

Soundless Rhythm

Victor Durà-Vilà

1. Introduction

This chapter has three goals; first and foremost, to establish the idea that rhythm does not require sound. I maintain that a universe without creatures with aural capacities, or a universe without the physics that make sound possible, would still potentially be a universe with rhythm. Although the case seems straightforward, the overwhelming influence of discussions of rhythm in relation to music and poetry may, perhaps unreflectively, create a state of opinion where, for some people, this is not so obvious and its consequences not so evident. Dance is crucial for my argument here. Second, I develop a defence of rhythm in painting, but the lessons are transferable to photography, sculpture, and architecture. Finally, I advance the view that we can readily conceive of rhythm in relation to senses other than sight and hearing.¹ The upshot is that the very notion of soundless rhythm can encourage the creative aesthetic explorations of these sense modalities, and that awareness of what rhythm may achieve in the traditional art forms can motivate these explorations, without limiting them or downplaying their original nature.

2. Rhythm without Sound

This section argues that neither music nor sound are necessary for the existence of rhythm.² I begin by confronting what, in my opinion, is the strongest challenge to my position, namely, Andy Hamilton's account of rhythm. I then put forward the positive case for soundless rhythm and chiefly use dance to motivate and exemplify my proposal. Finally, I build on Peter Simons' work in this volume to elaborate a

¹ Throughout this chapter, for the sake of simplicity, I confine my discussion to the traditional five senses. Obviously, such a view of the senses is no longer tenable in light of the current understanding of the senses. However, for the purposes of this chapter, it is acceptable to restrict ourselves to the traditional division. Furthermore, I use the terms "sense," "sense modality," and "sensory system" as synonymous. Likewise, I will write the following pairs interchangeably: "sight" and "vision," "smell" and "olfaction," and "taste" and "gustation."

² In what follows, it becomes apparent why I need to refer to both music and sound, as opposed to sound only.

definition of rhythm that is *neutral* regarding the *sensorial input* required for the production and experience of rhythm.

Hamilton's work on rhythm does not focus narrowly on the concept, but is rather part of a broader project which attempts to challenge, among other targets, the influential metaphorical interpretation of the notion of movement as applied to music.³ Therefore, it must be admitted from the outset that there are theoretical pressures and ambitions in Hamilton's work with which I will not engage even though they contribute to the aspect of his theory of rhythm that is of interest to me in this chapter. However, I am persuaded that I can discuss the relevant ideas of his work, if not to their full potential, at least in such a way that is useful for my own purposes here, without distorting their meaning and implications in relation to rhythm.

Some of Hamilton's formulations might seem to point to a rather ecumenical strategy regarding rhythm, one that could be consistent with the notion of soundless rhythm (as will be explained below) by dint of not prioritizing music or sound over dance or movement. So, for example, Hamilton writes that "Producing music is not more primitive or basic than moving rhythmically, or dancing."⁴ Indeed, his definition of rhythm could be read as allowing its existence through senses other than hearing and, consequently, as being sympathetic to the idea of soundless rhythm, i.e., rhythm existing independently of music or sound:

rhythm is order within human-bodily-movement or movement-in-sound that is perceivable through one or more of the senses, and achieved when accents are imposed on a sequence of sounds or movement.⁵

Nevertheless, Hamilton does not really espouse a view that puts music and dance on the same footing with respect to his conceptualization of rhythm. The following quotation effectively captures the position antithetical to mine:

Rhythm is essential to music, and—a stronger claim—rhythm and music cannot be defined independently of each other. They are internally related and form a conceptual circle or holism.⁶

The conceptual hegemony of music with regard to rhythm is compatible with the role of movement in Hamilton's definition because his view of what counts as musical (or incipiently musical) is very broad, perhaps uniquely so. For instance, he

³ I will focus on Hamilton, *Aesthetics and Music*, and "Rhythm and Stasis," rather than on his own contribution to this volume (see Chapter 1), since those texts are fixed and it is easier to engage with and quote from them. However, I do so while being aware that his text in the present collection is continuous with his earlier writings.

⁴ Hamilton, *Aesthetics and Music*, 127. In fact, he argues that "Dance, poetry and music are conceptually inseparable in that rhythm is essential to each, and none can be understood independently of it" (Hamilton, "Rhythm and Stasis," 39). The same formulation appears in Hamilton, *Aesthetics and Music*, 119; see also 144.

⁵ Hamilton, "Rhythm and Stasis," 37.

