

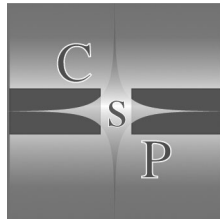
# Aesthetics and Innovation



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Edited by

Leonid Dorfman, Colin Martindale,  
and Vladimir Petrov



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Aesthetics and Innovation, edited by Leonid Dorfman, Colin Martindale, and Vladimir Petrov

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## PREFACE

In this book we have attempted to gather together a set of chapters that describe new ways of approaching questions about aesthetics and innovation. Rather than going over old ground, the chapters describe attempts to break new ground. A number of chapters are by Russian scholars. A valuable aspect of Russian scholarship is that many topics, such as art history, are studied with quantitative methods rather than being left to imprecise qualitative humanistic approaches. As well as describing new methods and results, they will be novel to most Western readers, because the Russian perspective on aesthetics and innovation is rather different than the traditional Western perspective. Looking at phenomena from a new viewpoint never hurts and very often helps in science.

The chapters in Part I deal with method, theory, and the history of aesthetics. Much of the time, we merely glance at art works, and they have rather little impact upon us. However, art can have a very striking and long lasting effect upon us. The book begins with Funch's analysis of this phenomenon. Munz describes von Ehrenfel's development of his Gestalt theory of beauty in the context of intellectual life in Vienna around 1900. He makes this period come to life in way that leads the reader to wish that he or she were living in Vienna then rather than wherever he or she may be living now. Nekrylova and Cupchik and Hilscher describe new and profitable ways in which art can be studied by a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The two methods together give us a better picture of the perception of art than either used in isolation. Helmut Leder and Dorothee Augustin describe a useful framework for describing the perception of art and outline work dealing with top-down influences on how we view a work of art. Art does not merely elicit a response. Rather, the response is heavily influenced by what we have been led to believe about a work of art.

The second part of the book deals with some new approaches to the creative process. Mazhul and Petrov examine the degree to which creators are free to work as they wish as opposed to being influenced by external factors. Social support for creative work has been little studied. Schweizer looks at in detail and most interestingly does so from a neuropsychological perspective. Based on the socioindividual world theory, Dorfman and Ogorodnikova discriminate the plural self into subselves and the plural achievement motives into submotives either of motives to achieve success or to avoid failure. They examine the link between subselves, achievement submotives and creative thinking. We seldom

think of war and creativity as being closely allied, but Hogenraad describes research showing that the rhetoric of politicians seems to be more creative when war is immanent as opposed to when it is drawing to a close.

The chapters in Part III deal in one way or another with the perception and understanding of art and literature. Petrenko and Sapsoleva and Martindale and Martindale deal with the "personality" of characters in film and literature. Petrenko and Sapsoleva describe a novel method of studying these personalities based upon Kelly's personal construct theory. Martindale and Martindale use content analytic methods to study Jungian hypotheses about the portrayal of women in literature. Though Jung is usually accused of formulating theories that cannot be tested, they show that this is not at all the case. Leontiev and Lagoutina also use a method derived from Kelly's work to study the influence of values upon both the creation and the perception of art. The chapters by Leontiev and László and Fülöp deal with individual differences in the perception of art. Leontiev shows that those with training in theater view theatrical performances in a far different way than those without such training. László and Fülöp show that reading the same work of literature will arouse quite different emotions in readers with different personality types.

In Part IV we have grouped three chapters that deal with innovative methods of studying the arts. Humphrey and Washburn compare the drawings of artists and non-artists on variables such as the seven band symmetries, affine projections, and so on that have seldom if ever been used in the study of art works. Mastandrea describes studies showing the intimate relationship of imagery and emotion that promise to shed light on how visual art is perceived. Finally, Kharuto describes a fascinating computer program that analyzes music in ways that had before to be done only by ear in an imprecise way.

The chapters in Part V deal with the evolution of art and literature. Martindale describes the oscillations that are set in motion by innovation not only in the arts but also in science and the economy. He raises the question of the degree to which these oscillations resemble the physical oscillations found for example in light waves and sound waves. The oscillations found in art arise from the periodic introduction of new styles in the various genres of art and literature. Based on his study of 6453 composers of the 13<sup>th</sup>—20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Kulichkin describes in detail how such styles are introduced by creative geniuses. The arts did not always consist of different genres. Petrov uses information theory to explain how such differentiation occurred.

