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Volume 7, 2015

Edited by Fabian Dorsch and Dan-Eugen Ratiu

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## Table of Contents

### **Paul Crowther**

*The Need for Art, and the Aesthetics of the Self: A Copernican Turn* 1-21

### **The Aesthetics Group**

*Turn, Turn, Turn: Civic Instrumentalisation and the Promotion of  
Autonomy in Contemporary Arts Funding* 22-45

### **Gemma Argüello Manresa**

*Participatory Computer-Based Art and Distributed  
Creativity: the Case of Tactical Media* 46-67

### **Zsolt Bátori**

*Photographic Deception* 68-78

### **Alessandro Bertinetto**

*Gombrich, Danto, and the Question of Artistic Progress* 79-92

### **Stefan Bird-Pollan**

*Benjamin's Artwork Essay from a Kantian Perspective* 93-103

### **The Branch Collective**

*Towards Gesture as Aesthetic Strategy* 104-114

<b>Camille Buttingsrud</b> <i>Thinking Toes...? Proposing a Reflective Order of Embodied Self-Consciousness in the Aesthetic Subject</i>	115-123
<b>Ilinca Damian</b> <i>On What Lies Beneath the Process of Creation</i>	124-136
<b>Wiebke Deimling</b> <i>Moralism about Propaganda</i>	137-147
<b>Daniel Dohrn</b> <i>According to the Fiction: A Metaexpressivist Account</i>	148-171
<b>Damla Dönmez</b> <i>Saving 'Disinterestedness' in Environmental Aesthetics: A Defense against Berleant and Saito</i>	172-187
<b>Luis Eduardo Duarte Valverde</b> <i>Net.Art as Language Games</i>	188-196
<b>Colleen Fitzpatrick</b> <i>Empathy, Anthropomorphism and Embodiment in Vischer's Contribution to Aesthetics</i>	197-209
<b>Jane Forsey</b> <i>Form and Function: The Dependent Beauty of Design</i>	210-220
<b>James Garrison</b> <i>The Aesthetic Life of Power: Recognition and the Artwork as a Novel 'Other'</i>	221-233
<b>Aviv Reiter &amp; Ido Geiger</b> <i>Kant on Form, Function and Decoration</i>	234-245
<b>Carmen González García</b> <i>Facing the Real: Timeless Art and Performative Time</i>	246-258

<b>Nathalie Heinich</b> <i>Beyond Beauty: The Values of Art — Towards an Interdisciplinary Axiology</i>	259-263
<b>Kai-Uwe Hoffmann</b> <i>Thick Aesthetic Concepts — Neue Perspektiven</i>	264-279
<b>Gioia Laura Iannilli</b> <i>The Aesthetics of Everyday Life: Suggestions for a Reconsideration of Aesthetics in the Age of Wearable Technologies</i>	280-296
<b>Jèssica Jaques Pi</b> <i>Repenser Picasso. Le Désir Attrapé par la Queue et les Iconographies Culinaires de l’Absurde et de la Stupeur</i>	297-316
<b>Mojca Küplen</b> <i>Art and Knowledge: Kant’s Perspective</i>	317-331
<b>Iris Laner</b> <i>Science, Art, and Knowing-How: Merleau-Ponty on the Epistemic Qualities of ‘Experimental Practices’</i>	332-362
<b>Regina-Nino Mion</b> <i>The Unpredictability of the Political Effect of Art</i>	363-369
<b>Vitor Moura</b> <i>Kundry Must Die — Stage Direction and Authenticity</i>	370-390
<b>Michaela Ott</b> <i>Aesthetics as Individual Affections</i>	391-405
<b>E. L. Putnam</b> <i>‘Bring a Camera with You’: The Posthumous Collaboration of Ahmed Basiomy and Shady El Noshokaty</i>	406-415
<b>James Risser</b> <i>Sensible Knowing in Kant’s Aesthetics</i>	416-427

<b>Salvador Rubio Marco</b> <i>Philosophizing through Moving-Image Artworks: An Alternative Way Out</i>	428-438
<b>Lisa Katharin Schmalzried</b> <i>Beauty and the Sensory-Dependence-Thesis</i>	439-463
<b>Niklas Sommer</b> <i>Schiller's Interpretation of the 'Critique of the Power of Judgement' — A Proposal</i>	464-475
<b>Tak-Lap Yeung</b> <i>Hannah Arendt's Interpretation of Kant's 'Judgment' and its Difficulties</i>	476-493
<b>Elena Tavani</b> <i>Giacometti's 'Point to the Eye' and Merleau-Ponty's Painter</i>	494-511
<b>Daniel Tkatch</b> <i>Transcending Equality: Jacques Rancière and the Sublime in Politics</i>	512-528
<b>Connell Vaughan</b> <i>Authorised Defacement: Lessons from Pasquino</i>	529-551
<b>Oana Vodă</b> <i>Is Gaut's Cluster Account a Classificatory Account of Art?</i>	552-562
<b>Katarzyna Wejman</b> <i>Plot and Imagination Schemata, Metaphor and Aesthetic Idea — A Ricoeurian Interpretation of the Kantian Concept of Imagination</i>	563-578
<b>Zsófia Zvolenszky</b> <i>Artifactualism and Inadvertent Authorial Creation</i>	579-593

