

David B. Milne: An Artist's Epistemology

by

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B.A., St. Francis Xavier University, 2007

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Philosophy

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University of Victoria

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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David Milne's extensive writings about visual art – focused largely on his subjects and practice – present, when translated into philosophical language, a coherent epistemology. The major themes in Milne's thought include the character of, and relationships between, abstract form and content, and an overwhelming desire for wholeness, unity, and sincerity in art. An exegesis of his two central ideas, *intransitive love* and *aesthetic emotion*, suggests that Milne is describing a particular state of nonjudgmental attention as a route to apprehension of truth, placing it within a continuous and growing body of philosophy that challenges Western society's epistemological orthodoxy. I accept that the mode of thought George Grant calls "Technology" – a term inherited from Heidegger – is the default mode for Western thought, and contrast it with Milne's epistemology to indicate ethical and environmental ramifications an epistemology of art could bring to bear on Grant's analysis of the ontology of Technology.

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Acknowledgments

Ten years ago I picked up Dennis Lee's book of essays, Body Music, which made me think very differently about philosophy – about what it does, and what it could do – and which, eventually, lead me to write this thesis. My mother's love for David Milne's rubbed off on me over the years and gave me its focus. I am greatly indebted to Lee and Milne, along with Jan Zwicky and the late George Grant, for their off-beat perspectives and insight.

I would also like to thank Claudia Haagan and David Gray for giving me such a good home in Victoria – an atmosphere of intellectual debate, mediated by Scrabble contests, and fuelled by great food and cheap champagne.

Dedication

For my parents, A.W. Syperek and Peter Murphy, who, on long drives through Cape Breton in the 80s, made me put down my paperback mysteries and look out the car window, teaching me to see the landscape.

And for T.P., a fellow fan of mysteries and very good company along the way.

"There are places, just as there are people and objects and works of art, whose relationship of parts creates a mystery, an enchantment, which cannot be analyzed. This place of mine was not remarkable for any unusual features which stood out. Yet there was a peculiar spacing in the disposal of the trees, or it was their height in relationship to these intervals, which suggested some inner design of very subtle purpose."

- Paul Nash

Introduction

"Art teaches nothing except the significance of life." – Henry Miller

In this thesis, I attempt to develop an epistemology of visual art found in the extensive writings of visual artist David B. Milne. As he consciously resisted the restrictions of most proscriptive theories of art upon his thought, in my exegesis of his practice and conception of art, I am primarily concerned to distil and clarify Milne's own ideas. I also explore the theories of two earlier thinkers, Clive Bell and John Ruskin, whose ideas Milne professed to admire and had incorporated into his own. By focusing on Milne's writing I hope to avoid incorporating the assumptions underlying previous critical interpretations of his work.¹

On the surface, and especially when presented with the two apparently opposed poles of influence in what Milne has reported reading and admiring – Clive Bell and the formalist critics, on the one hand, and American transcendentalists and John Ruskin on the other – Milne's understanding of art seems "paradoxical" or incoherent.² And yet, working with the apparent conflict between abstract formal considerations and the belief that by painting what he saw he was "glorifying God," Milne created art that still feels fresh and resonant almost one hundred years later.

¹ Unfortunately, many of Milne's compositions remain unpublished (letters, diaries, and an autobiography) and in his family's possession. This inevitably means that what I am able to find of Milne's writings has been selected for publication by authors and editors and will not be as complete or free of interpretation as I would desire. However, much of what is available is reprinted in full, or in quite lengthy passages, in the books by David Silcox, John O'Brian, Rosemarie L. Tovell, and Ian Thom.

² John O'Brian, David Milne and the Modern Tradition of Painting (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1983) 88.

I have translated his ideas, as I have understood them, into philosophical language, and argue that Milne offers us a valid epistemology that belongs within a continuous and growing body of philosophy that challenges Western society's epistemological orthodoxy. I accept that the mode of thought George Grant calls "Technology" is the default mode for Western thought, and contrast it with Milne's epistemology to indicate the ramifications an epistemology of art could bring to bear on Grant's analysis of the ontology of Technology.³

The first chapter provides an exegesis of Grant's ontology of Technology, introducing the foil against which we can see the radical nature of Milne's artistic epistemology. Grant adopted the term 'Technology' or 'Technological,' from Heidegger; it refers to both the knowledge of techniques (including the sciences, engineering and production methods, as well as various systems of categorization) and the machines and tools this knowledge allows us to create. Technology is, Grant claims, "the ontology of the age," and is characterized by instrumentality, neutrality and purposiveness.⁴ This way of thinking about ourselves in the world "is so rooted in us that it seems to be common sense itself, even rationality itself."⁵ Technology is therefore both the neutral tools we create to help us manipulate our world and the understanding of the world as not only neutral but as a set of raw materials at our disposal.

What both Grant and Heidegger point out is that we forget that scientific reason – the ascertaining of objective facts about an allegedly neutral world which justifies the

³ George Grant, Technology and Justice (Concord: House of Anansi Press, 1986) 32.

⁴ Grant, Technology 32.

⁵ Grant, Technology 21.

development and application of our technologies – is just one paradigm of knowledge, and that like any paradigm of knowledge it “is to be understood as the relationship between an aspiration of human thought and the effective conditions for its realization.”⁶ Within the ontology of Technology we are unable to see that everything we experience, or might use to judge our experiences, including our modern ideas of justice and the Good, has also been created or mediated by this singular account of reason that produces Technology.⁷

The following statement from his 1948 essay, ‘Feeling in Painting’ (the word ‘feeling’ here is an early indication of its incongruence with the Technological mode) is emblematic of Milne’s thought: “Feeling is the power that drives art. There doesn’t seem to be a more understandable word for it, though there are others that give something of the idea: aesthetic emotion, quickening, bringing to life. Or call it love; not love of man or woman or home or country or any material thing, but love without an object – intransitive love.”⁸ In the second chapter I provide an exegesis of Milne’s two central ideas, *intransitive love* and *aesthetic emotion*; and suggest that he is describing a particular state of nonjudgmental attention and intense feeling toward the world, in a mode free from everyday human concerns, as a route to the apprehension of a truth that is prior to our specific (and/or limited) human conceptions.

⁶ Grant, *Technology* 21.

⁷ Grant, *Technology* 26.

⁸David P. Silcox, *Painting Place: The Life and Work of David B. Milne* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 1. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are of Milne’s own words, and the references correspond to where I found them reproduced.

In the third chapter I look at several other thinkers, among them Dennis Lee and Jan Zwicky (my interest in this topic is deeply indebted to both), Don McKay, Robert Bringhurst, Grant, and Wittgenstein, who advocate paying just this sort of attention to our experience of the world, many of whom also refer explicitly to this particular orientation as “love.” In the discussion I look at the nature of both the truth perceived, and the mode of perception itself, that characterize the mode of thinking I will refer to as Intransitive Love. This brings several other major themes in Milne’s writing to the fore, including the character of, and relationships between, abstract form and content, and an overwhelming desire for wholeness, unity, and sincerity in art.

My motivations for pursuing this project lie in my belief that we recognize truth and meaning in art and that it is discovered and communicated through a mode of thinking that differs greatly from our everyday and academic modes. I also believe that this way of communicating truth and meaning has been marginalized by the dominance of the paradigm of knowledge as scientific reason, or, in the language of Grant and Heidegger, Technology. I suspect that if we were to take seriously Milne’s artistic epistemology it might lead us to act very differently in the world, particularly in areas of ethics and the environment.

Thus, in the fourth and final chapter I provide a rough sketch of the possible ways an artist’s epistemology might challenge the ontology of Technology. I resist asserting any concrete conclusions, but in displaying the contrasts between approaching our world in the Technological mode and approaching it from a position that incorporates the insights of an artistic epistemology, founded in a mode of Intransitive Love, I hope to suggest these epistemologies engender very real life consequences.

To be clear – I do not propose to be making claims about all visual art, but only about a particular strain of visual art which draws inspiration from looking at the world around us – and particularly the natural world – in a way that sees deep formal resonances. I would include in this conception of art, among many others, painters Paul Nash, Vincent Van Gogh, Emily Carr, Lawren Harris, Wassily Kandinsky, sculptor Henry Moore, and photographers Ansel Adams, and Edward Weston. I see their ideas and practice of visual art paralleled in the discussions of poetry, philosophy, mathematics, and ecology by Dennis Lee, Jan Zwicky, Tim Lilburn, Gregory Bateson, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein.

In conclusion, I will argue that if we attend to Milne's understanding of art with the depth of thought and rigour typical in other realms of philosophical study (but rarely focused upon the thought and writings of artists), we find a realm of thought within which meaning is protected from what Grant describes as Technology's nihilism.

Chapter 1

George Grant, profoundly perplexed by his inability to rationally articulate his experience of being claimed by “an eternal order,” looked to the writings of Levi-Strauss, Heidegger, and Jacques Ellul, where he found accounts of modern thought that resonated deeply with his own experience. We can think of Grant’s “eternal order” as “the coherence of what is,” as his friend and editor Dennis Lee suggests.⁹ Grant believed that this coherence ensures us the possibility of coming to know “what is,” for the eternal order “inform[s] the constancy of the physical world, and the moral order which human beings [can] sometimes sense.”¹⁰ Importantly, this order for Grant was not anything “created or measured by man,” but was one in relation to which man himself was measured and judged.¹¹ Grant eventually came to describe his seminal existential experience as an apprehension of “beholdenness,” a “recognition that I am not my own.”¹²

Grant applauded Strauss’ condemnation of modern thought (which Grant felt failed to recognize an eternal order) as nihilistic and founded upon unsupportable assumptions, and attempted to embrace his proposal that classical thought gave a more satisfying account of the truth. But he was unable to find in Strauss’ work a “concrete, reasoned account of the primacy of the eternal *in terms one could accept today*.”¹³ When

⁹ Dennis Lee, *Body Music* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1998) 132.

¹⁰ Lee 132.

¹¹ Lee 132.

¹² Grant, as quoted in Lee 132.

¹³ Lee 136. The italics express my own emphasis.

Grant turned to Heidegger he began to see why he and Strauss had been frustrated in their attempts.

In Heidegger Grant found an articulation of the disturbing plight of the West deeply bound up in an ontological condition best expressed by the term “Technological.”¹⁴ The Technological character of modernity repelled Grant, for he saw in it the preclusion of any rational understanding of ideas like, and experiences of, ‘the Good.’¹⁵ Thus, Grant devoted many years of thought and writing to Technology and descriptions of the Technological character of modern thought in the Western world. This was his attempt to demonstrate how and why, despite his belief that we receive intimations of the Good from the eternal order (Grant professes to have experienced this first hand), articulation of the Good in terms acceptable to modern thought *necessarily* eluded him. His efforts reveal that the failure of such a project is, in Technological society, inevitable.

The Technological paradigm of knowledge permeates our consciousness, conditioning our existence and placing us in a very particular relationship to the world we find ourselves in. This relationship is too narrow and limiting of our experience; as Grant

¹⁴ Throughout the text I will capitalize the terms “Technology” and “Technological” to identify and emphasize the rich and particular ontological sense with which they are imbued when employed by Heidegger and Grant. Although Grant adopted Heidegger’s description of Technological society, Edward Andrew argues that Grant “was a Platonist who got his bearings from an order outside history, an order not of man’s making,”* and that this marks an important distinction between Grant and Heidegger, who he believed had an essentially historical understanding of our being. However, this may be to overstate their differences, for it can also be argued that Heidegger’s understanding of being was not ‘purely’ historical either, but “Platonized” by his early experience as a Roman Catholic.

*Edward Andrew, “George Grant on the Political Economy of Technology,” Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society 23 (2003): 484.

¹⁵ I capitalize “the Good” throughout the text in order to emphasize its use as a place holder for a concept categorically opposed to the contemporary conception of “values” as subjective, arbitrary, and changeable. “The Good,” as Grant and Lee use it, is a term carried over from older paradigms of thought, and is (as we will see) necessarily difficult to define in the contemporary academic climate, but can be understood to involve both beauty and purpose.

demonstrates, Technology systematically denies recognition of inherent meaning and precludes criticism of its own methods and assumptions. Dennis Lee calls the problem of “modernity’s impotence toward meaning” that Grant has so carefully illustrated “Grant’s Impasse,” and describes it as a “systematic checkmate in our civilization – an independent condition of thought and life.”¹⁶

§

“In each lived moment of our waking and sleeping, we are Technological civilization.”

George Grant, Technology and Justice¹⁷

This opening statement of George Grant’s essay “Thinking About Technology”¹⁸ is an assertion of Technology’s remarkable permeation of our collective Western being. “Technology” is for Grant, as it was for Heidegger, the term that best encompasses the “internal and external realities of our civilization.”¹⁹ “Technology” refers not only to all manner of computer, machine and gadget, nor simply to the knowledge and skill that goes into their creation, but to both of these at once – Technology, for Heidegger and

¹⁶ Lee 139.

¹⁷ Grant, Technology 11.

¹⁸ Grant, Technology 11-34.

¹⁹ Lee 138.

Grant, refers to the “whole complex of [these] contrivances.”²⁰ However, Technology is still more than this. It is also the ends, attitudes, assumptions and social structures that promote and require such knowledge and production. We must be careful not to accept the common definition of Technology as merely instrumental – or consisting in inherently neutral tools at the disposal of humankind – for this will obscure its essence and power. As Grant explains, Technology is not simply “at man’s disposal”, it effectively mediates our daily existence – it structures our thinking and language, our conceptions of reason, value and justice, and our relationships to our selves, the environment, and everyone and everything within it. Thus Grant boldly asserts, “Technology is the ontology of the age.”²¹

I will accept, with Grant and Heidegger, that Technology is the ontology of our Western civilization, and will recount their description of its form and character in order to provide the foil against which Milne’s “artistic” mode of thought comes into bold relief. I argue that the fundamental character of these two paradigms of knowledge is the way they position us in relation to the natural world and other people, and that the “real life” results of Technology’s dominance are putting pressure on our civilization to reconsider which relationship we can more readily defend.

To show how the instrumental definition of Technology hides its essence and formidable power, we turn first, as Grant did, to the writings of Martin Heidegger. Grant found in Heidegger “the thinker who most deeply pondered our Technological destiny.”²²

²⁰ Martin Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology & Other Essays (New York: Harper and Row, 1977) 4.

²¹ Grant, Technology 32.

²² Grant, Technology 17.

In his quest to understand the essence of Technology, Heidegger performs an almost archaeological exploration of the words we use to speak about it, exploring the ranges of their meaning and unearthing what he argues are the ancient and fundamental meanings. For Heidegger, William Lovitt suggests, words are not “mere abstractions, but rather show the Being of that of which they speak.”²³ Heidegger’s excavations start with the term “instrumental” because, he explains, the instrumental is always conditioning our attempts to understand and “get a grip,” as it were, on Technology.²⁴ We are aware on a deep level that, in Heidegger’s words, “everything depends on our manipulating Technology in the proper manner as a means.”²⁵ We believe Technology produces “instruments,” and is itself “instrumental;” it is a means to an end. This is an “uncannily correct” definition, Heidegger acknowledges, and yet it misses what Heidegger ultimately determines is the essence of Technology.²⁶

The “instrumental” leads Heidegger to examine causes and causality, for “wherever ends are pursued and means are employed, wherever instrumentality reigns, there reigns causality.”²⁷ Causality comes from the Roman “*cadere*, “to fall,” or “that which brings it about that something falls out as a result in such and such a way,” evincing a setting-into-motion of a particular and ineluctable outcome.²⁸ The Roman notion seems to explicitly involve motion in causality while the Greeks had a somewhat

²³ Heidegger, QCT xx (Lovitt’s introduction).

²⁴ Heidegger, QCT 5.

²⁵ Heidegger, QCT 5.

²⁶ Heidegger, QCT 5.

²⁷ Heidegger, QCT 6.

