

'Can excrement be art ... if not, why not?': Joyce's Aesthetic Theory and the Flux of Consciousness

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In the fifth chapter of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen is having a detailed conversation on aesthetics and beauty with his friend Lynch. He is in the process of defining his aesthetic theory, and is explaining how this came about:

To finish what I was saying about beauty, said Stephen, the most satisfying relations of the sensible must therefore correspond to the necessary phases of artistic apprehension. Find these and you find the qualities of universal beauty. Aquinas says: *ad pulcritudinem tria requiruntur integritas, consonantia, claritas*. I translate it so: *three things are needed for beauty, wholeness, harmony, and radiance* (Joyce 2000, 229)

Stephen is quoting Thomas Aquinas, and is defining art in very intellectual terms. The rationalistic division and partitioning of aesthetic experience has been very much the norm in Western thinking on beauty, and at this juncture, the quotation mirrors this through a suasive rhetorical sleight of hand. The word 'apprehended', a term that is bound up with sensuous experience of the world, is denuded of its corporeal dimensions through its sub-division into the Thomistic tripartite qualities of '*integritas, consonantia, claritas*'.

The division of a single quality into intellectual abstractions means that the mind/body duality was enforced through a redefining of perception. Thus, the mind is the agency of perception, while the body becomes one of the objects of perception; the mind is the active creator of our sense of beauty, while it is no longer an active participant in its agency. As Umberto Eco puts it:

The beautiful object is an object that by virtue of its form delights the senses, especially sight and hearing. But those aspects perceivable with the senses are not the only factors that express the Beauty of the object: in the case of the human body an important role is also played by the qualities of the soul and the personality, which are perceived by the mind's eye more than by the eye of the body. (Eco 2004, 41)

This sense that the mind, and not the body, is the sole actant in the apprehension of beauty has a long intellectual history. Since, in Plato's view, the body is a 'dark cavern that imprisons the soul', then the 'sight of the senses must be overcome by intellectual sight, which requires a knowledge of the dialectical arts, in other words philosophy' (Eco 2004, 50).

While it is Aquinas who is cited, there are definite hints of Cartesian dualism at work in Stephen's early formal discussion of beauty. The Australian ecofeminist Val Plumwood makes the point that Descartes, as part of a project of making the body less of an agent in thinking, took the 'mental activities which involve the body, such as sense perception, and which appear to bridge the mind/body and human/animal division', and reinterpreted them in terms of 'consciousness', which he saw as a 'purely mental operations' (Plumwood 1993, 115). Greg Garrard, in his overview of ecocriticism, sees this as a Cartesian hypersaturation of mind and body, and he traces the mind/body split back to Descartes who denied to animals, not only the 'faculty of reason, but the whole range of feelings and sensations that he had associated with thought' (Garrard 2004, 25). In this chapter, I will argue that art, and specifically that of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, offers a corrective to this dualism, and that Joyce's aesthetic theory, which is worked out through this book, is a holistic one which values all aspects of experience as part of the aesthetic. I will also suggest homologies between Joyce's thinking on art and that of a number of philosophers and thinkers. The politics of such a view have strong implications for a criticism which sees the

world, not as an object to be used and mastered, but rather as a partner in aesthetic apprehension and experience.

Martin Heidegger critiques the *Cogito* from precisely this perspective of a disassociated certainty, noting that: 'the absolute 'Being-certain' ["*Gewisssein*"] of the *Cogito* exempted him from raising the question of the meaning of the Being which this entity possesses.' (Heidegger 1996, 183). Maurice Merleau-Ponty would agree, noting that 'consciousness is in the first place not a matter of "I think that" but of "I can"' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 159). Both thinkers see the detachment of the mind from the body and the environment as flawed, and both also see art as a way of restoring that sense of connectedness. This separation encourages a view that sees the 'I' as self, and the environment as other, and this can lead to that discourse of mastery and use which has little consideration for, and appreciation of, the environment. However, the 'understanding of the earth granted by art' challenges this view that:

does not let the matter be, but seeks to master it, to overpower it by subjecting it to human measures To be open to the reality of things is to be open to that dimension of things that will always resist human mastery. It is this dimension Heidegger calls the earth. Art recalls us to the earth. (Harries 2009, 117)

As we will see, Joyce's sense of the aesthetic has a similar imperative of connectedness and relatedness of the self and the world.

