colour and contour appear in one way, while on a bright and still morning they possess a quite different kind of vitality. Other media, such as atmosphere and shape, material and volume are also realized in their contact with the other media.

To expand on this example: the space in a garden is a medium of sensory perception that is organized by self-awareness, and this means that space is similarly realized in other respects. To begin with, the space must involve a coherent arrangement of things, of sky, landscape, water, trees and open ground. For example, there must be intervals between the objects in the space, and they must obey a visual order like perspective. The objects and sky must respond to light in a way that is coherent in terms of tone and colour, and must have some kinds of texture, density and volume, all of which, in order to define contour, position and distance, must harmonize in different ways with the spatial character of the object and with each other. These conditions imply that the possibility of coherence lies in an unconscious synthesis of the media that is made in the act of sensory perception, and the synthesis is one in which the relevant media are realized by their interfusion with the others.

However, coherence does not mean that we can always name the significance of our visual perception, and most of the time the object before us in a landscape, a public space, a room or a street has in it subtleties that are difficult if not impossible to describe or analyse. Such elusiveness only confirms the complexity of the ocean of knowledge and experience that affects our sensory perceptions, and this suggests that sensory knowledge is like a cognitive field in which there are clearly identified objects in its foreground and elusive suggestions of meaning and significance in its background. Between these extremes we can also recognize associations that connect the identifiable objects with related experience and thereby illuminate the inner life of sensory perception. Here we can see how a medium of sensory perception such as light or time can be given a particular significance by self-awareness.

Example: an East Anglian landscape in August. The interfusion of light and time is central to this experience of the object. On this day the light fluctuates and this is a psychological setting for the experience in question, as it helps to create an atmosphere of winter. The context of fluctuating light creates a sense of movement in time, in contrast to the stillness of a very simple visual phenomenon. There is no mood or emotional connotation; it is neither gloomy nor sombre. The space is defined and drawn out by a line of dark trees down the right-hand side, an unbroken windbreak of blurred foliage. This gives it aerial perspective and enhances the depth of the object in other senses – we seem to be finely balanced on a disclosure of some kind, and this feeling is intensified by mute, opaque, and motionless expanses of water gleaming in the middle distance, the interval between them harmoniously related to the spatial depth of the landscape. Though now the light is unchanging the object seems to be balanced on a change of light, so that the proximity of darkness can be felt behind it. A little earlier the atmosphere has been bright and clear – the day is a mixture of cloud and open sky. Though it is around the middle of the day we are now enclosed within an overcast sky that is evenly grey, midway between light and dark. The change of light and atmosphere in a few minutes, together with the intrusion of winter upon the embers of summer, and in stillness, cold, silence and a simple and stable landscape, creates an alternative time within time, that of a delicate order resisting dissolution. As media of sensory perception, light, time and space, and the interactions between them dominate the entire scene, and certain psychological inclinations are implied. This experience is clearly charged with inner significance and seems to foreshadow a dramatic transformation of some kind. Furthermore, the plasticity of light, time and space in their effect upon each other exposes the fluidly changing nature of experience itself. In these responses we see that involvement of the media in sensory perception gives them a considerable power over the realization of phenomena and the unfolding of inner life, providing a compelling example of how such media play an essential part in the constitution of the object.

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*Media of Sensory Perception as a Physical Condition for Phenomena and a Basis for Intelligibility*

The realization of the object from media of sensory perception is no stranger than facts of experience that are perfectly ordinary and familiar. The vast ocean of experience and knowledge that lies within sensory perception, and feeds memory and imagination, is not purely physical either, and cannot be adequately described in terms of physical objects. This is consistent with the distinction between a medium and the object for which it is a medium. Also, the idea that physical conditions for the realization of an object are media of sensory perception can be turned around: the media can be seen as conditions for an object and its materiality. In other words, all objects are objects of experience even though they might never actually be experienced; priority need not be given to materiality.

To take a familiar example, the sound of a tree falling in a forest is subject to the media of sensory perception whether it is heard or not. Contact between such media as material composition, magnitude, movement, the media of sound itself, atmosphere, space and time, etc belongs to the mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness even when the latter does not actually occur. This is more obviously so when we recognize that these physical conditions are systematically related to each other, as media of sensory perception, over the whole of the phenomena. A violin is still a musical instrument even though it is not being played, I know many things even when they are not on my mind, and interrelated media of sensory perception can contribute to the embodiment of an object even when it is not perceived. Thus there are prevenient or otherwise unperceived objects that are not fully realized because they are not experienced, and this incipient realization of the object is necessary to life in obvious ways. Since media for sensory perception evidently represent a physical condition for the realization of the object, and there is no purpose at all in materiality as such, the relation must be one in which the physical exists for the sake of experience, or, more precisely, the for the sake of forms of sentience for which life has significance and value.

This position can be supported by a closer look at the central ideas in this argument. The notion that light should become a medium of sensory perception only with the emergence of life is a mockery of reason, like supposing that a theatre can only be considered to be a theatre when a play is being performed in it. Long before it acts as a medium, light has a fundamental place in physics and the evolution of life, but nonetheless light is at all times a medium of sensory perception, and the same is true of time, space, matter, movement, volume, magnitude and the media for sound, touch and smell. Moreover, since space and time are media for light the anticipation of sensory experience is true of the physical system to which light is fundamental. In this respect there is good reason for seeing the object as being not only constituted but also materially fashioned by light, space and time, etc as interactive media of sensory perception.

In a glass of wine there is no object of smell or taste that is separate from the contact between media of sensory perception. There is physical substance, the liquid made from grapes; there is the air it breathes and the space in which it is seen and handled; there is the time in which it subsists and in which we experience it in one way or another. Considering the smell and taste more closely, there are physical conditions that are also media of sensory perception. Wine is a fluid and the interior of the mouth and throat with which the fluid comes into contact form a surface that is sensitive to the wine. Along with fluidity and surface, volume is a relevant medium of sensory perception, since this determines the capacity to taste the wine properly – a tiny sip would not suffice. Movement is also a medium, as the wine cannot be tasted properly if it is gulped down, and because taste is affected by smell, air is a medium of sensory perception in this case. Sentience and, more specifically, reflective life can be considered inner media, as life of some kind is a necessary medium for sensory perception.

It is not difficult to appreciate that the media of fluidity, surface, volume, movement, air and the media for inner experience are interactive aspects of the object, and that they form a composite with other media and general physical conditions, like the particular chemistry of the drink and its debt to sunlight, soil and climate. These physical conditions also include the particular sensitivity of our sensory faculties. Thus, taking the idea of synthesis a stage further, we can conclude that the object is a composite of interacting physical elements directed by sensory perception through its media. With respect to the object there is no unmediated interaction between the properties of the grape that give flavour to the wine and the physiology of taste buds and neural activity – above all this object requires the interaction with fluidity, surface and volume, etc that transforms the merely physical elements into elements of an experience. Hence an object does not represent a separate phenomenon that is assigned to its own sensory realm in a world of physical relations, but is fashioned by precise and intricate contact between media of sensory perception, involving a complex of physical and experiential relations.

If self-awareness is necessary to the object it is equally true that a combination of the media is already connected with self-awareness, since an act of perception can always complete the object. Hence the media are intrinsically receptive to self-awareness in individual sentient beings and therefore uniquely realized in the object. In this connection the intrinsic receptivity of the media to self-awareness, in the incipient object, is prevenient to life and then a regulating principle for the realization and development of sentient life when it appears. We can justify this position negatively, in that experience itself depends upon the incomplete realization of the object together with the receptivity of the media of sensory perception to self-awareness; the moment of full realization depends upon a prevailing state of incomplete realization. Thus, in order for the object to be perceived at all it must first, with respect to the perceiver, be an incipient object that is receptive to self-awareness.

This relation between the partly and fully realized object, in which we can observe an essential interdependence, reveals the nature of sensory knowledge. Because the object is determined by sensory perception, either as it is realized in experience or intrinsically receptive to it, the involvement of materiality and self-awareness creates order and coherence that is realized as an intelligible world. For life, therefore, the centre of this world is not a set of strictly physical conditions but rather the interfusion of media of sensory perception over many kinds of experience in many forms of life, including reflective life. So it should be possible to move from the idea of mutual involvement in the realization of an object to a satisfying conception of sentience in general.

For example, a person is an object, and, as such, receptive to the sensory perception of other sentient beings, but it is also an object that is receptive to its own sensory perception. Furthermore, it is receptive not only as a physical object like a garden but also as a sentient being, and being receptive in one’s own sentience can be expressed (in reverse) as sensory perception informed by self-awareness (call sentience a past event of which I have some kind of awareness, however obscure. Its receptivity to my present attention to the person to whom I am speaking affects my feelings about her, usually without my knowing it). The intrinsic receptivity of an incipient object to sensory perception can therefore be regarded as preliminary to self-awareness in a sentient being.

Other physical influences that obey their own physical laws act within the mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness. The study, as strictly physical, of light, space, time, matter and movement, etc is obviously fruitful, but achieves its success by abstracting the physical from phenomena. A true understanding of sensory knowledge restores the idea of phenomena to its full significance, and because the media are simultaneously physical and perceptual their interfusion makes sense of things by a synthesis in the object. It may seem improbable that media should be the source of intelligibility, but we have seen that, to a substantial degree, media of *sensory perception* both constitute and materially fashion the object. It is just because they are media of this kind that they synthesise the seemingly incompatible elements of materiality and self- awareness.

Also, because interfusion between the media is essential to their existence the material is ever- changing. Without the interfusion of light, space, time and other media the medium itself cannot act; for example, light cannot exist without space and time, and without the media of sensory perception there can be no object. Moreover, as the media are essential to the intelligibility of physical objects, material organization depends upon the interfusion and so is also constantly in motion. This movement and the movement of self-awareness combine in the realization of the object, and the incipient object that is obedient to strictly physical laws is now realized as a physical object, so that a chisel appears directly to sight as a tool for carving wood and a garden appears as an ordered space for leisure.

If light did not combine with space, time, surface, volume, personal appearance, facial expression and other media I could not spontaneously observe personal qualities in another person. A fixed physical object appearing simply and unalterably could not be given very much character by my perception of it, and this would deprive it of significance, as it would not convey my sense of its character. In order for expression to be seen in a face there must be in it some receptiveness to sensory perception, and this depends on extensive and subtle interfusion between media of sensory perception. This is how the media are incorporated into the object.

For example, spontaneous inclination could result in seeing the light on a face as heightening its shape in a way that creates an effect of sensitivity, or it could, in another perception, heighten details such as the mouth and eyes to create an effect of determination that makes the face unsympathetic (the mobility of facial expression is a medium of sensory perception through which we perceive character and personality, as well as feeling, emotion and experience). Similarly, interfusion of the media is necessary to the recognition of changes of expression in the face, as opposed to going from one fixed image to another. The interfusion enables us to follow very slight changes of expression that can be interpreted as significant alterations in mood and feeling, and to see these changes as belonging to a continuous movement in the same face. Here, for example, light and contour might combine to highlight a cast of countenance, and these together might be interfused with changes of facial expression in the eyes and mouth to give an interested observer the impression of an idea suddenly occurring to the person observed – in this kind of interaction, of which we are only fleetingly aware, our ability to understand is dependent upon the interfusion.

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*Play of Images and Ideas as a Source of Connections in Sensory Perception; Necessity for Alternation between Incipient Object and Physical Object*

We can see further into the activity behind self-awareness and its influence upon sensory perception by looking into the vagaries of inner causation. To begin with the purely mental association of an image of scraping clean a kitchen tile and an image from a golf course known in the past: the time to which this experience refers cannot be analysed in the physical terms which might relate it to memory (it cannot be said the first image comes from time x in these circumstances, and the second from time y in some other circumstances). Furthermore, though it is physical and even purposeful and significant (otherwise it would not be grasped and remembered) there is nothing that unites the images except a feeling that they are connected. In this kind of self- awareness, ideas and images may come together meaningfully and sometimes illuminatingly but often they are completely random and evanescent and we scarcely grasp them, let alone remember them. Here reflection is led not so much by the sense of a significant association as by the pursuit of some kind of connection. So this odd experience suggests that the mind is engaged in a constant search for some connection in images and ideas that imperceptibly come and go when they are of no interest. When, on the other hand, this inner movement makes a significant connection the reflective being, receptive to its own experience, becomes aware of the connection. In the above example of seemingly incongruous connection the interest lies not in the meaning of the association but in discovering an example of spontaneous psychological movement that seems to illuminate the searching nature of self-awareness in free motion.

On some occasions it is only after a moment’s reflection that we see the logic behind a strongly felt connection of images and ideas, and this gives us the impression that sensory perception is thinking for us or, at least, leading us into a cognitive state. To give an example: ‘drift’ in the sense of meaning or intention occurs in private reflection and is superseded by a visual memory of the painting *Stanner’s Dream* (by Brett Whiteley), which depicts a boat with two men drifting in high seas. Clearly, the mental image of this painting contains an awareness of the connection that lies in different senses of ‘drift’; the connection is visually suggested before I consciously grasp it. To make the process explicit in this way confirms the idea of an otherwise unseen inner receptivity to one’s own experience. Such unseen receptivity is continuous with the receptivity of materiality to sensory perception.

Taking a cue from this particular inner event, in dreams we are often led by a play of images and ideas not simply into the logic of a connection that we have not chosen but headlong into a narrative with its own peculiar logic. The strange narrative of a dream might be seen as an extension of the random movement of ideas and images in which we search for connections. It may be that in dreams the free play of images and ideas is unimpeded by deliberate action and the purposeful thought and perception that goes with it, and is therefore developed by the connecting links familiar to us from our experience of life and from stories. A sense of inner searching is contrary to the idea that dreams simply assimilate recent experience to a general sense of oneself, but consistent with the idea that degrees of clarity can exist within the physical object (see above).

All of this implies that the seemingly random association of images and ideas in wandering thought, and its free movement of memory and imagination, is neither pointless nor irrational. Though it may defy the rules of logic and reason, an unregulated movement of this kind is a foundation for making the connections upon which constructive thinking depends; the logical and the random are interdependent in reflective life and virtually simultaneous in our experience. Thus, in ordinary experience the moment of purely sensory experience is a search for connections that may or may not be confirmed by memory and reflection, and other kinds of evidence.

For example, we might, in the instant of noticing the features of somebody at a distance, spontaneously connect this person with our old friend Roger. This might be followed by a deliberate act of remembering that confirms the association, confutes it or leaves us uncertain. Then we might consider the matter more analytically and decide that this person is not tall enough to be Roger. The whole of this process can be considered as an operation of sensory perception, in the sense that we can contrast it - as a form of knowledge - with reflecting upon Roger as we are inclined to regard him or thinking about him in a way that might revise our view of him. Like the wandering thought described at the beginning, sensory perception includes the search for connections that are disregarded when of no interest or, when they are of interest, can be regarded as definite and potentially significant.

To develop this example, when seeing a stranger I might spontaneously perceive him as reassuringly self-possessed and as having a kind of inner strength. In this the person as a physical presence will be receptive to my seeing him so, owing to some interaction of the media of sensory perception (for example, the interaction of light, space and time, surface, shape, volume, mobility, expression, intelligence, authority and general appearance). My act of sensory perception spontaneously seeks out a possibility that is engendered by the interaction of media of sensory perception, as opposed to my simply seeing an object that has certain recognizable properties regardless of who or what sees it, or when. Moreover, the subtle contact within this act of sensory perception might be lost as soon as it is made, and the reassuring strength might evaporate in the ever-changing play of self-awareness in our perception of people and things. What is spontaneously sought out in sensory perception can just as spontaneously be replaced by a different inclination. This change could be caused by feeling that the person’s appearance is not as unusual as at first thought, or by an inexplicable loss of inclination to be reassured by the appearance in question. Having its foundation in the freely associative movement of inner experience, a change in self- awareness could be quite random to the perceiver and requires no justification, and this suggests that the initial moment of sensory perception is less a form of judgement than the searching out of a possibility.

In the perception of a stranger as reassuringly strong we can see not only the object but also how it is determined by self-awareness. From this we can infer that the sense of being in possession of a life, and corresponding interest in oneself, run silently through our least self-centred experience; a tentative knowledge of this kind is natural to beings in whom life is valued in itself. Thus, in sensory perception knowledge is Janus-faced: on one side is knowledge of the object (in conformity with our knowledge of ourselves and the world), and on the other is a muted knowledge of our inner life - a glimpse into the flux of personal inclination and its past. Though we do not see the act of perception, the object carries something of the psychological impulse that lies within it, and when we are alert to this impulse (to use a familiar example) the bicycle itself tells us that we see it so because it conveys us smoothly and effortlessly along. In these relations the wandering inner movement through images, memories and imaginary connections has a person’s experience in its entirety as its field, that of a life that is valued in itself. But clearly this cannot elucidate a person’s entire experience. Rather, the activity of self-awareness is mobile and opportunistic, and systematic only in its conformity to broad patterns of experience (as in our recognition of what is familiar to us).

From such patterns we can infer a richly multiple inner movement that takes place continuously below the threshold of conscious experience. When, for example, I recognize the person who is most familiar to me there must be a thick web of connections alive within the act of sensory perception, and this implies that, in this case, recognition occurs when her presence makes contact through my senses with what is already on my mind.

A corollary of this conception of knowledge, as essentially realized in time, is the necessity for an unperceived and therefore incompletely realized object. Continuous movement in the process of knowing implies successive acts of perception, and just as a moment of illumination draws as much on darkness as on light the perception of an object depends upon its having been unperceived by the subject. We have seen that the object is fully realized in the self-awareness of a sentient being, and that the states of its incomplete and full realization are bridged by the physical interaction of media of sensory perception. So, in order for phenomena to appear, the material must be in one of two forms, either receptive to sensory perception or transformed by self-awareness into a fully realized object. Thus, with reference to what is physically necessary, it is not enough to say that without materiality there would be no object – without materiality informed by media of sensory perception in combination there would be no object.

To argue this particular point more closely, we might consider how physical modes that are also media of sensory perception integrate both phenomena and the incipient object that anticipates them. Imagine, for example, a train moving through the countryside and focus upon the movement itself: the unity of this image owes much to the physical mode of movement, and this is interconnected with numerous other physical modes, such as mass, volume, shape, size and contour in both the train and the countryside. Equally, light, space and time, as well as sound and ambience are such modes, and interaction between all of them is significant to the physical unity of the object. At the same time, because all of these modes are also media of sensory perception unity of the physical aspect is interwoven with the self-awareness that lies in the act of sensory perception. In this respect the phenomenon of a moving train entails a mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness.

When we remove the sentient being and the act of sensory perception, moreover, there remains in the incipient object a unity that is owed to the modes in question, as light, space, time, movement, mass and volume, etc must already be disposed to interact constructively in sensory perception. Even when there is no likelihood of its ever being experienced, the incipient object is prospectively an object of experience due to its form, since the physical modes that give it unity are also media of sensory perception (mineral composition inside a planet that is remote from life of any kind is practically beyond sentience, but it is nevertheless the kind of thing that can be perceived by means of the senses). Therefore, in the alternation of physical object and incipient object mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness takes either an explicit form in the experience of a sentient being or an implicit form in the inclination toward sentience of physical modes that are also media of sensory perception - combined, it may be assumed, with many other physical tendencies that are similarly inclined, such as those which create life and sentience.

This implies that an incipient object is, for example, a visual object in the sense that it may become visible in the physical object, and that when the latter is no longer perceived it does not cease to exist but continues to be incipient. Everything physical is an incipient object and is transcended as a physical object only in the experience of a sentient being, and a universe can gradually evolve as incipient before anything is realized as significant and therefore as a physical object (such an evolution is necessary to the emergence of life into a viable world). Thus our sensory knowledge provides us with a psychological difficulty: when we try to imagine the object as it is when it is not observed, and therefore not given significance by an act of perception, our only resource lies in what we experience (how things look, sound, feel, etc) – namely, in how the object appears when it *is* observed. Though physical in accordance with the laws of nature and sensitive to self-awareness in sentient beings, the incipient object is (by definition) not another kind of phenomenon, being a logical counterpart to the physical object as it is realized in experience. In this respect the incipient object is akin to the influence of past experience upon the constitution of the physical object; each is essential to the realization of phenomena and so not a phenomenon in itself.

Interaction between the incipient object and this influence of past experience is suggested in the experience of making sense of a piece of music simply by repeated listening. Here the source of comprehension is a subtle transformation of the object through its being enquiringly perceived. This occurs quite noticeably in the spontaneous assimilation of the phenomenon to an intelligible order of things, as, for example, when a passage that is obscure on one hearing is heard as having a hymn-like melody on the next hearing. Recognition then takes the form of something discovered, as when we recognize a certain character in the object.

This example illustrates how a change in self-awareness turns the object from one form into another, and by referring directly to relations between the phenomenon and its incipient object we avoid the idea that past experience is stored in the brain. We also avoid the idea that past experience only provides an associative link that enables us to identify the object. Rather, this account analyses the process by which self-awareness determines the constitution of the physical object; it shows that past experience actively enables us to perceive the object as the expression of an intelligible order that is itself indebted to self-awareness. Therefore, neither the conversion of incipient object into phenomenon nor the action of past experience can be described in terms of strictly physical causation, both must entail the mutual involvement of materiality and self- awareness. For this to be so, the past must live in the sentient being in all of its complexity, and not simply in the aspect that is conducive to analysis.

To suggest a way that we can see this complexity, the bodily realization of a sentient being is identifiable with its life. This means that self-awareness takes form in the expression of inclination through physical engagement with oneself and other things. Correspondingly, the object is defined by a physical assertion of significance that is created by self-awareness. For example, it is by being aware of my past experience that I see a cup as a vessel for drinking tea or coffee – this awareness is in what appears to me and it gives the physical object its essence. (In such ordinary cases the essence of an object lies in how it is normally perceived by many people – and, in one way or another, the essence of any object lies in the significance that it can have for a sentient being.) Furthermore, the strictly physical aspects like shape, luminosity, colour, hardness, size and position can only be fully realized when a sentient being perceives the object and thereby apprehends *them* in relation to its essence. Prior to this they are incipient to the object by being material modes that are also media of sensory perception, and therefore belong to an ever- changing order of things that is oriented towards life and sentience.

Hence the involvement of sentience is part of the essence of any world of physical objects, and it is beside the point to ask whether such a world can exist independently of life. The size, position and movement of an object are only realized in relation to a sentient being in which these modes are equally realized, and without it they can only belong to an incipient object that is prevenient to sensory perception. With respect to the incipient object, we must assume that these and other modes are interactive and evolving, parallel with but distinguished from the world of physical objects that is known to sentient beings. By definition, we cannot perceive or imagine the majesty of Mount Everest or the speed of a cheetah as they are in the incipient object.

These points are sufficient to establish the mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness as a sphere for the influence of past experience upon sensory perception. The material, when it joins with the self-awareness of sentient beings, is adapted to their experience and therefore to their past, and this implies that past experience is located in sentient beings and the things with which they are engaged, or, to put it another way, in the world. Therefore, the past is alive in more than the brain and body, and must be included in the self-aware activities of purposeful life and experience. My seeing the cup as a vessel for drinking tea or coffee keeps alive the self-awareness upon which it draws, and in this the past is kept alive in my experience of life (seeing the cup affirms the significance of the object and so affirms my earlier experiences of it). Evidence of this can be seen in the sense of an intelligible order that is both necessary to and confirmed by our recognition of the object, and this reciprocal action depends also on the rich diversity of things that are similarly involved in our lives. The cup is clearly related to numerous other objects and its relations to them establish the sense of intelligible order. Furthermore, this sense of intelligible order is developed by the constant and largely hidden search for connections that is characteristic of our inner experience.

The account of experience offered here is opposed to mechanistic theories that are based on a conception of physical interaction to which self-awareness is subordinate. For if all phenomena arise out of a mutual involvement of the physical and psychological then they cannot be fully represented by a predominantly physical analysis. We can see this condition exemplified in the idea that the object is realized and given its essence by a self-awareness that spontaneously unites the incipient object with the past of a sentient being. Each instance of such an event is necessarily individual, since it is only possible at a given time for a particular sentient being with its own cognitive history. This does not exclude the close affinity between different events that is necessary to the existence of a world and sentient beings, or the many ways in which mechanical relations are indispensible to their physical and psychological constitution (with respect to our everyday experience of things the differences in perception are usually of no account; for example, whatever the elusive inner subtleties of sensory perception, I nearly always see a given cup simply as a vessel for drinking tea or coffee, and so would other people). However, in addition to the object, the sense of intelligible order also depends on the spontaneous and untraceable action in sensory perception, and a sense of intelligible order does not imply the possession of a consistent perception of things and their significance. Inconsistency and self-contradiction are extensive in our experience; for example, a mother who is strongly opposed to infidelity might also approve of her adolescent son’s sexual freedom, and with complete disregard for its effect on his victims. Such inconsistency often informs the significance that is given to the object by past experience.

