

As Within So Without

& other writings

Daniel Barbiero

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As Within So Without
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The eye's plain version is a thing apart,
The vulgate of experience.

Wallace Stevens, *An Ordinary Evening in New Haven*

Abandonnées les rênes du sens commun, une
autre espèce de sense pressant, divinatoire, guide
l'homme vers où il veut aller sans le savoir.

André Breton, *Le Merveilleux contre le mystère*

φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ

Heraclitus, DK B123

Acknowledgements

The twenty essays collected here contain ideas that have been crystallizing since the late 1970s but only relatively recently have been given the form they seem to have wanted to take from the beginning (if only I'd known then). All twenty were published in *Arteidolia*, an online journal of the arts I first discovered in 2014. I don't recall now exactly what brought me there, but I do remember reading a long review by Patrick Brennan and being impressed with the kind of intellectual depth and personal expression the journal clearly seemed to encourage. My own experiences in writing for *Arteidolia* since then have only served to reinforce that initial impression.

Over the years the journal and editor Randee Silv has indulged me in allowing me to write about whatever interests me, in whatever form I thought appropriate. Silv's editing style has been a happy combination of light-handedness and astute suggestion, and to her goes my deep gratitude for her unstinting encouragement and truly collaborative attitude toward editing. This book literally would not have come to be without her suggestion that I do it. Patrick Brennan has also provided invaluable input and stimulating discussion, particularly on the topic of improvisation, which has been a lifetime's work for both of us.

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And finally, I'd like to acknowledge my wife and son, who throughout this project have cheerfully put up with a husband and father even more distracted than usual.

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Is Silence Golden? is an expanded version of an essay that originally appeared in the June, 2018 issue of *Perfect Sound Forever*, and is reproduced here with the kind permission of PSF and editor Jason Gross.

Parts of *Joëlle Léandre: Being with Sound* originally appeared as a review published in *Avant Music News* in October, 2011 and are included here with thanks to AMN and editor Mike Borella.

Atopia: Soundings From Non-places began life as the liner note to *Non-places*, an album of composed and improvised music created in collaboration with Cristiano Bocci.

All of the essays in *As Within So Without: & other writings* were published on *Arteidolia* between 2015 and 2021.

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Introduction

As Within, So Without: the title of this collection of essays, written over the past ten years, is a parodistic paraphrase of the old hermetic formula often translated as “As Above, So Below.” The phrase has been interpreted as describing, in condensed form, a purported system of correspondences binding together the greater cosmos and the smaller human world.

The title of the present collection, like the phrase it parodies, also expresses the idea of a mutual implication of worlds—in this case what could be called, for lack of a better metaphor, the interior world of the individual person, and the exterior world in which that person is situated. It is a mutual implication based on a relationship of permeability and reciprocal formation that in turn is expressed as a network of meanings, both personal and impersonal, that disclose the world—the material world, the world of social relationships—as something that matters to us, often in terms appropriated from that world in uniquely personal ways.

The world within may disclose the world without through its needs, desires, moods, projects and limitations, but it often does so through systems of categorization, description and signification assimilated from the world without. These latter may be imperfect and notable for the slippages and gaps that open up between them and concrete experiences they are called on to conceptualize and convey, but they are nevertheless the means we have at our disposal.

Thus one of the fundamental ideas expressed in many of these essays is that what in everyday experience seem to be the separate worlds of the internal and the external are in fact intertwined and mutually dependent for their meaning. The distinction between myself as a conscious subject and the world around me as an object—a distinction that itself is the more-or-less artificial product of self-conscious reflection—is a secondary event grounded in the primary event of being out in a world that in a sense is at the same time within us.

Consequently, the world for us is a thickly textured, profoundly human one, woven of our material, interpersonal, affective, and imaginative involvements which may be made known to us through the signs, models, material forms, and overall conceptual furniture by which those involvements can be understood, articulated, and conveyed. The world is, to a significant degree, our world, a common world nevertheless assimilated in profoundly personal ways. (This is not to say that something of the non-human world does not escape the human, but that is a topic for another occasion.)

Primary among the means of understanding, articulating and conveying our world are language, gesture, and art. As the philosopher Gianni Vattimo has suggested, it is primarily through art that a particular world can be disclosed, and hence the focus of many of these essays on artworks of various types and disciplines. Improvised music is one particular mode of art that seems especially suited to illustrating the ways in which art as a means of signification can disclose a world; consequently, several of these essays consider improvised music in its existential dimension, which is to say as a meaning-laden, unfolding situation presenting certain possibilities in relation to which we must act on the basis of the choices we must make, in real time. Through those choices and the sounds they give rise to, we disclose ourselves and our ongoing interpretation—of the work-as-situation, of ourselves within that situation.

A very different kind of art frequently visited here is Surreal art, in some of its various forms. In fact, one of the recurring presences haunting these essays is that of André Breton, the founder and chief theorist of Surrealism. Through Breton, Surrealism demonstrated itself to be more than simply a style or movement within art, but rather a stance taken toward the world—as the embodiment and enactment of a certain existential position, in other words. Surrealism not only apprehended the world as something shot through with significance, it committed itself to a position on what that significance would be, and had a deep grasp of some of the internal mechanisms by which this significance was structured.

As Breton put it in his important statement “Marvelous versus Mystery,” it would be a significance built on a “compelling and divinatory” sense that, through the kinds of coincidences Breton termed “objective chance” or through the extra-referential, affective associations of words uttered or written in a state of psychic automatism, would reveal one’s fate, a fate that wasn’t foreordained but rather conditional on one’s recognition and free acceptance of it.

Whether or not one accepts the Surrealist worldview—and there are reasons to be skeptical of much in it that was irrational and even plainly superstitious—it does provide a fascinating instance of the articulation of a way of being in the world that read the world as a network of signs and through that reading sought a point at which, again in Breton’s words, “the real and the imagined...the communicable and incommunicable” would be reconciled. In other words, *As Within, So Without*.