Jacques Derrida has also referenced Descartes as a source of the mind body dualism. He notes how in the famous phrase *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am), Descartes abstracts from the "I am" his own 'living body, which, in a way, he objectivizes as a machine or corpse (these are his words); so much so that his "I am" can apprehend and present itself only from the perspective of this potential cadaverization' (Derrida 2008, 72). The use of the term 'cadaverization', a typically Derridean quasi-neologism, is interesting as Derrida is

signifying, not that the body is separate from the mind, but rather, that the body has been made a cadaver, and that its agency and influence have been diminished by this sense of Cartesian separation of mind and body. For Descartes, in order to define access to a pure "I am", it is necessary to suspend or, rather, detach, 'precisely as detachable, all reference to life, to the life of the body, and to animal life' (Derrida 2008, 72). Derrida has had a long association with the works of Joyce. He explicitly discusses his links with Joyce in his essay 'Two Words for Joyce', in which he claims, 'every time I write, and even in the most academic pieces of work, Joyce's ghost is always coming on board' (Attridge and Ferrer 1984, 149); while in 'Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce', he refers to 'the book of all books, *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake*' (Derrida and Attridge 1992, 293).

The detachability of which Derrida speaks is, I would argue, the origin of the attitude of the Western *mentalité* to the environment, and to the living world in which we have our being. It has allowed reason to separate itself from the environment and to take on a dominant and exploitative role. Extrapolating from the dualism of mind and body, and from the hierarchical structure set up wherein mind is the greater and body is the lesser term, one can trace the progression to viewing the mind as dominant over the body, and over the living world which the body inhabits. One of the negative consequences of Enlightenment rationality is precisely this privileging of instrumental reason which saw the body, the world, the environment and everything outside of rational inquiry, as in some way less important. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, have offered a telling critique of such instrumental reason, where they speak of how 'instrumentality' has led to 'the blind mastery of nature' (Adorno 1997, 149). They trace this dialectic of mastery and use-value through what they see as the methodical extirpation of all natural traces 'due to the sublimation into a transcendental or logical subject, formed the reference point of reason, the legislating authority of action' (Adorno 1997, 23). I would argue that the aesthetic is a

counter-discourse to this hegemonic view, as unlike technology, art, 'signals the site of a true dwelling on earth', because art 'begins with the world as this unfamiliar, uncanny phenomenon, which it does not seek to reduce, but to deepen, to 'understand' in a way that is radically different from its rational– scientific conquest' (Beistegui 2005, 127), and in this chapter, I will be looking at the aesthetic very much in this light

Derrida has also commented on the Cartesian attenuation of the role of the body in the realm of thinking. Indeed, the title of his book, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, is both a parody of, and an *homage* to, Descartes' *Cogito*. Joyce, too, has been influenced by Cartesian thought, but like Derrida, it is an influence with which he takes issue, and with which he has a complex relationship. In a punning phrase that has echoes of Derrida's own title, Joyce also parodies the *Cogito*: 'Cog it out, here goes a sum' (Joyce 1999, 304: 31), and goes on to refer to Descartes again in *Finnegans Wake*:

All moanday, tearsday,
wailsday, thumpsday, frightday, shatterday till
the fear of the Law. Look at this twitches!
He was quisquis, floored on his plankraft of
shittim wood. Look at him! Sink deep or
touch not the Cartesian spring! (Joyce 1999, 301:20-25)

Normatively, the days of the week rationally divide our experience into equal temporal units, thereby symbolising the intellection of our apprehension of the world through rational thought. In this novel, however, orthographic representations of the days of the week are haunted by the body and by emotion. As well as being signifiers of time, each word also signifies the lived emotions of people in time: 'moan'; 'tears'; 'wails'; 'thumps'; 'fright' and 'shatter' are all redolent of a lived experience of time. They exemplify the depth of living as opposed to the rational structures of thought. To achieve a perspectival depth, to 'sink deep', then the Cartesian spring must be avoided, and I argue that, despite Stephen's initial swerve

towards the intellectualisation of the apprehension of beauty which we have noted, in fact, Joyce's more developed aesthetic theory is a deconstruction of the mind/body duality, and acts as a call for the primacy of bodily sensation in the aesthetic as a whole.

