

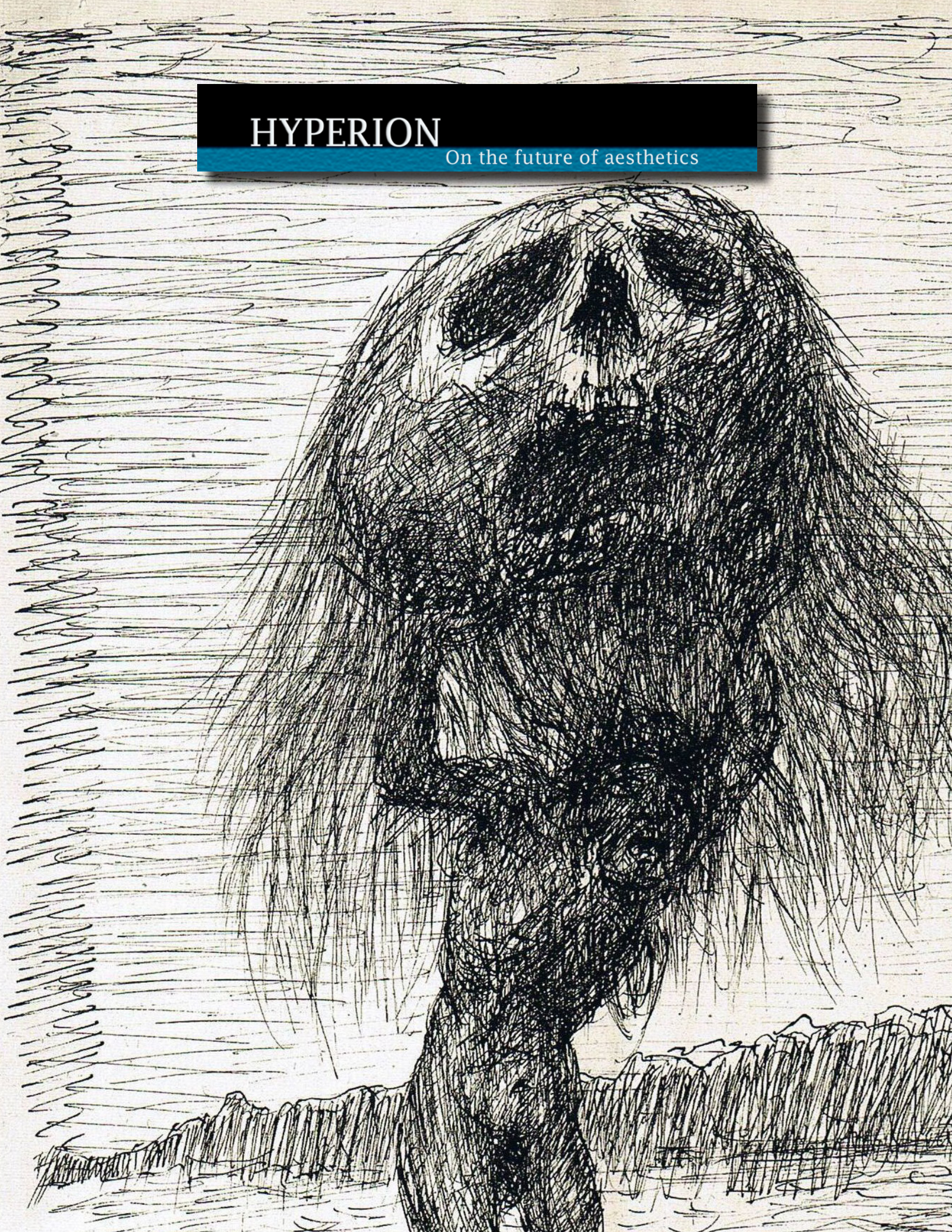
# Theatre's Impossible Promise

reviewed by David Kilpatrick

*Hyperion*, Volume V, issue 2, November 2010

# HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics



# *Theatre's Impossible Promise*

*The Void by Hybrid Stage Project*

*by David Kilpatrick*

*The Void.* Written and conceived by Fulya Peker and Deborah Wallace. Incubator Arts Project (inside St. Mark's Church), 131 E. 10th St., NYC. October 2010.

With *The Void*, the Hybrid Stage Project bring the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy to the contemporary stage in a production that blends disparate trends from the theatrical avant-garde, resulting in a Modernist imagining (rekindling?) of lost ritual from forgotten mystery schools. A solitary figure works with chalk on the bare black stage, the white circle growing as he mentally slips into the absence opened by his marks on the floor. Two female figures provoke and perplex him throughout the rest of the play. No lover's triangle, it is unclear if they serve or imprison him, or perhaps they are simply complimentary states conjured from his unconscious. He asks them who they are, only to be told not yet, the promise of identity revealed never delivered.

This obscure scenario is not altogether unfamiliar to theatre-goers accustomed to the pilgrimage to St. Mark's Church to witness Richard Foreman's plays for his Ontological-Hysterical Theater. Though Foreman has decided to withdraw the Ontological from its permanent home, the Incubator Arts Project, a spin-off from the Ontological dedicated to developing new talent, carries the legacy in the same space. The writer-performer team of Fulya Peker and Deborah Wallace, having worked with Foreman's Ontological, extend the mission into arguably darker terrain.

Though less overtly erotic and violent than Foreman's signature style, the

performers in *The Void* employ mannered gestures and diction, refusing the transparent comfort of realism. The players spit verse at one another filled with ontological riddles like “why is there something rather than nothing?” The effect is disorienting, often hypnotic, as efforts to discern narrative prove futile. The minimalist set and lighting design by Nate Lemoine and Zach Murphy, respectively, serve the play’s (in)action well, as Julian Mesri’s sound design provides a mix of industrial scratches with Tibetan drones to further the otherworldly sensibility.

In describing Peker’s directing style with her 2007 piece, *Requiem Aeternam Deo* (an adaptation of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), I used the term “ritual expressionism.” Together with Wallace, this methodology continues. *The Void* is inspired by the work of Alfred Kubin, the Austrian Expressionist associated with the Blue Rider group, especially his drawings and novel, *The Other Side*. So this play is loyal to the Expressionist exploration of inner vision.

Mark Jaynes is a potent mix of daring and vulnerability as the artist, his anxiety and curiosity viral. Perhaps based upon Kubin, his character is of the lineage of Shakespeare’s Hamlet and Mallarmé’s Igitur, as one who explores the dark night of the soul, lost in the cruel abyss of non-knowledge. Peker and Wallace likewise radiate intensity, both enchanting and disturbing like a psychic dominatrix.

*The Void* is a fascinating forty-minute one-act that rejects the cynical post-postmodernism that dominates Off-Off-Broadway. Instead, the Hybrid Stage Project dare the audience to share in their exploration of theatre’s impossible promise.



published in *Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics*, a web publication of  
The Nietzsche Circle: [www.nietzschecircle.com](http://www.nietzschecircle.com), Volume V, issue 2, November 2010