The book ends with two chapters on the new and fascinating work being done on the brain and the creation and perception of art. Vartanian and Nadal review studies of brain scans done when people are observing visual art. The studies have yielded consistent results and, if nothing else, lead us to question the notion of the disinterested nature of aesthetic perception. Razumnikova,

Volf, and Tarasova describe a large scale study of EEG patterns and creative thought. Very interesting sex differences suggest that men and women may use quite different strategies in thinking of new ideas.

We thank Yury Maximov who put the book into camera-ready form and offered invaluable help along the way.

Leonid Dorfman,  
Colin Martindale,  
Vladimir Petrov

# PART I

## METHODOLOGY, THEORY AND HISTORY OF ART AND AESTHETICS



# CHAPTER ONE

## A PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY OF THE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

BJARNE SODE FUNCH

A psychological theory of art's influence on the human psyche and existence is presented in this chapter. With a point of departure in a phenomenological description of the aesthetic experience as a transcendent phenomenon it is suggested that an aesthetic experience provides a distinct form to an existential theme in the life of the perceiver. A phenomenological model of consciousness serves as a basis for an understanding of how a momentary experience of a specific work of art on rare occasions exerts an extraordinary influence on the psyche and existence by constituting an emotional quality and giving options for reflecting an existential theme in the life of the perceiver.

Several years ago I went to the Tate Gallery in London. I remember walking around and enjoying the fine collection of works of art. At some point I came to an opening with a curtain in front of it and at first I was not sure if it was open to the public, but decided to enter nonetheless and found myself in a room with dimmed light surrounded by a group of large paintings in black and maroon. When I left the room I learned that it was the *Seagram Series* (1959) by the American painter Mark Rothko. I was totally absorbed in these paintings. They created a vibrating atmosphere that deeply touched me, and I don't know how long I stood there in front of each painting letting myself disappear in their infinite color fields. It was an unusually powerful emotional sensation; it is difficult to say exactly what kind of emotion it was, apart from it being extremely pleasurable.

### **The Aesthetic Experience**

It is well-known that people on exceptional occasions have experiences with works of art that transcend the ordinary stream of consciousness. Among other accounts of such experiences is one by the Roman theologian and philosopher Augustine who describes in his *Confessions* how the church music has affected him. He (1961, p. 190) writes, "The tears flowed from me when I heard your

hymns and canticles, for the sweet singing of your Church moved me deeply. The music surged in my ears, truth seeped into my heart, and my feelings of devotion overflowed, so that the tears streamed down. But they were tears of gladness.”

Throughout the history of the fine arts there are similar accounts and suggestions of a type of art appreciation that is so extraordinary that it presents an issue that cannot be ignored. Philosophers and psychologists such as Monroe Beardsley (1981), Martin Lindauer (1981), Robert Panzarella (1980), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Rick E. Robinson (1990) have already embarked on a description of this phenomenon of art appreciation and in a continuation of their work, I (Funch 1997) have established on the basis of accounts from their studies, as well as my own experiences and the interviews that I have carried out, a number of phenomenological characteristics of what I suggest to call *the aesthetic experience*.

The phenomenology of the aesthetic experience with a work of visual art includes cognitive, visual, emotional as well as intentional aspects. Especially the visual and the emotional aspects are conspicuous in comparison to the same aspects during ordinary perception, whereas the cognitive aspect of the aesthetic experience is relatively ordinary by promoting spontaneous recognition of the subject matter. The intentional aspect seems by first sight quite ordinary by focusing on the work of art with a passive and disinterested attitude, but further phenomenological studies reveal an extraordinary relationship between spectator and work of art. In aesthetic experiences within other disciplines such as music and literature, the visual aspect will be replaced by an audible or imaginary aspect and these will be conspicuous just like the visual aspect in encounters with works of visual art.

In the question of the phenomenology of the aesthetic experience it is important to be aware that an aesthetic experience is elicited by a specific work of art and therefore, the aspects of the experience are determined by the subject matter. Consequently, an aesthetic experience of *Guernica* (1937) by Pablo Picasso, for example, is different from an aesthetic experience of *Dance* (1910) by Henri Matisse. Not only will visual perception and recognition vary, but the emotions will vary as well according to the painting's subject matter. At the same time there are some general characteristics of the visual and emotional dimensions of the aesthetic experience which are of utmost importance for the understanding of the psychological effects of the experience.

