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# **The Beholder's I: The Perception of Beauty and the Development of the Self**

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## **Abstract**

A consideration of the perception of beauty immediately bridges the subjective and objective. To what extent is beauty residing in the object and to what extent is it a property of the subjectivity of the perceiver? Is beauty an objective feature of the object, like color, for example, which nonetheless needs to be perceived and therefore configured by the observer? Or is there some more complex relationship between the beauty that we seem to perceive “out there” and the state of our internal development? The dualistic framing of that would place beauty either out in the world or as an aspect of the self itself implies an overly dualistic view of the self and the self's environment. I will explore a view that the average development of individuals within a society determines structures of group consciousness, and one element of each structure is aesthetic, meaning that it configures the perception of beauty.

**Keywords:** beauty, aesthetics, self, development, modernity

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## **1. Introduction**

Before we can embark on a discussion of aspects of the perception of beauty, we might ask just what we mean by beauty? As is often the case with such exercises, what initially seems self-evident becomes increasingly obscure and difficult to pin down with increased scrutiny. We notice something “out there” which we label as beautiful. But is beauty really a feature of the object? Is it objective? If we were to say that it resides in features of the object (like symmetry or proportion) it would not necessarily render a discussion of the perception of beauty moot; our perceptual apparatuses configure our appreciation of objective features of the external world also. These questions of the relation of the subjective to the objective have parallels in psychoanalytic theories, such as object relations theory, attachment theory, and relational theory, among others. They also echo the traditional discussions of nature versus nurture,

that is, the subject finding itself within a particular environment, which becomes, for better or worse, its nurture.

Contemporary analytic models emphasize a view of the subject in relation with his or her environment, which initially for humans (due to our utter, and long, dependency at birth) is always another human caregiver. Winnicott's phrase "there's no such thing as a baby" [1] is a pithy summary of the shift to seeing the dyad of infant and caregiver as the phenomenon of interest, study, and care, rather than the infant in isolation. The dyad is seen as having emergent properties that are derived from the contributions of the individuals, but that go beyond them. Development unfolds through a process of the infant internalizing moments of self-other interaction [2], which then form the basis of implicit working models that configure the experience of subsequent interactions. The influence between self and environment then is bidirectional, though not necessarily always symmetric or equal.

Ekman [3] has demonstrated that humans experience a set of basic emotions that are hard-wired and set biologically and are therefore universal. These emotions are, however, invariably mediated through culturally specific expression rules. The expression rules are the proximate influence of the larger culture in configuring how the individual can give social expression to the underlying emotions. Those rules are the medium of expression. They can facilitate or hinder those expressions. Since it requires an intersubjective process to integrate emotion, the expression rules are crucial contributors to what developmental avenues are available for the self in development. The expression rules transmit what amounts to aesthetic languages, languages that are either rich or impoverished in terms of developmental potential.

Several authors have described stages of human cultural development that are conceived as being derived from the average individual development of participants in that culture. We can look to these descriptions as providing a picture both of the cultural worldview, including its aesthetics, as well as the psychological processes of the individuals participating in that culture. Just as in relational theory, in which the quality of relating is an expression of characteristics of the developing self-in-relation, we can look to evolving aesthetics on the level of cultural stages to characterize aspects of the evolving self.

I have contended elsewhere that psychoanalysis should be considered a form of applied aesthetics, parallel to medicine as applied science [4]. A corollary to this is the idea that art has a tendency to engage self-development as well as to reflect it, which psychoanalysis then makes use of. In this essay, I will explore how features of self-development configure broad stages of group consciousness, which then reflect, among other things, aesthetic vision, including the experience of beauty.

## 2. Stages of cultural development section

Ekman's expression rules are, of course, social constructions; they are both constructed socially but also configure how subsequent social interactions are experienced. Contemporary psychoanalytic models have shifted from viewing the self in isolation to a view of the self as constituted in a relationship; the unit of study becomes the dyad, rather than the individual [5].

