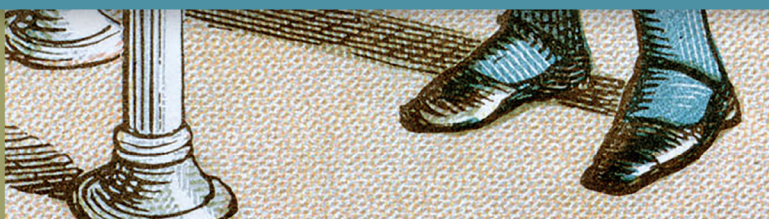
OXFORD STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE AND CULTURE

ELIZABETH FOWLER

Poetry and the Built Environment

A Theory of the Flesh of Art



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OXFORD STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Ardis Butterfield and Christopher Cannon

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The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne,
Th'assay so hard, so sharp the conquerynge,
The dredful joye alwey that slit so yerne:
Al this mene I by Love—

for Victor

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Figure 16
Ms. 60, fol. 214a
Reproduced by permission of the President and Fellows of Magdalen College, Oxford, courtesy of the Libraries and Archives of Magdalen College, Oxford.

Figure 19
College of Arms MS C. 35, part 2, p. 41. Reproduced by permission of the Kings, Heralds and Pursuivants of Arms. Courtesy of the College of Arms.

Figures 29, 30, 33
Kara Walker
A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of

the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant, 2014.
Polystyrene foam, sugar
Approx. 35.5 × 26 × 75.5 feet (10.8 × 7.0 × 23 m)
Installation views: Domino Sugar Refinery, A Project of Creative Time, Brooklyn, NY, 2014
Photos: Jason Wyche
Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co. and Sprüth Magers.

Throughout the book, translations are mine unless otherwise credited, and quotations of poems are keyed to line numbers.

Introduction

Art Is the Habituation of Bodily Experience

> You adopted a posture of the voice, or a posture of the voice adopted you, and you went with it.
>
> Seamus Heaney[1]

The material world around us issues nonstop chatter (Figure 1). A doorway invites us to duck and enter; an enclosed garden, to pace its cloister. These messages of instruction are like the currants spelling "EAT ME" on the cake and the paper label saying "DRINK ME" on the bottle in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*—though not always so explicit. Our world is not made of mere affordances or potential uses; it is not that indifferent, for we are addressed to it, and we hear its active address to us:

> . . . toute perception est une communication ou une communion, la reprise ou l'achèvement par nous d'une intention étrangère ou inversement l'accomplissement au dehors de nos puissances perceptives et comme un accouplement de notre corps avec les choses.

> [. . . every perception is a communication or a communion, the taking up or the achievement by us of an alien intention or inversely the accomplishment beyond our perceptual powers and as a coupling of our body with things.][2]

Even at the extremes of sleep or psychosis we sense the world persuading us to take up its alien intentions: go this way, listen, cringe, come closer, stand up, exult, despair, be honored, get bigger, stand back.

All art joins and augments this message-rich world: it is a skilled collaboration of the sensible (the perceptible properties of artifacts) and the sensate (our perceiving flesh). So I intend to convince you that the flesh of art participates in what Aimé Césaire calls:

[1] In Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 293.

[2] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1945), 370.

Poetry and the Built Environment. Elizabeth Fowler, Oxford University Press. © Elizabeth Fowler (2024).
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Figure 1 The ductile chatter of the built environment made legible.
Illustration by John Tenniel.

> la chair du monde palpitant du movement
> même du monde!