⁶ Hamilton, *Aesthetics and Music*, 127.

maintains that “Rhythm is an essentially musical feature of apparently non-musical, but incipiently musical, events or processes [e.g., human bodily movements].”⁷

Hence, even when rhythm is ascribed to human movement, it is in a musical sense that it is so ascribed.⁸ Even more tellingly in relation to my wider thesis of soundless rhythm in this chapter, Hamilton is very skeptical of the possibility of creating rhythm through light and unambiguously rejects the idea of rhythm being produced through olfaction.⁹ I discuss senses other than vision and hearing in Section 4. In what immediately follows, I defend the idea that we can have a perfectly good understanding of rhythm without recourse to music or sound.

I start by pointing out the numerous works in contemporary dance where there is no music or sound and yet in which there is undoubtedly rhythm. There are other cases where the dance was created independently of the music to be played during the performance, with the only exception being an agreement on the length of the piece; this way of creating dance was famously exemplified by Merce Cunningham. Nobody would deny that, while witnessing the rehearsal of a piece by Cunningham, one could experience the rhythm of a given choreographic phrase or a segment of the dance work despite there being no music played. I fail to see how one could describe the rhythm found in a soundless piece of dance as musical without invoking a stipulative and ad hoc concept of the musical (or incipiently musical). One could perfectly well conceive of a universe without sound, or a human species without hearing, where dance would still be an art form and rhythm an important aspect of our experience of dance. It seems a *reductio* to maintain that in that soundless universe, the dance would be musical (or incipiently musical), since it would lead to accepting that in a universe without sound there would be musical phenomena, even if only of a minimal kind.

However, my contention is not only that there is rhythm that can be ascribed *solely* to dance in cases of choreographies created with no input from music, but that this is true of *all* dance works. It is an unjustifiable oversimplification to argue that the rhythm of a dance is a musical rhythm because the dance is choreographed to music. There are many dance works in which the rhythm of the choreography follows, in one way or another, the rhythm of the music; it is also true that in other cases the rhythm of the music is either subverted by the dance or completely ignored. However, those considerations are beside the point, since my position is that in every case rhythm can be ascribed to dance without conceptualizing it as musical or incipiently musical analogously to the cases in which there is no music or sound.

Moreover, against Hamilton’s skepticism about experiencing rhythm through light, it seems to me plain that the opposite is true. Prestigious choreographers whose works do not sit on the fringes of the art form, but are widely performed

⁷ Hamilton, *Aesthetics and Music*, 145.

⁸ Hamilton, *Aesthetics and Music*, 127.

⁹ Hamilton, “Rhythm and Stasis,” 26–8.

and have enjoyed great critical acclaim (e.g., Jiří Kylián and Russell Maliphant) have created works where light is used in a clearly rhythmic fashion. The same would be true of the rhythm found in fireworks. To make my point even more salient, one can imagine being so far away from the fireworks that the sound is not heard, but the light effects are fully visible: one could perceive, analyze, and describe the rhythm of the fireworks, without reference to music or sound. As in the case of dance, to regard such displays of rhythm as musical appears unjustified and ad hoc.

Roger Scruton's views on rhythm seem to be compatible with my defence of soundless rhythm in dance. Scruton does emphasize the close connection between music and dance, a connection not limited to rhythm, but related to musical movement more generally.¹⁰ Nonetheless, he asserts that "Rhythm is a property of dancing and also of speech."¹¹ In the absence of any commitment to the idea that rhythm in dance has to be understood as musical or that there is some sort of conceptual priority of music over dance, I believe that the natural interpretation of Scruton is that rhythm can exist in dance *simpliciter*.

After having brought out the idea of soundless rhythm, I deem it appropriate to posit a definition that is inclusive of other senses besides hearing. I find Peter Simons' definitional approach to rhythm very much in sync with my overall view and theoretical needs in this essay.¹² He explicitly admits to prioritizing music over other art forms in his discussion of rhythm, but at the same time makes it clear that his notion of rhythm is not exclusively musical or, indeed, sound related. This is rather obvious when he provides unproblematic examples of processes that exhibit rhythm, such as

the swinging of a leg or a pendulum, the jiggling of a foot in time to music, the steps of a dance. They do *not have to be musical*: the walking of a person, the breathing of a fish and the galloping of a horse are also rhythmical, and *not just in sound*.¹³

At this point we must pay attention to Simons' definition of rhythm: "It is a repeatable (and typically repeated) pattern of sounds and silences [in time]."¹⁴ Given the earlier quotation from Simons, I believe that I can remain loyal to the spirit of his definition while constructively amending its letter to suit my purposes. In short, I propose that the idea of repeatable pattern can be expanded beyond "sounds and silences" to other sensorial inputs. I do not think that this modification does any violence to Simons' proposal, but simply expands it by taking a cue from his own examples. At the same time, I am fully sympathetic to Simons' strategy of focusing

¹⁰ Scruton, "Thoughts on Rhythm," 229.

