Paul Caffell: Painting

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Paul Caffell's paintings, made with few interruptions since the early 1960s but largely out of the public gaze in recent decades, belong to a modernist tradition that understands art to be possessed of a high moral and historical purpose. This purpose is made particularly clear in the demands that these works make upon the viewer. There is a 'difficulty' about Caffell's imagery that runs counter to the over-eager desire of most contemporary art to please its spectator. Such an accommodation is paralleled in most contemporary art with a submission to the aesthetics and ideologies of the mass-culture that dominates the lives of both artist and spectator. In stark contrast to this 'aesthetic of the glimpse', Caffell's art needs time, for it cannot be taken in by a quick sweep of the eyes, and it operates wholly beyond the influence or even the imagination of mass-culture. For the nuances of carefully worked texture and tone to become apparent within what, at first, seem to be monochromes, we must pay protracted attention. Both the paintings and the artist's recent 'abstract' photographs, then, not only 'need time', they solicit an active concentration. It is in this need for attention that Caffell's work has its strongest link to the modernist tradition and makes its most emphatic rejection of the facile properties of contemporary culture, such as immediacy and repetition. It is also where these paintings and photographs move from being objects of aesthetic difficulty to assume, also, a historical role. The object of that concentration is form: the paintings are neither overtly narrative nor symbolic in their deployment of signs. Time, as a property of these works, is not a matter of content and organisation – repeated sets of internal durations that carry an unfolding story nor even a sensible patterning of abstract forms and intervals. Rather, within this work, time is returned - and we shall see that it is returned as an internal property rather than exterior effect – as a malleable 'substance' to the viewing subject. The motifs of Caffell's painting, even when certain forms are repeated or transformed within one canvas or from one canvas to

another, are not possessed of a particular, nor even a general, "meaning" in the way that one tendency of abstract art, as it derived from Kandinsky, might be said to take real objects in the world and 'pulverise' them into abstraction. These forms are not signs in the sense that they might stand in for or as anything other than themselves.

Caffell's paintings and his more recent photographs are profoundly associated with music – both as a source of inspiration and, more significantly I'd suggest, in a specific thematic of temporality. It is this question of time that I want to explore, at length, in this essay. In their use of temporality and indeed in the study they make of it – for a form of time could be said to be the content of these works – Caffell's art is quite distinctive, both in its affiliations within modernism and in its intractability within the world of contemporary art. The paintings are made whilst music plays in the studio: common enough you might think since on many studio visits to young artists you will find a CD player in the background, carrying the clichéd harmonies and melodies, the spuriously subjective lyrical expression of rock music. Common enough, you might think, when there are frequent overlaps between art and popular music, whether in collaborations or in pastiche performances or with artists who double-up in bands. Not so: Caffell's remains the only studio where I have listened to Henze, to Roberto Gerhard, to Boulez and to Stockhausen. This is not background music: the work of late-modernist composers is an art that in itself that demands attention, to *listen* rather than simply to hear. For Caffell the act of listening precedes the act of painting, and the formal method of composition in one medium becomes a model for another. Gerhard's Symphony no. 3 (*Collages*) is exemplary here; Caffell still speaks fondly of a work, first heard in the early 1960s, whose structural procedures profoundly affected his own. The concentration on one art is transferred, then, into the demands of another. It is 'procedure' that is adapted: these paintings are not 'interpretations' of late-modernist avant-garde music, however, in the way that the music, oddly enough, may be an interpretation of a score that in late modernism

sometimes resembles more closely a work of visual art than a conventional ordering of notes on staves.