# ***The Need for Art, and the Aesthetics of the Self: A Copernican Turn***

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## **Introduction**

In late June 2011 a conference on ‘The State of Aesthetics’ was held in London. An electronic announcement of the event stated that

‘A century ago aesthetics was of central concern for philosophers and psychologists alike. These days the study of the arts is, for both disciplines, a relatively minor enterprise; almost none of the world’s highest profile philosophers specialise in the arts, and it is distinctly outside the curriculum’s core... [Indeed] the Anglo-American tradition in philosophy is regarded, where it is noticed at all, as too passive, distanced and traditional to be relevant to either art practice or art engagement.’<sup>1</sup>

There are many reasons for this perceived irrelevance. One of them is that the analytic tradition makes no sustained attempt to negotiate what happens in the making of art i.e., how art transforms the world and changes it into something new. It focusses, rather, on analysis of the formal conventions whereby, for example, we ‘read’ fiction or perceive pictures. The reason why such reading or perception is important in the first place falls away – or is negotiated through the crude notion of ‘expressive qualities’.<sup>2</sup>

The Continental tradition is somewhat more focussed towards the issues I have mentioned, but, again, very much from the viewpoint of the

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<sup>1</sup> This was an electronic announcement distributed by the online philosophy list PHILOS-L@liverpool.ac.uk, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed criticism of this concept see the discussion of Richard Wollheim in Chapter 1 of my book *Phenomenologies of Art and Vision: A Post-Analytic Turn*, Bloomsbury Academic, London and New York, 2013.

audience's perspective. This tradition also suffers from the problem that in most cases, the explanation of art is derived from the relevant thinkers own general philosophy rather than from close investigative engagement with the work of art itself. Too often, indeed, figures such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze are used as authorities to whom the artwork is made to answer, rather than theorists whose work must be tested critically against the authority of the work itself. As I have shown elsewhere, indeed, this critical test frequently shows the aforementioned theorists' approach to art to be limited or mistaken.<sup>3</sup>

It follows, then, that a change is needed. Instead of engaging with art mainly through the crude notion of expressive qualities, or making it speak through the voice of 'authorities', we need a Copernican turn – a re-orientation of aesthetics around the art object itself and the unique way in which it transforms how the world appears and the nature of human experience.

Elsewhere, I have propounded a large body of work in normative aesthetics that converges on this transformative power.<sup>4</sup> In it, I treat the artwork as an ontological event gravitating around *style* in how it is designed or makes its subject-matter appear, *vis-à-vis* the distinctive properties of the medium (or media) of which it is an instance.

To understand this requires a phenomenology of style in the individual work, that is grounded also on a sense of comparative relation to other individual styles in the medium in question. We must be prepared to engage with how the making of art transforms appearance and experience, and how the distinctiveness of such transformations is determined by the individual work considered in relation to other such works. Such comparative understanding enables recognition of what is special about the individual artist's way of doing things.

There is a rather facile objection to this approach which holds that

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<sup>3</sup> See the relevant Chapters on Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenologies of Art and Vision...*Ibid, and the Chapters on Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty in my *The Phenomenology of Modern Art: Exploding Deleuze, Illuminating Style*, Continuum, London and New York, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> See especially *Defining Art, Creating the Canon: Artistic Value in an Era of Doubt*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2007; and *Art and Embodiment: From Aesthetics to Self-Consciousness*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993.

an emphasis on the made character of artworks does not square well with modern and postmodern idiom of conceptual art and the tradition of the Duchampian ready-made. However, as I have shown in detail, elsewhere, such idioms can actually be accommodated on the basis of the approach I am proposing.

In the present discussion, then, I will formulate a summary perspective of this approach. However, rather than leap straight into the transformative structure of the artwork we must commence from an equally neglected issue, namely that of why we need to create art in the first place.

Part One, accordingly, outlines the *horizontal* basis of our experience of time and space, and then four key cognitive competences which are involved in this experience. Particular emphasis is given to the importance of the aesthetic in its narrative mode of expression. Part Two outlines how literature, music, and pictorial art engage with this narrative feature in their own unique ways. They transform the aesthetic narrative of experience by embodying it in a more enduring and lucid form than can be attained at the purely experiential level.

## **Part One**

We only inhabit the present in our distinctive human way, insofar as knowledge of other possible times and places, and what it would be like to occupy them, orientates our sense of the present (explicitly or tacitly).<sup>5</sup>

This means that we exist not just in the present of bodily need and the network of spatial and temporal locations that provide routes to its satisfaction, rather *we exist in and across present, past, future, and counterfactuality* - i.e. things that might have happened had circumstances been different.. All our choices – and our valuations – breathe through this *horizon* of factual realities and complex modes of possibility. Feeling and emotions tied originally to encounters with immediate stimuli, are redistributed across the subject's horizontally structured experiences.

Now the question arises as to how this horizon is articulated and negotiated. There are four major cognitive competences involved – each of

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<sup>5</sup> My general theory of epistemology and the unity of the self is set out in some detail in a book entitled *Philosophy After Postmodernism: Civilized Values and the Scope of Knowledge*, Routledge, London and New York, 2014.

which is involved reciprocally with the genesis and operations of the others. It is to these I now turn.