Hence, the subjectivity of our emotional experience is configured by nature in combination with nurture (the current synthesis of the traditional dichotomy of nature versus nurture). We know from attachment and developmental psychology research that development is configured by social interactions and that knowledge of one's emotions is gained through bidirectional communications with early caregivers. This means that the expression rules that Ekman described end up impacting not just our emotional expression interpersonally, but also intrapsychically—we learn what we feel by learning to express those feelings to others.

Psychoanalysis (and all psychoanalytically derived therapies) make use of this phenomenon for healing. These therapies are exercises in deepening one's knowledge of one's emotional world by expressing one's feeling to another person. That is, one learns to talk more deeply and authentically to oneself through the effort to speak more authentically and deeply to someone else. Freud called the basic instructions to the analysand (the patient in analysis) the fundamental rule. These instructions were to try to say what comes to mind and to relax the usual social editing that we have been programmed through our upbringings to engage pre-reflectively in order to fit in socially.

In other words, the fundamental rule amounts to instructions to loosen and undo the cultural specific expression rules. From a neurophysiology standpoint, these expression rules mediate an interaction between the limbic system, part of the midbrain, and where our emotions are processed, and the neocortex, the location of our social modeling. They are mediated by implicit, subconscious/unconscious procedures and schemes encoded in the right prefrontal cortex [6]. So Freud's early case material involved people struggling with disavowed emotions: feelings and intentions that they had learned were socially unacceptable and therefore had to be disowned—the neocortex fighting with, struggling to integrate, the limbic, or animal brain.

That these experiences are encoded procedurally (right pre-frontal cortex) rather than discursively, in the left hemisphere language functions has important implication for how they are engaged aesthetically. Discursive (episodic) memory/knowledge, is the knowledge of facts and figures—the content of knowledge that can be expressed in language. Procedural memory encodes the knowledge of how to do things. This is often illustrated by pointing to physical procedures, such as how to ride a bicycle. The crucial point is that there are not just physical procedures, but also psychological and emotional procedures, and these importantly mediate our implicit relational knowing and being. Ekman's expression rules are largely procedural. Procedural knowledge is activated and accessed differently than discursive knowledge is. Unlike discursive knowledge, which can be called to mind (what is the capital of Georgia? etc.), procedural knowledge is accessed by enacting it. Unless you have formed a secondary verbal memory for whether you can ride a bicycle, you could only access that procedure by performing it—your body is what knows how to ride the bicycle. This is why art always has to be enacted. Unlike the accumulation of propositional systems of knowledge as is seen in science and philosophy, in which one can build on the conclusions of previous researchers, the work of art only has an impact in its enactment. Another way of stating this is that the implicit procedural schemes that configure our set of identifications, and with it our emotionality, has to be enacted in time and space in order for the work of emotional integration to take place. Still another way of expressing this is that it requires play [7, 8].

Thus, as the self, or I, unfolds in development, the development is in concert with group structures that configure elements of the aesthetic language available to the self, which are then made use of to give intersubjective expression in the ongoing task of integrating the underlying emotional experience.

Several authors have described stages of human cultural development that are conceived as being derived from the average individual development of participants in that culture. We can look to these descriptions as providing a picture both of the cultural worldview, including its aesthetics, as well as the psychological processes of the individuals participating in that culture. Wilber [9] has correlated several of these accounts with one another and found that they are describing the same underlying reality, and indeed, even the descriptive labels have broad overlap. Habermas' epochs (*archaic, magical-animistic, mythological, mythic-rational, rational-reflective, world citizens*), are broadly equivalent to Gebser's stages (*archaic, magic, mythic, mental, integral-aperspectival*), which map on to Bellah's stages of religious development (*primitive, archaic, historic, early modern, modern*) [9].

With this set of concepts, we can begin to lay out some of the features of these cultural epochs, including a history of their art and aesthetics, with correlations to the psychological and emotional processes on the individual level. A major reference point for processes at the level of the individual level is the point of development along Piaget's cognitive line.

