

# THE AESTHETIC DISCOURSE OF THE ARTS

BREAKING THE BARRIERS

ANALECTA HUSSERLIANA  
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For sequel volumes see the end of this volume.

# THE AESTHETIC DISCOURSE OF THE ARTS

## BREAKING THE BARRIERS

*Dedicated to Marlies Kronegger*

*Edited by*

ANNA-TERESA TYMIENIECKA

*The World Phenomenology Institute*

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*Dedicated to Marlies Kronegger,  
the inspiring partner in this  
aesthetic enterprise*



Marlies Kronegger

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ix
THE THEME / The Aesthetic Discourse of the Arts	xi

### INAUGURAL ESSAY

ANNA-TERESA TYMIENIECKA / The Creative Impulse and the Aesthetic Discourse of the Arts	3
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### SECTION ONE

PAULA CARABELL / Breaking the Frame: Transgression and Transformation in Giulio Romano's Sala dei Giganti	19
JOAN FIORI BLANCHFIELD / The nineteenth-Century Landscape and Twentieth-Century Space: Traumatic Loss or Trace of Memory? Robert Smithson and the Entropic Metaphor	35
RENÉE RIESE HUBERT / Alechinsky, Cobra and the Book	57
KAREN KARBIENER / Aspiring to the Condition of Music: Hardy and His Art from the 1840s to the 1890s	71
ROSEMARY GRAY / Counterpoint in Print: Okot p'Bitek's <i>Song of Lawino</i> and <i>Song of Ocol</i>	87

### SECTION TWO

DAVID LIPTEN / Semiotics and Musical Choice: "Beyond Analysis" Revisited	105
JAMES PARSONS / When is a Work of Music Real?	143

### SECTION THREE

STEPHEN BROWN / Machine-Time, Passion-Time, and Time that Trembles: Debussy and Baudelaire	167
CYNTHIA OSOWIEC RUOFF / Baroque and Classical Aesthetic Visions	179
TONY RACZKA / To Consociate and Foster the Self	189

## SECTION FOUR

MICHEAL VANPELT / <i>Inanimorata: The Dread of Things</i>	201
ROBYN GANGI / <i>Musical and Visual Encounters: An Investigation of the Aesthetic Experience</i>	211
RANDAL DAVIS / "...We Need Not Fear ..." Expressivity and Silence in the Early Work of John Cage	241
CANDACE K. SKORUPA / <i>Berlioz's Programme and Proust's Sonate: Parallel Quests to Bridge the Gaps in Musico-Literary Expression</i>	251
Index of Names	273

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A-T. T.

THE AESTHETIC DISCOURSE OF THE ARTS

The consortium of the muses, that for the Greeks presided over the diverse arts, implies a kindredness among them, beginning with their common origin in human genius. If we take from the nine genres attributed to their inspiration only those that denote what we call the “fine arts” and expand their number to include aesthetic endeavors that have unfolded and flourished in the ages since – painting, graphics, sculpture, opera, cinema – we see that this kindredness has its origin in the human creative endeavor, specifically in the “creative impulse.” In all of these forms we find expressed in varied ways the aesthetic modalities of the specifically human striving to express what human beings feel, to arrest that which is passing away and retain it in a concrete representation, to bring away from our encounter with reality the elements of beauty, gracefulness, charm which germinate in that encounter, and, finally, to lift us from the everyday-ness of our practicality-bound existence to the ethereal and yet so very strong – stronger than old vintage wine – tonality of the sublime, to draw us from the fleetingness of existence into supratemporal reverie, even bliss.

And yet the artistic genres are distinct from each other in their specialization, which goes back to the different senses through which we express and receive those things having aesthetic import. The great majority of composers are inept at holding a brush or a woodcarving knife, for example. Nor will a musical work calling for a perfect ear ordinarily be justly appreciated by a gifted sculptor.

Each expression of the artistic is distinct, then, and yet art of its very nature projects rays allowing aesthetic discourse between all types of artistic creation. How is this ever-transformable network of correspondences thrown over the virtualities of works of art as well as their reception by the spectator-auditor? Each expression of creativity has affinities in some way or other with the others – sculpture, say, with lyric poetry, epic poetry, history. Indeed, the artistic endeavor, the crystallization of the aesthetic experience in ritual dances, cave drawings, etc., differentiates into what we have come to call “genres” as it brings them together: music, song, dance, poetry, adornments in a pictorial modality have evolved together until they have reached the distinctive “purity” of their kind. The spontaneous emergence of art seems to correspond to, to express the human longing for beauty, for arresting the fleeting moment, a longing to leave a trace of our innermost experience for