The first competence is that of *symbolic form*. It is constituted by language, and related competences that are enabled by the learning and applying of language in specific ways. In this respect, for example, history and geography are symbolic forms with a special distinctiveness through their comprehension of particular regions of time and space. Philosophy and religion address the more general character of humanity's relation to the world. Other symbolic forms such as mathematics and the various branches of science allow the expression of much more general patterns of structural order in the characterization of phenomena. At the opposite extreme, the arts offer clarification of the particularity of human experience, in ways I shall describe later on.

It should be emphasized that initiation into symbolic forms is not a static once-and-for-all achievement. For whilst one can receive a basic education in them, the education can be deepened insofar as symbolic forms admit of *progressive articulation*. This means more than change *per se*. For the basic semantic and syntactic structure of symbolic forms can often be extended so as to allow the expression of new levels of meaning. There is not only change of style and/or choice in what is represented, but, more fundamentally in terms of what can be represented.

Symbolic forms, then, enable knowledge of self and world in a way that allows that knowledge to be developed, in principle, to ever higher levels.

I turn now to a second cognitive capacity, namely *imagination*.<sup>6</sup> Imagination is one of the most important cognitive competences, even though its philosophical importance has scarcely been recognized. Of the great philosophers, Kant alone, saw its key importance, and I will follow his basic sense of it - as a capacity for generating quasi-sensory images of items and states of affairs that are not immediately given in perception.

This *trans-ostensive* function (as I shall call it) is far from being a mere

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<sup>6</sup> I have argued this theory in detail in two lengthy papers. 'Imagination, Language, and the Perceptual World: A Post-Analytic Phenomenology', *Continental Philosophy Review* 46 (1) 2013, pp. 37-56; and 'How Images Create Us: Imagination and the Unity of Self-Consciousness', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 20, No.11-12, 2013, pp.101-123. See also the Chapter on 'Imagination and Objective Knowledge' in *Philosophy After Postmodernism...* Ibid.

luxury. At the most basic level, for example, one cannot make sense of the acquisition and application of concepts – indeed, of the learning of language in general – without presupposing the mediation of imagination as a necessary factor.

All sign and concept acquisition at some point presupposes a capacity for engaging with things not immediately present, that is not itself merely another variety of sign or concept. If there was not such a capacity, our explanations of the learning of signs and concepts would presuppose more fundamental signs and concepts, and even more fundamental signs and concepts to explain them, and so on, in an infinite regress. Imagination is the feature that allows to get a trans-ostensive ‘take’ on things not present thus allowing signs to be learned.

And this centrality of imagination extends equally to memory. In order to recall facts about one’s life, one must articulate them through linguistic descriptions. This in itself, *qua* linguistic, presupposes the mediation of imagination for the reason just mentioned. However, much of our remembering – indeed, the remembering that really counts for us emotionally – involves not just descriptive facts about the past, but the generation of images that are consistent with these facts.

I emphasize the term ‘generation’ here, for such *episodic memory* does not consist of the retrieval of mere faded ‘pictures’. Our reliving of the past is a *creative* thing – it is an imaginative interpretation whose character is strongly influenced by our present interests and orientations.<sup>7</sup>

The phenomenology of the mental image, itself, reveals this intrinsically creative character. When we remember or imagine something episodically, we do not project an exact simulacrum of that which we are positing. Our images select, exaggerate, omit, sometimes even falsify, the appearance of their object. They are interpretations whose character is in large part determined by our personal interests in the present.

And this is all to the good. For if our imagining did not have this character, and our recollections of the past and projections of possibility had the vividness and intensity of present perception, there could be no experience. If moments from the past or projected possible experiences were

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<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed account of the phenomenology of the mental image see especially ‘How Images Create Us...’ Ibid.

to be imagined with the same sensory immediacy as present perception, we would lose our sense of reality. It is true that the existence of objects given in perception are not subject to the will in the way that imagined objects are. However, if the sensory intensity of the image were on a par with that of perception, then the very power of willing itself lose its cognitive bearings and lapse into psychosis.

It is through imagination directed by language that we inhabit the past, and project future and counterfactual possibilities in quasi-sensory, episodic, terms. Our sense of who and what we are and our place in the universe is shaped profoundly by the character of these images, and how we link them through descriptions that themselves involve imagination, albeit in less direct terms.

I turn now to the third cognitive capacity that is decisive to the horizontal basis of substantial freedom, namely *empathy* – the ability to identify, in affective terms, with how others experience the world.

Initiation into language and the exercise of imagination both enables and draws upon this decisive emotion. No one can be conscious of self except insofar as one has a sense of identity with and difference from, other members of the same species. In this context, empathy is more than mere intellectual recognition or subjective affective response, because it serves as both a motive for positive action towards others and a basis for mutual felt recognition in relation to, and through the other. It is the supreme, as it were, *reciprocal* and societal emotion.

Of course, there are psychopathic personalities devoid of empathy, but even in these cases, such a person must at least know, in principle what it is like to be a other person, even if this does not issue in any positive emotion.

