Contemplating the Undefinable

in *'Aesthetic Experience'*

by Adele Tomlin

The title of this collection, *Aesthetic Experience*, on the one hand, speaks for itself in its simplicity. Indeed, if asked to describe an aesthetic experience, many people might refer to the experience of a beautiful or sublime landscape (such as the magnificent Himalayas), listening to a deeply moving piece of music, or contemplating an exquisite painting. In other words, they would generally point to an experience and engagement with art or nature. To some aesthetic experience is akin to a panacea, to others proof of man's superior mind over nature, to others an experience that has great moral and social value. What unifies these various interpretations is an understanding and agreement that aesthetic experience is precious and of fundamental value to human beings. It is an experience which is prized very highly.

On the other hand, as Wittgenstein discovered in his own philosophical investigations,[1] the concept of ''aesthetic experience'' is not only difficult to define or express but may in fact be impossible to do so with logical language. Despite this pessimistic (or realistic depending on how you look at it) conclusion, the concept has still been the focus of much debate and disagreement within philosophical aesthetics. It has been described as an experience that imparts knowledge, as one that does not impart knowledge, as will-less, as disinterested, as active, as passive, as cathartic, as contemplative. Some have claimed that it is an experience not essentially unlike other experiences. While others have claimed that it is a type of experience that is uniquely different from others. Finding any clear defining characteristic of it or any single feature that is shared by all the various descriptions has proved to be extremely difficult. As a result, during the twentieth century, particularly in the Anglo-American tradition, not only the value of aesthetic experience but also its very existence has been questioned.

So how has this once vital concept lost its appeal? And does it still offer anything of value? Many philosophers (particularly from Continental or Asian traditions) have pinpointed the main culprit, of the depreciation of the concept of the aesthetic in Anglo-American philosophy, on the influence of scientific method and thought, with its insistence on dualistic and essentialist concepts and categories. Although brilliant and ground-breaking, Kant's thought in particular can be seen as the precursor and founder of

the divisions in the realm of knowledge that many still cling to today. The idea that science, art, morality and spirituality are separate realms with tenuous connections owes much of its power to Kant's philosophical approach to our perception of the world and how our mind orders it. However, the distinct modalities of perception advocated by Kant, such as reason, imagination and so on, as well as the dualistic oppositions between sense and reason, disinterest and interest, which formed the basis for the creation of the divisions of the moral, natural and aesthetic realms, can no longer be presumed as valid. Buddhist and Asian philosophies, existential phenomenology, hermeneutics, deconstruction, postmodernism and philosophical pragmatism have all seriously challenged the reduction of complex wholes to simple constituents and the hegemony of scientism in the fields of cultural experience and knowledge.

From an Asian perspective, a major reason for the conceptual difficulties and obstacles in defining aesthetic experience is that the Western mind, deeply conditioned by a rational and scientific education, has a foundational belief in a law of reasoning that insists upon a categorical positive or negative answer to any question. This conditioning, which is of crucial importance in the technological world, ignores the middle ground and is a radical impediment to development of gnostic vision. However, according to Buddhist metaphysics,[2] realization of the true nature of one's self and reality is only accessible when such thought patterns have become transformed into a perception that experientially reflects reality not as this or that, nor as the negation of this or that, nor as a synthesis of this and that, and nor as an absence of this and that. Ultimately, it involves recognizing that nothing inherently exists independently from the mind or other phenomena. Reality, in fact, is indeterminable and empty of inherent existence. Or to put it in more analytic terms, the notion of autonomous entities and independent categories for the things we experience and perceive in the world, unwisely ignores or blocks out the fact that objects, perceptions and thoughts are non-essential, irreducible, interdependent and impermanent. As a result, the only sensible route open to exploring aesthetic experience seems to be via non-dualistic means; via a consideration of reality and presence which excludes any kind of dualistic metaphysics or epistemology.

