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Moving Through Experience: Disruption, Emergence, and the Aesthetic of Repose

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MOVING THROUGH EXPERIENCE:
DISRUPTION, EMERGENCE, AND THE AESTHETIC OF REPOSE

Jeanne M. Moore

Submitted to the faculty of
The Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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I am trying to check my habits of seeing, to counter them for the sake of greater freshness. I am trying to be unfamiliar with what I'm doing.

— John Cage, *Silence* (1973)

Each of us is a cacophony of experience. Not just a seamless self.

— Nathaniel Mary Quinn, Artist (2021)

How we are to listen to our lives is a question worth exploring...If we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is go crashing through the woods, shouting for the creature to come out. But if we are willing to walk quietly into the woods and sit silently for an hour or two at the base of a tree, the creature we are waiting for may well emerge, and out of the corner of an eye we will catch a glimpse of the precious wildness we seek.

— Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak* (2000)

Dedicated to my mom, Charlotte Mary Faith,
and my daughter, Thalya Faith Marie

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ABSTRACT

Jeanne Marie Hunter-Moore

MOVING THROUGH EXPERIENCE:

DISRUPTION, EMERGENCE, AND THE AESTHETIC OF REPOSE

Contemporary aesthetic philosophy engages the notion of aesthetic experience from two conflicting lenses; on one hand are those who support a connection between the aesthetic and political while the other favors a more pragmatic position. An area of aesthetic engagement not yet explored inhabits an intermediary between these opposing poles, a modality of aesthetic experience I term, the *aesthetic of repose*. This dissertation traces the evolution of ideas regarding aesthetic experience through a survey of several philosophers whose varied perspectives form the foundation for my inquiry. Beginning with an exploration of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, proceeding through Friedrich Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, and progressing to John Dewey's *Art as Experience*, my aim is first, to situate their individual aesthetic philosophies within the context of 21st century aesthetic experience. Despite their differing viewpoints, these thinkers share in common; 1) the importance of sense and sensation to valuable aesthetic experience and 2) a desire to find value and meaning in aesthetic experience for overcoming the ills of humanity and advancing culture.

Secondly, this dissertation examines a polarity of ideas that challenge the notion of authentic aesthetic experience in our times. Similar to their predecessors, contemporary aesthetic philosophers desire to make aesthetic experience a portal for humanity's recuperation. There are

thinkers such as Jacques Rancière and Santiago Zabala, who advance an *aesthetics of action*; others, like Richard Shusterman and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht advocate for an *aesthetics of presence*. The *aesthetic of repose* rests uniquely between action and presence, as an area of slumber, where neither action nor presence is necessary. Rather, the idea is to remain in repose, linger there, where repositioning occurs naturally, as though without perception. One emerges from this seemingly imperceptible experience, having done nothing save moving through it, yet being forever changed by it.

Keywords: action, aesthetic, appearance, attention, experience, presence, react, resist, repose, perception, sense

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INTRODUCTION

“Into the dark beyond all light we pray to come, through not seeing and not knowing, to see and to know that beyond sight and knowledge, itself: neither seeing nor knowing.”

— Dionysius, fifth century A.D.

Philosophy is sometimes viewed as contemplative understanding that ends in comprehension. But philosophy can also be measured by the difference it makes in the life of the person engaged in it. Those who follow the latter viewpoint believe that we have concepts at our disposal that can intervene in the lives we lead and subsequently change them.

In the 21st century, what constitutes an aesthetic encounter? Is it something that merely gives pleasure? Does it offer itself as a space for contemplation? Does it require action? Might the aesthetic event act as a means to spiritual and ethical awareness, that in turn, brings forth a sense of renewal or transformation? Can the aesthetic encounter have benefits beyond an individual’s self-renewal that consequently, alters one’s relationship outside of oneself? Because of its link to ideas concerning beauty, the aesthetic encounter has most often been proposed as one of pleasure; if a person encounters beauty he/she will come away with a pleasing feeling. As regards visual art, the Modernist period certainly espoused this purity: an adherence to the limits of its medium provided a clarity to the work of art that subsequently resulted in an unmodulated aesthetic experience. During the period of Postmodernism, the aesthetic encounter became more complex: skepticism regarding universal truths and the questioning of previous narratives found objective presence in new art forms whose subjects were often ambiguous yet filled with scathing commentary on the state of the world. Postmodern aesthetics offered ambiguity and complexity of meaning rather than universal appeal. More recent scholarship attests to a deeper constitution for the aesthetic encounter in our current post-post-modern era, one whose

authenticity is not exclusively reserved under the guise of “high art.” Recent scholarship, for example, attests to the idea that aesthetic encounters can occur in unexpected ways and through non-traditional creative avenues.

Considering this evolution of ideas regarding aesthetic experience, the four chapters that make up this dissertation construct a timeline that begins with the Enlightenment period and ends in the 21st century. The first three chapters constitute a historical survey through the philosophical writings on aesthetic experience from Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, and John Dewey. Chapter four brings those authors into further perspective with an exploration of contemporary writings on aesthetic experience, particularly through two divergent lenses. On one side hand are the declarations of Jacques Rancière and Santiago Zabala, who write of aesthetic experience as active engagement; on the other, the expressions of Richard Shusterman and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, both of whom approach aesthetic experience from a more pragmatic point of view, in which presence takes precedence over action.

A region of aesthetic experience not given its due resides at the intersection of the two above suggested poles, between, as I have termed them, an *aesthetics of action* and an *aesthetics of presence*. I have designated this interregnum between action and presence as the *aesthetic of repose* and I dedicate a portion of Chapter 4 to introducing this prospect in comparison to the philosophers featured in the first three chapters. I will further explore that by probing the contrasting voices of the *aesthetics of action* thinkers, Rancière and Zabala, and the *aesthetics of presence* scholars, Shusterman and Gumbrecht. Putting these diverse perspectives in dialog with each other establishes the background to explaining my own formulation of aesthetic experience for the 21st century, the *aesthetic of repose*.

Through my genealogical survey, three common threads became clear: the first is the

importance of sense perception in encouraging aesthetic experience; the second is the significance of disruption as a predicate to aesthetic experience. Thirdly is a point of view that aesthetic experience can both enrich human life and become an avenue for advancing democratic culture. The featured philosophers share these values, regardless of each one's approach to understanding aesthetic experience. Furthermore, as I surmise it, certain of the authors I discuss also share an expectation that the outcome of aesthetic experience must result in something concrete at the perceived end of that experience. I would argue, however, that this systematic or conditional framing neglects the reality that all experiences are personal and individual but more importantly, that the effect of that experience does not always become immediately clear. In our contemporary world, with all its complexities, we hardly have time to be in the present, let alone to engage in valuable aesthetic experience. Approaching aesthetic experience via the notion of *repose*, offers an antidote to this disconnection; as a modality of aesthetic experience, the *aesthetic of repose* combines inward journey and outward reflection in a way that leads to a repositioning of self to world, and equally important, recognizes that the voyage is as vital as the outcome.

In my estimation, defining aesthetic experience for the 21st century involves the reincorporation of human intellect and morality as they relate to the notion of democracy, and as they have previously been pitted against the well-established notion of the beautiful. Additionally, I believe a key feature of aesthetic experience is that, although activated in the here and now, disperses in a way that at first blush, can seem otherworldly or more pointedly, spiritual. Furthermore, it is my contention that the aesthetic experience carries an ethical component and can prove to be a primary conduit in the relationship of self to other. As I have initiate it, the *aesthetic of repose* is a modality of aesthetic experience that merges the above

through a quiet awakening of the senses, in a mindful disruption that is at the same time, unrecognizable. To clearly understand its implications within this multi-layered functioning requires investigation of some key terms: aesthetic, spiritual, democracy and repose. The four chapters in this text will frequently engage the reader in an interrogation of these terms and their meanings as each has evolved and been modified to fit current needs and historical settings. Additionally, the idea of democracy, while advanced through each of the thinkers I discuss, proves problematic in terms of its 21st century constitution. Therefore, I will limit the discussion to its origins in Western civilization and as it relates to aesthetic experience in Western societies. A brief explanation of these individual key terms follows.

It can be difficult to define spirit or spiritual from the standpoint of philosophy: Hegel's philosophy, for example, attempted to show the limits of Absolute Spirit (or God) in favor of an Absolute truth revealed through the finite Spirit of man (Geist). His explanation, however, seems to default to the language of theology. John Dewey, on the other hand, took the religious idea of the spiritual, and attempted to free it from its dogmatic bonds and supernatural beliefs (Baurain 74).¹ Philosophical ideas on ethics as far back as Aristotle and as far forward as current scholarship have also consistently proven problematic. Several thinkers note an ethical current underlying the aesthetic experience, including Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche, as well as Dewey. The complexity underlying the term "community" which began with its first conception in Plato's *Republic*, we find further evaluated in Kant, Nietzsche and Dewey. Contemporary authors have critically examined their individual conceptualizations of "community;" Kate Moran, for example, argued that although critics of Kant believe his philosophy stressed individualism, at its core it emphasizes that progress toward an ethical community can only be achieved through our social relationships (Moran 1). Nietzsche's

individualism has often been at the foreground of critique, yet author Julian Young claims that much of Nietzsche's writings value community in equal or greater measure to that of the individual (Young 1). Additionally, as noted by Beth J. Singer, John Dewey believed that "conscious perceptions, purposes, and interests" were crucial necessities of any human community (Singer 556). Dewey himself stated, "communal life is moral, that is emotionally, intellectually, consciously sustained" (Dewey in Singer 557). The chapters on Immanuel Kant Friedrich Nietzsche and John Dewey will question these concepts in relation to each philosopher's ideas regarding truth, reality, and being.

Moreover, because a particular type of aesthetic experience (an *aesthetic of repose*) is the fulcrum of this text, an examination of its historic evolution since Kant will include a study of the aesthetic philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche and John Dewey. As noted previously, Kant, Nietzsche and Dewey each explore notions of the spiritual, the ethical and ideas concerning democracy in their writings on the aesthetic experience. Before delving more deeply into their individual perspectives, I will explain more clearly these component parts of the aesthetic experience as I assert them in regard to the *aesthetic of repose*.

The term *aesthetic* carries complex meaning and endless debate. The notion of *aísthêsis*, from which the contemporary conception of aesthetics derives, involves the entire realm of sensory perception. Furthermore, while it considers beauty, it also accounts for cognitive and moral concerns (Grondin 268). In fact, the 18th century philosopher Alexander Baumgarten, in his *Reflections on Poetry* (1735), first described "aesthetics" as the name for the study of sensory experience coupled with feeling, distinguishing it as a form of knowledge separate from logic. He derived his definition from the ancient Greek *aisthanomai*, meaning "to perceive." Questions arise in the field of aesthetics regarding attitude toward, experience of and value placed on the

aesthetic object, be it a work of art or something in nature. Often, questions of aesthetic value get compared to those concerning religion, morality, and epistemology (Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy 13).

Equating aesthetic value with that of religion or morality suggests that aesthetic contemplation carries with it both spiritual and ethical considerations. How might we define “spiritual” in the 21st century? Author Phil Zuckerman notes that throughout the world, people are turning away from traditional religious faiths in favor secular-based spiritual self-reliance. Pragmatism, faith in the Golden Rule, and citizenship are driving many to seek a secular investigation of the essential components of human existence, such as community, morality, beauty, death, and transcendence (Zuckerman 1). According to Zuckerman, at present, approximately 25% of Americans alone identify as non-religious yet searching for the kind of experiences that create awe and transcendence, building a faith-filled life based, instead, on one’s own principles of spirituality (2). Without the ritual of traditional religious practice, how can an individual seeking a spiritual experience still ask the deep questions and ponder the unknown? Can art offer the possibility for spiritual engagement? I believe it can if we relieve *spirit* or the *spiritual* from their dogmatic religious roots and redefine them under the context of personal transformation based in phenomenological experience, focused less on the idea of transcendence and more on that of immanence. Roger Lipsey, writing specifically about spirituality in 20th century art, provides a good definition:

What is the spiritual? It is an incursion from above or deep within to which the ordinary human being in each of us can only surrender. It is the *daimon* to which Socrates listened, to which he could not but listen when it spoke within him. In this sense the spiritual is a dramatic shift in experience and an undoing of what we take to be ourselves...The

spiritual can also be a reasonably stable presence in individual lives, an internal capacity that slowly grows in strength and understanding. It is the wiser thought that appears when the chatter dies down, the clearer vision achieved by looking again, the greater kindness reached by recognizing selfishness in time. (Lipsesey 10)

Lipsesey goes on to suggest visual art as the lens through which this shift becomes clear: as the experience of art broadens our vision, it can subsequently confirm “the evanescence of life,” transfigure “the commonplace” and “confront us with what we’ve forgotten” (13-14). Similarly, through listening, observing and contemplating the work of art via the *aesthetic of repose*, the recipient is granted an experience uniquely his own that might reveal the mystery of commonplace experiences. Thus, one chapter in this text is devoted to understanding the link between art and spirituality specifically as artists explored that connection during the modern period, and how it manifests in later art of the postmodern and contemporary eras.

As noted by Zuckerman, even 21st century notions of the spiritual consider both moral concerns and ideas of community.² The term community at its base level refers to a shared set of values amongst a group of like-minded individuals. I will utilize this definition as a starting point to further exploration, as it carries with it an ethical component in the idea that a community shares a set of values. The study of ethics as a branch of philosophy considers ethics in several ways, including regarding ideas of human well-being; goodness and the good life, moral codes of behavior and principles of living wisely; the virtue of citizenry and how we treat one another (Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy 329-334). As relates to the notion of an *aesthetic of repose*, it is through the final stage, the passage, that the ethical and community aspects reveal themselves.

As mentioned previously, preliminary investigation concerning aesthetic experience and

its connection to the spiritual, ethical, and communal begins with a review of Kant's theory of aesthetic judgement. Therefore Chapter 1 deeply explores Kant's notion of aesthetic judgement. Immanuel Kant suggested that an aesthetic judgement involved purposiveness without purpose, a disinterested moment of pleasure based on a set of universals that equate to the object of Beauty. Kant responded critically to Baumgarten's notion of aesthetic cognition when he wrote the *Critique of Judgement* (1790), aiming to dispel the idea that it prioritizes the rational and instead, proposing that it is subjective judgement at work in matters of taste (Grondin 268). Later thinkers, such as Friedrich Nietzsche and John Dewey revise both Baumgarten's and Kant's prospects to present the aesthetic encounter as a passionate affirmation of life and as open and continuous reflection, respectively. Therefore, a comparison of Kant's ideas to those of Nietzsche and Dewey will help enumerate the progression of aesthetic thinking from its idealistic roots to its more realistic conceptions.

Although in opposition to one another, both Kant and Nietzsche give validity to the role of aesthetics in understanding our human capacities. The ecstatic release at the heart of Nietzsche's Dionysiac drive, as spelled out in his early work *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), is meant to take one beyond the boundaries of rationality yet bond itself to real life. Chapter 2 will thus examine Nietzsche's formulation of aesthetic experience as he constructed it through his own exploration of Greek Tragedy. Author John Dewey's *Art as Experience*, from 1931, proposed the aesthetic experience as one that provides open and continuous recognition and reflection. Furthermore, Dewey asserted that all the senses take equal weight in the aesthetic experience. Additionally, Dewey connected art and aesthetic perception as an occurrence of "heightened vitality." In Dewey's words, "It signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of object and events"

(Dewey *AE* 18). A key component of Dewey's formulation of aesthetic experience is the notion of doing and undergoing. Chapter 3 then, discusses Dewey's *Art as Experience* keeping in mind his continuity theory. Kant, Nietzsche, and Dewey differ in their examination of aesthetic experience; however, each shows the importance of this type of experience as a form of knowledge, self-reflection, and self-assertion. Moreover, their writings on the aesthetic experience touch on the spiritual, democratic, and communal aspects at the heart of what I have termed, the *aesthetic of repose*.

KANT'S AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT

Immanuel Kant's three critiques, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) and the *Critique of Judgement* (1790) look at the boundaries or limits to knowledge. Kant's underlying concern is the question: "How do we attain knowledge?" or "How do we know?" Kant's assertion is that we already have some knowledge, that there are structures of knowing in place prior to our experience (a priori). This prior experience must link up to some kind of receptivity or sensation. In his discussion of Kant, scholar Terry Pinkard notes, "In the case of experience, spontaneity (combined with intuition) produces not merely individual perceptions of things, but an experience of a natural order governed by necessary causal laws...ordering the particular elements of our experience into a meaningful whole" (Pinkard 67). Experience then, is subject to a set of laws or "normative components." With regard to the aesthetic experience however, the institution of norms is unfounded. Kant's third critique, the *Critique of Judgement*, addresses this issue directly. Section I of Kant's third critique looks specifically at aesthetic judgements, firstly through an "analytic of the beautiful" and second, via the "sublime," aiming to understand how we determine beauty.

What is beauty and how do we establish that something is beautiful? In the first section, *Analytic of Aesthetic Judgement*, Kant encapsulates his ideas: “If we wish to decide whether something is beautiful or not, we do not use understanding to refer the presentation of the object so as to give rise to cognition; rather, we use imagination (perhaps in connection to understanding) to refer the presentation to the subject and his feeling of pleasure or displeasure” (Kant *CJ* §1). To designate something as beautiful, is according to Kant, a reflective judgement. Using the example of a rose, author Terry Pinkard explains the distinction between Kant’s use of “reflective judgements” and “determinative judgements.” He states, “In ‘determinative judgements’ we have a general concept, and we subsume a particular under it...In the case of ‘reflective judgments’, however, we begin with particulars, and we then search for which or what kind of general concepts they might fall under” (Pinkard 67-68). In the first instance, we start with the concept of “rose” and upon observing a flower, come to a determination as to whether or not it is a rose. In the second case (reflective judgement) we start with the rose and work to match it with a concept (67-68).

As an aesthetic judgement, a reflective judgement begins with encountering a beautiful object, gaining pleasure from that experience and upon apprehending its beauty, making a declarative statement of its beauty. In doing so, the one who encountered the beautiful object is making a judgement that goes beyond his own pleasure; others will likewise experience that object as beautiful (68). Pinkard also specifies that the aesthetic experience involves both “a passive element of pure experiential receptivity and an active element of (“reflectively”) judging something to be beautiful” that subsequently clues us into the ways in which “we are agents *subject* to the norms that we ourselves also *institute*” (68).

However, judging something as beautiful is a matter of *taste*, a subjective judgement whose validity relies on it being “universally communicable” (Kant in Pinkard 68). As Pinkard clarifies, “In making a subjective judgement about the beautiful, one is making a normative statement about how oneself and all others *ought* to experience something” (Pinkard 69). The universally communicable experience of the beautiful is not one that is determined by a set of rules, but according to Pinkard, it is “structured by universal norms,” or a “shared sense” that underlies the conditions of possibility for apprehending a beautiful object (69).

It begins with apprehension of the form without interest (a pure recognition); then becomes a dance between imagination and understanding, a free play that eventually leads to their harmonious merging and a feeling of pleasure. Upon recognition of the form and the subsequent feeling of pleasure, a judgement is made upon the object that results in a determination that the object is beautiful. To call an object beautiful then validates it. This is a universal validity, a common-sense agreement which others, too, should similarly determine, what Kant terms the “ought.” *Should* is essential here because while agreement is preferred, possessing taste is essential to being able to make aesthetic judgements.

Kant’s formula gets clarified in later sections of the *Analytic of the Beautiful* where Kant evaluates the question, “What are the conditions of possibility for Beauty?” As noted by Pinkard, it must “involve the cognitive faculties of the mind in a way that does not conform to rules” (70). This is where imagination and intellect come together, freely interacting in the apprehension of the beautiful. According to Pinkard, however, imagination is mediated: while it is free to “combine matters of experience” in its own way, it must also adhere to the rules that guide the intellect, in order to be in harmony with it (70). “In that way,” states Pinkard, “aesthetic experience combines elements of both spontaneity and passivity:

One must have the unconstrained harmony between intellect and imagination at work, and the harmony must be spontaneously attended to; and one must apprehend something as beautiful, as being an object of experience exhibiting in itself the same effect in which imagination and intellect would spontaneously result if they were to produce the object.

(Pinkard 71)

In other words, there exists a natural occurrence of free play between imagination and intellect that occurs without regard to purposeful outcome.

Disinterestedness is essential to the determining of universal agreement; beauty must retain its subjective universality because it is a property of something we already know (a priori); universal agreement is the first step to a further reflective judgement. How does Kant come to this determination? Central to Kant's proposal are two things: concepts and intuitions. Concepts regard what we grasp in the mind; they refer to a particular way of apprehending the world that does not require intuition. Kant would define intuition as what we perceive through our senses. Both concepts and intuitions relate to a way of knowing, one a more concrete apprehension and the other as determined through feeling. Aesthetic judgements arise when a concept is absent. Nature and art are two examples in which the concept is lacking; our experience of either provides pleasure or pain but does not conclude with an objective determinant.

Movement does exist within Kant's aesthetic judgement, however. The aesthetic judgement begins as a sensuous experience in which the viewer looks for confirmation (i.e. a concept). Once he/she finds agreement from others who share that experience, it becomes an experience of the beautiful. As Kant notes, "There can...be no rule according to which anyone is to be compelled to recognize anything as beautiful...And yet, if upon doing so, we call the object beautiful, we believe ourselves to be speaking with a universal voice" (*CJ* §8 47). Beauty itself is

then a concept that emerges via intuition; it arises from the conceptual work about the world that comes about on the basis of feeling and becomes concrete when its universal appeal is recognized. In sum, we can note Kant's formulation of the aesthetic experience as the site of theoretical knowledge about the world based on individual feeling that presents in itself the possibility for universal validity. Kant gives value to the sensual as a means to deliver truth: our senses are where the aesthetic can emerge and begin the process of conceptualizing, or cognitizing, our perception of the world.

As mentioned previously, the process by which this conceptualizing occurs begins with the free play of the imagination, that moment where feeling takes precedence and knowledge remains in the background. Along with free play is the notion of disinterestedness or a lack of concern for the outcome of the experience. Considering free play and disinterestedness, we might find in Kant's aesthetic judgement an element of repose; that space of free play and imagination sits somewhere between attempted understanding and justifiable knowing. The disinterested state invites both sensuous and cognitive reflection because there is no desire for resolution at this stage.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE: TRAGEDY AND ECSTASY

Desire seems to be the focus of Friedrich Nietzsche's inquiry into human understanding in his early text, *The Birth of Tragedy*, from 1872. In *Birth of Tragedy*, the philosopher utilizes this theme through the example of Greek Tragedy, and as a way to formulate a path for remaining invested in the world. His life affirming prospect was meant to counter the apathetic standards developing in the latter part of the 19th century. In this early text, Nietzsche provides a passionate genealogy and understanding of Greek Tragedy, what he refers to mid text as "the art of metaphysical solace" (Nietzsche *BT* §18 88). This statement is a fitting encapsulation of his

view of this particular form of art. Throughout the first several chapters, Nietzsche surveys the nature of Greek Tragedy, in order to utilize it in later chapters as a model for understanding modern culture during his time. At the heart of his treatise is the assertion that in order to have a vital life, humans must embrace the duality of their existence and utilize it as a means to rise above a culture in a state of decline.

The duality to which Nietzsche refers finds objectification in the oppositional roles of Apollo and Dionysos, whom he considers the two “Greek deities of art” (Nietzsche *BT* 14). Utilizing Apollo, who represents reason and rationality, and Dionysos, the god of intoxication, Nietzsche connects them to particular artistic forms. Nietzsche acknowledges their positions early on:

There exists in the world of the Greeks an enormous opposition, both in origin and goals, between the Apolline art of the image-maker or sculptor and the imageless art of music, which is that of Dionysos. These two very different drives exist side by side, mostly in open conflict, stimulating and provoking one another to give birth to ever-new, more vigorous offspring in whom they perpetuate the conflict inherent between them, an opposition only apparently bridged by the common term ‘art.’ (*BT* 14)

The characterization of the Apolline and Dionysian also references the two sides of man; on the one hand is his “dream state,” on the other, his passionate, primal self. Man’s Apolline existence is characterized by the image in its plastic form, eternal, controlled, a Götterbild (*BT* 17). The Apolline image is one of ideal beauty, immediately perceptible as metaphor or symbol, pleasurable to look at, separated from the chaos of life and providing release within its semblance. The Dionysian, in contrast, does not copy appearances, rather, it is jubilant, mystical, a place in which the boundaries between appearance and reality seem to collapse. One is meant

to shield man from suffering and provide comfort, standing as the “transfiguring genius of the *principium individuationis* (the Apolline), while the other acts to open a path to something more. Through the Dionysian, “the spell of the individuation is broken, and the path to the Mothers of Being, to the innermost core of things, is laid open” (Nietzsche *BT* §15 76).

Through this contrast of existences, Nietzsche reveals the repressive quality of the Apolline while simultaneously exposing its necessity as a conduit to healing. For Nietzsche, however, it is within the Dionysian state that this necessity becomes most apparent. Nietzsche wants to dispel the opposition between the Apolline and Dionysian and believes it is through the aesthetic experience that this might be achieved. He asks the question, “What aesthetic effect is created when the inherently separate artistic powers of the Apolline and the Dionysiac become active alongside one another?” (*BT* §15 77). According to Nietzsche the Dionysiac needs the Apolline in order to fully reveal its essence. Through the example of Greek tragedy, he shows how they work together — the tragic chorus represents the “people” as the ideal spectators who are physically and empirically affected, rather than aesthetically (*BT* §7 38). This is a phenomenological experience that altars one’s existence for the moment, to see a vision outside of oneself “which is the Apolline vision of perfection of his state.” It is also a state of ecstasy where the “limits to existence are destroyed” and “all personal experiences from the past are submerged” (*BT* §7 40). Nietzsche further expounds, “This is the first effect of the Dionysiac tragedy: state and society, indeed all divisions between one human being and another, give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity which leads men back to the heart of nature” (*BT* §7 39). This is man in his primordial unity, an existence that is not limited primarily to his individual experiences. As Nietzsche puts it, “The drama is the Apolline embodiment of Dionysiac insights

and effects...” (*BT* §8 44). Experiencing the merging of the two can lead one to new insights and renewed life.

Nietzsche finds social function in the Dionysian ritual that can turn us back on to life. The Dionysian invests us in an ecstatic aesthetic experience, on the threshold of nature and culture. It touches something in us that is almost precultural, an innate primordial state of being that allows us to embrace our desires. On the contrary, the Apolline state surrounds us in rationality. It is a state of pure contemplation and clarity. Within the Greek Tragedy, the intelligibility of Apolline state is dissolved in a dreamlike transformation. Nietzsche explains, “This is the Apolline dream-state in which the day-world becomes shrouded, and a new, clearer, more comprehensible, more affecting world, but one which at the same time is more shadow-like, is born anew and presents itself, constantly changing our gaze” (*BT* §8 45). Thus, although there is moment of repose, Nietzsche’s prospect seems more clearly one of release, a release that demands confirmation of life.

What necessitated Nietzsche’s radical revising of the aesthetic experience? Why did he so desire that human beings embrace the freedom infused in the Dionysiac drive? During his time as a philosopher, Germany was not the unified country it is today. It was according to Julian Young, a “fragmented patchwork of petty principalities” in search of unity (Young 7). According to Young, rather than the claims that Nietzsche cared only about the individual, within his philosophy are communitarian concerns that link him closely with many of the later German philosophers (7). Many of the German romantic philosophers, such as Hegel, Schiller and Schlegel believed that the only way for humans to flourish was through the unity of community that admired in the ancient Greek and Roman polis (7). What they wished to emulate was, according to Young, “that its unity was not the result of absolutist tyranny but was the expression

of a share agreement as to the proper way of life for the community as a whole” (Young 8). Hegel referred to this as *Volksgeist* or “spirit of the people” whose shared ethos (*Sittlichkeit*) created the community (8).

The “commitment to a share ethical substance” stemmed from the realization that the understanding life through the eyes of God was no longer viable. Therefore, a new civic religion, communitarianism took hold, emphasizing certain rights and freedoms to all individuals. The composer Wagner, at once a social revolutionary, also believed in a “shared communal ethos,” but differed from Hegel in that he held art in as high esteem as religion. It was Wagner who first underscored Greek Tragedy as a sacred and powerful way of gathering together communally. Young notes of the Greek tragic festival: “Since this represented virtually the entire citizenry, the tragic festival was the original *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the original ‘collective artwork’...it ‘collected’ together the entire community” (12).

In fact, Nietzsche’s admiration of Greek Tragedy came from his esteem for Wagner, to whom he dedicated *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1872. Nietzsche pays homage to Wagner in his reiteration of Wagner’s own description of Greek Tragedy to emphasize it as “a religious occasion” that ennobled the people. As Young notes, “the point of tragedy is bringing communal ethos to visibility” through the “tragic hero,” a “mythic figure, a contracted image that ‘abbreviates’ the complexity of appearances” (16). This combining of art and myth is meant to bring meaning to modernity’s “aimless meandering” (Nietzsche *BT* §3 23). Nietzsche writes, “The images of myth must be the unnoticed but ever-present daemonic guardians under whose tutelage young souls grow up and by whose signs grown man interprets his life and his struggles” (*BT* §3 23). According to Young, Nietzsche continued his commitment to “the rebirth of community through the rebirth of the collective artwork” in later writings such as *Human, All*

Too Human (1878) (Young 18). Nietzsche states, “[T]he branch of a people [*Volk*] that preserves itself best is that in which most people have, as a consequence of the sameness of their shared, habitual, undiscussable principles, that is to say, as a consequence of their shared faith, a living sense of community” (Nietzsche).³ In later writings he continued to praise art as means to communal ethos; art was a way to gain access to something and to do so with a collective spirit in mind.

JOHN DEWEY: ART AS EXPERIENCE

Although both Kant and Nietzsche consider the idea of repose in their examination of the aesthetic experience, neither seems to emphasize its value as a space in which to dwell; while Kant requires immediate satisfaction, Nietzsche’s aesthetic experience is one in which anticipation builds to a crescendo. Both instead refer to an end result of the aesthetic experience: For Kant, it is the necessary agreement that equates the experience to a concept; for Nietzsche, the Dionysian ecstatic euphoria leads to a state of release. Both do, however, find significance in the aesthetic experience as it connects to our perceptions of the world and find value in its sensual presentation of ideas. Author John Dewey considered both of these aspects of aesthetic experience as they simultaneously refer to and reflect upon our daily experiences.

In exploring the notion of aesthetic experience, John Dewey identifies several areas that limit access to the full realm of sensation at its heart. In the opening pages of Art as Experience, he notes that our conditions of living play a part in that limit; he explains that our senses have been divorced from the conditions upon which they rest, separated from each other and remaining superficial. What are the conditions of living to which Dewey refers? The daily compartmentalizing of our lives, the separating of values and interests into categories, turns them into “mechanical” activities devoid of deeper meaning and insight. This kind of fragmentation

and automaton way of being still exists today. We might consider Dewey as prophetic when he declared, “We undergo sensations as mechanical stimuli or as irritated stimulations, without having a sense of the reality that is in them and behind them: in much of our experience our different senses do not unite to tell a common and enlarged story. We see without feeling; we hear, but only second hand...we use the senses to arouse passion but not to fulfill the interest of insight...” (Dewey *AE* 21).

Through an historical journey, Dewey traces the origins of this separation of sense from daily life. In the very distant past aesthetic objects used as part of primitive rituals were embedded with magical qualities that enhanced the ritual experience (*AE* 30). According to Dewey, an emphasis on the supernatural which has been a mainstay of many religious practices neglects to consider our intellect. Similar in manner to the resultant ecstatic feeling Nietzsche claimed for Greek Tragedy, religious ceremonies, Dewey argues,

laid hold of the imagination because they have been attended with solemn processions, incense, embroidered robes, music, the radiance of color lights, with stories that stir wonder and induce hypnotic admiration. That is, they have come to man through direct appeal to sense and sensuous imagination...the most authoritative beliefs have been clothed in the garb of pomp and pageantry that gives immediate delight to the eye and ear and that evokes massive emotions of suspense, wonder and awe. (*AE* 31)

Christianity in the middle ages, Dewey reiterates, utilized the various arts to heighten religious experience. Visual imagery, architecture, music and other artistic mediums became, as Dewey called them, “the handmaids of religion.” Their purpose was to appeal to the senses, delighting the eyes and ears, evoking emotion and wonder from the spectator but ultimately, their use was meant to persuade one to believe in something above and beyond the earthly realm

(Dewey *AE* 32). The experience itself then becomes one in which the ideal is more suitable than the real. Dewey attests, “The elevation of the ideal above and beyond immediate sense has operated not only to make it pallid and bloodless, but it has acted, like a conspirator with the sensual mind, to impoverish and degrade all things of direct experience” (*AE* 32). In this way the senses, rather than remaining open, seem to act as apparatus, moving the spectator toward conclusion (i.e. greater spiritual certainty).

Dewey is critical of being guided toward conclusion as opposed to remaining open. Switching to literature, he discusses the writings of Keats and Shakespeare, whose works he valued, as more representative of the kind of aesthetic experience he espoused. He notes each one’s philosophy as accepting “life and experience in all its uncertainty, mystery, doubt and half-knowledge and turns that experience upon itself to deepen and intensify its own qualities — to imagination and art” (*AE* 35). This statement encapsulates Dewey’s own philosophy regarding the aesthetic experience; he often refers to it as a total experience, both opened and closed, a relationship between doing and undergoing that is constant. There are causes in place that limit our access to this relationship, a lack of reflection, an excess of receptivity and resistance interfere with the whole of one’s perception. However, thinking, as Dewey notes, is central to apprehending the relationship between doing and undergoing.

Imagination, play, spontaneity and freedom also play a part in the aesthetic experience. Art, Dewey states, is the outcome of imagination, not a means of mechanical output (*AE* 285). This seems a very Kantian statement. Where then, does experience come into play? Dewey clarifies, “In art, the *playful* attitude becomes interest in the transformation of material to serve the purpose of a developing experience” (*AE* 291). Art then, exhibits a performative quality that acts to drive the aesthetic experience. Imagination comes into play as the meaning bearer of

experience: “Imaginative experience exemplifies more fully than any other kind of experience what experience itself is in its very movement and structure” (Dewey *AE* 293). Spontaneity works in consort with our conditions of existence as catalysts in art’s creation. The experience of art, whether by the artist or spectator, Dewey believes, must consider these traits in relation to one another in order to fulfill the aesthetic experience, but also as that experience becomes a manifestation of the self in movement.

Experience itself, and how our experiences shape us, and our view of the world is in fact, the crux of Dewey’s philosophy. Experience can free us to fully and readily access our capacities, to bring us to new understanding; we can reflect on past experiences and create new ones. This is true in both art making and art viewing — as a creation that comes from our humanness, art undoubtedly connects to the conditions of life. It is the objectifying of art, as well as its placement in “the museum as the proper home for works of art” that disconnects it from the realm of daily life (*AE* 17). Upholding art to a higher ideal further separates it from the common. Dewey comments:

Why is the attempt to connect the higher and ideal things of experience with the basic vital roots so often regarded as betrayal of their nature and denial of their value? Why is there repulsion when the high achievements of fine art are brought into connection with common life? ...A complete answer to that question would involve the writing of a history of morals that would set forth the conditions that have brought contempt for the body, fear of the senses, and the opposition of flesh to spirit. (*AE* 20)

Art then, and the experience of art, as Dewey lays it out in this text, takes on a greater role than to be just an object of delight and pleasure. To experience art means to bring forward all previous experience in a kind of happening, a continual act of reciprocity between doing and

undergoing, between “acting and being acted upon” that has transformative potential (Dewey *AE* 78-79). Transformation takes place in two stages: On the one hand there is the artist, or writer or musician, who orders his “feelings and ideas” as he places a mark on the canvas or a word on the page. The medium itself undergoes its objective development; the inner thoughts of the artist become concrete outer manifestation. The inner and outer are progressively organized “in organic connection with each other” until after a “long period of gestation” something emerges (*AE* 79). A transformation occurs, then, through the expressive, “esthetic” act.

On the other hand, is the recipient of the art, or “live creature” as Dewey calls him. The expressive act noted about is the object in communication. Dewey calls it “a report and celebration of what we undergo and what our activity of attentive perception brings into what we receive by means of the senses” (*AE* 107). The expressive object, or art, communicates, Dewey asserts, because of the artist’s work, not necessarily within the limits of his creative expression but rather, “when it operates in the experience of others” (*AE* 109). Moreover, art opens us up to our own “perceptive consciousness” by removing the veils of prejudice and tearing away that which keeps us from seeing (*AE* 338).

BEYOND DEWEY: RETHINKING AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

As the 21st century has advanced so too has Western society been under what seems like a constant state of duress. Democracies across the world have experienced upheaval, their inequities, front, and center in a continual cycle of news that can lead one to not only question the value of a democratic society, but also to wonder, “What is my place?” within it. As human beings experience this daily onslaught of uncertainty, where might one find an offering of hope or a place of respite? As the examples of Kant, Nietzsche and Dewey have shown, aesthetic experience is one arena of liberation. How one responds aesthetically, in turn, can incur lasting

benefit, as it inspires one's personal journey, both inward and outside of oneself. Chapter 4 addresses the notion of response as it relates to 21st century aesthetic experience, particularly regarding its value for Western democratic societies. It begins with an account of the previously noted polemic between those writing about an *aesthetics of action* and those who support an *aesthetics of presence*. After establishing this divide, the chapter turns to a more explicit review of the *aesthetic of repose*, to place it within the context of these two poles and locate it as a beneficial modality for 21st century aesthetic experience.

Much like the call-to-action Kant advocates (an experience of pleasure equals a judgement of beauty) and Nietzsche expresses (the climatic experience of Greek Tragedy leads to life affirmation), some 21st century thinkers promote a role for aesthetic experience that culminates in action. Santiago Zabala, for example, offers what he terms an “aesthetic of emergency,” in which the aesthetic encounter commands one to an existential call, then offers a type of salvation. To make his point clear Zabala refers to a specific form of contemporary visual art, aimed at dismantling dominant structures that both reinforce and limit aesthetic and ethical implications. The interventionist works of Alfredo Jaar, for instance, call to mind an aesthetic journey meant to jar one out of slumber and into action. For Zabala this point is key, “These alterations produce disruptions that require interpretation, response and intervention instead of contemplation” (Zabala 23).

Zabala is not alone in his desire for an aesthetic of action. Contemporary philosopher, Jacques Rancière, frequently refers to contemporary aesthetics as being bound up in politics, with visual art at the heart of a struggle for recognition within the established order of things. Rancière categorizes art within a set of regimes: the ethical regime, in which art images are evaluated in terms of their utility to society; the representational regime, where art is elevated

above its utilitarian sphere into the realm of autonomy and freedom; and the aesthetic regime, where his notion of the political in art manifests in a dialectic clash between the “aesthetic of politics” and the “politics of aesthetics” (Rancière 31). On the one hand, art can provide political liberation and new ways for people to relate to one another. On the contrary, art still has the capacity to act as an apparatus of suppression. This inseparability of aesthetics from politics embeds the aesthetic experience as woven into the fabric of everyday life; it is a deceptive appearance of an “aestheticized life” situated within the sphere of commodity culture (41). As Rancière asserts, overcoming the politics of aesthetics is itself a political act that requires a negotiation of the senses, a clashing of perceptions that eventually breaks them apart to disclose new connections to reality (41-42).

Both Zabala and Rancière note the power of the aesthetic experience to break apart and realign the senses. Both require a particular type of aesthetic engagement that disrupts, pushes one to action and subsequently changes one’s perceptions. However, the lack of necessity for contemplation in both Zabala’s *aesthetic of emergency* and Rancière’s political aesthetics, disregards a key component of the aesthetic encounter: that there is potency in the slumbering, that there can exist action within inaction.

The opening pages of this introduction asked several questions regarding what it is that constitutes the aesthetic experience as a set up for further discussion in terms of the myriad of ways to think about an aesthetic encounter. As regards the visual arts, some contemporary thinkers, such as Zabala and Rancière view the aesthetic experience as one of action, while previous aesthetic theory from the Modernist period removed any thought beyond a superficial response to beauty. By the Postmodern era, the idea of aesthetic experience became wrapped up in the need to escape the bonds of tradition and exclusivity of art, instead linking art to everyday

life in very specific ways. The postmodern period saw art lay claim to issues of race, gender, civil and other human rights. We might in fact, consider the aesthetic projects of Rancière and Zabala as extension of the postmodern conversation. Can their prospects remain valid at this stage in the 21st century? Or is there room within the innumerable of aesthetic proposals for one that is quieter, in which the viewer takes central position in the outcome of his/her viewing experience?

Several recent inquiries try to answer that question. Some of the scholarly studies instigate a Deweyan framework as model, then reassemble it for a particular modality of aesthetic engagement. In the later 20th century, writings on the aesthetics of everyday life focused on the integration of aesthetic awareness in our commonplace existence; the way we decorate our homes or gardens carries value beyond just the decorative surface. These are examples of where the aesthetic reaches outside of the museum and into our human world. In his text on the aesthetics of everyday life (1983), Joseph H. Kupfer discussed the importance of the aesthetic experience in our everyday activities as it begets our moral, social, personal, and communal development. As Kupfer states, “The aesthetic dimensions of everyday life are ‘extrinsically’ valuable in developing people into more deliberate, autonomous community members” (Kupfer 3).⁴ Giving an educational role to the aesthetic experience, the author showcased that we respond to something by assessing its constituent parts, we look at them individually to understand their relationship to one another. The distinctive parts are “interdependent, forming a kind of community” as they work together to “enhance and deepen each other’s significance” (Kupfer 4).

Kupfer gives the example of the “ideal aesthetic object” to further his testament. As the center of the aesthetic experience, the object materializes because of one’s “creative response” to

it. Whether a musical composition, a work of art or a physical object, how we encounter it, and how it enters our consciousness, is how something becomes an aesthetic object. The fact of the object coming into our consciousness suggests it possesses a temporal quality; its various parts and relationships must be consummated, slowly and deliberately until they culminate into the wholeness of the object (68-69). Kupfer uses the example of a musical composition to clarify this scenario. He notes: A symphonic movement carries within it “motifs, variations and inversions which it recalls and completes” (74). Although each of the various parts of the symphony might be singularly enjoyable, together they create something altogether different. At that point Kupfer asserts, “It becomes impossible to grasp the qualities of one segment or moment without considering others and their relations” (74). Transferring this idea to our human relations, the aesthetic experience prepares us, Kupfer claims, to understand our reciprocal relation to others and to recognize how we all individually contribute to the well-being of one another (74-75).

More recent writings regarding the aesthetics of everyday life aim to further Kupfer’s inquiry regarding the value of aesthetic experience outside its usual framing; scholars Richard Shusterman and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, for example, both advocate for less active aesthetic engagement. Richard Shusterman’s work on *somaesthetics* asserts the body as the connecting point between thought and perception. According to Shusterman, not enough emphasis is placed on the body as a space of understanding, a place where our mental life formulates information. He defines *somaesthetics* as concerning “the body as the locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (*aisthesis*) and creative self-fashioning” that “involves a wide-range of knowledge forms and disciplines” and moreover, recognizes “that body, mind and culture are deeply codependent” (Shusterman 2). Thinking of the body as an instrumental force in our individual and cultural development, while also noting the burden of the body (that ages and decays), the author advises

that we must take care to understand the body as a powerful expression of “the fundamental ambiguity of being human” (3). Shusterman notes several expressions of the living body: 1) As an expression of “our double status as object and subject;” 2) As a unifying entity rooted in individuality; 3) As an example of our power and frailty as humans; 4) As an essential medium for the transmission of social norms and moral values, but also as the seat of our ethical life; and, finally, 5) As an arena for the direct grasping of the “world’s energies and objects” (3-7).

Shusterman’s validation of the body as space of aesthetic awareness provides a provocative prospect for cultivating contemporary aesthetic engagement. However, according to the author, modern humanistic philosophy still tends to marginalize the positive aspects of the body, instead, placing emphasis on its limitations. As Shusterman asserts, “humanist thinkers do not seem content to be human; they secretly want to transcend mortality, weakness, and error and to live like gods” (8). The field of humanities in general, he notes, was developed to distinguish from the theological. Why then, he asks, do humanist thinkers still aim to think beyond human existence toward “higher spiritual ends,” instead of focusing on transformation in the here and now? *Somaesthetics* at its core is about human transcendence, yes, but as it motions from one human existence to another and moves outward toward the world. It is a cultivation of the body as not just in the service of the soul, but Shusterman notes, as an “instrument in perception, cognition, action, aesthetic expression, and ethical self-fashioning, which together constitute humanistic research, artistic creation, and the global art of perfecting our humanity through better living” (Shusterman 8-13). Cultivating the body for these multiple aesthetic functions requires tranquility, calm and “slow, sustained thinking.” Shusterman borrows from Wittgenstein for his ideas on developing “somatic awareness;” Wittgenstein advocated for a kind of peaceful slowness in philosophical thinking that Shusterman translates into a pragmatic formulation of

somaesthetics (10-13). His inward-turning method for aesthetic engagement allows for a more conscious awareness of our outward connections. Moreover, for Shusterman, the medium does not always dictate the message; as he asserts, aesthetic encounters should not be confined only to the realm of high art. On the contrary, Shusterman validates popular art because “it provides us with too much aesthetic satisfaction” to be considered “aesthetically illegitimate” (170).

The idea that aesthetic encounters can happen anytime and anywhere is the subject of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s *Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Worlds* (2006). A central component to his notion of aesthetic experience is “presence,” thus he argues against the broadly held notion that the content of aesthetic experience is incompatible with everyday human experience. In his essay, Gumbrecht reasons that the institutional structure of aesthetic autonomy was itself symptomatic of a larger problem within the late 18th century capitalist bourgeois system that led by necessity to a rethinking of the relationship between art and life (Gumbrecht 199). However, as the author notes, it was a utopian dream meant to elevate humanity out of its everyday toil. William Morris’s Arts and Crafts Movement exemplified the aim to reintegrate art with life through utopian ideals. As quoted in Gumbrecht, Morris lectured, “that the true secret of happiness lies in taking a genuine interest in all the details of daily life, in elevating them by art instead of handing the performance of them over to unregarded drudges” (300).

Like Shusterman, and borrowing from Dewey, Gumbrecht wants to take the aesthetic object off its pedestal, as well as move aesthetic experience away from its singular association with beauty, to reframe both within a more diverse range of aesthetic modalities. These modalities, he states, “permeate our everyday worlds today” as interruptions to our everyday existence that happen unbeknownst to us, but that lead to a subsequent “switch” in thinking. Gumbrecht specifies three ways in which these naturally occurring aesthetic encounters happen,

firstly through taking a pause, secondly through the association of aesthetic value with function and third, when we encounter something familiar but suddenly see it in a new light (Gumbrecht 302). Chapter 4 looks more closely at Gumbrecht's three constitutions for aesthetic experience as well as at the objects, content, conditions, and effects that lead to the "switch" or aesthetic transformation that Gumbrecht suggests.

