

“Entering the World of the Hat:”

Artistic Phenomenology in Sondheim and Lapine’s *Sunday in the Park with George*

Alexandra Mitchell

Theatre

“How George looks... he can look forever... what does he see?”

--Dot, from Sondheim and Lapine’s *Sunday in the Park with George*¹

Phenomenology can be difficult to pin down. It is not a methodology like other concrete philosophies, but rather a way of thinking. Philosopher Edmund Husserl founds this school of thought by defining it as an “intentionality” of an individual’s cognitive experience; phenomenology engages with the world of individual, subjective reality.² While phenomenology lies under the umbrella of philosophical discipline—its consideration, reflection, and analysis of individual experience also relates to the realm of theatre. Theatre is a chance for the individual to be subsumed into a separate, live reality onstage. Often in theatre when applying a phenomenological lens to a piece, we seek to study experiences that ruin the “bracketing” of presupposition—moments that take audiences out of the suspension of disbelief and remind them that they are indeed watching a play. Animals onstage, incredible special effects, and water onstage can each make the audience wonder, “How did they do that?”—ruining the immersive environment of the play and bringing them back to their own separate realities. But what of the theatrical elements that draw the audience further into the world of the play, causing them to leave their own realities further behind? Karl Wagner’s concept of *gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art, allows for a more enticing phenomenological experience.³ Wagner coined his term when seeking to unify elements in his operas in response to the showier pieces of the mid 1800s, creating a more engrossing experience for his audiences. When every element and different

artform involved in a play, from the music to the set design to the acting, seeks to encompass the audience in the story, the result gives the audience a lived experience different from their own. An audience experiencing a total work of art will leave the theatre having existed in another cognitive world. Such an event impacts how the individual sees their own reality and can, perhaps, provoke a change in their worldview.

The original *gesamtkunstwerk* referred to opera, but due to the nature of artforms colliding, musical theatre also stands as a popular equivalent—combining music, design, and story in one package. The composer Stephen Sondheim is known for creating musical theatre that leans on story-building; he is often accused of not writing “hummable” tunes like his predecessors in favor of tunes that suit the emotional quality of the characters.⁴ His musical *Sunday in the Park with George* uses not only music, but traditional impressionistic art to contribute to the world of the piece—inciting a phenomenological experience linking the audience to the mind of the artist. The phenomenology of the elements in *Sunday in the Park with George*’s *gesamtkunstwerk*—its music and design, alongside the inner worlds of its two main characters—provoke the internal examination of audience members’ own creativity, forming future artists and appreciators of beauty.⁵

Sunday in the Park with George, premiering on Broadway in 1984, chronicles the life and relationships of the impressionist painter Georges Seurat and his future lineage.⁶ Sondheim and the book writer James Lapine were inspired by the actual Georges Seurat painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. The painting was created in a pointillistic style; each figure formed with thousands of dots of color so that the colors would blend not on the canvas, but in the eye of the viewer. Pointillism as a visual art falls under the larger category of post-impressionism—which is notable to the discussion of phenomenology. Impressionism was a late

19th century artistic movement prominent in France which aimed to put human perspective and experience as the lens for painting. Some famous painters of the genre included Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, and Claude Monet. Their work focused on the effect of light, perspective, and giving the viewer the experience of the world of the painter. Post-impressionist painters took impressionism and heightened the structural elements—the harsh curves of Vincent Van Gogh or the pictorial structure in Paul Cezanne each bring impressionism to a heightened state of being. If, as the philosopher interested in perception and embodiment Maurice Merleau-Ponty articulates, “to look at an object is to inhabit it and from this habitation to grasp all things in terms of the aspect which they present to it,”⁷ then looking at a painting—particularly an impressionist or post-impressionist painting with the goal of giving the viewer an artistic perspective— provides a distinctly phenomenological experience of entering another world. And it is from this experience that Sondheim and Lapine craft their show.

Sondheim and Lapine spent hours staring at *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. As Stephen Banfield says, “Sondheim was seized, as we can imagine, with the same excitement that the great painting and period evoke in us.”⁸ He had an experience in the world of the painter and worked with Lapine to generate how to bring the world to life onstage—how to bring the phenomenological experience of Georges Seurat to the audience. Even Mandy Patinkin, the original actor who played the character of George, went to the exhibit to get inside the mind of the painter. And it was his phenomenological experience of the original painting that helped him unlock the character.⁹ The painting clearly influenced those who viewed it, and its effect would only be enhanced amid the musical as a total work of art in the theatre.

