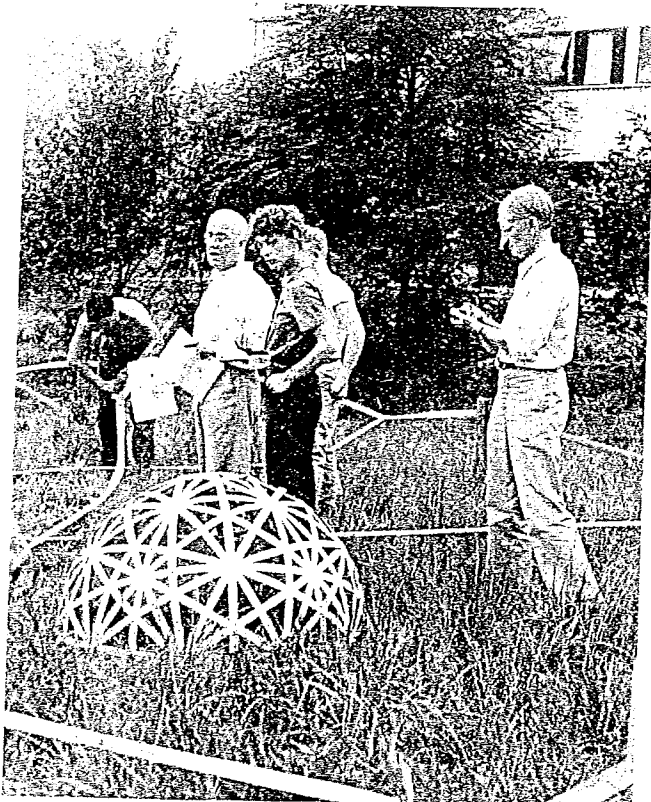


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SYLVIA WYNTER

**BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE.** Black Mountain College endures in the small but exceptional canon of profoundly unconventional places in America. These sites—including Woodstock, Berkeley, San Francisco, and Greenwich Village in the 1950s and 1960s—are locations in the cultural imagination where radical artistic innovation and vanguard social communitarianism fostered alternative visions of what creative, progressive, democratic culture can be. If Black Mountain was a "galaxy of talent," to use the former student Ray Johnson's semi-ironic phrase, it was also characterized by both years of bitter dispute and moments of evanescent harmony. Yet the rigorous artistic practices and influential teaching methods that emerged in its brief twenty-three year existence made it the site of a crucial transatlantic dialogue between European modernist aesthetics and pedagogy and their postwar American counterparts, a conversation whose roster of participants—the faculty and students of the college—now reads like a Who's Who of postwar American art.

Experimentation—and its close relative, interdisciplinarity—were key themes of this conversation. Seemingly everyone who attended Black Mountain College shared a desire to experiment, but they did not necessarily agree on what this meant. In particular, competing approaches to experimentation were advanced by three of the college's most notable faculty members in its heyday of the mid-1940s to early 1950s: the artist Josef Albers, the composer John Cage, and the architect-designer Buckminster Fuller. Simultaneously, visual artists such as Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, and Robert Motherwell, and poets such as Charles Olson and Robert Creeley, were developing visual and literary rhetorics of expressionism that subsequently came to dominate the post-World War II cultural landscape. In contrast, the language of experimentation developed at Black Mountain experienced a somewhat deferred reception, coming to prominence only later in the 1960s, in part through responses to the work and pedagogy of figures like Albers, Cage, and Fuller. Indeed, the language of "testing" continues to play an important role in contemporary artistic practice.



The Supine Dome Model, with Si Silman (bending), Buckminster Fuller, Elaine de Kooning, Roger Lovelace, and Josef Albers. COURTESY OF THE WESTERN REGIONAL ARCHIVES, STATE ARCHIVES OF NORTH CAROLINA

Yet the conflicts that arose among the college's competing ideas of the "experiment" have not been clarified. What does it mean to talk about experimentation in art? And why is it important? One gets a step closer to answering these questions by returning to a far-flung corner of North Carolina where decisive arguments about experimentation took place.