all to share in. Philosophers have wondered, “What is the beauty of something?” (Plato in *Hippias*) and “What is the nature of works of art making them beautiful/ugly?” (Aristotle in *Poetics*). This led to the development of “the science of the beautiful” that Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten called “Aesthetics” (*Aesthetica acromatica*). His conception of aisthesis (perception) went further than Kant’s, for whom aesthetics was a universal theory of our perception of reality. With the greater differentiation and nuancing of aesthetic experience and aesthetics conceived as a subjective feeling (Friedrich Theodor Vischer), as the objective correlate of the “aesthetic object” (Th. Conrad, *Der aesthetischer Gegenstand*, 1907), aesthetic values (Roman Ingarden), aesthetic qualities and enjoyment (Moritz Geiger), etc., it would seem that we have developed the means to investigate the common source of the artistic genres, the common nature accounting for their distinctiveness as well as the “aesthetic discourse,” as I call it, that they carry on among themselves enhancing thereby their respective aesthetic potentials by radiating within a vaster spectrum of aesthetic qualities.

The above-mentioned and numerous other attempts to grasp the specific nature and aesthetic conjuration of beauty/ugliness have dealt with issues surrounding the question of what art is by proposing different approaches and answers – objective, subjective, psychological, ontological, semiotic, linguistic, etc. When we ask what makes music, poetry, dance, pantomime, the theater play, sculpture, painting, arabesque, ornament, film, etc. “art,” “aesthetic,” we seek some common features that make them art and that make them aesthetic as well as the differences that set apart their respective modalities.

We may try, as has been proposed, to divide the arts according to the temporality and spatiality displayed in artworks. Yet this criterion is quite obviously inadequate. Arts such as sculpture, architecture, painting may have structures extended in space and may seem to be atemporal, being quite different from arts such as music, dance, poetry that are in essence extended through time, but we cannot overlook the temporal aspects of the plastic arts. Those consist in capturing an instant – as in Rodin’s “Bourgeois de Calais” in which a temporal instant fixed in bronze refers to the temporal phases of the circumstances from which it draws its significance, the history of the siege, the famine, the entire historical context. And “The Thinker,” which seemingly fixes a single instant, extends that instant into the previous moment, the present moment, and the future moment in maintaining the attitude grasped in bronze.

An architectural work may also appear to be an atemporal creation. It certainly is so as an aesthetically neutral building. Yet when we want to

appreciate a castle, cathedral, or avant-garde office building aesthetically, whether to appreciate it as an involved work or a bare one, we have to go around it, inside and out, and it is only in the temporal succession of our perceptions and their coming together in an aesthetic object as the artistic work that we “perceive it” aesthetically.

All of the criteria for classifying the arts offered so far, whether in terms of psychology, feeling, form, content, etc., even the ontological distinction between the genres in their natures, fail to do justice to the nature of their correspondences, to their discourse.

Even the two attempts that have come closest to bringing together the subjective and objective, the object and experience, do not reach the origin.

Ingarden brought analysis of the work of art as a conveyor of beauty/ugliness to its “foundation in being,” that is, to a many-layered structure, whose layers he differentiated as he evoked their ontological status, on the one hand, and the corresponding aesthetic experience in the perceiver who retrieves this aesthetic object from its crystallizing medium, on the other. But he did not reach the origin, nor the ways in which the artistic genres differentiate. Consequently, he does not show the reasons and manner of their aesthetic convergence either.

The approach that has come closest to touching the secret of the arts appears to be that of the “experiential system” of the Geneva School, which is supposed to be grounded simultaneously in the structure of the work of art and the mind of the percipient. Yet we are here also left only halfway toward the complete understanding of the work of art. No psychology, no theory of emotion, or of ontological foundation, or of the experiential system reaches the *existential* foundation that reveals the origination of the arts and aesthetics, the key to their secret.

In our times, with their innumerable attempts at extending the artistic media, at inventing new approaches, styles as well as criteria of aesthetic and other valuation, the criteria of beauty/ugliness, of gracefulness/clumsiness, of elevated and base have lost their significance. Not only may no consensus on aesthetic criteria be expected, but in this disarray of values no objective horizon of reference for criticism is possible. The arts themselves, then, call for a thorough re-visioning of their situation.

Where do we seek the “basic aesthetics”— in and beyond the aesthetic import into the senses – that shares in our rudimentary experiential existential axis of time and space? Time and rhythm, the time of passion, the time that “trembles,” the space of the landscape, the space of performance, the space of

feelings, the space expanding or contracting in music? Where shall we find the footholds of these correspondences? These and many others are the questions we propose to investigate in concrete examples.

No objective, subjective, ontological, or experiential approach draws from the source that is the spring of life itself. Only from the entire compass of an anthropology immersed in the onto-poiesis of life may we draw the adequate clues.

To seek the ways and origins in which the affinities of all the artistic genres are experienced means not only to seek deeper understanding, but also and foremostly to project, to enhance the aesthetic vision of our existence and lastly, to advance our investigation of the creative Human Condition.

*Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka*