

Creative writing

Tools : Stuff : Art

David Kirshner

'Before starting work I walk around it several times accompanied by myself'

Between 1890 and 1898 Erik Satie lived at 6 rue Cortot: 'in a wardrobe'. Satie was a collector. . . . After his death his wardrobe was found to contain 84 handkerchiefs besides 12 identical velvet suits and dozens of umbrellas.

Trois morceaux en forme de poire . .

. . . three pieces in the form of a pear

the title of a piano piece in seven parts by Erik Satie.

[Satie. Erik (Alfred Leslie). 1866-1925, French composer, noted for his eccentricity, experimentalism, and his direct and economical style . . .]

They are:

manière de commencement

prolongation du même

Morceau 1

Morceau 2

Morceau 3

en plus

redite

Satie composed this piece in response to Debussy's criticism that his works lacked a 'sense of form'. What exactly did Debussy mean by this? Where and what actually was this scene of formlessness? Was the quality that Debussy felt Satie's music lacked a sense of 'historical form'? Probably Debussy was referring to the lack of reference to sonata form with its inherent experience of 'development', of the experiencing of time through a series of interlinking episodes which would result initially in a 'resolution', and consequently a sense of 'returning'. An example would be that of Beethoven's 'Les Adieux' sonata, whose three movements are entitled Le depart, L'absence and Le retour. Was he referring to more technical matters, the arrangement of intervals, the minutiae of chords, of sequences, of 'passing notes', of parallel fifths? Or was Debussy speaking in a more 'philosophical' sense, feeling a lack of a 'raison d'être', a lack of forward momentum that a particular harmonic vocabulary produces, hence therefore the lack of 'form', the lack of forming and its subsequent lack of 'goals'? Satie parodies the notion of 'composition' by substituting it with 'organisation'. An organisation of time with an elaborate titling of divisions. Satie seems to attempt to subvert the Kantian view of time as subservient to movement into a situation where movement is subordinate to time, the path of which no conventional figure, whether it be circle or spiral, can mimic. It becomes a single thread, indivisible, stealth-like. Satie is defying the bar-line. Time is no longer related to the movement which it measures, it is related to the time which conditions it. So the very

nature of music, that is, succession, is challenged. This renunciation of division produces difficulties in the creation of necessary forms, ingredients needed to create contrast, repetition, reminiscence and memory. But though divisions create forms, these do not in turn necessarily have the qualities of what Heidegger might call 'the thingy', as I will discuss later.

Debussy's comments on Satie's piece open up a debate about the nature of form. What is meant by 'form' and 'forms', and how do form and content or expression relate to each other? The argument can be viewed from various points. Firstly the order of perception versus the order of creation. Secondly the nature of the containing element of the notion of 'form' and the necessary oxymoron of 'formless forms'. Imagine: concrete cube / wax cube: the form is the same but the matter is different. Plato, in his Theory of Forms, talks about classification, and also about definitions. Definitions can operate through comparisons. 'Redness' can be judged in terms of 'blueness' and 'greenness', nothing in the 'sensible' world is beautiful or, say, large without at the same time having the qualities of ugliness or smallness. But definitions can also be judged in their own terms, as parts of Forms. Forms can exist or not exist, but not at the same time. The Theory of Forms concerns itself with Definitions, that is, the understanding of a term as distinct from its mere usage. The sensible world is seen in terms of opposites. But these opposites must exist separately, and they must have definitions. Take a word such as 'Satie'. There is no opposite to 'Satie'. But there is the possibility of there not being a 'Satie'. Yet not at the same time: but perhaps . . . Satie. However Plato would only accept evidence that was 'eternally' true, i.e. not merely the result of observations of the world. Nothing in the sensible world could actually qualify as an object of knowledge. Our experience is founded on information collected by the senses, as Diderot emphasised in his Salon of 1767, [Denis Diderot (1713 - 84). See *Diderot on Art*, trans. John

Goodman, The Salon of 1767, Site 2] and Condillac elaborated on in his *Traité des sensations*.

Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (1715 - 80)

You will understand how easily we are led to make systems if you consider that nature itself has made a system of our faculties, of our needs, and things related to us. It is in accordance with this system that we think; it is in accordance with this system that our opinions, whatever they may be, are produced and combined. [Traité des systèmes, in Œuvres Phil. de Condillac, I, p. 216]

Sensations give birth to the whole system of man, a complete system all of whose parts are linked and mutually sustaining. It is a sequence of truths: the first observations prepare the way for those that follow, the last confirm those that preceded them. ["Extrait raisonné du traité des sensations", in Œuvres Phil., I, p. 325]

In his *Traité des sensations* and *Traité des systèmes*, one of Condillac's stated objectives was 'to reduce to one single principle all that concerns human understanding'. His approach was to reconcile Descartes's and Locke's philosophies - to achieve a synthesis between Descartes's 'natural', methodical reasoning and Locke's 'natural' sense-data-based thought. In doing so Condillac aimed to combine the naturalness of intellectual procedures with the naturalness of the physical world. Logical analysis could function in both mental and material worlds. The mind/body distinction is still maintained, otherwise the need for analysis to bridge the gap would no longer be needed.

Condillac's question, a recurring one in the 18th century [see in particular the 'Molyneux Problem' as described in Diderot's *Letter on the Blind*] centred on whether the primary data received by the senses produce by themselves the coherent image of a

physical world that we have in our consciousness, or whether some additional organising faculty was required to complete the process.

Condillac's 'Statue-Man' was an attempt to create the hypothetical experiences a statue would undergo as its senses were developed one by one. Starting with what he thought was the least informative of the senses, smell, he surmised whether, without innate ideas, reason and reflection can prevail. He went on to discuss the relationship of the senses to each other, and the crucial role of touch and movement in the awareness of the self and the discovery of the outside world. Condillac observed the statue now with its senses and movement. Excited by the prospect of pain and pleasure and steered by the mechanism of association of ideas, the statue-man acquired practical knowledge, formulated abstract ideas and developed a morality. He had the mental capacity of a man, limited only by his lack of a language and contact with humankind. Condillac saw the statue-man as an ideal, a model from which all irrelevant and extraneous factors had been omitted so that the essential features were clearly displayed.

Nature gives us organs in order to show us by means of pleasure what to seek, and by means of pain what to avoid. But there it stops; and it leaves to experience the task of making us contract habits, and of finishing work which it has begun. This is a new view, and it shows the simplicity of the ways of the author of nature. Is it not cause for wonder that it was only necessary to make men sensible to pleasure and pain to generate ideas, desires, habits and talents of every kind in him? [Traité des sensations, in Œuvres Phil., I, p. 222]

Condillac's originality is seen in his views on the environmental and physiological origins of personality - that man is the result of the reactions of the sense-organs to the stimuli provided by the physical environment [for Locke, man still possessed a

spiritual faculty, reason, which existed independently of the senses, though it could not function without the stimuli they provide. For Hobbes, man was regarded as matter in motion. For La Mettrie [in *L'homme machine*], man was a purely physical being, like an animal or a plant, and totally dependent on physical sensations gathered by his senses. For Diderot [*Lettre sur les aveugles*], man's ideas are relative to the senses and would be different if he or she were deprived of any].

The principal object of this work is to show how all our knowledge and all our faculties come from our senses, or, to speak more precisely, from our sensations; for in reality, the senses are only the occasional cause. They do not feel if it is the mind alone which feels through the agency of the organs; and it is from the sensations that modify it the mind draws all its knowledge and all its faculties. [Extrait raisonné, in Œuvres Phil., I, p. 323]