Now, whilst empathy is a relatively straightforward notion, the final cognitive component of substantial freedom that I will consider is much more complex and controversial. It is the *aesthetic*. The concept of the aesthetic as such was first formulated in eighteenth-century Europe, and in terms of post-colonial and gender studies orthodoxy, it might be thought to be no more than a reflection of the preferences and dominance of white, male, middle-class, heterosexist, patriarchy.

However, there is rather more to it than this. For whilst the theorization of the aesthetic *qua* aesthetic is historically specific, what *is* so

theorized is an idiom of experience that is intrinsic to the unity of self-consciousness.

This is because of the extraordinary scope of its basic character - which centers on the enjoyment of, and finding fulfilment in, the harmonious relation between the parts and whole of a sensible or imaginatively-intended structure. Because such fulfilment does not logically presuppose any beliefs that the significance of the particular part/whole relation is of practical significance, it has the character of disinterestedness.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this is of special cognitive importance in that it involves judgments whose relation to their object is relatively free, rather than constrained by the discursive rigidity of the means/ends logic of everyday life.

It is often supposed that disinterestedness makes the aesthetic into no more than a culturally specific western 'luxury' experience. How, for example, can a wild tribal dance intended to invoke victory in battle be counted as disinterested? But this question puts the cart before the horse. The more interesting question is that of why anyone in the first place should imagine that dancing or, indeed, any other mode of artistic mimicry should have the power to influence reality external to the image.

Such a belief presupposes that mimicry and image-making has already been found fascinating in its own right. It allows creator and audience to engage with subject-matter that has been adapted to expression in a medium by human artifice. The subject-matter appears to be controlled, and it is this embodiment that is fascinating.

Of course, one might retort that such an observation shows that the fascination is not aesthetic but just a sense of practical power over what is represented. But again one must press the question of why this should involve belief that real control is at issue when the image or mimicry manifestly has arisen through human artifice alone.

This question is answered by the an intrinsic aesthetic satisfaction arising from the creation of, or experience of a whole of meaning embod-

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<sup>8</sup> Disinterestedness has been addressed in detail in every book I have written. Whereas most theorists take it to be some impartial psychological attitude taken towards the aesthetic object, I argue, in contrast, that it is a logical characterization concerning the grounds of our enjoyment of it. Put simply we enjoy something disinterestedly insofar as such pleasure does not presuppose belief that the object is of practical or theoretical significance.

ied in the parts of an artifact (or, in the case of dance, a quasi-artifact). This satisfaction may be psychologically overwhelmed by uses to which the work is put subsequently, but it remains embedded as its logical core.

These putative objections to the scope of the aesthetic have been considered for a specific reason. The deep-seatedness of the aesthetic in self-consciousness, has scarcely been realised by most philosophers and cultural theorists. This is profoundly unfortunate, as there is a case for arguing that our very sense of who and what we are, and our place in the universe, has a quite specific aesthetic character.

It constellates around the need for narrative meaning in life – narrative in the sense of a ‘real-life’ story (albeit with fictional elements) where what one does, and the things that happen to one, are made sense of, *and enjoyed*, as factors contributing to, and emerging from, a continually changing meaningful whole of experience.

Of course, it might be argued that the notion of narrative does not *have* to be invoked here. Surely, the unity of experience can be sufficiently explained by reference to our capacity to recall, and to anticipate the future, as mere dispositions, i.e., things we can do as, and when, circumstances demand. Through such recall or anticipation we identify the continuity of our experience as a self-conscious Being. This sense of continuity is sufficient for grounding the unity of experience.

But again, this just defers the evil day. The factual continuity of experience is not created *just* by our recall of the past or anticipation of the future. Indeed, if such capacities are not to be overwhelmed by the excess of facts and details concerning one’s life – not to mention the huge complexities introduced by our sense of the future and counterfactual possibility – they must access memory or imagination in a form that is already amenable to recall or anticipation.

The exercise of such capacities is not usually a struggle but engages, rather, with facts and episodes that have been prioritized in terms of significance over the claims of other such facts and episodes. (Indeed, the grouping of experiences into a specific sense of an episode in one’s life entails that a selective principle of unity in experience is at work in experience, beyond than that of mere continuity.)

We should recall, also, in this respect, the nature of imagination. Imagination is necessarily involved in language acquisition and use, and has a

central role in episodic memory. The mental image itself is a quasi-sensory interpretation rather than a reproduction or copy of its objects. This means, accordingly, that a key competence involved in self-understanding, has itself, a creative character. It presents a kind of narrative of its object, rather than a neutral description.

Now in the case of referring to events surrounding inanimate objects or basic biological life-forms and processes, we are content to use the language of description. But the continuity of a human life demands narrative, because it has, in fundamental terms, a self-created, and creative unity of direction, however, vague. One's choices are exercised on the basis of one's sense of how one got here, and where, and with who, one wants to go next, and how soon, and in what order.

On these terms, in other words, the unity of self is determined by a set of interpretations of past, future, and counterfactuality, that converge on, and are realigned through the individual's developing present. It is in these terms that the continuity of a human life forms a narrative – existing in, and across, the horizontal factors. Its unity involves a maintained satisfaction in how the meanings of past moments and episodes reconfigure in relation to our sense of the present, as the story of our life advances

Most animals are content with the gratification of basic needs and societal roles – such as 'alpha-male' – that constellate around these needs. But the human animal is very different. Many are content to exist, of course, within the terms and scope of identities which they have inherited through family and/or broader social contexts. But even this simple conformity amounts to rather more than simply 'knowing one's place'. For it is always shadowed by, and plays-off against, the knowledge, that, at least in principle, one's life might have been different, and always has the possibility of changing radically through unexpected circumstances. The pleasure of conformity is that of a complex whole. It is emergent from an understanding of what we are, in play with a sense of more disruptive possibilities.

