

JAZZ, KANT AND ZEN

TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY OF IMPROVISATION

JONATHAN DAY

*School of Visual Communication
Birmingham City University
Birmingham, UK
jonathan.day@bcu.ac.uk
jonathanday.net*

Transgression and experimentation are at the heart of the musical composition with which this work begins. The compositional approaches employed developed from a consideration of Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (Kant, 1952) which offers a compelling explanation for the apparently bizarre "claim to objectivity" commonly made in judgements of taste. Kant's final conclusion around the source of the claim is, for me, disappointing. This current work re-examines and extends his argument through an elision with Zen writing, and offers an alternate account. It is posited that the "claim to objectivity" operates as a linguistic marker, acknowledging the presence of experience that is trans-rational and supra-linguistic, and indicating a point/place at which language ceases to be viable. It relies on and incites an implicit shared understanding that aesthetic experience often exceeds language, and further indicates that one or more of the myriad unspeakable things are accessible nearby. This understanding is explored in relation to compositional practice, finding a powerful synergy with the writing of composers, improvisers, and avant-garde/ jazz theorists. The work concludes with the suggestion that aesthetic experience and the "beautiful" may therefore signpost the ineffable, referring back to the score with which this work began.

I have previously argued that music has pan-cultural possibilities, functioning in many ways as a meta-language. These “pan cultural” characteristics are facilitated by the foundational exploitation in music of extra-cultural factors such as genetic heritage, the biochemical propensities and predilections of our bodies and the physical reality of sound.¹ I have explored a number of strategies developing from these arguments in the composition of a jazz piece called *The Sensuality of Trees*.

¹ Jonathan Day, “Image, word and sound – transmedia and the transcendent,” *Twice Upon A Time: Magic, Alchemy & The Transubstantiation of the Senses*, (Centre for Fine Art Research, Birmingham City University, 2014) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5o1_VxKdmUk, accessed 12 May 2016.

the sensuality of trees

♩ = 62 Free in time

359

Pnca. *p*

T./S. Sax *mp* SOPRANO SAX

363

Pnca. *mf*

T./S. Sax *mp*

369

Pnca. *ppp* *p* *pp* *mp*

T./S. Sax

376

Pnca. *mp*

T./S. Sax *mp*

384

Pnca. *mp* *pp*

T./S. Sax

391

Pnca.

T./S. Sax

398

Pnca.

T./S. Sax

405

Pnca.

T./S. Sax
Sing...
Ooh...—

411

Pnca.

T./S. Sax
pp

417

Pnca.
p

T./S. Sax

424

Pnca.
p *mp* *mf*

T./S. Sax
Sing *p*
Ooh—

430

Pnca.
p

T./S. Sax
p

I have played *Sensuality of Trees* to a number of people from different foundational cultures – including people in Singapore, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Amsterdam, Wales and England – in order to elicit and consider their responses to the music. This cannot be considered in any way statistically reliable, yet as anecdotal information it is stimulating. The music was described variously as:

Strange
Horrible
Unfamiliar
Disturbing
Beautiful
Dreamlike
Spiritual
'Art'

“Beautiful” is a vague and loosely used word, easily as evanescent and mercurial as “art.” It is a word I have frequently used when referring to those musical instances which cannot be ascribed to familiar creative paradigms or socially-mediated genres. “Beauty” as a notion is important and relevant here, since, as the German philosopher Immanuel Kant convincingly argues, it can describe an experience that is outside enculturation. This experience is often ignored or overlooked because it cannot be understood in terms of/by recourse to enculturation, since it challenges the consistent and inwardly harmonious, yet fragile and vulnerable, edifice of cultural world-view. Kant’s ultimate conclusion that “beauty is for itself, apart from any reference to the feeling of the Subject, nothing”² is disappointing, and I wish to argue an extension to his thinking, based on the writings of a number of Zen practitioners.

In order to do this, we must first examine Kant’s analysis of aesthetic experience in his *Critique of Judgement*³ in some depth.