²⁸ Heidegger, QCT 7.

more static understanding of causality as *aition*, or “that to which something else is indebted” in the sense of “being responsible for something else.”²⁹ Aristotle’s four causes are united, Heidegger believes, in this way of being responsible; by “[bringing] something into appearance” or “bringing forth.”³⁰ This idea of “bringing forth,” or *poiēsis*, he explains as “something concealed [coming] into unconcealment,” having the character of a “bursting open,” a coming to fruition which includes “the growing things of nature as well as whatever is completed through the crafts and the arts.”³¹ The essence of causality, Heidegger argues, incorporates all these ideas of motion, responsibility, bringing-forth, and the transition from concealment to unconcealment.

Heidegger’s unusual terms “concealment” and “unconcealment” derive from his understanding of the Greek word *alētheia*. The word is an alpha privative construction; the “a” at the beginning signals a negation of the root word.³² The root word *lēthē* means forgetfulness or oblivion.³³ Heidegger’s use of “concealment” and “unconcealment” emphasize the sense in which states of affairs often require some action or effort on our part in order to be accessible to consciousness, or to come into existence in a particular way. For Heidegger, this phenomenon was best expressed by the term “revealing.”

This idea of “revealing” is important for Grant’s take on Technology. The term Technology comes from the Greek words *technē* and *logos*, which Grant translates as *art*

²⁹ Heidegger, QCT 7.

³⁰ Heidegger, QCT 9.

³¹ Heidegger, QCT 10-11.

³² Martin Heidegger, “Aletheia (Heraclitus, Fragment B 16),” Early Greek Thinking (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 104.

³³ Heidegger, EGT 103, translators footnote.

and *systematic study*. North Americans, Grant argues, typically use “technology” to mean “the actual means of making events happen,” *as well as* “the systematic study of these means.”³⁴ This dual usage illustrates the extent to which “our activities of making and knowing have been brought together in a way which does not allow the once-clear distinguishing of them.”³⁵ This novel “interpenetration of the arts and sciences,” of making and knowing, Grant argues is the essential characteristic of Technology.³⁶ Until Plato, as Heidegger claimed, *technē* had been linked with *epistēmē*, and “both words were names for knowing in the widest sense.”³⁷ This knowing was an “opening up,” or “revealing.” It was Aristotle, according to Heidegger, who first articulated a key distinction: *technē*, which nonetheless “belongs to *poiēsis*,” was the specific way of revealing of those things “that do not bring *themselves* forward,” (my emphasis), and it involved the “gathering together in advance the aspect and the matter of a ship or a house, with a view to the finished thing envisioned as completed, and from this gathering determining the manner of its construction.”³⁸ Note that the action of revealing is prior to the action of manufacturing; therefore, Heidegger argued, “what is decisive in *technē* does not lie at all in the making and manipulating nor in the using of means, but rather in

³⁴ Grant, Technology 12.

³⁵ Grant, Technology 12.

³⁶ Grant, Technology 12.

³⁷ Heidegger, QCT 13.

³⁸ Heidegger, QCT 26.

the aforementioned revealing. It is as revealing, and not as manufacturing, that *technē* is a bringing forth.”³⁹

The absolutely crucial etymological link for Heidegger, is his claim that “revealing” for the Greeks was *alētheia*, which the Romans translated as *veritas* – or truth, for this explains why Technology can be “no mere means.”⁴⁰ Technology cannot be merely a means to an end because its essential activity precedes, in a real and important sense, the serving of any particular human ends. Its essence lies in *its particular way of revealing the world* to ourselves, and the realm of revealing, Heidegger reminds us, is the realm of truth.⁴¹

This is why the commonplace understanding of Technology as instrumental and benignly neutral is misleading; it obscures that fundamental move made by Technology. The world was not always so readily available to us as raw materials for manipulation toward the meeting of our ends – Technology puts us in the position where we can reveal the world to ourselves in that very particular way and accept it as *its* truth. This is the novel “interpenetration of knowing and making” that Grant is so concerned with. What we consider “making” and what we consider “knowing” are very difficult to extricate from one another, and “they have both been changed” Grant argues, “by their co-penetration.”⁴² To know what something is appears to be equivalent to knowing how and for what it can be used.

³⁹ Heidegger, QCT 13.

⁴⁰ Heidegger, QCT 12.

⁴¹ Heidegger, QCT 12.

⁴² Grant, Technology 13.

Modern Technology is a revealing, Heidegger states, but it is a mode of revealing that “does not unfold into a bringing forth in the sense of *poiēsis*. The revealing that rules in modern Technology is a challenging.”⁴³ For Heidegger energy is the paradigm case for understanding what is so new about this “challenging revealing;” it is both the perfect metaphor and primary example of the “peculiarity of this mode of unconcealing.”⁴⁴ The earth is “challenged” (asked or demanded) to reveal itself as a “standing reserve” of raw material; the earth is “unlocked” and “exposed” as a source of energy we can control and manipulate.⁴⁵ “A tract of land,” Heidegger laments, “is challenged to the putting out of coal and ore. It now reveals itself as a coal-mining district, the soil as mineral deposit. The field the peasant formerly cultivated and set in order appears differently than it did when to set in order still meant to take care of and to maintain.”⁴⁶ An earlier example of an energy source, the windmill, provides the contrast – “although its sails do indeed turn in the wind[,] they are left entirely to the wind’s blowing. But the windmill does not unlock energy from the air currents in order to store it.”⁴⁷ In other words, the windmill allows the wind to remain the wind.

The “extraction and storing of energy, and the subsequent regulation and securing of these reserves are characteristic of ‘challenging revealing’,” and this is where

⁴³ Heidegger, QCT 14.

⁴⁴ Heidegger, QCT 17.

⁴⁵ Heidegger, QCT 17.

⁴⁶ Heidegger, QCT 14.

⁴⁷ Heidegger, QCT 14.

Heidegger sees another crucial difference in modern Technology.⁴⁸ The necessity of clearly defining specific ends which might limit the need to reveal our environment as raw material is denied. There need never be a final end, just the continuous possibility of new ends, for everything is always available to us to be ordered, transformed, regulated and distributed “at our command.” Everything outside of us is revealed as a “standing-reserve,” and what is revealed this way “no longer stands over and above us as an object.”⁴⁹ But this, Heidegger insists, is an unreasonable demand we place upon nature.⁵⁰ Objects are ultimately stripped even of object-hood and placed at the bottom of a hierarchy of existence – we see only a limited aspect of their reality, we recognize no autonomy.⁵¹ Challenged for X, nature reveals itself only as a source of X.

The “monstrousness” of this way of revealing is most apparent for Heidegger in the example of the Rhine. In his time, he argued, the river could only really be seen as a part of the power plant, dammed and regulated by industry, where once it had had a magnificent and autonomous existence, wild and powerful, immortalized as the subject of Hölderlin’s hymn.⁵²

This way of knowing creates our very particular and limited Technological relationship to the world around us – the external world is no longer autonomous, or even unknown or mysterious – it can exist only as raw material at every moment available for

⁴⁸ Heidegger, QCT 16.

⁴⁹ Heidegger, QCT 17.

⁵⁰ Heidegger, QCT 14.

⁵¹ Heidegger, QCT 17.

⁵² Heidegger, QCT 16.

our potential use. From it, according to Grant, we have developed the basic liberal view of our modern situation – we are value-creating subjects in a neutral, ‘objective’ world (in the sense of value-free, or inherently devoid of meaning) – it is so engrained and oft affirmed that it seems common sense or even “rationality itself.”⁵³ This positioning makes extraordinary Technological production possible, but makes all other modes of interacting with the world impossible.

Grant demonstrates this by focusing his lens on a particular statement made by a computer scientist (and who should know better what a computer is and can do than a computer scientist?). The computer scientist, in an effort to reassure, states that “the computer does not impose on us the ways it should be used.” This is essentially a reiteration of the liberal world-view, an assertion that “we have certain Technological capacities and it is up to us to use these capacities for decent human purposes.”⁵⁴ This simple, and apparently innocuous, sentence, Grant argues, simultaneously expresses and obscures the essence of the Technological – its all encompassing, self-contained nature, its masquerade as instrumentality, and its ability to “cushion” us from the shock of what we as a society have forfeited in its name – by bringing to our attention what the speaker overlooks and the complex ways that Technology shuts down our ability to think critically about it. Technology, he reveals, appropriates our language and alters our understanding of possibilities, trapping us within the realm of the Technological. The computer *does* impose on us, Grant insists, and it goes one better – it hides this fact from

⁵³ Grant, Technology 21

⁵⁴ Grant, Technology 21.

us while simultaneously hiding the numbing fact that we are actually doing it to ourselves.

The primary problem with the sentence, “The computer does not impose on us the ways it should be used,” is that it does not allow us to observe computers “as they really are.”⁵⁵ It leads us to think of the computer and its capacities in abstraction from the conditions of its coming into existence. The computer, it says, is an isolated object – a neutral instrument – at our disposal. But this is to ignore the very specific circumstances that allowed for the production of a machine as complex and powerful as a computer. If we want to see what computers really are, we must look at them in the context of the conditions that make possible their existence. The production of computers requires access to plastic, for instance, to metal wires, skilled labourers, and other machines. Computers also importantly require the existence of a society that hosts large corporate institutions that enable computer development, financing and production coordination. We must recognize that the existence of computers “excludes certain kinds of communities and permits others.”⁵⁶

Further, if we look carefully at the “ways” a computer can be used we must admit that they are not actually as many or varied as the statement in question suggests. Essentially, what a computer can do is store and transmit information. It can do this efficiently only by abstracting the information in question; for example, by construing many subtly differentiated individual pieces of information as being of a single type. Abstraction requires classification, and classification inevitably results in

⁵⁵ Grant, Technology 21.

⁵⁶ Grant, Technology 25.

homogenization, for “identities and difference can appear only in its terms.”⁵⁷ By the very nature of its essential function, Grant argues, the ways a computer can be used are “ways which increase the homogenizing processes.”⁵⁸ Because the sentence suggests that we are able to choose from a variety of possible “ways [the computer] can be used,” the reality of the homogenizing function is passed over, and therefore any questioning of homogenization (and its desirability for humanity) is obstructed. Combining this observation with an awareness of the sort of community computer Technology requires and assumes, we are provided with a clear example of how Technology shuts down certain possibilities.

Grant brings our attention to another Technological invention, the automobile, as an example of a machine that over the course of time and history has become more difficult to accurately represent to ourselves as “neutral.”⁵⁹

“Canadians wanted the most efficient car for geographic circumstances and social purposes similar to those of the people who first developed the mass-produced automobile. Our desire for and use of such cars has been a central cause of our political and economic integration and our social homogenization with the people of the imperial heartland. This was not only because of vast corporate structures necessary for building and keeping in motion such automobiles, and the direct and indirect political power of such corporations, but also because any society with such vehicles tends to become like any other society with the same.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Grant, Technology 23.

⁵⁸ Grant, Technology 23.

⁵⁹ Grant, Technology 25.

⁶⁰ Grant, Technology 24-25.

75 or 100 years ago, Grant suggests, we might just as easily have told ourselves that the automobile does not impose on us the ways it should be used. However, he argues, we need only look at the way city planning has evolved to see the direct homogenizing impact of the automobile on society. Grant allows that it may still be possible for humans to make efforts to exercise some level of control over the way cars are used. For instance, strict legislation may help keep carbon dioxide emissions down, or prevent freeways from destroying downtowns. However, he concludes, “whatever efforts may be made, they will not allow us to represent the automobile to ourselves as a neutral instrument.”⁶¹

At a fundamental level, Grant notes, computers could never have come to be without the emergence of “the new science and its mathematics.”⁶² By “the new science and mathematics” Grant means “contemporary physics and mathematics,” saying that “where the steel press may have been taken as the image of Newtonian physics and mathematics, the computer can be taken as the image of contemporary physics and mathematics. Yet in making that distinction,” Grant notes, “it must also be said that contemporary science and Newtonian science are equally moments in the realization of the same paradigm.”⁶³

“Science,” is defined by Grant as “the project of reason to gain ‘objective’ knowledge,” where “reason” is “the summoning of anything before a subject and putting it to the question, so that it gives us reasons for being the way it is as an object.”⁶⁴ This

⁶¹ Grant, Technology 23.

⁶² Grant, Technology 21.

⁶³ Grant, Technology 23.

foundational condition belongs to our society's "scientific paradigm of knowledge," which, according to Grant, has adopted the well-defined structure and procedures of the modern "scientific model," as well as a firm belief in its "sure methods" and "objective knowledge." Our modern paradigm ("we have knowledge when we represent anything to ourselves as an object, and question it, so that it will give us its reasons"), stripped of any recourse to intrinsic meaning, is characterized instead by "instrumentality, neutrality and purposiveness."⁶⁵ The statement that the "computer does not impose" incorporates and reflects this paradigm: it is not comprehensible unless we *already believe* that we are value-creating subjects in a neutral objective world.

A paradigm of knowledge does not simply affect scientists and scholars, Grant insists, it permeates the entire education system and comes to characterize what it is "to know" in a particular society. It is central to what Heidegger calls our "civilizational destiny," which, in Grant's words, is the phenomenon wherein "the fundamental pre-suppositions that the majority of human beings inherit in a civilization... are given almost absolute status."⁶⁶ What Grant calls the scientific paradigm of knowledge stems directly from the acceptance of one particular relationship to the world, that peculiar mode of unconcealing Heidegger calls the "challenging revealing" or, in more familiar terms, an instrumental relationship.

If we do not keep the modern Technological paradigm of knowledge scrupulously in mind when looking at the statement, "The computer does not impose on us the ways it

⁶⁴ Grant, Technology 21.

⁶⁵ Grant, Technology 36, 32.

⁶⁶ Grant, Technology 22.

should be used,” we will be misled. The assumptions we have inherited, just by existing in this particular place and time, make this Technological way of thinking appear inevitable, necessary, and correct. And, according to Grant, these assumptions are insidious. They produce what Jacques Ellul articulated as the “self-augmenting,” “irreversible and geometrically progressive” nature of the Technological way of thinking.⁶⁷ The Technological inevitably reproduces itself, for all of our central ideas, values and the tools we can avail ourselves of (language, reason, justice) derive from the same source – the same assumptions, “the same account of reason” or what it is to know.⁶⁸ “Judgment,” Grant warns, “acts like a mirror, [it] throws back the very metaphysic of the Technology we are supposed to be deliberating about... the outcome is almost inevitably a decision for further Technological development.”⁶⁹

Thus, the heart of our modern Technological situation, effectively hidden from us by the statement that “the computer does not impose on us the ways it should be used,” has to do with our modern “values” and, as Grant would say, what we used to call “the Good.” At the same time this discussion provides an example of how our language works to strengthen Technology’s hold over the way we approach the world. The use of the word “should” appears to affirm the existence of “good” and “bad” ends for which a computer could be used. As we have seen, Grant demonstrates that the computer does in

⁶⁷ George Grant, “The Technological Society,” The George Grant Reader, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) 395.

⁶⁸ Grant, Technology 26.

⁶⁹ Grant, Technology 33. Even the cases in which technology’s failures are most apparent (i.e. the current environmental crisis), we fail to genuinely challenge our own assumptions, Grant notes, and determine that “more technology is needed to meet the emergencies which technology has produced.” (Grant, Technology 16.)

fact impose specific ways we can use it, but even more alarming for him is the absence that the use of the word “should” hides from us. “Should” according to what? It is suggested there is a right way to use a computer – but how are we to determine what that could be?

The truth is, Grant argues, we no longer have recourse to a commonly held, autonomous conception of justice with which we might determine for what ends a computer “should” be used, for there is no conception of justice that hinges upon anything solid outside of the society and conditions that have also created computers. “Politics in our era are dominated by accounts of society which came forth from the same account of reason that produced the new co-penetrated arts and sciences.”⁷⁰ There is no autonomous conception of justice because there is no autonomous conception of the Good. “As many Europeans have come to believe over the last three hundred years that their affirmations about goodness could not find foundations in accounts of God or nature, reason or history, the result for many,” as Grant asserts, “has been a state of mind which is well described as nihilism.”⁷¹

“Should” once had the sense of “owing,” of acknowledging a debt owed to another, or a thing, or ourselves – for example, “we can say of a good car that we owe it to the car to lubricate it properly.”⁷² Grant sees owing and the Good as intimately linked. We say we owe this care to the car “for its own good,” meaning “good” in the ancient Greek sense of “what something is fitted for”, or “the fulfillment of our given

⁷⁰ Grant, Technology 27.