¹¹ Scruton, "Thoughts on Rhythm," 250; see also 234.

¹² He does not seem to agree with the view I put forward in this section in relation to rhythm in painting, given his remark about rhythm in graphic patterns: see Simons, Chapter 3, "Ontology of Rhythm," this volume, 63; but it seems misguided to make much of this potential disagreement owing to the brevity of the comment.

¹³ Simons, "Ontology of Rhythm," 63 (my emphasis).

¹⁴ Simons, "Ontology of Rhythm," 69–70.

on music: given the dimension of the challenge that a definitional and ontological project such as his faces, it does seem advisable to concentrate on the paradigmatic art form as far as rhythm is concerned. I can now benefit from the outcome of his work in order to explore the concept of rhythm in relation to art forms other than music.

Hence, I contend that rhythm is a repeatable (and typically repeated) pattern of sensorial inputs in time, it being well understood that by “inputs” I mean positive sensorial stimuli and their absence (the wider sensorial analogue to Simons’ “sounds and silences”). Once this definition has been accepted, the examples of soundless rhythm alluded to above cease to present any particular theoretical problem.

3. Rhythm in Painting

I would now like to extend the idea of soundless rhythm into art forms such as painting, photography, sculpture, and architecture. I begin with two preliminary remarks. First, the success of the notion of soundless rhythm explained in the previous section in relation to dance (in addition to lighting and fireworks) does not depend on its being applicable to other art forms, such as painting or architecture. The reverse is true as well: it could be that my proposal in this section is received sympathetically by someone who disagrees with the argument advanced earlier. Of course, in both cases I endeavor to support a broad conception of rhythm as not manifested exclusively in sound, but recognizable through the different art forms. I discuss the importance of a relevant continuity in the concept of rhythm across different art forms in this section and the next.

Second, I find it most useful to engage with Jason Gaiger’s contribution to this volume in order to establish the existence of rhythm in painting, since he precisely rejects my contention. In fact, Gaiger’s chapter allows for a very effective development of my position because of the deft structure of his text and the careful consideration he gives to the potential criticisms of his own view. While my focus here is, following Gaiger’s lead, on painting, I hope that it will be relatively uncontentious that the lessons learnt from reflecting on painting can be readily applied to photography, most obviously, but also to sculpture and architecture.¹⁵

There is much that I find congenial in the way Gaiger sets up the enquiry concerning the possibility of there being genuine rhythm in painting. I take it that, in line with current musicological trends, we are not concerned with the properties of the painting itself, but with what is perceived by the viewer.¹⁶ Moreover, all parties

¹⁵ See “Pictorial Experience and the Perception of Rhythm,” Chapter 19 in this volume. Hence, when I use the word “painting” referring to the art form rather than an object, it should also be understood as applicable to photography, sculpture, and architecture, unless I am discussing something specific to painting itself.

¹⁶ Gaiger, “Pictorial Experience,” 307–8. Here, as in the rest of the paragraph, I follow Gaiger’s text very closely.

agree about the *temporal nature* of rhythm. Hence, any meaningful ascription of rhythm to a painting will require showing that an array of lines and brushstrokes can sustain a *durational experience* that can be recognized as containing rhythm. Merely considering the non-durational nature of a painting might make the previous proposition seem implausible, but we soon realize that “the process of looking at a painting is something that takes place over time.”¹⁷ It follows that, at least in principle, viewers can attend to temporal phenomena and, consequently, to rhythmic structures in paintings. With this much agreed on, the crucial point of contention presents itself: for there to be rhythm in painting, we need to elucidate whether or not the elements of paintings (i.e., the marks on the canvas, in whichever way one wants to conceptualize them: lines, colors, shapes, figures, etc.) are to be perceived over time in a rhythmic fashion.¹⁸ In the remainder of this section, I examine Gaiger’s rejection of this possibility and submit my defence of it.

