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## AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE: VISUAL CULTURE AS THE MASTERPIECE OF NON-HUMANITY

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## Aesthetic Experience: Visual Culture as the Masterpiece of Nonhumanity

This essay proposes a reflection on aesthetic experiences and their implications on the nonhuman for the study of culture. It focuses on visual culture as one of the representative means for a life of coexistence. In the present day, images search for an agreement with innovation as the new reality of culture. However, the life experiences offered by the digital world are being realized through the new senses offered by the media. Therefore, can today's realities of visual culture be considered nonhuman?

Aesthetics proposes to explain the interaction of human beings with space through human perception. This space extends itself to the digital dimension as a representation of human agencies. Images are built by constantly creating new principles of technology, by adopting a sense of innovation. These applied techniques assist in designing the environment for future generations and in conditioning transformations of the cultural order. Such events connect creativity and technological determination by way of the socio-historical sense of rationality.

Aesthetic experience has been considered one of the representative means of human life. It has always been mentioned in cultural studies, most recently due to the power of images on the Internet. However, the concept of the nonhuman as a digital process in relation to aesthetic experience has directly changed our lives through the new senses offered by technology. For this reason, we can ask the question: Can today's realities of visual culture be considered nonhuman or regarded as part of the heritage of humanity? Perhaps the new practices in art have categorically changed the sense of tradition related to the concept of the nonhuman. Therefore, this affects neither animal life nor the natural environment; however, the artificial world is affected, as it has been created by humans through artifices and inventions. In this regard, the concept of the nonhuman could be considered collective intelligence.

Therefore, we can first apply this concept to the artist's thinking and then to his art. Finally, we can also apply it to the artwork and the effect that it creates. On the whole, art can be understood in terms of innovations in humanity's history and by the comprehension of our own evolution in relation to the concept of the nonhuman.

The opposition of nature and culture involves interactions between the human and nonhuman. In this regard, two aspects are important in cultural transformation: technique, as the notion of art, and human beings.

Therefore, many possibilities of individual interactivity have been generally realized in their own socio-cultural environments through the techniques used in artworks. In such processes, realization always looks for possible creativity that is linked to the diversity of art configurations.

By analyzing the configurations of human social life throughout the evolutionary history of humanity, we find that ‘technology transfer’ has always been an interaction between nature and culture, for all possible realizations of human civilization. As stated by Wolfgang Welsch, with respect to Darwin’s evolutionary aesthetics, an aesthetic attitude is not a human invention; rather, it had already been manifested either in animal systems or the prehuman condition before our existence.<sup>1</sup> Hence, it is useful to apply this in context as it relates to the subject of the nonhuman. Aesthetic practice is a feeling related to the nonhuman, and human cultural evolution is related to an ability to feel pleasure and appreciate beauty.

The continuum of nonhuman and human aesthetics remains to be observed in Darwinian fundamentals. Therefore, Welsch suggests an essential “human aesthetics against sociobiological reductionism.”<sup>2</sup> He demonstrates the progression from beauty as a physiological effect without aesthetic function to an aesthetic sense. While the context of the evolution of species is the struggle for life, the evolution of our brain as the source of an aesthetic sense in human culture, in terms of the differences between nonhuman and human pleasure, is beyond the perception of the beautiful. Although pleasure in beauty is a sexual desire for animals, it is only a perception of the beautiful in an aesthetic sense for humans. Furthermore, I would argue that the related fitness that results in both animal and pre-human or human environments enables innovation with regard to the acquisition of management skills. Moreover, it has been an underlying support for environmental management and control through human evolution as the feeling of freedom, and from my point of view, such an innovation as the feeling of freedom is a pleasurable and beautiful thing and came about in response to all the struggles of life. This view accords with Welsch’s statements on the extension and refinement involved in Darwin’s aesthetic attitude. The perception of the beautiful is not accessible to all animals. Beauty as pleasure is realized through sexual experience, and

beautiful things that inspire the pleasure of beauty involve sexual persuasion. Moreover, in terms of this condition in animals, such a transference of beauty from body to artifacts is a medium for overcoming their natural limitations. I agree with Welsch about Freud's theory of sublimation as "the one great motor of human cultural development."<sup>3</sup> In this way, we can understand the origin of human aesthetics in our own condition as animal species. We are concerned with the invention of culture, i.e., building artificial environments that matter to non-human entities with social effects. In such a way, aesthetic practices can be realized by such arts as painting, sculpture, architecture, design, film, literature, and music.

