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**The Myth of Psychical Distance**

**in**

**Aesthetic Experience**

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## SUMMARY

The object of the present thesis is:

1. to question the modern and prevalent view that some kind of 'psychical attitude' is necessary to the emergence and success of an aesthetic experience. Edward BULLOUGH's theory of 'psychical distance' has been chosen and thoroughly analyzed as a significant example of the above view.
2. to offer an alternative to the above theory, which is based on a teleological/cosmological argument, and which makes an aesthetic experience dependent on a metaphysical 'intuition' of our 'attunement' to, and 'symbiosis' with, the world.

In support of my research, I examine and discuss:

- i. the aesthetic experience of 'beautiful' nature, 'beautiful' craftsmanship, and art, and I suggest some distinctions between them which have an important bearing on my rejection of 'psychical distance' as a viable aesthetic process.
- ii. how the unique nature and role of 'genius' in art provides us, not only with arguments supporting the views expressed in my theory, but with more reasons to believe that art is in a league apart in aesthetics, and could perhaps benefit further from its study through a philosophy of mind.
- iii. 'expression' and 'communication' as fundamental sources of, and constituents of art, and their application through a form of 'Representational Symbolism' developed in S. LANGER's theory of aesthetics.
- iv. the need for a thorough familiarization and understanding of the content, context, and genetic sources of works of art, in order to achieve a *rapprochement/communion* between artists and the observers of their works.
- v. H.G. GADAMER's theory of 'play', 1) as an explanation of how the essence of works of art, though *shaped* by the thoughts and feelings of artists, interpreters, and observers, is *protected* by the work's 'circle of meaning' which sets observers at an 'absolute distance' from the work, making therefore 'any practical purposive share' in it impossible; and 2) as a hermeneutical approach which allows Gadamer to solve problems of 'contemporaneity' in art.
- vi. some important aspects of M. MERLEAU-PONTY's theory of 'perception'; in particular, his emphasis on the necessity, for an understanding of, and communion with, the world, of a grasp of nature's language.

**PART ONE**

**The Concept of 'Distance' in Aesthetic Experience**

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction to the Concept of 'Aesthetic Experience'

The etymology of the word *aesthetic* directs us to the concept of *sensation*; whatever else it may involve, a theory of aesthetics deals with human sensitivity. This assessment should not, however, mean that we agree with Nietzsche's extreme view that aesthetics is but an applied physiology, or with Armand CUVILLIER who writes that 'the sensation becomes aesthetic matter only after having undergone a "purification", a shedding which frees it from the utilitarian interpretations of everyday life.' (1954, II, 204, my transl.)

For L.A. REID, aesthetic experience is more than sheer perception. 'On the one hand', he says, 'we apprehend the perceptual data.... On the other hand, our interest is interest in appearance for the sake of a meaning, a significance, a value, which could not be contained literally in a mere perceptual appearance, but must in some sense transcend it... and when that embodied meaning is enjoyed intrinsically, for its own sake, and not for its practical, or cognitive, or existential implications, then the contemplation is "aesthetic" contemplation, and the total complex before the mind we may call an "aesthetic" object.' (1954, 41-43)

There are many problems involved in any attempt at giving a satisfactory definition of what constitutes an aesthetic experience. Certainly as Diané COLLINSON remarks, 'No single account of a particular aesthetic experience... seems able to yield a characteristic or group of characteristics than can serve as the basis of a definition of the experience. It seems to have a variety and complexity that defy attempts to state its



essential conditions. It can be intense or gentle, sustained or fleeting, immediate or cumulative, or combinations of any of these.' (in Hanfling, 1992, 117)

Another difficulty which makes of any endeavour at analyzing and defining aesthetic experience a daunting task, comes from the fact that, as Arnold BERLEANT points out, 'while aesthetic experience has an identity, it is not set off from other modes of expression by some unique attributes. Indeed, the aesthetic is not a separate *kind* of experience but rather a *mode* in which experience may occur:... it is continuous with the whole range of human activity.' (1970, 93)

Our first efforts will, therefore, bear on attempting to clarify the 'mode' in which aesthetic experiences are said to occur, and, for this, we need to identify the factors and *signs* that are *commonly* manifesting themselves in such experiences.

For Berleant, although there is no infallible basis on which to claim that an account of aesthetic experience is authentic, one can start by 'consciously expunging the influence - moral, religious, pedagogical, metaphysical, historical and cultural - of any *a priori* expectations of what that experience must be like' (1970, 96). However, what is to be feared with such an approach is that, once the above criteria are eliminated, the analysis turns out to be exclusively based on psychological 'attitudes' (i.e. sensitive and emotional responses). Such analysis would thus make of what is generally regarded as a very complex and extraordinary experience in life, an oversimplified and *immature* phenomenon.

Another possible standpoint is to try to assess which elements in the form and content of an object, or event, would, with single sufficiency or articulated joint necessity, make of that object, or event, an aesthetically valuable entity. This approach is bound to

raise a web of metaphysical and ontological issues, some of them very complex and as old as philosophy itself; taken on its own, it would also tend to leave unexplored the intricate, influential, and essential roles played in the aesthetic experience of art, by artists and observers of their works.

Another viewpoint regarding aesthetic experience is expressed by L.A. REID who writes: 'Aesthetic expressions may be (among other things) expressions in a finer, in a subtler... sense than, say, an "expression" which is a mere relief of tension or the mere satisfaction of some desire' (1973, 50). This particular aspect will be given some particular attention in this thesis.

For Bernard BOSANQUET, aesthetic experience is mainly distinguished by three characteristics closely connected with each other:

- i. a *stable* feeling, i.e. a pleasure in something pleasant which does not pass into satiety, as it can in eating and drinking. 'The aesthetic want is not a perishable want, which ceases in proportion as it is gratified.' (1923, 4)
- ii. a *relevant* feeling - 'attached, annexed to the quality of some object - to all its detail ...' (4) but unlike, for example, the hearing of a dinner-bell which is not an aesthetic experience 'unless my feeling of pleasure is relevant, attached to the actual sound as I hear it. My feeling in its special quality is evoked by the special quality of the something of which it is the feeling, and in fact is one with it' (5).
- iii. a *common* feeling, which 'can appeal to others to share it; and its value is not being diminished by being shared ... Nothing is more discussed [than taste]; and nothing repays discussion better ... To like and dislike rightly is the goal of all culture worth the name' (5).

Bosanquet's account thus implies that an aesthetic experience necessarily *has an object*. It is a feeling *of something* and not the pleasantness of a general feeling. But, as he himself admits, his account leads to a paradox:

- i. In the aesthetic attitude, the object which embodies the feeling is valued solely for what it is in itself.
- ii. In the aesthetic attitude, the object which embodies the feeling is valued solely for its appearance to perception or imagination.'

This is because the embodiment of aesthetic feeling can only be an object *as we perceive or imagine it*. Anything in real existence which we do not perceive or imagine can be of no help to us in realising our feeling. So we may know a great deal about a thing as it really exists - its history, composition, market value, its causes or its effects; all that is as good as not there for the aesthetic attitude. It is all incidental; not present in the aesthetic object. Nothing can help us but what is there for us to look at, and that is what we perceive or imagine, which can only be the immediate appearance of the semblance ... Man is not civilized, *aesthetically*, till he has learned to value *the semblance above the reality* ... It is indeed ... in one sense the higher reality - the soul and life of things, what they are in themselves. (1923, 9-10, my emphasis)

Consequently, for Bosanquet, the aesthetic attitude is the contemplation (the preoccupation with a pleasant feeling) of the 'appearance' (through perception or imagination), of an object. 'Nothing which does not appear can count for the aesthetic attitude.' (10)

Bosanquet's above distinctions allow us to avoid attributing to the phenomenon of aesthetic experience an exclusively 'idealistic' or 'esoteric' quality. The difficulty remains, however, in attempting to reconcile, and integrate in a comprehensive but flexible *mode* of aesthetic experience (in nature and in art), not only Bosanquet's distinctions, but some of the most important aspects of the various approaches we have already identified above. All our efforts in this thesis will consequently tend to the task of providing a system of aesthetics which, by its very nature and structure, should provide us with the evidence we need to refute the theory of 'psychical distance' in aesthetic experience.

No mention will be made in this thesis of aesthetic experiences which may be said to depend on what are often called (perhaps unfairly) the *secondary* senses of touch, smell, and taste. The reason for this exclusion is that experiences involving these senses are too dependent on, and close to, organic functions and activities, to be studied in the frame of this research. Also, although the different arts may affect 'sensitivity' in different ways, I have avoided in my research to make hierarchical distinctions between arts in the manner of Kant or Schopenhauer.

I would also point out that the use I make in this thesis of the words 'beauty' and 'beautiful' is purely on practical grounds; it does not indicate that I regard these concepts as synonymous to, or coextensive with, the words 'aesthetic' or 'artistic'.

In order to maintain a focused view on the issue of 'psychical distance' in aesthetics, and to satisfactorily integrate it, and question it, in the different conditions examined in the course of my thesis, I have found preferable to delay until the conclusion of the latter, the task of synthesizing my findings and final summing up. The conclusions

of each chapter will, therefore, be only concerned with my assessment of the particular questions raised in these chapters.

## CHAPTER II

## An Account of Psychological Distance in Aesthetic Experience

Introduction

As early as Plato and Aristotle, there existed the belief that a 'contemplative' attitude towards life was conducive to the human 'greatest good'. However, in Neoplatonism, and up to the writings of 18th century thinkers, the concept of 'contemplation' acquired a more *aesthetic* dimension; this is epitomized in Immanuel KANT's *Critique of Judgement* in which the principle of 'disinterestedness' becomes a necessary condition of a pure 'judgement of taste'. 'Everyone must admit', Kant writes, 'that a judgement about beauty, in which the least interest mingles, is very partial and is not a pure judgement of taste.' (1951, 39) For Kant, in both an *empirical* experience (a sensual pleasure) which relates to the faculty of desire, and in an *intellectual* experience of a thing, or action, as useful for something, or good in itself (moral good), 'there is always involved a satisfaction in the presence of an object, or an action, i.e. some kind of interest (1951, 41)... It is not merely the object that pleases, but also its existence.' (43) But in the experience of 'beauty', 'we must not be in the least prejudiced in favour of the existence of the things, but be quite indifferent in this respect, in order to play the judge in things of taste'. (39) This, for Kant, is the essence of the concept of 'disinterestedness' in aesthetics.

Arthur SCHOPENHAUER also considers, though on different lines from Kant's, that aesthetic experience is brought about by rapt and disinterested 'contemplation'.

In more recent times, philosophers started to define aesthetic experience in terms of a special kind of outlook, frame of mind, or attitude; within this tradition,

Edward BULLOUGH puts forward the idea that 'Psychical Distance', as part of a highly complex process of psychological *adaptation* to the perception of a thing or an event, is essential to the success of an aesthetic experience. His theory had a strong influence on supporters of 'attitude theories' in aesthetics, and it is described and analyzed hereafter.

Edward BULLOUGH's theory of 'Psychical Distance'

Bullough's theory was expounded in 1912 in a paper published by the *British Journal of Psychology*, under the title of 'Psychological Distance As a Factor in Art and As an Aesthetic Principle', and was reprinted in the Wilkinson collection of his lectures and essays in 1957.

Bullough's main objective was to free the study of aesthetic experience from 'proceeding on exclusively subjective lines and failing to preserve continual contact with the objective world of art products ... by studying emotion, pleasure, perception in general, instead of *aesthetic* perception, *aesthetic* pleasure, *aesthetic* emotion' (1957, xxxiv). The process of 'psychical distance' thus became endowed by Bullough with the potential power to transform the ordinary experience of an object, or event, into a true 'aesthetic' experience. This Distance', says Bullough,

appears to lie between our own self and its affections, using the latter term in its broader sense as anything which affects our being, bodily or spiritually, e.g. as sensation, perception, emotional state or idea. (1957, 94) Distance describes a *personal* relation, often highly emotionally coloured, but *of a peculiar character*. Its peculiarity lies in that the personal character of the relation has been, so to speak, filtered. It has been cleared of the practical, concrete nature of its appeal, without, however, thereby losing its original constitution. (97)

It is important to point out that, for Bullough, both the *nature* of the perceived *object*, or *event*, and the *individual's capacity* for maintaining a greater or lesser degree

of distance, play jointly a part in the process of 'psychical distance'. For Bullough, the ideal situation in 'psychical distance' is what he calls the Antinomy of Distance, and it is the 'utmost decrease of Distance without its disappearance' (100).

A most evocative illustration is given by Bullough to back up his theory of 'Psychical Distance'. He writes thus :

Imagine a fog at sea : for most people it is an experience of acute unpleasantness. Apart from the physical annoyance and remoter forms of discomfort such as delays, it is apt to produce feelings of particular anxiety, fears of invisible dangers, strains of watching and listening for distant and unlocalised signals. The listless movements of the ship and her warning calls soon tell upon the nerves of the passengers; and that special, expectant, tacit anxiety and nervousness, always associated with this experience, make a fog the dreaded terror of the sea (all the more terrifying because of its very silence and gentleness) for the expert seafarer no less than for the ignorant landsman. Nevertheless, a fog at sea can be a source of intense relish and enjoyment. Abstract from the experience of the sea fog...its danger and practical unpleasantness,..., direct the attention to the features 'objectively' constituting the phenomenon - the veil surrounding you with an opaqueness as of transparent milk;... observe the carrying-power of the air, ...; note the curious creamy smoothness of the water,...; and above all, the strange solitude and remoteness from the world,...: and the experience may acquire, in this uncanny mingling of repose and terror, a flavour of such concentrated poignancy and delight as to contrast sharply with the blind and distempered anxiety of its other aspects. (93-94)

The above example of 'psychical distance', although confined to an aesthetic experience in nature, is condensed and explicit enough as to permit, even at this early stage of our study of Bullough's theory, some initial analysis and criticism of its main aspects and implications.

1. To some extent, Bullough's principle of 'psychical distance' reminds us of Schopenhauer's description of the 'contemplative' attitude which permits a transition 'from the common knowledge of particular things to knowledge of the Idea....' (1966, I, 178) 'Raised up by the power of the mind', Schopenhauer comments, 'we relinquish



the ordinary way of considering things,... Thus we no longer consider the where, the when, the why, and the whithers in things, but simply and solely the *what*.' (178) Therefore, no concepts of reason should 'take possession of our consciousness' which should instead be 'filled by the calm contemplation of the natural object... whether it be a landscape, a tree, a rock, a crag, a building, or anything else' (178). For Schopenhauer, 'contemplation' means *losing* ourselves 'entirely' in the object, *forgetting* 'our individuality, our will', and continuing 'to exist only as a pure subject, as clear mirror of the object, so that it is as though the object alone existed without anyone to perceive it.... What is thus known is no longer the individual thing as such, but the *Idea*....' (179) It is clear, however, that Schopenhauer's conception of 'contemplation', although quite close in some of its aspects to Bullough's concept of 'psychical distance', differs from the latter in some crucial respects. To begin with, for Schopenhauer, 'the transition from the common knowledge of particular things to knowledge of the Idea takes place *suddenly*.' (179, my emphasis) For Bullough, however, the situation is rather ambivalent: whereas he does write at some point that the transformation by 'psychical distance' of the experience of the fog at sea into an aesthetic experience 'often emerg(es) with *startling suddenness*, [and] is like a momentary *switching on* of some new current, or the *passing ray* of a brighter light' (94, my emphasis), he speaks elsewhere of the second phase (the 'positive side') of the working of 'distance' as the '*elaboration* of the experience on the new basis created by the inhibitory action of Distance' (95, my emphasis); indeed, the word 'elaboration' summons up the idea both of a 'very detailed and complicated' and 'carefully prepared and finished scheme' (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 1990), and among the various synonyms usually suggested for the word 'elaboration', we find the words 'intricate', 'laboured', and 'painstaking', which could hardly depict the characteristics

of the process described by Bullough in the first quotation. Furthermore, nowhere in Bullough's definition of 'psychical distance', is it implied, as in Schopenhauer's theory, that the central feature of an aesthetic experience is the 'will-less' state of 'contemplation' of Platonic essences, the self having totally lost its sense of identity. With Bullough, as we have seen, the 'personal character' of the relation, is only 'filtered', 'cleared', of the 'practical nature' of the appeal. Furthermore, the flexibility and adaptability of the Antinomy of Distance cannot be compared to Schopenhauer's absolute principle of 'contemplation', as defined in his metaphysical approach to aesthetics.

2. Bullough's theory of 'Psychical Distance' appears initially to offer new and ingenious suggestions which could, in some measure, help avoid either the perennial problems often posed by a transcendentalist view of the Ideal of Beauty, or the basic weaknesses of a purely pragmatic approach and explanation of aesthetic experience. It soon becomes apparent, however, that Bullough's understanding and exposition of the conditions he sees as pertaining to the experience of 'beauty' as a consequence of 'psychical distance', are liable to a substantial amount of criticism concerning both his choice of illustrations and the structure and logic of some of his main arguments:

(i) the events in the example of the 'fog at sea' strongly remind us of the well known psychological reaction of individuals who, when involved in situations of extreme danger or stress, neutralize them, as it were, by investing them with favourable or pleasant characteristics. Bullough's own account of the 'fog at sea' does induce a comparison between this event and the above mentioned psychological phenomenon of 'escapism' or 'self-deception'. 'The working of Distance', he writes, 'has a *negative*, inhibitory aspect - the cutting out of the practical sides of things and of our practical

attitude to them - and a *positive* side - the elaboration of the experience on the new basis created by the inhibitory action of Distance.' (95) The similarity is even reinforced when 'psychical distance' is very graphically described by Bullough as 'an impression which we experience sometimes in instants of direst extremity, when our practical interest snaps like a wire from sheer over-tension, and we watch the consummation of some impending catastrophe with the marvelling unconcern of a mere spectator' (94).

We should not be unduly surprised by the similarity noted above for, as Elizabeth M. WILKINSON notes, Bullough was after all 'an ardent propagandist of the psychological approach to aesthetics' and was keen on carrying on experiments 'which relied entirely on introspective evidence'. He was fully aware, however, Wilkinson notes, of the drawbacks and defects of this method, and of the possibility that self-deception could vitiate its results. But he was at the same time convinced, 'that there is nevertheless, "no other method for aesthetic experiments, the statistical method...serving no purpose whatever" ('On the Apparent Heaviness of Colours', *The British Journal of Psychology*, II, 2, p.122)' (in Bullough, 1957, xxvii).

If it is indeed the case that Bullough's illustrations of 'psychical distance' are no more than experiences of psychological *escapism*, or *self deception*, he would lend himself to the charge that he is extending and applying a very specialized and limited psychological phenomenon to the whole sphere of aesthetic experience.

(ii) Another interpretation could be placed on Bullough's example of the 'fog at sea', and it is that of the Sublime. For Edmund BURKE, for instance, it is clear that ideas of fear, anguish, or pain, can bear upon us as to generate a real aesthetic experience,

namely the experience of the Sublime, aptly described by P.A. ANGELES as a 'feeling stemming from being confronted with a terrifying power that can utterly destroy us at any moment, yet at the same time having a sense of safety and being aware of a pleasurable attraction to that power.' (1992, 297)

The decision to situate the experience of the fog *at sea* rather than from a safe point of observation such as a *beach* or a *pier*, would indicate that the dramatic and stressful factors inherent in such a dangerous situation well suit Bullough's argument.

It is also important to stress, in this context, that on Bullough's own account, there is an element of fear ('a mingling of repose and terror') *still* involved in the second and positive phase of the aesthetic experience of the 'fog at sea'; thus, it would appear that the passengers' 'personal relation' with the event has not, as it is suggested in the general analysis of the phenomenon, been 'cleared' by 'distance' of all its practical sides. Bullough would maintain, of course, that these feelings of 'terror' are not any more subjectively felt by the passengers but that they are experienced as modes of the phenomenon. But this account does not concur with the statement that 'the experience may acquire in this uncanny *mingling* of repose and *terror*, a flavour of such concentrated poignancy and delight as to *contrast* sharply with the blind and distempered anxiety of *its other aspects*'. As this quotation shows, the passengers are still, in some measure, negatively experiencing the phenomenon *after* 'distance' has played its part, but the experience is now felt as a mixed set of strongly contrasted feelings of 'delight' and 'anxiety'. Curiously enough, George DICKIE, notwithstanding his strong criticism of Bullough's theory, appears to accept nevertheless the possibility that such opposite feelings may alternate from a moment to another in one and the same experience. He writes, thus: 'If we appreciate some of the qualities of a fog at sea, we

do not cease to be aware of the associated dangers.... we may not *at every moment* while appreciating the qualities of the fog be thinking of the dangers, but this is not because the thought of the dangers have been removed by a special act or state of mind.' (in Werhane, 1984, 426, my emphasis) Dickie's statement, in this context, is really too ambiguous to be given a clear and constructive interpretation. The only justification I can find of its being made at all is that Dickie admits elsewhere that Bullough's theory may have a certain degree of plausibility when 'threatening natural objects' are involved.

In view of the above account, I would suggest that Bullough's illustration of the 'fog at sea' has all the characteristics of the phenomenon of the Sublime as it is generally defined, in particular by Kant. If it is so, Bullough's theory of 'Psychical Distance', relying as it does on extreme and dramatic circumstances such as the phenomenon of the 'fog at sea' (and we will see that his main illustration in art is of the same dramatic nature) is bound to be criticized for at least the following reasons:

- a) As already suggested above, Bullough makes aesthetic experience depend on a mixture of pleasurable excitement and frightening expectancy which can only occur in dramatic situations such as the 'fog at sea'. But, obviously, not all aesthetic experiences are taking place in situations which offer the same opportunities of awe and excitement. As Dickie rightly notes, 'the enormous majority of the cases of the appreciation of art and nature are not desperate cases.' (in Werhane, 1984, 425-26)
- b) Philosophers such as Schopenhauer, Kant, and Burke, clearly make a distinction between the experiences of the Beautiful in nature and the experiences of the Sublime. As Armand CUVILLIER notes, 'Schopenhauer defines the Sublime as the result of an

effort through which the individual, when facing hostile objects (i.e. a thunderstorm, a wild country), raises himself above the Will in order to contemplate them with serenity.' For Kant, 'the Sublime is a feeling associated to the Beautiful but in which the idea of the infinite introduces a conflict between the understanding and the senses.' (1954, II, 220/21, my transl.) Interestingly, in his definition of the Sublime, Kant himself uses the example of a stormy sea and its mixture of awesome and pleasant effects, to illustrate the difference between the *formlessness* and *boundlessness* (whose totality is yet present to thought) of such an experience, and the *purposiveness* of the beautiful in nature 'which seems to be preadapted to our judgement' (1951, 84). 'Thus', he writes, 'the wide ocean, disturbed by the storm, cannot be called sublime. Its aspects are horrible; and the mind must be already filled with manifold ideas if it is to be determined by such an intuition to a feeling itself sublime, as it is incited to abandon sensibility and to busy itself with ideas that involve higher purposiveness.... We must seek a ground external to ourselves for the beautiful of nature, but seek it for the sublime merely in ourselves and in our *attitude of thought*, which introduces sublimity into the representation of the world.' (84, my emphasis) We should note here that Kant's above reference to an 'attitude of thought', that is, the connection of the Sublime with the Ideas of Reason, seems to concur with the following comment made by Wilkinson about Bullough: 'In his later work, he is at pains to show that whatever much feeling is involved [in aesthetic experience], it is feeling set by the eye of the mind, *sufficiently removed to be contemplated.*' (in Bullough, 1957, xxxix, my emphasis) In fact, as S. KÖRNER points out, Kant's Analytic of the Sublime was regarded by him 'as the transcendental counterpart to Burke's merely "physiological" or psychological treatment of sublimity' (1955, 190).

There is a very clear and concise definition of the Sublime given by Cuvillier thus: 'We will say that the feeling of the Sublime implies *the notion of "something" which is beyond us*, with the awareness of a momentum, an inner lift, which exalts us and invites us, despite the feeling of distance, to commune with this transcendent object.' (1954, II, 221, my transl.) This definition is noteworthy and interesting because it almost exactly mirrors Bullough's description of the 'fog at sea', but, at the same time, fundamentally differs from it in presenting the phenomenon of the Sublime as emerging *not* through 'distance', but '*despite* the feeling of distance'. Ironically, therefore, this would lead us to criticize Bullough not only for having chosen such a specialized process as the Sublime to illustrate 'aesthetic experience' in general, but for having used that process in a topsy-turvy manner!

The conclusion to the present argument should thus be, in my view, that the example of the 'fog at sea' *rides on the back of the phenomenon of Sublimity*. If this assumption is incorrect, Bullough would have tremendous difficulties in explaining away the characteristics and mechanisms of his example, independently of a theory of the Sublime. But Bullough may not have objected to his theory being identified with the phenomenon of the Sublime, believing that the latter could accommodate a process of 'psychical distance' as would any other 'aesthetic' experience. After all, Burke does view experiences of the Sublime as 'distanced', and Kant comments that the Sublime 'brings with it as its characteristic feature a *movement* of the mind bound up with the judging of the object, while in the case of the beautiful taste presupposes and maintains the mind in restful *contemplation*.' (1951, 85, my emphasis). There are perhaps some grounds for believing that a 'distancing' process may be applied to a phenomenon such

as the Sublime, but it is not the object of this thesis which views such a phenomenon as totally distinct from 'aesthetic experience' per se, to investigate such a possibility.

3. Another problem in Bullough's description of the 'fog at sea' is worth mentioning.

'As a rule', he writes,

experiences constantly turn the same side towards us, namely, that which has the strongest practical force of appeal. We are not ordinarily aware of those aspects of things which do not touch us immediately and practically, nor are we generally conscious of impressions apart from our own self which is impressed. The sudden view of things from their reverse, usually unnoticed, side, comes upon us as a revelation, and such revelations are precisely those of Art. In this most general sense, Distance is a factor in all Art. (95) In theory, therefore, not only the usual objects of Art, but even the most personal affections, whether ideas, precepts or emotions, can be sufficiently distanced to be aesthetically appreciable. (101)

It is indeed clear that for Bullough everything can potentially be an adequate material for an aesthetic experience. For example, he accepts the view held by some thinkers that 'even muscular sensations may present aesthetic possibilities, in the free exercise of bodily movement, the swing of a runner, in the ease and certainty of the trained gymnast.... That they admit', he adds, 'of no material fixation such as objects of sight and hearing do, and for that reason form no part of Art in the narrower sense; that they exist as aesthetic objects only for the moment and for the single being that enjoys them, is no argument against their aesthetic character. Mere material existence and permanence is no aesthetic criterion.' (119)

Bullough admits, though, that to reach an appreciation through the lower senses [i.e. taste, touch, etc.] is undeniably very difficult 'because the materialness of their action, their proximity and bodily connection are great obstacles to their distancing'. Yet, as he points out, although 'the sweetness of scent of a rose is usually felt more as a



bodily caress than as an aesthetic experience.... poets have not hesitated to call the scents of flowers their "souls" (119). For Bullough, these 'poetical conceptions' mark the transition from the merely agreeable to the beautiful by means of Distance. It is a fact, however, that Bullough does not offer, with the above argument, any rigorous and clear explanation of how he believes data apprehended through the 'lower' senses are 'aestheticized' by distance; if he had done so, his view that all data are potentially 'aesthetic' if the right kind of 'distance' is applied to their perception, would have perhaps supplied a valuable and credible basis on which to build more convincingly his above general view. In any case, Bullough's belief in that respect is fundamentally opposed to Kant's pure Judgement of Taste in which the 'lower senses' are not of a kind to bring about aesthetic pleasure; only sight and hearing are, for Kant, of a nature which causes 'aesthetic' pleasure.

Taking thus into account Bullough's belief that *everything* in the world (objects, events, ideas, emotions, etc.) can, in certain conditions of 'distancing', be experienced aesthetically, we are entitled then to at least ask what are the significant circumstances, determining criteria, or precise influences, which trigger off in us the desire to 'aestheticize' some particular object, idea, or emotion, rather than another, and if we were able to do so (perhaps intuitively), how we would be able to choose the right kind and degree of 'psychical distance' in order to reveal the 'unsuspected aesthetic angle' of the perceived data. Bullough himself acknowledges that this is 'a very difficult performance in the circumstances', but that 'artists are gifted in this direction to a remarkable extent' (101). But to mainly grant that there are indeed many difficulties in the working of 'psychical distance', and that gifted artists are able to face them more easily, is too simplistic an argument to explain away these difficulties. The latter result

essentially but not wholly on the fact that 'distance', according to Bullough, is said 'to be variable both according to the distancing-power of the individual, and according to the character of the object.... {Not only] persons differ from each other in their habitual measure of Distance, but... the same individual differs in his ability to maintain it in the face of different objects and of different arts.' (100) And Bullough further explains that the average individual very rapidly reaches his or her limit of diminishing 'distance', i.e. the 'Distance-limit' at which point 'distance' is lost and appreciation either disappears or changes its character.' (101) The only conclusion we can draw from Bullough's assessment of his 'antimony of Distance' (as defined above) is that it would almost reduce to nil the chances of any observer to achieve a successful and rewarding aesthetic experience.

If Bullough cannot clearly and definitely explain in his theory, and I do not find that he does, the fundamental reasons which would answer the main questions I raised above, questions on which rests the entire edifice of the principle of 'psychical distance', the conclusion can only be that this failing is fatal to his theory.

4. Bullough insists on the need, in order to get an aesthetic experience, to 'direct the attention to the features "objectively" constituting the phenomenon (94)... and by interpreting even our "subjective" affections not as modes of our being but rather as characteristics of the phenomenon' (95). But, surely, the need to adopt an objective rather than a subjective attitude in our experience of the world, in order to be aware of what is at the 'heart of things', is not exclusively suited to 'aesthetic' experiences; it equally applies to many other areas of human involvements and interests (i.e. social, moral, religious, historical, scientific, etc.). For Bullough, however, the emerging 'relation' between an observer and the aesthetically experienced thing does not as in

science for example, become 'impersonal and purely interested'. 'On the contrary', he notes, 'it describes a *personal* relation, often highly emotionally coloured, but of a *peculiar character*. Its peculiarity lies in that the personal character of the relation has been, so to speak filtered. It has been cleared of the practical, concrete nature of its appeal, without, however, thereby losing its original constitution.' (97) But nowhere does Bullough effectively provide a clear and convincing explanation of, and justification for, the conditions and limitations which *ought* to bring about the 'personal relation' of a 'peculiar character' which, according to him, is the hallmark of an aesthetic experience. His argument, in fact, can be interpreted as saying no more than: 'Ignore your selfish natural inclinations and you will find "beauty" in all things'. I would thus argue that Bullough, in spite of his meritorious and sometimes interesting efforts, has not found an aesthetic principle which adds anything original to the current definition and structure of the principle of 'disinterestedness/detachment' in aesthetics.

5. Bullough's theory of 'Psychical Distance' has been studied and discussed by many thinkers; Dickie, in particular, in his essay 'Psychical Distance: In a Fog at Sea' (*British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol 13, No 1, Winter), isolates many problems which inevitably lead him to the conclusion that Bullough's theory 'is fundamentally wrong and...has misled aesthetic theory' (in Werhane, 1984, 422). What Dickie essentially reproaches Bullough for is that in his theory, 'psychical distance is supposed to be a psychical component of a specific kind of consciousness which when "inserted" between a subject and his affections is productive of aesthetic experience.... It seems clear', adds Dickie, 'that Bullough thinks that distancing is a kind of voluntary action....' (423). As concerns more particularly the example of the 'fog at sea', Dickie believes that no psychological force 'which cuts out the practical side of things' would make us 'cease

to be aware of the associated dangers (if we were aware of them to begin with)'; we would still 'be ready to act if the need arises and we know what to do' (426). However, in spite of the above statements which clearly rule out any possibility for 'psychical distance' to be applied to aesthetic experiences, Dickie later on in his critique surprisingly admits that Bullough's theory might have some plausibility in dramatic and threatening circumstances such as the 'fog at sea', for, he notes, 'it seems initially plausible in such a case, to think that a psychological force is needed to block our practical concerns for safety in order that we can aesthetically appreciate the threatening phenomenon.' (424) Thus Dickie, without any justifiable reason, appears suddenly willing to make the validity of a necessary principle such as 'psychical distance' dependent on the conditions of experience, and this also leaves his argument open to some of the serious criticisms I levelled above against Bullough's handling of his own theory.

Even at this early stage of our research, it has, therefore, already been shown that Bullough's theory of 'psychical distance' suffers from serious weaknesses and ambiguities. In what follows, an attempt will be made to demonstrate that even in his treatment of aesthetic experience in art, Bullough does not succeed in justifying the kind of 'distanced' attitude presented in his overall theory.

There are, says Bullough, two ways 'distance' can be compromised in art; one can be 'the commonest failing of the *subject*', the other a 'frequent failing of *Art*, especially in the past. In conditions of *under-distancing* a work is seen as 'crudely naturalistic', 'harrowing', 'repulsive in its realism', whereas *over-distancing* 'produces the impression of improbability, artificiality, emptiness or absurdity' (100-101).

On the whole, under-distancing tends to be more frequent than over-distancing, and the minimum of 'distance' at which aesthetic appreciation can maintain itself in the aesthetic field for the average person, 'lies considerably higher than the Distance-limit of the artist' (101). This has caused many an artist to see 'his work condemned and himself ostracized for the sake of so-called "immoralities" which to him were bona fide aesthetic objects' (102). Consequently, Bullough notes,

it is safe to infer that, in art practice, explicit references to organic affections, to the material existence of the body, especially to sexual matters, lie normally below the Distance-limit, and can be touched upon by Art only with special precautions. Allusions to social institutions of any degree of personal importance - in particular, allusions implying any doubt as to their validity - the questioning of some generally recognised ethical sanctions, references to topical subjects occupying public attention at the moment, and such like, are all dangerously near the average limit and may at any time fall below it, arousing, instead of aesthetic appreciation, concrete hostility or mere amusement.

...The same misconception has arisen over many 'problem plays' and 'problem novels' in which the public have persisted in seeing nothing but a supposed 'problem' of the moment, whereas the author may have been - and often has demonstrably been - able to distance the subject matter sufficiently to rise above its practical problematic import and to regard it simply as a dramatically and humanly interesting situation. (101-102)

Curiously, though, as Bullough reflects, many works of art which initially had some *direct* significance (i.e. ecclesiastical art) or *practical* appeal (i.e. satires or comedies), have 'profited greatly by lapse of time' (103). For instance, 'our understanding of Greek tragedy suffers admittedly under our inability to revert to the point of view for which it was originally written.... [But] provided the Distance is not too wide, the result of its intervention has everywhere been to enhance the *art*-character of such works and to lower their original ethical and social force of appeal.' (111)

In *over-distancing* we find that 'Art springing from abstract conceptions, expressing allegorical meanings, or illustrating general truths....appeal(s) to everybody and therefore to none.' (103) As Bullough notes,

An axiom of Euclid belongs to nobody, just because it compels everyone's assent;... By mere force of generalisation, a general truth or a universal ideal is so far distanced from myself that I fail to realise it concretely at all.... (103)

No doubt also, fairy tales, fairy-plays, stories of strange adventures were primarily invented to satisfy the craving of curiosity, the desire for the marvellous, the shudder of the unwanted and the longing for imaginary experiences. But by their mere eccentricity in regard to the normal facts of experience they cannot have failed to arouse a strong feeling of Distance. (110-11)

Regarding the graphic arts, Bullough observes about sculpture for example, that although not using a *living* bodily medium, its three dimensional aspects still constitute a threat to 'distance'. This is evident to 'anyone who has experienced the oppressively crowded sensation of moving in a room among life-sized statues placed directly upon the floor'. However, the lack of colour and the use of pedestals although 'originally no doubt serving other purposes, [are] now serving the purpose of Distance'. (As concerns the lack of colour of sculptures, Bullough does not seem to take into account the fact that most of the sculptures in ancient times were indeed painted with vivid colours.)

On the other hand, says Bullough, 'painting always retains to some extent a *two-dimensional* character, and this character supplies *eo ipso* a Distance.' This is also due to the fact that 'neither their space (perspective and imaginary space) nor their lighting coincides with our (actual) space or light' (114).

Music and architecture have, according to Bullough, 'a curious position' in that 'these two most abstract of all arts show a remarkable fluctuation in their Distances':

Certain kinds of music, especially 'pure' music, or 'classical' or 'heavy' music, appear for many people over-distanced; light, 'catchy' tunes, on the contrary, easily reach that degree of decreasing Distance below which they cease to be Art and become a pure amusement. In spite of its strange abstractness which to many philosophers has made it comparable to architecture and mathematics, music possesses a sensuous, frequently sensual, character: the undoubted physiological and muscular stimulus of its melodies and harmonies, no less than its rhythmic aspects, would seem to account for the occasional disappearance of Distance. To this might be added its strong tendency, especially in unmusical people, to stimulate trains of thought quite disconnected with itself, following channels of subjective inclinations - day-dreams of a more or less directly personal character. (105-106)

As regards more particularly drama, Bullough points out that

...it is largely the exceptional which produces the Distance of tragedy: exceptional situations, exceptional characters, exceptional destinies and conduct.... The exceptional element in tragic figures - that which makes them so utterly different from characters we meet with in ordinary experience - is a consistency of direction, a fervour of ideality, a persistence and driving-force which is far above the capacities of average men. The tragic of tragedy would, transposed into ordinary life, in nine cases out of ten, end in drama, in comedy, even in farce, for lack of steadfastness, for fear of conventions, for the dread of 'scenes', for a hundred-and-one petty faithlessnesses towards a belief or an ideal: even if for none of these, it would end in a compromise simply because man forgets and time heals. (112)

On the other hand, as Bullough sees it, there is in theatrical performances a propensity to a loss of 'distance' owing to the way the subject-matter is presented. For instance, 'the physical presence of living human beings as vehicles of dramatic art is a difficulty which no art has to face in the same way. A similar, in many ways even greater, risk confronts *dancing*.' (104)

One of Bullough's best known illustrations of 'psychical distance' in art concerns Shakespeare's play of *Othello*. He writes thus:

Suppose a man, who believes that he has cause to be jealous about his wife, witnesses a performance of *Othello*. He will the more perfectly appreciate the situation, conduct and character of Othello, the more

exactly the feelings and experiences of Othello coincide with his own.... In point of fact, he will probably do anything but appreciate the play. In reality, the concordance will merely render him acutely conscious of his own jealousy; by a sudden reversal of perspective he will no longer see Othello apparently betrayed by Desdemona, but himself in an analogous situation with his own wife. This reversal of perspective is the consequence of the loss of Distance.

....It follows that the qualification required is that the coincidence should be as complete as is compatible with maintaining Distance. The jealous spectator of *Othello* will indeed appreciate and enter into the play the more keenly, the greater the resemblance with his own experience - *provided* that he succeeds in keeping the Distance between the action of the play and his personal feelings: a very difficult performance in the circumstances. (99)

According to Dickie, three plausible situations, none involving 'psychical distance', could occur in the experience of the play *Othello* by the jealous husband:

a) 'He might be a person whose thoughts of his personal situation simply distract him from attending to the play once the play has reminded him of his problem.' (in Werhane, 1984, 428) In other words, the husband is not 'psychically' *under-distanced* in the Bulloughian sense, he is simply 'distracted' and thus unable to 'concentrate' on the play. As Dickie notes, 'Inattention is not a special kind of attention.' (428) I do not think however that in this instance Bullough would have made that error of judgement; at the most, he would have regarded such reactions as 'rather special forms of the conception of Distance,... [which] derive whatever *aesthetic* qualities they may possess from Distance in its *general* connotation' (1957, 93).

b) 'A jealous husband might fail to appreciate *Othello* because, although he continues to attend to the action of the play, it makes him miserable because his own personal situation makes him abnormally sensitive to portrayals of jealousy.' (in Werhane, 1984, 428) This is a case which would be qualified by Bullough as an example of *under-distancing*, but as Dickie emphasizes, the word 'appreciate' is taken here as meaning



that the husband, although able to understand and to find the play *valuable*, does not however appreciate it in the sense of finding it 'enjoyable' or 'pleasant'. But, as Dickie rightly notes, 'much of the great art which we appreciate so keenly is not pleasant in the relevant sense.... In fact, [the husband's] appreciation of the play may be keener than that of someone who has a more serene domestic life.' (428-29)

c) 'A spectator of *Othello* might fail to appreciate the play because although he more or less attends to the action of the play, he constantly views the play either in relation to some special problem or to some other thing "external" to the play.' (in Werhane, 1984, 429) This case, says Dickie, would be viewed by Bullough and his followers as an instance of *over-distancing* in which ' "aesthetic" consciousness...is destroyed...by a concern with things outside the work of art in question.... This exaggerated analysis', comments Dickie, 'is due to their imagining that appreciation requires being in a special mental state so delicate that the least external pressure destroys it. We almost always have, however, a background awareness of something external to a work we are appreciating... [but this awareness] does not necessarily interfere with appreciation', or at least not to such an extent that the spectator 'is out of relation to the work' (429) and unable to appreciate it.

Although, Dickie points out, many thinkers are totally opposed to this 'assumed necessity of the blocking' of ordinary, practical actions and thoughts *in order* to experience aesthetic consciousness, 'there seems to have been 'a persistent belief among aestheticians that people are so concerned with "the reality of things" that they cannot appreciate the qualities of things unless this concern is somewhat blocked.' Why this 'persistent fear that people will mistake art for reality'? This has the consequence, adds Dickie, that 'although Bullough explicitly says that distance has

both negative and positive aspects, it is the alleged negative and inhibitory psychological force which has come to be identified as psychical distance'. In other words, 'the positive aspect of distance in effect becomes that which can happen after distance (the inhibition) occurs.' (in Werhane, 1984, 423-24) But, in fact, adds Dickie,

the enormous majority of the cases of the appreciation of art and nature are not desperate cases. Usually when we watch a play, look at a painting, listen to music or gaze at natural scenery, and appreciate them, there is no hint of impulses to action which have to be overcome. Nor do real life emotions such as jealousy and fear constantly occur and require blocking out... If one reverses Bullough's procedure and begins with 'easy cases', with the experience of works which are devoid of strong emotional content, then the idea that *all* aesthetic experiences require insulation from practical impulses and thoughts simply does not arise. (in Werhane, 1984, 425-26)

It seems to me that Dickie's above comments and deduction are warranted. As concerns more particularly Bullough's choice of desperate or dramatic examples, it may have been influenced by his need (for reasons I already suggested elsewhere) to give to his artistic examples such intense and dramatic characteristics (*Othello* is a case in point) that they would provide the suitable criteria and conditions to match those of the 'fog at sea'.

Dickie therefore asks: 'Is there...any evidence that acts of distancing and states of being distanced ever actually occur in connection with our experience of art? When the curtain goes up, when we walk up to a painting, or when we look at a sunset, do we ever commit acts of distancing and are we ever induced into a state of being distanced?' And Dickie answers: 'I cannot recall committing any action which suspends practical activities or being in a psychological state which prevents practical activity....' (in Werhane, 1984, 426)

Dickie qualifies however the above position by saying that what is happening in the experience of art is, in simple terms, the 'attending to' the object, or event; that is, 'one's attention is focused' on the perceived art object, or artistic event. There should not be any difficulty in agreeing with this viewpoint, for even in our most ordinary experiences of the world, we tend to be more attentive to what we consider as the most relevant or interesting aspects of a situation, or perceived objects.

But, for Dickie, the main problem in Bullough's theory concerns his misunderstanding of the role played by 'modes of presentation' of works of art. In this respect, Bullough writes:

A general help towards Distance (and therewith an anti-realistic feature) is to be found in the 'unification of presentment' of all art-objects. By unification of presentment are meant such qualities as symmetry, opposition, proportion, balance, rhythmical distribution of parts, light-arrangements.... For, every kind of visibly intentional arrangement or unification must, by the mere fact of its presence, enforce Distance, by distinguishing the object from the confused, disjointed and scattered forms of actual experience. (1957, 114-15)

Thus, adds Bullough, although the forms of presentation, such as, for instance, in *drama*, 'the shape and arrangement of the stage, the artificial lighting, the costumes, *mise-en-scène* and make-up, even language, especially verse.... sometimes endangers the maintenance of Distance, [it] more frequently acts as a considerable support' (113).

I certainly find Bullough's mixing-up of factors such as 'symmetry', 'proportion', and 'language, especially verse', with forms of presentation such as the 'shape and arrangement of the stage', the 'costumes' and 'make-ups' totally unacceptable, and would subscribe, therefore, to Dickie's charge that:

The theorists of psychical distance... have mistaken the functioning of... [the] institutional conventions which govern the behaviour of spectators.... for the functioning of a psychological force.... Most theatre productions, for example, are presented with the tacit assumption (the

institutional convention) that the spectators do not interact with the actions of the play or communicate directly with the characters.... It is not that we are prevented from interaction with works of art by psychological forces within us; rather we are barred from interacting with many or most works by conventions governing particular art situations. Bullough's contention that such devices as picture frames, raised stages and the like help to cause a psychological phenomenon within us... is wrong. (in Werhane, 1984, 427)

I would suggest that the above debate is rendered more complex by a vagueness, of which Dickie himself is perhaps in some measure guilty, in the distinction between (a) 'modes of presentation' obeying institutional rules and conventions, 'forms of presentation' influenced by times, locations and circumstances, and individual modes of 'attending to' works of art, and (b) essential 'components' of the presentation of works of art which are either intended by the artists, or are alterations brought about by accidental or wear and tear circumstances, which become accepted in time as integral and essential features of the works.

