

Interview with: **Jill Marsden**

by Christopher Branson (University of Warwick)

Jill Marsden grew up in Nottingham and studied philosophy at the University of Essex, where she wrote her doctoral thesis on Nietzsche. Since then she has worked at the University of Bolton, where she is currently senior lecturer in Philosophy and English. She is the author of *After Nietzsche: Notes towards a philosophy of ecstasy* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), along with numerous articles on Nietzsche, Deleuze, the philosophy of the body and related questions. After reviewing her original and inspiring book for *The Agonist*¹ I was keen to meet her and ask about her relationship with Nietzsche and her approach to writing and academia. I found myself in conversation with a rare free spirit of the academic world, discussing, amongst other things, the secrets of her working methods and her vision of philosophy as aesthetics. The interview was conducted in her office in Bolton in April 2008 and was continued by correspondence.



CB: Let's start at the beginning. How did you get into philosophy?

JM: I did philosophy as an undergraduate, at Essex, but it was a last minute thing. I just perversely decided at the last moment that I wanted to do philosophy.

CB: Had you had any philosophy at school?

JM: No.

CB: That's the problem, isn't it?

JM: Yes, that's the problem, because I was going to do English at university. Somehow I realised, just in time, that what spoke to me in the literary texts that I particularly admired were philosophical questions, and that was the route in.

CB: I wasn't so lucky. It took me two years of deriving physical equations at university before I realised that I had been interested in physics at school insofar as it had philosophical implications.

JM: Yes, it's a common problem. But I never looked back from that point. It was a spur of the moment thing, but a good decision. When I started I'd decided I was going to do philosophy the week before, so it was completely new to me. At Essex, in the mid-eighties, there was a big emphasis on continental philosophy. David Krell was there, along with Robert Bernasconi. At that time, Warwick and Essex, and possibly Sussex, were the only universities that were really exploring continental philosophy, so I didn't have a mainstream philosophical education. It certainly wasn't biased towards the Anglo-American analytic tradition, and that suited me because of my interest in the literary. That's when I discovered Nietzsche, as an undergraduate student, before I'd had any classes on Nietzsche. I came across him and I did have that wonderful sense of finding something that you know you're going to stay with. It was easy for me after that because I knew that I wanted to write on Nietzsche.

CB: Which text did you discover first?

JM: *Beyond Good and Evil* was the one I first picked up. I remember reading the first section, where he is asking about the value of truth. We ask after this value of truth, but, he says, why not untruth, why not uncertainty, even ignorance? And it just seemed to me that these questions had been against the law. It was a case of really finding something. It's really from that point onwards... I think you can often do that with a book: that you can open a book and you'll know within the first moments whether you're going to have a good relation with it or not. With Kant I remember thinking, "I don't want to read this," but that would perhaps be the only exception. And I really had a strong reaction to Nietzsche.

CB: For me it was partly the honesty of it, but also the bravery, that you could dare to ask these questions. Two incidents in the formation of my relationship with Nietzsche stay in my mind. The first was when I was an incredibly disgruntled physics student towards the end of my second year, drinking in someone's room. We were discussing why on earth we did this, why we studied, pursued "truth," and so on. And our reasoning came to this dead end where we thought, "We have to, there's nothing else to do. We have to learn more." But we couldn't say why. Studying was accepted as a virtue; we weren't able to make that leap to questioning the value of it. A year or so later I was sitting on a bus, reading Nietzsche for the first time. It was *On the Genealogy of*

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Morals, and within about two pages it felt like somebody had hit my head with an axe and opened up a new world of possibilities. It was simply the fact of the questions he was asking. I had been ready to ask them, but it had seemed almost preposterous that one could: as if it was too dangerous, or frightening to ask them. So I had always shied away from it.

JM: It's a huge shot of adrenaline, isn't it? There is this sense with Nietzsche of finding the familiar becoming strange immediately, and the world becomes large again. It opens up to the most wonderful possibilities.