The concept of aesthetic experience was recently examined by the American philosopher Richard Shusterman. In his essay, ''The End of Aesthetic Experience,''[3] Shusterman gives a reasoned account of the concept's demise, and an argument for reconceiving and thus redeeming its purpose. Shusterman claims that the reason for the decline and resistance to the concept stems from a deep confusion about

this concept's diverse forms and theoretical functions; as well as a ''growing preoccupation with the anaesthetic thrust of this century's artistic avant-garde, itself symptomatic of much larger transformations in our basic sensibility as we move increasingly from an experiential to an informational culture.''

Shusterman traces the historical and intellectual assumptions, which have shaped yet confused twentieth-century accounts of aesthetic experience, by highlighting four features that are central to the tradition of aesthetic experience:

(a) Its evaluative dimension (it is essentially valuable and enjoyable);

(b) Its phenomenological dimension (it is something vividly felt and subjectively savored, affectively absorbing us and focusing our attention on its immediate presence and thus standing out from the ordinary flow of routine experience);

(c) Its semantic dimension (it is meaningful experience, not mere sensation. Its affective power and meaning together explain how aesthetic experience can be so transfigurative);

(d) Its demarcational-definitional dimension (it is a distinctive experience closely identified with the distinction of fine art and representing a defining aim of art).

Beginning with John Dewey's influential work on the concept of experience, Shusterman shows how Dewey's essentially evaluative, phenomenological, and transformational notion of aesthetic experience has been gradually replaced in analytic aesthetics by a purely descriptive, semantic one whose chief purpose is to explain and thus support the established demarcation of art from other human domains. These changes, according to Shusterman, generate tensions that ''make the concept suspicious.'' Moreover, when aesthetic experience proves unable to supply such a definition, the whole concept is abandoned for one that promises to do so: interpretation. As a result, the possibility that aesthetic experience may nonetheless be fruitful for other purposes is wrongly ignored.

Shusterman's analysis in this essay, as well as his more recent work on somaesthetics and pragmatist philosophy,[4] provided me with the inspiration to organize a conference in London on the topic of ''The Value of Aesthetic Experience,''[5] generously sponsored by the British Society of Aesthetics, with Shusterman as the keynote speaker. Then a postgraduate philosophy student in London, I was surprised at not only how little emphasis in the lectures there was on the evaluative and transformational aspects of aesthetic experience, but also how few academic publications dealt specifically with the topic of

aesthetic experience itself.[6] There did indeed seem to be, at the worst, an unspoken hostility to the notion, or at the best, a prejudiced ignorance of it. For me, the reasons for this attitude were clearly articulated in Shusterman's essay. The success of the London conference provided the motivation to produce a new collection of essays on the subject.

One of the aims of this book, therefore, is to highlight and explore some of those ''other purposes'' of aesthetic experience which have been wrongly ignored. To challenge the twentieth-century theorists' exclusion of the embodied and emotionally valuable experiences of sex and gustatory taste from the concept of the aesthetic and ''art''; to expose and expand our restricted cultural and intellectual pre-suppositions of what constitutes aesthetic experience. Finally, it aims to re-explore and affirm the place of aesthetic experience—in its evaluative, phenomenological and transformational sense—not only in relation to art and artists but to our inner and spiritual lives. A world beyond museums, galleries and concert halls but one which we carry with us at all times in our bodies and minds. To re-establish the concept in a way which undoes the fetters imposed on it and sets it free to its infinite potentiality. This book also hopes to show how we can learn from the wisdom of Buddhist and Asian philosophies and their view of aesthetic experience, even if they do not call it by that name.