⁷¹ Grant, Technology 29.

⁷² Grant, Technology 29.

purposes.”⁷³ Grant thinks, in this Greek spirit, that human beings, as rational, linguistic beings, are uniquely fitted “to live well together and to try to think openly about the nature of the whole.” However, Grant argues that modern science, rejecting the Aristotelian language of “purpose,” has instead championed concepts of necessity and chance which have “led to the conquest of nature and an understanding of things outside the idea of purpose.”⁷⁴ This has led to what Grant considers a “great change in the public conceiving of goodness:” it no longer “include[s] the assertion of a claim upon us which properly orders our desires in terms of owing...owing is always provisional upon what we desire to create.”⁷⁵ Without the idea of purpose as an anchor, “good” can have no meaning. “‘Good’ has been emptied into uncertainty,” replaced by subjective ‘values’...”⁷⁶

These subjective values are characteristic of our Western political climate, modern liberalism, which “defines man as free and that conceives freedom as control of nature,” and is, as Grant argued, particularly well suited to foster Technological progress.⁷⁷ As Edward Andrew puts it, Grant equated liberalism with “existential conceptions that the human essence is choice, will or freedom.”⁷⁸ Charles Taylor has

⁷³ Grant, Technology 42.

⁷⁴ Grant, Technology 42.

⁷⁵ Grant, Technology 30.

⁷⁶ Grant, Technology 41.

⁷⁷ Grant contrasted this view of liberalism with the more rigid conceptions of human flourishing found in Marxism and conservatism that he felt “impeded technical progress,” and condemned the Russian empire to failure “on the grounds of technological incapacity.” (Andrew 480.)

⁷⁸ Andrew 480.

argued convincingly that the relativism of liberalism's subjective values is ultimately self-defeating. As Taylor shows, the affirmation of choice (what is "good" is whatever I choose for myself) presupposes that some choices are better than others are. But significance cannot originate within me or my choosing would lose all significance.⁷⁹

In the absence of universally affirmed human values with which to judge our applications of Technology, Technology itself has become the judge of what is good. Grant cites the debate in the early Eighties over research into the possibilities of recombinant DNA and states that the victory of those in favour was virtually guaranteed.⁸⁰ For liberalism and the scientific paradigm work together to "justify Technological capacity," in that "what we can do technically, we ought to do."⁸¹ But for Grant the more frightening factor in guaranteeing the continuity of research was the fact that any doubts, from within the scientific community as well as from outside of it, *could not be expressed* except in terms of short-term risks – as soon as these threats were addressed and met by researchers "the case was closed."⁸² "The opponents of the research could not pass beyond the language of specifiable dangers, because any possible long range intimations of deprivation of human good could not be expressed in the ontology they

⁷⁹ See Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991). Meaning is not generated from within, Taylor argues, it comes from what he calls "a background of intelligibility," or a "horizon of meaning." Things are not of equal value because they are different, but because, despite their difference, "some overarching values are shared." This backdrop of shared values makes our relations with others of fundamental significance and reflects the fact that human life is "fundamentally dialogical." (Taylor 33-52.)

⁸⁰ Grant, *Technology* 33.

⁸¹ Andrew 480.

⁸² Grant, *Technology* 33.

shared with their opponents.”⁸³ We are unable to express doubts and concerns about Technology, or of the scientific paradigm of knowledge, for “there is no other language available which does not seem to be the refusal of the truths of scientific discovery.”⁸⁴

Grant is careful to explicitly state that he does not begrudge us the remarkable achievements Technology has engendered, especially in alleviating human suffering – but he cautions that what we risk forgetting entirely is that the Technological way of thinking is not necessarily the only way that we can think. Part of the monstrousness of Technology lies in the fact that this one way of seeing the world seems to preclude all others – especially those that acknowledge meaning in the world prior to and outside of the realm of human activity. As Grant and Heidegger both insist, once we recognize that this paradigm is in essence a way of seeing the world, we invite ourselves to entertain other paradigms. I suggest that there are other paradigms at work in the world – ways of seeing that do not require us to inhabit such a predatory position towards our surroundings. In the next chapter I will propose, and attempt to explore, one such alternative paradigm, alert to the possibility that it too may engender an element of distortion and the risk of self-deception.

⁸³ Grant, Technology 33.

⁸⁴ Grant Technology 33.

Chapter 2

“Feeling is the power that drives art. There doesn’t seem to be a more understandable word for it, though there are others that give something of the idea: aesthetic emotion, quickening, bringing to life. Or call it love; not love of man or woman or home or country or any material thing, but love without an object – intransitive love.”⁸⁵ – David Milne (1882 - 1953)

Art in Milne’s conception is love without an object, or “intransitive love”.⁸⁶ At first blush, this seems an odd claim for a modern landscape artist to make, but if we look carefully at Milne’s writings we can see a coherent and deeply thoughtful explanation of his own activity as an artist. Milne worked in watercolours, oils, and drypoint etchings, served as one of Canada’s official war artists, and had five pieces included in the famous Armory show of 1913, which included Duchamp, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Whistler and Monet. His spartan and reclusive outdoorsman lifestyle is almost as famous as his remarkably distinct artistic style – characterized by a “short, broken, staccato brush stroke”⁸⁷ and remarkable economy and balance.

Milne was particularly fascinated with the process and phenomenology of visual art, and spent a good deal of time and effort trying to put it into words. He recorded his daily experience in journals and kept notebooks by his side for jotting down observations as he worked. He was also a prolific letter writer and his correspondence, particularly with good friend and fellow artist James Clarke, was largely focused around discussions

⁸⁵ Silcox, Painting Place 1. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are of Milne’s own words, and the references correspond to where I found them reproduced.

⁸⁶ Silcox, Painting Place 1.

⁸⁷ David P. Silcox, Introduction, David Milne Centennial Exhibition Catalogue (Kingston: Queens University, 1967).

of visual art. He also published articles in Canadian art journals. Although his autobiography sadly has never made it to print (due to injunctions on his estate), we are still lucky to have an abundance of information and carefully articulated thoughts from the artist about his own practice – how it works, what is important, and what it means.

Milne was very wary of art theory on the one hand, and resisted any pressure to conform to “rules” or stylistic schools.⁸⁸ However, he admits on the other hand (as can easily be discerned in his thought and writings) to two major veins of theorizing – the modernist formalism of Clive Bell, and the adherence to “natural truth” advocated by John Ruskin.⁸⁹ The frequent employment of the terms *aesthetic emotion* and *significant form* in Milne’s discussion of art derive directly from Bell’s aesthetic theory.⁹⁰ Ruskin’s influence is only slightly less obvious.

In a letter to his closest friend, Milne wrote that “[he] had been reading quite a bit of Ruskin. Your remark that he is usually wrong but interesting hits him pretty well. I like his way of going at things. He doesn’t side-step or generalize. He gets right down to facts stated in plain language.”⁹¹ Milne’s biographer, David P. Silcox observes the apparent polarity in Milne’s influences: “Milne’s admiration for Ruskin, qualified though it was, is peculiar, given that Ruskin’s aesthetic was quite at odds with the modernist canon that Milne espoused. One is led to ponder whether Milne was firmly committed to the modernist approach, or whether his understanding of it was at least tempered by some

⁸⁸ Rosemarie L. Tovell, *Reflections in A Quiet Pool; The Prints of David Milne* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1980) 118.

⁸⁹ O’Brian 87.

⁹⁰ Tovell, *Reflections* 118.

⁹¹ Silcox, *Painting Place* 124.

other strains of art theory...”⁹² I argue that if one looks carefully at the ideas Milne took from his reading of Bell and Ruskin, it is not so surprising that Milne was able to synthesize the two apparently divergent streams of thought into his own coherent conception of art. For in essence, both critics believed that the artist’s task is an attempt to transmit a personal experience of formal and universal truth. In this section I will trace the influence of Ruskin and Bell on Milne’s artistic practice and philosophy through an exploration of the two terms that inform Milne’s own theory of art – *intransitive love* and *significant form*.

§

*“Art is love, but not love of man.... or nature... or country... It is just love, love without an object, a spilling of the oil of love. Art is for the Marys, not for the Marthas.”*⁹³

In the above statement Milne sets up a dichotomy between the Marys and the Marthas of the world. In the gospel story, Luke 10: 38-42, the two sisters invite Jesus and a large group of male disciples into their home for a rest from preaching. Mary follows Jesus and sits by his feet listening to him speak. Martha rushes about attending to the practical concerns of gathering food and drink for the guests, disapproving of Mary’s apparent neglect. Jesus defends Mary against her reproaches and tells Martha that

⁹² Silcox, *Painting Place* 124.

⁹³ Ian Thom, ed., *David Milne* (Vancouver: Douglas & MacIntyre, 1991) 115.

although she is worried about many things, “only one thing is needed,” and that by sitting and listening to him speak, “Mary has chosen what is better.” Mary further outrages Martha, and several others, by washing Jesus’ feet with incredibly expensive oils. This “spilling of the oil,” states Milne, “is love.” But note that the discussion opens with the statement that “art is love.”⁹⁴ Therefore, a closer look at this “spilling of the oil” should tell us a bit more about what the *nature* of art is in Milne’s schema.

The “spilling of the oil” is Mary’s passionate response to a profoundly meaningful experience, to borrow a phrase from Dennis Lee, in the “appropriate spirit of awe.”⁹⁵ Mary’s experience of listening to Jesus speak can be considered an experience of “truth,” for Jesus in the Gospels is believed to be the Word of God made flesh and therefore he necessarily speaks “The Truth.”⁹⁶ The “spilling of the oil” appears to those who view it from a practical standpoint as a wildly extravagant gesture. But Mary, in recognizing the special importance of the occasion – her experience of truth – is only doing what she senses is appropriate. The spilling of the oil is a demonstration of respect, of honouring, an attempt to respond adequately to her sense of the meaningfulness of being in Jesus’ presence and hearing his words.

This response is not in accordance with the practical, utilitarian aspect of life that Martha represents – it is inspired by, and expressed in, another mode of being. The dichotomy of the Marthas and the Marys of the world is the distinction Milne draws

⁹⁴ Thom 115.

⁹⁵ Lee 131.

⁹⁶ Although “truth” in my discussion is not to be understood as identical to “The Truth” of Christianity (though both Milne and Grant were religious), it is meant to invoke a different truth than the neutral, objective facts of the Technological paradigm. “Natural truth,” Ruskin’s term, will be used in this thesis to mean “*what really is*” in a way that involves eternity (thereby transcending us), neither requires nor rewards indifference (objectivity), nor can be revealed through the lens of subjective, utilitarian needs.

between a utilitarian approach to life as “mere survival,” and “life as living.”⁹⁷ “Higher man,” on Milne’s account, “...reasons not to survive but for delight in the thing itself, this reason is not useful, but altruistic.”⁹⁸ In this latter mode, the everyday standard of value – utility, or practical, material value – is replaced by another, one described with terms like ‘beauty’, ‘truth’, or ‘significance’.

I suggest that for Milne, “life as living” consists of paying undivided, awe-full attention to our experience of the world and, most importantly, being open to the insight and meaning it can offer us – just as Mary was when sitting at Jesus’ feet. For it is in this mode of “loving” attentiveness that Milne believes we can experience *what really is*. And it is only in this mode, in a gesture of some sort towards the felt significance of the experience (a “spilling of the oil”), that one can create meaningful art.

To paraphrase Milne, the artistic mode of being, which he calls Intransitive Love, is a state of attentiveness and receptivity, a type of sustained, objectless attention (in the sense of having no fixed object or objectives), undisturbed by everyday human concerns, but instead focused outward on the world around us. Emphasizing the divorce from our everyday mode and the need for intense focus, Milne tells us, “singleness of heart, *sincerity* beyond anything possible in daily life, is essential in painting.”⁹⁹

We can be jolted into this mode of Intransitive Love by a particularly concentrated experience of beauty or significance in a particular stimulus, for instance when we are “struck” by nature or art. Over and over again, Milne refers in his writing to

⁹⁷ Thom 114.

⁹⁸ Tovell, Reflections 118.

⁹⁹ Silcox, Painting Place 264, my emphasis.

this experience of “the kick,” “the thrill,” “the quickening,” and “the bringing to life,” and states that, “when I see these things [the kick] is instantaneous.”¹⁰⁰ This experience, Milne asserts, is what he seeks to recreate in a painting. In his words, “the thing that ‘makes’ a picture is the thing that ‘makes’ dynamite – compression.”¹⁰¹ “It’s an explosion. Everything must hit at once.”¹⁰²

More often, however, and particularly if one’s work requires entering into this highly receptive mode on a daily basis, more effort is required on our part. The artist must learn to court the experience of “the kick” and be prepared to respond whenever it is experienced. An artist’s first task, Milne argues, is to train themselves “to see better,” for “here is an opportunity for the painter, who is supposed to be an expert in seeing, and on whom we depend for all knowledge of appearances. He can get a kick... and reproduce it for all those capable of receiving it.”¹⁰³ This raises the crucial and central question of what exactly Milne took himself to be painting. His own ‘inner’ experience? The world independent of that experience? Both? I will return to this question at the end of this chapter. First, I want to explore further Milne’s practice and the aspects of Bell’s and Ruskin’s theoretical accounts that he found congenial.

Milne’s approach to painting in effect meant learning to “induce” the mode of Intransitive Love. Milne found he could do this best by walking through the woods and allowing himself to become increasingly observant of nature. He has in numerous essays

¹⁰⁰ Donald W. Buchanan, “David Milne, As I Knew Him,” *Canadian Art* 2 (Spring 1954): 91.

¹⁰¹ David Milne, “From Spring Fever to Fantasy,” *Canadian Art* 2 (April-May 1945): 162.

¹⁰² Buchanan 90.

¹⁰³ Thom 114.

and letters recounted in painstaking detail the shift that takes place in his thinking/attitude while walking through the forest or countryside at the beginning of a painting expedition.

“I fastened my canvas to the paint box, put on a sweater and overcoat, and, with easel and paint box, started out. I walked slowly past the yellow house and up the mountain. My thoughts, mostly, were of everyday affairs, occasionally conscious of a momentary interest in the shapes of things that I passed, the trunks of three dead chestnuts and the snowy road at the top of the slope for instance... Gradually began to bestow more attention on things I passed, thinking how the patches of snow with the tree-covered hillsides beyond would work out in painting. Began to be conscious of a working mode creeping over me, a concentration on painting problems, to the exclusion of wandering thoughts; conscious not only of an increase of attention but also a growing of will, a feeling of pressure within me that would lead me to unify the objects I was seeing... Then I came upon a subject that stirred rather more than the usual interest, stopped and set down the paint box to consider how it would work out, where it would lead to, I went over it fully in my mind – patches of snow on bare ground, a large broken apple tree with violet, bronze, green and red in its trunk and limbs; behind it, at the edge of the snow patches, a row of alders, very irregular, and among them a farther apple tree, brown; beyond that a snowy tree-textured hillside.”¹⁰⁴

This ‘artistic’ mode of observation is intense, exhaustive, unbiased and quite apart from our everyday ways of looking at the world around us.¹⁰⁵ Milne reports that there is often a struggle to maintain such a degree of close and genuinely receptive observation, “creative seeing, *with effort, work*, against one’s will, takes courage.”¹⁰⁶ This ‘fresh seeing’¹⁰⁷ is the real work of painting, he argues, “to force yourself to see, that is, to

¹⁰⁴ Silcox, Painting Place 149-50.

¹⁰⁵ Thom 114.