CB: On the first page of the preface to your book, *After Nietzsche*, you write, with regard to the idea of the eternal return of the same, "The transformative potential of this profoundly captivating thought has obsessed, preoccupied and enraptured me from the 'tremendous moment' of its first encounter, leading me again and again to a strange kind of knowledge, one which is glimpsed at the very moment that the reflective powers are eclipsed." Can you remember this moment?

JM: Well, from the moment of reading it, there was a sense of "this is going to be with me," and it has been. That would be twenty years ago ... There was a sense that there was something here that is a vector for thinking. Of course, as with any student, I had a desire to find out what it was about, and I've constantly been interested in trying to find out what it's about.

CB: Do you think you've got there? Do you think you could exhaust its sense?

JM: I'm not sure that I could exhaust it really, because I suppose I've become more interested in finding the question to which it could be presented as an answer. I think that is something which, philosophically, hasn't been explored. The students here [at the University of Bolton] that study Nietzsche initially do want to have ready answers, and they find reading Nietzsche a tremendous challenge because it makes serious demands upon them as students, but I've noticed a similar thing happen to them. If they abide with it for an amount of time—and there is a certain patience required—they eventually resist that desire for immobility and actually relinquish that desire to fix it in a certain position. They become much more interested in the quiet machinery of it and what it opens up for reflection. That's been really interesting for me, seeing what other people say about it, because I've never had any strong preconception of what students are going to say. I know they might talk about cycles of birth and rebirth, and occasionally that comes up, but they often surprise me, even though I know the passages quite well. In that respect the thought seems to be an infinitely rich and fecund resource.

CB: I've taught it in seminars and I find it enormously difficult, partly because, if I was doing my job properly, they would leave with even more questions and perhaps no firm answers. Many students encounter Nietzsche and don't know how to identify it as philosophy. At Warwick, the undergraduate degree is now heavily weighted towards analytic philosophy, which is specifically problem-based. With Nietzsche, perhaps, they are being asked to find new problems, rather than

answer questions that are definitely given, and I sympathise with them in finding this difficult, because they are asked to do something very different from what they have been trained to do.

JM: You do have to ask students to relinquish a lot of the tendencies they have when they encounter something for the first time. I used to go to Warwick a lot in the late eighties and early nineties, when Nick Land was there. Before he was at Warwick he was a PhD student at Essex, but a bit before my time. One of the things he did after he'd gone to Warwick was to organize a Nietzsche symposium and this was quite a wonderful thing, because rather than meeting to give great weighty papers on Nietzsche, or even to read passages together and talk about them, what we tried to do was write things which weren't really 'on' Nietzsche, but which were inspired by reading Nietzsche and his aphoristic style. It only lasted for a few weeks, but it worked quite well. It certainly took us all out of our comfort zone, doing something quite different. I still have some of the writings from various members of that group, and it was instructive. It is something that I'm particularly alert to in the way in which I respond to Nietzsche: how do you write on Nietzsche or about Nietzsche?

CB: I did want to ask about how you write. Quite aside from what I admired about your book philosophically, it was a real, rare delight to read. It has a poetic voice for much of the time and is incredibly passionate. Was this written in a burst of intensity, in the manner that Nietzsche would give birth to his books like sudden eruptions? Or was it toilsome, heavily worked on?

JM: It was both, I suppose, because the nature of these things is that we always have deadlines and I do work to deadlines—I literally work to deadlines! This meant that I spent far longer on the earlier parts of the book than on the later parts. I think the first chapter might have taken nine months to write and the last chapter probably a day [*laughs*]. And I suppose there was also the whole spectrum between.

CB: The voice in the book is incredibly pronounced. Was the fact that the first chapter took so long to write at all to do with trying to find a suitable voice, such that once you had found it the process became easier?