The author conceptualized the "everyday-world" in a previous essay where he historically advanced the concept in relation to "life-world." Taking a genealogical approach, Gumbrecht traced the philosophical formulation of these concepts in relation to the subject-object polarity as it became manifest in the late 1800s. As Gumbrecht assessed it, the notions of *everyday-world* and *life-world* corresponded to the split between objective truth and reality that had been evolving since the advent of science during the Renaissance, a time, according to Gumbrecht, when the world first became readable. In his essay, *Every-Day World and Life-World as Philosophical Concepts* (1993), Gumbrecht expresses that, because of science,

The subject/object paradigm had become established as a bipolar structure which opposed, on the one side, man conceiving of himself as a subject of observation (and, in the observer role, as purely spiritual) and, on the other side, the world (including the human body) as pure matter, as reality and object of man's observation. The basic assumption which set this paradigm in motion as a knowledge producing device lay in the expectation that each object "had" (or could "be attributed") a meaning. It transformed the world into a readable world and each of its objects into a potential sign. Once these signs were deciphered by individuals, their materiality would lose all importance because it had fulfilled its only function of serving as a signifier.⁵ (Gumbrecht 748)

To clarify, as man became more of an observer of his world, the distance between the objective world and reality became skewed. According to Gumbrecht, the late 19th century writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, specifically address this “epistemological shift” as he rejected the subject/object archetype that had “attributed to man a position of eccentricity in relation to the world (747-749). In art, poetry, and music as well, a “deregulation” of the sign occurred. Symbolist poets such as Mallarmé, musical composers such as Wagner, and writers like Emile Zola, each exemplify the desire to bring meaning to their works that did not necessarily equate with any given “truth.” What emerged during this era, Gumbrecht notes, was “a new disposition to accept as ‘real’ phenomena that which could not be defined as existing independently from the human mind. This opened the rift between ‘true knowledge’ about the world of objects, and ‘realities’ produced by the human mind” (749). Subsequently what occurred was a move from man being merely observer of reality to man becoming creator of reality. “Reality-creation” as Gumbrecht refers to it also began to shift from inward awareness to outward manifestation; the emergence of “the star” for example, grew out of the interaction between stage actor and audience. This “constituted reality,” I would argue, this meeting of subject and object, is in a way an aesthetic melding of the two, a change in relationship, a meeting of action and presence in a kind of in-between space. I refer to Gumbrecht’s reading of Henri Bergson here for clarification: overcoming the subject/object divide, Bergson wrote, occurs in an “intermediate sphere” of consciousness which he described it as “the place for ‘spatial and social representation’ of individual consciousness” that diffuses “mind and matter” (Gumbrecht 752). Although not an explicit part of this dissertation, Bergson’s notion of the *entre temps*, i.e., the intermediate sphere, connects well to my proposal for an *aesthetic of repose*. Furthermore, the merging of

everyday-world and *life-world* that Gumbrecht insinuates similarly correlates. Thus, I will explore both further in this section of Chapter 4.

THE AESTHETIC OF REPOSE: INWARD JOURNEY, OUTWARD CONNECTION

As foundational to an understanding of how we experience aesthetically, the aesthetic philosophies of Kant, Nietzsche and Dewey still carry relevance; if reviewed through a genealogical lens, it becomes clear that the period in which each lived and the crises of those times provoked each to explore the notion of beauty and art, and to devise a role for art in helping us to understand some aspect of our humanity, of what makes us human. Another certainty that these previous philosophers share is the acknowledgement that experiencing both artful and beautiful things can in some way enhance human life and move culture forward. Although coming at it from two sides of the contemporary debate, the more recent authors such as Zabala, Ranci  re, Shusterman and Gumbrecht similarly approach aesthetic philosophy with an understanding that art has the capacity to move us in many ways for the benefit of both the individual and the broader humanity. I should remind the reader that these thinkers come to their ideas through the lens of Western democratic society and as such, I am also speaking within that confine. There are limits however, that I believe must be addressed if we are to continue exploring a role for art and aesthetic experience within our current social, political, and economic circumstances.

As I mentioned in the opening pages of this Introduction, previous philosophic formulations of aesthetic experience, although still valid on many levels, are limited in their potentiality as resources for enduring human experience in our overstimulated, psychologically dislocated and fragmented 21st century. On the other hand, with several of the authors featured in these pages, the notion that we must act or resist action upon engaging in aesthetic experience

frames the experience under conditions such as those just listed; these imperatives, action, or resistance, ask that we accept and cope with these conditions, rather than helping us to overcome them.

So why do we still refer to these philosophers today with some authority? Their philosophies, that we continue to reference, do not carry the same significance in our current times as they did at the time each was writing. I would suggest, however, that although the background conditions that led Kant, Nietzsche and Dewey to explicate aesthetic experience from everyday life are less relevant today, the sense of longing, for a new way of seeing or experiencing the world, is something they commonly share. They share it with each other, but also with the above-mentioned contemporary authors. Each of their explorations has at its core a desire to make a place for beauty and art as they relate to our human condition. Their philosophies carry importance for an understanding of how we as humans operate in the world, how we manage the uncertainties of existence and how aesthetic experience can accommodate our suffering. In relating each one's aesthetic philosophy to our present times, problems arise because our conditions of existence are so vastly different than theirs. In my estimation, we are much more exposed, more vulnerable than in previous centuries. There exists today a palpable loss of connection to our humanity, a blindness to our potentiality for growth and connection that I believe needs tending to.

Noted author Cora Diamond pointed out in her essay, *Losing Your Concepts*, that our latent tendency to oversimplify ideas leads to a loss of understanding but also hinders perception (Diamond 258). Diamond is referring here specifically to approaches to ethical philosophy, but I believe her statement correlates also to another common thread in several of the aesthetic philosophies I have discussed in this Introduction, apart from Dewey, Shusterman and

Gumbrecht. The loss of concepts in our current age means that these earlier conceptions of aesthetic experience no longer convey the context that made them significant. Furthermore, the upending of traditions in our post-postmodern times make it difficult to express this loss.

Borrowing from John Berger, Diamond notes a cultural deprivation that makes it difficult to articulate or clarify experience. Speaking specifically about the English working-class Berger explains, “Any general culture acts as a mirror which enables the individual to recognize himself — or at least to recognize those parts of himself which are socially permissible. The culturally deprived have far fewer ways of recognizing themselves. A great deal of their experience — especially emotional and introspective experience — has to remain *unnamed* for them” (Berger in Diamond 258). Although Berger is writing about a particular class of citizens, I believe his account speaks to a more general lack of recognition in our current times.

Notes Diamond, “The criticism of our present conceptual life is not tied to what is embodied in our past but to a vision of human wholeness to which a mode of speech and thought unlike ours belongs” (Diamond 259). Human beings are deprived of a tool so to speak, that allows us to connect experience to something concrete. According to Diamond, this cultural deprivation comes in three forms: 1) as unnamed, 2) misnamed and 3) or used in improper context (260-261). But do we even have to put a name to experience? Does depriving it of a name make it any less valid? Can we find value in not knowing? Instead of viewing it as a loss of concept, might we think of the experience as simply a new way of conceptualizing that has nothing to do with language and everything to do with being in the world? I would argue that in the case of aesthetic experience, the philosophical naming or categorizing of that experience deprives it of its power to reposition.

As Iris Murdoch (quoted in Diamond) stated regarding moral philosophy, “some values

are...no longer capable of expression; the moral experience of ordinary people cannot be illuminated by a vocabulary used in ways available to modern philosophy” (Murdoch in Diamond 262). Incidentally, the rules for understanding aesthetically, morally, or otherwise, are challenged daily in our current hyper-stimulated, overly conceptualized world. Forms that were valid centuries previous do not work today; concepts constantly shift as we evolve in our human endeavors. As Diamond asserts, to experience “with the whole of one’s mind” means considering, “a network of concepts and values,” to be critically aware of them, but also to find value outside of them” (Diamond 273). I would add that to depart from shared conceptions allows for humanity to be reunited in our differences.

In the opening statements of this Introduction, I contended that the *aesthetic of repose* offers the potential for connection in ways that previous aesthetic modalities did not confront. It is my belief that the aesthetic encounter experienced in *repose* can act as a remedy for the fracture and loss that plagues our 21st century. Rather than requiring active engagement, the *aesthetic of repose* provides a space for stillness, a room for quiet, a residence for reflection. Embedded within the *aesthetic of repose* lies a more deeply ingrained desire for three things: a space of dwelling where the senses are quietly activated, a place to inhabit where perception begins an inward journey, and finally an area of safe passage that allows that internal voyage to eventually reflect outward. The notion of the *entre temps* and the concept of refuge assist in the postulating of the aesthetic of repose.

To awaken the senses while in repose might seem contradictory, but I propose that it is a more valuable mode of experience than something that motivates external response. The case for an *aesthetic of repose* is rooted in the long debate regarding the role of aesthetics that has challenged Western philosophy for centuries. Complications relating the impact of aesthetic

engagement to formulations of truth and self-hood, the emancipation of human spirit and subsequently, the restoration of humanity began as far back as Plato. These complications are further debated in the 20th century and to my contention, have yet to be resolved. Modern examples such as the previously mentioned aesthetic proposals of Zabala and Rancière reveal that the argument for or against aesthetics also carries implicit questions regarding its social and political imperative. On the contrary are the aesthetic prospects of Shusterman and Gumbrecht, who present aesthetic experience as part of our everyday existence. An *aesthetic of repose*, while not a concrete solution, does offer a new way of examining the aesthetic encounter. It also provides a fresh insight into the role of visual art in the 21st century. An *aesthetic of repose* envisions the aesthetic experience as beyond politics and outside of the everyday, more focused on the journey than on the destination. To experience aesthetically while in *repose* can provide a visionary, unrestricted, dialogical experience that can not only enrich and reinforce an individual's own code, but subsequently addresses humanity's common desire to find meaning in human existence.

The formulation of an *aesthetic of repose* also considers civic consciousness and art in a way that transforms the relationship of one to the other and reconsiders the bond between truth and being, guiding humanity to find common ground while simultaneously maintaining its heterogeneity. Using visual art as a primary conduit for humanity's aspirations, desires and hopes develops a role for art to usher in a new way of seeing those accounts for multiplicity, disparity, and difference, yet values collective consciousness. This new way of seeing, via an *aesthetic of repose*, enacts a kind of shadow consciousness, tenebrously slumbering somewhere between a given truth and concrete reality that allows the viewer room for aesthetic contemplation and restorative looking; the inevitable result of which is a repositioning of sorts, a

transformed perception of self that carries over into a new narrative of humanity.

Similar to Shusterman's *somaesthetics*, the *aesthetic of repose* emphasizes the connection between one's inner self and outer assembly. Also, like Shusterman's aesthetic proposal, the *aesthetic of repose* is concerned with human transcendence and renewal in the here and now. Like Gumbrecht is the desire for time and space within the everyday for moments of reflection that can lead to aesthetic transformation. As a modality of aesthetic experience, however, it is important to acknowledge that the *aesthetic of repose* extends from philosophical groundwork of earlier eras. Specifically, it reconsiders the melding of sense and cognition first given to us through Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Although Friedrich Nietzsche's "ecstatic vision" as noted in the *Birth of Tragedy* carries some validity in terms of its goal of life affirmation, its preternatural character takes it beyond reality into the realm of the asceticism. Nietzsche's portrayal of the dance between our Apolline and Dionysiac drives as life affirming secures an investment in the aesthetic experience that carries merit for the *aesthetic of repose*. Author Dewey, in *Art as Experience*, provides many important features of the *aesthetic of repose*. In particular, the way in which the work of art presents itself to the viewer as "materially embodied presentation, not as ideal form" allows for a moveable experience for the viewer.

All three philosophies, those of Kant, Nietzsche and Dewey, require sense as a primary catalyst for aesthetic experience, but each utilizes it for different purpose: Kant, to move toward confirmation of an object's form; Nietzsche, to move towards ecstatic release and heightened affirmation of life; and Dewey, to move towards meaning. But the *aesthetic of repose* does not complete an object, it does not move one to ecstasy, it does not come to meaning. Instead, as a modality of aesthetic experience, the *aesthetic of repose* is an occasion to gaze upon the image,

but not fully understand it. It is recognition of the image that passes from thought to feeling to comfort and relief.

The *aesthetic of repose* is its own occasion and sits somewhere between Nietzsche's ecstatic vision and rational sight, if we can think of vision as imaginary and sight as factual (or accurate). It also lies between the Kantian notion of agreement and Nietzsche's belief in life affirming, sublime ecstasy. It follows Dewey in terms of the movement that is inherent in the aesthetic experience, not as a rush to judgement or conclusion, however, but to be moved, slowly, toward a new way of seeing; not blinded by the light but illuminated by the glow that emanates in the space in between.

The equality and freedom within aesthetic experience that is central to Rancière's carries with it an ethical component that ties individual experience to its greater application within a community. Acknowledging the ethical exposes an awareness of others and claims recognition of humanity's common desire to say, "I am here" and to be regarded as "being-in-the-world." How can we place value on the aesthetic experience that validates our individuality within the greater collective existence? We must look beyond Kant's formalism that limits the notion of *sensus communis* as predicated on a commonality of rational faculties. We ought to reconsider the politics of aesthetics to take it beyond its distribution and maintenance in our late capitalist society. We must appreciate the aesthetic and its origins as a multi-disciplinary concept to offer it as something that provides emancipatory engagement that is never fixed, but rather is an open path to renewed spirit.

CHAPTER 1

Immanuel Kant and the Aesthetic Experience

“We ‘dwell’ on the contemplation of the beautiful because this contemplation strengthens and reproduces itself...the way we dwell upon a charm in the representation of an object which keeps arresting the attention, the mind all the while remaining passive.”

— Immanuel Kant (CJ §12 54).

A SYSTEM FOR EXPERIENCE

No conversation about the aesthetic experience can begin without acknowledging its foundation in the writings of Immanuel Kant. Highly influential to the German Idealist thinkers that followed him, Kant’s contributions to the understanding of how we engage aesthetically opened the door to new ways of conceiving how we come to understand both nature and art and the value of those experiences to greater understanding of our moral position as human beings. Through a systematic breaking down of the human faculties of sense and perception, and an evaluation of their significance to our subjective engagement with the objective world, Kant devised a formulaic structure for understanding human experience. As Martin Seel notes, for Kant, aesthetic contemplation differed from other forms of contemplation, in that what is gained through aesthetic contemplation is not insight, but rather involves perception of the object in its “process of appearing” (Seel 3). According to Seel’s reading of Kant, to apprehend the aesthetic object is an intersubjective process available to anyone “who, first, possesses the appropriate sensuous and cognitive faculties and second, is willing to be attentive to the full sensuous presence of the object...free from constraints of conceptual knowing...free from the compulsion to determine ourselves in the world (4).

This chapter explores Kant's aesthetic philosophy as it provides some foundational application to my proposed *aesthetic of repose*. Of particular interest are the idea of freedom in aesthetic perception Seel mentions, as it allows us to freely determine "ourselves and the world" (Seel 4). In addition, the notion of appearance as a slow process informs the *aesthetic of repose*; as Seel notes it in Kant's aesthetic judgement, it allows for rich, engaging, and pleasurable experience that confirms "the extensive determinacy of reality by us human beings" (4). Finally, of importance to my proposal of *the aesthetic of repose* is what I found hidden under the systematic way in which Kant presents aesthetic experience, namely, a longing for connection and a robust aesthetic experience that proves of value to the repositioning of self within, as well as outside of oneself.

Both the wish for connection and the desire for enriching aesthetic experience gain relevance through Kant's notion of *sensus communis*, therefore I devote a good portion of this chapter to its evaluation and critique. Several contemporary authors have examined Kant's *sensus communis* and lend scholarship to my own analysis. Author Karin Schutjer notes *sensus communis* as essential to fostering human relations. De Duve equates *sensus communis* with a sense of belonging, a human capacity that exists in all of us, but that must be cultivated. De Duve refers to *sensus communis* as an ethical imperative; what nature has failed to provide humans, that is, a "sens de la famille," culture can give us (De Duve 155). Additionally, scholar John Hicks questions the equitable relationship between *sensus communis* and Kant's concept of universal assent. As Hicks explains, 18th century Enlightenment predecessors to Kant such as Hume, Burke and Shaftsbury, defined *sensus communis* literally as "common sense." Their definition linked this concept to universal standards of taste that could be attained over time and with practice, to the benefit of Enlightenment society (Hicks 107). According to Hicks, what

Kant took up in his *Third Critique* seems to agree with these thinkers in terms of aesthetic experience benefitting culture. However, Kant theoretically diverts from their notion by claiming *sensus communis* not as referring to shared “good taste” amongst the educated, but rather, as attainable only through expected universal agreement (Hicks 107). The expectation of universal agreement, Hicks argues, is merely hypothetical; *sensus communis*, a “virtual phenomenon” (107). Therefore, Kant’s system leaves open the possibility of dissent within a group of individuals who are all reflecting upon the same judgement of taste (108).

The nurturing of human relations, the yearning for a sense of the familiar and the assent of culture through an experience of the beautiful could all be considered as valid consequences of Kant’s aesthetic philosophy. Therefore, the reader will note their references throughout the chapter. In consideration of each, I refer most specifically to Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, with supplemental help from more contemporary scholars, such as Schutjer, De Duve and Hicks as well as Robert Wood and Terry Pinkard. Each author provides acute analysis of Kant’s aesthetic philosophy, giving clarity to Kant’s points as well as providing new insights. We begin with some background on the *Critique of Judgement*, then proceed with an overview of Kant’s aesthetic philosophy therein. From there the chapter looks specifically at the relationship of nature and culture, critically evaluating Kant’s concept of *sensus communis* and closes with an analysis of the limits to his philosophy as bespeaks 21st century aesthetic experience.

Kant’s analysis began with his first two critiques, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1780) and *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), where he aimed to study the human mind and to examine its potential for attaining knowledge. Kant was searching for the underlying causes of human thought and experience which he believed came from *a priori* principles that ordered the world of appearances. The structures of knowing that are in place prior to our experience regard

what Kant refers to as the *noumenon*, the original form or the “thing in itself” accessed through a faculty of the mind that transcends the senses (CJ §26 255). With the first two critiques, and in particular with the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the philosopher focused on the separation of the noumenal from the phenomenal. Kant denotes the noumenon as “substrate underlying the intuition of the world as mere phenomenon” where *phenomenon* is associated with the realm of appearances (Kant *Introduction* 11). As such, what appears to one via sense perception inevitably gets sorted through a system that eventually links that appearance to something in the objective world (Wood 175).

As Kant notes in the preface to the third critique, *The Critique of Judgement* (1790), his sole concern with the first two critiques was human cognitive faculties related to *a priori* knowing, “to the exclusion of feelings of pleasure and displeasure” (CJ *Preface* 3). The notion of feeling that guides Kant’s philosophical treatise in *The Critique of Judgement* differs from his emphasis on the faculty of knowing at the heart of *The Critique of Pure Reason* and the faculty of willing that guides *The Critique of Practical Reason*. The faculty of knowing regards “a completely deterministic world of objectively sorted sensory presentations” while the faculty of willing involves “free self-determination allied with the moral law” that distinguishes human from nature (176). Fundamental to both the faculty of knowing and that of willing, are “a priori forms, given within the structure of appearances” (176). Kant labeled the type of judgement associated with each as *determinant judgement*, in which the forms associated with specific experiences integrate those experiences. On the other hand, is what Kant referred to as *reflective judgement*, a type of judgement in which objects, themselves, guide one to search for concepts that help to make sense of them.

Kant distinguishes determinant judgements from reflective judgements, associating the latter with the faculty of feeling. Furthermore, Kant's evaluation of determinant judgements through the faculty of willing and its emphasis on freedom and moral self-determination, and that of knowing and its relationship to determining the world of appearances, differentiate these regions as unrelatable. Kant asserts,

Understanding prescribes laws a priori for nature as an object of the senses, so that we may have a theoretical knowledge of it in a possible experience. Reason prescribes laws a priori for freedom and its peculiar causality as the supersensible in the subject, so that we may have a purely practical knowledge. The realm of the concept of nature under the one legislation, and that of the concept of freedom under the other, are completely cut off from reciprocal influence...The concept of freedom determines nothing in respect of the theoretical cognition of nature; and the concept of nature likewise nothing in respect of the practical laws of freedom. To that extent then, it is not possible to throw a bridge from the one realm to the other. (*CJ* Introduction IX 29-30)

It is in his *Third Critique* that Kant aimed to overcome the distance between the faculties of willing and knowing. He began to do so in the first section, *The Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, by focusing his attention on reflective judgement and the faculty of feeling (Wood 176). Distinguishing determinant judgements from reflective ones, and separating willing and knowing from feeling, introduces an opportunity for further exploration of the phenomenal world and human senses, both of which figure prominently in my notion of the *aesthetic of repose*. At the same time, Kant utilized his study of aesthetic judgement as a connector between the two types of determinant judgements and their correlating dualities: sensation versus thought, reason and experience, nature, and freedom, the universal versus the particular, the theoretical versus

practical (Schujter 22). It is the faculty of judgement, Kant states, that becomes the mediating factor between these opposing concepts (*CJ* Introduction IX 31).

How does Kant define “aesthetic” as it relates to affective (feeling) judgements? Rather than the previously established designation of aesthetic as “the sphere of what can be known through the senses,” Kant recants the link to knowledge (via sensory cognition) to favor an emphasis on feeling (of pleasure or displeasure) (Zoeller 54). As Kant asserted, “aesthetic judgement contributes nothing to the cognition of its objects” (*CJ* Introduction 29). To be more precise, aesthetic refers to a mode of relation that accounts for an unmitigated variety of “affective attitudes” transmitted through feeling (Zoeller 55). More accurately, aesthetic designates a relation of subject to experience, referring to “the subject’s affective stand toward some object” (55).

Noted above, the initial implication for aesthetic judgement is that it evokes either feelings of pleasure or displeasure, based on a relationship between an experiencing subject and an object of that experience (“object” to be more clearly defined in a later section of this chapter). At the outset of aesthetic judgement, the experience of beauty activates the senses, beginning a discursive process between imagination and understanding. Further repercussions emerge regarding both individual imaginative freedom as well as freedom in relation to others. Before examining the after-effects of aesthetic judgement, it is important to provide a more detailed exploration of Kant’s general model as he writes about it in the *Third Critique*.

KANT’S AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT

As noted previously, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) explore human limits and boundaries through the concepts of knowing and willing, and the faculties of understanding and reason, respectively. Kant’s underlying concern

regarded the question: “How do we attain knowledge?” or “How do we know?” Kant asserted that we already have some knowledge, that there are structures of knowing in place prior to our experience (a priori), and that our prior experience must link up to some kind of receptivity or sensation. The linking of prior experience with receptivity occurs through a spontaneous, yet intuitive process, in which individual perception combines with a naturally ordered causal experience. The result of this fusion is the ordering of “particular elements of our experience into a meaningful whole” (Pinkard 67). Simply put, individual experience is subject to a set of already established laws or “normative components” both practical and theoretical that guide us to reasonable conclusions (67).

With regard to aesthetic experience however, the institution of norms is merely speculative. The *Critique of Judgement* addresses this issue directly. Section I of Kant’s *Third Critique* looks specifically at aesthetic judgements, firstly through an “analytic of the beautiful” and second, via the “sublime,” aiming to understand how we experience beauty. Both cases, the beautiful and the sublime, take place via the faculty of feeling and involve the aforementioned reflective judgement. What is beauty and how do we establish that something is beautiful? In the first section, *Analytic of Aesthetic Judgement*, Kant encapsulates his idea: “If we wish to decide whether something is beautiful or not, we do not use understanding to refer the presentation of the object so as to give rise to cognition; rather, we use imagination (perhaps in connection to understanding) to refer the presentation to the subject and his feeling of pleasure or displeasure” (*CJ* §1 203). Discerning between pleasure and displeasure is essential for validating Kant’s proposed separation of the practical from the theoretical and for creating space for a judgement of taste. Kant formulates the judgement of taste, or otherwise called “aesthetic judgement,” as occurring over four “moments.” The first moment is the *moment of quality*; the second, that of

quantity; thirdly is the *moment of relation* and finally, the *moment of modality in the delight of the object* (*CJ* First Book: Analytic of the Beautiful). Each moment carries specific traits of analytic judgement that culminate in a final judgement of taste.

We might think of the *moment of quality* as a disruptive moment that evokes an unexpected outcome; it is a subjective reaction to an experience that gives one a pleasurable feeling without offering any other fixed properties or logical consequences. Kant uses the example of a building to explain the first moment: One can look at a building and, upon its observance, he might experience a “sensation of delight.” As Kant notes, “Here the representation is referred wholly to the subject, and what is more to its feeling of life — under the name of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure.” This experience, he adds, “contributes nothing to knowledge. All it does is compare the given representation in the subject to the entire faculty of representations of which the mind is conscious in the feeling of its state” (*CJ* §1 36). The *moment of quality*, furthermore, does not require contemplation; it is a judgement on the beautiful that obliges indifference to further investigation to favor instead, “pure disinterested delight” (*CJ* §2 37).

The Second Moment in a judgement of taste, or the *moment of quantity*, regards the universality of delight, that is, it is possible that others can judge the experience similarly. Carrying the example of the building forward, the original judging subject, having no other proclivity beyond feeling pleasure, can “presuppose” this response in “every other person.” Of the observing subject, Kant adds, “Accordingly, he will speak of the beautiful as if beauty were a feature of the object and the judgement were logical...although it is only aesthetic...that it may be presupposed to be valid for everyone. To clarify, the judgement itself does not spring from

logic, but in its potentiality for universal delight, lends it resemblance to a logical judgement (*CJ* §6 43). Everyone, Kant says, can experience that pleasure.

The fact in Kant's argument that all subjects can, in theory, delight in an object's beauty leads to the Third Moment in a judgement of taste, which he calls the *moment of relation*, or more specifically, "the moment of the *relation* of the ends brought under review in such judgements" (*CJ* §10 51). Here Kant is referring to the tangible form of the object of delight, its purposive make-up or representative mode. An object's purposive make-up is its "end" which Kant defines thusly, "An end is the object of a concept so far as this concept is regarded as the cause of the object (the real ground of its possibility); and the *causality* of the concept in respect of its object is purposiveness (*forma finalis*)" (*CJ* §10 51). The object derives its purposiveness not through cognition, but rather, "as an effect," i.e., its final form. Furthermore, it attains its purposiveness as beautiful merely through its "pleasing form" and nothing more. Additionally, the beautiful object that brings about feelings of pleasure only exists in its objective form based on it being experienced by an observing subject. This is what Kant refers to as "purposiveness without purpose" — it is merely an object that provides pleasure without thought.

The final or Fourth Moment in a judgement of taste, Kant terms the *moment of the modality of the delight in the object*. According to Kant, delight in an object as beautiful is both necessary and inevitable. Furthermore, it appeals to our common sense the underlying feeling of pleasure is not a private one, but rather, a common one (*CJ* §22 70). Scholars often refer to this as the "ought" in Kant's argument meaning 'if I feel it to be so, it ought to be so.' Kant states this clearly in section 19 of *Analytic of the Beautiful*, "The judgement of taste expects agreement of everyone; and a person who describes something as beautiful insists that everyone *ought* to give the object in question his approval and follow suit in describing it as beautiful... We are suitors

for agreement from everyone else because we are fortified with a ground common to all” (*CJ* §19 68). This idea of shared commonality, or *common sense*, in a judgement of taste assumes there is universal validity in that judgement which Kant distinguishes from “common understanding.” Kant equates common understanding with a common sense of another kind, which he terms *sensus communis*; it refers to a judgement predicated on a concept or the “presupposed existence of common sense” (*CJ* §20 68). Contemporary scholars have proposed many and varied interpretations of Kant’s *sensus communis* that I further examine in a later section of this chapter. As regards the fourth moment, we shall refer to Kant’s declaration that common sense becomes an ideal for which to strive; in accordance with a judgement of taste that results in delight of the beautiful, the possibility of consensus exists, that is, we can all come to the same determination.

The brief explanation above of Kant’s *Four Moments of Aesthetic Judgement* reveals that, although not considered scientific, Kant methodically breaks down the judgement of taste into a reasonable system of inquiry. Moreover, passing through each moment in an orderly fashion is what brings aesthetic judgement to a final, perceivable end. However, in the Introduction to the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant locates the feeling of pleasure associated with aesthetic judgement between the faculties of knowledge and desire, and the judgement of taste as “intermediate between understanding and reason” (*CJ* Introduction 14). Seated at the midpoint between knowledge and desire, and at the interstice of understanding and reason, aesthetic judgement seems uniquely positioned for a more open, continual and evolving perception.

On the contrary, Kant’s proposal further breaks down judgements into two kinds, reflective and determinate judgements. A reflective judgement starts with something specific seeking a universal concept under which it might fall, rather than beginning with a universal

concept under which a specific is incorporated, i.e., a determinant judgement (Pinkard 67-68). Put more succinctly, reflective judgement concerns something never before encountered, an appearance of something new in the world. An example from nature can help to clarify here: We begin with the concept of a “cardinal” and use our determining skills to judge whether the bird we see in our backyard is in fact, a cardinal. In this case, the fact of the cardinal is an instance of the more general concept of “bird.” The bird in this case, is the overarching theme under which the cardinal belongs. On the contrary, our discovery might start with the more particular, the cardinal itself, upon which we reflect in order to understand it as a type of bird; the particular (the cardinal), then, is matched to a more general concept (bird).

The example above distinguishes determinant from reflective judgement through the subsuming of a particular under a concept on the one hand and the matching of a particular to a concept on the other, respectively. As a reflective judgement, an aesthetic judgement regards encountering a beautiful object, gaining pleasure from that experience and upon apprehending its beauty, making a declarative statement of its beauty. It begins with apprehension of the form without interest (a pure recognition); then becomes a dance between imagination and understanding, a free play that eventually leads to their harmonious merging and a feeling of pleasure. Upon recognition of the form and the subsequent feeling of pleasure, a judgement is made upon the object that results in deciding that the object is beautiful. To call an object beautiful then validates it. This is a universal validity, a common-sense agreement which others, too, should similarly determine, what Kant expresses as the “ought.” *Should* is the essential term here because while agreement is preferred, it can only be achieved by those possessing *taste*, an important component in discerning aesthetic judgements; aesthetic judgements are, according to Kant, judgements of taste.

Kant defines “taste” as “the faculty of judging what makes our feeling in a given representation *universally communicable* without mediation of a concept” (*CJ* §40 125). In order to get to that definition, he provided a systematic interpretation of its various characteristics that begin again with its relationship to reflective judgement. To reiterate, when referring to reflective judgement, Kant established that it differs from determinant judgement in several ways. In particular, reflective judgement begins with a particular, an object, for example and seeks to associate that particular with something universal. Reflective judgement, according to Kant, is a law unto itself in that it adjusts itself to something already established (*a priori*). Furthermore, the object of reflective judgement is the end result of the agreement between the thing and its constitution, which Kant deems its “purposiveness of form” (*CJ* Introduction 16).

Purposiveness can take various forms; there is the purposiveness of nature, with empirical laws guiding it; or practical purposiveness that involves the faculty of desire and regards free will. In both types of purposiveness, no experience is necessary to complete the unification of object and concept because the knowledge to do so already exists *a priori*. In sum, there is a causal relationship between objects and the categories to which they belong. Human beings have the capacity to recognize these causal connections, although we might not be aware of this at all times. When we do recognize the correlation, we utilize some latent knowledge that leads us to a determinative recognition of it, i.e. a conclusion.

Not so in judgements of taste, which Kant separates from other forms of judgement (those related to knowledge and will). As mentioned previously, Kant defines taste as the judging based on feeling that leads to a universally communicable representation devoid of a concept. As a human faculty, taste comes to us through a particular type of experience that puts beauty as its primary outcome. The judgement of taste is, in fact, a judgement of beauty and regards not our

recognition, but rather, the feeling of pleasure or displeasure we gain from that experience.

Kant's critical analysis of judgement of taste explicitly notes several characteristics: 1) a judgement of taste lacks a correlating concept; 2) a judgement of taste involves agreement; 3) a judgement of taste is an autonomous experience; 4) a judgement of taste does not require empirical proof; 5) a judgement of taste provides an immediate feeling of pleasure. Furthermore, although it bears resemblance to logical judgements in that it utilizes the "power of the faculty of judging itself," it also uses two other powers of representation. Those powers of representation are the imagination, whose principle component is intuition, and the understanding, whose role is to move the judgement from the intuitive to the more conceptual form. The following section details the aforementioned characteristics associated with a judgement of taste to illustrate how one might arrive at an aesthetic experience.

When Kant denoted that a judgement of taste was a judgement of pleasure or dis-pleasure he aimed to separate it from cognitive judgements. Equating pleasure with taste, rather than grounding it upon a concept opens up the judgement to validity for all. That is to say, anyone has the opportunity to delight in an object and gain pleasure solely upon having that experience and subsequently making a judgement about that experience. Kant states, "the delight of any one person may be pronounced as a rule for every other" (*CJ* §31 111). Moreover, although the number of possible conceptualizations of the judgement are indeterminate, a judgement of taste functions as though the "quality of beauty were an objective property the object being judged." (Shaw 98). Kant's referral to a "rule" here does not regard the empirical nature of the object, rather it refers to the opportunity of the experience being universally valid (*CJ* §31 111).

Universal validity is based solely on autonomous judgement as opposed to already established "vote or interrogation" of the object in question "upon the autonomy of the subject

passing judgement on the feeling of pleasure” (*CJ* §31 111). Peculiarity of aesthetic judgement lies in the fact that it mimics logical judgements because it carries both universal validity and necessity. However, unlike logical judgements, a judgement of taste does not require a concept to which to connect and furthermore its necessity is not based in any a priori proofs (*CJ* §31 111). To overcome this peculiarity, aesthetic judgements must, according to Kant, be separated from logical judgements.

Agreeableness and delight are related characteristics of the judgement of taste and beauty, as a property of the object of delight, rests there for both individual sense and that of the masses. It occurs precisely with respect to the object itself and how we individually respond to it and cannot be implicated in anything beyond itself. Kant uses the example of a flower to which anyone can claim simply, “The flower is beautiful.” With that claim comes the assertion that, “its beauty is to be taken as a property of the flower itself” (*CJ* §32 112). However, in a judgement of taste the opposite occurs. Calling the flower beautiful is an occurrence of individual perception in which the object is deemed “beautiful solely in respect of that quality in which it adapts itself to our mode of receiving it” (*CJ* §32 112). In other words, the receiver has some agency in judging an object’s beauty, regardless of any claimed standard.

The notion that the quality of beauty adapts itself to how one receives it marks a clear distinction from the result of logical judgements. Firstly, Kant emphasizes the individual nature of the judgement of taste — no other influence but that of the receiver’s own experience factors into the judgement. Kant refers to this as an autonomous encounter: “Taste lays claim simply to autonomy. To make the judgement of others the determining ground of one’s own would be heteronomy” (*CJ* §32 112). Heteronomy precedes a lack of original, individual experience, as it looks to external sources for validation. However, in asking for agreement, Kant himself creates

a normative structure for aesthetic experience. In fact, he references ancient models as almost eternally influential, always there to steer one in the right direction, to set a precedent for experience. “Taste is a faculty,” Kant states, the one most in need of “examples of what has in the course of culture maintained itself longest in esteem” (*CJ* §32 113).

A statement such as this seems contradictory to Kant’s account of a judgement of taste being autonomous, but he clarified that, while agreement is verifiable it does not provide valid proof of an object’s beauty. This is a peculiarity of the judgement of taste; although it carries systematic similarities to both theoretical and practical judgements, a prior proof is less capable of amplifying a judgement of taste. For example, one can share a dish of food with another, list all the ingredients, etc. but I must taste the food to decide I like it. It is my own sense that will drive that decision, a subjective point of view without regard for rules (*CJ* §32 114-115).

As a singular judgement, not predicated on rules, a judgement of taste takes subjectivity as its first cause. It comes through the senses first but gets validated when the understanding comes in to validate the judgement, moving from the subjective realm to the objective. In this way it mimics the other types of judgements: With the introduction of the understanding, the judgement is converted to one of logic and predicated on a more widely known fact of the object. Furthermore, this transfers the judgement from one of individual, selective delight to one that others can accept as true. In other words, the judgement is put in a place of belonging, its claim “extended to all subjects” (*CJ* §33 115).

Although this *seems* like an objective judgement, it is important to remember that a judgement of taste occurs through the feeling of immediate pleasure (or displeasure) without proof or justification. It is only upon a subject’s reflection “upon his own state,” without regard for any law or guideline that the subject comes to this pleasurable feeling. How does one come to

this subjective conclusion? Furthermore, if the judgement of taste is subjective, how does cognition function within it? As articulated previously, a judgement of taste resembles a logical judgement in its necessity for universal validity. Additionally, like logical judgements, certain conditions must exist for the judgement of taste: 1) the power of the faculty of judgement itself and 2) the powers of representation in two forms, imagination and understanding. Imagination, through the faculty of intuition, provides the freedom for subjective reflection. Kant elaborates as such,

Since the freedom of the imagination consists precisely in the fact that it schematizes without a concept, the judgement of taste must found itself upon a mere sensation of the mutually enlivening activity of the imagination in its *freedom*, and of the understanding with its *conformity to law*. It must therefore rest upon a feeling that allows the object to be estimated by the purposiveness of the representation...for furtherance of the cognitive faculties in their free play. (*CJ* §35 117)

In summary, imagination and understanding engage in a free play that eventually puts them in accordance with one another. It is, as Kant notes, not a matter of pure subsuming of one under the other, but of a back-and-forth movement in which the imagination, in its freedom, eventually comes into harmony with the understanding (*CJ* §35 117).

The relationship between the cognitive and the intuitive in aesthetic judgements is one in which the cognitive connects to our immediate perception of an object. However, as we have established, one can also experience an object via feeling. If we were to formalize the experience, we might say that sense, plus formal reflection, allows us to deduce that the object is beautiful. Thus, we have an experience with the object that is aesthetic. As a judgement of taste, that aesthetic experience results in a singular judgement “uniting delight with representation,”

with the perceived pleasure residing in the object of delight itself. Kant attests, “Delight in the object is connected to the mere judging of its form” i.e., it is there for us to perceive and judge with no other purpose than to gain pleasure.

Kant’s formula gets clarified in later sections of the *Analytic of the Beautiful* where the philosopher evaluates the question, “What are the conditions of possibility for Beauty?” Firstly, it must “involve the cognitive faculties of the mind in a way that does not conform to rules” (Pinkard 70). This is where imagination and intellect come together, freely interacting in the apprehension of the beautiful. Imagination acts as a mediator, however; while it is free to “combine matters of experience” in its own way, it must also adhere to the rules that guide the intellect, in order to be in harmony with it (70). Thus, there exist both passive and spontaneous ingredients in aesthetic experience (71). Pinkard explains it this way:

One must have the unconstrained harmony between intellect and imagination at work, and the harmony must be spontaneously attended to; and one must apprehend something as beautiful, as being an object of experience exhibiting in itself the same effect in which imagination and intellect would spontaneously result if they were to produce the object. (71)

Disinterestedness is also essential to the determining of universal agreement; beauty must retain its subjective universality because it is a property of something we already know (a priori); universal agreement is the first step to a further reflective judgement. How does Kant come to this determination? Central to Kant’s proposal are two things: concepts and intuitions. Concepts regard what we grasp in the mind; they refer to a particular way of apprehending the world that does not require intuition. Kant would define intuition as what we perceive through our senses. Both concepts and intuitions relate to a way of knowing, one a more concrete apprehension and

the other as determined through feeling. As noted in Zoeller, concrete apprehension is predicated upon the cognitive elements of the object. In Kant's example of the rose, those elements include its shape, size, color and scent. It is through one's perceptive apprehension of those elements, furnished through the faculty of knowing, that the object appears in tangible form. Aesthetic determinations, on the other hand, refer to "the mind's affective reaction" to those elements perceived through cognition (Zoeller 56). Notes Zoeller, it is our "the human affective, aesthetic constitution" where consideration of the rose's size, shape, color, or other element leads to a feeling of either pleasure or displeasure. He clarifies, "The thing in itself that corresponds to the rose is as little pleasure-like as it is red. The thing in question only appears red, due to our human forms of knowing — and it only appears pleasant, due to our human ways of feeling" (56). To further explain, aesthetic judgements arise when a concept is absent to the entirety of our objective world. Our experience provides pleasure or pain but does not conclude with an objective determinant.

As noted previously, movement exists within Kant's aesthetic judgement. The aesthetic judgement begins as a sensuous experience in which the viewer looks for confirmation (i.e. a concept). Once he/she finds agreement from others who share that experience, it becomes an experience of the beautiful. As Kant notes, "There can...be no rule according to which anyone is to be compelled to recognize anything as beautiful...And yet, if upon doing so, we call the object beautiful, we believe ourselves to be speaking with a universal voice" (*CJ* §8 47). Beauty itself is then a concept that emerges via intuition; it arises from the conceptual work about the world that comes about on the basis of feeling and becomes concrete when its universal appeal is recognized. In sum, we can note Kant's formulation of the aesthetic experience as the site of theoretical knowledge about the world based on individual feeling that presents in itself the

possibility for universal validity. Kant gives value to the sensual as a means to deliver truth: our senses are where the aesthetic can emerge and begin the process of conceptualizing, or cognizing, our perception of the world.

Recall also that the process by which this conceptualizing occurs begins with the free play of the imagination, that moment where feeling takes precedence and knowledge remains in the background. Along with free play is the notion of disinterestedness or a lack of concern for the outcome of the experience. Considering free play and disinterestedness, we might find in Kant's aesthetic judgement an element of repose; that space of free play and imagination sits somewhere between attempted understanding and justifiable knowing. The disinterested state invites both sensuous and cognitive reflection because there is no desire for resolution at this stage. In doing so, the one who encountered the beautiful object is making a judgement that goes beyond his own pleasure; others will likewise experience that object as beautiful (Pinkard 68). Additionally, the aesthetic experience involves both "a passive element of pure experiential receptivity and an active element of ('reflectively') judging something to be beautiful" that subsequently clues us into the ways in which "we are agents *subject* to the norms that we ourselves also *institute*" (68).

However, Kant insists that judging something as beautiful is a matter of *taste*, a subjective judgement whose validity relies on it being "universally communicable" (69). The universally communicable experience of the beautiful is not one that is determined by a set of rules, rather, it is "structured by universal norms," or a "shared sense" that underlies the conditions of possibility for apprehending a beautiful object (69). Common human understanding, unlike cognition is the least we can expect from one another. However, Kant seems to be desiring human refinement in society (*CJ* §40 126). This can only occur through the

higher faculty of cognition, where the representation of beauty appears above the level of the senses (*CJ* §40 123).

CULTURE AND NATURE IN KANT'S PHILOSOPHY

The detailed analysis in the first section of this chapter called attention to the key components that make up Kant's aesthetic philosophy, specifically in regard to the judgement of taste. Most primary to having an authentic aesthetic experience and being able to make a judgement of beauty is the faculty of taste. Additionally, the aesthetic experience involves autonomous judgement and reflection set in motion through the imagination, then concretized through the understanding, as the two engage in free play. How can we as human beings find meaning in aesthetic experience? What can it provide for us beyond the mere feeling of pleasure and agreement?

Various authors have been critical of Kant's *Third Critique* as being too limiting and too ideological to remain relevant for the current century. Some authors have even noted hints of totalitarianism in its emphasis on universality. Bruno Bauch acknowledges the work as connecting nature and culture from a biological perspective, which some Nazi thinkers appropriated for purposes of exalting their own ideas of racial purity and "absolutist conceptions of community" (Schujter 25-28). Other 18th century writers also found new life under the National Socialists; the plays of Schiller, the writings of Goethe and the work of Hölderlin, became useful to the Nazi desire for "emotional mediation of individual and nation" (26). However, their overuse as part of the National Socialist propaganda machine turned aesthetic idea into aesthetic fetish.

Additionally, some critics take issue with the autonomy of aesthetic experience and its legacy as being too far removed from any kind of social engagement. Nevertheless, a much

broader desire existed among 18th century German writers after Kant. Schutjer notes, many strived for “wider, more inclusive ethical commitments, a more expansive vision of nature, and a much fuller, deeper notion of what it means to be human” (Schutjer 28). Thinking of collective transformation was a common theme, taking on an almost religious significance. Hölderlin in particular, believed that an aesthetic philosophy was the only way to take people out of the dark, to bring together “those who are enlightened and those who are not.” Envisioning a new society in which the aesthetic experience would be the gateway to spiritual renewal, Hölderlin asserted, “Until we make ideas aesthetic, that is mythological, they are of no interest to the *people*” (Hölderlin in Bernstein 186). Eternal unity between the rational and the sensual, the philosophical and the mythological would be achieved through the art of poetry, which would “outlive all other sciences and arts” (186-87). For Hölderlin and his colleagues, poetry was the means to “absolute freedom of all spirits, who carry the intelligible world in themselves” (186). It would become the new “teacher of humanity” eternally uniting all in equal measure under the “*sensuous* religion” of art (186).

Yet there is a third possibility for rethinking Kant’s aesthetic judgement. Because its primary components are “sensuality, sympathy and freedom of the imagination,” it possesses emancipatory power (Eagleton in Schutjer 31). Eagleton calls this the “soft filter” of aesthetic engagement, a notion with substantial implications for moving society into a place of solidarity while still taking into account the solitary nature of individual aesthetic experience (31-32). Thus, as the *Third Critique* acts as a bridge between Kant’s practical and theoretical philosophies, so aesthetic judgement mediates between part and whole (Schutjer 37).

The idea that Kant’s aesthetic judgement can act to connect the individual to the greater society without fetishizing it comes to us through more current readings of the *Third Critique*.

Author Karin Schutjer, whose text focused on the possibilities for community in the wake of Kant's writing, found purpose in the aesthetic experience beyond its intellectual foundation in the purity of aesthetic judgement (the judgement of taste). Schutjer describes a "circular narrative" at work in the judgement of taste in the fact of the observable object adapting itself to one's ability to receive it. The fact of our receiving the object means we accept and acknowledge its existence (a priori), thus eliminating "the otherness of the object" (Schutjer 46). "Aesthetic judgement 'abstracts the real in perception' to reproduce it as a form of knowledge achieved through the accord between the imagination and the understanding, structured, but lacking in material content. Although Kant does not explicitly mention this, Schutjer's examination revolves around the sensory presence of the object as capable of cultivating social relations. The sociability contained within the structure of the judgement necessitates the two orders, the "sensory particular" and the "formal structured" to converge so that we might extend ourselves outside of our own subjectivity. With a judgement of taste, this movement from the private, autonomous realm to more public social realm utilizes beauty as the conduit to human shared consciousness (41). This prospect of shared consciousness correlates directly to Kant's notion of *sensus communis*.

FAMILIARITY, BELONGING AND ASSENT IN KANT'S *SENSUS COMMUNIS*

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, several contemporary scholars have evaluated Kant's *sensus communis* and their varied interpretations suggest its complexity. Kant himself ties *sensus communis* to communicability and compatibility when he declares, "Sensation is the real in perception...its specific quality may be presented as completely communicable to others in a like mode, provided we assume everyone has a like mode as ourselves" (*CJ* §39 121). More specifically, Kant advocates that in *sensus communis*, a principle

of common human understanding (i.e., uncultivated as yet) is the least common denominator for attaining universal agreement (*CJ* §41 123). As the lowest form of understanding, he critiques, that which is common sense carries little quality or distinction as compared to the “sense” that arises through the faculty of cognition. Kant concedes, however, the merit of common sense (as *sensus communis*) in its association with “public sense.”

By the name *sensus communis* is to be understood the idea of *public* sense, i.e. a faculty of judging which in its reflective acts takes account (*a priori*) of the mode of representation of everyone else, in order, as it were, to weigh its judgement with the collective reason of mankind... This is accomplished by weighing the judgement, not so much with actual, as rather with merely possible, judgements of others, and by putting ourselves in the position of everyone else. (*CJ* §40 123)

In a judgement of taste, Kant emphasized, imparting one’s subjective delight in the beauty of an object on others communicates a universal feeling of pleasure (*CJ* §39 122). Beauty in this case, takes on the quality of factuality and the judgement behaves as if factual, thus requiring acquiescence of all who encounter it. In other words, a standard of judgement (of beauty) is set that ought to be agreed upon by all.

