2 The aesthetic

From experience to art

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Introduction

There are some pleasurable or displeasurable responses to the world which focus on its sensible, or imaginatively-intended character.[1] Such responses presuppose one to have had direct perceptual acquaintance with the sensible item in question, or an imaginative engagement with it (rather than an exclusively linguistic and descriptive one). If we did not have a name for this kind of response, we would have to invent one. But the fact is that we do have a name—the aesthetic. It is based on our interactions with singular sensible or imaginatively-intended items.

Of course, some responses to sensible items are causally based, arising, for example, through the impact of stimuli on the senses of taste or smell. But the aesthetic seems to involve pleasure or displeasure with an important cognitive aspect—an aspect, indeed, which seems to be implicated in the grounds of the pleasure itself.

But how should we characterize this? Commonly, terms from the following two groups are used: (i) aesthetic perception, aesthetic attention, aesthetic awareness the aesthetic attitude; (ii) aesthetic judgment, aesthetic experience. Which of these is most appropriate in relation to aesthetic responses? Or does nothing of theoretical substance hang on such an issue? As it happens, at least one substantial issue is involved. For how one characterizes the aesthetic generally, will tend to shape one's understanding of its more specific character. In this respect, for example, it is fairly clear that the aforementioned characterizations emphasize the aesthetic as a receptive rather than productive phenomenon.

To determine whether this is a legitimate bias, I shall explore criteria governing these characterizations in terms of their implications for the aesthetic. My strategy will be to ask whether the criteria which govern, say, the distinction of perception into its varieties, would allow us to distinguish and thereby necessarily and sufficiently define the aesthetic as one such variety. The strategy will show, in due course, that the aesthetic should be understood specifically as a mode of experience. Making use of key insights from Kant, I shall then offer a detailed examination of the way in which aesthetic experience is embodied in the creation of art.

I

I commence with those characterizations which seem especially linked to the aesthetic's sensible grounding, namely, perception, attention, and awareness. These terms have a broad affinity. We generally use them to emphasize different aspects of the subjective dimension to cognition. The term "perception," for example, readily connotes the sensory aspect; "attention" emphasizes the possibility of prolonged and fixed cognition; "awareness" emphasizes the subjective dimension as such.

Now these various aspects of cognition can be internally distinguished on both logical and psychological grounds. For example, their modes are separable on the basis of the logically distinct nature of the sensory media involved. One talks in this respect of visual perception, attention, and awareness, as opposed, say, to their auditory or tactile modes. On the other hand, we distinguish degrees of cognition by ultimate reference to psychological states of the cognizing subject. In this respect we contrast, say, "unified and vivid" with "muddled and faint" perception; or "rapt and concentrated" with "wandering and lax" attention.

Similar considerations hold in relation to the term "attitude," for whilst it is not a variety of cognition as such, it can be differentiated into its own internal varieties on psychological grounds similar to the above. We contrast, for example, a "hard and rigid" with a "soft and flexible" attitude by reference to the way in which a subject is disposed to hold specific beliefs, or regard specific states of affairs.

These logical and psychological criteria can now be related to the problem of the aesthetic. A first point is that whilst we can differentiate modes of cognition and its cognate terms on the basis of their logically distinct sensory media, we obviously cannot, on the same basis, define the aesthetic as one such mode. Although on occasion our aesthetic engagement may be concentrated on one of the senses, it can, equally well, range over several. Indeed, the only way one might hope to differentiate the aesthetic on these terms would be to posit a uniquely aesthetic sense; but this would simply take us into the discredited and archaic realm of faculty psychology.

However, it might be objected that I am being unnecessarily parsimonious in relation to the possibilities of distinction on logical grounds. Could we not, for example, say that perception, attention, awareness, and attitude have as many varieties as there are kinds of objects of cognition; and that aesthetic perception or whatever, will be that variety which is directed towards objects which have aesthetic qualities?

This raises two related points. First, if we really wish to define the aesthetic fundamentally by reference to the nature of phenomenal objects, then to posit a distinctively aesthetic mode of cognition or attitude supervenient upon such objects will be completely irrelevant to the task of definition. Second, whilst, for example, dogs or trees are qualitatively distinct kinds of object, this in itself gives us no grounds for asserting, say, that the dog-cognitions or

tree-cognitions which embody them will thereby be qualitatively distinct qua cognition.