I

Kant and Beauty

Kant argues that a universal claim for “truth” can be made when an object demonstrably exists: we could say a culturally determined and agreed “sign” exists for it. “Aesthetic” experience cannot be thus described, however, since such perception cannot be understood by recourse to any category of known object. The aesthetic object/experience is “strange” to us. Kant notes that on some occasions, despite our incomprehension a “claim for universality” regarding our judgement of the object/experience as “beautiful” is made:

In a judgement of taste the pleasure felt by us is exacted from everyone else as necessary, just as if, when we call something beautiful, beauty was to be regarded as a quality of the object forming part of its inherent determination according to concepts...⁴

² Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement (Kritik des Urteilskraft)*, trans. James Creed Meredith, (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1952 [1790]), 56.

³ *Ibid.*, 52

⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

Why is this claim made? Kant addresses this question by first differentiating between the “agreeable” and the “beautiful.” If we see something as agreeable we are prepared to accept that such a judgement is personal, we make no claim to universality. For example we might say: “I like her dress,” “I like the green colour of that grass,” “my favourite colour is green.” It is fine for your favourite colour to be blue, or to dislike the grass or her dress. In the case of “beauty,” Kant argues, such uncertainty does not stand and we do claim universality. The idiom “that is beautiful, in my opinion” communicates a lack of certainty in the claim and in one’s judgement. “That is beautiful” or “it was beautiful” are more recognisable forms of words. We make a claim to universality when we talk of beauty:

Whether a dress, a house or a flower is beautiful is a matter upon which one declines to allow one’s judgement to be swayed by any reasons or principles. We want to get a look at the object with our own eyes, just as if our delight depended on sensation. And yet, if upon doing so, we call the object beautiful, we believe ourselves to be speaking with a universal voice, and lay claim to the concurrence of everyone, whereas no private sensation would be decisive except for the observer alone and his liking.⁵

Why then is this so? It is perfectly reasonable to claim a taste for something or to see it as agreeable, but to claim that something that we do not recognise or understand is universally beautiful is rather outrageous. Kant argues first for a mechanism:

As the subjective universal communicability of the mode of representation in a judgement of taste is to subsist apart from the presupposition of any definite concept, it can be nothing else than the mental state present in the free play of imagination and understanding (so far as these are in mutual accord, as is requisite for cognition in general): for we are conscious that this subjective relation suitable for a cognition in general must be just as valid for everyone, and consequently as universally communicable, as is any determinate cognition which always rests upon that relation as its subjective condition.⁶

There is no definite agreed enculturated concept/object apparent in the aesthetic experience/object, yet we wish to claim that our judgement is, like any determinate cognition, valid for everyone and universally communicable. We are aware that cognition requires a relation between imagination and understanding, but there is none apparent here. Since imagination and understanding cannot find any accord by recourse to pre-existing concepts or objects when faced with the aesthetic object/experience, the claim here is the universality of the experience of “free play.” We may express it as “Look, everyone, this object or experience over here has no definite concept and results in free play! This is a free play thing!” The person here is claiming this as a universal; I experience free play, so you also must experience it.

There are aspects of the experience of free play, which may arguably engender a powerful sense of pleasure/wonder. We may enjoy escaping from our conditioning temporarily in free play, or we may enjoy the process of imagining, knitting a new understanding using the threads of our pre-existing understanding, born of

⁵ Ibid, 56.

⁶ Ibid, 58

enculturation. This may be called creative looking/listening. The pleasure of this process may create the desire in us for more such stimulants, more things that are not recognised:

taste appears to fasten...on the incentive it receives to indulge in poetic fiction, i.e. in the peculiar fancies with which the mind entertains itself. It is just as when we watch the changing shapes of the fire or of a rippling brook: neither of which are things of beauty, but they convey a charm to the imagination, because they sustain its free play...⁷

Free play cannot, however, adequately account for the passion and conviction which is evidenced by the “claim to universality” for subjectively experienced “beauty.” Kant acknowledges this: “what we have here in view calls for something more than this.”⁸