I would suggest that there are significant parallels between late-modernist music and late-modernist painting here that go beyond procedure into their very principles of practice. Both forms of artwork seek autonomy – forever the grail of modernist practice. Both forms of artwork, in pursuit of that autonomy, explore the problematic of their own temporality. However time is not incorporated into the artwork as a mode of management or mastery over nature. This is what separates late-modernist music of the 1950s and 1960s from the experiments in form earlier in the twentieth century, and especially from programme music, as much as it largely separates late-modernist painters, such as Caffell or Mark Tobey, Ad Reinhardt or Philip Guston (in his abstract phase) from the exploration of temporality either in painting or the abstract films made by artists in high-modernism. It is also, of course, what distinguishes late-modernist music, emerging from the classical tradition, from that of popular culture. In its pursuit of both autonomy and, perhaps, historical critique, the appropriation and management of time within the artwork of high-modernism leads ultimately, and paradoxically, to an appropriation of time from the viewing (or listening) subject equivalent to that achieved by the forms of mass culture. Though it is attempted in the name of autonomy from, and is at the same time a critique of, modernity, this appropriation, - even as it presumes a liberation of the subject - perhaps has the same deleterious effects upon it as the isolated, repetitious surface experiences - those impacts that Walter Benjamin called *Erlebnis* - of modernity itself. [1] I suggest that it is only with the art of late modernism, whether in the music of Boulez, Carter, Kurtag and Gerhard, in film – given its mechanical registration of time the most intractable of media for subjective autonomy – with Rivette, Duras and Godard, in Paul Celan's poetry, Duras's and Sarraute's novels and Beckett's plays, or in art in the painting of Tobey, Guston and others, that an autonomy is achieved that does not come at the expense of the subject. This is where Caffell's painting may be best placed, and where it is of supreme importance. Indeed - too

late perhaps, given the trajectory of subjective degradation within modernity - it is in these arts, at this moment, from the mid 1950s onwards, that a new possibility for the subject is realised through their 'volatilising' of time. [2] This 'volatility', the diffusion and dispersal of time as an immanent property of the work in contrast to its strict management, or what might be understood as its annihilation through regulation, is achieved through an attention to timbre rather than rhythm – which is, perhaps, too close to the insistent beat of modernity – to texture rather than to pattern, to interiority rather than to causality, to event rather than to interval.

This is, then, an abstract painting that belongs to the tradition within modernism that shears figuration from representation in order to present the painting as thing in itself, as experience rather than displaced sign of external or prior experience. However, this tradition itself has its own problematic history: there is no immediately presented model within modernism where autonomy is achieved. Paradoxically, even as it is freed from the burden of pictorial representation by the 'scientific', veristic representational technologies of photography and film, and instead investigates the formal rules that govern it as a medium – especially with the advent of Cubism - modernist painting quickly turns to characteristics of another non-representational medium, music, as a rhetorical resource with which to pursue that investigation. As Peter Vergo observes, 'not until the twentieth century do we encounter...determined efforts to apply musical principles to painting – not simply to find pictorial equivalents for musical elements such as rhythm or syncopation, but actually to translate musical *structures* – fugue, canon and so on – into paint.' [3] As Vergo goes on to emphasise, the artists engaged in this project were particularly concerned with the use of colour, and in particular with establishing equivalence between colour in paint and tone in music. We witness this as much in Frantisek Kupka's desire to 'produce a fugue in colours, as Bach has done in music' [4] as in the composer Alexander Scriabin's idea of a 'colour organ'.

It is the same impulse that is pursued in proposals (at least) for abstract film and projections in performance, once painters begin to grasp the implications of the moving image for the enactment of a dynamic temporality stilled, but alluded to, in abstract painting. We see it, for example, in Léopold Survage's drawings for his *Le Rythme coloré* (1914), published in Apollinaire's journal *Les soirées de Paris* on the eve of World War One. If the intention here is on the one hand to mime the rhythmic pulse of music – the distribution of abstract signs across time – through their deployment in both space and time, there is an equal commitment to evoking 'mood' or 'feeling' through relationship of coloured forms. Survage certainly thinks of his work as autonomous, writing that 'it is an art in itself, even if it is based on the same psychological facts as music.' [5] Whilst Survage makes no mention of musical accompaniment for his film, a similar desire for the deployment of forms in time, albeit one distanced from the idea of rhythm or repetitive spacing, informs the British painter Duncan Grant's *Abstract Kinetic Collage Painting with Sound* (1914). This was not made as a film but as a painted paper scroll wound past a viewing aperture to the accompaniment of a recording of the Brandenburg Concertos. Grant therefore painted discrete sets of coloured abstract forms (all rectangles) with development and transition being from one set to another, rather than sustained by the illusion of continual change that the rapid frame-by-frame modifications of form in film would allow. The idea of the painting both *as music* (that is unwinding over time in the manner of a scroll) and as paralleled by, and accompanied by, music, would dominate the idea of abstract filmmaking in the 1920s. It is overt in Viking Eggeling's *Diagonal Symphony* (1922), shot frame-by-frame from a painted roll: as Claire Goll remarked, 'Eggeling came up with the contradictory attempt to film sequences that should develop like a symphony.' [7]

The Futurist Bruno Corra, in 'Abstract Cinema – Chromatic Music' (1912) theorised a similar equivalence between the duration and development of forms in music and in painting, wanting to create 'a music of colours'. Film allowed artists to first imagine and finally introduce temporality as an overt effect of the work, as well as a compositional element, where in early abstract painting time,

as an autonomous property of the work, could only be imagined through the repetition, rotation and displacement of static forms on the canvas, and was, therefore, always held in check by the spectator's attention, by the interiorised, and to that point pre-eminent and defining temporality of the viewing subject. Jean Metzinger would claim in *Cubisme et Tradition* (1911) that modernist painters had incorporated time into the art work; the imagination of film's possibilities would seem to be an attempt to extend this autonomy from the spectator. [8] However, as we shall see - and painters as early as the Puteaux Cubists Gliezes and Metzinger perhaps realised this - what it risks, at the same time as the work's freedom from the world is announced through its assumption of time as an element in an internal, autonomous nature, is an illusory severance from a history and ideology that in fact continues to structure it, and on which it can no longer comment. Additionally there is a subordination, and even a degradation, of the viewing subject by its sublimating effects, which are, in their temporal organisation and spatial deployment, often oddly at one with the subordinating and degrading effects of modernity on the subject, rather than offering historical criticism of them. This situation would become obvious in Oscar Fischinger's abstract films of the 1930s, where he took a tradition already abandoned by the avant-garde and used it as synchronised accompaniment to commercial recordings of orchestral music, deploying the same technique for advertisers as for art. The temporality of the avant-garde – so often profoundly at odds with the temporal regimes of modernity - becomes nothing more than the temporality of the machine, and as recording even Beethoven may be ratioed to it.

There is, then, at the heart of this modernist tradition, even as it works towards autonomy, a reciprocal movement towards sublimation, to the stripping away of the critical relation to language that might characterise subjectivity. (It is this tendency that will eventually lead abstract filmmaking towards the synthetic light and sound projects of the 1960s in which the spectator's consciousness is effectively dissolved.) Furthermore, even as it seeks to yoke its rhetorical forms to those of another medium, painting finds that music moves away from it. There is a radical shift in the form of

musical expression at the same moment as painting undergoes the transformation from the representation of external appearances and events to the expression of internal experience, and from realistic figuration to abstraction. This is exemplified by the music of Mahler and Schoenberg. As Robert Hullot-Kentor puts it: 'Whereas music since the seventeenth century had simulated subjectivity and dramatized passions, producing images of expression, Schoenberg's break from tonality achieved a depositional expression, a docket of the historical unconscious that registered impulses of isolation, shock, and collapse.' [9] As vanguard painting turns to music for rhetorical devices that will facilitate sublimation, so vanguard music seeks to de-sublimate its listeners, to bring to them the world in its non-representational reality. Even as they engage with the traditions of modernist painting in its relation to music – the search for autonomy through abstraction, the formal relation of spatial figures to musical motifs – Caffell's paintings are profoundly resistant to the tendency toward sublimation: they emphasise consciousness and attention, rather than encouraging a loss of the boundaries between the self and the work of art. In this sense their affinity, as modernist painting, is not with music *per se*, but with the avant-garde after Schoenberg. Of course, Caffell's paintings are not alone in this necessary insistence on intractability: it is, rather, a characteristic of certain late-modernist painting and writing (I'm thinking respectively of de Staël's abstract phase and of Beckett). Both are influenced by and parallel developments in avant-garde music in the 1950s, under the influence of Schoenberg and Webern.