Mechanistic analysis discloses a feature that is common to many instances of a certain kind of object or action, and therefore fails to see what is distinctive to the object in any single act of sensory perception. Hence the idea of conditioned reflex, though useful, delivers much less to the illumination of human life and experience than the resources of dramatic form in the hands of Shakespeare or Sophocles or Dickens – here our understanding of ourselves and other people, and of things in general, is portrayed with a true sense of the internal operations of sensory perception. This is widely demonstrated, both explicitly and implicitly, in Part 2.

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*Sensory Perception and Time*

The conventional and scientific understanding of time is dominated by the conception of moving inexorably forward in a succession of moments, and this is commonly referred to as the arrow of time. Whatever other senses are given to the concept are generally taken to be subsidiary or subordinate to this one; a view that I wish to challenge in this brief section.

In phenomena the arrow of time and the scrambled time of past experience are interconnected; what is specifically physical is interconnected with self-awareness. For example, in the visual perception of a bicycle the arrow of time is present in the continuity of this physical object with experience of a physical set of circumstances, while the bicycle is also particular to the perceiver. To an experienced cyclist it could well be a graceful means of physical motion attuned to the rhythmical movement of the body, but to someone who has suffered a serious fall while cycling the object may be experienced in sensory perception as disturbingly unstable. The element of self- awareness that spontaneously determines the constitution of the object imparts a significance that is independent of time as an ordered succession of events; there is no perception of all of the experiences that lie behind an experienced cyclist’s perception or behind another perceiver’s quite different perception.

The obscure temporality of self-awareness in this respect is also present in memory: when remembering a past experience we do not remember the time that has past between the memory and what is remembered, only the character of what has been experienced. We must infer the actual time of such an event by connecting it with other events and circumstances that we can place in time – in other words, by way of physical association (one form of the arrow of time). Hence the arrow of time corresponds to specifically physical time as a medium of sensory perception, and scrambled time reflects the obscured temporality of significance as it determines the constitution of the object in self-awareness. So, we can conclude that, in sensory perception, self-awareness is a function of both time’s arrow and scrambled time. Sensory knowledge occurs in a forward moving succession of moments and so the operations of self-awareness must move accordingly, while this process is shaped by the spontaneous influence of earlier experiences that are scrambled in time but nevertheless determine the constitution of the object. The latter is essential to the object’s significance to the perceiver, and thus it is impossible to establish any priority that might be claimed for the arrow of time in defining the nature of time itself.

This implies that time belongs to a realm in which the sensory perception and experience of a sentient being can be realized. The realm is that of physical elements which are simultaneously media of sensory perception, and include - along with time -space, light, movement, volume, size, matter, surface, temperature, density and the media of sound, taste, smell and touch. When we consider scrambled time in its own realm the appearance of vague abstraction that it seemed to have in comparison with the arrow of time is suddenly replaced by a sense of its richly concrete significance. As a medium of sensory perception acting in concert with many other such media, scrambled time is systematically related to these media in the realization of all objects. This implies that generally the arrow of time moves towards or sustains forms of life in which things are perceived and acquire significance. Thus the two aspects of time are interdependent, and, as a medium of sensory perception acting in concert with the other media, time either moves towards the realization of sentient life or is fundamental to such life where it emerges. In essence, time belongs to a system that unites materiality and the experience of sentient beings so that life and its significance are possible.

A geometrical space is similarly shaped by our perception of the objects in it and our spontaneous interest in them – our concentration on a particular object tends to collapse the space in which it is perceived (it becomes a surrounding for the object). Just as time belongs to a system of interrelated media of sensory perception so do the other media. Materiality, as represented by, among other things, the arrow of time, aerial perspective, the laws of motion and electro-magnetism, reflects the order that is necessary to anchor sensory perception and thereby give a stable foundation to the object – the uniformity of nature is necessary to experience. In this connection, we can think of physical laws and the regularity of nature as an armature upon which self-aware sensory perception realizes the individual object. This implies that because the arrow of time is necessary to life it is also necessary to sentience; it is only by virtue of a continuous succession of moments that a coherent action occurs and this includes an act of sensory perception.

To illustrate the relation between these aspects of time: imagine a boy watching his older brother fling a stone into a lake, and consider this action as the object. Since time is not an isolated medium of sensory perception but is interconnected with such media as space and movement we might extend the analysis to these three elements. Thus the physical aspect of the object can be conceived in certain ways that are related to the three media. The passing of the stone through the air can be timed and so can the boy’s reactions in apprehending the action that he observes; the distance that is travelled by the stone can be measured along with the spatial extent of the throw both in height and trajectory; finally, the movement of the stone can be measured in speed and direction. (These calculations are related to time, space and movement as media of sensory perception because, though they are considered in their physical aspect, it is only to sentient beings that such things as time elapsed, distance, direction and speed are of any concern. The laws of nature are laws for the forms of life that engage with and make sense of it.)

When we turn to the object as it is for the boy, we might offer a different kind of description, based more precisely upon an understanding of time, space and movement as media of sensory perception. They affect the nature of the object for him in the snap of energy in his brother’s wrist, the soaring motion of the stone through the air, and the resolution of this compact action in a distant splash of water in the lake. Spontaneously, this perception draws, at least, upon physical actions in the past that are of the same kind and display a similar expression of timing, strength and suppleness, together with past experience of his brother; in this respect the object is constituted by the scrambled time of self-awareness that lies within the act of sensory perception. In addition, the object may be constituted by the intimation that in the future, when he is older, the boy will be able to do the same as his brother, and this future represents a time that can be imagined but not measured or specified.

This conception of time is supported by the consideration of sensory knowledge in which we have seen that inner experience - like wandering thought and imagery, reverie and dreams - is exploratory in nature. A largely hidden enquiry into connections between ideas and images is characteristic of our inner life, and this is necessary to the realization of the object in sensory perception. Since the definition of the object and its essence depend upon its assimilation to an intelligible order of things our knowledge in this respect depends upon a continuous sense of how experience and its objects are interrelated. We do not consciously work out all of the relations that give us an ordered world, but acquire them spontaneously through our sensory responses, and so the inner search for connections is fundamental to sensory knowledge and the definition of physical objects. Hence there would be no purpose in the arrow of time without the interconnection that it has with the scrambled time of continuous revision and discovery.

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*Sensory Perception as the Basis of Knowledge*

It is pertinent to the opposition of phenomena to the strictly material that there must be something in our experience, however abstract the object may be, that is owed to sensory perception. Experience must also have an underlying continuity, and this prevailing condition must include involvement with the media of sensory perception; otherwise there would not be the continuous flow of sensory perception that we know to be characteristic of experience. Thus light, space and time, etc must be constantly present to experience in a way that is sensitive to the rich and complex combinations that are disclosed in varying degrees by a realization of the object. Hence, even in the formulation of a theory, movement of thought is a medium of sensory perception, involving a kind of kinetic sensation. For example, having the idea of a mutual involvement of materiality and self- awareness is sensory because the idea of materiality comes from experience of physical objects. The kinetic sensation could not occur in a purely abstract realm, as the idea would then lack intuitive substance. It is often suggested that mathematics is a purely abstract realm, though it could only come, in one way or another, from the experience of physical things - to which number and measurement apply in many forms. Furthermore, if number is abstract so is the significance of a getting from one place to another (by bicycle for example) or of establishing social harmony (by reaching agreement). Nobody thinks that either getting from one place to another or social harmony belongs to a purely abstract realm. By virtue of its significance the phenomenon is always abstract in some senses, but, equally, thought and experience are always in some sense physical.

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*Sensory perception and the mind-body question*

We have seen that the act of sensory perception determines the constitution of the object, and this implies that assimilation of inner experience to its physical aspect is a category mistake - as in supposing that such inner experience consists of cerebral activity, or that thoughts, memories, fantasies and imaginings can be stored in the brain (Ryle, Tanney 2009). The physical object is in essence an object of experience and therefore the act of perception is one half of a relation and the object is the other. To treat the inner motivation of sensory perception as an object is to violate this relation by turning perception of the object into another object. This invites an infinite regress. If perception of the object is itself an object of experience then this implies a further act of sensory perception which must, according to the materialist’s initial assumption, also be an object, and so on. Sensory perception depends upon physical things but is not itself a physical object, rather it is a realization of the object. Hence it is necessary to avoid turning this form of consciousness it into one of the physical things of which we are conscious.

There is a problem concerning the influence of the brain upon experience because it is obvious that causation takes no clear form in this kind of relation. However, a point can be made in this connection by thinking about the nature of sensory perception. When I see a cup, the object is abstract as well as concrete – that is to say, I see a vessel for drinking tea or coffee, or some other beverage, and this takes the physical form of being a certain size, material composition, position in space and time, etc. Without these physical properties or something akin to them the cup could not be a vessel for drinking tea or coffee. But just as the brain is different in kind from my inner experience of things, so the physical properties of the cup are different in kind from its essence as a vessel for drinking tea or coffee, or the physical properties of a cricket bat are different in kind from its essence as a piece of equipment for playing a game. What connects the relations of mind and body to relations between the abstract essence of the object and its physical properties is the mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness. Thus, the essence of the cup (or any other physical object) does not emerge directly out of its physical properties, and similarly the inner experience of my thoughts, feelings, inclinations, memories, fantasies and impulses does not emerge directly out of the body or the brain.

This suggests that the question to be asked is not, ‘How does the inner experience of a sentient being arise out of its physical body?’, but rather, ‘What are the physical forms that are associated with inner experience?’ or ‘How do you understand the physical aspect of what sentience is for the subject?’ In my sensory perception of seeing the cup as a vessel for drinking tea or coffee, the physical aspect of the object includes its size, material composition and position in space and time; so, what are the physical aspects of my experience of looking in this case? Since there is a mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness in both the object and the act of sensory perception, we should be concerned with the corresponding physical form that is taken by the inner experience of a sentient being.

We can approach this question by looking more closely at the physical aspect of the object, for it is only a beginning to describe the relations between them in terms of certain obvious features like size, material composition and position in time and space. In essence the cup is a vessel for drinking tea or coffee, but this perception belongs to a manifold of related objects and human activities. In the absence of tables, tea leaves, coffee beans, the means for boiling water, along with social conventions and other appropriate occasions there would not be an essence of the kind that we ascribe to the cup. Of course, all of these secondary or subsidiary elements take a variety of physical forms, and this implies an extensive mutual involvement of the physical and self- awareness. It might be so extensive that, in relation to any particular perception of a cup, we might never get to the end of all of the ways in which materiality and self-awareness are mutually involved in each other.

Nonetheless, certain rare episodes of introspective self-knowledge give us good reason to believe that this manifold of relations spontaneously affects our immediate perception of the object. For example, the sight of an ordinary bicycle can be a definite pleasure to somebody who has regularly enjoyed long bicycle rides over a number of years – here the manifold might include taking pleasure in knowing the countryside and its forms of life, taking pleasure in physical exercise of a particular kind, mastering an exhilarating form of solitude and looking after the machine that makes these possible.

Furthermore, we should regard the manifold of relations as Janus-faced, since it must apply to both the object and the inner experience that determines its constitution; it is only in so far as the manifold is included in the experience that it plays a part in the constitution of the cup as a physical object. Hence it can be included in the physical aspect of sensory perception - the phenomenal structure of the object is an essential part of that physical aspect, and this merging of the identity of the object with the act of sensory perception may suggest a way into understanding the physical aspect of inner experience.

When we turn the analysis of this manifold from the physical aspect of the object to the physical aspect of her subjective experience, the pleasure of the cyclist at seeing an ordinary bicycle reflects the inner motivation suggested above. Her response is therefore affected by many occasions in which she has enjoyed the countryside, a particular form of physical exercise, the solitude of this experience and attention to her own bicycle. In all of these it is easy to appreciate the mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness, since these elements of the manifold are clearly bound up with many kinds of physical properties. For example, the pleasure of physical exercise in this case takes the form of a sustained rhythmical movement of the body in co-ordination with the movement of the bicycle, while the enjoyment of solitude takes the form of moving over long distances and the feeling of time being suspended by the absence of an immediate goal.

Moreover, the different elements of the manifold can be seen as mutually enhancing in this example. The vitality and beauty of the landscape gives to the experience one kind of excitement which may be further stimulated by both the freedom of physical motion and the sense of peace and solitude; in this respect, the elements of the manifold might enfold one another. This point of view enables us to clarify the inner significance of the ordinary bicycle to the cyclist, by showing how her subjective experience is shaped by the mutual involvement of materiality and self- awareness. Thus, it demonstrates a way in which we can see the physical aspect of what sentience is for the subject. The physical properties of the bicycle, its size, colour, shape and material composition are complemented by the physical properties of a landscape, location in this landscape, and her own body in motion.

This example exemplifies the experiential core of relations between sensory experience and materiality. It provides us with a basis for understanding the physical aspect of what sentience is for the subject. We can see, therefore, that the interaction concerned does not rely on an assimilation of mind to the physical (or vice versa) but depends upon the mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness in certain interrelated ways. In the first place, the object is realized in accordance with the inner motivation that gives it some significance for the perceiver. This identifies the physical properties of the object with an essential character that is abstract in nature. The motivation, in turn, is composed of inclinations that have been aroused by earlier experiences which themselves can only exist by virtue of the mutual involvement of materiality and self- awareness. Moreover, the active contribution of such inclinations to the essence of the object lies in a manifold of relations between them which can be seen as intensifying the identity of the object as a specific realization of inner motivation, and as a concentration of the mutual involvement itself. This implies the inclusion of a wide range of physical objects from many different realms of experience.

Consequently, the physical aspect of what sentience is for the subject demands a form of enquiry that involves the dynamics of inner experience and cannot simply be assimilated to the science of vision or hearing or touch, etc. Thus, we can see why it is a sentient being and not its brain that has sensory perception; the brain has no ‘personal’ history that gives the object its inner motivation, but is central to the machinery that makes the experience possible, and so belongs to the study of physiology.

With this in mind we can return to the initial problem concerning the place of mental causation in a material world. In the theory that is proposed here there are no longer anomalies created by the need to show how one kind of causation can be integrated with another. The mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness is essential to both experience and the physical object. It has already been seen in this enquiry that experience of physical things is essential for experience to take any form at all, and that the physical object is given its essence by an inner motivation generated by the sentient being by which it is perceived. When a sentient being acts upon the world, by perceiving it or in some other way, there is no opposition of physical and mental causation since the mutual involvement between them is present in all aspects of the event. When I see a cup as a vessel for drinking tea or coffee, materiality and self-awareness are involved in each other in my act of perception and, corresponding with this, in the object that is perceived. The physical object gives content to my experience and my experience gives the cup its identity.

It is easy to see from these ideas that the problem concerning the place of mental causation is created by assuming that material and mental things are distinct from each other. The problem for belief in the mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness is also quite easy to see. For if the constitution of the physical object is determined by the inner motivation of sentient beings then what is the physical constitution of things when there is no observation of them or, more dramatically, when there are no sentient beings to observe them?

In several places, we have seen that the answer to this question lies in a distinction between the physical object and what I call the incipient object. The former is the object of sensory perception upon which our understanding of phenomena is based, while the latter refers to the primarily physical aspect of things that is transformed by perception into the physical object. Necessarily, the incipient object must be pre-phenomenal and also act and evolve in accordance with the laws of nature that are realized in the physical objects that make up a world of experience for sentient beings. Otherwise such a world could not exist. But this requires, in addition to the natural elements and the laws that govern them, that the physical aspect must be disposed to combine with sensory perception in a realization of the physical object.

In this connection, attention has been drawn to a particular kind of identification. Because light, space, time, movement, temperature, mass, volume, surface, sound waves, and many other physical modes are also media of sensory perception, we have good reason to see them as elements of the incipient object that are oriented towards life and sentience. This view is especially compelling because the idea that these modes become media of perception only when life and sentience appear defies the logic of causation. Light is always a medium of vision and must be so when the object is not perceived, and even before the emergence of a being that can see. Though in the absence of life and sentience things cannot expressly include the mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness, it is anticipated in the incipient object by physical modes that are also media of sensory perception. This ties the incipient object to the possibility of sensory perception, and thereby unifies the physical aspect of things with the animate world of phenomena and experience. In the light of this unity, we can conclude that there is no separation of mental from physical causation; rather, they are involved in each other in every aspect of the world.

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*The Brain’s Experiential Identity*

We are beguiled by the idea of consciousness into regarding it as some kind of object, when it is primarily the realization of objects; that is, the sensory perception shaped by inner motivation that asserts an abstract significance in what we experience as physical. Therefore, as the sensing of an object, this inner experience cannot be either a spiritual substance of quasi-physical constitution or a non-spiritual substance that is actually physical. The brain is a physical object that is instrumental in making experience possible in much the same way as the cup as incipient object is instrumental in making our experience of it possible. Neither is the living experience of seeing the cup and, for example, deciding to make use of it.

Since our sensory perception is a realization of the object, and the object acquires its essence from the inner life of such perception, consciousness may depend upon a subliminal self-awareness of the whole experience of a sentient being. If this is seen as relevant to every experience, then in any given perception there is a simultaneous inclusion of all its past experience. At the physical extreme of an act of sensory perception is the world of atoms and sub-atomic particles, and at the experiential extreme is a subliminal contact with the whole experience of the sentient being concerned. Of that whole experience, we should expect the past to be most relevant in earlier experiences that are closely related to the physical object that is presently being perceived (as illustrated in the example of the cyclist). Sensory perception and realization of the physical object would be impossible if the whole of our past experience were not almost completely subliminal. In this analysis, we can appreciate that consciousness is not in the brain or ‘in the air’, but is rather a complex act of realization in which the object is constituted by the physical as modelled in an appropriate way by past experience. Equally, there will be a tendency for each act of sensory perception to enrich the object that is recognized and give substance to future experiences of similar kind. This is an essential statement of the mutual involvement of materiality and self- awareness.

In addition to the need for sensory knowledge of oneself and the world such things as nourishment and bodily control depend upon cohesion of experience and its physical aspect in the body. So, it is not difficult to suggest a way in which the brain might serve an instrumental purpose in bodily control. In order for me to move it is not sufficient that I possess a torso and limbs together with a reasonable space in which to move. Obviously, I must be co-ordinated with respect to bodily movement and possess an adequate sense of balance. Thus, the experience of running or swimming depends upon capacities that are not in my torso and limbs but give me the ability to regulate the movement of my body as a whole. In this simple example, we can see how communication between the body and brain enables us to enjoy experiences that are basic to our existence as sentient beings. And if the experience of co-ordination and balance is mutually involved with activity in the body and brain, then the relation between sensory experience and brain is less than one of identity and more than simply a correlation. Hence the growth of neural connections in the brain is the manifestation of a developing capacity for living experience in the sentient being that owns it.

Just as the material composition, geographical location and other physical properties are mutually involved with the cultural identity of the Eiffel Tower, so the material activity of brain and body is mutually involved with the self-aware inner experience of a sentient being; these physical characteristics contribute to the vast array of material elements (also illustrated in the example of the cyclist) that make up the physical aspect of subjective experience in an act of sensory perception. To be more specific: the mutual involvement of the brain and sensory perception means that physical activity in the brain enables me to enjoy and make sense of a piece of music, and if neural connections in my brain were depleted my experience would not be the same (just as the Eiffel Tower would not be the same object if it were made of plasticine, or situated in the Sahara Desert). Correspondingly, my experience of the music stimulates cerebral activity which creates further neural connections, and these will affect my experience of listening in the future. Superficially, the causation here may appear to be impossible, but, like any other physical object, the brain acquires its essence from the inner motivation of an act of sensory perception; materiality and self-awareness are mutually involved in its realization, and so it is not merely a lifelessly physical substance. Akin to the life in a perception of the Eiffel Tower, as a physical object the brain is realized in perception, with the significant difference that, as the organ in a sentient being that controls thought and perception, it is experienced in its function - which is that of contributing to the realization of other objects. So, when the Eiffel Tower acquires its essence from an act of sensory perception so does the brain of the perceiver, and this is why an experience of listening to music can stimulate cerebral activity.

To say that the brain acquires its essence from the inner motivation of an act of sensory perception demands some clarification, since it is obvious that, generally, the brain is not directly perceived. But, like other internal organs it is indirectly perceived. Just as the lungs are perceived in the breathing in of air, or the heart and circulation are perceived in the movement and vitality of the mind and body, the brain is perceived in such faculties as co-ordination and balance, and in the perception of other objects. Thus, we can appreciate that a direct perception of the Eiffel Tower must also be an indirect perception of the brain of the perceiver, and that the physical aspect of the object, its size, material composition, location and so on, is matched by the structures, neural connections and activities that constitute the physical aspect of the brain. Since the essence of the brain lies to a significant degree in our sensory perception in general, and materiality is mutually involved with self-awareness in the object, our perception of this organ by perceiving other objects is mutually involved with cerebral activity that is physical; an effect upon one will be reflected in the other. Musical experience, for example, stimulates physical activity in the brain and physical changes in the brain affect that kind of experience in the future.

To take this argument a little further, some people possess an ability to distinguish the different qualities in various performances of a piece of music, with respect to such elements as intonation, tempo, rhythm, articulation, sound, phrasing and harmony, and the subtle interaction of these elements. This kind of judgement is undoubtedly dependent not only on regulatory powers that are interconnected with activity in the brain, but also on the development of these powers by listening attentively to music over a long period of time. Essentially, however, there is no difference between this example and that of the runner or swimmer, physical activity of the brain is no less a matter of physiological function; it would not change things even if a very complex and minute account could be given for the cerebral activity that accompanied every nuance of a sensitive listener’s experience. The listener’s mental and sensuous experience exemplifies the essence of the brain (which, like the essence of a cup, is abstract and aesthetic), and not the physiology with which this essence is mutually involved.

We might put it this way: the cup is abstract in being a vessel for drinking from and aesthetic in its physical realization - in being, for example, a cup of pleasing shape and colour. In this connection, the essence of the brain lies in its being subjectively instrumental to the cup’s realization as a sensory phenomenon, and therefore aesthetic in its effect upon sensation, mood and feeling, and abstract in promoting an intelligible order of things that is focused on the cup. The perceptual act that gives identity and character to the object indirectly gives identity and character to the brain, as an agent of sensuous experience and intelligible order, and it is in this complex psychological effect, and not in its physiology, that its essence must lie. Furthermore, because it must be co-extensive with the inner motivation within sensory perception, this action must include contact with the vast ocean of subliminal experience that is the source of inner motivation.

As with the body as a whole, the essence of the brain lies in what it can do, and this gives us an answer to the mind/body question. Because the physical object is never simply physical but always a mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness, there is no incongruity in the idea of the brain as a physical object that is involved with thought and inner experience. If the essence of the object (such as a cup) is abstract and aesthetic then it can be assumed that the cerebral action that is required for its realization is abstractive and aesthetical; since, of the many things that make up the physical aspect of inner motivation, the body and brain are the most directly and generally instrumental to the realization of the object. Therefore, from the viewpoint of this enquiry, the obvious fact that the essence of the object lies in the subject’s self-awareness means that the essence of the brain lies in its being instrumental to the self-aware activity of the person who realizes the object, and this self-aware activity is what we call inner or subjective experience, or consciousness.

Since the brain itself is an object that is realized in sensory perception, it must at least be realized in the self-aware activity to which it is instrumental – as the expression of a physical object that is perceived indirectly via the realization of other objects. For example, seeing a cup is also seeing something of the inner motivation that gives the cup its essence, and seeing something of the body and brain that are instrumental to the realization of the cup. Therefore, the brain represents a subtle interaction of materiality and self-awareness, and this is confirmed by a reciprocal influence that is known, in which experience alters the physiology of this organ and its physiological changes alter experience and the character of sensory perception. These indications of interactive causation between the physical and mental avoid the ungainly imposition of one kind of cause upon another.