[the flesh of the world pulsing with the very motion of the world].[3] Like a doorway, all art issues instructions by means of its material as well as its immaterial, conceptual being. Art is dense with intricate, mesmerizing, optative acts inviting us to sense, to feel, to swell with emotion, to think certain thoughts, to move, to transform ourselves. Art speaks to our instincts, as do rocks and stones and trees, and it also employs the sophisticated conventions humans have developed, like gestures and written language, icons, metaphors, perspective, genre. It iterates. Yet the main motive that drives human beings to engage with poems, sculpture, architecture, and music isn't to learn an account of their forms, references, and histories, despite the preoccupations of scholars.[4] As readers and audiences, we are there for the experiences that art's instructions are designed to provide, and we undertake to accomplish what we feel that experience makes of us.[5] We might have almost any aim—becoming more tense or more relaxed, more elevated or adventurous, smarter or more able to forget, more masculine or less, richer or more empathetic, more Black or Irish, gardener or skinhead, more present here or transported to some other

[3] The title of this book relies on Aimé Césaire's pungent phrase "chair du monde," which appears in this line of poetry published in Paris in 1939. See *Cahier d'un Retour Au Pays Natal*, ed. Abiola Irele, 2nd ed. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), 23; the phrase, rendered "the flesh of the world" in English, now pervades phenomenologically minded writing in philosophy, ecology, art, and other fields. The phrase owes more to an anti-colonial assertion of wholeness than I think is generally recognized. It is usually attributed to Merleau-Ponty, who works out, in terms of the psychology of vision, some of the implications embedded in the phrase but leaves others aside. In an entry, dated December 1960, of his posthumously published working notes, Merleau-Ponty writes this versicle: "La chair du monde = son *Horizonthaftigkeit* (horizon intérieur et extérieur) entourant la mince pellicule du visible strict entre ces 2 horizons—" (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible: suivi de notes de travail par Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Claude Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 324 [The flesh of the world = its *Horizonthaftigkeit* (interior and exterior horizon) surrounding the thin pellicle of the strict visible between these two horizons—], Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 271.

[4] I agree with Jonathan Culler that, in literary criticism, interpretation has eclipsed and even suppressed an account of poetics. Hermeneutics and poetics "come at poetry from opposite directions" (*Theory of the Lyric* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015], 4–5). Though the present book provides many interpretations of poems, it seeks to subordinate that interpretation to the analysis of how poems support the experience of the reader, a quite different project.

[5] I stress experience here, but I want to distinguish my use of the word from that of Derek Attridge, who is interested in the social history of the performance of poetry before modernity in *The Experience of Poetry: From Homer's Listeners to Shakespeare's Readers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). I am closer to John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Batch & Co., 1934), yet I think Susanne Langer may be right that he is too ready to insist on complete continuity between everyday experience and the experience of art. See Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from* Philosophy in a New Key (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), 35–39.

world.[6] Engaging with art in "un accouplement de notre corps avec les choses," in Merleau-Ponty's resonant phrase, we respond to how it evokes sensations, how it conjures thought, how it shapes and affiliates us socially. We achieve an alien intention. And we return like riders at an amusement park to experience it again, to become present to art and to ourselves.

The motive of this book is to urge critics, historians, and theorists of art to give more attention to the way artifacts address human perception in order to construct powerful experiences. How do objects lean toward us and offer themselves to be lived? My first task here is to develop an account of how art issues its instructions to human beings, an account, in other words, of its inherent interactivity and performativity.[7] How, then, do artifacts get under our skin? My second task is to explore the role of virtuality in the practice of art: its ability to intertwine the hypothetical with the real and to alter our understanding of sensation and presence. How can we illuminate the powers art has over us? Third, I insistently situate the practice of art within social life, offering an analysis of how art offers to configure those who engage with it and exploring the consequences, for better or worse, of such effects. I shall pursue all three of these tasks, to differing degrees, in the course of every analysis here, no matter the medium.

Most of the artifacts I write about here, though certainly not all, are short poems. This allows me to offer a greater range of demonstration than would prose fiction or plays. The interactivity of all art is especially demonstrable in poems, which tend to employ their instructions to the reader in compact and explicit ways. Ritual performativity is key to the achievement of presence, and on the whole verse is more ritualized than prose fiction, more easily repeated,

[6] On presence, Merleau-Ponty makes this remark: "To perceive is to render oneself present to something through the body. All the while the thing keeps its place within the horizon of the world," in "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences." In *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. and trans. James M. Edie. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 42. For resources on presence outside the theological, I've valued especially Alva Noë, *Varieties of Presence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).