This music, as Hullot-Kentor writes, discussing Adorno's defence of Schoenberg, simply through the degree of its isolation from mass-culture – the impossibility that it will become a tune hummed in the lift or the bathroom – becomes 'a singular repository of critical historical experience.' [10] There is a similar resistance to recuperation in Caffell's painting: if the music that inspires it cannot be 'hummed in the lift' the painting is equally resistant to any facile incorporation into the everyday. To attend to one of these paintings is an event that marks you, its spectator. What marks, or changes you, is not necessarily the overt content of the work as the practice of attention to it. The

content of the work is, then, the latent demand for attention that derives from the autonomy of its forms. Adorno's claim for 'modern music' was that the more perfectly the elements of that music *appeared* as nature the greater was the degree of its relation to history. This convergence of art as nature as history was achieved at the expense of legibility – that is, the elements of the music *were* history rather than *representing* history. 'New music no longer wants to be the image of expression but the expression itself' as Hullot-Kentor says. [11] What's striking here is that both these claims for art as nature (if not nature as history, we'll come to that) and art *as* expression rather than as representation, are close to the theorisations made by the composer Ferruccio Busoni in the early part of the twentieth century. Furthermore, those musings had a particularly powerful impact on painting. Busoni's *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music* (1907) posits a new form of composition that does not represent the world in symbolic forms, as programme music does (Richard Strauss's *Domestic Symphony* for example, or Debussy's *La Mer*) nor simply mould existing formal conventions into new works, as what was then known as 'absolute music' attempted to do. Busoni's idea for a new music was a composition that would *be* nature itself. The problem here, for composers as much as for painters who might want to follow their lead, is that a music *as* nature would be either formless – in that it would refuse the syntactical conventions of the medium – or it would be indistinguishable *from* nature and not recognisable as music. (In either case, therefore, such a work might end up sounding very much like some of John Cage's projects of the 1950s and '60s.)

The painter who is perhaps most influenced by Busoni is Francis Picabia, through Gabriele Buffet, who he met in 1908 and married shortly after. Buffet had been a student of the French composer Vincent d'Indy and was well aware of Busoni's ideas. Picabia's way out of the seeming formlessness of abstraction is through transformation of the existing world: his 'mechanomorphs' of 1914-15 can be interpreted not simply as appropriations of modernity as machine, but as ironic representations of modernity *as nature*, so that the organic is not subservient to the machine – as it is, crucially, in

certain parts of Léger's oeuvre – but locked in a bathetic unity, so that rather than human interiority, subjectivity, being substituted by the machine, it occupies a void within the mechanical. However, what Picabia's return to a figuration that embodies the principles of an autonomous organic, abstract composition also makes clear is that whilst Busoni's theorisation of the autonomy and integrity of the musical composition is appealing as a model for painting, and indeed the work of art in general, its resolution is less easily achieved. Seemingly, one practical solution is to fall back on a figurative painting that, in its use of convention, declares the failures of those conventions. One watches, or listens, not for difference but for the knowing deployment of the same, nature that has the *appearance* of culture.

This ironic (and accurate) deposition of the figure of nature as the machine within modernity would be balanced, and later challenged, by a series of projects that sought either to celebrate the body in rhythmic harmony with modernity or to restore it to nature. On the one hand we have Sonia Delaunay's paintings from the *Bal Bullier* nightclub or her pochoir designs that follow the rhythms of Blaise Cendrars's poem in *La Prose du Transsibérian et de la Petite Jehanne de France* (1913) (a text that itself obeys the mechanical rhythms of the trans-continental railway as apotheosis of modernity). Poised against this is Léger's work after World War One. Although his film *Ballet mécanique* (1923) was understood, almost from its first screening, as a pæan to modernity – in the manner of the Delaunays with whom Léger was associated before 1914 - we might see it, as Robin Turvey has suggested, [12] as a retreat or return to the human, to a figurative version of nature in opposition to the machine, and to a relation of the subject to time that, whilst it does not return us to harmony, nonetheless refuses easy syncopation. Léger's reaction to modernity in the 1920s can be judged, perhaps, by his remark on time, and in particular his critique of the ratio between the body and the machine that was established, in the regulation of time, by those fashionable ideologies of the factory age, 'Fordism' and 'Taylorism'. Léger remarks – and he could as easily be talking about the film camera as he is about the more general systematising of time in modernity –