JM: No, I don't think it was that. I think the way that I work is to find a strand of interest in the text and to pursue that initially, without having a sense of where it's leading, and to simply follow the connections. There are a few intersecting themes in the book, which flow in and out of different chapters, but it was important for me to write a book that I would like, rather than one that would serve the purpose of career capital. I didn't want to write an introductory book. I wanted to produce something that I would appreciate.

CB: Reading the book it was clear that this wasn't necessarily a book written to improve your career standing.

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JM: No, I'm not sure it has [*laughs*].

CB: I wasn't referring to the quality of it, but in terms of the format that one comes to expect of books on philosophy. In terms of general appeal and approval, what people want tends to be what they are used to, what they expect. Unusual forms always risk being rejected or ignored. Reading your work I was reminded of something David Lynch once said in an interview. Mark Cousins asked him how he felt when *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* was booed at Cannes. Lynch said that his earlier film, *Dune*, had upset him, because he didn't make the *Dune* he wanted to, but that he was happy with *Fire Walk with Me*. He said that he could worry about the critical reception, but that would be to take his attention away from the work itself, which is the only important thing. It's like a ring doughnut and its hole, he said: the responses are the hole, and you need to keep your eyes on the doughnut. Your book reads like one written by someone who was only concerned with the doughnut.

JM: [*laughs*] Thank you. We do have copies of the book in the library here—I did think that this might be one library that might be persuaded to buy it!—and the students who do the Nietzsche module do read it, but I wonder what they make of it, really.

CB: In one sense, it's easy to read: one gets swept up by the rhythm of it, and so if one reads it without worrying too much about understanding everything immediately, then I think it communicates really well. But—and I realised this particularly as I was writing the review—it also contains much detailed and difficult scholarship and argumentation. For it to be written in such a beautiful way is particularly impressive. It reads as though it was written in a very intense way, but for this to be possible, you would have had to have ingested a great amount of scholarship and conducted a great amount of independent thought.

JM: Well, I suppose it is a scholarly book in the sense that there are passages of Nietzsche which claim my interest and I attempt to work on those and think about those. In the process of doing that connections are generated: not necessarily with other passages in Nietzsche, but perhaps with other things which also claim my interest at the time, like Schopenhauer, or whoever. So I didn't feel there was a tension between the scholarship of my approach and the writing voice.

CB: This was your first book. Did it follow from your PhD work?

JM: That is a good question and I could only give a vague answer. I did write about Nietzsche for my PhD at Essex, but even though that was about eternal return, the book is entirely different.

CB: Did you ever try to get your doctoral thesis published?

JM: No, like I said earlier, I work to deadlines. I submitted the PhD, went back to my flat and packed everything in a van to start here [the post at Bolton] the following day. I didn't have much cause to think about the PhD for a while, and even though I still had to have a *viva*, in my naivety

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I assumed that I'd got it. It wasn't arrogance, but just that, for me, the task had been to get it completed. And then I started this job. Going back to Essex for a *viva* was something I gave no thought to whatsoever [laughs]. Luckily that didn't turn out to be a big problem, but that's why I didn't return to the PhD. And it was a PhD: a PhD is a very different thing. I'm pleased that I didn't try to make that into a book. You know, it has its scholarly tone and I wanted to have a different voice.

CB: It is an idiosyncratic book and, in terms of what I've read, at least, it is unusual for a first book. As your modest title says, it contains "Notes towards a philosophy of ecstasy." It consists of interrelated investigations that sometimes go off in different directions, exploring different areas. At times the connection is loose between them, although they all use the ontology that you've tried to develop in the earlier chapters. I was wondering how the book was received by the academic community, and other readers beyond that.

