

The Play of Signs in a New Mexico Landscape: Michael Mauldin's *A'ts'ina: Place of Writings on the Rock*

Felicia E. Kruse

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, USA

Abstract

New Mexico composer Michael Mauldin's string quartet, *A'ts'ina: Place of Writings on the Rock*, was inspired by the ruins of an ancient Zuñi city at El Morro National Monument (USA) and by the surrounding landscape. Like many of Mauldin's works, the quartet aims to communicate "an environmental essence, rather than . . . a literal soundscape." "Art is a metaphor for life," the composer maintains. "Though art includes descriptive gestures from our shared physical experience . . . I feel [it] should distill and interpret that experience rather than just describe it . . . or randomly recreate it."

Mauldin's approach to composition points toward a semiotically-nuanced way of thinking about musical meaning that is rooted in our common experience as embodied human organisms. This essay examines the iconic and indexical roles of musical gesture and voicing to convey embodied experience in the context of landscape throughout *A'ts'ina*. I draw upon Mark Johnson's theory of the bodily grounding of metaphor to show how this work exhibits and enacts a "play of musical signs" that celebrates, in the words of New Mexico author Peggy Pond Church, one of those "certain places in the earth where the great powers that move between earth and sky are closer and more available than others."

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"Art is a metaphor for life," suggests New Mexico composer Michael Mauldin in an unpublished letter. "Perhaps it's the universal life-spirit searching for expression. Though art includes descriptive gestures from our shared physical experience . . . I feel art should distill and interpret that experience rather than just describe it (as did some

Romanticists) or randomly recreate it (as did some Modernists like John Cage).” He continues:

If the painters in New Mexico could move people (perhaps even help them) with realistic landscapes that were luminous—even numinous—like the place itself, then perhaps it was not a sin for composers to be less abstract and absolute. Perhaps it was alright for them to unashamedly appeal to the positive aspects of the listener’s human-ness, not just anger, fear, or disorientation. Those positive aspects need not automatically make the resulting music saccharine or shallow (even if the avant-garde reflexively dismisses it). I set out to represent the essence of the land and its people in my music. (Mauldin, 2010)

Mauldin’s reflections on his compositional practice point toward a way of thinking about musical meaning and signification rooted in our common experience as embodied, sensing, feeling, thinking human organisms who live and move in constant interaction with our physical and social environment, in both its precarious and its stable aspects. This approach finds philosophical articulation in the aesthetics of John Dewey, who argues that a work of art is not primarily an ontologically independent “thing” or “object,” but rather “what the product does in and of experience” (LW10, p. 9). Mauldin’s approach to composition also resonates with Mark Johnson’s work on the bodily grounding of musical meaning, which leads Johnson to characterize music as “the embodied flow of life” (Johnson, 2007, p. 236). I wish to explore how three metaphors Johnson identifies that orient our musical experience are exemplified in Mauldin’s string quartet *A’s’ina: Place of Writings on the Rock*. These metaphors—“music as moving,” “music as landscape,” and “music as moving force”—can help us understand how music in general, and Mauldin’s programmatically-inspired quartet in particular, can communicate what he calls “an environmental essence, rather than . . . a literal soundscape” (Mauldin, 2010). In order to keep my discussion as musically nontechnical as possible, I focus on how specific gestures in the *A’s’ina* passages illustrate Johnson’s position. A gesture, according to musicologist and semiotician Robert Hatten, is a “significant energetic shaping of sound through time” which is constituted as “a unit in the perceptual present (typically within two seconds)” that has initiation and closure and conveys emergent meaning (2004, pp. 94-95). Musical gestures “are grounded in human affect and its communication,” and their meanings are “often directly motivated by basic human expressive movements” (Hatten, 2004, pp. 92-93).