[7] Even the art W. J. T. Mitchell describes as "needing nothing from us" is enacting its self-sufficiency for and with us: see the exuberant *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010). He focuses on pictures being endowed with life by their viewers' beliefs in them or by "a clever artist/technician" who engineers them "to *appear* alive" (295). His work is full of intelligent provocations, and yet his descriptions of the desires of pictures are essentially incredulous. Juhani Pallasmaa persuasively acknowledges an "inherent suggestion of action in images of architecture, the moment of active encounter" and yet he goes too far when he asserts that "it is this possibility of action that separates architecture from other forms of art." *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 63. Much more on art's actions ahead.

and more repetitively patterned.[8] Plays are more closely associated with ritual and performativity, but like prose narratives they tend to be designed to be understood even if experienced only once, in a propulsive, suspenseful, ductile sequence that requires exposition at more length than this book of details can afford. They provide timed, larger-scale experiences. Poems are less closely tied to fictional settings that imitate a complete world, so their instructions to respond are easier to distinguish from their settings. At the same time, poems tend to be heavily sensual. Poetry has long been recognized to be the art form that stresses the distinction between sensations and meanings: the prominent sound patterns and mise-en-page arrangements of verse recruit but do not coincide perfectly with the import of its words, phrases, and sentences.[9] So, the "sense" of poetry is multiple: both sensory and denotative. This multiplicity is by no means the sole province of poetry, but, importantly, it is poetry's central mode of presentation.[10] It's in this spirit that Giorgio Agamben writes "the possibility of enjambment constitutes the only criterion for distinguishing poetry from prose," because enjambment is the moment when language's line, rhythm, or rhyme breaks against its grammar.[11] Such poetic devices rely on the explicitly multiple nature of poetry's "sense" and make it a proper object of my study, because here I am principally concerned with the gaps between sensations and the meanings cultures ascribe to them. If sensation and meaning were gears, we'd see them at play in poems—slipping, disengaging or re-engaging, stopping and getting traction, running at cross-purposes. That play between sensation and meaning is ultimately, I shall argue, how we generate our approaches to ourselves and others, our health and misery, rebellions, reformations and momentary cohesions of social life, as well as the thrills and tears that art can bring to us.

[8] I use "performativity" to include its larger Austinian sense, as we shall see: it describes the ability of art to enact a new state of affairs; the history of the performance of poetry is taken up by works like Derek Attridge, *The Experience of Poetry*.

[9] This is one of the features of poetry that produces fruitful comparisons with music and dance in the work, for example, of Ardis Butterfield and Seeta Chaganti. The explosion of lyric theory over the last years has been thrilling: there are many important contributions by scholars cited here and not cited, including Jonathan Culler's valuable magnum opus, *Theory of the Lyric*. I take up genre theory here in a different way than Culler does, making no attempt to define lyric, to distinguish lyric from other genres, or even to assert it as a genre. Instead, I'm interested (particularly in Part Four) in another basis for a powerful account of genres. My approach would require a rethinking of Culler's "four parameters" (though I won't pursue that here), because his observations, though inductively gathered, are not formulated with respect to how lyric designs an experience for its readers (yet his close analysis of the features of poems always illuminates them). My project is more interested in elucidating what poetry shares with the other arts than what sets it apart.

[10] When visual artists turn up the volume on denotation to match that of sensation, as do, say, the epigrammatic Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger, we see their work as approaching the form of poetry.

[11] Giorgio Agamben, "The End of the Poem," trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. In *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 430.