JM: The responses I've had have been favourable. I suppose that finishing the book was rather like finishing the PhD: my attention was immediately turned towards something else. Of course, it wasn't that I was indifferent to how it was received: I hoped that it would be positively received. I suppose you already have an imagined audience when you write these things. I knew that this audience was probably quite small and that I'd probably know who most of the members of this audience were, so I was quite surprised to find that copies had been sold in America: people had bought it who didn't know me! Goodness knows what they would have made of it...but I've had extremely flattering and warm responses. And I take it that someone who'd read and disliked the book wouldn't be bothered to write and tell me that, or indeed carry on reading it, I suppose.

CB: I'm just wondering what you feel your relationship is to the academic community at large—do you feel part of it? Or maybe you feel part of a smaller section of the community: the Nietzsche scholars, perhaps, or the adventurers in ecstasy?

JM: I suppose I do, but it would be a fairly small community. I feel connected to a number of people with whom I studied, such as my peers on the course at Essex, who've gone on to teach philosophy and continue to develop their own particular interests. And, although I've been away from the conference scene for the last three years, I still feel quite connected at a distance, I certainly feel part of something. As for the broader academic scene, probably not, but then I've got quite an odd relationship to academic philosophy, in the sense that there are very few jobs in philosophy that would really suit me, because my interests cross with a lot of literary texts and other kinds of texts and I've been able to completely indulge that in this job.

CB: Could you describe what your role here is?

JM: When I first got the job here it was to teach Philosophy and Gender and Women's Studies; the latter closed a number of years ago. Perhaps with it being a relatively young institution,

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there's a freedom that comes with that. So the courses that I've taught since I've been here are courses that I've developed. I haven't been obliged to ever teach practical ethics or formal logic, so that's completely ruined me for a job elsewhere. As it happens, this campus is closing for good in the summer, and the philosophy degree as well. I'll be continuing in Creative Studies, and I'm teaching on the English degree at the moment, and we've still got philosophy students for another year or two as the cohorts go through, but it's a turning point, quite a critical time. It's such a shame because a lot of really good things have been able to flourish here, simply because there hasn't been that tradition of the mainstream degree, and the department's very big: big for this sector, at least. It used to be even larger, with eight members of staff doing very different things, so there wasn't a constellation of interest in one area. Being at Bolton has been excellent for me and I've been able to really pursue my own interests.

CB: That strikes me as incredibly lucky in this day and age.

JM: It is, but it's rare. I have got a colleague who hasn't ever been entirely convinced that I wouldn't rather be at Oxford, but where else would I be able to do what I've been doing?

CB: Could I ask you about what you are working on at present? Do you have any current projects?

JM: Well, I'm planning to write another book. I feel like I'm approaching that sort of space. I want to develop, in the broadest terms, a philosophy and literature project. It won't be "how can philosophers use literature to do philosophy?" and it certainly won't be literary criticism with a philosophical edge to it. I suppose it relates to some of what we've been speaking about. I want to explore, particularly in modernism and modernist writers, this alertness to different rhythms of thought and the way in which certain texts map out alternative cartographies of the human. I'm not sure if this is going to be a case of leaving Nietzsche behind... I suspect not.

CB: Can you name any of the figures that you'll be exploring?

JM: Yes... but it's eclectic. If I say someone like James Joyce, I'm not thinking about *Ulysses* and I'm not thinking about *Finnegan's Wake*: I'm not thinking about that kind of thing in general. I'm thinking of a precise story in *Dubliners*, and I'm thinking of a precise story by Katherine Mansfield. It kind of grows in that way, because I must feel some connection that will perhaps show itself thematically. There is a sense that certain things, if put together, will cross-fertilise and produce something new.

CB: It must be a slow process; quite different in spirit from the current demands of academic production. It sounds like you wait patiently for connections to be made, in order to try and find something new.

JM: It's not something that worries me very much: the beginnings of projects, starting some-

thing. You have an instinctive urge to read a story by Kleist, or to read a poem by Trakl or a passage from Nietzsche. It isn't obvious that they are connected in any way but at a more unconscious level some path between them is apparently being forged. There are a lot of blind alleys, of course, when you work in this meandering fashion but I like to work like this, to think about why the things that really interest me interest me. It's what I love, pursuing these transverse connections.