As the visual information in the figure below demonstrates, there have been similarities in the attitudes of human beings throughout their evolution regarding the creation of objects that reflect the ideas of mobility and self-extension.



Fig. 1: The first human-made self-representation as nonhuman digital reproduction.

Invention has also been added to the complex subject of the relationship between humans and nonhumans, where both emotion and reason influence the ideal of innovation and are associated with the most attractive part in the art of beauty and its reverse. It is useful to think of the traditional forms in which the concept of the nonhuman manifests itself. For example, in natural representations, those in artworks in the generally accepted style, varying over time and by aesthetic experience; in relation to contemporary

art, which is integrated with social critiques; as humanity's resistance to market influences; and as support for a sustainable environment in coexistence with technologies that preserves tradition and nature while searching for innovation. The individual is able to create new realities, establishing the emergence of new forms to represent ideals through digital technology, the Internet, media convergence, and hypermedia. This involves a sense of purpose and the contemporary relevance of new theories in aesthetics, particularly in terms of helping conceptualize the status of the contemporary image and the daily life of a metropolis.

For instance, most countries are traveling along the same path toward an ecological solution for the world, and this has become one of the real image senses applied to the human experience in its process of materialization and social relatedness for the next fifteen years or more. This is based on the fact that most countries came to an agreement at the *21<sup>st</sup> Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21/CMP11)*, which took place in Paris, France from November 30<sup>th</sup> to December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015. This conference was expected to bring into being a new international resolution on climate change, applicable to all, that would keep global warming below 2°C and be based on the national realities of each country as they travel on their own sustainable and dynamic paths toward their long-term goals, although in practice an implementation of resources will increase technological development.

In theory, an agreement to combat climate change, one that respects the industrial and financial aspects of the world, through technologies of communication and aesthetic practices could integrate art with social critique on the Internet as collective intelligence, due to the influence of images. For instance, this could be achieved by images of a nostalgic return to nature, valuing biodiversity through visual arts, in which we could highlight the work of the Polish artist and naturalized Brazilian, Frans Krajcberg, who recently presented a manifesto, *Le nouveau manifeste du naturalisme intégral* (2013)<sup>4</sup>, with Claude Mollard on COP December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015, in Paris. In addition, and even before this significant approach, the international art exhibition *Rethink: Contemporary Art & Climate Change* in Copenhagen, Denmark (2009) and the *Royal Academy's Earth* in London (2010) displayed artworks in which artists adopted this ecological issue, seeking to engage the public in thinking of their human condition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Described by Madeleine Bunting in an article in *The Guardian* about the exhibitions, these artworks represented catastrophic global climate changes and

made us aware of our human need to survive. “We wanted people to have an aesthetic response,” claims one of the curators, Kathleen Soriano of Royal Academy’s Earth. To that effect: “There’s nothing literal. We’re not offering information — if visitors want that, we have a website,” Ms. Bunting wrote in her essay *The Rise of Climate-Change Art, Art and Design*.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, there are some researchers seeking considerable empirical evidence to support their inquiries, such as *Climart*, an art/science research project examining the effectiveness of visual language on the perceptions of climate change. The main question leading this research is whether visual art can affect viewer perceptions of climate change. This is a multidisciplinary research project in psychology, natural science, and arts at the Institute of Psychology at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway. They are focusing on these issues; however, the power of images throughout the history of humanity, such as the iconolatriy linked to myth and religion or ideology, is well-known in both Western and Eastern ways of thinking. Besides the attraction of images, which was always emphasized in the communication process and language development, the world and *Weltanschauung* are changing as a result of scientific and technological advances. This was posited in Jürgen Habermas’ works titled *Technik und Wissenschaft als “Ideologie”* (1968)<sup>6</sup> and *Kommunikatives Handeln und detranszendentalisierte Vernunft* (2001).<sup>7</sup> I based a part of my thesis on Habermas’ works.<sup>8</sup> In this, I analyzed how the image’s power determines the rhythm of the city in the public space. The people of contemporary democracy, according to Jürgen Habermas, make their ideas public through the process of appropriation from the public space. However, by systematizing the public (*Öffentlichkeit*) in its complex and dynamic magnitude, Habermas’ theory shows a relationship that proposes an agreement by reason. Indeed, the actions manifest themselves in the public space and seek to achieve consensus. Therefore, it has been observed that Habermas presents a rational communication for social reality. Among these achievements and the appropriation of space, from my point of view, the image is constructed by the collective consciousness out of a danger that threatens human existence. It is not the argument of needs, though that stimulates the search for solutions through new creations and discoveries.