that 'This merciless mechanic of time takes away all fantasy, all feeling of adventure from life. Even women have undergone this process of Taylorization.' [13] What is at stake for Léger is the reclamation of the subject from this mechanistic temporality, this regulation of experience so that even adventure is measured out in neatly ordered portions. What he cannot find is a form of 'nature' in modernity that might provide an alternative for the subject to 'nature as machine'.

David Harvey observes that Robert Delaunay's attempts to 'represent time through the fragmentation of space...paralleled the practices on Ford's assembly line' [14]; that is, modernist art's localised retreat from modernity's effects nonetheless mimed those effects as novel, exciting, and perhaps beneficial. We can make this argument more precise by suggesting that the fragmentation of space by regular intervals, in modernism's mimesis in space of musical abstraction in time, in its positing of systematised temporality as nature, enacted on its subjects precisely those effects, within culture, which modernity enacted on the subject within history. Through its total incorporation into the autonomous work – an action that effectively eliminates it – time is excluded from the subject and instead becomes a phenomenon imposed on, or effected upon, a subject constituted through reflex rather than reflection.

It is not, I'd suggest, until the late 1940s and early 1950s, when the impact of 'new music' is properly felt within painting, that an alternative strain within modernism releases itself from both the desire for sublimation and the desire to *represent* time, albeit in appropriated rhetorical forms. Despite its refusal of any figurative analysis within its subject matter, the greatest debt this new development owes is to Cubism, and its insistence on the incorporation of temporal effects within the discrete subject, as opposed to the imposition of those effects on the surface of the subject leading to its disintegration as a unique entity – its sublimation. It is within this tradition that we must understand Caffell's work since the 1960s, in both painting and his recent 'abstract' photographs. We see this new form of painting in the New York school, in the association of

composers such as Morton Feldman with the artist Philip Guston and the reverse influence of the modernist sculptor Alexander Calder on Earle Brown. If painters in New York learned about European modernism in part from expatriate artists like Hans Hofmann, there was an equal influence by European composers such as Edgard Varèse and Stefan Wolpe, who had already been associated with modernist art – especially in Wolpe's case with multi-media projects at the Bauhaus. What is especially important here is the use of time, firstly by Wolpe in works such as *Seven Pieces for Three Pianos* (1951) where the notion of interval is effectively deconstructed. As Austin Clarkson remarks 'The asymmetrical shapes of the beginning are deformed into a mixture of organic modes that is tense, conflicted and disruptive.' [15] The use, or rather the negation, of time – at least of time as it might be understood in a linear, equally divisible sense, the time of modernity and the machine – becomes more obvious in the work of Wolpe's pupil, Feldman. Feldman was profoundly affected by abstract expressionist painters such as Mark Rothko. Jonathan Bernard goes so far as to suggest that Feldman's idea of time 'is very much that of the visual artist, whose work does not make its effect primarily by temporal means and exists in time...only passively.' [16]

I'd suggest that what is happening here, for both painters and composers is a radical rethinking of temporality, that for all its capacity to be read either as a pursuit of indeterminacy and therefore of historical indifference in Feldman's composition, or of an ahistorical ur-humanity, before time, in Rothko's painting, offers us something close to the work as nature proposed by Busoni without the resort to an ironic representation exemplified by Picabia. In doing so the temporal 'form' (or anti-form) of the work alone, not least in its profound opposition to the mechanical structuring of time in modernity – whether in the regimes of the factory or of mass-culture – grants us precisely that access to history which Adorno perceives as a property of 'new music'. Rather than placing us as spectators to a representation of history, we are placed as conscious critical subjects within it.