It is, of course, a fact that institutional rules, artistic conventions, and conditioning to environmental factors, play an important part in the apprehension and enjoyment of works of art; the crucial question is: can these devices and conditioning be regarded as *essential* factors in the aesthetic experience of works of art? But, then, how could we explain the fact that the same work of art can be presented and attended to in many different ways and still preserve its aesthetic essence?

In order to help us clarify this question, it will be perhaps useful to examine it from the following angle: Could we ask, for instance, at which level of intensity, or quality of luminosity for a painting or a sculpture, or acoustics for a musical composition, would these works start acquiring or losing their aesthetic qualities? Or, what would be the limits beyond which blemishes, defacements, or grime on paintings,

sculptures, or buildings, would deprive them of their aesthetic appeal? A case in point is the huge controversy which recently accompanied the restoration of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling; this obviously showed how much an appreciation of such limits can vary between observers; this would, of course, give some ammunition to 'psychological' theories of aesthetics such as Bullough's, if it was not that, as I noted elsewhere, the crucial problem remains as to which *point in time*, and to *what extent*, observers should feel the need to 'distance' themselves from the works of art they experience. How difficult it would be to exercise such *arbitrary* choice and decision is reflected, for example, in the case of the Venus of Milo: Should we, in order to aesthetically experience the statue, 'distance' ourselves from the effect that its missing arms have on our perception of it, or should we, on the contrary, accept that it is precisely this effect that induces in us an aesthetic experience? In other words, what would be the precise criterion which would help us decide which 'attitude' to take in such a case?

My present argumentation is even better exemplified by a case alluded to by Bullough himself: Auguste Rodin's sculpture of the *Bourgeois de Calais*. 'It was on purpose', writes Bullough, '*and with the intention of removing Distance*, that Rodin originally *intended* his *citoyens de Calais* to be placed, without pedestals, upon the market-place of that town.' (1957, note 1, 114, my emphasis); however, adds Bullough, '*the circumstance* that the place of statuary is the same as ours (in distinction to relief sculpture or painting, for instance) renders a distinction by pedestals, i.e. a removal from our spatial context, *imperative*. (1957, 113, my emphasis). Thus, if we were to go along with Bullough's views, we would have to accept that Rodin's statues, in order to be aesthetic, should be raised on pedestals, or that observers should

'psychically distance' themselves from them, as the passengers in the example of the 'fog at sea' have to allegedly distance themselves from their feelings of terror in order to aesthetically experience the phenomenon. But, as concerns *Les Bourgeois de Calais*, it is a known fact that their realistic presentation was regarded by Rodin as essential to their aesthetic potential; it is clear, therefore, that for Bullough, and for the artistic community at large, the artist's *known* intention has been, and still is, totally ignored.

Of course, it could be argued that the use of pedestals for Rodin's sculptures has not prevented the statues from being aesthetically experienced, but could we not wonder if their true aesthetic potential, as intended by the artist, has not been compromised by the use of these devices? In the same context, are we sure that we have a true aesthetic experience of Greek statues, or temples, which are now deprived of their initial colours? And if we do, is it because, in the best Bulloughian tradition, we psychically compensate for this deficiency, or because we do not, nowadays, admire the statues and temples in the same way, and for the same reasons, as they were admired in ancient times?

Surely, the above argument demonstrates once more how Bullough's theory of 'psychical distance' is illogical, or at the very least, unrealistic and totally impractical.

But even as regards the play of *Othello*, it would be unreasonable to think that Shakespeare was not aware of the fact that, as Bullough puts it, the 'more keenly' the spectators would 'enter into the play', the greater they would 'feel the resemblance with their own experience'. Thus, either he intended this effect to be part of the play's aesthetic import, and 'psychical distance' by 'de-sensitizing' the 'jealous' spectators, would jeopardize the effect intended by the author, or he did not intend the spectators to

'feel the resemblance with their own experience', and, being the genius that Shakespeare was, he would have succeeded in writing a play capable of avoiding this effect. However, Bullough, again in this case, appears to ignore the above considerations, and still make the aesthetic experience of the play dependent on the spectators' arbitrary choice of 'attitude'.

My conclusion is that we must differentiate between, on one hand, artistic rules, conventions, and devices which are used by the artists, or are intended by them to form part of the presentation of their works, and should, therefore, be regarded as essential components of the latter, and, on the other hand, institutional conventions, and modes 'of attending' to the presentation of works of art, which 'serve', as Bullough writes, to 'render our grasp of the presentation easier and to increase its intelligibility', and also to protect the works from misunderstandings or misinterpretations brought about by problems of contemporaneity, perhaps in the way dictionaries or anthologies would facilitate the understanding and thus the enjoyment of certain forms of literature. They are dependable and ad-hoc accessories to the perception of works of art and should not, consequently, as Bullough would have it, be regarded as a 'help towards Distance'.

### Conclusion

i) Bullough's process of 'psychical distance' in being intent to regulate, or even curtail, feelings and thoughts induced by our experience of potentially aesthetic objects, or events, could have the regrettable effect of neutralizing many of our most spontaneous, original, and fruitful contributions to such experiences. This argument could, of course, be criticized on the grounds that by yielding unreasonably or uncontrollably, in our experience of works of art, to all our feelings, emotions, or moods, we could become so

engrossed in our own psychological reactions that our perception and understanding of the works would be distorted, or even compromised. However, there is, in my view, no risk of this happening as a rule, for not only are we used, for personal or social reasons, to already exercise in our everyday lives, some degree of self-control on our psychological reactions, but, as we have already noted, our demeanour in artistic situations is constrained and controlled by established conventions and rules; furthermore, our aesthetic sensitivities generally induce in us an instinctive desire to turn to, and commune with, the works, instead of giving way to psychological self-indulgence. In any case, how would it be possible, in the line of Bullough's theory, to intentionally and, with success, operate a selection among the immensely varied thoughts, feelings, or interests which accompany any experience of art? I have to doubt the feasibility of such a system and, thus, its value in a theory of aesthetic experience.

But, there are thinkers who approach the question of 'distance' in art from another angle; that is, they are wary of any too close, or 'intimate' approach to art. Georg MEHLIS, for instance, views 'the appreciation of beauty, the aesthetic joy of life.... [as] dependent on distance.... Intimacy', he writes, 'is inimical to beauty and...it must necessarily destroy the aesthetic phenomenon.' But, at the same time, Mehlis does admit that his argument is paradoxical for 'a close familiarity with art media and acquaintance with the technique of the artist, a rich knowledge of material, significance, and aesthetic meaning, should serve rather to heighten artistic impressions...Isn't it essential to understand things in order to care for them tenderly and to enjoy the fullness of their beauty?' ('The Aesthetic Problem of Distance', *Logos*, vol. vi (1916-17), pp.173-184) (in Langer, 1962, 79-81)



Thus Mehlis does not strictly object to a certain familiarity - acquaintance - with works of art; what he is objecting to is *intimate* familiarity. For him, the only correct approach to works of art is

to look at them, and elicit from them their mute secret without violating their self-containedness and their separateness in strict observance of distance. For this is the sin against a work of art and against beauty in general: that we destroy the circle of austere separateness which it has established to preserve its peculiar nature. There is a tremendous violation involved when a work of art and its images...are drawn into an individual's existence, subordinated to the narrow sphere of his experiential world, and removed from their own proper sphere with the arrogant assertion that they come into their true rights at the place where he keeps them. To take such an approach is to destroy beauty and make it incomprehensible. Never attempt to make the images of great art the companions of your daily life; do not permit their mute splendour to pervade your everyday dreams. (in Langer, 1962, 82)

Even the artist is not safe from the dangers of familiarity, points out Mehlis, for 'it happens very often that an artist loses the right relation to his work,... [and can] no longer recognize (the creatures of his imagination), or can no longer appreciate them, because they have become too familiar to him, they have lived too long with him in the closest communion', and Mehlis adds, 'There are numerous examples to show that beauty is destroyed by non-observance of distance' and that 'the birth of a work of art...is governed by the law of distance.... In order to find the aesthetically important element in the living reality the artist must remove himself from it.... The profession of the artist...is rather a calling which seizes the entire human being and takes possession of him.'

It would appear, as Langer notes, that Mehlis 'confuse(s) art and life in his treatment of "aesthetic distance"' (1962, x). This is reflected, for example, in his indirect comparison of art with love which, he writes, 'is destined to die insofar as it is interwoven with the temporal fate of the senses.... For this, too, a certain keeping of

distance, a concealment of emotional qualities from the object of love is required.' (in Langer 1962, 83-85-88)

But I would suggest that the implication of Mehlis' argument is, rather, that the essence of art is purely and simply the embodiment of a spiritual 'form' whose 'austere separateness' and 'peculiar nature' should never be drawn into the baseness and ordinariness of their 'experiential world'. It thus seems to me that the problem here is that Mehlis confuses the positive effect that a close acquaintance with the context of works of art may bring to an aesthetic experience of them, and the negative effect that a too prolonged or repeated contact with, or exposure to, them may have on the observers' aesthetic experience; a situation which he identifies with excessive 'intimacy'. Although he does admit at one point that 'it is generally true that familiarity with the artistic object and art media enhances one's aesthetic impression' (in Langer, 1962, 81), he is still very wary of the principle of 'familiarization' with works of art, in case it puts in jeopardy their 'self-containedness and their separateness', in other words, their *sacrosanct* essence. But, as we will see in the current of this thesis, the 'containedness' and 'separateness' of works of art, although essential to their 'being', are not obstacles to their remaining *open* to their understanding by observers.

Mehlis' argument does not bring, therefore, any improvement on Bullough's approach.

ii) From our analysis of Bullough's theory in this chapter, it certainly emerges that his intention is to find in aesthetics a compromise liable to keep the notion of *personal* interest as an essential part of an aesthetic experience, whilst, at the same time, freeing

such interest from *practical* motives. In my view, he has not, with his theory of 'Psychical Distance', succeeded in achieving this aim.

iii) It is important to realize that Bullough's concept of 'psychical distance' does not share any common grounds with either the Schopenhauerian aesthetic principle of 'self-denial', or the Kantian aesthetic principle of 'disinterestedness', though he may consider the latter as a matter-of-fact in an aesthetic experience.

iv) Another serious problem with Bullough's theory concerns his making aesthetic experience wholly dependent on a psychological *attitude*. Apart from the objections I have already raised against this position, I would add that it also involves a contradiction with the usual sense of the concept of 'attitude'. By definition, 'an attitude is a state whose essence is contentment or active discontent with some way the world is, rather than a simple cognition of the way the world is.' (*The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, S. Blackburn, O.U.P., 1994, 28) Therefore, an 'attitude' is a form of *reaction* to the perception of some objects, or events, and this means that when you adopt an 'attitude', you do so *after* having *assessed* the perceived object, or event, with all your faculties (physical, psychological, and rational). It would be, thus, illogical to posit, as Bullough does, that *after* having perceived an object, or event, in a certain way, you would be in a position to disregard or modify your initial assessment, and response to it, and to adopt instead an attitude susceptible to bring about a successful aesthetic experience.

The thorough analysis made in this chapter of Bullough's theory of 'Psychical Distance' has not only shown how unsatisfactory and unrealistic is his approach to, and

treatment of, this concept in aesthetics, but it has also exhibited some clear evidence of the unsuitability, and perhaps illogicality, of the principle itself.

I have, therefore, examined and presented in Chapter III, an alternative to Bullough's theory of aesthetic experience, which, instead of relying on a principle such as 'distance' and making of the observers the main *instruments* or *performers* responsible for the bringing about of an aesthetic experience, assigns that role to certain forms, and structures, in the world, which, by inducing in us a harmonious play of all our faculties, impels us to *intuit* our *attunement* to, and *pre-eminence* in, the universe.

As applied to art, my proposed theory, far from relying on the kind of Antinomy of Distance suggested by Bullough, emphasizes the need in aesthetic experience for a 'communion', 'rapprochement', between the artists and the observers of their works, through the 'representational symbolism' (Langer) of the artists' 'intuition/revelation' defined above.

**PART TWO**

**An Investigation into Modes of Aesthetic Experience**

### CHAPTER III

#### The Aesthetic Experience of Natural Beauty

In order for this study of the aesthetic experience of nature to be from the start clearly distinguished from the aesthetic experience of art, we will hereafter enumerate and define some of the important factors and characteristics which support this distinction:

1) Natural 'beauty' differs from art in that it is totally free from the rules and conventions which accompany the presentation of works of art. Nevertheless, says Kant, 'nature ... that is subjected to no constraint of artificial rules, can supply constant food for taste.' (1951, 80) Even wild and desolate nature can still inspire aesthetic thoughts and feelings, and even its imperfections can be apprehended as part of its aesthetic attraction; this usually does not occur with defective or damaged works of art (exception made perhaps of works such as the Venus of Milo). As Schopenhauer poetically writes:

Every little spot entirely uncultivated and wild, in other words, left free to nature itself, however small it may be, if only man's paws leave it alone, is at once decorated by her in the most tasteful manner, is draped with plants, flowers, and shrubs, whose easy enforced manner, natural grace, and delightful grouping testify that they have not grown up under the rod of correction of the great egoist, but that nature has here been freely active. Every neglected little place at once becomes beautiful. (1958, II, 404)

And it is so with many of the animals' works or behaviour, such as, for example, spiders' webs, beehives, or fish' rhythmic dances. 'Even the song of birds', writes Kant, 'which we can bring under no musical rule, seems to have more freedom, and therefore more for taste, than a song of a human being which is produced in accordance with all the rules of music; for we very much sooner weary of the latter if it is repeated often and at length.' And Kant adds, 'Here, however, we probably confuse our participation in the mirth of a little creature that we love with the beauty of its song, for if this were exactly

imitated by man (as sometimes the notes of the nightingale are), it would seem to our ear quite devoid of taste.' (1951, 80) The last point seems to me significant, for here Kant appears to imply that an understanding of the bird's assumed *emotions* may have played a part in the listener's aesthetic experience of the song.

2) Many extraneous elements usually encroach upon, or interfere with, the conditions of apprehension of objects, or events, in nature. 'In the pleasure I feel in looking at a scenery from the summit of a mountain', writes Mikel DUFRENNE, 'am I really able to say what part is played by the freshness of the air, the perfume of the wild flower, the satisfaction of having climbed the mountain and thus having asserted my will power? There is here a nearness with the aesthetic object [which is] different from what we feel with a work of art.' (1976, 40, my transl.)

3) There is sometimes the belief that, as writes Louis A. REID, although 'the work of art is an aesthetically significant *appearance...*, works of nature... are aesthetically significant *realities* whose beauty is immanent in them'. Certainly, adds Reid, 'the predominantly sensuous experience of nature involves... a powerful conviction of reality' (1973, 397) and the 'nature-lover frequently believes that nature *in some sense* is a "work of art", and perhaps even 'the experience of some spirit of nature or possibly of some supreme Artist' (402).

4) Unlike works of art, natural 'beauty' is not dependent for its import and meaningfulness on a subject matter. In fact, Reid notes, nature can become a 'field for suggestion', a 'field for art'. '[The artist] looks at nature through a post card with a hole in it. His is interested in making rather than in discovering. And, often enough, he frankly does not expect beauty in nature as she is.' (1973, 386) An extreme form of this point of view is expressed by Benedetto CROCE who finds that

the always imperfect adaptability, the fugitive nature, the mutability of 'natural beauties' ... justify the inferior place accorded to them, compared with beauties produced by art. Let us leave it to rhetoricians or the intoxicated to affirm that a beautiful tree, a beautiful river, a sublime mountain, or even a beautiful horse or a beautiful human figure, are superior to the chisel-stroke of Michelangelo or the verse of Dante; but let us say, with greater propriety, that 'nature' is stupid compared with art, and that she is 'mute', if man does not make her speak. (*The Essence of Aesthetic*, p.47 - quoted in Reid, 1973, 386-87)

5) The experience of natural 'beauty' can also induce in us, like works of art, spiritual or metaphysical thoughts, but for the particular and different reason that nature then appears *as if* it had been structured, combined, and displayed for our own gratification. As Gadamer notes, we find indeed in Kant that 'a creationist *theology* stands behind this unique human capacity to encounter natural beauty, and forms the self-evident basis from which he represents the production of the genius and the artist as an extreme intensification of the power that nature, as *divinely created*, possesses.' (1986, 30, my emphasis)

This particular form of the experience of natural 'beauty' (albeit devoid of its theological aspect) will be examined later on in the current chapter.

Now that we have underlined the main and most obvious criteria which set apart the experience of natural 'beauty' from the experience of art, we will examine how George SANTAYANA and Kant view and explain the experience of natural 'beauty'.

For Santayana, it is precisely the characteristics criticized by Croce, as the 'imperfect adaptability', the fugitiveness, and the 'mutability of nature', which inspire in us such an intense, varied, and rich range of ideas and emotions. The natural landscape, Santayana points out, 'almost always contains enough diversity to allow the eye a great liberty in selecting, emphasizing, and grouping its elements, and it is furthermore rich in



suggestion and in vague emotional stimulus.' (1955, 133-34) It is indeed in such a successful synthesis that the 'ideal of perfection' or 'beauty' is apprehended and enjoyed. 'Sensible elements by *themselves indifferent*, are so united as to please in combination.' (1955, 82, my emphasis)

How, then, could such successful synthesis of 'sensible elements' become the basis of our idea of 'beauty'? Santayana's answer is that 'modified averages' of our varied apprehensions of the world become 'immanent in human nature'; 'the beautiful horse, the beautiful speech, the beautiful face, is always a medium between the extremes which our experience has offered.' (1955, 120) (We will see later that this particular assessment is reminiscent, in some way, of Kant's definition of 'dependent Beauty'). Therefore, as Santayana so lucidly comments,

as our percepts are thus habitually biased in the direction of practical interest,... in the same manner, our aesthetic ideals are biased in the direction of aesthetic interest.... *Not all parts of an object are equally congruous with our perceptive faculty; not all elements are noted with the same pleasure.* Those, therefore, which are agreeable are chiefly dwelt upon by the lover of beauty, and his percept will give an average of things with a great emphasis laid on that part of them which is beautiful. *The ideal will thus deviate from the average in the direction of the observer's pleasure.* (1955, 122, my emphasis)

[But] we need to clarify our ideals, and enliven our vision of perfection.... For we have faculties, and habits and impulses. These are the basis of our demands. And these demands, although variable, constitute an ever-present intrinsic standard of value by which we feel and judge. The ideal is immanent in them; *for the ideal means that environment in which our faculties would find their freest employment, and their most congenial world.... Accordingly our consciousness of the ideal becomes distinct in proportion... to the vigour and definiteness with which our faculties work.* When the vital harmony is complete, when the act is pure, faith in perfection passes into vision.... Such moments of inspiration are the source of the arts, which have no higher function than to renew them.... A work of art is indeed a monument to such a moment, the memorial to such a vision.... (262, my emphasis)

Santayana calls the 'immanent residual average' of our 'faculties, and habits and impulses' (that is, *everything* that constitutes the Self *at any one moment*), the 'counterpart and entelechy' (263) of the 'ideal of perfection'.

Santayana's assessment of the aesthetic 'ideal' as an essentially subjective and evolved 'sense of perfection', is indeed foreign to the concept of the Platonic Idea which, he says, 'is indirectly shown to be futile, because such transcendent realities, if they exist, can have nothing to do with our ideas of them. The Platonic Idea of a tree may exist; how should I deny it?... But, why in that case, this infinite variability of ideal trees? Was the Tree Beautiful an oak, or a cedar, an English or an American elm? My actual types are finite and mutually exclusive; that heavenly type must be one and infinite. The problem is hopeless.... Very simple, on the other hand, is the explanation of the existence of that type as a residuum of experience.' (1955, 117) Santayana also argues against both Kant's principle of Universality, which he calls the 'supposed disinterestedness of our love of beauty' (1955, 40), and his definition of the experience of 'beauty' as a 'judgement rather than a sensation'. But, remarks Santayana 'we are fortunately not required to enter the labyrinth into which this method leads'; it is enough to seek a basis to the perception of beauty in human nature. After all, 'there is notoriously no great agreement in aesthetic matters; and such agreement as there is, is based upon similarity of origin, nature, and circumstance among men, a similarity which, where it exists, tends to bring about identity in all judgements and feelings. It is unmeaning to say that what is beautiful to one man ought to be beautiful to another'. (41) As Louis GUILLERMIT rightly points out, it is difficult to apprehend correctly 'a universality which is not logical, but aesthetic.' (1981, 76-77, my transl.)

In order to investigate Kant's theory of 'beauty' we must first remind ourselves of the discrimination he makes between:

a) 'free beauty' which is self-subsistent and 'presupposes no concept of what the object ought to be'. (1951, 65)

For Kant, flowers, 'many birds (such as the parrot, the humming bird, the bird of paradise) and many sea shells are beauties in themselves, which do not belong to any object determined in respect of its purpose by concepts, but please freely and in themselves. So also' adds Kant, 'delineations *à la grecque*, foliage for borders or wall papers, mean nothing in themselves; they represent nothing - no object under a definite concept - and are free beauties.' (1951, 65-66)

and b) 'dependent beauty' 'for which an ideal is to be sought..., is fixed by a concept of objective purposiveness; and... thus cannot appertain to the object of a quite pure judgment of taste, but to that of a judgment of taste which is in part intellectual.' (1951, 69)

Among his examples of 'dependent beauty', Kant includes 'human beauty (i.e. of a man, a woman, or a child), the beauty of a horse, or a building (be it a church, palace, or arsenal, or summer house)', which, he points out, 'presupposes a concept of the purpose which determines what the thing is to be, and consequently a concept of its perfection'. (1951, 66) For Kant, it is clear that, 'as the combination of the pleasant (in sensation) with beauty, which properly is only concerned with form, is a hindrance to the purity of the judgement of taste, so also is its purity injured by the combination with beauty of the good (viz. that manifold which is good for the thing itself in accordance with its purpose). We could add much to a building which would immediately please the

eye if only it were not to be a church.' (1951,66) Or, 'for example, if in a forest I come across a plot of sward around which trees stand in a circle and do not then represent to myself a purpose, viz. that it is intended to serve for country dances, not the least concept of perfection is furnished by the mere form.' (64)

We could still be tempted to ask why Kant illustrates 'purposeless beauty' with specific examples such as flowers and certain birds and sea-shells, and 'purposeful beauty' with examples such as horses, and humans? Would not the examples of the first category be 'dependent' as much as the examples of the second category upon 'a concept of the purpose which determines what the thing is to be'? The answer is 'yes' for, says Körner, 'while the layman can see a flower only as an instance of free beauty and not also as something serving a purpose, the botanist can apprehend the beauty of a flower both as free and as adherent [dependent]. The distinction between free and adherent is thus not a classification of things but rather a distinction between two modes of apprehending "purposive" wholes.' (1987, 189)

As Cuvillier explains, what Kant is, therefore, attempting to do in discriminating between 'free beauty' [which he seems to regard, in fact, as the only true 'beauty'] and 'dependent beauty' is 'to define the beautiful by its form, not by its content or its essence;... the beautiful is neither a supra-sensible given nor something given in nature; it is no more a pure *a priori* form of our judgements, or a simple creation of our mind... The beautiful is the outcome of a dialectical rapport between human being and nature....' (1972, II, 199, my transl.) Most of the commentators on Kant's *Judgement of Taste*, says J.Y. Chateau, have interpreted his view of 'free beauty' as 'the pleasure to feel the unity of our being in spite of the divisions of the various levels of consciousness.... The beautiful object appears to be the reason why our faculties which are ordinarily in conflict

with each other, suddenly cooperate harmoniously (without any effort on our part).' (in Guillermit, 1981, 23-24, my transl.)

As Guillermit comments,

Having discovered in the midst of the aesthetic judgement, the harmony that pure reflection perceives between a sensitive element and an intellectual element, (Kant) is particularly alert to the risks involved in that fragile equilibrium: however much it is essential for purposefulness to remain strictly *formal* [i.e. 'a unification of diversity into a unity (whose purpose cannot be determined)' (Kant)], any 'intrusion' of matter, either as a sensation or as a concept, can only compromise the aesthetic purity of the judgement.... In his *Anthropology*, Kant compares this situation to a daydream which would follow a sinuous course without however 'loosing direction', or to a relaxed conversation 'without a clear topic', which nevertheless keeps a thematic unity. These are effectively cases in which the association is carried out *without the consciousness of a rule*, but in *conformity* with it however, and thus with the understanding (although it does not result from it). (1981, 85 & 87, my transl.)

From the point of view of my research, what is of particular interest in Kant's understanding of 'beauty', is that, as points out Guillermit, 'everything happens as if... nature was demonstrating an art to produce, intentionally and according to laws, beautiful forms, capable to induce a harmonious play of the human faculties and to awaken in everyone the same feeling of pleasure.' (1981, 134, my transl.) This point is indeed clearly underlined by Kant when he writes that 'we can... in respect of the beautiful in nature, suggest many questions touching the cause of this purposiveness of their forms, e.g. to explain why nature has scattered abroad beauty with such profusion, even in the depth of the ocean, where the human eye (*for which alone that purposiveness exists*) but seldom penetrates.' (1951, 120-21, my emphasis)

The above reference to Kant's thoughts about the conjectural question of the 'purposefulness' of nature, gives me the opportunity to suggest a more rounded approach to the aesthetic experience of nature which would integrate various attractive aspects of

the theories examined in this chapter, especially Santayana's and Kant's, but would, at the same time, obviate some of their shortcomings, or ambiguities. My proposed approach would be based on the characteristics of a modern derivative of the Argument from Design (though free from its theological connotations or implications): the Anthropic Cosmological Principle. In view of the fair amount of doubts that recent and past philosophers have raised concerning the relevance of the Argument from Design in philosophical arguments, I am finding it necessary to initially back up my proposal with the following extracts from the introduction written by John D. BARROW and Frank J. TIPLER to their book *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*:

The perennial solution of the great idealistic philosophers has been to regard Mind as logically prior, and even materialistic philosophers consider the innate properties of matter to be such as to allow - or even require - the existence of intelligence to contemplate it; that is, these properties are necessary or sufficient for life. Thus the existence of Mind is taken as one of the basic postulates of a philosophical system. Physicists, on the other hand, are loath to admit any consideration of Mind into their theories.... But, during the past fifteen years there has grown up amongst cosmologists an interest in a collection of ideas, known as the Anthropic Cosmological Principle, which offers a means of relating Mind and observership directly to the phenomena traditionally within the encompass of physical science. (1988, 1)

This new scientific interest, comment Barrow and Tipler, has been 'one of the most important results of 20th century physics', and it has consisted in

the gradual realization that there exist invariant properties of the natural world and its elementary constituents which render the gross size and structure of virtually all its constituents quite inevitable.... These... are the consequences of necessity; they are the manifestations of the possible equilibrium states between competing forces of attraction and of repulsion. The intrinsic strengths of these controlling forces of Nature are determined by a mysterious collection of pure numbers that we call the *constants of Nature*.... For example, if the relative strengths of the nuclear and electromagnetic forces were to be slightly different then carbon atoms could not exist in Nature and [we] would not have evolved. (1988, 5)

The characteristics of the Anthropic Principle would first appear to be quite compatible with Kant's view that the world is such as to make us perceive it in no other form, but ordered (i.e. through the Categories). However, Kant has always been convinced that, because the Categories are the a priori conditions of experience, statements about them cannot therefore be proved or disproved. Hence the reason why in his later works he agreed with Hume that it was impossible to derive necessary teleological principles from such empirical data as our observations and interpretations of nature; from then on, he will thus show great care in making a distinction between the 'Objective', and the 'Subjective' Purposefulness of Nature. Kant writes, 'We have on transcendental principles good ground to assume a subjective purposiveness in nature, in its particular laws, in reference to its *comprehensibility by human judgements* [the Categories] and the possibility of the connection of particular experiences in a system.' (1951, 205) However, he goes on, 'to judge of a thing as a natural purpose on account of its internal form.... we require, not merely the concept of a possible purpose, but the knowledge of the final purpose (scopus) of nature. But this requires a reference of such knowledge to something supersensible far transcending all our teleological knowledge of nature, for the purpose of the existence of... nature must itself be sought beyond nature.' (1951, 225) 'That the things of nature serve one another as means to purposes and that their possibility is only completely intelligible through this kind of causality - for this we have absolutely no ground in the universal idea of nature,... [and] we have absolutely no *a priori* reason for presuming.' (1951, 205), 'We have nothing to say', admits Kant, 'against the reasonableness and utility of [the] line of argument [in itself],... yet we cannot approve of the claims which this proof advances of apodictic certainty.' (*Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. N. Kemp Smith: Macmillan, London, 1968, p.521) For Kant, it is clear that although we regard the laws of Nature as adapted to our faculties of cognition, the

Categories are nevertheless created by us and thus mind-dependent; we cannot, therefore, rederive from their 'existence' the proof that the structure of the world is teleologically linked to our own existence; just, perhaps, that the world has to be *ordered*. Our only 'reason for being warranted to regard the world as a system of final causes' is exclusively on the grounds of 'morality'.

What I would suggest, therefore, is an attempt at adapting Kant's 'Analytic of the Aesthetical Judgement' to some of the essential aspects of the Anthropic Cosmological Principle; this would allow us to palliate, in some measure, what is, in my view, a weakness in Kant's theory of aesthetics, the unexplained or unidentified factor which in an aesthetic experience is supposed to bring about a harmonious and pleasurable 'play of our faculties of imagination and understanding'.

My proposal would, thus, entail that in certain conditions of perception, and independently of our will or of our understanding, a certain harmony in the play of all our faculties would induce in us the vivid *intuition/revelation* of our *attunement* to, and *symbiosis* with, the structures and laws of the Universe. This would mean that instead of being conscious of our usual subjection to the empirical necessity of the Kantian Categories, we would 'feel' liberated from them - from the Will - and, as a result, would lose our *acquired* sense of *separateness*, *isolation* from, or *confrontation* with, the Universe. This experience could, in a way, be defined as an out-of-the-body experience, but without any religious or esoteric connotation. In that respect, I find Schopenhauer's following comparison between art and science rather thought-provoking. He observes that whilst science's 'restless and unstable stream... can never find an ultimate goal or complete satisfaction, ...; art, on the contrary, is everywhere at its goal. ...[The] method of consideration [of science] can be compared to an endless line running horizontally, and



the [method of consideration of art] to a vertical line cutting the horizontal at any point.

... The first is Aristotle's method; the second is, on the whole, Plato's'. Becoming lyrical, Schopenhauer adds:

The first is like the mighty storm, rushing along without beginning or aim, bending, agitating, and carrying everything away with it; the second is like the silent sunbeam, cutting through the path of the storm, and quite unmoved by it. The first is like the innumerable violently agitated drops of the waterfall, constantly changing and never for a moment at rest; the second is like the rainbow silently resting on this raging torrent. .... This particular thing, which in that stream was an infinitesimal part, becomes for art a representative of the whole, an equivalent of the infinitely many in space and time. It therefore pauses at this particular thing; it stops the wheel of time; for it the relations vanish; its object is only the essential, the Idea. (1969, I, 185)

The fact that, in such an experience, the Categories would appear to lose their *raison d'être*, would permit us to eschew Kant's main objection (as defined above) to the belief in an Objective Purposefulness of Nature. Such approach would undeniably constitute a challenge to Kant's Transcendental Idealism; it is not however the aim of this thesis to even attempt to do so! But, nonetheless, could we not be permitted to think that should Kant have lived in our own time, he may have revised his above stand in the light of the extraordinary scientific progress and developments that we have witnessed. As Barrow and Tipler point out, 'Kant's early work had attempted to reconcile the mechanical and teleological views of the world contained in the works of Leibniz and Newton,... [and] he was still strongly committed to the idea that all objects in Nature, be they organic or inorganic, are completely controlled by mechanical physical laws.' (1988, 72 - 74) Körner's comments confirm this view; 'In our own day', he writes, '... while mechanistic explanations are sought and employed... in every science, the nature and function of teleological judgements in the biological and social sciences is still under

discussion. We have here another case in which Kant's examination of a philosophical problem has more than merely a historical interest.' (1987, 198)

It would seem that an approach based on a principle such as Clive BELL's Significant Form, could be adopted for my proposed 'Attunement/Symbiosis' theory. Certainly, Bell's belief that aesthetic experience depends on the apprehension in the object, or event, of a 'significant form' which is 'a combination of lines and colours that moves me aesthetically' (*Art*: Chatto & Windus, 115, 2nd edn., 12), and that in this experience, 'we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions....' (Ibid, 27) would be totally compatible with an 'intuition/revelation' form of aesthetic experience.

As a matter of fact, a new *formalism* such as Bell's is seen by Oswald HANFLING as 'more akin to the subjectivism of Hume than to older views which were based on objective qualities of form.' But, as with Hume, adds Hanfling, 'questions arise about the status of aesthetic judgement and aesthetic value.... [for] if the criterion of quality were merely "what moves me aesthetically", then judgements of quality would be purely personal.... The main concern of the formalists, however, was about the importance of form, in both theory and practice.' (1992, 57) But it is precisely this attempt at 'blending' objective and subjective approaches, that is, at 'defining form in terms of the relevant emotion' (Hanfling, 1992, 57) which I find appropriate to the scheme I put forward in this research

I may have still given the false impression that I was inclined to rely on 'formalistic' principles similar to, for example, the Golden Section in painting, architecture, music, or drama, or the Pythagorean 'harmonic mean', or 'harmonic progression' in music. It would, as Monroe BEARDSLEY notes, 'be most gratifying if

some such simple formula as this could measure the perceptual conditions of beauty. But it has not yet been very plausibly shown, I think, that the Golden Section, or any simple set of ideal properties, is either necessary or sufficient for beauty.' (1981, 508) I indeed share Beardsley's view in that respect.

Anticipating some possible criticism of my inclusion of 'intuition' in aesthetic experience, I would say that there is nothing new, or objectionable, in the use of 'intuitionism' in aesthetics, particularly when, as it is the case in my thesis, the aesthetic experience of art does not exclusively depend on it. But, I certainly admit that my proposed form of aesthetic experience concurs with what Beardsley defines as:

a faculty of 'insight' which delivers knowledge to us in nonconceptual form, as immediate conviction; there is no inference, or reasoning,... The intuition is more like a feeling than anything else, but it carries with it the inescapable sense that it is *trustworthy*. In intuition we are in direct communion with the object; since our grasp of it is not mediated by symbolic devices, intuitive knowledge is ineffable, and conveyable, if at all, only by nonverbal aesthetic objects. (1981, 388, my emphasis)

An Intuitionist theory is also often criticized on the grounds that knowledge by intuition cannot be proved by rational investigation, but, as Beardsley notes, Intuitionists have some good reasons for showing that 'there are certain things human beings know that they could not have known if they had no faculty of intuition.... [Some Intuitionists would also argue that] intellect, reason, or science... have inherent limitations of method or scope and therefore cannot cover the whole of our knowledge'. (1981, 389-90)

Of course, Beardsley points out, there is no 'such thing as *self*-authenticating, or intrinsically justified, intuitive knowledge.... To have an intuition is presumably to have an experience of some sort. To call an experience "knowledge", not merely "experience" is to say that something is known *by means* of the experience. In other words, when the

experience is over, we must know something more than that we have had the experience. Therefore, there is a distinction between the object known and the experience.' (1981, 390-91) However, if we address ourselves to this question within the Kantian context of the Judgement of Taste, we can still, as Guillermit notes, accept a position whereby, 'paradoxically, the faculties of the understanding, the faculties of the sensitive and intellectual representation, are exercised without giving any knowledge to the subject, who *only feels* the state in which the mind is placed by their activity.' (1981, 68, my transl. & my emphasis) Thus, we could say that our *intuitive* theory of aesthetic experience does not provide us with *knowledge* as such, for we do not *learn* something in the process; in fact, what happens is rather the opposite: our knowledge of things is transformed into a pure *experience* of them. Such experience would however be regarded by Schopenhauer, as we have seen above, as true *knowledge* of the Idea. I would however emphasize that the 'Intuition/Revelation' process presented in this chapter should not be associated with Schopenhauer's understanding of an aesthetic experience, or with the Platonic theory of Recollection.

My suggested approach could also be criticized on the grounds of its anthropomorphic bias. To this charge I would answer that, in the present state of scientific knowledge, there is no more reason to invalidate the anthropomorphic implications of the Anthropic Cosmological Principle than there is to validate them. After all, as Cuvillier points out, Pascal's poetic idea of humanity being 'placed between two infinities, the infinity of bigness and the infinity of smallness' has been 'confirmed and strengthened by theories on the structure and evolution of the Universe and the constitution of the atom'. (1972, I, 392-93, my transl.)

The rapprochement I have chosen to make between the intuitive aspect of an aesthetic experience and some features of the modern scientific interpretation of the Argument from Design, should not be regarded as uncongenial with a philosophical research. The idea that scientific thought has often clear affinities with aesthetic sensation is not new. L. de Broglie notes in that respect that 'the aesthetic feeling is often a guide in the elaboration of (scientific) theories'. (in A. Cuvillier, 1972, I, 391, my transl.) And, as Cuvillier writes,

There is effectively *a harmony between ideas*, and certain facts have an aesthetic value because they "complete an unfinished harmony". Do we not talk, in mathematics, of "elegant" demonstrations?... Some mathematical curves present an indisputable aesthetic character.... H. Poincaré does allude... to the rational harmony of numbers,... and "the splendid harmony of the laws of nature", and he especially celebrates the value of Astronomy which, by the "spectacle of the starry night", has taught us to find, "under the apparent disorder", the discipline of the immutable laws.... "The true scientist," says Poincaré, "feels when faced with his work the same impact as the artist; his pleasure is as great and of the same nature.... If we work, it is less in order to get positive results... than to feel this aesthetic emotion and communicate it to those who are capable of experiencing it". [And] Paul Valéry compares Euclid geometry, this "logical edifice", to a well proportioned Greek temple. Science has, furthermore, an aesthetic value by virtue of the greatness of the horizons it uncovers for us. (1972, I, 391-92, my transl.)

It is a fact, however, that thoughts such as those expressed above often produce in us a sense of awe and perplexity which translates into a paralysing fear of the unknown. In Hepburn's view, 'the work of the sciences... has tended to increase bewilderment and loss of nerve over the aesthetic interpretation of nature.... The characteristic image of contemporary man, as we all know, is that of a "stranger", encompassed by a nature, which is indifferent, unmeaning and "absurd".' (1984, 10)

But there is another kind of reaction, this time more specifically linked with the experience of 'beauty', which, writes Santayana, 'is more mysterious.... It is found where

sensible elements by themselves indifferent, are so united as to please in combination, so much so that those who cannot conceive its explanation often reassure themselves by denying its existence.' (1955, 82)

The above reactions cannot but engender a sterile, or even damaging, attitude towards aesthetics; we have seen in this chapter how my proposed 'attunement/symbiosis' approach could translate these negative responses into an elevating and enriching aesthetic experience. As Hepburn comments, there are writers who, in fact, speak of the enjoyment of natural beauty as tending towards an ideal of "oneness with nature" or as leading to the disclosure of "unity" in nature. The formulations vary greatly and substantially among themselves; but the vocabulary of unity, oneness as the key aesthetic principle, is a recurrent theme.' However, Hepburn adds, some thinkers, tempted by 'a particularist approach to natural beauty', 'have very little sympathy for the more grandiose, speculative and quasi-mystical language of "oneness with or in nature". Yet it seems to me that we do not have here one good and one bad aesthetic approach.... Rather, we have two poles or well-separated landmarks between which lies a range of aesthetic possibilities; and in the mapping of this range those landmarks will play a valuable, perhaps a necessary role.' (1984, 17-18)

As this thesis and my proposed Attunement/Symbiosis theory bear out, I have attempted to introduce in my analysis and understanding of aesthetic experience, some degree of 'unity in diversity'. But my theory's most relevant contribution to this research, has been to make the phenomenon of aesthetic experience dependent on an 'intuitive' and thus *immediate noninferential* apprehension of, or insight into, the teleological 'significance' of some particular forms, structures, or harmonies in the world. The very 'immediacy' of such an experience logically, and thus systematically, excludes any

possibility of an aesthetic experience being conditional upon, or influenced by, an *intentional attitude* such as 'psychical distance'.

In our next chapter, we will attempt to examine if the above mentioned approach can be applied to the experience of 'beautiful' craftsmanship, and in what way this could help us discriminate between the latter and art.

## CHAPTER IV

## A Comparative Analysis of Craftsmanship and Art

There are many difficulties in attempting to make a discrimination between art and craft, especially in view of the fact that they use the same materials, techniques, and traditions. Certainly, works we would now regard as art, would not have systematically been given, in ancient times, any higher and privileged status. *Creativity*, then, as R.G. COLLINGWOOD notes, was the 'power to produce a preconceived result by means of consciously controlled and directed action' (1971, 15), whilst, as we will see later in this chapter, the high degree of 'preconception' involved in craftsmanship is nowadays one of the major factors called upon by philosophers to distinguish it from art.

But the emergence in modern times of 'art's self-consciousness' has been deplored by some thinkers, and, in particular, by John DEWEY who objects to '*theories* which isolate art and its appreciation by placing them in a realm of their own', thereby causing a discontinuity of 'aesthetic experience with normal processes of living'. (1958, '10) 'Because experience', he adds, 'is the fulfilment of an organism in its struggles and achievement in a world of things, *it is art in germ*' (19, my emphasis), and we have, therefore, to accept the principle that because 'the experience of a living creature is capable of aesthetic quality', no wall should be built around art. (17) To this I would answer that even if, as Dewey implies, art, like other experiences, is no more than the 'fulfilment of an organism in its struggles', there is no reason why it should not be singled out and ennobled as much as any other successful accomplishments, such as extraordinary acts of bravery, or outstanding scientific discoveries. Such an assessment of art would not, in any case, exempt us from



attempting to understand and ascertain the reasons why art invariably outshines even the most 'beautiful' examples of craftsmanship. We will attempt in what follows to provide some explanations in that respect.

It is sometimes thought that, for art to be born, there has to be first in the artists' consciousness the intention *to create* an art object, or event. This condition has been found totally irrelevant by many thinkers who argue that a work of art can be created unknowingly, and for many reasons which have nothing to do with artistic intentions. As the composer Robert Schumann points out: 'People compose for many reasons: to become immortal, because the piano happens to be open; to become a millionaire; because of the praise of friends; because they have looked into a pair of beautiful eyes, or for no reason whatsoever.' (*On Music and Musicians*, 1946, p.7) (quoted in Eaton, 1988, 18-19)

I would think that true artists soon forget the mundane reasons which motivated them in the first place, and let their artistic imagination, talent, and expertise take over.

But this particular point could perhaps, in a way, offer us a platform for starting our attempts at differentiating between craft and art, for it seems evident that whilst, as said above, artists are not always motivated by the desire to create a work of art as such, in craftsmanship the desire to produce an object which perfectly blends usefulness and 'beauty' is always foremost in the artisans' minds.

One of the most significant characteristics generally attributed exclusively to art is *originality*. Contrary to the artist, says Warren E. STEINKRAUS, 'the craftsman works without significant opportunity for originality or variety of design'. For example,

The violin maker may vary slightly the decorative character in his products but he cannot redesign the violin each time he makes one. Nor can the cabinet maker vary basic features much. A chair must serve a function. Similarly, the activities of gardeners, milliners, hairdressers, cosmetologists, dressmakers, flower arrangers and chefs, though often displaying high skill and ingenuity must always serve practical demands first and are usually limited by prescriptions or directions from others. Though one must *unhesitatingly grant that genuine artistry occurs in these areas*, the aim and direction of such activity is not *empirically* the same as that of the so-called fine arts. (1974, 22-23, my emphasis)

Such argument is not found very convincing by E.H. GOMBRICH who argues that what is essential in art, is not originality but talent and expressive power. He writes: 'Our modern notion that an artist must be "original" was by no means shared by most peoples of the past. An Egyptian, a Chinese or Byzantine master would have been greatly puzzled by such a demand. Nor would a medieval artist of Western Europe have understood why we should invent new ways of planning a church, or designing a chalice or of representing the sacred story where the old ones served their purpose so well.... [but] there remained *enough scope for him to show whether he was a master or a bungler.*' (1992, 119, my emphasis)

To illustrate his point Gombrich refers to different but contemporaneous paintings of St Mathew writing the gospel. The first painting, he says, dates from about 800 and was painted at Aachen, the second painting dates from about 830 and was painted at Rheims.

(The first artist) had strained every nerve to give an accurate and worthy rendering of a venerated model. The painter of (the second manuscript) probably had before him the same or a very similar ancient example from early Christian times. But while (the first artist) had done his very best to copy the original as faithfully as possible, the (second artist) must have aimed at a different interpretation... and he succeeded in conveying something of his own sense of awe and excitement.... In pictures like these we see the emergence of a new medieval style which made it possible for art to do something that neither ancient Oriental nor classical art had done: the Egyptians had largely drawn what they

'knew' to exist, the Greeks what they 'saw'; in the Middle Ages the artist also learned to express in his picture what he 'felt'. (1992, 119-20)

Goethe himself, speaking of the paintings in the Church of San Giorgio in Verona, comments thus: 'All the pictures are altarpieces which vary in merit but all are well worth seeing. But what subjects these poor artists had to paint! And for what patrons! A rain of manna,... and, as a companion picture, the miracle of the five loaves! What is there worth painting about that? Hungry persons pounce upon some small crumbs, bread is handed out to countless others. The painters have racked their brains to give these trivialities some significance. Still, genius stimulated by these demands, has created many beautiful works.' (1970, 57)

It is also essential to note that perfection in technique or execution, is not always necessary to an aesthetic excellence in art, though it is essential to 'beautiful' craftsmanship. The inevitable occurrence of mistakes in technique or mishandling of rules or conventions, are certainly not preventing numerous 'faulty' works of the past from being regarded as true instances of art. Gombrich mentions, for instance, Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* which, he says, 'is so beautiful that we do not notice the unnatural length of her neck, the steep fall of her shoulders and the queer way her left arm is hinged to the body' (1950, 199).