Piaget's sequence [10] goes *sensorimotor, preconceptual-preoperational, intuitive(conceptual)-pre-operational, concrete operational, formal operational*. For example, using this scheme, we would see early foraging social structures, part of the archaic level, as using largely sensorimotor level of cognitions; social organization at this level is around the immediate family. As the average level of cognitive development moves into preoperational, at the magic level, the social structure expands to include clans, with hunter-gatherer organization. As intuitive-pre-operational structures unfold at the individual level, the overall level moves from magic toward mythic. This level finds social structures that are tribe based and horticultural in the organization. Once concrete operations take hold cognitively, the mythic level is fully in place, with the full agrarian social organization and theocratic empires, complete with Gods and hero worship. The transition into early formal operational thinking, at the mythic-rational level, with the emergence of abstract thought, allowed for the unfolding of the Renaissance, and the nation state. Full formal operational thinking led to the Western Enlightenment and the development of the industrial revolution. By Wilber's account, the United States continues in a transitional state, between mythic and full rational structures, which can account for recent political currents, as well as aesthetic themes, as progressive and regressive forces struggle with one another. Late formal operations, with systems, thinking and polyvalent logic would correspond to global or world-centric social systems, systems that are as yet fledgling.

My goal is to describe these underlying structures of consciousness in order to clarify how they configure our general view of the world, and specifically how they impact aesthetics and appreciation of beauty. One element involves the way these structures relate to one another in their development and unfolding. Generally, each stage emerges out of the previous stage, transcending, or differentiating, from the previous structure, with a subsequent downward



integration with the original stage. With human psychic development, the direction is toward successive internal differentiations. One illustration of this process is in cognitive development. In cognitive development, the substance of one stage becomes the material that the next stage works on or processes. This has an important impact on self-experience; the subject(self) of experience becomes part of the object of contemplation and subsequent integration in the next stage. So at one stage, sensory-motor, we essentially are our perceptual experiences, and we are our body; at the next stage, there has been internal differentiation of an emotional self, which is the core of a self that is no longer the body, but now has a body—but this self essentially *is* the particular emotion that is manifesting in that moment.

We begin to examine the sequence of developmental stages. The initial stage is sensory-motor, made up the most basic, biologically organized percepts. The pre-operational stage involves physical actions in manipulating physically perceived objects. The self at this stage is the body which engages the environment through physical manipulation; Freud's oral stage. We can see at this point the beginning of the move inward, as indeed, all these stages tend to unfold with increased levels of interiority, even as psychologically, they involve a de-centering, or shift away from self-centeredness. The pre-operational stage is still largely external, in that the material for processing is the physical percept, and the manner of manipulation remains physical, on the outside—but it also represents an early unfolding of intentionality, which is always on the inside, not the outside. Intentionality appears at this stage with pretend play, which introduces the question of "who is it" that is pretending. Fonagy and his colleagues [7] describe an important milestone in self-development that occurs during the pre-operational stage, around age 4, which is expressed in the "false belief test." A child is presented with a box with an external label describing its contents—for this example, we will say that it shows chocolates. The child is asked to tell what is in the box; the answer will be "chocolates." Then the box is opened, and it is revealed to contain crayons. Once closed again, the child is queried as to the box's contents, and this time answers "crayons." Then the child is asked to imagine a friend, who hasn't seen the open box; what will this friend say is in the box? If the child is younger than four, the typical answer will be "crayons;" if the child is older than four, the usual response is "chocolates." Development theorist will point to this as an indication of the development of a theory of mind in the child. After this milestone, the child is able to hold in his or her mind an image of the other child and to realize that it is distinct and unique to that other person. This is the beginning of the emergence, still quite underdeveloped, of the *point of view*. And the sequence is inward, into the internal world.

With the next stage, concrete operations, the substance of the earlier stage—physical manipulations of the external world—become the material to be worked upon. Now there is a truly mental operation, though still manipulating a physical action. This is a huge step forward and allows for a much more logical, structured inner world, albeit still concrete and rather rigid. Societal structures that emanate from this level are labeled *mythic*; examples include the great imperialistic nation states. The emphasis is on fidelity to role and rule, conformism to a role provided from the outside (since true interiority does not yet emerge until the next stage). When viewed from the next stage of formal operations(*rational* level societal stage), the mythic structure can be seen as overly concrete, lacking appreciation of alternative views, and totalitarian. These are elements at both the individual level(for example, a parent asserting