Rather, what we are dealing with here are more appropriately described as classes of cognitions defined by their different objects. If difference of object were the only operative difference here, then to look upon such classes of cognition as also entailing a difference in variety or kind qua cognition would be in conflict with Ockham's Razor. We would be multiplying our varieties and kinds unnecessarily.

Let me now consider the aptness of psychological grounds for differentiating the aesthetic as a variety of perception, attention, awareness, or attitude. This approach has been very influential in the twentieth century, even amongst analytic philosophers. Monroe Beardsley (amongst others)[2] for example, has on numerous occasions suggested that an at least necessary condition of our aesthetic cognition is that it should have a high degree of unity that is not simply reducible to the unity of the object or state of affairs cognized.

Now (as will be seen in a moment) unlike some commentators such as George Dickie,[3] I do not find the idea of our aesthetic engagement having a subjective unity (or for that matter vividness, or a raptness) of its own, at all implausible. What is disputable is that such degrees of unity or whatever, should play a significant role in defining the aesthetic.

If we perceive some object or state of affairs, then (transcendental issues aside) we would normally say that the unity of our perception is due to the unity of the thing perceived. However, we sometimes find that an object or state of affairs has a significance for us in excess of being simply "that sort of thing called an x or a y." It engages us in respect of some interest or range of interests.

To find something interesting means that we are disposed towards it in a certain way; specifically, it means that we are disposed to make the thing of interest a node of intentional activity. We relate it to our stock of beliefs or projects-in-hand, and perhaps find that it has a new bearing on these, through fulfilling or thwarting our expectations. In the context of interests, therefore, our cognitive activity is by definition more concentrated and comprehensive, and it is in this sense that we can regard it as having unity at the subjective as well as objective level.

It should be clear by now that whilst there is such a thing as subjectively unified cognition, it is not a sufficient condition of the aesthetic. To specify the conditions under which subjectively unified cognition takes on a distinctively aesthetic character, we must go beyond the subjective level of cognition to that public realm of objects, events, human interests and practices, which provides cognition with its contents.

However, once we locate the aesthetic at least partially in this public realm, we surely demand that the subjective aspect of aesthetic cognition—like our cognition of any phenomenon—should admit of all degrees of unity, vagueness, raptness, haziness, and so forth. To tie it to some specific degree of, say, unity or vividness would (leaving aside the problem of finding exact criteria for these) seem arbitrary to say the least.

Of course, to insist on the necessity of aesthetic cognition being subjectively unified, does not preclude the possibility of degrees of such unity; indeed the capacity of certain objects to give rise to a heightened degree of it may be the basis of just that interest which is constitutive of the aesthetic. However, we must ask what it is about aesthetic objects and states of affairs which would enable us to enjoy such subjectively unified cognition? Our commonplace assumptions would probably lead us to reply "such things as formal, and expressive qualities."

To reply in these terms, of course, is to suggest that essentially aesthetic qualities are sensible aspects of objects and states of affairs, rather than material properties of objects or states of affairs as such. Such a distinction between seeing some aspect of a thing and seeing a thing as such, can only be made intelligible through the notion of interest. For to see an aspect is to select a specific range of a thing's properties for attention, or to take note of its broader significance; it is, as Wittgenstein puts it in the *Philosophical Investigations*,[4] "subject to the will." Hence, insofar as the emergence of such aspects to cognition is willed, then it is necessarily presupposed that we find them interesting in some respect.

I am suggesting, in other words, that because aesthetic qualities are aspects of things, their emergence to cognition necessarily presupposes a context of interest, i.e. subjective unity. However, if aesthetic qualities can only be cognized under conditions of subjective unity, then to actually incorporate these conditions into their definition is logically superfluous to the task of definition itself.

Similar considerations apply if, like Jerome Stolnitz and others,[5] we propose a psychological notion of "disinterestedness" as a necessary condition of the aesthetic. An attitude or act of attention or whatever, is aesthetically disinterested (so the argument goes) to the degree that it is concerned with some object or state of affairs "for its own sake." However, it is again clear that a concern for some object or state of affairs "for its own sake" has numerous non-aesthetic usages, for example the miser's concern for gold. This means that to differentiate the specifically aesthetic variety of disinterestedness, we must again have recourse to our aesthetic interest in specific aspects of objects and states of affairs.