In his 2007 book *The Meaning of the Body*, Johnson proposes that “music is meaningful because it can present the flow of human experience, feeling, and thinking in concrete, embodied forms—and this is meaning in its deepest sense.” Music appeals primarily to “our felt sense of life. . . . We are moved by it, and we are moved because music orders our experience using tone quality, pitch, meter, rhythm, and other processes that we feel in our bodies. We are moved bodily and emotionally and qualitatively” (Johnson, 2007, p. 236). Musical meaning reflects and resonates with “vitality-affect

contours”: the dynamic qualities of feeling that begin to be shaped in early infancy and that constitute “the patterns of process and flow of our felt experience, such as the buildup of tension and its release, the sense of drifting, the energetic pursuit of a goal, the anxious anticipation of some coming event, and the starting and stopping of a process” (Johnson, 2007, p. 238; see also Stern, 1985, p. 156). Dewey argues, similarly, that the inescapable involvement of the human organism in the ordered variation of changes, or rhythms, of nature—day and night, the cycles of the seasons, sleeping and waking, reproduction, growth, decay, and renewal—provide the conditions for the emergence of artistic forms. The delight we take in “rhythmic portrayals and presentations” in both plastic and performative arts originates in our recognition that these aesthetic forms “are instances of the relationships that determine the course of life, natural and achieved” (LW10, p. 155). It is also worth noting that insofar as musical meaning is rooted in vitality-affect contours, it has a Peircean iconic dimension. Following Peirce, T. L. Short argues that music signifies as a “pure icon” (Short, 2007, pp. 204-205), a sign which Peirce maintains “does not draw any distinction between itself and its object” (EP2, p. 163) and which “serves as a sign solely and simply by exhibiting the quality it serves to signify” (EP2, p. 306). Music signifies iconically insofar as it primarily signifies feeling-content whose proper means of expression is musical and whose proper interpretation by the listener involves the generation of a corresponding feeling. In other words, as I have argued elsewhere, the qualities of feeling signified *by* a musical work are embodied *in* the work (Kruse, 2007, p. 629); or, as Naomi Cumming explains (2000, p. 100), “Musical signs belong to a class of interpreted relationships which present an object of signification, without either pointing to a definite state of affairs or making a statement about it.”¹

Accordingly, Johnson points out that music “does not typically *re-present* anything, even though there may occasionally be a few representative elements in a particular musical work. Music’s function, instead, is *presentation* and *enactment* of felt experience” (2007, p. 238). This, incidentally, is why programmatic music, as Mauldin maintains, can aspire beyond mere narration or description to be transformative of experience. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey distinguishes between two kinds of meaning. Statement meaning is meaning that guides or directs one to a consummatory aesthetic experience but does not itself constitute such an experience, as a road sign might direct one to a city. (In Peircean terms, statement meaning is primarily indexical.) Expressive meaning is meaning that itself constitutes a consummatory experience, an intensification of experience such that it has an integral quality of felt unity (LW10, pp. 89-92).² During his formative years as a composer, Mauldin writes, he heard a number of superficial nineteenth-century works of program music. He reflects, “They were so poorly put together that I’d have quickly lost interest if I hadn’t been listening for how the music advanced the program. When it didn’t, I lost interest anyway. And the program didn’t make the music any less shallow” (Mauldin, 2010). Such pieces fail in large part because they are burdened, or overdetermined, by statement meanings—

typically, superficial iconic signs such as musical imitations of ships bobbing on waves, barking dogs, or whatnot—to the point that any possibility they may have held for expressive meaning is smothered to death. A fine work of program music must not merely *re-present*, or replicate, nonmusical experience in musical form; it must, like all fine music, *present* or *enact* a nexus of significant meanings that is capable of deepening or intensifying the lived experience of the listener.³ This constitutes iconicity in its deepest and most semiotically resonant sense, as *qualitative* rather than simply as *resemblance*.

The considerations above account for why Johnson rejects the “music as language” metaphor that imprinted itself onto analytic philosophy of music at an early stage. According to this view, “passages in music are conceived as sentences, with individual notes or clusters of notes taken to be the equivalent of words.” Meaning is thus construed to be primarily referential, so “music comes off looking semantically impoverished, since it is not typically regarded as having substantial referential meaning” (Johnson, 2007, p. 235). Although explicit adherence to the “music as language” metaphor is not as common as it once was, the Anglo-American tradition still struggles with the sharp subject/object dichotomy that the linguistic meaning model presumes, as well as with inquiries that rely upon the privileging of linguistic and quasi-linguistic metaphors.⁴ To the extent these inquiries remain genetically dependent upon philosophy of language, they participate in what Dewey calls the “epistemology industry,” treating the relation between the experiencing human organism and experienced lifeworld as if it were reducible to a purely external subject-object relation, privileging the meaning-bearing capacity of knowledge-about (*epistēmē*) over that of other modes of knowledge, let alone of sensation and emotion, and unsuccessfully using this framework to try to understand how music might possibly convey non-referential meaning.