CB: Returning to Nietzsche, I wanted to ask you about his place in the academy. There is an Epicurean aspect to his philosophy, which comes from his recognition that there are enormous amounts of different conditions of life, different forces. He saw his task as trying to become the one he is, which can loosely—albeit dangerously—be interpreted as the task of fulfilling his greatest potential. In order to achieve and explicate this he became overtly concerned with the conditions of the body. This led him to argue why certain seemingly benign factors are so important, such as the weather, diet and company. We have to think about the types of people one should spend one's time with and the types of people one should stay away from. Above all, he saw academia as a deeply unhealthy community and a decadent industry, which distracts one from important questions. For this reason I find the world of Nietzsche scholarship an incredibly strange and often contradictory place. I was recently at a conference and heard two wonderful papers, but I had to leave early, for the sake of my health. There was an overbearing atmosphere of “progress” in there, this self-congratulatory atmosphere, as though we were worthy children of a good cause.

JM: It does spawn some truly curious life forms, doesn't it? I find this weird, fascinating and horrifying in equal measure. For example, the ease with which Nietzsche can be presented as a liberal humanist: “Well, we've destroyed those old law tables: now we're completely free to create *ex nihilo*”. I also find this ‘heroic individualist’ reading of Nietzsche quite terrifying—as if all we need to do is ‘maximise our potential.’ There's none of the danger—it's an utterly domesticated Nietzsche—none of the goads to really go beyond what you think you might be able to think, or what you might be able to do. It's really anodyne and benign, and I just wonder, “Why read *Nietzsche* in that way?” There are other things you could read for that. And that really puzzles me. But then, it's very interesting to see how different readers approach Nietzsche's work. If you ever look at Walter Kaufmann's translations, his footnotes suggest a very literal reading of some of Nietzsche's metaphors, for example, when he pulls Nietzsche up on a point of empirical certainty. It amuses me a great deal. It horrifies me as well, because, going back to your question of the academy, I wonder if before long we will be teaching Nietzsche with bullet points.

CB: It is such a fascinating, but precarious aspect of reading Nietzsche. There is the instinct you have mentioned, to find in him what you wish to find, and perhaps to close your eyes to what contradicts it. For example, there are many readers who would say, “I love Nietzsche—apart

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from what he says about women,” and then carry on as though it is unproblematic to simply reject these views whilst affirming the rest of his thought, as though they were expressions of personal *ressentiment* and historical prejudices that are beneath his station as a philosopher, and which we have now rejected. The idea that the concept of the feminine might be a central feature of his thought—the symbol of Ariadne, for example, and her relation to Dionysus—is ignored because the reader fears the implications of following such a line of thought. The opposite instinct, which is equally dissatisfactory, is to feel that his work is beyond criticism. This perhaps emerges from a feeling of inadequacy in relation to the great philosopher, but also from a unique trust in him, in the personal voice with which he writes. The dangers of this instinct are, on the one hand, stultifying scholarship (“Who is Nietzsche?” “What is Nietzsche’s philosophy?”), and on the other hand, the deification of Nietzsche or Zarathustra: where Nietzsche becomes one’s model and one’s conscience, and we forget the task of ceasing to be a pupil. What is common to both instincts is that we close ourselves off from certain aspects of his philosophy. Is it necessary that we relate to his labyrinthine thought in a piecemeal fashion? And how should we negotiate with it in order to avoid these dangers?