What becomes apparent in these passages is that certain conditions of judgement provide the opportunity to connect with others via an aesthetic experience. First there is the subjective factor presupposed in all humans, i.e., that each of us is capable of experiencing aesthetically. In turn, since we are all capable of judging aesthetically, the outcome is that we might share commonly our judgement about the world, which consequently, puts us within reach of each other. Our capacity to be within reach of others then provides an opportunity to build a cultural community. Thus, Kant gives us a glimpse of alterity operating within a judgement of taste.

In fact, Kant suggested that cultivation of the beautiful cannot stand on its own; a person hones his skills at judging beauty through his capacity to communicate it with others. Sociability, Kant insists, is a primary requirement of being human, “it belongs to humanity” and relates to taste in that it is our natural inclination to share that feeling with others. To move culture forward, then, we must communicate our experience with others. Kant’s example:

With no one to take into account but himself, an individual abandoned in the desert would not adorn himself or his hut ... with the object of providing himself with personal adornment. Only in society does it occur to him to be not merely a human being, but a human being refined in his own way (the beginning of civilization) — for that is how we judge of one who has the bent and turn for communicating his pleasure to others, and who is not quite satisfied with an object unless his feeling of delight in it can be shared in communion with others. (*CJ* §41 126)

To “share in communion with others” seems contradictory to the independent nature of aesthetic experience that Kant first emphasized. It suggests alterity, but also hints at a kind of mutual understanding at work in the judgement of taste (Schutjer 56). This reciprocity is rooted in Kant’s account of nature as other; nature is there as an object for us to observe, but also for our domination which, consequently, alienates us from it. In our estrangement from nature, however, we aim to understand it, and through that experience, we might rediscover our mutual relationship (56). Schutjer affirms, “Kant first declares our independence from others, before setting out to rediscover otherness on a friendly, sovereign exploration” (56) Aesthetic judgement and the agreement at its heart gives us a glimpse of this reconnection and the opportunity to recognize something within ourselves in the world outside of ourselves.

Becoming aware of ourselves in what stands outside of ourselves takes place in what

scholar Thierry De Duve calls the “middle ground” of humanity (De Duve 152). This is where feelings of belonging can formulate, as DeDuve explains here:

Common examples of that feeling range from the joy of being immersed in a festive crowd to the enthusiasm of being swept forth by a just revolution; from the elation prompted by a new life coming into the world to the compassion for perfect strangers that manifests itself spontaneously during natural or political disasters; from awareness of being all embarked on the same boat to the perhaps fleeting but strong bond that ensues; from ecstatic discovery of the art and culture of foreign countries to empathy and solidarity for people in distress living on the other side of the planet... Those feelings all coalesce into the sense of belonging to one group whose cohesion ultimately reside in the unity of the species. (152)

The sense of belonging De Duve references above he further clarifies as akin to the benevolence one feels for family. Moreover, as its own configuration as “*social* institution,” familial ties form the foundation for a broader reference because they are the most “*naturally* affective;” family ties give us a sense of the familiar, while acting as a bridge from the “natural, animal world” to the “cultural, political world of institutions” (152).

De Duve believes the notion of family ties as benevolent bridge to the greater humanity is what Kant had in mind when he conceived of *sensus communis* in *The Critique of Judgement*. In section 22 Kant refers to common sense as a presupposition for a judgement of taste, common sense being “a mere ideal form” (*CJ* §22 70). In a later section, however, he equivocates *sensus communis* directly with *taste*, as an “innate capacity” we all share, but one that is “socially determined” (Kant in De Duve 154). De Duve uses the example of the rose to explain further, “The feeling of beauty in front of *this* rose, or the feeling of art in front of *that* work, are as

socially determined as anything else and therefore, of course, never universally shared” (De Duve 154). What the author is referring to here is that the declaration of *sensus communis* exists only theoretically as a human capacity, i.e., we all carry the potentiality toward taste and aesthetic judgement, but our differing levels of experience, as well as the varying conditions of our existence, affect the outcome of our judgement. Nevertheless, De Duve insists, while my affective response in aesthetic judgment might differ from my neighbor’s, we can still share in a sense of belonging, “For *sensus communis* is not merely widespread (*gemein*), it is universal (*allegemein*)” (154).

De Duve’s explanation of Kant’s *sensus communis* also reveals its inherent complexity. He describes it further:

As a sensibility for the common to all and all that all have in common; as the faculty that makes affects and feeling communicable or sharable across cultural difference...as the capacity both inter- and intrasubjective, for it is both the aptitude for the common, common to all subjects, and the putting in common of the individual subject’s aptitudes; thus as consent and consensus, peace with oneself, with others and with the world; and as a talent, a natural gift for seeking and finding agreement among all. It is the sense of the universal family and the universal sense of family, a *sens de la famille* extended to all and shared by all. (154)

Even in all its convolution, however, De Duve questions whether human beings carry a natural inclination towards *sensus communis*. Rather, he suggests we need an ethical imperative to move us toward consensus, “even if it is artificial” (De Duve 155).

As the author sees it, we might be naturally predisposed to *sensus communis*, but we need that ethical imperative to put it into practice. *Sensus communis*, then, becomes the bridge

between the natural and the ethical, and humans, with their naturally endowed capacity, carry the ability to embark on that bridge and should do so. De Duve furthers this call, “The idea that we ought to work at acquiring an artificial *sens de la famille*, the idea that culture and civilization ought to provide us with it when nature has failed to do so, makes it mandatory to suppose that nature nonetheless predisposed us for this acquisition (155). Aesthetic apprehension is one such way to cross the bridge and move toward *sensus communis*. As De Duve proclaims, “True and free aesthetic judgement” occurs within the realm of filiation, where “everyone’s taste is as equally entitled to prevail as one’s own which is why one’s own is entitled to speak for all” (158).

De Duve’s contemporary assessment of Kant’s aesthetic proposal suggests a progressive tone running through Kant’s notion of communal sense and the alterity it insinuates. Then again, at the point where connection occurs, autonomous aesthetic engagement moves from the purity of free play between the imagination and understanding to one in which moral conscience takes over. Once we subordinate our individual disinterested interest in the object of beauty to that of collective agreement, the limits of our capacity for pure aesthetic judgement come into focus. To weigh a judgement with the collective reasoning of mankind (agreement) avoids the prejudicial conditions of subjective and personal engagement. Additionally, leaving out sensation in favor of formal particulars serves a universal rule and thus becomes, according to Kant, “a duty and expectation” (*CJ* §40 124). He clarifies, “I say that taste can with more justice be called *sensus communis*, than can sound understanding; and that the aesthetic rather than the intellectual, judgement can bear the name of public sense” (*CJ* §40 125). Under Kant’s *sensus communis*, the judgement of taste then becomes one of adaptation, rationalization and intellectualization. As

Kant laid it out, it also becomes a moral expectation that requires cultivation and human refinement.

Kant's reinterpretation of *sensus communis* in section 40 of the *Third Critique* from his earlier notation, might suggest his own uncertainty at finding for it a singular, concrete application. There is one area where Kant does seem certain of the usefulness of *sensus communis*, however, in his notion of universal assent. At the opening of section 22, Kant decrees, "The necessity of the universal assent that is thought in a judgement of taste, is a subjective necessity which, under the presupposition of a common sense, is represented as objective" (*CJ* §22 70). Scholar John Hicks notes the concept of universal assent as Kant's modification of earlier manifestations of *sensus communis*; aesthetic philosophy prior to Kant emphasized *sensus communis* as an assertion of "universal standards of taste" that could be learned, cultivated and "broadened as shared ideals" (Hicks 107). Hicks points out, however, that an objective representation of *sensus communis* "does not allow for aesthetic judgements to be both valid and subject to dissent, debate or discussion" (108). Hicks finds Kant's critical system flawed in that in its "logical presupposition" it does not account for "any community of empirical individuals as they consider a specific judgement of taste" (108).

Hicks uses the paintings of former U.S. President George W. Bush to explain this shortcoming. Bush is not a trained painter but took it up as a hobby in his retirement. In 2012, New York magazine featured an article on Bush's paintings and featured a work he created of his dog Barney. In 2013 Bush's Facebook page featured his series of portraits, eventually made public through a hacker. The varied commentary from both art critics and the general public showcased the limits of universal agreement. Hicks explains that art critics rely on their expertise on artistic merit to make disinterested judgements, but one critic couldn't make that quick

judgement. Instead, former *New York* magazine art critic, Jerry Saltz, took his time with the Bush paintings before concluding that he “really” liked them and cautioned others not to be too hasty in dismissing them. Referring to negative commentary from the blog, Gawker, who labeled works “awkward and simple,” Saltz exclaimed, “Gawker is wrong — way wrong” (Hicks 108).

What the anecdote above exposes is twofold; first, Kantian disinterestedness still reigns in a judgement of taste, but the unexpected positive assessment from the art critic and his colleagues, suggests some complexity in claiming universal assent. Secondly, the critics’ surprise at their own positive, yet varied reactions to Bush’s paintings suggest that “their own subjective responses” would be “difficult to subsume” under any kind of “preexisting concepts of ‘George. W. Bush’” they had prior viewing of the paintings (De Duve 109). Further complicating the matter is that even with their positive critiques, according to Hicks, “there is a tentativeness about whether the paintings are *good* or *beautiful*” and the hesitation to claim either, leaves open the possibility of dissent (109). Using real-world aesthetic examples, then, makes clear the vulnerability of building an aesthetic theory of judgement based on the assertion of universal agreement (109). An alternative, Hicks asserts, would be a theory that does not diminish one’s aesthetic experience to “the privately agreeable, morally good, or objective knowledge about the world” (109). A more adaptable connotation would not discount the usefulness of *sensus communis*, on the contrary, it might confirm its limitless potentiality.

AESTHETIC SPACES/MORAL IMPERATIVES

Kant in fact, referred to beauty as a symbol of morality that acts to uplift and lend greater character to the receiver (*CJ* §59 180). Taste becomes the means to “bringing our higher faculties into common accord,” and in this harmony, the judging subject connects both inwardly and out toward the world. In this way, the merely sensible progresses toward the realm of the

“supersensible” (*CJ* §59 181). In turn, acknowledging the supersensible realm as the result of bringing one’s higher faculties into alignment transforms sensuous intuition, with its lacks a concept, into concrete form by either symbol or schema (*CJ* §59 181). Finally, the intervention of one’s private, autonomous reflection, converts the judgement to one of public moral positioning rather than taste.

Under what conditions does this passage to the supersensible occur? Kant places it within nature as the highest form of aesthetic experience. Beautiful forms in nature, Kant claims, provide immediate factuality, rather than charm. Furthermore, “*immediate interest* in the beauty of *nature*...,” Kant insists, “...is always a mark of a good soul; ...indicative of a temper of mind favourable to the moral feeling that it should readily associate itself with the *contemplation of nature*” (*CJ* §42 128). It is through the admiring of a beautiful flower or other such natural object that one connects not only to the beauty of its form, but to its existence in general (*CJ* §42 128). Natural beauty, he adds, takes precedence because it does not involve vanity; it doesn’t charm or entice one like the beauty of fine art might, but rather, communicates with one’s spirit, which Kant defines as “the animating principle of the mind” (*CJ* §49 142):

If a person with taste enough to judge of works of fine art with the greatest correctness and refinement readily quits the room in which he meets with those beauties that minister to vanity...and betakes himself to the beautiful in nature...he may find there as it were a feast for his spirit in a train of thought which he can never evolve, we will then regard this his choice with veneration, and give him credit for a beautiful soul. (*CJ* §42 129)

To Kant’s thinking, a beautiful soul is one who is best in a position to make moral judgements because he has already taken a deep interest in the objective laws that structure the “morally good” (*CJ* §42 130).

Nature, as the space where morality and beauty intersect, and where spirit and soul unite, receives heightened status for its pure presentation of *aesthetic ideas*. We interpret nature, Kant observes, through our visual and aural senses, then associate what we observe in nature with something outside of nature. Imagination works to evoke certain representations (from the observation), yet we cannot fully explain them. Their semblance lies just beyond our reach, somewhere outside of our experience (*CJ* §49 142-43). Kant sums it up thusly, “The aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination, allied with a given concept, with which, in the free employment of imagination, such a multiplicity of partial representations are bound up, that no expression indicating a definite concept can be found for it” (*CJ* §49 143). Beauty is one way of expressing the aesthetic idea.

Beauty acts as an expression of aesthetic ideas in both nature and art, but in different ways. Colors in nature, for example are symbolic of particular qualities; white equates with innocence, violet with tenderness, and so on. The sound of a bird chirping possesses a quality sometimes associated with joy (*CJ* §42 131). The work of fine art, on the other hand, is only a handmaiden of natural beauty. It foils us in its imitation, at once appearing as nature, yet not adequately imbued with “spirit” (*CJ* §49 142). It does not “animate the mind” effectively, the way nature can. Instead, for each kind of fine art the aesthetic idea becomes both archetypal and foundational.

As previously established, Kant positions the judgement of taste hierarchically. As a requisite for fine art, taste is the faculty that unites imagination, understanding and spirit (*CJ* §50 148). Furthermore, beauty, as the articulation of aesthetic ideas, remains so in fine art, but with one caveat: Beauty must be represented “through the concept of the object” (*CJ* §50 149). Kant divides fine art into two forms, the plastic arts and painting. The plastic arts of sculpture and

architecture, because they require both sight and touch, exemplify the sensuous truth of the idea; painting, because it requires sight “in artful combination with ideas” embodies sensuous semblance (*CJ* §50 151). Since human senses dominate aesthetic experience in fine art, it seems that a judgement of beauty in fine art should then align with that of nature. However, to reiterate, fine art in any form, engages the senses as mere copy of nature, which Kant established as the highest form of beauty, which in turn, is the highest form of aesthetic idea. This upward orientation in Kant’s discussion of aesthetic engagement seems problematic.

Firstly, Kant’s definition of the aesthetic idea as constituting a multiplicity of possible outcomes suggests the inexhaustibility of aesthetic experience. Second, the space in which this aesthetic experience occurs is itself an invented space. Thirdly, this invented space is where one can be in a solitude of his own making yet must eventually direct himself outward toward that vast expanse of possibilities. The boundlessness of the experience, while having the positive aspect of an unobstructed view, becomes a lofty pursuit, fully abstracted from the object at hand. In turn, its use value gets disregarded, thus disregarding the human connection. Kant provides several examples of this routine, including a poem in which a solitary king at the end of his life looks back on it without regret, having left the world a better place by his good deeds. Using a beautiful sunrise as metaphor for his experience, the king states: “Thus does the sun, his daily path completed, still shed a gentle light across the sky. The last rays it sends forth through the air, are its last sighs for the well-being of the world” (*CJ* §49 144). In both its space and orientation, the aesthetic idea that is the king’s memory of a beautiful day, with its myriad of sensations and representations, is one of solitary dominion (Schujter 57).

THE LIMITS OF KANT’S AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT

The previous sections of this chapter laid out some of Kant’s major ideas for aesthetic

judgement. The first section explained aesthetic judgement in relation to theoretical and practical judgement, and the faculties of willing and knowing with which each is associated, respectively. As well, the first section expounded upon aesthetic judgement as distinctive from theoretical and practical judgements, in that it is a reflective judgement, as opposed to a determinate one. Furthermore, the first part of this chapter established aesthetic (reflective) judgement as there to bridge the duality of theoretical and practical judgements. Finally, this section analyzed Kant's notion of a judgement of taste and the steps involved in making that judgement.

The second part of this chapter dealt specifically with the implications of aesthetic judgement in terms of its ideological components, ideas regarding freedom, as well as its bearing on human connections. It also focused attention on Kant's systematic formulation of how one comes to judge aesthetically as that experience relates to the progression and refinement of human culture. At the heart of aesthetic judgement lies Kant's notion of *sensus communis* as the common ground between the experience of beauty and human morality.

The third portion of Chapter 1 closely examined aesthetic spaces as Kant determined them. Beyond the characteristics of taste and its link to the sensual world, Kant claimed it as the linkage between our higher faculties. As taste brings them into accord with one another, the aesthetic experience converts from its status as free delight in natural beauty to that of a supersensible encounter in the realm of pure aesthetic ideas. The beauty of nature is beauty in its highest form, above that of fine art, whose recognition is tied to the physical presence of the object itself. As such the supersensible encounter transpires through immediate interest, radiating moral feeling and elevating the soul. It is an event that occurs in isolation, with no objective end. For the encroachment of others on the solitary figure's aesthetic enjoyment, along with the threat of artifice, would overturn the purity of that experience. Kant makes note of this in his

description of the various art forms, all of which (including poetry) exemplify the artifice of the objective world and as such, can cause us to “suspend reflection,” enticing us with “sensory appeal” that threatens to pollute “pure aesthetic contemplation” (Schutjer 58-59). The aesthetic idea then, becomes a regulator of experience, rather than a place of possibility. It places limits on both what kind of space is appropriate for aesthetic contemplation (i.e. nature), as well as what can constitute that experience.

There are other ways that Kant’s notion of aesthetic experience is limiting. Clearly, he recognized that art produced by humans could be both seductive and persuasive. Throughout time, art has been created for public consumption, used as political propaganda and been appropriated for special purposes. In Kant’s own time, the role of art was evolving, as human thought evolved, to become an extension of the artist’s own disposition, rather than always being bound to a particular subject or representation. In the late 18th century, the notion that we can contemplate the beauty of art created by human hands in the same way we contemplate the beauty of nature might have been hard to conceive. Scholar Karin Schutjer identifies a pattern in Kant’s argument. She states, “Kant depicts the problematic character of human encounter as residing in artifice, excessive design, and conceptual overload. Meanwhile he ignores something at work in many of his images: a feeling of natural continuity and identification with other human bodies” (60). He uses this complication to give privilege to aesthetic reflection in nature, and furthermore, to intellectualize the encounter with the beautiful. Moreover, the only way to really connect to other humans is to be in agreement with them as to what constitutes beauty and gives pleasure.

In my estimation, this notion of agreement also signifies a limit to Kant’s aesthetic prospect. As he perceives it, we are either in agreement on the judgement of taste, or we are

overwhelmed by beauty to the point of being overtaken by its inexhaustible possibilities. I would argue that whether nature's indeterminacy or art's objective framing, the aesthetic experience can offer more than just these two opposing prospects. Namely, if the judgement of taste acts as bridge between theoretical and practical judgement, why then, can't it also serve as place of connection, where one neither seeks agreement nor gets overwhelmed by too many possibilities? Might there be approximations to agreement that strike a conversation, rather than a conclusion, such as the example of the critical discussion prompted by the viewing of George W. Bush's amateur paintings? A judgement of taste could then become the link to open and ongoing dialog that favors discussion above agreement, a space of repose where community begins to form in all its heterogeneity.

Furthermore, the hint at alterity in Kant's *sensus communis* appears limited in scope; it addresses nature (non-human) as the primary space where the aesthetic encounter transforms from autonomous isolation to free alterity. Contrary to art, nature, in its purposiveness without purpose never becomes grounded in objecthood. Instead it provides an endless supply of aesthetic pleasures. Using the example of the irregularity of nature in a forest, as compared to the orderly arrangement of a pepper garden, Kant declares that once a viewer understands the regularity of the plantings in the garden, his imagination becomes stifled, "whereas nature subject to no constraint of artificial rules, and lavish as it there is, in its luxuriant variety can supply constant food for his taste" (*CJ* §22 73). At the end of Section 22 he uses the example of a fire in the fireplace, alighting one's imagination in continual free play through its constant movement and shifting shapes (*CJ* §22 74). Art on the other hand, is restricted in its potentiality for similar "interpersonal recognition;" because of its "determinate intention," art always makes itself aware as art, thus posing constraints on the imagination (*CJ* §22 73).¹ However, Kant

claims artistic beauty in its purest sense, that is, as the appearance of nature, can become “a model for a free relationship to other human beings” (64). Still, whether experiencing nature or pure art that *appears* as nature, the freedom permeating one’s autonomous aesthetic encounter gets challenged when other human beings impede upon his sovereignty.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE *AESTHETIC OF REPOSE*

Although Kant’s aesthetic proposal carries limits, it is important to recognize it as foundational to any study of aesthetic experience, whether in nature or in art. In each of the limits just discussed exist the seeds for repositioning contemporary aesthetic experience. Kant seems to long for connection, yet he buries that desire in a systematic program full of laws and causality. Furthermore, he conceals the yearning for a more robust aesthetic experience under the guise of the supersensible, a realm in which beauty is so awe inspiring as to become overpowering. Additionally, although Kant gives precedence to the subject and his individual experience, he extends that outward through the subject’s need to either seek agreement or remain outside of a community. Kant was also seeking an authentic experience with beauty, although he emphasizes that it can only occur above the artifice of real life.

Finally, accentuating sensation and feeling as the primary agents of aesthetic judgement, Kant uses it to bridge the divide between more rational judgements (the theoretical and the practical). Clearly, Kant’s assessments provide some important foundational considerations as regards aesthetic experience in the 21st century. However, what I find missing in Kant’s prescription for aesthetic experience is *purposeful* engagement, as well as deeper human connection, both of which are features of the *aesthetic of repose*. Rather than interest, Kant preferred to behold disinterestedness, to think of an aesthetic object in the most basic sense of its appearing (Seel 139). Anything beyond its initial presence would require thinking (either

conceptually or practically). Yet he believed to experience aesthetically freed us to have the experience “without subjecting ourselves to internal limitations;” i.e., we are not restricted by the deeper engagement that thinking might require (Seel 140).

However, as Seel points out, it is not about the “what “or “why” of an aesthetic object, but rather, how we perceive of it. Therefore, it is important not to rule out interest completely. On the contrary, Seel notes, as regards the aesthetic object (in its appearing), it occurs as “that which interests us in how it encounters our senses” (139). Something resonates and, in this way, we are attentive to its presence. In turn, we can stay with that moment, or as Seel puts it, we can linger in the object’s “sensuous particularity” (131).

Lingering is something that thinker Robert Lehman views as an essential component to Kant’s aesthetic philosophy. The author asserts that there are tiny notes of pause within Kant’s discussion we might with the notions of desire and pleasure. Firstly, Lehman asserts that they both come forth in aesthetic experience, but, he believes, they are linked rather than opposing poles in that experience (Lehman 218). With respect to “aesthetic desire” and experiencing the beautiful as he finds it in Kant’s treatise, Lehman points it out as “its own prolongation” (218). In Kant’s words, “we *linger (weilen)* over the consideration of the beautiful because this consideration strengthens and reproduces itself” (Kant in Lehman 218).² Second, Lehman stresses, Kant associates the feeling of pleasure while experiencing the beautiful as life affirming (Lehman 219). Kant calls this pleasurable feeling *Lebensgefühl* (awareness of life).³

To validate his assertion that desire and aesthetic pleasure are two sides of the same coin, Lehman borrows from James Joyce’s 1916 novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man* in which the character Stephen Dedalus, an artist, poses the question, “Is the portrait of the Mona Lisa good if I desire to see it? If not, why not?” According to Lehman, Stephen is trying to work

out an aesthetic theory regarding the “production and reception of works of art” (Lehman 220). For Lehman, the question substantiates his claim to the existence of a mutual relationship between desire and aesthetic pleasure (Lehman 220). In discussing this claim with his own students, Lehman found they read Stephen as saying, “Is the portrait of the Mona Lisa good *only because* I desire to see it?” He concluded from this exchange that his students, “took the question to indicate that the presence of desire, far from jeopardizing aesthetic judgement, was in fact constitutive of it” (220). Another way Lehman read Stephen’s question is: “Is the portrait of the Mona Lisa *still* good if I desire to see it?” In this case the question regards whether or not “the presence of desire disqualifies one’s claim to be judging something beautiful” (220).

What Lehman discerns from the exchange in Joyce’s novel is, rather than emphasizing pleasure over desire or vice versa, experiencing beauty evokes something more reserved. In Joyce’s novel, Stephen tells Lynch,

Beauty expressed by the artist cannot awaken in us an emotion which is kinetic or a sensation which is purely physical. It awakens, or ought to awaken, or induces or ought to induce, an esthetic *stasis*, an ideal pity or an ideal terror, a *stasis* called forth, prolonged, and at last dissolved by what I call the rhythm of beauty.⁴ (Lehman 221)

As Lehman explains, *stasis* “characterizes the pleasure proper to beautiful works of art” (221). He goes on to describe the various ways in which philosophers define pleasure. Aristotle for example, claimed it as *energia* or activity (222). Kant on the other hand, according to Lehman, seems to favor something less dynamic, likening aesthetic pleasure more so as presence. Lehman describes it thusly, “Pleasure in the beautiful frees us from a relation to the object — desiring it, loathing it — ...It locates us instead in a state — whether we call it *stasis* or *energia* — that is complete in itself” (223).

Quoting from Kant, Lehman reminds us that aesthetic judgements reside outside of interest “of the object judged.” Kant confirms, “we must not be in the least biased in favor of the thing’s existence but must be wholly indifferent about it” (Kant in Lehman 225). As noted in the quote at the opening of this chapter, and stated slightly differently via Lehman’s translation, to *dwell* or to *linger*, much like the concept of *stasis*, frees one from any need to “possess, understand, or bring an object into existence” (Wenzel quoted in Lehman 225). Instead, one can spend time in this in-between space, acknowledging that desire and pleasure are both there as counterpoints to a self-awareness and ““feeling of life being furthered”” (Kant in Lehman 228). Lehman states it this way, “When we ‘*linger (weilen)*’ in our contemplation of the beautiful,’ that is, when we enjoy without cognizing or consuming, what we feel is our own, finite life, or own selves in a state of essentially finite openness to essentially finite things” (232). According to Lehman, Kant also refers to this state of lingering as “interior sense” (*inwendigen Sinn*), an intermediary state of being outside of time that is neither passive nor active, yet still “eventuates a return to the self” (233-234).

Here is where I might agree with Kant. Similar to *lingering*, the devoted awareness at the heart of the *aesthetic of repose* is not purposeless, but rather is driven by attentive, yet restful contemplation, or as Lehman interprets Kant, it is an awareness that arises by “doing something while doing nothing” (234). Furthermore, because it is a mode of aesthetic experience that is available to everyone, it can become an avenue for restoring culture or more importantly, a way to inhabit culture, both personally and within the shared space of community. In this way, the *aesthetic of repose* can be life altering, a conversion that extends beyond one’s personal transformation toward one’s greater surroundings. This will be made clear through a more extensive exploration of the *aesthetic of repose* in a later chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Friedrich Nietzsche's Aesthetic Conditions

"The modern subject, steeped in Wissenschaft as she is, is nevertheless most authentically a creative being who seeks to express and intuit her world aesthetically."

— Paul Raimond Daniels (167).

INTERPRETING FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

The opening quote of this chapter from scholar Paul Raimond Daniels encapsulates an overarching feature in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. Rather than approaching knowledge as causal and determinant, as Kant's systematic methodology asserted, many of Nietzsche's writings claimed an individualistic approach that placed greater emphasis on the human ability to interpret one's own life.¹ In *The Gay Science* (1882), Nietzsche points out, self-determination is achieved through self-discovery; by listening to one's own conscience, "You shall become who you are" (*GS* §270 152). Nietzsche elaborates in a later aphorism where he asks not to take one's conscience at face-value or as a guarantor of truth (Ridley 218). Rather, he wants us to think more deeply about what it offers, to notice the "conscience behind your 'conscience'" (*GS* §335 187). As Nietzsche elucidates, there are many ways to listen to one's conscience, including as judgements: "Your judgement 'that is right' has a pre-history in your drives, inclinations, aversions, experiences and what you have failed to experience; you have to ask, 'how did it emerge there?' and what is really impelling me to listen to it?" (*GS* §335 187). Further on in this passage, Nietzsche blatantly criticizes the blind acceptance under which Kant's categorical imperative operates. As a counter to tolerating the conditions of one's existence as they have been programmed into one's being either from childhood or through dutiful acquiescence or some other means outside of oneself, Nietzsche asks us in this passage to think

more deeply about our experiences. By breaking from absolutes, one can discover for oneself an ideal of one's very own; we can "*become who we are* — human beings who are new, unique, incomparable" (GS §335 189).

How can we "become the poets of our lives" as Nietzsche phrases it in an earlier statement (GS §299 170)? What means do we have to become the creators, interpreters and sustainers of that which makes us each unique? Admittedly, reading Nietzsche's philosophical writings can be difficult, requiring deep evaluation and constant reassessment. They are considered controversial by some, misunderstood by others. One area that I believe still deserves attention, however, regards Nietzsche's desire to cultivate the above, to get humans to be more engaged in their own life experience. Of particular interest is the philosopher's acknowledgement of the power of aesthetic experience to gain insight into human experience; that it allows us to "become who we are" while also taking the unbearable and making it bearable. My approach to Nietzsche in this chapter comes from a comprehensive evaluation of his writings in order to find the links they all share in emphasizing aesthetic experience as this foremost means to self-discovery. My assessment begins with his early work, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) but I will also reference several of Nietzsche's other writings, such as the aforementioned, *The Gay Science* (1882) and other later texts.

The reader might ask whether Nietzsche's ideas about art carry any relevance for 21st century aesthetic experience, such as my own offering, the *aesthetic of repose*, and this is a valid question. What I find significant, particularly as it relates to my own offering of the *aesthetic of repose*, is the way in which Nietzsche's aesthetic proposal places emphasis on the aesthetic experience itself (rather than specific art) as a way to nurture self-discovery and bring meaning to life. Controversy aside, it is my assessment that through his own writing process, Nietzsche

was, himself, engaged in aesthetic experience that subsequently guided his continual self-evaluation and discovery. I come to this consideration in the context of having researched several authors who have written extensively on Nietzsche, in their own effort to understand and explain the philosopher's placement of aesthetic experience as the primary means to cultivate life.

As these scholars acknowledge, Nietzsche first began to connect the experience of art to self-discovery with his early writing, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). For that reason, this chapter begins with a thorough appraisal of this text. Several authors contribute to my own evaluation of *The Birth of Tragedy*, including Alexander Nehamas, Paul Raimond Daniels, James Winchester and Julian Young. Scholars Robert Pippin and Aaron Ridley contribute to my broader evaluation of *The Birth of Tragedy* in relation to Nietzsche's later works. Each of these scholars lend authority to the assertion that for Nietzsche, aesthetic experience played a prominent role in the service of self-discovery. However, it is Nietzsche's own writings that will provide the primary testimony of this relationship; a close examination of its contents follows this brief introduction to the ideas the above authors present.

As previously mentioned, some scholars interpret that, taken together, the bulk of Nietzsche's writings encompass a journey through Nietzsche's own continuous aesthetic experience. Author Alexander Nehamas wrote extensively on this idea in his text, *Nietzsche, Life as Literature* (1985). In his commentary regarding Nehamas's text, scholar Robert Pippin noted the title of Nehamas's book for its literal connection of Nietzsche's life to his writings; that Nietzsche becomes his own literary character suggests a merging of form and content that exemplifies the philosopher as poet of his own life (Pippin 119).² As Pippin points out, Nietzsche's "lifelong self-narration" relates to how "Nietzsche understands *the self*." According to Pippin, Nehamas interprets this as Nietzsche exposing the self as related to "its own past

deeds, beliefs, aspirations, attitudes, aversions, dispositions, and values as a relation between an artist and her work” (Pippin 120). Under this model, the self, as a product of itself, appears to result from continual reading and re-reading, like a text, of oneself in relation to those things, in a sense, a constant self-repositioning (121).

According to Nehamas, a cycle of interpretation and reinterpretation is how Nietzsche believed we understand the world and make it livable. As he translates Nietzsche’s model, “to reinterpret events is to rearrange effects and therefore to generate new things. Our ‘text’ is being composed as we read it, and our readings are new parts of it that will give rise to further ones in the future”³ (Nehamas 91). The occurrence is never completed, but rather with every new interpretation, new relations develop and subsequently affect the whole of those that came previously (92). Nehamas’s standpoint has much to do with his reading of Nietzsche’s perspectivism. Pippin’s reading of Nehamas, nevertheless, considers his account paradoxical; he asks 1) “how could the self be both producer and product” and 2) can self-knowledge be “understood as self-constituting.” According to Pippin, both points regard Nehamas’s insistence that Nietzsche requires equality between the notions of self-creation and self-discovery; it is only through the former that the latter can occur. Interpretation then becomes the interstice between multiple potentialities for “self-identification and affirmation” (Pippin 122).

The notion of interpretation in Nietzsche’s oeuvre as Nehamas has laid it out provides a foundation for recognizing a connection between interpretation and aesthetic experience. Pippin’s critique of Nehamas’s writing on Nietzsche gives further credence to this idea, but also presents a contrary point of view in terms of the role of aesthetics in Nietzsche’s works. Therefore, in this chapter I will utilize their conversation as a way of further understanding Nietzsche’s perspective as regards aesthetic experience. Scholar Aaron Ridley’s chapter in

Pippin's *Introductions to Nietzsche* (2012) looks further into Nietzsche's desire for humans to "become who we are" through an examination of some of Nietzsche's later texts, *The Anti-Christ*, *Ecce Homo* and *Twilight of the Idols*. Ridley's evaluation makes the assertion that for Nietzsche self-discovery occurs freely, within life as opposed to outside of it, in the here and now rather than the hereafter and that suffering is as much a part of *becoming* as any other experience (Ridley 232). As Ridley points out in his reading of Nietzsche, by acknowledging fully the conditions of our existence, we can free ourselves of them. He further asserts that art for Nietzsche is the means by which we can come to these realizations. Ridley clarifies, "artistry is possible only for those who acknowledge necessity as a condition of, rather than as a limit upon, their freedom to act...but in artistry we perpetually discover ourselves, as our actions express those 'thousandfold' unformulable laws which are, Nietzsche suggests, most truly our own" (222-223).⁴ I will appraise the critiques these three authors offer more closely later in this chapter. I will start first with a closer examination of how Nietzsche first came to the ideas expressed above through his early work, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872).

In his study of Nietzsche's, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Daniels asserts that at its heart, *The Birth of Tragedy* embodies Nietzsche's own claim that art provides "a more authentic engagement with life than the intellectual formulation of philosophical questions" (Daniels 150). As an exploration of art's revelatory power, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Daniels offers, "positions aesthetics as the philosophical axiom on which existential questions can be expressed and answered" (170). Daniels' study locates this early work as the fulcrum upon which Nietzsche's later writings emanate. Indeed, *The Birth of Tragedy* is rich with musings on the need for art to affirm life. Early in the text Nietzsche states, "only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified*" (BT §5 33).

Although Daniels specifies *The Birth of Tragedy* as the central point upon which his other writings pivot, other scholars posit a view that Nietzsche's writings must be read together as whole, a life's journey in words or an artist's self-portrait. Alexander Nehamas, for example, wrote about Nietzsche as the embodiment of aesthetic experience. According to Nehamas, Nietzsche's many texts represent an everchanging literary artwork that reveals his always present perspectivism in a coherently ontological exploration (Nehamas *Introduction*). Author Alan Schrift, on the other hand, offered a reading of Nietzsche's oeuvre as revealing a tension between his perspectivism and structures of language that interfere with interpretation; Nietzsche's philosophical mission, while not systematic, provides resources for finding truth where truth no longer resonates (Schrift in Winchester 126). The question of interpretation resounds in both of these examples; Nehamas asserts that to understand Nietzsche is to acknowledge the relationship between his varied writing styles and his perspectivism. However, Schrift proclaims Nietzsche's method as providing a "practical rather than ontological solution" leaving interpretation open to revision as opposed to having dogmatic or relativistic meaning (127).

Scholar James Winchester finds limit in both Nehamas' and Schrift's evaluations of Nietzsche, judging Nehamas' solution as "too neat" and Schrift's as characterizing an unresolvable dilemma. He suggests a reading of Nietzsche that shows both a continuity in thought as well as an explicit resolution to the difficulty of interpretation that avoids any kind of standard answer to the question of truth. For Winchester, there exists in Nietzsche's work an emphasis on the personal, a view of the world he constructs through the lens of aestheticism, that bares in mind the moment and context of its creation (127). Winchester acknowledges patterns of thought in Nietzsche's writing, but his "keen sense for the exigency of the moment" allowed him to adjust and even at times give up his principles. Winchester states, "The art of Nietzsche's

philosophy is found not in the creation of one literary character, but in the shaping of creative interpretations suited to certain contexts” (Winchester 127). In sum, Nietzsche desired to use aesthetics in a quest for truth that he believed was no longer obtainable through traditional philosophical inquiry (131).

The varied points of view explained above carry some commonalities: 1) Each author establishes aesthetics as fundamental for Nietzsche in critiquing the human condition; 2) Each acknowledges that, like the Greek model he so frequently relied upon, Nietzsche had in mind to firstly “intuit the world” and 3) Each recognizes in Nietzsche’s writing an aesthetic force that carries transformative power. Nietzsche explained that aesthetic transformation as intended to overcome the “metaphysical illusion of science” (*BT* §15 73). As Nietzsche attests in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), transformation occurs when the world of appearances reaches its limit, negating itself in favor of “the one, true reality” (*BT* §22 105). For Nietzsche, it is the inner life of the individual that precipitates this new conception of truth, driven by willful impulse and ecstatic vision.

A critique of the relationship between truth and pretense seems to guide *The Birth of Tragedy*, the text that began Nietzsche’s exploration of the potency of aesthetic engagement. Therefore, this chapter will focus on *The Birth of Tragedy* as it advances a particular form of aesthetic experience and posits the existential view that art and aesthetic experience is a more viable avenue to truth seeking than metaphysical contemplation. Furthermore, a consideration of the main elements of *The Birth of Tragedy* will help lay out Nietzsche’s approach to aesthetic experience and clarify his position. As well, by concentrating specifically on this early text I will validate the prospect that Nietzsche himself envisioned an aestheticized life as the antidote to the everyday challenges of a culture in decline. In addition, this chapter will mine some of

Nietzsche's other writings in relation to his statements in *The Birth of Tragedy*, in order to illustrate the philosopher's own aesthetic engagement. By doing so, I will show that for Nietzsche desire and life are intertwined and their connection reflects upon our human nature to want more out of life, to keep living and to find redemption through our own self-interpretation. I'll conclude by acknowledging ways in which Nietzsche's aesthetic proposal while limited, still carries some validity for contemporary aesthetic experience and the modality central to my thesis, the *aesthetic of repose*.

THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY: DESIRE AND AFFIRMATION

Desire is a prominent theme in Friedrich Nietzsche's inquiry into human understanding in *The Birth of Tragedy*, from 1872. Through the example of Greek Tragedy, the philosopher explicated desire as a way to affirm life and formulate a path for remaining invested in the world. This prospect was meant to counter the apathetic standards developing in the latter part of the 19th century that Nietzsche viewed as a symptom of modernity. In this early text, Nietzsche provides a passionate genealogy and understanding of Greek Tragedy, what he refers to mid text as "the art of metaphysical solace" (*BT* §18 88). This statement is a fitting encapsulation of his view of this particular form of art. Throughout the first several musings, Nietzsche surveys the nature of Greek Tragedy, in order to employ it in later sections as a model for understanding modern culture during his time. At the heart of his treatise is the assertion that in order to have a vital life, humans must embrace the duality of their existence and utilize it as a means to rise above a culture in a state of decline.

The duality to which Nietzsche refers finds objectification in the oppositional roles of Apollo and Dionysos, whom he considered the two most divine artistic figures (*BT* Forward I 14). Utilizing Apollo, who represents reason and rationality, and Dionysos, the god of

intoxication, Nietzsche connects them to particular artistic forms. He acknowledges their positions early on:

There exists in the world of the Greeks an enormous opposition, both in origin and goals, between the Apolline art of the image-maker or sculptor and the imageless art of music, which is that of Dionysos. These two very different drives exist side by side, mostly in open conflict, stimulating and provoking one another to give birth to ever-new, more vigorous offspring in whom they perpetuate the conflict inherent between them, an opposition only apparently bridged by the common term 'art.' (*BT* Forward I 14)

The characterization of the Apolline and Dionysian also references the two sides of man; on the one hand is his "dream state," on the other, his passionate, primal self. Man's Apolline existence is characterized by the image in its plastic form, eternal, controlled, a *Götterbild* (*BT* Forward I 17). The Apolline image is one of ideal beauty, immediately perceptible as metaphor or symbol, pleasurable to look at, separated from the chaos of life and providing release within its semblance. The Dionysian, in contrast, does not copy appearances, rather, it is jubilant, mystical, a place in which the boundaries between appearance and reality seem to collapse. One is meant to shield man from suffering and provide comfort, standing as the "transfiguring genius of the *principium individuationis* (the Apolline), while the other acts to open a path to something more. Through the Dionysian, "the spell of the individuation is broken, and the path to the Mothers of Being, to the innermost core of things, is laid open" (*BT* §16 76).

Through this contrast of existences, Nietzsche reveals the repressive quality of the Apolline while simultaneously exposing its necessity as a conduit to healing. For Nietzsche, however, it is within the Dionysian state that this necessity becomes most apparent. Nietzsche wants to dispel the opposition between the Apolline and Dionysian and believes it is through the

aesthetic experience that this might be achieved. He asks the question, “What aesthetic effect is created when the inherently separate artistic powers of the Apolline and the Dionysiac become active alongside one another?” (*BT* §16 77). According to Nietzsche the Dionysiac needs the Apolline in order to fully reveal its essence. Through the example of Greek tragedy, he shows how they work together — the tragic chorus represents the “people” as the ideal spectators who are physically and empirically affected, rather than aesthetically (*BT* §7 38). This is a phenomenological experience that altars one’s existence for the moment, to see a vision outside of oneself “which is the Apolline vision of perfection of his state.” It is also a state of ecstasy where the “limits to existence are destroyed” and “all personal experiences from the past are submerged” (*BT* §7 40). Nietzsche further expounds, “This is the first effect of the Dionysiac tragedy: state and society, indeed all divisions between one human being and another, give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity which leads men back to the heart of nature” (*BT* §7 39). This is man in his primordial unity, an existence that is not limited to primarily to his individual experiences. As Nietzsche puts it, “The drama is the Apolline embodiment of Dionysiac insights and effects...” (*BT* §7 44). Experiencing the merging of the two can lead one to new insights and renewed life.

Nietzsche finds social function in the Dionysian ritual that can turn us back on to life. The Dionysian invests us in an ecstatic aesthetic experience, on the threshold of nature and culture. It touches something in us that is almost precultural, an innate primordial state of being that allows us to embrace our desires. On the contrary, the Apolline state surrounds us in rationality. It is a state of pure contemplation and clarity. Within the Greek Tragedy, the intelligibility of the Apolline state is dissolved in a dreamlike transformation. Nietzsche explains, “This is the Apolline dream-state in which the day-world becomes shrouded, and a new, clearer,

more comprehensible, more affecting world, but one which at the same time is more shadow-like, is born anew and presents itself, constantly changing our gaze” (*BT* §7 45). Thus, it seems that within this moment of repose, there occurs a simultaneous moment of release, one that demands confirmation of life. Nietzsche reiterates,

But if we once divert our gaze from the character of the hero as it rises to the surface and becomes visible — fundamentally, it is no more than an image of light (*Lichtbild*) projected onto a dark wall, i.e. appearance (*Erscheinung*) through and through — if, rather, we penetrate the myth which projects itself in these bright reflections, we suddenly experience a phenomenon which inverts a familiar optical one. When we turn away blinded...we have dark, colored patches before our eyes, as if their purpose were to heal them; conversely, those appearances...of the Apolline quality of the mask, are the necessary result of gazing into the inner, terrible depths of nature — radiant patches, as it were, to heal a gaze seared by gruesome night. (*BT* §9 46)

The profound sense of overcoming in the above statement gives credibility to the aesthetic experience as catalyst for conversion. In fact, Nietzsche attests to the capacity of aesthetic experience to build a new world upon the ruins of the old one; by sublimely moving through the experience, instead of being a passive observer of it, one might indeed raise himself up to his own wisdom and existence (*BT* §9 47-48).

What necessitated Nietzsche’s radical revising of the aesthetic experience? Why did he so desire that human beings embrace the freedom infused in the Dionysiac drive? During his time as a philosopher, Germany was not the unified country it is today. It was according to Julian Young, a “fragmented patchwork of petty principalities” in search of unity (Young 7). According to Young, rather than the claims that Nietzsche cared only about the individual, within his

philosophy are communitarian concerns that link him closely with many later German philosophers (7). Several of the German romantic philosophers, such as Hegel, Schiller and Schlegel believed that the only way for humans to flourish was through the unity of community they admired in the ancient Greek and Roman polis (7). What they wished to emulate was, according to Young, “that its unity was not the result of absolutist tyranny but was the expression of a shared agreement as to the proper way of life for the community as a whole” (8). Hegel referred to this as *Volksgeist* or “spirit of the people” whose shared ethos (*Sittlichkeit*) created the community (8).

The “commitment to a shared ethical substance” stemmed from the realization that the understanding of life through the eyes of God was no longer viable. Therefore, a new civic religion, communitarianism took hold, emphasizing certain rights and freedoms to all individuals. The composer Wagner, at once a social revolutionary, also believed in a “shared communal ethos,” but differed from Hegel in that he held art in as high esteem as religion. It was Wagner who first underscored Greek Tragedy as a sacred and powerful way of gathering together communally. Young notes of the Greek tragic festival: “Since this represented virtually the entire citizenry, the tragic festival was the original Gesamtkunstwerk, the original ‘collective artwork’...it ‘collected’ together the entire community” (12).

In fact, Nietzsche’s admiration of Greek Tragedy came from his esteem for Wagner, to whom he dedicated *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1872. Nietzsche pays homage to Wagner in his reiteration of Wagner’s own description of Greek Tragedy to emphasize it as “a religious occasion” that ennobled the people. As Young notes, “the point of tragedy is bringing communal ethos to visibility” through the “tragic hero,” a “mythic figure, a contracted image that ‘abbreviates’ the complexity of appearances” (Young 16). This combining of art and myth is

meant to bring meaning to modernity's "aimless meandering" (*BT* §23 108). Nietzsche writes, "The images of myth must be the unnoticed but ever-present daemonic guardians under whose tutelage young souls grow up and by whose signs grown man interprets his life and his struggles" (*BT* §23 108). Nietzsche continued his commitment to "the rebirth of community through the rebirth of the collective artwork" in later writings such as *Human, All Too Human* (1878). Nietzsche states, "[T]he branch of a people [*Volk*] that preserves itself best is that in which most people have, as a consequence of the sameness of their shared, habitual, undiscussable principles, that is to say, as a consequence of their shared faith, a living sense of community" (Nietzsche *HH* I 224 in Young 18). A statement such as this illustrates Nietzsche's continued praise of art as a means to communal ethos; the shared experience of tragedy provided a common path to freedom, as well as renewed faith in the human spirit. Art, thus, became a means to gain access to something not yet disclosed and to do so with a collective spirit in mind. It is important to note here that Nietzsche is referring specifically to the performing arts where the phenomenological occurs; upon experiencing all the elements of the performance, the body is awakened and the senses react, through physical movement and emotional response. The physical response is not so apparent in the plastic arts, where the viewer is at once physically distanced from the work, and in some cases, less emotionally engaged.