¹⁰⁶ Thom 99, Milne’s emphasis.

admit things. One will persist in saying there is no such animal.”¹⁰⁸ Milne was fascinated with the often surprising reality of perception – “the natural seeing of everyday random arrangements,”¹⁰⁹ and reports being drawn to the ‘inventory method’ of observation that he attributes to Proust and Thoreau; perhaps seeing it as another device to shift his mode of observation. He was attracted, on the theoretical level (he may not have actually ever implemented it), by the idea of “enumerating everything,” for “the point of [this way of looking] is in the everything. Not merely things you would usually see but things so simple that you wouldn’t ordinarily think of them.”¹¹⁰

But what precisely is this “kick” that takes place in, and can sometimes induce the mode of, Intransitive Love? It is Milne’s word for the experience of being struck by, or recognizing, the beauty and significance of “form” (in its deepest sense) in anything and everything that make up the world around us. He refers to all of these as an experience of “aesthetic emotion.” Aesthetic emotion, Milne states, “is the distinguishing thing about art. If [something] is the product of aesthetic emotion (and so rouses aesthetic emotion in the appreciator), it is art... Work produced without it may be useful, may be creative, but it isn’t art.”¹¹¹ His persistent use of the term “aesthetic emotion” reflects the profound influence that I believe Clive Bell’s formalist aesthetic theory had upon Milne’s

¹⁰⁷A phrase borrowed from Emily Carr’s lecture of the same title. Emily Carr, Fresh Seeing. Two Addresses by Emily Carr (Vancouver: Clarke Irwin & Co., 1972).

¹⁰⁸ Silcox, Painting Place 183.

¹⁰⁹ Thom 103.

¹¹⁰ Silcox, Painting Place 141.

¹¹¹ Tovell, Rosemarie L., David Milne: Painting Place (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1976), 18.

thought.¹¹² Because aesthetic emotion is of crucial importance in Milne's understanding of art and truth, it is important to look carefully at the source of this term and what exactly Bell meant by it.

In his 1913 book Art, Bell sets out his "aesthetic hypothesis," a formalist aesthetic theory in the vein of Kant and Roger Fry. In it he proposes that real art removes a viewer from the practical concerns of everyday life and sentimentality, and provides a "personal experience of a peculiar emotion."¹¹³ "The objects that provoke this emotion we call works of art," and, as Bell continues, "all sensitive people agree that there is a peculiar emotion provoked by works of art."¹¹⁴ The "one quality common to all works of visual art," and capable of provoking aesthetic emotion, is something Bell calls "significant form."¹¹⁵ Despite the theory's several serious problems (it has come under considerable criticism for being elitist and glaringly circular), Bell's central ideas, and his tentative metaphysical conclusions, reflect an insight towards which I, and several of the philosophers I will discuss, are quite sympathetic. They certainly allowed Milne to focus his thinking about art and his practice of painting in a particularly effective and fruitful way.

The question Bell poses – "Why are we so profoundly moved by forms related in a particular way?" – he initially dismisses as "interesting, but irrelevant to aesthetics."¹¹⁶ However, the answer he eventually proposes (in a remarkably apologetic, almost

¹¹² O'Brian 89.

¹¹³ Clive Bell, Art (1961; London: Arrow Books, London; Chatto and Windsor, 1913) 36, 21.

¹¹⁴ Bell 21.

¹¹⁵ Bell 23.

¹¹⁶ Bell 25.

embarrassed, articulation, which I think belies an awareness that he is parting ways with many of his modernist peers) reveals a deep insight that is key to the artistic epistemology we are exploring. Bell explains significant form as “forms arranged according to certain unknown and mysterious laws,” that we experience as moving and, somehow, profound.¹¹⁷

Bell repeatedly insists on the sharp distinction between the realm of aesthetic emotion, in which the perception or recognition of significant form is possible, and the experiences and emotions of everyday life; “Art,” he tells us, “transports us from the world of man’s activity....we are shut off from human interests...we are lifted above the stream of life.”¹¹⁸ And again, “...he who contemplates a work of art, inhabits a world with an intense and peculiar significance of its own; that significance is unrelated to the significance of life.”¹¹⁹

Bell maligned paintings that depended on emotional or psychological responses to subject matter, and rejected his contemporary academicians whose work he is said to have found “freighted with anecdotal content and over-burdened with extraneous detail.”¹²⁰ The language, tone, and use of ambiguous terms (“the world of man’s activity,” “the significance of life,”) in *Art*, invite, upon cursory reading, the characterization of his aesthetic theory as an example of austere, overly-intellectual, morally devoid and elitist modernism. I believe that upon closer reading it becomes clear that such a characterization is a misinterpretation. Bell argues that the experience of the

¹¹⁷ Bell 25.

¹¹⁸ Bell 36.

¹¹⁹ Bell 37.

¹²⁰ O’Brian 88-89.

“life of man’s activity” is less “real” than the experience (in life) of significant form,¹²¹ because, he ultimately believes “*all works of art are immediate means to the Good,*” and are therefore “*ethically important from the first.*”¹²²

As Bell gets both bolder and more reticent, he reveals his Kantian formalist roots, in stating that when we see a thing as “pure form” we are seeing it as “the thing-in-itself.”¹²³ Seeing subjects as ends in themselves moves us more profoundly than an object considered as a means to a practical, human end, for as Bell puts it,

“when we consider it as an end in itself, we become aware of that in it which is of greater moment than any qualities it could have acquired from keeping company with human beings. Instead of recognizing its accidental and conditioned importance, we become aware of its essential reality, of the God in everything, of the universal in the particular, of the all-pervading rhythm. Call it by what name you will, the thing that I am talking about is that which lies behind the appearance of all things – that which gives to all things their individual significance, the thing in itself, the ultimate reality. And if a more or less unconscious apprehension of this latent reality of material things be, indeed, the cause of that strange emotion, a passion to express which is the inspiration of many artists, it seems reasonable to suppose that those who, unaided by material objects, experience the same emotion have come by another road to the same country.”¹²⁴

There has been great resistance to the thrust toward abstraction and disengagement from everyday life in Bell that many, particularly Ruskin, found unsavoury. But I suggest that beneath its cool, apparently detached, exterior there is

¹²¹ Bell 32.

¹²² Bell 32.

¹²³ Bell 59-60.

¹²⁴ Bell 72-73.

evidence in Bell's formalism of the possibility of an interaction, or fleeting connection, with a much deeper unity. Instead of a flight from the "reality" of shared human existence into a solitary, intellectual idealist realm, we can read Bell's description of the aesthetic realm as a realm of freedom from our subjective human needs, desires, and preconceptions (in other words, "the life of man's activity"), that allows us to *see and feel* a deeper reality, shared by humans and non-humans alike, and embodying a truth that is prior to "keeping company with human beings." He goes on to ask, "Shall I be altogether fantastic in suggesting what some of the most profound thinkers have believed, that the significance of the thing in itself is the significance of Reality?"¹²⁵ Here Bell redefines significant form as "form behind which we catch a glimpse of ultimate reality,"¹²⁶ and aesthetic emotion as "an emotion felt for Reality, generally perceived through form."¹²⁷ If we don't feel comfortable with "Reality", Bell offers the alternative conception of "the all-pervading rhythm that informs all things."¹²⁸

The distinction Bell describes, between experiences of the everyday world and the profound experience of aesthetic emotion felt for significant form (or Reality), corresponds, I believe, to Milne's distinction between 'life as survival' and 'life as living'. Seeing the thing-in-itself as an end-in-itself, apart from any human ends, is to see it in the light of Milne's Intransitive Love. In Milne's view, only when looking at the world with this loving attitude – intensely, almost obsessively, observant and receptive –

¹²⁵ Bell 60.

¹²⁶ Bell 60.

¹²⁷ Bell 71.

¹²⁸ Bell 62.

can one really “see” the natural world well enough to paint it in an artistic manner. The words of an American contemporary of Milne’s, John Marin, “whose sensibility and stylistic expression” are said “often [to] run parallel to Milne’s,”¹²⁹ express the spirit of this sentiment beautifully: “Seems to me the true artist must perforce go from time to time to the elemental big forms – sky, sea, mountain, plain – and those things pertaining thereto, to sort of *re-true* himself, to recharge the battery. For those big forms have everything. But to express these, you have to *love* these, to be a part of these in sympathy.”¹³⁰

Milne made a conscious and concerted effort to ensure his work reflected *what really is* – never relying on abstracted ideas (whether individual or cultural) of what a rock or field or a tree might look like – by going back to *really* look, again and again, intensely, openly, *and with love*, at the natural world. He famously wrote that while painting with one hand he had to have “someone, mostly nature, hold the other.”¹³¹ And, in a letter to Vincent and Alice Massey in 1934, he explains that as a painter, “Your direction is always being changed by your contact with nature.”¹³² Even in his most radically distilled images, Milne never “crossed the line into full abstraction.”¹³³ As one critic said of his preparatory sketches, “Even his rough penciled line, no matter how

¹²⁹ Thom 30.

¹³⁰ John Marin, “John Marin by Himself,” Creative Art (October 1928). Quoted in Thom 32. The emphasis is mine.

¹³¹ Thom 114.

¹³² Thom 32.

¹³³ Thom 30.

rapidly it swept the canvas, always conveys the impression of something [he] actually saw and experienced.”¹³⁴

According to John O’Brian, the formalist hypothesis, propounded by Bell (and Roger Fry before him), “logically [because of its insistence on the separation of art from nature] promotes an abstract art in which the element of representation is reduced to a minimum, or non-objective painting in which it is entirely dispensed with.”¹³⁵ And Bell certainly championed the “purity” of the most abstract of forms in visual art, and insisted that “most people do not see significant form in nature,” and feel something very different for “birds and flowers” than they do for works of art.¹³⁶ I offer Milne as a counter-example to this rule (even Bell begrudgingly acknowledges that *some* people are able to experience significant form in nature). Although he too insists his love for art and for nature are different¹³⁷, Milne’s thought and work – particularly his resistance of the “purely formal abstraction” advocated by Bell, the predominant focus on painting the natural world, and the remarkable resonance of the landscapes he expresses – puts pressure on Bell’s theoretical position to admit more readily the possibility and power of the perception of significant form in nature.

It is quite possible that Bell’s urge to champion the purely abstract and his reluctance to admit that we can experience significant form in nature are in part a reaction to the previous centuries’ approach to painting the natural world. The “Picturesque”

¹³⁴ Thom 30.

¹³⁵ O’Brian 96-97.

¹³⁶ Bell 26.

¹³⁷ Thom 114.

movement, exemplified by Lorraine and Poussin in the 18th Century, spawned a legacy of quaint and cliché ridden landscape painting which modern art standards deemed excruciatingly bland, static, and contrived.¹³⁸ Milne's work couldn't differ more in spirit and effect from the Picturesque – his compositions are extremely unconventional for their time, and feel fresh and alive even to a contemporary viewer.

Where Bell desired that the painter depict significant form *itself*, free of any reminders of where and when the artist might have experienced it, Milne painted significant form *as he discovered it in the world*. Wittgenstein states that a poem won't work "if the intellectual points are nakedly exposed, not clothed from the heart."¹³⁹ I interpret intellectual points "clothed from the heart" to mean ideas wearing the trappings of the particular. I think Milne believed a representation of significant form, completely abstracted from any particular experience of it, will have less impact than one "clothed" in the recognizable garb of the natural world – for instance, trees, hills, rocks, ponds.

I see this as diametrically opposed to the way Technology "sees"– objectification. In the Technological mode efforts are made to strip any particular context, connections and significance from the thing in question to reveal 'objective' facts. However, we must remember that this is *not* in fact the objective-neutral process it purports to be, for, as Grant has shown, it is carried out for a very particular purpose – to make the object in question available to us as a resource. Milne, always painting the particular combination of natural forms in front of him at that moment, recognizes the special-ness and singularity of the context in which meaning is manifest.

¹³⁸ Harold Osborne, ed., Oxford Companion to Art (London: Oxford University Press, 1970) 870.

¹³⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, Culture and Value (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977) 54e.

Painting in the mode of Intransitive Love, free of the distorting lens of Technology's objective, Milne was able to perceive the immanence of significant form – the patterns emanating from the eternal order, or the divine – in everything around him. I argue, as he himself believed, that the force and energy of Milne's paintings derive from his faithfulness to his perception of immanence in nature and his uncanny ability to communicate this perception to the viewer through his canvases. In so doing, Milne rejected Bell's elitism and made significant form more accessible to the viewer by showing us where and how he experiences it, thus increasing the viewer's ability to recognize the immanence of the divine in his or her own experience of the world.

It is important to note here that although Milne was a painter of recognizable landscapes, he never considered these landscapes, nor the flowers in his still lifes, to be his "subject" in the traditional sense.¹⁴⁰ Meghan Bice suggests instead, in a curious echo of Bell, that "given his definition of existence and living, Milne's subject in essence was the abstract, the intangible and the spiritual, the experiential side of life."¹⁴¹ Thus, Milne was not interested in merely reproducing or 'copying' the landscape, but in recreating, or translating, each *particular* experience of significant form (each occasion of perception of immanence) for the viewer, by painting, for instance, not the landscape but the "rhythm of the landscape."¹⁴² Although nature is not, per se, the *subject* of Milne's paintings, it is "the clothing" worn by his true subject. It provides the particular contexts through which

¹⁴⁰ Thom 99.

¹⁴¹ Thom 114.

¹⁴² Silcox, Painting Place 71.

Milne experiences 'Reality through form,' and it is always the standard, or "truth," against which a painting's success is measured.

This adherence to nature as source and measure of truth introduces the second major vein of Milne's thought about art, thought that found deep parallels and support in Ruskin's ideas. In Ruskin's view, the aim of art is "*the representation of some natural fact as truly as possible.*"¹⁴³ Ruskin also sees a loving disposition toward one's subject as crucial for art: "There is nothing that I tell you with more eager desire that you should believe... than this," he lectured, "that you never will love art well, till you love what she imitates better."¹⁴⁴ In the introduction to his selection of Ruskin's writings on art, Kenneth Clark notes that due to inconsistencies and contradictions, "Ruskin's moments of insight into the nature of art cannot be made to form a logical system," but "perhaps this is part of their value."¹⁴⁵ With such inconsistencies and contradictions in mind it may be less surprising that Milne can have read a good deal of Ruskin's work, admired it, and been strongly influenced by it, and could yet remark that Ruskin was "usually wrong."¹⁴⁶

Clark was able to produce a summary account of Ruskin's "most cherished beliefs," from which I have selected a passage that displays the deep concordance of those beliefs with Milne's views.

Art is not a matter of taste, but involves the whole man.
Whether in making or perceiving a work of art, we bring to
bear on it feeling, intellect, morals, knowledge, memory,
and every other human capacity, all focused in a flash on a

¹⁴³ John Ruskin, from "The Two Paths," Lecture I, Ruskin Today (London: Penguin Books, 1964) 168.

¹⁴⁴ Ruskin, "The Eagle's Nest," Lecture III, Ruskin Today 141.

¹⁴⁵ Kenneth Clark, Introduction, Ruskin, Ruskin Today 131.

¹⁴⁶ Silcox, Painting Place 124.

single point. Aesthetic man is a concept as false and dehumanizing as economic man.

Even the most superior mind and the most powerful imagination must found itself on facts, which must be recognized for what they are. The imagination will often reshape them in a way which the prosaic mind cannot understand; but this recreation will be based on facts, not on formulas or illusions.

These facts must be perceived by the senses, or felt; not learnt.

Beauty of form is revealed in organisms which have developed perfectly according to their laws of growth, and so give, in [Ruskin's] own words, 'the appearance of felicitous fulfillment of function.'¹⁴⁷

As I have suggested, Milne's artistic practice belies his reverence for Ruskin's "Natural Truth." Milne is famous for working almost exclusively on site, thereby remaining in contact with "the facts" of nature as long as it takes to complete a painting (as opposed to a quick sketch to be worked up later in the comfort and remove of a cozy studio). Once again, although he paints directly from nature, the activity is not to be understood as mere "copying." As he describes it, "the painter gets an impression from some phase of nature. He doesn't try to reproduce [the particular landscape or image of nature]... he simplifies and eliminates until he knows exactly what stirred him... and translates his impression into an aesthetic emotion,"¹⁴⁸ thereby reproducing the "kick" that had initially excited his interest. What is important for Milne is that act of distillation

¹⁴⁷ Kenneth Clark, introduction, Ruskin, Ruskin Today 131.