It should be emphasized that in societies which enjoy advanced standards of living, there is actually much more scope for choice in terms of creating one's narrative. The pleasures of a career may involve the satisfactions of power, authority, or of 'making a contribution', but how one sees these in relation to the story of one's life, and that of society, is again, surely a key consideration. One wants a story that satisfies in terms of its

structure and content, as well as in terms of the money it earns and/or the practical good it achieves.

Not least in such satisfaction is the way in which one locates what one has done or might do, in terms of broader possibilities which might have come to pass, but did not. Again, one's choices are not mere singular events but have, rather, a deeper content or texture that plays off actively against experience's horizontal depth.

All this is testimony to the fact that over and above brute practical considerations in making one's way through life, there is a need to find satisfaction in the making of the way – a pleasure in the story or narrative of one's being for its own sake.

This may only be a vague or blurry kind of aesthetic satisfaction, but it is such a satisfaction. It is embedded in, and directed by, practical considerations and instinctual drives, but equally it serves to recontextualize the satisfaction of these drives as a part of a broader whole of meaning that is more than the sum of their satisfactions. Indeed, whilst the various episodes and moments in life are packed with practical and instinctual meanings that are far from disinterested, our pleasure in who we are emerges from how these fit together in a satisfying unity. Viewing the self as an emergent whole, our pleasure in it has an, at least, *relatively disinterested* character. It is the aesthetic narrative of a life.

This narrative has by no means has to form some single grand story. There may be many stops and starts where the individual takes new directions, maybe even entertains alternative strategies that are actually in conflict with one another. In this case, the narrative structure of substantial freedom is itself an aesthetic effect of wholes that have become parts or are being explored in such terms

It should not be thought, either, that narrative is no more than a psychological need. It is, rather a conceptual presupposition of the unity of self-consciousness. The horizontal basis of experience – wherein we exist in and across present, past, future, and counterfactuality – enables unity of self. But the character of this unity reciprocally determines and is determined by, the individual's creative interpretation (no matter how minimal) of who or what he or she is, and the relation to the universe. Symbolic form, imagination, empathy and the aesthetic as such, cohere and find mutual enhancement in the aesthetic narrative of experience.

Without such a narrative, moments of experience would not accumulate *as* moments of experience. They might be lived-through, and even inform our future behaviour in tacit terms (as in animal consciousness) but there would be no way in which such moments could be retrieved and linked to form a knowable unity. Language and other symbolic forms cannot be used to present an alternative explanation, because it can be argued that the learning and use of them is reciprocally correlated with the development of personal narrative

I am arguing, then, that the unity of self-consciousness is creatively based; it focuses on a highly selective narrative or narrative interpretations of the temporal continuity of experience. Narrative in this sense is a loosely aesthetic structure within which desires and decisions and our sense of others become meaningful beyond their individual consideration. Such narrative develops as we are initiated into symbolic forms (most notably language) and through the complex functions of imagination and our empathy with others. In effect, each human being has his or her own style of dealing with things that happen and with the persons and institutions who they have to deal with. This existential style is determined by the narrative in terms of which they negotiate the world.

Now it is true that this narrative capacity does not have to be developed through conscious pursuit. Indeed, it is the exception rather than the rule to be experienced in this way. However, the point of capital importance is that it can be cultivated. The idea of 'self-formation' or 'self-improvement' are, of course, familiar terms. They can apply to the development of individual skills or experiences, but there is a more global sense of them – bound up with the deepening of one's life-narrative and substantial freedom. It should be emphasized that this is not a means to an end. Rather, it is an end in itself. Its pursuit might even be described as the purpose of a human life (in the secular sense).

I have identified, then, four cognitive competences – symbolic form, imagination, empathy and the aesthetic – which in combination, are the basis of human experience. They allow us to negotiate the horizon of space time, by making it meaningful through understanding and the projection of possibility, and through emotional involvement with others and the development of our own selves. In concert, they are the basis also, of an aesthetic narrative that is basic to self-consciousness. In effect, the self is an

aesthetic structure.

## **Part Two**

We can now begin to understand the significance of the artwork. As we have just seen knowledge of self and world is a process. It is not one that definitively resolved; but it can be developed into higher stages. Both these points are decisive in terms of our need for the arts.

Consider first the constant process of experience. We organise it very much in the expectation of episodes of consummation that will give meaning to the whole. And, of course, if one is lucky there will be such episodes in our lives. However, none of them can be complete in any definitive sense because as soon as the desirable state has been attained, we have to work to maintain it, or search for some even deeper goal to fulfill. The narrative of life brings aesthetic fulfilment, but it is not something we can opt out of – unless we die or suffer some terrible cognitive deficit. These moments of fulfilment are part of the experiential continuum; we do not possess them so much as the drive towards them possesses us.

