

“A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME”

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*What's in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet...
Romeo and Juliet (II, ii, 1–2)*

Introduction

The theme of this issue of *Filozofski vestnik*, “The Revival of Aesthetics,” may be taken to suggest that aesthetics is or has been in decline. I do not think that this is the case. The history of aesthetics shows a gradual and growing development from isolated questions and issues to greater scope and increasing identity as a distinctive field of inquiry. This development has continued to the present, apart from some brief intervals when, with supreme arrogance, the cognitive status of aesthetics has been questioned. I would say instead that we are witnessing a vast expansion of the scope of aesthetic inquiry, and that it is now possible to consider the aesthetic value, not only of nature and the arts, but of technology, popular culture, environment, and social relationships, to mention a few of its new directions.

These are promising possibilities and they would benefit by being clearly identified and described. But at the same time, the field of aesthetics has long labored under handicaps, cognitive as well as professional. These would benefit from articulation and clarification, and it is my intent here to initiate the process. This, then, is an essay on the tasks of aesthetic theory and the pitfalls that beset it. I want to show that aesthetics can be enlightening by discovering and examining the facets and dimensions of experiences we call aesthetic, experience that is expansive and revelatory. This kind of experience can also clarify the relation of aesthetics to other areas of knowledge,

such as cultural studies, and conversely, the bearing of different disciplines on our aesthetic understanding.

Let me consider, first, how aesthetic inquiry might proceed in clearer and more productive directions, beginning with the name of our discipline. The historical origins of 'aesthetics' is well known, and it can be informative and helpful. However, 'aesthetics' has often been used to restrict appreciative experience, and the term itself may be unimportant. What we label aesthetic is not significant; appreciation is. For aesthetic theory is easily caught up in secondary, unproductive, and even false issues, such as the definition of art, the boundaries of art, and the proper designation of beauty. It is this danger that gives this essay its title. What is important, I want to argue, is not what we label beautiful or call art but where we find the kind of value experiences traditionally associated with appreciating beauty, natural and artistic, and how we can enhance and develop such experiences. However, this also requires recognizing the converse of these values in the loss, the negation, the desecration of this mode of experience, and I shall touch on this, as well.

The scope of aesthetic experience

The field of aesthetics is unique in the central place it gives perceptual experience, experience that is never surpassed or transcended. Since this is where any inquiry must start, I consider aesthetics a, perhaps 'the,' foundational discipline, foundational not logically or ontologically but temporally and heuristically. This is a powerful claim, but it recognizes how important are those normative experiences that we call aesthetic.

What constitutes aesthetic experience?

Aesthetic experience has been a subject of discussion since Shaftesbury and Hutcheson inquired into the experience of beauty early in the seventeenth century and claimed that aesthetic appreciation is largely disinterested. Such a view was institutionalized by Kant at the beginning of the eighteenth century and, since then, it has become axiomatic for most aestheticians. At the same time, some have challenged its hegemony and for different reasons: descriptive, empirical, historical, social, conceptual, and theoretical. One key argument is that disinterestedness confines apprecia-

tion to a state of mind, that is, a psychological state, and unduly excludes the somatic and social dimensions of experience.¹

Aesthetic experience again became important in the nineteenth century and even more in the mid-twentieth, culminating in John Dewey, the principal figure in this re-focusing of aesthetic inquiry.² Somewhat in eclipse during the latter part of the last century, interest in aesthetic experience has returned in recent years, both in artistic practice and aesthetic theory, and with renewed vitality and a broader scope. Following the groundwork laid by Dewey in centering discussion on the active human organism, current interpretations of aesthetic experience stress its sensory character to varying degrees and interpret sensory perception far more widely than before. In contrast to a tradition originating in classical Greece that restricts the perception of beauty to sight and hearing, it is now often argued that all the senses are involved to varying degrees, including the proprioceptive and kinesthetic ones, and that the senses do not perceive through discrete and separate channels but rather in combination and often synaesthetically.