rules of the household to a 7-year-old “because those are the rules”) as well as at the societal level, with totalitarian governments imposing state religions (in the case of communism, the state religion is atheism). When viewed from the previous stage, *magical* level structures, the mythic level is a movement toward greater inclusion, greater overall integration; each stage is adequate, but each successive stage is more adequate. The relative concreteness of the mythic level, when viewed from the rational level, is actually a step toward less concreteness relative to the magical level. For example, magic level societal structures tend to be organized around bloodlines, rather than role/rule participation. Societies that are magically structured will attempt to preserve the good by cleansing the bad—literally ethnic cleansing, in which the evil or bad blood is eliminated. Mythic structures, on the other hand, preserve the good by converting the bad and incorporating it—everything is fine if you join The Party (but there is, of course, only one Party). Note how blood lines are more bodily based, more concrete, though the rule/role of the next stage is still relatively concrete, in that it is like an action that has to be undertaken or not, and the nature of the rule or role cannot be considered (literally can’t be conceived of yet at this level).

The unfolding of formal operational thinking at the individual level, and rational level societal structures is transformative. It is only at this stage that a true interiority opens up. Cognitively, the mental operations which in the previous level could only be used to manipulate concrete sensory data become themselves the material for operations at this new level. Individuals at this level can, for the first time, think about the nature of thought. The opening of this capacity, typically around age 12 with the full myelinization of the corpus callosum (the broad fiber tract that connects the two hemispheres of the brain), heralds the work of adolescence. One important aspect of this work is to bring into awareness the previously implicitly accepted rules and roles assigned by society and parents and to explicitly digest them, integrating them as deeply held principals rather than as religiously followed rules.

This account of development, both of individual and group cognition, helps explain a very broad sequence of development in art. The earliest productions by humans that are usual thought of as artistic production are the Paleolithic cave paintings, usually estimated to date from approximately 40,000 years ago. They tend to depict isolated images, such as particular animals, sometimes with human figures, quite iconographic (that is, lacking anything close to realism). Theorists debate whether to even consider them art per se, though they are often seen as precursors of what later would be considered art. The sense that they have a surface or superficial aspect would fit the notion that they reflect a sensory-motor processing of the world. Along these lines, they may also reflect what could be called sensory motor concerns—the primal struggle against nature and the elements, the struggle for food and basic shelter. Gebser [11, p. 48] summarizes key aspects of this stage, that of “magic man” as involving five characteristics: (1) egolessness; (2) a point-like unitary world; (3) spacelessness and timelessness; (4) a merger with nature; and (5) a magical reaction to being merged, imbuing him with supernatural power.

The mythic structure, as discussed above, relates to concrete operations in cognitive development for the individual. Gebser sees the magical stage as being *before time*, or before the emergence of our awareness of time. With the emergent awareness of time with the mythical structure, comes also awareness of *the soul*.

*...whereas the distinguishing characteristic of the magic structure was the emergent awareness of nature, the essential characteristic of the mythical structure is the emergent awareness of the soul. Magic man's sleep-like consciousness of natural time is the precondition for mythical man's coming to awareness of the soul. Wherever we encounter seasonal rituals in the later periods of the magic structure, and particularly in astronomical deliberations, as for example among the Babylonians and later in Egyptian and Mexican civilization, we find anticipations of the mythical structure. Such forms of evidence indicate that the coming-to-awareness of nature has reached its conclusion, a process whereby the rhythm of nature with its conspicuous auditory emphasis becomes, in a purely natural way, temporal. This is the decisive step taken by magic man out of his interlacing with nature [italics in original] [11, p. 61].*