The making and appreciation of art, however, intervenes on this. It projects imagined possibilities of experience on the basis of another person's style in embodying and presenting these possibilities in an enduring physical medium.<sup>9</sup> The possibilities in question here, are ways of imagining how things might happen or appear on the basis of the artist's interests and values. It should be emphasized that in making the artwork, the artist does not translate pre-given mental images into reality. Rather the very process of making these is the real act of imagination. The give-and-take between idea and medium in writing, composing, and painting, or whatever, brings the image to completion through physical embodiment.

This embodiment enables, in effect, permanent possibilities of experience which are no longer physically tied to the being of the artist who created them. The audience can identify with how the artist's style transforms the world's appearance, but because the work now exists independently of the artist, it can identify with this transformation on very much

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<sup>9</sup> For more concerning this major point, see Chapter 4 of *Defining Art, Creating the Canon...* op.cit.

its own terms. It is disinterested appreciation insofar as it does not presuppose reference to any knowledge about the artist's personal circumstances in order to be enjoyed.

In this way, the artwork integrates symbolic form, imagination, empathy, and the aesthetic – constitutive features of experience – at the level of objective reality. This objectification offers both creator and audience a release from the narrative continuum of life – but in a way that feeds back and clarifies it. Whereas moments of fulfilment in one's aesthetic narrative emerge, flourish, and are then left behind in the flow of experience, what the artwork embodies is a (notionally) timeless concretion of this flow.

The concretion is embodied differently on the basis of the individual medium involved. Literature, for example, involves temporal realization – that is to say a succession of successive developing events, where the principle of unity is such that these events must be apprehended in a strict linear order. If one simply read material from the end of the work and then things from the beginning and then the middle, one would not have comprehended the work *as* a unity. One would have reduced it to fragments.

Poetry and fiction both centre on the presentation of narrative. In the literary context, a narrative describes a related succession of events concerning sentient beings or which has relevance to the experience of such beings. One might describe changes that happen to certain inanimate objects but this would not count as poem or story unless it figured in the story or was being described from the experiential viewpoint of the author, rather than as a mere descriptive presentation of information. There is an 'as-if' dimension involved. We are invited to consider these happenstances from a personal perspective – sometimes of a character in the narrative, but always from that of the author (even if the author is trying to hide his or her own perspective from the reader).

In the real world, events happen and pass away, each of them generating – where humans are involved – narratives that also emerge and pass away in the nexus of other events. In the literary work, however, the emergence of the narrative, its development, and resolution happen within well-defined parameters and never pass away. The locks and hinges of events and human immersion in them are displayed with a completion that is not available

from real-life experience. The work remains as a permanent elucidation of how things come to be and how the individual human perspective can make these eloquent in terms of their broader human significance.

Even if a poem, play, or story describes actual events or states of affairs, they always remain in the realm of possibility. The author imaginatively projects on the basis of the facts rather than simply making a documentary out of them. The way they are recounted and the human responses to them involve creative imaginative variation rather than transcription. They allow the audience to inhabit the author's experience – to witness the events or state of affairs described as-if from another person's viewpoint.

It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that this does not involve trying to merge with the artist's own emotional states. The focus is on how style in the work transforms our own way of interpreting the world. Empathy arises here through following the artist's stylistic guidance – through identifying with the perspective on things that the work presents, rather than with fantasies of how he or she actually felt in creating it.

Music is also an art of temporal realization. True, there are some avant-garde works where the order in which one hears the parts of the work do not matter, but these are highly marginal. However, the narrative content of music is much more ambiguous and I have described it at great length elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Music has an intimate connection with the emotions. These are involuntary states but they can be expressed through features – such as the voice – which are amenable to voluntary control.

The voice, in fact, provides an important clue as to the basis of meaning in music. When listening to a conversation – even at a distance where we cannot actually hear what is being said – as the conversation develops, the protagonists' vocal tones will undergo change. We may find transitions from, say, a matter-of-fact character, to a sense of urgency; or, alternatively, a mere sense of accumulating significance. In such cases, simply listening to the vocal tones of the conversation exclusively, we can follow the cumulative progression of a narrative of emotional intonations.

The tonal system of music allows this narrative of developing inton-

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<sup>10</sup> The theory of music presented here is given a full exposition as Chapter 7 of *Defining Art, Creating the Canon*,... op.cit.

ations to be applied in a context that is not tied to any actual real-life situation. Major keys have strong general associations of positive and assertive feeling and/or movement, whilst minor keys have more introspective or melancholic association. The meaning of individual musical units and phrases within such keys and, indeed, the transitions from one to another is a function of their place in the developing whole of the work in which they are parts. They anticipate both that which is yet to come, and reconfigure the meaning of parts that have preceded them.

The upshot of all this is that the tonal scale-system is a kind of formalization of the intonations of auditory conversational narrative. Indeed, it enables the relation between units of sound (be they vocal or instrumental) to be formalized to such a degree, that the developing narrative of emotionally intonated notes, rhythms, and harmonies becomes much more complex. An emotional narrative structure is formed not just through the evocation of vocal tones but also of gestures and patterns of interaction or conflict between them. They can be described in terms akin to those which pertain to the emergence and development of emotional states in personal and group narratives.