Yet another expansion of aesthetic experience in the late twentieth century has been to reject disinterestedness, not only because of its psychological cast, but because it is unduly restrictive in excluding objects and activities that may be functional or have a practical purpose but that one can still appreciate aesthetically. Intrinsic perception must therefore be understood more broadly. It may occur alongside the practical, as in architecture, automobile design, or an English cottage garden, or it may be inseparable from practical uses, as in the appreciation of a perfectly functioning machine or a well-designed article of furniture. Social, cultural, and technological influences are also important factors in aesthetic experience. Because the range of aesthetic value has become vastly greater, so also has its significance as a cultural phenomenon.³

Thus with the expansion of perceptual experience to include all the senses and to go beyond a merely psychological attitude or mental state to an experience of the conscious, sensing body, the characterization and meaning

¹ Cf. Jerome Stolnitz, “On the Origins of ‘Aesthetic Disinterestedness,’” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20 (1961), pp. 131–44; Ronald Hepburn and Arnold Berleant, “An Exchange on Disinterestedness,” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 1 (2003) (www.contempaesthetics.org); Arnold Berleant, *Re-thinking Aesthetics, Rogue Essays on Aesthetics and the Arts* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2004), Chs. 2 and 3.

² John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch, & Co., 1934).

³ There is a large and growing literature here, some of it coming from sources in the phenomenological movement and some from the pragmatic. Among the more notable contributors to the enlargement of our understanding of aesthetic experience are Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Mikel Dufrenne, Arnold Berleant, and Wolfgang Iser.

of aesthetic experience have undergone major changes. What remains critical, however, is the strong emphasis on sensory perception and on the intrinsic character of such perception. The active participation of the appreciator, indeed the appreciator's contribution to the art and to the experience, have become widely recognized and are openly employed in the contemporary arts. Artistic practices, such as including the reader's response and the multitude of forms interactive art has assumed, call on the contribution of the appreciator in overt and active participation for their fulfillment; without that contribution they are incomplete. Indeed, we recognize that absorption in aesthetic appreciation can occur to a degree so complete that the viewer, reader, or listener may entirely abandon the consciousness of being a separate self and enter totally into the aesthetic world. I call this aesthetic engagement, and when it is achieved most fully and intensely and completely, it is the fulfillment of the possibilities of aesthetic experience.

Where can it be found?

When aesthetic experience is so broadly inclusive, its scope of application becomes correspondingly large. Appreciation then is not confined to the art museum or the concert hall but extends in all directions. Not only can any object be appreciated aesthetically but so can every situation. Consequently, aesthetics has generated a proliferation of sub-disciplines such as environmental aesthetics, the aesthetics of everyday life, the aesthetics of popular culture, and the aesthetics of sport, to name a few. The range of aesthetics has also grown, developing new relations with other disciplines and new regions to explore. Comparative aesthetics is one such development, and it expands our understanding of the aesthetic in relating other cultural and historical traditions to the classic Western one. Social aesthetics is another, looking into ways in which aesthetic experience and value enter human relationships and institutions.

There is yet another direction in which the scope of aesthetic experience has moved. In giving primacy to intrinsic sensory perception and to meanings and ideas grasped through such experience, we must acknowledge that this experience is not always rewarding, that it does not lift the capacity and subtlety of the aesthetic process to a richer range and depth. The very inclusiveness of aesthetic experience demands that we take account of experiences that are similar in kind but different in value. Intrinsic sensory awareness perceived through cultural meanings and influences may inten-

sify those objects and situations that range from the unfulfilled to the de-meaning and destructive.

In short, we may speak of a negative range of aesthetic experience, of negative aesthetics, so to say, and this can not only reflect lost or frustrated possibilities for enrichment, as in the design of a banal building or martial music that evokes loyalty to false or destructive myths of national or cultural superiority. Aesthetic experience can also produce outright pain, as in entering a favela or urban slum, of dismay in witnessing the clear-cutting of an old growth forest, or of revulsion when encountering kitsch in literature or art. These experiences can produce not only aesthetic pain but moral suffering, both of which, at times, are inseparable. Its capability of identifying negative aesthetic values gives the aesthetic the capacity to act as an incisive force in social criticism, a largely untried region of aesthetic activity but potentially a powerful one. Aesthetic theory and experience are intimately bound up with the moral, negatively as well as positively.