Thus, we have seen how the brain contributes to our subjective realization of the physical object, and of itself as a physical object. In keeping with the purpose of this work, I try to show the relations between mind and body in terms of the mutual involvement of materiality and self- awareness. Like all other physical objects, the brain is not simply physical, and I reject the attempt to force the mind into a physical model. Instead, I examine the physical aspect of what sensory perception is for the subject. Hence, the example of the cyclist reveals the manifold of phenomena that we can assume to play a significant part in an act of sensory perception. Physiology is introduced into this account by indicating how the interaction between body and brain is essential to our sentient life, and this leads into an assimilation of this physiology to the physical aspect of subjective experience. So, in accordance with the mutual involvement, and therefore in accordance with the logical relationship between perception and the object, I propose a vital distinction between the essence of the brain and its physiology.

In conclusion, since all physical objects and all experience reflect the mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness, the world must also reflect it, and this means that thought and inner experience are as natural to the world as the body or any other physical object. Here we have seen that relations of this kind are exemplified in the mutual interplay of experience that is essentially physical with a physiology that is essentially experiential. We have also seen that sensory perception is experience of the object and, by definition, not itself the object. Therefore, subjective experience and consciousness do not have any location in space or, more specifically, in any part of the body; rather, the mutual involvement means that they simultaneously animate and are animated by the body and brain in their own causal sphere.

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**Sensory Knowledge and Figurative Language**

*Phenomena, Intersubjectivity and Figurative Language*

Sensory experience, including its effect upon memory and imagination, is cognitive in a sense that is intersubjective. A life that is valued in itself is necessarily intersubjective because it depends upon an understanding of oneself and the world that is derived from a common experience in which the individual is purposefully involved. Purposeful involvement is at once cognitive, because acquiring and defending knowledge is continuous with such involvement, and intersubjective, because knowledge is acquired and contested between the members of a community. A constant search for connections is the basis for sensory perception as a means of extending the awareness of one’s life as valued in itself in constantly changing circumstances. Thus, while we are fully alive we are always engaged either in some form of knowledge or in a search for connections that will result in knowledge, and this engagement is implicitly intersubjective. In the sense that I know many things even though they are not on my mind, I know, when I identify an object as a bicycle, that I see it in much the same way as other people see it. If I respond to the music of Xenakis my doing so is not merely a private experience, as it affirms the value of that music for the community in which I participate. While this may be quite indirect, and have nothing to do with my intentions, by its very nature my response affirms the value of a common life in a particular way.

In so far as the object is determined by self-awareness, and therefore by the sense of a life that is valued in itself, the act of sensory perception is an expression of intersubjectivity. Therefore, though the object is a phenomenon to a particular reflective life in action, its realization also implies involvement in the experience of other people. Since a life can only be valued in itself through the shared experience that is acquired in a community, for which values are established by a particular way of life, the object is at once distinctively individual and intersubjective in nature.

Realization of the object also requires that in the interfusion space, time and movement there should some kind of embodiment. As a medium of sensory perception, embodiment can take forms as different from one another as gold and smoke, and the form will determine how embodiment interacts with the other media. It is evident too that embodiment is distinguished by a number of incorporated media, such as surface, volume, shape, colour, size, density, temperature, and disposition. As an embodiment of these qualities we might envision a change of expression in the face of someone who is being observed.

Consider the change of expression in a batsman’s face as he plays a cover drive. All of the media that have been mentioned will contribute in an organized way to the visual perception of this change as the expression moves from one of concentration to one of decisive action as he plays through the line of the ball. In this respect the perception will be the same for all of the spectators who can see the batsman’s face clearly. However, between those who are with him and those who are against him there will be a difference in the self-awareness that affects their response to both the object and the media upon which it depends. If, for example, the stroke is successful then for those who are with the batsman his change of expression will tend to be perceived as affirmative, while to those who are against him it will tend to be perceived as threatening and obstructive. In this difference, the effect of space, time, movement, embodiment and light might also be different (the light of illumination for one may be light of exposure to the other). The distinction could also be made by comparing the change of expression as it might be for a casual spectator of the game as compared with an experienced player. In the perception of the latter there might be a subtle sense of the movement of the whole body expressed in the change of expression, and this would influence his response to movement as a medium of sensory perception in this experience. Thus we can appreciate that the individual nature of the phenomenon, the moulding of the media by self- awareness, and the intersubjectivity of the object are aspects of the same act of sensory perception.

Hence an analysis of Viv Richards’ cover drive (to modify the example somewhat), might be receptive to such qualities as its poise, balance, fluency, power and timing, a perception of movement that is responsive to self-awareness plays an essential part, and can be contrasted with the merely physical nature of movement. So while the game is open to scientific analysis, in which relations such as those between trajectory and speed of the ball and contact with the bat can be measured in order to explain what happens in the stroke, this strictly physical perspective is abstracted from the phenomenon, and does not very substantially represent the batsman’s action as an expression of his taking part in the game.

In its concern for what is strictly physical about the object (and event or process) scientific understanding can be determinate, as we have suggested in the case of movement. But a clear representation of phenomena demands a language that is sensitive to the physical assertion of significance. An event in which the object is realized by self-awareness is by definition individual, though it is obvious that a stroke played by a batsman is seen as much the same by many spectators. Certainly many different observers could make the same kind of analysis of a stroke, notwithstanding differences in sensory perception due to the individual nature of the phenomenon. To defuse this apparent inconsistency we should recall that the significance of anything lies in the intersubjectivity that informs a life that is valued in itself; because the object belongs to a common life, our perception is largely at one with the perceptions of other people. Hence, when a number of people are involved the intersubjectivity of the object or event enables an authoritative judgement to be made, based partly on the coincidence of many similar instances of sensory perception.

These observations suggest a difference in language between science and knowledge of the object as a phenomenon. So, ‘when one body exerts a force on another, the second simultaneously exerts a force equal in magnitude and opposite in direction to the first’ expresses a law in the form of a proposition, and is alluded to in the physical description of the movement of ball and bat given above. On the other hand, the conception of a particular cover drive in terms of poise, balance, fluency, power, timing, concentration and self-assertion can be seen as a proposition, but it does not exemplify a law for the successful execution of a cover drive - even if it is relevant to one that is effective. In this respect the individuality of the phenomenon demands a use of language that merges the proposition with description in another way.

Description can be receptive to the individuality of the object or event, and thereby to the action as a physical assertion of significance. It allows for such qualities as balance and timing to be descriptively ascribed to the stroke and at the same time positively or negatively related to its purpose. By describing this action in terms of balance and timing (especially as interconnected with psychological factors like concentration and self-assertion) I implicitly propose an interpretation – namely that these characteristics help to make the stroke successful. They are the things in an event or action that stand out for attention, and therefore the integration of description and proposition gives a figurative significance to the relevant language (Grice 1975). In so far as they unite a visual impression of freely flowing action with the player’s intention, they figure the physical assertion of significance. Thus the comparison shows that an adequate representation of the object, event or action requires a figurative element. Conversely, since laws concerning what is strictly physical are not individual but universal, the physical assertion of significance must be avoided in scientific description.

The requirement of figurative language as opposed to the requirement that it should be avoided makes a considerable difference. Because related to phenomena as the physical assertion of significance, it is an expression of the necessity of sentience (or its prospect) to the existence of things. So, while the laws of nature promise a stable knowledge of predictable objects and events, they can only do so by excluding from analysis the necessity of sentience, and therefore of the individuality of the object and of everything non-physical that falls within the world of phenomena. Alongside this we should explicitly state what is strongly implied in these remarks, namely that the figurative language to which we refer is a perfectly stable form of rational analysis and, since it is required by the constitution of phenomena, it is the right language for them.

**Part 2**

In the second part of this book the conception of sensory knowledge that is presented in Part 1 is applied to works of art. Thus, Titian’s *Assumption of the Virgin* is seen as a physical assertion of significance by means of the painter’s physical medium. Two Sonnets of Shakespeare are seen as the use of figurative language as it is related to self-awareness in the realization of the physical object, and *Hamlet* (interpreted as a complete work) is seen as a dramatic portrayal of intersubjective experience. The different emphasis in these approaches shows us something of the scope with which art reveals the nature of sensory knowledge in reflective life.

**The Physical Work of Art: Titian’s *The Assumption of the Virgin***

The foregoing analysis of sensory perception and the physical object has implications for art forms, such as painting, sculpture and music. For example, in Titian’s *The Assumption of the Virgin* we see the physical assertion of significance in the beauty of physical features (the extreme harmony of vibrant red against a deep aerial gold - along with other colours and aspects of form - *is* the beauty of colour in the painting. These elements do not merely symbolize or illustrate the significance of the assumption, this significance is asserted in the physical interrelations of form, colour and human portrayal. Even when we cannot pinpoint what makes the painting beautiful, the aesthetic effect lies in the abstract and physical as one, and not in the subordination of one to the other. Thus the aesthetic realization does not approximate to an ideal of beauty (as imagined by the Neo- Platonist), rather it captures, in its own way, the inner life of sensory perception and thereby illuminates its form. In this connection, there is no reason why Titian’s portrayal of life should be in any way concerned with the idea of a purely physical object.

Some ideas about the painting: first, there is an ambiguity in the movement of the virgin. She is released from below in fairly obvious ways, such as the ascent suggested in the line of rich scarlet from the right-hand side through the rose figure of the virgin ascending. At the same time this figure is suspended (along with other formal elements) by the proximity of the horizontally drawn representation of God, the more emphatically by the dark tone of this figure. This emphasis on a suspended movement (rather than just a still person) dramatizes the action that is represented in the image, but it also dramatizes the image, as it draws attention to itself as the physical assertion of something significant. Through the gesture anticipating transcendental union the figure of the virgin is also saying, ‘Ponder what is revealed in this painting - we can take the gesture as an entry into an examination of how its physical assertion of the significance of the assumption lies at the heart of the painting.

Imagination and mastery of form enable Titian to go well beyond the Renaissance ideal of truthful physical representation. So, while the painting also has a religious purpose, and resembles an icon with symbolic intentions, there is an even deeper integration that is related to seeing into the nature of perception itself, and into the constitution of an object. In the perception of a bicycle, mobility is significant by virtue of its usefulness, and usefulness is realized in such things as mobility; this elucidates the (unseen) physical assertion of significance in seeing a bicycle. In the painting, in which the object is constructed intentionally, what is normally unseen in sensory perception is brought into clear view. The assertion of abstract significance by the painter determines the constitution of the painting as an object, and so his physical assertion of the significance of the assumption animates the portrayal of life. Conversely, this portrayal embodies the physical assertion of significance, and thereby sheds light upon the inner life of sensory perception, and in this respect the intense beauty of the image is created not simply by the emotional force of an icon, but also by a physical insight into the nature of reflective life.

To appreciate how this painting can be an object that heightens our sense of what constitutes an object, and our perception of it, we should look more closely at how Titian’s depiction of the assumption embodies a physical assertion of significance. In being figurative the image is based upon resemblance to the world of experience; however, construction of the object as a physical assertion of significance reconfigures the world as we normally experience it. In this reconfiguration the painting illuminates the cognitive process that is active within sensory perception.

An immediate sense of the physical assertion of significance can be seen in the pictorial invention of a ‘world’ in which there is a dramatic transition from the earthly to the celestial, as an appropriate setting for the assumption. In this case, moreover, the image is theatrical, not only in the presentation of the virgin and her relation to the figures below and above her in this partitioned ‘world’, but also in the turbulent figures of the Apostles that reach up against a backdrop of light though sombre sky. Thus the painting departs from the aim of simply producing an image of nature to which significance is added by such devices as allusion, association and symbol. Rather, in this respect the painter openly assembles a theatrical image in which the physical assertion of significance in sensory perception is transparent. In this respect, we can think of the dramatization as a guise of conformity to tradition to which opposition is created by the physical assertion of significance. The virgin ascends towards God dressed in red, which represents love in the sense of charity, against a glowing symbol of divinity in the colour gold. Soaring above the disorder below it, the celestial realm is described by a populous circle of cherubim arranged in a well-formed spiral in motion. Such an action and its earthly and celestial spheres bear some relation to what we might expect in a representation of the assumption.

The painter’s physical assertion of significance is experienced in our immediate response to the highly original geometry of the work. Titian creates an ambiguous feeling of motion and suspense in the virgin’s ascent by placing her at the centre of two kinds of movement. Thus her head is at the centre of the turning spiral of cherubim, and this puts her at the centre of the glowing, golden space of divinity that affirms the moment of her ascent. This is resisted in our visual experience of the image by an invisible line passing directly from the image of God through the line of her body to form the axis of a forceful rotation in the figures of the apostles. The torque that is created by this movement is integrated with other features of the image that drag against the virgin’s ascent and profoundly affect the meaning of the work. For example, a striking visual assertion of significance can be seen in the tension that is created by a co-ordination of geometry and colour in the prominent figures in the painting. While the apostle in scarlet and with arms stretched out (on the right) is aligned with the figure of the virgin and seems to release her, the sense of momentum that is conveyed by their shared colour and his gesture is opposed by the other apostle in red (on the left) whose figure makes a triangle with the other two. This triangle drags against the upward momentum, and its effect is accentuated by making the contorted figure of that apostle misalign the triangle and thereby strengthen the rotational hold on the figure of the virgin.

An integration of this use of geometry with aerial perspective is also important to the physical assertion of significance in the image. Thus, the apostles, who are close to us and draw us into their midst, are distinguished from the virgin who is above us and set back in space, while the figure of God is set even higher and further back. Aptly, we are among the fallen, but the use of perspective in relation to the virgin is ambiguous, as her departure from us is also restrained by the sense of proximity between her and the apostles, in particular the one in scarlet. So while she is separated from us spatially this apostle is seemingly within touching distance of her, and the gesture that seems to release her is also a plea for her intercession on his own behalf. Among other elements, such as the echoing of bodily movement and form and the tethering suggested by her scarf, which unite the image in its tension between her ascent and an earthbound connection with fallen man, the painting gives visual prominence to the dark cloud from which God looks down. The possibility of hope that is represented in the assumption is subjected to an immediate sense of the fall that gives rise to such hope.

Titian’s opposition of belief and sensory perception is not a dialectic intended to resolve the meaning of the assumption. Rather, the tension that is physically asserted by the image is associated with a complexity that can be seen in the situation of the virgin, and in the human life that this represents. In so far as she is called upon to intercede for us the virgin is tied to our fallen nature and her being so is inseparable from her majesty and dignity. The tension therefore portrays a depth of moral conflict that is implied by the story. Just as her character ties her to fallen man, so the use that is made of her by man in his moral frailty is painfully self-interested and perhaps delusory. Thus each apostle contends with the others in his plea for her intercession on his behalf; this is dramatized in their disorderly and largely obscured entanglement in the lower part of the painting. The one exception, in the bottom left-hand corner, is deep in prayer for his salvation. In this respect the painting aggressively departs from the kind of representation of the virgin that we often see in medieval art, in which she is placed at the centre of a harmonious gathering of saints and angels, as, for example, in Duccio’s *Maestà*.

The psychological suggestiveness of the story prompts a visual dissonance that is created by the contrast between different qualities and intensities of red and a light aerial gold that darkens into old gold as it expands outwards. Like the other physical features that have been mentioned, this visual dissonance affects the painting as a portrayal of reflective life. We are presented both with the portrayal of a human action and a psychological action in the artist’s physical assertion of significance. The questioning of our moral sensitivity is heightened by the questioning, by a strong colour opposition, of gold as a reassuring symbol of divinity.

Together these create a portrayal of reflective life in action; by involving us in the difficulties of understanding ourselves, the inner tension between reflection and self-awareness (how we make sense of ourselves and the world in sensory perception) is a true representation of our cognitive experience. From this wider perspective the artist achieves a portrayal that is in some ways probing but inconclusive and in others incisively critical of reflection as an independent mode of moral understanding. Hence the drag of fallen life upon the virgin that is conveyed by the physical assertion of significance is implied rather than affirmed, while the preoccupation with intercession and personal salvation in the lower section, which could in this connection be effective simply as the illustration of an idea, also conveys a powerful feeling of human beings at the mercy of conventional wisdom.

**The Elucidation of Sensory Knowledge in Shakespeare’s Sonnets 18 and 5**

In order to see the physical assertion of significance in poetry, we must first remember that our experience as reflective beings is truly represented not by a resemblance to an object or person (mimesis) but by the portrayal of human life in action. As we have seen in Part 1, the examination of an ordinary experience can show, for example, how the look of an object or person tells us something of the inner life of sensory perception. In the sonnets of Shakespeare, however, this kind of reflection upon the form of human life is developed to a high degree, and depends upon a language for the inner life of sensory perception.

Both Sonnet 18 and Sonnet 5 can be seen as an argument in the form of an extended cadence in the octave succeeded by an antiphonal argument in the same form in the sestet. Thus the poem as a whole is cadential and can be analysed into shorter cadences, such as ‘Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines / And often is his gold complexion dimmed’. These, in turn, can be extended into connected cadences in the quatrain and then cadential sections in the octave or sestet. Sound, rhythm and tempo, and their relation to meaning, shape both the short cadences and their contribution to the flow of thought in the sonnet as a whole. Out of this basic movement of sound, and its suggestive articulation of ideas, the cadence is opened to other cognitive resources that are characteristic of poetry such as those related to media of sensory perception, like imagery that is derived from the senses, and also those related to the use of language in which alternative meanings, or their possibility, affect the logic of the sentence (as in irony, double meaning, metaphor, symbol and allegory). Hence the physical assertion of significance is a means of qualifying the argument or changing its meaning altogether, and is fundamental to Shakespeare’s dramatization of the poet.

*Sonnet 18*

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

And summer’s lease hath all too short a date;

The words of Sonnet 18 are given to opposing personae, the love poet and, at the same time, the sceptic (Nelson, 2010). In the octave there is a particular emphasis given to this opposition, as the former leads in the opening quatrain and is challenged by the latter in the quatrain that follows it. Thus the cadence of the first two lines is composed of a call and response for which the dominant feeling is one of affirmation, both of the beauty of the subject and the vocation of the love poet. The lines are a sympathetic way of introducing the trope that is the basis for a comparison, and in this the response is both a continuation of the call and an assertion of character in the young man. In lines 3 and 4 the anticipated expansion into eulogy is substituted by the love poet’s concentration upon shortcomings of a summer’s day, and here the cadence reflects a mood of uncertainty. The apparent change of direction can be attributed to the word temperate, and the love poet’s sudden doubt is expressed in the sound and language of the cadence. A rhythmically free and open sound in line 1 is congested by line 3 and contracted in line 4, while the optimism of ‘summer’s day’ is depleted by the parsimonious ‘summer’s lease’, and ‘date’ rhymes imperfectly with its pairing in the quatrain (‘temperate’) but also collapses the openness and freedom of ‘day’.

In the love poet’s uncertainty, and its reflection in the cadence, we can already discern a conflict between sensory knowledge and our ordinary reasoning about the character of others. His seeing the subject as temperate is natural – sensory knowledge often makes the beautiful seem to be virtuous. However, the speaker also knows from experience and observation that the young man is far from temperate, and loses confidence in his own passion and the sensory impression that inspires it. In this respect there is a conflict between reason and sensory knowledge in the quatrain as a whole, as the love poet’s half-conscious deviation of thought and purpose betrays his shifting perception of the subject. This psychological movement, it is relevant to mention, is a very intimate portrayal of reflective life in action.

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,

And often is his gold complexion dimmed,

And every fair from fair sometime declines,

By chance or nature’s changing course untrimmed:

The love poet’s uncertainty is betrayed in a somewhat mechanical accumulation of ways in which summer can be disappointing, and his loss of confidence leads to his losing the thread of his argument as well. Summer cannot be compared unfavourably with the subject, as in line 7, since the inevitable decline from fair applies equally to both. Thus the sceptic can be sensed as taking initiative in the energetic surge that is felt from the accented first syllable of line 5, and the love poet’s weak metaphor of ‘the eye of heaven’ for the sun is overpowered by the same image as an allusion to the young noble. This much stronger metaphor represents the intemperate sexuality of the subject and is in direct opposition to the love poet, mocking his equivocation on the matter, and a considerably richer use of the words invigorates the quatrain. Hence ‘gold complexion dimmed’ is a directly physical evocation of effect of sexual excess upon the gilded and glittering appearance of the subject, and in line 7 the sceptic plays on the meanings of beauty, decency and justice in ‘fair’. We also see the sceptic taking command in the rhythmic shape and tempo of the quatrain. The compact assurance of the cadence in lines 5 and 6, in which the sceptic turns the love poet’s words into censure, leads into a halting repetition in line 7 and then a further slowing down in the melodious loosening of the cadence in line 8. These are especially expressive of the young man’s moral waywardness and indifference, the lines implying that he not only acts purely from desire, but also charms others into accepting his behaviour as ‘natural’.

The conflict between sensory perception and ordinary reasoning seen in the first quatrain takes another form in the second, for ‘the eye of heaven’ is also a metaphor for the all-seeing eye to which our lives may be subject. Moreover, its allusion to a searching light and vision is a gift to the sceptic, for whom light as a medium of sensory perception illuminates the moral frailty of the young man. Thus, for the love poet the object is seen as our exposure to the higher being who looks down on us – a feeling of psychological oppression evoked by the brilliance and heat of a summer’s day - while to the sceptic the same light (and vision) is gratifyingly able to penetrate the deceptions of those who deserve censure. For both personae the image of an all-seeing eye is at once a metaphor and a perception of light as a sensory medium. The inner life of their sensory imagination steals into the image and augments their thought; this is a counterpart in poetic language to the physical assertion of significance in the sensory experience of form in a painting. To be more exacting, the sceptic cannot, without creating confusion, present the ‘eye of heaven’ dialectically as a metaphor for both the young man and the all-seeing eye of God, and so the latter must arise from his visual imagination of the image (the sun imagined as transcendental vision derived from experience of the physical object). This sensory knowledge, unlike that of the love poet in the first quatrain, is perfectly consistent with his reflective and reasoned conception of the subject.

The exceptional use of metaphor in Sonnet 18 would be of passing interest if the sceptic’s sense of light as a sensory medium did not create an undertow that affects the meaning of the ensuing sestet, and therefore the poem as a whole.

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,

Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st;

Nor shall death brag thou wand’rest in his shade,

When in eternal lines to time thou grow’st.

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,

So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

In opposition to the love poet’s self-affirming celebration of the power of art to give eternal life to his subject, the sceptic gives prominence to the moral character that is a deeper concern of the sonnet. Thus in the sestet the ‘ ‘a summer’s day’ becomes an eternity in which a summer of youth carelessly disposing of others to serve its own pleasure will never fade in the light that emanates from the eye of God, and will therefore always be known. This means that the ‘fair thou ow’st’, the truth of a person’s character, will not wander obscurely in death’s shade (‘ow’st’ is an abbreviation of own’st, but as such alludes to the justice that is owed by one person to another and cannot be disowned). The sceptic’s perception of an all-seeing eye of heaven is not just a fleeting impression but becomes an extended inner response to light as a sensory medium and thus determines the moral sense of the poem. In this we can see how the entanglement of sensory knowledge and ordinary reasoning is represented with particular force when response to a medium of sensory perception is allowed to govern the meaning of the poem. In contradistinction to the proposition, the cadence can be distinguished as a complex means for showing in action the elusively heterogeneous sources of our judgement and understanding.

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*Sonnet 5*

Those hours, that with gentle work did frame

The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell,

Will play the tyrants to the very same,

And that un-fair which fairly doth excel:

For never-resting Time leads summer on

To hideous winter, and confounds him there,

Sap checked with frost and lusty leaves quite gone,

Beauty o’ersnow’d and bareness everywhere:

Taken altogether as a cadence, the octave is dominated by a tension between the humanist mentor’s rhetorical assurance and the turbulent alternation of perspectives that represents his subject matter. In this respect his address contends with a threat of instability that is related to the conception of time in the sonnet. Thus the unforeseen transformation attributed to time is countered in the cadence by the ways in which this transformation is described. The quatrains are balanced so that the movement of ideas from the individual to the universal is evenly composed, while the melodramatic excitement of the first quatrain is relieved in the second by a subdual of hope and energy that ends on a note of suspense.