Over against the “music as language” metaphor, Johnson points out that “virtually all of our conceptualization and description of music uses metaphors whose source domains are drawn from sensorimotor experience” (2007, p. 243). Thus, because music is a temporal art that involves shifts between and among tones and tonal patterns, we think of music as *moving*, or in motion: hence Eduard Hanslick’s famous definition of music as consisting of “tonally sounding forms in motion” (*tönend bewegte Formen*). Our “fundamental and pervasive experiences” of physical motion—seeing objects move, moving our bodies, and feeling our bodies being moved by forces—“*give rise, via metaphor, to three of the chief ways we conceptualize musical motion*” (Johnson, 2007, p. 247; italics in original). Johnson labels these three ways the “moving music” metaphor, the “musical landscape” metaphor, and the “music as moving force” metaphor. It is this ability to imagine similarity and continuity between our patterns of sensorimotor experience and tonal patterns in our auditory experience that makes it possible for us to express and communicate meaning in and through music.

The “moving music” metaphor consists of the perceived activity of a musical event as we anticipate its arrival (its moving toward us in a projected future), as we experience

it in the present, and as it moves past us. We imagine music as moving by analogy to our experience of “the spatial logic of physical motion”: the future musical event is imagined as belonging to a musical “space in front of the hearer,” then moving toward the listener, and finally, once heard, receding into the “distance” behind him or her (Johnson, 2007, pp. 248-249).

The “musical landscape” metaphor is based on our experiences of moving our bodies through physical space. The listener thus embarks metaphorically on “a journey over the path that defines the particular piece of music being heard,” “from a starting point through a series of intermediate steps to a destination” (Johnson, 2007, p. 250) so that musical events are conceived as locations on a musical landscape, and what the listener hears at a given moment is metaphorically *where* she or he is in that landscape at that moment. Two perspectives on the musical landscape are possible: those of participant and observer. A participant experiences herself as traversing the musical landscape over the course of the time it takes for the music to play. The observer perspective, on the other hand, “is conceived as a distant standpoint from which you can observe the path through a musical landscape that defines a particular work” (Johnson, 2007, p. 251). This latter perspective is characteristic of music analysis, “since it allows one to treat the entire musical work as an abstract object and to study its features” (2007, p. 252). Although Johnson does not explicitly state this, it is possible for a musically educated listener to enjoy both perspectives simultaneously, and musicians in the process of learning a piece and shaping a performance commonly employ both perspectives as well.

The third metaphor, music as moving force, stems from learning that our experienced physical motion of our bodies and other objects is influenced by physical forces such as gravity, inertia, and magnetism. Just as physical entities (such as wind and water) move us from one place to another, so do we experience music moving us from one emotional condition to another “along some path of metaphorical motion.” “If music is a force,” Johnson notes, “then it has causal effects:”

[M]usical forces are conceived as acting on listeners to move them from one state-location to another along some path of metaphorical motion. You can actually feel yourself being *pushed*, *pulled*, and generally *moved* by the music. When music is a *moving* experience, it can *bow* you over, *blow* you away, *carry* you along. . . . It can make you *float* along or it can *drag* you down. When the music *swings*, you *swing*. (Johnson, 2007, p. 254)

Johnson is careful to point out that these three metaphors—“music as moving,” “musical landscape,” and “music as moving force”—are far from exhaustive of the metaphors and metonymies we use in experiencing and understanding musical motion. By themselves, they cannot provide a comprehensive account of musical meaning (any more than the “music as language” metaphor does). They are also not exclusive: any combination of these metaphors may be at play in a listener’s experience of a single

piece of music. They do, however, give us a fruitful starting point for understanding how embodied experience of and within a physical landscape might find musical expression.

To illustrate this, let us turn to three passages in Michael Mauldin's string quartet *A'ts'ina: Place of Writings on the Rock*, a work inspired by the landscape and history of El Morro National Monument in the Zuñi Mountains of New Mexico.⁵ Mauldin reflects on the work's genesis:

On outings to the land [we purchased nearby], we took family and friends to see the writings at El Morro—boasts of explorers, Indian petroglyphs, names and comments by early settlers.

At first, I barely noticed the ruins at the top of the rock, and the circular box-canyon behind it. But for several years I've been fascinated by the "presence" I feel at A'ts'ina, the ancient, sacred Zuni city atop El Morro, and drawn by the petroglyphs' communication of the mundane and the spiritual. The piece comes from my imagining of life there in the 1200s, and from the place's spiritual power today.

