“The One in the Many and the Many in the One”

An Analysis of Monads, Folds, and the New Harmony in Jonathan Luckhurst’s Monuments Exhibition

FPA 412 – Case Study
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Introduction

Have you ever looked at a picture and were confused of what it was? Was it either so realistic that you swore it must be a photograph taken with the most high-definition digital camera on the market, only to find out that it was actually a painting? Or has the reverse happened – you’ve looked at an image so vibrant and textured, thought it was a painting, only to realize later that it was indeed a manipulated photograph? I experienced this phenomenon when I first came across Jonathan Luckhurst’s latest photography exhibition, *Monuments* (2011). While the medium of an artwork is usually an important component of its discourse (one must discuss the technical ability and compare it to other works of its kind), the ambiguity in Luckhurst’s photographs actually allows for a heightened conversation. Not only do his pictures look like they could be either paintings or photographs, but his incorporation of organic materials into the printing process suggest a type of painterly application.

For the purpose of this case study, I will examine Luckhurst’s *Monuments* collection by discussing how the pieces function as monads, their propensity to fold and unfold, the manners in which they unfold, and how they relate to the notion of the new harmony. The primary focus is how through different layers, the photographs unfold new perceptions and affect the viewer’s personal monad.

Description

While walking past the Buschlen Mowatt Projects site I caught a glimpse of black and white pictures hanging on the gallery walls; they were grainy and chaotic, and I couldn’t quite tell what they were. As I quickly passed, they resembled still images of static on a television screen. As a habit, I try to experience new artworks without any additional information first – ignoring the title cards and the artist’s statement, I try to look at something just as an independent
object within a vacuum. Even when looking at the large rectangular pictures so closely (that I thought somebody would tell me to step back), they were indistinguishable as photographs or paintings. Upon reading the information cards and artist’s statement, I learned that they were indeed photographs taken with an analogue camera and printed onto Dibond. The images in question are mostly of clusters of sparsely leafed trees and spatters of foliage. Tree trunks bisect the picture at all angles, two of the Monuments are such extreme close ups and cropped so thinly that they look more like abstract shapes than anything else. Based on the texture and the content of rest of the collection though, it seems as if they are close up images of tree bark. The other photographs are taken from a variety of distances and angles; some are from below as if looking up from the ground, others in line with the canopy of the forest. The consistent factor in all of them is that they are grainy, somewhat abstracted, unclear, and physically textured. In the photos that are primarily black, the trees act as white accents, and there are areas that show traces of its printing process. Closely set, horizontal discrepancies in the ink look like track marks on its surface. Refer to appendix 1 to see the images.

**Monuments As Leibnizian Monads and Deleuzian Perceptibles**

In order to discuss Luckhurst’s photographs as examples of Leibnizian monads, clarity to terms needs to be given. Just to summarize, Leibniz defines a monad as a “simple substance”, containing no various component parts but rather join together to make compounds.\(^1\) They come into being all at once, and are extinguished in the same fashion, and all are discernible from one another. They are also closed off to all external influence. Since every monad functions as a

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uniquely independent identity, “each monad brings its own world into being”. To call one of Luckhurst’s photographs a monad is to say that it was conceived of in immediacy (the moment the shutter of the camera closed, the film was exposed and the image was created); each picture functions and exists on its own to make up a series of compounds: the exhibition, the artist’s oeuvre, every photograph ever taken. Each is impenetrable to outside forces and each is unique (unique in form alone, the ink that was used in its printing exists on that image only and cannot be physically shared anywhere else now).

Each of the *Monuments* is filled with perceptions as well – perceptions are the only things that exist within these monads/simple substances and “work upon one another”. These perceptions are reflected in the monad’s “clear zone”, to use Deleuze’s (Leibnizian) terminology. The clear zone is what is related most clearly to the monad’s body, what is nearest to it, and that which it can discern without problem; it also consists of what is remarkable. This notion of perception and the “clear zone” can be discussed in a number of ways to Luckhurst’s work. First, each individual photo can be used to describe the clear zone within it: the actual scene that is depicted – this would be a micropersception because of how limited the image itself is. Or, the collection of images can be used to explain how they open up the viewer’s monad to increase the latter’s clear zone. The latter explains more of a macroperception because the viewer’s clear zone is larger than the images’, and is only being increased after perceiving the images.