Enlarging the domain of aesthetic value

Recognizing the dark side of aesthetic experience is another reason for exceeding traditional constraints. The aesthetic has not only a history but has evolved over time and has a future. It is clearly unwise to attempt to predict the aesthetic capacities of experiences as yet unknown. We can nonetheless see, at our present stage some of the revealing possibilities that new directions of inquiry offer. As we have just noted, negative aesthetics is a hidden region of perceptual experience that is inseparable from ethical issues. We might even argue that ethical criticism always harbors an aesthetic component. For every decrease in human good is also a beauty unrealized, and moral transgressions always bring with them a diminution of aesthetic capabilities. We might say that an aesthetic affront is part of every immoral act. This is clearly a complex interrelationship; it identifies a direction in which aesthetic inquiry can move into new ground and enlarge our moral as well as our aesthetic understanding.

Then there are perennial issues that can acquire new meaning. One of these concerns the interrelationships between and among the various arts, always an intriguing question and more so now with new arts and new artistic technologies. Some relationships that were challenging not long ago have been more or less settled as the presumed conflict has dissipated or at least become less interesting. Obvious examples are the relation of photography to painting, of film to the novel and to video art, and of assemblages and

environments to sculpture. It is a challenge for aesthetic theory to help us understand how these historically related art forms engage us in different ways and what is distinctive about our experiences with them.

We have already noted new perspectives in experience that can be identified in different historical periods. The question arises of how or whether such historically-qualified experiences can be grasped clearly enough that they retain their identity. Is there, for example, a Victorian sensibility that moves across pre-Raphaelite painting, didactic poetry, gothic novels, and the dark romanticism of nineteenth century symphonic music? What of the baroque in music and architecture or, more recently, dada and surrealist art, pop art and mass culture? Does appreciating seventeenth century Dutch landscape painting entail experientially entering the world of Vermeer or Hobbema and, if it does, how does the world in which we engage compare with the world of those painters?

A somewhat parallel issue concerns the comparative understanding of the characteristic aesthetic sensibility found in different cultural traditions. Can we discern, for example, a tangential connection between the experience of the x-ray paintings in aboriginal art with, say, cubist art of the early twentieth century, or medieval Indian erotic temple sculpture and the work of Rodin or Maillol?

Other related and underlying issues need to be exposed and clarified. Where is aesthetic value located and how is it identified in different cultures? Some obvious complications reside in the frequent fusion of aesthetic with religious experience and meaning. Can they be distinguished and, if they can, how much do they resemble one another? To consider a common, puzzling case, how can we best understand the interrelations of Christian history and beliefs with the aesthetic experience of the masses of Bach, Mozart, or Schubert? I suspect that a somewhat different understanding will emerge in each case and, perhaps, in each individual work. Where does the aesthetic lie in the statuary of Hindu deities, of Western Medieval and Renaissance painting, of the carved wood crucifixions and altarpieces of Riemenschneider in the late Middle Ages? Perhaps this cognitive complexity can be seen most directly in the names different cultures use to identify what we may call beauty: the Hebrew *yapha*, the Greek *to kalon*, the Japanese *wabi-sabi*, the Indian *rasa*.⁴ While a beginning has been made in comparative aesthetics, fascinating issues remain. Comparative aesthetics, historical aesthetics, the multi-dimensional richness of aesthetic experience in different arts: these are some of the productive directions in which aesthetic inquiry can move.

⁴ See Crispin Sartwell, *Six Names of Beauty* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

Obstacles to expanding aesthetic theory

Such promising possibilities may augur an optimistic future for aesthetic theory. Unfortunately, however, aesthetics is burdened with many so-called problems that are either insignificant or misdirected. Here is where the rose, referred to in my title, grows. Indeed, such problems often rest on theoretical assumptions originating in cultural belief systems, or on premises that derive from quite different philosophical sources. We may therefore want to regard some of these problems as false issues in aesthetics, all the more unfortunate in their tendency to deflect us from larger concerns and more productive directions. This is not a vague and general criticism: it rests on specific assumptions and practices.