JM: Well, I suppose the idea of reading Nietzsche in a piecemeal way sounds unsatisfactory, but I think we all, usually without thinking about it, do have preferences, and so there will always be texts that are considered, but are not explored with the same intensity. I suppose it’s a question of what speaks to you in the thinker, and there are different Nietzsches. I know that seems like a glib and obvious thing to say, but within Nietzsche’s corpus there are different personae, so I don’t think it’s a problem to find your attention alighting on one thing and not another. There are clearly dangers in ignoring or dismissing ideas that one finds unpalatable but these issues only emerge as problematic in relation to a particular perspective and for Nietzsche perspectives are developed in the process of enquiry - they are not given in advance. I particularly agreed with what you said a little while ago about attending to the material conditions of thought, referring to *Ecce Homo*, where he talks about the importance of climate and food, and the way these nearest things are given primacy—the nearest things rather than the furthest things: God, immortality and the soul. It’s what you eat every day and the company that you keep which strictly speaking determines what you are able to think. This is most interesting philosophically: the material conditions of thought, that thought has its material conditions. Some people dismiss *Ecce Homo* as being frivolous and parodying the writing of an autobiography, but I think something really interesting is being said there about the climate and culture of thought. Of course, in the ‘Why I am a Destiny’ section at the end, he does say I don’t want believers, I fear that I am going to be pronounced holy, so there is in that very declamatory passage a lot of railing against this notion of having acolytes, and yet at the same time there is this imperative to be read and considered.

CB: I wanted to ask about what emerged out of your earliest readings of Nietzsche. You argue against the potential for existentialist interpretations to draw out what is interesting and exiting in

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Nietzsche's thought; that perhaps such readings miss what is radical about it. You explicate this in terms of a philosophy of ecstasy, broadly construed as a foundational aesthetics, a science of sensitive knowing. Was this there in your first thoughts when reading Nietzsche, or did it take a longer period of consideration to draw it out?

JM: That took a longer time to come. It was influenced by reading Kant, primarily: the third critique.

CB: I thought that your work on Kant was your best chapter. It is a radical reading, but I found it compelling.

JM: Your description of it as 'radical' and 'compelling' makes me wonder whether an orthodox Kantian would accept the interpretation.

CB: Do you worry about things like that?

JM: [laughs] No. I presume that such a person wouldn't want to read the book anyway. I found Kant's third critique so compelling and, of course, it made me realise how important Kant is for Nietzsche. I don't think I'd really thought that through before. Whilst I assumed that Schopenhauer would be an important influence, it was only when I started to read Kant that I saw what an event for Nietzsche's philosophy Kant is. It is absolutely important.

CB: A lot of people feel that there is something incredibly unstable in the third critique, that there he's beginning to uproot the whole critical system, and that he really problematises the synthesised 'Self' of the first two critiques. I think you draw out the implications of this very successfully. I wrote in my review that Kant's concept of the Self haunts your book, insofar as the 'I' is something that we habitually return to in our thought, even though this is that which we're trying to think past, or even forget in our thinking.

JM: Yes. I mean, that's why I saw Kant as oddly being quite an ally of Nietzsche: I saw something anti-humanist there. You can interpret the demand for an intersubjectivity of taste as being, at the same time, an appeal for an anonymity; that there is something transpersonal about a genuinely disinterested judgement, which you almost have in spite of yourself, because there is nothing interested, invested, personal about it. I think in my book I put it as, "It's of you, without it being yours."

CB: It evokes the metaphor of the dream, as in *The Gay Science*: "I suddenly woke up in the midst of this dream, but only to the consciousness that I was dreaming and that I must go on dreaming lest I perish—as a somnambulist must go on dreaming lest he fall" (*GS* §54). Suddenly you are introduced into a philosophy which talks about transpersonal forces, the illusions and limitations of consciousness, and, ultimately, fatalism as well. You have made me eager to return to Kant: it's as though you have heard in him an utterly different voice than other listeners tune into.

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JM: But there is something astonishing there, particularly where he's talking about the sublime, that makes you really re-think the Dionysian in Nietzsche. You read Nietzsche and it's not obvious that Kant would have been such a stimulus, but you know, the language is there. You find a Kant revelling in a kind of sensory vibrancy in the sublime: it's the sort of thing Nick Land certainly identifies. There is such an energetic vocabulary at work there, which I don't see in the other Kantian texts, that language. You realise that you're in quite rare waters.