Black Mountain College was founded on the grounds of a YMCA summer camp on the outskirts of the small western North Carolinian mountain town of the same name, about twenty miles from Asheville. In the aftermath of a faculty governance dispute at Rollins College, in Florida, nine fired faculty members, including Black Mountain's first rector, John Andrew Rice, went before an American Association of University Professors mediation panel that vindicated them but ultimately could not reinstate them. Soon after, the discharged professors and a contingent of sympathetic staff decided to establish an educational institution that would avoid the pitfalls of autocratic chancellors and trustees and allow for a more flexible curriculum, thereby resolving the key issues in their clash with the Rollins administration. Black Mountain College was established immediately afterward, in 1933, with the holistic aim, according to a college bulletin, "to educate a student as a

person and as a citizen." Inspired by the work of John Dewey (who soon joined the college's advisory board), its pedagogy emphasized arts training, and its founders hoped to loosen or altogether abolish the types of separations between student and faculty, and between faculty and administration, that usually served to specialize roles and bolster hierarchical distinctions. It is important to note that the college was founded very rapidly during one of the lowest points of the Great Depression: Rice had been dismissed from Rollins in March 1933, and Theodore Dreier, who left Rollins in July, raised nearly \$15,000 throughout the summer months to open Black Mountain College to students by September 1933. With minimal structure, born of both ideological inclination and economic necessity, Black Mountain's experiment in education was groundbreaking, though relatively brief. In 1957, when the college closed its doors, it had dwindled to less than a half-dozen paying students, with a little over a thousand students having attended since its inception.

In spite of its short life and modest size, Black Mountain assumed a prominent place in the genealogies of widely disparate fields of thought. It has been heralded as one of the influential points of contact for European exiles emigrating from Nazi Germany; as a standard bearer of the legacy of intentional or planned communities, such as Brook Farm in Massachusetts; as the bellwether campus of Southern racial integration; as an important testing ground for proponents of progressive education; and, as discussed here, as a seminal site of American postwar art practices. Adding to the college's legend were a number of famous participants—in addition to those already mentioned: the faculty included Albers's wife, Anni, Merce Cunningham, Clement Greenberg, and Ben Shahn; among the students were Ray Johnson, Kenneth Noland, Robert Rauschenberg, Dorothea Rockburne, Kenneth Snelson, and Cy Twombly. The breadth of the artistic diversity of these individuals has garnered the college an impressive reputation, in spite of its uneven historical treatment.

Many stories could be told of Black Mountain College, but following the thread of a single concept—experimentation—allows one to see the import of this place with respect to a history of aesthetics. The concept can be traced in the spirit of radical innovation at the core of Black Mountain College's educational philosophy; for example, in a 1938 college bulletin, Anni Albers, a weaving professor, implored her students and other artists to employ "free experimentation... and leave the safe ground of accepted conventions." Albers was not alone in espousing the rhetoric of experimentation; indeed, it is one of the terms most frequently applied to the college. As with other repeatedly used concepts at Black Mountain—such as "community," "experience," "innovation," or "freedom"—experimentation was and continues to be treated as a generically positive attribute, at once a broad endorsement of the progressive history of the

college as well as an encapsulation of its specific history and merits. Whether in the context of education, community, or visual art and music, many aspirations became arranged around the concept of experimentation: collaboration and interdisciplinarity, countercultural ambitions, artistic avant-gardism, cultural improvement, and political progressiveness. Experimentation was, in fact, a complicated and contested concept defined by projects as varied as geometric abstraction, serial and mass production, dome architecture, chance-based musical composition, and explorations of monochromatic painting.

Nonetheless, a broad notion of experimentation became, in effect, a kind of glue binding together the many interdisciplinary discussions about the college. At the time, the idea was used to rethink underlying assumptions that separated various disciplines into realms of discrete specialization. Prior interdisciplinary modernist explorations, such as those practiced at the Bauhaus, were revisited and expanded at Black Mountain: art merged with concerns of visual perception and environmental design; music composition flirted with arbitrary sounds and background noise; and architecture and shelter design were pushed to redefine the conditions under which individuals, increasingly understood as members of wider communities, experienced space. Experimentation thus provided a shared terminology for college members to see their specific endeavors in relation to different though allied efforts in other disciplines. At Black Mountain, experimentation was professed to be a practice that could be shared by *all* creative producers.

The frequent invocation of “the experiment” by key Black Mountain figures cannot disguise the fact that the concept to which they appealed was and remains deeply contradictory. In large part, the contradiction reflects the compound meanings of the word “experiment,” and the historically shifting relation between concepts such as innovation and tradition, originality and routine. “Experiment” shares with “empirical” and “experience” a common root in the Latin *experiri*, “to try or to put to the test.” Until the eighteenth century, “experience” and “experiment” were interchangeable in English usage, though subsequently “experience” came to indicate that which has been previously tested, a past accumulation of knowledge or skill—“lessons as against innovation or experiments,” in the words of Raymond Williams. Yet “experience” continued to carry a second nuance, that of a full and active consciousness or awareness that may allow experimenting with, testing, or trying something. The complexity in the definition of “experience”—as either the past (tradition) or that which is freshly carried out (innovation)—had the effect of splitting the meaning of “experiment” into two definitions: “testing under controlled circumstances,” as distinct from “innovative acts or procedures” more generally. Although “experiment” is sometimes associated with systematic procedures such as the scientific method, which imply previously formulated hypotheses under test, the term

is also invoked (both in art and in science) in trials of new or different experiences in which results are not forecast beforehand. Debates at Black Mountain about the degree of freedom or control inherent or permitted in practices considered experimental, and not merely chaotic or improvisational, turn on this ambiguity.

**Testing the Contingency of Form.** If one considers the college in terms of its geographical locale, two of the most unlikely Black Mountaineers were Josef and Anni Albers. Exiles from Nazi Germany, both had been teaching masters at the Bauhaus, a school whose radical pedagogy encouraged new considerations of the function of art with respect to industrial production and modern society. As it turned out, the Bauhaus—closed in 1933—and Black Mountain—opened that same year—shared many characteristics as progressive educational institutions and as zones of experimental art practice. Upon his arrival in Black Mountain, Albers famously declared, “I want to open eyes.” His pronouncement indicated a desire to create an audience—for his art, and for practices of abstraction more generally—that would be educated by the new perceptual strategies he was advancing. In the drawing, color, and design courses he taught at the college (from 1933 until his departure in 1949), Albers proposed an ordered and disciplined testing of the various qualities and appearances of readily available materials, such as construction paper and household paint samples. His approach emphasized the correlation between formal arrangement and underlying structure, and it placed a high value on economy of labor and resources. But understanding the material and appearance of form was part of a broader project; to Albers, art was the experimental arm of culture, an investigation of the better forms that precondition advanced cultural production and progress. He encouraged a reflexive relation between art production and a better society, stating, “For me studying art is to be on an ethical basis.” Albers’s ethics of perception maintained that the arrangement of a work of art could mirror the way one organizes events outside of what is traditionally called art, but only by testing received conventions with carefully controlled sets of visual and material experiments.

Albers stressed the *experience*, rather than any definite outcomes, of a laboratory-like educational environment, and he promoted forms of experimentation and learning in action that could dynamically change routine habits of seeing. As he insisted, “art is not an object but an experience”—an experience in and of perception that facilitates complex understandings of the visual world. With his systematic exploration of subtle variations of form, he attempted to construct new techniques of pushing visual perception beyond habit. In this process of experimentation, he tried to influence patterns of transmission—transmissions of artistic tradition and of social pattern—by introducing the model of the perceptual test. It should also be mentioned that Albers’s work on tests of the contingency of form should

be connected to the epistemology of the concept of experiment he drew upon, positioning it within college-sympathizer John Dewey's early-twentieth-century philosophical discussions about using experimentation as a test of the mutability of experience.

**Cage's Chance Protocol.** The celebrated summer institutes at the college supplemented regular faculty such as the Alberses with guests of tremendous energy and talent, often at very early stages of their careers. One of the most significant of these sessions occurred during the summer of 1948, attracting Cage, Cunningham, Elaine and Willem de Kooning, and Fuller, among others. Frequently these summer institutes produced unexpected and enduring collaborations, though just as often the participants shared a language of experiment to effect vastly different projects. In particular, the Albersian definition of experimentation as a test of tradition—as a training of the eye and mind to recognize illusions by meticulously testing socially and historically constructed perceptual understandings—was being redefined by Cage as simply an act with unexpected results, without need for discursive or other interpretations.