In the Cartesian system reason is capable of development without reference to sense experience - only pure thought is clear and distinct. Passions are seen as disturbances in a rationality that humans suffer as a result of having a body. Descartes's realisation that we are not in direct contact with the surfaces of things led him to recognise that our perceptions take place within our minds and are made up of ideas, and that ideas are not the same stuff as the physical realities that cause them. In this he was perpetuating the dualism suggested by the 'New Science', and he accounted for our experience of a physical world by a theory of representative perception. Our perception of secondary qualities is caused by the physical attributes of things, but there is no necessary resemblance between them: in other words, the sensations we experience represent physical reality but are not identical with it. For Locke, thought divorced from experience did not exist. Reflection could not function without experience. Reflection enabled simple ideas provided by the senses to develop into more complicated ideas,

though this was dependent on the mind's innate ability to reason without experience. 'Uneasiness', a sense of discontent, of unfocused desire is the motivator of all actions, the will, the determination to act. Reason is the servant of the will, 'the sensitive soul contemplating its ideas' and suggests the best way to placate this uneasiness, and to imagine the likely outcomes of pain and pleasure. [Descartes puts the will in the service of reason. The will is the source of error, which can only be avoided if the former waits on understanding and refrains from making judgements until the outcome is clear. The will must control the passions, by siding with the rational.]

Condillac saw that empiricism required an analysis of the mind itself and not just a knowledge of external substances and relations. He saw desire as the motivating force behind the whole mind - as the root of both the will and understanding [*Extrait raisonné*, in *Œuvres Phil.*, I, p. 325]

. . . first ideas and experiences are sensations . . . some will be less pleasant than others resulting in uneasiness . . . memory of the pleasant changes uneasiness into desire - to return to a state of pleasure . . . which in turn activates love, hate fear etc. . . this takes the mind beyond the mere recording and feeling to the heights of reason . . .
[*Traité des sensations*, in *Œuvres Phil.*, I, p228]

While the understanding provides the ideas towards which the will moves, the will selects the ideas that the understanding focuses on. It is a physical need, not a rational logic that decides the association of ideas. Condillac concludes therefore that it is need, not logic, that is the foundation of reason. This analysis of reason was mirrored in his analysis of the self [or how we get the idea of the self]. The self is not intuitively known - when the Statue comes alive it has no knowledge of itself - it can only be discovered when change has occurred.

What we understand by this word {I} seems to me applicable only to a being who notices that in the

*present moment he is no longer what he has been. So long as there is no change, he exists without any reflection upon himself; but as soon as he changes, he judges that he is the same as he formerly was in another state, and he says {I}. [*Traité des sensations*, in *Œuvres Phil.*, I, p. 238]*

Condillac therefore rejects Locke's theory that one can perceive without knowing that one perceives. The Statue does not receive anything until it has been endowed with touch and movement. It is only aware of itself through change. The 'self', the {I} is the sum of its movements, its changes: there is not anything outside these sensations and memories. The next stage in the awakening of the statue is the discovery of the non-self, through touch and the revealing of its physical dimensions and limits [edges]. The statue is seen to have sensations, rather than being a sensation.

In *Traité des sensations*, Condillac asks if all knowledge is derived from sensations. He confirms that we are aware of the spatial world around us, and are able to fit different sorts of sense-data into a coherent picture of the world. As we see objects, we see them as totalities, we do not see their various separate qualities first and the whole later. Condillac found that none of the sensations of smell, taste, hearing and sight would reveal to the statue-man anything outside himself. Even the sensation of touch, if unaccompanied by movement, would not indicate an outside world. *Tâtonnement* . . . the vibratory continual touching and retouching that establishes experiential research - the 'innocent' study that requires almost no preparation of the soul. Both Condillac in *Traité des sensations* and Diderot in his *Interprétation* describe touch as the beginning of the process of 'distinguishing'. For Condillac the touching had to be continuous. The statue describes 'limit' and 'otherness'. The hand moving across a surface is mirrored by the bodies' sensation of being touched. Condillac was interested in the linear logic in sensation. Diderot was

not interested in origins (which suggest laws and rigidity) but ways of adapting to a world in continual transformation. For Condillac, movement introduces the perception of space, 'otherness', and solidity. Statue-Man can ascertain that there are at least two things in the world, himself and the space around himself. Secondary qualities such as smell, sound, taste, cannot provide any knowledge of the world on their own, they can only function by way of an experience of space and movement. Statue-Man's next task is learning to perceive the different sense organs. Through experiences of touch and movement, sensations are seen to be located in the body, not the mind. Different sense-organs would result in different sensations. The final act is the Statue-Man's ability to relate sensation to objects, therefore leaving reality behind. He realises that sensations are in objects and not in himself, and as sensations are a mass of chaotic feelings, they are also capable of being transformed into a diverse range of utterances.