While technological development is an important representative of forms, it is observed that the structure, i.e., the sense of building a narrative through images, is like a



rhetoric that aims at convincing the public regarding the logic of truth. The important issue is that there are many reasons to determine the actions of individuals by technological convergence, transforming the social environment into a flexible space between two poles: one of continuity and the other of innovation in terms of political and economic orientation. This space takes many forms and can be represented by the recreations of artworks in terms of the two poles mentioned above. When conditions are favorable and can be tuned in this flexible space, it can produce satisfactory results because it generates the influence, continuity, and sustainability of images. It sets up a world using collective knowledge to supply needs and desires, and these in turn determine what it is to be a human being at the present day. This digital space has taken up much of our lives. People know the place of digital technology in their everyday life, and they are concerned about being dependent on the Internet. On the one hand, everybody is trying out what is in vogue as millions of people are well acquainted with social media. On the other hand, the world of art increases its focus on socially and politically engaging work through social media as a nonhuman relationship — an online practice using new technologies and artificial intelligence toward forming a collective intelligence. Thus, new forms of activity arise on the World Wide Web and in other multimedia applications.

There are many resources like websites, blogs, and other social media to help us consider the pros and cons of the issue regarding new technologies, which focus on the recycling of obsolete technologies. These web-based sources of information seem to be a broad configuration of a collective intelligence and illustrate what Scott B. Waltz says: “Actor-Network theory acknowledged the active role of the nonhumans as actors in the co-fabrication of the social world.”<sup>9</sup>

On balance, the Internet has enabled a collective communication throughout the world, with the coexistence of both humans and nonhumans under aesthetic experience in the digital process through visual culture as reality. All questions are divided into two perspectives. The first is the image of a perfect illusion, which would lead the imagined reality to lose its enchantment through the large production of images. The second is the discussion of the ability that humans have to produce images as an abstraction of the world. Following this dimension of the real world, the achievements are the result of technological developments according to a potential illusion. Moreover, creativity is absolutely essential and is exploited through techniques in visual

culture such that the masterpiece of nonhumanity in the human approach can be regarded as part of the heritage of humanity which uses technological developments for the future of humanity.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Welsch, “Changes in Aesthetics,” paper presented at the XVIth *International Congress of Aesthetics*, Rio de Janeiro, July 18–23, 2004.
- <sup>2</sup> Wolfgang Welsch, “Animal Aesthetics,” in *Contemporary Aesthetics, Forum: Science in Aesthetics* 2 (2004), accessed November 7, 2016, <<http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=243>>. “Sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilized life” (Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (London: Penguin, 2002), accessed May 23, 2016, <[http://www2.uni-jena.de/welsch/papers/W\\_Welsch\\_Animal%20Aesthetics.html](http://www2.uni-jena.de/welsch/papers/W_Welsch_Animal%20Aesthetics.html)>.
- <sup>3</sup> Wolfgang Welsch, “Animal Aesthetics” (cf. note 2).
- <sup>4</sup> Frans Krajcberg and Claude Mollard, *Le nouveau manifeste du naturalisme intégral* (Grenoble: Critères éditions, 2013).
- <sup>5</sup> Madeleine Bunting, “The Rise of Climate-Change Art, Art and Design,” in *The Guardian*, December 2, 2009, accessed May 12, 2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/dec/02/climate-change-art-earth-rethink>>.
- <sup>6</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Technik und Wissenschaft als “Ideologie”* (Frankfurt, Main: Suhrkamp, 1968).
- <sup>7</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Kommunikatives Handeln und detranszendentalisierte Vernunft* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001).
- <sup>8</sup> Christiane Wagner, *In Art: Invenção e artifício* (São Paulo: Blucher, 2009).
- <sup>9</sup> Scott B. Waltz, “Nonhumans Unbound: Actor-Network Theory and the Reconsideration of ‘Things’ in Educational Foundations,” in *The Journal of Educational Foundations* 20.3/4 (2006), 51–68, here: 64–65.