As concerns the question of 'expressiveness' in art, and more particularly Gombrich's statement that it is in the Middle Ages that 'the artist also *learned* to express in his picture what he felt', I would argue that sensitive and 'artistically' gifted individuals have, from the dawn of humanity, felt the desire to 'express' their emotions, feelings, and thoughts through 'artistic' means. But it is certainly true that certain periods and ages are more propitious than others in that respect. As we know, this was

particularly the case in fifteenth and sixteenth century Italy, during which geniuses such as Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and Titian, to name but a few, freed art from its often rigid and constraining conditions. These exceptional outbursts of illuminating and revolutionary aesthetic 'expression' would not make me believe, however, in an 'evolution' of art. 'We know very well', says Gombrich, 'that in art we cannot speak of progress in the sense in which we speak of progress in learning. A Gothic work of art may be just as great as a work of the Renaissance.' (1950, 260-61)

A comparative analysis of craft and art has been made by R.G. COLLINGWOOD. I am referring hereafter to two of his most significant arguments:

1) 'Craft always involves a distinction between means and ends, each clearly conceived as something distinct from the other but related to it. The term 'means'... applies not to the things but to the actions concerned with them.... These actions... are passed through... in order to reach the end, and are left behind when the end is reached.' (1971, 15) However, this argument is criticized by the Technical theory of art which argues, rightly in my view, that the same distinction can be made in art. But, asks Collingwood, are the means by which an artisan makes a horseshoe, for example, the same as the means used by the poet? In art, the only factors involved are the artist, the labour of his or her mind, and the work of art. Collingwood's argument, although suited perhaps to an art such as poetry, is certainly not applicable to all arts. In painting, sculpture, and architecture, for instance, the 'means' could be conceived of in the same way as they are in craft.

2) In craft, 'the result to be obtained is preconceived or thought out before being arrived at. The craftsman knows what he wants to make before he makes it. This

foreknowledge is absolutely indispensable to craft.... Moreover, (it) is not vague but precise.' (1971, 15-16) How could we on such a basis, says Collingwood, explain the 'erratic steps', 'disorganized building-up', and 'tentative play' which characterize most of art creations? But, here again, we could argue that in architecture, for example, foreknowledge and planning are essential to the serviceability and safety of the buildings. To be fair, we must add that Collingwood himself does not wish to place overdue weight on the criterion of preconception, for, he notes, 'we must not erect the absence of plan into a positive force and call it inspiration, or the unconscious, or the like'. (1971, 22)

We have, however, to keep in mind that Collingwood's analysis is strongly influenced by his very special viewpoint regarding 'expression' in general and his belief that art, in particular, manifests itself exclusively as a 'mental object'. 'A work of art', he writes, 'need not be what we should call a real thing.... (It) may be completely created when it has been created as a thing whose only place is in the artist's mind.' (1971, 130) Writing about music, Collingwood remarks: 'Which of [the real tune, or the collection of noises] is the work of art? Which of them is the music?' And he answers: 'the music, the work of art, is not the collection of noises, it is the tune in the composer's head.' (1971, 139) Thus, 'art proper, as the expression of emotion, differs sharply and obviously from any craft whose aim is to arouse emotion.' (1971, 113) This particular understanding of the phenomenon of 'expression' is considered by Paul Ricoeur in chapter VII and by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in chapter IX.

Dufrenne, on his part, believes that art needs to be *physically* expressed, and that materials and techniques are essential to art as they are to craft, for 'all art is craft in the beginning' and, therefore, an artist 'must be a good worker first of all.... [But the]

concern for craftsmanship in no way prevents self-expression.... Craft may be made up of formulae which are binding, immutable, and impersonal, yet they become transfigured and take on a sacred character in the eyes of those who enact them.... The artist who has submitted to all the demands of a craft tradition is still entirely present in his work.' (1973, 103-104) Speaking more particularly of architecture, Dufrenne points out that although a building 'has still been erected for some purpose - e.g. habitation, ceremony or prayer - which it agrees to fulfil.... the architect finds in such purpose, which is joined to nature's laws of weights and materials, one of those constraints without which there is no art at all, because nothing is created where everything is possible. While the poet makes his own rules, the architect simply receives his from a client.' (1973, 93-94)

This is why we must resist the temptation, says Dufrenne, to differentiate craft from art on utilitarian grounds, for 'cannot the object of use be aesthetic, and cannot the aesthetic object serve certain useful functions?' (1973, 92) No doubt, 'certain objects of use... do solicit the gaze which aestheticizes them.... Without renouncing their usefulness, they seek to please by the manner in which they are ornamented or decorated.... But we can affirm that: 1) in such objects aesthetic quality is not measured by usefulness, e.g. the most beautiful vase is not the least porous, and the most beautiful chair is not the most comfortable; 2) if the object is primarily aesthetic and is not only incidentally useful, the use we eventually make of it ought not to turn us entirely away from its aesthetic perception...' (1973, 93)

Although the above arguments show some marked hesitation in discriminating between craft and art on utilitarian grounds, it seems clear however from what Dufrenne says elsewhere that for him craftsmanship is only the first step on the ladder

to a 'spiritual maturation' in which 'technique is continually surpassed by the genius who puts it to use'. (1973, 478) It is a case here, he comments, of differentiating 'between the building which speaks and the building which "sings" (Valery)'. 'Many works animated by the most incontestable veracity and answering to the most urgent need to say something vital are still lacking, for want of genius - for not having realized a perfect form comparable to their inspiration.' (1973, 506)

It might be interesting to quote here Dufrenne's study of the qualitative difference between *dance* and *acrobatics*. The latter, he writes, is 'a sophisticated, highly-developed form of movements already found in nature among animal species.' But where dance is *self-signifying* and subordinates the dancer to his self.... the acrobat, on the other hand, assumes responsibility before the public only with regard to his own body, whose capabilities he exhibits.... [His actions] are often regulated by some object such as a rope, bar, or rings.... In the acrobat the body is body, not language.' And Dufrenne adds,

When purely acrobatic figures are introduced casually and integrated into the ballet, cautiously, as in the *Bal des Blanchisseuses*, they take on expressive values - for example, joy, freedom from care.... "With us", Lifar writes, "grace and grandeur are substituted for aesthetic stunts". Living beings are called on only to bear witness to life.... But precisely in expressing life, the dancer foregoes appearing as a mere living being. This object, which the spectator discerns in the dance, is no more a living being than a painting is oil paint or a monument is stone. The living being is the material from which the aesthetic object is made and the organ of performance through which the aesthetic object appears. (1973, 77-78)

I find in the above discrimination between acrobatics (which Lifar, as we have seen, defines as '*aesthetic stunts*') and dance, some interesting arguments which could be regarded as valid in a discrimination between art and craft. It is particularly so when Dufrenne comments that 'the human [in acrobatics]... is not yet the expressive, in the

sense in which a look or a gesture is expressive [in dance]... The human accords with the hand and the project *but not yet with feeling*. It announces a real and active man but *not his deepest possibility*. (1973, 81, my emphasis)

### Conclusion

Although a distinction between art and craft is often very difficult to establish, most of us seem to be, however, capable of (almost intuitively) identifying true art. There must consequently be some essential conditions invested in creative art, which makes it distinguishable from craft even in the latter's most successful accomplishments. Some of these conditions are suggested hereafter:

a) an aesthetic feeling is induced in the artists as a result of a special and rare 'intuition/revelation' of our privileged 'attunement', as living beings, to the form and structures of the Universe. 'The artist with his superior sensitivity', writes Beardsley, 'intuits something about the world or about the inner life of man; he creates the aesthetic object; and this object, when we contemplate it, puts us in a special state of mind in which *we can share that intuition*. Thus when we see Van Gogh's *Cornfields*, we may feel *as if we were ourselves inside the corn, full of life and surging power, striving to grow and ripen in the sun.*' (1981, 388, my emphasis)

b) the artists should succeed in 'expressing' and 'conveying' through the 'articulated' meaning of their works, a true 'idea' of the 'feeling' that their intuition inspired in them, for, as Beardsley points out, 'even if there were intuitive knowledge... it would not follow that (artists) ... could convey it to us' (391).



The manner in which this second stage of the experience of art can be understood, will be studied in the light of Langer's, Gadamer's, and Merleau-Ponty's theories in Chapters VI, VIII, and IX.

I would tend to believe that what essentially differentiates artists from artisans, is that, although the latter can be inspired on the lines described in my 'attunement/symbiosis' approach, only artists and especially geniuses, have the necessary sensitivity, talent, and expertise to faithfully and successfully make us 'share' their inspiration through their works. This aspect will be discussed in the next chapter.

2) The artists should invest in their creations a high degree of *originality*, which is seen by Kant as 'the mark of genius', and by Schopenhauer, as '*the faculty of all great minds [to think] in the presence of perception*'. 'The genius', Schopenhauer writes, 'is like the organic body that assimilates, transforms, and produces... from mere feeling and... indeed instinctively.' (1969, I, 235) 'It is recognized in the naivety of the statements, the freshness of the images, and the striking effect of the similes.' (1966, II, 73)

3) Requirements regarding *practicality*, styles, or conventions, should not be such as to risk overwhelming and stifling the artists' freedom of expression.

On the other hand, an 'everything goes' attitude, that is, a total surrender to imagination or self-indulgence, would make of the created works sheer *fantasies*, or *reveries*, totally alien to the generally accepted concept of art, or at least of art as it is understood in this thesis. A word of warning is given by Schopenhauer about 'imagination', which, he says, can be used, as it is in genius, as a 'means to knowledge of the Idea, the communication of which is the work of art.... [but] can also be used to build castles in the air, .... The man who indulges in this game is a dreamer....' (1969,

I, 187) In that respect Salvador DALI, described by N. LYNTON as a Surrealist revolutionary who resorts to a 'critical-paranoiac method' (1989, 369), could be regarded as being just at the limit of what constitutes art proper.

Art must remain firmly anchored to life for, as comments Dewey, 'life goes on in an environment', and, 'in order to *understand* the esthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw'. 'Mountain peaks do not float unsupported; they do not even rest upon the earth. They are the earth in one of its manifest operations.' Even, he adds, when one sets out 'to theorize about the esthetic experience embodied in the Parthenon one has to be willing at some point in his reflections to turn from it to the bustling, arguing, acutely sensitive Athenian citizens, with civic sense identified with a civic religion, of whose experience the temple was an expression, and who built it not as a work of art but as a civic commemoration...'  
(1958, 3-4)

Dewey's above approach does not mean however that he totally dismisses 'imagination' as an important incentive to artistic creation. In fact, underlines Collinson, Dewey 'argues that all conscious experience has some imaginative quality and that it is only through imagination that the meaning is donated. What he is maintaining', adds Collinson, 'can be exemplified by reference... to Picasso's *Woman Weeping*. When we see this painting we comprehend it within the context of meanings and values derived from former experiences of the tears, the pain and wretchedness of grief, because we are able to *imagine* all those in relation to the work. Thus Dewey writes: 'The conscious adjustment of the new and the old is *imagination*' (*Art as Experience*, 1934, p.272).' (in Hanfling, 1992, 153-54)

It seems initially that the above set of conditions could fit, *albeit not to the same degree*, craftsmanship as well as art. However, I would personally believe that it is the often utilitarian, procedural, and perfectionist characteristics of craftsmanship, in other words, its *blatant* 'corporeality' (not, it must be said, an essential, and not even useful, characteristic of artistic creation), that ultimately provides us with a sound criterion of distinction between the two endeavours.

I would finally summarize the present chapter by submitting that beautiful craftsmanship possesses all the attributes susceptible to induce in us the same aesthetic 'pleasure' as would, for instance, a perfect mathematical theorem, or a magnificent sunset; equally, there is nothing in the aesthetic experience of craftsmanship which would distinguish it from the first phase of the aesthetic experience of works of art; in both, as I have demonstrated in Chapter III, an 'intuition' of the *teleological/holistic* 'significance' of some structures, or forms of nature, induces in us a harmonious 'play' of our faculties. It is particularly important, therefore, to emphasize that aesthetic 'pleasure' in whatever circumstances (including craftsmanship), is directly produced by an *object*, or *event*, (that is, by the latter's *significant* form, or structure). However, when we address ourselves to art, it becomes obvious that our aesthetic 'pleasure' takes on a totally different meaning. What, in my opinion, happens then is that the artists attempt, through their works, not only to convey the essence of their 'metaphysical' emotion (as defined in my 'Attunement/Symbiosis theory), but to 'express' this emotion *organically* as it were. My point of view, in this respect, is inspired by Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'rootedness' (*enracinement*); as G. Madison notes, 'Merleau-Ponty had indicated in *The Structure of Behaviour* that if nature shows itself to be meaningful, the meaning which it thus manifests does not exist *in* nature

considered as an object in itself but is rather a *perceptual* meaning; that is, it does not exist apart from the onlooker who perceives it.' (1990, 53, my emphasis) I would, therefore, regard art as a means to give 'visibility' and 'meaning' to the 'intuitive' impact that some *significant* forms, or structures, of the world have on inspired, sensitive, and gifted individuals. Langer's principle of 'representational symbols' in art is particularly apt in this respect, and it will be studied in Chapter VI. I would certainly say of art in general what Merleau-Ponty writes about painting: 'From Lascaux to our time, pure or impure, figurative or not, painting celebrates no other enigma but that of visibility.' (in Madison, 1990, 73)

Once we relate our above assessment of the nature of craftsmanship to the question of 'distance' in aesthetics, we are in a position to posit that in view of the intuitive and instantaneous nature of the aesthetic experience of craft objects, or events, no process of 'psychical distance' involving as it does a reflexive and purposeful decision on the part of observers, would be compatible with such an experience.

## CHAPTER V

## Genius in Creative Art

The idea that works of art can only be created by individuals who possess unique gifts, and almost mysterious insights, has often been debated in the philosophy of aesthetics, but more especially and significantly by Kant and Schopenhauer. As this question is relevant to some of the phenomenological and metaphysical issues and suggestions analyzed and discussed in this thesis, a brief account of Kant's and Schopenhauer's writings on this subject will, therefore, be given hereafter.

It is perhaps significant that neither Kant, nor Schopenhauer, appears to use the word 'genius' as if it was different from the word 'artist'. When we turn to F.W.J. SCHELLING, we detect, however, some nuance when he says, for example, that the 'true artists are self-contained, simple, great, and necessary in their own fashion, just as is nature'. (1989, 6-7)

In his theory of art, Kant maintains that what he calls 'free beauty' presupposes no concept of what the object ought to be: 'the concept of beautiful art does not permit the judgement upon the beauty of a product to be derived from any rule which has a *concept* as its determining ground ....' (1951, 150) But, on the other hand, '[in every art] ... some purpose must be conceived; otherwise we could not ascribe the product to art at all; it would be a mere product of chance.' Thus, adds Kant, 'there is no beautiful art in which there is not a mechanical element that can be comprehended by rules and followed accordingly, and in which therefore there must be something *scholastic* as an essential condition.' (153)

But how is it possible to reconcile the above statements? Kant replies that it is nature through 'genius' which accomplishes this reconciliation, for genius's talent or 'mental disposition (ingenium)' is an 'innate productive faculty' which belongs to nature. Therefore, '... beautiful art is only possible as a product of genius.' (150) '... Artistic skill cannot be communicated; it is imparted to every artist immediately by the hand of nature; and so it dies with him .... [However], the ideas of the artist excite like ideas in his pupils if nature has endowed them with a like proportion of their mental powers. Hence models of beautiful art are the only means of handing down these ideas to posterity.' (152) As Guillermit comments:

This principle can only make sense if we admit that Nature itself undertook to harmonize and balance the faculties of the creative mind.... [Thus] it is a fact that the creative genius does not know how certain ideas exist in him; it is not in his power to conceive a plan about them, nor to communicate them to others in precepts easy to imitate. J.S. BACH's intention may have been to teach [his students] the art of the fugue as a technique having determinate rules ..., but the only way he could do so was by showing them an example of that art, the composition *The Art of the Fugue*, the work he had produced thanks to the originality of his talent. (1981, 143, my transl.)

The above point is very important for it underlines Kant's belief that, since the genius' talent 'belongs itself to nature' (1951, 150), 'the author of a product for which he is indebted to his genius does not know himself how he has come by his ideas .... [Genius] cannot describe or indicate scientifically how it brings about its products, but it gives the rule just as nature does.' (151) Therefore, since genius is a '*talent* for producing that for which no definite rule can be given ... *originality* must be its first property ... But since it also can produce original non-sense, its products must be models, i.e. *exemplary*, and they consequently ought not to spring from imitation, but must serve as a standard or rule of judgement for others.' (150-51)

We have now seen how Kant perceives the origin of talent in genius, but how does he define talent itself? Talent, for Kant, 'is properly speaking, what is called spirit' (1951, 161), that is 'the name given to the animating principle of the mind ... [which is] no other than the faculty of presenting *aesthetic ideas*'.

And by an aesthetic idea I understand that representation of the imagination which occasions much thought, without however any definite thought, i.e. any *concept*, being capable of being adequate to it; it consequently cannot be completely compassed and made intelligible by language .... [But] the imagination (as a productive faculty of cognition) is very powerful in creating another nature, as it were, out of the material that actual nature gives it. (1951, 157)

But why cannot an 'aesthetic idea' be made intelligible by language? Because, writes Kant, 'the aesthetic idea ... is bound up with such a multiplicity of partial representations in its free employment that for it no expression marking a definite concept can be found ....' (1951, 160)

In fact, as Guillermit points out, such a theory requires that, 'paradoxically, the concept be, at the same time, present and absent; this can only be explained by the fact that the concept is '*indeterminable*', and it is at the root of this indeterminacy which allows the faculties (imagination and understanding) to play freely and the reflective judgement to value beauty, that it will be right to place the genius.' (1981, 142, my transl.)

As Kant argues, the 'happy relation' of the mental powers 'imagination' and 'understanding' is a characteristic of the 'faculty of taste'. And, clearly, for him, genius's talent also encompasses the 'faculty of taste'. 'To ask', he writes,

whether it is more important for the things of beautiful art that genius or taste should be displayed is the same as to ask whether in it more depends on imagination or on judgement .... Taste, like the judgement in general, is the discipline (or training) of genius; it clips its wings, it

makes it cultured and polished; but, at the same time, it gives guidance as to where and how far it may extend itself if it is to remain purposive. And while it brings clearness and order into the multitude of the thoughts [of genius], it makes the ideas susceptible of being permanently and, at the same time, universally assented to, and capable of being followed by others, and of an ever progressive culture. (1951, 163)

However, Kant clearly distinguishes between the *production* of beautiful objects which, he seems to think, is essentially dependent on genius, and the *judgement* of beautiful objects for which the faculty of taste is sufficient. At the same time, Kant also establishes the difference between 'natural beauty', the judging of which requires only taste, and 'artificial beauty', the possibility of which demands genius: He writes: 'A natural beauty is a *beautiful thing*; artificial beauty is a *beautiful representation* of a thing.' (1951, 154) For Kant, the superiority of 'artificial beauty' is shown by the way 'it describes as beautiful things which may be in nature ugly or displeasing.' (154-55)

Certainly, for Kant, not only does the production of beautiful objects demand 'the most careful investigation by reason' of the ideas prompted by imagination (1951, 153), but the genius's task will equally be dependent on arduous training and wide experience of works of art of the past. As Kant sees it, the genius's endeavour is

a slow and even painful process of improvement (1951, 156)... The artist estimates his work after he has exercised and corrected it by manifold examples from art or nature, and after many, often toilsome, attempts to content himself he finds that form which satisfies him (151, 155)... Genius can only furnish rich *material* for products of beautiful art; its execution and its *form* require talent cultivated in the schools, in order to make such a use of this material as will stand examination by the judgement. (153)

Significantly, Kant condemns the 'shallow heads [who] believe that they cannot better show themselves to be full-blown geniuses than by throwing off the constraint of all rules ...' (1951, 153). There is thus no doubt that, for Kant, a genius is *not* a



visionary inspired and enlightened by the revelation, or the 'recollection', of a transcendental Form of Beauty.

If we now turn to Schopenhauer, this is what he has to say about genius:

What kind of knowledge is it that considers what continues to exist outside and independently of all relations, but which alone is really essential to the world, the true content of its phenomena, that which is subject to no change, and is therefore known with equal truth for all time, in a word, the *Ideas* that are the immediate and adequate objectivity of the thing-in-itself, of the will? It is *art*, the work of genius. (1969, I, 184)...Only through the pure contemplation, ..., which becomes absorbed entirely in the object, are the Ideas comprehended; and the nature of *genius* consists precisely in the pre-eminent ability for such contemplation.' (185)

It seems evident that, for Schopenhauer, artistic creation is of a mystic nature, and that, as such, it demands from the artist a total absorption in the contemplation of the Idea, and complete self-abnegation; a genius becomes then '*pure knowing subject*' (1969, I, 186). He concedes however that the ability to recognize the Idea in things, 'must be inherent in all men in a lesser and different degree, as otherwise they would be just as incapable of enjoying works of art as producing them' (1969, I, 194). 'The man of genius', he writes,

excels them only in the far higher degree and more continuous duration of this kind of knowledge. These enable him to retain that thoughtful contemplation necessary for him to repeat what is thus known in a voluntary and intentional work, *such repetition being the work of art*. Through this he communicates to others the Idea he has grasped .... *The artist lets us peer into the world through his eyes*. That he has these eyes, that he knows the essential in things which lies outside all relations, is the gift of genius and is inborn; but that he is able to lend us this gift, to let us see with his eyes, is acquired, and is the technical side of art. (1969, I, 195, my emphasis)

Thus, as Schopenhauer adds, '... genius holds before us the illuminating glass in which everything essential and significant is gathered together and placed in the

brightest light; but everything accidental and foreign is eliminated.' (1969, I, 248) Due to their 'unfathomable and inexhaustible' excellence, works of genius 'do not become obsolete, but are the instructors of many succeeding centuries' (1969, I, 415).

For Schopenhauer, the reason why the 'perfected masterpiece of a truly great mind will always have a profound and vigorous effect on the whole human race [through distant centuries and countries], ... [is that] however accomplished and rich the age might be in which the masterpiece itself arose, genius always rises like a palm-tree above the soil in which it is rooted' (1969, I, 415). However, the positive universal impact of the work of art is not of an instantaneously formative nature, for, writes Schopenhauer,

a far-reaching, deep, and widespread effect of this kind cannot, however, take place suddenly, on account of the great difference between the genius and ordinary mankind. The knowledge this one man in a lifetime drew directly from life and the world, won, and presented to others as acquired and finished, *cannot at once become the property of mankind*, since men have not so much strength *to receive as the genius has to give* .... That knowledge must first wander through the circuitous paths of innumerable false interpretations and distorted applications; it must overcome the attempts to unite it with old errors, and thus live in conflict, until a new and unprejudiced generation grows up to meet it. (1969, I, 415, my emphasis)

Despite the otherworldly mould imposed by Schopenhauer on his theory of genius, he is adamant that art is necessarily dependent on perception, not abstract. The part played by imagination is also shown as an essential element of artistic activity, for it extends the genius's 'horizon far beyond the reality of his personal experience' (1969, I, 186). For Schopenhauer, as for Plato, 'actual objects ... [are] almost always only very imperfect copies of the Idea that manifests itself in them. Therefore the man of genius requires imagination, in order to see in things not what nature has actually formed, but

what *she endeavoured to form*, yet did not bring about, because of the conflict of the forms with one another ....' (1969, I, 186, my emphasis)

Thus, for Schopenhauer, the *gift of genius* is the 'objective tendency of the mind, as opposed to the subjective directed to our own person, i.e., to the will' (1969, I, 185). In other words, the Ideas apprehended by Genius are 'objects actually present to his own person', but the knowledge of them 'would be dependent on the concatenation of circumstances that brought them to him' if imagination of unusual strength was not extending the genius' horizon 'far beyond the reality of his personal experience', enabling him 'to construct all the rest out of the little that has come into his own actual apperception'. For Schopenhauer, this explains not only the restless and disquiet nature of the geniuses who are seldom satisfied with a present which 'does not fill their consciousness', but also their 'constant search for new objects worthy of contemplation.' (1969, I, 186). Genius, he adds, is empowered with a capacity for knowledge 'far exceeding that required for the service of an individual will' and this 'superfluity of power', free from the contingencies of the will, illuminates 'the inner nature of the world' (1969, I, 186).

'By recognizing in the individual thing its *Idea*,' writes Schopenhauer, '[the true genius], so to speak, *understands nature's half-spoken words*. He expresses clearly what she merely stammers. He impresses on the hard marble the beauty of the form which nature failed to achieve in a thousand attempts, and he places it before her, exclaiming as it were, "This is what you desired to say!". And from the man who knows comes the echoing reply, "Yes, that is it!" .... Only by virtue of such an anticipation also is it possible for all of us to recognize the beautiful where nature has actually succeeded in the particular case'. (1969, I, 222)

A significant facet of Schopenhauer's study of genius in art is reflected in his remark that 'the possibility of ... [the] anticipation of the beautiful *a priori* in the artist, as well as of its recognition *a posteriori* by the connoisseur, is to be found in the fact that artist and connoisseur *are themselves the 'in-itself' of nature, the will objectifying itself*. For, as Empedocles said, like can be recognized only by like; only nature can understand herself; only nature will fathom herself; but also only by the mind is the mind comprehended.' (Note 30: 'The last sentence is the translation of *il n'y a que l'esprit qui sente l'esprit* of Helvetius.') (1969, I, 223, my emphasis)

Schopenhauer's above comments and some important aspects of his views on genius do relate to the account of aesthetic experience I am developing. However, my emphasis on the expressiveness of emotions and thoughts in art inevitably places my account in conflict with the main principle of Schopenhauer's theory which is based on 'pure objectivity' on the part of the artist (genius).

I would thus subscribe to Croce's and Henry Bergson's claims that, as Langer notes, 'it is not... the actual existence of the object to be depicted, that *the artist understands better than other people*. It is the semblance, the look of it, and the *emotional import of its form, that he perceives* while others only "read the label" of its actual nature, and dwell on the actuality.' (1963, 76, my emphasis)

Before concluding this chapter, it is important to point out that, as Gadamer comments,

it is precisely the concept of genius that has become so suspect in our own time. No one today, least of all those most closely involved with modern art, would be prepared to credit the genius with such clairvoyant, somnambulant sureness of touch in all he does. Today we appreciate the degree of inner clarity, sober reflection, and even intellectual effort with which the painter experiments on canvas with his materials - something that surely must always have been the case. We

shall have to be careful, therefore, if we wish to apply Kant's philosophy to modern art in any direct fashion. (1986, 97)

I must confess my puzzlement at the reluctance, in modern times, to admit that only individuals who possess in an unusual degree, not only an exceptional creative talent and visionary power, but rare quality of determination and self-abnegation are capable of creating great art. There does not seem to be the same reluctance when other endeavours, such as science for example, are concerned. At the very least, the acceptance of the unique role of geniuses in art would at least justify a distinction between *standard* works of art and masterpieces.

I would add that the analysis we made in Chapter IV of the special nature of artistic creation, and of the immense demands that it makes on human talent, imagination, sensitivity, and expertise, should fully justify our conclusion that only exceptional and visionary individuals, that is, geniuses, are able to fulfill such extraordinary task.

**PART THREE**

**Art and Symbolic Expression**

## CHAPTER VI

### 1. THE CONCEPT OF EXPRESSION IN ART

The notion that thoughts, feelings, and emotions, can be embodied in, and expressed through, works of art, has always been hotly debated in aesthetics. Indubitably, there are serious questions and problems involved in a study of 'Expression' theories, and, as Dufrenne suggests, this makes it necessary to be concerned from the start 'with knowing to what extent the revelation which the work of art provides - the world to which it introduces us - is due solely to the initiative of the artists whose subjectivity is expressed in the work (thus investing it with subjectivity), or whether being itself is revealed, with the artist as the occasion or instrument of this revelation. Must we choose between an anthropological and an ontological exegesis of aesthetic experience?' (1973, 1xvi)

It should be clear by now that my thesis is orientated towards an anthropological-phenomenological exegesis of aesthetic experience, but even within that approach, Expression theories can still vary in many of their structures and applications. We have, therefore, to ask with R.W. HEPBURN: 'Do works of art "express" emotion, or "evoke" it, "represent" it, "organize" it or "purge" it? Or can they do several of these things?' (1984, 75) The following description of some significant approaches to Expressionism in art, should help us assess how some philosophers are trying to answer the above questions.

One of the most prevalent understandings of 'expression' in art, concerns our readiness to ascribe to works of art qualities and properties which are, usually, only predicated of living beings. But, Hepburn comments,

If we often transfer emotion-epithets to works of art and call them 'jolly', 'joyous' or 'frenzied', we are well aware that we *are* transferring them, that in the last resort it is we who are made jolly or frenzied; and that our epithets are in fact characterizing the poem or piece of music in terms of its effects on us, not in terms of its own qualities... There are, however, a number of analyses which claim that emotions and feelings can be in works of art just as certainly as meanings and ideas can be in them. (1984, 75)

Hepburn's last remark is certainly worth investigating, and this will be done in the following chapters. But, as concerns the particular phenomenon of 'transfer of emotion-epithets' to works of art, it would be worthwhile to remember that this is also happening in many other circumstances than the experience of art. We do often speak of the weather, for example, as being sad, or of the clouds, or storm, as being menacing, or of a bouquet of flowers as being cheerful. The reason for this is obviously that the colours, forms, or dynamics of these perceived objects, or events, because of their usual association with some particular facts of events and their consequences for us, are invested by us with the emotions and thoughts that these events generally induce in us. This phenomenon plays its part in the creation of works of art, either as a device used by artists to induce in observers some particular emotions or thoughts (i.e. social, political, religious, etc.), or as a spontaneous process of association of ideas. Because these expressive factors always play an important part in art, they should be taken into account in all aesthetic theories, and not exclusively in Expression theories.

The process of association and projection of emotions and ideas into the works of art is, in particular, dealt with by Santayana who regards the 'expressive' role of art, as involving not only the aesthetic object itself as 'given', but the associations it induces in us, associations which we then immediately project into the works and perceive as qualities of the works. But, as Wilkinson comments, there is a serious



problem in this approach, for 'in some cases, what is expressed in a work of art is *new* to the spectator. I do not *recognize* in the work of art something I have felt; *I am informed* about a possibility of feeling hitherto beyond my experience.... how can I [therefore] project a feeling of which I have had no experience? This is a particularly grave problem for Santayana, who in many of his books stresses that works of art are often sources of *ideals*, i.e. unrealized states of affairs which we have not experienced.' (in Hanfling, 1992, 232) I would think that, for Langer, as we will see later, this problem would be solved by positing that it is precisely the artist's role to elicit in the observers, by means of the Art Symbol, a 'feeling' of understanding. For Langer, the aim of art is precisely to make the observers know something they had not known before.

The existence of an emotional component in the experience of art is accepted by A. BERLEANT for, as he says, 'it can be found in the experience of almost anything'. Yet, he adds, 'this is soon overshadowed by the way in which the emotional aspect of aesthetic experience is typically described and interpreted.... the vocabulary in which we talk about emotions is impoverished in contrast with the richness of emotional experience.... it is lame and perhaps futile to speak of the emotional component of experience by using general terms like "joyful", "sorrowful", "exhilarating", "depressing", and "exciting".... In ascribing a single such term or even a combination of them to an art object, one succeeds more in misrepresenting and distorting than in characterizing it.' (1970, 27)

It seems to me that Berleant exaggerates the importance that such descriptions and interpretations have on the experience of a work of art. In fact, such epithets and hyperboles are most of the time used by art critics to give a more vivid description of

works of art. It is well known that ordinary language is far from being suitable to interpret what is conveyed by art. We find almost the same situation occurring in disciplines such as psychology, theology, or philosophy, in which there is also a real difficulty in describing processes of the mind, or spiritual or metaphysical experiences.

Berleant also deplores the tendency of some Expression theories 'to characterize the totality of an experience by its emotional component... [to mistake] a part of aesthetic experience for the whole experience' (1970, 28), and he adds,

Perhaps only by using a term with great inclusiveness, as when Susanne Langer employs 'feeling' to mean 'everything that can be felt, from physical sensation, pain and comfort, excitement and response, to the most complex emotions, intellectual tensions, or the steady feeling - tones of a conscious human life' (Langer, 1957, 15), can one hope to avoid falsification.

Such generality, however, makes feeling equivalent to the entire range of human experience of which we may become aware, and goes well beyond emotionalism. Furthermore, a notion as broad as this does little to help us account for the emotional quality of specific works of art.... (1970, 28)

We will see in the next chapter how Langer, in her theory of Symbolic Art, attempts to avoid the above consequence.

It is certainly not this thesis' contention to make of the 'emotional component' of works of art a sufficient condition of art. There are, however, thinkers who consider that the expression of feelings and emotions is central to art. For instance, Leo TOLSTOY believes that a successful work of art can actually make an observer share the artist's feelings and moods. 'Art', he writes, 'is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings, and also experience them.' (in Werhane, 1984, 92)

But, for Tolstoy, art is even more than the 'expression' of artists' feelings, it is also *normative* in the best Platonic tradition. It is worth quoting hereafter how he expresses his conviction in that respect:

Art is not, as the metaphysicians say, the manifestation of some mysterious Idea of beauty or God : It is not, as the aesthetic physiologists say, a game in which man lets off his excess of stored up energy; it is not the expression of man's emotions by external signs; it is not the production of pleasing objects; and, above all, it is not pleasure; but it is a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress toward well-being of individuals and of humanity. (in Werhane, 1984, 92)

It is, of course, undeniable that art has always been, and always will be, influential in all civilisations, and that it can be used with good or bad intentions. However, the problem with Tolstoy's theory, is that it makes of this intentional or unintentional influence the essential aim of art.

On the other hand, we could agree with Tolstoy that for a work to be regarded as art, there should be 'individuality of the feeling transmitted', and 'sincerity; i.e. that the artist should be impelled by an inner need to express his feeling' (in Hospers, 1971, 14)

The artists are without doubt 'expressing' *something*, which is variously understood and defined by philosophers; for instance, Roger SCRUTON believes that 'expression' in art is 'what is left over, when representation has been subtracted. You could give a complete account of the world described in *Faust* - a list of characters, situations, things said and done - and yet not exhaust the meaning of the play. A vision of the human condition is expressed by it....' (1996, 267) As Scruton comments, Croce 'first made the distinction between representation and expression, in order to dismiss the first as irrelevant to the aesthetic enterprise, and to elevate the second as the essence

of art.' (1996, 590) And, J. HOSPERS notes, one of Croce's disciples, Collingwood, defines 'expression' in general, and in art, as 'a process - largely unconscious - that takes place in the mind of the artist, a process of the inchoate gradually becoming clarified and ordered, of scattered feelings and intuitions gradually becoming transmuted into words and tones cast in the artist's chosen medium; and when the artist's final conception of the work is present to 'his mind's eye' (whether or not it yet exists on paper or canvas), the expressive process is complete.' (1971, 6)

It is however important to note that, for Collingwood, someone who is conscious of having an emotion is not initially conscious of what this emotion is. 'All he is conscious of is a perturbation or excitement.... From this helpless and oppressed condition he extricates himself by doing something which we call expressing himself. This is an activity which has something to do with the thing we call language: he expresses himself by speaking.' (1971, 109)

As explains Collingwood,

the artist proper is a person, who, grappling with the problem of expressing a certain emotion, says, 'I want to get this clear'. (1971, 114)

[But], expressing an emotion is not the same as describing it. To say 'I am angry' is to describe one's emotion, not to express it. The words in which it is expressed need not contain any reference to anger as such at all.... A genuine poet, in his moments of genuine poetry, never mentions by name the emotions he is expressing....

The reason why description, so far from helping expression, actually damages it, is that description generalizes. To describe a thing is to call it a thing of such and such a kind: to bring it under a conception, to classify it. Expression, on the contrary, individualizes. (1971, 111-12)

This position, adds Collingwood, makes us understand why the expression of an emotion may be directed at someone, with 'no intention of arousing a like emotion in

him'. The intention is simply to make someone 'understand how we feel', and by the same token make *us* understand how *we* feel. (110-11) This situation is, of course, totally unlike that in which the intention is to arouse in an audience a specific emotion, for, in that case, the speaker 'must know the audience he is addressing. He must know what type of stimulus will produce the desired kind of reaction in people of that particular sort; and he must adapt his language to his audience in the sense of making sure that it contains stimuli appropriate to their peculiarities' (111). The latter situation is regarded by Collingwood more as 'amusement-art' than art proper.

Collingwood certainly accepts the proposition that because an emotion has to be 'grounded' in order to be *expressed*, it is 'an activity which has something to do with the thing we call language: (someone) expresses himself by speaking.' (109) Furthermore, an emotion can only be 'lucid and intelligible' *if* it is expressed. The reason for this is, says Collingwood, that an expression of emotion cannot be distinguished from the emotion itself, for the *expression constitutes the emotion*. 'There are no unexpressed emotions.' (238)

As an extreme consequence of his theory, Collingwood posits that we may accept the proposition that 'every utterance and every gesture that each one of us makes is a work of art' (1971, 285). This is why he does not find it difficult to believe that a work of art 'is already complete and perfect' in the artist's mind before it is embodied in 'crafted objects'. The latter's *raison d'être* is to allow observers to 'reconstruct for themselves' the imaginary object created in the artist's mind.

Collingwood's theory attempts, therefore, to make us understand that an emotion is not an experience which can be felt and identified prior to 'expressing' it.

Expression is the only way to 'individualize' and thus 'identify' our emotions. But what Collingwood does not tell us, though, is the reason why, among the incredible number and variety of occasions for emotions which constantly assail us, some rather than others would need to be 'expressed', not only in ordinary circumstances, but in artistic creation. Furthermore, although for Collingwood, it is the faculty of 'imagination' which is responsible for our expressing our emotions, he does not see this process as a technique or a skill. How he sees it is again not clear.

Some of the consequences that Wilkinson, rightly in my view, identifies in Collingwood's theory are, for instance, that : 'Since *ex hypothesi* no artist knows the nature of what is to be expressed before the expression has taken place, no artist can set out to write, e.g. a comedy or a tragedy: such distinction can only be made *ex post facto*. (in Hanfling, 1992, 188) Equally, adds Wilkinson, 'it is difficult to see how any artist could sensibly be commissioned to produce a work of a given type..., for example, a setting of the requiem mass, or a wedding poem or anthem, and so on, since what the artist produced might bear no relation to the mood of the commission at all.... A further consequence.... is that with respect to music, drama and dance.... scores and scripts, in their different ways, are not exhaustive specifications for performance; some aspects of the performance... are left to the judgement of the performer. Collingwood draws attention to this last point himself..., but does not note the implication of his views with respect to ideal performance.' (in Hanfling, 1992, 190-91) Furthermore, points out Wilkinson, 'the distinction between artists and non-artists is abolished, where the former are regarded as possessors of a special mental endowment called genius. A spectator who understands the feeling an artist has expressed, is to that extent also an

artist, for on (Collingwood's) view, to understand an expression is to recreate and re-experience it oneself.' (in Hanfling, 1992, 188-89)

Collingwood's special approach to 'expression' involves, in any case, many problems directly linked to the nature and functions of the mind, and it would benefit therefore from being specifically analyzed in the frame of a philosophy of mind. Nevertheless, we will have the opportunity to come back to this particular understanding of 'expression' in chapters VII, VIII, and IX in which P. Ricoeur, G. Gadamer, and M. Merleau-Ponty analyze it in the context of 'language'.

For Dewey, an 'expression' goes beyond a simple impulse to act; it is the 'development of a feeling', its 'working out to completion', and this process is as essential to art as the artist's feelings and emotions. As Dewey notes, 'Expression, as personal act and objective result are organically connected.' (1934, 82) Therefore, the aesthetic experience of art is firmly anchored in the human conditions which brought them into being. The problem with this broad outlook is that it allows many kinds of 'expression' (smiles, for example) to be treated as aesthetic experiences. As Collinson notes, 'Thus [for Dewey] an experience of thought and an aesthetic experience each contain something of the other; it is only their different emphases that earn them different names.... in fact, any experience that is *an* experience rather than a formless continuity is so in virtue of possessing aesthetic qualities that unify it.' (in Hanfling, 1992, 151-52)

Finally, there are philosophers, such as Bell and Roger FRY, who believe in 'expressionism' in art, but approach it totally differently from philosophers such as Collingwood or Dewey. For Bell, for example, the emphasis should be on the

expressive qualities of the *art object*, or *event*, itself, not on the artist's expression of feelings or ideas; what is essential in a work of art is its 'form' not its context. Formal properties can vary, of course, depending on the art form; for example, colours and shapes for graphic arts, rhythms, tones, and dynamics, for music, etc., but the 'significant form' of a work of art is the only factor which can produce an 'aesthetic emotion' in observers. To this effect, he writes: 'To appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation. For a moment we are shut off from human interests; our anticipations and memories are arrested; we are lifted above the stream of life.' (1914, 25)

Bell's approach to art is often criticized by philosophers, on the grounds that, although attention to 'form' may be essential to a true aesthetic experience of works of art, it is not proven that it is sufficient for it. We have seen in Chapter III how I have attempted to reconcile Bell's approach with my proposed 'Attunement/Symbiosis' theory.

Although Langer considers sympathetically Bell's concept of Significant Form, she is however in doubt about the real meaning that Bell intends to give it; as she notes, he sometimes seems to mean 'that you should not look for the artist's *self-expression*', but, on the other hand, he writes that 'it seems to me possible, though by no means certain, that created form moves us so profoundly because it expresses the emotion of its creator' (in Langer, 1963, 25). For Langer, however, the situation is clear: there is no 'aesthetic pleasure' (Bell) in the experience of some 'form' in a work of art; the latter does not function as a *sign* that points to some matter of fact such as artists'



emotions or thoughts; art is the expression of an 'idea of feeling', the 'articulation', or 'abstraction' of that 'idea' through 'presentational symbolism'.

In many of its aspects, Langer's theory of aesthetics is in harmony with my understanding of the role played by 'expression' in art, and it is also, in some measure, very relevant to my proposed aesthetic theory. The main characteristics of Langer's theory will be reviewed in the next section.

Before ending the present section, I will attempt hereafter to answer the following questions usually asked about Expressionism in aesthetics:

- 1) Should Expressionism be regarded as a necessary condition of art? That is, should a work of art cease to be aesthetically valuable if observers fail to understand, or are not interested in, the emotions, feelings, or thoughts, which it expresses?
- 2) Is the use of 'emotion-epithets' justified in the description, or criticism, of works of art?
- 3) Is the use of Expressionism as a means of inducing certain emotions or thoughts in the observers of the works, justified in artistic creation?
- 4) Is it the case, as Collingwood posits, that for aesthetic emotions and thoughts to become 'lucid and intelligible' to the artists, they need to be 'grounded' in works of art.
- 5) Should art be regarded as a form of *language*?
- 6) Should a work of art be viewed simply as a direct 'expression' of the artists' emotions, feelings, and ideas, or as, for example, the 'expression' of a Significant Form

(Bell), or the 'expression' of the artists' emotions, feelings, and ideas through a Presentational Symbol (Langer)?

My answers to the above questions would be as follows:

1) Yes, I consider that the 'expression' of the artists' emotions, feelings, and ideas, whether induced by some intuition/revelation (as defined in Chapter III), or by any other fact related to the artistic creation-event, is essential to the creation of a work of art. It is also essential that these 'expressed' emotions, feelings, and ideas, whatever the manner of their expression, be to a great extent understood by the observers of the works, and cause in them a 'pleasurable' feeling.

It would be unreasonable, however, to make of 'expressionism' a *sufficient* condition to a definition of art, and that this is not my intention has already been indicated in Chapter IV in which I have attempted to involve, as an essential condition, some measure of 'formalism' in the initial stage of an aesthetic experience of art, a 'formalism' compatible with my proposed 'attunement/symbiosis' process.

