

LORNA COLLINS

## Introduction

This volume of texts has evolved from papers written and performed at the first Making Sense colloquium, which was held at the University of Cambridge in September 2009. This event brought together artists and scholars from all around the world, who gathered to build an interface between artistic creation, theoretical debate and academic scholarship. The underlying purpose of this event was to provoke and install the aesthetic encounter and an art practice as media to help us understand and make sense of the world. We wanted to formulate new ways to frame and develop discourse, and found a new way of making sense.

The chapters collected here reflect the multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary creativity and sense made at this event, which became something of an artistic installation in itself. With a stimulating and sensuous economy of mutual exchange and intimate debate, the colloquium deconstructed the traditional hierarchy between the audience and the speakers, reassembling participants who proceeded from the belief that we can all be artists.

This book follows from one of the underlying aims of the colloquium, which was to produce a new and creative form of academic scholarship. By juxtaposing works of pure theory and philosophical texts with pieces that incorporate poetry, prose and performance, *Making Sense* tries to present the reader with a lozenge of the creative act *per se*. This scholarship is new because of its direct acquisition: each piece in this book presents itself as a work of literature or art, which performs making sense in the mind of the reader, who is inspired to begin searching for sense. Together, we transgress the range of different genres from which the pieces included here emerge, by the way that the process of reading instigates the process of sense-making in the reader.

We include works that expose how one can make sense of the world from texts of Modern French aesthetic theory, alongside performance pieces that question the sense of theory and seek a making in craft, from plastic art or

the painting event. The essay on 'Making Sense' by Jean-Luc Nancy formed the grand finale for the first colloquium, and it provides the heart of this volume.

Chapters are grouped into themes. The first three chapters present 'Theoretical Approaches to Making Sense'. In this section we have works that begin from the viewpoint of what sense is in the thinking of Jean-Luc Nancy. Florian Forestier's 'Sens et composition: quelques remarques sur la pensée du sens et de l'art chez Jean-Luc Nancy' discusses what 'making sense' means in terms of the ontology and phenomenology implied in the process of sense-making, whilst concentrating on singularities and art, to investigate making sense through art in terms of the thought of Nancy. Then Ian James's 'Affection and Infinity' presents a theoretical thesis that sets Nancy's thinking about sense, and making sense, in terms of the philosophical registers of twentieth-century French and German phenomenological thought. James argues that Nancy can be seen as a thinker of affection who seeks to think this question in relation to that of infinity. The thesis of this chapter is that making sense involves affection and its relation to the infinite. The third chapter in this grouping is by Ryosuke Kakinami, who asks what is a *making sense* of art and a *making sense* through art? What does it mean to *make sense*? What does a work of art that *makes sense* look like? To answer these questions Kakinami addresses Nancean sense in the terms of 'a sort of destiny of modern subjectivity in art'. From this perspective Kakinami brings forward the thesis that a *fragmentary* subjectivity appears in the thought of Nancy, at the crossroads of literature, critique and philosophy. This theory of the *fragment* then prepares a new concept of community, that is, *making sense* of the way we inhabit the world.

The next group of chapters is presented as a set of 'Manifestos'. By this we mean to bring forward works that call the reader to think and make sense of aesthetic objects and aesthetic practices differently, calling for new aesthetic situations or re-situations. Chris Watkin describes his piece, 'Making Ethical Sense', as a 'collaborative venture', in which he makes a position on sense and ethics in relation to Jean-Luc Nancy. Watkin argues that Nancean sense-making brings with it an ineluctable ethical dimension. After making this position, Watkin then asks what implications might this have for an artist, sculptor, or filmmaker who is seeking to take Nancy's thinking into account. This chapter is juxtaposed with Patricia Ribault's 'Making Makes Sense: Craft

as an Exploratory Mode of Thinking'. In this chapter Ribault works from her own experience as a glass blower, and considers the *making* of making sense in terms of her own craftsmanship. Ribault exposes the difference between art and craft by emphasizing the corporal dimension of craft, and by highlighting in particular the way that craft involves the sense of touch. She then demonstrates how craft can be seen as a mode of thinking as well as a mode of production. Then Hugues Azérad presents the reader with a 'Making Sense of Epiphanic Images', which explores images that present what Joyce defined as a 'sudden spiritual manifestation' – a shock or profound emotion. Drawing particularly from Modernist masters such as Tarkovsky, for Azérad the epiphanic image is a privileged, distinctive event of encounter because of the emotion it produces in the viewer. The fourth manifesto is Faith Lawrence's 'The Art of Listening'. This chapter begins with Rainer Maria Rilke's 'Sonnet to Orpheus' and considers how this poem can help us learn to *listen* to sculpture. Lawrence develops what she calls a 'listening poetics' as a method of engaging with contemporary art, exploring a poetics weighted towards the possibilities offered by listening and sound, and by considering Jean Luc Nancy's meditation on listening alongside Rilke. Lawrence then applies her listening poetics to contemporary art; the object being to replenish and renew, rather than exhaust and reduce, the meaning of the artwork.