Kant sees free play as a part of a process. An initial perception is followed by the free play of “estimating” which may in turn result in pleasure if a “cognitive harmony” is achieved:

this purely subjective (aesthetic) estimating of the object, or of the representation through which it is given, is antecedent to the pleasure in it, and is the basis of this pleasure in the harmony of the cognitive faculties.⁹

What, then is the nature of this “cognitive harmony”? Kant argues that a claim for universality in an assessment of beauty made in response to an aesthetic experience/object occurs when imagination and understanding relate in “indefinite... yet... harmonious activity”:

The quickening of both faculties (imagination and understanding) to an indefinite, but yet thanks to the given representation, harmonious activity, such as belongs to cognition generally, is the sensation whose universal communicability is postulated by the judgement of taste.¹⁰

When we experience this “harmony” we claim universality for our assessment of “beauty”:

A representation which is singular and independent of comparison with other representations, and, being such, yet accords with the conditions of the universality that is the general concern of understanding is one that brings the cognitive faculties into that proportionate accord which we require for all cognition and which we therefore deem valid for every one who is so constituted as to judge by means of understanding and sense conjointly (i.e. for every man).¹¹

Kant is arguing here that although the “representation” is “strange” to us, it brings our “cognitive faculties” into “proportionate accord”. In other words, although we cannot

⁷ Ibid., 89.

⁸ Ibid, 59.

⁹ Ibid, 58-59.

¹⁰ Ibid, 60.

¹¹ Ibid.

process what we see in terms of our prior knowledge/experience, that is, we have no enculturated explanation or account for it, we nonetheless experience a sense of “imagination-understanding-harmony,” which I will style “recognition.” Our cognitive faculties experience proportionate accord. We do not know the object/experience and yet we experience a sense of recognition.

For Kant this experience of “accord” is the source of the claim for universality. There is nothing more: “beauty is for itself, apart from any reference to the feeling of the Subject, nothing.”¹²

It is possible, of course, to argue that objects/experiences which inspire this feeling of accord, do so because they appeal to, or access, preferences and predilections that are engendered in the viewer by foundational culture. There is a problem with this, however. If we are only the products of our foundational cultures, there should be no “gold-standard” for aesthetic experience, no music which transcends cultural boundaries, save as a “transplantation” – in short, no universal claim to beauty. Any such claim must be nonsense. From the perspective of enculturation, our claims can constitute nothing more than an attempt to validate our subjective experience by a plea to our peers. We seek to survive a momentary experience of free-play (which may be experienced as confusion/terror), in which the individual is outside of its enculturated understanding. We may argue that a “claim to universality” represents the desperate cry of the lost and confused. Kant, significantly, pre-figures such a culturally determined rationale:

The judgement of taste ...imputes this agreement to everyone, as an instance of the rule in respect of which it looks for confirmation not from concepts but from the concurrence of others. The universal voice is therefore only an idea.¹³

The necessity of socially mediated understanding is foundational to the notion of enculturation and any “unknown” must be placed quickly, if it is not to disturb the hegemony and functionality of a culture. An account of this new or strange object/experience is offered up for communal acceptance or rejection. The individual offering the account, based of course on their previous enculturation, must then accept the group decision. So a claim “this is beautiful” is, in this scenario, responded to by twenty replies “no it isn’t,” followed by an acceptance by the proposer, however grudgingly, that it is not.

It seems to me that there are problems with these descriptions and that we can account for the apparently outrageous “claim to universality” in other ways than Kant does. If we reject the notions that the claim is no more than the acknowledgement of a common mind-state experience, or the testing of the boundaries of culturally predicated readings, then a number of possibilities present themselves.

Kant’s recognition of the insistence of the “claim for universality,” coupled with the positive responses of people to new experiences arriving from outside of their foundational culture, introduced through the globalisation of information, evidences these alternatives. We have noted, “the pleasure felt by us is exacted from everyone else as necessary” and “when we call something beautiful, beauty was to be regarded as a quality of the object.”¹⁴ The person proposing “beauty” is not expressing an opinion, culturally shaped and mutable, but a conviction. They will accept no denial. This vehemence is significant.