Of course, one might describe a piece of music as 'cheerful' or 'sad' but if that was all that could be said about it, the piece would be fairly mediocre. The real substance of musical meaning and expression lies in the way that tense, relaxed, or anticipatory phases are transformed into others – usually in an extended way on the basis of melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic factors. The point is that music engages us not just emotional associations as such, but through the way these are given narrative development of a unique kind.

Why describe this as unique? Because in music emotion and, more importantly, emotionally charged auditory narratives are expressed in virtual terms. Whereas in the actuality of real life, emotions are enacted as states of persons, or are described second-hand in purely linguistic terms, music offers a virtual expression of them. This means that it is an *image* of emotional intonation and its narrative development – one that is presented quasi-sensuously, but which is not tied to any actual emotionally significant narrative of tones or gestures that ever existed. (Even in the case of programme music meant to evoke some specific real life situation, how the music evokes this is open; it cannot reproduce the emotional narrat-

ives involved in some kind of documentary way.)

It might be objected that music is surely not so distant from the actual circumstances of reality. Surely the composer felt the kind of narrative emotions that are embodied in the musical work, and the performers and audience simply rediscover and identify with these states through listening. However, the problem with this query is its false idealization of the creative process. It may well be that Beethoven felt dramatically angry when composing the opening bars of the Fifth Symphony, but he might also merely have felt cheerfully replete and inspired after an notable round of beer and bratwurst, humming the bars to himself and saying 'My God, what a grand sequence ! I must remember to use that'. The point to gather here, is that no one can ever know how an artist feels when creating a work. He or she will very likely move through a whole range of ideas and states of mind. And even if he or she writes down afterwards what was felt in creating the work, the account is not some mechanical transcription of the events, but an interpretation of them.

And this is the point, when it comes to music as virtual expression or any other mode of art, what we identify with is the possibility of experience that the work presents, and not those unknowable personal states of the artist that were involved in its creation. What makes music's virtual expression so unique is that it significantly diminishes the division between music and those who compose it, perform it, or simply listen to it as an audience. Precisely because the narrative emotional intonations of the work as embodied in the music are not tied to any actual individual then all the aforementioned parties can appropriate it, enjoy it, and even live it on their own terms to a degree that other art media do not allow.

Other representational media, in contrast, tell stories about definite individuals and/or represent them visually. Even if the individuals in question are not identified except in schematic terms and even if they never existed in real life, they are still presented *as* individuals - that is to say as beings presented as existing independently of the reader or viewer of the work. Music, in contrast, involves expression which arises from particular narratives of intonation that, nevertheless, are not assigned to any represented individual either fictional or real. They represent a kind of purely imaginary possibility of experience.

It is for this reason that, in music the composer, performer, and listener

inhabit one another without significant restriction. The impression arises that we are actually ‘in’ the music rather than merely encountering it as an object of auditory experience. Indeed, whilst (as I argued earlier) any artwork allows empathic identification with its creator’s style, the lack of individual reference in the musical work allows this identification to attain a unique level of phenomenological intimacy for the reasons just described.

Two other factors should be emphasized. First, the very fact that music’s emotionally charged content is embodied in an aesthetic whole means that, here, narrative structure is represented more lucidly than in our introspective or observational emotional experiences. To perform and listen to music is follow the narrative development of emotion in aesthetic terms rather than be pressurized and controlled by its everyday occurrent and involuntary structure. In the experience of music one possesses emotional intonation, its gestural correlates, and narrative development in a way that one does not in everyday life.

Let us now consider the relation between visual art and self-consciousness.<sup>11</sup> For reasons of brevity I shall focus on pictorial art alone. Every picture has a frontal plane that is notionally ‘closest’ to an *external* viewer. This frontal plane also defines the position of a notional *internal viewer*, who might immediately behold the represented scene from within the picture. The external viewer occupies a place in real physical time and place, whilst the internal viewer beholds the scene represented as if he or she were within the pictorial space itself. Hence whilst it does not make sense to ask how far the external viewer is from a building represented on the picture’s horizon, it makes perfect sense to ask this of the notional internal viewer.

In aesthetic terms identification with the internal viewer’s position is decisive. For in order to attend to its pictorial qualities, we must see *into* the work’s pictorial space, imagining ourselves being *in* there. Such imaginative identification involves a disregard for the real physical surroundings in which the identification takes place. In effect, the external observer comes to identify with what the notional internal viewer might ‘behold’.

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<sup>11</sup> The topics I am about to deal with are addressed more fully in Chapter 3 of *How Pictures Complete Us: The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Divine*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2015. It also features in Chapters 2 and 3 of my *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (even the frame)*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2009.

However, this disregarding does not necessitate the suspension of all beliefs and expectations bound up with our existence in real time and space. (If it did, there would be no distinction between the work's pictorial content, and the contents of the real physical world.) Indeed, the wonder of picturing centres on how it opens a space that is at once ontologically different from, and perceptually discontinuous with the normal perceptual order, yet, at the same time, is still orientated by some existential demands made by that order, and by the external observer's own personal experience. The key feature of this, indeed – the major focus of all aesthetic responses to pictorial art – is how the work's style enables and opens up this pictorial space. The viewer both inhabits that space (through the internal viewing position just described) and enjoys how it has been brought forth by artistic creation. It is the inter-relation between these two aspects that makes aesthetic responses to the arts so complex.