CB: I'd like to ask you about the relationship between the philosopher and art, as it is developed in your thought. I think, overall, what I most appreciated in your book was the idea of 'affective' knowing. If we are to take the death of God seriously—as our unbelief in forms of identity—then we have to pursue philosophy as sensitive knowing, i.e. as aesthetics, in the broadest sense. I completely agree with you that it is incorrect to pigeonhole aesthetics as the study of art. In fact, it makes it seem altogether absurd that aesthetics, in that sense, should be one of the central four philosophical disciplines, along with metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. It makes the whole enterprise seem trifling by comparison. You have the questions of 'what is it?', 'how do I know it?', 'how should I live?', and then we tag the question of art on at the end. 'What is beautiful?' To most ears this sounds like a flighty little trifle by comparison, a superfluous luxury. Such a view of aesthetics shows precisely that we have forgotten its original significance. But it does strike me that, if we are to pursue philosophy in the way you are proposing, it presupposes that the philosopher has an aesthetic sensibility, that he is sympathetic to the types of experiences you are thinking from and about. Now, we all have this to some extent: we all respond to music, for example, but then music is less problematic. It's my intuition, however, that the majority of our systems of education, particularly philosophical and scientific training, actually inhibit the aesthetic sensibility, insofar as these processes alienate us from the act of seeing. We have a habit of over-intellectualising, wishing to determine a work's ultimate "meaning," or wishing to interpret its signs as simple referents of thought. And yet what we are faced with is not a collection of ideas, not even a text, but a piece of art, a composed form. In such cases, we are intellectualising something insofar as we are viewing it under the form of the same, seeking to find in it the concepts that we had already brought with us. The possibility for seeing the new, of the sensation of ecstasy, is thereby minimised. I was wondering if you could talk about your own relationship to art in this context, of the relation between art, philosophy and aesthetic sensibility.

JM: I suppose the idea of rapture has romantic overtones and I'm aware that to speak about aesthetics in terms of rapture seems to focus on a notion of pleasure which is a very old, eighteenth century notion. For me, by contrast, what was important was to really think what it means when you describe aesthetics as a *science* of sensitive knowing. That gives us a definition of aesthetics,

and I liked what that definition suggested for philosophy. It's too easy to equate thinking with consciousness and mentality, but if you pursue a Freudian line of enquiry, then very quickly you have to relinquish that prejudice and recognise that thought is already 'of' the body. If philosophy could abide with that notion, then ethics, epistemology and metaphysics would look quite different. So, for me, it was an attempt to start from a position which doesn't assume that thinking is the soul's silent dialogue with itself. I think that Nietzsche is exploring something like that in the 'physiology of art.'² Art then would be one of the opportunities in which you might talk about that sensitive knowing, and it might be one of the vehicles for encountering that, but, interestingly, in Nietzsche it's in other places that an aesthetic sensibility might prove more subtle and telling. I do have interests in certain artists, usually the tormented ones [*laughs*], and that's not ancillary, but it isn't imperative for me that aesthetics is thought about in relation to art. I suppose that there are states, and Nietzsche talks about these states, which inspire a kind of ecstasy, because they communicate something of the ecstasy of the creator of the artwork. I suppose this touches upon the question of what you are entering into contact with, when you encounter something which you want to say moves you—and we do use this language of transport, because something is happening. Again, it's not so far away from Kant, when Kant is talking about the genius not knowing what he has produced—for obvious reasons, it can't be rehearsed: Kant can't have a genius knowing in advance what he is doing. So there is this illegibility of an artwork, which, at the same time, is communicated. It's something which never seems to arrive within the circuit of cognition, it seems to add relatively little to cognition, and yet something happens, something is transmitted. Nietzsche is fascinated, particularly in the notebooks, when he's talking about that element of perception, things which we are sensing all of the time, but of which we are unaware.