NIETZSCHE'S AESTHETIC CONDITIONS: THE AESTHETICIZED LIFE IN LUMINOUS ECSTASY

The first section of this chapter introduced the main ideas in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and his emphasis on ancient Greek Tragedy as the most compelling way to move humanity from one form of existence to another. The experience of Greek theatre, Nietzsche believed, at first unmasked the duality of one's existence, and secondly, through harmonious dialog between the Apolline and Dionysiac drives, released human desire and subsequently,

brought forth the certainty of life, for both the individual and the collective. As Daniels notes, “Through the experience of tragic art, the human subject was herself transfigured: transfixed by the chorus, she could identify with inevitable suffering of the tragic hero, and by her immersion in the beauty of the stage, she could simultaneously valorize that identity with her own *raison d’être*” (Daniels 148). To clarify, the individual spectator connected with the tragic chorus of singers and dancers, who embody the physical presence of the “ideal spectator.” Together, they become unified in their vision. Nietzsche explains, “The audience of the Attic tragedy identified itself with the chorus...so that there was fundamentally no opposition between public and chorus; the whole is just one sublime chorus, either of dancing and singing satyrs, or of those who allow themselves to be represented by these satyrs” (*BT* §8 42).

Nietzsche stated several criteria necessary for engaging in this type of profound aesthetic experience. One is the embracing of myth as a powerful tool for undermining truth. Second is the importance of inward subjective motivation that disappears once the subject identifies with the tragic chorus. A third component is an emphasis on individual values and the worth of intuiting the world on one’s own terms, with the ultimate goal of attaining a “new and higher *mechane* of existence” (*BT* Dionysiac World View §2 129). How does one achieve higher existence? In his own critical review of *The Birth of Tragedy*, from 1886, Nietzsche confirmed the rightful place of “purely aesthetic exegesis” as not only an antidote to the perils of life, but also as a justification of existence and the most authentic investment in the present. In defending his position, Nietzsche promotes this view as “the release and redemption (Erlösung) of God, *achieved* at each and every moment, as the eternally changing, eternally new vision of the most suffering being of all, the being most full of oppositions and contradictions, able to redeem and release itself only in semblance (Schein)” (*BT* An Attempt at Self Criticism §5 8). In summary,

the following are essential to the kind of overcoming Nietzsche championed: 1) Recognition of the terrors and absurdities of existence; 2) Submission, negation and resignation and finally, 3) Sanctification through suffering.

On the matter of recognition, Nietzsche spends some time reiterating the importance of the relationship between the Apolline and Dionysiac drive, emphasizing that, although dissonant, they need each other to bring forth semblance. This semblance consisted of the “measured beauty” of the Apolline ideal, a mediating figure, dream-like, calm and clear-minded, symbolic; in conversation with the Dionysiac nether world, a passionate realm of intoxication and suffering. One allows for immediate apprehension of beautiful forms; the other explores the boundaries between appearance and reality. One is meant to give clarity while the other is intended to startle us from our dream state into the dynamic expression of our humanness. When the orderly realm of the Apolline and the primordial Dionysiac state recognize each other harmony results, a harmony that makes audible the “ambit of Dionysos which had lain artificially hidden in the Apolline world” in turn unveiling a higher truth (*BT Dionysiac World View* §2 129). For Nietzsche, this is the Homeric Will, a deluding image of an ideal, in conversation with the Hellenic Will, a will of suffering necessary in order to bear life or as Nietzsche more clearly stated, “the Will outside and within all phenomenal forms,” a Will of both feeling and world (*BT Dionysiac World View* §2 125, §4 136).

To reiterate, recognizing the duality that is our Apolline and Dionysiac drives and bringing them together is the first condition of Nietzsche’s aesthetic overcoming, followed by submission to the intoxicating Hellenic Will. To submit to the otherworldly call of Dionysos, however, simultaneously requires negation of human existence. It is only through submission and negation that true healing can begin. How does the healing process progress? As Nietzsche

notes, “The ecstasy of the Dionysiac state, which destroys the usual barriers and limits of existence, contains, for as long as it lasts, a *lethargic* element in which all personal experiences from the past are submerged” (*BT Dionysiac World View* §3 130). After this separation in one’s state of being from reality, comes a reemergence into the consciousness of one’s everyday life. One awakens from intoxication only to discover “the terrible and absurd aspects of human existence wherever he looks; it disgusts him” and, once resigned to the fact of their presence, he begins “to transform those repulsive thoughts...into representations with which it is possible to live (*BT Dionysiac World View* §3 130). Nietzsche suggest these portrayals represent both

the sublime, whereby the terrible is tamed by artistic means, and the comical, whereby disgust at absurdity is discharged by artistic means. These two interwoven elements are unified in a work of art which imitates and plays with intoxication. (*BT Dionysiac World View* §3 130)

In a continued discussion, Nietzsche claims the interconnectedness of the sublime and the comical as exemplary of a “*middle world* between beauty and truth” (*BT Dionysiac World View* §3 130). He states:

The sublime and the comical are a step beyond the world of beautiful semblance, for a contradiction is felt in both concepts. On the other hand, they are in no sense identical with truth; they cast a veil over truth, which, although more transparent than beauty, nevertheless remains a veil. (*BT Dionysiac World View* §3 130)

The relationship of the sublime and the comical as Nietzsche explains above demonstrates that plausibility, rather than beauty is the main aim of the Dionysiac experience. The Dionysiac man, “as he is played,” Nietzsche expresses, “does not strive for beautiful semblance, but he does strive after semblance, not after truth, but after *probability*” (*BT Dionysiac World View* §3 130).

Portrayals that exhibit both the sublime and the comical then, form through the therapeutic effort of Apollo, the healing god, and are objectified in the tragi-comical work of art (*BT Dionysiac World View* §3 131).

Recognition, submission, resignation and negation, all occur, then, in the middle ground between the Apolline and Dionysiac Will. Nietzsche noted this as a space in which to achieve higher existence but also as a place where the inestimable chasm between the human and the divine becomes most apparent. Man's limits in the face of the sublime mystery of the world appear as a challenge for him to overcome. He must peel off the mask of "truth" so that he might find a clearer image of himself, negating that "dream-world" in favor of the reality of existence, in order to be cleansed of it. As Nietzsche proclaimed, one can achieve pleasure and happiness from misfortune, find self-expression through self-abandonment, create a joyful life through the nullifying of existence. Furthermore, he confirmed, "The struggle between both manifestations of the Will had an extraordinary goal, the creation of a *higher possibility of existence* and the attainment thereby of yet a *higher glorification* (through art) (*BT Dionysiac World View* §3 133). Man can submerge himself, then, in the wondrous phenomenon of the world, and resurface anew.

To emerge, sanctified, from that sublime space, is Nietzsche's final step to aesthetic redemption. With almost religious vehemence, he proclaimed:

Our eyes gaze in confusion after what has disappeared, for what they see is like something that has emerged from a pit into golden light, so full and green, so luxuriantly alive, so immeasurable and filled with longing. Tragedy sits in the midst of this superabundance of life, suffering, and delight, in sublime ecstasy, listening to a distant melancholy singing which tells of the Mothers of Being, whose names are delusion, will,

woe...The time of Socratic man is past. Put on wreaths of ivy, take up the thyrsus and do not be surprised if tigers and panthers lie down, purring and curling round your legs. Now you must dare to be tragic human beings, for you will be released and redeemed. (*BT* §20 98)

In this poetic passage, Nietzsche himself seemed to submit to the Dionysiac call, and upon completion of his incitement, to return to a place of contemplation where he could more clearly see the need to pull through tragedy and awaken on the other side, restored, renewed, and liberated. It is essential, he believed, to go through this process of sanctification and put back the balance between the Apolline and the Dionysiac, for both individual affirmation and the subsequent communal foundation it reinforces (*BT* §21 98). As Nietzsche believed, the Greeks recovered from their own setback by embracing the healing power of Greek tragedy, “to stimulate, purify and discharge the entire life of the people” in order to “achieve instead that magnificent blend, like a noble wine, that both fires the spirit and induces a mood of contemplation” (*BT* §21 99).

THE AESTHETICIZED LIFE AS AUTHENTIC LIVING

Achieving a happy balance between what frees the soul and calms the mind must have been an appealing prospect during Nietzsche’s time. Some scholars have noted his use of antiquity and Greek tragedy as both the means to that achievement and, simultaneously, a criticism of modernity. As James Porter notes, Nietzsche used the classical example to “confront his contemporaries’ sense of their own contemporaneity” (Porter in Stern 49). Modernity, Nietzsche felt, was in need of a revised grounding in antiquity, a period he believed still resonated in the present: Greek antiquity provided a library of resources for “the enlightenment of our entire culture and its development. It is a means *for understanding ourselves*” (Nietzsche,

We Philologists, 1875). Moreover, the classical model was necessary for coming to terms with the pace of modernity, a time when scientific progress and political upheaval were driving forces, and when art began to play a significant role in responding to those changes. Prior to Nietzsche's time, Enlightenment thinking sparked a debate between the merits of scientific progress and rationality and the still advantageous value of classical Humanism. Nietzsche, according to Porter, provided an alternative to this debate; a view of antiquity that called it into question in order to "alienate modernity from its own misguided understanding of the past" (Porter in Stern 50). To this point Nietzsche wished to expose the darker elements of humanity's "classical inheritance" to wake people up to their still evident influence (50).

As he diagnosed the ills of modernity through the lens of classical antiquity, Nietzsche utilized antiquity to expose the inauthenticity of the present; the nobility and grandeur of the classical past could not be recreated, rather, he felt those eternal images were no more than unattainable illusion. In the Greeks Nietzsche found both cruelty and beauty, barbarism and dignity, but in modernity these could not exist alongside each other. The ancient Greek example brought forth the hypocrisy of Nietzsche's modern present, a time when the Greek model was given a glorified yet imaginative makeover. Nietzsche's criticism of the Greek model as it was offered during this period, was that it provided "little more than a comforting screen-image and a solace that allows modern onlookers to deny their own concealed lack of humanity" (55). Here Porter is referring to Nietzsche's notion of the duality of man as both "human" and "inhuman" (55). Nietzsche himself asserted, "One imitates something that is purely chimerical, and chases after a wonderland that never existed" (Nietzsche as quoted in Stern 52). Uncovering the illusion of the classical past and reimagining it as a remedy for an elusive present is crucial in the search for a deeper, more authentic truth.

Truth, says Nietzsche, alludes human beings because the intellect “casts a blinding fog over the eyes and senses” deceiving “them about the value of existence” (*BT On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* §1 142). This character flaw in our humanness has a purpose, however, that is, to preserve our constitution in the face of others, both as rule and law (*BT On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* §1 142). It is a forgetfulness that sustains us, and, in our ignorance, we can possess a truth that is pleasant and “life-preserving” rather than knowledgeable (*BT On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* §1 143). Nietzsche refers to this activity as “dissimulation,” the futile process of play-acting through life so much so that we lose sight of a more “honest and pure drive towards truth” (*BT On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* §1 142). His complaint is that human perceptions never delve deeper than the surface of things; human beings are so caught up in dreamy illusion that they can never really know themselves. Furthermore, they lack the moral sense to go beyond mere “illusory consciousness” preferring instead to remain in a suspended state of ignorance (*BT On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* §1 143).

Truth, from this standpoint, becomes fixed in language, through a system of matching words to things that bares no consequence or argument, “truth in the form of tautology.” It is a system set up in relation to the human species’ capacity to grasp but it can never fully express the abundant possibilities of meaning. Nietzsche stresses, “When different languages are set alongside one another it becomes clear that, where words are concerned, what matters is never truth, never the full and adequate expression...the ‘thing-in-itself’ is impossible for even the creator of language to grasp, and indeed this is not at all desirable” (*BT On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* §1 144). What is necessary instead, is the instituting of a standard, that is, an abstract concept that disregards individuality. Nietzsche stresses:

What then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation, and decoration, and which, after they have been used for a long time, strike people as firmly established, canonical, and binding; truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors which have been worn by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigour, coins which, having lost their stamp, are now regarded as metal and no longer coins. (*BT On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* §1 146)

What is striking in the above statement is Nietzsche's emphasis on forgetfulness and loss; forgetfulness lies at the heart of our loss of "sensuous vigour;" Human beings forget, in order to build a firmer ground on which truth can stand. Forgetfulness acts as the unconscious catalyst for the sublimation of "sensuous metaphor into schema," or more clearly stated, for individual perceptions to become concepts. "Whereas metaphor standing in for a sensuous perception is individual and unique, and therefore always able to escape classification," Nietzsche attests, "the great edifice of concepts exhibits the rigid regularity of a Roman *columbarium*" (*BT On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* §1 147). As footnoted in his text, a columbarium is a funerary space for the placement of urns designed with niches that are set apart at regular intervals (*BT* 147). What Nietzsche wants to point out here is that even a concept that began as something inimitable stems from some more individualized reference point and as such, is capable of multiple interpretations. Concepts, he states, are "the left-over *residue of a metaphor*" and it is only through their standardization and classification that they become the reasonable facsimile of truth (*BT On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* §1 147).

The human ability to reason is also part and parcel of forgetfulness. Reason, Nietzsche tells us, allows us to gain knowledge in the most general sense, forgetting for example, that under the category of mammal there are many and varied specimens. Human beings prefer instead to weigh all other species against their own, as though humanity is the true original and nature, only subordinate copy. It is as if “the whole of the world,” Nietzsche clarifies, were linked only through humanity, “as the infinitely refracted echo of an original sound” and “as the multiple copy of a single, original image, that of humanity” (*BT On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* §1 148). By measuring all things against man, Nietzsche claims, human beings incorrectly believe in the purity of things in themselves; he asserts, “this sun, this window, this table is a truth in itself” is only truth because man has forgotten his own subjectivity. He must forget, however, in order to stay peacefully in the world: by forgetting that he is “*an artistically creative subject*” man can move through the world safely. To emphasize, the appearance of the world takes precedence over a more deeply engaged aesthetic inquiry; taking its place as reliable surrogate, a metaphor that has become “hard and rigid” (*BT On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* §1 149).

Nietzsche criticized the idealization of metaphor and the human need for consistency. He condemned the belief that to live in the world meant to live in conformity to some made up laws of nature that cannot, in actuality, be empirically proven. He perceived nature as fallible and inconsistent, but more importantly, as imaginative. As Nietzsche sees it, “If one of us were to see a stimulus as red, a second person were to see the same stimulus as blue, while a third were even to hear it as a sound, nobody would ever speak of nature as something conforming to laws; rather they would take it to be nothing other than subjective formation” (*BT On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* §1 149). To be human and be in the world, then, is to interpret the world based

on what one brings forth through experience. To find wonder in the world requires an inward turn rather than a reliance on universals. To live guided by concepts, is to live safely, but also inauthentically. It is the Apolline dream state, a grand, but deceptive myth on which human beings rely in order to endure life. To live aesthetically, on the other hand, is to awaken from the dream. It requires risk and disappointment, but it also provides the greatest yield in terms of happiness and possibility. Nietzsche proclaims, “The man of intuition, standing in the midst of a culture, reaps directly from his intuitions not just protection from harm, but also a constant stream of brightness, a lightening of the spirit, redemption and release” *BT On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* §1 153). It is, according to Nietzsche, the only way to live authentically.

THE THRESHOLD OF NIETZSCHE’S AESTHETIC ECSTASY

In a later edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* (1886), Nietzsche prefaced the main text with a critical review of his own ideas in which he explained his reason for writing it: “*to look at science through the prism of the artist, but also to look at art through the prism of life,*” he stated (*BT An Attempt at Self-Criticism* §2 5). Although written in the third person, Nietzsche admitted in the preface that he wrote *The Birth of Tragedy* during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71) and that fact informed his writing greatly. It is a book, he stated, that was both “profoundly personal” and “attested to the times in which it was written” (*BT An Attempt at Self-Criticism* §1 3). The Battle of Wörth had left him both “troubled and untroubled at one and the same time” and while recovering in Metz Nietzsche began to ponder what he called, “the cheerfulness of the Greeks” and their use of art (in the form of Greek Tragedy) as a coping tool. Nietzsche asked himself, could there be value in suffering? Can the hard truths about life simultaneously celebrate the significance of existence? Where does science fit in defining the truth of human existence? These questions he asked in reference to the decline of Greek culture through the death of tragedy and

the rise of Socratic ethics (*BT* An Attempt at Self-Criticism §1 4). However, each question Nietzsche asked about the ancient past was made significant through its relation to his present. As Nietzsche indicated, he constructed *The Birth of Tragedy* “entirely from precocious, wet-behind-the-ears, personal experiences, all of which lay at the very threshold of what could be communicated, located in the territory of *art*” (*BT* An Attempt at Self-Criticism §1 5). It was, he admitted, a book produced from “youthful courage and youthful melancholy,” yet created with an “artiste’s metaphysic.” It is also a book of veneration and overcoming; Nietzsche dedicated the text to composer Richard Wagner whom he greatly admired; he also relied upon Schopenhauer’s philosophical pessimism as it influenced his own philosophical thinking (*BT* Introduction vii).

Having gotten over his obsession with Wagner’s tragic compositions and the pessimism of Schopenhauer, the philosopher seemed to want to apologize for his naivete in the new preface, and to make the reader aware that he himself was on an aesthetic journey. The fact that he revisited the ancient Greeks in later writings, such as *Human All too Human* (1878) and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), might also suggest that he continued to rely on classical aesthetic practices as exemplary of how to deal with modern culture. Undoubtedly there are some interesting and beneficial components to Nietzsche’s aesthetic prospect: the notion of moving through tragedy via aesthetic experience towards transformation and conversion is very appealing. The way in which Nietzsche examined the notion of tragedy, the therapeutic effects of suffering and subsequent healing might today be considered a form of mindful self-care; rather than repressing trauma, there exist several methods for working through it, both on an individual basis and collectively. The last year of social and political upheaval, and the isolation brought on by a world-wide pandemic have caused human beings to realize their common predicaments,

while also making clear the inequities that continue to exist across race, class and economic well-being. Examples of collective healing through quiet, but deafening protest, such as the marches that occurred simultaneously across the United States and subsequent creation of street murals by groups of like-minded citizens, suggest a link to Nietzsche's immersing of souls through the tragic chorus. We might equate individual recuperation through contemporary restorative practices such as meditation and yoga to the Apolline dream-state in which deeper concentration brings forth release and affirmation. In both instances, there is an emphasis on authentic, subjective experience.

On the other hand, Nietzsche's conception of inauthenticity as self-preservation deserves consideration. As mentioned above, the traumas of 2020 laid bare the spectacle of 21st century life. Technological overstimulation and a reliance on screen culture have created a world outside of humanity, where "our best selves" become overexposed while at the same time, severely scrutinized. This inauthentic exploit is its own form of forgetting that at once cheapens experience, distracting us from our true needs and in turn exacerbating the trauma. This is the other side of the Apolline, that Nietzsche's explanation of Apolline dream-state, while offering solace and concentration, also succumbs to the Will (*BT* §4 24). When he refers to the Apolline in relation to the 'Will' Nietzsche calls it "naïve thinking" in which "powerful delusions and intensely pleasurable illusions" overtake tragic and terrifying reality, and thus, halting suffering (*BT* §4 24). Nietzsche declares, "Homeric 'naïveté' can be understood only as the complete victory of Apolline illusion," a deluded and deceptive image (*BT* §4 25). Yet Nietzsche himself expresses his awareness of the need for Apolline suffering and intoxication when he states:

There is no doubt that, of the two halves of our lives, the waking and the dreaming half, the former strikes us as being the more privileged, important, dignified, and worthy of

being lived, indeed the only half that truly is lived; nevertheless, although it may seem paradoxical, I wish to assert that the very opposite evaluation of dream holds true for the mysterious ground of our being of which we are an appearance (*Erscheinung*). The more I become aware of those all-powerful artistic drives in nature, and of the fervent longing in them for semblance, for their redemption and release in semblance, the more I feel myself driven to the metaphysical assumption that that which truly exists, the eternally suffering and contradictory, primordial unity, simultaneously needs, for its constant release and redemption, the ecstatic vision, intensely pleasurable semblance. (*BT* §4 26)

The world that alludes one, then, the world of reality, that is at once, a world of appearance and illusion, can only be accessed through this continual cycle of avoidance and confrontation, and experienced specifically, as Nietzsche denotes, through the “reciprocal intensification” of the Apolline and the Dionysiac (*BT* §4 28).

TOLERATING LIFE

Through fruitful exegesis into these leading features of Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, this chapter conveyed that above all, Nietzsche valued aesthetic experience via tragic art as a remedy for moving culture forward. Whether a book of youthful musings on the absurdity of life or a prescription for how to live fully, Nietzsche’s sense of longing for a more vital life and his desire to overcome society’s absurdities remain prominent throughout the text. What is more, the longing and desire that motivated Nietzsche to question what urges humanity onward still endures in our contemporary times. Furthermore, his emphasis on aesthetic experience as a vital force that bestows value on human existence can be very compelling in our present day where fragmentation and uncertainty seem to be the rule rather than the exception. Finally, the weight Nietzsche placed on authentic aesthetic engagement with the world to recover our humanity can

still find merit in our superficial, overly aestheticized times.

Despite Nietzsche's own desire to work through suffering via aesthetic experience, several points of contention stand out and deserve their own appraisal. The first one is Nietzsche's insistence on music, and tragic music at that, as the only form of art capable of "justifying the world as aesthetic phenomenon" (*BT* §24 114). Paired with that, Dionysian consciousness and a sublime state of ecstasy carry such prominence for any type of conversion as if to be granted religious reverence. Finally, the hierarchical voice with which Nietzsche presents aesthetic experience, although meant to uplift and affirm, simultaneously presents life as a state of being that we merely endure (Young 48).⁵ Scholar Julian Young refers to this as "the distortion of aesthetics by pessimism" which favors "the art of the transcendent" over that of the immanent (37). To clarify, art from this perspective can only serve to bring forth another kind of life outside or above reality (37). Nietzsche's programmatic plan for art then, although not intentional, risks becoming its own form of dogmatism.

To the first point, music as the only form of art might seem to be the most open to one's inner life and to bring about conversion but it has its limits. As previously noted, particular styles of music, specifically tragic compositions, can, according to Nietzsche, bring one to a sublime state of ecstasy that subsequently changes one's state of being. The positive aspect of Nietzsche's use of tragic art is its participatory nature; one must become a part of the tragic chorus, surrender to and move through it. I would argue, however, that ecstasy as a path to life affirmation and music as the only artistic medium to inspire and bring forth conversion is both discriminatory and limiting. Young also points out the propagandistic way in which Nietzsche discriminates against other forms of art. Why, he asks, should an opera such as Verdi's *Otello* be considered "a greater work of art" than Shakespeare's play, *Othello* (Young 35)? As Young sees

it, Nietzsche presented Wagner's operatic compositions as "the reborn, German Aeschylus;" the choral element of Wagner's works simulated the tragic Greek chorus. Thus, according to Young, Wagner represented "Attic tragedy as the complete form of art, the original *Gesamtkunstwerke*" (36).

Music as well, dominates as "the Dionysian art" thus solidifying its hierarchical prominence. Nietzsche asserts, "Only the spirit of music allows us to understand why we feel joy at the destruction of the individual. For the individual instances of such destruction merely illustrate the eternal phenomenon of Dionysiac art" (*BT* §16 80). Nietzsche thus relegated all other forms of art to "the long trough that separates Aeschylean and Wagnerian apexes of artistic greatness" (Young 36). Early on in the text he refers to poetry and sculpture as requiring a "certain musical mood" if they are to recover from being "lost in the pure contemplation of images" (*BT* §5 30). It is my assertion that there is value to being lost in pure contemplation. Rather than having to come to a "mystical state of self-abandonment and one-ness" that is so much the focus of Dionysian tragic music, I contend it is possible to have a similar aesthetic experience without the "primal pain and primal echo" (*BT* §5 30). Nietzsche himself declares the need for both the Apolline and Dionysiac. Despite the seductive hold of the Dionysiac on the Hellenic Will, the philosopher tells us, we must not forget the wisdom of Silenus: "let us imagine how little the psalm singing artists of Apollo and the ghostly sound of his harp could mean in comparison to the daemonic popular song! The Muses of the arts of semblance grew pale and wan when faced with an art which, in its intoxication spoke the truth; the wisdom of Silenus called out 'Woe, woe!' to the serene Olympians. The individual with all his limits and measure, became submerged here in the self-oblivion of the Dionysiac condition and forgot the statutes of Apollo...wherever the Dionysiac broke through, the Apolline was suspended and annulled" (*BT*

§4 27). Let us not forget, however, that eventually, having traversed through the Dionysiac deluge, the Apolline state is restored anew: “engulfed by the flood of the Dionysiac...the Apolline, confronted with this new power, rose up again” (*BT* §4 28).

In our contemporary times, many artistic examples exist, both visual and otherwise, in which we might apply similar properties, yet do so through quieter means. I will address this point more specifically in later chapters. More important here is further critical examination of the quasi-religious way in which Nietzsche addresses the role of art in bringing forth a deeper awareness of the relationship of self to world.

The sublime ecstasy that occurs through the experience of tragic art imparts subsequent reorientation and renewal of self; that is the crux of the Dionysian phenomenon. However, in my reading of *The Birth of Tragedy*, I find strong religious reference, specifically in Nietzsche use of the mystical as means to moving through tragedy. Other scholars have concluded similarly that even in his denouncement of God, Nietzsche articulates a kind of religious awakening in the programmatic way in which one is to experience tragic music. The deep tension and resonance of both Greco-Roman and Christian ideas and practices, as well as the use of the language of the divine seem to pervade much of his writing. For what purpose? Was Nietzsche’s concern for the “despiritualization of humanity” caused by the “death of God” what prompted him to subvert the language of religion (Roberts 8)?⁶ Does his use of religious myth and symbol in the form of Dionysian divinity itself become a kind of doctrine? Or might we view it as one way of looking at and dealing with the intolerabilities of world?

Young points out that in Nietzsche’s later writings, he condemns religion, and Christianity in particular, as originating through those who were hostile to life, which they found both damaging and demeaning (Young 48). In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche himself refers to

the German Reformation as formulated out of tragedy and Lutheran choral music as similarly profound to that of the Dionysiac (*BT* §23 109). He furthers that similarity throughout the text, using art as the vehicle to fill the hole left by the decline of Christianity (49). Scholar Roberts emphasizes a religious phenomenon at work in *The Birth of Tragedy* finding the ritualistic aspects of the ancient Greek mystery cults and the magical quality they project on art as like Nietzsche's aesthetic prospect (Roberts 106).⁷ Roberts stresses that even in Nietzsche's apology (via *An Attempt at Self-Criticism*) although he rejects certain facets of his original ideas in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche never loses sight of "the ecstatic dance and the dithyramb" (110).

Nietzsche continued to assert the importance of the dance and dithyrambic chorus in his later writing *Human all too Human* (1878). In a passage titled, "The Wanderer," Nietzsche accentuates this point:

Thus it may be that the wanderer shall fare; but then as recompense, there will come the joyful mornings of other days and climes, when he shall see, even before the light has broken, the Muses come dancing by him in the mist of the mountains, when afterwards, if he relaxes quietly beneath the trees in the equanimity of his soul at morning, good and bright things will be thrown down to him from their tops and leafy hiding-places, the gifts of all those free spirits who are at home in mountain, wood and solitude and who, like him, are, in their now joyful, now thoughtful way, wanderers and philosophers. Born out of the mysteries of dawn, they ponder on how, between the tenth and the twelfth stroke of the clock, the day could present a face so pure, so light-filled, so cheerful and transfigured. (*HH* §638 203)

A passage such as this clearly indicates that years after he began his search with *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche was still seeking, via the mystical, a particular kind of aesthetic experience.

How does the use of the mystical play out in modern times? The word itself derives from the Greek “mys” meaning *I close my eyes*. Related to the ancient Greek mystery cults, the term “mystikos” “referred to one who kept silent about the secrets of the initiations into the cult” and alluded to an “encounter with the divine” that did not lead to transformation, rather, it referred to something hidden (Roberts 112). This was also true, as Roberts notes, in the Early Christian era; mystical theology referred to a particular way of reading below the surface meaning of a biblical text to find its “spiritual” undertones. Again, it is a reference to something hidden, a reading that did not bring about an “experience of God,” but rather, imparted “an intellectual realization of revelation” (112).

With respect to contemporary encounter with the mystical, Roberts defines it as dynamic and complex, and furthermore, bound to individual, phenomenological experience. As well, mystical experience can provide truth beyond tradition and “beyond the interpretations provided by those traditions” (113). Roberts further clarifies contemporary mystical experience as a reorientation that occurs “when the boundaries of self and other, self and world, are disrupted or transformed in the context of being opened to the divine, or to ‘reality’” (116). It is, he declares, not a dramatic experience, but a “transformation of consciousness” based in a “deliberately cultivated life of study, discipline and spiritual practice” (116). In this way, modern mystical experience differs from the ecstatic experience that Nietzsche endorses.

Nietzsche’s ecstatic mysticism rather than the calm and disciplined description Roberts defines, involves awakening one’s passions and desires. It comprises, Roberts emphasizes, “a way of speaking, writing, living this desire” which translates to ‘affirmation’ and the ‘eternal joy of becoming’” (Roberts 127). Furthermore, it is a discourse that goes outside the limits of philosophical intentionality to reach the beyond of reality, in order to return with a deeper

awareness of “one’s life in the earthly and finite” (137). To that end it has beneficial properties for the advancing of humanity. However, as mentioned previously, the doctrine that Nietzsche prescribes involves first and foremost Dionysian intoxication, which in and of itself relates negatively to life: In order to endure life, one must first self-medicate; one essentially denies reality in order to live with it.

Nietzsche closes *The Birth of Tragedy* with further confirmation of the need for the Dionysiac myth. Without it, he states, “all cultures lose their healthy, creative, natural energy; only a horizon surrounded by myths encloses and unifies a cultural movement” (*BT* §23 108). The “images of myth,” he continues, must stand in the background, as “unnoticed but omnipresent, daemonic guardians” guiding man to an understanding of his place in the world (*BT* §23 108). Conferring further the supremacy of myth, Nietzsche relays, “even the state knows of no more powerful unwritten laws than the mythical fundament which guarantees its connection with religion and its emergence from mythical representations” (*BT* §23 108). In the end he asks that man put himself in the place of the ancient Hellene, to understand his life as one reflective of the nobility of this earlier culture, to walk beside others in solemn Apolline harmony and the rhythmic gesture of Dionysos. It is through this journey that suffering becomes beauty (*BT* §25 116).

TO COME THROUGH AND TO BECOME

Of great significance is the aesthetic journey of the author himself as he works out his ideas. As noted in my opening statements aesthetic experience as Nietzsche discussed it throughout *The Birth of Tragedy* continually arose throughout his philosophical career. Several Nietzsche scholars recognized this trend as Nietzsche living aesthetically through the examples he set forth in the *The Birth of Tragedy*; to clarify, it is through his aesthetic process, that

Nietzsche came through his own self-discovery. I emphasize ‘*coming through*’ as opposed to ‘*coming to*’ as it relates to Nietzsche’s own maxim on *becoming what one is*. According to Nehamas, Nietzsche did not view becoming as the final act of being human, rather, as he quotes the philosopher, “Becoming must not be explained without recourse to final intentions...Becoming does not aim at a final state, does not flow into ‘being’” (Nietzsche *The Will to Power* in Nehamas 170). According to Nehamas, Nietzsche’s view of becoming has to do with his belief that reality and appearance are impossible to differentiate. As Nehamas observes of Nietzsche’s claim, “the distinction is simply a projection onto the external world of our belief that the self is a substance, somehow set over and above its thoughts, desires and actions” (Nehamas 170). By Nietzsche’s account, *being* insights the finality of “this is” as opposed to becoming which purports the potentiality of “this can become” (174).

Although Nehamas found difficulty with Nietzsche’s phrasing “become what one is” he notes how often the philosopher refers to it both in his later writings such as *Ecce Homo* (1888) and, as noted previously at the beginning of this chapter, as early as *The Gay Science* (1882). In fact, notes Nehamas, Nietzsche wrote a similar statement in an even earlier work, *Untimely Meditations* (1874), where he stated, “Those who do not wish to belong to the mass need only to cease taking themselves easily; let them follow their conscience which calls to them: ‘Be your self [*sie du selbst*]! All that you are now doing, thinking, desiring is not you yourself” (Nietzsche *Untimely Meditations* in Nehamas 171). The phrase is similarly mentioned in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85) in which the main character counsels himself to “Become who you are” (172). Nietzsche’s continual phrasing and rephrasing of the adage *to become who one is* suggests that a lived life is one that is never finished, on the contrary, it is an ever-progressing, ever-changing voyage.

Stated another way, if we take Nietzsche's philosophical journey as his personal aesthetic experience, it becomes clear that the experience itself resides within a constant cycle of adjustment that repositioned the philosopher evolved in his writing, but also as a human. Scholar Aaron Ridley explored this possibility in his introduction to a Nietzsche compendium that looked at his later writings. Ridley was struck by, "a distinctive strand in Nietzsche's later philosophy having to do with freedom and self-realization"⁸ (Ridley 217). Like Nehamas, Ridley notes the thread of "becoming 'what you are'" as primary to Nietzsche's thinking throughout his writings (217). To reiterate from the opening statements of this chapter, in Ridley's reading of Nietzsche lies the claim that by acknowledging the conditions of our existence, along with artistically interpreting them, we can free ourselves from their clutches and discover for ourselves what most truly makes us unique.

As Ridley notes, for Nietzsche one condition with which all humans must reconcile is the fact that one is "essentially just an animal, rather than a creature with supernatural capacities." Furthermore, humans must acknowledge "that the world in which one has one's being, in which one must act and try to make sense of oneself, is a world without God." Failing to concede either of these two points means a failure to understand oneself (219). On the other hand, Ridley argues, humans, unlike animals, possess a "second nature" produced "by culture" that develops over time, with practice. Nietzsche himself wrote about 'second nature' in *The Gay Science* (1882). Ridley sums up the concept thusly

An animal without a 'second nature' could no more mistake itself for a transmitter of the 'voice of conscience', or for an inhabitant of a divinely ordered world, than it could enter into a contract, form a friendship or go to war. Our 'second nature' is what makes us 'interesting', as Nietzsche later has it, and the 'experiences' that are rooted there are pre-

eminently among those to be subjected to the ‘intellectual conscience.’ In order to ‘become who we are’ then, we must be honest with ourselves not merely as pieces of nature, as animals in an undesigned world, but as pieces of ‘second nature’, as animals whose character and circumstances are significantly constituted by culture. (Ridley 220)

According to Ridley, Nietzsche’s passage in *The Gay Science* references ‘second nature’ as way to claim oneself through self-evaluation and housecleaning, honestly surveying one’s strengths and weaknesses, and being able to distinguish what is valuable from that which is unnecessary (220). In doing so, one might become more fully conscious; to “‘give style’ to one’s character” is a “great and rare art” (GS §290 163). Nietzsche declares

It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses that their nature has to offer and then fit them into an artistic plan until each appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a great mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of first nature removed — both time through long practice and daily work at it. Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed; there it is reinterpreted into sublimity. Much that is vague and resisted shaping has been saved and employed for distant views — it is supposed to beckon towards the remote and immense. (GS §290 164)

As the passage continues Nietzsche goes on to suggest that if one is willing, one will be free to *become who one is* under his own bounding and perfecting laws. “Such minds,” he proclaims, are always out to shape or interpret their environment as free nature — wild, arbitrary, fantastic, disorderly, and surprising” (GS §290 164). Only in this way might he find “satisfaction with himself — be it through...poetry or art” and become “tolerable to behold!” (GS §290 164).

I'd like to suggest here that both Ridley's appraisal and Nietzsche's own words insinuate 'becoming who you are' as a creative process much like artistic creation. There is a freedom within practiced and continual self-evaluation and reinterpretation. It arises much like a work of art develops from a series of sketches or iterations; in his process of creating, the artist is free to use or discard as he pleases, working and reworking his materials as he brings his creation to life.

Scholar Allan Megill agrees; in his essay on Nietzsche's aestheticism, he also argues that interpretation is a path to freedom and affirmation. In a comparison to Kant, Megill stressed that unlike Kant, Nietzsche eschewed a "structured way of knowing" to emphasize uncertainty as more beneficial to mankind. Evaluating an essay from 1873, Megill points out Nietzsche's disdain for cognition as 'wretched, transitory, purposeless and fanciful'(OTF) and his further characterization of intellect as "a dissimulating power, one that claims to give us true knowledge of the world when in fact it does not" (Megill 208 and Nietzsche *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*). Notes Megill, "In Kant's view, we are pretty much constrained to constitute the world in certain ways, whereas Nietzsche portrays the process of imposition as a totally free and individual matter" (213). Megill further clarifies, where Kant wants to impose categories "upon the noumenal realm" to bring order to reality, Nietzsche views categories as "displacing" reality (or in Nietzschean terms *Verstellung*). The concept of *leaf* for example, omits the reality that there are many different actualities of leaves and that each leaf carries its own individual qualities (Megill 208). To sum it up, Megill states, "In short, concepts do not give us true, genuine knowledge of reality; on the contrary, they are bare schemata that rob reality of its multiplicity, and human experience of its original richness and vitality" (209).

Both Ridley and Megill point to a feature in Nietzsche's view of interpretation that is valuable to aesthetic experience, that is, the process of creation. Using the work of art as example

Megill elaborated on this point noting, the work of art becomes a work of art not by the reality it “appears” to represent but rather, by those elements that result from “artistic *Verstellung*.” He elaborates, “It is this *Verstellung* that introduces the impedances, the darkness, the gulf between saying and meaning, without which the work of art would be a mere statement of fact” (Megill 214). Art according to Megill, through its lack of fidelity to correctness, can become a sight of liberation, a space where interpretation both on the part of the artist and the observer encourages fresh perspectives. Like the variety of leaves one can discover on a walk in the woods, one might derive a multiplicity of meanings through the experience of art. “Art itself is not bound by the demands of mimetic or representational truth” states Megill, consequently aesthetic interpretation should not bind the observer to merely one perspective (215). Nietzsche approached it thusly, “Art furnishes us with the eye and hand and above all the good conscience to be able to make such a phenomenon of ourselves...we need all exuberant, floating, dancing, mocking, childish and blissful art lest we lose that *freedom over things* that our ideal demands of us (GS §107 104).

CONCLUSION: NIETZSCHE, HUMANITY, AUTHENTICITY AND THE AESTHETIC OF REPOSE

This chapter focused firstly on Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* as it laid out a program for how to have an authentic aesthetic experience. Important to Nietzsche’s proposal was looking back at ancient Greek sources to utilize them as a model for modern aesthetic experience. Nietzsche’s goal throughout the text was to guide man in overcoming the duality of his existence and to posit art as the most worthwhile path to surmounting the challenges of being human. Furthermore, my investigation into the main premise of *The Birth of Tragedy* in this chapter revealed several important points that still resonate in our contemporary times.

As noted earlier, Nietzsche wrote a later preface to *The Birth of Tragedy* that, rather than justify his thoughts, concluded them as the work of youthful despondency. Yet he revisited similar themes in later writings, some of which I've referenced in this chapter, suggesting that even as he apologized for the passion with which he explored Greek tragedy, he still believed it to be a model for surmounting contemporary existential questions. The reintroduction of Greek tragic themes through the compositions of Richard Wagner became Nietzsche's contemporary example. The act of overcoming modernity (thru Greek Tragedy) promised a new form of existence, "renewal and purification of the German spirit," and an awakening from the "growing sterility and exhaustion of present-day culture" (*BT* §20 97).

I find great merit in Nietzsche's exploration of how we construct and interpret life when all possibilities for finding a viable truth seem to have been exhausted. His aesthetic prospect also provides resources for creating one's own perspective. It is clear that for Nietzsche, the aesthetic experience is undeniably a personal one; he rejects any absolute standards in favor of taste as an intuitive appreciation of the moment (Winchester 125). What lies at the heart of Nietzsche's approach to aesthetic experience is notion of the self-interrogating self, which I believe is still valid and worth exploring further as relates to the concept of the *aesthetic of repose*. However, Nietzsche's concentration on tragic music as the highest artistic medium, as well as his emphasis on the ecstatic sublime as the most authentic means to transformation creates a hierarchical position for aesthetic experience. Furthermore, his use of Greco-Roman and Christian religious simile only serves to further mythologize aesthetic experience. A more non-dogmatic point of view, that considers an ever-changing human perspective, personal experience and quiet interpretation might be a more plausible approach for aesthetic experience in the 21st century. I will explore this idea in a later chapter of this text.

CHAPTER 3

Down to Earth: John Dewey and Art as Experience

“The moral function of art itself is to remove prejudice, do away with the scales that keep the eye from seeing, tear away the veils due to wont and custom, perfect the power to perceive.”

— John Dewey (*AE* 338).

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters of this dissertation focused on two thinkers whose aesthetic philosophies on the one hand measure aesthetic experience against other forms of human experience and on the other, consider aesthetic experience as a vital human force. At the same time, both Kant’s and Nietzsche’s aesthetic philosophies advanced a notion of conclusiveness to aesthetic experience; Kant, relying on the notion of agreement as imperative for aesthetic confirmation and Nietzsche, assuring life affirmation as the outcome of aesthetic experience. While Kant and Nietzsche approached aesthetic experience from quite different angles, they share a commonality of purpose, that is, to find merit in aesthetic experience as a resource for self-determination. American philosopher John Dewey similarly engaged aesthetic experience, but his pragmatic approach emphasized the value of aesthetic experience in everyday life; engaging aesthetically, he believed, could be beneficial to reclaiming a lost self, that is, a self in crisis from what Dewey saw as cultural, spiritual, and moral degradation in American society. Moreover, for Dewey, aesthetic engagement, like other forms of experience, is part of the human process of living whose finality is never determined, but rather, provides limitless opportunities for growth and change.

In her chapter on Dewey, democracy, and education, from her book, *The Gleam of Light* (2005), Author Naoko Saito refers to Dewey as a “philosopher of growth” whose faith in democracy never wavered. Saito clarifies,

His struggle to reorient American society toward a liberal-communitarian democracy — the reconstruction of a public space in which individual freedom is realized within community — can be understood as an expression of his hope for democracy. That democracy can always fall into a state of conformity means that it must never be allowed to settle down in some fixed telos; it is a state forever to be worked toward, never finally to be achieved. (Saito 3)

Dewey’s philosophy of growth relates to his philosophy of education. As Dewey saw it, the goal of education was to “foster continuous reorganization of a child’s experience,” that is, he viewed education as a constant readjustment of the self through continually evolving natural processes (5). Within these natural processes is a tendency toward compulsion found in children that lends itself to their claiming a sense of self; a child responds to the world at first on impulse, bringing forth a fresh view of the world that corresponds to the child’s “own true nature” and instinct (99). It is a response to the world inherent within the child’s ‘deeper and more primitive reaction of emotion’ that carries both a “spiritual and aesthetic” dimension (99).¹

Saito points to Dewey’s *Experience and Nature* and *Art as Experience* where he emphasized the notion of impulse as the primary conduit to engaging in an ongoing cycle of experience (105). Transferring his continuity theory to his aesthetic philosophy, Dewey believed that aesthetic experience, like educational experience, involves a process of continual reinterpretation of experience that subsequently, permits unending reorientation of the self. As Saito interprets this process, it is “a temporal event” that “consists of a rhythm between the

perceptual and reflective phases” (Saito 105). According to Saito, Dewey borrowed from William James the idea of a “‘double-barreled’ experience” in which “act and material,” “subject and object” perceptually merge as the “primary experience” that brings forth reflection. This movement from perception to reflection occurs in a continuous cycle of experience, where impulse plays a major role in moving through that experience (105). Dewey states,

Every experience, of slight or tremendous import, begins with an impulsion, rather *as* an impulsion.... ‘Impulsion’ designates a movement outward and forward of the whole organism to which special impulses are auxiliary. (Dewey in Saito 105)

This act upon impulse is the live creative interacting with the world, thus becoming “immediately connected with life” (Saito 106). Borrowing from Dewey, Saito asserts, “an organism experiences a thoroughgoing ‘participation’ or immediate inhabitation in the world in a state of ‘surrender in perception,’ and in complete ‘saturation with objects’ (106).² It is this impulse of the live creature, connecting with the world through experience, albeit with a kind of youthful exuberance, Saito notes, that Dewey regards as the impetus for “the reconstruction of culture” (100).

Dewey desired to place aesthetic experience at the precipice of democratic culture, not as it relates to the political, but rather to showcase what I believe is a co-dependent relationship between the aesthetic and the democratic. To clarify, as I interpret Dewey, to achieve democratic culture, we must recognize the value of aesthetic experience to education in the humanities. How we respond to any experience is something that should be valued and cultivated, but to experience aesthetically brings something qualitative to our humanistic tendencies. Dewey’s philosophy of art lays the groundwork for this copacetic relationship by being attuned to the deeper value of individual aesthetic experience to the greater humanity.

To validate this relationship, I focus this chapter firstly on explaining Dewey's position on democracy. Next, I evaluate the basic premise of Dewey's philosophy of art, first by considering Dewey's criticisms and solutions, then through a discussion of the essence of Dewey's philosophy of art as experience, his aesthetic pragmatism and continuity theory. Following that discussion this chapter examines Dewey's assertion that an integration of the senses takes precedence in aesthetic experience. Finally, the conversation will turn to Dewey's notion that art and aesthetic experience can provide moral cultivation and the betterment of our daily lives. A short conclusion will contemporize Dewey's philosophy as it provides some key ingredients for the cultivation of an *aesthetic of repose*.

OVERVIEW

In 1934, philosopher John Dewey published his seminal text on aesthetic experience, entitled *Art as Experience*. This compilation, based on a series of Dewey's lectures at Harvard University on the philosophy of art, exposed a new thesis for engagement with art that is by far its most elaborate application. Publicized during an era in which Modernism's emphasis on the purity of the work of art and its detachment from everyday life took precedence, Dewey's pragmatic argument for an experience with art that engaged the "live creature" through keen sense perception provided a radical break from the analytic philosophy being practiced since the time of Kant. Moreover, Dewey's emphasis on embodied aesthetic experience, along with his placing of art as the epicenter of moral cultivation, positioned art and aesthetic experience as natural extensions of human experience in general. His overall goal, to make life aesthetic, advanced a qualitative experience of art in which a continual reorientation of self to world occurs with each aesthetic encounter. According to Dewey, this continual self-reorientation occurs as recovery and passage, a migration from one state of being to another enriched by the experience

with all its “disparity and resistance,” to pass from a tense state to one of equilibrium in a constant rhythm of interaction (*AE* 13-14). Furthermore, aesthetic experience occurs within an unfinished world, where the “hushed reverberations” of the past and the promises of the future overlap and merge with the present. As Dewey puts it, “Art celebrates with peculiar intensity the moments in which the past reinforces the present and in which the future is a quickening of what now is” (*AE* 15).

How Dewey came to his position on art and aesthetic experience seems to be through a reflection on both modern art and the social and technological changes in bloom during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Born in Vermont shortly before the American Civil War began, Dewey lived through several major events including the American and Indian Wars, the First and Second World Wars and the subsequent upheaval in American society, which made him highly critical of the direction of American culture. As noted in Clements, Dewey responded disapprovingly to “racial, gender-based, and economic oppression; the expansion of laissez-faire economics; overly prescriptive or near non-existent education that was failing large portions of the population; political turmoil and ongoing wars” (Clements 1). His belief in a democratic ideal prompted his philosophy of education that supported the capacity of all students, regardless of background, to fulfill their potentiality. Moreover, understanding that each human being is shaped by his/her experience and interaction in the world became the basis of his advocating for experiential learning and the subsequent benefit it garnered to both the student and his/her social surroundings (3).