Cage arrived at Black Mountain College in 1948 as the choreographer Merce Cunningham's accompanist. His interest in French musico-aesthetic models of disorder and disruption antagonized many of the college's German émigrés, deeply invested as they were in the twelve-tone music of Arnold Schoenberg and the ordered architectonics of Bauhaus theater. Very schematically, the shift at Black Mountain from a model of experimentation as attention, order, and observation to one of dispersal, chance, and fragmentation can be understood as Cage's introduction to the college of his varied sources: his growing interest in Zen Buddhism, Dada, and surrealism, and, in particular, his often-expressed attraction to the writings and works of Erik Satie, Marcel Duchamp, and Antonin Artaud. Incorporating ideas and actions that had previously been explored by these figures, Cage increasingly viewed experimentation as a terrain of chance procedures and indeterminate outcomes. In his time at the college, he devised techniques to test the relationship of natural forces to human intention, privileging the former over the latter in a way that forestalled art's potential to influence larger social practices.

Cage's 1948 theatrical production at Black Mountain of Satie's *The Ruse of Medusa*, characterized by absurd monologues and unrelated musical interludes, alerted him to the possibility of arbitrary relationships between actions within a performance. On his next extended visit to the college, in 1952, in a radical departure from existing traditions of performance at the college, he introduced overlapping activities and narrative fragmentation in the production of *Theater Piece No. 1*, also known as the first "happening." In this later work Cage recruited faculty and students to perform short, timed scripts, resulting in many unrelated events scattered

throughout the performance space that could not be apprehended simultaneously. To Cage, the event represented "the centrality within each event and its non-dependence on other events," though he had in fact established strict time brackets and organized the event with particular temporal and locational guidelines. Cage's employment of what could be termed a "chance protocol" in *Theater Piece No. 1*, which involved particular restrictions (duration, assignment of specific tasks to performers, or an agreed-upon use of certain tools or instruments) governing the execution of the work, represented an attempt to sever experimentalism from determining factors such as artistic intention or interpretive argumentation, and from any calculated effects such as social progress or change.

Cage's version of the experimental test—the formulation of the chance protocol—was, as he termed it, a "purpose to remove purposes." This directly contradicted Albers's project of experimentation as a rigorous and rational testing of carefully controlled and evaluated outcomes. To Cage, experimentation ruptured patterns of reasoning in which testable conditions were hypothesized; procedures of close attention and observation such as those proposed by Albers were impediments that served to control results and impose a restrictive order. The history of the changing nature of experimentation at Black Mountain therefore hinges on a comparison of Cage's efforts in exploring chance-derived scoring and events of indeterminate performance with the work at the college of European émigrés, who tended to share Albers's approach to experimentation. One of these émigrés was Xanti Schawinsky, who had been a student and collaborator of the Bauhaus theater master Oskar Schlemmer in the 1920s. The Schlemmer-Schawinsky tradition of experimentation, brought to Black Mountain at Albers's invitation, emphasized ordered vision as a way to defamiliarize viewers from their habitual relation to space and its larger social context. However, like Cage's 1948–1952 events at the college, it too represented a larger shift in which experimental theater commingled with what came to be known as performance art, in that both models probed non-narrative performance situations, employed experimental music, broke with strict theater in their use of spontaneous or unscripted events, and disrupted traditional spatial relationships of audience to stage.

**Buckminster Fuller and Total Design.** Buckminster Fuller, in contrast, was only dimly interested in the conditional or accidental. His method of experimentation was oriented toward the acceptance of unforeseen tactical failures in the interest of long-term strategic goals. Experimentation, for Fuller, was the process of aligning specific faults of a tested form with the regularity of a holistically conceived system, a system he termed "comprehensive" or "total" design. The goal of design, to Fuller, was to convert traditionally compensatory political thinking into "anticipating and laboratory experimenting." These experiments toward

comprehensive knowledge—proposed and tested by Fuller and other nonspecialists—were ostensibly set forth for the greater good of society.