Major contemporary voices from both Anglo-American and Continental aesthetic traditions are represented in this collection, which seeks not only to move beyond the supposed exclusivity or independence of these approaches (which are effectively combined by some of the contributors) but also to suggest by such example that the alleged dichotomies are more a matter of intellectual prejudice and institutional power than essential unbridgeable differences of views and methods. This book should not, therefore, be seen as a rejection of the analytic tradition of aesthetics (whose leading thinkers have contributed to this volume) but rather as an invitation to open it up to greater dialogue with other ways of thinking. In any case, on the topic of aesthetic experience, there is much to learn from some diversity of approach, both within and beyond the Anglo-American framework. For example, we are very pleased that in several of the essays there is an explicit, as well as implicit, reference to Asian philosophical perspectives on aesthetic experience and art. The collection is thus roughly divided into three parts that reflect the concerns and themes of the essays, as opposed to any difference in approach or theoretical influences.

The nature of aesthetic experience

Generally, aesthetic experience, at its highest and best, is considered to be an experience of great value. So what makes an experience aesthetic as opposed to an ordinary everyday experience? Accounts of aesthetic experience seem unable to yield a characteristic or group of characteristics that can serve as the basis of a definition of aesthetic experience. It seems to have a variety and complexity that defy attempts to state its essential conditions.

In the Part I of this book, the contributors respond to the question of the nature of aesthetic experience with differing emphasis. The chapters by Malcolm Budd and Gary Iseminger, on the one hand, focus on defining the aesthetic through our experience of works of art. The chapters from Paul Crowther and Christoph Menke, on the other hand, emphasize the difficulty of reducing aesthetic experience to dualistic, objective categories or ontological entities.

In Chapter 1, ‘‘Aesthetic Essence,’’ Malcolm Budd (a philosopher firmly rooted in the Anglo-American analytic tradition), defends his experiential theory of aesthetic value and argues that although aesthetic pleasure is a promising definition of the aesthetic, it cannot elucidate the notion of artistic value and so must be replaced with the notion of ‘‘being intrinsically rewarding to undergo.’’[7]

However, in ‘‘The Aesthetic: from experience to art’’ (Chapter 2) Paul Crowther disagrees with Budd’s definition of the aesthetic as a kind of perception or judgment. Crowther argues that aesthetic experience cannot be defined as ‘‘a consumer-based perception or attitude’’ nor can it be reduced to a distinct category of perception, but rather should be understood as a mode of experience. Making use of key insights from Kant, Crowther offers a detailed examination of the way in which aesthetic experience is embodied in the creation of art. The aesthetic experience for Crowther is one ‘‘wherein our bonding with the world is much more intimate than in the usual subject-object relation.’’

In Chapter 3, ‘‘Experiential Theories of Aesthetic Value,’’ Gary Iseminger defends the notion of aesthetic experience as appreciation. For Iseminger, ‘‘a work of art is a good work of art to the extent that it has the capacity to afford appreciation.’’ Iseminger abandons a phenomenological conception of experience for one which is understood in epistemic terms, in which the concept of an experience is imbued with an

awareness of the properties of the object experienced that ground the attribution of artistic value to it. For Iseminger, ‘‘The function of the artworld and practice of art is to promote aesthetic communication.’’ Iseminger concludes that one of the main problems with Budd’s experiential theory of artistic value is that it lacks any normative force and amends his own definition to account for this problem, resorting to a Humean-influenced notion of an ideal observer. The final essay in Part I of this collection takes a completely different and more radical approach to the question of the nature of the aesthetic by focusing on the process of aesthetic theorizing.

In Chapter 4, ‘‘The Dialectic of Aesthetics: the new strife between philosophy and art,’’ the German philosopher Christoph Menke argues that the loss of significance of philosophical aesthetics in relation to other philosophical fields is due to academic philosophers trying to secure a place for philosophical aesthetics as a producer of knowledge. However, for Menke, philosophical aesthetics does not produce knowledge, it reflects and criticizes the philosophical process itself:

> Aesthetic experience is a mode of self-reflection of ordinary practice, but so too is philosophy. There are therefore (at least) two basic forms of a (self-) reflection of ordinary practice—philosophical thought and aesthetic experience. ... Aesthetics is, rather, that exceptional place within philosophy in which the philosophical form of reflection is confronted with the structurally different form of reflection in aesthetic experience.