### **Visual aspect of the aesthetic experience**

The visual aspect of an aesthetic experience with a painting is emphasized by complete unity, lucidity, eminence and originality. The picture appears in

experience as a unified whole in which every detail is an inevitable component of the composition. No visual element is more prominent than the others; rather they all contribute to a common image. The experience is limited to the work of art in question and the picture's surroundings are excluded from experience. Monroe Beardsley as well as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi point to this aspect of visual unity. Beardsley (1981, p. 527) writes, "An aesthetic experience is one in which attention is firmly fixed upon heterogeneous but interrelated components of a phenomenally objective field—visual or auditory patterns, or the characters and events in literature."

Lucidity or luminosity is another characteristic of the visual aspect. Paul Tillich, the German-American philosopher and theologian, once described this aspect from an experience he had with a painting by Sandro Botticelli at the Kaiser Friederich Museum in Berlin. He (1955, p. 235) writes, "Gazing up at it, I felt a state approaching ecstasy. In the beauty of the painting there was Beauty itself. It shone through the colors of the paint as the light of day shines through the stained-glass windows of a medieval church."

This aspect of luminosity as if the painting is imbued with its own inner light is occasionally referred to in phenomenological accounts, but neither Beardsley (1981), Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990), Martin Lindauer (1981), or Robert Panzarella (1980) mention this aspect as a characteristic of an aesthetic experience.

Sublimity or eminence is a third characteristic of the visual aspect. The picture in question appears during the aesthetic experience with such a profound prominence and vital power that it transcends what is depicted. The subject matter appears with a visual singularity and autonomy that makes its references subordinate to its own presence.

This aspect is hinted at when Panzarella (1980) speaks of "an altered perception" during the aesthetic experience and possibly also when Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990, p. 68) refer to a state of "heightened awareness", but only in Erich Neumann's description is it given full attention. He (1989, p. 188) describes the sublime aspect, or the "eternal" aspect as he calls it, as something that becomes visible to us as "the authentic reality". He (p. 189) writes, "Yet in every case, we find ourselves confronted with the ineffable magnificence of something which can never be grasped, but which animates everything that is real as a crowning super-real essence." This sublime quality of the visual aspect is difficult, if not impossible, to isolate from other aspects of the aesthetic experience, but it is important to notice that the visual presence of the subject matter is imbued with a distinct form or appearance. This leads to a fourth characteristic of the aesthetic experience, namely, originality, which is often associated with works of art.

Originality in regards to visual art is associated with the visual appearance of the subject matter. The spontaneous experience of originality may be difficult to differentiate from the aftermath of comprehension. The American art historian H. W. Janson states originality as a defining quality of a work of art. He (1995, p. 21) writes, "Whether we are aware of it or not, tradition is the framework within which we inevitably form our opinion of works of art and assess their degree of originality." This attempt to define originality within the context of tradition is very different from the spontaneous experience of something which has never been experienced before. The subject matter may actually not be foreign to the spectator, but it appears spontaneously in a form that is novel and unique without any evaluating references at all.

### **Emotional aspect of the aesthetic experience**

Art appreciation and emotions are closely related to each other. Whenever we speak about an experience with art, the emotional response is recognized as fundamental. This emotional response in ordinary encounters with art is expressed from two different levels of consciousness. One being the spontaneous response of horror, joy, or any other specific emotional quality elicited by the work in question; the other being the reflective response evaluating the work as being a good, exciting, bad or any other evaluation of the work in question. The emotional aspect of the aesthetic experience is always a spontaneous response and it usually transcends ordinary emotions by being exceptionally intense. The Dutch literary scholar Ernst van Alphen once described such an emotional response to a painting by Francis Bacon. He (1992, p. 9) writes, "Seeing a work by Francis Bacon hurts. It causes pain. The first time I saw a painting by Bacon, I was literally left speechless. I was touched so profoundly because the experience was one of total engagement, of being dragged along by the work. I was perplexed about the level on which these paintings touched me: I could not even formulate what the paintings were about, still less what aspect of them hurt me so deeply." Similar descriptions of emotional responses to works of art have been brought forward by James Elkins (2001) and Robert Panzarella (1980) and these accounts demonstrate a broad spectrum of different emotional qualities as well as an emotional intensity that is overwhelming to the spectator.

These emotional responses to works of art differ from ordinary emotions mainly because they are elicited by fiction. Ordinary emotions are caused by incidents in real life originating, for example, from a relationship where another person hurts, irritates, or pleases you, whereas the emotional response to art is a response to an occurrence that has no influence on life apart from the relationship to the work of art. Nevertheless, the emotional impact seems to be

so significant that it is ascribed great importance and remembered as an exceptional experience. A major reason for this distinguishing quality is an experience of terrific pleasure which arises together with the specific emotional quality associated with the work of art in question. Even in cases a work of art elicits an emotion associated with a feeling of displeasure as for example disgust, anxiety, or terror, the aesthetic experience is characterized by a feeling of transcending pleasure.