This model of experimentation played out in the late 1940s through Fuller's research on the structural properties and social benefits of geodesics, defined as the arcs of great circles. Because they mirrored the form of the earth itself, spheres were a main component in Fuller's argument that he was discovering the universal laws of nature occurring on "Spaceship Earth." Fuller's initial, unsuccessful attempt to assemble a geodesic dome took place during his first summer at Black Mountain in 1948. He began collaborating with the sculpture student Kenneth Snelson in developing what Fuller termed "tensegrity," a new and unique engineering principle of discontinuous compression and continuous tension that he viewed as extending his work with "energetic geometry" (e.g., physical models of energy and tension seen in closely packed spheres). The geodesic dome, which employed tensegrity innovations, became a touchstone for Fuller's notion of holistic planning, an efficient *ur*-structure central to his reconsideration of postwar housing, transport, and communications as networked systems.

Yet the articulation of "total thinking," culminating in the successful erection of a geodesic dome on campus in 1949, was perhaps not the lasting consequence of Fuller's time at Black Mountain. It was his paradoxical stance of self-declared success in the face of apparent setback—his proposal of a model of experimentation that accommodated failure in the name of the larger holistic program—that proved to be Fuller's greatest contribution to Black Mountain, particularly in its selective adoption by Cage. In Cage's case, the acceptance of failure was enthusiastically embraced, and the programmatic element abandoned.

To step back a moment, it may be helpful to ask what the implications of Fuller's "total thinking" as a model of experimentation are. Though the comprehensive designer was charged with thinking broadly about social problems, the wider, more inclusive breadth of society was not necessarily invited to participate in design. Fuller's heady proposition of artist-scientists seeking truths beyond organized politics was a self-described "design revolution," the parameters of which could be understood only years into the future. Fuller's utilitarian version of experiment as a test and proof of total systems found company with many postwar iterations of pattern and network theory emerging out of the New Bauhaus in Chicago (later renamed the Institute of Design [ID]), where Fuller taught prior to Black Mountain, and particularly with the work of his ID colleagues László Moholy-Nagy and György Kepes. Design for these men was not a product but a social process (a distant echo, to very different effects, of Albers's "art is not an object but an experience"); experiment proved that "structures are not *things*" but patterns. Design processes should reveal underlying, universal truths hidden in patterns and networks.

Fuller's still controversial version of technocracy presented a picture of total design—contingency, alternative platforms, and even human agency itself eliminated—in a world of self-sacrificing nonspecialists risking failure to improve unproductive habits in society. Whereas Cage and Albers argued over degrees of contingency, Fuller regarded experimentation as a process moving knowledge toward a comprehensive, technocratic global order.

#### Experimentation between Chance and Design.

These three models of experiment initiated at the college—the methodical testing of the appearance and construction of form in the interest of designing new, though ever contingent, visual experiences (Albers); the organization of aleatory processes and the anarchical acceptance of indeterminacy (Cage); and "comprehensive, anticipatory design science" that tests traditional artistic and architectural forms, and embraces temporary failures, in order to teleologically progress toward a utopia of efficiently managed resources (Fuller)—represent incipient directions of postwar art practice and social praxis, elements of which would be sampled, if not wholly adopted, by Black Mountain students and subsequent practitioners. In spite of their different proposals for experimental art practice—from explorations of contingency to schemes of total design—the cases presented here each attempted to establish experimentation in opposition to self-expression or spontaneous immediacy. And it is important to note again that in the immediate postwar period, expressionistic practices were, in fact, the ascendant ones.

One should understand the models of experimentation discussed here as being aligned around axes of methodology and place. The axis of place maps a trajectory of spatial and discursive moves from Europe to America—though sometimes from America to Europe—in particular, a cross-circulation of Bauhaus ideas and their stateside reception, as well as a consideration of the German audience for John Dewey's theories. The line of methodological inquiry charts a continuum of experimental practices from the chance-derived to the highly ordered, designed, and, in the case of Fuller, technophilic. The coincidence that concepts and practices employing a notion of the experimental test flourished at Black Mountain College, at the same early 1930s moment during which many European models of experimental social and aesthetic practice were being foreclosed upon by political persecution and the ensuing "call to order" of a return to artistic tradition, is also implicit here. The Bauhaus project in particular—a utopian vision of aesthetic form integrated with society (art, architecture, design, and performance seen contextually and as part of modernist industry, transport, infrastructure, communication and media, housing, and education)—in its U.S. reception, fractured at times into a depoliticized notion of experimentation as mere interdisciplinary conversations. In recent years art and architectural historians have been rethinking how form is

taught to students and meaning communicated in artworks, regrouping after years of cultural relativism in which criterion for evaluating projects of modernist innovation were deeply shaken. Above all, the Bauhaus was a program, or at least a series of competing programs, that offered students training in the observation of form and its creative rearticulation. It presented students with a persuasive sense of order and design as a means to think about the social stakes of form in a collaborative, interdisciplinary fashion, and to rework outmoded, routinized production that leads to repetition and stagnation. The minimization of explicit links between aesthetics and social praxis at Black Mountain, in contrast, left the college open to criticisms of it as a communitarian venture of artistic practitioners living a kind of enlightened social experiment of interdisciplinary affinities as social progress, divorced from an earlier avant-garde's aspirations to link developments in aesthetic form to wider, socially transformative ramifications.

The specific postwar context of Black Mountain College's most propitious, creative years also has manifold implications for the rhetoric and practices of experimentation nurtured there. Not only did the college benefit from a bevy of talented veterans who brought generous G.I. Bill funding (the students Noland, Rauschenberg, and Snelson, among many others, took advantage of the U.S. government's few-strings-attached cash payments for tuition and living expenses to attend the unaccredited, art-focused Black Mountain College), but the widespread association in postwar society between experimentation and cultural value, following the immense technological advances of the war-driven economy, no doubt influenced the frequency of the term's invocations on the campus. In this light it is easy to see the invitation to Buckminster Fuller to head the college upon the Alberses' departure as an endorsement of his sense of the horizon of experimentation as opening onto questions of scientific truth and advancement.

One must also recognize the close interrelationship of experimentation with politics, suggesting that working "experimentally" in a cultural practice (in these cases, art, architecture, and music) casts a shadow venture, a project of posing models of how to test and organize new forms of political agency and social life. For Josef Albers, the "ethics" of a careful, trained visual attention to the world of form often substituted pedagogy and personal growth for forms of collective politics or social transformation. For Cage, indeterminacy in musical composition mirrored his idea of a fundamentally uncontrollable and anarchic world, though he created meticulous chance protocol structures to eliminate personal bias and the crust of habit. And finally, for Fuller, total design in architectural form extended toward types of efficient technocratic social and political organization that, at times, shaded into forms of libertarian utilitarianism. Yet the attribution of a common experimental basis to their works and inventions, and their reinterpretations of tra-

dition, brings to the fore a common impulse to change present and control future conditions. Experiment as a testing of the past or as a moving toward unforeseen experiences was nevertheless a quest for new, more adequate, and politically progressive and inclusive understandings of the world. One would not experiment if the current state of affairs—the status quo—was perceived as satisfactory. This extension of the project of artistic experiment to a redefinition of life conditions was of course as fraught as those preceding it in earlier moments of twentieth-century modernism.

Ultimately, Black Mountain College allows us to understand how experimentation emerged as one of *the* crucial midcentury modernist practices. The legacy of Black Mountain College is precisely bound up with contradictory visions of modernism as inextricably interwoven with the logic of experimentation—the interest in testing as an exploration of a paradoxical "fact of contingency," to use Louis Althusser's phrase. It should be clear that the category of experimentation elucidates a crucial conflict around American artistic purpose in the late 1940s. In proposing experiment as a model for understanding interdisciplinary practices of the postwar period, a clearer understanding can emerge of Black Mountain College's role in generating new methods and objects of artistic production, innovative critiques about the constitution and uses of form in its time, and then developing working means to effect those critiques. Black Mountain participants' ambitions to transform habits of perception, systems of intention, and patterns of tradition have essential implications for understanding not only modernist but subsequent art and architecture practices.

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EVA DIAZ

**BLAIR, HUGH** (1718–1800), Scottish divine, rhetorician, and the first person to occupy the distinguished Regius Chair of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Edinburgh (1762). Blair was part of the literata circle of Edinburgh, which included David Hume, Lord Kames, and Adam Smith. He assisted in the publication of various literary and philosophical works in Edinburgh and in the exchange of letters and works between Scottish adversaries such as Hume and Thomas Reid (Wood, 1986).

