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*Artistic Experience as a Construct of Multifaceted
Cognitive Sub-Systems*

Social instability and different systems of values entail deep spiritual anxiety which, in turn, influences everyday experiences, including artistic ones. Issues such as global terrorism and environmental degradation, economic recession and religious intolerance, psychological paralysis and chemical addiction which nowadays have reached epidemic proportions make it difficult for cultures to welcome emerging counterforces. As art is understood — by its content — as a kind of an imaginable being in life, it, consequently, seeks to find some dialogical contacts between contradictions of artistic manifestations. Artistic ideas as the artist conceives of them are just manifested by adequate artistic means and are expressed by some artistic form. The present article offers reflections on two aspects of multiart experience, namely on the problem of the main artistic domains and their formal relation to lifestyle elements or, using the phrase of the Renaissance thinker Nicholas of Cusa, »*Artis omnia formatis*« (the art forms everything), and the main characteristics of artistic manifestation, their interrelations and unity or, according to ancient Greek thinkers, »*Unitas in varietate*« (unity in the variety).

Artis omnia formatis

Recent theorists of multiartistic experience and policy makers in arts education have pointed out the necessity of a unified system of education based on aesthetic and humanistic foundations, one of which is a comprehensive approach to the teaching of the arts. In my opinion, the comprehensive arts program proposed by Bennett Reimer offers a sound basis for effective action. The general principle on which all aspects of his program are based is summarized in the following premise: »A successful approach to arts study must accomplish two essential tasks of cooperative endeavors – to preserve the integrity of each art while illustrating their nature as a family.«¹

¹ Bennett Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education*. Second Edition (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1989), p. 238.

We find that there are four basic artistic domains on the whole. They are: verbal, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. These subdivisions are based on essential principles of space and time. In the first part of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, entitled »The Transcendental Aesthetic,« Immanuel Kant has persuaded Western Culture that »Time and space are (...) two sources of knowledge,« that »Time and space, taken together, are the pure forms of all sensible intuition,« and »Lastly transcendental aesthetic cannot contain more than these two elements, space and time.«² In our case auditory and verbal artistic domains are based on the substance of time, while visual arts are based on the substance of space, and kinesthetic arts are spatio-temporal. According to this classification, we have essential domains of artistic activity. The domains manifest themselves differently due to artistic views and according to instrumental purposes.

The main artistic domains (verbal, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic) as a foundation for multiarts experiences, in turn, are evidently closely connected with the main elements of lifestyle. In sociology, for example, lifestyle is understood as some common cultural form for different social groups. Hence youth culture is subdivided into four subcultures. They are: respectable youth, delinquent youth, cultural rebels (or bohemians), and politically militant youth (or radicals). All these subcultures have their specific symbolic use of a style which, according to professor of Carleton University Michael Brake, consists of three elements: »image« (appearance composed of costume and accessories such as hair-style, jewelry and artifacts), »demeanor« (made up of expression, gait and posture), and »argot« (a special vocabulary and how it is delivered).³

Singled out stylistic elements are based on firm philosophical and psychological principles. Thus, image and demeanor are the attributes of visuality and they have the same ontological axis of space, i.e. they are co-axial. The difference between them is found only in the area of mobility: spatial images are nearly static while demeanor is astatic. In contrast, the stylistic element of argot is based on an audible psychological ground and its ontological attribute is not space, but time. A special vocabulary such as argot, and even speech as a whole, is a very broad phenomenon of culture. Nevertheless, the linguistic area cannot completely express a way of life. In

² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. By Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), pp. 80 and 81-82. (Second Printing. Originally published in 1929.)

³ See: Michael Brake, *Comparative Youth Culture: The Sociology of Youth, Culture and Youth Subcultures in America, Britain and Canada* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987). Originally published in 1985.

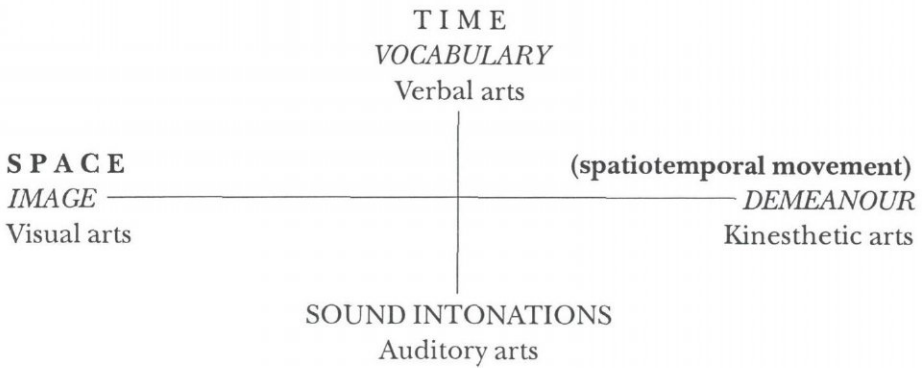


Fig. 1. Ontological attributes of lifestyle elements and basic artistic domains.

my opinion, it would be beneficial to add to the three mentioned elements a fourth one – the element of sound intonations. Now an axis of time would be coaxial, too, like an axis of space. It is clear that musical surroundings and vocal intonations represent an inner cultural world of the individual (and social group) along with hair-style, clothes, decorations, and other aspects of his or her appearance. In a few words, some kind of music fulfills the same symbolic function for distinct subcultures as does vocabulary, appearance or gait.