As many are our needs, so many are our different enjoyments, and as many are the degrees in our needs, so many are the degrees in our enjoyment. In this lies the germ of all we are, the source of our happiness and of our unhappiness. . . . The history of our Statue's faculties makes the growth of all these things very clear. When it was limited to fundamental feeling, one uniform sensation comprised its whole existence, its whole knowledge, its whole pleasure. In giving it successively new modes of being and new senses, we saw it form desires, learn from experience to regulate and satisfy them, and proceed to new needs, to new knowledge, to new pleasures. The Statue is therefore nothing but the sum of all it has acquired. Why would it not be the same with man? [Traité des sensations, in Œuvres Phil., I, p. 314]

Condillac made a distinction between the senses, which belong to the body, and sensation, which is

a function of the mind. It is sensations that we owe our development to. Condillac's work on the Statue-Man announced his departure from total agreement with Locke. Pain and pleasure looked forward to the mind and ultimately understanding [attention] and will [desire]. The nature of the will - passion, love, hate, fear evolve out of desire and experience in the same way that understanding evolves out of attention. Whereas Locke had analysed the mind as a static entity, Condillac looked at the activities inside the mind, specifically between reason and the will, and the will and passion.

Plato held the view that humans understood eternal forms before they were born, when our experience of the world is purely intellectual. He sees Forms as being more substantial than eternal objects, but relates the two notions together in terms of hierarchies, in the sense of the archetype and the copy. These copies are kept in 'space'. A divine artificer copies these in different places, therefore creating many things from the same form [printing / moulding / casting]

Heidegger restates and then develops Aristotle's notion of form. Take a block of granite: there is a form, the block, and there is the substance, the granite. Form determines the distribution of the matter in space, resulting in a particular shape. But with an object such as equipment [tools, say], the shape is not made by a prior distribution of matter: On the contrary, form controls the arrangement of the matter, and also selects the matter, and its arrangement. The relationship between form and matter is dictated by the usage, the tool-like qualities of the object, and this 'usefulness' is not something that can be added at the end. The 'usefulness' is paramount. A made object is self-contained, but its shape has not taken place by itself, like the granite. The tool, like the art-work, is constructed. But Heidegger then links these two notions by suggesting that art has a 'self-sufficient presencing' that has a similarity with the granite. Tools therefore are half

art-work: they have thingliness, but they lack the self-sufficiency of the art-work. Tools have a position between 'thing' and work.

Was Debussy therefore questioning Satie's commitment to the 'thingly'? For Heidegger, works are 'things'. There is a 'thingly' element in works of art [colour in painting, stone in sculpture]. But the work is more than the 'thingly'. It has an artistic 'nature': the aesthetic value is superimposed on it by our subjective views of it. The artwork is a thing that is made, but it says something other than the 'thing' itself, it is an allegory, a symbol [Gk, *symballein* - to bring together]. It is the 'thingly' feature of the work that the artist 'makes' by his labours. For in the *Trois Morceaux* there are 'things' that show themselves [chords, durations, timbres] and there is the 'thing in itself' - things which do not appear [progressions, cadences]. Heidegger's 'thing' therefore designates everything that is not nothing. This 'thing', this 'form' is something around which properties are assembled: the core of things [Gk. *hypokeimemon*]. For Heidegger the core was something at ground level, the plan. It is these properties such as colour and texture that give things their consistency and quintessence, their sensuousness. This matter is encapsulated in the 'Form'. The Form has a consistency of matter: it is formed matter: it is what we see in something. But this thing-concept applies to nature and tools, not to Art. The thingly element in Art is the matter of which it consists. The 'mere thing' has its quality of self-containment. 'Equipment' has both the qualities of self-containment and specific use. But the Artwork has neither of these qualities. By its very nature its boundaries lack self-conviction and its lack of 'specific use' is ingrained in its own texture, grain.