The most obvious way to recreate the world of the painting was to literally recreate the painting—letting the design of the piece capture the look of the original work. Design is one

phenomenological element of *Sunday in the Park with George* which supports a larger, impactful phenomenological experience in the musical as *gesamtkunstwerk*. The play begins with an empty stage and white backdrop. George appears and says, “White. A blank page or canvas. The challenge: bring order to the whole. Through design. Composition. Balance. Light. And Harmony.”¹⁰ As he speaks, the creation comes into being—a moment akin to the Old Testament Genesis. Trees fly in, the park is revealed, and light streams from above. The artist has created his world by speaking about the act of creating. The opening does not yet fully resemble the famous painting, but the audience can see glimpses of elements that will remain in the final design. This visual moment speaks to the phenomenology of the artist—how they see the world as a painting ready to come into being—and to how the audience can see from what the artist draws inspiration, locating bits of the final masterpiece.

As the first act continues, the set slowly begins to resemble the painting—like an artistic work in progress. When the act reaches its finale, George finishes the painting. During the climactic number “Sunday,” he places all the characters onstage and a frame lowers down to complete the picture. The result is an extremely moving piece in which the audience finally sees the artist’s disjointed world come together in harmony—each character that has existed with a life and personality is now subsumed in a larger whole of creation. Joanne Lesley Gordon describes this moment almost like a cognitive fulfilment for the audience. She says:

This is the moment of release both George and the audience have been working toward... art and reality merge. The audience recognizes the reality of the actors, but at the same time can perceive the perfection of Seurat’s masterpiece... The audience is moved not because a plot has been resolved but because a harmonic work of art has been born.¹¹

The audience sees how George sees. This moment of phenomenological shared artistry is reinforced by the lyrics of the number. George repeats the words when he first began creating his world, “Order. Design. Tension. Balance. Harmony.”¹² This time the words represent not merely

artistic concepts, but also the relationships of the people he is painting. “Order” grabs their attention from their various lives. “Design” places the unhappily married servants a couple. “Tension” puts the arguing shop-girls and unfaithful art critic and his wife together. “Balance” indicates other characters to counter-cross to opposite areas of the stage. And finally, “Harmony” is when George places his lover, Dot, into the frame and he himself steps out of the picture. He has created his own world with the audience observing his cognition—a visually stunning moment.

The second act opens 150 years later with George’s great-great grandson trying to succeed as an artist. Though the times have changed, and the characters have progressed, the visuals still remain tied to a phenomenological experience—drawing the audience in to the world of the musical. Young George makes light machines called “chromolumes,” meant to be a modern take of the impressionist fascination with light. The audience is plunged into a technical landscape of flashing colors and images that break the fourth wall and travel into their seats. But this time, what the audience sees is not the emotional creation of a world—but rather a failure of concept. The flashes overwhelm the audience and the machine breaks—underlying George’s struggle to fashion his own self-being. After all, this is his seventh chromolume, and his success is running thin. We experience George’s failure with him because of the phenomenology of watching the art fall apart before us. He goes to Seurat’s park to find inspiration, bringing along his grandmother’s keepsake: Dot’s grammar book. The park has turned dank, crowded with buildings, and empty. George asks “Where are the people out strolling on Sunday?”¹³ We feel what he feels because the vibrancy from earlier in the show is replaced by a visual of dark colors and oppressive buildings. George begins to read the book, and Dot of old appears before him. She tells him to move forward, and to truly look at the world—as Seurat looked. He reaches the

back of the book and sees familiar words, “Order. Design. Tension. Composition. Balance. Light. Harmony.”¹⁴ Gradually, the park begins to fill with the light from Act I. He begins to find a new way to see the world because of Seurat’s vision. He sings:

Things I hadn’t looked at
 Till now:
 Flower on your hat.
 And your smile.
 And the color of your hair.
 And the way you catch the light.
 And the care.
 And the feeling.
 And the life
 Moving on.¹⁵

George’s ability to see the world in a new perspective echoes the experience of the audience at the end of the previous act. We recognize his cognitive discovery because it is one we shared only an hour prior. “Sunday” reprises, with the old characters returning to the park. The show ends as it started, with a blank canvas—holding limitless possibilities for George and for the audience, who now understand how to see the world through an artistic phenomenology.