> As a musical composition compresses time, and as a painting folds spaces into one another, so the possibility is concretized that the world could be other than it is. Space, time, and causality are

> maintained, their power is not denied, but they are divested of their compulsiveness. Paradoxically, it is precisely to the extent that art is released from the empirical world by its formal constituents that it is less illusory, less deluded by subjectively dictated lawfulness. [17]

Adorno writes here of music's compression of time – thinking, perhaps, above all of the intensity and brevity of Webern's *Six Bagatelles* op.9, but this 'release from the empirical world' is perhaps due not so much to compression as to a subjective volatilising of time. The same degree of intensity and of release from the compulsive ordering of the world is present, for example, in Luigi Nono's *Fragmente-Stille, An diotima* (1979-80), which lasts for thirty-five minutes but in which, if you attend to the work, and especially to its silences, all sense of time is lost. One's encounter with the work, and with the world, is opened out by the smallest gesture. It is also present in the expansiveness of Feldman's work, a grandiose scale as the composer himself noted was not to be equated with monumentality. [18] It is worth comparing Adorno's remarks on the freeing of temporality from structure in the new music as an invocation, if not of utopia, then at least of historical possibility, with Feldman's remark that 'I am not a clockmaker. I am interested in getting Time in its unstructured existence.' [19]

There is, in Feldman's comment, a sense of the reification of time as a formerly pure, that is natural, essence of history that might somewhere, outside of the ideological and technical systems that stabilise it within ordered, mechanical systems that are imposed on, that indeed *create* in some sense, the subjects that occupy them. Feldman is, it seems, hoping for something similar to that condition identified by Adorno: 'there is no mistaking time as such in music, yet it is so remote from empirical time that , when listening is concentrated, temporal events external to the musical continuum remain external to it and indeed scarcely touch it' [20] Not all music, of course, is so remote from empirical time: the music of popular culture in fact depends upon it. As Hullot-Kentor puts it:

> 'Popular music...must manufacture a busyness and direction to time that is in fact stagnant or anxiously, dully swirling... In countless situations its role is to make time pass. Popular music is music

> that seeks to master time by its rigid exclusion, generally by means of rote repetition. This form of mastery is the point of convergence between amusement and labor...' [21]

Feldman's conception of time is radically opposed to this structuring, and indeed we might see, in its difference from the growing emphasis on mathematical rules that came to govern intervals in the scores of 'total serialism' the cause of his vehement critique in the 1950s of Boulez's fondness for organised, predictable temporal systems. As Feldman would comment much later, 'It is Boulez, more than any other composer today who has given system a new prestige...' [22] Feldman's hostility here is strikingly similar to Adorno's critique of Boulez, Nono and others in his 1954 lecture 'The Aging of the New Music', in which he perceives that 'the loss of expression in total serialism [*as a consequence of its 'fetishisation' of its material through the systematising of material*] is the point at which new music again converges with popular music.' [23]

As is clear from their later works both Boulez and Nono would retreat from the systemic impulse - the profoundly political *Fragmente-Stille*, for example, draws much of its historical force from a return to Webern's notions of expression within the interval even as Nono excludes the overt political statements that had characterised his work in the 1960s. However, I want to suggest that Caffell's painting, in its treatment of space, creates a similar volatility of time to that of both Webern and Nono, *and* Feldman. That is, there is in its intimate relation of one space to another, the equivalent of interval, an individual expressiveness in which the work assumes its own status as nature, possessed of its own, infinitely flexible, micro-temporal scale, and simultaneously a macro-temporal effect in which time is almost infinitely expansive. These works, and this is as true of the 'abstracted' photos as it is of the paintings, open out through the smallest gesture – exactly as do Nono's or Webern's compositions. One of the scratches that Caffell makes in the wet paint with his nails, a gesture akin to the emphatic physical relation of player to instrument in much modern music, is a measure of the bodily relation of artist to canvas, it is a mark of time, and of a now absent body that experienced that time, in its own way. Time, in this condition, is indeed

'volatilised' – *as if it were a solid, material thing become, in another phase, a gas* – so that it is almost impossible to talk of it as a structure within the work, in which it is as hard to imagine an 'edge' to the experience of the work as it is to discern edge or structure in some of Feldman's most protracted, and yet most intimate, compositions.

The intimacy and closeness of these works does not simply derive from the near-monochromic palette of the recent paintings; that would be to suggest that they teeter on the brink of a void. Rather, there is a quiet, steady language – *an exchange between forms that have their own status, not representing any thing, nor indeed any specific feeling* – present also in the treatment of texture and shape in the paintings made in the 1960s when Caffell was still a young man, where the colour range, if not exactly exuberant, is nonetheless far wider. If there is an emphasis upon texture, rather than pattern, in the works – even when they have a clear variety of colours – it is a consequence of the internal relation of these paintings to time, and its subsequent effect upon the viewer. Pattern would maintain the high modernist problem of yoking a form antithetical to the mechanical subjectivity of modernity to the very derivations of the machine that came to characterise modern culture. Even when there are localised motifs in Caffell's paintings, for example the almost signature swathe of paint somewhere in the canvas, furrowed with a palette knife to subtly expose an underlying colour, they are abrupt occurrences within a wider field, a different form of that field rather than an intrusion or figure on it. There is none of the syncopation of forms aspired to in one domain within high modernism: rather we have what Adorno, writing of Hölderlin, referred to as the intermittent gesture which used the silence around it as a compositional element, and which in its refusal of synthesis undertook an historical critique of idealism. [24] (That meditation on Hölderlin, as Carola Nielinger-Vakil shows, was to have important effects not only upon the use of the poet's work by contemporary composers such as Nono and Wolfgang Rihm, but upon the way in which that work was used, including especially the emphasis upon silence in *Fragmente-Stille, An Diotima*. [25]) Caffell's visual motifs, whether scratches or furrowings of paint with palette knife, or

smoothing of fields, are similar interruptions, intermittent gestures. They guide the eye and mind only briefly into a regime of repetition and regularity – then they are gone, leaving a visual emptiness as their residue, as a crucial part of the painting. 'Time', registered as the regulation of duration into repeatable, mensurated structures, is shown to be no more than a fragment in an unstructured, diffused field. The 'all will be well worth the world' of the modern culture industry, where everything adds up in the end in the heroic moment of (illusory) transcendence, might be taken as our own, debased, version of Enlightenment Idealism.

It's worth thinking here about the progression that Caffell makes with his reduction of the palette, his move towards monochromaticism. Ad Reinhardt's monochromes of the 1950s were always a point of reference for Caffell, even in the 1960s. It's interesting to see Reinhardt's earlier canvases of the late 1940s which in some respects appear influenced by the diffuse fields of Mark Tobey's paintings from that period – themselves made under the influence of Chopin's music – while in others still seeking to establish a rhythmic relation between forms, especially in a vertical axis. In the end Reinhardt would reject both routes: his 'diffusion' of forms would be into the all-black monochrome, but with symbolic forms – *often profoundly symbolic forms such as the cross* – quietly inscribed into the paint with the handle of a brush. If Caffell learned about nuance within a circumscribed palette from Reinhardt he nonetheless avoided this tendency towards occluded symbolism, 'meaning' concealed in that which seems to blank out 'meaning'.

Perhaps the most interesting of Caffell's works in this situation are the recent 'photographs' as much as the later paintings. Whilst still wholly representational – his subjects are the wrappers and envelopes for photographic film and other materials – the use of a chromatic printing technique (platinum-palladium) and the particular emphasis that this places on tonal relationships between fields in the image renders the subject *almost* abstract. Their origin places the subjects of these images as already objects in the world – they are nature represented – but through the participation