¹² Ibid, 56.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 59.

I wish to argue that the experience of beauty is a real experience, but one which cannot be recognised by reference to “concepts” or “Objects.” A claim for universality in beauty that is not based on “cognitive accord,” can only make sense if the perception of the object/experience constitutes a recognition of something that is real, but that cannot be classified or understood according to our enculturation. It is something that transcends our understanding and reason, something that we recognise but cannot name. This recognition goes beyond culturally determined signifiers because it is beyond culture and beyond the exclusively human.¹⁵ We claim universality because we experience something which echoes or points to a reality, usually hidden from us by our enculturation, namely the utter beauty and wonder of what in Japanese Zen is called *Mu* (無) or the “no-thing.” We recognise what Robert Pirsig in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* calls “quality.”¹⁶ We claim universality because we know the experience is real and important, but, as Kant points out, cannot be explained by recourse to understanding, reason or argument, to any concept or object, since it is trans-rational.

II

Zen and Music

Lao Tzu in the *Tao te Ching* says: “the way that can be spoken is not the true way.”¹⁷ This acknowledges the inadequacy of language in attempting to speak of the profound and “beautiful” in Kant’s terms. The Zen poet Obaku further explores this notion: “until our minds cease their endless turning and fruitless searching, until we’re quiet, as still as stone, as a forest breathing, we will not enter the gate.”¹⁸ The white gate is a description in Zen writings of the entry into enlightenment. It is never closed; the gate is perpetually open and always only a step away. We must simply choose to enter. Entry is not considered a once for all action: a person may enter through the gate and achieve enlightenment, only to find themselves again confused and lost within the world of forms.

Zen describes the “something” at the centre of all things, from which all things

¹⁵ It should be noted that Kant identifies two kinds of beauty, ‘free-beauty’ and ‘beauty which is merely dependent’:

the beauty of a man (including under this head that of a man, woman or child), the beauty of a horse, or of a building (such as a church, palace, arsenal, or summer-house) presupposes a concept of the end that defines what the thing has to be, and consequently a concept of its perfection; and is therefore merely appendant beauty. (Kant, 1952, pp. 72-3)

Appendant beauty, attached to an object (something which is “good” in Kant’s terms) is impure. It is mixed with something with a functionality that can be judged. A beautiful house combines ‘beauty’ with an appreciation of its fitness to purpose. This echoes Kant’s earlier comment: “Every interest vitiates the judgement of taste and robs it of its impartiality” (Kant, 1952, p. 64). Beauty, which is thus mixed, impure, is partial and more difficult to discern. This does not, of course, mean it is absent. Social functionality in music is clearly ‘purposeful’. Whether that function is socially conservative, as with much ‘classical’ music, or socially critical/subversive as with much reggae and punk, the assessment of that work in part depends on how effectively it fulfils its function, its ‘fitness to purpose’. The judgement of ‘beauty’ in the Kantian sense, is of something other than this fitness to purpose, which can coexist with, but is incidental to it.

¹⁶ Robert Pirsig, *Zen And The Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance*, (London: Corgi, 1974), 234.

¹⁷ Lao Tsu, *Tao te Ching*, trans. Ian McGreal (New York: Harper Collins, 1995 [c. 600 bce]), 1.

¹⁸ John Baldock, *Zen Wisdom* (Shaftesbury: Element, 1994) no pagination.

emerge as the *Mu*, the no-thing.¹⁹ To say “describes” is of course ridiculous, as it is beyond words. Since it is un-nameable I will here represent it as “...”. Any attempt to describe it will be partial, inaccurate and flawed. More significantly, since we always seek to place experience into our enculturated understanding, any flawed and partial description carries the awful danger of adoption by those who read it, thus denying the unknowable unnameable beauty of the “...”. Huang Po in 850 c.e. described it in this way:

The master said to Pai-hsiu: Buddhas and sentient beings both grow out of One Mind, and there is no other reality than this Mind. It has been in existence since the beginning-less past; it knows neither birth nor death; it is neither blue nor yellow; it has neither shape nor form; it is beyond the category of being and non-being; it is not to be measured by age, old or new; it is neither long nor short; it is neither large nor small; for it transcends all limits, words, traces and opposites. It must be taken just as it is in itself; when an attempt is made on our part to grasp it in our thoughts, it eludes. It is like space whose boundaries are altogether beyond measurement; no concepts are applicable here.²⁰

The implications of this for composition are significant. If the “...” cannot be named or described is it also, then, beyond the reach of music? I believe this is true. The following mondo is taken from a book known as the *Sayings of the Ancient Worthies* (*Ku tsun-hsiu yu-lu*):

Only let a man exhaust all the thinking and imagining he can possibly have in the triple world. When even an iota of imagination is left with him, this is his triple world and the source of birth and death in it. When there is not a trace of imagination, he has removed all the source of birth and death, he then holds the unparalleled treasure belonging to the Dharmaraja. All the imagination harboured since the beginning-less past by an ignorant being, together with his falsehood, flattery, self-conceit, arrogance, and other evil passions, are united in the body of One Essence, and all melt away.²¹

Does music remain, when all has melted away, or is it, too, a product of the imagination and a facet of the “triple world”? Must it too disappear with enlightenment? Is there music that is “imagination free”? Perhaps we could invoke machine-composed music, yet such music relies on pre-programmed, “imagined,” algorithms. There are many natural sounds that are sometimes called music. The “Music of the Spheres” was believed to be the sound of the great celestial engine whirling through time. The actuality of this “music” can only be heard through invented devices, and then constitutes, in the case of a pulsar, a series of harsh clicks, or, in the case of the “Big Bang’s” residual radiation, white noise.

¹⁹ Philip Toshio Sudo, *Zen Guitar* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 158.

²⁰ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, “*Huang-Po's Sermon, From Treatise On The Essentials Of The Transmission Of Mind (Denshin Hoyo)*”, *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, <http://consciouslivingfoundation.org/ebooks/new2/ManualOfZenBuddhism-manzen.pdf>, 59. Accessed 14 May 2016.

²¹ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, “*Ku tsun-hsiu yu-lu*,” *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, <http://consciouslivingfoundation.org/ebooks/new2/ManualOfZenBuddhism-manzen.pdf>, 56. Accessed 14 May 2016.

The “song” of the Humpback whale is perhaps closer to music for us.²² The “Song” is a ritualised mating display and would not, I suspect, be at all attractive to a smaller or less experienced male. Bird song, which has played so significant a role in the works of many composers, with Olivier Messiaen being perhaps the most noted, is similarly socially significant and motivated in the lives of birds.

Human music (as opposed to sound/noise) requires imagination and since this is the source of delusion it must “melt away” with enlightenment.²³ I do not believe, therefore, that music, or any human expression can describe the “...” adequately. This is not, however, the end of this account, since we have argued that the experience of “beauty” can intimate the “...”, if not embody it. If imagination is above described as delusion, this description is refined in the following extract from Baso (Ma-Tsu) and Sekito (Shih-T’ou) in *Two Great Masters of the T’ang Dynasty*:

‘Going astray’ stands against ‘being enlightened’; but when there is primarily no going astray there is no being enlightened either. All beings since the beginning-less past have never been outside the Dharma-essence itself; abiding for ever in the midst of the Dharma-essence, they eat, they are clothed, they talk, they respond; all the functioning of the six senses, all their doings are of the Dharma-essence itself. When they fail to understand, to go back to the Source they follow names, pursue forms, allow confusing imaginations to rise, and cultivate all kinds of karma. Let them once in one thought return to the Source and their entire being will be of Buddha-mind.²⁴