In sum, poems make the best support for demonstrating my theoretical propositions in a short book designed to treat many artifacts. Yet it is difficult to make visible Carroll's little tags, and I've found it most effective to draw on my readers' experiences of the built environment (such as landscapes, monuments, temples, tombs, paintings, photographs) in order to count the ways that poems invite us to experience them. All of us, whether aware of it or not, have infinitely more experience of our built environments than of poems. I shall ask you to marshal that awareness here. This book sees all art as putting bodily sensation into play in order to mobilize our perceptual expertise and configure it. On and around a theoretical framework, I've woven interpretive studies that meditate on the capacities of various objects. I explicate, compare, and worry the examples—and then often return to the same objects from new angles.

Many of my examples are late medieval, in part to argue that theory needs more recourse to post-ancient, pre-modern materials. Yet I consider verse ranging from the anonymous lyric "At a sprynge wel" to a poem by Tracy K. Smith, and I interpret built environments stretching from the medieval monastic site Clonmacnoise on the Irish River Shannon, to the ancient Ka'ba in the Grand Mosque at Mecca, to a final, extended consideration of Kara Walker's 2014 installation in a Brooklyn sugar warehouse, entitled *A Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby*. Contemporary examples are important when demonstrating how art draws upon our sense of social emplacement. The texts, sites, architecture, sculpture, and paintings that make up the major case studies are Anglophone, Western European, and North American (though in a few places, to situate that orientation, I refer to Asia, the Arab world, and sub-Saharan Africa). They were made between the early centuries of the common era and the present of living memory. Of course, my selections are, in part, evidence of my own education and experience; I happen to love these particular things. They have taught me what I try to convey here, and I commend them to you with loving attention. But I hope that the theoretical contribution of the book is legible whether or not you follow all the particular interpretations. Moving you through such a collection risks miscellany, but it also offers you, I hope, the pleasure of engaging with the spin and vitality of art and the intense field of interactivity that hovers in and around artifacts, a field made visible in the LED lights of an ancient Burmese Buddha at the Shwedagon Pagoda (Figure 2), in the dust around Charles Schulz's Pigpen, or in the mandorla painted around a fifteenth-century Italian Virgin Mary. Like Lewis Carroll's tags, such images attempt to notate the radiating power to move us that is built into art.

I hope to make visible that radiating power, the performativity of art—to illuminate what Auden, worrying about Yeats's political power, called poetry's "way of happening": the support necessary to enact, however loudly or quietly,

Figure 2 The interactive, notating, light-emitting diodes of ancient Buddhas, Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon, Burma.
Photograph by Cathy Birdsong Dutchak.

new states of affairs.[12] To do this, I use the term *ductus*, an ancient term of rhetoric revived by the medievalist Mary Carruthers.[13] We can define ductus with her as the way a work of art leads us through our experience of it. Ductus is "that quality in a work's formal patterns which engages an audience and then sets a viewer or auditor or performer in motion within its structures" (190). It is also the sequence or path that appears by means of its instructions to us. Though Carruthers's work is powerfully influential, we continue to lack a critical mass of practical literary criticism for ductus.[14] This book attempts to give examples of how such an interpretive discourse might look. A good

[12] W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats (*d. Jan. 1939*)." In *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden, Poems*, vol. I, ed. Edward Mendelson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022), 373. Of course, he and others say that poetry "makes nothing happen"—that's true insofar as it is an important reservation to or apology for or resentment of the claim that poetry acts and is indeed performative: i.e., in itself, an artifact's actions should not be granted perlocutionary completeness, even if at fault. More on this follows, especially in Parts One and Five.

[13] Mary Carruthers, "The Concept of *Ductus*, or Journeying Through a Work of Art." In *Rhetoric Beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Carruthers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 190–213. This anthology shows how attention to ductus has been more sustained in art history, architecture, and musicology than in literary criticism. I am indebted throughout to Carruthers's magisterial work, especially *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Outside rhetoric, "ductus" is a paleographical term for how the hand draws the pen when writing letters, an environmental engineering term for the way water is conducted by a built environment, a military term for leadership, and so forth.