One of these is the widespread practice of centering discussion on the object, the art object, alone. The question is often asked, “But is it art?”, rather than inquiring into the experiential situation in which alone that question is meaningful. This object orientation leads to many minor issues that have produced major efforts at conceptual identification, such as identifying aesthetic qualities, determining the meaning and boundaries of beauty or the definition of ‘art.’ It is the distortion that results from taking aesthetic inquiry to be about art objects that produced the controversy between formalism and representation in the visual arts and the persistent puzzle over the aesthetic significance of artistic representation, as well as uncharitable responses to new materials, styles, and subject-matter. What we should ask instead is, “Are we experiencing this situation aesthetically and how can we develop the capacity to appreciate these artistic innovations?” One consequence of making aesthetic experience central is the recognition that art is not an object at all but a situation, a field of aesthetic experience, an aesthetic field, and that every art object functions aesthetically and can be understood only as part of a experiential situation involving appreciative, creative, and performative aspects, as well as the objective one.⁵ It does not matter whether we call something art or not: What is important is how the object works in appreciative experience. It is such experience that is the heart of the aesthetic.

In considering obstacles to the expansion of aesthetics, it is useful to distinguish between different modes of aesthetic inquiry. I shall call them critical and substantive aesthetics. Defining key concepts, demarcating the

⁵ I term this “the aesthetic field” and it is the guiding idea in my work in aesthetics. It was first developed in my book, *The Aesthetic Field, A Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (Springfield: C. C. Thomas, 1970) and has been extended and refined in subsequent publications.

boundaries of art, puzzling over whether and how we can characterize the aesthetic properties of objects that function in appreciative experience, specifying precisely the relation these objects have to aspects of the world independent of art – all these may be subsumed under critical aesthetics. So, too, are the concern with the logic of those concepts and the structure of aesthetic theory. Substantive aesthetics, on the other hand, is not directed at objects and their corresponding ideas but toward understanding the content and conditions of appreciative experience. It attends to the first-order factors in such experience and not with the second-order, meta-aesthetic activity of defining and characterizing that experience. In their extremes, these modes of inquiry represent two different and incompatible intellectual cultures, but happily they are not often carried to extreme lengths. Most aestheticians do both critical and substantive aesthetics. The differences among them result from the degree of importance or emphasis given one or the other. Even when not extreme, these differences may be significant, indeed fundamental.⁶

Another obstruction to progress in aesthetic thought results from hierarchical thinking that leads to invidious distinctions as, for example, between the higher arts and the lower or popular arts.⁷ Instead of making normative distinctions, we can gain greater understanding from investigating differences in appreciative experience that occur in conjunction with artistic modes, materials, and styles associated with that classification. Here we should also include the folk arts, as well, arts that have histories, styles, and experiences of significant value in their own right. Weaving, basket making, quilting, sculpture using recycled materials, and environments constructed out of discarded objects can offer deep satisfactions to a perceiver and rich insights into the worlds of people who may be too modest or naïve to claim the title of artist. Moreover, it would be misleading to consider the popular arts as a homogeneous group. Significant differences exist among them, and subtle yet important discriminations can be made of appreciative experience between arts in the same modality. Popular music encompasses an enormous range of sub-genres that differ significantly from one another. What makes swing, ballads, jazz, be-bop, rock, hip hop, and rap distinctive and different from one another? This, moreover, is not to deny the qualitative differ-

⁶A fuller discussion of this distinction occurs in A. Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), pp. 25–26.

⁷Cultivating the “higher arts” is seen as an important source of creative inquiry in European culture. See the program of The European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA) and the Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen (AEC).

ence between Bartók and be-bop. It is rather to recognize that each artistic modality (not level) is the occasion for unique appreciative experiences. Differences in quality, refinement, complexity, and subtlety do not tendentially demarcate degrees of aesthetic value but rather differences in experience that is itself normative. Research into those differences is an important field for aesthetic research.