For Menke, this relationship of the aesthetic and the philosophical mode of reflection also forms a ‘‘dialectic’’ of aesthetics. However, it is a negative, not a positive, dialectic: a dialectic that is (and remains) a conflict. Drawing an analogy between the ancient Platonic conflict between philosophy and poetry, as two different forms of knowledge, Menke claims the conflict between these two modes of reflection is one of two profoundly different images of our ordinary practice of comprehension and representation. Menke thus uses the notion of aesthetic experience to define aesthetics as a productive destabilizing of philosophy that promotes better philosophy.

All these essays, in different ways, reveal the great difficulty (and perhaps futility) of focusing on the demarcational/definitional dimension of aesthetic experience. However, rather than rejecting the concept because of this difficulty, what may be needed is less focus on a logical definition of the experience and more on the effects of the experience. In other words, an exploration of the

transformative and evaluative dimensions of aesthetic experience is required. Indeed, these aspects of aesthetic experience are considered more fully in the next part of the book.

Expanding the aesthetic

The main focus and theme of the second group of essays is the exploration of the value of aesthetic experience and what has been excluded from its domain in Western thought. The contributors in Part II seek to expand the notion of the aesthetic to include that of sexual experience and activity, taste (in relation to cuisine and gustatory experiences) and experiences which encourage and promote the refining of one's emotional and mental states (in a way which leads to valuable and lasting spiritual and moral insights). In this section of the book, the influence of Asian philosophical perspectives on both experience and reality is made explicit. For example, it is an ancient idea in Asian religions and philosophies (especially the Tantric traditions still practiced today in India, Nepal and Tibet), that sexual experience and energy can be a profound and spiritually enlightening experience with significant individual and social benefit. Certainly, the Western cultural packaging of sex as reproduction or in terms of merely sensual and short-lived orgasmic pleasure has understandably led many Western philosophers to the view that sexual activity is not as worthy an experience as that of engaging with a Mozart symphony or a Dickens novel. However, this cultural and intellectual prejudice obscures the power and magic of sexual energy, which has been harnessed by some to reach profound levels of spiritual and personal awakening.[8]

The aesthetic and transformative dimension of sexual and erotic experience is taken up in Chapter 5, Richard Shusterman's essay ''Aesthetic Experience: from analysis to Eros.''[9] Shusterman re-affirms his contention that the analytic ideal of precise definition is not very amenable to the notion of aesthetic experience but argues that conceptual clarity can be achieved in by exploring the pluralistic ways the concept has been used for and which doesn't require such a complex and wide-ranging concept being 6 Introduction reduced to a single definition. Following a thorough analysis of some key terms in aesthetic theory, Shusterman argues that there is no reason why sexual experience should be excluded from the notion of the aesthetic within analytic philosophy, and concludes that, compared to the Eastern perspective on sexuality, the Western model is more medical and functional as opposed to an ''ars erotica.'' Thus continuing his intellectual project of bringing ''art back into life,'' as well as his more recent work on somaesthetics, Shusterman urges us to include sexual and erotic experience in aesthetic experience, not only to break the academic dogma and prejudice on the subject but also to:

> Inspire us to greater aesthetic appreciation of our sexual experience and, consequently, to more artistic and aesthetically rewarding performance in our erotic behaviour, which surely forms one important dimension in the art of living.

Chapter 6, ‘‘On the Scope of Aesthetic Experience,’’ by the German philosopher Martin Seel, argues that aesthetic experience can provide subjects with a type of consciousness that no other mode of experience can provide. Seel claims that aesthetic experience is an intensified form of aesthetic perception and that aesthetic perception is an ‘‘attentiveness to the appearing of what is appearing.’’ Despite most people’s desire to control and determine themselves and their environment, Seel recognizes that most people also know that their life situation is enduringly indeterminate and uncontrolled. Therefore, Seel goes on to say that:

> By lingering with the appearing of things and situations, aesthetic perception acquires a specific consciousness of presence. It provides those who surrender to it with time for the moment of their lives.