¹⁴⁸ Thom 113.

and translation – of paring away, or to use Milne’s word “compression” – not imitation; as a result the finished painting “has an existence of its own.”¹⁴⁹

We are now in a position to approach directly the question raised on p.33. What exactly did Milne believe he was painting? I argue that Milne, while in the mode of Intransitive Love, is able to perceive and paint the world around him as *it really is* – immanent – imbued with significant form. In painting significant form as it is revealed in the particular things of the world, Milne strove to reveal the deep structural truth found in resonant patterns of interconnected wholes and parts, and to show us that the natural world is inherently meaningful. The ideas of inherent meaning and the conception of structural truth will be explored in the following chapters.

The painter’s activity, in Milne’s conception, is not the ‘romantic’ idealization of the natural world, for as Bice remarks, “Milne sought out subjects which demonstrated unbalanced compositions, an idea completely in opposition to an idealized view of nature.”¹⁵⁰ It is in the most unexpected observations discovered in “contact with nature,” and “through the act of painting itself,” that Milne found that “the opportunity for all creative painting lies.”¹⁵¹ This steadfast reliance on his own perception and experience allowed Milne to eschew the stylistic restrictions of most ‘modern art’ theories or schools. “In painting,” he wrote, “when you see a rule, crack it if you can.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Tovell, Reflections 118.

¹⁵⁰ Thom 103.

¹⁵¹ Thom 110.

¹⁵² Tovell, Reflections 118.

Ruskin too was critical of overly prescriptive art theories, and also quite wary of the modernist penchant for abstraction which he believed led to “error... when men of design despise facts.”¹⁵³ He railed against any form of painting in which “the truths of nature are wilfully neglected” and which relies instead upon the homogenizing invention of design and compositional rules.¹⁵⁴ For instance, he ridiculed the Picturesque, which, although concerned with representing the natural world, advocated that the natural world must be ‘composed’ on a canvas according to independent ‘aesthetic laws’ to ensure that the finished painting met the accepted standard of ‘aesthetic taste.’¹⁵⁵ Ruskin exhorted modern artists to reject inherited artistic conventions, for he felt the compositions of old masters were guilty of too much intellectual invention. He rejected Whistler’s painting style as an example of these hypostatized aesthetic conventions resulting in an art of mechanistic reduction.

Instead he implored artists to follow Turner’s lead and be guided only by ‘natural truth,’ which he understood, like Milne, is *the way things really are* in the world. Again like Milne, Ruskin argued that seeing the ‘Natural truth’ is far from “easy,” instead, he said, “it is most difficult, and worthy of the greatest men’s greatest effort, to render, as it should be rendered, the simplest of natural features of the earth... for every painter knows, that when he draws back from the attempt to render nature *as she is*, it is oftener in cowardice than in disdain.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, Vol. II, Ruskin Today 147.

¹⁵⁴ Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, Vol. II, Ruskin Today 147.

¹⁵⁵ Osborne 867-870.

¹⁵⁶ Ruskin, “Reviews and Pamphlets on Art,” V, Ruskin Today 159, my emphasis.

On the surface their opposing positions toward abstraction make it appear that the theories of Ruskin and Bell must be diametrically opposed, I argue that their differences are far more subtle, and that Milne exhibits an understanding of both that reveals important connections between the two. Namely, I argue, as I believe Milne sensed, both Bell and Ruskin value, above all things in art, the artist's sincere effort to recognize and render *what really is* in the world – in a deep formal and structural sense – which both believe is profoundly significant, and is that which can make great art significant.

Although Ruskin apparently “made up his mind that geometric form was evil and organic form was virtuous and could not bring himself to believe that one was a symbolic statement of the other,”¹⁵⁷ it is not abstraction per se that he abhorred, but the *unthinking* abstraction that allowed theorists to develop concretized theories of ‘taste’ or style, and unmitigated rules of proportion and beauty. He required above all things the expression of ‘natural facts,’ and allows for them to be “reshaped,” or, perhaps, translated, by the artist's imagination in ways “the prosaic mind cannot understand.”¹⁵⁸ We must remember that Bell states that aesthetic emotion is emotion felt for “Reality, generally perceived through form,”¹⁵⁹ or “the all-pervading rhythm that informs all things,” and that he allows that some may be better able to experience the “Reality” of the natural world. By painting in the receptive and nonjudgmental mode of Intransitive Love, and by focusing on the immediate experience of aesthetic emotion directly from nature, Milne's imagination was able to actively distill Ruskin's ‘natural truth’, that is, what Bell calls the “Reality” of the

¹⁵⁷ Ruskin 135.

¹⁵⁸ Kenneth Clark, introduction, Ruskin, *Ruskin Today* 131.

¹⁵⁹ Bell 69.

natural world, without the danger of allowing stylistic convention to override actual experience.

Milne consciously avoided the limitations and directives of art theory, and the misguided focus on subject matter, refusing to “go outside [his] own experience for material...”¹⁶⁰ “All that is needed to appreciate any art is a capacity for aesthetic feeling; most people lack this entirely and are driven to try to get into contact with painters through their understanding. Even the artists fall into the trap of trying to make their pictures understandable instead of felt. Very often the pictures are good in spite of the theories.”¹⁶¹ In his view, we cannot know any more than what we experience, and, as we must take our cues from experience, neither form nor content can be decided in advance, for that would be to limit and reduce the perception of truth. The recognition of significant form (in whatever surprising subject it might be experienced) as “Reality” in this account, once again, reveals a truth occurring in nature, beyond and prior to our human conceptions.

§

Milne is certainly not alone in identifying this state – a state of nonjudgmental attention – and the feeling of a peculiar emotion toward the world – the world as considered free from particular human concerns – as artistic, or as a route for the

¹⁶⁰ Thom 30.

¹⁶¹ Buchanan 90.

recognition of a truth that is prior to our utilitarian conception of reality. In the next chapter I will look at several other thinkers, who advocate paying just this sort of attention to our experience of the world, many of whom also refer explicitly to this particular orientation as “love.” In that discussion I will also look at the nature both of what is perceived, and the mode of perception itself, in an attempt to characterize this mode of awareness called Intransitive Love.

Chapter 3

Milne is certainly not alone in his experience of this particular, and as I am arguing, epistemologically significant phenomenon. In this chapter I will introduce several other thinkers who identify very similar states of nonjudgmental, extremely focused attention as a route to the apprehension of a reality and truth abiding in the world (something different from the everyday concerns of 21st Century North American culture) that inspires a peculiarly acute emotional reaction.

Although there are certain obvious connections with Eastern religions and philosophy (Taoism and Zen Buddhism) and with mysticism of all forms (for example in the philosophy of Simone Weil), in this chapter I focus upon the writings of several Western thinkers, from various disciplines, who I believe endeavour to increase awareness and acceptance of an epistemological model very much in tune with Milne's, and who encourage us to question the hegemony of the epistemological paradigm discussed in Chapter One. They include: Robert Bringhurst, Dennis Lee, Tim Lilburn, Don McKay, Charles Simic, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Jan Zwicky. Zwicky finds additional support for this epistemology, including even mathematical perceptions, in Konrad Lorenz's writing on evolutionary biology and Max Wertheimer's Gestalt psychology. I include Mozart's account of writing music, which Grant cites in Technology and Justice, and which I find particularly illuminating. I encourage the reader to note that many on this list are difficult to classify simply as poet or philosopher or biologist, as they exhibit serious interest in multiple disciplines, and in demonstrating the connections among science, mathematics, the arts, and philosophy.

Most of the individuals I have mentioned above ground their thought in a very careful attention to their own, actual experiences of life – Milne’s “life as living” – and would agree that when we are truly engaged in “life as living,” we are available to experiences that often feel profound or very much out of the ordinary – as though time stands still, perhaps, or as though we can suddenly see more clearly. Paying this sort of attention to the world – or our experience of it – requires *really* looking and *really* listening, and further requires, as Wittgenstein attests, that we “look at [things] in their proper spirit.”¹⁶² Like Milne, who often spent several hours walking through the woods before he felt himself shifting into this more attentive mode, most find this can engender difficulty. As Wittgenstein noted, the trick lies in seeing *what is actually there*, right before our eyes, rather than what we might want or expect to see.¹⁶³ Once we succeed in shifting our consciousness, we become aware of a subsequent shift in values and meaning. As Bell states, “the rapt philosopher, and he who contemplates a work of art, inhabit a world with an intense and peculiar significance of its own... In this world the emotions of [ordinary] life find no place. It is a world with its own emotions.”¹⁶⁴

Thus, from these multiple descriptions, “the proper spirit” for looking at the world appears to be one that is receptive, respectful, all embracing, liberated from everyday human desires and expectations, and allows for wonder, surprise, and awe. Grant and Lee both use the word “awe” to describe what they feel is the appropriate spirit in which to think about the world and to recognize the significance that abounds in it. Simic writes,

¹⁶² Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Philosophy,” *Philosophical Occasions*, eds. James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Inc., 1993) 169.

¹⁶³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture* 17e.

¹⁶⁴ Bell 37.

“Awe (as in Dickinson) is the beginning of metaphysics. The awe at the multiplicity of things and awe at their suspected unity.”¹⁶⁵ And in Lilburn, “The world ignites awe...awe persists; a desire to simply look springs up... One gazes at the world with alacrity and courtesy and becomes less.”¹⁶⁶ Eventually this can bring us to an awareness of “the enormity of being and the vast intricacy of individual things, their beauty, their difference from us.”¹⁶⁷ We get a sense of similar apprehensions in the introduction to Milne’s unpublished autobiography. It includes the following passage exhibiting this spirit of awe; “On the back [of the farm], along the edge of Black’s bush, there was a hill, and from the top of a stump on that hill we could see mostly everything, our own fields and barn and part of the house, Finnie’s pasture and berry patch, another farm, and then the valley through which the Saugeen river flowed, Brown’s farm [where his father worked] very small and faint, and beyond it sand hills and a long, straight streak of blue, sometimes with a white moving speck on it, Lake Huron. From that stump for the first time, I was brought face to face with Infinity where anything might be and anything might happen.”¹⁶⁸

Bertrand Russell, who remains steadfastly in the camp of the epistemological paradigm I propose to challenge, nonetheless avows that “even the cautious and patient investigation of truth.... may be fostered and nourished by that very spirit of reverence in

¹⁶⁵ Charles Simic, “Wonderful Words, Silent Truth,” in *Wonderful Words, Silent Truth* as quoted in Jan Zwicky, *Wisdom and Metaphor* (Kentville: Gaspereau Press, 2003) 99rh.

¹⁶⁶ Tim Lilburn, “How To Be Here?,” *Poetry and Knowing* (Kingston: Quarry Press Co. 1995) 175.

¹⁶⁷ Lilburn, *Poetry and Knowing* 175.

¹⁶⁸ Silcox, *Painting Place* 7.

which mysticism lives and moves."¹⁶⁹ The mystical experience, as he describes it, shares many of the trappings of what I'm calling (after Milne) the mode of Intransitive Love, and although Russell is determined to delimit the scope and certainty allowed to "mystical intuition" he does admit that there is much to be gained from adopting the mystical "attitude" towards the world. He claims that "as colouring and informing all other thoughts and feelings, [it] is the inspirer of whatever is best in Man."¹⁷⁰

Mystical intuition is, in Russell's description, "sudden, penetrating, and coercive"¹⁷¹ – just like Milne's instantaneous "kick."¹⁷² It is marked by its recognition of unity.¹⁷³ Unity is also of paramount concern for Milne, as he desires that one "feel the whole, not just the parts" of a painting.¹⁷⁴ Above all, Russell tells us, mysticism is an attitude, an orientation towards the world. It "lives and moves" in "a spirit of reverence."¹⁷⁵ This spirit of awe toward the world, as we find it really is when we really look, is the most profound characteristic of the epistemological paradigm under discussion, and is referred to by Milne, and many of the others cited, as love. In Zwicky's words, "Ontological attention is a form of love."¹⁷⁶ Weil has claimed that, in faith, "intelligence is enlightened by love."¹⁷⁷

¹⁶⁹ Bertrand Russell, Mysticism and Logic (New York: W. W. Norton, c.1929) 12.

¹⁷⁰ Russell 12.

¹⁷¹ Russell 8.

¹⁷² Buchanan 91.

¹⁷³ Russell 10.

¹⁷⁴ Silcox, Painting Place 27.

¹⁷⁵ Russell 12.

¹⁷⁶ Zwicky 57lh.

When the world is observed in such a loving spirit, and when this observation is expressed in a way that gets it exactly right, perhaps in a work of art or a poem, it is unusually powerful and affects us in a particularly acute way. Milne calls it “the kick,” “the thrill,” or “the quickening;” Zwicky echoes Wittgenstein and claims we are “pierced.”¹⁷⁸ The particular uniqueness and *rightness*, she continues, “strikes into us like a shaft of light. We are focused by it, and experience it as focused.”¹⁷⁹ In Lee’s words, “it’s the all-at-onceness that gets you. When you’re attuned.”¹⁸⁰

When attuned, there is occasion for the type of moment Milne recounts, when “you solve problems that have been simmering for months. On the rare day you can do no wrong [-] that is aesthetic emotion, aesthetic feeling, better aesthetic quickening.... The point of aesthetic quickening is that it comes from the elements of the art – in painting from colour and line. And it can, of course, be stirred up again – in the appreciator – by that same colour and line.... Like animal emotions[,] aesthetic quickening differs entirely from reason. It may be a tremendous driving force behind reason but... it isn’t steady... It cannot be sustained... This makes speed the important element in it ... Anything that slows you up or interrupts you... allows it to dissipate and leaves you helpless.”¹⁸¹

Mozart has described his own experience of writing music in similar terms;

¹⁷⁷ Simone Weil, *La Pesanteur et La Grace* (Plon, Paris, 1948), as translated in Grant, *Technology* 38.

¹⁷⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1958) 155, and Zwicky 53lh.

¹⁷⁹ Zwicky 53lh.

¹⁸⁰ Lee 215.

¹⁸¹ Tovell, *Reflections* 18.

“I can say no more than this, for I know no more and come upon nothing further. When I am well and have good surroundings, traveling in a carriage, or after a good meal or a walk at night when I cannot sleep, the ideas come to me in torrents. Where they come from and how they come I just do not know. I keep in my head those that please me and hum them aloud as others have told me. When I have all that carefully in my head, the rest comes quickly, one thing after another; I see such fragments could be used to make a composition of them all, by employing the rules of counterpoint and the sounds of different instruments, etc. My soul is then on fire as long as I am not disturbed; the idea expands, I develop it, becoming clearer and clearer. The piece becomes almost complete in my head, even if it is a long one, so that afterwards *I see it in my spirit all in one look*, as one sees a beautiful picture or beautiful human being. I am saying that *in imagination I do not understand the parts one after another, in the order that they ought to follow in the music; I understand them altogether at one moment*. Delicious moments. When the ideas are discovered and put into a work, all occurs in me as in a beautiful dream which is quite lucid. But *the most beautiful is to understand it all in one moment*. What has happened I do not easily forget and this is the best gift which our God has given me. When it afterwards comes to writing, I take out of the bag in my mind what had previously been gathered into it. Then it gets pretty quickly put down on paper, being strictly, as it was said, *already perfect* and generally much the same way as it was in my head before.”¹⁸²

Grant declares this an example of “intellectual intuition,” and says that modern philosophy (within the Technological paradigm of knowledge) is reluctant to grant it legitimacy, in part because the description of understanding is rife with connotations of *receptivity*.¹⁸³ Bergson too uses the term ‘intuition’ in a discussion of understanding that emphasizes receptivity. He proposes that ‘intuition’ (as opposed to reason) is a way of

¹⁸² Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Mozart's Briefe*, ed. L. Nohl (Salzburg: Mayr, 1865) 443-444, quoted in Grant, *Technology* 48, my emphases.