### **Focus of the aesthetic experience**

The intentional aspect or the focus of the aesthetic experience is similar to the unusual character of the visual and emotional experience. One's focus becomes completely concentrated on the work of art to the exclusion of everything else. The surrounding context drops away from consciousness and there are no reflections, associations, or comparisons to disturb the focus on the work of art. The visual appearance of the work of art defined by spontaneous identification and emotionality completely occupies consciousness. Furthermore, the focus transcends the usual dichotomy between subject and object which means that the work of art is experienced with a significant quality of existential density. It is as if the spectator is transparently present in what is being perceived which makes the experience rooted in the present moment.

Perceiving without the usual division between subject and object invigorates the viewer, causing him or her to feel present without necessarily being self-aware. There are no intentions that point to specific intrinsic or extrinsic interests, as if the experience contains the intentions themselves. It is a momentary incident as if time is abolished and without any practical, relational, or other kinds of perspectives. This type of intentionality is described by Mikel Dufrenne (1973, p. 406) as participation *with* rather than an aim *towards*.

The special character of the intentional aspect has invited many different and sometimes contradictory descriptions. "Being absorbed" or "losing self-awareness" are typical descriptions of the focus of the aesthetic experience. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990, p. 122) put forward that "attention is so completely focused, so completely enmeshed in the interaction with the artwork, that the viewer gives up, at least momentarily, his most human attribute: self-consciousness." This description of absorption or loss of ego is from time to time contradicted by descriptions such as "detached affects", "disinterested enjoyment" and "psychical distance". Absorption and distance seem to contradict each other in conception of the perceiver's ego, but actually they emphasize or rather overemphasize two features of the intentional aspect. On the one side, the work of art lays claim to the entire experience without any specific attention given to the viewer. On the other side, the ego or self is

intensively present without being focused on. This mixture of absorption and personal presence can be recognized as a characteristic quality of the aesthetic experience.

### **Spiritual reflection**

The phenomenology of the intentional focus indicates a distinctive state of being. Building on Søren Kierkegaard's idea, I suggest identifying this aspect as an example of self-actualization. He (1980, p.13) defines the self as "a relation that relates itself to itself." Applying his idea to the aesthetic experience reveals a double nature of it. First, the aesthetic experience is a relationship between the perceiver and the work of art in a direct and momentary encounter. At the same time, it is an example of a relationship between an existential theme and the personality of the perceiver in the sense that personal life-experiences are reflected in the theme in question. The sublime quality of the visual aspect indicates that not only the specific work of art defines the experience, but it is also permeated by ideals that can only originate from the perceiver's life-experiences. The first relationship reflected in the second refers to what Kierkegaard calls "the self" or "spirit". He (p. 13) states that "a human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two."

Defining the self as a relation relating to itself, Kierkegaard establishes the self as a process of becoming oneself. The self is constituted in the moment or the process of relating one relation to the other rather than as a trait or skill that characterizes the person in question. Kierkegaard (1980, p. 14) concludes that "the self rests transparently in the power that establishes it." In other words, an experience of existential density originates from a ruling art encounter being reflected in life-experiences. The self is a process of being constituted by the process itself.

Kierkegaard (1980) mentions the will not to be oneself and the will to be oneself as major obstacles for the constituting process of the self. These are also major obstacles for the aesthetic experience when an art audience either rejects to engage in a direct encounter or uses the work of art for self-conformation or self-orchestration.

The aesthetic experience is a sudden and momentary incident that occurs without any proceeding intentions. It is a case of a person's personality being reflected in his or her current art encounter. The question is how this process of constituting the self can be understood from a psychological point of view.

## Emotional Constitution

With a point of departure in the preceding phenomenological description of the aesthetic experience I postulate that an aesthetic experience is an instance in which an emotion is constituted in its existential actuality. My reasons for this thesis are first of all based on the transcending character of the aesthetic experience in which the sensual and emotional aspects are conspicuous. This phenomenological emphasis on the two aspects makes it evident to relate them to each other.