[14] For an important exception, see the sophisticated "narrative reenactments" of Seeta Chaganti's *Strange Footing: Poetic Form and Dance in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018), which trace ductility in complex and persuasive ways.

description of ductus provides me with a foundation of empirical information that I can build upon, because it describes not only what a poem "says" but what it does and how it expects us to respond.

Because ductus relies on the iteration of conventions, it is an imprint of human practices captured and curated by individual poems, buildings, monuments, paintings, and more.[15] These practices are lost to us until we perform them by engaging with art. It is an important component of my argument to insist that ductus indeed bears the historical trace of what Marcel Mauss called "les techniques du corps" [the techniques of the body]—ways of moving, feeling, and thinking that become embedded in human habitus, our bodily disposition.[16] We can see, in ductus, both the body techniques of the past and a script for future human practices. We could think of this aspect of ductus as a footprint (Figure 3). Art, in this sense, is a kind of "trace fossil": it is evidence of the history of body techniques.[17] It is often evidence of modes quite other than those that are already achieved by the person encountering the art, and so it offers us practices that invite us to experiment with the foreign and widen our knowledge of the repertoire of human practices designed to create

[15] In this concept, I have been influenced (like so many) by Sarah McNamer's use of the theatrical term "script," borrowed from Sylvan Tomkins and Pierre Bourdieu. She shows how texts are scripts that can be evidence of the practice of the passions. Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), e.g., the "performance scenario" she first introduces on p. 26.

[16] "Habitus" is a term from Thomas Aquinas (e.g., *Summa theologiae* 2a2ae), who renders Aristotle's *hexis* into Latin. For the need to understand as social and therefore socializing (as well as psychological and physical) the postures and skilled movements with which we walk, smile, sleep, swim, kiss, and so forth, see Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," trans. Ben Brewster. In Marcel Mauss, *Techniques, Technology and Civilisation*, ed. Nathan Schlanger (New York: Durkheim Press/Berghahn Books, 2006), 80. Mauss introduced the concept of techniques of the body in his presidential address to the Société de Psychologie Française in May 1934; it was published as "Les Techniques du corps," *Journal de psychologie normal et pathologique* 32, no. 3–4 (1934): 271–293. In his brilliant observations of the techniques of infancy, adolescence, and so forth, he strongly marks their gendered nature. Among scholars who have deepened my understanding of this gendered nature of habitus, see particularly the political philosopher Iris Marion Young on body techniques (e.g., *Throwing like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990) as well as Judith Butler's influential work on performativity throughout her career. For *hexis* in Aristotle, see, e.g., *Nichomachean Ethics* 1105b20–30. The present book argues that art is one among the ways that societies transmit body techniques and their meaning; as art habituates us to body techniques, it plays a role in differentiating among social persons as well as in setting them into relation with one another in the polity.

[17] I'm grateful to the paleobiologist Kevin Hatala, whose living foot appears in Figure 3, for confirming to me in private correspondence that footprints often draw people to step into them (or, in the case of precious ancient relics, near them). Seeta Chaganti uses the fifteenth-century poet John Lydgate's memorable phrase "strange footing" (her title) to speak of what are perhaps similar traces. Her work compellingly infuses medieval lyric with the theory, practice, and ductile force of dance; I take permission from her freedom in moving among media and historical periods. Her stress on making the force of virtuality visible to us is a salutary influence on my work here. Much rich work in the last decade has written the history of the senses, e.g., Fiona Griffiths and Kathryn Starkey, eds., *Sensory Reflections: Traces of Experience in Medieval Artifacts* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2018.)