In this sense, there is a strong correlation with the ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty on the phenomenology of the aesthetic and of perception. His notion of 'intentionality', which is distinguished from the Kantian relation to a possible object, is that the 'unity of the world, before being posited by knowledge in a specific act of identification', is 'lived' as 'ready-made or already there' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, xvii). He feels that in 'in experiencing the beautiful, for example, I am aware of a harmony between sensation and concept, between myself and others, which is itself without any concept' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, xvii). He posits a perceptual 'synergic system', where the experience of the external world involves 'the synchronisation of my body with it' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 272). Merleau-Ponty speaks of a 'co-existence or communion' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 274), which is centred at a 'nexus of living meanings' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 175). This sense of a unified perception, unified in terms of mind and body and in terms of 'already there' relationship with the world, is contiguous to what Joyce is attempting to set out as an aesthetic theory, or, to be more exact, an aesthetic process in this book. Indeed, 'a nexus of living meanings' and a synergistic experience' could both be used to describe the list of weekdays in the above quotation.

It is no accident that his desire to avoid the Cartesian spring is prefaced by the phrase 'shittem', a variant of the slang term for excrement. As his aesthetic theory develops in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, excrement will again feature in his discussion of the value of the aesthetic:

I have a book at home, said Stephen, in which I have written down questions which are more amusing than yours were. In finding the answers to them I found the theory of esthetic which I am trying to explain. Here are some questions I set myself: *Is a chair finely made tragic or comic? Is the portrait of Mona Lisa good if I desire to*

see it? Is the bust of Sir Philip Crampton lyrical, epic or dramatic? Can excrement or a child or a louse be a work of art? If not, why not?

Why not, indeed? said Lynch, laughing. --*if a man hacking in fury at a block of wood, Stephen continued, make there an image of a cow, is that image a work of art? if not, why not?* (Joyce 2000, 232)

In this discussion, the italicised examples foreground the inclusivity of his aesthetic theory in terms of the human body. His questions take in all of human form, not just the traditional objects that are seen as beautiful. The discussion moves from the traditional objects of intellection, the Mona Lisa and a bust of Sir Philip Crampton (both portraits in different ways), through to the key questions as to whether excrement or a child or a louse can be a work of art. I would suggest that this has some significance in terms of ecocriticism, as Joyce is suggesting that there is no split between mind and body in terms of the aesthetic. An enigmatic smile, or the head of an aristocrat, or a piece of excrement, or a louse, or a child can all, he suggests, become a work of art and if not, why not?

The example of the wooden cow is interesting, especially in the light of its similarity to a programmatic point made by Martin Heidegger:

A cabinetmaker's apprentice, someone who is learning to build cabinets and the like, will serve as an example. His learning is not mere practice, to gain facility in the use of tools. Nor does he merely gather knowledge about the customary forms of the things he is to build. If he is to become a true cabinetmaker, he makes himself answer and respond above all to the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering within wood-to wood as it enters into man's dwelling with all the hidden riches of its nature. In fact, this relatedness to wood is what maintains the whole. (Heidegger 2004, 14)

Both writers see a value in the response of the artist to his material, and while one expresses this in the interrogative, the other, Heidegger, is more certain. For Heidegger, the relationship between the creator and the material of creation is a bodily one, where there is a

harmony and a connection between mind, body and world. Heidegger expresses this sense of holistic unity in a resonant phrase: 'poetically man dwells' (Heidegger 1971, 211), which stresses the relatedness between the human and his or her environment. It can be shown that excrement is a signal part of this relatedness. As food taken from the environment is processed by the body, so excrement is returned to the environment, and this is an aspect of our inter-relatedness that is on-going and necessary; given that excrement can also be used as fertiliser to nourish new growth, it is also an example of environmental recycling before this term became part of the lexicon of ecocriticism. And of course, it is an example of the external being internalised and then returned to the external again, as well as the presencing of an item of our lives that is normally occluded and is seen as almost a somatic opposite to the intellect. So Joyce is taking a part of experience that has been hitherto seen as separate from thinking and aesthetic creation and bringing it to the fore. It is by taking these and unpacking the occluded elements of value, that they can become 'grafted onto a "new" concept of writing' (Derrida 1982, 329), which is the emancipatory aim of the exercise. In Heidegger's view the artist represents his medium, as opposed to mastering it, and thereby makes it conspicuous: 'according to Heidegger the work moves the earth itself into the Open of a world. In the world it asserts the usually passed over earth' (Harries 2009, 116).