In psychology, emotions have always been closely related to the senses. Visual, auditory, tactual, olfactory, and gustatory impressions are primary sources for eliciting emotions. Here I take the liberty to include imagination among the primary senses because it is clear that dreams, memories, and fantasies caused by thinking bring forth emotions just as sense impressions do. Cognitive reflections on primary sense impressions on the other hand do not bring forth emotional responses by themselves and have even an impeding influence on emotional states of being. Sense impressions in ordinary perception are linked to specific emotional qualities so that each time a person encounters a vicious dog for example he or she will feel fear. With this example in mind it should be taken into consideration that emotional responses vary, at least to some degree, from person to person. In each case people recognize the specific quality of such emotional responses because they are familiar with them from previous encounters. The exceptional thing about the aesthetic experience is that the person does not recognize the specific quality of the emotion elicited by the work of art. The emotion is not only ineffable; it has never before been associated with a sense impression. It may seem familiar although it doesn't bring forth any memories. This leads to the assumption that the emotion during an aesthetic experience is linked to a sense impression for the first time.

A precondition for the thesis that the appearance of a work of art elicits an unconstituted emotional quality is that the repertoire of emotions increases during the course of life and it is not limited to a fixed number of emotions. It is clear from watching a newborn that we respond with appreciation or rejection right from the beginning, even before we have any idea of the world. At first the child still lives in a kind of symbiosis with the surrounding world, and within this symbiotic state of being the infant sometimes expresses a feeling of harmony with the world as for example when the infant nurses or is simply cuddled up in her arms. Being undressed or hearing a loud crash will cause a response of rejection and despair, and the baby will demonstrate feelings of displeasure. The emotional responses of appreciation and rejection are little by little associated with objects in the child's surroundings. The emotions are no longer just states of being but are also related to specific sense impressions. The

baby will soon be able to recognize and even anticipate exterior circumstances and respond with appropriate emotions.

The child's emotional repertoire develops little by little as new emotions arise and as the child learns how to differentiate between the already existing emotions. Appreciation is associated with new objects and situations and new qualities are constituted. As an adult the repertoire of emotions continues to expand as new existential encounters require adequate emotional responses. In this way the repertoire of emotions, as with knowledge, is increasing during the entire course of life.

Most people will throughout life encounter new existential themes and consequently new emotional qualities need to be constituted. The repertoire will be different from person to person, although we all have a good number of emotions in common. The interesting thing is that the emotional life varies from generation to generation. People today encounter life situations that are very different from those encountered in former times. Their living and work situations are different, they relate differently to their partners, children, and friends, and their cultural and spiritual engagements are also different. Emotions experienced by people today may have been totally unknown to former generations. From a phenomenological point of view, human existence holds an uncountable number of different emotional qualities, and in future there will appear emotional qualities that we do not know of yet.

The origin of emotions experienced during an aesthetic experience is different from emotions experienced in daily life. A specific feeling of repulsion or attraction in front of a painting or a piece of music is no different from the same feeling arising in ordinary situations, but since emotions during aesthetic experiences are elicited by fiction, they are not associated with intentions or requirements for action. The emotional intensity may be just as powerful as emotions in daily life, but they cause no action.

This peculiar lack of initiation in the aesthetic experience leads to the assumption that an emotion during an aesthetic experience is a reawakening of an emotion rather than a proper emotional response. When an adult, just like a child, encounters a specific situation he or she experiences a specific emotional quality. If this is the first time this emotional quality occurs it may not be constituted right away by the concurrent sense impression. A reason may be that the sense impression has not been sufficiently distinct to serve as constituting factor. Such emotions which are not constituted by sense impressions can only be actualized in new encounters that are similar to the first; they cannot be remembered and recalled. When a work of art reawakens such a latent emotion it is because the work elicits an experience that is equal to the original experience. The work displays at the same time a distinct form which is appropriate for the emotion in question. In other words, the work of art elicits an

existential theme in compliance with similar experiences from past life encounters and provides an adequate sense impression for the emotion to be constituted.

## Phenomenological Model of Consciousness

A phenomenological conception of human consciousness serves as the basis for understanding the aesthetic experience.

Ordinary consciousness is according to phenomenological studies an interaction between two different approaches to life-world. One is a spontaneous approach characterized by an uninterrupted stream of consciousness, another is a reflective approach basically characterized by reflecting the spontaneous stream. The two approaches alternate with each other in such a short interval that they seem to form one kind of consciousness.