¹⁸³ Grant, *Technology* 49.

knowing in which, rather than remaining separate and moving around an object one engages in a kind of “intellectual sympathy, in which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique and therefore inexpressible.”¹⁸⁴ This description of knowing echoes Mozart’s peculiar account of gaining knowledge through sensing or receiving what is external to the knower. It also captures a second important aspect of the epistemology I am proposing. Each of the thinkers claims that their insights in this mode are experiential and direct – think of Milne’s insistence on painting on site, and Mozart receiving melodies that seem to be sent to him whole.

There are other senses in which they are ‘direct.’ For instance Milne was deeply concerned with immediacy. He asks, “Why had the apparently easy and careless canvas life and thrill, when the carefully wrought and painfully conscientious picture may be cold and dead? Of course the answer is that the painter was live, quickened, when he painted the first, and whatever he put down would carry that quickening, and reveal it to the spectator. How? Feeling drove his intelligence. His thought was at its clearest, his courage at its highest. Everything he had was concentrated on that rectangle of canvas. ...eager, impatient,... straight for the thing he saw... [overriding] doubt and tradition.”¹⁸⁵ He also has expressed that he believed “the most successful [paintings] seem to be the ones that are caught the quickest... the idea is to get [the kick] from the subject... have the thing strongly enough fired in your mind, then grab your brushes and just fall all over the canvas.”¹⁸⁶ And that “the less the expenditure of the means (colour and line), the

¹⁸⁴ Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* I(1912) as quoted in Russell 14.

¹⁸⁵ Silcox, *Painting Place* 270.

¹⁸⁶ Thom 30.

greater the power of the picture.”¹⁸⁷ At times, he reports, he thought he would like best to be able to “just wish” the image onto the canvas.¹⁸⁸

There is also a sense in these passages of a tremendous directness of intention. This is evident throughout Milne’s writing; in an essay about seeing Monet’s work, Milne remarked upon the “singleness of heart, the unity of his pictures. There was no straying into bypaths. He clearly aimed at one thing and one thing only.”¹⁸⁹ Zwicky talked about ‘focusing’ and ‘being focused by’ a particularity¹⁹⁰, and provides a parallel in Wertheimer’s assertion that “In human terms there is at bottom the desire, the craving, to face the true issue, the structural core, the radix of the situation; to go on from an unclear, inadequate relation to a clear, transparent, direct confrontation – straight from the heart of the thinker to the heart of his object, of his problem.”¹⁹¹

There is also a more mystical sense of directness in the accounts we have been discussing. I am referring to the idea that one enters into a sort of direct contact with their subject that bypasses conscious analysis and control. Milne reports that while painting in this mode “things click into place, without conscious effort, problems solve themselves, the picture seems to move under its own power.”¹⁹²

An understanding that seems to enter into the very core of its subject, and is characterized by sudden clarity and unity (“all at once”), is referred to as Gestalt

¹⁸⁷ Thom 30.

¹⁸⁸ Buchanan 91.

¹⁸⁹ Silcox, Painting Place 27.

¹⁹⁰ Zwicky 53lh.

¹⁹¹ Max Wertheimer, “Dynamics and Logic of Productive Thinking,” Productive Thinking 236, as quoted in Zwicky 95rh.

¹⁹² Thom 67.

perception ('Gestalt' comes from the German for "shape" or "figure"). From Zwicky: "The experience of understanding something is always the experience of a gestalt – the dawning of an aspect that is simultaneously a perception or re-perception of the whole."¹⁹³ Wertheimer explains that 'science' (in the limited sense we have come to think of science within the Technological paradigm) breaks things down into elements and then reassembles them, "all wholes are reduced to pieces and piecewise relations between pieces," whereas "the fundamental formula of Gestalt theory might be expressed in this way: That there are wholes, the behaviour of which is not determined by that of their individual elements, but where the part-processes are themselves determined by the intrinsic nature of the whole."¹⁹⁴

As Wertheimer and Konrad Lorenz show us, scientists do not necessarily perceive of their activity as functioning in the former (Technological and reductive) mode. In pursuing his own research Lorenz observes that he does not actually proceed according to the model of the scientific method – "creating a random hypothesis and subsequently trying to find fault with it."¹⁹⁵ In fact, he suspects the sequence is the reverse, and that "at the time when a set of phenomena seriously begins to fascinate me, my Gestalt perception has already achieved its crucial function and 'suspected' an interesting lawfulness in that particular bunch of sensory data."¹⁹⁶ Although he is still in the phase of observing phenomena, and may still be unconscious of it, he believes the hypothesis has

¹⁹³ Zwicky 21h.

¹⁹⁴ Max Wertheimer, "Gestalt Theory," in A Source Book of Gestalt Psychology, 2, as quoted in Zwicky 78rh.

¹⁹⁵ Konrad Lorenz, Studies in Animal and Human Behaviour, trans. Robert Martin, xxii-xxiii, as quoted in Zwicky 114rh.

¹⁹⁶ Lorenz, Studies in Animal and Human Behaviour, xxii-xxiii, as quoted in Zwicky 114rh.

already been formed, and that “the increased observation accelerates the input of sensory data until, when sufficient redundancy is achieved, the consciously perceived lawfulness detaches itself from the background of accidentals, an event which is accompanied by a very characteristic experience of relief expressed, as Karl Bühler described many years ago, in the sigh: ‘Aha!’ ...”¹⁹⁷

Another famous example of ‘Aha!’ moment of gestalt perception is Poincaré’s famous seaside experience. “Disgusted with his failure,” after struggling with a particular mathematic problem, “apparently without much success and without a suspicion of any connection with [his] preceding researches,” Poincaré decided to leave those thoughts behind and spent a few days enjoying the seaside.¹⁹⁸ “One morning,” he reported, “walking on the bluff, the idea came to me, with just the same characteristics of brevity, suddenness and immediate certainty, that the arithmetic transformations of the indeterminate ternary quadratic forms were identical with those of Euclidean geometry.”¹⁹⁹

Clive Bell sees many parallels between math and visual art, and claims that “the pure mathematician rapt in his studies knows a state of mind which I take to be similar if not identical” to that of the visual artist contemplating significant form. He wonders if “the appreciators of art and mathematical solutions are not even more closely allied” for

¹⁹⁷ Lorenz, *Studies*, xxii-xxiii, as quoted in Zwicky 114rh.

¹⁹⁸ Henri Poincaré, “Mathematical Creation,” Ch. III, *Science and Method*, The Foundations of Science 388, as quoted in Zwicky 95rh.

¹⁹⁹ Poincaré, “Mathematical Creation,” 388, as quoted in Zwicky 95rh.

“before we feel an aesthetic emotion for a combination of forms, do we not perceive intellectually the rightness and necessity of the combination?”²⁰⁰

But how does an artist or poet or scientist proceed from an experience of Gestalt perception, or, in Milne and Bell’s terminology, from an experience of aesthetic emotion? Zwicky suggests that, “one way the facilitation of understanding may proceed [...] is by the judicious selection and arrangement of elements of that whole.”²⁰¹

Gestalt perception, with its focus on the whole, does not allow the usual neat separation of form and content we find in typical analyses of art and literature. Silcox suggests that for Milne it is clear that “the process of art, not the content of it, was paramount.”²⁰² Milne himself asserted that he was not very interested in “content:” “It is refreshing to come on an article about painting without ‘plastic’ in it and ‘content’, you know ‘social content’ or ‘aesthetic content.’”²⁰³ However, I argue this is only true if we limit ourselves to a particular conception of content, and try to claim, for instance, that the ‘content’ of one of Milne’s water lily paintings is the collection of water lilies. Milne claims that the lily is not the focus or subject, it is an excuse for having bottles of water around to refract and diffuse light, and to excite his imagination in a new and surprising way.²⁰⁴ This excitement is part of his artistic process – Milne begins with a particular experience of aesthetic emotion (for instance, as excited by the shapes and play of light

²⁰⁰ Bell 36, 37.

²⁰¹ Zwicky 21h.

²⁰² Silcox, Centennial Exhibition unpaginated.

²⁰³ Buchanan 90.

²⁰⁴ Silcox, Painting Place 203.

on the water lily glasses) which is a response to the experience of his true subject, 'significant form' (in Bell's words 'Reality,' and in Ruskin's 'natural facts'). For Milne, content *is* form, and form content – the whole process is, at essence, the courting and translation of an experience of significant form.

We have yet to discuss the process of translation in any detail, except to suggest that Milne's interest in conveying these *particular and unique experiences* of his subject, significant form, requires him to eschew any inherited stylistic conventions. Milne's conscious rebellion against the idea of systems and rules for art, meant that he was free to develop new techniques for the translation of significant form, or Truth, always with one eye ensuring the work's agreement with its source at all times. It is important to stress once again that these techniques and devices, even if repeated in successive paintings, originate in Milne's own experience, for as Simone Weil notes, the mind can only avoid becoming a "slave to its own methods" by refusing to "accept connections *which it has not itself established*."²⁰⁵

It is important to note the difficulty in distinguishing the decisions of technique from the initial observation and perception of aesthetic emotion, for they both boil down to embodiment in significant form. However, in some ways it is distinct – in the hopes of transmitting some portion of the original experience to the viewer, there is a type of analysis of the experience which never forgets the unity of the initial perception. This too requires extremely focused concentration and thought – what aspects of this arrangement of forms are the source of its power? What must be included? What must be left out?

²⁰⁵ Simone Weil, First and Last Notebooks, trans. Richard Rees, 24, as quoted in Zwicky 109rh.

What ought to be heightened? What downplayed? Where is the pattern? The unity? In what does it consist? How best to translate it?

Look at Wertheimer's description of Gestalt thinking,

“Thinking consists in

envisaging, realizing structural features and structural requirements; proceeding in accordance with, and determined by, these requirements; thereby changing the situation in the direction of structural improvements, which involves:

that gaps, trouble regions, disturbances, superficialities, etc., be viewed and dealt with structurally;

that inner structural relations—fitting or not fitting—be sought among such disturbances and the given situation as a whole among its various parts;

that there be operations of structural grouping and segregation, of centering, etc.;

that operations be viewed and treated in their structural place, role, dynamic meaning, including the realization of the changes which this involves;

realizing structural transposability, structural hierarchy, and separating structurally peripheral from fundamental features—a special case of grouping; looking for structural rather than piecemeal truth.”²⁰⁶

It has been suggested that, in literature, with the advent of new and as yet unexpressed ways of looking at the world, familiar words are linked in “speculative metaphors” which function as analogues for new ideas; and that in these instances the “relation between form and content is in one sense external and incidental, but in another *internal and essential*.”²⁰⁷ In these examples the form, or the way the words and expressions are arranged in relation to one another, relates content in a way the words alone could not literally express. “Old words, old motifs, old images are appropriated and extended

²⁰⁶ Max Wertheimer, “Dynamics and Logic of Productive Thinking,” *Productive Thinking* 235-236, as quoted in Zwicky 31h.

²⁰⁷ Alexander Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides* (Yale University Press, 1970) 38,39, my emphasis.

toward the expression of ideas and concepts which are still in the process of development.”²⁰⁸ But only the *right* arrangement of the *right* words, can create the desired meaning by recreating or echoing – in a way that no rule can determine in advance – the inherent structure of the idea in question.

McKay, in his essay “The Bushtit’s Nest,” offers us a fable, his re-writing of the Genesis tale in which Adam names the animals, which I believe provides an enchanting example of the ways in which metaphors both work and do not work. In McKay’s version, late in the day, after having all his choices heartily approved by God the Father, Adam begins to doubt his selections – particularly in the case of the “Screech Owl.”

“Now Adam could see – or rather hear – what a bonehead of a name it was. Anyone could tell you that a screech was an ascending scream: his mind flashed forward to a ’58 Pontiac Bonneville braking, screeching into the rending metal crash and tinkling of glass which followed. But the owl’s voice fluttered down, a heart sinking, it went down like –Adam paused – finger to lips – like a little aluminum ladder. Bingo. This was more like it: “the little aluminum ladder of its scream.” Adam loved its riskiness, its resonance, the way it connected something airy with the world of tools and – incredibly – found common ground.”²⁰⁹

I argue that when Milne, or any artist, looks to the natural world in a genuinely observant and receptive mode, and attempts to convey with uncompromising precision (in a medium rife with convention), what he *actually* perceives, he too must adapt traditional material in the course of a speculative inquiry – in a process that works in a way similar to the way that McKay shows us metaphor does. Milne’s ‘traditional

²⁰⁸ Mourelatos 39.

²⁰⁹ Don McKay, “The Bushtit’s Nest,” *Thinking and Singing* (Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2002) 64-65.

materials' include both subject matter – the 'landscapes' in which he encounters significant form – and physical materials: pencils, paints, and canvases. But using these, Milne "invented [radically new] perceptual motifs"²¹⁰ (for example, the "dazzle spots" and "interrupted vision"²¹¹ motifs which I will discuss shortly) that we find engaging and resonant because they echo the 'natural truth' he perceives in the world around him.

In his paintings form is demonstrative of meaning – it actually *shows* what the content means. As Milne puts it, "the whole arrangement of my pictures is expressive. The place occupied by figures and objects, the empty spaces around them, the proportions [–] everything plays a part."²¹¹ For example, Northrop Frye observes the novel sense of spatial ambiguity Milne is able to create on a flat canvas – reporting that a landscape by Milne appears to the viewer as if "floating in the air detached from its rectangular frame."²¹² This effect is not achieved by use of the long established rules of conventional perspective, but, as O'Brian says, by "a kind of convex perspective in which the feeling for space is determined by a unity of object and observer."²¹³ O'Brian describes the inventive techniques Milne employs to create the novel sensation of space in the watercolour *Hill Reflected, Bishop's Pond* (1920):

"Because Milne has filled both registers with intricate patterns consisting of nervous black lines and short dashes of colour, the eye has no place to rest and, consequently, splay out to the circumference of the picture. Then the painting begins to take on the character of a fish bowl. Pushed by the colour red which is restricted to the centre of

²¹⁰ Thom 114.

²¹¹ O'Brian 112.

²¹² Northrop Frye, "David Milne: An Appreciation," quoted in O'Brian 109.

²¹³ O'Brian 109.

the picture – the area on the shoreline just to the left of the blackly defined trees – the painting bulges roundly forward. Thus space in the painting becomes strangely illusory at the same time that it can be seen to remain flat.”²¹⁴

This example is, I argue, parallel to the case of speculative metaphors. It shows that in Milne’s work, too, the relation between form and content is also “internal and essential.”

Bringhurst revives the scholastic term “circumincession” to describe the “mutual indwelling” of form and content.²¹⁵ I believe such circumincession of form and content in the epistemology under discussion is due, in part, to the receptive nature of this form of perception; for if the content is derived from the direct experience of a perception of significant form (or structure) found already existing in the world, it requires, as Milne notes, “the dropping of any conscious plan of composition.”²¹⁶ It also allows Milne to claim, “one subject is as good as another.”²¹⁷

Milne explicitly links the thrill of recognition of significant form, both in nature and in the artwork he reports to have inspired him, with the recognition of wholeness or unity – which is, as we have discussed, a central feature of gestalt perception. For instance, he wrote in response to a questionnaire about influences on his work that he “got [his] second thrill from painting at the Durand Ruel Galleries... There was an exhibition of Monet’s Haystack series – about a half a dozen pictures I think. ...It was the amazing unity of the pictures that impressed me, a unity gained by compression, by

²¹⁴ O’Brian 110-111.

²¹⁵ Robert Bringhurst, “The Trashing of Dr. Empedocles,” *Thinking and Singing*, ed. Tim Lilburn, (Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2002) 83.

²¹⁶ Thom 103.