CB: What I read you as being primarily interested in is what ecstasy enables us to think. Is it in this sense that you are suggesting that, apart from those cognitions which we have merely brought forward in perception, there is something else going on, something that is incomprehensible as far as the understanding goes?

JM: Yes, there is another thinking which hovers at the borders of "thinking", and that fascinates me. And you can't point to exactly what it is, but you can point to examples of the sorts of things that it is like. Leibniz speaks of these little perceptions, which are too insignificant, or too banal, to enter into consciousness, but are there all the time. And of course when Freud is talking of the psycho-pathology of everyday life he is giving plenty of examples of the way in which another kind of thinking is protruding into conscious thought.

CB: What we are actually aware of, including this language which we "know," is actually the tip

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² 'Physiology of Art,' was the prospective title Nietzsche gave to a series of notes on art and physis in the 1880s, which connected his later concerns of embodiment and incorporation with the Apollinian and Dionysian. Many of these notes are collected in **The Will to Power**, Ch. IV, 'The Will to Power as Art' (794-893).

of an iceberg of bodily forces and movements that are unknown to us.

JM: Yes, and artists have the tremendous power to explore those and that's something which Nietzsche is clearly pursuing in the physiology of art, or, at least, I think he is.

CB: Insofar as you wish to articulate this thinking that you are trying to develop, you are really fighting against language. You have this language of the drives, which is helpful, and you say that we are forced into this language and these metaphors: that these are the types of metaphors that we have to use when we talk about these things. But, at the same time, we are so conditioned into what thought is that it is very difficult to remain in the metaphor. I always got the sense that I understood what you were talking about, and that I was on the verge of being able to articulate this myself, but it was nonetheless very difficult to capture.

JM: It does seem to be very limited, what you can speak about, but I don't want to speak about this in some mystical way. What I find very inspiring in *The Birth of Tragedy*, for example, is the way in which Nietzsche starts with figures of transport and of ecstasy. He starts with the Apollinian and Dionysian, rather than a concept or a subject, both of which are forms of identity. His starting place is just to say, immediately, "let's approach this physiologically, in terms of a compulsion to dream, a compulsion to intoxication or rapture." That ability to start elsewhere and to pursue it means that you're looking at a quite different map of what's possible and what is thinkable. Inevitably, there will be a tendency to fall back into a certain way of theorising, but I think Nietzsche really shows directions of another kind, of where you begin and how you enter.

CB: Before we finish, I'd like to offer my congratulations. A mutual friend informed me that you have recently started a family. I was just wondering, if you don't mind me asking, what the implications of this are for the material conditions of your thought.

JM: Well, that's why I've not been on the conference circuit for a while. I've had three children in fairly rapid succession. The youngest is only nine months. It does force a different pace, because your time is accounted for, which means all of that wandering around in the middle of the night, drinking, chain-smoking, just isn't there. You know, four in the morning, when you start to have your insights and you collapse into bed and emerge at three in the afternoon. That's gone... [laughs] What's interesting is that the things I've written since having children have either been fairly brief, or about brevity. There's obviously a new relation with time in that, a new form. So, in the process of having children I've made new conditions, and am writing in a different way.

CB: Is this something you've thought about a lot?

JM: Well, one of the last things I wrote on Nietzsche was on the aphorism.³ But I wanted to write

3 Editor's note: See Jill Marsden, "Nietzsche and the Art of the Aphorism" in *A Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006): 22-38.

on the aphorism for quite a while, because that was another thing that interested me in Nietzsche quite early on. The whole issue of what it means to write 'on' Nietzsche is worthy of consideration. My own view is that the text makes demands on the reader which are different to those made by other philosophers and that to really 'engage' with Nietzsche might mean to follow a vector of interest that conducts us away from commentary. I suppose, to some extent, that's what I try to do.

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interviewed by:

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