The most fascinating thing is that all four lifestyle elements (argot, image, demeanor, and sound intonations) are of the same nature and origin as the different kinds of artistic media (verbal, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic). They convincingly express the life attitudes of one or another (delinquents, bohemians, radicals, respectable youth) subcultural group or the individual. Visuality and audibility function as sign systems which obtain appropriate public forms. Consequently, according to the principle of continuum, the main forms of artistic manifestation find their direct connection with the most intimate forms of an individual's cultural expression.

It is these four elements of style that really help to know people (especially young people) better and to establish their relevant subcultural dependence. I noticed an excellent example of such insight in fiction when I was reading Chapter IV »A Queer Character« in Maine Reid's novel *The Land Pirates* to my younger son before his bedtime. This writer presented a marvelous fourfaceted description of the lifestyle case which fully conveyed a character of the horseman met on the road:

There was something in the style of the man we met – both in his *speech* and *demeanor* – that provoked a feeling of indignation (...) I could see

that he was what, in the Southern States, is called a »bully.« Its broad arrow was upon him – unmistakably impressed on his *countenance*, as well as in the way in which he carried himself. There was a swagger that seemed intended to conceal the coward (...)

It was the sight of these ugly *insignia*, carried so ostentatiously, that had produced my first feeling of aversion – soon strengthened, however, by the bantering *tone* in which he talked to my young companion (...)⁴

It is striking that the expression of the face (»countenance«) is mentioned in this discourse along with all four elements of the lifestyle.

The whole pedagogical enterprise considered from the perspective of the existing social order is charged to keep in touch with young people, especially with young people at risk, in order to maintain both their visibility and audibility related to the dominant normative system. Democracy as a condition for developing human beings to be free and capable of creativity, of course, should become stronger and stronger. One of the most important assumptions of this condition is to increase the civic activity of the young generation. A highly influential way of doing this is participation in students' everyday life. On the other hand, young people in a democratic society are more or less free to express their inner world by those external means which they like or pretend to like. Thus, their lifestyle can inform us to some extent of their identification with different cultural youth groups. Such information could be used for taxonomic aid (for example, pointing to the set of cultural values which could indicate dependency on one or another subcultural group), as well as for observation of subcultural tendencies of the young generation. Arts education, especially one which is based on the comprehensive multiarts approach, could in turn influence both the elements of lifestyle and the cultural life of subcultural groups.

Unitas in varietate

Similarly, the present artistic culture entails the urgent problem of *extending* a sphere of artistic being according to the possibilities of aesthetic perception and artworks interpretation. It means that attention of investigators should relevantly be focused, along with traditional art, both on practically oriented and postmodern artworks (artifactual art, conceptual art and the like). Contemporary philosophy of art is already in the process of fulfilling this task. As was suggested by Arthur Danto, »a philosophy of art must

⁴ Mayne Reid, *The Land Pirates: or, The League of Devil's Island* (New York: Beadle & Adams, 1886), p. 5. All italics added, except »*insignia*.«

be consistent with all the art there is and ever has been« and further added that »an adequate philosophy of art straightaway entails pluralism, for it would be wholly adventitious that there should be only one kind of art.«⁵ It seems to me that a philosophy of arts education is preferable if it is consistent with all the arts, too, including »transitional« spheres of artistic activity, which manifests itself between the artworld and material and ideal worlds.

Though history observes constant changes in the forms of artistic manifestation and their varying degrees of importance, time reveals that some characteristics of that manifestation have common traits in every art domain. The characteristics about the way an individual experiences the aesthetic/artistic world might be classified into three relative sub-systems (groups). The *first* sub-system contains pure artistic characteristics which show various facets of artistic manifestation (form, representation, expression). They are highly discussed in a contemporary philosophy of art as well as philosophy of arts education.

The representative and expressive characteristics of artistic manifestation are closely connected with the characteristic of *formal* artistic manifestation. It is characterized by prevalence of the total contextual arrangement of elements of some stuff in order to achieve a certain result. Sometimes form is considered as such type of property on which most other aesthetic properties depend. Priority of form is characteristic of abstract fine arts, pure dance, experimental drama or movies, absolute music.

The artistic *representation* is characterized as mimetic, imitative, naturalistic, programmatic, referential, realistic, hyper-realistic and so forth. This facet has been observed in the evolution of art, revived each time in a new shape. With the decline of precision in depicting the world, each artist interpreting the object in a different manner, artistic representation should eternally remain as a certain evidence of the aesthetic relation between the subject and the surrounding world. Different kinds of art in the representational characteristic are known in the history of the arts as imitative visual arts, realistic literature, drama and cinema, thematic dance, and programmatic music.