DEWEY ON DEMOCRACY

How does Dewey define democracy? In the opening statements of an early edition (1903) of the essay, *Democracy and Education*, the philosopher defines democracy as “freeing

intelligence for independent effectiveness — the emancipation of mind as an individual organ to do its own work” (*Democracy and Education* 193). This idea of freeing thought is, according to Dewey, a spiritual force necessitated by the limitless potentiality all humans possess (193). To have “freed capacity of thought” meant one could take what he had learned in school and apply it to life outside of the classroom. Later in the essay, Dewey expanded upon his definition to emphasize the moral self-determination that arises when an individual has a share “in determining the conditions and the aims of his own work” (197). He went even further to connect this individual freedom of choice to the subsequent influence it could have on society as a whole.

The consequential effort of an education system that encourages free thinking is that it breeds culture. Dewey defined culture as “something cultivated, something personal; it is cultivation with respect to appreciation of ideas and art and broad human interests” (*Philosophy of Education* 142). Culture is, furthermore, the development of what is unique to an individual, that encourages the “capacity for constantly expanding the range and accuracy of one’s own perception of meaning” (145). An individual’s ability to find personal meaning goes beyond himself to impact his social surroundings; in democratic culture it constitutes a moral imperative. As Dewey insists, for democracy to have meaning, it demands “a social return” from all of its citizens while also giving each one the “opportunity for development of distinctive capacities” (142). The freedom to cultivate and nurture one’s own perceptions, thus, correlates with the cumulative effect it has on others within that shared community.

Dewey believed a similar correspondence was possible in education. Regarding the education system of the early 20th century, he was critical of leaving decisions to autocrats who disregard the role of the teacher in planning a curriculum. The task of the teacher, he remarked,

was the “difficult and delicate” guiding of souls, that allowed them to engage in “free and full play...of their own vigor” (*Philosophy of Education* 198). The notion of a student having such dominion over his/her own learning was progressive and antithetical to the contemporary education system of the time, a system that, as Dewey critiqued it, was one of dictation and restriction. Rather than taking an active role in determining curriculum, teachers were instead thought of as passive recipients; their students, merely regurgitators of information (196). Dewey condemned this method:

The dictation, in theory at least, of the subject-matter taught, to the teacher who is to engage in the actual work of instruction, and frequently, under the name of close supervision, the attempt to determine the methods which are to be used in teaching, mean nothing more or less than the deliberate restriction of intelligence, the imprisoning of spirit. (1903)

Instead of being enriching, education becomes symbolic, artificial, and isolated from “the subject matter of life-experience” (Dewey *Democracy and Education* 1916). To clarify, this more passive way of teaching and learning means what one learns in the classroom is not carried over into daily life and it ignores “its social necessity and identity with all human association that effects conscious life” (Dewey). What Dewey advocated on the other hand, was a balance between the acquiring of information and “technical intellectual skills” with the formation of social disposition. Maintaining equilibrium between the intellectual and the social would allow experience to gain meaning and subsequently for that meaning not only to come to consciousness, but also to be absorbed within the fabric of one’s very being.

Dewey’s makes other notable arguments in the 1916 edition of *Democracy and Education*: We the living maintain ourselves through renewal. That renewal occurs beyond our

life span, in the lessons we impart on others who come into our path. Meaning grows within life's self-renewing process as the continuity of one's life spreads from individual to species in a continuous cycle of rebirth. This is the beauty of the "living organism," that even upon its death, it leaves remnants that others pick up on and forward to their own sense of being. Dewey finds this principle of continuity as pertinent to education — that information, skill, interest, and purpose carry on from the more experienced to those who've yet developed fully. He notes "Beings who are born not only aware of, but quite indifferent to, the aims and habits of the social group must be rendered cognizant of them and actively interested. Education, and education alone, spans that gap" (Dewey 1916). Transmission of ideas occurs through many means, including technical training, but also "by means of communication of habits of doing, thinking and feeling" from elder to novice (Dewey 1916). However, it must be communicated through painstaking care for the transmission of ideas to be ascertained and retained.

Regarding education, Dewey is critical of its formality, advocating instead for a more malleable notion of education that considers adaptations to the transmission and communication of information. "Society," Dewey attests, "exists in transmission, in communication. There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community and communication" (Dewey 1916). The way a society comes to be a community is by virtue of what its citizens share in common, "their aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge — a common understanding" (Dewey). This common understanding does not come to pass in the same way one physically builds a house brick by brick. Rather, it comes through communication that ensures emotional and intellectual response. It is relational, but not in a hierarchical way, where one expresses superiority over another. It is a one-to-one relationship where both giver and recipient benefit. As Dewey puts it, the recipient of any communication will "have an enlarged and changed

experience” that modifies his attitude. However, the giver of the communication is also affected, becoming changed by the communicating experience. Dewey explains:

The experience has to be formulated in order to be communicated. To formulate requires getting outside of it, seeing as another sees it, considering what points of contact it has with the life of another so that it may be got into such form that he can appreciate its meaning...One has to assimilate imaginatively something of another’s experience in order to tell him intelligently of one’s own experience. All communication is like art.
(1916)

The cultivation of social life, then, is a communications process in a continuous cycle of renewal. In many instances, it happens incidentally, rather than formally. It is not limited to the measures that institutions often impart so as to control or work toward a specific desired outcome. Real cultivation requires acknowledgement of human association, both the “intellectual and emotional,” the “personal and vital” (Dewey 1916). By acknowledging the individuality of that human experience and recognizing the communication between individual human experience and its continual effect outward, culture can advance.

As articulated through his educational philosophy, it becomes clear that Dewey saw the value of individual experience as most favorable to cultivating and sustaining democratic culture. Moreover, he believed one exceptional way this potentiality can come to fruition, and subsequently affect a person’s social relations, is through the experience of art. The correlation between art and democratic society finds its foundation in the ancient past. As Dewey recalls, art in all forms had been a significant part of collective life for centuries; in Ancient Greece for example, art was part of “the ethos of the community” and “reflected the emotions and ideas that are associated with the chief institutions of social life” (AE 6). Furthermore, the modernist notion

of separating the experience of art and, moreover, setting apart the art object from other modes of experience denies a certain aesthetic quality. Dewey saw the isolation of art and the taking away of aesthetic experience from the “normal processes of everyday living” as antithetical to it as an organic outgrowth of human life (*AE* 9-12). With experience as a starting point, intimate connections can occur between a human being and its surroundings that can induce reflection and enrichment (*AE* 13-14). Aesthetic experience, Dewey believed, provides vast possibilities for engagement in reflection and enrichment. Like the experiential education he extolled, with its emphasis on individual freedom of thought and its significant benefit beyond the individual, the experience of art could also provide a kind of engagement whose value moved beyond the perceiver to serve the greater humanity.

Furthermore, Dewey advocated for a communion of the senses to bring aesthetic experience to its full potentiality, rather than categorizing them in the way that science had. Dewey believed that the integration of sight and touch was essential for one to be fully present in aesthetic experience as both active observer and participant, rather than passive receiver. True aesthetic experience, he stated, “signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events” that affords continually developing perception (*AE* 18). This consequential conception of art and aesthetic experience would have been contrary to the museum concept of art at work that, even before the Modernist era, glorified the art object as sacred. The “spiritualization” of art and its elevated status, according to Dewey, only served to complete its distinction from everyday life. Many of the objects honored in the museum setting, he testified, were first and foremost useful objects of domestic and communal life (*AE* 5).

To summarize, Dewey's general criticisms regard first, the divorcing of art from its natural tendencies as part of our "normal processes of living" (AE 16). Second, he disparaged the objectification and purification of art that ennobled it beyond and above its instrumental value (Shusterman 9). Thirdly, Dewey disapproved of the isolation of different parts of an experience that he believes subsequently become divisions of the self and thus, also degrade the real value of experience (16). For Dewey, it is experience that shapes us and guides us to new understanding and aesthetic experience that can provide the greatest means to understanding. With that in mind, Dewey advocated a more holistic approach that privileges aesthetic experience as 1) a continuation of our natural tendencies, 2) a dynamic appeal to all the senses and 3) a practical means to long term moral cultivation. These three points provide the impetus for Dewey's reevaluation of art and aesthetic experience. Therefore, subsequent sections of this chapter will look more closely at each and Dewey's intentions therein.

DEWEY'S PHILOSOPHY OF ART AS EXPERIENCE

In this section I will explain some of the main tenets of John Dewey's philosophy of art as experience beginning with a general overview, proceeding through a closer assessment of Dewey's continuity theory, then finishing with a discussion specifically regarding Dewey's interpretation of sense-perception. For further clarification, besides Dewey's writings, the following sections also refer to two contemporary authors who have written extensively on Dewey. Supplemental to Dewey's seminal text are Richard Shusterman's writings on pragmatist aesthetics, and that of Scott R. Stroud, whose text, *John Dewey and the Artful Life*, provides insight into the moral component of Dewey's pragmatism. Both authors provide introductions to Dewey that explain his basic tenets, as well as detailed analysis of his approach to aesthetic experience. For my purposes these authors engage the Deweyan conversation for contemporary

application as a theory of aesthetic experience. Therefore, although I primarily rely on Dewey's voice throughout this chapter, both Shusterman's and Stroud's points of view help to substantiate my own inquiry.

How does Dewey define experience? In much of his text, the philosopher examines what experience does rather than clearly defining what it is. Early on, however, he explains experience as a common biological process that occurs through disruption, a disturbance that precedes a loss of equilibrium, but eventually brings forth both restoration and balance. Dewey explains it this way,

Life consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers in unison with it — either through effort or by some happy chance. And, in a growing life, the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it successfully passed...Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of energies of the organism with those conditions under which it lives. (*AE* 13)

Important to note here is the emphasis Dewey places on the growth, that is, disruption causes an experience out of which growth transpires and furthermore that it is life-enhancing. He clarifies, "If life continues, and if in continuing it expands, there is an overcoming of factors of opposition and conflict; there is a transformation of them into differentiated aspects of a higher powered and more significant life" (*AE* 13). Moreover, according to Dewey experience as a natural occurrence happens continually because it involves our "very process of living" (*AE* 36). Sometimes we are aware of it, but often our conditions of existence limit our capacity to articulate that experience (*AE* 37).

In exploring the notion of aesthetic experience, John Dewey identifies several areas that limit access to the full realm of sensation at its heart. In the opening pages of Art as Experience, he notes that our conditions of living play a part in that limit, explaining that our senses have been divorced from the conditions upon which they rest, separated from each other and remaining superficial. What are the conditions of living to which Dewey refers? The daily compartmentalizing of our lives, the separating of values and interests into categories, turns them into “mechanical” activities devoid of deeper meaning and insight. This kind of fragmentation and automaton way of being still exists today. Dewey’s prophetic declaration clarifies this separation, “We undergo sensations as mechanical stimuli or as irritated stimulations, without having a sense of the reality that is in them and behind them: in much of our experience our different senses do not unite to tell a common and enlarged story. We see without feeling; we hear, but only second hand...we use the senses to arouse passion but not to fulfill the interest of insight” (*AE* 21).

Through a historical journey, Dewey traces the origins of this separation of sense from daily life. In the very distant past aesthetic objects used as part of primitive rituals were embedded with magical qualities that enhanced the ritual experience (*AE* 30). According to Dewey, an emphasis on the supernatural which had been a mainstay of many religious practices neglected to consider our intellect. Similar in manner to the resultant ecstatic feeling Nietzsche claimed for Greek Tragedy, religious ceremonies, Dewey argued,

laid hold of the imagination because they have been attended with solemn processions, incense, embroidered robes, music, the radiance of color lights, with stories that stir wonder and induce hypnotic admiration. That is, they have come to man through direct appeal to sense and sensuous imagination...the most authoritative beliefs have been

clothed in the garb of pomp and pageantry that gives immediate delight to the eye and ear and that evokes massive emotions of suspense, wonder and awe. (*AE* 31)

Christianity in the Middle Ages, Dewey reiterated, utilized the various arts to heighten religious experience. Visual imagery, architecture, music, and other artistic mediums became, as Dewey called them, “the handmaids of religion.” Their purpose was to appeal to the senses, delighting the eyes and ears, evoking emotion and wonder from the spectator but ultimately, their use was meant to persuade one to believe in something above and beyond the earthly realm (*AE* 32). The experience itself then becomes one in which the ideal is more suitable than the real. Dewey attested, “The elevation of the ideal above and beyond immediate sense has operated not only to make it pallid and bloodless, but it has acted, like a conspirator with the sensual mind, to impoverish and degrade all things of direct experience” (*AE* 32). In this way the senses, rather than remaining open, seem to act as apparatus, moving the spectator toward the conclusion of greater spiritual certainty.

Dewey criticized being guided toward conclusion as opposed to remaining open. According to the author works of literature like the writings of Keats and Shakespeare, whose works he valued, were representative of the kind of aesthetic experience he espoused. Both Keats and Shakespeare, he noted, carried a philosophy that accepted “life and experience in all its uncertainty, mystery, doubt and half-knowledge and turns that experience upon itself to deepen and intensify its own qualities — to imagination and art” (*AE* 35). This statement encapsulates Dewey’s own philosophy regarding the aesthetic experience which he often referred to as a total experience, both opened and closed, a relationship between doing and undergoing that is constant. He acknowledged causes in place that limit our access to this relationship, a lack of reflection, an excess of receptivity and resistance that interfere with the whole of one’s

perception. Thinking, Dewey noted, is central to apprehending the relationship between doing and undergoing.

Similar to Kant, Dewey also advocated for imagination, spontaneity, freedom, and play as important components of aesthetic experience. Art, Dewey states, is the outcome of imagination, not a means of mechanical output (*AE* 285). Dewey clarified, “In art, the *playful* attitude becomes interest in the transformation of material to serve the purpose of a developing experience” (*AE* 291). Art then, exhibits a performative quality that acts to drive the aesthetic experience. Imagination comes into play as the meaning bearer of experience: “Imaginative experience exemplifies more fully than any other kind of experience what experience itself is in its very movement and structure” (*AE* 293). Spontaneity works in consort with our conditions of existence as catalysts in art’s creation. The experience of art, whether by the artist or spectator, Dewey believed, must consider these traits in relation to one another in order to fulfill the aesthetic experience, but also as that experience becomes a manifestation of the self in movement in the world.

Experience itself, and how our experiences shape our view of the world is in fact, the crux of Dewey’s philosophy. Experience can free us to access our capacities fully and readily, to bring us to new understanding; we can reflect on past experiences and create new ones. This is true in both art making and art viewing — as a creation that comes from our humanness, art undoubtedly connects to the conditions of life. It is the objectifying of art, as well as its placement in “the museum as the proper home for works of art” that disconnects it from the realm of daily life (*AE* 17). Upholding art to a higher ideal further separates it from the common. Dewey commented:

Why is the attempt to connect the higher and ideal things of experience with the basic vital roots so often regarded as betrayal of their nature and denial of their value? Why is there repulsion when the high achievements of fine art are brought into connection with common life? ...A complete answer to that question would involve the writing of a history of morals that would set forth the conditions that have brought contempt for the body, fear of the senses, and the opposition of flesh to spirit. (*AE* 20)

Art then, and the experience of art, as Dewey lays it out in this text, takes on a greater role than to be just an object of delight and pleasure. To experience art means to bring forward all previous experience in a kind of happening, a continual act of reciprocity between doing and undergoing, between “acting and being acted upon” that has transformative potential (*AE* 78-79). Transformation takes place in two stages: On the one hand there is the artist, or writer or musician, who orders his “feelings and ideas” as he places a mark on the canvas or a word on the page. The medium itself undergoes its objective development; the inner thoughts of the artist become concrete outer manifestation. The inner and outer are progressively organized “in organic connection with each other” until after a “long period of gestation” something emerges (*AE* 79). A transformation occurs, then, through the expressive, “esthetic” act.

On the other hand, is the recipient of the art, or “live creature” as Dewey calls him. The expressive act noted above is the object in communication. Dewey calls it “a report and celebration of what we undergo and what our activity of attentive perception brings into what we receive by means of the senses” (*AE* 107). The expressive object communicates, Dewey asserts, as a consequence of the artist’s work, not necessarily within the limits of his creative expression but rather, “when it operates in the experience of others” (*AE* 109). Moreover, it can open us up to our own “perceptive consciousness” by removing the veils of prejudice and tearing away that

which keeps us from seeing (*AE* 338). What Dewey acknowledges here is the correspondence between the artist, the object of his expression and the perceiver.

AESTHETIC PRAGMATISM AT WORK: VALUE AND CONTINUITY

The previous section gave a general overview of Dewey's model for aesthetic experience. To briefly reiterate, Dewey's intent for aesthetic experience is that it provides both immediate and long-term efficacy, makes use of our senses and clears the way for the primacy of perception. Certain components are recognizable for Dewey's aesthetic experience, including that there is qualitative value inherent in both immediate experience and subsequent engagement. Stroud notes the immediate as carrying intrinsic value and what comes later as constituting instrumental value. Dewey himself spends some time defining the values inherent in aesthetic experience in several sections of *Art as Experience*. Furthermore, an emphasis on the continual impact of experience is notable in Dewey's philosophy, what Shusterman refers to as Dewey's "continuity theory." This pragmatist approach forecasts aesthetic experience as having long term consequence; what is first an immediate response can alter later experience, thus providing ongoing "repositioning" of the subject to his experience. A more detailed evaluation of these two important aspects of Dewey's aesthetics, the value of experience and its continual influence, follows beginning with an evaluation of value in aesthetic experience.

Evaluating the value of aesthetic experience seems to require an overcoming of the limits set about by theorists who content themselves with a duality model that separates the content of an artwork from anything outside of itself. This model finds little interpretive value in the art object, preferring to accept it only for its appreciative notation as an aesthetic object. Looking mainly at an art object's aesthetic properties maintains the value of experiencing that object for its intrinsic qualities, not for any connection to something outside of itself (Stroud 25-26).

Intrinsic value, as theorized by Malcolm Budd, is a special value assigned to art that relates primarily to its internal and unique contents “all of which are understood and comprehended in an aesthetic experience of the work of art” (Budd in Stroud 26). Budd considers *intrinsic* value to be in opposition to *instrumental* value, which, for his purposes, is not aesthetic. Rather, he defines instrumental value as “the value from whatever point of view, of the actual effects of the experience of the work on people or the effects that would be produced if people were to experience the work” (Budd in Stroud 26).

Budd separates intrinsic value from instrumental value because he believes the latter to be “too varied and subject-dependent;” instrumental value cannot be established empirically, nor can it provide a predictable response (26). Budd’s account of aesthetic experience, then, follows a more analytic approach to experiencing art: he finds value in the immediate experience, but anything more is too unpredictable to be valued as aesthetic. Moreover, according to Budd, “instrumental value is in principle detachable from the work of art, and thus does not do justice to what is unique about *that* work of art” (27). By this notion, Budd asserts that instrumental value can be achieved in ways other than through the experience of art and so disregards the unique connection between the art and its audience. The value of the work of art, in Budd’s estimation, must lie exclusively within the work itself (27).

The example of Budd clearly imposes a separation of observation from understanding in aesthetic experience, a dualism that Dewey rejected in his aesthetic philosophy. As noted in Stroud, one of Dewey’s major points is that there are many ways to reflect upon aesthetic experience that provide continual influence on one’s lived experience; it can be a fluid and dynamic interaction. Furthermore, aesthetic experience goes beyond the art object itself; more attention needs to be paid to the experience itself, where much can be gained beyond the simple

pleasure of the object. What Stroud proposes, based on Dewey's model, is to think about the value of aesthetic experience as it connects "subjective orientations (attitudes), both immediate and reflective" (Stroud 30). Additionally, Stroud's *experiential account*, again based on his reading of Dewey, relates the value of aesthetic experience beyond its immediate and reflective qualities to associate it closely with moral improvement.

Throughout his text, Dewey enumerated the qualitative value of aesthetic experience and although he did not use those specific terms, he also noted two types of value in aesthetic experience. Primary experience, as Dewey called it, is "gross, macroscopic, crude subject matter" that which is prior to linguistic description and analysis (*AE* 15). Primary experience carries similar traits to Kant's intuition because it takes place before any deeper reflection. According to Dewey, humans are naturally oriented toward this kind of experience, succumbing to forces and impulses in the act of undergoing (*AE* 37). Reflective experience, on the other hand, requires the "conscious separation and creation of 'refined, derived objects' that connects them to events and outcomes of events" (*AE* 15). The idea is to find the causal relationship to other "states of affairs" — when impulses are hindered one might stop and examine further. In this way, reflective experience is like scientific inquiry, except that science equates causal relationships with determined outcomes, promoting a system of matching rather than looking more closely at the "inner nature of things" (*AE* 6). Dewey stated of science that it prefers to find some instrumental use for the properties and relations of things. Scientific reflection "cuts up elements of experience" in a purposeful manner to "increase our intelligent command" over something; by picking apart at experience, science connects those aspects to "conditions and consequences" (Dewey in Stroud 37). This analytic approach allows for human control over the outcome (Stroud 38). Art on the other hand, according to Dewey, carries "unique *quality*" to

elucidate and distill meanings that, although spread out and weak in some ways, live within the “material of other experiences” (*AE* 87). Put more succinctly, while “science states meanings,” Dewey conjectures, “art expresses them” (*AE* 87).

Dewey also asserted that the intrinsically qualitative aspect of reflective experience can be felt at once; it is immediate in that it can offer enjoyment and satisfaction without delay. It is also qualitative in its distinction from other experience. Furthermore, immediate experience can be “informed by past experiences” while also providing the material for later, deeper reflection (Stroud 40). In reference to aesthetic experience, connecting past experience to future reflection is an important one because as Dewey asserts the experience of art is not static. Rather, its effect is cumulative and carries forward that which has passed. Reasonably speaking, some prior experience must have occurred in order to reflect, i.e., there must be something upon which to reflect. This is a conscious state of connection to something prior, some other state of affairs, a cognitive engagement, but not necessarily constituting the whole of that engagement (Shusterman in Stroud 40). For Dewey, it is the whole of experience, not just reflection, that is important. Aesthetic experience carries both immediate and reflective value (or as Stroud notes it, “instrumental value”), both of which benefit the experiencing subject (Stroud 41).

Dewey clarifies the concept of the experiencing subject through the example of the critic. Criticism, Dewey argued, exemplifies qualitative judgement, rather than a measure of some fixed standards of engagement. When judging a work of art, Dewey believes the critic engages on a personal journey. His “process of evaluation” should be one not concerned with specific valuations or criteria, such as “good” or “bad.” On the contrary, whatever distinctions the critic makes should result from “an endeavor to find out what a work of art is as an experience: the kind of experience which it constitutes” (*AE* 322). Dewey adds that the critic’s conclusions

should not dictate a set of rules for engagement with the art. Instead, they constitute an awareness of the art as an experience that leads to enhanced consideration of the work of art each time it is set forth as a human experience (*AE* 322).

The idea of continuous engagement with the work of art as an experience is what Shusterman labels Dewey's *continuity thesis*, a central focus of which is "somatic naturalism" (Shusterman 6). This idea places aesthetic experience as rooted in our natural needs, a vital component of our normal processes of living (*AE* 16). Dewey explains that the world human beings occupy is most often in a state of flux, a world "of movement and culmination, of breaks and re-unions" (*AE* 16). This state of constant change provides the opportunity for the live creature (Dewey's reference to the human being) to have an aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience is not fulfilled in the sense of having an end, however, it is one of constant motion and renewal. Dewey explains, "In the process of living, attainment of a period of equilibrium is at the same time the initiation of a new relation to the environment, one that brings with it a potency of new adjustments to be made through struggle" (*AE* 16). This continual gesture of consuming and starting afresh exists as biologically embedded in the live creature. Notes Dewey, it is akin to the activities of an animal such as a dog who is constantly active, alertly surveilling its surroundings, tilting its ears, and sniffing. "The dog is never pedantic nor academic; for these things arise only when the past is severed in consciousness from the present and is set up as a model to copy or a storehouse upon which to draw" (*AE* 18). Instead, the past becomes a part of the present and gets carried forward into the future (*AE* 18).

To possess active and alert commerce with the world in a constant rhythmic and developing way is what Dewey labels a process of doing and undergoing. This process is one whose function is to make connections, rather than distinctions. It is also intended as a way to

bring together various aspects of human experience that had been separated by specialists. Furthermore, it is a method for overcoming bureaucratic division and homogenization, as well to negate the “split subject or the conditional aspects of the splitting of subject matter” (Shusterman 12). Moreover, Dewey’s thesis constitutes a move away from the philosophical ideology that sharply distinguished art from real life (12). To sum, Dewey’s continuity thesis was a method for overcoming all dichotomies. In his reading of Dewey, Shusterman emphasized:

Dewey’s aesthetics of continuity connects more than art and life; it insists on the fundamental continuity of a host of traditional binary notions whose long assumed oppositional contrast has structured so much of philosophical aesthetics: the fine versus the popular arts, the spatial versus temporal arts, the aesthetic in contrast both to the cognitive and to the practical, and artists versus the “ordinary people” who constitute their audience. (15)

Additionally, Dewey extends his quest to overcome rudimentary oppositions that separate the experience of art from other experiences: mind/body, material/ideal, thought/feeling and so on including the separation of subject and object, self, and world (16). Noted previously in this chapter, Dewey’s emphasis on continuity above division, stood in stark contrast to the distinguishing of art from other experiences so important in analytic philosophy. However, he did understand that aesthetic experience carried value different from other experiences. For example, Dewey’s argues that any dynamic experience must be an integration of the practical, emotional, and intellectual. He explains, “The emotional phase binds parts together into a single whole; ‘intellectual’ simply means the fact that the experience has meaning; ‘practical indicates that the organism is interacting with events and objects which surround it” (*AE* 57). One part does not precede the next, rather, they are linked together as parts of a whole experience that

results in unceasing conscious consummation. In terms of the “distinctively aesthetic experience,” Dewey claims that the end occurs as a result of the dynamic movement of each part, with each characteristic taking the dominant or subordinate position in a continuous cycle (*AE* 57). The complete experience he claims, is distinguishable as “esthetic” because it is “a conversion of resistance and tension, of excitations that in themselves are temptations to diversion, into a movement toward an inclusive and fulfilling close” (*AE* 58).

To be clear, the aesthetic experience never comes to full completion. As Dewey notes, “fulfilling, consummating, are continuous functions, not mere ends, located at one place only” (*AE* 58). On the contrary, they are stages in experience like that of a painter or writer who must compose his/her work through a succession of moments (or, as Dewey refers to them “a series of doings”). With each phase, the artist takes stock of his work thus far, to “sum up what has gone before as a whole and with reference to the whole to come” (*AE* 58). What follows are the “undergoings,” the unifying manifestations of the doings. Together doings and undergoings represent the whole of “*an* experience” that is rich, inclusive, and capable of providing continual, unlimited enrichment. For the artist, creation happens through a constant rhythm of observation and imagination that builds to a coherent perception, that is, at the same time, open to continuous development (*AE* 53). As Dewey confirms, “What is done and what is undergone are thus reciprocally, cumulatively, and continuously instrumental to each other” (*AE* 52). A thing becomes aesthetic because the relation between doing and undergoing helps achieve perception in its entirety (*AE* 52).

The value of aesthetic experience, then, seems to be in its lack of permanency. Dewey contends, “The conception that objects have fixed, and unalterable values is precisely the prejudice from which art emancipates us” (*AE* 100). “They are,” Dewey insists, “the only media

of complete and unhindered communication between man and man that can occur in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit community of experience” (AE 109). Shusterman concurs, “Deweyan aesthetics is interested...in achieving richer and more satisfying experience,” in which value, rather than truth takes precedence (Shusterman 18). As *an experience*, art can have real world consequences, cumulatively changing perceptions and enhancing understanding with each encounter.

AN APPEAL TO THE SENSES

Perception, of course, is more than just that of the artist, it also concerns the person having the aesthetic experience. Like the creator, the perceiver takes ownership of his experience, participating in his own activity of doing and undergoing. Both go through a process that includes interest, evaluation, and comprehension. Additionally, the creator and perceiver each pull together fragments that form significance *to* the whole of his/her experience. For the perceiver as for the artist, expressiveness comes through as an activity of “attentive perception” without which there is no connection of the perceived object to its aesthetic qualities. Dewey explains, “Without an act of recreation the object is not perceived as a work of art” (AE 56). Furthermore, attentive perception melds with reception through the senses; the full experience is a corroboration of the two in “a merging of sensuous material and relations” (AE 107).

Experience, to reiterate, is a product of attentive perception and reception crystalized through the senses. However, this does not always become evident to the perceiver. For as long as philosophy has considered aesthetics to be a crucial branch of philosophy, understanding the role of the senses has remained polemic. As I noted in the first two chapters, Kant, and Nietzsche, referred to sense and the senses differently; Kant approached the senses formulaically, while Nietzsche noted their reactive tendencies. This duality of the senses, as both objective

observers and emotional receivers, showcases that as often as something becomes clear to the perceiver, there are also instances in which experience merely alights the fact that clarity is sometimes elusive. Dewey believed that by categorizing and creating dualities within our sense perception, we risk separating practice from insight (*AE 21*). Additionally, our conditions of living, he asserts, rupture the connections between imagination and executive doing, significant purpose and work, and emotion and thought.

On the contrary, human nature, Dewey trusts, advocates for experience that encompasses all the above in overlapping ways that are “organically undergone” (*AE 21*). Dewey’s method is meant to overcome these divisions, therefore when he refers to “all of the senses” what he really means is to experience them as unified (*AE 21*). He rightly notes the confusion inherent in the word “sense:” it can refer to a variety of context, including “the sensory, sentimental, along with sensuous” (*AE 22*). Each reference carries validity in that they all relate to occurrences in the life of the “live creature” that gains ground via the sense organs. Thus, Dewey acknowledges that any experience is an embodied one; sense itself is related to the sense organs “coming to their full realization.”

Embodied experience refers to a person’s complete participation in his life and the world that surrounds him firstly through the senses that results in a quality experience of that world and all its splendor (*AE 22*). It involves collaboration between “material and action,” as well as an alliance between one’s physical motor skills and one’s “will.” In referring to embodied experience Dewey reiterates, “It cannot be opposed to intellect, for mind is the means by which participation is rendered fruitful through sense; by which meanings and values are extracted, retained, and put to further service in the intercourse of the live creature with his surroundings” (*AE 22*). He further illuminates, “Experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that

interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication” (*AE* 22). Interaction leading to participation that leads further to communication; this correspondence signifies a continuity of sense organs, particularly the brain, the eyes, and the ears. Working in consort with one another they transport meaning to consciousness and bring experience to its fullest manifestation (*AE* 23).

What makes that experience aesthetic? The eye and the ear play significant roles in moving an “experience” to the realm of aesthetic. How does Dewey define “esthetic” (his spelling)? According to Dewey, esthetic is the “clarified and intensified development of traits that belong to every normally complete experience” (*AE* 49). In other words, for an experience to be aesthetic, it must be a more intense experience, one not driven by urgency or scientific observation, but rather, something disruptive, that strikes one to pay closer attention. Regarding the experience of art, Dewey believes that for it to be an aesthetic experience, the work itself must be “framed for enjoyed receptive perception” (*AE* 49). By this Dewey means that for a work to be “truly artistic” experiencing it must impart pleasure. Dewey thinks of art as representative of his concept of doing and undergoing, that is, through the relationship of artist to audience. The artist, he attests, integrates the perceiver in his own process of doing and undergoing — together it is a process of production and consumption — the art itself to be both perceived and enjoyed, these two things “sustain each other” (*AE* 48). Together they are the “creative act”, the artist as producer and having his own experience in the production of his work, and the perceiver who gets to enjoy and appreciate the work.

Art itself, according to Dewey, “represents the concept of doing and undergoing” because it involves the “interpenetration of action and perception” for both artist and perceiver. From a physical standpoint, “sensory satisfaction” is always linked to this process of production and

consumption. Dewey specifies an integration of at least three of the senses; seeing, touching, and hearing to create a “cumulative doing” experience that is aesthetic. He specifies thusly:

As we manipulate, we touch and feel, as we look, we see; as we listen, we hear. The hand moves with etching needle or with brush. The eye attends and reports the consequence of what is done. Because of this intimate connection, subsequent doing is cumulative and not a matter of caprice or routine. In an emphatic artistic-esthetic experience, the relation is so close that it controls simultaneously both the doing and the perception. Such vital intimacy of connection cannot be had if only hand and eye are engaged. (*AE* 51)

In further describing the intimacy of aesthetic experience, Dewey clarifies it as follows:

1) it carries both emotional and purposeful engagement; 2) it connects the senses so that together, they form the whole of perception; 3) rather than merely receiving aesthetic experience, the perceiver surrenders to it; 4) in surrendering to the experience, the perceiver “plunges” into it with all his energy; 5) the perceiver is thus the creator of the experience and its sole heir; and 6) perception of the aesthetic experience combines the practical, emotional, and intellectual (*AE* 56). To clarify this last point Dewey explains it thusly: “The emotional phase binds parts together into a single whole; ‘intellectual’ simply names the fact that the experience has meaning; ‘practical’ indicates that the organism is interacting with events and objects which surround it” (*AE* 57). Thus, Dewey links these parts, rather than suggesting them as successive. As such, these parts move together toward already anticipated consummation that does not lie in wait but rather “is recurrently savored with special intensity” (*AE* 57). We might refer to this playful, yet purposeful engagement as inter-sensual and distinctly aesthetic in nature.

The phrase “recurrently savored” is particularly important for differentiating aesthetic experience from one that is primarily intellectual and, in my opinion, helps to set apart Dewey’s

aesthetic proposal from those of his predecessors Kant and Nietzsche. Unlike Kant, who intellectualized the notion of Beauty through his insistence that aesthetic judgement takes place via immediate sensation and universal agreement, Dewey maintains that aesthetic experience remains opened ended. Furthermore, in contrast to Nietzsche, who proposed an aesthetic experience that ends in cathartic life affirmation, Dewey insists on both the cumulative and continuous effects of that experience. To clarify, Dewey does not impart aesthetic experience as a means to an end. On the contrary, that is reserved for purely intellectual experience.

In discerning intellectual experience from aesthetic experience, Dewey insinuates that an experience is intellectual if it terminates in a so-called “truth,” truth being a formal property that can assist in further inquiry. Contrarily, the experience of art is not static, rather, it produces other characteristics in a dynamic interaction that “remains vital and incomplete” (*AE* 57). He states, “In a work of art there is no such single, self-sufficient deposit. The end, the terminus, is significant not by itself, but as the integration of the parts” (*AE* 57). To substantiate his claim, Dewey uses the example of the novel or drama; both artistic mediums allow the perceiver time to let their content incubate and moreover, to integrate with that person’s own experience. Contained within that incubation period is both anticipation and discord that enables growth and moves the experience to eventual fulfillment. Dewey considered aesthetic experience as akin to a conversion: “That which distinguishes an experience as esthetic is conversion of resistance and tensions, of excitations that in themselves are temptations to diversion, into movement toward a conclusive and fulfilling close” (*AE* 58). Through “intimately connected” intervals of rest and flight, the perceiver moves through the aesthetic experience in a cumulative rhythm of “doings” and “undergoings” that subsequently intensify perception (*AE* 59).

Dewey’s position on sense perception and the correlation between sense qualities and

expressiveness arose in response to other theories that disregarded their association. Psychology, Dewey argued, separated sensuous quality from any kind of intellectual worth, an idea picked up in aesthetic theory. He criticized this division on the grounds that it overlooked the possibility of a unity in which “sense quality” might bestow in striking reality the material content of an object (*AE* 103). Dewey clarified, “The question of the relation that exists between direct sensuous matter and that which is incorporated with it because of prior experiences, goes to the heart of the expressiveness of an object:” it is an integration of “the internal and the intrinsic” rather than merely an external association (*AE* 103).

One theory of which Dewey was critical viewed sensual qualities as aesthetic expression only when they served to make an object more interesting. The other took the stance that expressiveness was only connected to the material aspects of an object (*AE* 103). On the one hand, a line is just a line; it is expressed as a line and experienced as a line without any connection “beyond the immediate sensory apparatus directly involved” (*AE* 104). As the first theory contends, in the case of the line, the eye sees it in isolation of anything beyond itself. Dewey counters, however, that there must be interaction with others sense qualities. For example, as the perceiver uses his “optical apparatus” so too he might explore the line with his hands, getting a sense of its straightness or curvature. Therefore, the eyes are not acting alone, but rather, in consort with other senses (*AE* 104).

Dewey criticized the second theory for its assessment of sense as only “an external vehicle by which other meanings are conveyed” (*AE* 105). He ridiculed the evaluation of artist Vernon Lee, along with others, who theorized that “... ‘art’ signifies a group of activities that are, respectively, recording, constructive, logical, and communicative” (*AE* 105). According to this theory, products labeled “art” became aesthetic for reasons other than their sensual qualities.

On the contrary, they were seen merely as reasonable facsimiles of standard and imperative desire. As Dewey interpreted this, “desire arises because of the need for satisfaction of congruous relations among our modes of motor imagery” (*AE* 106). Using “shapes” as an example, he conjectured that satisfaction only occurs when “our motor imagery reenacts the *relations* embodied in the object” (*AE* 106).

In both theories, it is the mechanical operation of said “sense” that enacts a relation of mental activity to object, thus creating a kind of matching system of desire to outcome. The senses are separated and each one’s logical relation to form is encapsulated in the passive reception more so than active participation of the receiver. In two key phrases about the expressive object Dewey argues otherwise:

The expressiveness of the object of art is due to the fact that it presents a thorough and complete interpenetration of the materials of undergoing and action...The expressiveness of the object is the report and celebration of the complete fusion of what we undergo and what our activity of attentive perception brings into what we receive by means of the senses. (*AE* 107)

Put succinctly, in aesthetic experience attentive perception involves both “habit and need,” emotion and rationality, to bring forth the aesthetic object in its most sensual concrete forms, while simultaneously generating the fullest interpenetration of self and world.

Dewey alleges, “The moralist knows that sense is allied with emotion, impulse and appetite. So, he denounces the lust of the eye as part of the surrender of spirit to flesh. He identifies the sensuous with the sensual and the sensual with the lewd” (*AE* 22). But for Dewey these terms all manifest under the more general term of “sense”, as denoting phases in the life of the organic creature (*AE* 22). Sense connects directly with embodied experience and the senses,

the means by which the live creature connects to the larger world: “In this participation the varied wonder and splendor of this world are made actual for him in the qualities he experiences” (AE 22). Senses provide fulfillment when they are recognized together in experience, as the necessary parts that help to bring the whole of experience, the doing and undergoing, to fruition.

Dewey proceeds to claim, “It cannot be asserted too strongly that what is not immediate is not esthetic” (AE 123). He continues, “We cannot grasp any idea, any organ of mediation, we cannot possess it in full force, until we have felt and sensed it, as much so as if it were an odor or color...immediate feeling is not limited in its scope... (AE 123). Sense qualities do not act alone; they have “esthetic quality” in their relation to one another, in the way they interact. They are not limited by their particularities, they are complex. Notes Dewey, “No shadow cast by even the thinnest line is ever homogeneous,” and furthermore, colors have edges, hues, they are never pure (AE 125). Dewey brings this up to make clear that sense perception cannot be subject to scientific inquiry, for it is malleable and impure. Sense perception, like the elements in a painting, such as color, line, and form, carry resonance in relation to each other. Quoting Cézanne, Dewey emphasizes, “The secret of design, of everything marked by pattern, is a contrast and relation of tones.” (AE 126). Interpenetration is key, the actions of one sense on another as they “enter into the perceived thing,” like a pointillist painting (AE 126). “The eye, the ear, or whatever, is only the channel *through* which the total response takes place” (AE 127). As well, past experiences merge with the immediate through the senses, “as an increase and individualization of *present* experience,” that is “organically absorbed” into present perception. It does not act as bridge or otherwise contributor (AE 127). In referring to the relation of substance and form, Dewey clarifies, there is an inherent tendency:

Of sense to expand, to come into intimate relations with other things than itself, and thus to take on form because of its own movement — instead of passively waiting to have form imposed on it. Any sensuous quality tends, because of its organic connections, to spread and fuse. When a sense quality remains on the relatively isolated plane on which it first emerges, it does so because of some special reaction, because it is cultivated for special reasons. (*AE* 129)

Dewey ascribes to the idea that the sensual and the intellectual must go hand in hand in aesthetic encounters which occur through the “integration of matter and form” and expressively meet the “organic need of the sensorimotor system” (*AE* 129). If not for an integration of the senses, “nothing remains but a senseless and unidentifiable succession of transitory trills” (*AE* 130). As example he speaks of Hudson, a figure who in childhood could feel things sensitively and relished the integration of sight, taste, touch, and smell when he would explore his surroundings. As noted in Dewey, Hudson declares, “I rejoiced in colors, scents in taste and touch: the blue of the sky, the verdure of the earth, the sparkle of light on water, the taste of milk, of fruit, of honey...the mere feel of a blade of grass made me happy” (*AE* 130). He goes on to admonish all that he encounters in sensuous detail and the succeeding intoxication and joy he felt with every new discovery. The experience for Hudson was one in which the senses, as Dewey notes, “are the means to which the boy’s entire being reveled in acute perception of the qualities of the world in which he lived — qualities of things experienced not of sensation” (*AE* 130).

The experiences of the “live creature” then, involve the accumulation of the senses in relation to each other in a continuous, phenomenological encounter. The example of Hudson, explains Dewey, draws correlation to experiencing the work of art as a communing of the senses producing a qualitative experience, the only difference being its reference to a specific object.

“The native experience in its continuous and cumulative character...” Dewey expounds, “...thus affords a frame of reference for the work of art” (*AE* 131). Sense is relational and comes to pass through the “full play of sensual qualities” (*AE* 132). Adornment is only there to cover up something, expressiveness is what Dewey seeks. To experience something aesthetically requires that one does not distinguish between matter and form, sense and thought. On the contrary, aesthetic experience involves integration and, eventually reflection comes into play. At the point of reflection, one’s experience becomes richer, leading ultimately to “the intimate relation of undergoing and doing in interaction of the live creature with the world of nature and man” (*AE* 137). It is through art, Dewey asserts, that the fullness of experience can come to the fore, as a clarifying of meaning and a deepening of reality through the “creation of a new experience” (*AE* 138). The path of art, Dewey proclaims, is resonant and immense; it “keeps alive the power to experience a common world in its fullness” (*AE* 138). It is an open journey, unconstrained by time or language.

SUSPICIOUS ART AND THE KEEPERS OF TRADITION

This unrestricted voyage gives the subject (or perceiver) a certain agency in the aesthetic experience that has the initial effect on his/her sense of self in connection to a prior self. Additionally, the experience of art can ally the perceiver to his greater surroundings, thus affecting his social relations. Art, Dewey believes, is a more accessible form of communication, not constrained by barriers of language or otherwise. He states, “Art is a more universal mode of language than is the speech that exists in a multitude of mutually unintelligible forms” (*AE* 349). Dewey also acknowledged art as immune to the conditions of history that denote varied modes of human speech; music, for example, can bring together unrelated parties that do not convene through formal language. Furthermore, he believed that individual experience, when wed with

what happens through that experience, can forge community; our “response to another becomes an expansion of our own being” and allows us to better understand one another (*AE* 350). In some ways, according to Dewey, art civilizes us: as an unencumbered form of communication, it can impart shared values that might not otherwise be possible, considering the human population is made up of such varied cultures, languages, rituals and otherwise (*AE* 350). Art’s power derives from its ability to educate and inform, no matter one’s level of experience. Its equanimity lies in the fact that it is a human endeavor.

We share goods and services, but not our lives, with other cultures so there is little chance to create a social whole. Moreover, Dewey noted, the impact of science and industry on the isolation of art manifests as “the incoherence of our civilization” (*AE* 351). Therefore, we need to recover an organic place for art where it is valued in and of itself as opposed to being interpreted in contrast to science, to find a place for art within humanity (*AE* 352). Dewey strived to place art at the midpoint of the relation between man and nature; he recognized it as “actuating spirit” between them, as always having been there (*AE* 352). Furthermore, friction and tension can be driving forces in the creation of art, “Neither a world wholly obdurate and sullen in the face of man nor one so congenial to his wishes that it gratifies all desires is a world in which art can arise” (*AE* 353). Again, it is in occupying the middle ground that art has the potential to improve humanity.

Dewey is also okay with science and sees the value in scientific discovery as it arouses curiosity and liberates the human spirit, but not to the detriment of art. Scientific disclosure can provide the materials of art, he argued, but it must become “acclimatized in a common culture” in order to have a similar effect (*AE* 353). Furthermore, Dewey recognized science for its contribution to the material and form of art. Take for example, the advances of late 19th century

French artists like Seurat, who explored the science of optics and color theory in his pointillist paintings. Cézanne was also thinking about vision and perception when he broke apart his compositions into geometric planes of color. In addition, the advent of photography as a medium that could recreate the real freed artists from the traditional compositional confines.

Science aside, Dewey had been critical of the limits placed on art that kept it sequestered in the proverbial high castle. As mentioned previously, Dewey noted the integration of art into life as exemplified by the ancient Greeks. The artisans of that period were the builders of Greek culture as seen through their architecture, sculpture, music, and other performing arts. The only high art was that of poetry. During Dewey's time, however, the handiwork of the artisan gave way to mass production and that specialized talent all but vanished. In turn, as Dewey states, "the split is reinforced by the greater importance that now attaches to industry and trade in the whole organization of society" (*AE* 355). To clarify, it was not just the artistic producers and their products that were affected, but the entire social order: the consequence of industrial production was the distance it created between maker and consumer.

Dewey was hopeful, however, that even with changes to human civilizations' conditions of living, there was still the possibility to integrate art into life. Even with new materials and new means of creation, an object can be aesthetic, provided its "external form fits into a larger experience" (*AE* 355). If certain art, that is what has been deemed "fine art," is kept in its sacred hall, however, separated from its use value, culture cannot thrive. Dewey proclaims, "As long as art is the beauty parlor of civilization, neither art nor civilization are secure" (*AE* 358).

According to Dewey, the degree to which a culture thrives is matched only by the extent to which its arts flourish (*AE* 359). Art is a product of imaginative experience that can create a

rich and abundant life in way that other models cannot. Dewey takes a principled stance when he elaborates:

The sum total of the effect of all reflective treatises on morals is insignificant in comparison with the influence of architecture, novel, drama, on life...the political and economic arts that may furnish security and competency are no warrants of a rich and abundant human life save they are attended by the flourishing of the arts that determine culture. (*AE* 359)

A statement such as the above indicates that Dewey found moral value in the aesthetic experience, more so than by any other social means. “The first stirrings of dissatisfaction and the first intimations of a better future are always found in works of art,” Dewey claims, “Change in the climate of the imagination is the precursor of the changes that affect more than the details of life” (360). Art reflects upon societal changes, disclosing in its own way the conditions of possibility, exposing them in contrast to the actual conditions of existence, rather than imparting moral judgement. This according to Dewey, accounts for arts “humane function” (*AE* 360).