Within this framework the elements of transformation (like ‘gentle work’, ‘play the tyrants’ ‘Never-resting Time’, ‘summer’ and ‘hideous winter’) are opposed by a euphony which does not depend so much on internal rhyme, or the obvious agreement of sounds in alliteration and assonance, as on the subtle control of sound and meaning together across phrases, lines and longer cadences in the octave as a whole. The melody, for example, of ‘The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell’ lies in that sequence of sounds and its meaning, and the same is true of ‘For never- resting Time leads summer on / To hideous winter, and confounds him there’. In the octave itself, this euphony is intensified by an extension of rhyme in which the phrase to which the rhyming word belongs echoes the rhythmic shape of its counterpart. Thus a sense of confidence is strengthened by the echo of ‘with gentle work did frame’ in ‘tyrants to the very same’, of ‘which fairly doth excel’ in ’where every eye doth dwell’, of ‘Time leads summer on’ in ‘lusty leaves quite gone’ and of ‘and confounds him there’ in ‘and bareness everywhere’.

The resistance of this euphonism to what he himself is saying can be referred, moreover, to the mentor’s deeper meaning in the polysemous language of the lines. For example, in the first place ‘un-fair’ means to deprive a person of his or her beauty, but the octave as a complete statement implies that in being so deprived the person is un-faired in being stigmatised by time. Thus the deception in changing from gentle and nurturing to playing the tyrant makes time (as represented by winter) hideous in a moral sense, and ‘confounds’, in addition to meaning confuses, acquires the biblical sense of shaming. For if, in taking back physical beauty, time takes away a person’s sense of identity then the summer of maturity in which we may reach a pitch of physical perfection is no more than a preparation for the ignominy of its loss. However, this is only the case if all of our values are subordinated to that of physical beauty, and, correspondingly, it is only in relation to this conception of life that the sestet has real conviction. In this respect the euphony of the octave resists the outrage of time in anticipation of the sestet, in which the argument of the poem is completed.

The ‘never-resting Time’ of line 5 means moving forward constantly at regular intervals, like a clock, and it also means ever-changing and capable both of slowing down and of dramatic acceleration. In this respect time is a medium of sensory perception involved in the mutual involvement of materiality and self-awareness. Growing up is one kind of experience, with its own kind of significance for us, and is commonly perceived to be excessively slow; in ageing this is transformed into another kind of experience, and in decline the sense of time is characteristically one of acceleration. The contrast is clearly suggested by variations of tone in the octave. The freely flowing opening lines are abruptly interrupted by the vigour of line 3, and this pattern is repeated in the second quatrain, so that line 7 briefly destabilizes the rhythm and euphony of the cadence. The humanist mentor treats time as a tyranny that is external to us. However, as a medium of sensory perception time is part of us, and the shame of no longer being beautiful is mainly a consequence of how we think about this loss.

Personal identity is not a fixed set of qualities, and cannot be so because its constitution is determined by how we think about it. Different people think in different ways about a person’s identity (including, of course, one’s own), and so does the same person at different times. For example, the character of a person who sees the loss of physical beauty as a loss of identity is significantly different from the character of one who does not. Hence a view of personal development is itself a vital aspect of a person’s identity and, in so far as sensory perception elevates beauty in our estimation of personal qualities, the effect of sensory knowledge upon judgement is dramatized in the sonnet.

The octave ends on a note of suspense, as though inviting a response to its argument, and this is provided in the sestet. Here the humanist mentor is supported by another persona, that of a Neo- Platonic aesthetician (Nelson, 2010).

Then, were not summer’s distillation left

A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass

Beauty’s effect with beauty were bereft,

Nor it nor no remembrance what it was.

But flowers distilled, though they with winter meet,

Lose but their show; their substance still lives sweet.

Though the beauty of the cadence is continued in this section of the sonnet, the sestet, in contrast with the octave, represents an assured and even resolution. However, the cadential nature of the sonnet as a whole is influenced by a subtle rubato that is worked into the thought of the personae. Whereas the octave involves a speeding up, in the sestet there is an overall slowing down, in each case in accordance with the intention of the speaker. Within this there are variations: in the octave there is some slowing down in lines 7 and 8 in preparation for the response that follows, while an acceleration in line 12 prepares for the definite deceleration in the couplet, which ends with a ritardando that is created by the sense of ‘still’ as motionless combined with successive s and l sounds.

In relation to tempo, ‘A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass’ describes the perfume as held within a glass vessel, but also refers to a painting and would, on its own, be written ‘A liquid prisoner, paint in walls (layers) of glaze’ The alternative and more important meaning of the second part of the line elucidates the first part and thereby creates feeling of suspension; this is in keeping with the intention of the sestet to stabilize time. It is anticipated in the contraction of syllables in ‘summer’s distillation’, from which line 10 is more slowly drawn out. The feeling of release evokes the slow ‘distillation’ of perfume and paintings. Correspondingly, an echo of the ‘gentle work’ in the opening line suggests a desire to counter the turbulence of time by means akin to the slow biological processes of growth. Hence in ‘summer’s distillation’ the aesthetician picks up the metaphor in line 6 referring to the ‘summer’ of our flowering, when a person’s beauty is at its height; the liquid prisoner is paint that has been ‘distilled’ into a portrayal of this moment. The gentle care of nature is seen as having its counterpart in the care and precision of the artist.

In the absence of such portrayal, and of the production of perfume, the effect of beauty is lost by natural decay, and any physical realization of the Idea of Beauty (an instance of beauty being an effect of the Form) must in time be lost (line 11). This echoes line 2, which foreshadows the Neo- Platonism of the aesthetician: ‘every eye doth dwell’ in ‘the lovely gaze’ in the sense that it partakes of the Form to which that gaze is the closest approximation in our experience. Sensory knowledge is thereby woven into reflection in the portrait that stabilizes time (the enjoyment of a painting can be increased by an impression that the portrayal rescues a person’s beauty from the transitory nature of life). Hence the literary image of summer’s distillation alludes to our sensory knowledge, and with a high degree of sensitivity to its fragility. This puts the elucidation of sensory knowledge and its relation to ordinary reflection at the heart of the sonnet.

Thus there are two senses in which ‘summer’s distillation’ represents an apogee: it is the highest pitch of a person’s natural development as reflected by his or her beauty, and the highest approximation to the Form of Beauty. Moreover, in its stabilization of time, the poem itself resembles a distillation – the Neo-Platonist evokes an illusion of permanence in things that are of great value to him but inescapably transitory. He does so by means of cadential expression in a mastery of sound, rhythm and tempo, and their euphony, together with a figurative language in which he makes special uses of metaphor and wordplay. By extension, the idea of concentration as an essence, akin to that of perfume, is identified with the heightened mental concentration of an aesthetic experience. Paradoxically, the delicacy that captures the essence of a person’s beauty in art, in both a painting and the sonnet itself, is associated with the evanescent and intangible pleasure of a subtle fragrance.

As if to act as a counterbalance, and in opposition to the ‘show’ in which beauty is exploited to personal ends, the key idea in the couplet is in the use of ‘still’ as motionless, here meaning calm, quiet and stable. We have seen that Shakespeare is not concerned with the general effect of experience upon time - how, for example, waiting slows it down - rather, Sonnet 5 is sensitive, specifically, to the instability of time as a medium of sensory perception. This implies that time changes in character as the thing that is valued changes. Thus it is only by changing the thing (as in the concentration of beauty in art) that time as a medium of sensory perception can be mastered. However, the stillness that is required to achieve this is inconsistent with the temporal movement that is essential to life and the enjoyment of art.

The idea that a person’s beauty can be rescued from time could arise in response to, say, Vermeer’s *Girl with a Pearl Earring,* but only as one impression among thoughts of a quite different orientation. The humanist mentor and aesthetician collaborate to invoke the possibility of preserving the essence of beauty, but only by making time stable in the sense that it ceases to move, and this entails that it ceases to be time as a medium of sensory perception and life. In these personae, therefore, Shakespeare dramatizes the inclination of reflective beings to experience time as relatively stable, and so sustain an illusion of permanence in a life that is valued in itself.

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In the discussion of these two sonnets we have seen that insight is tied not to a propositional but to a cadential form, which depends for its significance upon the influence of sensory suggestion upon meaning. This aspect of the work, as a physical assertion of significance, transforms the purely aesthetic experience of art into a kind of knowledge for which meaning belongs to the exact form of its expression. So while the poem can be interpreted it cannot be paraphrased or translated without losing the essence of its figurative design. For example, the lines ‘Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines, / And often is his gold complexion dimmed,’ liken the golden youth to the changing light of summer, and equate an atmospheric change with lust shadowed by its physical and moral effect. A change in the words would dismantle the figurative purpose of the lines and so depart from their meaning; such purpose can be disclosed but not paraphrased. With respect to translation, the music of this direct and mobile use of simple words that are steeped in the history of the language is specific in character to the English language and its grammar, and it opens the verse form to a range of figurative suggestion. Hence ‘dimmed’ is given the sense of personally diminished and debased, as well as the physical sense of lustreless and dull. And this word is opposed, in meaning and position, to ‘shine’, which is also used in its sense of making an impression through personal qualities. The secondary meanings awakened by the metaphor are particular to these words in the language to which they belong.

Both sonnets dramatize the poet and thereby present the argument as that of personae who use the same words with contrasting, or complementary intentions; and in both cases the central object in the poem alludes to a medium of sensory perception. In Sonnet 18 the inner life of an experience of light alludes to the all-seeing eye of God to whom our moral violations are known forever; while in Sonnet 5 the same inner life of sensory perception alludes to an experience of time in painting and the sense of rescuing what is deeply valued from its transience. Hence the truth lies not in these ideas but rather in the psychology behind them, with regard to which the poems elucidate our sensory knowledge from within the individual’s experience.

**Intersubjectivity and Indecision in *Hamlet***

The argument that I present here is based on three main ideas: 1) the influence upon Hamlet’s characterization of Sophocles’ plays *Electra* and *Oedipus the King*, 2) the tension between living primarily for oneself and our essential involvement in a community, and 3) the depth that intersubjectivity gives to characterization in *Hamlet*. These elements are interconnected and partly represent, in turn, the formal armature of the play, the possibilities for dramatic form as a genuine portrayal of reflective life, and the psychological realization of these possibilities in the portrayal of individual lives.

A sense of their interconnection arises, therefore, as soon as my exposition becomes concrete. Though we do not have direct evidence of Shakespeare’s interest in Sophocles, it is very likely that he made a close study of *Electra* and *Oedipus*. The action in *Hamlet* is dominated by two interwoven threads of psychological motivation: the necessity for Hamlet to respond to the vengeful demands of the ghost and the intersubjectively charged response of Hamlet to his mother’s ‘amnesia’ in abandoning him to the mercies of her new King. Hamlet’s belief in the sensual enslavement of his mother to Claudius closely resembles the rage of Electra, who feels rejected by her mother, out of preference for a lover. There is also a similarity in the general situation: Claudius has murdered Hamlet’s father in order to claim the throne, while Electra’s father, Agamemnon, has been slaughtered by her mother, Clytemnestra, with the help of her lover. The significant difference between these cases is that Electra and Orestes were abandoned when children, and therefore we can accept, in the relatively young Clytemnestra, a passionate relationship with Aegisthus. The sensual relationship between a much older Gertrude and Claudius is Hamlet’s invention. Sophocles’ plays, and Greek tragedy in a wider sense, are concerned with conflict between political power and obligation to the family. This is strong in both *Electra* and *Oedipus* and it is also strong in *Hamlet*, and touches on the tension between living primarily for oneself and living in a community.

Shakespeare’s formal debt to *Oedipus* is both more specific and more profound. Here the conflict between political power and obligations within the family is clear, though in *Oedipus* political power is entangled with religious power, that of the oracle at Delphi. Moreover, in *Hamlet* an interesting reversal is made to the Sophocles plot; whereas Oedipus only learns the truth about the harm that has been done to him by his parents at the end of the play, when it is too late, Hamlet is aware of his mother’s amnesia at the beginning of the action and this plays a central part in how the action unfolds. Hence, the closet scene (Act 3, scene iv) includes an important structural affinity with *Oedipus*, for the moment of recognition and reversal in which Oedipus senses the truth about his own history, and the action makes a decisive shift towards his investigation of this truth, is echoed in Hamlet’s psychological disorientation when he sees the futility of trying to undo his mother’s desertion of him. This is a moment of recognition and reversal in which he is released from his psychological struggle with her and her actions.

However, it is in the power of dramatic form to portray the intersubjective nature of human experience that we see the deepest of Shakespeare’s debts to *Oedipus*. Intersubjectivity figures extensively in the speeches of Teiresias and Creon, both in their communication with Oedipus and with the Chorus; it is fundamental to the plot and enables them to control the action of the play. For example, Teiresias employs forms of psychological influence based on his understanding of the power of religion in their community to lead Oedipus into the conviction that he is the land’s pollution, and also into the self-mutilation that confirms his guilt and exile. A similar intersubjective manipulation is employed by Teiresias and Creon to separate the people (represented by the Chorus) from Oedipus, to dissolve their dependence upon him and, finally, to induce their condemnation of him (Nelson. 2010). In the ensuing discussion of *Hamlet* we will see an even more extensive use of intersubjectivity as a basis for characterization, affecting communication between many characters, including Hamlet and Gertrude, the ghost and Hamlet, and a collaboration between Hamlet and Ophelia that is designed to unsettle the King and Queen and their court.

Furthermore, the use of intersubjectivity in *Hamlet* significantly affects the conception of Hamlet. The story behind the play comes primarily from a mixture of history and legend, *The History of Denmark* written by Saxo Grammaticus in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The hero of this story is a prince called Amleth, and the play broadly reproduces the circumstances of his life. What gives the story its vitality, however, is the ingenuity with which Amleth copes with his circumstances and the task of overcoming his adversary, the usurper of his father’s throne. In all of this Amleth is clever, knowledgeable and something of a trickster; Hamlet is similar, but with the addition of a psychological twist, and that twist appears to come from Teiresias. Like Sophocles’ disturbing seer, Hamlet is a psychological trickster, and his being so is similarly related to an ability to influence others by means of intersubjective insight. He differs from both Amleth and Teiresias in being faced with circumstances that are so difficult, both externally and internally, that he cannot succeed through the use of his gifts; *Hamlet* is an example of the psychological realism in Shakespeare which may be seen to challenge his literary sources.

My second line of enquiry in this interpretation is more abstract, and gives us an appropriate conception of the life that is represented by dramatic form. The ideas that I have introduced by the mention of Sophocles, such as those of intersubjectivity and rifts that are created by the conflicting inclinations of political ambition and obligations within the family, are the expression of relations that lie at the heart of all human life and experience. Thus by clarifying these relations we can understand the internal structure of Shakespeare’s thought and its truth. In this connection dramatic form has a particular formal advantage, because the psychologically inward portrayal of human interaction represents a life that is simultaneously self-oriented and communal. The reflective life of a person is one that is valued in itself, and how it is lived and valued is determined by our response to other people and the community and culture which give that life its substance. This means that over and above the benefits of social co-operation we cannot live reflectively without giving ourselves to other people, by sharing their interests and inner lives, and they also have a life that is self-oriented. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare is acutely aware of the tension between living for oneself through the experience of others and thereby being exposed to their self-interest. He is also aware of how this tension influences our understanding of ourselves and other people, and the world to which we belong.

Another form of intersubjectivity is pervasive in *Hamlet*, as it is in all great plays. Just as the object is given something of its identity by self-awareness, because we experience life as possessing value in itself, so it is necessary to nurture or tend a conception of oneself and others. Without this we could not establish the relationships that give substance to our lives and give us our self- awareness in the first place. Most of the time this is another unseen action in our understanding of ourselves and other people, and is interwoven with perception. In the play, it is highlighted when, acting under the influence of an excited will, a character forgets ‘himself’ or ‘herself’, as in Gertrude’s amnesia of her son, and, later in the play, his amnesia of Ophelia. Act 1, scene ii gives us reason to believe that, before the death of King Hamlet, Gertrude, has thought herself a loving and considerate mother. The action of the play also implies that, before killing Polonius, whose love for Ophelia he has doubted, Hamlet has thought himself a considerate lover to her.

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***Act 1***

It is important to realize that the antic disposition confided to his associates by Hamlet precedes the appearance of his father’s ghost in the first act of the play. In the scene in which he first appears (Act 1, scene ii), his provocative wordplay, in response to his mother in particular, leads into a psychologically significant use of language in his first soliloquy.

*Hamlet*

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,

Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew !

Or that the Everlasting had not fix’d

His canon ‘gainst self-slaughter ! O God ! God !

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable,

Seem to me all the uses of this world !

Fie on’t ! Ah, fie ! ’tis an unweeded garden,

That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature

Possess it merely. That it should come to this !

But two months dead ! Nay, not so much, not two,

So excellent a King that was to this

Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother,

That he might not beteem the winds of heaven

Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth !

Must I remember ? Why, she would hang on him

As if increase of appetite had grown

By what it fed on; and yet, within a month -

Let me not think on’t. Frailty, thy name is woman ! -

A little month, or ere those shoes were old

With which she followed my poor father’s body,

Like Niobe, all tears - why she, even she -

O God ! a beast that wants discourse of reason

Would have mourned longer - married to my uncle,

My father’s brother; but no more like my father

Than I to Hercules. Within a month,

Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears

Had left the flushing of her galled eyes,

She married. O, most wicked speed, to post

With such dexterity to incestuous sheets !

It is not, nor it cannot come to good.

But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue. (Lines 129 - 159)

His despairing invective against the world is joined, in line 137, with the cause of his despair, so that the whole of what he is saying unwinds from an intense expression of mood and feeling and gives an impression of thought being developed from a specifically defined psychological disposition. This can be considered a characteristic way in which meaning is conveyed in dramatic art, in the sense that significance lies not merely in the obvious semantic intention of the words, but also in the movement of thought in action. In this soliloquy the movement is evident in subtle contrasts of emphasis, the conflicting ways in which Hamlet describes the character and behaviour of other people, and in misplaced allusion and judgements about their motivation. Thus what he says and the movement of his thought together enable us to see into the nature of what is happening to him and how he responds to it.

Within the seemingly irresistible flow of ideas, memories, interruptions and exclamations in this release of anguished feeling there are obvious incongruities. The energy, quickness of thought and liveliness of language and image are not those of a dejected and spiritless man as suggested by the suicidal attitude that is expressed in the first nine lines. At the same time we should not regard these lines as mere artifice, or as a histrionic pretence. By this stage the scene has given us a clear insight into the bleak situation in which Hamlet now finds himself. For the speech in which he taunts his mother with ‘that within which passes show’, and invites her to ponder what it might be (‘that within which passes show’ also means ‘that within me which escaped your attention when you remarried’), is answered by a protracted ‘sermon’ which has a sting in its tale. Here Claudius makes it known to Hamlet that his desire to return to Wittenburg is refused, and for reasons that are not difficult to fathom. Hence the lines ‘And we beseech you bend you to remain/Here, in the cheer and comfort of our eye,’ are understood by Hamlet, and intended to be so, as ‘We order you to stay, so that we can keep an eye on you’ (for ‘comfort of our eye’ read ‘reassuringly within the immediate scope of our intelligence’, the comforted being not Hamlet but a watchful Claudius). Thus the soliloquy is more an expression of resistance than it might appear.

It is not difficult to see that the speech is in three parts: the first, from line 129 t0 137 is a quasi- philosophical expression of disillusionment; the second, from line 137 to 146, is a reminiscence upon the past that has been despoiled by Gertrude’s marriage to Claudius; and the third, from lines 146 to 159, is an intensely self-appeasing portrayal of Gertrude’s character and motivation. In the first part the physical assertion of significance is forcefully conveyed in the opening imagery, a sense of being tainted is physically expressed in his desire to dissolve like snow into a poetically innocent and simple ‘dew’. Being rendered down in this way from the density of solid flesh into something insubstantial conveys the idea of escape from the moral complexities of flesh, and its echo of the fall leads into a rhetorical protest against the metaphysical authority that traps Hamlet in his despair. However, the rhetoric is at one with the rhapsody of complaint that follows, in his extended imagery of fallen and corrupted nature; already we see how significance is worked over by introspective inclination, the real issue of which emerges in line 137.

Line 137 makes the transition from the first to the second part of the soliloquy (‘That it [the world] should come to this [Gertrude’s marriage to Claudius]’). Hamlet opposes his father to Claudius by means of an improbable likening of the former to a classical example of youthful beauty, and then by following ‘satyr’ with ‘so loving to my mother / That he might not beteem the winds of Heaven /Visit her face too roughly.’ Gertrude, who has just been associated with the fallen world at its lowest point, is now ‘my mother’, and this delicacy of feeling is intensified in ‘beteem’ and ‘winds of Heaven’, which echo the poetic innocence and simplicity of ‘dew’. This leads, through an appropriate sense of the extremes involved, to an image of Gertrude as languorously and sexually enthralled to the King’s nobility, presented as a painful recollection, for Hamlet, of lost joy.

Transition from the second to the third part of the soliloquy occurs in line 146 and specifically turns on ‘Frailty thy name is woman’. Initially this follows naturally from the image of Gertrude as emotionally dependent upon her husband, which becomes a kind of moral flimsiness in the light of her marriage to Claudius. Her tears at King Hamlet’s funeral are then portrayed as being those of Niobe, and therefore an imitation of genuine grief, the artificiality being confirmed by the brevity of Gertrude’s mourning. At line 150 the art of pretence and lack of real feeling place her below the state of bestiality in the chain of being, and she remarries before the stain of ‘unrighteous tears’ has disappeared from her face. Now the calculated expression of sorrow anticipates the unrighteous actions of a calculating and decisive agent of her own interests, in ‘to post / With such dexterity to incestuous sheets’.

It is clear that the frailty upon which the transition from the second to third part changes significantly in meaning from one part to the other. The image of subservient emotional dependency and moral flimsiness is replaced by its opposite when Gertrude is seen as aggressively and effectively pursuing of her own interests. Moreover, these interests are precisely indicated as being sexual in nature; the weakly compliant sexuality of attachment to Hamlet’s father being replaced by an efficient gratification of unnatural desires. In this connection the use of ‘incestuous’ is justified by the relationship between Claudius and his brother, but Hamlet’s language figures a serious moral charge and is prompted, perhaps, by what he feels to be her unnatural treatment of himself. Hence the figurative energy of his speech conceals the inconsistency of the argument, the overall design of which intimates a deeper cause for his vertiginous loss of control.

The vehemence of Hamlet’s attack on a degenerate and fallen world gives us a clue to the reasons for both the contradictory versions of Gertrude and what lies behind his portrayal of her. We already know that her marriage to Claudius has put Hamlet in peril, that he is now seen as a threat to the King and, as such, faces the immediate future as an imprisoned pariah. Against this background his sense of encroaching decay is a psychologically appropriate introduction to the divergent but dramatically coherent characterization of the queen. In the second part of the speech Hamlet sets a fantasy of innocence based on his past experience against the fallen world, and then in the third part he concentrates the violation of his life in Gertrude. The indirect nature of this cry of outrage is due to pride, but the soliloquy as a whole makes it clear that Hamlet’s real complaint is his mother’s desertion, and this explains his anxiety to see her relationship with Claudius as carnal and depraved – however unlikely that may be (the marriage is politically convenient and has little to do with sensuality; to Claudius, Gertrude represents continuity and a useful familiarity with the government of Denmark, while the marriage enables her to remain queen and continue to enjoy power and status). Hamlet’s sense of his own prevarication is betrayed in the lines ‘My father’s brother; but no more like my father / Than I to Hercules’. The subsidiary comparison might appear to refer to physical strength but, less obviously and more pertinently, Hamlet shows that he is aware that his distorted perception of Gertrude makes him less than heroic. He recognizes that by entering her mind in the way he does he is himself enveloped by the fallen world – in the third part of the soliloquy there is no glimpse of an innocent prospect or an innocent past.

Hamlet’s figurative language in this speech is of such psychological richness and subtlety that it cannot be directly related simply to sensory experience. But nonetheless we can infer that sensory perception must play an essential part in all he says. The imagery of the opening lines refers to his body, and, like the emotional attachment to his mother, rests upon his sensory experience of himself; imagining the body as he does gives to the physical assertion of significance a particular orientation by means of figurative language. It is in this sense that Hamlet figures the physical assertion of significance throughout the speech, and throughout the play, and we see it again immediately in his metaphorical language for fallen nature, which rests upon sensory experience of the world. In this regard the use of metaphor, simile, personification and similar devices normally has roots in the physical assertion of significance that lies in the object of sensory perception. However, the most telling allusion to the inner life of sensory experience is in Hamlet’s memory of an innocent past in which his parents openly displayed their love, and so affirmed his security and worth. This piercing recollection emerges from his reaction to Gertrude’s negligent amnesia, and it exemplifies the subtle integration of thought, feeling and sensory perception with character and personal circumstances in Shakespeare’s dramatic portrayal of reflective life. Correspondingly, the soliloquy as a whole expresses the essence of dramatic form as an illuminating portrayal of reflective life in action.