Although it is easy to get lost within human imaginings, within culture, it is possible with “one thought” to return to the “Source.” Is it not, then, possible for imagination to contribute to “signposts” within a cultural milieu, which, flawed and partial though they will be, may say something like “this way to the Source,” or more humbly “this may be a way to the Source”? They will of necessity be formed in part from, and shaped by, the “imaginings” of the host culture, but can sit within it, pointing away nonetheless. Musicologist Victor Zuckerkandl supports this notion when he says that music functions as a “critique of our concept of reality”.²⁵ When the American writer and humanist Kurt Vonnegut says “Music is so extraordinarily full of magic,”²⁶ it seems to me that he too is indicating its potential as a “sign post” to the transcendent. There is a relationship between the kind of work proposed here and the notion of “Wabi” as expounded thoroughly by Ana Maria Schluter Rodes in her article “The Experience of the Beautiful in Zen”:

Wabi is something that must be lived and the experience of it made manifest. It’s somewhat like... placing directional signs on a road...which is not the

²² Tom Arnbohm and the University of Newfoundland’s Whale Research Group, *Whale Songs*, (Newfoundland: Wildland, 1986), no pagination.

²³ It could follow from this that music which relies less on imagination may more easily approach transcendence. Systematic music and the music of chance are relevant here.

²⁴ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, “*Baso (Ma-Tsu) And Sekito (Shih-T’ou)*, *Two Great Masters Of The T’ang Dynasty*,” *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, <http://consciouslivingfoundation.org/ebooks/new2/ManualOfZenBuddhism-manzen.pdf>, 57. Accessed 14 May 2016.

²⁵ Victor Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician* trans. Willard Trask, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 364.

²⁶ Jamie Catto and Duncan Bridgeman, *One Giant Leap* (London, Palm Pictures, 2001), no pagination.

equivalent of being on the right road or arriving at the proper city.²⁷

It seems, then, that attempting expression of one's experience of the "source," the *Mu*, the "no-thing," that place which is extra-cultural, beyond description, yet never more than a step away, along with the experience of always looking to encounter it, through the vehicle of one's "self," enculturated certainly but always looking to exceed that enculturation, constitutes "Wabi" work, work which can be "beautiful" in Kant's terms or have "quality" in Pirsig's. Such music is implied in a great deal of writing by musicians.

John Corbett speaking of Free Improvisation, says the following:

The all-consuming desire on the part of the performer for the unknown, the uncharted, the search for area beyond territory, for 'reterritory', as Deleuze and Guattari call it, the nomadic impulse is certain but problematic.

Improvisation does not simply mean the death of language, however, for in the place of the dead language – the disfigured and defiled codes – a new one emerges, more vibrant than the last. Improvisation involves the permanent play of threshold and transgression.

For improvisers, this pseudo linguistics [improvisation as language] never calcifies, however; the language must never become the music.²⁸

The use of the word "language" here has implicit within it the notion of culture: Corbett is noting the constant desire for cultural transcendence. This relates back to Kant's division of beauty into "free" and "appendant" categories. Free beauty does not refer itself to concept, object or fitness to purpose (the "good" in Kant's taxonomy), so in music it must not be, say, a wonderful exposition of sonata form, or wonderfully support the Labour party, for example. Such works can be beautiful, but such beauty is "appendant," additional, contingent to purpose. Corbett's use of "music" in his last line is synonymous with "free" beauty.

The composer Jonathan Harvey notes:

I take no joy in composing if I set out in broad daylight knowing exactly what I want: I feel cheated of the adventure that makes music art. Instead each new work must grope out into some dark region, in which the imagination and the unconscious can operate together. It must be full of contradiction – of "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" as the poet John Keats said. It must live in ambiguity. Debussy put it quite plainly: "Music must come from the shadows". And Mahler commented, "The creation and the genesis of a work is mystical from beginning to end since one – himself unconscious – must create something as though through outside inspiration. And afterwards one scarcely understands how it happened."²⁹

We may take Harvey's "dark region" as the space at the edge of enculturation and the unspeakable "...". Too far into the unspeakable, too far beyond the human and no descriptive work or "art" is possible. Not far enough into this "dark region" will result

²⁷ Ana Maria, Schluter Rodes, "The Experience of the Beautiful in Zen", *Sufi* (Spring: Seattle, Spring 2002), 32.