However much traditional rationality would like to excise the bodily functions from our humanity, by stressing the idea of 'intelligible extension as a denuded body' (Derrida 2008, 73), the artist will always stress the inter-relation between the human and his or her environment, the 'dwelling' of which Heidegger speaks. For him, the separation of mind and body is not tenable: 'in order to say what he must say, reporting what he sees, relaying what he hears, the author has to speak of the gods, mortals, the earth, shoes, the temple, the sky, the bridge, the jug, the fourfold, the poem, pain, the threshold, the difference, and stillness as he does' (Heidegger 1971, xi). This would parallel Joyce's own views about the importance

of the integration of body, mind and soul in the creation of aesthetic experience. As he describes his first game of rugby, he stresses the bodily dimension of the experience: 'he felt his body small and weak amid the throng of the players and his eyes were weak and watery' (Joyce 2000, 4). When he is being teased about whether or not he kisses his mother, his reaction is again an integrated one: 'he felt his whole body hot and confused in a moment' (Joyce 2000, 11). As he goes on to ponder the notion of kissing, again, we see the integrated and undetachable nature of his aesthetic musings:

Was it right to kiss his mother or wrong to kiss his mother? What did that mean, to kiss? You put your face up like that to say good night and then his mother put her face down. That was to kiss. His mother put her lips on his cheek; her lips were soft and they wetted his cheek; and they made a tiny little noise: kiss. (Joyce 2000, 12-13)

Here there is intellection and rational exploration of sensation, but there is also sensation for its own sake, a core part of the aesthetic experience.

In the infirmary, we see this aesthetic fusion come to fruition. Lying in bed, having caught cold from the square ditch (Joyce 2000, 19), he hears a bell and:

He said over to himself the song that Brigid had taught him.
Dingdong! The castle bell!
Farewell, my mother!
Bury me in the old churchyard
Beside my eldest brother.
My coffin shall be black,
Six angels at my back,
Two to sing and two to pray
And two to carry my soul away.

How beautiful and sad that was! How beautiful the words were where they said Bury me in the old churchyard! A tremor passed over his body. How sad and how

beautiful! He wanted to cry quietly but not for himself: for the words, so beautiful and sad, like music. The bell! The bell! (Joyce 2000, 22)

Here we see the power of words over the body and the way in which apprehension is an embodied trait; the fusion of the life of the mind and 'the life of the body' (Derrida 2008, 72). The words have a somatic effect on his body and provoke a reaction: in a nutshell, this is the core of Stephen's aesthetic portrait, and of Joyce's aesthetic theory, as it explores the interconnection and relatedness of all aspects of life from the aesthetic perspective. This is what Heidegger terms a 'primal oneness' through which 'the four—earth and sky, divinities and mortals—belong together in one' (Heidegger 1971, 147). Joyce's aesthetic theory foregrounds this sense of belonging and oneness. Stephen's reactions to the sound of the bell, and his synthesising of sound, mind and body, can be seen as an example of art as presencing.

For Heidegger, presencing is 'luminous self-concealing'. It is the 'sheltering of what is present within the intangible nearness of what remains in coming – that coming which is an increasing self-veiling' (Heidegger 1975, 108). In connection with the intentionality already spoken of, the work of art, rather than mastering its material, instead allows the material to presence itself. So, 'the work as work, in its presencing, is a setting forth, a making' (Heidegger 1971, 44); it is an 'urgent' readiness for action' (Young 2001, 152), and this readiness is the readiness to see the connectedness between self, mind, body and earth through aesthetic perception.