During the stream of consciousness sense impressions, imagery, emotions, and thoughts randomly follow each other without any specific focus. There is no subject-object relationship in play, and therefore, no point of view or an ego in command. Under exceptional circumstances such as in dream, meditation, contemplation, and activities with an unusually concentrated focus, the period of spontaneous consciousness is extended without interruption. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) talks about “flow” as a characteristic of focused activity. Extreme states of spontaneous consciousness consist of sense impressions alone without any kind of conceptualization except from the form appearing before one. Less extreme states include emotions, imagery, and even thinking in its non-reflective form. These aspects of consciousness are determined not only by sense impressions elicited by the current surroundings but also by what randomly arises from memory and mental imagery. The number of impressions during the spontaneous approach is staggering and it is unthinkable that each and every one of them is stored in memory. Nevertheless, it is well-known that some of these impressions if they are loaded with strong emotions are stored in memory and become part of a person’s life-experiences. If such impressions are not followed up by reflection they are stored in a *concealed memory* and are usually impossible to recall at a later time. This happens with traumatic experiences for example. Impressions that are stored in mind without access create a dynamic factor by randomly intruding on the stream of consciousness. Such intrusions make a claim on consciousness and influence a general state of being. In case of traumatic memories they contribute with unrest and anxiety and the person in question is not able to do anything or control the situation. In this way a person’s general state of being is influenced by concealed memories whenever they are brought into action and the person is unable to interrupt and bring an end to such powerful memories.

Concealed memories are important to the understanding of the aesthetic experience by providing the emotional aspect of the experience. When a person encounters a work of art, it is not the work as such that stimulates an emotional response, but it brings forth an existential theme with a corresponding emotional quality. This emotional quality originates from past experiences which are stored as concealed memories. When such an emotional quality is actualized through an art encounter it is linked to the appearance of the work of art, and through these means, constituted as an emotion that can be approached through reflection.

Ordinary consciousness alternates between the spontaneous stream of consciousness and the reflective approach. The process of reflection basically mirrors the spontaneous stream, but during this process different cognitive capacities such as identification, discrimination, comparison, and so forth, are also brought into action. For example, if a person is contemplating a landscape and suddenly something happens, he or she will switch to reflective consciousness by asking what it is. This attentive attitude brings cognitive schemata into action in an attempt to identify the subject. When the subject is identified this subject may be the cause of a new sequence of spontaneous stream of consciousness and so forth.

Consciousness in the reflective mode is different from the spontaneous stream by constituting a subjective perspective. In trying to identify something moving in the landscape, the spectator is constituted in experience as an identity that relates to the surrounding landscape. This identity may just be defined as *me* without further qualifications than being the onlooker of the landscape. Thus, the subject-object relationship is constituted through the relationship between the spontaneous stream and the reflective process and this relationship means that the cognitive identifications are accentuated in experience. Whereas the spontaneous stream has no priorities, the reflective mode is focused and determined by personal cognitive capacities. When a person from a city for example looks at a field and recognizes the crop as grain, the farmer will be able to discern subtle differences and identify the same crop as wheat, oats, rye, or barley.

The reflective focus lays the ground for ordinary memory—a sort of archive in which specific entities can be reactivated to bring up previous experiences and knowledge. This depository of sense impressions, concepts, and other kinds of cognitive entities, serve as grounds for cognitive schemata. These schemata provide the basis for recognition and identification.

Ordinary consciousness continuously goes back and forth between spontaneous and reflective modes and they interact in such a way that they complement each other. The spontaneous approach provides new material for the reflective process and the reflective approach initiates spontaneous

awareness. Their interactions are so subtle that they usually are recognized as one kind of consciousness.

The reflective mode in the ordinary sense is excluded from the aesthetic experience, although spontaneous identification necessary for constituting the existential theme in question is an aspect of the spontaneous stream of consciousness. The reflective process during the aesthetic experience is extraordinary because it reflects appropriate parts of the concealed memory and elicits emotions from previous life experiences. I suggest calling this process *spiritual reflection*. During spiritual reflection life experiences are recalled in their living state without being subject for recognition and cognitive processing. This reawakening of familiar emotional qualities that cannot be identified creates a feeling of existential density which is a major characteristic of the aesthetic experience.

During the spiritual reflective process the spontaneous stream of consciousness constituted by the art encounter is reflected in life-experience. The same existential theme as the one elicited by the work of art is reawakened from the concealed memory. It is not the memories as such that are recalled, but the emotional reminiscences that are elicited as if they are part of the present experience. When these emotional reminiscences are linked with the visual appearance of the work of art they are brought to a new stage of consciousness. They are brought out of the concealed memory by being objectified in the form of the work of art, and as a result, they will no longer have a disturbing influence on the stream of consciousness. The spiritual reflective process of the aesthetic experience brings in this way harmony to the stream of consciousness and provides a platform for better contact to present life.