²¹⁷ Thom 103.

forcing all detail to work to one end. In all other pictures I was conscious of parts, in these I felt only the whole.”²¹⁸

It is evident that the attempt to recreate unity was a particular preoccupation in Milne’s work. His painting notebooks, remarkable for their detail and discipline, are a wealth of information about the particular problems and solutions Milne wrestled with in his work. Here are a few examples of his thoughts about achieving unity in a painting:

“The things get their kick from singleness of purpose.”²¹⁹

“The overburden of detail was lost and the precision was retained. The Dart’s pictures were all in the same vein. They might be described as line drawings in colour. Shape was all important, colour a mere agent in simplifying the form. The chief means of simplification was form itself, a contrast of open and worked over spaces – open and shut painting was Clarke’s name for it.”²²⁰

(Of pieces he felt did not work) “it lacks unity, simplicity, compression – it is a thing of parts,” and it was “too heavy handed, too close, too painstaking in detail, without enough grasp of the whole.”²²¹

I will very briefly note a few of the innovative techniques Milne developed in the effort to recreate the “kick” of aesthetic emotion he received on occasion from his close observation of the world. Milne and Bell agree, that “all artistic problems—and their possible variety is infinite—must be the foci of one particular kind of emotion, that specific artistic emotion which I believe to be an emotion felt for reality, generally perceived through form; but the nature of the focus is immaterial. It is almost, though not

²¹⁸ Silcox, Painting Place 27.

²¹⁹ Silcox, Painting Place 272.

²²⁰ Thom 103.

²²¹ Silcox, Painting Place 180,185.

quite, true to say that one problem is as good as another. For [the viewer] the problem has no value; for the artist it is the working test of absolute ‘rightness’.”²²²

Milne’s “interrupted vision motives,” and his use of “foils” and “dazzle spots,” “came from the simplest and most common of occurrences... novice photographer [goes after] a clear view of his subject... results disappointing. The reason may be that he has left out what, unnoticed, gave the subject interest.” For example, the fuzzy branch in the foreground which blocks our view of some part of the subject. Milne noted how the inclusion in the foreground of the white post on a porch animated the rest of picture, and brought to it “speed and concentration.”²²³ Keep in mind that, as Silcox points out in the catalogue accompanying the centennial exhibition of Milne’s work, in the era Milne was painting, these devices were far more radical than they might look or sound today.

Thus far I have been attempting to show that Milne’s epistemology of Intransitive Love is not merely an individual’s personal theory of art, but an example of a far more widespread model of phenomenological epistemology, often referred to as gestalt perception. The question remains, what does this model, that is so fascinated by and dependent on formal structures, purport to know? And how can one distinguish whether it is right or wrong?

I have suggested that the mode of knowing is largely receptive, and, in the previous chapter, that for Milne, as in Ruskin, the understanding of ‘truth’ is linked to the idea of “natural facts.” Although one might initially suppose that these terms are used metaphorically when speaking about feelings, and art and poetry, we must remember that

²²² Bell 71.

²²³ Silcox, Painting Place 81.

on the view we've been discussing Bell's aesthetic emotion is "an emotion felt for Reality, generally perceived through form."²²⁴

I hope it has also become increasingly clear that the connection between form and content is of crucial significance in this epistemology. Zwicky argues that "What 'has' meaning, embodies it. A gesture is informed by its meaning. This is both *how* and *why* it means," and "that it is so is shown by the world... (Any sense that these [the how and why of meaning] are conceptually independent of one another, or can be made so by an adequate analysis, is illusory.)"²²⁵ "The intuition of resonant relation is the experience of meaning," Zwicky explains.²²⁶ That is where the energy and thrill Milne is always seeking originate.

But a picture can be wrong if a painter gets a gesture wrong, or even not quite right, and thus the picture will fail to create resonance. Zwicky talks about weak metaphors, and Milne of paintings that lack life and energy. Often when our efforts in poetry or art lack resonance it is because we are creating pictures (of whatever type) "without experiencing their meaning. We use the word 'mechanical' to describe this kind of speech or thought."²²⁷

It is important, once again, to note that each of the thinkers discussed emphasizes the continual effort required to attend properly to our actual experiences which must act as our guide for truth. Wittgenstein requires that a poet must constantly ask herself, "is

²²⁴ Bell 69.

²²⁵ Zwicky 78lh.

²²⁶ Zwicky 49lh.

²²⁷ Zwicky 49lh.

what I'm saying really true?"²²⁸ "The choice of our words," Wittgenstein carefully explains, "is so important, because the point is to hit upon the physiognomy of the thing exactly, because only the exactly aimed thought can lead to the correct track..."²²⁹

Wittgenstein, in his earliest work, states that "what any picture, of whatever form, must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it – correctly or incorrectly – in any way at all, is *logical form, i.e. the form of reality.*"²³⁰ "A gramophone record, the musical idea, the written notes, and the sound-waves, all stand to one another in the same internal relation of depicting that holds between language and the world. They are all constructed according to a common logical pattern. (Like the two youths in the fairytale, their two horses, and their lilies.) They are all in a certain sense one."²³¹

Milne too uses the word "logical;" for instance, he remarked that a particular painting "came [to him] easily, *logically.*"²³² And, in one of the most interesting sections of his book, Bell asks, "Before we feel an aesthetic emotion for a combination of forms, do we not *perceive intellectually the rightness and necessity* of the combination?"²³³ He also wrote that every artist must choose his own problem as a "working test of *absolute rightness.*"²³⁴

²²⁸ Wittgenstein, Culture 40e.

²²⁹ Wittgenstein, "Philosophy," Occasions 165.

²³⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (New York: Routledge, 1961) 2.18

²³¹ Wittgenstein, TLP 4.014

²³² David Milne, "From Spring Fever to Fantasy" Canadian Art 2 (April-May, 1945) 164.

²³³ Bell 37, my emphasis.

²³⁴ Bell 71.

When we get it right – when it is, as Zwicky puts it, resonant – we feel “yes, *this* is how the piece fits into the world of our thoughts and feelings.”²³⁵ Milne’s “kick” and Zwicky’s being “pierced,” are ways in which we *sense* that something is right, or true – that it works, or *fits*. This is for the early Wittgenstein a matter of recognizing *logical necessity*; the understanding of “a whole thought in a flash,” is this sense of suddenly seeing it all clearly as simple, and *necessary*.²³⁶ This is the distinguishing mark that tells us we have succeeded in capturing some aspect of internal relationships by mimicking the structure of reality – “Yes, that’s how it is”, you say, “Because that’s how it *must* be!”²³⁷

When Zwicky talks of metaphors in poetry, and says that ‘seeing-as’ requires imagination, she insists that this does not mean there is no correlation to “what *is there*.”²³⁸ The ability to see-as for Zwicky, like the perception of reality as significant form, “is the result of the natural attunement of our capacities for perception to the world.”²³⁹ She quotes Lorenz, who in defending gestalt perception also insists on correspondence with the way things really are: “I am unshakeably convinced that all the information conveyed to us by our cognitive apparatus corresponds to actual realities. This attitude rests on the realization that our cognitive apparatus is itself an objective

²³⁵ Wittgenstein, *Culture* 57e.

²³⁶ Wittgenstein, *PI* 319.

²³⁷ Wittgenstein, *Culture* 26e.

²³⁸ Zwicky 25lh.

²³⁹ Zwicky 26lh.

reality which has acquired its present form through contact with an adaptation to equally real things in the outer world... and we may trust it – as far as it goes.”²⁴⁰

The Chinese are reported to have believed that "the universal order was intelligible to human beings because they themselves had been produced by it."²⁴¹ In keeping with this idea, Clark has suggested that Ruskin's "insistence on the sanctity of nature was part of an attempt to develop Goethe's intuition that form cannot be put together in the mind by an additive process, but is to be deduced from the laws of growth in living organisms, and their resistance to the elements."²⁴² I suggest that when we are free to think about ourselves in the world from outside the Technological mode Grant and Heidegger described, and instead approach the relationship in a mode like Milne's *Intransitive Love*, the objective distance that allowed us to see the world as 'standing reserve' disappears, and when it disappears, the distance between ourselves and the world collapses: we are able to experience ourselves as being a part of the pattern of nature.

This idea of a 'pattern' of nature can be expressed in terms we have mentioned before – one might substitute Milne's use of "significant form," derived from Bell's "reality generally perceived through form" or "the all-pervading rhythm that informs all things," or Ruskin's "natural truth." I argue these are all ways of referring to what Grant and Lee called the "eternal order," which "inform[s] the constancy of the physical world,"²⁴³ and, because we too are part of the world, also informs us.

²⁴⁰ Konrad Lorenz, *Behind the Mirror*, trans. Ronald Taylor, 7, as quoted in Zwicky 26rh.

²⁴¹ Joseph Needham, "Human law and the laws of Nature," *Shorter Science and Civilization in China: An Abridgement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) 305.

²⁴² Ruskin, *Ruskin Today* 136.

²⁴³ Lee 132.

We must be careful not to let our inherited Technological assumptions muddy the waters here by assuming that this order is somehow exclusively physical. In other words, 'the physical world informed by an eternal order' is not meant to simply evoke Newtonian mechanical law. Although the eternal order "inform[s] the constancy of the physical world,"²⁴⁴ for Grant and Lee (like the Chinese Taoists), this same order also informs the moral and spiritual realms, simultaneously creating "the moral order which human beings can sometimes sense."²⁴⁵ This order *just is*, and informs everything – physics and biology, as well as human moral order – allowing us to enjoy a sense of coherence in our experiences.

Returning to the central discussion, we must consider what it is that we recognize in these resonant experiences. As Zwicky says, and most of the people I have discussed would agree, "When attempting to say what an experience of meaning was an experience of... we sometimes reach for one or more of the following words: 'truth', 'beauty', 'goodness', 'integrity'."²⁴⁶ These are the very concepts that Grant had such trouble discussing when trapped within the Technological paradigm of knowledge.

²⁴⁴ Lee 132.

²⁴⁵ Lee 132.

²⁴⁶ Zwicky 49lh.

Chapter 4

Milne starts with living life and observing his experience carefully, for, “One may live without painting, but one cannot paint without living.”²⁴⁷ The other thinkers that I have cited in support of the epistemology of Intransitive Love, also take rigorous observation of their own experience as their foundation. Although I acknowledge the tendentious nature of this claim, I would like to offer for consideration a possible explanation for the fact that these accounts so often coincide at the phenomenological level. Each of these individuals is attempting to track an experience of meaning that begins outside the self, with what is really out there in the world – perhaps their accounts coincide because somewhere beyond the distortion of language and synthesizing reason “there is,” as Zwicky assures us, “only one world.”²⁴⁸

The mode of thinking that allows Milne to experience the world around him as a thrilling subject for painting is clearly divorced from the Technological mode Grant argued is our everyday mode of being in the world. The most profound difference between the two is that Milne’s epistemology places us in a very different relationship to the world: it does not permit us to see the world as merely a collection of neutral objects for our manipulation and use. As Zwicky explains, “ontological attention is a response to particularity: *this* porch, *this* laundry basket, *this* day. Its object cannot be substituted for, even when it is an object of considerable generality (‘the country’, ‘cheese’, garage sales’). It is the antithesis of the attitude that regards things as ‘resources’, mere means to

²⁴⁷ O’Brian 99.

²⁴⁸ Zwicky 55lh.

human ends. In perceiving *thisness*, we respond to having been addressed. (In fact we are addressed all the time, but we don't always notice this.)"²⁴⁹

In Milne's view "higher man... reasons not to survive but *for delight in the thing itself*," and "this reason *isn't useful* but altruistic."²⁵⁰ The reasoning of 'higher man' is altruistic in the sense that it is not employed for any self-serving or utilitarian purpose, the end is instead "delight in the thing itself." The commentator who quoted this passage, Rosemarie Tovell, interpreted 'the thing itself' in this statement as meaning 'reason itself' – as in 'reasoning for the delight in reasoning itself.'

Although it is quite possible that in claiming "higher man's" delight in reasoning "for the thing itself," he meant to affirm the inherent value of human reasoning, I believe he may have meant something quite different. I suggest that the use of the word "altruistic" suggests that the delight is not in *reasoning* itself, but in reasoning – or as I think Milne would agree, in serious intellectual activity – concerned with some *other* 'thing' *as it really is* 'in itself.'

Although they use the term 'thing in itself' and "that which lies behind the appearance of all things,"²⁵¹ I insist that we must not mistake Bell and Milne for Kantian metaphysicians. To be more explicit, I do not believe that they understand 'the thing in itself' as a Kantian 'noumenon.' In fact they cannot, for if they believed 'the thing in itself' was necessarily imperceptible, or a mere human postulate, the type of art they believe themselves engaged in would be quite impossible.

²⁴⁹ Zwicky 53lh.

²⁵⁰ Tovell, Reflections 118.

²⁵¹ Bell 73.

If we recall the passage I quoted earlier, Bell believes that, *when considered as an end in itself*, “the thing in itself” reveals to us its inherent significance, or “*essential reality*,” he believes that this “essential reality” is completely independent of human perception or mental activity.²⁵² He cannot have Kantian noumena in mind for he clearly states that the “essential reality,” or “the significance of [a] thing considered as an end in itself” which inspires aesthetic emotion is “the *formal* significance of *material* things.”²⁵³ To clarify: Bell’s and Milne’s use of the term ‘thing in itself’ is to be understood as the thing seen *as it really is* in the world: independent of human minds, inherently and formally significant, and, quite definitely, materially existent.

The uncanny ability of the great artist or poet is not merely to enter into the mode of Intransitive Love which, by eliminating the distorting effects of Technological assumptions, allows them to see what is really out there in the world – to experience significant form, the immanence of the divine. It is to be able to hold such an experience in mind and to use it as their guide while working to translate what they have witnessed so that the viewer too may come to recognize immanence. This requires that the artist is able to hold onto formal unity while working out the specific arrangement of its parts, and somehow recreate their perception on canvas. Clark said of Ruskin something that I believe applies to any thinker who works in the epistemological mode of Intransitive Love – “It is extremely rare for anyone who is capable of the intense dream-like joy which we call aesthetic emotion to do more than utter cries of satisfaction. But when Ruskin was moved by a Gothic window or a cloud, a Turner or a Byzantine capital, he

²⁵² Bell 71-73, previously quoted on p.38 of this text. The emphasis is mine.

²⁵³ Bell 71-73, my emphasis.

could analyze its structure and recognize the relationship of the parts without losing his delight in the whole.”²⁵⁴

The word ‘analysis’ might initially seem out of place in this discussion as it turns so much on ideas of feeling, specifically love, and we have become accustomed to believing that feelings (particularly love!) result in a sort of intellectually lax and unfocused ‘fuzziness.’ I hope it has been evident throughout this exploration that there is a rigour of concentration, an insistence on accuracy and clarity that permeates any attempt to communicate meaning in the epistemology of Intransitive Love – for instance, Milne’s observation that “shape should be used wherever possible instead of colour[;] because colour is the more arbitrary means, its use involves less thought.”²⁵⁵ Each of the accounts I have addressed notes the requirement of intense concentration, in Milne’s words, of “singleness of heart, sincerity beyond anything possible in daily life” as essential.²⁵⁶ Wertheimer relates Einstein’s account of his own thought processes, while working on the Theory of Relativity as “a *feeling* of direction, of going straight toward something concrete...very hard to express that feeling in words; but it was... clearly to be distinguished from later considerations about the rational form of the solution. Of course behind such direction there is always something logical; but I have it in a kind of survey, in a way visually.”²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ Ruskin, Ruskin Today xx.

²⁵⁵ Silcox, Painting 121.

²⁵⁶ Silcox, Painting 264.

²⁵⁷ Max Wertheimer, “Einstein, The Thinking That Led to the Theory of Relativity,” from Productive Thinking 228, found in Zwicky 73rh, my emphasis.