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3 Leibniz, *Monadology*
Figure 1, below, is a visual representation of the photograph’s clear zone. The pictures depict a number of trees, bushes, etcetera, that exist within a forest, which exists within (presumably) Canada, which is part of the larger universe. However, the photograph’s monad is so limited that its clear zone is only what exists within the frame. In regard to figure 1, the photo is a point on the fold of the forest, which is a point on the overall landscape, which is part over the overall universal fold. Deleuze wrote that “every monad expresses the entire world, but obscurely and dimly because it is finite and the world is infinite”; in the case of Monuments, the photographs show a very finite and limited part of the whole but is a representation of it nonetheless.\(^5\) There are even more microperceptions within the image too – individual trees to focus on, or individual particles of ink. This is keeping in line with Deleuze’s explanation that microperceptions are “folds in folds, over folds, following folds” containing endlessly smaller parts that make up the perception.

In a much more literal sense, this is even referential in the content some of the photos themselves. In Monument IV, the image is primarily black, with individual trees as the starkest

\(^5\) Ibid., 86
white and some of the leaves a mixture of the two (Refer to appendix 1). The space around the trees is impenetrable by light; it is representative of the universe but the photo’s monad cannot perceive it. Conversely, the wider shots that show more trees and cover a larger area tend to have lighter atmospheres because they show more of the universe (albeit, not by much) (Refer to Monument II in the appendix for an example). To look at Monuments affecting the clear zone of the viewer is a much different task. Because it is the interaction of two monads with two very different perspectives and amplitude, it increases the perceptions to a macroperception level. Figure 2 is another visual representation of this example.

This figure uses O'Sullivan’s theory on folds and perceptibles, specifically within art. But first, explanation of the different components is necessary. Figure 2 shows the viewer’s monad while looking at Luckhurst’s photographs. The lightest, or most clear, part of the viewer’s monad comes while looking at the image itself (“the image as it is printed and on display”) and is marked so as white. The other material perceptions below it are less clear because they were not on display with the actual photographs, but one could imagine what the negative and the actual trees look like. Below the fold of “physical place where photos were taken, the actual trees” is
the darkest – enfolded within that are the materials that make up the tree, the bark and leaf molecules, organisms living in the tree, etcetera. One can hardly imagine what lies beneath that.

On the other end of the spectrum, are the immaterial perceptions. This is everything that increases the viewer’s soul’s amplitude and clarity. This can only be achieved by having another monad look at, or interact with the photos in question. An example of the external subjectivity could be the fact that the photographs are named *Monuments I-VI*. What exactly does “monument” denote? By definition, a monument is a structure meant to commemorate a person, event, or thing of importance. Also, because the viewer would be aware that the artist is Vancouver-based, one might think that there is some kind of local or First Nations association to it; Pacific Northwest totem poles are commonly seen or referred to in British Columbia, are made out of natural materials (wood from trees like the ones photographed), and can be referred to as monuments. Is Luckhurst referring to traditional B.C. aboriginal art practices with the content and titling of his works? It can’t be known for sure by just the average viewer, but the logical train of thought can lead to unfolding more of the universe, which is why its level of unfolding is a lighter gray and higher on the perceptible spectrum of the figure. To be clear, macro perceptions are dependent on the micro. One could not come to draw any larger conclusions about “what the work means” without the nearly imperceptible flecks acting together to form the picture. If these two figures were to be put together, they would be points on the same curve; that is, the infinite.⁶