For Stephen, the body is a crucial dimension in the aesthetic experience, and the connections between sexual and aesthetic feelings in the book are a testament to this. From the outset, his synaesthetic relationships with the environment, and with women (as evidenced by his pondering on kissing), have been central, and this theme will climax in the apotheosis of the bird-girl on Sandymount Strand in Chapter Five. In this example, in

Chapter Four, he remembers the touch of a girl's hand, and it is a memory that is synaesthetic:

Then in the dark and unseen by the other two he rested the tips of the fingers of one hand upon the palm of the other hand, scarcely touching it lightly. But the pressure of her fingers had been lighter and steadier: and suddenly the memory of their touch traversed his brain and body like an invisible wave. (Joyce 2000, 87)

The foregrounding of the touch of the hand is interesting as again, there are Heideggerian resonances at work here. For Heidegger, all thinking is a craft, a 'handicraft', and he sees thinking as 'something like building a cabinet', a task that fuses mind, body and the element of wood. Heidegger focuses especially on the hand, and his teasing out of the epistemology of the hand:

In the common view, the hand is part of our bodily organism. But the hand's essence can never be determined, or explained, by its being an organ which can grasp. Apes, too, have organs that can grasp, but they do not have hands. The hand is infinitely different from all grasping organs paws, claws, or fangs-different by an abyss of essence. Only a being who can speak, that is, think, can have hands and can be handy in achieving works of handicraft. (Heidegger 2004, 16)

For Joyce, the relationship between feeling, thought and expression is very similar to that proposed by Heidegger – mind and body are fused in their reaction to, and aesthetic expression of, the world in which they exist.

Interestingly, Joyce mentions hands some one hundred and eighty five times in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, with references to Eileen's hands being crucial to the very young Stephen's gradual understanding of the concept of metaphor. He recalls how Dante reminds him that Eileen Vance was a Protestant and that when Dante was young, she used to hear Protestants making fun of "the litany of the Blessed Virgin": *'Tower of Ivory, they used to say, House of Gold!* How could a woman be a tower of ivory or a house of

gold?' (Joyce 2000, 35). In pondering this question, a question which arises in his mind in the middle of the fraught Christmas Dinner episode, Stephen is once again attempting to see how language connects with reality, and to understand the connection between word and world. He is, far from detaching mind and body, intent on fusing them in order to understand the Heideggerian primal oneness and interconnectedness of place, transcendence, mind and body:

Who was right then? And he remembered the evening in the infirmary in Clongowes, the dark waters, the light at the pierhead and the moan of sorrow from the people when they had heard. Eileen had long white hands. One evening when playing tig she had put her hands over his eyes: long and white and thin and cold and soft. That was ivory: a cold white thing. That was the meaning of TOWER OF IVORY. (Joyce 2000, 35)

The fusion of mind and body here demonstrates the importance of the body in terms of language and expression, as well as the relationship between the body and its environment. It is through touch that the aesthetic apprehension of the meaning of metaphor becomes real in Stephen's mind, and this is the interrelation of which Heidegger spoke in terms of how man [sic] dwells poetically. It is this sense of dwelling, of being part of the world, of being a creature of the world, that is at the core of Joyce's sense of the aesthetic, and his use of hands is a metaphorical connection with the Heideggerian sense of a hand as an organ whose meaning is dependent on the mind and speech of the person as human.

That the hand is the organ of written expression, of inscribing language on blank sheets of paper, is also a strong factor, and it is noteworthy that this sense of Stephen as physically writing is made overt in the final chapter, where the style of the book is now that of a diary, where each entry is handwritten and where each date is redolent with the emotions that are experienced on that date (in a manner proleptic of the days of the week already quoted from *Finnegans Wake*). It is also interesting that when he takes communion after the

purification of his retreat, again it is a fusion of body and soul that expresses his sense of joy: 'his hands were trembling and his soul trembled as he heard the priest pass with the ciborium from communicant to communicant' (Joyce 2000, 155). The use of 'trembling' to describe a movement of the soul is very much in line with Joyce's sense of a fusion that is aesthetically-sanctioned, just as before his first sexual encounter with a prostitute, it is described how her 'tinkling hands' ran through his hair (Joyce 2000, 107). His description of his first sexual experience, again in terms of touching the other and in terms of a related experience, is replete with this sense of relatedness:

He closed his eyes, surrendering himself to her, body and mind, conscious of nothing in the world but the dark pressure of her softly parting lips. They pressed upon his brain as upon his lips as though they were the vehicle of a vague speech; and between them he felt an unknown and timid pressure, darker than the swoon of sin, softer than sound or odour. (Joyce 2000, 107)

The connection of brain and lip here, through the word 'press', is another example of his aesthetic sense where experience is loaded with meaning and with a sense of aesthetic connectedness. There is no mastery here but rather surrender.

The same is found when he hears a woman singing *Rosie O'Grady*, and Cranly responds with the Latin phrase:

Mulier cantat.