Heidegger then asks the question 'With what essence of what thing should a Greek Temple agree?' and follows this with, 'Who could maintain the impossible view that the Idea of Temple is represented in the building? And yet, truth is set to work

in such a work, if it is a work'.

Heidegger paints, he sculpts this Temple before our very eyes, but at the same time as he *builds* this image, he questions its *foundations*, its right to lie *on* the earth. . . . This Temple in a building . . . it is not representational, it is not a model, it is not an imitation. . . . Heidegger separates the building, the form, from its function, its toolness. . . . A Greek Temple portrays nothing. It simply stands there in the middle. . . . Standing there, the building rests on the rocky ground. . . . The Temple's firm towering makes visible the invisible space of the air. The Temple rests on the earth. Then Heidegger adjusts his position: adjusts his aspect. He resists the notion of the Temple coming to rest on the surface of the earth, but renames the surface, the planetary earth as the *shelter earth*, the earth that creates, supports, gives life to the arising structures and then gives them shelter when they return. The World and the Earth are contestants in this field. The world displays its clarity and openness, the earth conceals, shelters, attempts to draw the world into itself. The Temple straddles both worlds. The frontier bisects it, masking for a time its progress [a place of respite, the customs post]. The Temple work standing out there on this earth opens up a world and at the same time sets the world back again on earth. And, whereas in the case of fabricating equipment, e.g. an axe, the stone is used, and used up, disappearing into its own usefulness [and the material is all the better and more suitable the less it resists vanishing in the equipmental being of the equipment], the Temple does not cause the material to disappear. It displays it. It allows it to be seen. The Temple is in the earth: rises above it: descends back into it. It promotes, displays the earth: it allows the earth to speak, to be seen. The Temple presses downwards and shows its heaviness to the earth. The earth though cannot be destroyed: the earth is always 'closed up': it is 'self-secluding'.

The Temple. This Temple. The event of the

Temple. The Temple in motion. Heidegger talks about motion: rest is the opposite of motion and only what is in [has been] in motion can rest. Rest can include motion: there is a rest which includes an inner concentration of motion, inside of which exist a multiplicity and variety of inflections which produce 'events' or 'vibrations' with an infinity of harmonics or submultiples. These do not move to a rational or 'philosophical' plan, but they radiate and disseminate in a topography of experience composed of units that are neither logical or organic, that is, neither based upon pieces as a long unity or a fragmented totality; nor formed or prefigured by those units in the course of a logical development or of an organic evolution.

Let us return to the subject of hierarchies, in the sense of the archetype and the copy. These copies are kept in 'space'. A divine artificer copies these in different places, therefore creating many things from the same form [printing / moulding / casting] . . . and, eventually . . . cliché, . . . overexposure / the trite / the stereotype [C19: from the French, from cliché to stereotype; imitative of the sound made by the matrix when it is dropped into molten metal]. The making of the 'master', either through the cutting [the actual cutting] through of the metal or by the dissolving [etching, dissolution] in the acid. The master is formed, or the form [image] is mastered. Alloy, zinc, lead, leather, rubber, the image if formed through these. The developing process [a misnomer: the process only offers a change in circumstance], a process of a chemical development mirrors perhaps Satie's non-developmental compositional processes. Both in black and white, blanc et noir, the double negative. As the chemicals attack the paper surface [seen/scene in/of red light] the image comes into physical and visual being simultaneously. The hardness or softness of the grain [the conduit of the grain as the grain pours through the differences]. This graininess, this process of gradual surface deterioration destroys the naturalness and the absence of time

provokes the narrative and lets in the possibilities of the image. It is limited, it is inside itself, there is no place for itself outside the process. The pleasure of this recalling. The pleasure of the grain. Disclosing, unfolding and lastly, obsolescent in its waiting, the Old French desveloper - to unwrap, to reveal, layer by layer the imitation, the mimicry, the counterfeit. . . . To paraphrase Nauman:

*The master is formed the image is mastered.
The form is mastered the master is imagined.*

. . . the transcript, abundance and hence power, wealth. Abundant becomes copious. Rich begets opulence. Copious; copyist; copyright - the exclusive right to copy; this copying between 'art' and 'life' - reality by exclusion. They do not encourage meanings, they enjoy descriptions. Explanation is stupidity, and stupidity is their belief in explanation. Knowledge is only valued by its inherent banality and practical uselessness.

Objects too have an inherent stupidity. They have no organisation, only order/disorder. They have presence, but they prove nothing. Lists exude authority: the possible privileges resulting from inclusion, the possible disaster of omission. Lists suggest realism, they point metaphor to the extremities, they provide a set of pieces for the 'audience' to move around without any preconditions or expectations. These lists slow down the narrative, at times to the point where the names are becalmed in a mirror image of themselves; extremes to not meet in some dramatic mêlée, they rather cancel each other out. This attention to details, minutiae, categories, parallels that of the abortive suicide who wishes so much to be seen to want to die. Flaubert allows 'little' metaphors to develop inside these listings: 'in the real world distinctions have little force, it is a literary deceit that they do', and it is in these little metaphors that the pairs are born. As time begins to falter, the reader/observer begins to write their own sub-lists, to rearrange things, say,

alphabetically [encyclopaedia], temporally, in terms of colour, texture, politics. Listings turn out to be arbitrary in their very earnestness. This splitting-up of otherwise rational events deprives objects of their meaning and creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and suspicion, justified by pointless acts of organisation. And as we strip away the meaning from the signs we set the objects free and leave openings, fissures, where the [common-place] becomes the emblematic - a notion which Debussy found problematic in the extreme.

Before starting work I walk around it several times accompanied by myself.

Between 1890 and 1898 Erik Satie lived at 6 Rue Cortot: 'in a wardrobe'. Satie was also a collector. . . . After his death his wardrobe was found to contain 84 handkerchiefs besides 12 identical velvet suits and dozens of umbrellas. For the last 27 years of his life he lived in an apartment in Arceuil.

[BEDROOM, BACHELOR'S. Always untidy, with women's whatsits left around. Smell of cigarettes. There must be some bizarre things hidden away there.]

Satie created *Musique d'ameublement* [Furniture Music] as music that was not to be listened to, and to distinguish background music from 'serious' music. He said,

You know, there's a need to create furniture music, that is to say, music that would be a part of the surrounding noises and that would take them into account, as masking the clatter of knives and forks without drowning it completely, without imposing itself. It would fill up the awkward silences that occasionally descend on guests. It would spare them the usual banalities. Moreover, it would neutralise the street noises that indiscreetly force themselves into the picture.

Satie elaborated on this idea in a note to Jean Cocteau: 'Furniture music for law offices, banks, etc.... No marriage ceremony without furniture music.... Don't enter a house which does not have furniture music.'

Furniture Music's premiere was a disaster. People insisted on actually listening to it. Satie was furious; he and fellow composer Darius Milhaud urged the audience to take no notice of the music and to behave as if it did not exist.

The music ... wishes to make a contribution to life in the same way as a private conversation, a painting ... or a chair on which you may or may not be seated.

Milhaud later recounted:

It was no use Satie shouting: 'Talk for heaven's sake! Move around! Don't listen!' They kept quiet. They listened. The whole thing went wrong.

Biography

David Kirshner is an artist and writer. His most recent exhibitions have been 'Stuff Happens', a group exhibition at the Angel Row Gallery, Nottingham, 'Conflict', a group exhibition at the 20/21 Gallery Scunthorpe, and 'In their Own Words' an exhibition at the End Gallery, Sheffield Hallam University. His work is involved with Deconstruction and related topics in architecture and eighteenth century art and philosophy.