This theory of the aesthetic experience as a constituting factor in a psychological process of increasing personal integrity cannot be approved through systematic empirical research because the aesthetic experience is unpredictable and because the complexity of the interaction between person and work of art prevents controlled investigations. Therefore, the theory's truth value can only be tested on its ability to account for art's psychological and sociological status in daily life. The following account is an attempt to put personal, societal, and artistic circumstances into perspective.

## **Personal Perspectives**

For many people art is a leisure activity. They are attracted and fascinated by works of art as products of artistic craft and creative imagination. Even so, art appreciation is often regarded as unproductive, and without fulfilling any practical purpose. Thus, art is generally relegated to the role of entertainment.

The same people, however, who recognize art as a leisure activity have also experienced on rare occasions works of art that have made deep impressions on them. They will remember encounters with a specific book of fiction, a piece of music, or a painting, in which they were touched at an existential level far beyond amusement. Experiences that set the ground for vitalized reflection and are imprinted in the mind forever. Such experiences are often counted among the most important life-experiences, right alongside of the birth of a child, the death of a friend or relative, and other occasions of dramatic life changes. People may not talk much about such experiences with art because they are imbued with mysticism and are difficult to describe.

Authors such as Orhan Pamuk (1997), Rainer Maria Rilke (1989) and Nathalie Sarraute (1958) have suggested that art experiences of existential character make the person wish for a change of life. After experiencing the archaic torso of Apollo, Rilke claims explicitly, "You must change your life." Such poetic descriptions may at first seem a bit exaggerated, but observations reveal that an aesthetic experience is followed by a state of enlightenment. Beardsley (1981, p. 560) writes, "There is often a very special refreshing feeling that comes after aesthetic experience, a sense of being unusual free from inner disturbance or unbalance." He maintains that an aesthetic experience creates a feeling of personal integrity or harmony. It may also resolve lesser conflicts, develop imagination, refine perceptual discrimination, and improve the ability to put oneself in place of others. He (p. 576) concludes that an aesthetic experience is "an aid to mental health" and offers "an ideal for human life." Similar observations have been put forward by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Rich E. Robinson (1990), John Dewey (1934), Marghanita Laski (1961), Abraham H. Maslow (1968), Rollo May (1975; 1991), and I. A. Richards (1925).

After all, art appreciation on some rare occasions gives cause for far-reaching existential changes. The aftermath of an aesthetic experience indicates a radical change of existence that can be understood in the light of the thesis that an aesthetic experience provides a latent emotional quality with an appropriate and distinct form.

Artistic engagement is another personal perspective of the psychological effects of art. Professional artists have to quite often renounce economical security. In some instances they may have to risk their lives because of political and religious restrictions. Furthermore, working as an artist is often an isolated activity because the profession is independent of the democratic organization of the society which means that there is no position as artist that would provide working conditions, economic security, social relations, and so forth. The artist is independent or even excluded from any type of societal support. Moreover, the creative work is usually based on a personal engagement that only adds to

the isolation often experienced by artists. Nevertheless, some are ready to devote their lives to art in spite of all privations and difficulties.

The question is, why do people choose to be artists when it isn't directly supported by the society? Artists often say that they cannot stop themselves from engaging in creative activity. The work is so alluring that it is impossible to push it aside.

Although the prospects of fame and wealth, however slight, may be reasons for embarking on an artistic career, the intensity of creative engagement reveals more essential reasons. Artists are often absorbed in their work and pursue their ideas with persistent courage. From a psychological point of view, creative engagement provides the artist with an existential anchoring that is fundamental to his or her commitment. This anchoring of creativity in existential dimensions of life makes it plausible that art appreciation may have an existential impact on viewers as well.

## **Social Perspectives**

Art is given great importance within the society. Institutions such as art academies, art museums, libraries, theatres, and concert halls are established with the only purpose of serving the art world. Government investments in art are sometimes considerable and buildings erected for the fine arts are often pretentious and displaying outstanding architectural designs. Moreover, top artists are greatly admired among the public and art and artists are likely to be the major focal points whenever culture, past or present, is studied or celebrated. From this perspective, there is no doubt about the great importance attached to art.

On the other hand, art also gives rise to great furor. Under totalitarian governments certain expressions of art are commonly banned and artists prosecuted. When totalitarian states are brought down, art is once more target of attack. This time people run riots against art previously adopted by the authoritarian leaders. Throughout history iconoclasm has demonstrated how works of art are closely associated with ruling powers as if art were a tool for influencing people's values and political engagement.