Another, related traditional hierarchical assumption is the distinction between the fine arts and the practical arts or crafts. This, of course, has cultural and historical roots in the superiority that the classical Greeks attributed to theoretical over practical knowledge. Its modern form appears in the assumption that objects of fine art must be regarded for their own qualities and not for any practical interest. This, the doctrine of the disinterestedness of aesthetic appreciation, has been an axiom of modern aesthetics. While it served to identify the distinctiveness of the aesthetic, at the same time it excluded from aesthetic significance and even legitimacy those arts that are inseparable from practical interests, such as the design arts, and it led to such anomalies as considering architecture a fine art and furniture design a practical one.⁸ Resting aesthetic value on appreciative experience undermines these false oppositions and makes possible the illuminating study of finely discriminated qualities of appreciation.

The future of aesthetics

Finally, a word about the implications of the aesthetic topography I have mapped here. Some of these are fairly obvious from what has already been said. Others are not so apparent. Let me indicate several possible directions.

Once we extend the range of the place and the experience of art and the aesthetic, we can better appreciate their critical position in human society. Every design decision affects people's experience, and the aesthetic is an essential part of that experience. Instead of being thought of as a “frill,” we begin to grasp the pervasiveness and importance of aesthetic factors. These, then, assume greater importance, and decisions about the design of human environments and institutions and of the activities that are part of their functional processes take on a broader significance. Social decisions,

⁸ I have developed an extensive critique of aesthetic disinterestedness in several places. See *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991) and especially *Rethinking Aesthetics*, cited above.

such as those implemented through city planning and urban design, residential developments, and architecture, all produce aesthetic consequences. Once their importance is acknowledged, all social decisions will have to consider aesthetic effects in addition to economic constraints and technological requirements. Before any major construction project is begun, a community should require an “aesthetic impact study,” as many now require an environmental impact study. Money must no longer rule as an autocratic god, for economic values are never the only values at stake. Such forethought is necessary not only for design decisions in the physical environment but for design decisions about organizations, political processes, and other forms in which societies structure themselves and carry on their activities.

The aesthetic also has an important place in human relationships, both personal and social, and it affects people’s daily activities. I call the aesthetic here “social aesthetics,” the aesthetic factor present in friendship, family, love, employment, and even in education. Aesthetic decisions and experiences are also embedded in the design of influential factors and features in the everyday environment. These extend from the choice of clothing, the use of appliances, the packaging of articles, the care and management of one’s dwelling place, and the other objects and aspects that constitute daily life, to personnel policies and the structuring of employer-employee relations, i.e., the social organization of production. This is not to deny the major importance of an ethical factor in these last cases for, indeed, ethical values lie at the heart of social aesthetics. We should also not fail to include the influence of aesthetic decisions on political life and on social institutions. Aesthetic distinctions are easily transmuted into class distinctions, and class distinctions are quickly institutionalized in political distinctions and discriminatory social practices. Influences on the quality of aesthetic experience pervade the human environment.⁹

Pervasiveness and universality

The assumption that there are universal aesthetic standards and the quest for them have colored the history of aesthetic thought, but such standards have never been established successfully.¹⁰ The individual human and

⁹The key study here is Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). See also Arnold Berleant and Allen Carlson (eds.), *The Aesthetics of Human Environments* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, forthcoming 2007).

¹⁰The question of whether it is possible to establish such standards has been a preoc-

social factors in aesthetic judgment are ineradicable, and with them come the other contextual factors that influence appreciative experience. Yet while aesthetic judgments may not be universal, the aesthetic in experience is valued everywhere, and more research is needed to explore and examine this. Not only do all peoples seem to consider aesthetic satisfactions important; there is a similar breadth found in the occurrence of the aesthetic in every nook and cranny of experience. The traditional boundaries that have circumscribed art and the aesthetic have been forever breached.¹¹