Let me take up first what I consider to be the most serious challenge to my proposal here and look at lesser threats later. Gaiger writes:

The position I shall defend is that pictorial experience takes place in time, and thus is successive, but that it cannot be temporally structured in a sufficiently determinate manner to sustain the kind of attentional focus required for the communication of even simple rhythmic patterns.¹⁹

It seems clear that Gaiger would accept the existence of rhythm in painting if there were *requirements on viewers* that resulted in their pictorial experience being structured in such a way that the experience of rhythm was included. This is, therefore, the crux of my contention: making use of what I take to be the most popular theories of interpretation on offer in current anglophone aesthetics, the requirements necessary for viewers to experience rhythm in paintings can be established.

The sustained research effort of the last few decades has taken us away from, as we may judge them now, rather crude and radical views that either maintained a naive authorial intentionalism or proclaimed the absolute disregard of authorial intentions along the lines of the well-known thesis of the death of the author. For the most part, participants in the contemporary debate tend to gravitate toward three different positions: moderate actual intentionalism, hypothetical intentionalism, and weak or moderate anti-intentionalism.²⁰ My task here is to explain how we can posit a requirement to experience rhythm in painting that is consistent with any of these three mainstream theories of interpretation.

¹⁷ Gaiger, “Pictorial Experience,” 307–8.

¹⁸ I use advisedly the phrase “are to be perceived” instead of “are designed,” “are organized,” or “are required to be perceived” in order to maintain neutrality with regard to matters that soon will become critical to developing my argument.

¹⁹ Gaiger, “Pictorial Experience,” 308.

²⁰ Although some contributors to this debate admittedly focus on literature or other narrative art forms, I believe, as do other authors, that these positions can (and should) be extended to all art forms regardless of whether their works have literary or narrative content.

Sensible varieties of *anti-intentionalism* do not suggest that interpretative efforts discard what we can learn about the intentions of the author of a given work of art, but neither do they limit or restrict interpretation to the meaning intended by the author. An attractive version of anti-intentionalism, the *value maximizing theory*, advocates that the goal of interpretation is to maximize the artistic value of each work of art within certain constraints having to do with each work's identity.²¹

Let us take Gaiger's own example, Raphael's *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes*.²² I would submit that our aesthetic experience²³ of Raphael's painting is *more satisfying* if we subscribe to an interpretation that follows Kenneth Clark's elucidation of the rhythm exhibited by the group of heroic fishermen, which is quoted by Gaiger.²⁴ Indeed, one can perceive other instances of rhythm in the painting beyond what is alluded to in Clark's quotation, for instance, by noticing the groupings of different birds, from those in the foreground of the painting to those in the distant background. Perhaps the most conspicuous example is that of the four birds flying above the river, the first two getting relatively close to the fishermen. The notion of rhythm can be used not only to focus the viewers' attention on the internal dynamic of these bird groupings (analogously to Clark's description focusing on the internal dynamic of the fishermen), but also to underscore the potential connection between the groupings themselves, where the pictorial motif repeats itself as it reduces in size and impact while changing, much as a musical rhythmic motif that dies out as it repeats itself while effecting certain variations. The inter-group rhythmic connection could be posited as well for the groups of people other than the fishermen, from those who are close to the river to those that recede into the background.

Therefore, those subscribing to the value maximizing theory need only point to any of the many examples throughout art history in which rhythm is salient, such as the Raphael painting just discussed. An interpretation of the painting including rhythm is to be preferred to an alternative which does not since the experience derived from and the value ascribed to the painting will be superior with than without rhythm. Evidently, the value-maximizing theorist will support an interpretation containing rhythm regardless of any considerations involving the intentions of the painter.

We may wonder, on Gaiger's behalf, whether the interpretation of paintings might guide the direction of the viewer's experience of rhythm. Should the group of heroic fishermen be viewed from right to left or vice versa? I do not think that this presents much of a problem. First of all, we should allow that, due to the dramatic differences between art forms at many levels, it is perfectly reasonable for rhythm

²¹ Davies, "Author's Intentions, Literary Interpretations." For other useful texts on anti-intentionalism, see Dickie and Wilson, "The Intentional Fallacy"; Gaut, "Interpreting the Arts," and "Understanding Cinema"; and Lamarque, "Death of the Author."

²² Gaiger, "Pictorial Experience," 316f.

²³ Insofar as it is usually understood that aesthetic value contributes to artistic value, and as long as we think of aesthetic value as the value afforded by our aesthetic experience, we honor the commitment of the value-maximizing theory as explained earlier in relation to artistic value. For those who think that non-aesthetic artistic value does not exist, the problem is solved by reformulating the value-maximizing theory accordingly.