Art assumes a central position within the religious domain just as it does within the secular society. Stories, pictures, and music are essential for the practice of any religion. In Christianity for example the Bible contains parables, poetry, and narratives that could be compared to secular literature. Pictures, sometime highly estimated works of art, are displayed and used for devotion within the Roman-Catholic Church. A Lutheran service without music is almost unthinkable. Art of every kind is a natural part of Christian rituals and the same is true for other religions.

At the same time, there are restrictions concerning what may be depicted. Within Judaism as well as Christianity it is forbidden according to the Holy Scriptures to make pictures of God. This prohibition is administered with varying degrees of stringency, but in all cases it is based on a conviction that pictures may exert such an influence on people that they will confuse the pictures with God.

Censorship of art is also common within the educational domain. It is a well-known phenomenon even in western democracies today that books are banned from libraries and schools. There are very little resources given to art education in schools with the focus placed predominantly on subjects such as language, mathematics, and history. Art has to great extent been excluded from the curriculum and reckoned as an amusement without much educational value.

The prevailing ambivalent attitude towards art within the society spans from great respect to hostile rejection. The passion behind these opposing attitudes reveals that art has the potential to exert a great influence on people and their existence making it something far more essential than a momentary amusement. If art does constitute emotional qualities then it likely that art can lay the ground for existential values.

## **Artistic Perspectives**

Artistic media in all the disciplines such as painting, music, and writing can be manipulated and combined in an unlimited number of ways. The history of fine art demonstrates how painting for example has varied in style and subject matter for hundreds or even thousands of years. Even if artistic media are comprised of such basic elements as colors, tones, and words, still they provide the options for variations that surpass the appearance of the surrounding reality. A landscape depicted in a painting can be in comparison to the same landscape in reality manipulated in a great many ways. Furthermore, the artistic media provides the means for creating artistic expressions that have never before been introduced. New expressions are continuously coming up and demonstrate the unending process of innovation associated with art. From an existential-phenomenological point of view it is reasonable to relate diversity and innovation within the fine arts to the reality of emotional life. Just as in art, one's emotional life varies in an unlimited number of ways and new emotional qualities emerge as living conditions change. Assuming that art constitutes emotions, it is plausible to say that art echoes emotional life. As living conditions change and people encounter new existential themes in life, art has to produce new artistic expressions to provide the necessary means for their constitution.

Works of art are ideally suited to play a role constituting emotions, not only because of art's diversity and its capacity for innovation, but also because works of art display a compositional unity which relates primarily to only one of the human senses. The phrase "unity in variety" has often been used to describe a work of art, meaning that every detail contributes to the work as a whole. This makes works of art well suited for providing a distinct form for the constitution of emotional qualities. The surrounding world may also provide constituting forms, but in comparison to art, reality is rarely sharply outlined nor do the details necessarily have harmony. Reality stimulates more senses at once and creates a more multifarious sense impression than works of art, and therefore, it is less suited for providing a limited and integrated sense impression to reflect an existential theme.

Art has often been claimed to be a mirror of its contemporary culture. Form and content have changed over time and it is only reasonable to believe that these changes are caused by new existential challenges in the society. It is easy to detect a shifting focus on spirituality and religion, individual identity, powers of the unconscious, technology, and so forth. An increase of technological inventions in our world has accounted for an increase in existential challenges during the last century and this has also been followed by an increase of changes in artistic expressions. Assuming that new existential challenges inspire artistic innovations it might be said that art provides the art audience with an aid for retaining the existential theme in question. When current existential themes are objectified through works of art these objectifications make it possible for the audience to constitute and retain new emotional qualities.

I could put forward further details of the reality of art and art appreciation in an attempt to evaluate my thesis, but let me instead return to my aesthetic experience at the Tate Gallery.

## Epilogue

My experience with Rothko's works has had a profound impact on me. In retrospect, I see that it gave me a new insight that I was not yet able to grasp or determine, though I was aware of the elevated state of being that it left me with. It was not until many years later that I realized how I was actually influenced by the experience. I wrote an article with the title "Eternity" (1990) after a visit to the Grand Teton National Park in America, and I realize now many years later that this article reflects an interest in the infinite as a spiritual dimension. When I wrote the article I did not relate it to my experience with Rothko's paintings, but today I am convinced that his paintings provided a distinct form for an existential theme in my life. A few years ago I visited the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas, and the Matisse Chapel in Vence, France, in order to carry out

studies on the relationship between contemporary art and spirituality—a research project that I am still working on today. What seemed to be an accidental incident at the Tate Gallery became a driving force in my life as a scholar.

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