Just as Sondheim and Lapine use visuals as an element in their phenomenological *gesamtkunstwerk*, so too do they intentionally craft music to draw the audience further into the world of the artist. Music, like art, has a phenomenological effect on those who encounter it but differs in the specifics of that effect. Art, and post-impressionism art specifically, draws the viewer into a representation of a world. Music, however, does not directly represent an existing reality. There are no oboes, violas, or symphonies in the natural world. Music therefore springs from the inner being of the composer. In his essay, “What Do We Hear When We Hear Music? A Radical Phenomenology of Music,” Rudd Welten grapples with the phenomenology of music. He states, “But the sounds of music are not the sounds of the world. Listening to music is something other than listening to objects... From a Schopenhauerian viewpoint, music is not an

imitation, but an immediate manifestation of a primary force, called the Will.”¹⁶ Art taps into the cognitive perspective of the painter, but music taps into the “Will” behind cognition, connecting the listeners with a primal and instinctual force. Adding this primal phenomenological experience for an audience, in addition to the phenomenology of perspective in visual art, makes the bracketing of personal cognition easier (to subvert one’s own experience to take in the action from a different perspective) and the world onstage a more present reality. A comparison of the impressionist painting and the world created by the show is pictured below (fig. 1 and 2):

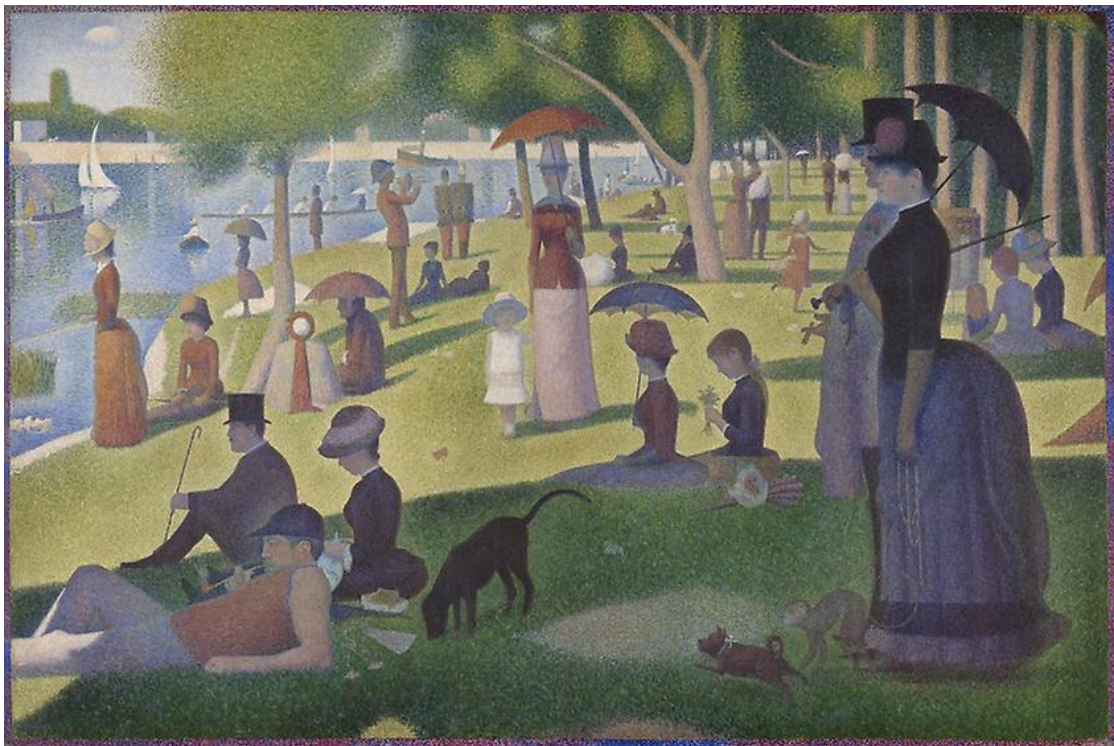


Fig. 1. *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, George Seurat, [ca. 1884], Art Institute of Chicago.¹⁷



Fig. 2. A scene from *Sunday in the Park with George*, directed by James Lapine, [ca. 1984], Playbill.com.¹⁸

Because of the result of combining art and music in service of the greater story, the phenomenology of *Sunday in the Park with George* as a total work of art bring the audience deeply into a new world and provokes them to consider the possibility of that world's artistic perspective in their own lives.