The fact that I use the term "aesthetic interest" here suggests that as with the notion of degrees of unity, haziness, and so forth, we should expect our aesthetic engagement to be psychologically characterizable in terms of varying degrees of interest, disinterest, and even, on occasion, uninterest. Which of these will apply, will depend on both the nature of aesthetic objects, and the context in which we engage with them.

These points may seem highly surprising, given the traditional link between the aesthetic and disinterestedness. It should be emphasized, however, that I am not denying the link as such. What I am denying is the interpretation of disinterestedness as a kind of psychological attitude, which we adopt in order to perceive aesthetic qualities. Instead, I propose that disinterestedness

should be seen as an aesthetic criterion—i.e. something bound up with the logical grounds of our aesthetic responses, rather than with their psychological structure.

To explain. Most of our interactions with the world involve responses which are "interested" to the degree that they are pursued for their use-value or as sources of animal or physiological gratification. However, in contrast to this, the enjoyment of such things as the purely formal and expressive aspects of some object or states of affairs, does not logically presuppose that we take them to have use value of a practical or theoretical kind.

Of course, we may be psychologically "interested" in them (as described a little earlier) but this interest is not the logical ground of our response. Aesthetic qualities (as opposed to the broader uses to which we might put them) have no necessary connection with the means/ends nexus of our physiological, practical, or theoretical interests in the world.[6] The distinctively aesthetic sense of disinterested, in other words, is a question of logic. It is not some distinct psychological "attitude" and, in consequence, cannot be used to characterize the active cognitive dimension of our aesthetic responses.

My first stage of argument, then, converges on the following. We find that the aesthetic cannot be identified as a special variety of perception, attention, awareness, or attitude per se, insofar as it transcends the logical and psychological principles whereby we distinguish such notions into their varieties. Indeed, even if we insist upon factors such as unity or disinterestedness as a necessary condition of the aesthetic, we find that these do not allow its cognitive structure to be characterized adequately.

II

I shall now consider the aptness of "judgment" and "experience" as characterizations of the aesthetic's cognitive dimension.

The most important way in which we distinguish modes of judgment is by reference to the nature of the concepts involved, and the principles which govern their application. On these terms, for example, we might separate mathematical, scientific, and sociological judgments (amongst others) on logical grounds, insofar as each embodies distinctive concepts and criteria for their application, which are not completely analyzable in terms of the concepts and criteria of other modes of appraisal.

This leads to a crucial point. In the case of mathematics, science, and sociology, to employ the appropriate concepts in the correct way is both a necessary and sufficient condition for saying that someone is fully engaged in mathematics, science, or sociology. These disciplines, in other words, are necessarily and sufficiently defined as distinctive ways of employing concepts, i.e. just as modes of judgment.

It is true, of course, that we draw a distinction in science and sociology, between theoretical and practical research, but even here it is always presupposed that practice is in the service of theory, i.e. that it is a means to

more successful and comprehensive judgments. To put this another way, whilst mathematical, scientific, and sociological concepts can occur in judgments that furnish the motives for actions which are not themselves simply judgments (for example, setting up experiments), we do not make this possibility a logical condition of their use. A scientist, for example, could address purely theoretical issues, without us thinking this a misuse of scientific concepts.

However, in contrast to these points there are some contexts where a capacity to make the appropriate judgments is a necessary but not sufficient condition for being engaged with the world in a certain way. We would not, for example, regard a person as morally or politically engaged in an adequate sense, unless, on occasion, his or her judgment furnished motives for the appropriate sorts of moral and political action.

The order of logical priority we find in mathematics, science, and sociology is here reversed, insofar as we regard judgment as a means to practical moral and political ends. Hence it is a logical condition of the distinctively moral and political use of such terms as "fairness" and "obligation," that they can figure in judgments that provide the motives for actions that are not themselves simply judgments. If a person confined him or herself to moral and political judgments rather than moral and political deeds, we would regard them as amoral or apolitical, or even alienated. On these terms, then, our moral and political engagements with the world are aptly defined as modes of action.

Interestingly, the cases of emotional and religious engagement closely parallel these considerations. For whilst a capacity to make appraisals involving the appropriate concepts is necessarily presupposed, it is not a sufficient condition of our emotional and religious engagement. We require in addition, that on occasion our appraisals should embody some element of affective response.