Seel argues, however, that this kind of perception can be had by simply taking time to look out of the window or by putting a CD on. What transforms this kind of perception to an aesthetic experience is that is becomes an ‘‘event.’’ This is why aesthetic experience cannot be restricted to the experience of art.[10]

Interestingly, although Seel does not make any explicit reference to Asian thought in his paper, his notion of being attentive to the ‘‘simultaneity and momentariness of sensuous appearances’’ bears a great deal of resemblance to the Buddhist meditation practices of Mahamudra or Dzogchen, wherein the meditator’s aim is to be attentive to and aware of the ebb and flow of external and internal phenomena and perceptions in the absence of conceptualization or mental distraction. The purpose of this meditation being to bring one’s consciousness back to the true nature of mind which is clear, pristine awareness[11] and away from the delusional notion of an inherently existing self and world of phenomena. The value of this realization is a natural reduction in the experience of the mental states of self-centered grasping, anger and greed (which Buddhist teachings identify as the root causes of conflict, suffering and violence) accompanied with an increase in compassion, generosity and love for other

sentient beings who are still suffering from these negative mental states. Thus Seel's conception of aesthetic experience, one where a person experiences phenomena non-conceptually (or without the projections of the delusional mind), is one which has the potential for much moral and spiritual realization contained within it.

The moral and spiritual value of aesthetic experience is explored further in Chapter 7, ''Refined Emotion in Aesthetic Experience,'' by Kathleen Higgins. In this chapter, Higgins also explicitly acknowledges the influence of Asian philosophy and culture in her examination of the valuable and transformative dimensions of aesthetic experience. First, Higgins takes issue with the omission of emotion from most recent Western aesthetic theory, which instead focuses mainly on pleasure and affect or ''garden-variety'' emotions. Higgins argues, however, that this lack of rigorous analysis of the role of emotion in aesthetic experience may be because our concepts about emotions are too coarse and broad, and urges that ''a psychology of refined emotions is needed to do justice to the emotions so prized in the aesthetic realm.''

Making reference to the work on refined emotions by the psychologist Nico Frijda, Higgins distinguishes six ways in which emotions can be refined, by being (a) pure or unadulterated, (b) more subtle than the coarse emotions, (c) raised to a higher moral or spiritual state, (d) the appropriate feeling, (e) more cultured, (f) associated with greater maturity. Higgins then surveys the kinds of analyses of refined emotions within aesthetic contexts provided by the Indian and Japanese traditions and how these traditions contain elements of these six categorizations. First, Higgins reviews the Indian tradition's focus on the experience of the audience member of an artistic performance, using the example of rasa theory.[12] Second, Higgins analyses the Japanese tradition's concern with aesthetic emotion not only in connection with nature and everyday life, but also as the emotion of the artist. Higgins presents us with a way in which the notion of refined emotions can help us understand and value aesthetic experience in moral and spiritual terms. Aesthetic experience, via the cultivation and experience of refined emotions, can elevate one spiritually as well as morally, and lead us to a better understanding of ourselves and others via awareness of the unfolding processes of creation, performance, and appreciation, which are applicable to many contexts beyond art, as well as important within them.

The move away from a focus on hedonic and sensual pleasure to more refined or spiritual states is also recommended by Carolyn Korsmeyer in her essay, ''Taste, Food and the Limits of Pleasure'' (Chapter 8).