²⁸ John Corbett, "Ephemera Underscored: Writing Around Free Improvisation", in Krin Gabbard (ed.), *Jazz Among the Discourses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 224.

²⁹ Jonathan Harvey, *In Quest of Spirit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 28.

in enculturated work, playing with Corbett's "defiled and disfigured" codes. Composer Steve Lacy says:

For me that's where the music has to be – on the edge – in between the known and the unknown and you have to keep pushing it towards the unknown otherwise it and you die.³⁰

Art Lange, speaking of John Cage's *Music of Changes*³¹ sees a similar tension there:

There is method in Cage's lack of decision-making. It is the difference between the acceptance of pure chance and the adherence to chance operations. That is to say, Cage went to enormous lengths to adhere to a self-imposed system that would ensure that his work was divorced from the habits of convention and individual taste – in the experience not only of the composer, but also the performer and the listener...³²

The cultural commentator Roland Barthes similarly recognises the notion of creativity at the boundary: "Neither culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw..."³³

Harvey's reference to Keats and Mahler underscores and here stands for the legion attempts by writers, painters and composers to account for creativity or "inspiration," which could be cited here, had we the space.

If a work accesses or embodies the "beautiful" as Kant describes it, if it emerges from Corbett's "area beyond territory," Harvey's "dark place," Keats's "Mysteries," Mahler's "mystical...outside inspiration" then this music intimates/points to the *Mu*, the "...", to the place through the white gate. A listener may recognise, therein, a resonance, an intimation perhaps an echo of that "place."

Conclusion

I have argued, through an examination of some of the writings of Immanuel Kant and a number of Zen practitioners, that the apprehension of "beauty" can be understood as a transcendent experience. It has been further argued that since "music" is human, it cannot describe or embody the "...", but may signpost, echo and intimate it.

Jonathan Harvey described a "dark region" which I characterised as the space at the edge of enculturation and the unspeakable "...". I posited that a composer who attempts to journey too far into the unspeakable, too far beyond the human, will find nothing that can be described/communicated and no satisfactory means of describing/communicating it. Work which does not venture far enough into this "dark region" will result in enculturated work, playing with Corbett's "defiled and disfigured codes." *The Sensuality of Trees* is an outworking of these ideas.

³⁰ Derek Bailey, *Improvisation: its nature and practice in music* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 54.

³¹ John Cage, *Music of Changes* (1951).

³² Art Lange, *John Cage, The Music Of Changes* (Basel: Hat Hut 2000), 2.

³³ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987 [1973]), 9-10.

BIOGRAPHY

Jonathan Day works as a musician, writer and image maker. He is Associate Director of Research for Art and Design and Professor of Transmedia Arts at Birmingham City University, director of BirTH, the Transmedia Research Hub and visiting professor at Hong Kong Design Institute, Silpakorn University, Bangkok, Thailand, and the Academy of Design, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Jonathan has published three books and a series of musical works. Jonathan's releases include *Postcards from the Road* (University of Chicago), *Atlantic Drifter* (Proper Records), *The Politics of Navigation* (VDM), *Carved in Bone* (Proper Records) and *The Stain of Time* (Aalto University). His work has been called "Seductive, complex and poetic" *ARTnews* magazine, New York, "Scratching at the transcendent" *the Independent*, "Captivating and beautiful... reminds us how fascinating it can be to view the world from an outsider's perspective" *iQ* magazine, "Expansive, intelligent and eloquent" *South China Morning Post*, "Breathtakingly beautiful, Jonathan's voice floats like an ancestral spirit" *Folk Radio UK*, "Visionary" *fRoots* magazine, "a voice like Scott Walker and Jim Morrison – dark as chocolate on a still night" *Stirrings Magazine*, "Stunning" *Bob Harris, BBC*. Please see jonathanday.net for details.