Dewey also noted an edifying quality in art that were underplayed due to systems in place in education that discount imagination. He recognized the power of “imaginative projection,” via Shelley, who viewed the poet as the founder of civil society and referred to imagination as “the chief instrument of the good” (*AE* 362). Using the example of how one treats his fellow human beings, Dewey illuminates:

A person’s treatment of others is dependent upon his power to put himself imaginatively in their place. But the primacy of the imagination extends far beyond the scope of direct personal relationships. Except where ‘ideal’ is used in conventional deference or as a

name for a sentimental reverie, the ideal factors in every moral outlook and human loyalty are imaginative. (*AE* 362)

Claiming art as “more moral than moralities” Dewey also recognized where imagination could get misappropriated for use as policy. The great orators of the past became moral guards, their poetic speech, meant to engage thinking, “their vision of possibilities,” get converted into proclamations of fact and hardened into “semi-political institutions” (*AE* 362). What results, according to Dewey, is that

Creative intelligence is looked upon with distrust; the innovations that are the essence of individuality are feared, and generous impulse is put under bonds not to disturb the peace. Were art an acknowledged power in human association and not treated as the pleasuring of an idle moment or as a means of ostentatious display, and were morals understood to be identical with every aspect of value that is shared in experience, the “problem” of the relation of art to morals would not exist. (*AE* 362)

Dewey’s aim here seems to be to incorporate the values gleaned through aesthetic experience into a system of social relations, to imagine a place for art that “insinuates possibilities of human relations not to be found in rule and precept, admonition and administration” (*AE* 363). Again, he comes to this claim through his ideas about the American education system, along with his desire to rethink democratic society. In my opinion, the challenges Dewey saw to both during his lifetime seem just as apparent in our 21st century, and thus, to reconsider his musings seems ever more significant. Moreover, to advance aesthetic experience as a relevant means to overcoming obstacles to growth in either area imparts on it the role of intermediary. To further clarify, the power of art, as Dewey noted above, lies not in its objecthood, on the contrary, it should be valued as a space for recovering our individual humanity and reawakening human potentiality. I

am borrowing from Saito here, who declares in her text, “We need to reclaim a lost dimension in education, one in which we can inspire the invisible, patient transformation of the spirit” (Saito 3).

This chapter opened with a statement from author Naoko Saito citing John Dewey as a “philosopher of growth.” Saito was referencing Dewey’s philosophy of education as it relates to his conviction that progressive education and a restructuring of democracy go hand in hand. Having a personal stake in one’s learning gives one a sense of self-hood that can be both morally and spiritually transformative. Not only does it have individual consequence, but that transformation can reverberate to the whole of democratic society. As Saito notes, for Dewey, education was “the continuous process of conversion, metamorphosis and internal transformation,” a constant repositioning of one’s “lost light” (11) The cultivation of one’s individual light, Saito clarifies, requires “the encounter with the other” (12) Moreover, “aesthetic education,” where “poesis is at the heart of democracy” is the primary mode in which this cultivation of light arises.

CONCLUSION

I’d like to conclude this chapter first with some clarifying remarks and second, with an evaluation of how Dewey’s experiential claim for art might find present relevance. I’ll open by restating some important points about which Dewey was critical; first, the idea that the experience of art should be merely pleasurable and second, that art only be regarded for its superficial beauty. In either case, the exchange between object and viewer was one that lacked more than just an immediate response. As was recognized in Chapter 1, the first of these two surface manifestations of art originated with Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* and was further elaborated upon by later analytical philosophers. The second formulation found prominence

through the advancement of technological innovation in the wake of Modernism. The commodification and fetishizing of art arose through a capitalist value system that only found merit in art based on a hierarchical scheme that determined what constituted “high” art. The value in the work of art took precedence over the value of experience. Furthermore, the shallow attending to art dissociated it from any connection to everyday life.

What Dewey argued against was the placing of art and the experience of art outside of life, as an escape mechanism to help “deal with the perils of human life” on the one hand, and on the other, as outside of custom and not verifiable as a concrete way to understand what it means to be human in the same way as science. In both scenarios the moral value of art gets deemed only relevant on the surface, as though taste were the main mechanism for engagement, rather than an effective experience open to many possibilities. Furthermore, the separation of parts of ourselves into our many senses, via scientific investigation proved more interested in how our senses work individually than in how they work together. For Dewey this separation of the senses proves incompatible with the full richness of aesthetic experience.

There is something very appealing about Dewey’s interactive, interpenetrating, multi-sensory approach to aesthetic experience. What he offers is an embodied experience that considers the subject as whole and primary, as opposed to breaking it up into its distinctive human faculties. Furthermore, Dewey’s aesthetic prospect places art within daily life, rather than placing it in some sacred space above the realm of human experience. Additionally, his practical application of aesthetic experience views the perceiver as naturally engaged in passive reception. Unlike Kant, who viewed aesthetic experience as a moment of active judgement, Dewey’s take on aesthetic experience holds open the moment of perception, suspending judgement and giving power to the experience itself. Holding off judgement, provides the perceiver with not only

unending opportunities to engage with the object, but also cumulative enrichment. In other words, Dewey gives value first and foremost to experience through the slow, quiet accumulation of sensory reception. As referred to in the opening statements of this chapter, Dewey wanted the experience of art to be one of quality that enhanced the life of the live creature; with every aesthetic encounter there was the opportunity to reposition oneself within as well as outward toward the world.

Dewey advocated such a radical role for art during a time when much was changing in the world. A combination of advances in technology, consumerism, political upheaval, and war preceded a period of economic depression and social alienation in post WWI Europe and America. With so much uncertainty and lack of equity among citizens, it would have been difficult to find something positive to count on. Art played a significant role during this period; German artists such as Hannah Hoch and Ernst Kirchner, provided sometimes scathing social commentary on the state of their country after World War 1. French artist Fernand Léger created images of a rapidly changing metropolis, as did American artists such as Joseph Stella and Charles Demuth. The works of these artists and others, although critical of their present times, suggest a well-established relationship between art and life.

Dewey saw the pace and inequities of life as symptomatic of the rise of capitalism, and the art museum as an example of the ills of a capitalistic economy. He viewed museums with disdain for segregating art from society by means of memorializing “the rise of nationalism and imperialism. Every capital must have its own museum...devoted in part to the greatness of its artistic past, and ... to exhibiting the loot gathered by its monarchs in conquest of other nations” (*AE* 14). The economic links to the “museum conception of art” also provoked Dewey:

The growth of capitalism has been a powerful influence in the development of the museum as the proper home for works of art, and in the promotion of the idea that they are apart from common life. The nouveau riches, who are an important by product of the capitalist system, have felt especially bound to surround themselves with works of fine art, which being rare, are also costly. Generally speaking, the typical collector is the typical capitalist. For evidence of good standing in the realm of higher culture, he amasses paintings, statuary, and artistic bijoux...Not merely individuals, but communities and nations, put their cultural good taste in evidence by operating opera houses galleries, and museums...these things reflect and establish superior cultural status, while their segregation from the common life reflects the fact that they are not part of a native and spontaneous culture.” (AE 14-15)

It is through this “cloistering” of art that it comes to be a world unto itself, without reflection for the average citizen. As Dewey notes, the art loses its “indigenous status” and acquires a new one, as a specimen of fine art ready and available for sale on the open market (AE 15). The art viewed in the museum setting, then, carries with it a storied history of domination and accumulation. Moreover, to experience art in the museum setting, according to Dewey, becomes one not of “a life actively practiced in the real world” but rather, one of escapism from that world into the confines of the museum (AE 15-16, 285).

Art as status symbol, as capitalist commodity, as escapism — all combined suggest the fetishizing of art that Dewey’s *Art as Experience* rallied against. To submit art as a more equalizing vehicle, and the aesthetic experience as one with real world consequences, while seemingly radical for its time, has as much relevance today as it might have had then. Our contemporary times are rife with conflict. Like the early 20th century, economic, social, and

political upheaval, the fast pace of technological progress, the climate crisis and more have created a sense agitation that can be unbearable. Moreover, the conveniences of post-postmodern life bring with them a kind of hyper-aesthetic environment in which everything we need, from designing our living rooms to perfecting our bodies, is given to us with the press of a button. Our cities have become places of aesthetic overload as well, leaving little for imagination and discovery and even less for the kind of authentic experience that Dewey advocated.

Now seems the precise time to re-engage with Dewey, to reevaluate his positioning of aesthetic experience and the role of art in everyday life. Several authors are doing so, including those referenced in this chapter, Shusterman and Stroud. In his essay from 1989, Shusterman asked the question, “Why Dewey Now?” noting a new wave of philosophers picking up on Dewey’s emphasis on “art’s socio-historical context and responsibility” (Shusterman *Why Dewey Now* 61). The embodied experience and connection to the natural needs of the live creature, the revitalization and enhancement that aesthetic experience can provide, as well as its spillover and integration into other parts of one’s life reveal it as a meaningful way to bring quality back into human life (65). Part of the reason for a change in thinking (away from analytic philosophy), as Shusterman sees it, is the importance Dewey places on “the mutability... of human thought and its objects” (61). As well, Dewey’s naturalism grounds aesthetic experience within the “embodied human organism” in ways similar to that of other living organisms; like other (non-human) species our “basic vital functions” match theirs in terms of the way we “reorganize our energies, actions and materials” (61).

Correspondingly, the perceiver of art uses these energies similarly to how the artist uses them, engaging all her “her physiological sensory motor responses” in appreciation of the art object on the one hand, but responding with such wholeness as to constitute aesthetic experience

(Shusterman 61). This embodied experience is both more immediate and more meaningful. Noted in Shusterman, the experience at once satisfies the live creature, but also enhances her life on a more global scale. For Dewey, the value of aesthetic experience lies in its ability to invigorate, revitalize, enhance, and modify perception in ways that spill over and get integrated into other areas of one's life (62). Furthermore, Shusterman claims, the "instrumental aim" of Dewey's aesthetic philosophy was to enrich "our immediate experience through socio-cultural transformation, where art would be richer and more satisfying to more people because it would be closer to their most vital interests and better integrated into their lives" (64).

We might consider this as an "aesthetics of everyday life," a concept Thomas Leddy associates with Dewey's aesthetic philosophy. Leddy believes Dewey's intention for *Art as Experience* was to develop a continuity between art and everyday life. States Leddy, because it begins and ends with the live creature and his interaction with the environment, in both ordinary and extraordinary ways, the experience can have an aesthetic dimension (Leddy 78). He gives the example of the everyday activity of mowing the lawn turned into a stage performance of a dancer mowing the lawn. The dance, Leddy argues, "would draw attention to unnoticed aesthetic features entailed in the experience of mowing the lawn" (79). Noticing the everyday within artistic form transforms everyday experience into art, altering the nature of the relationship between them. Thus, Leddy declares, it is entirely plausible that "everyday experience is *itself* part of the nature of art" (Leddy 79).

Leddy furthers his case with an example from the painter, Cézanne and how he might paint a tree, to make the point that the physical artwork is more than just its objecthood. He explains of Cézanne's process,

He sees the tree, even initially, in a way that is radically different from that of non-artists...He then goes on to transform his experience of it, both during the contemplative moments prior to putting paint to canvas, and in reflective looking during the process of painting. The experience of the painting as it emerges in the creative process becomes part of the experience of the tree and the experience of the tree part of the experience of painting, the two mixed up in ways that would be hard to disentwine.³ (80)

The artistic process as Leddy explains it in his Cézanne example correlates to Dewey's avowal that art is a series of interactions that accumulate in experience. Dewey states it thusly,

When the structure of the object is such that its force interacts happily (but not easily) with the energies that issue from the experience itself; then their mutual affinities and antagonisms work together to bring about a substance that develops cumulatively and surely (but not too steadily) toward a fulfilling of impulses and tensions, then indeed there is a work of art. (AE 168-169)

Put succinctly, art is more than the physical act of creating or the expression of the artist's intent, it is for Dewey, as Leddy reiterates, "a function of interaction between the live creature and the surrounding environment" (Leddy 81). This interaction can be transformational; for the one experiencing say, Cézanne's painting of the tree, it might compel that viewer to have a new appreciation for trees (Leddy 86). Dewey likens this aesthetic moment to the intensity of a religious experience, "We are, as it were, introduced into a world beyond this world which is nevertheless the deeper reality of the world in which we live in our ordinary experiences. We are carried out ourselves to find ourselves" (AE 202).⁴

Additionally, the internal transformation that results from aesthetic experience carries with it, long-term consequences that not only benefit the live creature, but also carry over into

his/her outward relationships. As Stroud suggests, while there are causal effects of aesthetic experience that are “morally valuable” on the short term, thinking about the experience of art as a “lived experience” positions art as a means to moral cultivation and improvement (Stroud 34). As Stroud notes, the communicative aspects of the art experience “can be morally useful” in that they can change or improve a “subject’s values, habits of reflection and beliefs” (127). The perceiver’s reflective activity in connection to his/her process of deliberation can lead to “practical decision making” similar to making a moral judgement. Stroud clarifies, “Reflective/deliberate activity occurs in order to decide which impulse ought to be acted upon” (127). Moreover, the long-term consequence of the activity of reflection and deliberation is that each time the perceiver does so, it imparts more value, leading to further deliberation and subsequently, improved meaning (128).

Stroud calls this cumulative effect on the perceiver “progressive adjustment;” Shusterman refers to it as a way of having an intense aesthetic experience free of inhibitions (Shusterman in Stroud 135). For Dewey these two go hand in hand in what is a phenomenological experience of the live creature that brings together the whole of his experiences past and present, with a direct and open link to future experiences. It is in essence, an open passage, unencumbered by time or place, similar in kind to what I have proposed as a model for 21st century aesthetic experience, the *aesthetic of repose*. The *aesthetic of repose* is an idea that I believe could provide an antidote, or at the least, a respite from the chaos and uncertainty that plagues our contemporary world. Similar to Dewey, I liken the *aesthetic of repose* to a holistic journey that begins as a space of dwelling. In this space perception begins an inward journey, in which the quiet of repose turns to noisy disruption, activating one’s senses and taking him on an internal voyage that in due time, passes safely into outward reflection.

To be more specific, like Dewey's idea of continual doing and undergoing, experience is paused through the *aesthetic of repose*. For that moment, when one's sense of the everyday is disrupted, rather than making a rush to judgement or being shocked into consciousness, one might suspend time and just sit with it. Instead of trying to conceptualize the moment, the perceiver might enjoy a sense of wonder. As an alternative to intellectualizing the experience, one can remain open to insights that come not in that instance, but as they might arise much later. Finally, these new insights, gained through the *aesthetic of repose*, allow the perceiver to reposition the self within the greater context of his cultural surroundings. In summary, like Dewey's aesthetic experience, the *aesthetic of repose* carries both immediate and long-term consequence, giving primacy to the perceiver as the agent of his own self-reflection and change. I will clarify these connections in the subsequent chapter with the aim of acknowledging Dewey's contribution to my proposal of an *aesthetic of repose*, while also noting its limitations in this regard. Furthermore, to further my proposition I will survey the work of several contemporary thinkers whose writings critically evaluate aesthetic experience in the 21st century. Finally, through my own detailed assessment, I will formulate a practical application for the *aesthetic of repose*, accepting the philosophers of these first three chapters as foundational sources, while extending my ideas forward through more recent critical thinkers.

CHAPTER 4

Resist, React or Repose? A Philosophical Offer in Favor of Repose

“As to the contemporary effects of aesthetic experience...we are longing more than ever perhaps, for a feeling of inner quietness and stability as evoked by the concept of ‘composure.’”

— Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, c. 2006

EMBRACING DISRUPTION

In his writing on aesthetic experience, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht recognized the notion of *composure* as significant to an understanding of 21st century aesthetic experience. Noting the conditional framing that often guides aesthetic experience, Gumbrecht suggested this new modality as an antidote to the “sudden” appearance and just as abrupt disappearing content of that experience. As a characteristic of aesthetic experience, Gumbrecht states, temporality does not allow for one to bask in the discord. To clarify, the author is referring mainly to everyday moments in which aesthetic experience can occur, a moment for example, when a person glances at himself in the mirror and suddenly notices something odd in his appearance, just as quickly as that moment passes. One might feel a tinge of strangeness that, as Gumbrecht attests, is not “welcome or even desired” but also “vanishes quite independently of my reactions and will” (Gumbrecht 308). A person gets caught, Gumbrecht claims, between a desire to get back to the familiar, or to acknowledge the peculiar new impression that has made its presence known, with little time to either react or resist (308).

If one were to look up these two words in the dictionary, react and resist, one might find the following: React: to respond, to act in return, or in opposition to something; Resist: to withhold or withstand the action or the effect of (Dictionary.com). Both of these terms, react and resist, although set in opposition to one another, might be considered ways of dealing with

disruption: a sudden or even gradual change to one's environment, for example, could prompt one to notice and act upon, on the one hand, or simply endure the moment, on the other. I'd like to offer a third mode for dealing with disruption, that is, to remain in repose. Akin to composure, which refers to a state of serenity, calm, and tranquility; repose, as the dictionary defines it, means "a state of rest, a pause" (Dictionary.com). To linger in repose, that is, to take a pause, aids in overcoming the temporality of aesthetic experience. I would further argue that in an era of continual fragmentation and division, crisis and estrangement, an *aesthetic of repose* can become an indispensable modality for 21st century aesthetic experience.

The idea of aesthetic experience arising from disruption of any kind is not new. The previous three chapters all touched on this concept. As I evaluated in Chapter 1, Kant describes in detail the conditions for aesthetic experience in his analytic of the beautiful; it is a judgement of taste that relies on disinterested engagement, lacking purpose beyond a feeling of pleasure or displeasure. That feeling occurs in a split second, however, and the fact of its spontaneity lends to the idea that the judgement occurred within a moment of disruption. My examination of Nietzsche in Chapter 2 revealed that, although his idea of aesthetic experience more likely relates to sublime ecstasy, that moment of climax, when the Greek chorus merges with the audience, also creates an interruption of what first appeared as a harmonious moment. The crisis of Tragedy, in the case of Nietzsche, disturbs the normal course of the experience. Finally, the exploration of Dewey in Chapter 3 disclosed aesthetic experience as a carryover of natural human tendencies that, as an experience, is also a continuation of previous experiences. To clarify, Dewey's prospect of continual "doing and undergoing" is itself a form of unceasing disruption.

To reiterate, despite their disparate means of occurrence, the philosophies of each of the above authors disclose a common thread of disturbance, highlighting aesthetic experience as a moment of strife or crisis that leads to a transformative consequence. A thorough survey of each one's aesthetic philosophy, however, also reveals that despite this consistency, multiple ways of having and perceiving aesthetic experience exist. Then again, and despite their differing contentions, Kant, Nietzsche, and Dewey similarly interrogate the meaning of aesthetic experience, giving it linguistic shape and intellectual structure. Putting them in dialog with each other makes this point clear. Additionally, placing their ideas in a contemporary context highlights the lasting validity of their individual contributions to aesthetic philosophy. It also illuminates their shortcomings. This chapter considers several contemporary thinkers whose positions on the value of aesthetic experience differ as much as those of Kant, Nietzsche, and Dewey, but whose quest is the same, that is, to find value and meaning in aesthetic experience.

Like their predecessors, contemporary thinkers desire to make aesthetic experience credible as a resource for meaning building, culture building and democracy building. As I discovered, however, even within contemporary philosophical discussions of aesthetic experience, choices abound. Furthermore, evaluating aesthetic experience in the 21st century brings with it its own challenges, particularly as regards the notion to either react or resist. From my estimation, the contemporary debate around the meaning of aesthetic experience falls into two camps. The first I categorize as an *aesthetics of action*; the second, an *aesthetics of presence*. As will become clear, and as they relate to aesthetic experience, these two poles correspond closely to the idea of reacting or resisting, respectively. Several contemporary authors preside over opposite ends of the debate: On the one hand are Jacques Rancière and Santiago Zabala, both of whom link aesthetic experience to the political and exemplify an *aesthetics of action*. On

the other are Richard Shusterman and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, each offering a pragmatic approach to aesthetic experience that connects to an *aesthetics of presence*. Both poles, the *aesthetics of action* and the *aesthetics of presence*, yearn to understand the role of art and aesthetic experience in late capitalist democratic culture. Like Kant, Nietzsche, and Dewey before them each is writing with Western democratic societies in mind. Moreover, and similar to these earlier thinkers, each of these contemporary philosophers focuses on disruption as a key prompt for moving through aesthetic experience. The following section offers a brief review of Kant, Dewey, and Nietzsche as a prelude to more elaborate discussion of the polemic regarding contemporary aesthetic experience and the role of disruption therein.

What prompts any state of disruption or suddenness of a moment? What part of our humanness avails any kind of response to that disruption? My exploration of the philosophers in the previous three chapters, showcased the prominence of sense and sensation for each one's consideration of aesthetic experience. Furthermore, the aesthetic writings of Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, and John Dewey each provided a foundation for the thinking about the concept of aesthetic experience as a space of repositioning. Kant, Nietzsche, and Dewey all grappled with understanding the meaning and outcome of aesthetic experience. Kant had to separate this kind of experience from other forms of knowledge, so he created the concept of a judgement of taste — a way to experience the beautiful as pleasurable and without any other purpose than that. Nietzsche chose to view aesthetic experience as an affirmation of life; to experience art through the form of Greek tragedy provided both individual experience and collective release. Both Kant's and Nietzsche's aesthetic prospects are conditional, that is, certain controls must be in place for the experience to occur. Although the experiences, like the *aesthetic of repose*, result in a change of self within oneself, their aesthetic prospects live outside

of everyday life. Dewey on the other hand, accepted that art was a part of our everyday and proposed that we experience aesthetically within the conditions of our everyday. He called it a process of “doing and undergoing” that was continual and complete all at once — a continual process of doing and undergoing until that change occurs.

However, the usefulness of that repositioning carried different significance for each of the three previously featured authors. Kant chose to separate aesthetic experience from other, more intelligible forms of experience, and nature from art. On the one hand, he could note the value of that experience to unite community under (common sense) agreement. As Jaspers notes, “a judgement of taste is always individual,” that is, it is not founded on a concept (Jaspers 79). It only gains validity as a judgement of beauty, however, through a guaranteed act of agreement: What is beautiful to me, must also be beautiful to you. Beauty, furthermore, is linked to pleasure. If the experience provided pleasurable feelings without further interest, then Kant considered it aesthetic. Aesthetic experience was also limited to within the scope of what one knows already and can comprehend immediately. Paraphrasing Kant, Jaspers asserts, “the determining ground of the judgement of taste lies ‘perhaps in the concept of that which can be regarded as the supersensible substrate of humanity. For ‘in the supersensible lies the point of convergence of all our a priori faculties’” (79).

Friedrich Nietzsche also stressed individuality regarding aesthetic experience while also finding its communal value. However, Nietzsche’s focus went beyond that of mere pleasure. By couching experience firstly within the medium of Greek Tragedy, Nietzsche could focus attention on the experience itself whose outcome, if successful, took the experiencer from tragic consequence toward life affirmation and overcoming. By experiencing Greek Tragedy and all its

elements, including the tragic chorus, one might join with others in a sublime and cathartic movement from stasis to ecstasy and subsequently, toward enriched self-awareness.

For John Dewey, aesthetic experience was more fully realized for its enduring capacity for a “conversion of resistance and tensions” and for its continual effect beyond the moment of the experience. His concept of doing and undergoing meant that experience was never exhausted, its potentiality constantly available for renewal and repositioning. Borrowing from William James, who likened the “course of conscious experience” to the way birds alternate between flying and perching, Dewey stated,

The flights and perchings are intimately connected with one another; they are not so many unrelated lightings succeeded by a few equally unrelated hoppings. Each resting place in experience is an undergoing in which is absorbed and taken home the consequences of prior doing, and, unless the doing is that of utter caprice or sheer routing, each doing carries its meaning that has been extracted and conserved. (*AE* 58)

Aesthetic experience as Dewey surmised, provides one the opportunity for perpetual repositioning.

Unlike his predecessors, Dewey derived his aesthetic concepts from the perspectives of education and democracy. For Dewey, aesthetic experience carried with it both democratic values and emancipating possibilities. Aesthetic experience or the experience of art was something available to all and, furthermore, had ramifications beyond individual experience. In the case of Dewey, one’s own renewed sense of self had immediate relational effect. Moreover, and, like Nietzsche, Dewey placed sense and the senses as primary and above intellect for his notion of aesthetic experience.

What seems common among these divergent authors are the following points: 1) Each was a writer of his time, attempting to find ways through philosophy to counter the rapid societal changes occurring in their prospective time periods. Kant's Enlightenment era approach focused on "transcendental philosophy' as a metaphysics of experience," aimed to mediate between the empiricist and rationalist philosophical traditions of his contemporaries (Walker, *Introduction to Immanuel Kant*, Critique of Judgement). Nietzsche was writing during the rise of European modernism at the height of the Industrial Revolution; Dewey, an American author, wrote his famous treatise *Art as Experience* in 1934 during America's Great Depression. I mention this because I find it relevant that each of their philosophies carries with it a kind of longing to remedy the social/cultural ills of Western society during their time.

AESTHETIC ATTENTION

The concept of *aesthetic repose* as I have formulated it, is itself related to what I consider rampant social and cultural disintegration in our contemporary era. Human beings are living in a time in which aesthetic influences seem dictated for us, rather than being something we seek of our own volition. In fact, in our current century, it seems our lives are fully curated for us, from the way we design our home interiors to the way we cook. Click on any food service app and one can order meals for the week with all the ingredients included — no need to experiment with flavor because all the spices and other fixings come neatly packaged and ready for use. Other examples abound, such as music choices; find a favorite musical artist or genre on any one of the many music streaming services and a plethora of similar artists will flow out of that first selection without effort. Watch any home improvement show and learn how to decorate a room with the most up-to-date styles and color schemes. Our TV choices are curated for us, as are so

many other arenas of everyday life. On the one hand, the algorithms at work can expand our experience. On the contrary, they also to a certain degree take away a necessary individual freedom: Having too many choices, having to cull through it all, I would argue, can be as stressful as not having enough choices. In turn, the resultant weariness can put a strain on one's capacity to decide for oneself what aesthetic prospect he deems worthy of his time and attention.

Overstimulation and aesthetic burnout have been the subject for writers on contemporary aesthetic experience such as Sianne Ngai. In her text, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute and Interesting* (2012), Ngai aims to understand how aesthetic experience became transformed by “the hypercommodified, information-saturated, performance-driven conditions of late capitalism (Ngai 1). Specifically, the author evaluates the “zany, interesting and cute” as aesthetic categories that correlate to late capitalist production, circulation, and consumption, respectively (1). Ngai states, “As sensuous, affective reflections of the ways in which contemporary subjects work, exchange, and consume...the commodity aesthetic of cuteness, the discursive aesthetic of the interesting, and the performative aesthetic of zaniness help us to get at some of the most important social dynamics underlying life in late capitalist society today” (1). Drawing a direct line from cute, interesting, and zany to how we function as a society, Ngai chronicles these categories as worthy and essential dimensions of aesthetic experience, whose consequence rolls over into our outward relations. Like a judgement of the beautiful, Ngai notes, a judgement of cute, zany, or interesting can “presuppose the presence of others” (42).¹

Ngai's is an attempt to negotiate the place of aesthetic experience, its value and consequence within the context of our “hyperaestheticized” 21st century (20). To move culture forward, she believes, we need a new model for “reflecting on aesthetic experience as a whole, or for reflecting on art in its newly displaced relation to aesthetic experience as a whole” (20).

The post-World War II era saw the role of art become increasingly devoid of its original intent, moving further away from its position of uniqueness and exclusivity. Pop art was the “first to embrace the commercialized styles of cuteness and zaniness,” while conceptual art became the medium of the “merely interesting” as it attempted to divorce itself from the traditional frames of high art. As Ngai observes, conceptual artists themselves became curators as their works moved from the institutional museum to more site-specific arenas. Due to its move into the public sphere, conceptual art developed as a discursive medium. However, conceptual art’s idiomatic quality became limited by the fact of its appeal firstly to an audience of like-minded “participants of its own projects” (Ngai 21). Ngai elucidates, this amplified commercialization of art, along with the “overarching habitualization of aesthetic novelty,” as well as the “increasing interpenetration of economy and culture” lessen the intensity of aesthetic experience (21).

That contemporary art is even more reliant on its commercial relevance further raises the question of how to distinguish the aesthetic from any other cultural arena. Past notions equating aesthetic experience with the beautiful or the sublime inferred a kind of power on the aesthetic (moral, religious, epistemological, political) outside of the everyday and into an otherworldly realm, whereas the “weakness” of zany, cute and interesting bring them to the fore in terms of their relations to culture and society, allowing for “more direct reflection” (22). As Ngai clarifies, “The zany, the cute, and the interesting thus help us imagine what the discourse of aesthetics might become when aesthetic experience is no longer equated with awe, or with rare or conceptually unmediated experience” (24). Acknowledging the zany, interesting and cute as aesthetic categories, then, can act to shift 21st century culture (2).

Indeed, it can be difficult to direct our “aesthetic attention” away from this “hyper-commodification” and toward some deeper social discourse, in part as Ngai notes, due to “the

ambivalent nature of many of our aesthetic experiences” (Ngai 2). Forces that interfere with the cultural significance of meaningful aesthetic encounter include the post-modern blurring of the line between what is or is not considered *aesthetic* that is reliant upon “the increasingly intimate relationship between the autonomous artwork and the form of the commodity” (2). Ngai also recognizes the significance of aesthetic judgements, or judgements based on feeling, as critical determiners of objective truth. Finally, the author questions “the future of the long-standing idea of art as play as opposed to labor in a world where immaterial labor is increasingly aestheticized” (2). By exposing the cultural relevance of the zany, cute and interesting Ngai aspires to overcome these systemic conditions that often interfere with meaningful aesthetic experience. As the author declares,

The zany, cute and interesting...call forth not only specific subjective capacities for feeling and acting but also specific ways of relating to other subjects and the larger social arrangements these ways of relating presuppose...affect and emotion, in the case of zaniness; language and communication, in the case of the interesting; intimacy and care in the case of the cute. (11-13)

Categorizing, the zany, the interesting and the cute as “subjective, feelings-based judgements” gives merit to their impact on our everyday lives; they offer what Ngai believes is “a simpler relation to our commodities” (38).

A study such as Ngai’s makes clear that our contemporary era is ripe for a more up-to-date view of aesthetic experience that accounts for the challenges of the late capitalist 21st century. Not only should we validate a broader spectrum of available paths to aesthetic experience we must also consider the myriad of channels available to perceiving something

aesthetically. In his critique of modern aesthetic philosophy Stanley Cavell addresses a similar challenge. In his essay, *Aesthetic Problems in Modern Philosophy*, the author noted a continued need for absoluteness and accommodation associated with aesthetic perception. Both, Cavell believes, can become barriers to aesthetic understanding due to their inherently decisive outcomes. To make his point clear, Cavell references poetry and the problematic nature of using paraphrase to interpret a poem's meaning (Cavell 69). To paraphrase a poem, he states, does not get to the real core or essence or essential structure of the poem's meaning; the problem arises when, in attempting to interpret the poem the reader or critic can only approximate its meaning. To elucidate this point, Cavell borrows from Cleanth Brooks critique that the paraphrase, rather than leading one to understand a poem's meaning, moves one further away from its center (69). To clarify Brooks' point, Cavell asks, if not to paraphrase, how can we evaluate a poem's meaning? More than likely, accommodation will occur. Brooks example referring to the opening stanza from Wordsworth's 'Intimations' and a critic's suggestion that the line refers to the poet having lost something, helps Cavell make his point:

We can ransack that stanza and never find the expression 'lost something' in it. Then the critic will be offended — rightly— and he may reply: Well, it does not actually say this, but it means it, it implies it; do you suggest that it does not mean that? And of course, we do not. But then the critic has a *theory* about what he is doing when he says what a poem means, and so he will have to add some appendices to his reading of the poetry explaining that when he says what a poem means he does not say exactly quite just what the poem means; that is, he only points to its meaning or rather, 'points to the area in which the meaning lies.' But even this last does not seem to him humility enough and he

may be moved to a footnote in which he says that his own analyses are ‘at best crude approximations of the poem.’ (Cavell 69)

The point Cavell makes with his example regards the fact that many possibilities exist for interpreting this one phrase. Is any single elucidation more valid than another? Moreover, must it mean something specific? Aesthetic philosophy as Cavell critiques it will fall to the level of either absolute meaning or some answer that might accommodate (or approximate) for a lack of concrete determination. This overcompensation limits the potentiality of the aesthetic encounter, as Cavell clarifies, “some modes of figurative language are such that in them what an expression means cannot be said at all, at least not in any more or less familiar conventionalized ways” (75). Meaning or lack thereof is less relevant than the potentiality of the aesthetic encounter and the openness to varied responses that it might convey.²

The reader might ask why insert Ngai’s or Cavell’s voice at this point in the chapter? These authors showcase two sides of an argument for a new formulation of aesthetic experience. First, Ngai’s aesthetic categories of zany, cute and interesting reveal that we can experience aesthetically via areas outside of the traditional framing, i.e., outside of former conceptions of the beautiful as well as beyond the realm of high art. Secondly, as Cavell notes, we are not limited to the determined meaning of aesthetic experience as philosophy has presented it so far. Of further significance in the case of Cavell, is the author’s insinuation that sometimes clear meaning cannot be fully expressed, nor is it always necessary. Both Ngai’s and Cavell’s rethinking of aesthetic experience for the 21st century connect to the *aesthetic of repose* as a new aesthetic philosophy that considers both mediums outside of tradition and the inexhaustibility of interpretation. They also relate to the two poles of contemporary aesthetic experience previously mentioned, that of action and presence.

ACTION OR PRESENCE

Earlier in this chapter, I classified contemporary aesthetic experience as a polemic between an *aesthetics of action* and an *aesthetics of presence*. The following paragraphs briefly explain the main points of these two poles, beginning with those authors under the umbrella of an *aesthetics of action*, then addressing those writing about an *aesthetics of presence*. A more explicit discussion of each individual author will follow.

In much of his writing, philosopher Jacques Rancière has surmised that art and politics are intertextual and nary shall they be separated. His thesis regards the aesthetics of politics (that all art is political) which he connects to the concept of “dissensus” as the method for overcoming aesthetic oversaturation. Santiago Zabala, on the other hand, believes that contemporary art plays a vital role in raising society out of its “state of emergency.” In offering up an “aesthetics of emergency,” Zabala finds a place for art as society’s savior. Aid comes through the experience of a particular type however, as exemplified by the many interventionist artists featured in his text. I find merit in both Rancière and Zabala in terms of their desire to create a role for art that connects meaning to contemporary aesthetic experience. I take issue, however, with the dogmatic necessity they attach to that experience. I assert alternatively, that the experience of art 1) does not always have to move one to action and 2) should not be dictated for us. Rather, I believe the value of aesthetic experience lies within the innate human ability to perceive and interpret the world through our own eyes, a concept that seems to have run adrift in the era of late capitalism.

Our human capacity to think for ourselves is a concept even Kant and Nietzsche set in the background; Kant because he had to categorize an experience as aesthetic only if the determination from that experience was one of beauty. Nietzsche relied primarily on the medium

of music, specifically that of Wagner, as the preferable avenue for aesthetic engagement. Furthermore, over the lifetime of his writing, Nietzsche continually returned to Greek tragedy as providing the greatest aesthetic sensibility, a point of view that for my purposes, is too limiting. Dewey on the other hand, gives us more of an opportunity to experience aesthetically because he grounds that experience within individual daily life; aesthetic experience as Dewey asserts it offers continual readjustment and alteration to one's worldview. Dewey claims, "We are, as it were, introduced into a world beyond this world which is nevertheless the deeper reality of the world in which we live our ordinary experiences. We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves" (Dewey *AE* 202).

Dewey's pragmatic role for art sets the backdrop for the opposing voices in the contemporary debate about aesthetic experience, those who consider aesthetic experience as an *aesthetics of action* and those who view it an *aesthetics of presence*. Like Dewey, philosophers from both poles consider the democratic potential of aesthetic experience. On the one hand are the *aesthetics of action* thinkers, Zabala and Rancière, the first of whom believes in the power of art to save us from the world's ills, and the second of whom ties art's democratic potential to the political. On the contrary are the *aesthetics of presence* authors such as Richard Shusterman and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht both of whom write of aesthetic experience in popular culture, giving merit to commercial art mediums as having as much value as those considered high art. Furthermore, both Shusterman and Gumbrecht find ways to situate aesthetic experience within everyday worlds. Rather than consider commodified art as corrupted, for example, Shusterman believes it as an integral part of contemporary democratic culture. Gumbrecht's writings on aesthetic experience in relation to education follow a Deweyan model, specifically regarding the humanities. Gumbrecht advocates for a new relational model in humanities education that might

help to overcome our current divisive culture, keeping his discussion in this arena mainly to literature and poetry. Shusterman, in contrast, looks beyond high art to include popular art, film and television, rap music, and even the body as worthy avenues for engaging aesthetically. The following sections delve more deeply into each of these four authors.

MUST WE DEMAND SOMETHING OF ART?

What parameters, if any, are necessary to have an authentic aesthetic experience? Must art play some grand role such as to save us or to demand political action or to be “merely interesting” (as Ngai suggests)? In my opinion, these aesthetic modalities work similarly to deepen the categorization of aesthetic experience and to limit its worth as a space of repose. A more concentrated consideration of these *active* aesthetic approaches, as they oppose the idea of repose, is necessary to substantiate my claim. I’ll begin with Zabala’s recent text on the savior quality of aesthetic experience *Why Only Art Can Save Us* (2017). In the preface to his text, Zabala writes, “this book aims to show how contemporary art...is another realm where the remains of Being are disclosed, that is, where existence takes place” (Zabala *Preface* xi). Zabala goes on to assert that it is through “art’s alterations of reality” that being is disclosed and that this demands a new kind of aesthetic, “one of emergency” (xii). Zabala relies on philosopher Martin Heidegger’s discussion of art as the antidote to (or savior from) metaphysics in “The Origin of the Work of Art” as backdrop for his “aesthetic of emergency.” To begin, Zabala reasserts Heidegger’s own testament that 1) “art embodies the ontological struggle between the self-concealing earth and the illuminating world” and 2) that the work of art is the place where truth (as an event) happens (*Introduction* 1). Searching for salvation from metaphysics, Heidegger claims art not as it had to do with beauty, but rather, as a space of “unconcealment” where the

truth of beings begins to unfold (Krell 140). The work of art, he suggests, is something other than its outward appearance; on the contrary, it is essence, story, symbol (Heidegger in Krell 146).

As Zabala interprets it, Heidegger viewed art as the salvation from a state of emergency he associated with human beings' forgetfulness or, lack of a "sense of emergency." During his lifetime, Heidegger believed, humans had become blind to their essence; their "disappropriation" he claimed, "takes from them the truth of being, allows humanity, ensnared in such beings, to fall into a lack of emergency" (Heidegger in Zabala 2). A reliance on that which is calculable, where humans question nothing, is what precipitated this state of emergency. Overcoming such a state, Heidegger suggested, was not to be found in metaphysics, but in art. To this Zabala agrees.

I can also agree with Zabala that in the 21st century we cannot rely on metaphysics for answers. I also agree that our present day lives seem in a constant state of emergency, in which everything before us is explained as crisis, but also that our world, on so many levels, is in crisis. "Although the media — traditional, online, and social — are full of 'events' and 'emergencies,' the dominant impression of citizens in industrialized countries, whether at their centers or in their postcolonial slums, is that nothing new happens: reality is fixed, stable, and secured" (Zabala 5). It is an absence of emergency where, as Zabala asserts, "An aesthetic force is needed to shake us out of our tendency to ignore the 'social paradoxes' generated by political, financial, and technological frames that contains us" (5).

Zabala demands intervention rather than contemplation because as he sees it, "in framed democracies" we lack a sense of emergency (5). Noting previous artistic movements as examples, Zabala impels, "Just as impressionism was a response to industrialization and Dada to the First World War, contemporary art of emergency responds to the 'lack of a sense of emergency' that we are all framed within" (6). Emergency aesthetics, he asserts, interprets

contemporary art's "ontological essence...My post metaphysical aesthetics does not aim simply to overcome representations of reality but rather to disclose and interpret the forgotten and annihilated existential appeal of Being" (Zabala 7). Other authors, such as Arthur Danto and Jacques Rancière, also exact demands on art (as a transfiguration of the commonplace or dissensus from the sensible, respectively) (7). Zabala makes his own claim in agreement, "The truth of art no longer rests in representations of reality but rather in an existential project of transformation" (7). Furthermore, contemporary artists working within *emergency aesthetics* are given the task of saving humanity; they must be responsible to a wider, global audience, "now artists, along with their audience, are called to intervene for the sake of humanity" (8).

I agree that an encounter with a work of art today goes beyond the attainment of pleasure, or the synthesis of sense and understanding. As Zabala elucidates, "It's no longer possible to claim that the encounter with the work of art can be explained on the basis of optical, sociological, or even psychological models: this would ignore the ontological appeal to intervene expressed in contemporary art" (8). Borrowing from Danto, Zabala finds merit in contemporary art's ability to make meaning and evoke truth, although active interpretation is necessary (8). And though he disregards commercial art (such as media images or commercial photography) as less powerful than "works of art," Zabala calls upon commercial artistic examples as contemporary art; he claims the music of Tom Waits and the films of Steven Soderbergh "radical examples of art determined to save us." More than just narrations of truth, Wait's song "The Road to Peace" and Soderbergh's film "Traffic" possess existential qualities because "they demand that we take a stance in a process of transformation that is vital to our future" (9). Further citing Danto and Rancière, the author looks to works such as these not just from their creative essence but also as commonplace events from which we "feel a need to 'dissent'" (9). In

other words, aesthetic endeavors such as those of Waits or Soderbergh, present opportunities for humans to get out of their own way and overcome obstacles that continue to frame their sense of humanness and that “condition aesthetics” (Zabala 9). Interestingly, at this point in his text, Zabala tells his audience how they “ought to interpret” the title of his book — “only art can save us given the emergency of aesthetics, that is, the political ‘neutralization’ or ‘lack of a sense of emergency’ that we find ourselves in” (11).

Although I understand Zabala’s sense of urgency in finding a role for art that befits our 21st century reality, I find the author’s need to tell the reader how to interpret his book title curious and problematic. First, it seems to contradict his desire to take art out of its conditional framing, or the way we as viewers are conditioned to enter its framing. Furthermore, the author’s demand that the work of art must act as humanity’s savior sets a precedent that I believe devalues an individual’s own ability to critically (or not so critically) engage with art. Finally, I question the authenticity of setting the experience of art under accepted “doxa” instead of considering on the other hand, that it might contain limitless potentiality (Kottman 4).

Paul Kottman addresses a similar set of issues in his critical review of Zabala’s text, noting firstly the urgency with which Zabala turns to contemporary art for his claim. Referring specifically to Maurizio Cattelan’s golden toilet, titled *America* (2016), Zabala infers upon it the legacy of Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*, the early 20th century artist’s famous Dada piece of social commentary. To create this work of “art,” Duchamp took a urinal and placed it upside down, then signed and dated it in a sarcastic gesture meant to “authenticate” it. By upending the use of this everyday functional piece of modern technology, Duchamp called into question what constituted “art.” Notes Kottman, “As Duchamp understood, the term ‘artwork’ applies in late modernity only to those objects that are treated like artworks, in virtue of belonging to a

collection of such artworks. To be treated as belonging to an art collection means the object in question is taken out of the cycle of use, consumption, and waste” (1).

To be considered a work of art, then, meant that it would be displayed in a museum. This is not the case with Cattelan’s *America*; instead, the Guggenheim placed this 18-karat gold toilet in a public restroom, allowing over 100,000 viewers to use it. Might we consider that an aesthetic experience? Rather than put the toilet on public display, the museum utilized it as a functioning piece of plumbing in a single-use restroom. On one the one hand, a viewer/user could have a personal experience with this piece. However, the question arises as to whether that experience is aesthetic. As Kottman asserts, “One is thus not invited just to view or admire *America* — one is explicitly urged to use it, in just the way one would utilize any other toilet” (Kottman 1). Whether 18-karat gold or otherwise, placement of *America* in a restroom rather than on display in the museum limits the value of the experience, placing it more on the object’s use function than its artistic merit. That Zabala also claims *America* as an example of how art can save us, Kottman points out, can only be so by first emphasizing the object’s function in the service of our “unmet material needs” (1). Furthermore, the “emergency” in this case, refers to a human being’s natural bodily functions, rather than as essential to Being’s becoming as Heidegger’s discusses it. As Krell notes, “Heidegger...calls art the becoming of truth, the setting to work the truth of beings” (Krell 140).

Like Heidegger, from whom Zabala borrows the idea of emergency aesthetics, the author is longing for a new relationship of art to Being, an origin story that reinterprets the role of art away from its relationship to aesthetics, towards a position where thought takes precedence over beauty. Art is “truth setting itself to work,” says Heidegger. Beauty, on the other hand, resides in aesthetics (Heidegger in Krell 162). Furthermore, as Zabala interprets Heidegger, aesthetics,

rather than elevating art, “becomes cultural politics,” because it “is an indifferent measure of beauty” (Zabala 14). Following Heidegger, Zabala suggests that we conceal ourselves by the very nature of the things we do to not think; we busy ourselves with activities to quell our restlessness, we keep ourselves occupied so that we might leave thinking at bay (Zabala 14). Not thinking, according to Heidegger, is a condition of modern man; it is left out because what “is left to be thought about” had long ago turned away from man (Heidegger in Krell 372).

According to Zabala, Heidegger distrusts aesthetics, because, like philosophy, it can be framed by metaphysics. Zabala clarifies, “Its concealment of art behind measurements of objective beauty is the emergency of aesthetics, an emergency that will continue to enforce the reification of a lack of emergency until Being is no longer systematically retrieved, appropriated, or disclosed through our cultural contemplation of beauty” (Zabala 14). This objectification of art was problematic for Heidegger, who rather than fixate on the eternal “thingness” of the artwork, focused on its unfolding “essence” (Heidegger *Origins* in Krell 145). While my intention here is not to re-analyze Heidegger after Zabala, I believe it is pertinent to acknowledge Zabala’s reliance on Heidegger to explain his own use of the term “emergency” and to forward his own conviction that “only art can save us.” After summarizing Zabala, I will look more closely at where I believe his assessment of art’s role and its relation to beauty differs from Heidegger’s.

Zabala’s reading of Heidegger surmises that when art is framed within the methodology of aesthetics, its value is put in question (Zabala 20). Heidegger believed aesthetics had lost its connection to humanity, equating to a “loss of Being” in which values and standards (in the modern era) became interchangeable terms. Cultural values had themselves become measures, self-fulfilling essences; in turn culture, value and politics developed as the conditions of

becoming (20). Aesthetic experience, then, was not worthwhile as a lived experience because values have already been set forth, decided under the frame of democracy, and styled for the masses (Zabala 21). In sum, rather than moving one to transcendence, the outcome of aesthetic experience would provide satisfaction and validation within an already established set of conditions.

Zabala believes museum exhibitions exemplify this idea, showcasing works of art that have already been deemed “stable”: 1) they fit the already established aesthetic criteria and 2) they preserve “the cultural organization of democracy” (Heidegger as Zabala interprets 22). As a result, representations within this kind of cultural framing deter from a “sense of emergency” (Zabala 21). Noting Heidegger’s belief that works of art could disclose ontological meanings Zabala emphasizes, “To acknowledge this lack, aesthetics must twist free from representations, allowing for alterations and difference to disclose themselves through works of art” (23). Zabala clarifies thusly,

In sum, if we are able to acknowledge the remains of being through the disclosures of art, it’s not simply because these occur beyond aesthetics, at its margins, but most of all because of the emergencies artworks create through alterations. These alterations produce disruptions that require interpretation, response, and intervention instead of contemplation. These alterations make possible the recognition of truth’s beauty because they disclose emergencies and, moreover, because they imply change. (23)

In other words, change can only happen when the art is unstable, and as such, exposes “the aesthetic emergency.” The absence of emergency is the same as indifference to beauty, but there are “creators” (as opposed to artists) who expose this lack. According to Heidegger (via Zabala’s assessment of his writing), there is the “profession of art” and there is the “creation of

art” which differ in their purpose and outcome. The artist as professional produces work within the frame of capitalism, while the artist as creator works outside of this system. Furthermore, the “professional” artist retreats from cultural politics, while the creator uses his art to expose the essence of being through responding to the world, as one aware of the world’s suffering, rather than being indifferent to it (Zabala 26). The creator’s position has to do with exposing the nature of being first and foremost, and his creation acts as “an existential call we must respond to” (27). The artist, Heidegger states, “remains something inconsequential in comparison to the work — almost like a passageway which, in the creative process, destroys itself for the sake of the coming forth of the work” (Heidegger in Zabala 28). In turn, the work departs “the realm of culture” to arrive at “the remains of Being” (28).