Korsmeyer continues the theme of her thesis, presented in her recent book Gender and Aesthetics, [13] that the boundaries of aesthetic experience have been unduly restricted, by arguing that food and gustatory taste have been unfairly excluded. In Gender and Aesthetics, Korsmeyer's main focus was on the gender discrimination and bias implicit in the conceptual language and framework of aesthetic theories, which has ultimately led to the preparation and consumption of food and drink being excluded from the aesthetic. In this essay, Korsmeyer attacks the implicit assumption that eating is exclusively pleasure-based and thus further seeks to weaken the idea that aesthetic experience is necessarily connected with the experience of pleasure. Korsmeyer then defends a variety of aesthetic cognitivism, which is not just about propositional knowledge or empathetic insight but one which includes the reflective experience of food and also one which ''carries cognitive values and attention into the heart of even sensuous aesthetic experience.'' Thus, she concludes, if we neglect those aspects of aesthetic experience which are not pleasure-based then we neglect that which resembles what we most value in works of art.

The chapters in Part II, in different ways, all identify the restrictive boundaries that have been drawn around aesthetic experience and suggest reasons as to why these boundaries should be broken or expanded. In fact, by challenging these boundaries (with some contributors also acknowledging the influence and importance of Asian perspectives on our experience of art, music and sexuality) they also re-affirm the evaluative dimension of aesthetic experience, in its transformative and phenomenological aspects.

Aesthetic experience, art and artists

Part III concludes this volume with three essays which look at some of the issues relating to the aesthetic experience and its connection with artists and artworks. Returning to the problem identified by Shusterman in ''The End of Aesthetic Experience,'' Chapters 9 and 10, by Noel Carroll and Jean-Pierre Cometti respectively, argue for the displacement of the demarcation problem with a focus on art's other functions. However, Chapter 11, by Alex Neill, follows Schopenhauer's thought with a change in focus from that of the observer of works of art to that of the maker of works of art, the artist.

In ''Aesthetic Experience, Art and Artists,'' Noel Carroll argues that the dominant concept of aesthetic experience is now obsolete and that it should be replaced by an alternative conception, which he calls

the ‘‘content-oriented’’ approach. Carroll explores the historical emergence of the standard conception of aesthetic experience and how Kant’s notion of ‘‘disinterested pleasure’’ has been particularly influential. He goes on to say that the reason for this dominant notion of ‘‘disinterested pleasure’’ is mainly due to the grouping of certain activities under the banner of ‘‘fine art.’’ According to Carroll, the demarcation problem (of art from non-art) is no longer relevant and is defunct. Carroll goes on to attack the idea that aesthetic experience is something which is ‘‘intrinsically valued itself.’’

Chapter 10, ‘‘Between Being and Doing: aesthetics at the crossroads,’’ by Jean-Pierre Cometti, also seeks to divert the main focus for modern aesthetic theory from the problem of demarcation. The thrust of Cometti’s paper is that ‘‘we need aesthetics without ontology.’’ Cometti tries to show, using Nelson Goodman’s ideas, that a philosophical or critical approach to artworks should devote more attention to the conditions under which they function. This Goodmanian notion is rooted in the idea that the only convincing version of aesthetics is an aesthetics of usages in which pragmatic conditions are centrally operative.

Indeed, this is the reason why we should include the works’ operating modes in our view of artworks or in the very notion of the work of art. Cometti claims that concentrating our attention on this aspect would not necessarily exclude all ontology, but it would considerably alter its meaning and reach. For Cometti, it is questionable whether it is useful to reason about art in terms of properties independent of use, since the only pertinent properties are those that remain describable in a given context of action and understanding, somewhat like what happens in Wittgenstein’s language games. Cometti concludes, however, that we should not exclude the possibility of a humble ontology:

> art and artworks have their own mode of existence, although they thus interact with conditions far in excess of their restricted field of definition. In the perspective of such an appreciation, however, questions of aesthetic properties’ realism or irrealism, transcendence or immanence, are utterly irrelevant. Ontology, in this perspective, is rather one with anthropology.