**Unfolding Through Style**

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⁶ Ibid.
The circle encapsulating all of the folds within figure 2 would be the larger fold or the style of the artwork. In O’Sullivan’s article, he refers to Gerhard Richter’s style (painting over photographs) as a manner of unfolding. The same principle can be applied to Luckhurst’s unique style. As previously mentioned, the images in question can be unfolded in various ways, both internally by the image itself and externally by the viewer. Both lead to new folds and increased clarity. This argument was brought about by the distinct quality of Luckhurst’s photos: they looked like paintings. In his artist statement, Luckhurst mentioned that he regularly includes organic materials into the prints and that the printing process is just as important as the image itself, if not more so. It should not be confused that I am comparing Luckhurst’s work to Richter’s; it is that their stylistic philosophy are two leaves from the same, very large, tree.

As a self-described pictoralist, Luckhurst avoids literal recordings of his scenes and manipulates his film, physically adding matter onto its surface as a means of defining his style. This aesthetic quality could be described as a “true fiction”; the photos are of actual places that exist in the world, but because the clarity of the perceptible is so low, the imagination fills in the rest of the universe. Baumgarten would agree that Luckhurst’s aesthetic quality has as much, if not more value than the “logical knowing” of his works. This plays well into the artist’s intention too – he noted that he wants to create a type of anonymity within his work, devoid of human context. The artist’s intention is for the landscapes to speak for themselves as natural states and for their aesthetic quality to bring that out. In this sense, the aesthetic knowledge here is what leads to further unfolding as previously outlined. The root of unfolding, according to

7 O’Sullivan, “From Possible Worlds to Future Folds”
10 Ibid.
Baumgarten, is perfection within aesthetic knowledge that increases clarity. Luckhurst’s work have already been argued to increase clarity in multiple ways, this approach solely focuses on the artist’s style as the catalyst for that.

All of these forms of interconnected unfolding and the clarity that they produce lead to O’Sullivan’s discussion of Leibniz and Deleuze’s notion of the “new harmony”\(^\text{11}\). Essentially, this argument supports open monads and the relationships between monads. It has been established that each of the works function as monads, according to Leibniz’s classification. Furthermore, discussion of the viewer’s monad as it interacts with the image’s monad was discussed as a way of unfolding. This relationship between two autonomous but interacting bodies is what produces the new harmony. Consider figure 3 below as a diagram of this principle:

For this argument to fall into the category of the new harmony, it must fulfill a series of qualifications. First, there must be multiple monads that include an entire world within each, and are “distinguished from other possible but divergent worlds”\(^\text{12}\). In figure three, there are two monads present, the monad of one of Luckhurst’s *Monuments*, and the monad of the viewer;

\(^{11}\) O’ Sullivan, “From Possible Worlds to Future Folds”
\(^{12}\) Ibid.
each one has its only clear and dim areas (denoted by the white and gray areas within them, respectively). Secondly, each “autonomous monad bleeds over into its fellow monads” – this is represented by having the monads open to the others, willing to converge worlds.\(^{13}\) Because the monads cannot contain these divergent worlds together, they are launched upon a vertical harmonic and are “fused in a system of interpenetration and transitory moments of capture” along the three axes: X, Y, and Z.\(^{14}\) The two monads affect one another in an open and reciprocal way, and open the plane of immanence even further.

**Conclusion**

Confusion is often an emotion that works in tandem with angst and frustration – none of those were present when first encountering Jonathan Luckhurst’s photographs, *Monuments* though. I was intrigued and increasingly curious. The ambiguity inherent in Luckhurst’s style plays to his advantage; it does not shut down the viewer or make the photographs closed from consideration. In fact, it does quite the opposite. By exploring the theories of monads and folds, the writings of Deleuze, O’Sullivan and others, an explanatory process of unfolding these photographs is quite possible. Much more could be said on the topic, considering these photographs are representative of a sliver of the universe, and each viewer that encounters them a minute and limited being. However, to go on endlessly would be to try to explore the infinite folds of fabric. There will always be more, they will always be changing, and it is near impossible to ever truly pin one down.

\(^{13}\) Ibid.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.
Appendix 1