of the accident, the modernist acceptance of happenstance, they become transformed. What we see in these pictures is not a figure but a series of related fields, all rendered in different tones of the grey scale, delineated by shadow and lines. Nature disintegrates into 'abstract' planes, akin to those slightly reflective, almost metallic areas that Caffell establishes in the later paintings by careful use of diluted paint. (It almost goes without saying that as a painter trained in the early 1960s, and with four decades of experience, Caffell has a technical control of his medium that most young painters today would struggle to imagine, let alone match.) Whereas those shadows and lines would, in Reinhardt's version of abstraction, take the form of a return to symbolic figuration, here they lose all specific reference to the world. That which in its medium is most literal (and the self-referential use of photographic materials as subject emphasises this), which most depends on the world as phenomenon to establish itself, and then mythologises the human ordering of that world, here breaks down almost to the component elements of making that figuration *as its subject*. Light, space, time, the chemical materials of printing, rather than the objects of registering the image, become the subject. It is an inaccurate truism that time is the true subject of photography: the photograph in fact depends for its very existence on the elimination of time to highly measurable degree. A photograph *of* time would be a photograph on the verge of destroying itself – as Francesca Woodman consciously demonstrated several times in her oeuvre, and as Daguerre, accidentally, as a result of the technical limitations of the first cameras, demonstrated in what is, almost, the first photograph. *Boulevard du Têmple* (1839) might be regarded as the first picture of time, or more accurately, the first picture juxtaposing the time of the subject with the temporal ontology to which modernity aspires. Caffell is doing something similar with time at one level with these images – it is here that the principle of temporal collage that informs Gerhard's Symphony no.3 is most apparent - but the dispersion of a physical subject into its component determinants takes a different form. This is because – rather like the simultaneous concentration and dispersion of time that characterises Nono's or Feldman's compositions, these photographs at once use the

'photographic' compression of time and then release it, 'volatilise' it in the protracted process of abstraction that is the printing process.

Painting and photographs, then, have much in common in Caffell's oeuvre, where elsewhere the painting might be understood as 'rescuing' subjectivity from the modern literalism of the photographic image. In both cases what distinguishes the work is its relation to time. The temporal regime of both paintings and photographs is profoundly at odds with the dominant imagination of time in high-modernism, whether that is expressed in abstract painting after Cubism or abstract film. As we have seen, the consequence of art's investment in and influence by music in modernism is, largely, to return it either to the rhythmic pulse of the machine, an ordering of temporality that annihilates the very subjectivity which most modernist art would seek to preserve, or to seek to sublimate critical faculty in overwhelming, synthetic experience. In part this problematic relation to music stems from the misrecognition of the fundamental shift that occurred in music in the early twentieth century. Picabia is one of the few artists to recognise the consequences of this appeal to nature in the form of temporal structure – recognising that the 'natural' temporality of modernity is, now, the insistent beat of the machine. It is only as the influence of Webern and Schoenberg permeates a new generation of artists, emerging primarily in the USA because of the Second World War, that both painters and composers rethink temporality. We see this in the work of Mark Tovey, and in Guston's turn to abstraction, and we might consider these painters, above all, along with Reinhardt – and with qualification - to be the predecessors of what Caffell is attempting in paint. Those composers who similarly conceptualise temporality anew in composition include Wolpe and Feldman, and the latter's approach to time, one that is both concentrated and volatile, is, I'd suggest, especially close to Caffell's, and one that the painter draws from late modernist music. Even in total serialism there is a problem with the organisation of interval, which both Adorno and Feldman see as bringing the avant-garde dangerously close to the denigration of the subject that marks the false promises of the culture industry. (In other words to the problematic

position established by Delaunay.) In Feldman there remains an aspiration towards a freely attentive subjectivity that is recovered in the late work of Nono, with its return to Webern, its use of the 'intermittent gesture' and its attention to individual experience as a counter to modernity. In Caffell's work we witness a similar double action with time: a compression and a volatilisation, we witness the effects of the intermittent gesture that emerges from and recedes into a diffused field, serving only to highlight the deliberate construction of modern time, and we witness a similar concern for the human as being in history whose role there may be best diagnosed, be best determined, by the relations of aesthetic forms to history, rather than by an easily recuperated, commoditised content.

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