The departure and arrival of the work, Zabala suggests, is an event that thrusts the work of art into its role as, “the art of essential emergency,” art that exposes the lack of sense of emergency related to the many frames under which human reality exists. Art must intervene, Zabala insists, “for the sake of salvation,” so that another way of being can come forth. “The art of essential emergency,” he clarifies, “is really about those experiences we are compelled to ignore or are unwilling to face” (Zabala 28). Emergency aesthetics, he continues, creates a role for art that is less about aesthetic experience and more about its ability to “rescue” human beings “into the emergencies that concern us...The art that really matters engenders rather than removes anxiety” (28). If I am reading this correctly, in order for something to be valid as art, or more so as an experience with art, it must evoke anxiety from the viewer. On a certain level Zabala’s reading of anxiety is like the notion of disruption as I discussed it earlier in this chapter. On the contrary, that art must be engendered to producing anxiety narrows its potentiality.

There are several issues with Zabala's interpretation of Heidegger in connection with his claim that art is humanity's savior. Moreover, Zabala's interpretation of Heidegger regarding anxiety is confusing: the "in your face" aspect of an encounter with art is something with which Heidegger might disagree. As Kottman points out, rather than drawing upon emergency, Heidegger viewed artworks as events that unfold in a dance between concealing and unconcealing, "the way a gust of wind both covers and uncovers as it passes over a sandy beach" (Kottman 3). In this way, it is a slow reveal, an uncovering of something hidden from view, yet always in the background. Heidegger stated it this way:

Art is the origin of the artwork and the artist. Origin is the provenance of the essence in which the Being of a being essentially unfolds. What is art? We seek its essence in the actual work...defined by that which is at work in the work, the happening of truth. This happening we think of as the instauration of strife between world and earth. Repose occurs in the concentrated agitation of this striving. The self-composure of the work is grounded here. (Heidegger *Origins* in Krell 182- 183)

Kottman summarizes Heidegger thusly, "truth" happens, as both the "concealing" and "unconcealing" of the "world in tension with...the Earth" (Kottman 3).

Heidegger's notion of truth as unconcealment bares out for the philosopher in reference to man's self-understanding as it can reveal itself through the work of art. However, Zabala interprets this idea as a concrete disclosure of truth. For Heidegger tension arises as the artwork exposes a certain concealed truth, but it is a slow-going participatory event. Heidegger used the example of van Gogh's painting *Pair of Shoes* (1886), a painting he declared is not just about a pair of shoes, but also a commentary on peasant life. Notes Krell in the introduction to Heidegger's *The Origins of the Work of Art*, "This work reveals things in their Being. More, it

reveals the *world* of the peasant who walks in those shoes while working the *earth*” (Krell 141). Notes Kottman, it is “the peasant farmer world, in tension with the Earth, as visible in the ‘equipmentality’ of the shoes as painted” (Kottman 3). For Heidegger, Kottman highlights, the painting’s significance arises from its ability to expose something that “modern technological modes of self-understanding not only overlook but actively conceal” (3). Impervious as self-understanding might be to this unconcealment, the experience of art slowly cultivates something anew as it brings forth participation “in the creative strife of world and earth.” In this way, as Heidegger declares, it gives rise to the Being of beings (Heidegger *Origins* in Krell 149).

Like the discussion earlier in this chapter, under his category of emergency aesthetics Zabala notes disruption as an essential component. However, as I evaluate his claim, to experience emergency aesthetics, itself lacks aesthetic experience. I would also argue that Zabala’s notion of art as savior and his concept of emergency aesthetics, whose value is placed in exposing the lack of emergency associated with modern technological culture, are themselves framing devices. This is another area where I believe Zabala digresses from Heidegger who argued the meddlesome nature of framing when he stated, “we force the work into a preconceived framework by which we obstruct our own access to the work-being of the work” (Zabala 165). Zabala wants the viewer/perceiver of emergency aesthetics to react to the state of emergency and then, act. On the contrary, Heidegger calls for openness as the artwork brings itself forth “as a becoming and happening of truth” (196).

Zabala further tasks the work of art with the role of redeemer, both exposing the absence of emergency, and rescuing human beings from their arrested state. Additionally, if I’m reading him correctly, Zabala has concluded that if art saves us, it is not aesthetic, therefore, if the experience of art is meant for salvation, it must not be an aesthetic experience. Emergency

aesthetics is, instead, both political and social with the aim of concurrence to a point of view, which in and of itself is ideological. Here again, Heidegger might argue otherwise, when he comments on the relationship of aesthetics to art, “Aesthetics takes the work of art as an object, the object of *aisthesis*, of sensuous apprehension in the wide sense. Today we call this apprehension of lived experience. The way in which man experiences art is supposed to give information about its essence” (Heidegger in Zabala 206).

Zabala offers several artistic examples to support his idea of emergency aesthetics, more than the limited number pages of this chapter will allow for review. These examples cover art that responds to contemporary events such as the 2008 housing crisis, the Iraq War, social inequality in urban settings, the Palestinian refugee crisis, and many other note-worthy events of the 21st century. At stake for this author, and I agree here, is humanity’s existence on all levels. I disagree, however, that beauty, and the kind of aesthetic experience that allows contemplation, must both be sacrificed to answer this existential call. Quoting Heidegger, Zabala insists that neither beauty nor contemplation have a place in 21st century aesthetic experience, “In metaphysical aesthetics, as Heidegger pointed out, ‘the beautiful is the relaxing, what is restful and thus intended for enjoyment. Art...[here] belongs in the domain of the pastry chef’” (Zabala 119). Zabala adds, “But in emergency aesthetics the beautiful is an existential intervention that belongs to the militant hermeneuticist, and the perception of beauty must thereby be a result of anarchic interpretations” (119). As one might surmise from these statements, beauty has been relegated to the realm of artisan, rather than art, and aesthetic experience has been replaced by an act of rebellion. Whether Heidegger would agree with Zabala’s here is questionable; in the Epilogue to *The Origins of the Work of Art*, Heidegger declared that beauty cannot be separated

from truth; in fact, beauty is “truth’s propriative event” (206). For Heidegger, it seems, both share equal importance in the ever-unfolding happening of art.

Zabala is not alone in his argument for an art of action. Although he rarely mentions Jacques Rancière in his text, there are similarities in their framing of aesthetic experience as it relates to contemporary political and social disruption. In his review of French philosopher Jacques Rancière’s *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (2010), writer Todd May notes Rancière’s definition of *politics* as a matter of challenging “the social hierarchy of a given set of social arrangements” in an act that “presupposes its own equality” (May).³ Furthermore, this act is a collective one, by a group of people who have been deemed unequal within the established hierarchical structure and in consort with others who stand with them in solidarity. Challenging the social hierarchy disrupts power arrangements, as well as the more deeply perceived and “epistemic underpinnings” of that order, along with the “naturalness” attached to it. Disrupting this so-called “norm” is what Rancière calls *dissensus* (May).

Added to this act of disruption is a concern for the aesthetic. According to May, “A *dissensus* is not merely a disagreement about the justice of particular social arrangements...It is also a revelation of the entire perceptual and conceptual order in which such arrangements are embedded...what Rancière calls... ‘The partition or distribution of the sensible.’” (May). An important consideration for May is Rancière’s use of the term *aesthetic*: it does not refer to the field of art, but rather, to a “particular regime of artistic practice” (May). In his introduction to Rancière’s *Dissensus*, editor Steven Corcoran explains, the act of *dissensus* begets the demise of the representative regime, which placed constraints on language and image use through the rules of mimesis and tied the propriety of representation to the norms attached to social hierarchy” (Corcoran in Rancière 17).

What occurs through *dissensus* is a new “principle of literariness” that frees language and representation, so that everyone no matter what his/her status, can “intervene in any form of discourse” within a “regime of unlimited representability” (Corcoran 17). In other words, a notion of non-fixed ontological distinctions severs the field of experience from “its traditional reference points” leaving it open “for new restructurings through the ‘free play’ of aesthetization” (17). This can move a particular position of the sensible from one partition to another; the new partition is based not upon hierarchy, but on equalities of aesthetic worthiness in “subject, activities and objects” (May). A redistribution of the sensible relates politics to aesthetics, as Rancière notes, “If there is such a thing as an ‘aesthetics of politics’ it lies in a re-configuration of the distribution of the common through political processes of subjectivation” (Rancière 140).

It is important to note the collective consideration at the heart of Rancière’s proposal in terms of its aesthetic component: It must be a “collective demonstration...that disrupts the distribution of social parts” (141-142). The political component to Rancière’s proposition articulates “new modes of constructing common objects and new possibilities of subjective enunciation” based on a reframing of the world of common experience “as the world of a shared impersonal experience” (142). Dissensus then, consists of two distinct, yet relatable components.

According to May’s reading of Rancière, as regards the relationship between art and life, the “aesthetic regime” must consider the paradoxes at its core. It should also deliberate the task of art to “navigate these paradoxes” keeping in mind the value of both sides. The relation of art to life is a complex one, where on the one hand “there is no border that separates art from life,” but on the other, art and life are two very separate experiences. The challenge is “how to keep

alive the *dissensus* of art without simply reducing it to the reality from which it dissents or claiming that that reality is nothing other than art” (May).

The first eight chapters of *Dissensus* discuss the aesthetics of politics to formulate each as acts of *dissensus*. According to book editor Steven Corcoran, the claim of Rancière’s main thesis is as follows: “What these activities do, each in their own way, is to effect a redistribution of the sensible, that is of the way in which human communities are ‘spontaneously’ counted as wholes divisible into their constitutive parts and functions” (Corcoran in Rancière 1). As acts of *dissensus*, both aesthetics and politics can disrupt normative notions of political activity that rely on the further notion of *consensus*. Rancière, himself, offers *dissensus* as an antidote to the ideological structures that make up the social order; these structures find grounding in ancient divisions of society, but also take shape in “contemporary flows of wealth, populations, opinions and geo-strategic forces” (Rancière 4-5). The aesthetics of politics thus involves movement away from a “consensual vision of politics” toward an enacting of rights guaranteed by the social order but denied by the constraints of that order (6). Each section in *The Aesthetics of Politics* offers descriptive explanations of how to define these terms.

Rancière’s writings on aesthetics extends its definition as a regime of art to reiterate its connection to politics and its position as a power structure. Rather than artworks referring upon themselves, the philosopher asserts their independence from themselves in a paradoxical relationship between sense and reception (Rancière “Aesthetics as Politics” in *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* 12). Moreover, as he observes, art takes on two forms, that of powerful communal voice on the one hand, or indiscernible object on the other, caught also between its place as a “work of art” and its commodified other (20). He reiterates, “aesthetics is held responsible both for the anything goes aspect of art and for having misled us with its fallacious promises of the

philosophical absolute and social revolution” (14). Art today, says Rancière, is a more modest form of its original self, situated somewhere between its radical singularity (as object) and its reuse within the already established imagery of “the common world” (Rancière “Aesthetics as Politics” in *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* 21). To situate art within the political, requires a redistribution of the sensible, in an aesthetic act that “renders visible the common” through “the framing of a space of presentation by which things of art are identified as such” (22). Rancière thinks of art, then, as a system of presentation; it becomes political when its sensory qualities are suspended in favor of its material and symbolic constitution. He states,

Art is not...political because of the messages and sentiments it conveys concerning the state of the world. Neither is it political because of the manner in which it might choose to represent society’s structures, or social groups, their conflicts and identities. It is political because of the very distance it takes with respect to these functions, because of the type of space and time that it institutes, and the manner in which it frames this time and peoples in space. (23)

Rancière’s aesthetic regime sets up an interesting, yet problematic relationship between the origins of the term *politic* as it refers to the polis or “of the people,” and its contemporary reference within the aesthetic realm. Within that relationship, the author sets up the term *politics* against itself, revealing the limitations of its fixed definition in the realm of sensation, while also offering the possibility of its redistribution through the act of *dissensus*. He defines politics as “not the exercise of, or struggle for power,” but rather, as “the configuration of a specific space, the framing of a particular sphere of experience, of objects posited as common and as pertaining to a common decision, of subjects recognized as capable of designating these objects and putting forward arguments about them” (24). Art itself is not political, Rancière asserts, however, the

frame of the political is aesthetic experience. “In the aesthetic regime of art, art is art to the extent that is something else than art. It is always ‘aestheticized,’ meaning that it is always posited as a ‘form of life’. The key formula of the aesthetic regime of art is that art is an autonomous form of life.” At the same time, he clarifies, the intersection of art and life, where “life becomes art” or vice versa, this is where we find the politics of aesthetics (Rancière *Dissensus* 118-119).

Similar to Zabala’s “emergency aesthetics,” Rancière’s politics of aesthetics aims to shake us out of our state of oblivion towards action. In the case of Zabala, the result of surviving the disruption is salvation; for Rancière, the outcome is dissent. What these authors share is that action takes precedence over experience. Furthermore, although equality stands at the heart of Rancière’s project, individual perception amounting to aesthetic experience is only legitimized if matched with something life changing (116). Both also argue against art that lends itself more to consumerism than experience, but I would argue there are many avenues that can prompt aesthetic experience. Furthermore, while I agree that disruption is an important component to aesthetic experience, I maintain that aesthetic experience does not require action. As I have asserted previously, the *aesthetic of repose* gives experience priority over reaction or response.

Must art save us, as Zabala attests? Or is all art so political, as Rancière asserts, that we must desensitize ourselves to its power? Is one type of art more legitimate than another as an avenue for aesthetic experience? What do we gain from these categorizations except to limit our own space of reference and our own authentic experience, whether it be one of fleeting pleasure and instant gratification or something greater, something more lasting, even, dare I suggest, spiritual? When we approach aesthetic experience with an element of repose, can we gain something that goes beyond the myriad of external voices asking us to resist, react or respond?

An offering of *aesthetic repose* counters Zabala's aesthetic emergency, or the idea that art can save us; it opposes the political in art; it also contrasts aesthetic saturation and the idea that every aspect of our lives must be or already is, curated for us. These three modes of aesthetic engagement, the savior, the political and the commodified commonly share a "correctness" of experience that notably limits the potentiality of that experience. Each one, while offering a place for art in human experience, at the same time contains an artificiality and estrangement from thoughtful, individual human experience. Furthermore, each makes demands of the viewer, in the form of immediate reaction, response or resistance as opposed to offering a moment of pause and repositioning.

It could be argued that in their immediacy, these aesthetic modalities (savior, political, commodified) can also illicit repositioning in the form of knowledge. However, as I previously asserted, the experience of art can also be a place of repose. Rather than being an active change, the shift that arises while in *aesthetic repose* is unintentional; it is an organic occurrence of quiet disturbance, whose natural consequence is self-repositioning. To clarify, the outcome of aesthetic experience in *repose* is less important than the experience itself. Furthermore, repositioning in *aesthetic repose* refers more directly to feeling at ease with not knowing. Finally, as *repose* happens within the self the subsequent repositioning affects one's relationship outside oneself.

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND THE BODY: SHUSTERMAN'S *SOMAESTHETICS*

To engage in *aesthetic repose*, then, regards an approach to that experience in which the visual stimulus or art that prompts the experience takes a back seat to the experience itself; the medium for that experience need not be specific. Several authors propose alternatives to the commodified, religious, and politicized outcomes for aesthetic experience. Like Dewey, author Richard Shusterman, for example, locates aesthetic experience within the pragmatist tradition.

Playing off Dewey's aesthetics, Shusterman offers his own slow form of aesthetic experience, *somaesthetics*, which I discussed briefly in a previous section of this dissertation and will attend to succinctly here. As Shusterman defines it, *somaesthetics* "concerns the body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning" (Shusterman 2).⁴

Shusterman suggests *somaesthetics* as a way to bridge the divide between high and low culture. According to the author, the discipline of the humanities has tended toward a higher cause, through its pursuit of "topics of high culture" that in turn, create a "aura of established nobility" (Shusterman 1). Instead, Shusterman asks, why can't the humanities extend its studies toward the world as we live in it today, within the realm of popular culture? In addition, the humanities have traditionally favored the mind as the most important aspect of our humanity. Shusterman cites the German term "*Geisteswissenschaften*" to point out its literal translation as "spiritual (or mental)" sciences' (1). Disregarding the body, he believes, leaves out an important aspect central to the question of what it means to be human. To understand the human condition, Shusterman asserts, we ought to engage in a conversation that considers our "lived somatic experience" (3).

The body is an essential part of our humanness: it houses our perceptions, it is performative, it is relational in that it is, at once individual, yet shares characteristics of the broader human species (4). As well, the body is a marker for transmitting human values and social norms; it can unite us under shared commonalities or divide us through varied social and cultural differences. Furthermore, it can express both freedom and oppression, in our ability to move freely about the world on the one hand, on the other, constrained by either bodily degeneration or some force outside of ourselves (6-7). In total, the body expresses that we are at once subject and object, "as something in the world and as a sensibility that experiences, feels and acts in the world (3). Shusterman clarifies this last point,

When using my index finger to touch a bump on my knee, my bodily intentionality or subjectivity is directed toward feeling another body part as an object of exploration. I both *am* body and *have* a body. In much of much of my experience, my body is simply the transparent source of perception or action and not the object of awareness. It is that *from which* and *through which* I perceive or manipulate the objects of the world on which I am focused, but I do not grasp it as an explicit, external object of consciousness, even if it is sometimes obscurely felt as a background condition of perception. (Shusterman 3)

To summarize, our bodies are inscribed with our human experiences from various points of entry and on multiple levels. With this in mind, Shusterman asserts that “we cannot act without bodily means” (6). In turn, cultivating greater “somatic awareness,” similar to that found in Eastern mindfulness practices such as meditation or martial arts, helps to instill “proper mind-body harmony” (8) Unifying the mind and body can then “improve our perceptual sensitivity and powers of action” (8).

According to Shusterman, Western humanistic philosophy disregards this mind-body connection partly because of its unwillingness to acknowledge the body as carrying equal significance to the mind in understanding what it means to be human. Rather, humanist thinkers regard the body merely for “its service to higher functions of humanity identified with the soul (9). Shusterman explains it thusly,

Part of the reason is our profound reluctance to accept our human limitations of mortality and frailty, which the body so clearly symbolizes. Though the field of humanities was first introduced in contrast to theological studies termed “divinity,” humanist thinkers do not seem content to be human; they secretly want to transcend mortality, weakness, and

error and to live like gods. Since bodily life does not allow this, they focus on the mind.⁵

(8)

The idea of “transcendence” is itself an other-worldly concept. Shusterman traces its lineage from ancient Greek philosophy through Christian theology and forward from Enlightenment thinking to modern times. As regards the “body in service of the soul” model, thinking of the body as inferior to the mind and emphasizing only its functional use value means humanist thinkers can still strive toward “the highest and purest of spiritual ends” (Shusterman 10).

Might it be possible, instead, to locate transcendence within the flux of our existence, through our continual development of both mind and body, as gained through our experiences in the here and now? As Shusterman notes,

Like other aspects of our humanity, transcendence has a distinctly bodily expression in the soma’s urge for locomotion; in its reaching out to the world for nutrition; in its normativity of developmental growth and self-transformations of its physiological systems.... Strengthening the body helps develop the mind, which it nourishes and informs through its senses. (9).

Emphasizing somatic awareness, gained through “slow, sustained thinking,” can according to Shusterman, bring forth “greater tranquility” of mind, increased “focus of our mental concentration” and subsequently, more patient and enduring reflection (11). To be able to nurture thinking in this way, I liken to remaining in repose. Furthermore, as relates to aesthetic experience, I agree with Shusterman that somatic awareness nurtures the senses in a way that can produce a more valuable and sustainable experience. He states,

Our appreciation of art’s sensuous beauties has an important somatic dimension, not simply because they are grasped through our bodily senses (including the sense of

proprioception that traditional aesthetics has ignored) but, in addition, because art's emotional value, like all emotion, must be experienced somatically to be experienced at all.⁶ (16)

To clarify, Shusterman is acknowledging here that aesthetic experience can be a “full-bodied experience” where the physical sensations that accompany one's experience might also enable mindful contemplation and in turn, enhance one's subjectivity (17). He states it thusly, “human thought would not make sense without the embodiment that places the sensing, thinking subject in the world and therefore, gives her perspective and direction” (17). Moreover, beyond the personal growth that can result from “thinking through the body,” Shusterman decrees, are the enhancements this mindful practice can produce in human culture. As noted at the beginning of his essay, Shusterman's goal with *somaesthetics* was to bring the discipline of humanities down to earth. In a later essay, the author embraces popular culture as one arena where his aesthetic proposal might take form.

DOES THE MEDIUM MATTER? IN DEFENSE OF POPULAR ART

Shusterman does not dismiss or oppose the political, religious or commodity aspects of aesthetic experience, however. On the contrary, he pinpoints them within their contexts of common culture. He notes that “even popular entertainment of one culture can become the high classics of another subsequent age” (Shusterman *Pragmatist Aesthetics* 169). He also notes that even within one timeframe, something can go from popular to high art as it gets interpreted and appropriate within the public. It gives us, as he says, “aesthetic satisfaction” (169-170).

Shusterman defends the aesthetic satisfaction of popular art succinctly:

To accept its wholesale denunciation as debased, dehumanizing, and aesthetically illegitimate. To condemn it as fit only for the barbaric taste and dull wit of the

unenlightened, manipulated masses is to divide us not only against the rest of our community but against ourselves. We are made to disdain the things that give us pleasure and to feel ashamed of the pleasure they give. Thus, while conservative and Marxian critics of popular culture bemoan our contemporary societal and personal fragmentation...the rigid line of legitimacy they draw between high and popular culture both reinscribes and reinforces those same painful divisions in society, and still more deeply in ourselves. (170)

According to the author, delegitimizing art of this kind acts as “a form of ascetic renunciation, one of many forms that intellectuals since Plato have employed to subordinate the unruly power and sensual appeal of the aesthetic” (170). He further insists that to be liberated from the hegemonic structures that oppressed the vast lot of us who don’t portend to so-called “high culture,” to be being freed from this bond can lead to other cultural reforms (170).

Shusterman lists four factors that interfere with defending of popular art. First, defense of popular art must happen within the realm of intellectual pursuits in order that it be legitimized as important. However, as Shusterman notes, anyone interested in popular art most likely will find intellectual critique of the subject irrelevant: “They see no need to defend their taste against claims of alienated “uptight” intellectuals, just as they see no need to justify it by anything more than the satisfaction it gives them and so many others.” Second, those who might apologize for the shortcomings of popular art do so in defense of its use-value as a democratic, unfiltered means for social change, which then gives it “aesthetic validity.” In this case, those of lower status have an opportunity to experience art that is on their level (according to Gans, whom Shusterman quotes in his essay), but popular art should only be tolerated until we can educate the

masses on a higher level (Shusterman calls it “social apology. See also his thoughts on the “myth of aesthetic apology”) (Shusterman 170-171)

A third way that makes it difficult to defend popular art is due to the connotation of “high art” as predicated on genius and originality, in contrast to the idea that popular art is thought to be more generally accepted as commercial and standardized (171). This notion neglects the idea that not all “high art” is good art just as not all popular art is sub-standard. In both cases, some “aesthetic discrimination” and flexibility is necessary. One final problem in defending popular art, according to Shusterman, involves the placing of the term “aesthetic” only within the realm of high art and intellectual culture, leaving popular art to languish as its illegitimate sibling. Intellectual bias amongst theorists and critics, such as Pierre Bourdieu, only serve to strengthen this divide. As noted in Shusterman, Bourdieu insisted that the “popular aesthetic is nothing more than “a foil or negative reference point” from which any legitimate aesthetic must distance itself to establish legitimacy” (172). In summary, what Shusterman is pointing out through his list of indefensible arguments for popular art is that the negative critique regarding popular art “is a fundamentally aesthetic one,” i.e., that, according to some critics, like Gans, popular art is “aesthetically worthless” (174).

To be sure, one problem of popular art is that because of its persuasive quality, it can become propagandistic. But can’t we also say that about so-called high art? Throughout the history of art there are numerous fine art examples that were created for persuasive means. Fine art up until the mid-19th century most often carried political, religious, or social messages, meant to appeal to the masses. The imperial imagery of ancient Rome comes to mind, as well as Medieval and Renaissance religious art, or even the stately portraiture of the French Imperial court. In the 20th century Adolf Hitler realized the power of art and used it greatly to promote his

totalitarian regime, upgrading the classical Imperial style to fit with the popularity of European art deco. Hitler also took it upon himself to decide what constituted “good” art, choosing both traditional art styles, as well as heroic paintings of the working-class families that were his appeal.

This would lead us to suggest that art in general is either supposed to be political or it’s supposed to save us, or it’s meant to put us in a trance. But, as Shusterman rightly points out, we can’t just swing between the two poles of popular art as at once purely manipulative and without any aesthetic or social merit, and, on the other hand, the most expressive form of “ingenuous optimism” (Shusterman 177). Shusterman takes a more mediating position, stating, “popular art should be improved because it leaves so much to be desired, but that it *can be* improved because it can and often does achieve real aesthetic merit and serve worthy social goals” (177). The author thus gives merit to popular art’s aesthetic value; I would argue further that popular art, as much as any other form, can also offer itself for a deeply engaging, gratifying and meaningful aesthetic experience. He asks the question, “Are we permanently or even lastingly satisfied by the reading of a single sonnet or the viewing of a dozen paintings? Does the passing of these gratifications imply that they are somehow fraudulent?” “Not at all,” states the author, “because one of the positive features of genuine aesthetic pleasure is that, while it gratifies, it also stimulates the desire for more such pleasure” (Shusterman 179).

With these statements, I believe Shusterman, similar to Cavell, embraces the aesthetic experience as replete with interpretative possibilities. In his essay on the value of Dewey’s pragmatism, Shusterman argues that “everything we understand and talk about is interpretation” (Shusterman 72).⁷ Clarifying “perspectival pluralism” as a valid pragmatist view of interpretation, the author insists,

The very notion of interpretation implies that other interpretations are in principle possible (and may be even reasonable or somehow valid). Even if one interpretation seems right or best, its rightness does not entail that all the others are wrong. Works of art and literature are notoriously open to multiple interpretations.⁸ (Shusterman 72).

Furthermore, context, perception, and reflection all shape interpretation in contrast to the more immediate, a priori function of understanding. As Shusterman points out, there exists a relationship between understanding and interpretation, but they are not one in the same. Understanding, he explains, “is what interpretation relies or builds on, even if such basic understandings were at some point shaped by earlier interpretations, which relied still on earlier understandings” (73). In turn, giving weight to the idea that understanding can be more immediate than interpretation, legitimizes its importance to “our cognitive life.” (73). Notes Shusterman, “most of the time when we intelligently understand and react to situations through appropriate behavior we are not engaging in reflection, thinking or interpretation; we respond through intelligent, unreflective habit” (73). To clarify, we can have experiences that do not need and do not lead to further elucidation.

However, Shusterman recognizes a discursive element in interpretation, especially as he links it to his notion of somatic experience.⁹ As noted previously, Shusterman associates his concept of *somaesthetics* within Dewey’s pragmatic formulation of aesthetic experience. He reminds us that Dewey valued art not for its use value, but rather, for the way in which objects of art can become conduits to experiences that enhance and enrich human life. Referring to that encounter as aesthetic experience, Shusterman notes, “helps highlight that there are aesthetic dimensions beyond the official realm of art that are worth noticing and cultivating” (75). As such, Shusterman declares, “Art can be relished in wordless wonder. Experience, moreover, can

likewise be usefully deployed as a general term to designate the consequences of action and thought that are lived or felt in ways which may not be articulated (or even articulable) in language” (Shusterman 75). In this way, we might be guided toward meaning and significance, in the experience, and I might add here, relative to our own pleasures, needs and desires, rather than having to match it to some already established connotation (79). For Shusterman, pleasure became the foundation to his “aesthetic appreciation” of popular art as a definitive contributor to “a culture’s aesthetics or an individual’s vocabulary and self-fashioning” (79). This is not to discourage the celebration of high culture, but instead, to recognize the value of popular art as it appeals to a broader audience and can thus, contribute to each individuals own sense of being a part of something.

On the other hand, Shusterman is against the supposed ephemeral nature of popular art because it places it in some otherworldly realm; it lacks the durability of, for example, the works of Homer that we still enjoy today (180).¹⁰ For purposes of understanding the *aesthetic of repose*, however, neither lack of permanence nor enduring quality is the most relevant feature. Rather, to experience something aesthetically while in repose offers a kind of engagement that, while certainly pleasurable, can lend itself to a much deeper, more profound encounter.

In fact, as a modality of aesthetic experience, the *aesthetic of repose* can act as a bridge to all these varied uses of the aesthetic. First, it does not delineate the form of art; popular art can provide aesthetic engagement just as that considered to be high art. Second, meaning and interpretation happen through the experience, not the object of that experience. Therefore, the experience can occur anywhere in one’s built environment; for example, through something that confronts one on the drive home, such as graffiti or a mural on the side of a building. Thirdly, the length of that experience matters not; whether watching a durational performance or observing a

temporary installation, sitting in a theater, or walking through an art museum, the opportunity to have that experience *in repose* remains available.

As Shusterman notes, even the Greek Classics were first meant as popular forms of art; Greek Tragedy, for example was a “popular and raucous affair, as was Elizabethan theater” (181). Today, these same examples are seen as “high art,” having been reappropriated as items of taste and cultural elitism (181). Shusterman also questions the devaluing of the ephemeral nature of popular art stating that such an option, discounts it as a mere substitute for real aesthetic experience. Here he is referring to Adorno, who criticized popular forms of art as “false surrogates” and forms “of narcotic escape” with no lasting effect (182). In his introduction to Adorno’s *Note to Literature* (2019), Paul Kottman writes that, for his part, Adorno was concerned with the art’s destiny in the commodified landscape of capitalist modernity, an era that saw art’s meaning and value increasingly driven by its commercial viability (Kottman in Adorno 3). Writing specifically about literature, Adorno was nostalgic for a more traditional role for art that favored the formalist, self-referentiality he found in the long line of works from Shakespeare to Goethe and on through some modernist writers. Along this line, according to Kottman, Adorno considered “modernist art as ‘critical’ — artistically serious — in virtue of its formal properties, its autonomous development in the sphere it ekes out for itself” (4). Notes Kottman, “Adorno sees our experiences of the autonomy of modernist art as pathological, even painful — an acknowledgement that artworks call for or express something we have been unable to make happen in our own social lives” (5). The writings of Shakespeare and Goethe, the music of Webern and Berg, according to Adorno, stood outside of what he referred to as the “culture industry” and its precedence for standardization (5). As artistic expressions, these works offer “meaningful subjective experience” within “purely formal artistic forms;” as such they resist that

commercialization Adorno associated with the “culture industry,” living outside of that reality or social function (5).

We might question the relevance of Adorno’s critique to contemporary aesthetic philosophy. He found popular art to be a distraction. On the other hand, Shusterman asks that we not discount popular art forms as means to aesthetic engagement, suggesting that even the briefest encounter can provide both pleasure and enduring satisfaction (Shusterman 181). He believes we can find value in commercial art forms if we avoid being consumed by them, avoid becoming spellbound or zombie-like. This criticism of popular art, that it only offers up effortless passivity and empty superficiality (not purposiveness without purpose?) stands in contrast to high art, which “demands aesthetic effort” (Shusterman 183). Furthermore, it claims there can be no aesthetic challenge or active response; instead, we linger as passive consumers. However, as Shusterman attests, even the highest art gets “mediated and removed from actual living” (182).

Conversely, I would argue neither passivity nor action need play a role in aesthetic repositioning. Shusterman agrees, stating, “So even if all art and aesthetic enjoyment do indeed require some active effort or the overcoming of some resistance, it does not follow that they require effortful ‘independent thinking’” (183-184). The author suggests there are other, “more somatic forms of effort, resistance, and satisfaction” such as rock songs which can emit both “energetic and kinesthetic response) (184). To Shusterman, the idea that the sensuous is incompatible with the intellect seems preposterous, and, quoting John Lennon, the author cedes that rock music, “gets right through you without having to go through your brain” (184). As he assesses the critics, if it isn’t “cerebral” the conclusion becomes that it is not “aesthetically legitimate” (185). This in turn, concludes Shusterman, is a “philosophical prejudice with a

platonic pedigree” — the idea that the intellect and the sensuous cannot work together (185).

That prejudice leads more deeply to the argument that popular art is a distraction from reality and does not engage with everyday life — a claim that popular art’s only goal is to put us all in a “drugged quiescent stupor” (185).

Shusterman believes on the other hand, that rock music has often been a voice of protest and promise — Live Aid, Farm Aid, and other large scale music festivals, for example. He asks the question, what even is the criteria for something to be deemed “worthy of artistic expression?” (187). Does the “common” aspect of popular art delegitimize it as being a worthy avenue for aesthetic experience? According to Shusterman those critical of popular art would say yes due to its presumed lack of originality, lack of relevance to reality and banality (Shusterman 187). On the contrary, Shusterman states, “however unattractively banal they are to the cultural aesthete, such ‘unreal’ problems (and the common ‘unreal’ people whose lives they exhaust) constitute an important dimension of our world” (187). Quoting Bruce Springsteen, these “spare parts and broken hearts keep this world turnin’ round” (187). Critics also argue that popular art lacks “sufficient complexities, subtleties and levels of meaning” to sustain any kind of interest while high art offers enough to be “perceived and understood on several levels” (187).

According to the author, there are three reasons popular art is considered less than ideal for aesthetic experience. First, creativity gets lost in the standardization that is consistent with popular art. Secondly, the fact that much of popular art requires partnership between various disciplines for its production means that authenticity and originality, so important to “high art,” suffers. Lastly, critics of popular art condone its lack of individual self-expressive quality and thus, consider it to be unoriginal as aesthetic expression (188). Shusterman strongly disagrees, countering that these statements both disregard the often-collaborative nature of aesthetic

creation and only serve to keep art in its high castle. Complicating this further is the still looming myth of the creative genius whose integrity upholds the idea that for art to be legitimate the artist must live in isolation and carry contempt for common culture (192).

All these arguments rest on the premise that aesthetic creation is necessarily individualistic, a questionable romantic myth nourished by bourgeois liberalism's ideology of individualism, and one which belies art's essential communal dimension. In any case, none of these arguments is compelling, nor will they serve to isolate popular works from high art. (187)

Shusterman elaborates on his contrasting view of the above three points, noting first that even the mostly highly elevated aesthetic forms contain an element of standardization; the length of a sonnet for example, "is as rigidly standard as the TV sitcom's" (Shusterman 189). In either case, he stresses, it takes imagination to overcome predictable conventions and achieve "aesthetic validity" (189). Regarding the lack of original expression, he argues that even the construction of ancient Greek temples and Gothic cathedrals required teamwork: "Though collective production will no doubt place constraints on the flights of individual fancy, it is also true that the collaboration of several minds can compensate creativity with added imaginative resources" (190). Elaborating on this point, Shusterman adds

In any case we must remember that even individual imagination always works in some sort of collaboration with a larger community, in terms of the tradition's inherited conventions and the audience's anticipated reactions. Thus, even the high-culture artist, as a socially constructed and socially motivated self, may, in the very act of leasing herself, also be trying to please a large audience - even if it be only the imagined legions of posterity. (190)

Additionally, Shusterman believes, the third argument about popular art's lack of creativity presumes it must be easily readable to a large audience and as such requires only "the most basic stereotypes in both content and form" (190). This homogenization disregards the fact that a mass audience for popular art contains within it a multitude of differentiations in social, ethnic, educational, and ideological backgrounds, each of whom respond to this art form based on their individual backgrounds and experience. As corroboration for this point, Shusterman emphasizes, "Media studies show that a work expressing a particular view can be very popular with audiences who reject (or simply do not grasp) it, because such audiences systematically misread the work, creatively 'decoding' or reconstituting its meaning to make it more interesting and serviceable to them" (Shusterman 191). In short, as Shusterman points out, popular does not necessarily equate to conformity, nor "does it preclude the creation of meanings only properly understood by initiates in a subculture or countercultural artistic tradition" (192).

Stated succinctly, creative expression of any kind, whether popular or otherwise, can lend itself to aesthetic appreciation. Critics of popular art, however, believe that its entertainment aspect delegitimizes popular art as truly autonomous and original; because it is "popular," that is, designed for a mass audience, it "forfeits its aesthetic legitimacy" (193). As Adorno asserts, to be considered legitimate, art must be divorced from "ungodly reality" and use function...if any function can be ascribed to art at all, it is the function to have no function" (Adorno in Shusterman 193). Bourdieu also claims that art must "break from the world." According to Bourdieu, for art to be authenticated as "art" (as opposed to something else) "requires 'an autonomous field of artistic production...capable of imposing its own norms on both the production and consumption of its products' and of refusing external functions or 'any necessity other than those inscribed in...[its] specific tradition'" (Bourdieu in Shusterman 193). However,

the popular aesthetic does no such thing, instead engaging in “real-life concerns and pleasures” which in turn, deems it unworthy of even being called “art” (193). The transfiguration of art as pure autonomy, as occurred in the late 19th century, as it is argued by Bourdieu, cannot be reversed (193).

Shusterman disagrees, however, with the idea that popular art is not legitimate as “art” or more to the point, that the experience of popular art is not aesthetic. These ideas, he states, rest on the philosophical prejudice that first claims sovereignty over the aesthetic and second, maintains the separation of art from life. On the contrary, the author points out, is the fact that as of today, there is an “implosion of the aesthetic into all areas of life” (Shusterman 194). To appreciate it, we must break from this prejudice and “see that art surely forms part of life, just as life forms the substance of art and even constitutes itself artistically in ‘the art of living.’ Both as objects and experiences, works of art inhabit the world and function in our lives” (194).

There is good and bad to be gleaned from this aesthetic invasion and its penetration in so many aspects of human life. As I referred to it earlier, in the 21st century, we have become oversaturated with the curated life to the point that it is sometimes difficult to make an original decision about what we like, what gives us pleasure, or what constitute our own, individual aesthetic experience. I would argue that we can have meaningful experiences with popular art as much as any other form but recognizing that experience as one’s own can be difficult, mired as it is in the “musts” of our exaggeratedly crafted lives. So how does one stop the noise long enough to take a pause and just be with the experience? I cannot summarily answer that question, but I can offer that allowing for an aesthetic experience to happen in *repose* might provide both respite and a subsequent shift in thinking.

Shusterman agrees, advocating for the Deweyan pragmatic approach to aesthetic engagement that caters to the needs of the “live creature,” as Dewey refers to human beings. For Shusterman, two items stand out as fundamental to Dewey’s aesthetic philosophy:

Two things...are clear. Dewey’s privileging of art over science on a fundamentally naturalist and empiricist philosophical base was both brave and a therapeutic gesture in an increasingly technological world whose dominant cultural hero was the scientist.

Secondly, aesthetic inquiry would seem best served by a philosophy which treats not only art but its theory as having the highest philosophical importance and recompence for our cultural self-understanding. (Shusterman 12)

Summarizing Dewey, aesthetics, like science, can be a form of ordering and coping with experience, Dewey’s continuity thesis — connects various aspects of human experience and decries the isolation of art from that experience. As Dewey himself states: “esthetic perceptions are a necessary ingredient to happiness” they are part of our everyday living (Dewey in Shusterman 13).

AUTHENTICITY AND LEGITIMATION

In America, the thriving and success of popular arts dominates. High art was a construct lead by the aristocracy in Europe as a way of distinguishing themselves above the emerging bourgeoisie. Religion also provided a highly spiritualized experience with art that garnered “pious attention” (Shusterman 197). However, America did not have to contend with these “socio-historical factors” (197). For one, the freedom and independence that stand at the heart of American ideology made it more flexible and decentered than traditional European societies. Second, as a nation of immigrants, no one central tradition dominated in America’s early years, thus no imposed cultural uniformity and furthermore, no “tradition of high art could be imported

and held up” (197). As Shusterman attests, the cultural plurality of American popular art had a liberating effect (197). Today, notes Shusterman, popular artists “regard their role as more than mere entertainment.” Popular artists today crossover genres and artistic mediums. Moreover, their art becomes legitimized through awards like the Oscars, the Emmys, or the Tony awards, which confer an impression of “artistic prestige” on the award recipient, thus validating him/her as an artist (196).

Another critique against the legitimization of popular art condemns it for “not achieving adequate form.” Shusterman refers to Abraham Kaplan here, who argued that popular art “does not invite or permit sustained effort” due to its “formlessness” and lack of unity (Shusterman 198). This opinion supposes that content is the most important aspect of popular art. Not so, says Shusterman, who argues that works of popular art can, in fact, prompt a “variety of aesthetic effects” in part due to their self-conscious allusion to and from each other (199). Furthermore, Shusterman argues against the presumed disconnection between form and content that theorists like Bourdieu promote; Bourdieu instead only finds “aesthetic legitimacy” with the singularity of the work of art, that is, to its unique form in relation to other works. Aesthetic appreciation, Bourdieu believes, only comes about through an emphasis on the “specific artistic effects which are only appreciated relationally” (Bourdieu in Shusterman 199). As Shusterman notes, however, works of popular art also influence one another in terms of self-consciously invoking “a variety of aesthetic effects” (Shusterman 200).

Shusterman’s argument in favor of popular art as experience legitimizes the medium as a valid avenue for authentic aesthetic engagement and individual self-reflection. Therefore, we might ask again, does the medium matter? As has been noted by several contemporary thinkers, even Greek tragedy played to a large audience, much like popular art today. Theater was an

important part of cultural life for all Athenian citizens, regardless of status. Alexander Nehamas, for example, compares the argument for or against popular art with Plato's concerns about poetry as a harmful, imitative art. As he evaluates Book X of Plato's *Republic* (4th BCE), Nehamas questions Plato's argument against poetry, comparing it to critical arguments against the value of television today. Greek drama, he clarifies, carries common features to popular literature: 1) the volume of output is similar, the most prominent three Greek tragedians produced upwards of 300 works; 2) The audience of the Greek tragedy was similar in size and scope as television viewership; and 3) The 'magic' projected upon TV is "structurally identical to the magic Plato denounced in Greek poetry" (Nehamas *Plato and the Mass Media* 227).

As Nehamas further points out Plato's concerns about poetry were ethical; Plato felt that the medium fed off human desires and passions, which stand in opposition to the rational behavior necessary for an ordered city. Notes Nehamas, Plato viewed poetry as bad for the soul because it was "a medium inherently suited to the representation, or imitation, of vulgar subjects and shameful behavior." From Book X

The irritable part of the soul gives many opportunities for all sorts of imitations, while the wise and quiet character which always remains the same is neither easy to imitate nor easy to understand when imitated, especially for a festival crowd, pole of all sorts gathered in the theaters. (604e1-5)

Plato's limited point of view deflected the philosopher from seeing the value of art beyond its ethical allegiance. His concerns about the effect of poetry on Greek citizenry assessed poetry not as it might be reflective of life, but rather, as a perversion of it. According to Nehamas, Plato's issue was that because the difference between imitation and reality is "ontological," an audience might perceive them similarly (Nehamas 221). As Nehamas asserts, Plato assumed that "our

reactions to life follow on the lines of our reactions to poetry” as though watching *Medea* would lead a mother to murder her children (218). To engage in the poetics of Greek theater, then, was an appeal to the ‘lowest part of the soul’ (221).

Similarly, mediated representations such as what we might find in popular art can distort reality. Nehamas does not view this as having negative value, however. That bias, he states, is a critical argument based in Platonic thinking that viewed poetry as disturbing due to its lack of “fine art” value and attachment to life and reality in a way that fine art does not (Nehamas 225). To clarify, attending the Greek theater, because of its “commercial’ quality and mass audience, displaces it as an art form in the highest sense. Rather, Nehamas suggests, we might compare a night of Greek tragedy to experiencing today’s movies. In turn, while Plato might view this popular medium as a distortion of reality, as a “duplicate” per se, Nehamas believes we can read popular art in much the way we do fine art, as an “indirect, interpretive relation to the world” (Nehamas 226). States Nehamas,

Popular art is commonly perceived as literally incorporating parts of reality within it; hence, the generally accepted and mistaken, view that it requires little or no interpretation... We do not literally emulate our literary heroes... we understand them through interpretation and transformation, finding their relevance to life, if anywhere, on a more abstract level. (227)

With this statement, I believe Nehamas, like Shusterman, gets to the crux of the issue regarding the experience of art of any medium and on every level: that literal connection is the only outcome of that experience and that if not correct, it will corrupt. On the contrary, human beings are not misshapen souls as Plato would have us believe (221). We are capable of individual thought and thus, can make connections that do not need to be told how to react or

respond. I would also argue against the assumption that there is only one way to have an authentic experience, either as pleasurable or painful. Finally, let's not assume that because a person has an experience with something others might not consider "aesthetic" that it might not be vital to one's self-understanding and subsequent repositioning.

DISMANTLING THE FRAMES OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

As mentioned previously, author Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht refers to the concept of disruption as it is specifically tied to aesthetic experience. He further specifies that, like the examples above, numerous modes of aesthetic experience exist that tie that experience to our everyday lives (Gumbrecht 301). Through his analysis, Gumbrecht is trying to take aesthetic experience out of its traditional autonomous framing. To do so, he offers three types of aesthetic experience that occur "as crises in the literal sense," moments of estrangement within everyday life (302). One such occurrence regards changes in environment that make one pause; a second resembles the old adage of "form follows function" in which an object so effortlessly becomes a part of our lives that we "suspend our everyday attitude toward it," gaining aesthetic value by way of its ease of functionality. A third mode of experience happens when something that has always been a part of our everyday suddenly "appears in a new, exceptional light, in the light of aesthetic experience" (302).

Gumbrecht explains this as a switch in framing that occurs when, "we suddenly think of food as 'artsy food,' we suddenly see clothes as 'fashion,' we suddenly begin to appreciate an 'elegance' in the solution of a mathematical problem, or we are suddenly surprised to hear a rhyme that we have inadvertently produced while speaking" (302). To reiterate, the three aesthetic modalities Gumbrecht offers, 1) arise from everyday interruptions, 2) emerge from an object's function and 3) result from a switch in framing (303). According to Gumbrecht,

disruptive happenings lead to an experience in which we either bend to the will of the normal and familiar or turn toward the strange that has now entered consciousness (308). He offers four characteristics for describing aesthetic experience as it unfolds from this so-called “disruptive happening” (308). Firstly, is the “*content of aesthetic experience*,” which includes “intimate feelings” we might not have access to in our daily lives. The second involves the “*objects of aesthetic experience*” that is, those things that trigger the experience in terms of “feelings, impressions and images.” A third feature related to aesthetic experience regards the conditions of that experience: these are, “historically specific circumstances on which, in each case, the happening of aesthetic experience will rely.” The example Gumbrecht uses here is Kant’s *disinterestedness*, which was not conceptualized prior to his 18th century writing, but upon its publication, became a particular condition for a judgement of taste. Finally, there are the “*effects of aesthetic experience*,” that is, what results from that experience, including unexpected transformation that maintains long after the experience (Gumbrecht 305).¹¹

Although our current cultural environment easily lends itself to it, Gumbrecht warns against relying too heavily on any traditional framing of aesthetic experience or meaning making. He states,

We appreciate, as a central content of aesthetic experience, the impression of an oscillation between meaning effects and presence effects, that is, an oscillation between the concepts and functions that we associate with objects, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, their tangibility as things. If it is impossible to repress or to stop our meaning production in relation to the things of the world (‘interpretation’), we have developed a particularly strong desire today and a particularly high appreciation for the ‘grain’ of the world, for its ‘punctum’...More than ever before perhaps (and due to our longing for a

grain of the world), many of us want to play with everyday things as potential objects of aesthetic experience.” (306 – 307)

In his review of Gumbrecht’s book, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (2003), writer Carsen Strathausen explains Gumbrecht’s modality of “the presence effect” as it relates to what Gumbrecht terms “presence-culture” in opposition to “subject-culture” (Strathausen). Notes Strathausen, with this text, Gumbrecht is trying firstly to break from the Western Metaphysics reliance on interpretation and second, with postmodernism’s tendency toward deconstruction. According to Strathausen, for Gumbrecht, both are limited in that each place too much emphasis on language/meaning affiliation (Strathausen). As a solution to these limited points of view, Gumbrecht advocates for the “spatial notion of presence” (Strathausen).