Aesthetic understanding

One of the consequences of such a renewal of aesthetics as I have projected here cannot be described or categorized easily. This is a vastly enlarged vision of human understanding. Here artists can be our guides and philosophers our cartographers. Experiential understanding is a legitimate and important mode of knowing the human world. Our awareness deepens as we incorporate the revelations novelists give us into different human conditions, both historically and culturally different.¹² Poets reveal the nuances of particular occurrences and situations; playwrights the peculiarities of an endless range of social situations. As fine artists bring to light new sights and new ways of seeing, composers lead us into the experience of a non-verbal, non-representational realm.¹³ So with every art and every original artist.¹⁴

Not only are the range and subtlety of human experience vastly enlarged through our aesthetic understanding. Artists are uniquely able to penetrate beneath the protective layers with which we shield ourselves. For aesthetic appreciation is not sensory delectation alone but an entrance into domains of awareness that lie outside the boundaries of empirically verifiable scientific knowledge, of linear rationality, as it were.

cupation of philosophers from Hume and Kant to the present day.

¹¹ For a revealing account of this, see David Novitz, *The Boundaries of Art* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

¹² In her analysis of literary works, Nussbaum probes into the kind of understanding that literature offers. See Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹³ Vladimir Jankélévitch draws a penetrating distinction between the ineffable and the untellable, and assigns the former to music. The ineffable cannot be explained but “acts like a form of enchantment,” dealing with mystery and provoking bewilderment. *Music and the Ineffable* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, (1961) 2003), p. 72.

¹⁴ See Derek Whitehead, “Artist’s Labor,” *Contemporary Aesthetics* (www.contempaesthetics.org), Vol. 5 (2007).

Philosophers have long had intimations of such “poetic understanding.” Heidegger, for example, found the meaning of an artwork’s “coming-to-presence” in poetry, for poetry reaches toward what words cannot say directly and literally. Thinking, he wrote, “must think against itself,” and poetry discloses being by offering a presence that touches us. Poetry, indeed, becomes the language of being.¹⁵

Merleau-Ponty approached aesthetic understanding by another route, through vision rather than language, painting rather than poetry. His problem is somewhat different: how to grasp “our mute contact with the things, when they are not yet things said.” How can we make the “transition from the mute world to the speaking world”? To do this we must confront “brute vision” and recognize the ineradicable influences both of our corporeal body and of the world of human encounters, culture, and history. What we are seeking, he stated, is being, neither in itself or for itself, but at the intersection of both, before the chasm between consciousness and body that reflection interposes.¹⁶ In pursuing this, Merleau-Ponty invoked original and powerful ideas. One of them is the concept of reversibility, the kind of interdependency that holds between touching and the touched, between the visible and the invisible. This led him to speak of more than interdependency but of a joining together into what he calls “the flesh of the world,” the “indivision of this sensible Being that I am and all the rest which feels itself in me, pleasure-reality indivision [...]”¹⁷ His fascinating investigation of this led him to the idea of a ‘chiasm’ or intertwining. This is a rich concept, whose full elaboration he left unfinished. It points to a direction from which we attempt to grasp the pre-reflective human world where words cannot lead us.

An art object can be analyzed, considered historically and in the context of the artist’s oeuvre, and, yes, theorized about in terms of its form, expressive qualities, and technique. It can also be appreciated, and this, too, can be cognized in similar ways. I want to maintain, however, that something remains in the way in which art is grasped in appreciative experience that eludes these cognitive processes. It is this understanding, the grasp of the work that exceeds everything that can be said about it, that is the work’s core, its heart. It has to be experienced to exist and, like all perceptually based experience, cannot be fully transcribed or commu-

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1975), pp. 8, 93. Cf. also pp. 137, 216.

¹⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), pp. 36, 38, 63–64, 95, 154.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 254–257.

nicated. Such an understanding is what Jankélévitch called ineffable and what Nussbaum described as love’s knowledge. Stravinsky put it pointedly in the case of music: “The one true comment on a piece of music is another piece of music.”¹⁸

These last, brief accounts only cite some important efforts to achieve a kind of understanding that, by its very nature, is pre-conceptual. Yet the inarticulability of the end point of philosophy is hardly a new discovery. One cannot help but be reminded of Plato’s recognition of it in the incommunicability of his vision of the forms.¹⁹ A comparable but essentially different case is Kant’s projection of a noumenal realm of things-in-themselves, a realm that lies beyond the capabilities of human knowledge but that at the same time we can grasp as the ground of possibility. This non-conceptual understanding, what I have been calling aesthetic understanding, has to be rediscovered constantly as philosophy moves into different phases.