²⁴ Clark, *Looking at Pictures*, 64–5, quoted in Gaiger, "Pictorial Experience," 314.

in painting not to have the normative directionality encountered in music, dance, or poetry. But, secondly, in some (perhaps many) cases, it will be obvious what the most aesthetically satisfying way of viewing a given composition is. For instance, if we draw our attention to the birds flying over the river and getting closer to the fishermen, it would seem very counterintuitive and even unpleasant to view them against the direction of their flight, i.e., from the one closest to the fishermen to the one most removed.

According to *hypothetical intentionalism*, the interpretation of a work of art should not correspond with the actual intentions of its author, but with the hypothetical intentions that people, when interpreting and focusing on the work itself, ascribe to the author as being most likely, their having made or been given certain contextual and background assumptions about said author.²⁵ Hence, documentary evidence that might illuminate what the author actually intended is of no use for those endorsing hypothetical intentionalism.

I maintain that any judicious hypothetical intentionalist would want to postulate, merely on the basis of the analysis of the composition of the painting, that Raphael intended that rhythm be perceived by those looking at his painting along the lines, broadly speaking, of Clark's description. Of course, we are thinking here of "Raphael" as the hypothetical or postulated author or, in this case, painter. Whether or not Raphael *actually* thought in terms of the concept of rhythm (and if so, how similar his conception might have been to our own notion) is of no consequence. The crucial contention is that we can justifiably hypothesize Raphael's intention that the viewer undergo the type of experience captured by Clark's remarks on the painting. To resist positing said intention would appear to run contrary to a salient aspect of our experience of the painting and its critical appraisal. Therefore, one would need good reasons to resist such an interpretation.

For those favouring *moderate actual intentionalism*, the actual intentions of an author should at least dictate the contours or limits of the correct interpretation of a work of art, as long as those intentions are successfully realized.²⁶ At this point we face one of the standard problems of any version of actual intentionalism, namely, that often the actual intentions of an author are not accessible, nor is there any hope that they will be. One way to get around this problem is to emphasize the negative aspect of actual intentionalism: the commitment of this theory of interpretation is to avoid interpretations that are incompatible with the known intentions of the author, but not to require explicit, positive proof of every aspect of the interpretation of a work of art. Despite actual intentionalism being perhaps less forthcoming than either its hypothetical counterpart or the value maximizing theory in sanctioning

²⁵ Currie, "Interpretation and Objectivity," and "Interpretation and Pragmatics"; Levinson "Hypothetical Intentionalism," and "Defending Hypothetical Intentionalism"; and Nehamas "The Postulated Author." Versions of hypothetical intentionalism may differ with respect to the degree to which assumptions about the author (e.g., cultural background or context of creation) restrict the freedom of interpretation.

²⁶ Carroll, "Interpretation and Intention," and "Art Interpretation"; Livingston, *Art and Intention*; and Stecker, *Interpretation and Construction*, and "Moderate Actual Intentionalism Defended."

the ascription of rhythm to Raphael's *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, if it were decided that it did not have the capacity to do so, I would argue that it would run into serious trouble beyond any consideration of rhythm, given the ubiquitous potential occurrence of interpretative dilemmas of this kind, which hypothetical intentionalism and anti-intentionalism can standardly avoid.

I conclude then that in contemporary aesthetics we have the theoretical tools to meet Gaiger's challenge along the lines that viewers should be required to experience rhythm in paintings. I believe that this is particularly evident in any version of anti-intentionalism that is chiefly motivated by the maximization of artistic value. But I also contend that this should be accepted rather straightforwardly by the proponents of hypothetical intentionalism. Finally, I argue that moderate versions of actual intentionalism have the conceptual resources to endorse rhythm in paintings such as the one by Raphael discussed here.

Although I submit that the plausibility of my proposal concerning rhythm in painting lies on what I have developed so far in this section, I turn now, rather briefly, to two other worries that Gaiger considers. He devotes some effort to discussing the literature on eye-tracking.²⁷ There is empirical evidence that the human eye is not fixed on any given spot for more than 0.2–0.3 seconds, jumping from one point of the painting (or any other object for that matter) to another in a way that does not follow in a continuous fashion what we would think of as the most important features of the painting. Hence, there is no relationship between the way gaze movements are temporally ordered and the spatial disposition of the relevant elements of paintings. To be fair, Gaiger does not claim to establish this as a *positive reason* to discard rhythm in paintings;²⁸ nonetheless, he arguably finds some merit in the skepticism emanating from the empirical work on gaze movement. However, I remain unpersuaded for a very simple reason: as is well known, our perceptual experience does not correspond in any way with the reality of our gaze-movements, but rather with the experience of a continuous, seamless gaze.²⁹ Since, as mentioned earlier, Gaiger and I agree that the focus is on what is experienced by the viewer, I do not think that the empirical data derived from gaze-tracking experiments (interesting though it may be in its own right) provides any significant input regarding the topic under scrutiny here. Intriguingly, as commented on by Gaiger, the empirical findings to the effect that there are "areas of interest" in paintings, in the sense that "beholders tend to reiterate particular paths with their eyes,"³⁰ could plausibly help my cause in this chapter, as long as we may purport a pertinent connection between the repeated patterns and our experience of the painting. As Gaiger admits:

²⁷ Gaiger, "Pictorial Experience," 317.

²⁸ Gaiger is quite subtle in the wording of his view with regards to the meaning of the empirical work on gaze-movements. He writes: "At least as far as gaze-movements are concerned, there does not seem to be any evidence to support the claim that spatial patterns can be designed in such a way that they are apprehended by the viewer in a temporally ordered sequence" ("Pictorial Experience," 321).

²⁹ Kowler, "Eye Movements," 1472, quoted in Gaiger, "Pictorial Experience," 319.

³⁰ Rosenberg and Klein, "The Moving Eye," 92, quoted in Gaiger, "Pictorial Experience," 321.

The pattern is spatial not temporal but it does give structure to pictorial experience as something inherently durational. This recognition perhaps goes some way to meeting our intuition that there can be spatial as well as temporal rhythms and that certain works of graphic art have a pronounced rhythmic structure or rhythmic line that connects the different parts.³¹

While this is an exciting possibility, I need not explore it any further for present purposes, since I rest my case on what I have explained above in relation to what is required or demanded from viewers attending to paintings with rhythmic elements.

A different worry, according to Gaiger, is that we cannot find entrainment (or an analogue of it) in painting. I would be happy to bite the bullet here and accept that generally we do not have entrainment in the case of rhythm in painting. Given the vast differences between art forms, it would be surprising if every prominent aspect of rhythm in music and dance could be maintained in painting. I merely note that entrainment is not usually a definitional aspect of rhythm and for good reason: it would be problematic since, despite the fact that we often find entrainment in music and dance, there are cases where it is not an option, and yet no one contends that rhythm is not perceived. To give a clear example, many of Conlon Nancarrow's compositions (both the humanly and non-humanly playable) cannot produce anything by way of entrainment; nonetheless, they are perceived as highly rhythmic. The same is true of other examples of virtuoso music and dance. In the case of virtuoso dance, skilled professionals are able to entrain, but most members of the audience are not, though they often perceive the virtuoso dance as rich with rhythm.

Even though engaging with art forms other than painting is beyond the scope of my contribution to this volume, it should be apparent that the very same strategy deployed in painting can be successful in photography, sculpture, and architecture, allowing for the particular characteristics of each art form. It is not hard to imagine a photograph similar to Raphael's *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes* or a complex sculptural group with features that can require the viewer to appreciate rhythm. As for architecture, precisely because of the fact that repeated motifs are used very frequently in many styles, I believe that the notion of rhythm should be, if anything, easier to accept in this art form than in painting or sculpture.

After having articulated my proposal, I would like to highlight some of its benefits. To begin with, it is advantageous to preserve the notion of rhythm in painting: a great deal of critical commentary and scholarly work will not need to be reinterpreted, but can instead be taken at face value. Furthermore, there is another important gain to be had if the existence of rhythm in painting is admitted. Let us ponder the fundamental role that rhythm plays in the creation, experience, and critical reception and analysis of works of music, dance, and poetry. I maintain that

³¹ Gaiger, "Pictorial Experience," 326–7.

meaningful connections can be established among different and seemingly distant art forms if a notion of rhythm *continuous* with that of music, dance, and poetry can be successfully preserved in painting, photography, sculpture, and architecture. I would then propose that such connections among distant art forms may (and sometimes do) play a positive role in art creation and experience by way of fostering conceptualizations and modes of appreciation which benefit from being inspired, motivated or, perhaps simply, colored by one's acquaintance with a different art form.