To illustrate this transition from magical to mythic levels, Gebser cites examples of Occidental art dating from the second millennium B. C., for example, a colored stucco relief depicting a "Prince with a Crown of Feathers" from the Palace in Minos. The scene presents "terrestrial man(and not a divinity)" distinguished from the background of reeds and grasses [11, p. 62]. Though this figure is terrestrial, that is, of a human, not a God, it is still quite stylized and non-realistic. The art of the mythic period tends to be *concrete and literal*, consistent with the concrete operations stage of development and is typically dominated by religious art and iconography [9, p. 213]. It lacks depth, both visually, with the absence of visual perspective, and psychologically, in that there is no inner world depicted. With no space internally there is no internal or psychological perspective, and as such, there is no individuality, no uniqueness. Myths tend to be structured as personifications of Universal forces. They depict the formal and therefore external and standardized rules and roles of this level. The action is externalized into the world, not reflected upon internally. This matches a dynamic in work in therapy with individuals functioning at this level. Projections are directed by therapist outside the room, are then considered from a distance [12]. To call these "counter-projective" techniques might give the wrong impression, if that were to imply an effort, at least initially, to get the patient to stop projecting(I say "at least initially, because successful work might eventually lead to less of a tendency to project indigestible emotional material as integration successfully unfolds). Projections are joined by the therapist, but then directed past the therapist to some target outside the room. For example, a patient seen in the hospital might complain of not being able to smoke during the interview; the therapist might commiserate about the frustration of having to put up with seemingly arbitrary rules—the frustration is directed toward the faceless institution in order to dissipate the emotional charge in the room and allow the interview to proceed. This is in contrast to more conventional psychoanalytic techniques that invite the patient to project onto the patient and work through the issue in the transference. Harry Stack Sullivan was considered a master of these approaches. He was said to gradually shift his chair around so that he was eventually gazing in the same direction as the patient, literally enacting physically the empathic joining with the patient's point of view. It was said that patients would be less paranoid after sitting with Sullivan [12].

While Wilber calls the next stage *rational*, and Habermas labels it *rational-reflective*, Gebser refers to it as *mental* [9]. The transition, on the individual level, to what Fonagy [7] calls *mentalization* begins with adolescence, and the full flowering of this stage could be seen as the successful work of adolescence. On the societal level, the renaissance was the adolescence of Western culture, and the Western Enlightenment corresponds to the attainment of young



adulthood. It would be hard to exaggerate the impact of the unfolding of this stage has at both the level of individual development and at the cultural and group level. Recall the cognitive sequence, of successive dis-identification and differentiation from the earlier level, which then becomes the material that the new level acts upon; this is essentially the emergence of successively new dimensions of reality. Gebser also calls this level *perspectival*, which emphasizes the attainment of perspective in art. Literally, the third dimension is now included and depicted. But he is also emphasizing perspective in art as only one indication of a broader shift in overall consciousness. The appreciation of depth in space which is reflected in perspective is mirrored in the unfolding of internal space and psychological perspective. On the individual level, there is a differentiation of the internal world from the external. At the mythic level, adherence to role was attained by merging with and being/enacting the role. At the mental/rational stage, the ability to separate from role allows the ability to reflect upon and process (do work on) the role. Because role can now be thought about without having to be enacted, it is more completely mental and internal. With this comes the capacity for a more completely mental definition of self, which has impact societally on types of citizenship. Thought and feeling become more fully differentiated. Fonagy's fully mentalizing person includes the ability to think deeply about what one is feeling, and feel deeply about what one is thinking.

Remember, what is subject at one stage becomes the object of the subject's contemplation at the next stage. This also means that the stages represent an evolution in the self's set of identifications—what it imbued with “I-ness” shifts with the stages. The progression of internal differentiations means that what had to be concretely enacted at one stage may be available for mental contemplation at the next stage. This is particularly evident with the emergence of the rational stage, corresponding to formal operations at a cognitive level. As such, it is the first purely mental, or internal stage, in which one is able, for the first time, to think about thinking. As with the ability to hold space more fully in mentation, with perspectival consciousness, a similar shift occurs in relation to time. As people are less embedded in their physicality, they are less embedded in time. The circular, repetitive experience of time in nature is replaced by linear, clock time.