2) If the 'expression' and 'communication' by the artists of emotions, feelings, and ideas, has been successful, that is, if they have induced in observers the right conditions for their aesthetically experiencing the works, we should not wonder at the use of 'emotion-epithets' in order to describe what are perceived in the works as wholly human emotions or thoughts. But, remarks Lyas, in spite of the propensity of critics to use 'emotion-epithets', there is a current premise that 'for any term that a critic uses we can ask the question, "Is that term used to refer to the artist or to the work?"', where it is thought that to refer to the one is not to refer to the other', but, adds Lyas, rightly in my view, "I wish to suggest that if we were asked, "Which are you referring to when you

use [such terms] - the artist (but not the work) or the work (but not the artist)? - we have no clear reply. For, in the kinds of cases I have quoted we seem to be talking about both at once. Indeed, the best answer is that we are referring to a quality displayed by the artist in the work.... What we are talking about is the *artist* as she or he has immanently shown her or himself *there*.' (in Hanfling, 1992, 387)

3) I do not see any objection to works of art being *intended* by the artists to induce in their public certain emotions or thoughts; after all, most works of art of the past, and many in modern times, have been, and are, either commissioned, or intended, precisely with such an objective in mind, and this has not compromised their artistic value and status. One clear example is Picasso's *Guernica* which is not only an expression of his revulsion at such an atrocious event, but of his attempt at inducing the same feeling in his public. In such instances, we should not consider that the artists themselves are not emotionally or intellectually involved, i.e. that they have chosen to take a back seat, and to give the 'expressive; initiative and responsibility to the subjects represented or evoked in their works; in fact, it is perhaps in these particular conditions that the artists' talent and expertise are at their most penetrating and powerful, for they use to the utmost their imagination and powers of observation to *make their own* whatever emotions and thoughts are supposed to be implicated in the *scenario* of their works. Short of the above situations regarding 'expressionism' in art, any 'artistic' creations in which the artists intend, for reasons of convenience only, to *present* emotions, feelings, and ideas as if they were their own; in other words, to create instruments of propaganda, will exclude themselves, for reasons explained hereafter, from the realm of art. Whether this kind of endeavour is enforced on the artists, or willingly adopted by them, does not make any difference to the experience that observers will have of these

works. Artificiality or dishonesty will be *felt* as having taken over the 'meaning' of the works. One could ask, of course, what is the difference between artists who, with a sincere artistic intention, invest their works with feelings and thoughts which either they abhor, or they do not share, and artists who act in the manner described above. My answer would be that true works of art would reveal that the artists have taken a stand vis-a-vis the events or the characters involved. Perhaps could we usefully remind ourselves here of Tolstoy's normative approach to art. As Tom SORELL writes, 'Besides having a subject matter that sympathetically promotes unity among people and that conveys universally accessible human feelings, good art in Tolstoy's sense must proceed from a need in the artist, and not be made to order, or be a way of striking a pose. Unless it proceeds from such a need, unless it is also sincere, clear and produced so as to bring the artist closer to his audience, the painting, sculpture, piece of music or literature is not even art.... - such a person is not a producer of art even if the things the person makes require enormous skill to create.' (in Hanfling, 1992, 316, my emphasis)

4) As I have already pointed out, Collingwood's analysis of 'expression' in art is too dependent on a philosophy of mind, to be fully examined in this thesis. In my opinion, his theory, in spite of some serious defaults already underlined in this chapter, contains some attractive propositions which I would not reject offhand, and which I will use in the Conclusion of this thesis.

5) and 6) These particular questions will be examined and answered in Part III.

In concluding this chapter, I would like to add that, in my opinion, theories of aesthetics are often presented or understood as *discrete* and thus *exclusive* paradigms, when, in fact, they often contain enough compatible elements to permit and justify their

integration, without much adjustment, into a larger and more embracing system. I hope that the different approach to aesthetic experience which I am suggesting in the present thesis, will provide sufficiently convincing arguments in support of this viewpoint.

## 2. LANGER'S THEORY OF SYMBOLIC ART

### Introduction

Susanne LANGER introduces her notion of 'Symbolism' in art by emphasizing the way certain *motifs* of design (i.e. circle, spiral, triangle, parallel) 'lend themselves to composition, and are therefore incentives to artistic creation'; 'motifs', she says, 'are organizing devices that give the artist's imagination a start, and so "motivate" the work in a perfectly naive sense.' (*Feeling and Form*, 1963, 69) An example of this 'motivation' is witnessed in the floral rosette which often appears in artistic designs. For Langer, however, and contrary to current belief, these 'forms' ('motifs') come generally first and their representative functions subsequently 'accrue' to them. 'Gradually', she notes, 'the decorative forms are modified more and more to picture all sorts of objects - leaves, vines, the intriguing shapes of marine life, flights of birds, animals, people, things... (and) a similar shift occurs in the development of color.' (70) In other words, the artists are influenced and moved by 'quasi-geometric shapes' because these 'are "congenial" to our spatial intuition'. They constitute 'a simple but pure and abstract order of expressive form' (70). Because of the artist's freedom to play with such pictorial elements when composing the work, the composite result is never a copy or an imitation of the artist's visual perception or impression; the graphic elements, writes Langer, are 'symbolizing from the outset... (and) the importance of

this principle increases as the forms become more involved, asymmetrical, and subtle.... [therefore] the interpretation of such units as forms of objects is an inestimable aid in the creation of new spatial relationships, in distributing centres of interest and composing them into a visual unity' (71). This 'visual unity' is the object of perception; thus, the work of art 'must be not only a shape in space, but a shaping of space - of the space that (the beholder) is given' (71). This, for Langer, is the great miracle of art: it 'creates' space. Whilst the space in which we live and act is always experienced through 'other faculties than sight to complete our fragmentary visual experiences - for instance memory, recorded measurements, beliefs about the physical constitution of things, knowledge of their relations in space even when they are behind us or blocked by other things - in the virtual space of a picture there are no such supporting data. Everything that is given at all is given to vision; therefore we must have *visual substitutes* for the things that are normally known by touch, movement or interferences' (73). But adds Langer, this 'purely visual space is an illusion, for our sensory experiences do not agree on it in their report.... Like the space "behind" the surface of a mirror, it is... an intangible image.' (72) 'Artistically, things and goings on are only motifs on which forms are made, and whereby forms are related, in order to define the visual space and exhibit its character.' (74) To this 'character of things', Adolf Hildebrand gives the name of 'actual form' (*The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture*, New York, G.E. Stehert, 1932). '(This) is not a bad term', comments Langer, 'for it refers to the characteristics of things that are learned and valued in the sphere of our actions. This 'actual form' is what an artist works with; what he works for, on the other hand, is to clarify their "perceptual form", or visible appearance.' (74-75) 'All may be represented in the virtual realm of purely apparent shapes and intervals', Langer notes, 'but it is not, as notably Croce and Bergson have said, the

actual existence of the object to be depicted, that the artist understands better than other people. It is the semblance, the look of it, and the emotional import of its form, that he perceives while others only "read the label" of its actual nature, and dwell on the actuality.' (76) The artists, in fact, are aware and make us aware of 'related forms', of 'harmonies', 'in the continuum of total perceptual space'. Devices such as accents, selections, distortions, or departures from the 'actual form of objects' become organized in a 'projected image' which is not a re-creation. Of course, Langer notes, there are clearly discernible and identifiable elements in a picture, but they are there *only to 'support the primary illusion*, which is invariant, while the forms that articulate it may vary indefinitely. The primary illusion is a substrate of the realm of virtual forms; it is involved in their occurrence.' (85, my emphasis)

Turning to concrete examples, Langer observes that Cézanne was so 'supremely gifted with the painter's vision that to him attentive sight and spatial composition were the same thing.' (78) And for Redon, the mere sight of a white sheet of paper induced in him a strong desire to cover it with some indeterminate scramblings, the bare intention being to transform a simple plane into a *space*, and to make that space alive.

It is indeed very significant, Langer notes, that many artists refer to the ' "life" of objects in a picture (chairs and tables quite as much as creatures), and to the picture plane itself as an "animated" surface. The life in art is a "life" of forms, or even of space itself.' (79). But, asks Langer, 'in which sense can one possibly say that Van Gogh's yellow chair or a studio stove is alive?... (Van Gogh) would probably insist, quite seriously, that he was not using metaphor at all; that the chair really *is* alive, and an animated surface truly lives and breathes and so on. This means simply that his use

of "life" and "living" is a stronger, symbolic mode than metaphor: it is myth... it is a figure of thought, not merely of *speech*.' (81)

We are certainly reminded here of M. HEIDEGGER's study of one of Van Gogh's paintings about which he comments:

From Van Gogh's painting we cannot even tell where these shoes stand. There is nothing surrounding this pair of peasant shoes in or to which they might belong - only an undefined space.... A pair of peasant shoes and nothing more. And yet - .... this equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety.... this equipment belongs to the *earth*, and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant women. (in Hofstadter, 1976, 663-64)

And Heidegger goes on :

[Nonetheless], the equipmental quality of equipment was discovered. But how? Not by a description and explanation of a pair of shoes actually present; not by a report about the process of making shoes; and also not by the observation of the actual use of shoes occurring here and there; but only by bringing ourselves before Van Gogh's painting. This painting spoke. In the vicinity of the work we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be.

What happens here? What is at work in the work? Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, *is* in truth.... In the work of art the truth of an entity has set itself to work.... The nature of art would then be this: the truth of beings setting itself to work.... the work, therefore, is not the reproduction of some particular entity...; it is, on the contrary, *the reproduction of the thing's general essence*. But then where and how is this general essence, so that art works are able to agree with it? With what nature of what thing should a Greek temple agree? Who could maintain the impossible view that the Idea of Temple is represented in the building? And yet, truth is set to work in such a work, if it is a work. (in Hofstadter, 1976, 665-66, my emphasis)

This 'truth' of the work which, like 'myth', succeeds in being visualized by the artist, in spite of 'contrary evidence and in complete defiance of argument', is not, says Langer, 'something' static; it is a form which is "'living" in the same way that a border



or a spiral is intrinsically "growing": that is, it *expresses* life - feeling, growth, movement, emotion, and everything that characterizes vital existence. This process, moreover, is not symbolization in the usual sense of conventional or assigned meaning, but a presentation of a highly articulated form wherein the beholder recognizes, without conscious comparison and judgement but rather by direct recognition, the forms of human feeling: emotions, moods, even sensations in their characteristic passage.' (82)

For artists such as Delacroix, Matisse, or Cézanne, for example, adds Langer, "living" form is the symbolism that conveys the idea of vital reality; and the emotive import belongs to the form itself, not to anything it represents or suggests.' Mondrian, adds Langer, extols this reality when he reflects that "art" is not the expression of the appearance of reality such as we see it, nor of the life which we live, but... it is the expression of *true reality* and *true life*... indefinable but realizable in plastics.' (82, my emphasis)

And for Marsden Hartley, Langer notes, 'art is a logical, not a psychological expression.' As he writes, '... what the [painters] have to say, not what they are impelled to feel, is what will interest those who are interested in them. The thought of the time is the emotion of the time.' But Langer remarks, 'One might vary the last sentence to read: *the emotion in the work is the thought in the work*. Just as the content of discourse is the discursive concept, so the content of a work of art is the *non-discursive concept of feeling*; and it is directly expressed by the form, the appearance before us.' (82, my emphasis)

Thus Henri Matisse writes; 'Expression, to my way of thinking, does not consist of the passion mirrored upon a human face or betrayed by a violent gesture. The whole arrangement of my picture is expressive. The place occupied by the figures or objects, the empty spaces around them, the proportions - everything plays a part....' (in Langer, 83)

After having studied the creative act, Langer then analyses the role of works of art, and finds that it is precisely this role which differentiates art from day-dreaming. Because of their 'commanding form' and 'great emotive power', and however much their presentation may be 'confounding and estranging', works of art will always be understood intuitively by a public whom artists regard as the 'ideal audience'. The art symbol has therefore a 'public function' which imposes on it a 'standard of complete objectivity. It has to be entirely given; what is left to imagination being implied, not missing. But the implication may be subtle.' (1963, 392-93)

Langer then addresses herself to the question as to how the public know that they have 'understood' the artist's message; in fact, she says, 'since the art symbol is not a discourse, the word message is misleading. A message is something communicated. But... a work of art cannot be said, in all semantic strictness, to effect a communication between its maker and his fellows; its symbolic function, though it has much in common with language (wherefore Croce subsumes art under "linguistic", and Collingwood declares that art, and not discourse, "really" deserves the name of language), is a *more direct traffic with intuition* than we hold by discursive symbols.... its import is not separable from the form (the picture, poem, dance, etc.) that expresses it.' (393-94, my emphasis) A work of art, therefore, is not a 'comment on something', or a 'sign' directing the public attention to something distinct from the work. In fact, points out Langer, an artist 'is not saying anything, not even about the nature of feeling; he is *showing*. He is showing us the appearance of feeling, in a perceptible symbolic projection, but he does not refer to a public object, such as a generally known "sort" of feeling, outside his work.... The effect of this symbolisation is to offer the beholder a

way of conceiving emotion; and that is something more elementary than making judgements about it.' (394)

The other important aspect of Langer's views on art, is her belief that the observer of a work of art 'enters into a direct relation *not with the artist, but with the work*. He responds to it as he would to a "natural symbol", simply finding its significance, which he is likely to think of as "the feeling in it". This "feeling".... is not "communicated", but revealed; the created form "has" it... To ask whether the sculptor wanted to convey his particular feeling is to ask whether he made what he wanted to make; and in a work so unmistakably successful [for example, as the Parthenon], the question is rather silly.' (394, my emphasis)

And Langer goes on, there is 'an actual emotion, which has been called "the aesthetic emotion", [which] is not expressed in the work, but belongs to the percipient; it is a psychological effect of his artistic activity...a pervasive feeling of *exhilaration*, directly inspired by the perception of good art. It is the "pleasure" that art is supposed to give.' (395) Langer is not however happy with both concepts of "pleasure" and "aesthetic emotion", for, she says. 'Other things than art can evoke it, if and only if they excite the same intuitive activity that art excites.... that is, when anything strikes us as *beautiful*.' (395) But, she adds, 'natural objects become expressive only to the artistic imagination, which discovers their forms.... The entire qualification one must have for understanding art is responsiveness...(which) is primarily a natural gift, related to creative talent, yet not the same thing; like talent, where it exists in any measure it may be heightened by experience or reduced by diverse agencies. Since it is intuitive, it cannot be taught; but the free exercise of artistic intuition often depends on clearing the

mind of intellectual prejudices and false conceptions that inhibit people's natural responsiveness.' (395-96).

### Symbolic Agency in Art

From Langer's definition of art as a 'virtual form', a 'primary illusion', totally divorced from actuality, we could be led to think that feelings and emotions do not enter into 'symbolic art', either as the artist's self-expression or the public's emotive response to the works of art. But Langer, although admitting the paradoxical character of art as illustrated by Nietzsche's classification of pure feeling and pure form as Dionysian and Apollonian, views an art work as an 'expression of its author's "Idea", i.e. something that takes shape as he articulates an envisagement of realities which discursive language cannot properly express.' And this 'articulation' takes the form of a Symbol,- 'primarily a symbol to *capture and hold* (the artist's) *own imagination of organized feeling, the rhythms of life, the forms of emotion*' (392, my emphasis). 'In another sense', Langer adds, '[a work of art] has social intent, which is essential to it, (and which) sets a "standard of significance".' (392)

But, for Langer, a work of art is not uniquely a means of self-expression for the artists, or a stimulus producing feelings in the public, though it may be both. In fact, she notes, some critics tend to totally discount both subjective elements 'and treat the emotive aspect of a work of art as something integral to it, something as objective as the physical form, color, sound pattern of verbal text itself' (18). Certainly, 'pleasure objectified' has been, for instance, seriously considered by Santayana and Otto BAENSCH; the latter writes;

I hope to prove that art, like science, is a mental activity whereby we bring certain contents of the world into the realm of objectively valid cognition; and that, furthermore, it is the particular office of art to do this

with the world's emotional content.... The mood of a landscape appears to us to be objectively given with it as one of its attributes, belonging to it just like any other attribute we perceive it to have.... We never think of regarding the landscape as a sentient being whose outward aspect "expresses" the mood that it contains subjectively.... the mood belongs to our total impression of the landscape and can only be distinguished as one of its components by a process of abstraction.... The feeling that appears to be expressed in a representational painting may be the same as the objective feeling which inheres in the work itself, but by no means is this necessarily the case; so far from it in fact, that the two will often stand in a relation of sharp contrast.' (in Langer, 1963, 19-20)

'How feelings can "inhere" in lifeless objects is a challenge to analytic thinking', remarks Langer..., but Baensch accepted 'the paradox of "objective feelings"... as an undeniable, even though incomprehensible, fact'. (19) As he writes, 'there are, then, "objective feelings" given to...our consciousness, feelings *that exist quite objectively and apart from us*, without being inward states of an animate being.' (in Langer, 20) But Langer notes, 'it must be granted that these objective feelings do not occur in an independent state by themselves; they are always *embedded and inherent* in objects *from which they cannot actually be separated, but only distinguished by abstraction*: objective feelings are always dependent parts of objects.' (20, my emphasis) For Baensch, Langer notes, 'all feelings are non-sensory qualities; subjective ones are contained in a self, objective ones in impersonal things. The great difficulty is to think of them apart from any host, to conceive them as independent contents of the world.... The crucial problem is to present feelings not to enjoyment..., but to conception; not experience of feelings (which is presupposed in the appeal to memory), but *knowledge about them* is difficult to achieve.' (21). Baensch writes,

Since (feelings) are non-sensory qualities, our apperception of them is also of a non-sensuous sort.... There is no apperception so blind as the non-sensuous apperception of feelings.... How can we capture, hold and handle feelings so that their content may be made conceivable and presented to our consciousness in universal form, without being understood in the strict sense, i.e. by means of concepts? The answer is:

We can do it by creating objects wherein the feelings we seek to hold are *so definitely embodied* that any subject confronted with these objects, and *emphatically disposed toward them*, cannot but experience a non-sensuous apperception of the feelings in question. Such objects are called 'works of art', and by 'art' we designate the activity that produces them. (Ibid, p.14) (in Langer, 21-22, my emphasis)

From then on, Langer's efforts will consist in demonstrating that 'the public function of the art symbol imposes on it a standard of complete objectivity. It has to be entirely given; what is left to imagination being implied, not missing'. (392-93) And what is 'given' is the Significant Form.

But, most importantly, Langer considers that in an aesthetic study of art, both the parts played by the artists' 'self-expression' and by the 'impression' made on the public by the works, should be conjointly examined and considered. What happens generally, though, comments Langer, is that instead of harmonizing and synthesizing the two approaches, there is a tendency to analyze them and judge them on a different basis. 'The dominant ideas occur in both types of theory, but they look different when viewed from such different standpoints.' For instance, what occurs is that 'emotion may be taken either as the effect of a work on the beholder, or as the source from which the author's conception arose.... (one will tend to [a] sort of laboratory psychology that seeks aesthetic principles in the tabulated reactions of [the various kinds of public...]'), and the second to a 'psychoanalytic study of artists'. Thus, Langer observes, 'representation may be taken as Plato and Aristotle took it - that is, as the social function of the picture or statue, poem or drama - the function of directing the percipient's mind to something beyond the work of art, namely the represented object or action; or it may be taken as the artist's motive for creating the work - a record of things that fascinates him, persons or scenes he desires to immortalize.' (1963, 14-15)

Therefore, in that kind of approach, aesthetics oscillates between a view of art as either a record of contemporary scenes, or as a 'make-believe' - an 'aesthetic emotion'. As a result, says Langer, one falls into a contradiction. But, she adds, 'the old division between the two perspectives... - art as expression against art as impression - is not bridged by acceptance of an eternal tug of war between the opposed 'poles', prescribed form and emotional content.... *Obviously, any art object may be both*', although in some cases it can be better in one function than in the other. (17-18, my emphasis)

Addressing herself to the question we have already discussed in this chapter, i.e. the projection of emotions or feelings into the objects that caused them, Langer comments: 'Just why and how the projection occurs is not clear; it is not imputation, for we do not impute enjoyment to the Parthenon... What the picture "has" is beauty, which *is* our projected, i.e. objectified, pleasure. But why is subjective pleasure not good enough? Why do we objectify it and project it into visual or auditory forms as "beauty", while we are content to feel it directly, as delight, in candy and perfumes and cushioned seats?' (18-19)

Keeping to Baensch's idea that 'the function of art, like that of science, is to acquaint the beholder with something he has not known before', Langer will submit the idea of 'symbolic agency' which, she says, 'has nothing to do with the iconographic functions usually assigned to symbols in art.' (22) 'The artistic symbol, *qua* artistic, negotiates insight, not reference; it does not rest upon convention, but motivates and dictates conventions. It is deeper than any semantic of accepted signs and their referents, more essential than any schema that may be heuristically read.' (22)

With her theory of Symbolic Art, Langer will attempt, therefore, to give an answer to the question: 'What is "Significance" in Art? What, in other words, is meant by "Significant Form"?' (23) 'I am scouting the possibility, she notes, 'that *rationality arises as an elaboration of feeling....* [but] such a hypothesis leads one, of course, to the possible forms of feeling, and raises the problem of how they can be conceived and abstractly handled.' (Essay *The Art Symbol and the Symbol in Art*) (in Werhane, 1984, 297-98)

Taking her cue from the structure of 'discourse' which expresses the form of rational cognition, Langer applies the term 'discursive symbols' to the constituents of language conveying rational thought. It is obvious to her, however, that these symbols are 'no apt model(s) of primitive form of feeling'. They could not express 'the forms of what might be called "unlogicized" mental life (a term we owe to Professor Henry Sheffer of Harvard), or what is usually called the "life of feeling"...' (in Werhane, 1984, 298). Langer then proposes a different symbolic form which is 'characteristic of art' in general and the essence and measure' of it: the 'representational symbol'. But this special form, she notes, is not what is commonly thought of as a 'representation', not even a 'secret' or 'disguised' one. 'Many works represent nothing whatever.... but if (a work) is beautiful, it is expressive; what it expresses is not an idea of some other thing, but an idea of feeling.' (298) But, as we have seen, Langer admits that there are many difficulties connected with the thesis that a work of art is primarily an expression of feeling'. Therefore, she attempts to attribute to a work of art 'an expressive form somewhat like a symbol,...[which] has import...like meaning, so it makes a logical abstraction, but not in the familiar way of genuine symbols' (298). 'The expressive form, or art symbol', she writes, 'is... the work of art itself, as it meets the eye;...[It is]



given directly to perception. [But it is] more than an arrangement of sense-data. It carries with it something that people have sometimes called a quality...sometimes an emotional content, or the emotional tone of the work, or simply its life.... It is not one of the qualities to be distinguished in the work; artistic import is *expressed*, somewhat as meaning is expressed in a genuine symbol, yet not exactly so.' (in Werhane 1984, 299) In order to deepen her analysis, Langer turns to the case of discourse, in which, she remarks, 'another function of symbols comes into play,...which is the expression of ideas *about* things. A thing cannot be asserted by a name, only mentioned.... [Thus] the second great office of symbols,...is not to refer to things and communicate facts, but to express ideas; and this, in turn, involves a deeper psychological process, the formulation of ideas, or conception itself.... This basic intellectual process of conceiving things in connection belongs...to the same deep level of the mind as symbolization itself. That is the level where imagination is born.' (300)

Consequently, Langer will refer to symbols not primarily as entities which stand for something else, but as formulations with a 'more primitive function', that of *articulation*. 'Symbols articulate ideas....for whatever is named becomes an entity in thought.' (301)

Turning now to art, Langer admits that 'according to the usual definition of "symbol", a work of art should not be classed as a symbol at all. But', she adds, 'that usual definition overlooks the greatest intellectual value and,...the prime office of symbols - their power of formulating experience, and presenting it objectively for contemplation, logical intuition, recognition, understanding. That is articulation, or logical expression. And this function every good work of art does perform. It formulates the appearance of feeling, of subjective experience, the character of so-

called 'inner life', which discourse - the normal use of words - is peculiarly unable to articulate....' (in Werhane 1984, 301)

We must remember, says Langer, that 'a genuine symbol, such as a word, is only a sign;...an instrument. Its meaning lies elsewhere, and once we have grasped its connotation or identified something as its denotation we do not need the word anymore. But a work of art does not point us to a meaning beyond its own presence... *In a work of art we have the direct presentation of a feeling, not a sign that points to it.*' Langer's Art Symbol, therefore, 'does not signify, but only articulate(s) and present(s) its emotive content;... The work seems to be imbued with the emotion or mood or other vital experience that it expresses.' (in Werhane 1984, 301, my emphasis) It is 'a single organic composition' whose constituents are not independently expressive in the same way as words are meaningful in their own right in discourse. And although 'the import of art is perceived as something in the work, articulated by it', it is now, however, 'further abstracted' from it. Langer thus remains adamant in her belief that art is not a 'symbolism' like language, and her more convincing argument is that, as in all organic forms, 'the elements in a work are always newly created with the total image, and although it is possible to analyze what they contribute to the image, it is not possible to assign them any of its import apart from the whole. That is characteristic of organic form. The import of a work of art is its 'life', which, like actual life, is an indivisible phenomenon.' (in Werhane 1984, 302)

In her analysis of art Langer does not however ignore the important role played by what she calls 'genuine symbols' whose connotations may be stated and which artists often incorporate in their works; their meanings, she says, 'enter into the work of art as elements, creating and articulating its organic form,... But they function in the

normal manner of symbols: they mean something beyond what they present in themselves.... [and thus] lie on a different semantic level from the work that contains them. Their meanings are not part of its import, but elements in the form that has import, the expressive form' (302-303).

It is clear, comments Wilkinson, that in her general theory of art, Langer takes as her starting point an assumption which has been widely subscribed to in the philosophy of mind since Kant, namely that the structure or articulation of experience is the result of the processing by the mind of data furnished by the senses and by introspection.... The fundamental operation of the mind on this array of data Langer calls abstraction, and abstraction is defined as "the perception of form".' (in Hanfling, 1992, 202)

Interestingly, as Berleant points out, this 'abstraction' is described by Ducasse, as an 'immediate symbol' which so embodies an emotion that 'we receive the "taste" of that emotion by directly apprehending the symbol' (1970, 34).

The notion of 'semblance' or 'virtual form' is extended and adapted by Langer to fit the structures and conditions of the various forms of art. This will be examined in the next section.

#### Implementation of Symbolic Agency in the Various Arts

Speaking about the graphic arts, Langer views a picture as 'a total visual field.... which create(s) a single, self-contained, perceptual space.... a *virtual scene*.... [not] in the special sense of "scenery".... [but in the sense] of a *space opposite the eye and related directly and essentially to the eye*' (1963, 86). However, adds Langer, can we think in the same terms about sculpture, which does not, like painting, 'create' a

three-dimensional space, but is *actually* three dimensional? Sculpture is essentially *volume*, not *scene*.... Sculpture is a space made visible, and is more than the area which the figure actually occupies.... The figure itself seems to have a sort of continuity with the emptiness around it. The void enfolds it.... The source of this illusion is the semblance of organism [which, as in nature, is] nothing but a vital function.' But, adds Langer, 'sculpture is *virtual kinetic volume*, created by - and with - the semblance of living form....' (88) This 'semblance of organism' also applies to non-representational sculpture, or the representation of inorganic things, for ' "life" in sculpture is the *expression of biological feeling, not suggestion of biological function.*' (89, my emphasis) In that respect, Langer summons up the principle of 'vital function' whereby living organisms, performing characteristic functions, *must* have certain general forms, or perish'. In other words, there exists in life, 'a norm of organic structure', of 'necessary form' which supports all the specialized activities at every moment, safeguarding the life of the whole organism. Violate this 'functional whole', comments Langer, and 'the constituent parts disintegrate, and "living form" has disappeared'. (88-9)

Inevitably, remarks Langer, questions will be asked as to whether architecture which is generally viewed as 'an art of space, meaning actual, practical space', with 'actual values: shelter, comfort, safekeeping' (92), can pretend to an artistic status. Langer is in no doubt that 'architecture is a plastic art, and its first achievement is always unconsciously and inevitably, an illusion; something purely imaginary or conceptual translated into visual impression' (93). For Frank LLOYD WRIGHT, in architecture ' "Form follows function" is but a statement of fact. When we say "form and function are one", only then do we take mere fact into the realm of creative

thought.' (*On Architecture*, p.236) (quoted in Langer, 1963, 93) Indubitably, points out Langer, in architecture 'the influence of the underlying idea shows itself in such key phrases as "functional form" (Sullivan, *Kindergarten Chats*, p.47), "life in space" (Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, p.4), "taking possession of space" (*The New Vision*, p.61)' (93-4). However, she adds, the above terms certainly do not mean that architectural 'forms' simply are 'convenient arrangements' which 'permit people to carry on activities in them' (94). The fact that architects often use such adjectives as 'dynamic', 'organic', 'living', 'activated' and even 'omnipresent' to describe the internal relations of space in buildings, would not make sense if they were referring to practical or scientific concepts of space. 'The architect', Langer notes, 'in fine, deals with a *created space*, a virtual entity'. 'As *scene* is the basic abstraction of pictorial art, and *kinetic volume* of sculpture, that of architecture is an *ethnic domain*. But domain here is not taken in the sense of a "thing" among other "things"; it is the sphere of influence of a function or functions.' (94-5) Even, adds Langer, in places such as a ship, a gypsy camp, or a circus camp, which often changes its geodetic bearings, we literally say that 'the camp is *in* a place; culturally it *is* a place.... A place, in this non geographical sense, is a created thing, an ethnic domain made visible, tangible, sensible. As such it is, of course, an illusion.... - the centre of a virtual world, the "ethnic domain", and itself a geographical semblance.' (95) This 'architectural illusion' or 'idea' creates a 'complete domain' which has no outside as such but is paradoxically severed from the outside world by its 'virtual form' whose 'proportions are internally derived'. (95) 'It has its own center and periphery, not dividing one place from all others, but limiting from within whatever there is to be.' (97)

When great architecture is at the service of *social* needs, it often becomes the 'confluence of all ideas'. Note, for instance, remarks Langer, how in a secular and barbaric culture such as the Goths, 'the Hall was the natural symbol of a human world', the 'counterpart' of the system of functional relations in the people's actual environment. This power of great architecture to become symbol of functional existence should not however, says Langer, be confused with the concept of 'functionalism'. It does not suggest 'provident planning or good arrangement,... but embodies the feeling, the rhythm, the passion or sobriety, frivolity or fear with which any things at all are done'. (98-99) And Langer adds, 'In a parallel fashion to organic life (physiological and psychological), the human environment is subject to a metabolic pattern, [therefore a] 'place articulated by the imprint of human life, must seem organic, like a living form. "Organization" is the watchword of architecture'. (99)

Leaving the graphic and plastic arts, we turn now to Langer's study of music, which, she writes, is 'a different kingdom' in which 'everything is air'; 'a universe of pure *sound*, an audible world, a sonorous beauty taking over the whole of one's consciousness.' (104) The primary illusion of music as an art is the 'semblance (of) vital, experiential time.... Its sonorous forms move in relation to each other - always and only to each other, for nothing else exists there. Virtual time is as separate from the sequence of actual happenings as virtual space from actual space.' (109) 'Music spreads out time for our direct and complete apprehension, by letting our hearing monopolize it - organize, fill, and shape it, all alone. It creates an image of time measured by the motion of forms that seem to give it substance.... (110) For Basil de BALINCOURT, 'Music is one of the forms of duration; it suspends ordinary time, and offers itself as an ideal substitute and equivalent. The space of which the painter makes

use is a translated space, within which all objects are at rest.... the Time of music is similarly an ideal time.... Music uses time as an element of expression; duration is its essence. The beginning and the end of a musical composition are only one if the music has possessed itself of the interval between them and wholly fitted it. ('Music and Duration', *Music and Letters*, I, No 4, (1920), 286-293). (in Langer, 1963, 110-11)

For Langer, an abstract art such as music, and the emotive life it symbolizes, share with each other a common logical form, which she describes as 'structure, articulation, a whole resulting from the relation of mutually dependent factors'. (1957, 15, my emphasis) In that respect, she adds, 'there are certain aspects of the so-called "inner life" - physical or mental - which have formal properties similar to those of music - patterns of motion and rest, of tension and release, of agreement and disagreement, preparation, fulfilment, excitation, sudden change, etc.' (1963, 228) But, as Wilkinson notes, for Langer, music 'differs from other presentational symbols in being unconsummated, i.e. it is incomplete, since it can symbolize only one aspect of felt life - its logical form or morphology or pattern - and it cannot individuate feelings which are similar or identical in respect of their logical form but differ in emotional tone.' (in Hanfling, 1992, 205)

Another important aspect of Langer's theory of 'music' is that because its elements 'are not words - independent associative symbols with a reference fixed by convention..... we are always free to fill its subtle articulate forms with any meaning that fits them; that is, it may convey an idea of anything conceivable in its logical image.' (1963, 31)

Interestingly, as Beardsley notes, in her approach to music, Langer will substitute to the Expression theory, the *Signification Theory* in which 'the venting and the evoking of emotions... are set aside... as not properly a matter of meaning at all'; but Signification theorists 'do not think statements about musical meaning can be reduced to descriptions. For they hold that music does have a referential relation to things outside itself, and they propose to analyze this relation in semiotic terms, that is using the concept of *sign*.' (1981, 332) But, adds Beardsley, the Signification Theory of music is interested in only one subclass of signs, those that are in some important way similar to their significata, that is, to the things they stand for. Such signs are said to be *iconic signs*.... Onomatopoeic words are examples of iconic signs; on a larger scale, grammatical order can be iconic too.... The visual analogue of onomatopoeia is a design that exhibits the same pattern as what it signifies.' (333) Such are geographical maps for instance. Therefore, 'if there is something that music can map.... [then] music is an iconic sign of psychological processes. It "articulates" or "elucidates" the mental life of man, and it does so by presenting auditory equivalents of some structural or kinetic aspects of that life.' (333) It would remain to ascertain if Langer's view of music concurs with the *semiotic* and *iconic* characteristics described above by Beardsley, and if, in that case, she would apply these characteristics to *all* arts.

It would clearly be impossible, within the frame of the present thesis, to clarify the above question, or analyze in more depth Langer's theory of 'music'. Suffice to say that it is this area of her aesthetic theory which attracts the greatest amount of criticism; especially regarding her notion that music, because it shares a common logical form with the emotive life it symbolizes, is an unconsummated symbol.



Of all the arts examined by Langer, the one which, in my view, is most illustrative of the way she identifies the essence of art with 'representational symbolism' is Dance. In particular, her concept of 'magic circle' makes us understand how the meaning and value of art can be conveyed and shared by a public through Symbolism.

Dance, writes Langer, refers to 'forces that cannot be scientifically established and measured', such as 'chthonic powers, divine powers, fates and spells and all mystic agencies, the potency of prayer, of will, of love, and hate, and also the oft-assumed hypnotic power of one's mind over another' (188). According to Langer, such 'mythic consciousness' (Cassirer) totally dominated the primitive phases of social development. 'Painting, sculpture, and literature, however archaic, show us these Powers already fixed in visible or describable form, anthropomorphic or zoomorphic - a sacred bison, a sacred cow, a scarab, a Tiki, a Hermes or Kore, finally an Apollo, Athena, Osiris, Christ....'. (1989-90) However, in the initial stages of social development the 'mythic consciousness' could not yet be embodied in such definite forms. But there was indubitably, even at that stage, a conscious recognition of these powers, and more importantly, a desire and an attempt to objectify them through some kind of bodily activity : dancing. 'The dance', writes Langer,

creates an image of nameless and even bodiless Powers filling a complete, autonomous realm, a "world".... This explains the early development of dance as a complete and even sophisticated art form.... Dance is, in fact, the most serious intellectual business of savage life: it is the envisagement of a world beyond the spot and the moment of one's animal existence,.... a world transfigured, wakened to a special kind of life.... To the "mythic consciousness" these creations are realities, not symbols; they are not felt to be created by the dance at all, but to be invoked, adjured, challenged, or placated, as the case may be. (190)

For Curt SACHS, 'the oldest dance form seems to be the *Reigen*, or circle dance,... a spontaneous expression of gaiety.' (*World History of the Dance*, p.208) (in Langer, 190-91) Furthermore, for Sachs, all dance is ecstatic. 'In the ecstasy of the dance man bridges the chasm between this and the other world, to the realm of demons, spirits, and God.' (Ibid, p.4) Langer, however, objects to this interpretation of primitive dancing as an impulsive activity; circle dance, she notes, 'has nothing to do with spontaneous prancing; it fulfils a holy office... - it divides the sphere of holiness from that of profane existence. In this way it creates the stage of the dance which centers naturally in the altar or its equivalent - the totem, the priest, the fire - or perhaps the slain bear, or the dead chieftain to be consecrated.' (191) At this stage of the argument, Sach's theory seems to concur with Langer's for he does point out that dancing in primitive societies was undertaken in order that 'the power of (the) objects may flow across to them in some mysterious way' (Ibid, p.59) (in Langer, 194)

Let us remember, therefore, that, for Langer, what is important in *dancing* is that 'its first move is always the creation of a realm of virtual Power. "Ecstasy" is nothing else than the feeling of entering such a realm'. What is crucial is '*what is created* in the various kinds of dance, and what purposes, therefore, the various rhythmic, mimetic, acrobatic, or other elements serve' (193). This realm of 'mystic consciousness', enacted as a Symbol, loses with time its holiness to become later 'the expressive form which it really is'. 'Whatever motifs from actual life may enter into a dance, they are rhythmized and formalized by that very impression'. (194) The very movements of dance also show the attempts made by the dancers to conquer the earth's gravity, as artists attempt to conquer the material with which they work; 'sculptor over the stone, painting over the flat surface, poetry over language'.

For Langer, the evolution of dance, from an active social and religious form involving participants, to a spectacle, is really a natural development from dance magic which 'may be projected to a spectator to cure, purify, or initiate him'. 'This use of the dance', she notes, 'is a great advance over the purely ecstatic, because addressed to an audience the dance becomes essentially and not only incidentally a spectacle, and thus find its true creative aim - to make the world of Powers visible.... to break the virtual image of a different world.' (199-200) But, most significantly, Langer conceives of *artistic* dance as a spectacle which 'creates a play of forces that *confronts* the percipient, instead of engulfing him, as it does when he is dancing.' We witness here, adds Langer, 'the separation of the dance as spectacle from the dance as activity'. (200) But, then, why, without motives of worship or magic-making did people go on dancing at all?' This is due, says Langer, to the ecstatic function of dance, which, instead of lifting the dancers from a profane to a sacred state, as it was the case in ancient times, uses its 'magnetic forces, its powers of rhythm' to create 'virtual powers'. Thus, she writes, the 'normal fate (of dance) is simply the shift from religious to romantic uses', either in ballet for its sense of freedom from gravity, or in social dance for its day-dream and romantic effects. In the latter, 'a whole literature of "dance music" has been developed... (which) in turn has produced musical forms which are independent, today, of that original connection: the suite, sonata, and symphony.' (103)

For Langer, dance as an art 'holds a hegemony over all art materials', for although its effect as a 'primary illusion' is 'as immediate as that of music or of the plastic arts', it is more complex. 'Whatever enters into it does so in radical artistic transformation: its space is plastic, its time is musical, its themes are fantasy, its actions symbolic.' (204-5)

The meaning of Langer's theory of art is perhaps contained in, and best exemplified by, her view of 'artistic' dance as a crucible of all the influences received since the Stone Age. She aptly sums it up thus: 'The substance of... dance creation is the same Power that enchanted ancient caves and forests, but today we invoke it with full knowledge of its illusory status, and therefore with wholly artistic intent. The realm of magic around the altar was broken, inevitably and properly, by the *growth of the human mind from mythic conception to philosophical and scientific thought.*' (207, my emphasis)

In the next section, we will study Langer's analysis of literature in the context of her theory and how she attempts to back up her belief that art is not similar to language.

#### Representational Symbolism in Literature

Langer's discrimination between 'discursive symbols' and 'representational symbols', and her reluctance to completely associate art with language, is certainly shared by many thinkers, not least for the reason that a form of art such as literature depends entirely on language for its formulation. Richard WOLLHEIM, for instance, remarks that 'to compare art to language runs into the difficulty that some works of art, more generally some kinds of works of art, e.g. poems, plays, novels, are actually in language.' Thus, he asks: 'In the case of the literary arts, does the analogy simply collapse into identity?.... Is there a special sense in which we could be said to understand a poem or a novel over and above our understanding of the words, phrases, sentences that occur in it? But it remains unclear how this question is to be decided.' (1980, 139)

It is indeed the case, writes Langer, that 'since its normal material is language, and language is, after all, the medium of discourse, it is always possible to look at a literary work as an assertion of facts and opinions, that is, as a piece of discursive symbolism functioning in the normal communicative way.' (1963, 208) But, she points out, words in literature are not, as in ordinary discourse, instruments which can be dispensed with once their connotation or denotation has been grasped.

Another complementary aspect of literature which also lends itself to confusion comes as a result of its using the technical methods currently used in ordinary discourse. The principle of 'applied art', says Langer, is known in architecture as 'functionalism'; we have touched upon it in Chapter III. 'There are not many "applied arts",' comments Langer, 'as closely bound to actuality as discursive writing', except perhaps 'scientific drawing' which although 'meticulously faithful to a scientific ideal' as in the case of Dürer's flowers and animals, are nevertheless examples of art 'as religious architecture or sculpture is art though it serves faith and exaltation'. (303)

This confusion between discourse and literature should not however occur, argues Langer, because once we disregard the discursive laws at work in literature, or consider them as simple means to an end and therefore not *in essence* artistic means, we are still left with the 'power of words' whose 'very sound can influence one's feelings about what they are known to mean'. (258) Langer's efforts will then bear on showing that although *what* the author says is the material of which literature is made, 'the way of saying things' is really 'all-important', especially in poetry. Devices such as the 'length of rhythmic phrases', or of 'chains of thought', 'vocal stresses', 'length of vowels', 'tonal pitch', have a power that is 'really astounding'; such are also 'assonances and sensuous associations' and, in particular in poetry, the 'sound and

evocative power of words, meter, alliteration, rhyme and other rhythmic devices, associated images, repetitions, archaisms, and grammatical twists', act individually or in conjunction in the 'meaning' of literary works. (258-59) The question is therefore: 'How is the reader to divide his interest between the value of the assertion and the special way it is made? Isn't the wording everything? And yet, must not the wording itself be judged by its adequacy to state the author's ideas? Why then, goes on Langer, attempting 'to determine "what the poet is trying to say", and to judge of "how well he says it"'? Could not 'the poet say it clearly in the first place?' (1963, 208-209)

Not only does Langer dismiss the role played by the meaning of words in literature, but she also belittles the 'arrangement of words' as being 'no more a creation than the arrangement of plates on a table' (210). As in painting, music or dance, she comments,

the poet uses discourse to create an illusion, a pure appearance, which is a non-discursive symbolic form. The feeling expressed by this form is neither his, nor his hero's, nor ours. It is the meaning of the symbol. It may take us some time to perceive it, but the symbol expresses it at all times, and in this sense the poem 'exists' objectively whenever it is presented to us, instead of coming into being only when somebody makes 'certain integrated responses' to what a poet is saying.... For the poem is essentially something to be perceived, and perceptions are strong experiences that can normally cut across the 'momentary trembling order in our minds' resulting from assorted stimuli.... The initial questions, then, are not: 'What is the poet trying to say, and what does he intend to make us feel about it?' But: 'What has the poet made, and how did he make it?' He has made an illusion, as complete and immediate as the illusion of space created by a few strokes on paper, the time dimension in a melody, the play of powers set up by a dancer's first gesture. He has made an illusion by means of words.... But what he creates is not an arrangement of words, for words are only his materials, *out of which* he makes his poetic elements. (1963, 211)

And Langer offers an illustration of what is achieved even in ordinary discourse, not by 'the fact or belief expressed, but by the appearance of it': '...Namely, being told,

in response to a perfectly candid and true statement, "It sounds so dreadful when you put it like that!" Now the fact referred to is actually not more dreadful from being conveyed by one verbal signal rather than another.... But it *seems* more horrible when stated in some particular way.' But, says Langer, it is significant that, in a case like this, the listener will not say: "It is so dreadful when you put it like that", but "It *sounds* so dreadful....". 'What is altered in the telling is not the fact or belief expressed, but the appearance of it.' (211-12) It is particularly interesting to note that Langer, as a staunch opponent to psychologistic theories, still turns the subjective influences at work in the above example into assets when she writes that 'such causes cannot be controlled by a poet', since he does not know *a priori* the state of mind of his readers. But to the contrary of 'the appearances of events in our actual lives, (which) are fragmentary, transient and often indefinite.... the poet's business is to create the appearance of "experiences", the semblance of events lived and felt, and to organize them so they constitute a purely and completely experienced reality, a piece of *virtual life*.' (211) Thus, in literature, and especially in lyric poetry, says Langer, 'the events... are... much more fully perceived and evaluated than the jumble of happenings in any person's actual history.' (211-12) As she emphasizes, 'Illusory events (in poetic art) have *no core of actuality* that allows them to appear under many aspects. They have only such aspects as they are given in the telling....' For instance, she goes on, the 'tyger' mentioned in Blake's famous poem 'exists as a supernatural animal, not a beast for British sportsmen to hunt and have skinned. A common tiger would prowls in a dark jungle, not burn in "forests of the night".... Blake's "tyger" has no natural birth, no daily habits; he is *the* "tyger" made by God, with a heart of satanic emotions and a master brain. The mystery of Nature is in him: "Did He who made the Lamb make thee?" (214) But, adds Langer, this is not peculiar to mystical poems, for it happens 'in

poems that are close to common experience' and in which 'everything of common-sense importance' can be radically omitted, and a completely subjective situation be created. (215) In other words, explains Langer, in poetry, 'the occurrence of thought is an event in a thinker's personal history, and has as distinct a qualitative character as an adventure, a sight, or a human contact; it is not a proposition, but the entertainment of one....' (219) And in what follows, Langer is expressing what I consider to be the epitome of her fundamental philosophical position, not only regarding literature, but all the arts. She writes:

Poetic reflections, therefore, are not essentially trains of logical reasoning, though they may incorporate fragments, at least, of discursive argument. Essentially they create the *semblance* of reasoning; of the seriousness, strain and progress, the sense of growing knowledge, growing clearness, conviction and acceptance - the whole experience of philosophical thinking. Of course a poet usually builds a philosophical poem around an idea that strikes him, at the time, as true and important; but not for the sake of debating it. He accepts it and exhibits its emotional value and imaginative possibilities.