For example, if one judged oneself in terms of emotional concepts, but ceased to manifest or feel those behavioral and physiological traits which constitute emotional affect (e.g. laughing, crying, animated gestures, visceral tension and release), one would be ill, or, at best, unemotional, i.e. alienated from authentic emotional engagement with the world. Again, if a person judged God to be almighty and redemptive, but without ever feeling awe before the almighty or the joy of the redemption, then we would rightly say that they had not experienced the world in a distinctively religious way. It is, in other words, analytic to the religious use of such terms as almightiness and redemption, that they should engage the heart as well as the mind.

This contrast between modes of judgment as such (e.g. mathematics, science, and sociology) and our emotional and religious engagement with the world, has a further crucial aspect. Whereas modes of judgment as such have well defined criteria of truth and validity, it seems harder to get the notion of truth going in relation to the distinctively emotional or religious realms.

Indeed, even where we can, the criteria of truth involved differ radically from those pertaining to modes of judgment as such. For example, if a man trembles and shakes uncontrollably as he pronounces an event to be

frightening, we rightly take this as evidence of the truthfulness or sincerity of his judgment. Trembling and shaking, in themselves, of course, offer no watertight guarantee of such truthfulness, but they are at least relevant. Again, if in judging that God exists a person experiences a joyful personal communion with him, this can, and indeed must, be cited as evidence for the truth of the judgment. Other evidence of a more philosophical nature may be offered to the skeptical, but from the distinctively religious viewpoint, the authority of personal revelation is the more compelling.

Now this direct relevance of the judging subject's affective experience to the truth of his or her judgment is completely inadmissible and irrelevant amongst those disciplines which are to be defined as modes of judgment as such. In mathematics, science, and sociology, for example, we are aiming, ideally, at objective understanding which is usually to be achieved in spite of our affective dispositions, rather than (at least in part) through them. Such dispositions are not necessary elements in the meaning of such judgments.

With emotional and religious engagements matters are otherwise. For whilst they necessarily involve judgment, they are not sufficiently definable as modes thereof. Rather their significance is grounded as much (if not more) on the affective dimension. This is not just a case of pleasurable or unpleasurable feeling being involved, but rather the fact that such feelings arise from, and illuminate, situations of existential import. They are expressions of those conditions of historical and physical embodiment which give meaning and value to life. They are to be defined, in other words, as modes of experience.

These considerations now enable us to logically situate the aesthetic. First, whilst we do indeed make aesthetic judgments these are a necessary but not a logically sufficient characterization of our aesthetic engagement. As in the case of emotion and religion (and for roughly the same reasons) we require that at least on occasion our aesthetic judgments embody some affective response.

For example, if a person made aesthetic judgments but without ever finding the object of their judgment pleasing at the level of feeling, we would not only have reason to deem them aesthetically insensitive or alienated, but could, with equal justification, say that they had missed the whole point of our aesthetic engagement. For whereas our interest in math, science, and sociology lies in their capacity to issue in understanding, the interest which leads us to discriminate aesthetic qualities, in contrast, is (at least in part) their capacity to issue in a particular sort of pleasure.

It is vital to reiterate that the pleasure in question here—even if it is of a mild sort—has logical connections with some of the profoundest dimensions of human being. Even the simpler forms of such pleasure have quite surprising levels of existential complexity at issue in them; and in the more complex sorts—bound up with art—the complexity is even more pronounced. The aesthetic should, accordingly, be characterized as a mode of experience.

I shall now give much more substance to this provisional conclusion.

III

As a starting point let us consider the simplest form of beauty—namely a pleasure in how things appear to the senses, or, to put it another way, structure in appearance. Some phenomena engage our senses in terms of personal preferences, e.g. liking one color, or one taste or smell, rather than another. But there is a beauty in appearance which is a function of the relation between the elements in a sensible manifold.

For reasons which will become clear, this takes us rather beyond the realm of personal preference per se. Its understanding is best pursued along broad lines indicated by Kant.[7] For him, the enjoyment of formal relations of unity and diversity in the perceptual manifold, has a special significance. It arises from the mutual stimulation of the understanding and imagination which is achieved through the experience of aesthetic form.

Of course, it may seem that the notions of "understanding" and "imagination" are mere remnants of eighteenth-century faculty psychology. This is far from being the case. It is difficult, for example, to see how any kind of knowledge, or recognition of identity is possible without the capacity to apply or connect concepts. This capacity is more or less synonymous with what Kant means by "understanding."

Likewise, it would be difficult to see how knowledge and the formation of concepts would be possible without a non-conceptual capacity to project perceptual situations which can signify sensible possibilities other than the immediately given. Again, this is more or less what Kant means by "imagination."