There is an important sense in which each evolving stage represents the differentiation of a new dimension of reality that is then added to the reality of the previous stage. Each stage is “more whole, more inclusive, more complete” than the previous stage [13]. We can get a feeling for this by looking at how one dimension relates to higher dimensions in geometry, particularly as it relates to the experience of time. If we think about how one dimension relates to the next lower dimension from which it emerges, we see that the next higher dimension tends to be experienced as *time* from the point of view of the lower dimension. So, geometrically, a single point in space is zero dimensions. Movement through space traces a line, a single dimension. A line moving through space traces a two-dimensional plane. A plane moving through space produces the third dimension of space, that is, a space with physical depth. From the point of view of the point moving through space to produce the line, movement and therefore duration is experienced. That single point can only be at one location as it traces the line through time. But from the point of view of the line, all the points exist simultaneously. Similarly, a line moves through space to trace a cube. From the point of view of the line, the cube is the experience of movement and duration; from the point of the cube, each line along the path still exists—simultaneity replaces duration, therefore space replaces time.

This has a great impact on both the individual and cultural levels. As people are less embedded in their physicality, they are less embedded in time. And a huge consequence is that one can now think about time without having to enact it to the same degree. The circular, repetitive experience of time in nature is replaced by linear, clock time. The wide distribution of cheap pocket watches, which occurred in the eighteenth century, along with the differentiation of the individual internally from the conformist social roles allowed for the development of a middle class, and individual driven consumerism. *Time is money* as an Enlightenment ideal could only develop as time became more purely mental.

As is implied in the point about the transformation of the experience of time and space, the rational or mental stage of cultural development is also commonly referred to as *modern*. There are many definitions of modernity, but a widely held view is that a key process involves the differentiation of the value spheres of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful [14]. It is during the Western Enlightenment that we see the impact of this on the level of social institutions involved with science, religion, and art. In philosophy, Kant's three great works (*The Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781; *The Critique of Practical Reason*, 1788; and *The Critique of Judgment*, 1790) describe and delimit the approaches successively, to Science, Ethics, and Aesthetics [15, pp. 85–87]. Much like the new freedom internally on the individual level, with the differentiation of thought from emotion, the differentiation of the value spheres allowed each to unfold with new levels of depth and freedom.

Science, freed from the dogma of religion, transformed the world. I do not have space in this discussion to do justice to the utter transformation of our world that modern science has unfolded, but perhaps the ubiquity of these effects render an exhaustive discussion of this unnecessary. I would emphasize how this process involved an opening up of internal space, parallel to the perspectival depth achieved in external space. This involved a transcending of the previous level's view of time and space. As technology, as applied science, takes up increasing space in our world, more and more of the world we live in becomes a projection of our inner worlds. In urban environments, it is possible to live in settings in which literally everything visible originated as an idea in a person's consciousness before finding physical manifestation in the outer world. Recall, this is all part of the sequence of internal differentiations, leading to the emergence of the mental world, sometimes referred to as the noosphere. The noosphere, or mental world, is seen as emerging from the biosphere, the realm of life, which emerges from the physiosphere, or lifeless universe [16]. At each stage, what could only be manifested through physical enactment can gradually be experienced internally, as a mental event—the “eye of flesh” can become the “eye of mind” [14]. A vivid example is Einstein's famous thought experiment, of imagining that he was riding on a photon at the speed of light. In his imagination, he transcended the limits of time and space.

Greater depth of post-conventional ethical development unfolded, manifesting in the liberation movements that reflect Enlightenment ideals. In the previous stage, self is still embedded concretely in how we act in the external world, it is also embedded in our bodies. With the mental stage, our sense of self and therefore citizenship can transcend our bodies and therefore our biology. The liberation ideals of the Enlightenment reflect this in the re-defining of citizenship rights as no longer rooted in biologic elements such as race or gender. Personhood

is now based on an idea rather than a concrete biologic or physical attribute. Wilber sees the appearance of women's liberation movements as a sign of the emergence of rational level societal structures [15]. Tolerance of opposing views is another unique manifestation in the world of the mental/rational level. This was institutionalized in Constitution of the United States, with minority rights protected against the power both of the majority and of the government, as well as in the separation of church and state, and guarantee of freedom of religion. For the first time in the history of the world, the twentieth century saw a general consensus on the level of nation states for the abolition of slavery.