Exploring the domain of aesthetic understanding is a task to be undertaken in its own place, for we cannot depict and communicate this understanding directly and exactly through language without losing its very identity. This greatest of questions is like great art. As Derrida observed, “A masterpiece always moves, by definition, in the manner of a ghost.”²⁰ In these times when it is widely claimed that scientific knowledge is exclusive and exhaustive while, on the other side, gross irrationality runs madly amok on an international scale, it remains a challenge for philosophers to recognize this realm of the inarticulable and determine its significance for inquiry. This is something to pursue, not as an investigation into an objective, universal structure and not as an artist’s intuitive path, but as the exploration of an elusive and ever-changing region of experience, a domain that may be grasped though not known.

Here aesthetics can help us, for the ultimate inarticulability of the aesthetic provides an occasion for recognizing and clarifying the character and range of a region of human understanding that has been insufficiently considered. To view it as terrain that is contiguous with aesthetic experience is to acknowledge the philosophical importance of aesthetic inquiry. This is a challenge for inquiry and, like the arts themselves, it is substantive rather than critical. In the process aesthetics has to enlarge its scope and develop the confidence to move in new directions. Here is an undertaking of surpassing importance, and its results are unpredictable.

¹⁸ Jankélévitch, *op. cit.*, Nussbaum, *op. cit.* Igor Stravinsky in an interview in the *New York Review of Books* (May 12, 1966), p. 12.

¹⁹ Plato, *Republic*, VII, 540A.

²⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* (Routledge, 1994), p. 18.

We have come, in our projection of a renewal of aesthetics, to a key place. Here, however, we must stop, for it is not the purpose of this essay to provide answers to the questions I have raised or try to fulfill the productive possibilities of aesthetics. What I hope to have done is draw a topographical map of the landscape of aesthetic theory, and it has brought us to this most fascinating and elusive of questions: recognizing and identifying the kind of understanding that comes by way of art and, more generally, through aesthetic experience.

Conclusion

It is clear that a revival of aesthetics has already begun. The place of the arts and aesthetic experience in human society has expanded and become more prominent. Aesthetic values are discovered in the objects and situations of daily life and extend to the various forms of social relationships. Assimilating all these into the province of aesthetic inquiry provides a basis for social and environmental criticism, giving aesthetic judgment an important social role. Aesthetic experience also has had to grapple with the challenges presented by new arts and artistic technologies. All these have enlarged the range of aesthetic experience of which we are aware and attentive, and which then must be understood in ways that can account for these changes. Part of this expanded range of experience is a growing appreciation of the value of differences among cultures, something an aesthetic sensibility is particularly capable of recognizing. We can think of this variety in aesthetic perception as part of the cultural pool of humankind, as a resource comparable to the human gene pool, a rich fund from which ever new possibilities of perceptual experience can be brought to consciousness. And as the values we find in cultural perceptions increase, our appreciation of the importance of these differences grows accordingly. Lastly, the greater breadth of human cognitive and perceptual awareness leads us to recognize its limits and to gain a more balanced vision of its range.

There is clearly much room for the expansion of aesthetic inquiry as it proceeds down the many avenues that stretch before it. New and revived theoretical questions appear, from re-examining aesthetic appreciation to disclosing the shape of aesthetic understanding. Moreover, theory has a whole other side, for applied aesthetics is becoming increasingly important in the larger culture. Indeed, both of these must go hand in hand, for they are different sides of the same coin. In the process of its expansion, some traditional issues may be abandoned and, with them, the comfort of familiar

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ground. But this is all to the good, for it reaffirms the vitality of this inquiry and the continuing importance of aesthetic value in the mass culture of an industrial world. While we may have to forsake the rose, we may discover its hidden fragrance everywhere. So let us proceed.