Consider the Platonic doctrine of transcendental remembrance in Wordsworth's *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*: there are no statements pro and con, no doubts and proofs, but essentially the experience of having so great an idea - the excitement of it, the awe, the tinge of holiness it bestows on childhood, the explanation of the growing commonplace of later life, the resigned acceptance of an insight. But to cite Wordsworth as the proponent of a bona fide philosophical theory is a mistake; for he could not and would not have elaborated and defended his position. (1963, 219)

Fearing the possibility that her above arguments would only fit the case of poetry, but not necessarily all forms of literature, Langer points out that because the novel is a relatively recent phenomenon, with new structural and technical means and a discursive form similar to that used in ordinary language, its function can be interpreted as a way for the author 'to inform, comment, inquire, confess, in short: to talk to people. But a novelist intends to create a virtual experience, wholly formed, and



wholly expressive of something more fundamental than any "modern" problem: human feeling, the nature of human life itself.' (288-89) This point of view is also adopted by Thomas De Quincey who, says Langer, though he 'still treats of poetry as real "literature" ', views "the commonest novel" 'as a literature which sets forth human aims and emotions directly, not for discursive understanding but for "the heart, i.e. the great *intuitive* [or non-discursive] organ" ('Alexander Pope', *Literary Criticism*, 1908, p.96)' (in Langer, 1963, 289).

Therefore, for Langer, 'imagination always creates; it never records.' (296) Even when autobiographical literature is concerned, she says, 'in the hands of a true novelist... his own story is entirely raw material, and the end product is entirely fiction. (Edith Wharton) points this out in speaking of Tolstoi's *The Kreutzer Sonata*: "Tolstoy's tale, though almost avowedly the study of his own tortured soul, is as objective as *Othello*. The magic transposition has taken place; in reading the story we do not feel ourselves to be in a resuscitated *real world* (a sort of Tussaud Museum of wax figures with actual clothes on), but in that other world which is the image of life transposed in the brain of the artist, a world wherein the creative breath has made all things new." (*The Writing of Fiction*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925, p.79).' (in Langer, 1963, 297)

In the same context, Langer also brings up Bell's analysis of Marcel Proust, who, Bell writes, 'deals with time as modern painters deal with space.... *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* is a shape in time; it is not an arabesque on time. It is constructed in three dimensions.... The characters exist in time, and were the sense of time abstracted would cease to exist. In time they develop; their relations, colour and extension are all temporal. Thus they grow; situations unfold themselves not like

flowers even but like tunes....' (*Proust*, pp.26-55-56) (in Langer, 1963, 300) For Bell, therefore, 'the supreme masterpieces derive their splendor, their supernatural power, not from flashes of insight, nor yet from characterization, nor from an understanding of the human heart even, but from form - I use the word in its richest sense, I mean the thing that artists create, their expression. Whether you call it "significant form" or something else, the supreme quality in art is formal; it has to do with order, sequence, movement and shape....' (*Ibid*, p.67) (in Langer, 1963, 299-300)

Perhaps the most significant and evocative arguments used by Langer in her analysis of literature, relate to 'drama'. Whilst, she says, plastic arts create a virtual 'space', music a virtual 'time', and literature in general a 'piece of virtual "life"' (212), 'drama is not merely a distinct literary form; it is a special poetic mode, as different from genuine literature as sculpture from pictorial art, or either of these from architecture.... Drama presents the poetic illusion in a different light: not finished realities, or "events", but immediate, visible responses of human beings, make its semblance of life. Its basic abstraction is the act, which springs from the past, but is directed toward the future, and is always great with things to come.' (306) But, for Langer, there is however a distinction to make between an 'act' which 'is normally oriented toward the future', and an 'act' in *drama* which, though 'it implies past actions (the "situation")', moves not toward the present, as narrative does, but toward something beyond; it deals essentially with commitments and consequences. Persons, too, in drama are purely agents - whether consciously or blindly, makers of the future. This future, which is made before our eyes, gives importance to the very beginnings of dramatic acts, i.e. to the motives from which the acts arise, and the situations in which they develop; the making of it is the principle that unifies and organizes the continuum

of stage action.... As literature creates a virtual past, drama creates a virtual future. The literary mode is the mode of Memory; the dramatic is the mode of Destiny.' (307)

From this allusion to the special power of drama, in which the present action is already pregnant with its 'virtual' future, Langer will develop an argument which, to my mind, is the nearest that any attempt at explaining and understanding the artistic principle in general, and not exclusively in drama, has come. What it amounts to is to say that the *power* of a work of art, consists in creating an 'immediacy' or 'now', in which 'the two great realms of envisagement - past and future - intersect the present....' (308) This is further explained by Langer thus: 'In actual life the impending future is very vaguely felt.... But we do not usually have any idea of the future as a total experience which is coming because of our past and present acts; such a sense of destiny arises only in unusual moments under peculiar emotional stress. In drama, however, this sense of destiny is paramount. It is what makes the present action seem like an integral part of the future, howbeit that future has not unfolded yet. The reason is that on the stage, every thought expressed in conversation, every feeling betrayed by voice or look, is determined by the total action of which it is a part.... (the) theatrical "present moment", is what gives to acts, situations, and even such constituent elements as gestures and attitudes and tones, the peculiar intensity known as "dramatic quality".'

(308)

#### A View of 'Psychical Distance' in Aesthetic Experience

Langer's suspicion of psychologism is very much reflected in her whole theory, and especially in her critique of theories which make of the 'aesthetic attitude' 'the chief datum in artistic experience'. (1963, 34) She attributes this tendency to the then

success of behaviourism and pragmatism in which, she comments, 'philosophical problems of art... find neither development nor solution....' (34) Thus, 'we might do better to look upon the art object as something in its own right, with properties independent of our prepared reactions - *properties which command our reactions....*' (39, my emphasis)

Wilkinson remarks that Langer, 'by starting... with art itself instead of with its effects,... has found an answer to the crucial question which aestheticians have usually skirted,...: What is it that art actually *creates*? Her answer is: Quite literally, an illusion,... which in its turn serves the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling.' (in Bullough, 1957, xxix) At first sight, Langer's argument appears to be totally contrary to Bullough's position, but Wilkinson remarks that, although the two systems 'start off from opposite ends', they still agree that, as Langer writes, 'the question of what gives one the [aesthetic] emotion is exactly the question of what makes the object aesthetic.' (34) As Bullough writes, 'its power to *compel* aesthetic adaptation... is, of course, what makes an object a work of Art'. (*Publications*, No 10, p.98) 'Yet,' points out Wilkinson, 'it is on this very point that the real difference between them hinges.... [for Langer is convinced that] art commands an appropriate response regardless of the attitude we bring with us when we come into its presence.' (in Bullough, 1957, xxxi) For her, adds Wilkinson, the argument goes thus: 'If aesthetic experience is such a sophisticated, rare, and artificial attitude as some of its modern apologists make out, then the fact "that primitive peoples, from the cave-dwellers of Altamira to the early Greeks, should quite unmistakably have known what was beautiful, becomes a sheer absurdity" (1963, 38).' (in Bullough, 1957, xxxi) But Wilkinson notes, 'Bullough was sceptical of this kind of reasoning.... He points out that the greater part of what we call

art was *not* art to the men who made it,.... that art may be cherished and esteemed for reasons quite other than aesthetic. And he was altogether less sanguine about the power of art to compel an appropriate response.... But he did think that it is a distinctive mode of awareness....' (xxxix) I would however argue that, contrary to the interpretation that Bullough gives to Langer's above argument, she does not, in my view, imply that primitive and ancient people were already able, or willing, to attribute the status of 'art' to exceptionally well made objects, but that they intuitively knew, or were aware of, the very special quality which differentiates these objects from ordinary crafted objects.

As Wilkinson points out, there is no doubt that, for Bullough, the apprehension of 'beauty' always involves 'two sets of factors: those in the work and those in the percipient' (xxxix), and that, despite some sympathy with this approach, Langer is still 'impatient of the prepared reaction, of the cultivation of an aesthetic attitude' (xxxix). In any case, comments Langer, 'few listeners or spectators, in fact, ever quite attain the state which Roger Fry described.... as "disinterested intensity of contemplation" (*Vision and Design*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1925, p.29). Most people are too lazy to uncouple their minds from all their usual interests before looking at a picture or a vase.' (1963, 37-38) Langer categorically asserts that '*it is part of the artist's business to make his work elicit this attitude instead of requiring the percipient to bring an ideal frame of mind with him*' (1963, 318, my emphasis). 'To this', says Wilkinson, 'Bullough would reply: Why make them alternatives? That indeed is the artist's business. It is our own business to meet him half-way - not for his sake but for our own.' (xxxix)

Certainly, Langer agrees with Bullough, though, that what the artist should establish by whatever suitable devices, is 'a relation between the work and its public

(including himself). She is not opposed to calling this relationship 'Distance'; for, she notes, Bullough 'points out quite rightly that "objectivity", "detachment", and "attitudes" are complete or incomplete, i.e. perfect or imperfect, but do not admit of degrees. "Distance, on the contrary, admits naturally of degrees...."' (319) What Bullough calls 'a *personal* relation, often highly emotionally colored, but of a *peculiar character*' is interpreted by Langer as 'our natural relation to a symbol that embodies an idea and presents it for our contemplation, not for practical action, but "cleared of the practical and concrete nature of its appeal". It is for the sake of this remove that art deals entirely in illusions, which, because of their lack of "practical, concrete nature", are readily distanced as symbolic forms.' And Langer adds most significantly: 'But delusion - even the quasi-delusion of "make-believe" - aims at the opposite effect, *the greatest possible nearness*. To seek delusion, belief, and "audience participation" in the theatre is to deny that drama is art.' (319, my emphasis)

Langer's particular emphasis on the 'crucial factor' of 'otherness' in art, and especially in theatrical art, could be correlated with Brecht's epic theatre, in which the public is not allowed to suspend disbelief and to participate in the play, and is constantly reminded of this principle by means of various devices.

The manner in which Langer adapts Bullough's concept of 'distance' to her own theory is an immense credit to her brilliant approach to aesthetics, and to her mastery of Symbolism. Without any hesitation, she will consequently sail comfortably through an understanding of 'distance' which, in some measure, accords with Bullough's basic belief in this respect, but is nevertheless sufficiently reassessed to fit her own understanding of creative art. This is clearly emphasized in her statement that 'we might do better to look upon the art object as something in its own right, with

properties independent of our prepared reactions - *properties which command our reactions*, and make art the autonomous and essential factor that it is in every human culture.' (39, my emphasis) And, she adds, 'Every real work of art has a tendency to appear thus dissociated from its mundane environment. The most immediate impression it creates is one of "otherness" from reality - the impression of an illusion enfolding the thing, action, statement, or flow of sound that constitutes the work.' (45) Therefore, 'where an expert in the particular art in question perceives immediately a "rightness and necessity" of forms, the unversed but sensitive spectator perceives only a peculiar air of "otherness", which has been variously described as "strangeness", "semblance", "illusion", "transparency", "autonomy", or "self-sufficiency". This detachment from actuality, the "otherness"... is a crucial factor, indicative of the very nature of art.' (45-46)

Such 'dramatic illusion' is compared by Langer to the Hindu *Rasa*, 'the vital feeling of the piece'; 'that comprehension of the directly experienced or "inward" life that all art conveys.' And Langer adds, 'A public that enjoys such pure acting gives itself up to the dramatic illusion without any need for sensuous delusion. But sensuous satisfaction it does want: gorgeous robes and curtains, a rich display of colors, and always music.... These elements make the play dramatically convincing precisely by holding it aloof from actuality; they assure the spectator's "psychical Distance" instead of inviting him to consider the action as a piece of natural behaviour.' (323-24)

#### Synopsis and Assessment of Langer's Theory of Symbolic Art

1) An aesthetic experience consists in becoming intuitively aware of related forms and harmonies in the 'continuum of total perceptual space'. This, in a way, answers Bell's

question: 'Before we feel an aesthetic emotion for a combination of forms do we not perceive intellectually the rightness and necessity of the combination?' (*Art*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1914, p.8) Indeed, Langer accepts that 'to recognise that something is right and necessary is a rational act, no matter how spontaneous and immediate the recognition may be', but, she adds, Bell's "aesthetic emotion" is nothing more than 'a personal reaction to the discovery of "rightness and necessity" in the sensuous forms that evoke it'. However, 'to dwell on one's state of mind in the presence of a work does not further one's understanding of the work and its value. The question of what gives one the emotion is exactly the question of what makes the object artistic.' (33-34)

2) Artists, more than most people, can discern how their intuition of 'a simple but pure and abstract order of expressive form' in nature is 'symbolizing from the outset.' The artist's task is thus to 'interpret' and 'organize', through imagination, such symbolic units. Artistic creation is, thus, a 'growing', 'living' process.

3) Although artists insert in their works 'discernible and identifiable elements' which they can vary indefinitely, these elements are only there to 'support the semblance' - the 'projected image' - which itself is invariant.

4) Therefore, a work of art 'is more than an "arrangement" of given things - even qualitative things'. The making of a work of art is 'the creative process that enlists a man's utmost technical skill in the service of his most conceptual power, imagination.' (40)



Thus, 'technique is the means to the creation of expressive form'. It is 'a difficult, exacting, and ingenious way to serve the articulate expression of feeling.'  
(40)

5) Artistic creation is not a 'comment' on feeling, or a 'sign' pointing to something outside the work; it 'articulates' the 'appearance of feeling', but this 'appearance' is not communicated, but 'revealed'; the created form 'has' it....' (394)

6) The artist 'captures and holds' as well as 'articulates' an 'envisagement of realities which discursive language cannot properly express', and this process is actualized by a 'presentational symbol' which is 'felt as a quality' rather than recognised as a function; it is not however presented to enjoyment, but to 'conception'. The 'presentational symbol' is the work of art; it is not, therefore, like a genuine symbol, a sign that suggests or refers to something else.

7) Such Symbol is not a representation of the 'actual space' perceived by the artist, but is the 'shaping of the space that the beholder is given'. Thus, the artist creates a 'virtual scene' whose 'essence and measure' are not independently expressive in the same way as words are.

8) Because art must be 'entirely given' in its 'representational symbolism', the understanding of a work of art should not depend on criteria or information external to the works. A work of art, says Langer, does not rely on communication between the artist and the observers of his or her work; 'its symbolic function, though it has much in common with that of language,... is a more direct traffic with intuition than we hold by discursive symbols.' Therefore, the import of art 'is not separable from the form (the picture, poem, dance, etc.) that expresses it', and this is contrary to 'an author's

comment on something' which 'always does direct one's interest to something distinct from the words, gestures, or other signs conveying it.' (393-94)

It is important to underline the fact that Langer does not deny that a work of art may often give us 'a symptom of the artist's state of mind'; it may also ' "express"... the life of the society from which it stems... And besides all these things it is sure to express the unconscious wishes and nightmares of its author.' But, comments Langer, 'all these things may be found in museums and galleries if we choose to note them', or even 'in wastebaskets and in the margins of schoolbooks'; and this means that 'all drawings, utterances, gestures, or personal records of any sort express feelings, beliefs, social conditions, and interesting neuroses; "expression" in any one of these senses in not peculiar to art....' and should not, therefore, be regarded as necessary constituents of the meaning of a work of art.

9) A work of art gives a feeling of 'otherness' from reality, and this form of 'illusion' is 'a crucial factor, indicative of the very nature of art'.

Langer's 'Symbolic Art' is the theory which matches most my intrinsic understanding of creative art. In particular, her emphasis on the character of intuitive awareness which inspires and guides the artistic creation in its perception of the 'rightness and necessity' of some forms of the world, strikes me as being very much in harmony with the process of aesthetic experience I suggested in Chapter III.

I am also in total agreement with Langer's belief that art 'articulates' a 'feeling' which discursive language cannot properly express, and which is 'shaped' by the artist into a 'virtual space'', a space which the beholder has never experienced before.

As I have already indicated, I also subscribe to Langer's understanding of 'distance' in art, that is, her belief that, if 'distance' has to play a part in the success of an aesthetic experience, it should be the artist's responsibility 'to elicit this attitude instead of requiring the percipient to bring an ideal frame of mind with him'.

Langer's emphasis on the essential roles played in creative art by the artist's talent and technical knowledge and ability also meet with my total agreement.

There are, however, some important facets of Langer's theory which I find unsatisfactory or equivocal:

a) Could 'virtual space' be perceived in the same way by different observers, or by the same observer at different times? Would not the observers be bound to react, physiologically and psychologically, in different ways? Langer is aware of this possibility, but answers that there are 'enough people [who] perceive in *essentially* the same way to make... symbolic function effective' (215). This is far from reflecting Kant's principle of Universality in Aesthetics, and would rather remind us of Santayana's approach. I would suggest that a satisfactory answer to this question could be found in the 'intuitive' stage of the 'attunement/anthropic' process suggested and examined in Chapter III.

b) A problem with Langer's theory, which is linked to the above, appears to concern her use of the terms 'appearance of feeling' and 'direct presentation of feeling' which the artist is 'showing', not 'communicating', through his or her work. What worries me particularly here is Langer's tendency to view art as if it was a process of 'thought-reading'. Her fear of 'referring' the work to anything outside it, and therefore to risk confusing the function of 'symbolic art' with that of genuine symbol, makes her loose

sight, it seems to me, with the 'reality', the 'tangibility', of the art *object*, or *event*. Even with his particular view of Expression in art, Collingwood, as we have seen, has to reckon with this factor. Therefore, if we accept the principle that creative art has to be *anchored, grounded*, in an object, or event, it seems difficult, if not impossible, to dismiss the crucial importance and effect that a knowledge and understanding of the content and context of a work of art may have on the aesthetic experience of the work.

Although Langer does accept that there may be an infinity of different 'identifiable elements' in a work of art, which 'support' the illusion 'shown' or 'revealed' by the artist, they do not, she says, *partake* of the created 'virtual space' which itself is *invariant*; this means that the 'virtual space' can be apprehended and 'felt' artistically, *without any reference to the elements which have 'supported its 'creation'*. It is simply, points out Langer, a question of 'immediacy, which [as] a metaphysical virtue of pure reality, or concrete individuality, entails the idea of *intuition* as a direct perception of all there is to know about a work of art' (13). 'Natural objects become expressive only to the artistic imagination, which discovers their forms. A work of art is intrinsically expressive; it is designed to abstract and present forms for perception - forms of life and feeling, activity, suffering, selfhood - whereby we conceive these realities, which otherwise we can but blindly undergo.' (395-96)

For Langer, therefore, our aesthetic experience of a work of art does not depend on our identification and understanding of, and issuing sensitivity from, its content and context. I do not share with Langer her view that a work of art can be *fully* experienced as an aesthetic object, or event, without the above preliminary conditions being fulfilled. At the same time, I can appreciate that in view of her belief that 'expressive

form' is already contained in 'simple and pure' shapes, 'congenial to our spatial intuition', it is the 'emotional import' of these features rather than their 'actual existence' which inspires and motivates the artists. I would also suspect that Langer is strongly influenced by artists' writings such as Henri Matisse's. 'Expression, to my way of thinking', comments the latter,

does not consist of the passion mirrored upon a human face or betrayed by a violent gesture. The whole arrangement of my picture is expressive. The place occupied by the figures or objects, the empty spaces around them the proportions - everything plays a part....

A work of art must carry in itself its complete significance and impose it upon the beholder even before he can identify the subject matter. When I see the Giotto frescoes at Padua I do not trouble to recognize which scene of the life of Christ I have before me, but I perceive instantly the sentiment which radiates from it and which is instinct in the composition in every line and color. The title will only serve to confirm my impression. (in Langer, 1963, 83)

'Maurice Denis', says Langer, 'remarked the same thing when he wrote that "A Byzantine Christ is a symbol; the Jesus of the modern painter, even in the most correctly drawn turban, is merely literary. In the one, the form is expressive; in the other, an imitation of nature wishes to be so".' (in Langer, 1963, 83)

I cannot avoid to question the sincerity of either Matisse's or Denis's statements, for, in both examples, it is clear that their chosen subject-matter, in whatever way, place, or style, they would choose to paint them would still be everywhere present and identifiable. Although Matisse declares that there is no need to identify the subject matter of a work of art for it to become significant, he still writes about 'the place occupied by the figure or objects, [and] the empty spaces around them'. It is clear, thus, that he sees the subject matter of a painting as simply something

around which everything else is organized, and this would imply that the subject matter is essential to an experience of the work.

Taking into account, on one hand, the affinity between some aspects of Langer's theory and my 'Intuition/Revelation' approach, but, on the other hand, what I consider to be the weaknesses of her odd form of 'formalism/expressiveness/symbolism', I would suggest an integration of Langer's approach into a broader system in which the 'formalist' element of her system would only constitute an initial stage in the aesthetic experience of works of art, and the 'symbolic' side a second and complementary stage. This system would develop as follows:

- 1) an intuitive and, thus, immediate aesthetic apprehension in works of art, of some 'significant form', 'congenial to our spatial intuition', which the artists would succeed in 'symbolizing from the outset' (Langer).
- 2) an 'emotional' experience, induced by the harmonious 'play' of our faculties, when apprehending the 'idea of feeling' articulated and expressed by the artists in their works.

I would argue, furthermore, and contrary to Langer, that artists are symbolizing their initial 'intuition/revelation' with the *support* of especially chosen data, concepts, or/and 'genuine' symbols, whose knowledge and understanding are, if not necessary, at least conducive to a full and true aesthetic experience of works of art. This particular aspect of art will be discussed in the next chapter.

It will be noticed that the above two-phased experience, involving as it does our faculties of reason and imagination, is very much in the spirit of Kant's *Judgement of Taste*.

Inevitably, the question would be asked: When would the knowledge and understanding of the context and content of a work of art become *sufficient* for a true aesthetic experience of it to occur? I would be prepared to contemplate the strong possibility that, once we would have been 'intuitively' attracted to some 'significant form' in a work of art, and have obtained some measure of knowledge and understanding of its content and context, we would be in an ideal position to aesthetically experience these works. This would happen when a right balance would be stricken between our 'formal' and our 'emotional' experience of the works.

As concerns section 1) above, it appears to me that my two-fold theory would reconcile Bell's belief that an aesthetic emotion is felt when we 'perceive intellectually the rightness and necessity' of a 'combination of forms' in a work of art, and Langer's insistence in viewing an 'aesthetic emotion' as more than 'a personal reaction to the discovery of "rightness and necessity" in the sensuous forms that evoke it'. In other words, we have in a situation of fulfilled aesthetic experience (as Kant so clearly suggests it), not a knowledge of the particular *causes* which induce such experience in us, but a *feeling* that a particular set of *circumstances* in a work of art, generates in us a harmonious and thus pleasurable 'play' of all our faculties.

I would certainly question Langer's strong reluctance at regarding 'one's state of mind in the presence of a work of art' as a convincing proof of the aesthetic experience of a work of art. It does not seem to me that her own theory provides, in any case, any satisfactory answer to the question as to '*what* makes the object artistic'. What it indubitably provides, though, is an extremely apt and convincing hypothesis of how artists 'articulate' and 'convey' in their works, an 'idea' of the 'feeling' induced in them by a certain 'intuitive' experience of some forms and structures of the world.

This, and Langer's viewpoint about 'psychical distance' in aesthetics, which gives the artists the sole responsibility for investing in their works, when they consider it necessary, elements which will bring about such 'psychical distance' in an aesthetic experience of these works, gives us enough evidence of the clear compatibility which exists between Langer's approach to the aesthetic experience of art, and my proposed 'Attunement/Symbiosis' theory and its consequences regarding 'psychical distance'.



## CHAPTER VII

**The Need for a 'Contextual' and 'Genetic' Approach to the Experience of Art**

Artistic intentions are elaborated, developed, and finalized through the creative act. However, there are thinkers who consider that a knowledge of the artist's intentions is essential to the understanding of works of art, because intentions are precisely what differentiate art objects from natural objects; a stone, for example, from a sculpture which looks identical to it, *because someone has intended it* to have these characteristics. But, as we have seen in Chapter IV, philosophers such as John HOSPERS and Collingwood, have, in their different ways, attempted to demonstrate that what distinguishes art from artifact is precisely that artists, unlike artisans, do not work within rigid boundaries and do not strictly plan their work. In other words, they have not, at any one time, any definite and clear 'intentions' in mind. Non-intentionalists argue, therefore, that no amount of information regarding artists' intentions plays a part in the aesthetic experience of works of art. For Fry, 'the only meanings that are worth anything in a work of art, are those that the artist himself knows nothing about.' (quoted by Virginia Woolf in *Roger Fry*, 1940, pp.240-41) (in C. Barrett, 1965, 145); and Shelley writes in his *Defense of Poetry*, 'When composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet.' (in Barrett, 146)

But the most important contribution to the subject of 'intentions' in art has been made by W.K. WIMSATT and M.C. BEARDSLEY. In their essay *The Intentional Fallacy*, they attempt to establish that an investigation into the genetic sources of works

of art should not be regarded as part of the *meaning* or *quality* of the works, but simply as 'historical biography', and they point out that, for instance, 'the design or intention of the author is neither available or desirable as a standard of judging the success of a work of literary art.' (in Lodge, 1972, 334) Therefore, they add, 'the Intentional Fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its origins, a special case of what is known to philosophers as the Genetic Fallacy. It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological *causes* of the poem and ends in biography and relativism.' Thus, the outcome of the Intentional Fallacy 'is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgement, tends to disappear'. ('The Intentional Fallacy' in Lodge, 1977, 345) But, as Wimsatt and Beardsley note, the fact that intentions are involved in the creation of a work of art is not a recognition that they are *standards* by which the work should be judged. 'It is only because an artifact works that we infer the intention of an artificer.... A poem can *be* only through its *meaning* - since its medium is words - yet it *is*, simply *is*, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant. Poetry is a feat of style by which a complex of meaning is handled all at once.... In this respect poetry differs from practical messages, which are successful if and only if we correctly infer the intention'. (335)

Beardsley, in his *Aesthetics*, does admit that 'the things that naturally come to mind when we think of works of art are the products of deliberate human activity, sometimes long and arduous.... To put it another way', he adds, 'these things were *intended* by someone, and no doubt they are largely what they were intended to be by those who made them. The artist's intention is a series of psychological states or events in his mind: what he wanted to do, how he imagined or projected the work before he began to make it and while he was in the process of making it.' (1981, 17) However,

points out Beardsley, 'one of the questions we can ask about any work, but probably not with much hope of a conclusive answer, is: What was its *cause*? (17-18) As a result, 'a good deal of writing about works of art consists in describing' their *genetic* history. However, 'due to the complexity of the thing to be explained and the scarcity of available evidence,... [often, one has to concern oneself] not with the remoter antecedents of the work, but with its proximate or immediate cause in the mind of the artist. These are the critics who are fond of enquiring after the artist's *intentions*.' (17-18) There are, says Beardsley, two kinds of *evidence*, to which we can refer where intentions are concerned: the *internal* evidence from a direct inspection of the works of art, and the *external* evidence from genetic sources. Various situations may then obtain:

- (a) 'internal and external evidence go hand in hand,.. [then], there is no problem.' (20)
- (b) 'we can seldom know the intention with sufficient exactness, independently of the work itself, to compare the work with it and measure its success or failure.' (20) For instance, 'of the intentions of Shakespeare, Vermeer, the Etruscan sculptors, the makers of the *Thousand and One Nights*, and the composers of old folk songs, we have no evidence at all outside the works they left us. If fulfilment of intentions were the only *test* of value, then we could not evaluate these works at all....' (1981, 458) But, points out Beardsley, even when we have some reliable external evidence, especially the artist's words, an assessment should still be made of how good it would have to be in order to convince us of its validity. There are again here several situations which deserve attention:

(a) the artists' testimonies have enough prestige to *make us* perceive in their works qualities or characteristics we would not have otherwise perceived, and in this case, comments Beardsley, 'the intention, or the announcement of it, actually brings something to pass; what the statue is cannot be distinguished from what it is intended to be.... [but] if a quality can be seen in a statue *only* by someone who already believes that it was intended by the sculptor to be there, then that quality is not in the statue at all.' (1981, 20-21)

(b) 'internal and external evidence conflict, [then] there *is* a problem, for we must decide between them. The problem is how to make this decision.' (20) We may decide to ignore the artists' testimonies, and to take only into account those qualities or characteristics which their works directly suggest to us. 'Yet', points out Beardsley, 'it is well known that our perceptions can be influenced by what we expect or hope to see, and especially by what we may be socially stigmatized for not seeing.' (20) But most importantly, Beardsley notes, what is not always taken into account is that the distinction between works of art and artists' intentions 'depend(s) upon a general principle of philosophy.... If two things are distinct, that is, if they are indeed two, and not one thing under two names, then the evidence for the existence and nature of one cannot be exactly the same as the evidence for the existence and nature of the other.... [However], this point is obscured where the two things, though distinct, are causally connected.' (19) This is the case in art where we have, on one hand, the *internal evidence* of the nature of the artists' intentions from a direct inspection of their works, and, on the other hand, the *external evidence* of the artists' intentions from genetic sources. This confusion, says Beardsley, should not, however, for the reasons already given above, make us regard 'intentions' as a 'final court of appeal'.

(c) finally, 'the problem of distinguishing the object itself from the psychological processes that produce it becomes more difficult... with those arts that involve the process of *performance* between the creator and the perceiver.' (21) Such is the case with a musical composition or a play whose directions can never be as specific as the performance itself. 'The "real" music is what the composer heard one time in his head: the aesthetic object *is* the intention'; when it is not possible to investigate the latter, the performers must do their best to 'interpret' the musical piece in the way they imagine the composer would have intended it to be. However, Beardsley points out, most performers do not operate on this principle, and even when aware of the composer's intentions, still attempt to determine 'what details of performance are most appropriate to the broader features of the music that the score does prescribe,... and this involves relations to be found within the music itself'. (23) For example, 'there is no sure indication in the score that Mozart wished his minuets played as slowly as Beecham plays them or as fast as Toscanini and Cantelli did. It is not even agreed which of the widely different versions of Brückner's *C Minor Symphony (No 8)* he wanted performed: the 1887 original, the 1890 version, the 1892 version - or some compromise like that reflected in the Hass version of 1935.' (22) There is, adds Beardsley, an analogous situation in dramatic performance, which leads to the surprising situation that, 'it is not what the playwright intended, but *what he ought to have intended*, that the rewriting serves to discover' (24, my emphasis). My view is that, unfortunately, although such interpretations or adaptations are often necessary and thus justified, they can also, when mishandled, weaken or even corrupt the works, and this is not a rare occurrence.

But Beardsley is not just satisfied with justifying some licence in the interpretation of musical compositions, or plays, whenever judged necessary; he also maintains that, in any case, the artists' 'intentions' do not play any role in the manner in which scores and scripts have to be performed; he does not deny though that the latter 'are written in a language that has to be learned', i.e. we have to learn the notation of plainsong in its original sound, and know the rules used by medieval singers for reading that notation, if we want 'to recover plainsong in its original sound' (24). 'We can be helped to understand a poem: there are meanings that we do not see unaided, but acknowledge to be present as soon as they are pointed out to us.' (129) However, for Beardsley, this consists only in *explicating* the poem.

One of the most interesting analyses of the Intentional Fallacy has been made by Colin LYAS. Addressing himself more particularly to Beardsley's argument that artist and work are *discrete entities*, he notes, that:

(a) 'it would appear that what can be truly said of a work or art is different from what can be truly said of its creator. It is true of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* that it hangs on a certain wall in the Louvre, by this is not, happily, true of Leonardo. It is true of Picasso's *Acrobat on a Ball* that its colour is predominantly blue. This was not true of Picasso. It is true of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony that it can still be heard in a concert hall: this is not true of Beethoven.' (in Hanfling, 1992, 382)

But, Lyas notes, although this argument has considerable plausibility, it does not invalidate the fact that 'an investigation of the lives of artists and the story of the creation of their works is a legitimate activity' (in Hanfling, 1992, 382). However, he

adds, the argument still claims that 'it is one thing to study how a work that has certain merits and demerits came about, another to ascertain what merits and demerits it actually has.... (To ignore this principle) is to use one thing, the work, as a springboard to talk about another thing, the artist.' (382) In other words, adds, Lyas, 'starting with information about the artist, we might use that information in order to make inferences about features we might possibly find in the work. But then that sort of inference is in principle unnecessary (*though in practice it might give us a short-cut to an understanding of the work*). It is unnecessary because if the work does have a certain property, then that property must be detectable in the work itself... then we need only study the work to find it.' (383, my emphasis) Even if we could get the information from the artists themselves, observes Lyas, 'at the end we would have to go to the work to verify the presence of [the] properties in it.... So references to the artist are either irrelevant or unnecessary.' (383) It is also clear, comments Lyas, that, as Beardsley has established, 'what makes the genetic study of a work a part of the study of art is the decision that that work has certain sorts of value.... [In other words], 'until critics have done their work, we do not know whether the object whose genesis we are studying is a work of art, and, so, will not know whether our investigation into its genesis is part of the study of art.' (384) As Lyas adds, the profound consequences of this situation have been witnessed in, for instance, the Marxist literary studies to determine the social and economic origins of works of art. Trotsky himself had to write: 'It is very true that one cannot always go by the principles of Marxism in deciding whether to reject or to accept a work of art. A work of art should, in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is, by the law of art. But Marxism alone can explain why and how a given

tendency in art has originated in a given period of history....' (*Literature and Revolution*, University of Michigan Press, 1960, p.178) (in Hanfling, 1992, 384)

and (b) the meaning of a text, according to the Structuralist understanding of *meaning* and *interpretation* in literature,

is a property conferred on words, actions and institutions by the structure of the public language and not by individual acts of willing meaning onto words, acts, etc. It follows that the task of determining meaning falls to the reader.... The reader brings an accumulated body of public understanding to the text and, using that understanding, assigns a meaning to it. Where a reader is in doubt, it is in virtue of a lack of competence with part of that public domain; in which case what is needed is not a reference to the artist but reference to a dictionary or a more competent speaker. (In Hanfling, 1992, 397-98)

'And this looks right', says Lyas, because 'the view that meaning is given to words by individual acts of intention entails that the meaning of no word can be explained.... One would have to give that word or phrase a meaning by another word or phrase, and so on for ever.... [But] when I speak I do not, typically, *give* the words I use a meaning. I use them as *already* having a meaning.... A word gets its meaning from a public structure which is not the possession of any individual speaker.' (in Hanfling, 1992, 396) But, Lyas' argument goes,

if all this is so, why do we need reference to individual artists and their intentions in order to discover the meaning of a literary or any other work of art? All we need to do is bring to a text our knowledge of the structure of rules that give words their meaning and then read that meaning off from the text.... Beardsley can therefore write: 'It is in its language that the poem happens. That is why the language is the object of our attention and our study when its meaning is difficult to understand. It is not the interpreter's task... to draw our attention off to the psychological states of the author.' (*The Possibility of Criticism*, Detroit, 1970, p.34).



And Sartre writes: 'Words... became things themselves. And when a poet joins several of these microcosms together the case is like that of painters when they assemble their colours on the canvas.' (*What is Literature?*, trans. B. Frechtman, Methuen, 1950, p.229).

Here we have the clear view that the meaning of a word is what it is regardless of what the author might say about what he or she would have like to have said, just as the colour of a coloured patch is what it is regardless of what its painter would have liked to have painted....

On this account reference to intention in the determination of meaning is unnecessary. (in Hanfling, 1992, 396-98)

The above arguments refer essentially to a literary context, but Structuralists contend that other arts too reflect the basic laws and structures of societies and cultures. However, it would seem impossible to say, for example, of the art of painting that 'all we need to do is bring to [it] our knowledge of the structure of rules that give [its constituents] their meaning and then read off that meaning off [the painting]', and 'where [an observer] is in doubt, it is in virtue of a lack of competence with part of that public domain [the 'accumulated body of public understanding']; in which case what is needed is not a reference to the artist but reference to a [textbook] or a more competent [artist].' (in Hanfling, 1992, 398)

Lyas is, in any case, rather reluctant to unreservedly accept the Structuralist argument regarding literature, for, as he points out, 'a structuralist account, which allows us to assign a determinate meaning to a text by the use of a structure of meaning-giving rules may take an over-optimistic view of the extent to which the rules we have mastered for the use of language can help us when our task is the discovery of the meaning of a text.' (398) The reason for this is that we often use language in a creative way which extends beyond these 'meaning-giving' rules. And 'yet we manage

to make perfectly good sense of this creative extension of our language.' (398) This fact is commented upon by Stuart SIM who writes that 'as an aesthetic theory structuralism is vulnerable at several points'. For instance, 'structure continues to have a reality independent of readers: human beings discover or appreciate it, not control or direct it.... [Furthermore], the formalism of the theory... leads to a form of criticism which *can say very little about the content of works of art, and, by extension, their psychological effect....* [But most importantly], in structuralist criticism... an author's oeuvre is examined in terms of an assumed ideal structure (spatial and geometrical references abound in such criticism,..), and then each individual work is compared to this ideal structure.... [whether or not this work] is well or badly realized by the author'. As a result of the marginalization of the evaluative aspect of aesthetic theory, the distinction between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic becomes blurred, and, as Sim remarks, 'an *aesthetic theory* which does not provide the means *to evaluate artefacts in a social and psychological sense, ultimately can only appear somewhat impoverished.*' (in Hanfling, 1992, 423-24, my emphasis) But, for Lyas, 'this line of argument, however, does not, as yet, reinstate the artist as a source of meaning. It is still the reader who has to see the possibility of creative extensions of thought.' (in Hanfling, 1992, 398) Therefore, what is necessary is to show that even if we accept the 'structuralist' approach as described above, we do not need to regard it as incompatible with the belief that artists can show their personal qualities in their works in relevant ways. 'For', says Lyas, 'the words of a text are put together by an *authorial act* which *can show us the author's character and intelligence at work....* Sartre pointed out that at every stage of the production of a work of art.... the artist has to make a choice: to juxtapose these colours rather than those, to use this word rather than that, to use this chord when others were available.' (399, my emphasis) What is interesting here is

that, as Lyas points out, although Sartre was nonetheless 'suspicious of references to authors (who, he thought, had no right to dictate to readers how their works should be read)', he still strongly believed that what Wimsatt describes as "the operative mind or effective intention" of the author 'could be read from the work, for the work is a *repository that bears the evidence of successive acts of choice*' (399, my emphasis). In the same context, Wayne Booth writes: 'Though the author can to some extent choose his disguise, he can never choose to disappear.' (*The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 1961, p.20)

At this point I think it relevant to briefly refer to Sim's analysis of Jacques DERRIDA's Post-structuralism in the context of aesthetics. '*Deconstructionist aesthetics*,' Sim writes, 'involves very different assumptions from those of structuralism, namely:

- (i) that texts, like language, are marked by instability and indeterminacy of meaning;
- (ii) that given such instability and indeterminacy neither philosophy nor criticism can have any special claim to authority as regards textual interpretation;
- (iii) that interpretation is a free-ranging activity more akin to game-playing than analysis.'

The point of deconstructionist criticism is to demolish the illusion of stable meaning in texts.' (in Hanfling, 1992, 425)

Consequently, adds Sim, for Derrida, whose inspiration comes from 'Saussurean linguistics and the notion of the arbitrariness of the signifier.... there are no pre-existing meanings, structures, or essences to be taken into account.... Derrida wishes to replace the search for a pre-existent essence or "interior-design" with what he

calls "the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs, without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation" (*Writing and Difference*, Bass A. (trans.), Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p.292).' Therefore, 'Derrida is calling for a free play of sign and meaning, unrestricted by any limiting notion of structure: what Culler has called "the pleasure of infinite creation" (*Structuralist Poetics*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, p.248). Creation of this kind is undertaken by the reader;... V. Leitch has neatly summed up the deconstructive project as a celebration of "playfulness and hysteria over care and rationality" (*Deconstructive Criticism, An Advanced Introduction*, Hutchinson, 1983, p.246).' (in Hanfling, 1992, 425-426) And Sim concludes: 'On the one side, we have determinism and authoritarianism (structuralism), on the other indeterminism and some form of anarchism (deconstruction and post-modernism).... In critical terms of reference this represents a move from description and classification to anarchic game-playing, but in each case we remain within the framework of semiotics, with Saussurean linguistics remaining the major point of reference.' (in Hanfling, 1992, 436) The extremely polarized aspect of the debate between Structuralists and anti-Foundationalists, with on one side a total reliance on criteria of truth-value, and on the other side a desire for all cases of aesthetic judgement to be relative and plural, does not facilitate a right assessment of this crucial issue in aesthetics. As Sim rightly comments, 'most of us would be quite willing to accept that meaning is not always completely stable (the art of poetry largely depends on just such a premise), without thereby feeling this licenses a swift transition to the position of claiming that all meaning at all times can *only* be unstable: how could one possibly *prove*, or even *test*, such a proposition?' (in Hanfling, 1992, 437)

In the same context as above, we turn now to a very interesting study made by Paul RICOEUR, concerning *sense* and *reference* in literature, and their crucial import on the question of 'distanciation' in aesthetics. 'An essential characteristic of a literary work, and of a work of art in general', he writes, 'is that it transcends its own psychosociological conditions of production and thereby opens itself to an unlimited series of readings, themselves situated in different socio-cultural conditions. In short, the text must be able, from the sociological as well as the psychological point of view, to "decontextualize" itself in such a way that it can be "recontextualized" in a new situation - as accomplished, precisely, by the act of reading.' (1989, 139) And Ricoeur goes on,

The emancipation with respect to the author has a parallel on the side of those who receive the text. In contrast to the dialogical situation, where the *vis-a-vis* is determined by the very situation of discourse, written discourse creates an audience which extends in principle to anyone who can read. The freeing of the written material with respect to the dialogical condition of discourse is the most significant effect of writing. It implies that the relation between writing and reading is no longer a particular case of the relation between speaking and hearing.... To begin with, *writing renders the text autonomous with respect to the intention of the author*. What the text signifies no longer coincides with what the author meant; henceforth, textual meaning and psychological meaning have different destinies.... Distanciation is not the product of methodology and hence something superfluous and parasitical; *rather it is constitutive of the phenomenon of the text as writing...* [In writing] the functioning of reference is profoundly altered when it is no longer possible to identify the thing spoken about as part of the common situation of the interlocutors. (1989, 139-40)

In support of his argument Ricoeur adopts Frege's distinction between the *sense* and the *reference* of a proposition. 'The sense', he says, 'is the ideal object which the proposition intends, and hence is purely immanent in discourse. The reference is the truth value of the proposition, its claim to reach reality. Reference thus distinguishes discourse from language [*langue*]; the latter has no relation with reality, its words

returning to other words in the endless circle of the dictionary. Only discourse, we shall say, intends things, applies itself to reality, expresses the world. [Therefore], the new question which arises is this: what happens to reference when discourse becomes a text?' (140-41)

For Ricoeur, what happens in art is an 'appropriation [which] is quite the contrary of contemporaneousness and congeniality: it is understanding at and through distance.... Distanciation is not abolished by appropriation, but is rather the counterpart of it. Thanks to distanciation by writing, appropriation no longer has any trace of affective affinity with the intention of the author.... [Appropriation] does not respond to the author, it responds to the sense;... [it is] dialectically linked to the objectification characteristic of the *work*.' (143) Thus, if I understand Ricoeur correctly, 'distanciation' and its effects, are precisely the means which allow us to 'appropriate', i.e. to *respond to the sense* - the 'ideal object' - which is '*in front*' of the works of art - and not to what is '*behind*' the works, i.e. the artists' intentions. 'What must be interpreted in a text [work of art] is a *proposed* world which I could inhabit and wherein I could project one of my ownmost possibilities. That is what I call the world of the text, the world proper to *this* unique text.' (142) This is brought about, says Ricoeur, by a 'redescription of reality', a 'mimesis of reality' (Aristotle), through a 'metaphorical language' which can be defined as a 're-structuration' of stylisation. 'The work of stylisation', writes Ricoeur, 'takes the peculiar form of an interplay between an anterior situation which appears suddenly undone, unresolved, open, and a conduct or strategy which reorganizes the residues left over from the anterior structuration.... The two aspects of event and meaning are drawn together by the notion of style.' (137) Therefore, concludes Ricoeur, what Gadamer calls the "matter of the

text" and what I call here the "world of the work" .... [is ultimately] a proposed world.'  
(143)

I must admit of having some difficulty in understanding the reason why anti-Intentionalists object so strongly to a reliance on external evidence in order to apprehend the *meaning* of a work of art. It is as if that knowledge was bound to deprive the works of some sacred autonomy, or essence, and was thus desecrating them. But even Berleant, who has many reservations about the justification of the role of 'expressiveness' in art and emphasizes the 'immediacy that infuses our encounter with [the arts]', comes to write that the artist as 'the originator of particular aesthetic experience,... becomes at times a source of information and explanation about it and of assistance in obtaining it. *For the artist's vision is the basis for perceptual emulation.*' And, most significantly, Berleant comments:

Here is where our knowledge of the genesis of an art object becomes important. There are many artistic occasions on which an *awareness of the cultural situation in which a work was produced sensitizes our perception in a way that could not occur if we were to confine our attention to the art object alone.* When we realize that Picasso found his theme for *Guernica*, for example, in the German bombardment of a tiny Spanish village during the Spanish civil war, our awareness of the painting is increased. The presence of a bull in it, for example, becomes understandable. Bulls, or the symbolism of the bullfight, do not figure in the pathos of most wars. The painting becomes more than a depiction of the horrors of war in general; it takes on a particular significance through its association with a specific event. *Perhaps this is one role that titles may play at times in the experience of art. They introduce a relationship or a setting which bears on the art object in order to influence and enhance our experience of the object itself.*

There are many other kinds of factors, too, of which our awareness can have a powerful effect on the experience of art... Speaking more broadly, the technology of art is relevant to perception. While we can view paintings, for example, without knowing what the materials or techniques of application were, realizing this sensitizes us to the peculiar qualities of the end result. Our perception is [also] *influenced* when we *know* that an artist held a stylistic or aesthetic theory such as cubism, impressionism, futurism, or serialism. Such knowledge often does more

than influence our perception; it may indeed make it possible. The same holds true for those art objects in which symbolism is an inherent part of the style and is not introduced *ab extra* to meet the demands of a critic's or aesthete's theory. In symbolist poetry or Hindu dance, for example, it is essential to know the stylistic intent of the poet, the materials of the tradition, the import of the different gestures and stances, to be able to have *full aesthetic apprehension*. Similarly, our understanding of the artist's intention, *if we can discover what it is*, may contribute not a basis for judging an object but rather a *source of insight* into its features and qualities. (1970, 60-64, my emphasis)

In order to substantiate the above arguments submitted against the stringency of the concept of Intentional Fallacy, I will offer hereafter various illustrations which should typically demonstrate the value of 'referential' and 'contextual' principles in the aesthetic experience of works of art. For example, in the graphic arts:

(a) Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*, painted in 1819, was based on a contemporary event: a shipwreck which occurred in 1816 near the occidental coast of Africa. More than one hundred persons survived the tragedy, and were then stranded on a raft for twelve days. Fifteen of them were near death when they were finally rescued twelve days later, when it was then revealed that, in order to survive, some of the castaways had been reduced to cannibalism.