Comparing Gumbrecht’s notions of “presence-culture” to “subject-culture,” Strathausen reads each as exhibiting the following qualities: 1) Presence-culture regards the importance of the body while subject-culture embraces Cartesian subjectivity; 2) The former takes into account “humans in the material world” while the latter maintains the distance between subject and object; 3) In presence-culture, one passively receives knowledge “in and through revelation,” in subject-culture one “produces knowledge by shaping the state of things;” and 4) Meaning in the former uses the “sign effect” that occurs through the relationship of subject and form, but “subject-culture is primarily interested in the ‘meaning effect’” where (Strathausen). As Strathausen notes, Gumbrecht is borrowing from Aristotle’s “notion of substance” when he links the sign-effect in presence-culture as ““a coupling between a substance (something that requires space) and a form (something that makes it possible for the substance to be perceived)”” (Gumbrecht in Strathausen). Gumbrecht furthers this claim, stating, “This sign concept avoids

the neat distinction between the purely spiritual and the purely material.... Consequently, there is no side in this sign-concept that will vanish once meaning is secured” (Gumbrecht in Strathausen).

From my own perspective, our lives today are so heavily curated that meaning is already made whether we are conscious of it or not. What Gumbrecht offers is an antidote to that over-curation and “meaning production:” One can choose to enter the frame that comes about conditionally from that consciousness, or one can choose to take a pause within a “temporal threshold” (Gumbrecht 309). Furthermore, to the extent that they are events of disruption or crisis, Gumbrecht also claims experiences that are aesthetic as “slow events of transformation, quiet episodes in which the Being of things — quite literally— is “growing on us” (312).¹² This statement aptly lends itself to thinking about my own aesthetic proposal, the *aesthetic of repose*. Gumbrecht’s preference, as is mine, would be to take a pause, even in as much as there might be a “suddenness” to the appearance of, and ephemerality to, the contents of the aesthetic experience. To stay with that experience, to dwell within it, likens to inhabiting a state of repose.

There are frames that Gumbrecht accepts as bridges to aesthetic experience, as “literal frames” intended to draw attention towards something. As example, the author refers to certain “framing gestures” that are omnipresent in Japanese culture such as the red gateway entrance to a Shinto temple (309). The way in which the arrangement of foliage in a Japanese garden “functions as a structural threshold in the flow of our aesthetic perception,” also guides our perception in a way that it showcases the beauty within the garden (309). As the author states, “We find such forms, in which the branches and trees have grown together, remarkable enough to pause. We pause and we let ourselves be attracted by a picture of a real landscape that the branches constitute by framing it” (309). As well, the arrival announcement at certain train

stations in Japan features “different motifs from Beethoven’s symphonies,” providing both “visual and acoustic impression of the train entering the station” (309). These immersive experiences belie spatial-temporal regularity, thus deliberately interrupting the normal flow of experience to become, as Gumbrecht asserts, “forms of aesthetic experience in the everyday” (Gumbrecht 309). However, the author emphasizes, it is a gradual process of recognition, rather than a sudden disruption, that transforms the experience from “normal,” to “aesthetic” (310).

Transformation, to some degree, happens in retrospect, as a new state of awareness emerges. It occurs, for example, when one becomes increasingly aware that the comfortable chair upon which he sits and enjoys a good book or favorite drink, gives such comfort and good feeling because of its “superior” design quality (310). This new awareness slowly reveals itself, transforming the chair experience from one of use function (as a place to sit) to one of comfort giving (as a place to enjoy the finer things in life) in an act of “unconcealment.” Like Zabala, Gumbrecht refers here to Heidegger for clarification, but he interprets Heidegger’s concept of “unconcealment” differently. Rather than associating it with a state of emergency, Gumbrecht emphasizes its relevance to our everyday processes of being, as noted firstly in Heidegger’s essay “The Question Concerning Technology.” In this essay the philosopher warns against using technology only in an “instrumental way” because by doing so, we lose sight of its potentiality for “the unconcealment of Being” i.e., its epistemic value in “letting Being come to the fore” (Heidegger in Gumbrecht 311). To further clarify this point, Gumbrecht recalls a passage from Heidegger’s 1950 lecture “What is called Thinking?” in which the philosopher talks about flying an airplane as akin to “experiencing an unconcealment of the Being of energy” (Gumbrecht 311). The experience of flying an airplane, Heidegger contends, is a better descriptor for the process of energy conversion than any scientific explanation (Heidegger in Gumbrecht 311).

Truth be told, chairs are for sitting, but as the example reveals, they can also provide experiences; airplanes take us from one place to another, but to experience flying can profoundly alter one's relationship to his surroundings. In both instances, then, the chair and the airplane, instrumentality becomes less important than the experience it garners and the truth it unveils.

Citing Heidegger again, Gumbrecht notes,

Learning how to fly an aircraft and feeling comfortable in a piece of furniture (or with any other object we 'use' on a daily basis) have a surprising point of convergence. They converge inasmuch as they are both processes in our everyday behavior that set us up to approach, gradually, moments of aesthetic experience. Seen from the other side (that is, from the side of Being, rather than from that of human existence, *Dasein*), these processes in our everyday behavior correspond to movements in which Being emerges from "under" the everyday layer of the "entities" ... in order to unconceal itself, in other words, the movements that will transform objects into things. (Gumbrecht 312)

As mentioned previously, Gumbrecht insists on the slowness of this transformation as essential to growth and change. This modality of aesthetic experience, as slowly manifest through "quiet episodes" of unintended disruption, that allows one to take a pause and let the experience gradually unfold, befits the idea of repose that I am asserting. I will explore this further in the following section.

IN PRAISE OF THE PAUSE: ART, EXPERIENCE AND THE AESTHETIC OF REPOSE

How might we formulate a modality such as the *aesthetic of repose*? As demonstrated in this chapter, the meaning of aesthetic experience can take many forms. No matter the medium there are many factors that affect the formulation of aesthetic experience and many approaches to understanding it. The authors I've chosen to survey here vary greatly in their approaches to

understanding aesthetic experience and in their assessment of its value in late-capitalist, contemporary Western society. I chose these diverging voices for the very reason that each addresses some aspect of a humanity in crisis, and, like their predecessors Kant, Nietzsche, and Dewey, I find in each a sense of longing that places aesthetic experience as the antidote to that crisis. And while I might disagree with some in their approach and methodology, I can find merit in their desire to find a role for art that can move Western culture forward.

I can accept from Zabala, for example, the idea that certain art forms carry with them explicit functions that require more from the viewer than the quietude of experience I seek. On the other hand, the author takes the dogmatic position that in its action, art must save society, which places a limit on the potentiality of individual aesthetic experience. Likewise, in directly connecting aesthetics and politics, Rancière maintains a position for aesthetic experience that requires action (as resistance or dissent) and in which art becomes defined primarily by the response that its subject might garner from the viewer. In a time when real information gets lost in the myriad of contradictory communications mediums, I can appreciate from both authors, the necessity of framing art as a primary resource for understanding the social and political dynamics of the 21st century. However, these framing devices, art as savior and art as politics, disregard to a degree our human capacity to come to those resources of our own volition. If the conditions of experience are already given, how is one to think for oneself and to decide for oneself on the outcome of that experience?

This is where the *aesthetic of repose* comes in. It refers directly to our human capacity to think for ourselves. It is a modality of aesthetic experience in which, when engaging with art or any other experience, rather than being a passive observer, and rather than being moved to act, one becomes absorbed in the experience. Consequently, when one becomes absorbed in the

experience, the senses pick up on something and disruption occurs. It could be a color, or an arrangement or the way the light is falling across the art; it could be the sudden notice of imagery or sound, a picking up of subtle nuances. Time becomes a central component when having an aesthetic experience *in repose* — meaning taking time, rather than rushing the experience. To remain in repose allows for the experience to be felt more deeply, to penetrate on both a conscious and unconscious level so that a question arises, such as, “Something is happening that I can’t quite pinpoint.”

The previous evaluation showcased several ways of aesthetic experience, all of which ask that the receiver or the experiencer either react or resist the arising tension. Not so with the aesthetic of repose. Instead, to remain in repose means to take a pause, so that one might move through the tension and be moved by it, remaining open to the feeling as it enters one’s body and mind through the senses. Additionally, rather than giving meaning to the experience, one might come to an awareness that something is happening, a thinking while not thinking, a moment within a moment that stretches a duration. The point is to slow down, to remain in repose so that change occurs organically, leading to a literal repositioning of oneself within oneself and in the world. The outcome is that one feels changed inside and then subsequently, alteration occurs with one’s outward relations.

As noted previously in this chapter, there are many artistic arenas where aesthetic experience *in repose* can occur. Tyree Guyton’s multi-dimensional and every evolving *Heidelberg Project* is a fitting example. Installation and performance art are two other areas that provide the right environment for the *aesthetic of repose* because of their duration and ephemerality. The sound and image installations of Bill Viola, the durational performances of Marina Abramovic, and the multi-dimensional works of Kabakovs, all provide such an

environment. Additionally, our surroundings give us many opportunities to engage in aesthetic experience if we are observant and take the time to pay attention. When you are driving down a road, for example, do you notice your surroundings? If so, do you pick up on something that you cannot really describe? What happens after that moment of disruption? Do you come away feeling different? If so, you have had an experience, within a moment, that made you stop and think/not think, that led to a subsequent questioning of what just happened, that then made you feel something other than what you had been feeling before that moment. You were in repose and then became “repositioned” within yourself.

The aesthetic is here and accessible in our daily lives. It can provide shelter and comfort, but it can also become a pathway to transformation of mind, body, and spirit. It might be in our everyday experience that we have that first encounter, but art, in many forms, can act as a catalyst to secure that transformation. Art can refresh and renew while also signaling a sudden “knowing” not recognizable before and still, quite possibly unexplainable. The point is not to come to conclusion, rather, it is to remain open. Art can provide that opening, the beginning of that opening, the safe passage to a knowable uncertainty. Beyond reference to “expression, representation and meaning” most often associated with the aesthetic, Kupfer suggests that aesthetic experience can provide a space for working out “personal development, responsibility and community” as well (Kupfer *Experience as Art* 2). The material of everyday experience can provide the backdrop from which art grows, rather than keeping it within the realm of intellectual formulations. The fundamental importance of aesthetic experience is not exclusive to art in the traditional sense. It is more so, interdependent with outcomes of everyday life. We can find it within communities, classrooms, and other areas. Kupfer recognizes the world today as aesthetically impoverished, and therefore, incapable of fully nurturing our human capacities.

This is partly because of the diminished ability of our social contacts, like “family, work, politics, art and so forth” to positively influence our daily lives. He is concerned for “our mindful daily traffic with the social world.” Kupfer suggests,

In aesthetic experience, we respond to what is presented to us by discriminating among its constituents so as to integrate them into a unified whole. The whole is formed out of the interaction among its parts. While these parts are distinct, making distinctive contributions in their relations with one another and their place in the whole is decisive for their meaning and value. In the aesthetic ideal, they enhance and deepen each other’s meaning, this musical phrase heightening that one’s effect, the shape of a roof setting off the window’s lines. The parts are interdependent, forming a kind of community. Or rather, we draw them into a community. Because this unified outcome demands our sensitivities and integrative powers, aesthetic experience unobtrusively encourages us to participate in the formation of community. (Kupfer 4)

To picture an aesthetic life is what Dewey referred to as the dramatic rehearsal. To experience something aesthetically grows out of a sense of lack and works to remedy that lack of understanding and our everyday “unmindfulness” (6-7). We might pause within that space of lack, not to master the experience or conclude something about it, not to impose knowledge upon it (6-7). More accurately, we want to remain open to it, to let it be and let it come forth. Kupfer defines aesthetic perception similarly, stating “if we ‘take a pause,’” we obtain a new way of seeing, a new way of being in the world that repositions our relationship to ourselves and to other human beings. Every work of art is a construction and presentation, it is an articulated creation that displays its supporting parts in such a way that the interaction between them becomes the center of its perception (151).

Likewise, to engage in the *aesthetic of repose*, is to engage aesthetic perception in a way that resonates on several levels, yet we remain unaware in the moment. I'd like to close this chapter with some thoughts on aesthetic perception by author Martin Seel whose text, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, complements the evaluations of Shusterman and Gumbrecht on an aesthetic of presence. Furthermore, and specifically, chapter 2, "Aesthetic of Appearing," is helpful for clarifying aspects of the *aesthetic of repose*. According to Seel, "In principle, anything that can be perceived sensuously can be perceived aesthetically" (Seel 21). The author defines aesthetic perception as an appearance that comes to an individual through the senses and in the here and now, yet outside of the continuity of our lives. He further defines it as tending to one's internal self as one experiences the external world. Finally, he believes aesthetic perception uncovers a dimension of reality that evades epistemic fixation but is nonetheless an aspect of knowable reality (17).

Seel is thinking about aesthetic appearance as an enhancement to human possibility outside of the ethical and moral respect — to enrich the possibilities of human perception (18). His focus with aesthetic perception is attentiveness. I would argue similarly, that to remain in a state of repose is to remain attentive to the aesthetic moment, to let it linger, allowing aesthetic perception to slowly come forth. Seel views this as a merging of the simultaneous with the momentary, where perception is a dance between a stationary thing and the transient events occurring around it. Through aesthetic perception, we take it all in. The author clarifies,

A noise or sound is an occurrence that is just momentarily accessible. But it too can be perceived in the concurrence of what is perceivable in it. As soon as we pay attention to the consonance of the particular tones, to the color, the volume, and the rhythm of their resounding, as well as to their relation to the tones that have just faded away and those

that are expected presently, we perceive this event with sensuous repleteness that is in no way inferior to the repleteness of a stationary visual object. (Seel 28)

As Seel deduces, aesthetic perception is a series of “enduring and passing appearances” that we can behold “only if we linger in its presence,” for the sake of what is perceived in the act of appearing (28). To reiterate, the object will become visible via sensuous perception and linger in the process of appearing (29). Although my focus is not primarily on aesthetic objects, I believe similarly, that to remain in repose, is to pause and linger, allowing for perceptual appearance and “aesthetic knowing” via a non-restrictive, self-determining experience. Seel sums it up thusly,

It is a basic characteristic of all aesthetic relations that we take time for the moment, though in entirely different rhythms. In a situation in which aesthetic perception is awakened we relinquish a solely functional orientation. We are no longer preoccupied (or no longer solely preoccupied) with what we can achieve in this situation through knowledge and action. We encounter what our senses and our imagination happen upon here and now, for the sake of the encounter. This is one reason aesthetic attentiveness represents a form of awareness of the human life, for without this possibility of consciousness human beings would have a vastly diminished sense of their life’s presence. (20)

Why only action, or reaction, or resistance, as worthy outcomes of aesthetic experience? Why not consider “time for the moment,” or embrace the pause, as valuable aesthetic pursuits? As I distinguish it, this is just what the *aesthetic of repose* offers: To remain in repose is to take time; to experience aesthetically while remaining in repose repositions the self within the self and consequently, carries forth outwardly to reflect the limitless potentiality of human experience.

EPILOGUE

In our strife-ridden 21st century, can the *aesthetic of repose* become the mode through which emancipation of the human spirit occurs? Over the last several years, and, beginning in early 2020, humanity has experienced a heightened sense of its peril; a worldwide pandemic, a frequency of natural disasters, constant political turmoil and social fragmentation seem to afflict populations from every country. In the United States alone conflict, racial divide and financial upheaval continue to plague the country. Cities are dying and our citizens are in despair. What can we do as a community to quell the anger and build positive reinforcements that can bring citizens a sense of comfort and pride in their communities? By what means can we find common ground while simultaneously maintaining our heterogeneity?

As noted by Michael Greer, artistic response to these events has spiked since 2020 as a way “to process these traumatic upheavals” and “as a way to express grief, connect with each other, and provide hope” (Greer 1). Past history has shown this correlation to be true: the Renaissance began to develop simultaneous to the Black Death, the Romantic era in art coincided with political events such as the Napoleonic wars, World War I saw a flowering of artistic response from German artists who eagerly participated in the war, but, if they survived, came back psychologically broken. The Great Depression, World War II, the Civil Rights movement and so many other more recent events prompted artistic innovation in both subject and technique. Art, as a uniquely human endeavor, is an expression of human longing and desire, but also of the human capacity to communicate deeply and thoughtfully. In an era that has experienced an alarming amount of tragedy, we might consider art the first place to turn for comfort, not, to “save us” or for political gain or for consumption, but rather, as a place to rest our weary bones. Must art shake us awake, or can it instead allow us to slumber momentarily so

that when we do awaken, we feel refreshed, reset, and able to deal with the daily of emergencies and events? I can submit that we must shatter the frame of aesthetic experience, but I disagree that the answer is always, to act. As we stand at the precipice of uncertainty, at a time when we are inundated daily with that reality, can the experience of art take on a new dimension and become instead, a space of *repose*?

IN BETWEEN SPACES

Might we find value in the momentary space in between, a place where time slows and seeing or knowing and matching experience to a concept become less relevant than the journey to understanding? Does understanding itself need to be concrete or can it rather, remain an open arena for continual exploration and ever-evolving insight? Can we allow ourselves the opportunity to take a pause, as I suggested in Chapter 4, so that repositioning becomes a natural outcome of our experience rather than a forced response? What are the further implications for self and other once one emerges from the state of repose?

At this point, I'd like to revisit John Dewey, his pragmatic approach to aesthetic experience and to consider ways in which recent scholarship has turned to Dewey to consider the mindfulness with which he approached his aesthetic philosophy. Dewey, according to some, puts into practice an approach to aesthetic experience reminiscent of Eastern thought. In recent years and more currently, since the Covid pandemic, the mindfulness at the heart of much Eastern philosophy has become an important part of education curriculums, workplace environments and everyday stress relief for many. How does mindfulness equate with lingering in aesthetic *repose*? Reconsidering Dewey's continued relevance for contemporary aesthetic practices will bring to light that connection.

According to Greenwalt and Nguyen, meditation has replaced praying as a more likely

path to “meaning and purpose” in life (Greenwalt and Nguyen 49). The authors explore this trend as it relates to social life, education, and democracy (49). Focusing their study specifically on Buddhism as it came to North America through different avenues, they have discovered an increased prominence of mindfulness practices across various arenas (50). Rather than concentrating on its “religious and ethical components,” state the authors, contemporary practitioners of “all cultural and religious backgrounds” use mindfulness as a path to a more spiritual life (50). “Mindfulness and the discourse around it have been secularized,” confirm Greenwalt and Nguyen, and they believe the practice of mindfulness can have great consequence for “democratic social change” (50).

Utilizing Dewey, Greenwalt and Nyguyen put his theories in dialog with “Vietnamese Theravada Buddhism” in order to reconstruct Dewey under the guise of mindfulness and creative democracy (Greenwalt 54). As the authors contend, similar to Dewey’s aesthetic experience, mindfulness practices occur in the “here and now” (52). They explain it thusly,

The mindfulness practice, which is, at essence, the cultivation of happiness, means to stop running after fantasies and speculations, to see deeply and clearly and appreciatively embrace what is actually happening in the present moment. Put more fully, mindfulness is the practice of observing one’s own body, feelings, mind, and objects of the mind in the present moment, nonjudgmentally, and in interaction with the living environment.
(52)

In sum, letting the present unfold through mindfulness is a process that brings forth sensory awareness on many levels. This occurs through “moment-by-moment arisings and fadings” (54).

Although Dewey did not directly address mindfulness, we might relate this idea of “moment by moment arisings and fadings” to the “doing and undergoing” at the heart of his

notion of aesthetic experience. However, as Greenwalt and Nyguyen point out, unlike mindfulness's focus on the here and now that discount typical perceptions of time and space, Dewey considered the past and future as "bound up in the present" (Greenwalt and Nyguyen 52-55). Given this perspective, the authors explain Deweyan mindfulness as more complex; they refer to it as "the ability to see the present clearly, but in light of the possibilities that human intervention might bring about" (55). Whether this is good or bad in terms of mindfulness is unclear here.

On the contrary, Dewey acknowledges the value of the past as informing the present, in the "hushed reverberations" that linger as rich reminders of the lived experience (Dewey *AE* 17). Regarding the future Dewey states, "to the being fully alive, the future is not ominous but a promise; it surrounds the present as a halo. It consists of the possibilities of what is now and here" (*AE* 17). As I read Dewey here, he draws on the past and the future as positive reinforcements of the present, rather than obstacles to overcome. The past and the future anchor the present, bringing together previous experience with anticipation of future experience. In regard to Dewey, Greenwalt and Nyguyen refer to this as "anoetic intuition" where a "rising out of and merging back to" experience occurs (58). According to the authors, Dewey described it as a moment of "pure ejaculation" that takes place "in and through the 'oh' and the 'good'" in a moment of "temporary stasis" where "all is right in the world" (Greenwalt and Nyguyen 58). I would similarly consider the stillness at the heart of *aesthetic repose* as a moment of passage that affects one's relationship to the world.

Another aspect of Dewey's philosophy that finds its way into contemporary discussions of mindfulness is the philosopher's emphasis on the primacy of sense in aesthetic experience. According to Joseph D. John, Dewey's integration of art into life does not regard an experience

of the beautiful as a correspondence to some other-worldly (think Platonic) ideal. Rather, aesthetic experience as Dewey posits resists “timeless ideals” in favor of and embracing our imperfect human senses as we listen and remain with them (John 85). Moreover, and as noted previously, Dewey placed significance on ordinary experiences. Similarly, according to Johns, “traditional Japanese aesthetic conceptions” embraced “ordinary experiences” (83).

To make this connection John refers to the writings of Jun’ichiro Tanizaki (1977) and Leonard Koren (1994). Like Dewey Tanizaki defines aesthetic experience as a fully consumable “whole” experience. As he describes the “beauty of lacquerware,” for example, Tanizaki gives a full description of the best way to experience it in all its decoration; it must be set within a “pitch black void,” lit only by a “single lantern” in order to experience the “sparkling patterns” of silver and gold on its surface (Tanizaki in John 85). Of Tanizaki’s description, notes John,

Beauty, here, is not some quality present in the object itself, or an abstract ideal that this object mimics. Rather, it is the whole experience — the shadows, the subtle changing reflections, and even the inability of the perceiver to see the “true” bowl — flooded with light, its details exposed. In this instance we find that damnable realm of mediation — the ‘distorter’ of perception, the impediment to experiencing truth — turns out to be essential to beauty. (85)

As Johns surmises, the artist created his lacquered piece “with and for imperfect human senses” (85). Similarly, Dewey felt we must experience things first at the “lower” levels of sense in order to “elevate” and develop them further (85).

John provides another example from Tanizaki, where the author describes beauty as only to be discovered “in shadow.” “The beauty of a Japanese room,” says Tanizaki, “depends on a variation of shadows, heavy shadows against light shadows — it has nothing else” (Tanizaki in

John 85). He goes on to describe the placement of objects in the room and how they serve to enhance the shadows. The room is a fully integrated work of art, where all elements blend together in service to the shadows. Experiencing the shadows then, (or in Deweyan terms, having an experience with the shadows) brings awareness of beauty on multiple levels; the beauty of the room as a whole, the beauty of the objects arranged within it, as well as the shadows.

Being attentive to such details is primary to the concept of Japanese “wabi-sabi” which Koren describes as concentrated on “the minor and the hidden, the tentative and the ephemeral; things so subtle and evanescent they are invisible to vulgar eyes” (Koren in John 87). Unlike a work of art, Koren explains, *wabi-sabi* is “imperfect,” always a “work in progress” that allows for long-term engagement (87). Furthermore, at its core *wabi-sabi* “solicits the expansion of sensory information” such as in a tea ceremony (87). Koren describes such elements as the tarnish on the teapot, for example, as “the glow of grime” that should be carefully preserved. A “richer expression,” he states, appears due to “corrosion or contamination” of the object (87). He thus gives aesthetic value to the aged teapot that continues to be enjoyed long after its creation. John adds, *wabi-sabi* artwork often seems unfinished; as well, *wabi-sabi* embraces ambiguity, “rather than attributing all progress to our ability to reason” (88). Likewise, Dewey states, “Reason must fall upon imagination — upon the embodiment of ideas in emotionally charged sense” (Dewey in John 89).

The above examples from Eastern thought not only relate to Dewey’s notion of aesthetic experience they also carry elements similar to my proposal of the *aesthetic of repose*. Central to mindfulness is the idea of *stasis* or remaining with the moment so that one fully experiences its presence both physically and spiritually. The concept of *wabi-sabi* places the sensory as a primary conduit to perception. Both of these ideas consider the pause as the space in which

mindfulness and perception thrive and both embrace value in ordinary lived experience. Similarly, stillness, or lingering within the pause is central to the *aesthetic of repose*.

As Irvin suggests, “One must linger more discerningly over the sensual details of everyday experience, cultivating the kind of focus and contemplation hitherto reserved for the art gallery (at least in Western traditions):

An experience that one has every day, like drinking a cup of coffee, can become quietly exquisite and even strangely foreign when done with full attention to the feel of the cup in one’s hand, the rim of the cup touching one’s lower lip, and the sensation of the coffee in the mouth and going down the throat. Such commonplace moments of everyday experience are rightly replete with qualities that we tend to neglect as we physically or psychologically multitask, giving our full attention to nothing. (Irvin in Dowling 232)

For Shusterman, aesthetic experience is rarely instantaneous because it requires processing, we must focus, react, absorb, and appreciate (Shusterman *Complexities of Aesthetic Experience* 109). When we experience a work of art, we “directly savor” meaning and value, we can enjoy it while on the journey and gain a sense of value along the way (110). An aesthetic experience is more than immediate and involves reflection, “Reflection itself offers its own aesthetic pleasures of immediacy” (110). Shusterman explains,

An aesthetic experience of climbing a mountain (which obviously takes time and requires some training) means enjoying the climb while one is climbing, not when one’s enjoyment is postponed till one has reached the summit and enjoys its view. When I emphasize the immediacy of aesthetic experience, I am celebrating this character of direct, undeferred, imminent appreciation or sense of value, which is what makes such experience enjoyed or valued for its own sake. (110)

“Moreover,” Shusterman continues, “subsequent reflection on an aesthetic experience can prepare the way for a future experience of aesthetic immediacy of still greater intensity, depth of meaning, and accuracy of judgment” (110). Somatic reflection helps with this via a “plurality of senses” that brings about subsequently, better aesthetic experience. “And, by analogy,” Shusterman asks, “cannot a lingering reflection on an aesthetic experience be part of the aesthetic experience by which it was evoked?” (111). Whether via Eastern thought or Western ideas, it is clear that lingering, taking a pause, or remaining in repose, can serve to enrich and enliven aesthetic experience. Furthermore, that experience need not be extraordinary, rather, our everyday surroundings can prove fertile ground for worthwhile and engaging aesthetic experience.

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE IN A CITY ON THE VERGE

I want to end this dissertation with this claim in mind: that the space of art is a space of repose, that aesthetic experience can occur in repose, and finally, that it can transpire in the most unexpected places. Examples of this possibility abound, but I’d like to turn to one with which I am intimately familiar, the city that inhabits my daily life, Detroit. Detroit is a city that has struggled almost since its founding, but one whose resilience has continually carried it through conflict, racial divide, and financial upheaval. Moreover, and despite the economic and social strains, the visual culture of Detroit has endured. My life, my artistic practice and my scholarly pursuits have had as their backdrop, this city in which I live. Over the course of my adult life, my experiences in Detroit, and particularly aesthetic endeavors, have shaped my ways of seeing, my ways of understanding and my ways of being. I am not alone in this; as the previous chapters have suggested, personal experience is part of what drove the philosophers I featured toward their own aesthetic proposals. Of philosophical significance is the way in which those aesthetic

experiences occurred, through disruption of my daily routine that resulted in an almost unconscious repositioning of my relationship to the city and its citizens. What has happened in Detroit, especially in the last decade, and specifically as relates to art in this city, illustrates a crucial point about the *aesthetic of repose*, that disruption and estrangement can set about slowly to create repositioning within individuals, as well as outwardly, without the need for reaction or resistance.

There is something about the city “on the verge” that belies the usual consequences that come about when beset by negative commentary, a fascination with its ruins and subsequent savior mentality from those who aimed to take advantage of Detroit’s plight. Having survived a bankruptcy that almost cost it its vast collection of publicly owned art, Detroit is living through transformation, both physically in terms of architectural renovation, and emotionally as the physical and financial renovations beget a kind of renovation in thinking. The financial burdens that afflicted Detroit just a few of years ago are subsiding with the influx of investors from both inside the city and elsewhere. Artists are flocking to Detroit from other major metropolitan areas, taking advantage of cheap rents and opportunities to be a part of Detroit’s “renaissance.” What are the implications of either prospect for Detroit’s diverse population? Can financial investment and art comeingle in this new coming community? Moreover, what role can art play in ushering in a new way of seeing? That question is still up for debate but, while some endeavor to commodify aesthetic experience as Detroit reinvents itself once again, there are still opportunities hiding in plain sight that offer the quiet reflection at the heart of the *aesthetic of repose*.

As Detroit emerges anew, art has played a major role in ushering in a new way of seeing; the slow metamorphosis of the city seems a living example of an *aesthetic of repose*. In my personal journeys throughout the city, I’ve uncovered an example in a most unlikely place,

seemingly in the middle of nowhere. Tucked away in an undisclosed Detroit neighborhood street overgrown with weeds, shrubs and remnants of the houses that once existed here, a series of trees covered in hearts calls out. This is *Love Street*, an extension of Tyree Guyton's infamous art installation, *The Heidelberg Project*. Viewers might come upon *Love Street* by accident, in search of the heart of *The Heidelberg Project*, Heidelberg Street, itself. But it is here, on *Love Street*, that one finds the beginnings of the journey of passage, from inward voyage to outward manifestation. It is here, on *Love Street*, that one can be captivated in a moment, transformed by the subtle, yet loud booming message in the trees. It seems so simple, like the end line of an epic movie or great novel, that love can conquer all. Yet that is the message that beats in the hearts of the trees; it is also the message that pulses through the complex visual imagery of *The Heidelberg Project*.

COME UNTO ME: TYREE GUYTON'S HEIDELBERG PROJECT

Tyree Guyton began *The Heidelberg Project* in 1986 on the street where he grew up. Notes Wendy S. Walters, the Heidelberg Project "visually captures the history of a residential community coming undone" (Walters 64). Local poets and writers, like John Sinclair and Jerry Herron, capture the essence of Guyton's Project. John Sinclair's short poem captures a hint of resistance:

*it's just tyree & grandpop out there
on Heidelberg Street
in the middle of the night
turning their neighborhood inside out*

— John Sinclair (1990:14)

Herron records the decay and destruction of Guyton's once vibrant community. As Herron viscerally describes them, the houses on Heidelberg Street,

Literally vomit forth the physical elements of domestic history; furniture, dolls, television sets, signs, toilets, enema bottles, beds, tires, baby buggies come cascading out doors and windows and through holes in the roof, flowing down the outside walls and collecting in great heaps on the lawn, so that the whole world looks like some kind of man-made lava flow. The magma of discarded lives: these visible tokens of a humiliated history. (Herron 1993 in Walters 65).

On the other hand, is this description from David Sheridan,

Heidelberg is, among other things, a spectacle, something that says, "look at me." It is a celebration that can be "heard" for miles in every direction (as evidenced by the attention of tourists, media, and the city council). On the most fundamental level, it seems to be saying, "we are here, we exist" and thus serves as an answer to those who construct Detroit as a culturally empty space, as presently meaningless and worthless (Sheridan 1999 in Walters 65).

As Walters sees it, both of these descriptions provide "a visual record" of a city engaging with its past; the "spectacle" of the Heidelberg Project to which Sheridan speaks acknowledges the existence of people living in the city, while the Project itself "illustrates the transformational power that is present in the community in both a real and imaginary sense (Walters 65).

Furthermore, the *Heidelberg Project* exhibits "a sense of place" where there otherwise might only be neglect. Walters also recognizes a "spirit of industriousness" at the heart of the *Heidelberg Project*, calling it as a "work in progress" that has always evolved its "aesthetic and narrative impulses" (68). In turn, Walters believes the *Heidelberg Project* acts as a catalyst for

the “empowerment, development, and continuity of its community values — its *community sovereignty* (Walters 66). Rather than abandonment, leaving structures to become “visual metaphors” for the failures of the city, or demolition, in which traces of the city’s history become mere remnants, Walters asserts, “the future of Detroit’s neighborhoods is being imagined in the artscape of Heidelberg” drawing “attention to the transformational power that emanates from the city’s streets” (67).

Reimagining his neighborhood was always at the heart of Guyton’s Project. With the encouragement and help of his grandfather, Guyton sought to reconceive the blight that had taken over his east side city streets. Guyton was a trained artist, as was his grandfather. Together they began to reconstruct their neighborhood street, initially painting large polka dots on his grandfather’s house, then extending them out into the street and onto other houses. Next Guyton added installations in the empty pockets along the street, a tree filled with hanging shoes, hoods of cars painted with faces of various color and expression, taxis cabs, clocks, stuffed animals, all placed or composed to suggest the passage of time, but also as ways to “get people thinking” and to “build bridges” (MoCA Cleveland video 33:10).

What began then, as an attempt to revitalize one decaying street, according to Guyton, became a means to “recycle the human spirit.” (10:05). Thirty-one years later, *The Heidelberg Project* is the third most visited cultural site in Detroit, with an average of 270k visitors per year coming from over 144 countries all over the world. Moreover, each year the site brings approximately \$3.2 million to the city of Detroit (another \$2.4 million to the surrounding suburbs), without any city support. It’s not for wanting alone that this artistic intervention remains a fascinating place of creativity and imagination. Twice, city government has tried to tear it down; first in 1991 under the executive order of then Mayor Coleman A. Young when

citizens in the community complained of it as an eyesore. As Guyton attests, “they dug a grave and tried to bury everything,” so he and a group of like-minded individuals held a funeral procession on the premises and Guyton vowed, “I gotta do it again” (*Come Unto Me* -11:57). The death of his beloved grandfather two days after Guyton saw a vision of a 9ft angel in a dream, also confirmed that he must rebuild. He did just that, but in 1999, 30% of *The Heidelberg Project* was again destroyed. Ironically, it was Mayor Dennis Archer, who in 1993 had donated a pair of shoes and proclaimed Guyton as Detroit’s own “Native Son,” that considered the street a danger to the surrounding neighborhood (-3:54). Still again, in 2013, a series of arson fires decimated many of the Heidelberg properties, but Guyton persisted and rebuilt a series of installations on the remains of several of the burnt-out buildings.

What does this say about the aesthetic prospect of *The Heidelberg Project*? What can we glean from its many iterations, its continuous rebirth? Guyton believes it to be many things, at once a spiritual journey: Guyton often quotes the biblical passage, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (*King James Bible Translation* Matthew 11:28). At the same time, *The Heidelberg Project* addresses hope and freedom; “In the midst of all the grey there is all of a sudden color...with those colors come feelings of hope,” states Guyton (*Come Unto Me* -12:32). The freedom to which he speaks is a freedom at once for himself and for others — to spark a dialog through art, to make sense of the world and to share that with others. Thus, it can also be considered a site of community transformation. As noted by his executive director, Jenenne Whitfield, “the magic is the dialog that opens up people, not the stuff you see on the premises...what *The Heidelberg Project* is doing is it’s causing people to look at themselves first and then, when you do that, you begin to come together” (*Come Unto Me* -6:40). The “coming together” to which Whitfield refers finds philosophical equivalence in

Mikhail Bakhtin's *Architectonics*, a concept that specifies existence as how we relate our unique position to the rest of the world which is other to us. This existence occupies an ever-shifting position within the existence of other human beings, a dialogic exchange in which "the self is never whole" but instead, exists within "a tensile relationship...with other selves" (Clark and Holquist 65). Bakhtin's goal, like Guyton's, is to bridge the gap and form connections between disparate constituents. Existence then, becomes a gift that we communicate, an exchange of one's perceptible self with that of another in a shared consciousness unbound by time and space. Rather, as noted previously, consciousness remains always on the border between one's "living particularity" and the "abstract reality" we all share (68-91). According to Bakhtin, this allows for movement between one's own subjectivity and that of others; for Guyton, it is an invisible connection that helps us go beyond what we see to experience something deeper (Bakhtin in Clark and Holquist 68-91).

Tyree Guyton's *The Heidelberg Project* embodies an *aesthetic of repose* in that it provides not only a space for dwelling and contemplation, but also as a site of opening where inhabitants can begin an inward journey, cross over a threshold, and emerge changed. Furthermore, Guyton's provocative reuse of materials attests to their transhistorical validity both as artifact and art object. These everyday items, the telephones, car hoods, old toys, shoes and so on, carry with them the refuse of past lives and possess a history that we might find valuable beyond their utility. Through their reimagining, their memory trace allows us to find value where we might otherwise not. Thus, Guyton brings forward something relevant, a potentiality that had always been there, resting in the *entre temps*, hidden in the interstices, stowed away in the interregnum.

Guyton's vision for *The Heidelberg Project* emphasizes that "a community can rebuild itself from the inside out, by utilizing its culture and creativity as essential building blocks" (MoCA Cleveland video 2:32). It is a vision that uses art as its primary catalyst for change, driving the human spirit out of a "beat down" place towards possibility. As Jenenne Whitfield declares it, "That's the breath of life" (42:22). We might look at Tyree Guyton and his neighborhood art project as the culmination of an *aesthetic of repose*, that final passage from inward turn to outward reflection. It is an achievement of the merging of ethics with aesthetics in the service of community. Guyton's art resides within a space that allows for aesthetic contemplation and ethical consideration, bringing forth the kind of wholeness we all seek, within ourselves, but also in relation to the Other. In fact, *The Heidelberg Project*, which began on the streets of Detroit, is entering a new phase. Guyton has decided to dismantle the project so that he might create it anew. In repurposing his own art, Guyton is striving to find a new reality, to put the art in a new context and to give it new life. He believes however, that this change will keep people coming back, "If I take it down tomorrow, people are gonna come, because it was once there" (MoCA Cleveland video 48:33). A statement such as this suggests the image is never fixed, yet it always leaves a trace, a lingering vestige of its materiality that we can retrieve and bring forth, the image that lies within the *aesthetic of repose*.

Tyree Guyton's *Heidelberg Project* is just one example of the co-mingling of art and society and the opportunity to experience aesthetically while in *repose*. Throughout my own experience in Detroit, I have discovered them at every turn: in the reflective light installation found in the underpass of a downtown intersection near the college where I teach; in the somber, yet radiant mural of a young black man taken too soon calling from a quiet city street I drive down on my way home from work; in the "visual cosmology" embedded in the mosaics that

cover an abandon house that is a favorite place to explore with out of town visitors (www.mbad.org). These aesthetic spaces are the slumbering passages that lay bare traces of human spirit, exposing evidence of humanity's aspirations, desires and hopes. They surround us as open paths to aesthetic contemplation and subsequently, a repositioning of self to world that arises naturally out of the *aesthetic of repose*.

INTRODUCTION NOTES

¹ Baurain, Bradley, “Common Ground With a *Common Faith*: Dewey’s Idea of the ‘Religious’.” *Education & Culture*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2011). 74-91. Baurain’s article evaluates Dewey’s essay, *A Common Faith* (1934) to understand the philosopher’s position on organized religion as it relates to his educational philosophy. According to Baurain, Dewey used the term “religious” to refer to a “middle way” where doctrine and dogma take a backseat to a more humanist, existential approach. States Baurain, for Dewey, “moral faith rests...upon the dynamic potential of inquiry to discover knowledge and pursue ideals that is, to act on experiential knowledge in order to improve life” (75). I believe this idea carries over into Dewey’s aesthetic philosophy.

² Zuckerman, Phil. “Introduction” in Living the Secular Life. New York: Penguin Press, 2014. Zuckerman’s text examines ways outside of the traditionally “religious” that we can not only cultivate a good and moral life, but also one that is deeply meaningful on both an individual level and with respect to one’s greater community. Zuckerman distinguishes “spiritual self-reliance, clear-eyed pragmatism, and faith in the Golden Rule” as shared resources for our more secular 21st century society (Zuckerman Back Cover).

³ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, I 224, quoted in Young, 18.

⁴ Kupfer, Joseph H. *Experience as Art*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983. While there are more contemporary authors writing about the aesthetics of everyday life, such as Richard Shusterman and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (whom I feature more prominently in a later portion of this dissertation), Kupfer’s earlier text advocated the aesthetic as providing shelter and comfort, as well as a pathway to transformation of the mind. He claims the aesthetic as pervasive “in various spheres of life” outside of art that have impact on one’s personal development, sense of responsibility and relationship to community.

⁵ Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich. "Every-Day World and Life-World as Philosophical Concepts: A Genealogical Approach." *New Literary History*, Autumn, 1993. Vol. 24, No. 4. Papers from the Commonwealth Center for Literary and Cultural Change (Autumn 1993). This essay addresses the concept of *every-day world* and *life-world* within the contexts of "phenomenological philosophy and sociology" as they originated in the intellectual circles of academia in the 1920s (746). Gumbrecht traces their problematic use to a speech from 1891 in which Leland Stanford, founder of Stanford University, described his "view on the moral, spiritual, and material progress of mankind" as relates to practical matters of the American machine age (745). According to Gumbrecht, Stanford was progressive in defining teaching around a "sound practical idea of common-place every-day matters" (746).

CHAPTER 1 NOTES

¹ Also noted in Schutjer, "Art always involves a determinate intention; The artist sets out to produce something, even if that something is simply free design. We do not attribute, on the other hand, a determinate intention to nature, although what nature gains in its analogy with art is intentionality." 65.

² Lehman cites from Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987). From *Oxford World Classics* (2008) James Creed Meredith translates it thusly, "We *dwell* on the contemplation of the beautiful because this contemplation strengthens and reproduces itself. The case is analogous (but analogous only) to the way we dwell upon a charm in the representation of an object which keeps arresting the attention, the mind all the while remaining passive" (*CJ* 12 54). The note on dwelling and remaining passive we might liken to a lingering in repose.

³ Lehman citing from Kant, Immanuel. *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königliche Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902-83).

⁴ Lehman citing Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as Young Man*, 181.

CHAPTER 2 NOTES

¹ See Daniels, Paul Raimond, “*The Birth of Tragedy: Transfiguration through Art*” in Stern, Tom, ed. 167.

² See Pippin, Robert. “Self-Interpreting Selves: Comments on Alexander Nehamas’s Nietzsche: Life as Literature.” *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Volume 45, Issue 2, Summer 2014. 118-133.

³ See Nehamas, Chapter 3, “A Thing is the Sum of its Effects” in *Nietzsche, Life as Literature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985.

⁴ Ridley, Aaron, “Nietzsche: *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols*” in Pippin, Robert B., *Introductions to Nietzsche*.

⁵ See Young, Julian. *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

⁶ Roberts, Tyler. *Contesting Spirit*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. 447 pp. Print.

⁷ Ibid, see “Chapter 4: The Problem of Mysticism in Nietzsche.”

⁸ Ridley, in Pippin, Chapter 10, *Nietzsche: The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols*. 217. This essay is also featured as the *Introduction* in Ridley and Norman, *Nietzsche: The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols And other Writings*.

CHAPTER 3 NOTES

¹ Saito, Naoko. “Chapter 7 The Gleam of Light: Reconstruction Toward Holistic Growth,” from *The Gleam of Light* (2019). In this chapter, Saito is comparing Dewey’s philosophy of growth

and thoughts on childhood impulse to Emerson's notion of the "gleam of light." According to Saito, Emerson's "gleam of light" corresponds to Dewey's idea of impulse in that they both refer to a "sense of one's being" that comes about through a natural process of intuition.

² See Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 25, 280.

³ Leddy extends this example to encompass more than just artist, tree, and canvas, but also to consider the interaction with the materials "out of which the work is made," the "aesthetic properties of the paint," even the studio in which Cézanne creates the piece. The audience as well, has a stake in moving art beyond its objecthood towards experience.

⁴ Also quoted in Leddy, 86.

CHAPTER 4 NOTES

¹ Ngai is referring here to a statement from Hannah Arendt regarding Kant's concept of *sensus communis* as brought into existence through the very notion of judgement. Whether spoken out loud or imagined, the judgement presupposes a response from a member of the community.

² Cavell, Stanley. "Chapter 3: Aesthetic Problems in Modern Philosophy" from *Must We Mean What We Say?* In this text, Cavell addresses issues of meaning as they play out in philosophy, art, literature, and the humanities.

³ May, Todd. Review of Jacques Rancière's *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Notre Dame Philosophical Review, 2010. 7. Web.

⁴ For a more detail evaluation of somaesthetics, see Shusterman, "Thinking Through the Body, Educating for the Humanities: A Plea for Somaesthetics." *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Spring 2006). 1-21.

⁵ Shusterman is quoting from the Oxford English Dictionary which defines *divinity* as “the quality of being a god or like God or a god.”

<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/divinity?q=divinity>.

⁶ *Proprioception* is the physical sensation that occur in the body and helps us “to perceive the location, movement and action of parts of the body.”

www.sciencedirect.com/neuroscience/proprioception#. Shusterman references this term as he is discussing the physical changes to one’s body when experiencing joy or love (see page 17).

⁷ See Shusterman, Richard. “Pragmatism and Cultural Politics: From Rortian Textuality to Somaesthetics” in *New Literary History*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Winter 2010).

⁸ Shusterman is explaining the value of perspectival pluralism in comparison to Rorty’s assessment of the fallibility of interpretation as both refer to interpretation as “the basic mode of all cognition” (72).

⁹ Here again, Shusterman is arguing against Rorty’s belief that experience, in its immediate presence, can lead to falsity in interpretation. Shusterman argues in contrast that philosophy can use experience in ways that need not be justified within a particular framework, for example via the experience of art.

¹⁰ See Shusterman, Richard. *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000. 169-227.

¹¹ Gumbrecht composed his four concepts of aesthetic experience through a close reading of Kant’s *Third Critique*, Heidegger’s *The Origins of the Work of Art*, and Martin Seel’s *Aesthetics of Appearing*, which all commonly suggest that aesthetic experience is “subject-centered” and can occur outside of the traditional canon of works of art.

¹² Gumbrecht borrows the language of Heidegger here when he refers to capital “B,” Being. The distinction between “being” and “Being” for Heidegger regards the esoteric nature of *being* as opposed to the more concrete idea of *Being* as intelligible entity brought into existence.

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