Finally, I would like to turn to a methodological matter which, beyond capturing a potential contrast between Gaiger's and my own approach, underscores a point that affects the very motivation and scope of our respective inquiries. In this chapter, I have argued for a *normative* thesis in relation to the notion of rhythm in painting to the effect that the experience of rhythm is *required* for the correct appreciation of certain kinds of paintings, namely, those which exhibit the right features for being so experienced. Gaiger's article may be interpreted as defending a *descriptive* thesis rather than a normative one. On this reading, Gaiger is concerned with the *psychological possibility* of experiencing rhythm when looking at a painting.³² It is true that my normative approach presupposes an affirmative answer to the descriptive or psychological question. Nevertheless, barring empirical evidence to the contrary, which I do not think likely to be forthcoming, I believe that it is entirely possible to engage with paintings in a temporarily structured fashion that satisfies the definitional requirements of rhythm. One need only reflect on the therapeutic exercises recommended for several eye disorders where, in a very regimented manner, a person has to look at different spots on a wall or card board, in a precise order, at fixed time intervals, and so on. Given that the descriptive question seems unproblematic to me, I have naturally taken Gaiger's views to directly challenge my normative position. An alternative descriptive focus could be on the ways that people actually engage with paintings in relation to rhythm. Here, as in so many other matters concerning aesthetic appreciation, people will exhibit all kinds of behavior. This, if anything, will only incentivize paying attention to a normative approach, which will require exploring whether it is the right one and whether it can be plausibly developed. I hope to have made some progress on both related matters in this section.³³

³² Here, I am using the phrase "psychological possibility" very broadly and ecumenically. Depending on one's terminological preferences, the same thought could be conveyed with "cognitive possibility" or "experiential possibility."

³³ Of course, if one accepts that the perception of rhythm in paintings is psychologically possible, as argued above, then a normative thesis could be supported even if most people did not experience paintings in the prescribed way. It would make the defense of the normative thesis perhaps harder, but certainly not impossible. Throughout history, a majority of people have engaged wrongly with art for a wide variety of reasons: it was novel, subtle, unfamiliar, obscure, and so on. For instance, the fact that most people today might approach a Latin poem expecting rhyme and in ignorance of its rhythm should have no influence on how one ought to appreciate it.

4. Rhythm outside Sight and Hearing

In this final section, I examine artistic practices that may exhibit rhythm in sense modalities other than vision and hearing. Although a defence of soundless rhythm can be independently motivated for the reasons discussed in Sections 2 and 3, an exciting aspect of an enquiry such as this one is that it allows us to think about (and potentially motivate) new art practices. Considering these uncharted creative avenues fulfills a dual function in the context of the present chapter. First, reflecting on these options will help us to further refine and clarify the notion of soundless rhythm. In this respect, much of what I propose in what follows can be regarded as thought experiments. Second, it will also allow us to contemplate in what ways new art practices and, perhaps, art forms can be explored. Therefore, I am fully aware that the nature of this section is both speculative and ambitious, but I am satisfied that this is only to be expected given what I endeavor to investigate here.

At this point, it is necessary to revisit my modification of Simons' definition of rhythm: rhythm is a repeatable (and typically repeated) pattern of sensorial inputs in time. Next, I put forward a few examples to show that this expanded definition of rhythm is both sound and eminently accessible. My hope is that readers will relate to these examples simply by recourse to their own experiences of rhythm and of the different sensory systems invoked.

Let us take olfaction first, which has recently been the object of study in relation to the potential emergence of an art form centered around it.³⁴ I argue that it is perfectly conceivable that we could perceive rhythm through smell, that is to say, that rhythm can be created by using perfumes or scents. There are different ways of implementing the idea; for example, a device to be put on one's nose (it would not need to be a full mask covering the whole face) that discharges different scents in a very precise, sharp fashion.³⁵ The device would be controlled by software either in real time or through a preprogrammed routine. Given the current state of software development, for use both in the arts and elsewhere, the actual technical aspects of the program do not seem to pose any significant difficulty. That such a set-up could produce sensorial inputs in repeated patterns seems uncontroversial to me. Owing to the sophistication and breadth of already existing scent databases, the possibilities would be endless, not only in relation to the mere formal contrasts and connections that can be established among scents, but also to their associations with different aspects of human experience.³⁶ This final point is relevant to putting

³⁴ Shiner, "Art Scents." For a novel that explores the idea of an olfactory art, see Huysmans, *À rebours* ([1884] 1998).

³⁵ My point here is independent of (and, indeed, would adapt itself to) any empirical findings about the speed at which our sense of smell can experience different odors. In order to make sense of what I am trying to convey, one simply needs to reflect on how we register different scents during an activity in which we particularly focus on olfaction, such as, for instance, when cooking or enjoying an elaborate dish, or walking through a garden or forest heavily populated with aromatic plants.