All of this is reflected in modern art. Leonardo's *Trattato della Pittura* was the first scientific discussion of all types of perspective and included the first detailed discussion of light as it impacts the eye and not just as a symbol of the Divine [11, p. 19]. In form, there is a movement toward greater realism. In content, there is a movement away from idealized scenes and figures that depict the social rolls and conformism of the mythic stage; there are more representations of ordinary people in the midst of ordinary life. There is a greater emphasis on single moments of living, and with it, the psychological depth that contextualize that given moment. In literature, novels appear, which are accounts of this new, internal and individual psychological landscape. Secular subjects can be taken up as the church's dominance over all forms of expression is relaxed. This happens equally with music as with art and literature. The almost entirely ceremonial church music gave way to increasingly emotional, complex, romantic and individual expressions.

Although I am using words like a stage, and level, we should emphasize these are types of processes, and as such, they unfold in time in space. A particular moment of aesthetic appreciation is as much a function of the dynamic unfolding of process and development. As such, a major form that art takes is in the depiction of the dynamics of growth and development itself. This cuts across the different levels. So early religious iconography is just as much about development as it is understood at that level (development means striving toward God) as a modern psychological novel is. Freud, who had such an impact on modern aesthetic sensibility, started with concerns about pathological side tracks in the unfolding of the mental level. Complexity involves the differentiation of function, allowing specialization, followed by subsequent integration. Pathology can occur both with incomplete differentiation to begin with or with differentiation which defies subsequent integration and thus becomes dissociation. The *Studies in Hysteria* involved cases, mostly women, in which there was difficulty in the mental self's integration with the bodily, animal self, discussed in that system as drives that emanate from the *id*, or it(not me). The expression rules which Victorian society made available to these women was a kind of aesthetic language available to narrate the moment to moment affective experience of living and was inadequate in these cases to allow for a full integration of their affective experience. Instead, they were forced to dissociate and repress important elements of their inner worlds, resulting in symptoms.

Much of the art and literature of the mental stage involves the struggle to reach and consolidate at this level. This is reflected in the truism that for a novel, or movie, or play(more broadly, a story) to be compelling, it must involve growth and development in the protagonist. This is true even in classical tragedy, in which the development typically involves an earned awareness of

in the protagonist of his or her fatal flaw. Much of the classic American Theatre can be seen in this light, as depicting struggles reconcile the demands of roll deriving from the previous, mythic stage, with the earning dual yearnings that emerge as part of the differentiations of the mental/rational stage, the yearnings both for individuation and authenticity, on the one hand, and intimacy and communion on the other. These are themes found in abundance in the plays of Williams, O'Neill, Miller, and Wilson. These are themes found often in novel and films, as well, such as Ecco's *The Name of The Rose*, which depicts the struggle of the rational to emerge in the face of the regressive pull of the mythic in the form of The Inquisition.

As you will recall, we discussed earlier the tendency for beauty to evoke love toward the object. Clynes [17] has pointed out the close relationship between love, empathy and the appreciation of beauty; we tend to develop loving feelings toward an artist, writer, or musician who deeply moves us.

This theme of love and beauty leads into a discussion of yet another unfolding that many writers see as a potential for human development. Wilber describes a post-rational stage involving what he calls *vision-logic*. Gebser describes a level he calls *integral-aperspectival*. From a cognitive processing point of view, the subject of one stage becomes the object of the next. Informal operations, there is the ability to think about thoughts. Post rational stages take up systems thinking cognitively, that is, thinking about more and more complex combinations of thought. Examples at this level might include abstract and cubist art.

One of the major themes of process and development that we have been discussing involves increasing complexity as a function of differentiation of function, with subsequent integration. This process manifests on the individual and group level, and in small versions that are nested within larger and larger manifestations. The shift from prokaryotes, single cell organism that lacks an encapsulated nucleus, to eukaryotes, which have encapsulated nuclei, is an example from early in phylogenetic development. Multicellular development can only unfold so far before specialization of the function at the cellular and tissue level is necessary for further development. The specialization of the liver for detoxification frees the other cells and tissues of the body from that task, allowing those other tissues to concentrate on their unique functions, be it circulating the blood as with the heart, filtering out waste and water with the kidney, insulating the body from the external world with the skin, or the unfolding of interiority and consciousness with the brain. The differentiation of the value spheres can be seen in a similar light. Pathology at both the individual and societal level can be attributed to the twin dangers of incomplete differentiation and merger at the lower level, or dissociation and lack of subsequent integration at the higher level. Much of the post-modern critique of Western Culture amounts to a version of the later, in which science has colonized and suppressed the other two value spheres, leading to a soulless modern world, with technology run amuck [6, 15, 18]. Much of post-modern art and culture can be seen in this light.