The key scenes in Act 1 are two, three and five. Scene two reveals to us the nature of Hamlet’s situation and his response to the chilling transformation that has been created by his mother’s amnesia and the enthronement of Claudius. Scenes three and five are linked to scene two by the significance for other characters of this central change in Hamlet and the ways in which he understands it and behaves in relation to it. Thus, in scene three, Laertes and then Polonius threaten Ophelia in order to end her relationship with Hamlet. This is not coincidental, for both men have been present and taken part in the action of scene two, and we can suppose that they are well able to observe the perilous rift that is opening up between Hamlet and the King. Scene five is linked primarily to Hamlet’s soliloquy; in this scene it becomes increasingly obvious that the ghost of the dead King has been listening in, as his speeches are conceived so that Hamlet should respond in the manner that is desired, and without any impediment.

*Act 1 scene iii*

The action in this scene turns on Ophelia’s quiet resistance to the directions that are given to her by Laertes and Polonius. Thus her resistance itself, apart from its expression, echoes the resistance of Hamlet we have just seen. The speeches of Laertes (lines 5 – 44) warn his sister in language that is weighted with rhetorical imagery and philosophical reflection against her association with Hamlet. But while his reasons are plausible and he appears to be moved by a genuine concern for her, his rhetorical skill plays with the idea of Hamlet’s sincerity in a way that is intended to disconcert her. Thus, to begin with he stresses the careless, primy nature of youth which is to be feared in men, and then, in order to restore a sense of his own fair-mindedness, places the emphasis upon the inevitability of change and what change means in the case of Hamlet. In developing this theme Laertes betrays his own fears.

*Laertes*

... Perhaps he loves you now,

And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch

The virtue of his will; but you must fear,

His greatness weigh’d, his will is not his own;

For he himself is subject to his birth:

He may not, as unvalued persons do,

Carve for himself; for on his choice depends

The sanity and health of this whole state;

And therefore must his choice be circumscrib’d

Unto the voice and yielding of that body

Whereof he is the head. Then if he says he loves you,

It fits your wisdom so far to believe it

As he in his particular act and place

May give his saying deed; which is no further

Than the main voice of Denmark goes withal.

Then weigh what loss your honour may sustain,

If with too credent ear you list his songs,

Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open

To his unmast’red importunity. (Lines 14 - 32)

In this part of his speech the ‘fair-minded’ Laertes presents a reasonable argument counselling Ophelia to wait until she is certain of her place in relation to Hamlet, while at the same time betraying to the reader his reasons for doing so. The central point that the will of Hamlet is subject to the will of the people of Denmark is made elaborately to begin with and then given further emphasis following the direct advice that Ophelia should wait (lines 27 – 28). The insistent tone is significant because Ophelia has not been present at the meeting of the court in the previous scene, and therefore does not know that Hamlet’s prospects of becoming King have been gravely diminished. Laertes and Polonius have both been in a position to see that Ophelia is now very unlikely to become queen, and much more likely, if she continues in her relationship with Hamlet, to become the wife of an anxious fugitive. Laertes’ reference to the ‘sanity and health of this whole state’, and to ‘the main voice of Denmark’ covertly allude to his own prospects if Ophelia were attached to an enemy of the people. The apparent expression of brotherly concern disguises a concern with his own prospects, as someone whose family connections place him favourably with the King and queen. Fittingly, at this moment Laertes drops the virtuous characterization of Hamlet and reverts to the conception of him as an example of the primy nature of youth, and warns Ophelia against his ‘unmast’red importunity’. In the lines that follow he elaborates upon this idea in a way that is increasingly lurid and exaggerates the threat to her innocence (lines 33 – 44).

Ophelia cannot respond to what she is in no position to see, but her wit and grace convey a rich vein of self-assertion.

*Ophelia*

I shall the effect of this good lesson keep

As watchman to my heart. But, good my brother,

Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,

Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,

Whiles, like a puff’d and reckless libertine,

Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads

And recks not his own rede. (Lines 45 -51)

Superficially, Ophelia wrests herself free of the complications in her situation by telling her brother to go and do likewise, whilst seeming to agree with him. However, from its polite beginning her speech descends in tone, and has a sting to counter his oratorical assault. Thus, the decorum of ‘good lesson’, ‘good my brother’, and euphemism ‘some ungracious pastors’ are qualified by the directness of ‘like a puff’d and reckless libertine’, which implies that Laertes might simply be a sanctimonious hypocrite. Similarly, his excessive use of repetition is quietly mimicked in the descent from ‘good lesson’/’good my brother’ to ‘reckless libertine’/’recks not his own rede’. Her economy and elegance both express her dissent from his rhetorical style and indicate a distrust of him that will become evident in her actual response to his advice.

Ophelia’s use of language here is paralleled by the fluently confident speech of Polonius when he gives Laertes some parting advice concerning his conduct in the world at large. The parallel is significant to the exchange concerning Hamlet that follows Laertes’ exit, for here, in both Ophelia and Polonius, the elegance and fluency go strangely awry.

*Ophelia*

He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders

Of his affection to me.

*Polonius*

Affection! Pooh! You speak like a green girl,

Unsifted in such perilous circumstance.

Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?

*Ophelia*

I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

*Polonius*

Marry I will teach you: think yourself a baby

That you have ta’en these tenders for true pay

Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly;

Or – not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,

Running it thus – you’ll tender me a fool.

*Ophelia*

My lord, he hath importuned me with love

In honourable fashion.

*Polonius*

Ay, fashion you may call it; go to, go to.

*Ophelia*

And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord,

With almost all the holy vows of heaven.

*Polonius*

Ay, springes to catch woodcocks!

I do know, When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul

Lends the tongue vows. These blazes, daughter,

Giving more light than heat – extinct in both,

Even in their promise, as it is a-making –

You must not take for fire. From this time

Be something scanter of your maiden presence;

Set your entreatments at a higher rate

Than a command to parle. For Lord Hamlet,

Believe so much in him, that he is young,

And with a larger tether may he walk

Than may be given you. In few, Ophelia,

Do not believe his vows; for they are brokers,

Not of that dye which their investments show,

But mere implorators of unholy suits,

Breathing like sanctified and pious bonds,

The better to beguile. This is for all -

I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth

Have you so slander any moment leisure

As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.

Look to’t, I charge you. Come your ways.

*Ophelia*

I shall obey, my lord. (Lines 99 – 136)

At the beginning of the sequence Ophelia makes a casually inaccurate use of ‘tender’, as this word means an offer or proposal, and affection is expressed or given but not offered, much less proposed. In his imperious way Polonius questions her use of the word, and then proceeds to mock her in his own string of inaccuracies. Having the idea of legal tender in mind, he distorts her use of ‘tender’, as the show of feeling, to refer to payment that is counterfeit (‘true pay which are not sterling’). The distortion continues in his next sentence, for in saying ‘Tender yourself more dearly’ he means tend, or care for, yourself more dearly, but his interest in currency leads him to imply that Ophelia should sell herself at a higher price. This talent for saying the opposite of what he means is evident again in ‘you’ll tender me a fool’ when ‘you’ll render me a fool’ is what he has in mind.

In the speeches that follow it becomes clear that a high degree of intersubjective action is involved in Ophelia’s contribution to the exchange, and that she is covertly leading her father into his mishandling of the language. As a continuation of her unfocused employment of ‘tender’ she protests that Hamlet ‘hath importuned me with love in honourable fashion’, and ‘hath given countenance to his speech’ with ‘almost all the holy vows of heaven’. In someone who we have just seen to use the language in a way that is both lucid and cogent (in her response to Laertes), Ophelia’s lapses can only be regarded as deliberate. For example, though ‘importuned’ can mean urged, compared with alternatives, like ‘persuaded’, it suggests coercion, and is therefore incompatible with love that is pursued in ‘honourable fashion’. Earlier in the scene we have seen Laertes refer to Hamlet’s ‘unmast’red importunity’. The use of this complicated word when simple ones would have expressed her intention better is amplified in ‘countenance’ (in the sense of support). Moreover, her mockery of Polonius’ inflated diction is even more daring in the next line. ‘The holy vows of heaven’ refers to the holy vows of chastity, poverty and obedience that are made by monks and nuns, so ‘almost all the holy vows of heaven’ a mischievous piece of nonsense. In her deliberate confusion of lovers’ vows and holy vows, she says ‘almost all’ because a vow of chastity is not usually included in the former, and provocatively implies that it is not a vow that she and Hamlet would countenance. However, the immediate target of her mischief is her father’s pretence of verbal precision and psychological insight.

In Polonius’ concluding speech, a vexed crescendo of authority under threat betrays his uneasiness about her motives. Not only does his rhetorical ambition result in the use of ungainly words and phrases, like ‘how prodigal the soul’, ‘entreatments’ and ‘implorators’, it leads him into knots of figurative language that are barely comprehensible. In line 116 ‘the blood burns’ is an image of lust, and then, in lines 117 – 120, heat and fire appear to be desirable and precious. The familiar metaphor ‘giving more heat than light’ is inappropriately reversed, and then immediately contradicted. If they are extinct in both then there is no question of ‘these blazes’ giving more heat than light. In lines 126 – 131, sense has to struggle through a jumble of terminology from such diverse fields as finance and law, personal apparel and Christian religion. Polonius takes his cue from his own elaboration on ‘tender’ and Ophelia’s reference to ‘the holy vows of heaven’, but quickly loses control of the proliferation of imagery. Thus in relation to ‘brokers’ some sense can be made of ‘that dye which their investments show’ and ‘implorators of unholy suits’, but these phrases also allude to apparel without contributing to the meaning; an inconsequential pattern of imagery is hooked on. Then the discordant mixture of religious and legal language is repeated in ‘sanctified and pious bonds’. Aware, perhaps, of his charmless mutilation of the language, Polonius reverts to ‘plain terms’ and orders Ophelia not to ‘slander any moment leisure’ (with Hamlet), when he means ‘squander any moment of leisure’. As slander has been his main purpose in this speech the mistake might be seen as a guilty slip of the tongue; Ophelia immediately provides a sober contrast, by making a promise that she knows she will not keep.

*Act 1 scene v*

In this and the previous scene the dramatic action shows us that the ghost enjoys all the advantages in his exchange with Hamlet. The supernatural appearance creates terror and wonder in all who are present in scene iv, and Horatio attempts in vain to hold his friend back. Because his nature and origins are unknown, moreover, the ghost is able to manage the exchange with Hamlet by creating a fiction about his circumstances that will serve his purposes. For the ghost has not appeared in order to enlighten anybody about the true situation that we face in the afterlife, he appears to Hamlet specifically because he wishes to be avenged, and any distraction from this is not in his interests. When, therefore, at the beginning of scene v, he says ‘My hour is almost come, / When I to sulph’rous and tormenting flames / Must render up myself.’ this could be simply a way of controlling the meeting, so that it can be ended abruptly before any difficult questions are asked. We can see, then, that Hamlet is there to listen and to be told both how things stand and what he is to do, and in the following he is given an emotional incentive to act as the ghost wishes.

*Ghost*

I am thy father’s spirit,

Doom’d for a certain term to walk the night

And for the day confin’d to fast in fires,

Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature

Are burnt and purg’d away. But that I am forbid

To tell the secrets of my prison-house,

I could a tale unfold whose lightest word

Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,

Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,

Thy knotted and combined locks part,

And each particular hair to stand an end,

Like quills upon the fretful porpentine.

But this eternal blazon must not be

To ears of flesh and blood. List, list, O, list !

If thou didst ever thy dear father love -

*Hamlet*

O God !

*Ghost*

Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

*Hamlet*

Murder !

*Ghost*

Murder most foul, as in the best it is;

But this most foul, strange and unnatural.

*Hamlet*

Haste me to know’t, that I, with wings as swift

As meditation or the thoughts of love,

May sweep to my revenge.

*Ghost*

I find thee apt;

And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed

That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf,

Wouldst thou not stir in this. Now, Hamlet, hear:

‘Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,

A serpent stung me; so the whole ear of Denmark

Is by a forged process of my death

Rankly abus’d; but know, thou noble youth,

The serpent that did sting thy father’s life

Now wears his crown.

*Hamlet*

O my prophetic soul !

My uncle !

*Ghost*

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,

With witchcraft of his wits, with traitorous gifts -

O wicked wit and gifts that have the power

So to seduce ! – won to his shameful lust

The will of my most seeming virtuous queen.

O Hamlet, what a falling off was there,

From me, whose love was of that dignity

That it went hand in hand even with the vow

I made to her in marriage; and to decline

Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor

To those of mine !

But virtue, as it never will be moved,

Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,

So lust, though to a radiant angel link’d,

Will sate itself in a celestial bed

And prey on garbage. (Lines 9 – 57)

As a true report of his condition the ghost’s tale is improbable from the beginning, and it becomes increasingly improbable as the scene unfolds. The situation he ascribes to himself is based on the catholic idea of purgatory, an idea with which Hamlet would be familiar and therefore disposed to accept as a real possibility. Thus there are fires in hell and fires in purgatory, the purpose of the latter being to purge the soul of ‘foul crimes done in the days of my nature’ before it can be allowed into heaven. In order to sway Hamlet in his favour, the ghost invokes a terrifying image of the physical reaction a person might experience in hearing the lightest description of his ‘prison- house’; the subjection to this terror is implicitly connected to the cause of King Hamlet’s death. It seems, also, that the ghost gains much in the incisive and vivid language of his speech by being forbidden to describe the ‘prison-house’ in detail.

Having brought Hamlet to the point at which he will do anything to comply, the ghost makes his dramatic disclosure, that the cause of his death and therefore of his present suffering is a foul and *unnatural* murder. In the excited state into which the ghost has put him, and even before he is told who the murderer is or why the murder is unnatural, Hamlet is ready to sweep to *his* revenge; so great is the ghost’s skill in creating, in Hamlet, a sympathetic identification with his deceased father. However, at this moment the whole of the encounter between Hamlet and the ghost is thrown into question. The story he has created in order to invoke the sympathy of Hamlet and inspire him to act is fraught with inner contradiction. If the ghost is in purgatory and enduring a torture such as would ‘harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, / Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,’ then he is unlikely to prolong this experience by inciting an act of revenge. It might even send him from purgatory to hell. Already we have good reason to feel that we do not know very much about the ‘world’ of the ghost, and also that it has not been conceived in accordance with any Christian doctrine.

Having artfully delayed the ultimate disclosure in order to create the dramatic effect he desires, the ghost, it may seem, only has to name the guilty brother to achieve his purpose. Then, at this climactic moment, his long concluding speech (lines 42 – 91) powerfully dramatizes the complexity of intersubjective influence, as he tries to make use of what has been revealed to him by Hamlet in his first soliloquy. We have seen Hamlet’s conception of Claudius and Gertrude as incestuous adulterers at the mercy of their passions – with a strong emphasis on the frailty of woman. The ghost takes what he has heard and reverses the emphasis in his own interests, portraying Claudius as a seducer, exploiting the ‘witchcraft of his wits’ and ‘traitorous gifts’. There are few signs of witchcraft in the wits of Claudius, and for the main part his prosaic language is that of a politician, in contrast with those of the ghost himself, whose language we have already seen to be strikingly potent. This impression is continued in the description he gives of himself as a loyal and blameless husband, which is carefully attuned to the conception of his father expressed by Hamlet in the soliloquy (Act 1, scene ii, lines 139 – 145). However, the flowing, translucent language of the ghost, with its polished rhetoric and illusion of logic (lines 53 -57), is self-defeating because he fails to see the reasons for Hamlet’s ‘belief’ that Gertrude has married out of passion for Claudius. The conception of a lecherous Claudius, which will fire Hamlet into prompt action, depends, unfortunately for the ghost, upon the idea of a lustful Gertrude. But Hamlet’s attachment to this idea is only a means of concealing the anguish of abandonment, and therefore there is little comfort in the idea that she has forgotten him because she will ‘prey on garbage’. So now, while he is more disposed than ever to see her as pernicious (line 105), the lasting effect of this is not to inspire prompt action but to aggravate his sense of a spreading pollution that is already beyond remedy.

At the close of the scene the ghost discourages Hamlet from making any move against his mother, both because she is not guilty of lust and because such action would distract him. With the ghost’s exit we see Hamlet work himself up in a curiously unconvincing way, as he seems to think that a sense of purpose will be enhanced by erasing from the memory, if it were possible, much of the knowledge that he has so far acquired in life. Correspondingly, in Act Two just as Hamlet conceives a test for Claudius which might confirm both his guilt and the legitimacy of this visitation, there is an interesting development of the psychological gap that is opening up between Hamlet and the ghost.

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***Act 2***

*Act 2 scene i*

This scene is divided into two parts: in the first we see Polonius the spymaster at work, as he instructs Reynaldo in the methods that will enable him to discover the secrets of Laertes behaviour in Paris. The unsavoury mentality at work in this part, and its expertise, are then set against the second part, in which Ophelia feeds the gullible spymaster some material concerning Hamlet to be passed on to the King.

*Ophelia*

My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,

Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbrac’d,

No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,

Ungart’red and down-gyved to his ankle;

Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,

And with a look so piteous in purport

As if it had been loosed out of hell

To speak of horrors – he comes before me.

*Polonius*

Mad for thy love?

*Ophelia*

My lord, I do not know,

But truly I do fear it.

*Polonius*

What said he?

*Ophelia*

He took me by the wrist, and held me hard;

Then goes he to the length of all his arm,

And, with his other hand thus o’er his brow,

He falls to such a perusal of my face

As ‘a would draw it. Long stayed he so.

At last, a little shaking of mine arm.

And thrice his head thus waving up and down,

He rais’d a sigh so piteous and profound

As it did seem to shatter all his bulk

And end his being. That done, he lets me go,

And, with his head over his shoulder turn’d,

He seem’d to find his way without his eyes;

For out adoors he went without their helps

And to the last bended their light on me.

*Polonius*

Come, go with me. I will go seek the King.

This is the very ecstasy of love,

Whose violent property fordoes itself,

And leads the will to desperate undertakings

As oft as any passion under heaven

That does afflict our natures. I am sorry -

What, have you given him any hard words of late?

*Ophelia*

No, my good lord; but, as you did command,

I did repel his letters, and denied

His access to me.

*Polonius*

This hath made him mad.

I am sorry that with better heed and judgment

I had not quoted him. I fear’d he did but trifle,

And meant to wreck thee; but beshrew my jealousy!

By heaven, it is as proper to our age

To cast beyond ourselves in our opinions

As it is common for the younger sort

To lack discretion. Come, go we to the King.

  This must be known; which being kept close, might move

More grief to hide than hate to utter love.

Come. (Lines 77 – 119)

In this exchange the Ophelia we know to have a mind intentionally reduces herself to an eye. Thus her description of a distracted Hamlet is a transparently ordered succession of physical features and actions, the purpose of which is to evoke a clear visual image of him. Along with an acute and innocent eye she affects a child-like sensitivity to the shock of seeing the noble prince in such a degrading state, and his strange behaviour. Thus in lines 83 – 84, the image of being loosed out of hell is deferentially softened by ‘To speak of horrors’. Even at this point it should be clear that the incident is an invention that has been cooked up by Hamlet and Ophelia, in order to create a sense of unpredictable instability in the world of the court. There is nothing in what we see from Hamlet to support this image of a feeble and lovesick victim of Ophelia’s rejection. Her naïve report, therefore, is vividly physical in order both to draw her father in so that the reality of the incident becomes irresistible, and a way of feigning ignorance, so that he can make sense of it. Not only does Ophelia avoid giving an opinion about the incident, her concentration upon the evidence of the senses is highlighted in lines 98 – 100. Hamlet, she says, finds his way out ‘without his eyes’ and goes ‘without their helps’; the child-like literalism suggests that each eye has a mind of its own. She adds to the impression of intellectual uncertainty in ‘to the last bended their light on me’, which makes use of an antiquated theory that objects are perceived by light that is emitted from the eye.

Ophelia plays the innocent who awaits the judgement of someone wiser and more experienced partly because this encounter is also a test of Polonius. Once it is accepted that he swallows her story because he cannot imagine being deceived by his daughter, his response to the fanciful invention touches seriously on his attitude to her and her interests. Hence it is very significant that, in lines 101 – 107, the first person he thinks of is not his daughter but the King, and then he considers Hamlet’s behaviour (as it has been described) to resemble the ‘ecstasy of love’, which is likely to ‘lead the will to desperate undertakings’. Having been excluded by Hamlet’s heartless seduction of her, Ophelia’s association with him is now excluded by his being a psychopath, even though this is not the impression that is given by her account. As Polonius is about to apologise for his earlier mistake about Hamlet’s character, he notices her look of disappointment and stops (line 106). Her change of expression is caused not by anything she might have said, but by her father’s blithe disregard for her hopes and feelings; when he does refer to his earlier view of Hamlet (lines 110 – 117), he passes quickly over the use he has made of this view to keep the lovers apart. He excuses his error with a mild reproof touching on the susceptibility in people of his age to make judgements that go beyond evidence and reason. (This, of course, is just what he is doing now; Polonius is blessed with the kind of self-knowledge that has no influence on personal behaviour). Thus we can assume that he consistently subordinates her concerns to the role he enjoys in relation to the King, and, as he hurries off to impart the news that Hamlet’s madness has its origins in his love for Ophelia, it is plain that Polonius is only inclined to promote their association when it promises to elevate his own position.

*Act 2 scene ii*

In this scene it becomes clear that Polonius has been unable to reach the King, and in the meantime Hamlet and Ophelia have collaborated in the composition of a ‘love letter’ which will serve as compelling evidence of the Prince’s madness.

*Polonius*

I have a daughter – have while she is mine –

Who in her duty and obedience, mark,

Hath given me this. Now gather, and surmise

‘To the celestial, and my soul’s idol, the most beautified

Ophelia.’ That’s an ill phrase, a vile phrase; ‘beautified’ is

vile phrase. But you shall hear. Thus: ‘In her excellent

white bosom, these, &c.’

*Queen*

Came this from Hamlet to her?

*Polonius*

Good madam, stay awhile; I will be faithful.

‘Doubt thou the stars are fire;

Doubt that the sun doth move;

Doubt truth to be a liar;

But never doubt I love

O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers.

I have not art to reckon my groans; but that I love the best,

O most best, believe it Adieu.

Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst

this machine is to him, HAMLET.’

This, in obedience, hath my daughter shown me;

And more above, hath his solicitings,

As they fell out by time, by means, and place,

All given to mine ear. (Lines 106 – 127)

We can only surmise that the most delicate literary sensibility on hand is that of Polonius himself, and he draws attention to this fact by informing the others that ‘beautified’ is a vile phrase. So confident is Hamlet that none of them will be capable of seeing through the ploy that he makes fun of the whole enterprise (‘I am ill at these numbers / I have not art to reckon my groans’). Their faith in appearances is supported by Polonius’ assurances of Ophelia’s good faith, for he pointedly refers to her obedience (twice). His lack of awareness in this respect is mirrored when, following his lengthy explanation to Claudius of how he has kept the lovers apart, and how this has led to Hamlet’s forlorn condition, Gertrude betrays her ignorance of her son by accepting his piece of nonsense (line 151).

Hamlet’s moral fury is vented upon Polonius in two short exchanges between them as the scene unfolds. The first follows immediately upon the episode we have just examined.

*Polonius*

How does my good Lord Hamlet?

*Hamlet*

Well, God-a-mercy.

*Polonius*

Do you know me, my lord?

*Hamlet*

Excellent well; you are a fishmonger.

*Polonius*

Not I, my lord.

*Hamlet*

Then I would you were so honest a man.

*Polonius*

Honest, my lord!

*Hamlet*

Ay, sir; to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man

pick’d out of ten thousand.

*Polonius*

That’s very true, my lord.

*Hamlet*

For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion – Have you a daughter?

*Polonius*

I have, my lord.