³⁶ Shiner, "Art Scents," 380–1.

the rhythm generated through smell in the context of a more ambitious artistic enterprise, one that goes beyond simply creating rhythmic patterns.

As far as touch is concerned, no hypothetical scenario involving technology is necessary, although, naturally, such a possibility would always be an option. Without downplaying the ingenuity involved in giving massages in different cultures, one need only envision an approach that puts a greater focus on producing repeated patterns of touches. The amount of variation regarding the length and type of pressures that can be applied to one's skin, not to mention their different locations over one's body, speaks to the complexities of potential rhythmic patterns and the scope for the use of this sense modality. Of course, limitations on the repeatability of this kind of "artistic" massage and the fact that a massage calls for one "performer" per "spectator" could be readily overcome by using devices that resemble massage chairs, the only difference being that they would be more sophisticated and versatile, as required by the artistic ambitions of the project in question.

By analogy with the proposal for smell rhythm above, one can imagine how gustatory rhythm might be created. The idea of a device rhythmically discharging different types of flavors to different parts of the tongue is meant to make as intuitively accessible as possible the notion of gustatory rhythm. Two brief points of clarification are in order. One, given what we know about the mechanisms for sensing flavor, I am dramatically simplifying matters for the sake of ease of engagement with the thought experiment in a way that still renders it perfectly useful for my purposes here. In all likelihood, for this idea to work efficiently, the tongue would not be the only part of our sensorial make-up under consideration: as people who cannot taste their food on account of having a cold know all too well, there is more to taste than one's taste buds. Two, even though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to consider this matter, one may posit the existence of rhythm in the degustation menus of high-end restaurants. I refer to high-end restaurants because it is typically in those settings that a great deal of attention is paid to matters of order and timing of the different foods that are being consumed.

We could think of smoking cigars as, at least potentially, displaying rhythm in relation to olfaction and gustation. A viable notion of rhythm readily presents itself involving the frequency and sharpness (or, conversely, smoothness) of the smoke intake, the length of retention of the smoke in the vocal cavity and the manner of the exhalation. Indeed, there is a sense in which different people smoke cigars at different rhythms, where such sense of variation has to do with the aspects of smoking a cigar just mentioned. Other fictional scenarios are conceivable, including ones that involve a simultaneous plurality of sensorial inputs, a sort of multi-modal rhythmic structure, but I believe that the examples provided so far sufficiently establish what I propose in this section.

I finish with a reflection on the importance of postulating a viable notion of rhythm for those senses that, up until now, have been largely ignored in art creation and art practices. First of all, my hope is that the thought experiments described above further support the contention that soundless rhythm is a perfectly plausible

notion. In this respect, it is immaterial whether readers think that any of the fictional scenarios explained in this section will ever come to pass.

Second, I contend that there is no contradiction in maintaining that it is theoretically irrelevant whether or not a fictional scenario will become actual (in the tradition of the philosophical methodology on thought experiments), while at the same time positing that it is worth considering the role of soundless rhythm in the emergence of new art practices and, perhaps, art forms. Here, I simply wish to deploy the very same idea elaborated upon at the end of Section 3: a notion of rhythm that is continuous through different art forms or practices can lead to meaningful connections. However, this point is of vastly more consequence for new art practices than it is for traditional art forms, since novel art practices stand to benefit more from connections to conventional art forms in order to facilitate engagement, acquire status, and so on. Of course, points of contact between a novel art practice and a traditional one, while helping to consolidate the status of the former in the arts world, would not take away any of the originality of the newly explored art practice. In this respect, the influences between the traditional art forms and novel ones would not be any different from the influences among the traditional art forms themselves. Therefore, the acceptance or awareness that a robust experience of rhythm can be sustained by smell, taste, and touch could be significant for the very viability of artistic enterprises focused on these senses.

I was initially motivated to write this chapter by the opportunity to argue for soundless rhythm, an aspect of the broader concept of rhythm such as can be found in dance, that is often ignored or downplayed. I subsequently sought to establish the same notion in the more controversial realm of painting, photography, sculpture, and architecture. But here again I was defending what I believe exists and what we by and large recognize in our aesthetic experiences and critical practices. However, in the final part of this chapter, I have endeavored to propose some hypothetical scenarios, both as a way to additionally sustain the idea of soundless rhythm and as a means to perhaps motivate further developments in our art practices.³⁷

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³⁷ I am grateful to Jason Gaiger, Ted Gracyk, Andy Hamilton, and Peter Simons for their comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

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