The final chapter of the book changes the perspective from that of the observer to that of the creator, the artist. In ‘‘Schopenhauer and the Foundations of Aesthetic Experience’’ (Chapter 11) the British philosopher Alex Neill argues that Schopenhauer’s conception of aesthetic experience is radically different from that of his predecessors because it is based on reflection on the experience of the artist

rather than the spectator. Neill claims that introspection-based accounts of aesthetic experience cannot adequately ground an account of the nature of aesthetic experience and attempts to explain in what sort(s) of thing any potentially successful account of the nature of aesthetic experience will have to be grounded. Citing the empiricist conception of aesthetic experience in support, Neill argues that introspection alone lacks the relevant kind of authority: in other words, the fact that a certain feature of my experience seems significant to me does not in itself entail that it is significant in the sense required.

Neill then analyses Schopenhauer's inspiring and influential account of aesthetic experience as a potential candidate for a more authoritative account. Interestingly, the Buddhist and Hindu perspective on aesthetic experience (although not explicitly mentioned by Neill) still lurks in the background of this essay. Schopenhauer was an avid reader of Indian philosophy and his account of aesthetic experience is clearly influenced by the notions of egolessness and by Hindu metaphysics. For example, Schopenhauer holds that the kind of attention to things that gives us access to their ''inner nature'' is disinterested attention, which he then claims is the kind of attention that is characteristic of aesthetic experience. Neill concludes that on Schopenhauer's account, which he differentiates from that of Kant, aesthetic experience can be called ''disinterested'' if it is based on the experience of the artist.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this new collection of essays on the topic of aesthetic experience will help motivate and redirect further study of this sometimes maligned, yet also much-valued, concept. Of course, looking at the valuable aspects of aesthetic experience and the appreciation (and observation) of art does not necessarily entail a romanticization of art and aesthetic experience. Experiences can be aesthetic while being also disturbing and disagreeable. Experience of nature (sublime and beautiful), sex, relationships, all contain within them the seeds for profound and transformative experiences in life because they provide excellent opportunities to discover, express and perceive those aspects of reality which lie at the root of our existence and ultimately make life valuable and joyful (though also sometimes painful).

However, the experience of these realities depends also on our perceptual powers, discipline, and choices. We make the world with our thoughts. For example, your perception of a beautiful sunrise or a particular person may be quite different from my perception of that sunrise or person.[14] If we recognize this mental flexibility and freedom, we can then attempt to transform all perceptions into valuable and

beneficial ones, no matter how harmful or averse they might initially appear to us. In this way, Kant's insistence that aesthetic judgment involves the ''free play'' of the mind can be fruitfully combined with the Buddhist perspective that the joy experienced from such freedom, far from being a mere matter of sensual satisfaction, reflects the joyful state of the true nature of mind; in its unadorned, pristine, brilliant awareness. Here I agree with my co-editor's earlier insistence, in ''The End of Aesthetic Experience,'' that rather than demarcational, ''the concept of aesthetic experience is directional, reminding us of what is worth seeking in art and elsewhere in life.''

We, hope, therefore, that this book serves as a reminder (if nothing more) of the value and importance of aesthetic experience in both art and life, and opens up the possibility for a new way of thinking about aesthetic experience which contains within in it the potential to positively transform oneself, our fellow sentient beings and our environment.

Notes

1 In Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, Wittgenstein came to a more pessimistic conclusion on discourse about aesthetic experience, stating that ''whereof one cannot speak, one must be silent.'' Although it is certainly true that dualistic concepts are limiting and often inadequate to describe certain experiences and feelings, there is value in contemplating such matters even while acknowledging the limits. Wittgenstein was also clearly influenced by Schopenhauer's thought in coming to this conclusion, far more than he ever publicly acknowledged.