Lawrence's poetics provides an effective crossover point to the next grouping of chapters, which explore 'Poetry'. In this section we have works by Carol Mavor and Ben Morris. Mavor's essay, "'Phantoms of the Past, Dear Companions of Childhood, Vanished Friends": Making Sense of Sally Mann's Trees', responds to the recurring theme of the image of the tree that is seen in a selection of works by the contemporary American photographer Sally Mann. Mavor's text is intertwined with these images that she is directly making sense with, so that her prose – touched by the images – at times becomes itself moving stanzas of poetry. Underlying this aesthetic juxtaposition of poetry and image is a theoretical investigation, which appeals to Nancy's *À l'Écoute*, bringing forward a rich sense that seeks a 'listening to the beyond-meaning'. In Mann's piece the trees have agency; the images she uses in her piece could be seen to answer back to the strong direction against arborescent, or root-tree thinking, which is seen in Deleuze's notion of the rhizome. As such, the images of Sally Mann's trees in this work play a strong part in its agency; they might even challenge the concepts we see in other chapters. This piece

is juxtaposed with Morris's 'On Bilingualism in English', which is an essay about making sense in terms of the relationship between critical and creative work. Morris is a poet, and we sample his creative work in this chapter, which includes *The Names of Storms*, a poem that came out of Morris's making sense of his research experience.

Morris's poetic praxis and work of literature sets up the next group of chapters, which involve and instigate 'Performance Art'. First in this section is Elizabeth Wright's and Susan Sellers's 'Painting in Prose: Performing the Artist in Susan Sellers's *Vanessa and Virginia*'. This piece was originally brought forward as a performance at the first Making Sense colloquium. In this chapter they describe what happened in their performance, and use Nancy's scholarship to make sense through the different genres of novel, visual art and performance that it involves. The second piece in this section, Jean-Luc Moriceau's and Jennifer Milligan's 'I Could Only Tell, by the Skin of my Body', is also based on a performance given at the first Making Sense colloquium, in which Moriceau and Milligan set out to embody philosophy in performance by layering Nancy, the work of the Parisian photographer Victor Bellaich, and personal experiences of touch and resonance. In this chapter Moriceau and Milligan replay the sense and impressions that they made during their performative piece. The next chapter is brought forward as a performance in itself. Alice Shyy's 'Making "Me" Things Makes "You"' intrudes upon the mind of the reader as they take in the cheeky musings on making sense that define this impetuous piece. Alice Shyy describes herself as an artist and this piece presents her efforts to make sense from her profession. This piece does not really fit into a specific genre such as theory, literature, poetry or criticism; by expressing and following an imaginative conscious stream of thought trying to make sense of the present, Shyy brings us performance in praxis.

This writing as art and creative praxis bleeds into the next grouping of chapters, which express 'Making Sense as "Event"'. This section is heavily influenced by the rhizomatic thinking of Gilles Deleuze, and it begins with Caroline Rannersberger's 'The Sensation of Painting Country in Remote Northern Australia'. In this essay Rannersberger describes her own painting practice as a landscape painter in the Northern Territory. She explores the ways in which the remote north exists outside of the traditional European genre of landscape painting, how she experiences the process of painting in the remote north of Australia, and how Deleuzian philosophy allows her to

make sense of her painting experience and of the artwork itself. This theme of making sense by making art is carried over into the next chapter, which is Lorna Collins's 'Making Sense of Territory: The Painting Event'. This chapter considers Deleuze's ideas about geophilosophy, the event and subjectivity, to think on a different register – through the painting event – about territory, i.e. how we inhabit the world. Collins demonstrates how we can make sense with material forms and use the process of artistic creation to consider the formation of territory. Collins brings forward Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'geophilosophy' as a mode of thinking that opens a topology and territorial outlook, and interprets this term by applying it to an art practice. By describing her own process of painting, Collins intends to think about how the painting event – or the act of artistic creation – helps us make sense of how we encounter and inhabit the world.

The third chapter in this grouping is Laura McMahon's 'Passage of Sense: Anish Kapoor's *Memory* (2008) with Jean-Luc Nancy'. McMahon begins from her own embodied encounter with the artist Kapoor's *Memory*, drawing out the ways in which 'making sense' may lie in an unfolding of the specific temporality and situatedness of that encounter. She argues that Kapoor's installation discloses much to make sense of, in terms of the specificity of its location, the inaccessibility of memory and the destabilization of vision. These ideas are considered in terms of Nancy's understanding of sense.

This return to Nancy sets up our grand finale, which is Jean-Luc Nancy's own 'Making Sense'. This piece was written specifically for the first Making Sense colloquium, and it presents Nancy's reflections upon the meaning of the phrase 'making sense'. Nancy considers sense in terms of a process of sensory reception, and argues that it then becomes an overflowing of sense, building sensibility, sensuality, and meaning. This chapter is a key text because it extends Nancy's acclaimed scholarship on sense, as it is framed specifically for our concept of Making Sense. We publish Nancy's text next to Emma Wilson's translation of it. This translation is printed so that one can read the original French as well as the English translation, enabling the *sense* to be *made* during the reader's efforts to grasp the sensible meaning that tallies through both versions.

From this grouping and selection of chapters we bring together pieces interested in Nancean theory with those which are creating manifestos to challenge us to do something differently, and those challenging the divide

between artist and craftsman, or actually enacting performance art, poetry or the painting event. The backdrop of this is Making Sense the collective, which is a loose and expanding group of artists and scholars who gather at yearly colloquia to create a vital, international forum that crosses between modes of thinking and doing.

## Select Bibliography

Deleuze, G., and F. Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980).

—, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (Paris: Minuit, 1991).

Nancy, J.-L., *Le Sens du monde* (Paris: Galilée, 2001).

—, *À l'Écoute* (Paris: Galilée, 2002).