Since its first exhibition this work of art has been the subject of many questions and interpretations, notably about the way Géricault thought about, felt, and interpreted, the subject-matter and its various *implications*. Apart from obvious psychological considerations, some religious connotation is found by some in the fact that the mast and sail on the raft vaguely resemble a Christian cross. On the other hand, some aspects of the painting appear to others to symbolize the artist's political response and protest to some unpopular decision taken by the Government with regard to the choice of the shipwrecked ship's captain. Various other meanings have been attributed



to this painting. But it is evident that without a preliminary knowledge of the main historical fact which inspired the artist, that is, *cannibalism*, nothing in the painting, except perhaps the vague picture of a knife stained with blood, and placed at the feet, and in the shadow, of one of the shipwrecked, would indicate that such a horrific event has taken place on the raft. Could we, in a case like this, still contend that this work of art would have been aesthetically experienced as it is, if the public had been left in the dark regarding its subject-matter? Not only the factual circumstances behind the work, but the social and political climates of the time, and perhaps even some knowledge of the artist's life, would be bound to significantly contribute to the aesthetic experience of the work.

(b) Let us now consider Andrea Mantegna's painting *St. James on the way to his execution* (1455). As Gombrich tells us, Mantegna tried to imagine what the scene must have looked like in reality, that is, in Roman times: '...the procession escorting St James has halted for a moment because one of the persecutors has repented and thrown himself at the feet of the saint to receive his blessing.... while the Roman soldiers stand by and watch, one of them impassively, the other lifting his hand in an expressive gesture which seems to convey that he, too, is moved.' (1992, 194) 'Mantegna', says Gombrich, 'had made a special study of classical monuments.' Furthermore, 'like Masaccio, he uses the new art of perspective with eagerness, but he does not exploit it as Ucello did to show off the new effect which could be achieved by means of this magic. Mantegna rather uses perspective to create the stage on which his figures seem to stand and move like solid, tangible, beings.' (194) What Mantegna wanted to 'represent' was not a Roman scene as such, but *the kind of attitudes and reactions that would have probably occurred in the conditions engendered by a type of society such*

as Roman society. And, consequently, Mantegna's intentions and ideas, although referring to a particular time and place, should be taken as *workable* in any kind of society similar to Roman society. The choice of the Roman society does not make the painting exclusively dateable temporally and spatially, but it is nevertheless indispensable as a *sign* to the kind of backdrop that Mantegna intends to give to his inspiration. As Gombrich comments, Mantegna 'distributes [his figures]... so as to convey the significance of the moment....' (194)

It is obvious that without some knowledge and understanding of the historical event depicted by Mantegna, and of the times and conventions attached to it, a mistaken interpretation of the painting, and of the graphic and symbolic means chosen by the painter, would spoil our aesthetic experience of this masterpiece.

Certainly, our aesthetic apprehension of such work would in great part stem from the psychological, ethical and political *resonances* inherent in the context of this particular subject-matter.

(c) Would Michelangelo's ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican in Rome, have the same aesthetic import if we did not know the biblical story which inspired it? Gombrich has this to say about this masterpiece: 'It is one of the greatest miracles in art how Michelangelo has contrived thus to make *the touch of the Divine Hand* the centre and the focus of the picture, and how he has made us see the idea of omnipotence by the ease and power of this *gesture of creation*.' (1992, 235, my emphasis)

(d) My next example concerns Piet Mondrian's *Composition with Grey, Red, Yellow and Blue* which depicts a group of colours contained in rectangles. On a television talk, the critic Neil Macgregor reported that, as the artist himself had indicated, this

configuration of straight lines and right angles was intended to evoke a state of stillness, an ambience free of tension and ambiguity; this was indeed reflected, commented Macgregor, in the neatness of the painting, and especially in the lack of visible traces of paint strokes. Mondrian also revealed that he wished to show in his painting how colours and lines organized themselves into a community, and how this organization was supposed to induce ideas of permanence and harmony, a state of thoughtfulness and rationality, which would make us ask questions about the relations between the colours in the same way as, in other kinds of paintings, we would ask questions about the relations between the various characters depicted. Mondrian's avowed aim was to make of the formal and structural principles involved in his painting, social and moral *signifiers* of how society and the world could, and should, transform themselves into a state of *rationality and tranquillity*.

But could we believe that, if left in total ignorance of Mondrian's above *normative* and *idealistic* intentions, the public would be in a position to understand and aesthetically experience his work? What would be perhaps perceived in it is simply an overall atmosphere of *clarity* and *discipline*, but, as Croce comments: '... if the task of the painter... were to combine lines and lights and colours with ingenious novelty of invention and effect, he would be, not an artist, but an inventor,... [then] we would have to fear (as Proudhon did for poetry and John Stuart Mill for music) that the possible combinations of words or notes would one day be exhausted, and poetry or music would disappear.' ('Aesthetics', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th ed.) (in Hofstadter and Kihns, 1976, 558)

Our argument could equally be supported by examples chosen in other artistic media. For instance,

(a) this is what Gombrich writes about Houdon's bust of Voltaire: 'It allows us to see, in the face of this *great champion of reason* the biting wit, the penetrating intelligence, and also the *deep compassion of a great mind*.' (1992, 373, my emphasis) Such aesthetic judgement is obviously based on, and inspired by, the knowledge that Gombrich has, and the public would have, of the sitter of the sculpture. But, even if we accept that *superior intelligence, wit, and benevolence* could, without this knowledge, be directly *seen* in Houdon's work, it is to be doubted that observers would have a true aesthetic experience of that portrait, if they could not identify its sitter.

(b) as concerns architecture, as Dewey writes,

By common consent, the Parthenon is a great work of art. Yet it has aesthetic standing only as the work becomes an experience for a human being.... one has to be willing at some point in his reflections to turn from it to the bustling, arguing, acutely sensitive Athenian citizens, with civic sense identified with a civic religion, of whose experience the temple was an expression, and who built it not as a work of art but as a civic commemoration.... The one who sets out to theorize about the aesthetic experience embodied in the Parthenon must realize in thought what the people into whose lives it entered had in common, as creators and as those who were satisfied with it, with people in our own homes and on our own streets. In order to *understand* the esthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw.... (1958, 4)

There is no doubt that the above argument could be equally applied to Medieval Cathedrals, Roman Stadia, or even to prehistoric monuments such as Stonehenge.

(c) is it not also the case that our aesthetic experience of parks, gardens, terraces, and fountains surrounding palaces such as Versailles or Blenheim, is influence and inspired, whether we realize it or not, by our knowledge of the history and prestige of the courts, or aristocracy, which inhabited these palaces?

We could also submit that music, as the epitome of non-representational art, is perhaps the form of art which would benefit most from an appeal to 'contextual' or 'circumstantial' evidence. However, this view is not shared by many philosophers who argue that music is purely and simply a 'direct shock... of intensity' (Eliot), or that, as Mercia M. EATON reports,

it is *the* one and only purely formal art form, that is, the only art form in which only formal properties are aesthetically relevant. Some theorists believe that to describe music in 'literary' ways - to attribute descriptions of rivers to it or even to ascribe emotion expression to it - distorts music. For example, Roger Scruton (in *Art and Imagination*, London: Methuen, 1979, p.210),... admits that some composers do intentionally try to tell stories or refer to things and events through their work. But this is not the norm, he argues.... People can understand a piece of music even if they do not know that it is supposed to stand for Melisande's frailty or the flow of the Moldau river... (in Eaton, 1988, 70)

The above viewpoint is not shared by musicologists such as Susan McClary who 'believes', writes Eaton, 'that, in general, it is a mistake to treat music as if it were a "pure" entity isolated from other aspects of cultural and social experience.... Peter Kivy, another philosopher who is also an accomplished musician.... believes that music can be treated with *more than* a strict technical analysis - that it does say or express things (*The Corded Shell*, Princeton University Press, 1980).' (1988, 70, my emphasis)

I would agree with the above position, and will offer hereafter some illustrations in order to support my reasons for doing so.

(a) Could, for instance, Grieg's two Suites from *Peer Gynt* be aesthetically experienced if we were left totally in the dark as to the subject-matter which inspired Grieg in the first place? Malcolm Rayment writes about these Suites: 'The story of Peer Gynt,... an unpleasant Norwegian youth with a dream of becoming emperor of the world, gave

opportunities for a wide variety of musical moods.' (Tape jacket *Music for Pleasure Ltd*, Hayes)

(b) I had loved since childhood Schubert's composition *Impatience*, without, however, having known its title until recently. The feeling, or mood, evoked by this song could reflect any agitation of the spirit, such as anger or stress, but although such interpretation would not seem incongruous, or damaging to, the aesthetic value of this musical piece, none would, in my view, adequately and significantly *evoke*, or to use a Langerian term, 'symbolize', the 'feeling' of *impatience*. As soon as the true meaning of the piece is known, the latter acquires a new dimension and everything falls into place; it is as if a hazy veil which had been partially hiding a radiant sunny landscape had suddenly been lifted. Some important element of knowledge, the artist's basic intention, had been missing which had deprived the work (for me at least) of its true emotive and expressive *import*.

Of course, works of art always become more than what the artist intended, or subconsciously came to, invest in them. The dynamics of the creative act generate characteristics and qualities which outgrow the 'given'. This is also why titles or descriptions of works of art do not always *explain* or *reflect* the artists' intentions, or even the conception they have of their works, and why they should not, therefore, at least as a general rule, be relied upon to throw light on these works. For instance, the title of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* was not chosen by the composer, but was suggested by a friend for whom the musical theme evoked a moonlight atmosphere. This does not necessarily mean, of course, that Beethoven, when he wrote this piece, was not inspired by the same theme.

Another example concerns Chopin's *Minute Waltz* which is said to have been inspired by the amusing sight of George Sand's little dog chasing after his tail. It is clear that, once we are made aware of this story, not only do we have the sensation of *sharing* with the composer the *hilarity* and *charm* of the occasion, but we become acquainted with a side of Chopin's personality which is not always known, his great sense of humour; this discovery may even influence our experience of other Chopin's works. Needless to say that I do not mean that our aesthetic experience would depend, in this particular case, on our being able to vividly imagine the scene which inspired Chopin; in fact, it is rather the reverse: it is Chopin who, by *aesthetically seeing* the scene, instils in his work a *dimension* which has transcended the event itself.

Certainly, there is no lack of references and information on musical compositions and their sources of inspiration or contexts in musical anthologies, biographies, and critiques. Also, *titles* of musical compositions, more than in other forms of art, can be, as Beardsley himself admits, 'an indispensable aid... in helping the listener imagine specific objects or events while listening to the music. But', adds Beardsley, 'some of them serve a purely musical function.... A title like *Spring*, or even *Mal de Mer*, could mean "Play this with a springlike quality", or "Make it sound a little queasy".' (1981, 349) But whether as a musical instruction to interpreters, or as a help to listeners, the title of *Spring*, for instance, is still concerned with the 'springlike' quality which the composer intends to associate with the meaning of the musical piece. This does not mean that titles should be used as programs, or résumés; it would be, in any case, difficult or even impossible to condense in a title such as 'Impatience', for instance, the exact nature of the composer's inspiration. But what can this title do, is to make us more sensitive and alert to the *atmosphere* of the state of 'impatience'.

### Conclusion

Ideally, works of art should be *expressive* and *explicit* enough to make us understand and aesthetically experience them without an appeal to external information or genetic sources, but we are not discussing here a phenomenon of extra-sensory perception; an aesthetic experience is very much rooted in the realistic conditions of human life. However, I have made clear in this chapter that I was not strictly opposed to the basic criticisms presented in the Intentional Fallacy, but that there was one factor, however, which would make me doubt the full validity of this argument, and it is the need, in aesthetic experience of works of art, for a basic understanding of their *context*. What cannot certainly be denied is that artists deliberately choose a particular subject-matter, i.e. social, political, historical, geographical, biographical, or scientific, as well as a particular style, or definite means, symbols, etc., which they regard as essential, or at least as the most appropriate, to the expression and communication of their 'inspiration'. As we have seen, even Sartre, in spite of his suspicions of any 'referential' process in the experience of works of art, believes that artists exercise a choice regarding the contexts and means used in their creations, and that these choices are most of the time reflected in their works, I would, however, be less convinced than Sartre in this respect, and would rather agree with David Pole that precisely because 'artworks are public objects with a history... they invite interpretation. They can be *misinterpreted*, especially if their history is ignored. We have no idea what the words mean, or why there is a bagpipe in a painting of a Dutch interior. Consulting a dictionary or an iconologica like Cesare Rippe's may help here.' (in Eaton, 1988, 111) I am aware that the above argument is rather directed to the 'criticism' of works of art



rather than to the aesthetic experience of them, but I would maintain that the same basic principle does apply, in great measure, to the latter.

Taking account of all the views and arguments presented in this chapter, we should now be in a position to assert that a clear and thorough knowledge and understanding of the *context* in which works of art *emerge* and *grow*, are of the greatest value for our aesthetic experience of them. The fact that art galleries are intent in offering to the public as much detailed information as possible about artists and their works, is certainly significant in this respect. What is also revealing is the public's usual attitude when faced with works of art, that is, they attempt to learn as much as they can about them, and it is evident that in most cases, their interest is not *primarily* aroused by a gratuitous curiosity, but by a genuine desire to better *understand*, and *participate* in, the artist's world. As the following quote (from an article about aesthetics of which I lost trace) points out: 'For many people, their interpretation of a novel will be crucially affected by their beliefs about the author; it will matter, for example, whether the author is male or female, European or African. Who shall prescribe that such readers are wrong?'

Even 'titles' of works of art are generally made rather explicit by the artists. As a matter of fact, it is often the case that the less representative and understandable are the works, the lengthier and more explanatory are the titles'; viz. Fernand Léger's *Mechanical Elements*, Jean Arp's *Rectangles Arranged to the Laws of Chance*, Naum Gabo's *Project for a Radio Station*, Piet Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*. Unfortunately, some titles given to abstract art are as puzzling as the works they are attached to! Perhaps are they, in this case, supposed to be parts of the works themselves.

Beardsley is very skeptical about the role played by 'titles' in the aesthetic experience of art, for, as he rightly points out, works of art do not always have titles, or the latter may be totally misreading and baffle the public, or they may be 'mere labels such as *Composition # 6* or *Harmony in Grey and Gold*' (1981, 312). The fact that, in cases like these, the public often attempt to find what the artists did entitle their works 'is not', writes Beardsley, 'an appeal to the painter's intention, *though it perhaps comes close to it*; the question is not what the painter intends to portray, but what he called his picture' (1981, 275, my emphasis). But I would make the following point here: there are two factors involved in Beardsley's above argument; 1) understanding the context and content intended by the artists to 'articulate' and 'express' their 'aesthetic intuition', and it is here that the use of 'referential' and 'contextual' principles in art, should prove extremely useful and 2) being provided with a 'title' to the work, sufficiently explicit, and relevant to, the artistic 'message', to at least 'intellectually isolate the artists' essential intention among a multitude of other possible intentions.

In this context, Beardsley offers the example of Rembrandt's *The Jewish Bride* (a title given to his work by the artist himself), 'which shows a pair in Biblical costumes - that is its depiction-subject - but', asks Beardsley, 'does it portray Ruth and Boaz, or Isaac and Rebekah, or two of Rembrandt's contemporaries...?' (1981, 275) I would argue that there is a difference to make between the above painting and, for example, a portrait. In the latter case, a knowledge of the identity of the sitter would indeed help to deepen our aesthetic experience of the painting; however, in the case of Rembrandt's *The Jewish Bride*, there are two factors involved: a) the individuals who posed for the picture, and b) the historical individuals, involved in a social event. Therefore, in (a) it is no more important to know the identities of the sitters than it

would be to know the identities of actors in a play); but in (b) it would be important to identify the historical and social backgrounds of the 'pair in Biblical costumes'. Of course, as I have already underlined in this chapter, Rembrandt's painting would still be regarded as a work of art with an ambiguous title, or no title at all, but would it be aesthetically experienced as it should, or at least as Rembrandt would have wished it to be experienced?

In any case, Beardsley himself, speaking this time about music, does admit that 'it is true that ... titles are an *indispensable aid* ... in *helping* the listener imagining specific objects or events while listening to the music' (1981, 349, my emphasis). This statement is even more surprising when speaking about music which is generally regarded as 'the most powerful of all the arts, and therefore [capable of] attaining its ends entirely from its own resources' (Schopenhauer).

It would also be important to remember that the background and circumstances of a large majority of great artistic works were known by the craftsmen's or artists' contemporaries, and that their knowledge, and informed assessment of the works, have largely be handed down to subsequent generations. (What Linge, writing about Gadamer, calls the 'tradition that transmits the text or art work to us and influences our reception of it in the present' (in Gadamer, 1977, xxiv).

We may have the illusion that we approach and apprehend works of art in a state of complete *neutrality* but this is not so. As Eaton emphasizes, 'In our daily lives as well as in more sophisticated investigations - we are not neutral observers.... Our minds, to use a Popperian metaphor, are more like searchlights; theories and concepts already formed influence what we actively look for and then discover in the world.'

And Eaton adds, '... Gombrich (who credits Popper's influence on him) and Nelson Goodman describe looking at art as a kind of reading; habits and theories that we bring with us determine what we see or hear.' (1988, 110)

We are also often helped and trained by our experience of other works by the same artists or by contemporary artists, or by critics' commentaries. This *fund* of information is stocked in our memory, and consciously or subconsciously used in our experience of works of art. This is why I believe that we could not, even if we wanted to, *look at* works of arts with an 'innocent' eye. Contrary to what supporters of the Intentional fallacy posit, we are already dependent on an established frame of reference when we start experiencing works of art.

The object of this chapter is not to prove that an aesthetic experience of works of art should necessarily be dependent on a *complete* knowledge and understanding of their context, and genetic sources; in any case, this would be unrealistic because of the *organic* nature of creative art. I would however contend that a knowledge and understanding of the main 'signifiers' introduced by the artists in their works to *support* the 'articulation' and 'symbolic expression' of their inspiration, are indeed essential to a true aesthetic appreciation of these works. A disregard of this prerequisite would, in my view, not only result in total subjectivism and thus relativism in aesthetics, but would indicate a deliberate neglect, or disregard, of the artists' personal involvement in their creations.

But let us now turn to what Reid has to say in the same context. He writes: '(The) 'external objects or events, or the ideas or feelings, which stimulated the artist to express the particular happenings which moved him, [and] without which the particular

work of art would not have been produced, constitute the '*primary* subject matter' of the work of art'; the latter, when apprehended aesthetically by the artist, becomes a '*secondary* subject-matter', which when 'worked out into a self-fulfilling whole in a material', generates the '*tertiary* subject matter', i.e. the work of art. The latter is 'flesh of its flesh, spirit of its flesh, something which cannot be apprehended apart from the work, though theoretically "distinguishable" from its expressiveness.' ('Beauty and Significance', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. xxix (1918-29), pp.123-154) (in Langer, 1962, 41-42, my emphasis) What must be made clear here is that, for Reid, the '*primary* subject-matter' 'does *awaken* aesthetic interest, though it is defined as being unqualified by aesthetic interest. As soon as aesthetic interest is awakened the object of interest *loses its aesthetic neutrality and becomes aesthetically qualified.*' (Op. cit., my emphasis) This is one of the most cogent and unequivocal statements I have witnessed in a definition of the aesthetic value of the objects and sources of the artists' inspiration; I would interpret it as implying that, contrary to the arguments presented in the Intentional Fallacy, all the physical, psychological, or intellectual elements which have contributed to an artistic creation, do not become *aesthetically* redundant once synthesized and embodied in the work of art. As Reid points out, even concepts 'must be particularized, must be translated into terms which *can* be perceived or imaged. "Duty" for Wordsworth is not the "duty" of the moral philosopher, but becomes the "Stern Daughter of the Voice of God" (op.cit).' (in Langer, 1962, 42)

Although I can, in a way, sympathize with the autonomists' refusal to treat a work of art as an identifiable *replica* of the artist's subjectivity and intentions, I am still very uncomfortable with their way of turning the aesthetic experience of art into what seems to be a *parasitical* process, or *alienation* process. Ricoeur's distinction between

sense and reference is based on the belief that in a written text, it is no longer possible 'to identify the thing spoken about as part of the common situation of the interlocutors'; this argument if applied to works of art would negate what is precisely the main aim and function of art: a 'dialogue' between the artists and their public. But, in any case, as Lyas rightly points out, why should it be impossible to 'feel' the authors intentions in the written text? The very *raison d'être* of literature is precisely to offer the reader the means to apprehend an absent speaker's 'idea of feeling' (Langer). And although I agree with Langer that art is not strictly speaking a language, I still believe that it is, like language, a means to perceive and understand what an artist 'intends' us to perceive and understand. As Lyas notes, 'Alan Tormey, at the end of a work in which he seeks to deny that talk about works of art in any way involves references to their creators, has to concede that "an art work may be an expression" of its creator's attitudes, emotions, and qualities of mind.' (Tormey's *The Concept of Expression*, Princeton University Press, 1971, p.118) (in Hanfling, 1992, 391)

Lyas submits some very convincing arguments when he writes that: 'Many practising critics do think it relevant to talk about the articulation of the personal qualities of artists in the works of art they create.' And, he adds, 'The view I have sketched talks about a mind or controlling intelligence that can be detected in the work and characterized by the use of a certain vocabulary.' (in Hanfling, 1992, 392)

As we have already seen, there are, at least, three possible ways to take account, understand, or interpret, artists' intentions; *directly*, by a study of their works, and there is no reason why 'the structure of the work [should inevitably] modify reference to the point of rendering it entirely problematic'; *indirectly*, by appeal to genetic sources; and *hermeneutically*, in situations distorted by, for instance, social or historical 'distances'.

Either we are successful, at least in a certain measure, in our search and there is, in principle, no obstacle to a successful aesthetic experience of works of art, or we fail, and the aesthetic experience will be weakened or compromised. With an approach such as Ricoeur's there is, of course, none of these alternatives to expect or fear, for the works of art, by being 'de-structuralized', become the observers' *own* intentional projects.

We will note that the point of view adopted in this chapter is totally compatible with, and in fact reinforces, my 'attunement/symbiosis' approach which, as we remember, does involve a complementary stage of identification of, and familiarization with, the context and genesis of works of art.

One of the aims of this chapter has been consequently to warn us of the dangers involved in an 'autonomist' approach to art, not least concerning the frequent possibilities of misunderstanding, or misinterpretation, of their content. In this respect, David E. LINGE writes about literature: '... beginning with Schleiermacher, the talk is no longer of "not understanding", but rather of the *natural priority of understanding*: "The more lax practice of the art of understanding", declares Schleiermacher, "proceeds on the assumption - that misunderstanding arises naturally...." (*Hermeneutic*, transl. H. Kimmmerle, Heidelberg: Karl Winter, 1959, p.86).' And Linge adds, 'For Schleiermacher, therefore, what the text really means is not at all what is "seems" to say to us directly. Rather, *its meaning must be recovered by a disciplined reconstruction* of the historical situation or life-context in which it originated.' (in Gadamer, 1977, xiii, my emphasis)

Finally, I would definitely question the specific point at issue in a criticism of 'reference' and 'contextual' theories, i.e. that the work of art and the artist are discrete entities, and that, therefore, 'what can be truly said of a work of art is different from what can be truly said of its creator'. This statement implies that all the connections and ties which are forged between the artists and their works during the creative proceedings, are, in a strange Pinocchiesque fashion, totally severed, or dismissed, once the artistic task is achieved. But, as we have already attempted to argue, in agreement with some of the most influential and informed aesthetic theories, artists, unlike manufacturers, or even craftsmen, always remain 'present' in their works. I would even attempt to argue, if this was not beyond the scope of the present research, that if this was not the case, copies of works of art would be as valuable as the originals, and, from the first interpretation of a musical composition, all traces of the composer's 'influence' would be obliterated. Thus, to the wry comment already quoted in this chapter that 'it is true of Leonardo's Mona Lisa that it hangs on a certain wall in the Louvre, but this is not happily true of Leonardo', we could retort with no less wryness, that as Leonardo da Vinci is, and always will be, *present* and *alive* in his work, he does indeed, theoretically, 'hang on a certain wall in the Louvre'!

We have in the previous chapters presented some arguments intended to prove that 'psychical distance' should not be regarded as a prerequisite to the success of an aesthetic experience of nature, or of art; in the present chapter, we have reinforced this argument by underlining how 'referential' and 'contextual' principles when applied to the experience of works of art, can facilitate and deepen their aesthetic understanding, and thus bring about a 'rapprochement' between artists and their public. This takes us still further from the conception of 'psychical distance' in the experience of art. The



manner in which such 'rapprochement', or 'communion', between artists and observers, through the works of art, is activated and successfully achieved will be examined in the next chapters, in the light of Hans-George GADAMER's theory of 'play', and Maurice MERLEAU-PONTY's theory of perception.

**PART FOUR**

**The Structuralist Approach to Aesthetic Experience**

## Chapter VIII

## Gadamer's Theory of 'Play' as an Ontological Explanation of Art

Introduction to the Theory of 'Play'

Such expressions as 'the play of light', 'the play of the waves', 'the play of forces', 'a play on words', etc., writes Hans-Georg GADAMER, bring to mind the 'to and fro movement' inherent in the concept of 'play'; a movement 'which is not tied to any goal which would bring it to an end'. It is just that 'something is "playing" somewhere or at some time'. (Gadamer 1988, 93). But, he adds, what is really significant is that 'if, in connection with the experience of art, we speak of play, this refers *neither to the attitude nor even to the state of mind of the creator or of those enjoying the work of art, nor to the freedom of a subjectivity expressed in play, but to the mode of being of the work of art itself.*' (1988, 91, my emphasis) Therefore, on his own account, Gadamer avoids the subjective meanings involved in Kant's and Schiller's theories. It is clear for him that 'the actual subject of play is obviously not the subjectivity of an individual who among other activities also plays, but instead the play itself' (1988, 93). 'For play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play.' (1988, 92)

The most important premiss emerging from the above position is that *in play* the subject is not confronting *something*, i.e. the 'play'. The player is, in fact, one of the constitutive parts of the 'play'. For Gadamer this situation is evident, for the concept of 'play' could not be formulated without the concept of the 'player-subject' being a part of its definition; that is, in any experience modelled on, or assimilated to 'play', the 'play' itself and the 'player-subject' could not exist *separately*, for their existence depends on their *simultaneous* interaction. More specifically,

The real experience of the game consists in the fact that something that obeys its own set of laws gains ascendancy in the game. To the movement in a determinate direction corresponds a movement in the opposite direction. The back and forth movement of the game has a peculiar freedom and buoyancy that *determines the consciousness of the player.... Whatever is brought into play ... no longer depends on itself* but is dominated by the relation that we call the game. For the individual who, as playing subjectivity, engages in the game, this fact may seem at first to be an accommodation. He conforms to the game or subjects himself to it, that is, he relinquishes the autonomy of his own will. For example, two men who use a saw together allow the free play of the saw to take place, it would seem, by reciprocally adjusting to each other so that one man's impulse to movement takes effect just when that of the other man ends. It appears, therefore, that the primary factor is a kind of agreement between the two, a deliberate attitude of the one as well as the other. *But this attitude is still not the game.* The game is not so much the subjective attitude of the two men confronting each other as it is the formation of the movement as such, which, *in an unconscious teleology*, subordinates the attitude of the individuals to itself. (1977, 53-54, my emphasis)

Borrowing another example, this time from the neurologist Viktor von Weizacker, Gadamer evokes the tension-filled situation in which a mongoose and a snake hold each other in check. This situation, says Gadamer, 'cannot be described as the reaction of one partner to the attempted attack of the other, but represents a reciprocal behaviour of absolute contemporaneousness. Here too, neither partner alone constitutes the real determining factor; rather, it is the unified form of movement as a whole that unifies the fluid activity of both.' (1977, 54) Therefore, for Gadamer, such movement 'goes on automatically - a condition of weightless balance, "where the pure too-little incomprehensibly changes - springs round into that empty too-much" (R.M. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 1963, Fifth Elegy, lines 84-86)' (1977, 53). In fact, '[man's] playing is a natural process. The meaning of his play, precisely because - and insofar as - he is part of nature, is a pure self-presentation .... Nature, inasmuch as it is without purpose or intention, as it is, without exertion, a constantly self-renewing play, can appear as a model for art.' (1988, 94)

It is of interest to note that for Gadamer, 'play', although a serious involvement, 'is not to be understood as a kind of activity' (1988, 93). Of course, 'every game presents the man who plays it with a task.... [but] he cannot enjoy the freedom of playing himself out except by transforming the aims of his behaviour into mere tasks of the game. Thus the child gives itself a task in playing with the ball, and such tasks are playful ones, because the purpose of the game is not really the solution of the task, *but the ordering and shaping of the movement of the game itself.*' (1988, 96-97, my emphasis) In other words, explains Gadamer, 'the structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus takes from him the burden of the initiative which constitutes the actual strain of existence.... It is part of play that the movement is not only without goal or purpose but also without effort,... [it] is experienced subjectively as relaxation.' (1988, 94) Thus we say of someone, adds Gadamer, that 'he plays with possibilities or with plans. What we mean is .... [that] he still has the freedom to decide one way or the other, for one or the other possibility. On the other hand this freedom is not without danger. Rather the game itself is a risk for the player .... The attraction of the game, which it exercises on the player, lies in this risk. *One enjoys a freedom of decision, which at the same time is endangered and irrevocably limited....* This suggests a general characteristic of the way in which the nature of play is reflected in an attitude of play: *all playing is a being-played.*' (1988, 95, my emphasis)

In support of his theory of 'play' Gadamer refers to language which, he writes, is 'the middle ground in which understanding and agreement concerning the object takes place between two people .... It is characteristic of every true conversation that each opens himself to the other person, truly accepts his point of view as worthy of consideration and gets inside the other to such an extent that he understands not a

particular individual, but what he says.' (1988, 345-47) 'An essential feature of the being of language is therefore 'its I-lessness.... To speak means to speak *to* someone.... To that extent, speaking does not belong in the sphere of the "I" but in the sphere of the "We".... The actuality of speaking consists in the dialogue.... [and] the form of operation of every dialogue can be described in terms of the concept of the game.' (1977, 65-66) What happens, therefore, is that 'when one enters into a dialogue with another person and then is carried along further by the dialogue, it is *no longer the will of the individual person holding itself back or exposing itself*, that is determinative. Rather, *the law of the subject-matter* is at issue in the dialogue and elicits statement and counterstatement and in the end plays them into each other. Hence, when a dialogue has succeeded, one is subsequently fulfilled by it, as we say.... For the motivational background of a question first opens up the realm out of which an answer can be brought and given.' (1977, 66-67, my emphasis)

We can see here how much Ricoeur's understanding of 'language' and 'dialogue' in the context of literature, has been influenced by Gadamer's theory. But we will note later how the two philosophers' conclusions diverge in some important aspects of their theories, in particular as concerns 'distanciation' in art.

Let us now examine how Gadamer applies the basic principles of his theory of 'play' to artistic conditions.

The first particularity that Gadamer sees in art is that it is 'potentially representative for someone'; the fact that this potentiality 'is intended is the characteristic of art'. And he explains,

The closed world of play lets down as it were, one of its walls. A religious rite and a play in a theatre obviously do not represent in the same sense as the playing child. Their being is not exhausted by the fact that they represent; at the same

time they point beyond themselves to the audience which is sharing in them. Play here is *no longer the mere self-representation of an ordered movement, nor mere representation*, in which the playing child is totally absorbed, but it is *"representing for someone"*. This assignment in all representation comes to the fore here and is *constitutive of the being of art*. (1988, 97, my emphasis)

But most importantly, for Gadamer, not only 'artistic presentation, by its nature, exists for someone, [but it exists] *even if there is no one there who listens or watches only*' (1988, 99, my emphasis). Taking the example of chamber music, Gadamer remarks that although it is sometimes performed for the players themselves and not for an audience, 'it would be properly there for any listener' (1988, 99).

For Gadamer there is no doubt that a profane drama, like a religious drama, is only 'raised ... to its perfection' if it is 'experienced properly by, and presents itself as what is "meant" to, one who is not acting in the play, but is watching' (1988, 98). What happens is that 'when a play activity becomes a play in the theatre a total switch takes place. *It puts the spectator in the place of the player...* [because the play] bears within itself a meaning that must be understood and that can *therefore be detached from the behaviour of the player.*' (1988, 99, my emphasis) Although Gadamer points out that the play 'intends' its meaningfulness for both the actors and the spectators (since the actors need to engage with the play in order to act), nevertheless, as I understand it, it is only for the spectators that the play 'represents'; the spectators have a 'methodological precedence' in the play, for they *complete 'what the play as such is'* (1988, 98, my emphasis). In other words, although the actors engage with the 'spirit' of the play and, as such, are 'able to experience [its] significance', their subjectivity becomes lost in the play - *transparent* to it as it were -. It is 'only through this development', Gadamer emphasizes, '[that] play acquire(s) its ideality, so that it can be intended and understood as play. Only now does it emerge as detached from the representing activity of the

players and consist in the pure appearance of what they are playing.' (1988, 99) For Gadamer, *this severance of the play from the players' activity is crucial, for 'as such the play - even the unforeseen elements of improvisation - is fundamentally repeatable and hence permanent.* It has the character of a work, of an ergon and not only of energeia. In this sense', adds Gadamer, 'I call it a structure.' (1988, 99, my emphasis)

We find an adequate illustration of the above situation in the *attitude* that Samuel Beckett demanded from the actress Billie Whitelaw when she started to work on his play *Not I*. Whitelaw reports in her autobiography that Beckett 'would repeat over and over again: "Too much colour, no, no, too much colour". By which he meant: "For God's sake, don't act"'. And, Whitelaw comments:

In *Not I*, as in *Play*, and again later when he directed me in *Footfalls*, what Beckett wanted was not the acting out of the internal thought, but the internal thought itself. He didn't want anything 'presented'. His 'Don't act' instruction necessarily caused me some difficulty. Surgeons want to surge, actors want to act. An actor is usually hired precisely for the personal things he will bring to a piece.

Some of Beckett's words I found beautiful and poetic. I must admit I sometimes enjoyed acting them out. But that's precisely what he didn't want. He wanted to get to some unconscious centre. Yet the moment I started imposing myself on the text, the moment I became 'aware of playing the role', I realised that I was making a 'comment' on the piece, instead of allowing its essence to come through.

Often, when one is sent a play, the first thing that occurs to you is: 'What can I do with this to make it different?' With Beckett I learned that 'you don't do anything with it', you don't try to make it 'different', you simply allow your own core to make contact with what comes off the page. Eventually everything then falls into place, the material takes off on its own. If you allow the words to breathe through your body, if you become a conduit, something magical 'may' happen. There are no short cuts. ('How I became Beckett's mouth', *The Sunday Times*, 20/8/95, Section 10, p.12. Edited extract from Billie Whitelaw's *Who He?*, a John Curtis Book published by Hodder & Stoughton, 1995)



(The extent to which such *transparency* would be achievable without a knowledge of the author's intentions raises issues to which we shall return.)

The above illustration does reflect Gadamer's belief that 'what no longer exists [in a play] is the players - *with the poet or the composer being considered as one of the players*. None of them has his own existence for himself, which he retains so that his acting would mean that he "only acts".' (1977, xxvi) 'So much is [an artistic creation] common to all', adds Gadamer, 'that even the artist enjoys no privileged status over those who experience his work. Precisely because he has expressed what he has to say, he keeps back nothing for himself, but communicates himself without reserve. His work speaks for him.' (1986, 128) Play itself is, rather, *transformation* of such a kind that the identity of the player does not continue to exist *for anybody*.... But in truth that means that [the player] holds on to this continuity with himself for himself and only keeps it from those before whom he is acting.... But, above all, what no longer exists is the world, in which we live as our own.' (1988, 100, my emphasis)

It is important to point out that, for Gadamer, the notion of 'transformation' as used above is not synonymous with the notion of 'change'. He remarks thus: 'A change always means that what is changed also remains the same and is held on to.... But transformation means that something is suddenly and as a whole something else, that this other transformed thing that it has become is its true being, in comparison with which its earlier being is nothing.... There cannot here be any transition of gradual change leading from one to the other, since the one is the denial of the other. Thus the transformation into a structure means that *what existed previously no longer exists*. *But also that what now exists, what represents itself in the play of art, is what is lasting and true.*' (1988, 100, my emphasis)

Clearly, then, the Gadamerian 'structure of play' is 'not simply transposition into another world' but it also finds 'its measure in itself and measures itself by nothing outside it.... It no longer permits of any comparison with reality as the secret measure of all copied similarity.... because a superior truth speaks from it.' (1988, 101) In this, remarks Gadamer, could be found the central motif of Platonism, i.e. a kind of 'idealism of being' which is already suggested in the phenomenon of mimesis. The 'known' 'as recognised ... is grasped in its essence, detached from its accidental aspects' (1988, 103). But in true 'play', 'imitation and representation are not merely a second version, a copy, but a recognition of the essence. *Because they are not merely repetition, but a "bringing forth", the spectator is also involved in them.* They contain the essential relation to everyone for whom the representation exists.' (1988, 103, my emphasis) This is why the *performance* of a play 'cannot be simply detached from the play itself, as if it were something that is not part of its essential being.... Rather, in the performance, and only in it - as we see most clearly in the case of music - do we encounter the work itself, as the divine is encountered in the religious rite'. That is, 'the work of art *cannot be simply isolated from the "contingency" of the chance conditions in which it appears*, and where there is this kind of isolation, the result is an abstraction which reduces the actual being of the work.... A drama exists really only when it is played, and certainly music must resound'. Thus, concludes Gadamer, 'my thesis ... is that *the being of art cannot be determined as an object of an aesthetic awareness because, on the contrary, the aesthetic attitude is more than it knows of itself.* It is a part of the essential process of representation and is an essential part of play as play.' (1988, 104, my emphasis)

Therefore, for Gadamer, 'aesthetic being' is 'aesthetic non-differentiation'. That is, 'what is *formed* by the poet, *represented* by the actor, *recognised* by the spectator is to

such an extent what is *meant* - that in which the significance of the representation lies...'. Thus, says Gadamer, 'we have here a double mimesis: the writer represents and the actor represents. But even this double mimesis is one: it is the same thing that comes to existence in each case.' (1988, 105, my emphasis)

But, however much the variety of the performances of a play 'goes back to the conception of the players, the *structure* of the play is still '*not at all a question of a mere subjective variety of conceptions, but of the possibilities of being that the work itself possesses which lays itself out in the variety of its aspects.... But one fails to appreciate the compelling quality of the work of art if one regards the variations possible in the representation as free and optional.* In fact they are all subject to the supreme criterion of the "right" representation.' Significantly here, Gadamer uses the word 'tradition' which, he says, is not a 'random succession, a mere variety of conceptions, but rather from the constant following of models and from a productive and changing development there is cultivated a tradition with which every new attempt must come to terms.... But it has nothing to do with blind imitation.' (1988, 106)

#### A Hermeneutical Approach to Art

As David LINGE notes, for Gadamer, every hermeneutical theory has made the mistake to regard 'understanding as a repetition or duplication of a past intention - as a reproductive procedure rather than a genuinely productive one that involves the interpreter's own hermeneutical situation. Over against this dominant ideal' adds Linge, 'Gadamer develops a conception of understanding that takes the interpreter's present participation in history into account in a central way. *Understanding is not reconstruction but mediation.* We are conveyors of the past into the present... Understanding is an event, a movement of history itself in which neither interpreter nor

text can be thought of as autonomous parts.' (in Gadamer, 1977, xvi) It is important to realise, however, that as Linge notes, 'Gadamer's specific emphasis is not on the application of a method by a subject, but on the fundamental continuity of history as a medium encompassing every such subjective act and the objects it apprehends.... It is a process of "presencings", that is, of mediations, through which the past already functions in and shapes the interpreter's present horizon. Thus the past is never simply a collection of objects to be recovered or duplicated by the interpreter, but rather what Gadamer calls an "effective history"... that alone makes possible the conversation between each new interpreter and the text or events he seeks to understand.' (in Gadamer, 1977, xvi-xvii)

The above presentation of Gadamer's hermeneutics is so totally alien, and we could even say contrary, to standard Hermeneutics that we could almost deny it the right to be called so. However, in view of what is involved in Gadamer's theory of 'play', it is clear that no other hermeneutical approach but his own would be acceptable, particularly in arts such as drama and music, which, Gadamer notes, because they rely on 'representation' or performances, are even more 'left open to this kind of re-creation and thus have visibly opened the identity and continuity of the work of art towards its future.... [This is why] performances of music played on old instruments are not as faithful as they seem. Rather, they are an imitation of an imitation and in danger of "standing at a third remove from the truth" (Plato).' (1988, 107) In this respect, although for Gadamer, the artistic performances of great actors, or musicians, always remain influential on future performances of the same works, they need not impair or compromise 'free creation' on the part of future interpreters. What happens is that 'tradition' 'has become so one with the work that the concern with this model stimulated

the creative interpretative powers of an artist *no less than the concern with the work itself* (1988, 107, my emphasis). But, of course, we could ask: What is the criterion that determines whether something is 'a correct interpretation'? For Gadamer, it is 'a highly mobile and relative one' (1988, 107) for, as Linge notes, 'the variety of performances or interpretations are not simply subjective variations of a meaning locked in subjectivity, but belong instead to the ontological possibility of the work. Thus, there is no canonical interpretation of a text or art work; rather, they stand open to ever new comprehensions....' (in Gadamer, 1977, xxvi)

Interestingly, as Linge adds, the theologian Gerhard Ebeling himself 'express(ing) this universal characteristic of human understanding as he discovers it within his own field of endeavour', writes thus: 'Actually, both factors, identity and variability, belong inseparably together and are linked to one another in the process of interpretation, whose very nature is to say the same thing in a different way and, precisely by virtue of saying it in a different way, to say the same thing. If, by way of pure repetition, we were to say today the same thing that was said 2,000 years ago, we would only be imagining that we were saying the same thing, while actually we would be saying something quite different.' (*The Problem of Historicity*, Philadelphia Fortress Press, 1964, p.59) (in Gadamer, 1977, xxvi-xxvii)

There is no doubt, therefore, that for Gadamer,

the compelling quality of the representation is not lessened by the fact that it cannot have any fixed criterion.... Here the obvious fact, that every interpretation seeks to be correct, serves only to confirm that the non-differentiation of the interpretation from the work itself is the actual experience of the work.... Thus we do not allow the interpretation of a piece of music or a drama the freedom to take the fixed 'text' as a basis for a lot of ad-lib effects, and yet we would regard the canonisation of a particular interpretation, e.g. in a gramophone recording conducted by the composer, or the detailed notes on performance which come from the canonised first performance, as a failure to understand the actual task of

interpretation. A 'correctness', striven for in this way, would not do justice to the *true binding nature* of the work, which imposes itself on every interpreter in a special and *immediate* way and does not allow him to make things easy for himself by simply imitating a model. (1988, 107, my emphasis)

There is undeniably some ambiguity in Gadamer's attempts to give flexibility and adaptability to the *representation* and *interpretation* of a work of art, on the condition however that the identity of the work should not 'disintegrate into the changing aspects of itself so that it would lose its identity...' (1988, 108). Nevertheless, we have to admit that the strength of his argument does depend on a Husserlian premise which is very convincing: 'In view', Gadamer writes, 'of the finite nature of our historical existence there is, it would seem, something absurd about the whole idea of a uniquely correct interpretation.' (1988, 107) Gadamer's whole argumentation will never depart therefore from the premise that a work of art, like 'play', depends on self-representation and that, consequently, 'however much it may be changed and distorted in the representation, it still remains itself' (1988, 109); it 'is something that has emerged in an unrepeatable way and has manifested itself in a unique fashion.... it has in a strange way transcended the process in which it originated' (1986, 126). This is why, says Gadamer, 'interpretation is probably, in a certain sense, re-creation, but this re-creation *does not follow the creative act*, but the lines of the created work which has to be brought to representation in accord with the meaning the interpreter finds in it.' (1988, 107)

In order to illustrate the principle of 'contemporaneity' in art, Gadamer proposes the interesting example of the 'periodic festival' whose nature is precisely to be repeated; but, he points out, 'the returning festival is neither another, nor the mere remembrance of the one that was originally celebrated.... The time-experience of the festival is rather its

celebration, a present time sui-generis.' (1988, 110) Although the festival changes from one time to the next, it still remains 'one and the same festival that undergoes this kind of change. For the essence of the festival its historical connections are secondary.' In other words, there was never once a 'real' festival because the essence of a festival is '*always to be something different (even when celebrated in exactly the same way)*'. An entity that exists only by always being something different is temporal in a more radical sense than everything that belongs to history.' (1988, 110, my emphasis) In other words, adds Gadamer, 'Enactment is the festival's mode of being, and in this enactment, time becomes the *nunc stans* of an elevated presence in which past and present become one in the act of remembrance.... [For instance], the festival of Christmas is more than the festival of the birth of the Saviour who was originally present nearly two thousand years ago. In a mysterious way, every Christmas is contemporary with that distant present.' (1986, 59) It was already Aristotle's belief, Gadamer notes, that 'behind such "aesthetic freedom" there lies a profound sense of community that dissolves all distance.... In this experience, any distanciation between play and actuality, appearance and reality, is eliminated. The distance between onlooker and player is thoroughly overcome here as was the distance between the representation and what is represented.' (1986, 121) A festival does not depend, therefore, on 'the subjectivity of those celebrating it.... It is by no means just the point of intersection of the experiences that the spectators have. *Rather the contrary is true, that the being of the spectator is determined by his being there present.*' (1988, 110, my emphasis) And to be 'present' is to *share* in the *solemn act* but, at the same time, *to forget one's own purposes*, that is, it 'has the character of being outside oneself, [with] the positive possibility of being wholly with something else.... It is only in a derived sense that presence at something means also a kind of subjective attitude, that of attention to something.' (1988, 111) But, for

Gadamer, this of course does not mean that one is gaping at an event out of curiosity; in that case, there would be nothing of real meaning and interest which would induce in the spectators a permanent desire to come back to the event, 'whereas that which presents itself to the spectator as the play of art does not simply exhaust itself in the ecstatic emotion of the moment, but has a claim to permanence and the permanence of a claim.' This is why 'contemporaneity' forms part of the 'being' of the work of art and, as such, gives it 'full presentness, however remote its origin may be' (1988, 112); 'it is not a mode of givenness in consciousness, but a *task for consciousness* and an *achievement that is required of it.*' (1988, 112-13, my emphasis)

Therefore, Linge notes, for Gadamer, 'our view of the nature of the past,... now appears as an inexhaustible *source of possibilities of meaning* rather than as a passive object of investigation.... A text speaks differently as its meaning finds concretization in a new hermeneutical situation and the interpreter for his part finds his own horizons altered by his appropriation of what the text says.' (in Gadamer, 1977, xix) This again justifies Gadamer's contention that 'neither the separate life of the creating artist - his biography - nor that of the performer who acts a work, nor that of the spectator who is watching the play, has any *separate legitimacy* in the face of the being of the work of art' (1988, 13, my emphasis). What is essential to understand here is that, for Gadamer, this situation is inevitable, that is, 'what unfolds before one is for everyone so lifted out of the continuing progression of the world and so self-enclosed as to make an independent circle of meaning that no one is motivated to go beyond it to another future and reality.' (1988, 113) But, he remarks, this state of affairs is not so unusual, for the principle of an absolute 'circle of meaning' is also found in 'the most serious kinds of all human activity: in ritual, in the administration of justice, in social behaviour in general, where



we even speak of role-playing and so forth. A certain self-imposed limitation of our freedom seems to belong to the very structure of culture.' (1986, 124)

That is why, comments Gadamer, we can say of art what we say of the 'meaning of a text', that it 'does not just depend on the occasional factors which characterize the author and his original public. For it is always co-determined by the historical situation of the interpreter and thus by the whole of the objective course of history.... The meaning of a text surpasses its author not occasionally, but always. Thus understanding is not a reproductive procedure, but rather always a productive one.... It suffices to say that one understands *differently when one understands at all.*' (*Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1960, p.280) (in Gadamer, 1977, xxv) In other words, comments Linge, 'Every interpretation attempts to be transparent to the text, so that the meaning of the text can speak to ever new situations.... Thus we can give Gadamer's insight a paradoxical formulation by saying that the mediation that occurs in understanding must modify what is said *so that it can remain the same.*' (in Gadamer, 1977, xxvi) And, in a very apt assessment of the value of Gadamer's hermeneutics in art, Linge concludes thus:

The self-presenting, self-renewing structure of the game helps Gadamer come to terms with one of the most difficult problems of hermeneutics, the problem of meaning and of the fidelity of interpretation to the meaning of the text.... The customary way of defining the meaning of a text has been to identify it with the subjective act of intending of its author. The task of understanding is then construed as the recapturing or repetition of this original intention.... [This allows a] definitive, canonical interpretation.... *the* correct one that banishes all competing interpretations as incorrect.... [Thus], while there may be varying explications of the *significance* of the text for us, it has only one *meaning*, and that is what the creator meant by his words or by his work of art.