*Hamlet*

Let her not walk i’ th’ sun. Conception is a blessing. But

as your daughter may conceive – friend, look to’t. (Lines 170 – 185)

Believing that Hamlet is out of his mind, Polonius begins by asking, ‘Do you know me’, and is then subjected to a web of double meanings that is alive with moral insinuation. Thus Hamlet responds to the insulting question with a more penetrating sense of knowing someone; ‘you are a fishmonger’ means that Polonius is a pimp – because he is willing to trade Ophelia’s beauty for social eminence and the personal esteem this offers. When Polonius innocently denies that he is a fishmonger, Hamlet’s wish appears to mean that fishmongers are honest, but he actually means, ‘I would that you admitted what kind of man you really are’. In the next lines, the idea that one man in a thousand is honest implies that the world in general is corrupt, so the ensuing image portrays the sun as a good that generates corruption by what it ‘kisses’. The question, ‘Have you a daughter?’ leads from the image of corruption back to the perception of Polonius as a man. The immediate sense of lines 184/5 gives warning that if, in a world that is corrupt, your daughter is kissed by the sun (encountered in the world at large) she will probably conceive someone who is corrupt, even though to the devout mind conception is a blessing. Less obvious is the idea that ‘conception’ refers to mental conception (understanding), which is also a blessing. Here, being out in the sun means seeing things in the clear light of day, and in this connection ‘your daughter may conceive’, and see you as you are. Furthermore, the advice ‘Let her not walk i’ th’ sun / friend, look to’t’ sardonically alludes to Polonius the spymaster, who equates power with secrecy.

In the lines that follow it is clear that Polonius is imperviously wrapped up in his enquiry into Hamlet’s mental disorder, and does not even respond to a list of the defects of old men, delivered in a forthright manner and obviously applicable to himself. The second exchange between them, following the entrance, in this scene, of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, returns to the allusive game in which Hamlet more typically gives expression to his ire.

*Hamlet*

O Jephthah, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!

*Polonius*

What a treasure had he, my lord?

*Hamlet*

Why -

‘One fair daughter, and no more

That which he loved passing well’.

*Polonius*

[Aside] Still on my daughter.

*Hamlet*

Am I not i’ th’ right, old Jephthah?

*Polonius*

If you call me Jephthah, my lord, I have a daughter that I

love passing well.

*Hamlet*

Nay, that follows not.

*Polonius*

What follows then, my lord?

*Hamlet*

Why -

‘As by lot, God wot’

and then, you know,

‘It came to pass, as most like it was’.

The first row of the pious chanson will show you more; for look where my abridgement comes. (Lines 398 – 415)

Jephthah is an Old Testament leader who sacrifices his daughter and only child for the sake of military success (Judges,11.30-40). In the action of the play, Hamlet’s introduction of this figure is a non sequitur, and forces upon Polonius an identification that he has to make an effort to understand. Clearly, the song from which Hamlet quotes lays great emphasis upon the treasure that is embodied in the daughter, as she is loved passing well by her father. By invoking the parallel between Jephthah and Polonius, Hamlet, therefore, implies that Ophelia, too, is a treasure, and Polonius affirms this evaluation when he says, ‘I have a daughter that I love passing well’. Having drawn him in, Hamlet then denies the parallel (‘Nay, that follows not’), not because Polonius does not have a daughter, but because he does not love her passing well. When asked what does follow, Hamlet evasively quotes the next line of the song. This exposure of Polonius as a man who would sacrifice a treasure that he only pretends to love shows us the feeling behind Hamlet’s attack on him. For not only does he himself love Ophelia, he sees in her situation in relation to her father a clear resemblance to his own situation in relation to his mother. Thus his hostility to Polonius can be seen as an expression of resistance to the desolation that she has created in him. It is in this that we see how, in the second act, a new development is created in Hamlet’s response to his mother’s sacrifice of him, and his involvement in a conflict concerning Ophelia distances him emotionally from the task that he has been given by the ghost of his father.

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***Act 3***

*Act 3 scene 1*

The famous soliloquy and a meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia form the heart of this scene, and, in order to see what is going on here we require some background to the action. With the disclosure of Hamlet’s ‘love letter’, the King

and Queen and Polonius decide to contrive a meeting for the lovers and arrange to spy on them (Act 2, scene ii, lines 159 – 166). Ophelia must have prior knowledge of this meeting, and, therefore, so will Hamlet. At the beginning of Act three, Claudius announces that he has secretly sent for Hamlet to come presently (lines 28 – 31). Thus we can assume both that Hamlet knows well in advance of the encounter that the King and Polonius will be listening in, and that, with Ophelia’s help, he has had ample time to prepare something for them.

The plan to spy on him gives Hamlet an opportunity to mystify and unsettle Claudius, who is expecting an insight into Hamlet’s psychological condition, especially in relation to his feelings for Ophelia. As a response to this expectation the soliloquy feigns the tortured introspection of a lost soul contemplating suicide. On the surface of it, this is just what Claudius might have been looking for, except that this tortured introspection is cast in the language of oratory. Whereas in the other soliloquies Hamlet expresses his concern over the circumstances that trouble him, and in language that is sensitive to his responses to them, here there is an incongruity between the situation and the style. ‘To be or not to be’ gives his thought an imposing metaphysical resonance that would not be given by the more natural ‘to live or die’, and ‘that is the question’ evokes both the sense being gripped by a problem and the topic of a speech or debate. Similarly, rhetorical flourishes, like ‘nobler in the mind’ and ‘slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’, suggest not inward reflection but an orator striking an attitude. This, together with the generalizing and abstract nature of its references to experience, move the speech away from a sense a person examining himself and his own life and towards a theoretical argument. We feel this also in the clear structure of this argument, its seemingly irrefutable logic and presentation of evidence. The more persuasive to reason it appears, the less it resembles the inner turmoil of a man who is contemplating suicide – in such a man the fear of what may happen after death is unlikely to affect his thinking. This is implied by Hamlet himself, when, at the end of his ‘performance’, he deliberately confuses the fear of supernatural retribution (‘Thus conscience does make cowards of us all’) with the debilitating effect of thought upon action (‘the native hue of resolution / Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought’), and equates suicide with ‘enterprises of great pitch and moment’. The play gives us no reason to believe that Hamlet thinks that thought leads to inaction (a considerable amount of thought has gone into his present action), and in ‘enterprises of great pitch and moment’ he lets the grandeur of his diction take over from sense.

In the ensuing exchange with Ophelia, the oratorical edifice dissolves in a cascade of quicksilver wit and intense feeling.

*Hamlet*

Soft you now!

The fair Ophelia. – Nymph, in thy orisons

Be all my sins rememb’red.

*Ophelia*

Good my lord,

How does your honour for this many a day?

*Hamlet*

I humbly thank you; well, well, well.

*Ophelia*

My lord, I have remembrances of yours

That I have longed long to re-deliver.

I pray you now receive them.

*Hamlet*

No, not I;

I never gave you aught.

*Ophelia*

My honour’d lord, you know right well you did,

And with them words of so sweet breath compos’d

As made the things more rich; their perfume lost,

Take these again; for to the noble mind

Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.

There, my lord.

*Hamlet*

Ha, ha! Are you honest?

*Ophelia*

My lord?

*Hamlet*

Are you fair?

*Ophelia*

What means your lordship?

*Hamlet*

That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty.

*Ophelia*

Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty?

*Hamlet*

Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner transform

honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty

can translate beauty into his likeness. This was sometime

a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you

once.

*Ophelia*

Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

*Hamlet*

You should not have believ’d me; for virtue cannot so

inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you

not.

*Ophelia*

I was the more deceived. (Lines 88 – 120)

Here the opening lines portray the helpless lover, as with his change of focus Hamlet ‘corrects’ the preoccuptions of the soliloquy. ‘Nymph, in thy orison / Be all my sins rememb’red’ is a plea for forgiveness, since the long reflection on suicide neglects his love for her. Of course, the scrupulous observation is made for the benefit of the spies in the neighbourhood, and prepares for an immediate change of direction. As a means of initiating their performance, Ophelia has brought a prop in the form of some ‘remembrances’ she ‘longs’ to return to Hamlet. These, along with her ceremonious little speech give him a point of entry for an attack on her that is designed to create a feeling of moral instability in the eavesdroppers. At this moment the form changes from blank verse into a prose that is suitable to a dispute that includes rapid changes in tone. ‘Are you honest?’ has the immediate sense of ‘Are you being serious?’ as the King and Polonius have been led to believe that Ophelia has broken off relations with Hamlet; therefore, to them it should seem reasonable for him to question just who has been unkind. ‘Are you fair?’ reiterates this question and, with Ophelia’s reply, Hamlet changes the meaning of ‘fair’ to denote beauty, and thereby initiates a dispute on the subject of relations between honesty and beauty. Then Ophelia’s commonplace thought that beauty is enhanced by ‘commerce’ with honesty is turned by Hamlet into the suggestion that beauty will indeed enhance itself by an attachment with honesty and corrupt it in the process. This is given proof by time in the form of Ophelia’s (supposed) corruption of her honesty by her beauty, by collaborating with Claudius and Polonius. It is, however, they who would make a bawd of Ophelia and her honesty, and Hamlet’s words are directed to them.

The decline from ‘I loved you once.’ to ‘I loved you not.’ marks another change of direction, as Hamlet develops a more general attack, which includes himself and the world.

*Hamlet*

Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of

sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could

accuse me of such things that it were better my mother

had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious;

with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put

them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act

them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling

between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves, all;

believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where’s your

father?

*Ophelia*

At home, my lord.

*Hamlet*

Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool

nowhere but in’s own house. Farewell.

*Ophelia*

O, help him, you sweet heavens!

*Hamlet*

If thou dost marry, I’ll give thee this plague for thy

dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt

not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery, go, farewell.

Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men

know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a

nunnery, go; and quickly too. Farewell.

*Ophelia*

O heavenly powers, restore him!

*Hamlet*

I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God

hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another.

You jig and amble, and you lisp, and nickname God’s

creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go

to, I’ll no more on’t; it hath made me mad. I say we will

have no moe marriage: those that are married already, all

but one, shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. To a

nunnery, go. (Lines 121 – 149)

The intense feeling of Hamlet’s tirade clearly draws upon a sense of defilement that has been created by his mother; his misogyny mocks spirituality by using ‘nunnery’ for ‘convent’ and the reiteration of ‘none’ invokes a universal nullity. At the same time this piece of acting, which appears to be a violent assault upon Ophelia, is a melodrama enlivened by comic exaggeration, and her antiphonal exhortation to the heavens joins in the fun and adds confusion. Accordingly the exchange is casually determined by such accidents as random association and wordplay. Thus Polonius comes to mind because Hamlet’s low opinion of mankind recalls his earlier imagery of the sun kissing carrion and producing maggots, and Ophelia’s ‘restore him’ reminds Hamlet of painting and thence the use of paint to colour the face. Similarly, his invective against the frailty of woman stirs him to declare, ‘Go to, I’ll no more on’; it hath made me mad’, so he acts the mad tyrant and decrees that there will be no more marriages.

Hamlet’s theme is clear enough but he treats it in a disorderly way, and this enables him to interject unexpected and threatening references. For example, at lines 124 -126, Hamlet describes himself as ‘proud, revengeful and ambitious’, and in his ‘megalomania’ includes, ‘those that are married already, all but one, shall live’. The disorder in his argument is given a psychological aspect, and creates an atmosphere of emotional instability. In this respect the speeches in this exchange create a spell that enthrals Polonius and the King; Hamlet knows that eavesdropping makes them hyper-sensitively receptive. With his exit Ophelia delivers her own rhetorically artificial speech, a kind of funeral oration that is the counterpart of Hamlet’s soliloquy, memorializing the loss of a great leader, ‘blasted with ecstasy’. Though this represents a high point in the comic possibilities of the scene, we immediately see the effect of their antic performance in the King’s decision to send Hamlet to England (lines 162 – 175). The inability of the spying couple to focus what they have been watching is understandable, and only adds to their agitation. Clearly, the subtle dramatization of intersubjective action reaches great heights in this episode.

*Act 3 scene ii*

The play-within-the-play incorporates into the action a further development of the dramatic interplay between Hamlet and Ophelia, and we can see that its purpose is to intensify the King’s disorientation and fear of moral collapse. It is also intended to disturb the composure of the Qu*een*

*Queen*

Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

*Hamlet*

No, good mother; here’s metal more attractive.

*Polonius [To the King]*

O, ho! Do you mark that?

*Hamlet*

Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

*Ophelia*

No, my lord.

*Hamlet*

I mean, my head upon your lap.

*Ophelia*

Ay, my lord.

*Hamlet*

Do you think I meant country matters?

*Ophelia*

I think nothing, my lord.

*Hamlet*

That’s a fair thought to lie between maids’ legs.

*Ophelia*

What is, my lord?

*Hamlet*

Nothing.

*Ophelia*

You are merry, my lord.

*Hamlet*

Who, I?

*Ophelia*

Ay, my lord.

*Hamlet*

O God, your only jig-maker! What should a man do, but be merry? For look you how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within’s two hours.

*Ophelia*

Nay, ’tis twice two months, my lord.

*Hamlet*

So long? (Lines 105 – 124)

This is the first of three such exchanges, woven into the performance of the play-within-the-play. They are structured to amplify Hamlet’s design, the changing degrees of modesty and license in Ophelia bringing the pair closer together as the performance reaches closer to the critical moment in which the poisoning of King Hamlet is explicitly shown. In this connection Polonius’ comment to the King, at line 107, is important to the dramatic situation: it alerts the whole company to the conversation, and creates a silence that we can assume will prevail in the other two exchanges between the lovers. To the audience (including the court) Ophelia seems at first to resist Hamlet’s vulgarity, and the impression of an unhinged person being grossly familiar with an unwilling victim confirms her father’s notion of Hamlet’s romantic obsession and Ophelia’s filial obedience. However, Hamlet’s characteristically quick change of mood and interest is a warning against being over-confident, as when he catches the word merry and changes the subject to his mother’s fidelity. Attention to the movement of his thought creates an awareness of the opacity of his preoccupations and their unpredictability.

The exchange following the dumb show accentuates this uncertainty, in lines 136 – 143, where Hamlet’s innuendo elicits an ambiguous response; Ophelia’s ‘You are naught, you are naught’ implies that he is saying nothing and merely being frivolous, and also that he is being obscene. These two intentions together express a mock indignation that could easily be seen as flirting. With the intermission in the performance of the play-within-the-play, the third exchange effectively confutes Polonius’ conception of his daughter’s relations with Hamlet.

*Ophelia*

You are as good as a chorus, my lord.

*Hamlet*

I could interpret between you and your love, if I could see the puppets dallying.

*Ophelia*

You are keen, my lord, you are keen.

*Hamlet*

It would cost you a groaning to take off mine edge.

*Ophelia*

Still better, and worse.

*Hamlet*

So you mis-take your husbands. – Begin murderer; pox, leave thy damnable faces and begin. Come; the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge.(Lines 239 -247)

In response to Ophelia’s likening him to a chorus, Hamlet picks up the ideas of showing and interpreting he has expressed earlier (lines 139/40) and relates them specifically to her private thoughts. Our fantasies enable us to be puppet masters, disposing of the image of others as we please; therefore, if he had access to the ‘puppets dallying’ Hamlet could interpret her affections. Ophelia has no difficulty in taking the point, and ‘you are keen’ both acknowledges that his perception of her inner life is acute and leads him on by suggesting that he is getting aroused (she delivers one ‘you are keen’ for each meaning). Hamlet responds to this by making a forthright allusion to copulation, and, far from being offended, Ophelia exclaims, ‘Still better’, adding ‘and worse’ as a playful concession to good taste and decorum. With ‘So you mis-take your husbands’, he changes the direction and tone of the exchange by making a further thrust at Gertrude, suggesting (yet again) that her marriage to Claudius betrays an unseemly sensuality.

The implications of this exchange are far reaching. Guided by Ophelia, Polonius has given the King ‘evidence’ of Hamlet’s emotionally enfeebled attachment to her, and this has been quickly succeeded by the witnessing, in the opening scene of Act three, of a vicious expression of misogyny at her expense. Now, however, we see a freely erotic display of co-operation between the lovers, which is performed for the benefit of the audience of *The Murder of Gonzago*. Outrageously, Hamlet and Ophelia enact a kind of verbal foreplay in a play-within-the-play-within-the-play. This at once contributes to the turbid atmosphere created by Hamlet and throws into confusion certain assumptions about Ophelia’s loyalties. Assured by Polonius of her obedience, Claudius has accepted the employment of Ophelia as a collaborator, and it now appears that the lovers enjoy a close and intimate attachment. Suddenly the exchanges between them are revealed as another way in which Hamlet has set out to unnerve Claudius, and this is why the last of the exchanges is placed immediately before the players perform the murder of Gonzago. Hamlet is impatient for the play to recommence because he is concerned about timing; he wants the spectacle of the poisoning to follow soon after the unveiling of Ophelia’s allegiance to him. Having created a sense of unfathomable moral disorder around Claudius, he is anxious to strike before the situation can be considered and analysed.

*Act 3 scene iii*

*King*

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;

It hath the eldest primal curse upon’t -

A brother’s murder! Pray can I not,

Though inclination be as sharp as will.

My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,

And, like a man to double business bound,

I stand in pause where I shall first begin,

And both neglect. What if this cursed hand

Were thicker than itself with brothers’ blood

Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens

To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy

But to confront the visage of offence?

And what’s in prayer but this twofold force,

To be forestalled ere we come to fall,

Or pardon’d being down? Then I’ll look up;

My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer

Can serve my turn? ‘Forgive me my foul murder’!

That cannot be; since I am still possess’d

Of those effects for which I did the murder –

My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.

May one be pardon’d and retain th’ offence?

In the corrupted currents of this world

Offence’s gilded hand may shove by justice;

And oft ‘tis seen the wicked prize itself

Buys out the law. But ‘tis not so above:

There is no shuffling; there the action lies

In his true nature; and we ourselves compell’d,

Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,

To give in evidence. What then? What rests?

Try what repentance can. What can it not?

Yet what can it when one can not repent?

O wretched state! O bosom black as death!

O limed soul, that struggling to be free,

Art more engag’d! Help, angels. Make assay:

Bow stubborn knees; and, heart, with strings of steel,

Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe,

All may be well. *[Retires and kneels.* (Lines 36 – 72)

In this remarkably clear and analytical soliloquy, in which the King dissects both his moral circumstances and the effect of the analysis itself, we are constantly aware of the experience that engenders his thought. The idea, for example, that his offence has a primal curse on it is well known to him and therefore does not arise as the instigation of a new enquiry. Rather, it enables Claudius to put into words a response to the profoundly disturbing experience of seeing his actions represented by the play-within-the-play. Reeling at the effect of the play so paralyses the will that he makes uses of the idea to explain the impossibility of prayer, and from this he is able to examine his turmoil. Hence the mood of the soliloquy involves coping with his own thought as an aspect of the thought itself, and from lines 43 to 56 Claudius puts the circumstances and then the form of his prayer into a series of conjectures. If there is in the ‘sweet heavens’ the rain to wash away his primal curse, and if the spirit of mercy is in part to pardon our offences, then forgiveness is possible. However, this would only give him hope if prayer can preserve its meaning - if he were to relinquish all of those things that the offence has given him.

Claudius is still in possession of crown, ambition and queen, and intends to remain so, and this may seem to be the end of the argument; however, at line 57 the turbulence below the surface of his soliloquy emerges out of it, in a strikingly figurative passage. In the allegory of ‘offence’s gilded hand’, to shove by justice means both to push it aside and to use justice as a means of coercion, as we have seen Claudius do to Hamlet, and in this sense his wicked prize buys out the law. In this respect, Claudius confronts his own inclination to similarly dispose of the uncomfortable reality of his situation when he admits that ‘above’ there is ‘no shuffling’ and ‘the action lies in his true nature’. Hence the power and concentration of these lines reveal the psychological interior of the speech, for Claudius’ deeper purpose is not to weigh himself before his religious convictions, but to find some way of escaping the truth that has been impressed upon him by the performance. This is conceded in, ‘O limed soul, that, struggling to be free / Art more engag’d’. It is the self-recognition created by the exposure of his true nature to a public audience, that is the real concern of his reflections. His only release is to turn his attention elsewhere and thereby soften the ‘strings of steel’ about his heart.

The tortured indecision of the King is immediately mirrored in Hamlet, whose actions also appear to reflect his religious beliefs.

*Hamlet*

Now I might do it pat, now ’a is a-praying;

And now I’ll do’t – and so ’a goes to heaven,

And so am I reveng’d. That would be scann’d:

A villain kills my father; and for that,

I his sole son, do this same villain send

To heaven.

Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge.

’A took my father grossly, full of bread,

With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;

And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?

But in our circumstance and course of thought

’Tis heavy with him; and am I then reveng’d

To take him in the purging of his soul,

When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?

No.

Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent.

When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage;

Or in th’incestuous pleasure of his bed;

At game, a-swearing, or about some act

That has no relish of salvation in’t –

Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,

And that his soul may be as damn’d and black

As hell, whereto he goes. My mother stays.

This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

*King [Rising]*

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.

Words without thoughts never to heaven go. (Lines 73 – 98)

Like Claudius, Hamlet makes an appeal to Christian doctrine that would be more convincing if it were consonant with his customary thought and behaviour. Here the incongruity is especially acute, as he is contemplating murder and revenge, and apart from the consequences of such action for himself, he might well consider why this task has been imposed upon him. Does the ghost care nothing for his son’s immortal soul? Throughout the action of the play, being consistent with religious belief does not carry much weight with Hamlet, rather he responds to the behaviour of others and how they choose to act in relation to him. Corresponding to the crisis that he has created for Claudius, this is Hamlet’s moment of psychological truth – the moment for deliberate action. The test that he has contrived for the ghost has been more than sufficient and he confides as much to Horatio (Act 3, scene ii, line 280). Thus Hamlet’s ideas about heaven and the promise of it are convenient assumptions, and so is the description of King Hamlet, once Hyperion but now gross, ‘full of bread / With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May’. This, of course, echoes the ghost’s, ‘Cut off in the blossoms of my sin’; but the ghost continues, ‘Unhous’led, disappointed, unanel’d’ (Act 1, scene v, lines 76/7). The words of Claudius that close the present scene show that an attitude of prayer is not the same as a true repentance that is confirmed and validated by the last rites. Hamlet chooses to see the King’s physical attitude as signifying the ‘purging of his soul’, even though this judgement is woefully lenient on a man who lives in the shadow of a primal curse while the victim has his soul purged by fire. Thus, in the second half of his soliloquy, Hamlet betrays a sense of relief. Claudius’ life can be taken on one of any number of suitable occasions and so it is no longer necessary to consider the matter. Hamlet is simply glad to escape having to take action. In the next scene we will discover that his plot to create chaos in the court of Denmark has another motive, and that the discomfiting of the King is only a stepping-stone to another end that is much closer to Hamlet’s heart.

*Act 3 scene iv*

The tone of this scene is set by the murder of Polonius. After he has briefed Gertrude, she challenges Hamlet about his ‘pranks’, unaware that she is giving him a long awaited opportunity to challenge her with what she has done to him. Hamlet turns this meeting from her admonition of him into his psychological evisceration of her, and as he begins to do this Polonius makes his unfortunate intervention. Hamlet’s first reaction when he sees who he has killed is, ‘Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!’ The intrusion is not simply that of a habitual spy who is constantly working on ways of acquiring information; Polonius has interrupted Hamlet in the execution of his design. Therefore, in complete disregard of decency and any feeling for what this could mean for his beloved accomplice Ophelia, he ruthlessly continues what began with the play- within-the-play. Unprotected by the King and his court, which tacitly impose a silence upon Hamlet, the Queen is now isolated in a world of precarious flux in which her son is free to carry out his interrogation, and the insensate body of Polonius in the room reinforces our sense of Hamlet’s obsessive determination. Thus, at the outset of an attempt to ‘correct’ his mother’s amnesia, Hamlet himself forgets Ophelia in the torrent of his will and purpose.

*Hamlet*

Look here upon this picture and on this,

The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.

See what a grace was seated on this brow;

Hyperions’s curls; the front of Jove himself;

An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;

A station like a herald Mercury

New lighted on a heaven-kissing hill -

A combination and a form indeed

Where every god did seem to set his seal,

To give the world assurance of a man.

This was your husband. Look you now what follows;

Here is your husband, like a mildew’d ear

Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?

Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,

And batten on this moor? Ha! have you eyes?

You cannot call it love; for at your age.

The heyday in the blood is tame, it’s humble,

And waits upon the judgment; and what judgment

Would step from this to this? Sense, sure, you have,

Else you could not have motion; but sure that sense

Is apoplex’d; for madness would not err

Nor sense to ecstasy was ne’er so thrall’d

But it reserv’d some quantity of choice

To serve in such a difference. What devil was’t

That hath thus cozen’d you at hoodman-blind?

Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,

Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,

Or but a sickly part of one true sense

Could not so mope. O shame! where is thy blush?

Rebellious hell,

If thou canst mutine in a matron’s bones,

To flaming youth let virtue be as wax

And melt in her own fire; proclaim no shame

When the compulsive ardour gives the charge,

Since frost itself as actively doth burn,

And reason panders will.

*Queen*

O Hamlet speak no more!

Thou turn’st my eyes into my very soul;

As will not leave their tinct.

*Hamlet*

Nay, but to live

In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,

Stew’d in corruption, honeying and making love

Over the nasty sty!

*Queen*

O, speak to me no more!

These words like daggers enter my ears;

No more, sweet Hamlet.

*Hamlet*

A murderer and a villain!

A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe

Of your precedent lord; a vice of Kings;

A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,

That from a shelf the precious diadem stole

And put it in his pocket!

*Queen*

No more!

*Enter Ghost* (Lines 53 – 101)

Hamlet’s long speech here is a strikingly new way in which intersubjectivity can be explored by dramatic form. By holding up two miniatures to Gertrude he begins the unfolding of a sensuous experience that is shared by them, and this is the basis for the whole of their exchange. We know that they are looking at miniatures, and not paintings on a wall, from lines 64/5, since Claudius could only be described as ‘a mildew’d ear / Blasting his wholesome brother’ if the images were held close together. Moreover, the physical intimacy created by this sets in motion their natural intimacy, as mother and son, which has inspired Hamlet’s pre-meditated approach to this encounter. He introduces the images as a counterfeit presentment of two brothers because only one of them is a true brother; the other is a forgery or corruption of filial relations. From this point Hamlet uses the miniatures to make a specifically sensuous comparison, and in this respect he uses the vivid immediacy of sensory perception, rather than a more abstract reference to moral qualities and character, to intensify the intimacy of shared experience. The substance of his imagery has an obvious classical basis and this is indicated by the comparison of King Hamlet with Roman gods, such as Hyperion, Jove and Mercury. In a broad and rudimentary way, he draws upon classical ideas of an underlying unity that links Goodness, Beauty and Truth, while acting upon our primitive tendency to see physical beauty as an outward manifestation of character. Accordingly, the conception of his father is centred upon physical images which are heightened by supernatural allusion, while the image of Claudius is seen as grotesquely disfigured. In a deeper sense that contrast is intended to suggest something fundamental, for ‘To give the world assurance of a man’ implies not only that King Hamlet possesses the ideal qualities of a man, but also that his existence assures man of his worthiness.

Hamlet’s manipulation depends on the use of sensory perception that is self-evidently deceptive, as we all know that the painter of an important person is employed to improve on nature and heighten the dignity and virtue of the sitter. He gives another turn to his concentration on sensory perception in his castigation of Gertrude’s judgment. Just as the nobility of his father is known through the senses, so Hamlet represents the failure of his mother’s judgment as a degeneration of her primary perception of the world, reiterating the word sense, and referring frequently to sensory perception and its organs. The suggestion that her sense of things is deranged by sexual enthrallment ends in imagery of utter decay; the primary modes of knowledge and understanding being etiolated to the point at which nothing is left, not even a ‘sickly part of one true sense’. This intimate assault upon his mother’s immediate sense of herself goes to the heart and is unimpeded by any considered assessment of character. Thus his insistent concentration upon the senses leads effortlessly into a parody of the twisted sensuality that Hamlet supposes to be the reason for his mother’s attachment to Claudius.

Because Hamlet ‘corrects’ his mother’s failure of him, not by means of a reasoned explanation of her actions but by enveloping her in the desolation of his own feelings, it is the communication of his pain and not his reasons that affect her. Without overtly mentioning her desertion of him, he gives expression to his own disappointment in the violence of his comparison between the brothers, and of his disillusionment with her. In this he pretends that his censure is not merely personal but inspired by moral principle (given emphasis in the conclusion, lines 82 – 87), while she is subjected to the full force of his grief. Correspondingly, the ‘black and grained spots’ in her soul do not appear because Hamlet’s accusations are literally true, but because the engulfment of her in his feelings show her how deeply her actions have affected him, however dimly she may perceive the exact cause of his unhappiness. Regardless of her motivation, however, this confession of her sins is not enough for Hamlet, whose revel in sexual revulsion (lines 91 – 94) suggests that, as far as he is concerned, she should beg his forgiveness. In this connection, his dissembling torrent of blame is leading to an ill-fated attempt by Hamlet to persuade his mother to ‘undo’ the fault she has committed against him, an attempt that is delayed by the intervention of the ghost.

*Hamlet*

A King of shreds and patches -

Save me, and hover o’er me with your wings,

You heavenly guards! What would your gracious figure?

*Queen*

Alas, he’s mad!

*Hamlet*

Do you not come your tardy son to chide,

That, laps’d in time and passion, let’s go by

Th’important acting of your dread command

O, say!

*Ghost*

Do not forget; this visitation

Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.

But look, amazement on thy mother sits.

O, step between her and her fighting soul!

Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works,

Speak to her, Hamlet.

*Hamlet*

How is it with you, lady?

*Queen*

Alas, how is’t with you,

That you do bend your eye on vacancy,

And with th’incorporal air do hold discourse?

Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep;

And, as the sleeping soldiers in th’alarm,

Your bedded hairs, like life in excrements

Start up and stand on end. O gentle son,

Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper

Sprinkle cool patience! Whereon do you look?

*Hamlet*

On him, on him! Look you how pale he glares.

His form and cause conjoin’d, preaching to stones,

Would make them capable. – Do not look upon me,

Lest with this piteous action you convert

My stern effects; then what I have to do

Will want true colour – tears perchance for blood. (Lines 102 – 130)

By appearing only to Hamlet, the ghost focuses his presence on the person he wishes to shock, and little is added by his saying ‘this visitation / Is to whet thy almost blunted purpose.’ This suggests that the best that can be hoped for is a supernatural experience which might jolt his son into action, and that the ghost intervenes primarily in order to protect the Queen. Thus his solicitude for her is consistent with his instruction to Hamlet that she should be left to the judgment of God; the ghost’s appearance is a sign of his affection for her, and of indifference to the sufferings of his son. The distinction is relevant to the dominant theme of Hamlet’s interrogation, as it implies that the ghost knows that sensuality has nothing to do with the marriage between his wife and Claudius. There are further allusions to this in her agitated reaction to the spectacle of Hamlet conducting a conversation with thin air, in ‘O gentle son / Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper / Sprinkle cool patience’. As we have seen, it is by enveloping his mother in his own feelings that Hamlet assails his mother, and this has prevented a rational response. Rather, her response has been governed by feeling for him, and, incidentally, she betrays no sign of uneasiness concerning the substance of his attack. ‘O gentle son’ echoes her response to his lurid description of her lust, ‘No more, sweet Hamlet’ (lines 92 -95), while ‘flame of thy distemper’ echoes his association of her behaviour with ‘flaming youth’ (line 84). Unable to reason with him, Gertrude interpolates into her cry of alarm an insinuation that the ‘flame’ is not in her feelings for Claudius but in Hamlet’s disordered mind.

When Hamlet turns to him again, the ghost’s glaring and spectral appearance is a further attempt to scare his son into action, but Hamlet is evasive. Awe is immediately converted into pity, and pity is the enemy of action; ‘tears perchance for blood’ means tears instead of blood and, in combination with this meaning, tears for a blood relation. Thus, though Hamlet refers specifically to the dread command of his father, these words have an obvious resonance with what we have just seen. The phrase tears for blood refers also to Hamlet’s persuasion of his mother by enveloping her in his desolation, and this implies a similar contradiction with taking action. For if Gertrude has only been persuaded to feel something for him and is not even sure of the nature of her fault, then there is no prospect that her pity will lead to the undoing of her fault. His manipulation of her begins to appear misguided not only in its detail but also in its conception. At this point the ghost wearily decides to leave.

When Gertrude supposes Hamlet to have had a hallucination and ascribes it to ecstasy, he is quick to tell her that he is not mad and that he is willing to be tested. He goes on to warn, ‘Lay not that flattering unction to your soul / That not your trespass but my madness speaks’, which suggests that he has been alert to her insinuation of this in ‘flame of thy distemper’. Hamlet refuses to let his mother contradict his ‘view’ of her attachment to Claudius and ends this speech (lines 152 – 155) with an apology for his own virtue, an apology that is both pious and sardonic. The importance of his view of the marriage to Hamlet is clarified in the long speech that follows.

*Queen*

O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain.

*Hamlet*

O, throw away the worser part of it,

And live the purer with the other half.

Good night – but go not to my uncle’s bed;

Assume a virtue if you have it not,

That monster custom, who all sense doth eat,

Of habits devil, is angel yet in this,

That to the use of actions fair and good

He likewise gives a frock or livery

That aptly is put on. Refrain tonight;

And that shall lend a kind of easiness

To the next abstinence; the next more easy;

For use can almost change the stamp of nature,

And either curb the devil, or throw him out,

With wondrous potency. Once more, good night

And when you are desirous to be blest,

I’ll blessing beg of you. For this same lord

I do repent; but Heaven hath pleas’d it so,

To punish me with this, and this with me,

That I must be their scourge and minister.

I will bestow him, and will answer well

The death I gave him. So, again, good night.

I must be cruel only to be kind;

Thus bad begins and worse remains behind.

One word more, good lady.

*Queen*

What shall I do?

*Hamlet*

Not this, by no means, that I bid you do:

Let the bloat King tempt you again to bed;

Pinch wanton on your cheek; call you his mouse;

And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses,

Or paddling in your neck with his damned fingers,

Make you to ravel all this matter out,

That I essentially am not in madness,

But mad in craft. ‘Twere good you let him know;

For who that’s but a queen, fair, sober, wise,

Would from a paddock, from a bat, a gib,

Such dear concernings hide? Who would do so?

No, in despite of sense and secrecy,

Unpeg the basket on the house’s top,

Let the birds fly, and, like the famous ape,

To try conclusions, in the basket creep

And break your own neck down.

*Queen*

Be thou assur’d, if words be made of breath

And breath of life, I have no life to breathe

What thou hast said to me. (Lines 156 – 198)

Hamlet’s view of his mother’s recent marriage enables him, he assumes, to locate the fault that is the cause of her amnesia. Passion has distracted her, and now, after an immense effort of intellect and will, he assumes that he is in a position to undo her fault. The moral significance of her failure is essential to the attempt to put things right, as only a serious lapse in judgement and behaviour demands correction. If Gertrude’s amnesia were simply the ordinary inattention that we might see at any time in a person who is pursuing some reasonable goal, then the injury would be just one of those things that we all have to live with. Her blind spot over relations between Claudius and Hamlet is too innocent to be recognized as a serious moral failure. Thus, ‘go not to my uncle’s bed’ indicates the way in which Gertrude must undo her terrible wrong. Hamlet’s instruction and his homily on how to avoid temptation provide her with a sanctified course of action that is designed to unite mother and son at Claudius’ expense, and thereby reverse the significance of the marriage. With a further ‘good night’ Hamlet seals the imaginary union of their purified souls with a promise of mutual blessing, which must be all the more bewildering to his mother. Nevertheless, it is now quite clear to us, if it is not so to Hamlet himself, that his power to obey the ghost’s command has been disabled from within. For his deeper need to undo his mother’s desertion of him can be realized only if there is a living Claudius against whom she can act for the sake of her son.

Upon making his promise of blessing we must assume that Hamlet sees in Gertrude’s reaction that his dream of their mutual redemption is based on error, and, as desperate people sometimes do, he exaggerates his mistake. By forcing his mother to conform to his theory about her he may be free to continue, and so, in turning to Polonius’ dead body, he assumes the role of spiritual and moral saviour. Thus he interprets the murder as a divine act of retribution for which Hamlet himself will have to pay in this fallen world. The Queen’s response to ‘One more word, good lady’ is less a question directed to Hamlet than a cry of anguish. ‘What shall I do?’ follows upon the killing of Polonius, wild suppositions about her marriage presented as though they are indisputably true, a ghost’s appearance from which she is secluded, and, now, the pretence of a Christ-like mission to save mankind.

Hamlet’s response is tortuous in the extreme, introducing a labyrinthine and allusively figurative and allegorical instruction with ‘not this’. Following his thought and its movement would be difficult for a fresh and acute mind in ideal circumstances, let alone those of an exhausted Gertrude. Hence it is unsurprising that the point of the speech is not so much to tell her in clear terms what she should do, as to give expression to the disintegration of his purpose, and to vent his fury in the process. Hamlet begins this moment of recognition and reversal in the plot of *Hamlet* by advising against her allowing a grotesquely sensual King to seduce her into divulging the fact that her son’s madness is a deception. Even the idea that Gertrude should be susceptible to this kind of allure is deeply offensive, and in any case Hamlet can see that she now believes that beyond question he is actually mad. Because he knows that there is no danger of her telling the King that he is ‘mad in craft’ we can see that the sudden turn of his thought is the real purpose; telling his mother what she should not do is a means of characterizing her to her face. Lines 189 – 191 sarcastically allude to a corrupt court at the centre of which the Queen, fair, sober, wise can be relied on to spy, gossip and betray to serve a degenerate and morally poisonous King.

The idea that Gertrude’s sense is perverted echoes the comparison of Claudius and Hamlet’s father (lines 53 – 88) and it also lies behind the allegory of the ‘famous ape’ which is the climax of this speech. There is no source for this fable, and it seems likely that it emanates from the play of Hamlet’s own imagination, especially as its narrative conception is a natural, if obscure, development of his ideas. Therefore, to unpeg the basket on the house’s top and let the birds fly is an image for the perilous action of disclosing Hamlet’s deception to the King. It is perilous because Gertrude’s knowledge of this deception would appear suspicious to someone as deeply immersed as Claudius in a world of precarious authority and intrigue. His first reaction would be ‘How do you know this? Did he tell you?’ and doubts over a conspiracy between mother and son might follow. She would, like the ape that mischievously unpegs the basket, make herself a transgressor. Then in her confusion, like the ape that ‘tries conclusions’ (attempts to affect the outcome of its transgression by hiding from punishment), she will ‘try conclusions’ and fail to explain herself (Hamlet puns on ‘conclusions’); and just as the large and clumsy ape loses its balance, falls from the roof and breaks its neck, so she will buckle and ‘break your own neck down’ (this is a contraction of ‘break your own neck in falling down’).

Psychological violence is the purpose of Hamlet’s fable. As we have seen, he knows that Gertrude has no intention of betraying him, and engaging her in the oblique and threatening obscurity of his thought is attuned to a literary form in which brutal effects are created by a disturbing confusion of human and animal behaviour. Gertrude is psychologically impaired because she belongs to a world that is illuminated by this allegory – Hamlet implies that this horrifying enclosure is what she has come to deserve. In this scene we see a high point in Shakespeare’s use of dramatic form to portray our reflective life in action. There is an exemplary precision in its definition of the moral, psychological and emotional turbulence of characters in a very complex situation. \*

Hamlet’s next important moment of psychological action arises in the soliloquy that is the reason for including this scene.

*Hamlet*

How all occasions do inform against me,

And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,

If his chief good and market of his time

Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more!

Sure he that made us with such large discourse,

Looking before and after, gave us not

That capability and godlike reason

To fust in us unus’d. Now, whether it be

Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple

Of thinking too precisely on th’event -

A thought which, quartered, hath but one part wisdom

And ever three parts coward – I do not know

Why yet I live to say ‘This thing’s to do’,

Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means,

To do’t. Examples gross as earth exhort me:

Witness this army, of such mass and charge,

Led by a delicate and tender prince,

Whose spirit, with divine ambition puff’d

Makes mouths at the invisible event,

Exposing what is mortal and unsure

To all that fortune, death and danger, dare,

Even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be great

Is not to stir without great argument,

But greatly to find quarrel in a straw,

When honour’s at the stake. How stand I, then,

That have a father kill’d, and a mother stained,

Excitements of my reason and my blood,

And let all sleep, while to my shame I see

The imminent death of twenty thousand men

That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,

Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot

Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,

Which is not tomb enough and continent

To hide the slain? O, from this time forth,

My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth! (Lines 32 - 66)

This is an important soliloquy, because it shows Hamlet in the aftermath of his unsuccessful and highly elaborate attempt to undo his mother’s desertion of him. Here he returns, in a condition of spiritual depletion, to what he has considered to be his main task – revenge on the King, both for his father and for himself. Hence the soliloquy is self-examination at a time when all of his energy has gone to waste, and he is being driven as far as possible from the court of Denmark. It is, therefore, less a genuine summoning of resolve than an expression of maimed purpose and anxiety. This soliloquy is steeped in uncertainty and inner contradiction, the mood of which is implied in the opening line. In his exile, and surrounded by informers, Hamlet presents himself as assailed by internal informers – occasions being simultaneously an experience of the external world and a corresponding awareness of oneself (here the external occasion is Fortinbras and his army re- awakening Hamlet to his own urgent obligation). However, a suggestion of internal conflict in the words is already present in the trope, for the informers working for the court of Denmark are considered by Hamlet to be devious, unreliable and corrupt; the same may be true of his internal informers. This is why what he is saying is allowed to eat into his conviction in saying it.

Hamlet delivers a eulogy on the purposeful action that distinguishes man from the animal Kingdom. Not only is this tied to his godlike reason, but a failure to engage in such action is to sink into a bestial state and become less than human. Moreover, he sees the capacity to look into the past and imagine the future as the foundation for purposeful action (lines 36 – 39), and this is relevant to the characterization of Hamlet. His energetic activity, especially by creating designs that are aimed at rectifying the past, has dominated the action of the play. Thus we can hardly avoid feeling that his reflection upon action itself betrays an uneasy interruption of what has come from him in a continuous flow of effortless spontaneity. In this respect the soliloquy seems like a departure from what comes naturally to the character; Hamlet betrays some estrangement from himself, for example, when, in lines 39 – 41, he wonders whether his failure might be due to ‘bestial oblivion’ or ‘thinking too precisely on th’event’. The first of these ideas could only be a sign of distracted reasoning, as bestial oblivion is the last thing of which he could be accused. A similar inattentiveness can be seen in line 45, in which, at a time when he knows he is being escorted to his death, he confesses that he has the ‘cause, and will, and strength, and means / To do’t’.

His characterization of Fortinbras is intended to make much of the exploits of a ‘delicate and tender prince’, but immediately loses plausibility in ‘with divine ambition puff’d / Makes mouths at the invisible event’. In these lines a sensitive hero becomes something closer to a self-regarding actor; this interpretation, furthermore, fits better with the idea of someone who will sacrifice lives for the sake an egg-shell (and his honour). In lines 53 – 56 the end and purpose of godlike reason is defined as honour. Thus ‘to stir without great argument’ is not in itself great, but greatness is to stir without great argument for the sake of honour. Hamlet’s reiteration of ‘great’ is a rhetorical support to a tenuous conception of what it is to be rightly great, and there is a counterpart to this abstract and light-headed reasoning in the comparison of Fortinbras and his army with Hamlet himself. In the list of reasons for his taking action, he includes ‘Excitements of my reason and my blood’, which is an oddly detached expression of enmity, since he knows that the King is sending him, at the very least, into exile. Another counterpart can be seen in his commendation of mass slaughter. In line 61 this wholesale disposal of human life is ‘for a fantasy and trick of fame’. Hamlet knows a great deal about both fantasy and trickery, and here one trick is to transpose what is rightly great from honour to a fantasy and clever deception that ends in victory. However, there is also a suggestion that the soliloquy itself is a fantasy and a trick through which he can see. Hamlet’s language, his affected indifference to his circumstances and his free characterization of the main actors in the situation, subvert the eulogy to purposeful action and thereby concede the world to the King and his men, against whom he is powerless. The closing lines can be read as ‘henceforth, if my thoughts are not bloody they are worthless’, but also as ‘my thoughts must be bloody, but since they cannot be bloody they are of no account, and I will have to accept this’. Thus the soliloquy should be seen as Hamlet’s way of neutralizing the devious informers within him, and therefore as a change of heart concerning his energetic but unavailing actions and designs.

Another reason for the importance of this soliloquy is its function in the dramatic structure of the play. It enables us to see the psychological consequences of Hamlet’s collaboration with Ophelia for him and then for her. In the first and third phases of Act 4 scene v there is a many-sided portrayal of her state of mind, which combines her disenchantment and guilt with an oblique retaliation against the King and Queen for their treatment of Polonius.

*Act 4 scene v*

*Queen*

I will not speak with her.

*Gentleman*

She is importunate, indeed distract. Her mood will needs be pitied.

*Queen*

What would she have?

*Gentleman*

She speaks much of her father; she says she hears

There’s tricks i’ th’ world, and hems, and beats her heart;

Spurns enviously at straws; speaks things in doubt,

That carry but half sense. Her speech is nothing,

Yet the unshaped use of it doth move

The hearers to collection; they yawn at it,

And botch the words up to fit their own thoughts;

Which, as their winks and nods and gestures yield them,

Indeed would make one think there might be thought,

Though nothing sure, but much unhappily.

*Horatio*

‘Twere good she were spoken with; for she may strew

Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds.

*Queen*

Let her come in.   *Exit Gentleman*

*[Aside]* To my sick soul, as sin’s true nature is,

Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss.

So full of artless jealousy is guilt,

It spills itself in fearing to be spilt. (Lines 1 – 20)

As this phase of the scene unfolds, it becomes clear why the Queen will not speak with Ophelia, and this is connected to the aside concerning the nature of guilt. In lines 78 – 81 we learn that the body of Polonius has been swiftly and secretly interred, thus denying him a ceremonious funeral and dishonouring his memory. We can infer that the reason given for such action is to withhold from the people the knowledge of his murder, but Ophelia knows that the real reason is to punish her for collaborating with Hamlet at the expense of the King and Queen. Thus when Gertrude speaks of her ‘sick soul’ and the ‘artless jealousy’ of guilt she is referring to their vindictive behaviour. Her guilt spills itself in her refusal to see Ophelia; the Queen does not welcome what Ophelia so ardently desires, and others might wonder why (in fearing to have her guilt exposed by Ophelia, the Queen betrays it).

The Gentleman’s speech indicates that this treatment of Polonius is Ophelia’s main concern, and it is significantly placed alongside her hearing that there are ‘tricks i’ th’ world’ and the ‘hems’ and beating of her chest. Claiming to do one thing when you are doing another is, of course, a familiar trick, and ‘hem’ is form of reprimand. However, the beating of her chest could be the expression of outrage and remorse, and she is fully aware of the tricks in which she herself has been engaged. Her being driven by outrage and remorse is fundamental to this phase of the action, as Ophelia implicitly separates them in her speeches so that reprimand is also intended for herself. This is connected to the rest of the speech, in the sense that her disjointed and seemingly chaotic outpourings are not so ‘mad’ that no sense can be made of them, rather they are received as a confused medley of words, gestures and facial expression behind which intentional thought is perceptible. This and the coherence within the speeches and songs that we do hear make it obvious that Ophelia is acting, and that her condition has less to do with madness than with a suicidal rage and despair.

Horatio, who manages to stay on the right side of the King and Queen, gives the latter what appears to be sound political advice, but actually enables Ophelia to obtain her audience with them.

*Ophelia*

Where is the beauteous Majesty of Denmark?

*Queen*

How now, Ophelia!

*Ophelia [Sings]* How should I your true love know

From another one?

By his cockle hat and staff,

And his sandal shoon.

*Queen*

Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?

*Ophelia*

Say you? Nay, pray you mark.

*[Sings]* He is dead and gone, lady,

He is dead and gone;

At his head a grass-green turf,

At his heels a stone.

O, ho!

*Queen*

Nay, but, Ophelia -

*Ophelia*

Pray you mark

*[Sings]* White his shroud as the mountain snow -

*Enter King*

*Queen*

Alas, look here, my lord.

*Ophelia*

Larded with sweet flowers;

Which bewept to the grave did not go

With true-love showers. (Lines 21 – 37)

Ophelia’s opening question is so full of meaning that we should know immediately that she is pretending to be mentally deranged. The word beauteous is a pseudo-poetical mockery of ‘beautiful’, alongside which ‘Majesty of Denmark’ mocks royal grandeur ; in plain terms Ophelia is asking, ‘Where is the ugly King?’ She knows who is behind her anguish, and clarifies from the start who she is anxious to see. The Queen understands this and so her caution (line 22) is not simply a reaction to the breach of decorum. Thus while the King and Queen are hypersensitive to undercurrents of meaning in this scene, Ophelia is using the guise of madness to show them how their character should be regarded. Such a guise enables her to say what would otherwise be impossible to say, and to do so in an unnervingly unpredictable way.