The music in *Sunday and the Park with George* draws the audience into George's perspective on a subconscious level. The numbers "Color and Light," "The Day Off," and "Sunday" each help connect the audience to the emotional tone of the character.¹⁹ "Color and Light" occurs midway through the first act; it portrays George painting in his studio and Dot getting ready for a night out. The music entails staccato notes punctuated by each dab of George's brush. As George sings, he echoes these notes with the colors he paints and the effect he wants to achieve. In the most complex section, he sings the accompaniment that pulsed beneath him to the words:

Red red red red
 Red red orange
 Red red orange
 Orange pick up blue
 Pick up red
 Pick up orange²⁰

And so on. The music articulates the inner Will of George, and how his pointillism *feels* to inhabit. It is intense. It is frantic. It is creative. The piece has, what Stephen Banfield calls, “indivisibility of word and note.”²¹ It is as if we understand the words because of the tone of the music. The words do not always come out clear for the audience since the song is so pointed and rapid, but it is the *feeling* of the music that matters. Sondheim explains how music gets this feeling, and therefore inner Will of a moment, across. In an interview with Mark Eden Horowitz, Sondheim says, “[The audience] doesn’t have to understand the *details* of what’s going on, all they have to understand is *what’s* going on. So, if we decided to have a riot in this room, it is not necessary that they hear every individual line; all they have to hear is all the different kinds of anger and all the different kinds of hysteria.”²² So “*what’s* going on” with George is the creation of his masterpiece in and the audience connects with George’s inner world through the tone and style of the music. Sondheim even wanted to originally connect Seurat’s pointillism to the 12-note scale by having each note represent a corresponding color on the color wheel. A great idea in theory, but the blend of colors and music became too chromatic, so Sondheim abandoned the idea. He did retain the feeling of pointillism—bringing the audience into George’s world— but without such a literal translation from visual art to music.²³

“The Day Off” is another prominent number that uses music to draw the audience further into the essence of George’s inner world. The number consists of several small themes underneath the interactions of different characters. The sailor’s theme is dissonant and heavy, the shop-girls’ theme is quick and flattery, and the soldiers’ is gallant and heavy with trumpet. The

music represents not only the personalities of these people, but how *George* sees them. This perspective is evidenced by George singing with each character as they begin to speak and by George reprising their various themes later in the show. He even impersonates two different dogs, dreaming what they would say on their Sunday off. The theme and variations within “The Day Off” are a clever way to demonstrate, yes how George views his subjects, but also how George works as a painter. Seurat would make several small sketches of various figures before combining them in a larger complete painting. Sondheim, inspired by this artistic theme and variations within the sketches, attempts to capture that process musically. He says of this number, “‘The Day Off’ is a sequence whose primary purpose is to show George sketching—by which I mean inhabiting, as Seurat did, the interior lives of the major figures in his painting.”²⁴ George inhabits his subjects for his sketching process, just as the audience inhabits George’s artistic world through the musical motifs.

“Sunday” posits a loftier phenomenological connection between the audience and George than the previously discussed pieces. It occurs during the height of his artistic creation, when he stops the world and rearranges it to create his masterpiece. Rightfully so, the music takes on a heightened tone. It is one of the few traditional chorus pieces Sondheim has ever written, and it features a solo trumpet soaring above the ensemble of voices along with a build from hushed tones to glorious projected harmony. Listening to the piece, it is difficult not to compare its tone to that of a hymn sung by a church choir— which fits the world Sondheim wants his audience to inhabit. Just as the Judeo-Christian God creates a world from nothing, so too does George the artist create a masterpiece from the nothing of everyday living.²⁵ The music creates a worshipful, sweeping feeling—like that of entering a cathedral or hearing the “Ave Maria.” “Sunday’s” music brings the audience into George’s holy ground and allows them to participate in a divine

act of creation. Paired with the visual completion as discussed earlier, the moment makes for an all-encompassing phenomenological experience of truly living in the world of the artist, and perhaps provoking internal examination of our own holy places of creativity.

Thus far, this paper has analyzed how the visuals and music in *Sunday the Park with George* separately create phenomenological experiences for the audience, and also how those two elements build off of one another as parts of a total work of art to create a largescale entrance into the world of the artist. But no total work of art is complete without the story at its heart—the music and visuals can bring the audience into a world, but it is ultimately the story that these elements support. In *Sunday* the story follows George, his lover Dot, and his great-great grandson also named George. The show centers around more than mere plot device; it displays the clashing of the inner lives of the characters. Phenomenology plays into not just audience experience but the conflict between the characters themselves. Just as impressionist painting departed from the traditional method of representational portraits, so too does *Sunday* depart from traditional plot structure. Joanne Lesley Gordon writes, “It has no linear, casually connected plot. Its narrative structure is focused on evolving states of mind rather than a conventionally developed story.”²⁶ These “evolving states of mind” draw the audience into the play and allow for reflection of their own inner worlds. Gordon continues, “The emotional subtext of this musical. . . forces Sondheim’s audiences to rediscover aesthetic truth through his art. Consequently, this musical not only dramatizes its subject matter, it is the thing itself.”²⁷ The world onstage, combined with the evolving inner worlds of the characters, makes the audience discover “aesthetic truth” in their own lives.