The soft beauty of the Latin word touched with an enchanting touch the dark of the evening, with a touch fainter and more persuading than the touch of music or of a woman's hand. (Joyce 2000, 265)

Once again, the sense of touch is both intellectual and physical, and that fusion is at the core of Joyce's thinking. Here touch affects the 'dark of the evening' and is compared to the 'touch of music' or to the touch of a woman's hand. In this sense, one could apply a Heideggerian tag that would be appropriate:

the sail
of thinking keeps trimmed hard to the
wind of the matter. (Heidegger 1971, 6)

Joyce's portrait explores how the aesthetic sensibility has grown and developed in Stephen's grasp of the interrelation between self, other and the world. Stephen's rootedness both underscores Heidegger's point about 'what maintains and sustains even this handicraft is not the mere manipulation of tools, but the relatedness to wood' (Heidegger 2004, 24), as he, too, is related to his environment:

Stephen Dedalus
Class of Elements
Clongowes Wood College
Sallins
County Kildare
Ireland
Europe
The World
The Universe.

That was in his writing: and Fleming one night for a cod had written on the opposite page:

Stephen Dedalus is my name,
Ireland is my nation.
Clongowes is my dwellingplace
And heaven my expectation. (Joyce 2000, 13-14)

Here, there is a very strong sense of Heideggerian dwelling as Stephen is located within his world, and on the earth. The fusion between the local and the global; the present and the future; the immanent and the transcendent is clear in the location of Stephen as part of the fourfold, and as part of his environment, and it is an index of Joyce's own integrative and syncretic aesthetic processes.

I use the name 'Joyce' here, as opposed to 'Stephen', because I suggest that Joyce's aesthetic theory is one wherein the body (be it of excrement, child or louse) is at the centre of his aesthetic and epistemological theoretical paradigm. Throughout *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the human body is at the core of his aesthetic experience. The title is significant here as it is a portrait of the artist, when he is a young man. It is a development, not of just the subjectivity of Stephen Dedalus, but of his aesthetic subjectivity. As Colin McCabe has noted, 'central to the discourse of literary criticism is the philosophical category of the subject' (McCabe 1978, 4), and in terms of Irish writing, the *Bildungsroman* (a narrative someone's growth from childhood to maturity), has long been a staple in Irish writing, across the genres of short story and poetry but especially in the case of the novel. A kind of subset of the *Bildungsroman* is the *Künstlerroman*, the story of an artist's growth to maturity, and this necessitates a focus on the senses and the body and from the outset, the body is foregrounded in this book. As art is synaesthetic, he is providing, throughout *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, a deconstruction of the Cartesian dualism and he reinscribes the role of the perceiving, or intentional body (and I use this term in a phenomenological sense), as an agent of knowledge and experience.

In this book, it is not mind or body, but the relation between mind and body, which is the subject of the portrait in question. He takes 'balanced binary oppositions of classical philosophy' (Derrida 1976, lxxiii), and disrupts this balance through a writing that demonstrates that such oppositions, while seemingly underpinned by a logic of 'neither/nor', can be deconstructed to reveal a logic of 'both this and that' (Derrida 1977, 232). As Derrida notes, one 'never accedes to a text without some relation to its contextual opening and that a context is not made up of only what is so trivially called a text' (Derrida 1989, 841), and in this case, the text of the mind as mastering the body, and by extension nature, needs to be examined in the context of its dwelling in nature. This is very much what Joyce does by

demonstrating the connectedness of mind, body and environment in his developing aesthetic theory in this book.

The final example of this can be seen in the opening of the book, where the dawnings of an aesthetic consciousness are to be found in the infant Stephen's recollections of his early encounters with the world. These encounters are significant in the development of subjectivity. Jacques Lacan notes that the 'little man' at the *infans* stage, manifests 'the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject. (Lacan 2006, 76). In other words, it is the conflation of the infant with language that is creative of subjectivity, and it is the initial stages of this conflation that are the focus of the opening pages of the book. The opening section is a series of sense impressions where all of the senses are involved. The narrator *hears* the story 'once upon a time'; he *sees* his father 'he had a hairy face'; he *feels* the touch of the cold urine in bed 'When you wet the bed first it is warm, then it gets cold'; he *smells* the oilsheet 'it had a queer smell', while taste is indexed in the fact that Betty Byrne 'sold lemon platt' (Joyce 2000, 3). These sensory impressions of the world are recalled in language but they refer to sensations upon which the infant Stephen is attempting to express in language. That this language is incipient and nascent is very clear from the mispronunciation of 'the green rose blossoms' as 'O, the green wothe botheth' (Joyce 2000, 3). These are infant recollections and they involve the incipient stages of expression speech (song) 'he sang that song. It was his song'; (Joyce 2000, 3). The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben makes some interesting points about the development of language. He sees early experiences as wordless and feels that humans need to acquire language which acts as a form of limit on infancy:

On the contrary, the constitution of the subject in and through language is precisely the expropriation of this 'wordless' experience; from the outset, it is always

'speech'. A primary experience, far from being subjective, could then only be what in human beings comes before the subject – that is, before language: a 'wordless' experience in the literal sense of the term, a human *infancy* [*in-fancy*], whose boundary would be marked by language. (Agamben 1993, 47)

Infancy is a term that, for Agamben, is intimately linked to potentiality (De la Durantaye 2009, 91), and in any ways this is the thematic and narrative core of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. As Agamben makes clear, speech and infancy are linked in the most substantial way (Ross 2008, 171). From the beginning, where there is a mimetic presentation of baby talk and of the beginnings of an interaction between the infant Stephen and his world and its words, there is a teleological progression at work which culminates in his resonant declaration of aesthetic purpose towards the conclusion of the book.

The soul is born, he said vaguely, first in those moments I told you of. It has a slow and dark birth, more mysterious than the birth of the body. When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets. (Joyce 2000, 220)

I would suggest that there is a double logic at work here. The word 'by' can be read as an adverb, signifying a movement past, suggesting that he will fly past or around those nets. This meaning would suggest that the nets are traps that aim to catch him and inhibit his free movement. But the word can also be read as a preposition, meaning a mode of propulsion, suggesting that he will use those nets to fuel his flight. The interesting thing about this statement is the swerve from the mind to the body, with the soul seen as incorporeal, but either attempting to fly around, or else using as a means of propulsion, the very material nets of nationality, language, religion.

Even if Stephen were to try to fly around these or to escape from them, he is incapable of so doing as he is Irish and writes about his Irishness to a huge extent, in the shape of

Parnell, the Irish language and its relationship with English, and the cultural politics of the time. The same can be said for religion, because even as he attempts to sublimate religion through aesthetics, his frame of reference is suffused with religious terminology: he sees himself as 'a priest of the eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life' (Joyce 2000, 240). I would suggest that what is at work here is a double logic, where each meaning interweaves with the other to create a layered structure, a structure which parallels the days of the week that we saw in *Finnegans Wake*, where the rational and the emotional informed each other. For this 'double logic is the order of both "this and that" and, simultaneously, "neither this nor that"' (Derrida 1995, 89), and it exemplifies the Heideggerian relationship with the artistic material. By dwelling in the complexities of nationality, language and religion, he allows the aesthetic to view each of these differently. It is not accidental that he uses 'nets' as the metaphor for these three structures. In Chapter Three, when he was contemplating his sense of sin during the retreat, He also mentions nets:

His soul was foul with sin and he dared not ask forgiveness with the simple trust of those whom Jesus, in the mysterious ways of God, had called first to His side, the carpenters, the fishermen, poor and simple people following a lowly trade, handling and shaping the wood of trees, mending their nets with patience. (Joyce 2000, 153)

We return to the idea of the craftsman and the cabinetmaker and his relationship to his material. Nets will be broken and will be mended again and again. Whether they are broken by the Daedalan figure flying through them or whether they are broken by being used as fuel for those flights is not of huge importance. The importance is that the nets, a fusion of the material and the immaterial, will be remade again and again. What we see here is what has been gradually developing throughout the book as a whole; it is a 'flux of consciousness', which is 'beyond any "lived experience" or any prior psychic reality' (Agamben 1993, 48).

It is that relatedness to material of which Heidegger spoke; it allows that presencing of the earth in language, of the world in the word. So, to answer the question as to, for Joyce, excrement can be a work of art, the answer is yes it can. As part of the body and of the earth, excrement has as much right to aesthetic value as has any other property of the mind, the body or the world: it too is part of the flux of consciousness.

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