The basic difficulty with this theory is that it subjectifies both meaning and understanding, thus rendering unintelligible the development of tradition that transmits the text or art work to us and influences our reception of it in the present. When meaning is located exclusively in the *mens auctoris*, understanding becomes a transaction between the creative

consciousness of the author and the purely reproductive consciousness of the interpreter. (in Gadamer, 1977, xxiii-xxiv, my emphasis)

In an attempt to justify his belief that a work of art can be viewed *both* as an 'absolute circle of meaning' and as an 'inexhaustible source of meanings', Gadamer will appeal to the concept of 'aesthetic distance'. 'The spectator', he writes, 'is set at an *absolute distance* which makes any *practical, purposive share in it impossible*.' But, on the other hand, 'distance is, in the literal sense, *aesthetic distance*, for it is the distance from seeing that makes possible the proper and comprehensive sharing in what is represented before one. Thus to the ecstatic self-forgetfulness of the spectator there corresponds his continuity with himself. Precisely that in which he loses himself as a spectator requires his continuity.' (1988, 113, my emphasis) Therefore, for Gadamer, 'time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged, *because it separates*, but it is actually the *supportive ground of process* in which the present is rooted.... It is not a yawning abyss, but is *filled with the continuity of custom and tradition*, in the light of which all that is handed down presents itself to us.... Only when all relations of [contemporary creations] to the present time have faded away can their real nature appear, so that the understanding of what is said in them can claim to be authoritative and universal.' (1988, 264-65, my emphasis) This is why in modern art,

one of the basic impulses... has been the desire to break down the distance separating the audience, the 'consumers', and the public from the work of art. There is no doubt that the most important creative artists of the last fifty years have concentrated all their efforts on breaking down just this distance. We need only to think of the theory of epic theatre in Brecht, who specifically fought against our being absorbed in a theatrical dream-world as a feeble substitute for human and social consciousness of solidarity. He deliberately destroyed scenic realism, the normal requirements of characterization, in short the identity of everything usually expected of a play. But this desire to transform the distance of the onlooker into the involvement of the participant can be discerned in every form of modern experimentation in the arts. (1986, 24)

However, we could wonder if this particular application of 'distance' to art, does not bring about the disappearance of the work of art as such. Interestingly, Gadamer admits that 'it is indeed how many contemporary artists see the situation... as if it were a question of renouncing the unity of the work' (1986, 24-25), but, he notes, the hermeneutic identity of the work is so deeply grounded that there is no danger of it losing its unity. 'In truth', he writes, 'the horizon of the present is conceived in constant formation insofar as we must all constantly test our prejudices.... [but it] does not take shape at all without the past.' (in *Intr.*, 1977, xix) As a support to his belief in this respect, Gadamer offers the example of an organ improvisation which will never be heard again, at least not in the same way, nor even perhaps remembered by the organist, but of which, nevertheless, everyone says: 'That was a brilliant interpretation' or 'that was rather dull today'. In saying this, remarks Gadamer, we are obviously referring to an *identifiable something*: the improvisation; a 'something [which] "stands" before us; it is like a work and not just an organist's finger exercise. Otherwise we should never pass judgement on its quality or lack of it. So it is the hermeneutic identity that establishes the unity of the work.... I identify something as it was or as it is, and this identity alone constitutes the meaning of the work.' (1986, 25).

### Conclusion

i) An analysis of Gadamer's theory of 'play' in art brings out a notion of the concept of 'distance' which seems, at first, to be deeply puzzling. Namely, on the one hand, he states that 'it is quite wrong to think that the unity of the work implies that the work is closed off from the person who turns to it or is affected by it', but, on the other hand, he posits that 'the spectator is set at an absolute distance which makes any practical, purposive share in it impossible'. However, this position starts to make sense when we

understand that, in Gadamer's theory, the subjectivities of the artists, interpreters, and observers, are not the *actual subjects* of 'play' but that they are, nevertheless, *constitutive* of the 'play', for, as 'player-subjects', they depend for their *existence* on their simultaneous interaction with the 'player-objects'.

From the above premiss, it is clear, therefore, that a psychological attitude, or a special state of mind, on the part of the 'player-subjects', would be bound to affect the 'togetherness' structure of 'play'. As we have seen, for Gadamer, 'what unfolds before one is... self-enclosed as to make an independent circle of meaning that no-one is motivated to beyond it to another future or reality. The spectator is set at an *absolute distance* [i.e. 'aesthetic distance'] which makes any *practical purposive* share in it impossible.' The conclusion has to be, therefore, that in such a situation, a psychological 'attitude' such as Bullough's 'psychical distance', would have no necessary, and not even useful, function.

ii) Gadamer's Hermeneutical approach to art is also a help to an understanding of the problems involved in 'temporal distance', which I had, at the start of my research, regarded as perhaps the only form of 'distance' to which a Bulloughian principle of 'psychical distance' could be justifiably applied. By emphasizing how the observers' 'present horizon' can be *shaped* by the past, Gadamer convinced me that even in situations of 'temporal distance', 'psychical distance', if applied to art, would compromise the observers' aesthetic interpretation of the works of art, for as Ebeling comments: 'Both factors, identity and variability' belong inseparably together and are linked to one another in the process of interpretation'.

iii) Gadamer's theory of 'play' also provides an interesting explanation of how the aesthetic experience of art can be at one and the same time, dependent on the subjective

import and influence of artists, interpreters, and observers, and yet be protected by its inviolable 'circle of meaning' from external influences and arbitrary pressures.

iv) Finally, Gadamer's understanding of, and profound belief in, what he calls the 'Nature of Things', very much reflect in spirit the meaning and intent I attempted to give to my Attunement/Symbiosis theory, in particular in its holistic approach to an aesthetic apprehension of the world. He writes: 'The *language of things* is something... to which we should pay better attention.... We are not at all ready to *hear things in their own being*.... Only the poet remains true to them.... We can still speak of a language of things when we remember what things really are, namely, not a material that is used and consumed, not a tool that is used and set aside, but something instead that has existence in itself...'. 'Even Husserl', adds Gadamer, '... tried to give a phenomenological demonstration of the doctrine of the thing-in-itself by proceeding from the fact that the various shadings of the things of perception *formed the continuum of a single experience*.' (1977, 71-73, my emphasis)

In the next chapter, we will study how Merleau-Ponty has, with his theory of perception, attempted to go even deeper and further than Gadamer in his recognition of our 'attunement' to the world, and in his belief that it is the artists' mission to give aesthetic 'recognition' and 'expression' to this awareness.

## CHAPTER IX

MERLEAU-PONTY's Phenomenology of Perception<sup>1</sup> as applied to ArtIntroduction to the Phenomenology of Perception

For Maurice MERLEAU-PONTY, the physical order of the universe, the structure of bodies, and the behaviour of things are not the result of isolated causal series; they are not to be found 'in the laws taken one by one, but in their combinations' (Merleau-Ponty, 1963b, 139). Even at a primitive level, life is defined by 'circular' structures which are integrated in a global 'system'. As a result, as Gary Brent MADISON explains, for Merleau-Ponty, 'a "cause" is ... a cause only in regard to an organism which "constitutes" it as such.' (1990, 8) Although Merleau-Ponty does not deny the existence of reflexes, he finds the classical notion of 'reflex' insufficient because it implies that it is isolated from the total behaviour of the organism, instead of being part of the global structure or the nervous system. Consequently, he dismisses altogether 'linear causality' and adopts instead 'circular causality'. However, it is important to realize that he does not regard perception as a blending of consciousness and thing - as the two becoming 'one'. As Madison remarks, for Merleau-Ponty, 'the circularity and reciprocal implication between the perceiving subject and the perceived thing never result in an identity; between the two

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is very indebted to Gary Brent MADISON's study and what he calls 'interpretative reappropriation' of Merleau-Ponty's works, in the *Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*. The latter's philosophy has been variously described as ambiguous, arduous, disconcerting, and incomplete, and Madison certainly contributes to a better knowledge and understanding of Merleau-Ponty's otherwise fascinating and inspiring philosophy. Madison's analysis also helps the present research to keep in perspective the evolution and changes in Merleau-Ponty's thoughts in the latter years of his life, and to concentrate on the aspects which specifically relate to one of the main themes of this thesis, that is, the circular and reciprocal relationship between a subject and an object involved in a phenomenon of perception (see footnote 2 on p.206)

there is always a certain *duality*.' (1990, 31) 'To "live" a thing', writes Merleau-Ponty, 'is not to coincide with it....' (1962, 325) But this 'duality' demands some degree of coherence and togetherness, and this is realized through the introduction of the notion of 'form/system' in the process of perception: 'The lived body is in the world as the heart is in the organism; it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system.' (1962, 203) The latter is an ensemble of forces in a state of equilibrium or of constant change such that no law is formulable for each part taken separately and such that each vector is determined in size and direction by all the others' (1963b, 137). Thus, structure and law are 'two dialectical moments and not two powers of being' and 'form is not an element of the world but a limit towards which physical knowledge tends and which it itself defines' (1963b, 142).

As Madison explains, Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'global system' applies to three orders of activity: the *physical*, the *vital* and the *human*, which are all dynamically and dialectically interrelated. At a higher level than the 'Physical Order', is found the 'Vital Order' in which 'signs' are used, and in which behaviour is therefore meaningful. This order can represent two forms of behaviour: (a) a 'syncretic' form 'which designates structures which are for the most part submerged in the content itself of behaviour' and "responds literally to a complex of stimuli rather than to certain essential traits of the situation" (1963b, 105); it is seen in 'the invertebrates which act by what is generally called instinct', and (b) an 'amovable' form which is a response to "signals which are not determined by the instinctual equipment of the species" (1963b, 105); it designates structures that 'tend to impose their own demands on the elements of a situation', and is seen in 'the vertebrates where one begins to notice "intelligent" behaviour' (1990, 5). As Merleau-Ponty notes, 'the unity of physical systems is a *unity of correlation*, that of organisms is a *unity of meaning [signification]*.' (1963b, 155-56)

Merleau-Ponty identifies a third order, the 'Human Order', in which the difference between animal behaviour and human behaviour is represented by the conceptual difference existing between 'signals' and 'symbols'. In this order, says Madison, 'genuinely human consciousness is thus a symbolic consciousness; it has the ability to orient itself by the *possible*, the *virtual*. What indeed defines man is just this power he has of "going beyond created structures in order to create others" (1963b, 175).' (1990, 7).

The above three orders constitute the 'phenomenal field' of human behaviour, but it is important to note that, for Merleau-Ponty, 'the relation of each order to the higher order is that of the partial to the total', and that, therefore, 'the advent of higher orders, to the extent that it comes to be, eliminates the autonomy of the lower orders and gives a new signification to the steps which constitute them.' (1963b, 180) Thus, bodily and psychological life are not 'two *de facto* orders external to each other, but ... two types of relations, the second of which integrates the first'. But Merleau-Ponty proposes another order, the 'Spiritual Order', which should not be regarded as a 'substantial opposition' to the other orders, but as a 'functional opposition' (1963b, 180-81). As Madison notes, 'In this case spirit is not a new kind of being but a new form of *unity*.... But if body and soul are not two substances or two orders of reality and must be "relativized", Merleau-Ponty in no way seeks to *reduce* one to the other.... Man is not a rigidly monolithic entity. There is indeed a "soul" and a "body", but the body is a *human* body ... and the soul is a soul only by means of the body which is like its very appearance. Between body and soul there is, as it were, a tensional polarity, and the total man is nothing other than this tension which is continually renewed.' (1990, 12, my emphasis)



At this higher-level we find a *dialectic of transcendence* in which, says Merleau-Ponty, 'mental acts would have their own proper meaning and their own internal laws' (1963b, 180). The reason for this, explains Madison, is that '*while remaining faithful to its past, existence is something dynamic*. Its nature, according to an expression of Hegel that Merleau-Ponty takes over himself, is to preserve while overcoming.' (1990, 13, my emphasis) Furthermore, 'just as Freud himself rejected the physiological explanation of dreams which, as he said, have their own meaning, so Merleau-Ponty likewise calls for an abandonment of the causal and "energetic" explanation of higher-level behaviour and a recognition that at this level life is defined by structures which *it itself brings into existence*, and that it possesses its own meaning and is not reducible to the play of lower-level structures.' (1990, 11, my emphasis) This introduces us to the corner-stone of Merleau-Ponty's theory: his concept of 'vertical Being' which supports and explains the existence of a meaningful, rational world. It is interesting to note in that respect that Merleau-Ponty's 'dialectic of transcendence' is very reminiscent of Gadamer's concept of 'excess' or 'superabundance' (Überschuss) which, as Robert Bernasconi notes, Gadamer seems to use in 'the sense in which for Heidegger art is an "overflowing" (Überfluss)' (in Gadamer, 1986, xiii).

It is in his opposition to an atomistic, realistic, and mechanistic approach to the phenomenon of 'life', that Merleau-Ponty succeeds in demonstrating and clarifying the mode of existence of Form as a relation between consciousness and nature or, as Madison says, the relation 'of the objective and the subjective, the exterior and the interior.... the antinomy which inevitably seems to arise between nature and idea. It would indeed appear that form must be either a thing in nature or an idea of a constituting consciousness. Merleau-Ponty attempts to overcome this antinomy.' (1990, 15) Since behaviour does not exist like a thing, writes Merleau-Ponty, it must exist 'like the *ideu*

under which what happens in several places is brought together and summed up' (1963b, 144). After all, he adds, vital acts 'are not defined, even in science, as a sum of processes external to each other, but as the spatial and temporal unfolding of certain ideal unities' (1963b, 159) and, as such, 'the object of biology cannot be thought of without the unities of signification which a consciousness finds and sees unfolding in it' (1963b, 161). Structure thus becomes 'the joining of an idea and an existence which are indiscernible' (1963b, 206).

Thus, Madison comments,

it is... not on the level of the *Cogito* but beneath it in primary perception that is to be found the means of overcoming the antinomy of nature and idea, of objective and subjective.... The meaning I perceive does not exist *in* the thing like a natural property, spread out in space and time, but *for me*, the onlooker. If therefore one wants to understand this meaning as it shows itself, it must be taken in its nascent state: one must return to beginning perception as to a primordial experience and the place of the first upsurge of meaning (or 'rationality') in the world. What is demanded is a kind of phenomenological reduction.... The meaning of physical or vital forms is in the first instance something which is perceived and not an idea in the proper sense of the word.... What is important is to undertake a regressive or archaeological inquiry which would reveal, not the 'conditions of possibility' of perceptual meaning, but its real and fundamental structures. (1990, 17-18, my emphasis).

What is therefore involved in any inquiry into human behaviour on the lines proposed by Merleau-Ponty is a regressive move into what Madison calls 'naive perception'. Sensation is a 'communion' (1962, 212) between body and thing, a 'natural transaction' (1962, 226). The 'subject of sensation', writes Merleau-Ponty, 'is neither a thinker who takes note of a quality, nor an inert setting which is affected or changed by it, it is a power which is born into, and simultaneously with, a certain existential environment, or is synchronized with it'. (1962, 211)

If we turn to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the concept of 'expressivity' in human behaviour, we find that the three main tenets of 'circularity', 'transcendence', and what Madison translates as 'rootedness' [*enracinement*], are essential to it. Although the principle of 'circularity' does not present problems in its application to 'expressivity', the principle of 'transcendence', in this particular context, demands some initial discrimination between two interpretations. Madison explains:

One could understand it in a 'Hegelian' sense, that is, as a vertical overcoming wherein existence would transcend itself towards a greater perfection and a greater degree of being; or again one could rule out any notion of this sort by allowing a solely horizontal transcendence, that is, a transcendence which would include only the intentional relations between man and the world.... With Merleau-Ponty .... we encounter a thought which, basing itself on a concrete analysis of the human phenomenon, attempts to unify the two notions of vertical and horizontal transcendence according to the requirements that the phenomenon itself seems to call for when one attempts to think it. (1990, 45).

As the 'lived body' constitutes with the perceived world an homogenous system, it cannot be comprehended outside this relation, and this means therefore that it can only transcend itself. And, explains Paul Ricoeur, it does so through 'the emergence of a transforming and creative existence which impresses a movement of transcendence or verticality onto the horizontal relation of the body to the world....' (in Madison, 1990, xv) 'This movement of active transcendence', writes Madison, 'is precisely what is eminently attested to by the *phenomenon of expression*.... There is a "teleology of consciousness", a wave of transcendence which rises up through man, an opening of man towards the virtual, a "Logos which assigns to us the task of bringing to speech a hitherto mute world" (1964a, 10) .... [It is] in this pivotal phenomenon' adds Madison, '[that] man shows himself to be at once *naturata* and *naturans*, inheritor and creator, rooted and transcendent.' (1990, 71) 'If', adds Madison, 'the entire work of the artist is ... polarized towards an "infinite logos" (1964, 19), this can only be because the ground of reason and

of its infinite *logos* or *telos* is not the mere *finitude* of phenomenal being in the world but is itself an *infinite* ground or *arché*.' (1990, 72). For Merleau-Ponty, 'man is a historical idea and not a natural species' (1962, 170), therefore, 'it is impossible to superimpose on [him] a lower layer of behaviour which one chooses to call "natural", followed by a manufactured cultural or spiritual world. Everything is both manufactured and natural in man ....' (1962, 189) Thus, Merleau-Ponty believes that in a true artistic or spiritual endeavour, there is a need for an 'archaeological phenomenology' in which consciousness must be faced with its own pre-personal - pre-conscious - life in things and awakened to its own history which it was forgetting. In this respect, says Madison, Merleau-Ponty 'could well have used this sentence from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: "It is thought that man can advance straight ahead. What is not seen is the cord that attaches him to the well-spring, which, like an umbilical cord, attaches him to the stomach of the earth." (*Terre des Hommes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1939, p.174).' (in Madison, 1990, 52).

What we have to understand is that for Merleau-Ponty the relationship between consciousness and the world is not a 'relationship of meaning' but a 'relationship of being' (1964c, 727); 'It is not' says Madison 'a conceived relationship but an *ontological* one.' (1990, 66)

#### A view of art in the context of the Phenomenology of Perception

Merleau-Ponty will find in the art of painting the perfect realisation of his phenomenology of perception. 'Painting', he writes, 'awakens and carries to its highest pitch a delirium which is vision itself.' (1964a, 166) Modern painting especially has 'a metaphysical significance' (1964a, 178), in particular in the case of Cézanne, who, with his paintings, wanted to return to 'this primordial world' in which 'we are anchored', to 'nature in its origin' (1964c, 13), not only by attempting to give 'an impression of solidity

and material substance' (1964c, 12) to things on his canvas, but, paradoxically, by taking nature at the same time as its model. But, as Madison points out, with Cézanne 'it was rather a question of rediscovering nature using all the resources of *art*.... It is not a question of *reproducing* reality but of *expressing* it, which is an altogether different matter.' (1990, 77) 'As Cézanne's work attests', adds Madison,

art thus has a bipolar nature.... His art is thus at one and the same time a *recuperation* of nature and a *creative* endeavour.... Cézanne's pictures do not make us think of nature, they present it to us. And if they can do this, it is because the nature which appears in them is that of our initial perceptions. This nature is that of the 'immediate impression' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964c, 12); it is the 'primordial world' (1964c, 13, my emphasis)... not that of civilized man who has surrounded himself with cultural worlds which hide from him the natural world, but that which the first man on earth could have seen; it is 'nature at its origin' (1964c, 23, my emphasis)... What is expressed in [Cézanne's] work is neither mere 'sensations' nor an 'in-itself' reality but the primordial encounter of man and the world, the moment when they *mutually come into being*, one as perceiving, the other as perceived.... The work of art exists as a symbol or a sign: it translates and expresses existence (being in the world), and it is by its means that man comes to an awareness, comes for the first time to the full awareness of his own existence, grasps effectively what he *is*'. (1990, 79-80, my emphasis)

For Merleau-Ponty, Madison notes, the '[artist's] mission is to deliver up a meaning which, however, does not yet exist as a meaning. Hence the doubt, the anguish, the uncertainty....' (1990, 81) Merleau-Ponty writes: 'Only the work itself completed and understood is proof that there was *something* rather than *nothing* to be said.' (1964c, 19) And this 'something' says Madison, is revealed through *metamorphosis*, or the *transmutation* of 'the perceived work into a progressed symbol' (1990, 85). Thus, painting, and art in general, can in the light of such a theory be regarded as 'creative expression'. This is exactly how an artist such as Paul Klee, for instance, feels about art when he writes that it 'does not reproduce the visible; it makes visible.... *Natura naturans* is of more importance to [the artist] than *natura naturata*.' (*Théorie de l'Art Moderne*,

Genève: Editions Gonthier, 1964, pp.55, 32) (in Madison, 1990, 86) And as such, points out Madison,

the artist's work situates him in the *field of truth*.... The painter's style ... [is] the advent or coming to light of a power of expression which emerges from incarnate existence. If the painter brings to the total enterprise of painting his own initiative and makes his perception undergo a 'coherent deformation', the fact remains that he is haunted by a desire to paint, a demand for manifestation of truth, which impels him to express himself.... The unity of painting stems from this simple fact that all painters do no more than take up and re-express their bodily insertion into the world; they simply give universal symbols to the signifying existence of the perceiving body. (1990, 94) Since, however, the painter's reflection is precisely an operative, spontaneous, non-thematized reflection, painting does not result in ideas, concepts or propositions. It takes place in that original and silent milieu which is perception.... when in Cézanne's words [the painter] 'thinks in painting' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, 178). (Madison, 1990, 96)

#### The Phenomenology of Language

These observations regarding the process of creative art are clearly inspired and influenced by the way Merleau-Ponty considers the phenomenon of 'language', for he definitely believes that new ideas are born and understood by 'speaking themselves out' (1962, 389); before 'being expressed they are only vague feelings of dubious value' (Madison, 1990, 58). Therefore, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between 'operative', or 'originating speech', in which new ideas are born in consciousness, and 'secondary speech' which deals with already acquired and expressed thoughts, ideas, and emotions. Furthermore, the concept of original - pre-conscious idea - lends itself to the concept of 'truth', and thus 'eternity', for, says Madison, it has 'that persistent power...of *teaching itself* [and therefore]...is eternal in the sense that as a worthwhile creation of the human mind it calls out to all possible men and all possible times' (1990, 59). For Merleau-Ponty, therefore, 'to eternalise an idea is to insure, by the use of words already used, that the new intention carries on the heritage of the past, it is at a stroke to incorporate the past

into the present, and weld that present to a future, to open a whole temporal cycle in which the 'acquired' thought will remain present as a dimension, without our needing henceforth to summon it up or reproduce it. What is known as the non-temporal in thought is what, having thus taken up the past and committed the future, is presumptively of all time and is therefore anything but transcendent in relation to time.' (1962, 392)

But beside the 'expressive process', Merleau-Ponty notes, the concept of 'humanity' would be unthinkable without the realization that our existence as human beings depends on *communication* with others; 'we are involved in the world and with others in an inextricable tangle.' (1962, 454); hence, the power of language either as speech, dialogue, or writing. '[Language is] our element as water is the element of fishes.' (1964, 17).

The essential aspect of Merleau-Ponty's theory of language is his opposition to empiricist and intellectualist schools of thought which regard the relation between thought and speech as the causal interaction of two separate entities. For Merleau-Ponty, thought and speech, meaning and expression, are in a dialectic, mutual dependence; language is not preceded by thought but is born at the same time as thought. Before the act of expression, thought is a 'floating realm' (Saussure).

Merleau-Ponty precisely adopts this view and states that ' "pure" thought is reducible to a certain emptiness in consciousness, to an instantaneous desire' (1962, 183). 'I say that I *know an idea* when there is set up in me a power of organising around it words which make a coherent meaning.' (1962, 182). Therefore, Madison explains, 'there can be no question of [someone] merely translating already worked-out thoughts into a given vocabulary. The voices of language are the voices of silence, and the writer does not work with thoughts existing in themselves but with words or, more exactly, with

the 'threads of silence' (1964b, 46) with which speech is mixed together and which make of speech a signifying structure.... If he wishes to express a new meaning, he must erect a new construction of signs; he must bend "the resources of constituted language to some fresh usage" (1962, 389).... It is a question of "shaking the linguistic or narrative apparatus in order to tear a new sound from it" (1964b, 46).' (1990, 112-13)

It is evident that Merleau-Ponty (like Saussure) considers that 'taken singly, signs do not signify anything, and that each one of them does not so much express a meaning as mark a divergence of meaning between itself and other signs' (1964b, 39). As Madison points out, 'like the painter, therefore, the writer brings about a "coherent deformation"; he decentralises and rearranges words, makes them enter into a new style....' (1990, 113) '... It is a matter', writes Merleau-Ponty, 'of realizing a certain arrangement of already signifying instruments or already speaking significations (morphological, syntactical, and lexical instruments, literary *genres*, types of narrative, modes of presenting events, etc.) which arouses in the hearer the presentiment of a new and different signification, and which inversely (in the speaker or the writer) manages to anchor this original signification in the already available ones.' (1964b, 90)

These comments do not indicate clearly what is the 'stimulus-intention' behind the desire to bring a thought to light; there is, however, no doubt, according to Madison, that for Merleau-Ponty, although there is 'no inner man' (1962, xi) and 'internal experience...is meaningless' (1962, 276), the 'authentic expressive operation is violent, spontaneous, non necessitated - but it is always *motivated*.... This means that, even though speech is not directed from the outside, it becomes *meaningful* because it is animated by an operative *intention*.... guided by a certain "unknown law".' (1990, 113) For Merleau-Ponty, therefore, 'thought is no "internal" thing, and does not exist



independently of the world and of words.' (1962, 183); what happens is that thought 'does indeed move forward instantaneously and, as it were, in flashes, but we are then left to appropriate it for ourselves, and it is through expression that we make it our own' (1962, 177, my emphasis). But even if we accept that what precedes the creative act is a 'vague fever' (1964b, 19), a 'certain void of consciousness' (1962, 183), a 'thought which is struggling to establish itself' (1962, 389), we are not still in a position to understand the reason why and the manner in which one can be suddenly *motivated* to give meaning to the 'voices of silence', to the 'void of consciousness'.

As Madison remarks, Merleau-Ponty has so far been unable 'to account for what is unique about language in relation to the other functions of the lived body.... [His conclusion] does not seem able to clarify the "meaning-intention" and the "teleology of consciousness".... or again "that Logos which gives us the task of bringing to speech a hitherto mute world" (1964a, 10).' (1990, 115) It is to be noted that Merleau-Ponty himself does admit that he is facing a 'bad ambiguity' (1964a, 11) in the 'problem of the passage from the perceptual meaning to the language meaning, from behaviour to thematization' (1968, 176). Rightly, in my view, Madison writes in this respect : 'The perspective of the lived body alone can no more account for the miracle accomplished by language - the "excess of the signified over the signifying" - than it can justify us in speaking of a "task" which imposes itself on the painter.' (1990, 116). In other words, Merleau-Ponty appears to have problems in justifying his basic belief in the power of regressive analysis - archaeological investigation - to explain the 'symbolic expressivity' of language. Certainly, as Madison suggests, Merleau-Ponty involves himself in difficulties for although he 'does not deny that by means of language the subject *transcends himself* towards a meaning or truth which is not reducible to the perceived world;... he insists that the transcendence of speech, this teleology of consciousness, is

realized only in the perceived world'. But, Madison notes, 'it would then be necessary to say that language does not coincide with existence and also that it is not something purely and simply transcendent, but that it is the very act of transcendence.' (1990, 116, my emphasis) This is reflected in Merleau-Ponty's definition of the 'natural expressivity of the lived body' as a 'first language' (1964a, 7) which is then sublimated by language proper. But, Madison asks, what precisely 'makes it be that the perceived world is in the last analysis *to-be-thought*' (1990, 117)? Merleau-Ponty does not seem to be interested in finding an answer to this question; what he wishes is really to posit that bodily existence is not exclusively biological, for the seeds of an active transcendence make their first appearance in it; there is therefore in man a potentiality for 'a sort of *escaping* (*échappement*)' (1962, 221). As Madison points out, 'Merleau-Ponty sees a whole itinerary to "this act of transcendence": one encounters it first in the motor subject who can move about in the perceived world, then in the "silent communication of the gesture"; and then in language and the system of thoughts to which it affords access. In short a kind of itinerary of spirit or mind... Speech thus shows itself as the "surplus of our existence over natural being" (1962, 197).' (1990, 118)

But how does language finally benefit the human race? Essentially for the very reason that because its users are always in search of new forms, language acquires a permanent dynamism and develops what Madison calls 'an equilibrium or a Gestalt in movement' (1990, 123); this can be conceived of as a 'cultural logos' which, despite the fact that it 'lives only in and by' humans taken individually, transcends the linguistic community as a whole. And, Madison writes, precisely because 'language precedes all speaking subjects, [but, at the same time,]... is inseparable from acts of expression which have occurred in the past, it is a wholly historical phenomenon' (1990, 120). And, he adds, 'Wartburg has summed up in an admirable way this relation between individual

creativity and the general spirit in a passage which Merleau-Ponty must have read: "Individuals are the living but also changing carriers of the collective spirit; it is their creative action which moves it and advances it, even though the movement itself, as a uniform continuity, belongs only to the spirit and not to its carriers. And, inversely, the collective spirit is what supports spontaneity and the individual creative force." (Wartburg's *Problèmes et méthodes de la Linguistique*, p.217).' (Madison, 1990, 124-25).

The 'act of expression itself' says Madison, should be understood as 'the motive force of history...[which] ensures the development of culture.... Man's expressivity is a "miracle" precisely because it does not merely reflect already existing meanings, but is the place where that which did not have a meaning until then receives one.' (1990, 126) But, for Merleau-Ponty, 'the problem is to grasp *what*, across the successive and simultaneous community of speaking subjects, *wishes, speaks*, and finally *thinks*.' (1968, 176) 'This "what", observes Madison, '... is what *The Visible and the Invisible* will take to be Being itself.' That is, human expressiveness is where Being, the force of creative transcendence, becomes Logos, 'the place where a spontaneous desire, a "teleology" of consciousness, is transformed into symbols and truth,...this moment "without equal" when man begins to speak and to deliver up what in him wanted to express itself, to "endow with a name what has never been named" (1964b, 233).' (1990, 126-27).

Merleau-Ponty uses his account of language (i.e. speech, dialogue, and writing) as the model, the archetype, for artistic creativity. We have seen, for example, how much this is the case with his study of Paul Cézanne's paradoxical treatment of painting, and this is no less the case with Marcel Proust's method of writing, especially as regards *A la recherche du temps perdu*. In this respect, Madison notes,

In his infancy Proust often had the impression that things held in themselves an insurpassable wealth, an inexhaustible beauty, and that they called out to him to enter into them and to deliver up the secrets they contained... It was from moments such as these that Proust received, as he says, his vocation to be a writer by feeling himself called upon to rediscover in himself the secret which things seemed to be suggesting to him. What destines a man to be a writer, Merleau-Ponty would say, is the conviction that 'the sensible is, like life, a treasury ever full of things to say' (1968, 252); it is the feeling that the world and experience contain in themselves a 'scattered', 'buried' (1964b, 55), 'captive', or 'hidden' (1968, 36) meaning, a meaning which is *to-be-said*.... [And] Proust experienced with a growing intensity this necessity of transforming life into a work in order to save it. (1990, 128-32)

Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, truth, as a linguistic explanation of the world, has a bipolar role: it reveals and describes the world, but at the same time reflects on this revelation and this description. 'What is basically in question', comments Madison, 'is thus the meaning of meaning. If the world's truth is not a "natural property" of an in-itself world but what a *consciousness* discovers in contact with it, it is because truth...is inseparable from the expressive operation which says it.... *Once its has appeared*, [truth] presents itself as that which preceded and motivated reflection. The problem thus lies entirely in the "retrospective reality" (1968, 252), this "retrograde movement" of the truth'. (Madison, 1990, 137) As Merleau-Ponty writes, 'The experience of the true cannot keep from projecting itself back into the time which preceded it.... To think, or, in other words, to think an idea as true, implies that we arrogate to ourselves the right of recovering the past, either to treat it as an anticipation of the present, or at least to place the past and the present in the same world.' (1963a, 29) (The second alternative reminds us of Gadamer's notion of 'contemporaneity' in art). As we have already noted, Merleau-Ponty will attempt to resolve this apparent antinomy in his philosophy of being.

What remains to solve is, therefore, what J. Hyppolite calls 'the enigma of a becoming-conscious which is an authentic creation'. (*Etudes sur Marx and Hegel*, p.176)

As Madison points out, 'We would not look for anything at all if in some way we did not know what we were looking for, but we would also not look for anything if we had already found what we were looking for. The situation is thus as follows (according, again, to the formulation Hyppolite gives to Hegel's problematic): "Everything happens as if there existed an immediate lived experience which it is a question of expressing, this expression being at once a discovery, in the etymological sense of the term, and an invention, since its expression has not yet been formulated." (op.cit, 188).' (Madison, 1990, 139) 'Thus', adds Madison, 'reflection is not a *coincidence* with a meaning or a brute Logos; it is its *realization*, the promotion of a wild logos to a spoken Logos, to truth.... This is why expression is a *task*.... it is a conquest on the part of reflection.' (1990, 141) Turning to art, Madison adds, 'The perceived world imposes a task, a vocation, on the painter, for the painter can grasp the visibility of the world in its meaning (this meaning being that of his presence to the perceived world) only by reflecting it in a picture which expresses it.' (1990, 141)<sup>2</sup>

### Synopsis

As I have noted, the main tenet of Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception is its emphasis on the circular structure of life, while taking into account the phenomenological duality of consciousness and thing. This does not entail chaos, but a balance - a harmony

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<sup>2</sup> As Madison indicates, Merleau-Ponty became later on increasingly inclined to give to his ideas a purer ontological form, speaking of 'vision' rather than 'perception', of 'carnal' (*charnelle*) existence rather than 'corporeal' existence, and writing 'Being' rather than 'being'. It is in *Eye and Mind*, says Madison, that 'Merleau-Ponty is going to revise his ideas concerning the primacy of perception and, consequently, concerning the contingency of existence and the gratuitousness of the teleology of consciousness' (1990, 97). Because it is not the aim of this thesis to engage in an ontological line of research, this latter aspect of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is not analyzed and discussed herein. It is worth mentioning however that in his later works, Merleau-Ponty returned in part to his initial views on perception.

- between law and structure which exist as 'two dialectical moments'. Like Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty refers to the principles involved in 'dialogue', but with an emphasis on its 'I-lessness' - that is, 'speaking does not belong in the sphere of the "I" but the sphere of the "we"; the speakers (Gadamer's 'players/subjects') do not exist separately but relinquish the autonomy of their own will - they are the two sides of the same coin, that is, they co-exist but remain distinguishable entities.

This principle is inherent in Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the various 'orders of activity' in life, which although 'dynamically and dialectically interrelated', do not lose their individualities; i.e. one order integrates another, but instead of obliterating it, it gives it 'a new signification'; we are speaking therefore of a 'functional opposition', not a 'substantial opposition'. As a result of this 'dialectic of transcendence', the new order acquires a meaning which is not reducible to the meaning of the lower-level structure, but 'contains' it and the objectivity of nature is preserved. In other words, the 'teleology of consciousness' - or teleology of meaning - would not be a teleology without integrating the roots of its evolution. One might compare this with the evolutionary story of life on earth, in which living species still, to some extent, embody some of the basic, if rudimentary, features and organs present at the beginning of their evolution.

As has been argued in chapter VI, this 'emergence of a transforming and creative existence' is demonstrated and informed in the phenomenon of 'expression' in art. Certainly, Merleau-Ponty considers that the artists' mission is to deliver up a meaning which does not yet exist as a meaning - to give the 'proof that there was "something" rather than "nothing" to be said'. And this 'something' is for Merleau-Ponty, as Madison suggests, a 'metamorphosis' - a 'transmutation' - of the perceived world 'into a professed symbol'. But as Madison remarks, justly in my view, if the 'entire work of the artist is...

polarized towards an "infinite logos" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964c, 19), this can only be because the ground of reason and of its infinite *logos* or *telos* is not the mere *finitude* of phenomenal being in the world but is itself an *infinite* ground or *arche* (Madison, 1990, 72). 'Infinite ground', because, as the human's consciousness by its very nature and the world it is perceiving are carried along with the flow of life and history, and there are no spatial or temporal limits to this flow (at least in the kind of universe we live in), the 'co-existence' and 'dialectic' of consciousness and things are bound to generate an infinity of new *meanings*. And this is as it should be, if we refuse to believe that there is only one 'meaning' out there - one Truth - which waits to be discovered in a flash of *enlightenment*.

But the question thus becomes: What is the lever - the signal - which compels artists to express the emergence of their everyday experience 'incarnate existence', whilst remaining at the same time faithful to, and dependent on, it? For Merleau-Ponty, it is 'an unknown law'. But he seems to have given some answer to this question through his analogy between the 'dialectical structure' of perception and the structure of language/speech/dialogue. For Merleau-Ponty, as we have seen, language is not used as an external tool to express emotions or thoughts, it is itself emotion or thought which comes to be known - objectified - in that way. In Merleau-Ponty's identification of two categories of thinking ('operative/originating' and 'secondary'), it is in 'originating' speech that emotions and ideas are born in consciousness; there seems to be, therefore, no difficulty in positing, in agreement with this argument, that it is in the 'originating' creative act that new aesthetic meanings, or truths, are born. This scheme is, however, difficult to associate with Gadamer's concept of 'play', and even if we compare it to the Schopenhauerian 'willness' experience, the problem remains of how an 'unobjectified' thought can acquire an 'incarnate existence'. In a way, this *objectification* of an aesthetic

truth is its conceptualization. Thus, we could say that the necessity for an aesthetic experience to be 'conceptualized' makes it automatically a candidate for its meaningful communication to a public, that is, the structure of the creation of a work of art makes it necessary to have the latter experienced by a public because 'we are involved in the world and with others in an inextricable tangle' (Merleau-Ponty). If that was not the case, it would be sufficient for creative art, as Collingwood would have it, to exist solely in the artists' consciousness; we have already underlined in chapter IV what kinds of problems this point of view generates in an aesthetic theory.

But even if we attempt to use the concept of 'secondary' language in order to explain the necessity for artists to 'express' themselves through some form of 'communication' which allows them to 'acknowledge' and 'aestheticize' their intellectual and emotional inspirations - and even if we accept with Merleau-Ponty that it is an 'inner law' which impels the artists to express themselves in this manner, it remains to understand how, in the absence of an inner man' (1962, xi) and an 'internal experience...[which] is meaningless' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 276), we can explain the 'problem of the passage from the perceptual meaning to the language meaning, from behaviour to thematization' (1968, 176) Merleau-Ponty himself admits that there is a 'bad ambiguity' in this argument, but that it is not so flagrant in what he calls the 'first language' of the 'lived-body' - the 'silent communication of the gesture' - for there does not appear to be the same hiatus between the wish for expression and its embodiment in gestures, as there is in the embodiment of expression in language proper. Gestures, and facial expressions, as I have suggested earlier, have become instinctive and spontaneous as the result of evolution; it is tempting to think that language itself has become an instinctive process, having only acquired with time more sophistication, diversity, and range of meanings than gestures and facial expressions.



One evidence of the ambiguity that artists have to face and conquer in the creative process is the numerous tentative drawings, scripts, or partitions, etc. which they are often driven to make prior to their more formal involvement in their works. These preliminary attempts give an idea of the still vague but powerful forces (emotional, sensual, intellectual) which spring up from the artists' collaboration with some aspects of the world, and of their struggle with the materials, techniques, rules and conventions, involved in their chosen art. Very often, in fact, artistic 'sketches' are more meaningful and aesthetically significant and pleasing than the finished works; they make us come closer to the human beings behind the perfect artistry.

### Conclusion

A comparison between Merleau-Ponty's and Gadamer's theories shows some similarities but significant divergencies; they both establish global systems of a dynamic nature, and they both recognize in these systems a potentiality for what Gadamer calls an 'unconscious teleology', or 'higher determination', and what Merleau-Ponty identifies as a 'dialectic of transcendence'. What however essentially differs between the two theories is that:

- (a) whilst for Gadamer, the 'identities' of the 'players' are lost in the movement of the 'play' - in its 'circle of meaning' -, for Merleau-Ponty, there is no loss of the identity of an Order in its integration into a higher order of the Global System.
- (b) whilst Gadamer sees 'play' as developing into a 'horizontal transcendence', based on 'linear causality', for Merleau-Ponty, this 'Gestalt in movement' (Madison), this 'cultural logos' is accomplished through both 'horizontal' and 'vertical' transcendence. This particular structure allows Merleau-Ponty to avoid the *erasing* effect produced on the

individualities of the 'players' by the two and fro (horizontal) movement of 'play' based on a linear causality, and to organize his structure of increasingly human and spiritual Orders on a spirally ascending progression, through circular causality.

(c) what Merleau-Ponty is emphasizing more than Gadamer is the justification in art of what he calls the 'miracle of the act of expression itself' 'which ensures the development of culture' - 'it does not merely reflect already existing meanings', but 'endows with a name what has never been named' - and 'bring(s) to speech a hitherto mute world'. By comparison, Gadamer seems more concerned with giving to art the metaphysical Platonic task of 'revealing' a transcendental Idea, or Truth.