The first and most obvious world we encounter is that of the artist himself, George Seurat. As already discussed, much of the music and visuals of the show bring the audience into

George’s artistic perspective, but what is an artistic viewpoint? Is it truly always a presence in a higher reality of beauty? Based on George’s interactions with others and his own internal thoughts, the piece reveals that George’s viewpoint is one caught between the action before him and the higher reality he wishes to create through his art. We first get commentary on George from Dot in the opening scene. While he is sketching her, she tries to get his attention—but he does not respond. She says, “George? Hello George? There is someone in this dress!”²⁸ George is so preoccupied in his own reality that he cannot connect to what happens in the material world before him. The musical begins with not a number from George—who seems to be distantly present in another world—but one from Dot.

As the musical continues the audience gets another taste of George’s artistic pull between two realities in “Color and Light.” The music in the number, as analyzed previously, portrays the feeling of pointillism and his painting methods—but the number also demonstrates George’s conflicting worlds. His lyrics blur between painting and reality. He sings:

Blue, still sitting
 Red that perfume ...
 Blue-green, the window shut
 Dut dut dut
 Dot Dot sitting
 Dot Dot waiting.²⁹

He associates colors with the action occurring in the concrete world in an almost synesthetic response. His “dut dut” of his brush becomes thoughts of “Dot,” his lover. The two worlds become hard to separate. Dot echoes this conflict soon after, saying over George’s muttering, “But how George looks. He could look forever. It’s like he sees you and he doesn’t all at once. What is he thinking when he looks like that? What does he see?”³⁰ She notices that George is both present and distant from her world—that he sees something she cannot. George even chastises himself when he looks at Dot. He says, “The pink lips, the red cheeks. Seeing all the

parts but none of the whole.”³¹ He cannot see her fully because he remains partially present in his artistic reality. Dot and now George both demonstrate George’s artistic catch-22.

The audience gets to hear a complete explanation of George’s internal struggle in the beautiful number “Finishing the Hat,” where George agonizes over his being caught in two realities. He first sings of experiencing a separate reality from the people around him:

How you have to finish the hat.
How you watch the rest of the world
From a window
While you finish the hat.³²

He stands in the world of the hat while others live lives seemingly in a shared distant reality. He then bemoans his phenomenological perspective as he misses out on life; he sings,

You’re always turning back to late
From the grass or the stick
Or the dog or the light ...
There’s a part of you always standing by
Mapping out the sky.³³

He regrets that part of him exists to create a higher artistic world—that he will miss the happenings and connections that come from living in the present moment. Joanne Lesley Gordon beautifully sums up the emotional journey of this song, and even points out the effect of music as contributing to the reality of the character. She says:

The world that calls through the window of the studio is the world of human warmth and companionship. The world that calls through the other window (the perception of the hat as the opening through which the artist can reach into the enchanted world of imagination) is the world of subjective truth. This latter world is evoked for the audience in the accompaniment, with its suggestion of Debussy and Ravel, which may be seen as the objective correlative of George’s art.³⁴

George’s world is not one, but two realities. These cognitive experiences ebb and flow amidst each other, and the audience—through George’s character and the other elements of *gesamtkunstwerk*—can inhabit both. This experience is distinctly phenomenological. Sondheim himself explains the relatable artistic perspective of this number. He writes:

“Finishing the Hat” reflects an emotional experience shared by everybody to some degree or another, but more keenly and more often by creative artists: trancing out—that phenomenon of losing the world while you’re writing (or painting or composing or doing a crossword puzzle or coming to a difficult decision or anything that requires intense and complete concentration).³⁵

The habitation of George’s inner worlds provokes a response from the audience. The drawing in of the show is so intense that it causes the audience to think of their own realities with new light—a new artistic lens.