The quartet has six movements, each with a programmatic title: "The Spirit that Wants Me," "Starlight on Trees," "The Old Man and the Boy," "Raiders in the West," "Sanctuary in Box Canyon," and "Circling Spirit."⁶

The second movement, "Starlight on Trees," is a brief interlude inspired by an experience the composer had of going outdoors and looking up at the night sky while working on the quartet. Each of the three voices in the movement represents—and enacts—the situation of a particular entity. The two violins, playing *con sordino* (with mutes), occupy the position of the stars as the human perceiver/experiencer sees them above the trees. The solo viola is the "voice" of the human being viewing the starlight, and the cello, playing a strongly-marked rhythmic ostinato figure, represents the earth upon which the human observer stands and in which the trees are rooted. The register of each instrument, from the violins' high treble to the viola's middle range to the cello's deep bass, is metaphorically representative of the spatial location and range of each entity. The viola, which occupies the middle tonal register between the violins and cello, is positioned *in medias res*, literally in terms of its function in the quartet ensemble and metaphorically in terms of its placement in the "Starlight on Trees" landscape imagined in and through the movement. The cello frames the viola solo by "grounding" it, and the violins remain in a tonal register above the viola, metaphorically "overhead" from the human perceiver's viewpoint.

Although "Starlight on Trees" exhibits all three of Johnson's metaphors, the solo viola melody is an exquisite example of "music as moving force." The viola invites the listener into an experience that is a *mimesis*—an enactment, not an imitation—of the experience of the persona viewing the land- and skyscape. The melody is in AAB form—a phrase that is stated and then repeated (A, then A again), followed by a different phrase (B) played only once, as if it were an "answer" to the "question" posed

in the A phrase.

Example 1. *A Is'ina*, “Starlight on Trees,” A phrase (measures 9-12)

The auditory contour of the B phrase serves as a Peircean icon of the persona’s experience at that point in the music, signifying both by resemblance and by evoking an experienced quality, and it invites the listener to participate in that experience. Beginning with a series of three ascending stepwise sequences, the B phrase brings the experiencer upwards to a quiet *exstasis* and then exhibits a gravitational tendency to float gently down to earth—a point of rest—at the end.

Example 2. *A Is'ina*, “Starlight on Trees,” B phrase

The second passage is at the beginning of the fifth movement, “Sanctuary in Box Canyon.” The preceding movement, “Raiders in the West,” “broods on the threat” the ancient Zuñis at El Morro “faced from marauders,” and “Sanctuary in Box Canyon” “reflects the feelings of the people who hid there, a safe place, yet open to the sky” (Mauldin, 2004, liner notes). From the movement’s outset, the listener is guided toward experiencing an intertwining of the “music as landscape” metaphor and the “music as moving force” metaphor. The initial theme, played by the violins largely in parallel thirds while the lower voices (viola and cello) remain silent, gives a sense of pause and suspension after the hurried fear and anxiety expressed in the previous movement. Since the interval of a third is close, but consonant, it provides a

metaphorical feeling of “closeness” and security, at the same time that the sequential rising in the melody indicates the expanse of the canyon. A second, brighter and more heavily ornamented theme, played by the second violin and supported by an accented accompaniment in the viola and cello, introduces the voice of a human persona into the scene. After theme 2 is heard, the first violin ascends into its higher range, articulating the expansive physical distance between the people hiding in the floor of the canyon and the mesa and sky above, as well as the spiritual interaction between the people and this sacred place.

Example 3. *A'ts'ina*, “Sanctuary in Box Canyon,” initial theme

From its opening measures, “Sanctuary in Box Canyon” also exemplifies what Mauldin calls his favorite tetrachord (sequence of four notes)—half-step, whole-step, half-step—which, he points out, “uses gravitational pull well at its top and bottom.” He explains, “. . . it occurred to me that perhaps I used it in my music ‘about’ New Mexico because Peggy Pond Church’s phrase from *The House at Otowi Bridge* . . . was planted firmly in my mind: ‘There are certain places in the earth where the great powers that move between the earth and sky are closer and more available than others’” (Mauldin, 2010; see also Church, 1960). Through its bivalent gravitational pull and its implicit harmonic ambiguity, the “Mauldin tetrachord” articulates in this movement the tension between stability and precariousness in the relation between the imagined physical/spiritual landscape and the personae who inhabit it. At the same time, it holds forth the promise of a celebratory, if provisional, resolution in an embodied, consummatory aesthetic experience of the musical New Mexican landscape, of the “environmental essence” that Mauldin calls “the spirit that wants me.” As such the tetrachord is both an aesthetically expressive device and a symbol of further possibilities for aesthetic experience, both on the part of the imagined personae in the canyon and on the part of the listener.