Figure 3 An imprint of the body techniques of the past and a script for future practices: a paleobiologist responds to the ductility of a *c.*1.5 million-year-old trace fossil near Ileret, Kenya.
Photograph courtesy of Kevin Hatala.

and interpret sensation and movement.[18] A footprint says both "here is where creatures walked before you" and, crucially, "place your foot here." The appeals artifacts make to our bodily expertise in the built environment—how to walk, where to walk—are essential to their power to move us. In this way, I believe, poems are very like other kinds of art—they draw on our sensory perceptions, our abilities to navigate the world around us, and our literacies in the phenomenology of the built world. Even poems that never ask us to imagine anything like a setting make use, as we shall see, of our sensory, spatial, and kinetic expertise.

If we were to imagine art without ductus there would be no experience generated by it. There would still be images and propositional thought and

[18] The aspect of literature I'm calling to our attention is sometimes touched on when its capacity to *move* the reader is praised. For instance, though she is explicitly writing against "use" as a criterion for poetics (220), Heather McHugh writes about lyric as a mode of transport in an essay called "Moving Means, Meaning Moves: Notes on Lyric Destination." In *Poets Teaching Poets: Self and the World*, ed. Gregory Orr and Ellen Bryant Voigt (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 207–220. In my own position against the time-honored scorn of art's utility, a scorn that narrows our understanding of art's power to solicit our action (though it helps to explain much about the history of style), I am sympathetic to David Freedberg's spirited defense of the continuity between high art and pornographic and propagandistic images in *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989) and to John Dewey's sense of art arising out of everyday needs in *Art as Experience*.

historical inflections and representations embedded or printed in art, but we would not know how to achieve these visions and thoughts. As Stanley Cavell writes:

> So many remarks one has endured about the kind and number of feet in a line of verse, or about a superb modulation, or about a beautiful diagonal in a painting, or about a wonderful camera angle, have not been readings of a passage at all, but something like items in a tabulation, with no suggestion about what is being counted or what the total might mean. Such remarks, I feel, *say* nothing, though they may be, as Wittgenstein says about naming, preparations for saying something (and hence had better be accurate).[19]

All critics struggle with this risk of formalism becoming sterile, and most, I think, take too much for granted the question of what moves readers. Expert readers like faculty and students easily follow the instructions of ductus without much awareness of its operations: we translate it quickly and unconsciously into the mental, physical, spiritual, and cognitive acts of our responses. This book advocates for a slow criticism that brings back to awareness what becoming a good reader seems to require forgetting. Of course, if we were to linger too long on the instructions, it might impair our enjoyment—just as explaining a joke can kill it, or a batter's hyper-awareness of mechanics can ruin his or her swing.[20] But we must trace ductus or risk missing what is delivering our essential experience of art. Making ductus visible can powerfully motivate empiricism and bring close reading to life, making careful description a worthwhile preparation for *saying something*, in Cavell's

[19] Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 36–37.

[20] Of course, there are entire historical movements of art that do everything possible to make us pleasurably conscious of the artificial, confected, manufactured nature of art. For instance, Charles Bernstein's "antiabsorptive" poetics stresses the objecthood of the poem in *A Poetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). Kimberly Johnson makes an excellent case on these grounds for including in contemporary discussions of poetics George Herbert and other Reformation poets who draw our attention to the page and its words as the matter of art. See her *Made Flesh: Sacrament and Poetics in Post-Reformation England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), esp. 22–26. Modern painting that foregrounds color or exposes its material supports and buildings like the 1977 Piano + Rogers designed Centre Pompidou in Paris, a museum for modern art that wears its pipes on its sleeve, are asking us to enjoy the construction itself. In these cases the wit isn't killed by the explanation, but inhabits it. Such art strives to make its ductility thematic, but that doesn't in itself make it more transparent than other art. I like Andrew Elfenbein's comment: "Rather than prize disruptions as the core of literariness, as literary critics since [Viktor] Shklovsky have done, I would rather notice the constant modulations of attention that literary reading assumes, modulations so practiced that they occur under the threshold" of our awareness. Andrew Elfenbein, *The Gist of Reading* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 38. See also Lucy Alford's wonderful formulation of human attention as poetry's primary medium in *Forms of Poetic Attention* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).