A popular preacher and instructor, Blair wrote *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), widely used as a text in both the United States and Great Britain. The work saw numerous editions and abridgments, making Blair the most widely published rhetorician of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Schmitz, 1948; Carr, 2002).

Blair played a key role in the controversy surrounding the publication of the poems of Ossian, allegedly translated from ancient Gaelic documents by James Macpherson. Along with John Home, Blair persuaded Macpherson to publish two collections of these poems: *Fingal* (1762) and *Temora* (1763). Suspicions about their authenticity began to surface early from Samuel Johnson and eventually from Hume, but through it all Blair remained supportive (Burton, 1846, pp. 462–480). In *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian* (1763), Blair likened the ancient poet to a Scottish Homer and considered the epics prime examples of the classical style. An 1805 report by the Highland Society of Scotland, however, found that the poems were forgeries (Schmitz, 1948).

Like most members of the Scottish Enlightenment, Blair was an empiricist and a proponent of associationism. For these philosophers, aesthetic values are merely expressions of sentiment. Thus, Blair writes that taste is “ultimately founded on an internal sense of beauty, which is natural to men, and which, in its application to particular objects, is capable of being guided and enlightened by reason” (*Lectures*, Vol. 1, p. 30). Although subjective, “taste is far from being an arbitrary principle, which is subject to the fancy of every individual” because there is a uniformity with respect to the operations of our perceptions (p. 34). Consequently, art that is truly beautiful will be recognized as such through the ages. “That which men concur the most in admiring, must be held to be beautiful. His taste must be esteemed just and true, which coincides with the general sentiments of men” (p. 30). In this way, taste is subject to an objective, empirical standard.

Although the standard is the “general sentiments of men,” good taste is not determined by majority rule, for one’s sentiments must be properly tuned through education and practice. “Our sense of beauty is refined by frequent attention to beautiful objects.” Also, reason plays an important role in judgments of taste and such judgments are open to improvement (Cohen, 1958). This is important because “moral beauties” are classified among the objects of taste. “A cultivated taste increases sensibility to all the tender and humane passions” (Blair, *Lectures*, Vol. 1, p. 12; Brinton, 1992, p. 40). As our aesthetic sentiments improve, so do our moral sentiments.

Many will note a similarity between Blair’s views and those of Hume, but the theory just sketched owes as much to the thoughts of Alexander Gerard and Edmund Burke. Moreover, Blair was adverse to Hume’s ideal critic because “there is no such living standard, no one person to whom all mankind will allow such admission to be due” (Blair, *Lectures*, Vol. 1, p. 30).

Blair’s attitudes about the sublime were also heavily influenced by Burke. He notes some typical examples: “infinite space”; “the burst of thunder or of cannon”; “the grandeur of earthquakes and burning mountains”; “darkness, solitude, and silence”; “a Gothic cathedral” (pp. 45–52). The remaining question is whether there is “some one fundamental quality in which all these different objects agree” (p. 54). Blair considers some suggestions, including one he attributes to Burke, “that terror is the source of the sublime” (p. 55). This position is flawed given that vast, open spaces and the starry sky are not in any way terrifying (p. 55). In the end, Blair endorses a skepticism about finding a single feature essential to the sublime, although he favors the quality of “mighty power or force” above others (p. 56; see Hipple, 1957, p. 127).

One of Blair’s more interesting categories is that of the “moral, or sentimental sublime” (*Lectures*, Vol. 1, p. 52). Virtues such as courage are a source of moral sublimity because “they produce an effect extremely similar to what is produced by the view of grand objects in nature; filling the mind with admiration, and elevating it above itself” (pp. 52, 54). The previously noted connection between aesthetic and moral values is contained in this example of the sublime (Brinton, 1992, pp. 36 ff).

Connections between Blair’s moral theory and his theory of rhetoric are of interest as well. Blair was part of the belletristic tradition, which has recently come under attack for being both overly formal and elitist (Broaddus, 1994; Agnew, 1998). Indeed, there is also the matter of whether Blair was consistent with his own advice in this regard, suggesting that perfect eloquence requires that we engage with the passions in a way that is apparently lacking in his own works (Brinton, 1992). Perhaps some of these perplexities may be settled through a better understanding of the influence of Stoic philosophy on Blair’s thought (Agnew, 2003).

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