(d) it is obvious that any process of 'psychical distance' would be totally incompatible with Merleau-Ponty's theory; (a) because of the circularity and integrated structure of its system which makes 'everything happen as if there existed an immediate lived experience' (Hyppolite), and (b) because of Merleau-Ponty's view of 'expression' as 'born at the same time as 'thought'. This is linked, of course, to the relation 'artist/work of art', but it could be related in the same way to the relation 'observer/work of art' if we were using Collingwood's concept of 'emotion' instead of Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'thought'.

In conclusion, I would say that although I regard Gadamer's application of his theory of 'play' to art as quite powerful and rich in new ideas, I would still consider that Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the aesthetic experience of art, in the context of his general theory of Perception, avoids some of the serious ambiguities involved in Gadamer's theory, and adds much sophistication, depth, and constructive realism, to a study of the aesthetic experience of art.

I would finally add that Merleau-Ponty's holistic understanding of 'life' in general, and of art in particular, as 'the revelation of an aesthetically meaningful and rational world, and the means of overcoming the antinomy of nature and idea, of objective and subjective (Madison), is very much in harmony with the spirit of my 'attunement/symbiosis' hypothesis.

## CONCLUSION

In order to investigate the proposition that a process of 'psychological distance' could be a necessary condition of aesthetic experience, I have initiated my research with an analysis of Edward BULLOUGH's well known principle of 'Psychical Distance' in aesthetics. After having put his theory to the test, I have found that most of his basic arguments were not only structurally, but logically wanting, and my conclusion has been that Bullough's principle of 'psychical distance' could only be found justified if it was interpreted as what George DICKIE defines as a condition of 'attending to' an object, or event. But this particular condition obtains in all our experiences and should not, therefore, be regarded as exclusive to aesthetic experiences. In any case, the above interpretation does not fit Bullough's fundamental understanding of 'psychical distance' which is that of a special 'attitude' which allows us to experience the *aesthetic side* that all objects and events possess. As I have underlined in my thesis, the query which comes to mind about this principle, a query which Bullough's theory does not answer, is: What are the significant circumstances, criteria, or influences, which would trigger off in us the desire to perceive the aesthetic side of things? I would contend that such question would not need to be asked in the context of the proposed 'Attunement/Symbiosis' theory I suggested in Chapter III, and to which I will come back later in this conclusion.

Having also questioned the principle of 'psychical distance' in aesthetics on the grounds of its arbitrariness, and excessive 'psychologism', I still had to accept the fact that there is a psychological element involved in aesthetic experience as in all human experiences. I attempted to find, therefore, a theory of aesthetics which, although taking this factor into account, would not make of it the linchpin of an aesthetic experience. I was helped in this aim by Gadamer's theory of 'play' which asserts that the psychological

involvement of observers of aesthetic objects, or events, is kept in check by the fact that the 'players' are 'set at an absolute distance from the experienced object, or event, which makes any practical *purposive* share in it impossible'. This allows Gadamer to attribute to the 'meaning' of a work of art, through the latter's power of 'contemporaneity', the incompatible qualities of *inviolability* and *adaptability*. As a result, for Gadamer, the 'representation' of works of art is 'highly mobile and relative' for it is 'the fundamental continuity of time which encompass(es) every subjective act and the object it apprehends.' As I have often indicated in this thesis, we should not be tempted, however, to assimilate Gadamer's 'circle of meaning' with what Ricoeur calls an 'emancipation' of [the work of art] with respect to the author', a 'distanciation of the real from itself', and I would certainly not believe that, as Ricoeur writes about literature, 'what the text signifies no longer coincides with what the author meant'.

But let us now turn to the most important side of Bullough's theory, which concerns the need in aesthetic experience for an approach which *reveals* to us the aesthetic side of objects, and events. As I have already noted, this idea presents insurmountable problems not only on logical grounds, but from a practical point of view. In order to provide a valid alternative to Bullough's approach in this respect, I have studied and worked out the possibility of integrating the principle of an aesthetic experience in a system which, by its very nature, would render redundant Bullough's requirement for a special attitude in order to experience the aesthetic side of objects, or events. My proposed process frees the observers from any responsibility in the initiation and evaluation of an aesthetic experience, because it is induced in them by the 'pleasure' they feel at a sudden 'intuition/revelation' of life's 'attunement' to / 'symbiosis' with certain forms or structures of the world.

What prompted me to adopt Bell's principle of Significant Form in the first stage of my theory is that I found Bell's acceptance that 'pleasure' is felt in the perception of some significant forms in objects, or events, very much in accord with my belief that in the aesthetic experience of nature, or of art, the harmonious and pleasurable play of all our faculties is always linked to some 'significance' of forms and structures of the world; in Bell's theory, this significance is purely physical; in my theory, it is in part physical and in part metaphysical; hence the reason why I would suggest that my approach would better fit Langer's theory of Symbolism than Bell's theory would.

The other essential characteristic of my proposed theory of aesthetics is that its 'intuitive' element is kept *alive*, and remains *integral* to, the whole aesthetic process in art, in that the artists' inspirational intuition/revelation has to be *successfully* 'articulated' and conveyed to observers through the works of art. This is the condition for an aesthetic experience to become, *not* an exercise of pure self-expression on the part of the artist, or a Platonic process of 'Recollection', but an 'articulation', 'transmission', and 'diffusion' by means of Representational Symbolism (Langer), of an artist's discovery, in some rare moments of inspiration, of the 'attunement/symbiosis' of living beings with the world.

The above artistic mission demands such a high degree of sensitivity, imagination, talent, expertise, and freedom of expression, that, as I have shown in Chapters IV and V, craftsmanship could not pretend to be in the same league as art, and that only exceptional individuals, the geniuses, would be capable of fulfilling the above task successfully.

It has also been made clear in this thesis how important I regard the notion of 'rapprochement' and 'communion' with the artists through their works, and the need therefore for a thorough familiarization with the genetic and contextual circumstances of the works. Although I have admitted in Chapter VII, that the above aims were not always

easy to accomplish, I have also attempted to show in Chapter II, how neglect and arbitrariness in these respects could endanger or alter the message that artists intend to convey; I would thus find the principle of 'referential connection' (W.P. Alston), if not necessary, at least foremost and very influential in the success of an aesthetic experience of works of art. My viewpoint in this respect diverges from Langer's contention that works of art are totally autonomous.

With some of Gadamer's statements, we may be under the impression that he shares Langer's above belief. For example, he writes: 'The *real meaning* of a text, as it speaks to the interpreters, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and whom he originally wrote for.... Not occasionally, but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is *not merely* a reproductive but always a productive attitude *as well*.' (1988, 263-64, my emphasis) The above statement makes however clear that Gadamer attributes to works of art both a *productive* and a *reproductive* function, and that his argument concerns the *real meaning* (essential meaning) of a work of art, not its contextual, linguistic, or symbolic meanings.

My above approach to the aesthetic experience of art, relying as it does on 'referential' and 'contextual' principles, and on a 'rapprochement' and 'communion' with the artists through their works, constitutes one more reason for dismissing the principle of 'psychical distance' which, fundamentally, as I have attempted to prove in more than one occasion, gives most of the time precedence to the observers' judgement and 'attitude' rather than to the artists' intentions, and their *presence* in their works. I do share consequently Langer's point of view regarding 'distance' in an aesthetic experience of art. She writes thus: 'We might do better to look upon the art object as something in its own right, with properties independent of our prepared reactions - *properties which command*

*our reactions.*' (1963, 39, my emphasis) 'It is part of the artist's business to make his work elicit this attitude instead of requiring the percipient to bring an ideal frame of mind with him.' (1963, 318)

The interesting problems underlined by Bullough in his analysis of under or over-distanced works of art are, in my view, more appropriately and convincingly dealt with by Gadamer in his Hermeneutical approach to aesthetics as analyzed in Chapter VIII. Thanks to his principle of 'play', the understanding of an over, or under distanced, art object becomes a kind of 'transposition' which, he writes, finds 'its measure in itself and measures itself by nothing outside it... It no longer permits of any comparison with reality... because a superior truth speaks from it'. Obviously, this particular hermeneutical approach exempts an observer from having to appeal to some factor 'outside' the object, such as the observer's psychical distance.

Turning now to another context studied in this thesis, viz. the 'transcendence' of works of art, I would submit that Gadamer's theory of 'play', as applied to art, in spite of its accent on the dynamism of the 'play', still does not furnish us with a clear and original account of the progression from a 'playful' creative act to the emergence of a 'transcendental' object, or event, such as a work of art. In my view, Merleau-Ponty's 'dialectic of transcendence', i.e. the synthesis of an 'horizontal transcendence' and a 'vertical transcendence', offers us a true demonstration of how artistic creation can transcend itself. Although Gadamer, inspired by Heidegger, does indeed use at one time the concept of 'excess', or 'overflowing', I did not detect in his writings the same sense of overwhelming élan that is implied in Merleau-Ponty's 'force of creative *dépassement*', this 'moment "without equal" when man begins to speak and deliver up *what in him wanted to express itself*'. In fact, Merleau-Ponty's definition of 'vertical transcendence'



as a movement which 'supports and explains the existence of a meaningful, rational world', is very much in harmony with my proposed 'attunement/symbiosis' thesis.

The difficult situation resulting from my association, in a same aesthetic experience, of an intuitive/formalist stage and an expressive/symbolic stage, is, in my view, solved by taking on board some important characteristics of the view that philosophers such as R.G. COLLINGWOOD and M. MERLEAU-PONTY, have of the simultaneity of the phenomena of 'emotion' (Collingwood), or of 'thought' (Merleau-Ponty), with the phenomenon of 'expression'. For Collingwood, as we remember, the expression of an emotion cannot be distinguished from the emotion itself, for the expression constitutes the emotion. 'There are', he says, 'no unexpressed emotions'; this is why a work of art 'is already complete and perfect' in the artist's mind before it is embodied in crafted objects. The aim of art objects is to allow observers to 'reconstruct for themselves' the imaginary objects created in the artist's mind.

For Merleau-Ponty, as we have seen in Chapter IX, language is not preceded by thought but is born at the same time as thought. New ideas are born and understood by 'speaking themselves out'. Merleau-Ponty distinguishes thus between 'operating/originating speech' in which new ideas are born in consciousness, and 'secondary speech' which deals with already acquired and expressed thoughts. Translating this argument into the area of art, Merleau-Ponty argues that the artist's 'mission is to deliver up a meaning which, however, does not *yet* exist as a meaning.... It is not a question of *reproducing* reality but of *expressing* it, which is an altogether different matter.' As Madison notes, for Merleau-Ponty, 'art is thus at one and the same time a *recuperation* of nature and a *creative* endeavour.'

Merleau-Ponty's above distinction between 'operative/originating speech' and 'secondary speech', though appealing, seems difficult to justify. If he believes that language is born at the same time as thought, this could mean two things: 1) that 'originating speech' has already the structure of an 'artificial language' when one 'expresses' a thought to oneself. But, surely, this already structured language would have to be *learned*, and how could it be *learned* if there are originally no thoughts at one's disposal; further, it would be difficult to imagine that this 'originating speech' would be different from the 'secondary speech'; but even if it was, what would happen to the 'operative/originating speech' in the meantime? Surely, the 'thought' contained in it would not remain *static* in the transfer from one 'speech' to the other; if it did, what would be the point then of a 'secondary speech', and if it did not, it would not be the same 'thought' as the 'original' thought. To borrow one of Sartre's comments in the different context of thoughts in dreams, this move from one 'speech' to another, 'will surround itself with a worldly atmosphere.... [in which] will be projected all my knowledge, all my interest, all my memories' (1983, 196). I would tend to believe with Sartre that language (whether rudimentary, artificial, or formal), is the *crystallization* of our subconscious emotions and thoughts at the contact of our 'worldly atmosphere'. Previously to this stage, we are able when influenced or prompted by internal or external factors, to *intuit* the 'significance' of emotions and thoughts, as perhaps infants intuit the 'significance' of their thoughts without having yet been trained to conceptualize and linguistically express them. In my view, the stock of *pure* 'emotions' and 'thoughts', that is, at a stage when they have not yet been *polluted* by our 'worldly atmosphere', and by what Merleau-Ponty would call 'secondary speech', constitutes our inner Being.

Therefore, I do not believe, as Collingwood does, that a work of art is complete and perfect in the artists' mind before it is embodied in 'crafted objects', but that it is

*complete* in an *intuitive* mode, that it is, as it were, *pregnant* with the artists' 'inspiration'. The immense talent and expertise that artists need, as well as the huge difficulties and long hardship that they have to face, in order to 'express' this 'intuition/revelation' through the 'language' of art, bear witness to the almost miraculous role they appear to play in human civilization.

I hope that the arguments presented in my research and the conclusions I reached about the principle of 'psychical distance', will justify the title I chose to give to my thesis. I would like however to add that, even independently from all the objections raised against this principle, another of its important failings would concern the extreme difficulties that even the most gifted and sensitive observers would face in order to adopt and maintain the right sort of 'attitude'. As H.S. Langfeld points out: 'For most individuals [this attitude] has to be cultivated if it is to exist at all in the midst of the opposing and therefore disturbing influences which are always present.' (*The Aesthetic Attitude*, p.65) (in Langer, 1963, 37) For David Prall, 'Complete aesthetic absorption, strictly relevant to our object, is seldom if ever the sole object of our attention.' (*Aesthetic Analysis*, pp. 7-8) (in Langer, 1963, 37) And Langer herself writes: 'Few listeners or spectators, in fact, ever quite attain the state which Roger Fry described in *Vision and Design* (p.29) as "disinterested intensity of contemplation".... Most people are too busy or too lazy to uncouple their minds from all their usual interests before looking at a picture or a vase. That explains, presumably', adds Langer, 'what (Fry) remarked somewhat earlier in the same essay: "In proportion as art becomes purer the number of people to whom it appeals gets less. It cuts out all the romantic overtones which are the usual bait by which men are induced to accept a work of art. It appeals only to the aesthetic sensibility, and that in most men is comparatively weak" (Ibid, p.15).' (1963, 37-38)

As concerns my proposed 'Attunement/Symbiosis' system, based on a teleological argument, I would submit that it has permitted me to build up a new, and, I would believe, interesting alternative to the principle of 'psychical distance'; it should also, thanks to its flexible integration and harmonization in *one system* of significant phenomenological, metaphysical, and psychological elements, offer a suitable platform for further research (perhaps in the complementary frame of a philosophy of mind), especially with regard to the strong belief that some philosophers entertain about the simultaneity of 'emotion', or of 'thought', with 'expression' in creative art.

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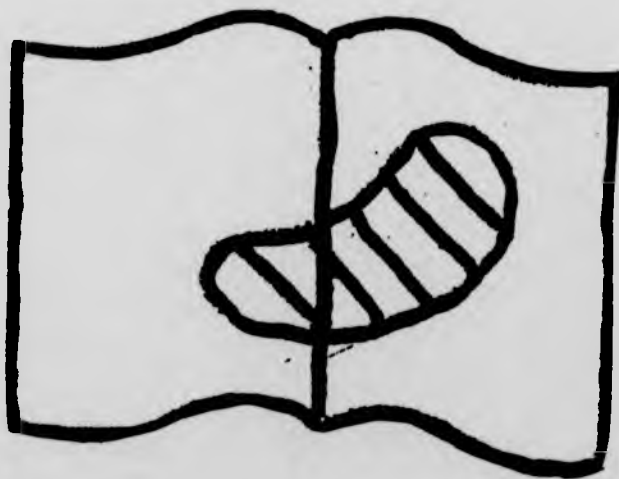
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PART <sup>ONE</sup> #

**The Concept of Distance in Aesthetic Experience**

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**The Myth of Psychological Distance**

in

**Aesthetic Experience**

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Jacqueline H.M. Bazin

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Submitted for the Degree of Ph.D. ~~in Philosophy~~

~~Jacqueline H.M. Bazin, BA (Hons), MA~~

Ph.D. Philosophy

University of Warwick

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October 1997

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## CONCLUSION

In order to investigate the proposition that a process of 'psychological distance' could be a necessary condition of aesthetic experience, I have initiated my research with an analysis of Edward BULLOUGH's well known principle of 'Psychical Distance' in aesthetics. After having put his theory to the test, I have found that most of his basic arguments were not only structurally, but logically wanting, and my conclusion has been that Bullough's principle of 'psychical distance' could only be found justified if it was interpreted as what George DICKIE defines as a condition of 'attending to' an object, or event. But this particular condition obtains in all our experiences and should not, therefore, be regarded as exclusive to aesthetic experiences. In any case, the above interpretation does not fit Bullough's fundamental understanding of 'psychical distance' which is that of a special 'attitude' which allows us to experience the *aesthetic side* that all objects and events possess. As I have underlined in my thesis, the query which comes to mind about this principle, a query which Bullough's theory does not answer, is: What are the significant circumstances, criteria, or influences, which would trigger off in us the desire to perceive the aesthetic side of things? I would contend that such question would not need to be asked in the context of the proposed 'Attunement/Symbiosis' theory I suggested in Chapter III, and to which I will come back later in this conclusion.

Having also questioned the principle of 'psychical distance' in aesthetics on the grounds of its arbitrariness, and excessive 'psychologism', I still had to accept the fact that there is a psychological element involved in aesthetic experience as in all human experiences. I attempted to find, therefore, a theory of aesthetics which, although taking this factor into account, would not make of it the linchpin of an aesthetic experience. I was helped in this aim by Gadamer's theory of 'play' which asserts that the psychological



involvement of observers of aesthetic objects, or events, is kept in check by the fact that the 'players' are 'set at an absolute distance from the experienced object, or event, which makes any practical *purposive* share in it impossible'. This allows Gadamer to attribute to the 'meaning' of a work of art, through the latter's power of 'contemporaneity', the incompatible qualities of *inviolability* and *adaptability*. As a result, for Gadamer, the 'representation' of works of art is 'highly mobile and relative' for it is 'the fundamental continuity of time which encompass(es) every subjective act and the object it apprehends.' As I have often indicated in this thesis, we should not be tempted, however, to assimilate Gadamer's 'circle of meaning' with what Ricoeur calls an 'emancipation' of [the work of art] with respect to the author', a 'distanciation of the real from itself', and I would certainly not believe that, as Ricoeur writes about literature, 'what the text signifies no longer coincides with what the author meant'.

But let us now turn to the most important side of Bullough's theory, which concerns the need in aesthetic experience for an approach which *reveals* to us the aesthetic side of objects, and events. As I have already noted, this idea presents insurmountable problems not only on logical grounds, but from a practical point of view. In order to provide a valid alternative to Bullough's approach in this respect, I have studied and worked out the possibility of integrating the principle of an aesthetic experience in a system which, by its very nature, would render redundant Bullough's requirement for a special attitude in order to experience the aesthetic side of objects, or events. My proposed process frees the observers from any responsibility in the initiation and evaluation of an aesthetic experience, because it is induced in them by the 'pleasure' they feel at a sudden 'intuition/revelation' of life's 'attunement' to / 'symbiosis' with certain forms or structures of the world.

What prompted me to adopt Bell's principle of Significant Form in the first stage of my theory is that I found Bell's acceptance that 'pleasure' is felt in the perception of some significant forms in objects, or events, very much in accord with my belief that in the aesthetic experience of nature, or of art, the harmonious and pleasurable play of all our faculties is always linked to some 'significance' of forms and structures <sup>of</sup> in the world; in Bell's theory, this significance is purely physical; in my theory, it is in part physical and in part metaphysical; hence the reason why I would suggest that my approach would better fit Langer's theory of Symbolism than Bell's theory would.

The other essential characteristic of my proposed theory of aesthetics is that its 'intuitive' element is kept *alive*, and remains *integral* to, the whole aesthetic process in art, in that the artists' inspirational intuition/revelation has to be *successfully* 'articulated' and conveyed to observers through the works of art. This is the condition for an aesthetic experience to become, *not* an exercise of pure self-expression on the part of the artist, or a Platonic process of 'Recollection', but an 'articulation', 'transmission', and 'diffusion' by means of Representational Symbolism (Langer), of an artist's discovery, in some rare moments of inspiration, of the 'attunement/symbiosis' of living beings with the world.

The above artistic mission demands such a high degree of sensitivity, imagination, talent, expertise, and freedom of expression, that, as I have shown in Chapters IV and V, craftsmanship could not pretend to be in the same league as art, and that only exceptional individuals, the geniuses, would be capable of fulfilling the above task successfully.

It has also been made clear in this thesis how important I regard the notion of 'rapprochement' and 'communion' with the artists through their works, and the need therefore for a thorough familiarization with the genetic and contextual circumstances of the works, ~~and the meaning of the contents of the works.~~ Although I have admitted in

Chapter VII, that the above aims were not always easy to accomplish, I have also attempted to show in Chapter II, how neglect and arbitrariness in these respects could endanger or alter the message that artists intend to convey; I would thus find the principle of 'referential connection' (W.P. Alston), if not necessary, at least foremost and very influential in the success of an aesthetic experience of works of art. My viewpoint in this respect diverges from Langer's contention that works of art are totally autonomous.

With some of Gadamer's statements, we may be under the impression that he shares Langer's above belief. For example, he writes: 'The *real meaning* of a text, as it speaks to the interpreters, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and whom he originally wrote for.... Not occasionally, but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is *not merely* a reproductive but always a productive attitude *as well*.' (1988, 263-64, my emphasis) The above statement makes however clear that Gadamer attributes to works of art both a *productive* and a *reproductive* function, and that his argument concerns the *real meaning* (essential meaning) of a work of art, not its contextual, linguistic, or symbolic meanings.

My above approach to the aesthetic experience of art, relying as it does on 'referential' and 'contextual' principles, and on a 'rapprochement' and 'communion' with the artists through their works, constitutes one more reason for dismissing the principle of 'psychical distance' which, fundamentally, as I have attempted to prove in more than one occasion, gives most of the time precedence to the observers' judgement and 'attitude' rather than to the artists' intentions, and their *presence* in their works. I do share consequently Langer's point of view regarding 'distance' in an aesthetic experience of art. She writes thus: 'We might do better to look upon the art object as something in its own right, with properties independent of our prepared reactions - *properties which command*

*our reactions.*' (1963, 39, my emphasis) 'It is part of the artist's business to make his work elicit this attitude instead of requiring the percipient to bring an ideal frame of mind with him.' (1963, 318)

The interesting problems underlined by Bullough in his analysis of under or over-distanced works of art are, in my view, more appropriately and convincingly dealt with by Gadamer in his Hermeneutical approach to aesthetics as analyzed in Chapter VIII. Thanks to his principle of 'play', the understanding of an over, or under distanced, art object becomes a kind of 'transposition' which, he writes, finds 'its measure in itself and measures itself by nothing outside it.... It no longer permits of any comparison with reality... because a superior truth speaks from it'. Obviously, this particular hermeneutical approach exempts an observer from having to appeal to some factor 'outside' the object, such as the observer's psychical distance.

Turning now to another context studied in this thesis, viz. the 'transcendence' of works of art, I would submit that Gadamer's theory of 'play', as applied to art, in spite of its accent on the dynamism of the 'play', still does not furnish us with a clear and original account of the progression from a 'playful' creative act to the emergence of a 'transcendental' object, or event, such as a work of art. In my view, Merleau-Ponty's 'dialectic of transcendence', i.e. the synthesis of an 'horizontal transcendence' and a 'vertical transcendence', offers us a true demonstration of how artistic creation can transcend itself. Although Gadamer, inspired by Heidegger, does indeed use at one time the concept of 'excess', or 'overflowing', I did not detect in his writings the same sense of overwhelming élan that is implied in Merleau-Ponty's 'force of creative *dépassement*', this 'moment "without equal" when man begins to speak and deliver up *what in him wanted to express itself*'. In fact, Merleau-Ponty's definition of 'vertical transcendence'

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as a movement which 'supports and explains the existence of a meaningful, rational world', is very much in harmony with my proposed 'attunement/symbiosis' thesis.

The difficult situation resulting from my association, in a same aesthetic experience, of an intuitive/formalist stage and an expressive/symbolic stage, is, in my view, solved by taking on board some important characteristics of the view that philosophers such as R.G. COLLINGWOOD and M. MERLEAU-PONTY, have of the simultaneity of the phenomena of 'emotion' (Collingwood), or of 'thought' (Merleau-Ponty), with the phenomenon of 'expression'. For Collingwood, as we remember, the expression of an emotion cannot be distinguished from the emotion itself, for the expression constitutes the emotion. 'There are', he says, 'no unexpressed emotions'; this is why a work of art 'is already complete and perfect' in the artist's mind before it is embodied in crafted objects. The aim of art objects is to allow observers to 'reconstruct for themselves' the imaginary objects created in the artist's mind.

For Merleau-Ponty, as we have seen in Chapter IX, language is not preceded by thought but is born at the same time as thought. New ideas are born and understood by 'speaking themselves out'. Merleau-Ponty distinguishes thus between 'operating/originating speech' in which new ideas are born in consciousness, and 'secondary speech which deals with already acquired and expressed thoughts. Translating this argument into the area of art, Merleau-Ponty argues that the artist's 'mission is to deliver up a meaning which, however, does not *yet* exist as a meaning.... It is not a question of *reproducing* reality but of *expressing* it, which is an altogether different matter.' As Madison notes, for Merleau-Ponty, 'art is thus at one and the same time a *recuperation* of nature and a *creative* endeavour.'

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Merleau-Ponty's above distinction between 'operative/originating speech' and 'secondary speech', though appealing, seems difficult to justify. If he believes that language is born at the same time as thought, this could mean two things: 1) that 'originating speech' has already the structure of an 'artificial language' when one 'expresses' a thought to oneself. But, surely, this already structured language would have to be *learned*, and how could it be *learned* if there are originally no thoughts at one's disposal; further, it would be difficult to imagine that this 'originating speech' would be different from the 'secondary speech'; but even if it was, what would happen to the 'operative/originating speech' in the meantime? Surely, the 'thought' contained in it would not remain *static* in the transfer from one 'speech' to the other; if it did, what would be the point then of a 'secondary speech', and if it did not, it would not be the same 'thought' as the 'original' thought. To borrow one of Sartre's comments in the different context of thoughts in dreams, this move from one 'speech' to another, 'will surround itself with a worldly atmosphere.... [in which] will be projected all my knowledge, all my interest, all my memories' (1983, 196). I would tend to believe with Sartre that language (whether rudimentary, artificial, or formal), is the *crystallization* of our subconscious emotions and thoughts at the contact of our 'worldly atmosphere'. Previously to this stage, we are able when influenced or prompted by internal or external factors, to *intuit* the 'significance' of emotions and thoughts, as perhaps infants intuit the 'significance' of their thoughts without having yet been trained to conceptualize and linguistically express them. In my view, the stock of *pure* 'emotions' and 'thoughts', that is, at a stage when they have not yet been *polluted* by our 'worldly atmosphere', and by what Merleau-Ponty would call 'secondary speech', constitutes our inner Being.

Therefore, I do not believe, as Collingwood does, that a work of art is complete and perfect in the artists' mind before it is embodied in 'crafted objects', but that it is

*complete* in an *intuitive* mode, that it is, as it were, *pregnant* with the artists' 'inspiration'.  
 The immense talent and expertise that artists ~~would~~ need, as well as the huge difficulties  
 and long hardship that they ~~would~~ have to face, in order to 'express' this  
 'intuition/revelation' through the 'language' of art, bear witness to the almost miraculous  
 role they appear to play in human civilization.

I hope that the arguments presented in my research and the conclusions I reached about the principle of 'psychical distance', will justify the title I chose to give to my thesis. I would like however to add that, even independently from all the objections raised against this principle, another of its important failings would concern the extreme difficulties that even the most gifted and sensitive observers would face in order to adopt and maintain the right sort of 'attitude'. As H.S. Langfeld points out: 'For most individuals [this attitude] has to be cultivated if it is to exist at all in the midst of the opposing and therefore disturbing influences which are always present.' (*The Aesthetic Attitude*, p.65) (in Langer, 1963, 37) For David Prall, 'Complete aesthetic absorption, strictly relevant to our object, is seldom if ever the sole object of our attention.' (*Aesthetic Analysis*, pp. 7-8) (in Langer, 1963, 37) And Langer herself writes: 'Few listeners or spectators, in fact, ever quite attain the state which Roger Fry described in *Vision and Design* (p.29) as "disinterested intensity of contemplation".... Most people are too busy or too lazy to uncouple their minds from all their usual interests before looking at a picture or a vase. That explains, presumably', adds Langer, 'what (Fry) remarked somewhat earlier in the same essay: "In proportion as art becomes purer the number of people to whom it appeals gets less. It cuts out all the romantic overtones which are the usual bait by which men are induced to accept a work of art. It appeals only to the aesthetic sensibility, and that in most men is comparatively weak" (Ibid, p.15).' (1963, 37-38)

As concerns my proposed 'Attunement/Symbiosis' system, based on a teleological argument, I would submit that it has permitted me to build up a new, and, I would believe, interesting alternative to the principle of 'psychical distance'; it should also, thanks to its flexible integration and harmonization in *one system* of significant phenomenological, metaphysical, and psychological elements, offer a suitable platform for further research (perhaps in the complementary frame of a philosophy of mind), especially with regard to the strong belief that some philosophers entertain about the simultaneity of 'emotion', or 'thought', <sup>with</sup> ~~and~~ 'expression' in creative art. I would also think that a deeper exploration of the full philosophical implications that a theory based on an anthropomorphic/cosmological principle like the one I am offering in this thesis, would be of ~~great~~ interest and value in future studies on aesthetic experience.



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such a supportive  
research environment throughout  
my work.



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## SUMMARY

The object of the present thesis is:

1. to question the modern and prevalent view that some kind of 'psychical attitude' is necessary to the emergence and success of an aesthetic experience. Edward BULLOUGH's theory of 'psychical distance' has been chosen and thoroughly analyzed as a significant example of the above view.

2. to offer an alternative to the above theory, which is based on a teleological/cosmological argument, and which makes an aesthetic experience dependent on a metaphysical 'intuition' of our ~~'attachment/symbiosis'~~ <sup>'attunement' to, and 'symbiosis' with,</sup> with the world. <sup>the world</sup>

In support of my research, I examine and discuss:

i. the aesthetic experience of 'beautiful' nature, 'beautiful' craftsmanship, and art, and <sup>I suggest</sup> ~~submit~~ <sup>Some</sup> distinctions between them which have an important bearing on my rejection of 'psychical distance' as a viable aesthetic process.

ii. how the unique nature and role of 'genius' in art provides us, not only with arguments supporting the views expressed in my theory, but with more reasons to believe that art is in a league apart in ~~the realm of~~ aesthetics, and could perhaps benefit further from its study through a philosophy of mind.

iii. 'expression' and 'communication' as fundamental sources of, and constituents of, art, and their application through a form of 'Representational Symbolism' developed in S. LANGER's theory of aesthetics.

iv. the need for a thorough familiarization and understanding of the content, context, and genetic sources of works of art, in order to achieve a <sup>/communion</sup> ~~rapprochement~~ between artists and the observers of their works.

v. H.G. GADAMER's theory of 'play' <sup>1) as</sup> ~~is~~ an explanation of how the <sup>essence of works of</sup> ~~essence of~~ art can be, <sup>through</sup> ~~at the same time,~~ shaped by the thoughts and feelings of artists, interpreters, and observers. <sup>is</sup> ~~but be~~ protected by the work's 'circle of meaning' which sets observers at an 'absolute distance' from the work, making therefore, 'any practical purposive share' in it impossible. <sup>and 2) as a</sup> ~~hermeneutical~~ <sup>hermeneutical</sup> approach <sup>which gadamer</sup> allows ~~him~~ to solve problems of 'contemporaneity' in art.

vi. some important aspects of M. MERLEAU-PONTY's theory of 'perception'; in particular, his emphasis on the necessity, for an understanding of, and communion with, the world, of a grasp of nature's language.

In *over-distancing* we find that 'Art springing from abstract conceptions, expressing allegorical meanings, or illustrating general truths....appeal(s) to everybody and therefore to none.' (103) As Bullough notes,

An axiom of Euclid belongs to nobody, just because it compels everyone's assent;... By mere force of generalisation, a general truth or a universal ideal is so far distanced from myself that I fail to realise it concretely at all.... (103)

No doubt also, fairy tales, fairy-plays, stories of strange adventures were primarily invented to satisfy the craving of curiosity, the desire for the marvellous, the shudder of the unwanted and the longing for imaginary experiences. But by their mere eccentricity in regard to the normal facts of experience they cannot have failed to arouse a strong feeling of Distance. (110-11)

Regarding the graphic arts, Bullough observes about sculpture, for example, that although not using a *living* bodily medium, its three dimensional aspects still constitute a threat to 'distance'. This is evident to 'anyone who has experienced the oppressively crowded sensation of moving in a room among life-sized statues placed directly upon the floor'. However, the lack of colour and the use of pedestals although 'originally no doubt serving other purposes, [are] now serving the purpose of Distance'. (As concerns the lack of colour of sculptures, Bullough does not seem to take into account the fact that most of the sculptures in ancient times were indeed painted with vivid colours.)

On the other hand, says Bullough, 'painting always retains to some extent a *two-dimensional* character, and this character supplies *eo ipso* a Distance.' This is also due to the fact that 'neither their space (perspective and imaginary space) nor their lighting coincides with our (actual) space or light' (114).

Music and architecture have, according to Bullough, 'a curious position' in that 'these two most abstract of all arts show a remarkable fluctuation in their Distances':

'psychically distance' themselves from them, as the passengers in the example of the 'fog at sea' have to allegedly distance themselves from their feelings of terror in order to aesthetically experience the phenomenon. But, as concerns *Les Bourgeois de Calais*, it is a known fact that their realistic presentation was regarded by Rodin as essential to their aesthetic potential; it is clear, therefore, that for Bullough, and for the artistic community at large, the artist's *known* intention has been, and still is, totally ignored.

Of course, it could be argued that the use of pedestals for Rodin's sculptures has not prevented the statues from being aesthetically experienced, but could we not wonder if their true aesthetic potential, as intended by the artist, has not been compromised by the use of these devices? In the same context, are we sure that we have a true aesthetic experience of Greek statues, or temples, which are now deprived of their initial colours? And if we do, is it because, in the best Bulloughian tradition, we psychically compensate for this deficiency, or because we do not, nowadays, admire the statues and temples in the same way, and for the same reasons, as they were admired in ancient times?

Surely, the above argument demonstrates once more how Bullough's theory of 'psychical distance' is illogical, or at the very least, unrealistic and totally impractical.

But even as regards the play of *Othello*, it would be unreasonable to think that Shakespeare was not aware of the fact that, as Bullough puts it, the 'more keenly' the spectators would 'enter into the play', the greater they would 'feel the resemblance with their own experience'. Thus, either he intended this effect to be part of the play's aesthetic import, and 'psychical distance' by 'de-sensitizing' the 'jealous' spectators, would jeopardize the effect intended by the author, or he did not intend the spectators to

'feel the resemblance with their own experience', and, being the genius that Shakespeare was, he would have succeeded in writing a play capable of avoiding this effect. However, Bullough, again in this case, appears to ignore the above considerations, and still make the aesthetic experience of the play dependent on the spectators' arbitrary choice of 'attitude'.

My conclusion is that we must differentiate between, on one hand, artistic rules, conventions, and devices which are used by the artists, or are intended by them to form part of the presentation of their works, and should, therefore, be regarded as essential components of the latter, and, on the other hand, institutional conventions, and modes 'of attending' to the presentation of works of art, which 'serve', as Bullough writes, to 'render our grasp of the presentation easier and to increase its intelligibility', and also to protect the works from misunderstandings or misinterpretations brought about by problems of contemporaneity, perhaps in the way dictionaries or anthologies would facilitate the understanding and thus the enjoyment of certain forms of literature. They are dependable and ad-hoc accessories to the perception of works of art and should not, consequently, as Bullough would have it, be regarded as a 'help towards Distance'.

### Conclusion

i) Bullough's process of 'psychical distance' in being intent to regulate, or even curtail, feelings and thoughts induced by our experience of potentially aesthetic objects, or events, could have the regrettable effect of neutralizing many of our most spontaneous, original, and fruitful contributions to such experiences. This argument could, of course, be criticized on the grounds that by yielding unreasonably or uncontrollably, in our experience of works of art, to all our feelings, emotions, or moods, we could become so

shall have to be careful, therefore, if we wish to apply Kant's philosophy to modern art in any direct fashion. (1986, 97)

I must confess my puzzlement at the reluctance, in modern times, to admit that only individuals who possess in an unusual degree, not only an exceptional creative talent and visionary power, but rare quality of determination and self-abnegation are capable of creating great art. There does not seem to be the same reluctance when other endeavours, such as science for example, are concerned. At the very least, the acceptance of the <sup>unique</sup> role of geniuses in art would at least justify a distinction between <sup>A</sup> *standard* works of art and masterpieces.

I would add that the analysis we made in Chapter IV of the special nature of artistic creation, and of the immense demands that it makes on human talent, imagination, sensitivity, and expertise, should fully justify our conclusion that only exceptional and visionary individuals, that is, geniuses, are able to fulfill such extraordinary task.



As I have already indicated, I also subscribe to Langer's understanding of 'distance' in art, that is, her belief that, if 'distance' has to play a part in the success of an aesthetic experience, it should be the artist's responsibility 'to elicit this attitude instead of requiring the percipient to bring an ideal frame of mind with him'.

Langer's emphasis on the essential roles played in creative art by the artist's talent and technical knowledge and ability also meet with my total agreement.

There are, however, some important facets of Langer's theory which I find unsatisfactory or equivocal:

a) Could 'virtual space' be perceived in the same way by different observers, or by the same observer at different times? Would not the observers be bound to react, physiologically and psychologically, in different ways? Langer is aware of this possibility, but answers that there are 'enough people [who] perceive in *essentially* the same way to make... symbolic function effective' (215). This is far from reflecting Kant's principle of Universality in Aesthetics, and would rather remind us of Santayana's approach. I would suggest that a satisfactory answer to this question could be found in the 'intuitive' stage of the 'attunement/anthropic' process suggested and examined in Chapter III.

b) A problem with Langer's theory, which is linked to the above, appears to concern her use of the terms 'appearance to be felt' or 'direct presentation of feeling' which the artist is 'showing', not 'communicating', through his or her work. What worries me particularly here is Langer's tendency to view art as if it was a process of 'thought-reading'. Her fear of 'referring' the work to anything outside it, and therefore to risk confusing the function of 'symbolic art' with that of genuine symbol, makes her loose

This, and Langer's viewpoint about 'psychical distance' in aesthetics, which gives the artists the sole responsibility for investing in their works, when they consider it necessary, elements which will bring about such 'psychical distance' in an aesthetic experience of these works, gives us enough evidence of the clear compatibility which exists between Langer's approach to the aesthetic experience of art, and my proposed 'Attunement/Symbiosis' theory, <sup>and its consequences regarding 'psychical distance'</sup> ~~as applied to it~~. As we have seen, neither in ~~my~~ <sup>later, now in my</sup> theory's initial 'intuitive' (and thus ~~instantaneous~~) phase, nor in its second 'expressive' phase through 'symbolization' and ~~involves~~ a *rapprochement* and *communion* between artists and observers, could be integrated a process of 'psychical distance'.

calls "the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming,  
 the affirmation of a world of sign<sup>S</sup> without fault, without truth, and without origin  
 which is offered to an active interpretation" (*Writing and Difference*, Bass A. (trans.),  
 Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p.292).' Therefore, 'Derrida is calling for a free play  
 of sign and meaning, unrestricted by any limiting notion of structure: what Culler has  
 called "the pleasure of infinite creation" (*Structuralist Poetics*, Routledge and Kegan  
 Paul, 1975, p.248). Creation of this kind is undertaken by the reader;... V. Leitch has  
 neatly summed up the deconstructive project as a celebration of "playfulness and  
 hysteria over care and rationality" (*Deconstructive Criticism, An Advanced  
 Introduction*, Hutchinson, 1983, p.246).' (in Hanfling, 1992, 425-426) And Sim  
 concludes: 'On the one side, we have determinism and authoritarianism (structuralism),  
 on the other indeterminism and some form of anarchism (deconstruction and post-  
 modernism).... In critical terms of reference this represents a move from description  
 and classification to anarchic game-playing, but in each case we remain within the  
 framework of semiotics, with Saussurean linguistics remaining the major point of  
 reference.' (in Hanfling, 1992, 436) The extremely polarized aspect of the debate  
 between Structuralists and anti-Foundationalists, with on one side a total reliance on  
 criteria of truth-value, and on the other side a desire for all cases of aesthetic judgement  
 to be relative and plural, does not facilitate a right assessment of this crucial issue in  
 aesthetics. As Sim rightly comments, 'most of us would be quite willing to accept that  
 meaning is not always completely stable (the art of poetry largely depends on just such  
 a premise), without thereby feeling this licenses a swift transition to the position of  
 claiming that all meaning at all times can *only* be unstable: how could one possibly  
*prove*, or even *test*, such a proposition?' (in Hanfling, 1992, 437)

would be to know the identities of actors in a play); but in (b) it would be important to identify the historical and social backgrounds of the 'pair in Biblical costumes'. Of course, as I have already underlined in this chapter, Rembrandt's painting would still be regarded as a work of art with an ambiguous title, or no title at all, but would it be aesthetically experienced as it should, or at least as Rembrandt would have wished it to be experienced?

In any case, Beardsley himself, speaking this time about music, does admit that 'it is true that ... titles are an *indispensable aid* ... in helping the listener imagining specific objects or events while listening to the music' (1981, 349, my emphasis). This statement is even more surprising when speaking about music which is generally regarded as 'the most powerful of all the arts, and therefore [capable of] attaining its ends entirely from its own resources' (Schopenhauer).

It would also be important to remember that the background and circumstances of a large majority of great artistic works were known by the craftsmen's or artists' contemporaries, and that their knowledge, and informed assessment of the works, have largely be handed down to subsequent generations. (What Linge, writing about Gadamer, calls the 'tradition that transmits the text or art work to us and influences our reception of it in the present' (in Gadamer, 1977, xxiv).

We may have the illusion that we approach and apprehend works of art in a state of complete *neutrality* but this is not so. As Eaton emphasizes, 'In our daily lives as well as in more sophisticated investigations - we are not neutral observers.... Our minds, to use a Popperian metaphor, are more like searchlights; theories and concepts already formed influence what we actively look for and then discover in the world.'

**PART FOUR**

*The*  
**A Structuralist Approach to Aesthetic Experience**

However, we could wonder if this particular application of 'distance' to art, does not bring about the disappearance of the work of art as such. Interestingly, Gadamer admits that 'it is indeed how many contemporary artists see the situation... as if it were a question of renouncing the unity of the work' (1986, 24-25), but, he notes, the hermeneutic identity of the work is so deeply grounded that there is no danger of it losing its unity. 'In truth', he writes, 'the horizon of the present is conceived in constant formation insofar as we must all constantly test our prejudices.... [but it] does not take shape at all without the past.' (in *Intr.*, 1977, xix) As a support to his belief in this respect, Gadamer offers the example of an organ improvisation which will never be heard again, at least not in the same way, nor even perhaps remembered by the organist, but of which, nevertheless, everyone says: 'That was a brilliant interpretation' or 'that was rather dull today'. In saying this, remarks Gadamer, we are obviously referring to an *identifiable something*: the improvisation; a 'something [which] "stands" before us; it is like a work and not just an organist's finger exercise. Otherwise we should never pass judgement on its quality or lack of it. So it is the hermeneutic identity that establishes the unity of the work.... I identify something as it was or as it is, and this identity alone constitutes the meaning of the work.' (1986, 25).

#### Conclusion

- i) An analysis of Gadamer's theory of 'play' in art brings out a notion of the concept of 'distance' which seems, at first, to be deeply puzzling. Namely, on the one hand, he states that 'it is quite wrong to think that the unity of the work implies that the work is closed off from the person who turns to it or is affected by it', but, on the other hand, he posits that 'the spectator is set at an absolute distance which makes any practical, purposive share in it impossible'. However, this position starts to make sense when we

involvement of observers of aesthetic objects, or events, is kept in check by the fact that the 'players' are 'set at an absolute distance from the experienced object, or event, which makes any practical *purposive* share in it impossible'. This allows Gadamer to attribute to the 'meaning' of a work of art, through the latter's power of 'contemporaneity', the incompatible qualities of *inviolability* and *adaptability*. As a result, for Gadamer, the 'representation' of works of art is 'highly mobile and relative' for it is 'the fundamental continuity of time which encompass(es) every subjective act and the object it apprehends.' As I have often indicated in this thesis, we should not be tempted, however, to assimilate Gadamer's 'circle of meaning' with what Ricoeur calls an 'emancipation' of [the work of art] with respect to the author', a 'distanciation of the real from itself', and I would certainly not believe that, as Ricoeur writes about literature, 'what the text signifies no longer coincides with what the author meant'.

But let us now turn to the most important side of Bullough's theory, which concerns the need in aesthetic experience for an approach which *reveals* to us the aesthetic side of objects, and events. As I have already noted, this idea presents insurmountable problems not only on logical grounds, but from a practical point of view. In order to provide a valid alternative to Bullough's approach in this respect, I have studied and worked out the possibility of integrating the principle of an aesthetic experience in a system which, by its very nature, would render redundant Bullough's requirement for a special attitude in order to experience the aesthetic side of objects, or events. My proposed process frees the observers from any responsibility in the initiation and evaluation of an aesthetic experience, because it is induced in them by the 'pleasure' they feel at a sudden 'intuition/revelation' of life's 'attunement/symbiosis' with certain forms or structures of the world.

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 ↓  
 (attunement to / symbiosis with)