In contrast is a vision of the value spheres as increasingly integrated, in which a clear view of objective reality informs and is informed by a deepening moral sentiment, both of which interact with a deepening individual subjectivity and aesthetic. Wilber [15] has described the Buddhist ideas of *Buddha*, *Dharma*, and *Sangha* as corresponding to the value spheres—Dharma, the teaching, to objective truth, Sangha, the community of like seekers,



to moral sentiment, and Buddha, the development of the individual self, to individual subjectivity expressed through aesthetics. Different spiritual paths which correspond to the value spheres have been identified as moving toward the same omega point [19]. Wilber [9, 14] describes a sequence of spiritual or post-mental stages—*sychnic, subtle, causal and nondual*.

We have discussed the development of the individual self, or “I” as that development has unfolded within its complementary social matrix, emphasizing the aesthetic aspect of the cultural experience. Two of the main configuring dynamics of that development has been the sequence of internal differentiations, as well as the differentiation of the value spheres of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful, institutionalized in social and cultural structures as Science, Religion, and Art. These three value spheres engage three different facets of reality, and use differing languages—the language of “it” for science’s examination of the external, objective world, the language of “we” for the shared values of the realms of morality and religion, and the language of “I” as the subject experiencing the realm of beauty. The art of the sensory-motor realm takes as its content or referent the world or sensation itself, and sees with the “eye of the flesh.” The art of the mental realm takes as its referent the content of the psyche as mentally perceived. Examples at this level include surrealism, conceptual art, abstract art and abstract expressionism. Marcel Duchamp summed this up: “I wanted to get away from the physical aspect of painting. I was much more interested in creating *ideas* in painting. I wanted to put painting once more at the service of the mind” [14, p. 192]. The art of the subtle level takes as its referents visions and illuminations of archetypal forms, “soul art.” Frantisek Kupka stated, “Yes, painting means clothing the processes of the human soul in plastic forms” [14, p. 192]. Tibetan *thangkas* paintings, used to support contemplation, are other examples at this level. Wilber [14] points out that these are not symbolic, metaphoric or allegorical representations, but direct images of one’s subtle level potentials.

Wilber [14, p. 193] refers to the causal and non-dual levels as partaking of the “eye of spirit.” At this level, there is no particular level of the referent, which means that this “formless” art might make use of any and all levels, from the sensory-motor imagery of a Zen landscape to the subtle/causal level of the Tibetan *thangkas*.

What characterizes this art is not its content, but the utter the absence of the self-contraction in the artist who paints it, an absence of that in the greatest of this art, can at least temporarily evoke a similar freedom in the viewer, which

was Schopenhauer’s profound insight about the power of great art: it’s being transcendence [14, p. 193].

As has been discussed above, each successive unfolding transcends and includes the previous level, achieving greater and great adequacy and completeness of appreciation of reality in all its depth and beauty. The beginning of this discussion involved considering how we perceive what is beautiful; the backdrop to this is the implicit assumption that we distinguish beauty as sometimes present, and sometimes not. In as much as art is both a reflection of a state of mind but also a way of evoking certain states, these latter stages move toward psychological, emotional and spiritual states in which integration is more and more achieved.



These states tend to involve an appreciation of beauty as everywhere all at once, just as truth seems self-evident, as well as the rightness of everything [20, 21]. The True, the Good and the Beautiful become again integrated, intertwined and self-evident. The journey of the I, then, is toward a greater and greater appreciation of beauty as everywhere and in everything at once, as truth and rightness become equally increasingly imminent and self-evident. As Wilber sums it up: "Art is in the eye of the beholder, in the I of the beholder: Art is the I of Spirit." [14, p. 194].

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