Though George stands as the focal character of the musical, he is not the only inner reality that the audience experiences. Dot and the second George also portray their own worlds to the audience—implying that everyone has a subjective lens through which they view the world, and that everyone has the ability to create as the artist does. We see Dot’s world in the first solo number of the show, “Sunday in the Park with George.” She sings complaining about the weather and the park, but then has a moment of inner revelation. She steps out of her dress and the audience enters her inner subjective reality. The subject switches from describing the heat—and objective truth—to dreaming of being immortalized through George’s work—a subjective thought process. Sondheim believes this solo song reflects the monologue of straight plays; in that it reveals the inner workings of Dot’s mind. He says, “solos are in some ways monologues, but most of them are in song form: refrain lines and the like. Monologues, which reflect the loose, disorganized ways of the mind, which reveal and develop character.”³⁶ Sondheim even wrote this first number from a monologue of Lapine’s creation. He wanted to get at Dot’s inner world, which a monologue would help to reveal. In this moment, Sondheim prompts the audience to enter Dot’s “loose, disorganized” mind, which contrasts with the orderly creative world that George inhabits.

For the most prominent moment of Dot’s cognition, we must turn once again to the number “Color and Light.” So much occurs during that song, musically and thematically, it is no wonder that it yet again becomes prescient. When focusing on Dot’s phenomenology, the number reveals the capability for everyone to have separate subjective worlds that possess creativity. As George is making up his painting, Dot is making up her face. She accents her makeup brush with the same strokes that George accents with his painter’s brush. She does not “enter the world of the hat”³⁷ like George, but enters her own world, dreaming of the glamorous follies. Though she does not paint on a canvas, Dot still creates her own reality—and reminds the audience of their ability to fashion their own worlds. George acknowledges her distant world the way she acknowledged his. He says, “Look at her looking. Forever with that mirror. What does she see?”³⁸ He recognizes that she sees something he cannot, but the audience gets a look into both realms of being. With such omnipresence, the audience can see how both characters fashion themselves and can perhaps be prompted to look at how they fashion their own perspectives.

At the second-to-last number of act one, Dot recognized the difference of their two worlds, and asserts the validity of her own. “We Do Not Belong Together” is more than a break-up song; it is a moment where Dot can express her own agency. She sings:

No one is you, George,
 There we agree,
 But others will, do George.
 No one is you and
 No one can be,
 But no one is me, George,
 No one is me.³⁹

She acknowledges that George has a unique perspective on the world—no one is like him because he, as an artist, sees something others do not—but she also believes that she also has a unique way of viewing reality: “No one is me.” She continues to sing, furthering her defiance:

You have a mission.
 A mission to see.
 Now I have one too, George.⁴⁰

Her “mission” to see the world, to fashion her own reality, is just as valid as that of the artist.

Dot’s defense of her perspective provokes the audience to examine their own. How are they like Dot? How are they like George? How do they create their own world?

The second George, like Dot, demonstrates a new reality for the audience. At the end of his personal exploration, the audience sees George see the park transform into one of inspiration and then one of possibility. He begins to see as his predecessor saw. Since this perspective was explored in the discussion of visual phenomenology, this section will focus on an earlier moment of George’s self-fashioning. George’s first solo, when the audience can see his “loose and disorganized”⁴¹ mind, comes with the number “Putting it Together.” In this number, George networks with various art donors to try and earn a commission. As he wheels and deals, he puts up various cardboard cutout versions of himself in front of the donors. He forms these versions of himself as how he wants to appear to others. He sings lines such as:

Drink by drink,
 Fixing and perfecting the design.
 Adding just a dab of politician
 (Always knowing when to draw the line),
 Lining up the funds but in addition
 Lining up a prominent commission.⁴²

This moment of cognitive awareness regarding his behavior implies that he creates his persona the way Dot made up her face or George paints his masterpiece. He “perfect[s]” his “design,” but rather than his design being that of artistic reality, it is one of financially successful windfalls. As the song continues, George’s false personas crumble. The guests begin to wander away and George must run frantically to reposition his selves—to keep up his phenomenological reality. He, just like Dot and Seurat, shows how each individual attempts to create his or her own

world—whether through persona, or dreams, or art. And as the characters bring the audience into their world in a phenomenological experience alongside the visuals and music, the overall effect calls the audience to examine their own creative worlds. How do they create their personas? How do they take notice of the everyday in a creative way, like the characters do?