The final movement, “Circling Spirit,” realizes the celebratory promise hinted at in the previous movement. It is in a quasi-rondo form, opening with new musical material which then alternates with themes from previous movements.

The first statement of the new material in “Circling Spirit” constitutes the third passage for us to consider in light of Johnson’s three musical metaphors. We hear first a dancing, gigue-like series of “twirling” triplets in 9/8 meter in the violins, which Mauldin (2017) has identified as “‘the spirit’ permeating the place.” The triplets are undergirded by a rhythmic figure in the cello reminiscent of its “trees and earth” grounding motif in the “Starlight in Trees” movement. Then the viola introduces the A theme, a “leaping” theme (mm. 5-8), which it repeats in a melodic sequence that proceeds upward, the second time ornamented with a festive sixteenth-note run (mm. 9-16; Example 4). This theme is then passed on to the cello, metonymically expanding the community of celebrating musical personae.

Example 4. *A'is'ina*, “Circling Spirit,” A theme sequence

The musical notation consists of three staves in 9/8 time, with a tempo marking of quarter note = 112. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The first staff begins with a quarter note (F#), followed by a dotted quarter note (A), and then a series of eighth notes (B, C, D, E, F#). The second staff continues with a triplet of eighth notes (G, A, B) and a sixteenth-note run (C, D, E, F#, G, A, B). The third staff shows the sequence continuing with a sixteenth-note run (C, D, E, F#, G, A, B) and a final melodic phrase (C, D, E, F#, G, A, B).

A sequence, in Western music, is “the repetition of a phrase of melody (melodic sequence) and/or a harmonic progression (harmonic sequence) at different pitch levels, the succession of pitch levels rising or falling by the same or similar intervals” (Randel, 1986, p. 739). A common function of the sequence is to build and release tension, and this effect is intensified when a melodic sequence is supported by a harmonic sequence, as is the case with the “leaping” viola theme. Johnson articulates the metaphorical effectiveness of melodic sequencing in his account of the song “Over the Rainbow” (2007, p. 241):

The first four measures (“Someday I’ll wish up-on a star and wake up where the clouds are far be-hind me”) are a series of middle-range, rapidly alternating eighth notes that create a strong sense of anticipation and anxious, energetic forward movement. In the first two measures, we jump from G to B-flat four times in quick succession, jerking us up emotionally. But then in the next measure, simply by the move up a half step from G to A-flat,

our agitated expectation is heightened even more: the rapidly alternating eighth notes jump from A-flat to B-flat, instead of the previous G to B-flat. This modest, almost imperceptible change ratchets up the sense that something is about to happen, that we are “going somewhere” via this half-step upward pitch change. And, indeed, we *do* go somewhere—we are carried right on up to C.⁷

Mauldin’s sequencing of the “leaping” theme in “Circling Spirit” similarly serves to increase tension in anticipation of release. But instead of the poignant anxiousness evoked through the stepwise sequential motion in “Over the Rainbow,” the “Circling Spirit” sequence conveys a sense of playful celebration. It does so in part by proceeding upward by the interval of a minor third and then a major third, which are farther apart than the minor and major seconds of the “Over the Rainbow” sequence and are thus experienced as more “open.” The “leaping” contour of the melody, its ornamentation, and its accompaniment by the (protective) “circling spirit” gigue motif augment its festive character as well. The entire passage (mm. 1-24) well exemplifies Johnson’s “music as moving force” metaphor, inviting listeners to participate aurally in the joyful dance.

