

who “cannot tolerate the ambiguity of the flux.”¹ Robert Bernasconi argues that Gadamer’s understanding of dialogue and his notion of assimilation and the fusion of horizons “have the common feature of diminishing alterity.”² However, an examination of Gadamer’s reflections on art exhibits a genuine openness to and appreciation of difference, not unrelated to his hermeneutical approach to the other. Thus, by bringing Gadamer’s reflections on our experience of art into conversation with key aspects of his philosophical hermeneutics, we are able to better assess the viability of Gadamer’s contributions to contemporary discussions of difference and alterity.

The first part of my essay (sections two through six) focuses on key concepts in Gadamer’s account of art’s dynamic ontology and our experience of art. Such concepts include the play structure of art, hermeneutic identity, tarrying with a work, and contemporaneity. The opening sections provide not only a discussion of these central themes, but they also (1) draw attention to the various ways in which difference and otherness are integral to Gadamer’s account, and (2) utilize relevant musical examples that prepare the reader for a more focused discussion of a Gadamerian approach to free jazz in section seven. By highlighting how Gadamer’s understanding of art possesses a dialogical play structure, is characterized by identity and difference, requires actively engaged spectators and auditors, and is amenable to what many criticize as an unintelligible musical expres

Similarly in the play of art, the viewer or listener engages in a back-and-forth interplay with the work, which, in the case of art, allows the work to emerge in a communicative event. Here too, the artwork draws the viewer or auditor into its movement and expects a countermovement or

presentation or a performance of a work is not a copy of some original or more “real” entity,

something, I must be able to identify it. For there was something there that I passed judgment upon and ‘understood’ [*verstand*].”¹² Stated otherwise, the work’s identity consists in its presence before me as other, in its being there as something addressing me. The work asks to be understood; it issues a challenge requiring a response.¹³ Here again the emphasis is on the active, engaged listener or spectator: in order to experience a work of art as a communicative event, one must actively participate—one must “play along with” (*mitspielen*) it.¹⁴ The listener must comport herself to the work as an other expecting something meaningful to come forth. If the viewer or listener approaches the work having already decided that it has no value and thus nothing to say, then the work will remain silent. Art is a dynamic, communal event; its happening or occurrence can be thwarted or foreclosed when we comport ourselves to the other with a closed attitude. The same is true of our hermeneutical encounters with others—whether texts or human beings.

B. Tarrying as Ecstatic Participation

Gadamer also emphasizes the importance of tarrying or lingering with a work. To tarry or linger is to become so intentionally absorbed in a work of art that one forgets oneself. As one attunes herself to the work and becomes wholly captivated by it, she is able to see beyond her projects, concerns, and cares; she exists ec-statically, or outside herself. This ecstatic way of being should not be understood as merely passive or private; rather, as Gadamer explains:

being outside oneself is the positive possibility of being wholly with something else. This kind of being present [*solches Dabeisein*] is a self-forgetfulness [*Selbstvergessenheit*], and to be a spectator [*es macht das Wesen des Zuschauers aus*] consists in giving oneself in self-forgetfulness to what one is watching. Here self-forgetfulness is anything but a private condition, for it arises from devoting one’s full attention to the matter at hand [*denn sie entspringt aus der Zuwendung zur Sache*], and this is the spectator’s own positive accomplishment [*Leistung*].¹⁵

When one actively enters into a condition of self-forgetfulness, one is not (as Gadamer explains) merely passively or privately receiving the work, but rather, one is actively participating in it. This is the ecstatic way of being, or the way of being that is ec-statically, or outside oneself.

As we have seen, Gadamer stresses what he calls the “absolute presentness” of the work - that is, the artwork’s ability “to build bridges that reach beyond the enclosure and space in which it originated.”²⁷ I have suggested that this is in part due to the work’s immediacy, its ability to draw us in via its materiality and sensual qualities. However, this is a structured materiality; the

How can we understand the innovative forms of modern art as they play around with the content so that our expectations are constantly frustrated? [...] How are we to understand what Duchamp is doing when he suddenly exhibits some everyday object on its own

himself explains, “tradition means transmission rather than conservation. This transmission does not imply that we simply leave things unchanged and merely conserve them. It means learning how to grasp and express the past anew. It is in this sense that we can say that transmission is equivalent to translation.”³²

VII. A Gadamerian Approach to Free Jazz

We have seen that a key feature of our aesthetic experience is the spectator’s or listener’s active participation. Also significant are Gadamer’s understanding of art as an event, tarrying with a work, the play-character of art, art’s communal dimensions, and the primacy of art’s address. In the following paragraphs, I highlight how these fundamental aspects of Gadamer’s account apply to free jazz. I conclude that a Gadamerian approach to free jazz not only allows but requires the voice of the other to sound in its alterity; consequently, Gadamer’s hermeneutical aesthetics demonstrates an openness to the other that creates the possibility for self- and world-questioning and even a transformation of one’s way of seeing the world.

Free jazz, also called the “New Thing,” burst forth on the jazz music scene in the late fifties and is frequently associated with names such as John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, and Cecil Taylor. An adequate definition of free jazz is notoriously difficult, as each group or musician now recognized as a pioneer or exemplar of free jazz instantiates diverse expressions of the genre. Even so, Ekkehard Jost highlights a “point of agreement” among free jazz groups: namely, they sought to subvert signature practices and norms of traditional jazz that carried over into bebop and hard bop.³³ In particular, free jazz musicians were unsatisfied with the constraints of the harmonic, metric, and structural norms that constituted jazz up to hard bop. Although the harmonic elements of bebop and hard bop had become increasingly complex compared to earlier expressions of jazz, the structures of standard jazz pieces had become rigid and formalized. As Jost explains, in traditional jazz the main purpose of the melody or theme is to establish the harmonic and structural framework for improvised solos. However, “[i]n free jazz, which does not observe fixed patterns of bars or functional harmony, this purpose no longer exists.”³⁴ Thus both the form and content of free jazz pieces are highly specific, consisting neither in typical jazz harmonic sequences (II-V-I, etc.) nor in common structural frameworks (e.g., the AABA form). As a consequence, one cannot continue to recJET © (c)0r A0257 o257 -05 419.ies r (c) 057 rk 0450.760at c

foregrounded rather than traditional jazz's emphasis on a single soloist improvising over relatively stable chord-changes. Moreover, as is the case with works such as Ornette Coleman's "Sound Gravitation" and "Falling Stars," numerous free jazz pieces contain no traditional melody or theme.

each carries together in a community where moves and countermoves are reciprocally recognized, valued, and harmonized in the truest sense.

References

Baskerville, J.D. (1994). Free jazz: A reflection of black power ideology. *Journal of Black Studies*, 24, 484-497.

Benson, B.E. (2003). *The improvisation of musical dialogue: A phenomenology of music*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Bernasconi, R. (1995). You don't know what I'm talking about: Alterity and the hermeneutical ideal. In L. Schmidt (Ed.), *The specter of relativism*, pp. 178-

Habermas, J. (1990). The hermeneutic claim to universality. In G.L. Ormiston & A.D. Schrift (Eds.), *The hermeneutic tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, pp. 245-272. Albany, NY: SUNY.