Sunday in the Park with George is a *gesamtkunstwerk*; each element— from the visual design to the music to the characters— works together to create total and unified experience for the audience. Combined with a phenomenological lens, one can see how the parts of this piece cognitively play on the perception of reality for the audience—drawing them into the world of the show and the minds of the characters. W. Kandinsky describes the phenomenology of living in someone else’s perspective. He writes:

The street may be observed through the window pane, causing its noises to become diminished, its movements ghostly, and the street itself, seen through the transparent but hard and firm pane, to appear as a separate organism, pulsating “out there”. Or one can open the door: one can emerge from one’s isolation, immerse oneself in this organism, actively involve oneself in it and experience its pulsating life with all one’s senses.⁴³

Rather than stare through the window at another reality, *Sunday in the Park with George* makes the audience step into the street of another method of cognition. And to great effect. The musical won numerous awards, was revived on Broadway and in the West End, and continues to be performed by theatres across the county. Sondheim contributes the musical’s success to the phenomenological effect of the piece. He says:

You can’t tell why a show is successful or not. But I think one of the reasons this one did fairly well was that it created a world... You just wanted to live in that park forever, which is part of the point of the play. It became mesmeric... so the audience success had to do with a willingness to know that it was all going to be a little strange, and then realizing they’d fallen into an enchanted world. *Sunday* was a world onstage.⁴⁴

If *Sunday* is a “world onstage,” then what does living in that world for two and a half hours do to the individual worlds of the audience members? Living within a total work of art, one centered

around creativity, must impact one's own creative reality. So perhaps now more people can have "a mission to see" new things in their separate worlds. Perhaps existing within an artistic reality, even for a moment, can bring that reality into one's own separate cognition. And perhaps spending a phenomenological Sunday in the park with George can create a new generation of artists and appreciators of beauty.

Notes

1. Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine, *Sunday in the Park With George: A Musical*, (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1986), 172.

2. See David Woodruff, "Phenomenology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018).

3. See Boris Groys, "Gesamtkunstwerk," In *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

4. When *La Cage Aux Folles* won the Tony for Best Musical over *Sunday in the Park with George*, the star Jerry Herman declared that the "simple, hummable tune" is still alive on Broadway, much to the detriment of Sondheim's work.

5. Along with art, music, and character, Sondheim and Lapine tried to bring the audience into the cognitive world of George through another method: cutting amplification. Though during *Sunday's* premiere in 1984, almost all theatres used microphones to amplify the voices of the actors, Sondheim and Lapine wanted to achieve an effect of making the audience lean in to the story—to make them give effort to cognitively participate in the action. So they experimented with cutting amplification. On this subject, Sondheim says that in earlier times they had "none of the luxury of sitting back and letting the show come to us—we had to lean into it. The concentration required was so great that we had to shut out the real world, and in so doing we became participants in the experience, all of which made it easy to suspend disbelief and enter another world. With the advent of amplification, ears became lazy and audience now tend to visit rather than enter. The issue is not one of volume but of concentration." He and Lapine tried to cut all microphones to achieve this effect of concentration but had to add them back into the production due to discomfort of the actors. See Stephen Sondheim, *Look, I Made a Hat: Collected Lyrics (1981-2011) With Attendant Comments, Amplifications, Dogmas, Harangues, Digressions, Anecdotes and Miscellany*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), xviii.

⁶ Though the thrust of this paper could certainly center around the phenomenology of only the original production, I will be focusing on what the source text implies—and therefore the impact of what all productions will share. The stage directions of the source text require the same interpretations of key moments, therefore the work in its essence indicates that any

remounting of the show would have similar phenomenology for the audience— so my analysis would still apply to any production that remains faithful to the text.

7. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London; New York: Routledge, 1962), 68.
8. Stephen Banfield, “*Sunday in the Park with George*,” *Sondheim’s Broadway Musicals*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 343.
9. Craig Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 320.
10. Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine, 3-4.
11. Joanne Lesley Gordon, *Art Isn’t Easy: The Achievement of Stephen Sondheim*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), 285.
12. Sondheim and Lapine, 101.
13. Sondheim and Lapine, 163.
14. Sondheim and Lapine, 171.
15. Sondheim and Lapine, 168-9.
16. Ruud Welten, "What Do We Hear When We Hear Music? A Radical Phenomenology of Music," *Studia Phaenomenologica* 9, no. 1 (2009): 272-3.
17. Seurat, Georges, *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, 1884, oil on canvas, Art Institute of Chicago, <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/27992/a-sunday-on-la-grande-jatte-1884>.
18. Swope, Martha, “A Scene from *Sunday in the Park with George*,” 1984, Playbill.com, <https://www.playbill.com/article/did-they-finish-the-hat-where-are-the-stars-of-sunday-in-the-park-with-george-now-com-348196>.
19. Sondheim, himself, has commented on the phenomenological experience of listening to music and how it connects the listener to the essence of the composer. He discusses his love for Rachmaninoff in an interview and says offhandedly, “I’m not a Russian, but a I feel like a Russian when I listen to him.” This small comment articulates a greater view of music, one that leans on the idea that the listener is somehow cognitively connected to the composer by the mere act of listening to their music. See Mark Eden Horowitz and Stephen Sondheim, *Sondheim On Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 2nd ed, (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press in association with the Library of Congress, 2010), 97.
20. Sondheim and Lapine, 31.