Now, decorative phenomenal forms—such as an intricate crustacean shell or embroidered patterns—can be described just as the kind of thing they are. We simply label them with a concept. However, to experience their beauty involves sustained cognitive exploration of those relations of unity and diversity which characterize their phenomenal fabric. In following the relation between whole and parts in the crustacean shell, for example, what may engage us is how the overall shape restrains and directs aspects of texture and color, and other elements within the manifold. We not only relate parts and whole to one another, but also explore its possibilities in relation to sub-structures within the whole.

In the case of the embroidery, matters can be more complex still. The work may set up visual rhythms which admit of continuation beyond the immediately given. We can take up cues which allow a rhapsodic continuation of the rhythm in imagination. Alternatively, through exploring how one color emphasizes or appears to negate or neutralize other colors, we might continue this as a process of formal interaction, where our momentary present perceptions of the configuration are linked to imaginings of its previous stages (or even possible future ones). The specific forms of the embroidered pattern might also be such that we can alternate between seeing them as background or as foreground elements. Each such gestalt switch opens up new perceptual possibilities in relation to the pattern.

Now when it comes to the perception of spatial objects, under normal circumstances our recognitions of what they are do not require perceptual exploration of the particular instance. However, to experience the beauty of a whorled shell or embroidered pattern, involves different considerations. Here the configuration's aesthetic unity emerges through the interplay between its phenomenal form and alternative avenues of possible cognitive exploration which open up in the very perception of it.

This means that some dimension of freedom in cognition, is partially constitutive of aesthetic unity. We do not recognize beauty through merely applying a concept; rather the understanding detects various alternative perceptual possibilities in the manifold which are, simultaneously, reciprocally enhanced through the imagination's following them up.

Of course, freedom in some cognitive contexts is a problem to be overcome. But in the aesthetic it is part of a distinctive experience. In it, the openness and cognitive fecundity of the world stimulates those capacities which are most fundamental to us as rational and sensible beings. The aesthetic experience of beauty centers on a unique embodiment of cognitive freedom.

This experience is one wherein our bonding with the world is much more intimate than in the usual subject-object relation. The world's open phenomenal richness is correlated with the depth and richness of our own cognitive capacities, and affective receptiveness. We are at home with the world, as rational, sensible, and affective beings.

There is also a further significant dimension. It is often asserted as a matter of fact that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," i.e. largely a matter of personal preference. No doubt our sense of the beautiful starts from personal preference, but the vital point is that it is not a static thing. Not only can it change over time, but these changes can arise, in part, through rational interchange and critical discussion with oneself and other people.[8]

For example, many individuals find that, as they accumulate experience, the things that satisfied them previously no longer do so to the same degree. They become able to make finer and more informed cognitive discriminations—perhaps noticing valuable features that they never noticed before. And whilst someone else simply telling us that we have not properly appreciated something is not, of itself, a compelling ground for changing one's values, it can help bring about such change—if supported by reasons and observations which are grounded on close acquaintance with the matter in question.

In the case of aesthetic experience these factors are especially to the fore. Aesthetic sensitivity has a natural basis, but it can be cultivated through experience and critical scrutiny. The fact that the aesthetic is grounded in basic cognitive factors, means that there is a shared ground around which debate can constellate. Through such debate, both oneself and society can develop its experiential range of knowledge and affective awareness.

It is in this context that "aesthetic judgment" plays its authentic role—as a facilitator of aesthetic experience's changing horizons. In the aesthetic

experience of art, more complex considerations than these are involved.[9] They center on the fact that, whilst one can enjoy art simply as a beautiful configuration, the knowledge that it is, in fact, something made by another human, opens up more complex experiential vistas.

At the heart of these, is the fact that the artwork involves working with a medium. In learning to paint, write, compose, or whatever, the artist has to learn the techniques which are basic to the medium in question. No matter how complete his or her foreconception of the work, its making involves a qualitative transformation. Working in a medium does not translate private experience into a public domain, it enables that experience to be developed into a more complete form.

The artist's stylistic interpretation of a subject means that it is necessarily changed. One does not duplicate the subject in its entirety, rather some aspects are understated or omitted, whilst other aspects are exaggerated or idealized. The artist's style of writing or whatever, means that the subject is made to exist in a new way. Through this it can become a source of aesthetic ideas. This means able not only to indicate a subject-matter, but to present it in a way that is so associationally rich for the imagination, that its meaning cannot be paraphrased adequately.

The artist's style is also significant in another important respect. Individual human experience is a continuum, but we divide it up into discrete moments, episodes, and phases, on the basis of the things we think, do, and feel. No matter how discrete and self-contained these elements may appear to be, their individual character is determined by their place in the whole, just as the nature of that whole is determined by the character of the parts.

Now this continuum of mutually dependent factors involves a vital relation of contingency and necessity. The particular elements in one's life are contingent to the degree that we chose to do them. That being said, once enacted, their status changes. To remove even a slight element from one's past, would create a wave of exponentially developing changes that would lead to a present which is different from the one that we actually occupy. However, this actual present is all that we have. All the elements in our past which lead up to it have, therefore, the character of necessity, in retrospect. Take one away, and the character of the whole would change.

This necessity is the path of our life. But it is only complete when the whole series is compete, i.e. at death, when all our experiences have been enacted. Short of this, there is only one phenomenon which allows us a symbolic expression of experiential completeness, and that is the work of art. All the moments in its creation are individually contingent, but in the context of the finished whole each is necessary. Here at least, experience is completed in a symbolic form.

Such considerations mean that even if looking at purely formal relations in an artwork, they are always something more than that, even if one cannot say exactly why. This is even more the case when it comes to following how the artist develops thematic elements and characterizations.

Through this we appreciate how he or she understands the way in which experiential textures are woven into the fabric of a coherent, progressing whole. To experience the artwork aesthetically is to enjoy a relational complex which exemplifies decisive vectors of experience itself.

If this account is right, the making of art qua aesthetic object is of the greatest metaphysical significance. This extends also to our sense of the artwork's creator. In life, people tell us who and what they are, and the various things which are important to them, or not. Such reports, however, labor under two singular disadvantages. On the one hand, they rarely qua reports do justice to the depth and affective ambiguities of the person's experience. On the other hand, in bearing witness to such reports there is always some element of psychological pressure in terms of how one responds. It is not easy to give the reporter exactly what he or she wants in terms of response. Neither is it easy to turn away, if the report is too complex, challenging, or, for that matter, too boring to negotiate.

Suppose, however, that we encounter the other's experience as embodied in a poem, painting, or piece of music. Whether or not the artist is present in person when we engage with the work, qua object it is always capable of being experienced independently of such direct presence. Indeed, with the vast majority of artworks which we negotiate, the artist is nowhere around, and in cases is long dead.

This physical discontinuity of the work from its creator is of the most positive worth. For it means that we can engage with the experience embodied in the work in much freer terms than in direct engagements with another person. The fact that the work declares the artist's conception of things through stylized interpretation in a medium, allows that which is important to him or her to be negotiated in allusive rather than explicit terms. Experience is shown rather than baldly stated, and this allows us to identify with a personal vision of things, rather than with the other's experience in its own right. Such empathy allows us to discover things about ourselves and our own values. The artist and ourselves relate on a more equal basis.

Our identification, in other words, is based on an invitation and sharing rather than prescription. We may know many things about the artist or even the circumstances under which the particular work was created. But the key point is that we can identify with it without having to take these contextual factors into account as a logical condition of our identification. By virtue of this our appreciation of the work counts as relatively disinterested. Our empathy with what it shows is an aesthetic experience.

It should also be emphasized that this engagement admits of cultivation and education even more so than with the experience of simple beauty as such. This is because artworks are—as products of human artifice—created in a comparative historical horizon. We have strong criteria for comparison and contrast which can sharpen our sense of what is of most worth (or for that matter, derivative) in this particular way of articulating the medium. The possibility of experiential cultivation and change is enhanced. It is so

because the practice of artmaking itself, is grounded on how the artist relates to and modifies traditions of creation within the medium.

This comparative horizon is not just a case of technical issues. For the way in which such issues are negotiated is deeply implicated in how the world is disclosed by a particular artwork. And in deciding on this question, mere reports of what an artist has done are not sufficient to determine value. We must see how these are embodied in the particular work.

Conclusion

It is worth considering, finally, an objection to my strategy. The objection holds that my account is hopelessly outdated because it converges so much on beauty and the making of art. Surely "beauty" and "making" have had their day. What is now to the fore are conceptual and theoretical issues rather than "experience."

In response, it must be noted first that the objection assumes that what is fundamental to art—what defines it even—are the preferences of that insidious world of curators, managers, collectors, and critics who dominate Western art, and its colonial subjects in other cultures. However, to allow this world to dictate what is appropriate to the analysis of aesthetic experience and its relation to beauty and art is wholly unacceptable. It is a kind of unconscious racism which denigrates upwards of around 30,000 years of artistic creation on a worldwide scale.

Against this, it might be claimed that since the notions of "art" and the "aesthetic" are Western social constructs, one can hardly complain if shifts in that society's values have brought a corresponding change in the meaning of art and the aesthetic. However, this invites the question of what it is that enables the West to "construct" such concepts. And here we face a decisive transcultural factor. In non-Western societies, the indigenous function of image-making, music, poetry, dancing and the like seems almost exclusively ritualistic. However, it is difficult to see how practices of this kind could be taken to have functional efficacy—to have magical effects, or whatever—unless there was something intrinsically special about the very making of them.

And there is. No matter what function artifacts of the aforementioned kinds are intended to serve, by definition they involve the artist working in a medium, and through that working, changing his or her relation to medium, self, and world. Through the making of "aesthetic ideas" in the sense described in section III, the subject-object relation in experience is changed, no matter how slightly. Through this we find the emergence of new, intrinsically valuable ways of experiencing things.

Now, whereas in many cultures this aesthetic experience is drawn back into the functional context, Western societies have come to pursue it in specialist terms, and it is for this specialist pursuit that the term "art" has been used. However, Western culture has now extended the terms the "aesthetic" and "art" to mean ideas and contexts related to theories about art, or artifacts used to illustrate such ideas. But this approach is characteristically

unable to distinguish discourse and strategies about art, from art itself. Indeed, through the devising of "institutional" and related definitions, the very nature of art is redefined so as to make the concept constellate around what are at the very best a marginal set of Western preferences. That body of practices—extending far beyond the West—which sustains the idea of art being something worth having ideas about in the first place, is transformed into a passé, secondary function of the very thing which it enables.

Interestingly, this is not only a logical and ethical problem, it also masks a massive failure of imagination on the part of philosophical aesthetics. For whilst contemporary Western idioms are often marginal to the features which make art an enduringly significant phenomenon, even these marginal modes can relate to aesthetic experience in important ways. In this respect, for example, there are important connections which can be made between installation and assemblage art and the sublime, and even between some conceptual idioms and modes of imaging.[10]

This why it is vital to clarify the importance of the aesthetic as a mode of experience, rather than some consumer-based mode of perception or attitude. Only by clarifying the aesthetic's experiential depth can any justice be done to beauty and art's transcultural and transhistorical formative significance.

Notes

1 My approach to the aesthetic has been outlined in more general terms in a number of other works, most notably *Art and Embodiment: From Aesthetics to Self-Consciousness*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. A more recent and critical approach to questions of value can be found in Paul Crowther, *Defining Art, Creating the Canon: Artistic Value in an Era of Doubt*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007.

2 See, for example, Monroe Beardsley, *The Aesthetic Point of View*, Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1982, especially 77—92.

3 Dickie's objections are stated most effectively in his *Art and the Aesthetic*, Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1974.

4 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M.Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1973, 213.

5 See, for example, Jerome Stolnitz, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Criticism*, Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1960, 29–65.

6 The notion of disinterestedness as a logical criterion of the aesthetic is developed more in my book *Defining Art, Creating the Canon: Artistic Value in an Era of Doubt*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006. See especially chapter 2.

7 I develop Kant's position as set out in the first four Moments of the Analytic of the Beautiful in his *The Critique of Judgment*, trans.Werner J. Pluhar, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987, 43—95.

8 Kant also gives great emphasis to the fact that the pure aesthetic judgment has validity beyond personal preference. However, his "deduction" of this universal validity is extremely difficult and unviable. See, for example, *The Critique of Judgment*, op. cit., 155—162.

9 In what follows, I significantly develop Kant's theory of art, most notably the notions of aesthetic ideas, and of artistic originality. See *The Critique of Judgment*, op. cit., 181–86 and 174–76 respectively.

10 I have made extensive connections between, for example, installation art and the sublime in chapter 10 of my *The Language of Twentieth-Century Art: A Conceptual History*, New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1997, and between conceptual art and imaging in the conclusion to my book *The Transhistorical Image: Philosophizing Art and Its History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.