Ophelia’s first song seems quite innocent, and might be related to her own failings; her ‘true love’ as a solitary pilgrim of pure heart and soul seems to allude to her loss of the worldly Hamlet, and therefore to a lapse in her judgement. But when a briefly reassured Queen asks for an interpretation, Ophelia unexpectedly changes the theme to one of bereavement. Suddenly her ‘performance’ is close to the bone, and the words are altered to make a clear reference to Polonius. In lines 31/2 ‘head’ and ‘heels’ are exchanged with one another as a way of making a travesty of the burial. Ophelia emphasises the point by adding the negation in ‘Which bewept to the grave did not go’ (line 36). Her expression of grief, ‘O, ho!’ is not just for the death of her father, it is even more for the cruel way in which the King and Queen have disposed of his body.

*King*

How do you, pretty lady?

*Ophelia*

Well, God dild you! They say the owl was a baker’s daughter. Lord, we know what we are, but not what we may be. God be at your table!

*King*

Conceit upon her father.

*Ophelia*

Pray, let’s have no more words of this; but when they ask you what it means, say you this:

*[Sings]* Tomorrow is Saint Valentine’s day,

All in the morning betime,

And I a maid at your window,

To be your Valentine.

Then up he rose, and donned his clothes,

And dupp’d the chamber-door;

Let in the maid, that out a maid

Never departed more.

*King*

Pretty Ophelia!

*Ophelia*

Indeed, la, without an oath, I’ll make an end on’t

*[Sings]*  By Gis and by Saint Charity,

Alack, and fie for shame

Young men will do’t, if they come to’t; By Cock, they are to blame

Quoth she ‘Before you tumbled me,

You promised me to wed’

He answers:

‘ So would I ‘a done, by yonder sun,

An thou hadst not come to my bed’.

*King*

How long hath she been thus?

*Ophelia*

I hope all will be well. We must be patient; but I cannot

choose but weep to think they would lay him i’ th’ cold

ground. My brother shall know of it; and so I thank you

for your good counsel. Come, my coach! Good night,

ladies; good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

*King*

Follow her close; give her good watch, I pray

you. *Exeunt Horatio and Gentleman* (Lines 39 – 72)

At the beginning of this passage Ophelia responds with vulgar aggression to the King’s fake courtesy. ‘God dild you!’ is taken to mean God yield, or requite you (Arden 2006). However, it could also mean God gild you, in the sense of giving a spurious lustre (like that of the golden youth of the sonnets). It could also mean God furnish you with a dildo in order to give you a virile appearance. Both of these meanings imply that the King is a fake by nature, and Ophelia goes on to steer the theme in another direction. According to folk-tale Jesus turns the baker’s daughter into an owl for denying him bread (Arden 2006). Juggling with appearances, therefore, can be turned against you, and ‘God be at your table’ wishes this upon the King. When Claudius obscures the attack on himself by assuming that she is absorbed in her father’s death, Ophelia dismisses his comment and sardonically presents him with an example of deception that he is better able to understand. Her descent into a popular ballad idiom, with its characteristically bouncing rhythm and accentuated rhyme, is the occasion for bawdy reflections on a commonplace manipulation of young women by young men. This grafts Ophelia’s preoccupation with her loss of Hamlet onto ‘what it means’, and in relation to both her tone is crude and fractious. With respect to love she uses the idiom as a means of self-laceration, for the calculating deception condemned in the song does not itself represent her relationship with Hamlet. Moreover, her mixture of anger and self- awareness is anticipated in ‘We know what we are, but not what we may be’; thus anxiety about a sense of herself seeps into her mockery of the King.

When, at line 150, Ophelia re-enters her brother is present.

*Ophelia [Sings]* They bore him barefac’d on the bier;

Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny

And in his grave rain’d many a tear -

Fare you well, my dove!

*Laertes*

Hadst thou thy wits, and didst persuade revenge,

It could not move thus.

*Ophelia*

You must sing ‘A-down, a-down’, an you call him a-

down-a. O, how the wheel becomes it! It is the false

steward, that stole his master’s daughter.

*Laertes*

This nothing’s more than matter.

*Ophelia*

There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance; pray you,

love, remember. And there is pansies, that’s for

thoughts.

*Laertes*

A document in madness - thoughts and remembrances

fitted.

*Ophelia*

There’s fennel for you, and columbines. There’s rue for

you; and here’s some for me. We may call it herb of

grace a Sundays. O, you must wear your rue with a

difference. There’s a daisy. I would give you some

violets, but they wither’d all when my father died. They

say ’a made a good end. *[Sings]* For bonny sweet Robin

is all my joy.

*Laertes*

Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself,

She turns to favour and to prettiness.

*Ophelia*

*[Sings]* And will ’a not come again?

And will ’a not come again?

No, no, he is dead,

Go to thy death bed,

He will never come again.

His beard was white as snow

All flaxen was his poll;

He is gone, he is gone,

And we cast away moan:

God-a-mercy on his soul!

And of all Christian souls, I pray God. God buy you. *[Exit* (Lines 161 – 196)

Ophelia has learned of Laertes return and comes back to bid him farewell. Her song ‘They lay him barefac’d on the bier’ is a fiction intended to console, and her tender greeting clearly contains a valediction. The second line of the song obliquely negates the first, and Laertes’ response joins sister and brother in shared grief. Here the guise of madness spares her, in her despair, from the unbearable prospect of a sober conversation concerning the true circumstances of their father’s death. Rather, in an obscure and figurative way, she seeks a formula that might explain something of the world that has brought her to her present state. Hence her second speech makes the musical form of a round, or canon, a metaphor for the cycle of generations – she points to one person and tells him to sing ‘A-down, a-down’ and then another, who must respond and follow, ‘an you call him a-down-a’. Calling this a wheel is in keeping with her being slightly off-centre, but it is also in keeping with the idea of a perpetual cycle, which is ‘becoming’ (beautiful) because it involves a continuous renewal of life and its sweetness. The false steward who keeps the wheel turning is Eros, who steals the master’s daughter in the sense that the young man takes the young woman away from her father, just as the second voice in a round takes over the melody from the first.

There are several ways in which this allegory is relevant to Ophelia’s experience. In the conflict between her duty to her father and her love for Hamlet she has allowed the ‘false steward’ to govern her, and put considerable faith in the power of Eros to affirm the soundness of her judgement. It is clear from her treatment of Polonius (and, incidentally, the King and Queen) that Ophelia’s boldness is acquired through her strong erotic attachment to an extraordinary man who is contemptuous of foolish old knaves. Eros has had a self-vindicating authority over all human values and, in the light of this, the personal frailties of her father make him seem to be of no account. This has had the further consequence that Ophelia is now aware that her love for Hamlet has encouraged him in this conviction; by being his accomplice she has endorsed a ‘lug the guts’ attitude, and she is now sensitive to the charge of her own complicity in the murder.

Though he senses that there is substance in what she says, Laertes understandably has some difficulty in grasping what she means. This accentuates Ophelia’s purely personal need to draw together some coherent sense of things, before she ends her life. She appeals to the symbolic meaning of flowers as a fragile way in which attention to things that are close to the heart can be recognized and tended, and places a special emphasis upon rue, which is for repentance, and violets, which stand for fidelity. Rue is connected with Sunday and therefore with the church, and so the cure for her remorse is linked to a wider conception of order and solicitude than the mere symbolism of flowers. Wearing your rue with a difference implies that there are many kinds and degrees of remorse, and that hers is especially severe. All of the violets withered when her father died because it was in that moment that her attachment to a healthy and vital existence withered. With this, fidelity to the life she anticipated collapsed within her; the lines that follow express a mournful fantasy of what she had dreamed. Polonius did not make a good end; did not receive the last rites; he was hastily interred in secret in order to punish her. The song ‘For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy’ is obviously a celebration of motherhood. Thus her last song ‘And will ’a not come again’ refers to her father, Hamlet and the child she has dreamt of having, and the line ‘Go to thy death-bed’ is sung to herself. Her closing line invokes once again the hope of a world of order and solicitude; ‘God buy you’ means both God be with you and God value you enough to save you.

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***Act 5***

Act 5 is a psychological denouement. Hamlet now accepts that life is largely a matter of unforeseen contingency, and that control over highly complex events is virtually impossible (he implies as much in scene ii, lines 5 – 11). The external world is unpredictable, and our grasp of the inner world and motivation of other people is often tenuous. He is contrasted with Claudius, careful architect of the concluding debacle (Act 4 scene vii, 125 – 162). This contrast is realized in a portrayal of the court and Danish society that is animated by satire, burlesque, parody and farce. Thus, in a play that is seriously concerned with the importance of respect for burial ceremony, the first part of scene i is a burlesque that reflects upon the curtailment of last rites to Ophelia. The foolery of the gravedigger, which Hamlet enjoys, especially in connection with his childhood friend the jester Yorick, is implicitly directed against the solemn adherence to written law by which Ophelia’s memory is dishonoured. If the graveyard does not represent justice and humanity it might as well be treated as a playground in which coarse jokes and throwing about of skulls are freely indulged, and life itself is seen as nothing more than a brief gesture of resistance to the sovereignty of dust. Something akin to this is evident later in Osric, who is a parody of the courtier, with his ornate artifice and dizzy flight from normal speech. Behind the iridescent appearance lies a will that is compliant to whatever is required by a ruthless authority.

The second part of Act 5 scene i can be seen as a response to the burlesque in the first part.

*Act 5 scene i*

*Hamlet*

What, the fair Ophelia!

*Queen*

Sweets to the sweet; farewell! *[Scattering flowers]*

I hop’d thou should have been my Hamlet’s wife;

I thought thy bride-bed to have deck’d, sweet maid,

And not have strew’d thy grave.

*Laertes*

O, treble woe

Fall ten times treble on that cursed head

Whose wicked deed thy most ingenious sense

Depriv’d thee of! Hold off the earth awhile,

Till I have caught her once more in my arms.

*[Leaps into the grave]*

Now pile your dust on quick and dead’

Till of this flat you have a mountain made

T’ o’er top Pelion or the skyish head

Of blue Olympus.

*Hamlet [Advancing]*

What is he whose grief

Bears such an emphasis, whose phrase of sorrow

Conjures the wand’ring stars, and makes them stand

Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,

Hamlet the Dane. *[Leaps into the grave]*

*Laertes*

The devil take thy soul! *[Grappling with him]*

*Hamlet*

Thou pray’st not well.

I prithee take thy fingers from my throat;

For, though I am not splenitive and rash,

Yet have I in me something dangerous,

Which let thy wiseness fear. Hold off thy hand. (Lines 236 – 257)

Farce seeps into this more serious action from many angles. In the first place it is odd that so demeaning a funeral should be attended by royalty, and the King and Queen must have known in advance what form would be taken by the ceremony. It is implied, therefore, that their approval was given and, in the light of what we have seen, that they welcomed it. One punishment leads to another, as we move from the interment of the father to the funeral of the wayward daughter. Therefore the Queen’s hypocrisy adds further insult, and it is given a cynical twist by the appearance of making a personal tribute; Ophelia’ punishment is deserved by virtue of her association with Hamlet, and is the most successful execution of premeditated revenge in the play. Laertes’ performance reminds us of his counsel in the first act, when, in his own interest, he warns Ophelia against involvement with Hamlet. An excessive concern for personal prestige and the honour of the family lie behind the passion and hyperbole in this expression of grief, but a sense of personal loss is missing. It is incongruous of Laertes, who violently objects to the defilement of the ceremony (lines 228 – 235), to leap into the grave in order to demonstrate the depth of his feelings.

Hamlet knows perfectly well that his mother and Laertes are false and watches them with growing disgust. The rhetorical ‘What is he’ questions Laertes’ character; the purpose of a funeral is not to draw attention to the interstellar magnitude of your soul by sacrificing yourself in words to the person who has died, and in his ire Hamlet loses control and confronts Laertes in the grave. ‘This is I / Hamlet the Dane’ is the moment when he snaps, and it is prompted by the curse upon him in Laertes’ speech. Hamlet’s absurd announcement of his ‘naked’ (and therefore blameless) presence, and accompanying action, challenge the judgement behind this curse, implying that he rejects the accusation that he is responsible for her suicide. But unfortunately his joining Laertes in defiling the ceremony betrays his uneasy conscience on this matter, and he betrays it even further in the ensuing verbal assault with which he silences his opponent (lines 260 – 278). In the next scene Hamlet tries to conceal his uneasiness in conversation with Horatio (lines 75 – 80), uncharacteristically expressing regret and the intention to apologize to Laertes, and claiming that ‘the bravery of his grief did put me / Into a towering rage.’ Since neither Horatio or Laertes know anything about Ophelia’s collaboration with Hamlet, he feels free to let them think that it is only the accidental killing of Polonius that could implicate him in her suicide. Hamlet’s uneasiness returns at a critical moment in the action, immediately before his fencing contest with Laertes.

*Act 5 scene ii*

*Horatio*

You will lose this wager, my lord.

*Hamlet*

I do not think so; since he went to France I have been

in continual practise. I shall win at the odds. But thou

woudst not think how ill all’s here about my heart; but

it is no matter.

*Horatio*

Nay, my good lord -

*Hamlet*

It is but foolery; but it is such a kind of gain-giving as

would perhaps trouble a woman.

*Horatio*

If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will forestall their repair hither and say you are not fit.

*Hamlet*

Not a whit, we defy augury; there is a special

providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, ’tis not

to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not

now, yet it will come – the readiness is all. Since no

man owes of aught he leaves, what is’t to leave

betimes? Let be. (Lines 201 – 210)

Anticipation of the contest is no sooner excited than it is broken, and this accentuates the impression that Hamlet is occupied with something that is more important to him. No sooner does he mention it than he tries to dismiss it, when the ‘no matter’ and misgiving ‘as would perhaps trouble a woman’ has been conveyed to Horatio in the words, ‘thou wouldst not think how ill all’s here about my heart’. Because the King has recently planned Hamlet’s execution an air of suspicion inevitably hangs over the contest, and it is natural for Horatio to think that his friend is thinking of this. However, Hamlet’s language is not of suspicion and apprehension; it is much closer to the language of remorse and irretrievable loss. It is inescapable that he is thinking about Ophelia and her punishment, and that the heaviness of his thought has forced him to confide something of it to Horatio. But because Horatio knows only a small part of what troubles him, Hamlet immediately denies the seriousness of what he has said. In the light of his inner change we can see that Hamlet is genuinely indifferent to the devices of the King, as he has to live with what he cannot undo; hence he rejects augury in all of its forms, whether they be from feelings of uneasiness or ‘signs’ in the external world. In the characterization of Hamlet, this is an inversion of the opening action of the play. There his anguish over his mother’s desertion is expressed in his resistance to it; now in the estrangement and death for which he is responsible there is nothing more than simple and unbearable recognition.

The psychological denouement is completed in the King’s farcical removal of Hamlet. From the grand gesture with which Claudius announces its commencement (lines 269 – 2710), the contest descends through error, misjudgement and mishap to his death, along with the death of the Queen, and Laertes.

*Laertes*

He is justly serv’d:

It is a poison temper’d by himself.

Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet.

Mine and my father’s death come not upon thee.

Nor thine on me!

*Hamlet*

Heaven make thee free of it! I follow thee.

I am dead, Horatio. Wretched Queen, adieu!

You that look pale and tremble at this chance,

That are but mute or audience to this act’

Had I but time, as this fell sergeant Death

Is strict in his arrest, O, I could tell you –

But let it be. Horatio, I am dead:

Thou livest; report me and my cause aright

To the unsatisfied.

*Horatio*

Never believe it.

I am more an antique Roman than a Dane;

Here’s some liquor left.

*Hamlet*

As th’art a man,

  Give me the cup. Let go. By heaven, I’ll ha’t.

O God! Horatio, what a wounded name,

Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!

If thou dist ever hold me in thy heart,

Absent thee from felicity awhile,

And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,

  To tell my story. (Lines 319 – 340)

These lines are dominated by recognition of another kind. For neither Laertes nor Hamlet wishes to be remembered by the ignoble fiasco which has caused their death. In this respect both are sincere in the forgiveness of each other that distinguishes them from those who have devised the trap. Thus Hamlet’s ‘’Wretched Queen, adieu!’ both unites her in treachery with Claudius, and fills the valediction with as much feeling as possible over her vengeful treatment of Ophelia. Moreover, the word adieu echoes the departure of the ghost in Act 1, and thereby associates him with the ruthless power of monarchy in the play, its endless intrigues, manipulation and violence. In this Hamlet disowns both of his parents as he dies, and in this moment of exposure makes a confused attempt to rescue his own reputation. In departing from this harsh world and being freed from the recognition of his own actions, Hamlet cannot bear to leave a ‘wounded name’ that would be the delight of his enemies. To avoid this he appeals in some desperation to the friend he has also deceived. (Not only has he concealed essential information concerning his relationship with Ophelia, he has deliberately misled Horatio in the events leading up to the play-within-the-play (Act 3 scene ii, lines 54 – 84). In this speech Hamlet flatters Horatio in order to give the impression that he is entirely alone in his stratagem, when he has Ophelia to join him in his scrutiny of the King’s reactions. By concentrating on the task Hamlet has given him, Horatio is distracted from the game that is being played by the lovers.)

Thus, in dying, Hamlet cannot resist the authority of ‘the world’, as this is the origin and measure of any individual; this is accepted in our concern for the public identity that is so penetratingly seen through in the dramatic portrayal of reflective life in this play.

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Intersubjectivity enables Shakespeare to greatly expand the portrayal of a person’s psychology and character, by revealing the unseen action within perception. For example, in the first soliloquy: the effect of Hamlet’s disillusionment upon his perception of his mother; especially the need to convert personal feelings of disappointment into a moral flaw that he can regard as substantial in order to justify action. In the last soliloquy a disorientation of perception and memory that is bound up with language enables him to reconcile himself to the impossibility of taking action when events arouse the ‘informers’ within him.

Intersubjectivity is also an instrument with which Hamlet imaginatively enters the mind of others and influences their thinking and behaviour. This is displayed in the various ways in which he deceives and confuses Polonius and Claudius and Gertrude; not only in the scenes where he simply exploits the eavesdropping of his victims, but most extensively in the play-within-the-play where several techniques are employed, and he clearly resembles Teiresias (in *Oedipus the King*), who guides the thought and action of others by suggestion and insinuation. A subtle variant of this can be seen in the ways in which both Hamlet and Ophelia create uneasiness over the nature of their ‘madness’, and whether it might be a mask for some threat. For example, in Act 3 scene iv, where Hamlet enters his mother’s thought and feelings in a variety of different ways and plays upon the idea of his madness. There is also the intersubjectivity of someone who knows you in a way that you could not expect: the ghost exploits his knowledge of Hamlet’s decision to see Claudius as the seducer of his libidinous mother. Its deepest expression, however, is related to the self-oriented preservation of personal identity. This is dramatized in the rifts that occur between Hamlet and his mother, Ophelia and her father, and Ophelia and Hamlet. In all three cases the forgetful are punished by their own conscience: in the closet scene Gertrude suffers without fully knowing her sin, Ophelia’s suffering over her treatment of Polonius is intensified by the vindictive Claudius, and Hamlet suffers in the recognition of what he has done to Ophelia.

In this play, as in *Oedipus*, dramatic form is not employed in order to illustrate a general theory of personality. Rather, it portrays very precisely the movement of thought and experience of its characters in clearly defined circumstances. In the closet scene, for example, the definition of circumstances is both clear and exceptionally complex and dense, and depends upon an understanding of what has been revealed about the characters in the action of the play to this point. This is because Shakespeare is not engaged in the creation of character as the representation of moral and psychological attitudes; Hamlet does not represent stoicism, or resignation, or fatalism, since the acute portrayal of reflective life in action transcends this kind of simplification. In Hamlet’s perception of her, Gertrude can be understood as the enfolding of sensory perception, memory, thought and imagination, and this is shaped by the unseen action that affects sensory perception. Because this unseen action arises out of our response to a life that is valued in itself, and is realized primarily through interaction with other people who are placed in the world as we are, it is basic to experience and the sense of oneself that determine judgement and intention.

Hence it is characteristic of *Hamlet* that key moments in the action are not overtly dramatic but seemingly quiet and incidental. This is true of Gertrude’s desertion of Hamlet and his proud refusal to refer directly to her amnesia as the cause of his anguish. In this connection, Hamlet has that within which passes show and so does *Hamlet*. This becomes, in the course of the action of the play, a silent conflagration of intersubjective action. Another key moment is seemingly quiet and incidental, Hamlet and Ophelia’s verbal foreplay being a seemingly idle exchange before and during the performance of *The Murder of Gonzago*. Similarly, the key moments in the closet scene are not only the obviously dramatic ones, like the murder of Polonius and the appearance of the ghost, but also the subtle changes that indicate Hamlet’s attempt to undo his mother’s desertion of him, and his failure to achieve this. (This scene has an anti-climactic structure, and so that as the overtly dramatic moments are absorbed into quieter action the interplay between the characters grows in meaning and significance.)

It is possible that Shakespeare’s influence for this approach to dramatic form can be found in *Oedipus*. In particular, the spell that is cast over Oedipus by Teiresias is a relatively unobtrusive moment that may seem to be incidental, but is of great importance to the action and can be appreciated as such when the play is understood as a whole. The consequences of this key moment are present both in the final catastrophe and in Oedipus’ acceptance of his guilt, as imposed upon him by Teiresias and Creon (Nelson 2010). Sophocles’ influence in this connection is strongly suggested by patterns of action that are deliberately subdued in *Oedipus* and *Hamlet* – in a way that extends far beyond anything else we know, either in Greek tragedy or in Shakespeare. The reader must engage thoughtfully with the work in order to see that the action of *Oedipus* is governed by a conspiracy between Creon, Teiresias and the oracle, and that the action of *Hamlet* is significantly influenced both by Hamlet’s compulsion to undo his mother’s betrayal and by his collaboration with Ophelia. In all of this, among other things, we see evidence that the version of *Hamlet* considered here (primarily Quarto 2) was published not for the theatre but in order to be read. There is a growing body of scholarship that supports this view (Arden 2006).

**Conclusion**

The foregoing argument grows out of a consideration of mental causation and its relation to physical causation. Hence, in Part 1 the idea of mutual involvement of materiality and self- awareness is presented by showing how the object is constituted by sensory perception and its inner life. Thus we see that the object is defined by such perception and that there is no physical object that is not realized by the experience of sentient beings; when unobserved, including being prior to the emergence of life, what exists is incipient to the object but nonetheless oriented towards life and sensory experience. The incipient object is material but also connected to life by physical modes that are media of sensory perception, and this implies that the world is an alternation between the unobserved incipient object and the physical object that is perceived and defined by experience. This and other viewpoints are taken in order to show that the relationship between materiality and self-awareness is not simply one of interaction but entails mutual involvement and interdependence.

It follows from these ideas that all phenomena, including oneself, and other people and sentient beings, are given their essence by how they are perceived. The inner life of sensory perception asserts the significance of the object and this inner life is conditioned by the intersubjective experience of participation in a community or group. So, in a reflective being, the conception of oneself and the world exists in a state of tension between the pursuit of a life that is valued in itself and the recognition of similar beings upon whom this reflective life depends. Hence the essence of the object cannot always be perfectly stable. It is characteristically subject to the individuality of experience in a particular sentient being. This is in conflict with the demand for a consistent conception of oneself, and of personal virtues and other qualities, but that does not imply that judgements about oneself and other people are merely relative.

Because a sense of personal identity determines the constitution of phenomena the illuminating portrayal of reflective life in action requires its own language. In works such as *Hamlet,* the Sonnets and Titian’s painting cognitive purpose is based on cohesion between the elusive and unpredictable self-awareness in sensory perception, the real constitution of phenomena as the assertion of significance, and a language that figures this assertion in the disorderly plenitude of experience as it flows in time. The discussion in Part 2 shows how natural language, or its equivalent in physical works of art, subtly portrays reflective life in action by means of various figurative techniques, and in doing so reveals the moral conflict and uncertainty within human actions and events. The artist is able to achieve this kind of revelation because the portrayal of reflective life in action is organized so that the assertion of significance in the object is convincingly portrayed in the self-oriented experience and behaviour of powerfully conceived individuals in a coherently imagined human world.

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