21. Stephen Banfield, 346.

22. Mark Eden Horowitz and Stephen Sondheim, *Sondheim On Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 2nd ed, (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press in association with the Library of Congress, 2010), 93.

23. See Stephen Sondheim, 15.

24. Stephen Sondheim, 21.

25. This idea of creating as the Creator creates is referred to in the Christian tradition as humanity being *Imago Dei*— or image-bearers of God. In short, this concept means that God created humanity with certain inherent attributes similar to that of Himself: kindness, goodness, and of course creativity. Though these attributes do not remain intact and become marred by the entrance of sin in the world, *Imago Dei* allows all humankind the opportunity to tap into the God-like power of creating—just as George does in *Sunday*.

26. Joanne Lesley Gordon, 265.

27. Joanne Lesley Gordon, 266.

28. Sondheim and Lapine, 10.

29. Sondheim and Lapine, 31.

30. Sondheim and Lapine, 32.

31. Sondheim and Lapine, 34.

32. Sondheim and Lapine, 70.

33. Sondheim and Lapine, 70-1.

34. Joanne Lesley Gordon, 280.

35. Sondheim, 27.

36. Sondheim, 11.

37. Sondheim and Lapine, 71.

38. Sondheim and Lapine, 33.

39. Sondheim and Lapine, 85.

40. Sondheim and Lapine, 85.

41. Sondheim, 27.
42. Sondheim and Lapine, 139.
43. W. Kandinsky, *Complete Writings on Art*, (Boston: First Da Capo Press, 1994), 532.
44. Sondheim in Craig Zadan, *Sondheim & Co.*, 2nd ed, (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 316-7.

Bibliography

- Banfield, Stephen. "Sunday in the Park with George." *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993. 343-81.
- Gordon, Joanne Lesley. *Art Isn't Easy: The Achievement of Stephen Sondheim*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990.
- Groys, Boris. "Gesamtkunstwerk." In *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Heidegger, Martin, and Joan Stambaugh. *Being and Time : A Translation of Sein Und Zeit*. SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.
- Horowitz, Mark Eden., and Stephen Sondheim. *Sondheim On Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*. 2nd ed. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press in association with the Library of Congress, 2010.
- Kandinsky, W. *Complete Writings on Art*. Boston: First Da Capo Press, 1994.
- Lawlor, Leonard. "Phenomenology." In *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Philosophies*, edited by Boundas Constantin V., 389-401. Edinburgh: Edinburgh, 2014.
- Marshall, George. *Guide to Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. London ; New York: Routledge, 1962.
- Ricœur, Paul. *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967.
- Georges Seurat, *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, 1884, oil on canvas, Art Institute of Chicago, <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/27992/a-sunday-on-la-grande-jatte-1884>.

- Sondheim, Stephen. *Look, I Made a Hat: Collected Lyrics (1981-2011) With Attendant Comments, Amplifications, Dogmas, Harangues, Digressions, Anecdotes and Miscellany*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011.
- Sondheim, Stephen and James Lapine. *Sunday in the Park With George: A Musical*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1986.
- Šuvaković, Miško. "The phenomenology of the Screen (And/ Or/ As) Event: Musical De-Ontologisation." In *Neo-Aesthetic Theory: Complexity and Complicity Must Be Defended*, 129-38. Wien: Hollitzer Verlag, 2017.
- Swope, Martha. "A Scene from *Sunday in the Park with George*." 1984. Playbill.com. <https://www.playbill.com/article/did-they-finish-the-hat-where-are-the-stars-of-sunday-in-the-park-with-george-now-com-348196>.
- Welten, Ruud. "What Do We Hear When We Hear Music? A Radical Phenomenology of Music." *Studia Phaenomenologica* 9, no. 1 (2009): 269-286.
- Woodruff, David. "Phenomenology." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition).
- Zadan, Craig. *Sondheim & Co*. 2nd ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1986.