In addition to the “Circling Spirit” dance, though, the movement reprises themes heard earlier in the work. In so doing it brings us back to the “moving music” and “musical landscape” metaphors. Recall that the “moving music” metaphor is grounded in our bodily experience of objects moving in space toward us and then receding behind us into an indefinite distance, so that “[o]nce the musical event has occurred for us, it exists only in the memory of the past, that is, in the metaphorical space behind the observer” (Johnson, 2007, p. 248). But because musical performance is temporal and therefore impermanent, repetition, the restatement of a musical idea, is indispensable for expressing meaning in nearly all musical genres and is a core element in the perception of musical form.⁸ When material from earlier in a work is reprised later and its repetition is recognized as such by a listener, it serves as a metaphorical enactment of memory. In the context of a “musical landscape,” Johnson explains (2007, p. 251),

repetition is tracing out the same trajectory of motion again. In music, one can repeat the same path of motion, but always *at a different time* from the original musical event. However, the experience of tracing the *same* musical path over again is so powerful that it can actually make you feel as though you are experiencing the *same time* over again. . . . Some of the most striking effects in music come from its ability to make us feel like we’re experiencing the *same time* over again, as though we are “back home” (and back *now*) again.

Throughout “Circling Spirit,” six themes from previous movements are interspersed with the new thematic material discussed above, serving as aural reminders of or “flashbacks” to these earlier experiences of events along the musical landscape. For instance, immediately after the gigue-like introduction and “leaping” theme, we hear the

flowing, meditative introductory and A themes from the first movement, “The Spirit that Wants Me,” thus bringing us metaphorically “full circle” back to the beginning of the piece. Like the “Circling Spirit” gigue, the first-movement introductory theme is in triple meter and is voiced by the violins in their middle range, and it is also followed by the statement of an A theme in the viola, then the cello, and finally the first and second violins. Its reprise in “Circling Spirit,” though, is not an exact repetition of its initial statement in “The Spirit that Wants Me”; once the viola has passed the A theme along to the cello, the viola (rather than the violins) takes up the introductory theme, and the violins are silent for nine measures. When the A theme appears in the violins this time, it is also ornamented more elaborately than in “The Spirit that Wants Me.” These variations serve the indexical function of calling forth the environmental essence presented in the earlier movement, but they are also iconic manifestations of the ways in which memory reframes the experience of what has been remembered, whether it be enhanced through subsequent experience (the most plausible interpretation in this case), clarified, faded, or distorted. Both effects are intensified as the “Circling Spirit” movement proceeds: after each return of the gigue and “leaping” motifs, thematic material from the first, third, and fifth movements is called forth, usually but not always in the order in which it originally was heard, and not always exactly as it was heard before.⁹ The work ends with a declamatory theme (Example 5), a reprise of the music that ends the first movement, followed by a brief coda (mm. 139-150).

Example 5. *A'is'ina*, declamatory theme and coda

The musical score for Example 5 is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 1 through 4, and the second system covers measures 5 through 8. The score is for four instruments: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Cello (Vc.). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 120. The dynamic marking is fortissimo (ff). The music features a declamatory theme and a coda. The first system shows the initial statement of the theme, with the Viola and Cello playing a similar rhythmic pattern. The second system shows the theme being taken up by the Violins, with the Viola and Cello playing a more complex, ornamented version of the theme.

In *Art as Experience*, Dewey maintains that the artist “does not shun moments of resistance and tension” but “rather cultivates them, not for their own sake but because of their potentialities, bringing to living consciousness an experience that is unified and total” (LW10, p. 21). Following Dewey, Johnson affirms (2007, p. 262):

We ought to realize that our human capacities for discerning meaning operate pervasively in all our experience, artistic and non-artistic alike, but in good art those capacities operate in exemplary fashion, showing us how experience can be significant and meaningful. Art—at least art that is not overly enamored with postmodernism—is not an escape from meaning, but rather a pursuit of consummated meaning. That is part of what Dewey meant when he insisted that art is a condition of life.

The rich meaningfulness of *Ats'ina: Place of Writings on the Rock* is not reducible simply to an object lesson in Deweyan aesthetics. But it illustrates well how when consummatory aesthetic experience is musical, it is an enactment and a carrying forward of the rhythmic drama of life itself.