Some of the special ramifications that this has for pictorial art can be brought out through a contrast with photography. The photographer takes the picture (at a specific time and a specific place, and then the camera mechanically captures a momentary appearance of what is actually present before it. Here the relation between the photographic content and the photograph's notional internal viewer involves a *real* immobilization of *real time*. The events captured in the photograph are from a spatio-temporal continuum whose existence as a continuum is independent of the will of the photographer and the spectator. To put it another way, the things in the photograph had a real existence and history before the photograph was taken, and went into a real future afterwards. We might imagine what this history or future might be like, but it existed irrespective of our imagining. The photograph's notional internal viewer witnesses an arrested visual reality rather than an imaginatively constructed one.

Here, of course, we find the major difference from picturing. Pictorial art involves the *creation* of a virtual space that relates to the continuum of real space and time but not in the way that the photograph does. When the artist creates a picture, he or she projects a *possible* appearance of some three-dimensional item or state of affairs. That which is in the photograph must have existed at some time or other, whereas what is represented in a picture need not have.

This is decisive. As a *created* three-dimensional appearance the picture

represents a pictorial content that – in contrast to the photograph – has no past or future independent of the creator's or audience's will. The picture represents only a possible object of visual perception – its contents are virtual projections alone. True, the creation of the picture as a material manufactured thing means that it has a real past, and (once created) a real future as a made physical object. However, the virtual content of the picture *qua* pictorial exists at a different ontological level through being created in a medium such as drawing or painting.

The key point to gather from this is that the virtual reality represented by the picture – by virtue of having been created rather than 'taken' – is something apart from the temporal flow of the real world. The picture's notional internal viewer and what that viewer beholds exist a relation of *idealized immobility* (as opposed to the real arrested immobility of the photograph). I call this relation *presentness*.

Throughout history, philosophers have pondered the 'present' understood as an occurrent moment or instant in time. But the human experience of the Present (which I will henceforth capitalize) is more than just a temporal instant or point. This is because it both connects and separates our experience of the past and anticipations of the future. Experientially, as cognitive act or orientation, the Present may last only instant; or it may seem more prolonged – as when we become engrossed in a continuous act of scrutiny.

In broader terms, the Present is of the profoundest significance in terms of the goals and fulfilments of what I have called the aesthetic narrative of self-consciousness. We desire these goals and fulfilments to be realized in sustained terms, but their realisations tend to converge mainly on high points – on specific Presents of achievement and gratification. But, whilst the Present is a central focus of human existence, as soon as we reflect on it, it has already gone. One Present replaces another even in the very act of contemplating it. We strive to possess it, but to no avail.

This elusiveness has another aspect. The Present's content is determined by the relation between the perceived and the character of the one who perceives. In relation to the latter, how the human subject perceives the Present involves different existential emphases – different *styles* of experiencing. These styles are organized by the narrative history of the perceiving subject and by the social and cultural context of his or her activity.

Such factors mean that the basis of our style in how we regard the Present is of the most unfathomable complexity. One can reflect on it, but it is formidably difficult to comprehend what is at issue at the level of our immediate experience of the Present. However, this is all to the good. For if our experience of the Present constantly involved reflection on the factors at issue in it, then cognition would be overwhelmed by an excess of information.

Now, it is these various aspects of the elusiveness of the Present that pictorial art intervenes upon and transforms. To recognize the pictorial content of a picture *qua* pictorial is to perceive it as a possible (that is to say, virtual) visual Present – and not one that has been mechanically extracted from a real continuum of past and future. As pointed out earlier, the notional internal viewer and what that viewer beholds are in a created and idealized relation of immobility. *The transitoriness of the Present is symbolically possessed and fixed in place* through being represented in a picture. Indeed, the artist's choice of materials and specific modes of handling, mean that the personal existential style that informs any experiential Present is here manifest at a publically accessible level. In effect, it shows a possible way of seeing that is brought to enduring completion through the artist's making of it into a picture.

In this way, then, the Present's striving for self-possession, and the style which both informs it and makes it meaningful, both find objective expression through pictorial art. The otherwise transient Present and the existential style that sustains it are realized in a *symbolically autonomous form*. In this way, pictorial art intervenes upon and transforms our relation to the aesthetic narrative of self-consciousness.

## **Conclusion**

I have, then, discussed the unity of self-consciousness in terms of four symbolic competences which work together allowing us to inhabit the spatio-temporal continuum as a meaningful horizon of experience. I gave special emphasis to the aesthetic narrative of the self as central to this meaningfulness. It was then shown how literature, music, and pictorial art, engage with this narrative allowing features of it to be adapted into more enduring

forms that further clarify some of its main features – such as the importance of style. Each medium does this in its own unique way – which is why assigning privileged features to each medium has no hierarchical implications. Each mode of art has its own special area of distinctiveness.

Finally, then, by clarifying the main features of this distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* literature, music, and pictorial art, I hope to have not only signposted how the major question of explaining why the arts are intrinsically significant for us can be solved, but also to have set forth concepts and relations that can be developed much further by others. By developing these it is to be hoped that aesthetics as a discipline will overcome the problem of its marginalization from art practice.