2 Buddhist metaphysics is particularly well documented in the Madhyamika (or MindOnly) school of philosophy. Madhyamika (also known as ''Sunyavada'') is a Buddhist Mahayana tradition popularized by the Indian scholar, Nagarjuna. According to this school of thought, all phenomena are empty of ''self nature'' or ''essence,'' meaning that they have no intrinsic, independent reality apart from the causes and conditions from which they arise. Madhyamika philosophy rejects the opposing views of eternalism (the view that something is eternal and unchanging) and nihilism (the assertion that all things are intrinsically already destroyed or rendered nonexistent) and thus represents the ''middle way'' between these ''two extremes.''

3 Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 55 (1997), 29–41.

4 For Shusterman's account of somaesthetics, see, for example ''A Disciplinary Proposal,'' Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 57 (1999), 299–313; Practicing Philosophy (New York: Routledge, 1997), chs 4 and 6; Performing Live (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), chs 7 and 8. For further discussions of somaesthetics, see, for example, the essays of Martin Jay, Gustavo Guerra, Kathleen Higgins, Casey Haskins, and Shusterman's response in The Journal of Aesthetic Education, 36:4 (2002), 55–115; and the symposium on Pragmatist Aesthetics, 2nd edn, with contributions by Antonia Soulez, Paul Taylor, and Thomas Leddy (and Shusterman's response) in Journal of Speculative Philosophy, 16 (2002), 1–38. See also Peter Arnold, ''Somaesthetics, Education, and the Art of Dance,'' Journal of Aesthetic Education, 39 (2005), 48–64; and Eric Mullis, ''Peformative Somaesthetics,'' Journal of Aesthetic Education, 40 (2006), 104–117.

5 Senate House, University of London, 11 June 2004. The other invited guest speaker at this conference was Dr Paul Davies from Sussex University, UK, who delivered a paper entitled ''On Beautiful Art.''

6 In preparing this book we discovered that this will be the first major edited collection on the topic of aesthetic experience, as well as the first which encompasses both analytic and continental approaches. Certainly, within the analytic tradition there are very few publications, if any, which specifically discuss the topic in great detail.

7 This notion, Budd elucidates in his book Values of Art, London: Penguin (1995). For criticism of Budd's notion of ''being intrinsically rewarding to undergo,'' see Jerrold Levinson's review of Budd's book in ''Values of Art : Pictures, Poetry and Music,'' Mind, October 1996. See also, ''Pleasure and the Value of Works of Art,'' in Jerrold Levinson, The Pleasures of Aesthetics, Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press (2006), 11–24.

8 In the Tibetan Buddhist and Hindu tantra yoga practices, dedicated spiritual practitioners engage in laborious and lengthy tantric sexual practices with a ''spiritual consort or partner'' in order to use sexual energy to attain spiritual enlightenment, or at the very least great mental and bodily states of bliss and spiritual revelation. For a good introduction to the content, purpose and benefit of such practices, see Tantra: Path of Ecstasy, George Feuerstein (Boston MA: Shambhala, 1998).

9 First published in The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 64:2, spring 2006. Shusterman further develops this perspective through a detailed analysis of classical Chinese and Indian texts on the erotic arts, in ''Asian Ars Erotica and the Question of Aesthetics,'' Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 65:1 (2007).

10 Artworks being a particular type of event which Seel calls ''presentation events.''

11 For descriptions of the practice of Mahamudra and the benefits of this practice, see The Mahamudra: Eliminating the Darkness of Ignorance, Ninth Karmapa

12 Introduction Wangchung Dorje, trans. Alexander Berzin, 5th edn, 2002; and Pointing out the Dharmakaya, Kenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, 2003 (Ithaca NY: Snow Lion Publications). 12 An ancient Indian aesthetic theory, which states that the aim of the arts is to enable the audience member to experience rasa, the essential flavor of emotion.

13 Gender and Aesthetics (Understanding Feminist Philosophy), Carolyn Korsmeyer, London: Routledge (2004).

14 The same person can be seen as an enemy, a stranger or a friend by different people. There is not one defining characteristic which can be considered objectively correct.