Notes

- 1 I do not concur with Short, however, that pure iconicity is music's only properly musical semiotic function. Most pertinent for the present essay is the fact that the primary mode of signification in music does not consist only of “musical feelings contained in the sound,” as Short maintains (2007, p. 205), but also in the movement of these sounds, their tonal, rhythmic, and harmonic relations, in the form they give rise to as the music unfolds, and, when appropriate, to their relations to a sung text. See Kruse, 2007, especially pp. 630-633.
- 2 One unfortunately common misconception of Dewey's aesthetics is the shibboleth that consummatory experiences are always positive. The persistence of this misunderstanding is rather surprising, considering that Dewey's examples at the beginning of the chapter of *Art as Experience* devoted specifically to consummatory experience include such things as “a quarrel with one who was once an intimate” and “a catastrophe finally averted by a hair's breadth” (Dewey, LW10, p. 43). Alexander explains (1998, pp. 14-15): “It must be stressed yet again that by ‘consummation’ or ‘completion’ Dewey does not mean that works of art cannot deal with themes that involve ‘alienation’ or ‘fragmentation.’ A bad work of art, whatever its theme, fails to integrate its materials so that they are expressive and realize a felt meaning to the work. Our interest is not provoked and our senses are not brought into a fresh synthesis. On the other hand, a good work of art, like Picasso's *Guernica* [,] which deals with the destruction of civilization, achieves its power through the focal, integrated intensity of its composition. An experience of seeing *Hamlet* well performed does not leave us with a sense that there is either a triumph of order in the universe or that everything works out for the best. But it does achieve ‘consummation’ and ‘completion’ because of its integrity and depth as a work of art.” For more on the relation between the possibilities of experience and the tragic in Dewey's thought, see Alexander, 2013, pp. 352-391.

- 3 See Dewey, LW10, ch. 2. What makes an artwork “fine,” according to Dewey, is not whether it is designated as belonging to a cultural tradition of “fine” or “high” art as distinct from, say, popular, vernacular, or “useful” art forms: “An angler may eat his catch without thereby losing the esthetic satisfaction he experienced in casting and playing. It is this degree of completeness of living in the experience of making and of perceiving that makes the difference between what is fine or esthetic in art and what is not. Whether the thing made is put to use, as are bowls, rugs, garments, weapons, is, *intrinsically* speaking, a matter of indifference. That many, perhaps most, of the articles and utensils made at present for use are not genuinely esthetic happens, unfortunately, to be true. But it is true for reasons that are foreign to the relation of the ‘beautiful’ and ‘useful’ as such. Wherever conditions are such as to prevent the act of production from being an experience in which the whole creature is alive and in which he possesses his living through enjoyment, the product will lack something of being esthetic. No matter how useful it is for special and limited ends, it will not be useful in the ultimate degree—that of contributing directly and liberally to an expanding and enriched life” (LW10, pp. 33-34).
- 4 Examples of this sort of inquiry include Aaron Ridley’s and Peter Kivy’s work on whether musical meaning is conveyed with reference to “musical objects,” discussions by Jerrold Levinson and others of whether a particular musical performance can be considered a “token” of which a performance tradition or a written score is a “type,” and Kendall Walton’s work on instrumental music as representing “fictional worlds.”
- 5 *A's'ina* was commissioned by the Placitas Artists Series for Willy Sucre and Friends and premiered in 2002.
- 6 The term “movement” in Western art music, which defines a relatively self-contained section of a larger work, is of course a direct expression of Johnson’s “music as moving” metaphor.
- 7 Johnson continues (2007, p. 241): “Two measures later, we are back again to the alternating G to B-flat leaps; but in the next measure, instead of rising just a half step up to A-flat (as before), we now go even a half step higher, to A natural. The result is an even greater heightening of anticipation, which carries us on up to a high F that resolves downward slightly to middle C. This is the passage ‘where you’ll find me,’ and it slows down considerably from the rapidly jumping eighth notes to reduce some of the sense of forward movement and give the listener a feeling of temporary rest.” The tension and resolution Johnson identify in this passage’s melodic sequence are supported harmonically as well: the ascent to A natural is supported by a brief harmonic modulation from the original tonic key of E-flat major to the key of the dominant, B-flat major—which then resolves back to E-flat major only with the return of the original “Somewhere over the rainbow” melody.
- 8 The discussion of sequences just above is a case in point.
- 9 As mentioned above, the titles of these movements are “The Spirit that Wants Me,” “The Old Man and the Boy,” and “Sanctuary in Box Canyon.”

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About the author

Felicia E. Kruse (fkrusealex@gmail.com) is Visiting Scholar in the Department of Philosophy at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, USA. She has published numerous articles on Peirce's semiotic in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*. Her current research is in musical aesthetics and semiotics from the perspective of the classical American philosophical tradition.