This last observation points to a crucial aspect of this epistemology – aesthetic feeling (indeed feeling of any sort) need not be understood as exclusive of the activity of thought, nor need thought exclude feeling. This circumincession of feeling and thought is intimately related to the inseparability of form and content in this mode. As Milne claims, his “thought was at its clearest” at the height of the experience of aesthetic emotion, when “feeling drove his intelligence.”²⁵⁸ Milne’s notebooks are full of the language of intellectual activity working together with aesthetic feeling: we see this, for example, in his discussion of “reading” a picture, or in his effort to identify the “right balance and tension between lines and shapes.”²⁵⁹ On the other side of the same coin, Henri Poincaré claims that, although “it may be surprising to see emotional sensibility invoked *a propos* of mathematical demonstrations which, it would seem, can interest only the intellect,” “this would be to forget the feeling of mathematical beauty, of the harmony of numbers and forms, of geometric elegance. This is a true esthetic feeling that all real mathematicians know, and surely it belongs to emotional sensibility.”²⁶⁰

In this mode, thought and feeling work incredibly closely in the service of meaning that originates beyond the self. In Grant’s mind, both poetry and philosophy (and I add visual art) rely on receptivity, which, he argues, is not compatible with attempts to master the earth.²⁶¹ In the Technological mode we have great difficulty receiving the beauty of the world, for we have come to understand science as rooted in a

²⁵⁸ Silcox, *Painting* 270.

²⁵⁹ Silcox, *Painting* 121.

²⁶⁰ Henri Poincaré, “Mathematical Creation,” Chapter III, *Science and Method* in *The Foundations of Science*, trans. George Bruce Halsted, 391-392, found in Zwicky 37rh.

²⁶¹ Grant, *Grant Reader* 362.

desire to change the world.²⁶² To put it another way, in the Technological mode one looks at the world through the lens of a particular objective. But, as Milne and the others argue, Intransitive Love has no objective – we are free to see the world *as it actually is*. “Only as something stands before us in some other mode than the objective can we learn of its beauty and from its beauty.”²⁶³

This brings out what I consider the fundamental, and most hopeful, aspect of the epistemology of Intransitive Love. While the Technological paradigm of thought requires that we regard everything we encounter as a collection of discrete, neutral objects upon which any value is conferred by our own activity, Milne’s epistemology requires that we inhabit a very different stance toward the world. In this mode the world is already full of meaning, significance, and beauty that we can come to know with the appropriate attitude of loving attention.

Technology’s “objective” approach allows us to “know” an “object” in a way that maintains that the world is wholly other and distant from the self and makes it available to us as a resource. What is ‘other’ is “held away from us for questioning.”²⁶⁴ Grant argues that “in all scientific explanation we are required to eliminate the assumption of the other as itself beautiful.”²⁶⁵ To see the other as beautiful would be completely inappropriate in the Technological mode. Within this paradigm, the term can have only subjective meaning. What one must do to “see” clearly in the Technological mode is strip the object of particularities of context and those qualities that it presumes can only be

²⁶² Grant, *Technology* 50.

²⁶³ Grant, *Technology* 41.

²⁶⁴ Grant, *Technology* 40.

²⁶⁵ Grant, *Technology* 40.

projected onto it by human minds – for instance, beauty and significance. At the same time it obscures beauty, Technological objectification assumes the subject's authority over the objectified other. Technology enables us to reduce and control the other by distancing ourselves from it, engaging it only as the neutral object of our reasoned inquiry and in the process subjecting it to categorization and homogenization.

As I have already argued, if we approach the world, and the other, in the mode of Intransitive Love, we cannot maintain such distance, objectivity, or control. I believe Bergson is correct when he suggests intuition – which I think is coextensive with knowing in Intransitive Love – does not permit us to “remain separate and move around the object,” but requires instead that one “places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique.”²⁶⁶ This means we cannot bring with us particular expectations of the other, nor subject it to our desires, rather we must attend to it *as it really is*, as ‘an end in itself.’

The old teaching, according to Grant, held that “we love otherness, not because it is other, but because it is beautiful.”²⁶⁷ This requires us to let go of the human-centric, scientific view of the world. In Bell's words, “be they artists or lovers of art, mystics or mathematicians, those who achieve ecstasy are those who have freed themselves from the arrogance of humanity. He who would feel the significance of art must make himself humble before it.”²⁶⁸ And it is this access to something prior to the self, perhaps prior even to the human, that makes the aesthetic emotion experienced in the face of art or the

²⁶⁶ Russell 14.

²⁶⁷ Grant, *Technology* 39.

²⁶⁸ Bell 73.

natural world so exhilarating. “It is because art adds something new to our emotional experience, *something that comes not from human life but from pure form*, that it stirs us so deeply and so mysteriously.”²⁶⁹

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In his essay on Grant, Lee expresses a concern they share – that “there are certain things that speak to us at the core, but that scarcely exist within the assumptions of modern thought. I have in mind the kind of reality that people once pointed to with words like ‘good,’ ‘evil,’ ‘the sacred.’ It is not that we have lost contact with such things in our lives, but rather that educated thinking no longer recognizes them as having any substance.”²⁷⁰ Lee is referring to the “rational muteness” or seeming impossibility of acceptable articulation Grant encountered whenever he tried to think and speak about inherent or non-subjective meaning – meaning he personally had experienced such as intimations of: beauty, truth, integrity, the sacred.²⁷¹

It appears that Milne’s mode of thought, in which one both apprehends and communicates the meaning discovered in the world around us, and which can be referred to with the very terms that have evaded Grant and Lee – beauty, truth, integrity – is able to provide an avenue around or through what Dennis Lee identified as Grant’s Impasse. As for the sacred, there is a strong sense of the sacredness of the world that runs through

²⁶⁹ Bell 213.

²⁷⁰ Lee vii.

²⁷¹ Lee 139.

the thought of each of the thinkers I have identified as functioning in this mode. Bell, who influenced so much of Milne's thought, said "whatever the world of aesthetic contemplation may be, it is not the world of human business and passion; in it the chatter and tumult of material existence is unheard or heard only as an echo of some more ultimate harmony."²⁷²

In attending to the world's significant form, in a mode of perception that is sensitive to the relations between wholes and parts, and the circumincession of form and content, and thought and feeling, we are struck by the sensation of "feeling the world as a limited whole."²⁷³ Even while painting a particular place, or a specific arrangement of natural forms, the focus on patterned connections and structural coherence allowed Milne to feel that "the whole world was now in front of you."²⁷⁴ The deep unity and coherence of all individual things that an approach in the spirit of Intransitive Love can apprehend has obvious parallels in, and would require us to take seriously, the ecological model of our environment. A genuine recognition of interconnectedness and the inherent value in all things has profound implications for ethics and environmental responsibility – it insists that we take seriously the claims that we ought to treat one another, our environment and the natural systems and cycles within it, with the utmost respect.

I do not mean to suggest that merely by adopting a more ecological, or holistic, worldview we automatically preclude the possibility of human tyranny. Grant notes that "the Europeans somehow seem to have come to an apprehension of the whole as 'will',"

²⁷² Bell 73.

²⁷³ Wittgenstein, TLP 6.45

²⁷⁴ O'Brian 113.

and one need only to think of Heidegger's own association with the Nazis to see there is reason to proceed cautiously with such ideas.²⁷⁵ However, I do think the emphasis on seeing others as 'ends in themselves,' and the ecological model as an example of 'unity in diversity,' help to prevent such corruptions of the ontology I am attempting to outline.

I think an even more powerful protection against corruption is that the beliefs that characterize the mode of Intransitive Love – that all things are interconnected and that meaning resides outside the self – are motivated by a complete and genuine shift in orientation. In Wittgenstein's conception, this shift in orientation is "learning to look at [things] in their proper spirit."²⁷⁶

In his "Lecture On Ethics," Wittgenstein discusses the difficulty of talking sense about ethics – the realm of absolute value judgements – when, as he argues, all facts and propositions can express only relative values. Yet, in spite of awareness of this apparent impossibility, he admits that he and others (like Grant and Lee) are often tempted to use terms like absolute good and right. When thinking about happiness (and here the term is used relatively), one might think of a previous experience of the sensation – for instance, of walking in a beautiful summer breeze. In the effort to clarify for himself what he could mean by absolute or ethical value, Wittgenstein brought to mind the specific experiences in which he has felt intimations of absolute Good. "I believe," he says, "the best way of describing it is to say that when I have [this experience] I wonder at the existence of the

²⁷⁵ Grant, *Technology* 18.

²⁷⁶ Wittgenstein, *PI* 169.

world. And I am then inclined to use such phrases as 'how extraordinary that anything should exist' or 'how extraordinary that the world should exist.'²⁷⁷

Wittgenstein goes on to claim that “the experience of wondering at the existence of the world” is “*the experience of seeing the world as a miracle.*”²⁷⁸ However, as he acknowledges, the use of the term ‘miracle’ is certainly not going to help him explain absolute value in acceptable terms. But, in a passage that sounds very much like Grant’s discussion of “rational muteness” on the topic of the Good in the Technological realm, Wittgenstein explains there is a particular reason for this.

“Now suppose [a miraculous] event happened. Take the case that one of you suddenly grew a lion's head and began to roar. Certainly that would be as extraordinary a thing as I can imagine. Now whenever we should have recovered from our surprise, what I would suggest would be to fetch a doctor and have the case scientifically investigated and if it were not for hurting him I would have him vivisected. And where would the miracle have got to?

For it is clear that when we look at it in this way everything miraculous has disappeared; unless what we mean by this term is merely that a fact has not yet been explained by science which again means that we have hitherto failed to group this fact with others in a scientific system. This shows that it is absurd to say 'Science has proved that there are no miracles.'

The truth is that the scientific way of looking at a fact is not the way to look at it as a miracle.”²⁷⁹

I am aware that much of what I propose about the epistemology of Intransitive Love will invite criticism from those who would see words like “miracle,” “immanence,”

²⁷⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, “A Lecture on Ethics,” *Philosophical Occasions*, eds. James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Inc., 1993): 37-44, 41.

²⁷⁸ Wittgenstein, “A Lecture on Ethics,” *Occasions* 43.

²⁷⁹ Wittgenstein, “A Lecture on Ethics,” *Occasions* 43.

and “the Divine” as grounds for the immediate dismissal of any philosophical position that employed them. Nonetheless, I believe that this epistemology makes sense of what Milne, Bell, Ruskin (and the many others I have quoted) are saying they experience and know. It also provides an avenue for overcoming Grant’s Impasse and Technological nihilism by allowing us to see states of affairs differently – free of the distorting bias of Technological understanding. Finally, I must count myself among those who cannot agree that the holocaust, for example, is an instance of merely *relative* wrong-doing. Thus, I believe, as Lee and Grant do, that a disjunction between the propositions of educated thinking and the way we actually live our lives is deeply discomforting. It is, I believe, more discomforting for many of us than taking seriously an epistemology that questions the assumptions of our Technological modernity.

For Milne, painting is “a labour to the glory of God,”²⁸⁰ and when he searches for the cause of the aesthetic emotion that spurs and directs his work, he discovers “that [the] feeling came from just one thing, the great restful space above the horizon.”²⁸¹ Megan Bice states in the conclusion to her essay on Milne, that “for David Milne art was the essence of life itself.”²⁸² I think what this statement expresses is that art, in Milne’s view, is an activity of recognition, and praise – of reverence – in the face of the essential truth and meaning we can experience as living beings. Milne was able to undertake such an enormous task by focusing on the particulars in which he was able to see the divine and concentrating on getting them exactly right.

²⁸⁰ O’Brian 99.

²⁸¹ Thom 113.

²⁸² Thom 115.

O'Brian argues that Matisse shared Milne's attitude, writing that it was "*by means of painting the human figure* that he was best able to express his almost religious attitude towards life."²⁸³ Although *Intransitive Love* has no "object" in the strict sense (Milne tells us it is "not love of man, or nature, or country..."²⁸⁴), Milne's paintings are recognizable "paintings of" things he sees in the natural world. Although he is painting a particular tree, or a particular place, Milne is not trying to tell a journalistic story about this place, or show you what this tree means to *him*. *Intransitive Love* sees the world without the mediation of any personal objectives. However, we must not forget, it nonetheless begins and ends in careful, focused attention to the individual. As Zwicky says, it is evoked in "response to particularity: *this* porch, *this* laundry basket, *this* day."²⁸⁵

Indeed, it could be argued that Milne's unique contribution to the history of art was the revelation that Bell's significant form need not be wholly divorced from representational painting, for, as he so powerfully shows, one can attend to and reveal significant form in paintings of actual places and things. Milne insisted on showing significant form *as he experienced it* – in the particular and recognizable forms of the world around him – without ever allowing that the "particular dissolves into the merely general, nor does the universal flatten out into abstractions."²⁸⁶ This opens the possibility that many other types of paintings, perhaps all the great works of visual art, move us so

²⁸³O'Brian 98. My emphasis.

²⁸⁴Thom 115.

²⁸⁵Zwicky 53lh.

²⁸⁶George Grant, "Dennis Lee – Poetry and Philosophy" in Grant Reader 367.

profoundly because those artists too were able to see and reveal immanence in the stuff of their own times and places.

Lee's introduction to his essay on Grant relates a conversation between the two men that is relevant to this point. Lee had been telling Grant about his favourite place in the world, the summer home of his childhood on the shores of a lake in southern Ontario.

“How marvellous, Dennis!” [Grant] boomed, with that outsized gusto that always caught me off guard. A scatter of cigarette ashes came snaking down his cardigan. “How *marvellous!* It’s what Plato said, isn’t it? ... That we’re meant to love the good... And we come to love the good by first loving our own. How *marvellous* for you, having that place in Muskoka to love.”²⁸⁷

In this conversation, Lee says, Grant gave him back his love for that particular place “in a luminous further dimension.”²⁸⁸ This is how, I believe, David Milne understood what good painting does: it gives us particulars in a luminous further dimension, revealing significance beyond our personal objectives and distinct from the agenda of Technology. Intransitive Love, as Milne understood it, is an epistemological stance that reveals to us that things, unique and particular, *just as they are*, are immanent. It is my proposal that when we are able to see this, we are struck by awe, and recognize that these particular things fit together logically, necessarily, as parts of a larger coherent whole. This whole is structured according to an order that we ourselves are subject to, and are sometimes able to perceive, but which is prior to our human conceptual organization. When we perceive our place within this larger order, as parts of an interconnected whole, we are humbled.

²⁸⁷ Lee 129.

²⁸⁸ Lee 129.

The whole, the connections, and all the other parts that make it up, demand our respect. As Grant would say, we understand ourselves as “beholden,” as “claimed.”²⁸⁹

What’s more, art – and as I argue, the artistic mode of knowing – “*involves the whole man*. Whether in making or perceiving a work of art, we bring to bear on it feeling, intellect, morals, knowledge, memory, and every other human capacity, all focused in a flash on a single point.”²⁹⁰ In a letter to the Massey family in which he attempted to sum up his entire philosophy of art, Milne stated that “I have very little interest in art as technical performance, an accomplishment, a superficial matter of the trained eye and hand. I think of it, rather, as a way of life, shaped and moulded by influences before the artist’s birth, by his training, particularly, in the very early years, and by every event and circumstance in his life.”²⁹¹

Finally, Milne’s understanding of the meaning and importance of art stands in stark contrast to Technology’s ideals of utility and purposiveness: “I have never heard this love of flowers very satisfactorily explained. I think we go to flowers as we go to art, because both are useless. We do not reach out to either as an aid in our struggle for existence. Our devotion to either or both is a statement of faith, a declaration that for us there is more to life than mere continuance, it is good for itself, without purpose, that heaven is not far away and shadowy and unreal, but here, now and very real.”²⁹²

²⁸⁹ Lee 130.

²⁹⁰ Ruskin, Ruskin Today 134.

²⁹¹ Thom 63.

²⁹² Silcox, Painting Place 4.

I believe that taking seriously the alternative mode of thought presented here as Intransitive Love is of the utmost importance, particularly in an age facing not only political and economic upheaval, but unprecedented environmental crisis. As Zwicky puts it, "The phenomenology of experience is particularly relevant in situations where there is evidence that certain experiences are shared *but also* ignored by ideological emphases in the culture. Attending to this phenomenology is one way to begin to take them seriously; and to begin to reflect on the politics of marginalization."²⁹³

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"Bonnard's perception of reality is coloured by his glorious ability to see and to paint with heart and soul. A figure in a bathroom can become paradise on earth or a collection of cold facts. The choice is truly ours."

- Arthur Madeson

²⁹³ Zwicky 109lh.

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