Lastly, the characteristic of artistic *expression* is presented in literature in a rather different way. In some theoretical trends it is considered to be the expression of the creator's emotions; in others, mainly the result of the creation process; in still others, the art's power to evoke emotional responses of the recipient or to be a basis for interpersonal communication. The expression characteristic consists of various kinds of the arts which have rel-

⁵ Arthur C. Danto »Art after the End of Art,« in *Artforum International* (April 1993), p. 67.

evant names, such as highly expressive works of drama, dance or music, literature or visual arts. The distinction between representation, expression and form in arts calls for different distribution of the perceiver's attention and determines a variety of artistic experience.

Gene H. Blocker successfully divided all three artistic characteristics as oppositions of heteronomy and autonomy. So the idea of abstract form is opposed to the organic sense of formal composition; the imitation theory is criticized in favor of artistic representation; to the interpretation of artistic expression as the venting of human emotion, he preferred a view of expression as embodied emotion.⁶ In this paper I prefer the concept of expressiveness which was recently elaborated in aesthetic theory. I am going to use it as a contrast to the concept of expression.

The *second* sub-system contains applied artistic characteristics (utilitarian and pragmatic criteria). Bifunctional (aesthetic and useful) nature of these characteristics determines their relevant place in the arts system and artistic experience. Thus, oratorical art (some artistically created and occasionally performed under various circumstances, such as congratulations, funeral speeches, sermons, anecdotes and so forth) and artistic expository writing are closely related to pure verbal arts; commercial visual arts, connected with consuming culture (pragmatism), and applied visual arts (utilitarianism) are related to pure visual arts; artistic sports are related to pure dance. Even music is commonly exploited for its concomitant (perceived in passing) role. As shown by investigations, nontraditional music instruction coupled with background music gives, for the most part, negligible results and cannot be a substitute of any kind for formalized music instruction.⁷ Nevertheless, background music is effective in a variety of settings for an array of uses.

The purpose of artistic surroundings is mainly the emotional unity of people in various life situations. This refers to both commercial art (pragmatism) and traditional applied art (utilitarianism). The artistic pragmatism has appeared in recent historical period as a result of development of consumer culture. Advertising art and relevant verbal texts, commercial music and dance, drama or sports shows, advertising theatrical series on TV and the like represent this characteristic of artistic manifestation. If the main function of the applied arts, along with the esthetic one, is utilitarian (i.e. to use applied arts or ritual actions practically), the main function of artis-

⁶ See H. Gene Blocker, *Philosophy of Art* (New York: Charles Scribners, 1979).

⁷ Deborah A. Sheldon, »Between Classes: The Effects of Non-Traditional Instruction and Background Music on Music Learning and Preference,« in *Contributions to Music Education* 22 (Ohio Music Education Association, 1995), pp. 24-39.

tic pragmatism, along with the aesthetic one, is to make commercial profit from various artifacts or entertainments.

Thus, two different and to some extent opposite areas of the respondent's relation to arts have been observed. In modern literature the way of perceiving artworks intentionally, mainly concentrating on them, is called *percipience*. Artworks, however, can also be perceived concomitantly, that is perceived in passing, while the observer is participating in some other activity. This includes musical background and ritual music, accidentally seen works of art and architecture, theatrical performances in everyday or religious rites or on military and festive occasions. Both these areas of art perception are relatively autonomous, whilst their limits are sometimes exceeded.

Lastly, the *third* sub-system contains art-like artistic characteristics (aesthetically intentional human activity). It contains aesthetic characteristics of the surrounding reality (naturalism), on the one hand, and hermeneutic manifestation of arts, on the other.

Some examples of artistic naturalism are expressively used natural sounds and words of natural (sometimes also artificial) speech, natural things, phenomena and movements. When they are regarded for their aesthetic meaning they may serve as examples of artistic naturalism. Hermeneutic characteristic (interpretation) is one of the newest tendencies in the development of the artistic mind, which is essentially connected with post-modernism. The crucial feature of this characteristic is an emphasis on subjective associations and cultural context in contrast to high modernism which emphasizes artistic form and artistic autonomy.⁸

The last dozen years have, in effect, raised, in addition to applied forms of art, such forms of artistic activity as found art, conceptual art, performance art or electronic art which extended the boundaries of the artistic field. Incidentally, such a limiting edge has been achieved even during my introductory discussions with students—future teachers of Lithuanian. One of the answers to the question »When is art?« was rhetorically reformulated in the form of a question: »Well, but how to ascertain when life is already a life and when it is not a life? The same pertains to art.«

Using the method of deconstructive activity it is possible to show key artistic characteristics (concepts) of every sub-system in their interrelationship. So the privileged artistic characteristics at a certain stage of their historical development make either some suppress the opposite ones or the privilege is

⁸ More detailed description of these characteristics in terms of visual art education can be found in Dalia Siaulytė, Vaidas Matonis »Toward a Relationship between National Homogeneity and Multiculturalism in Visual Arts« in *Canadian Review of Art Education: Research and issues*, forthcoming.

replaced by equality or, lastly, primacy is assigned to the formerly suppressed characteristics. Similar interrelations (vertically or diagonally) seemingly might be noticed among all above mentioned characteristics as well.

Characteristics of artistic manifestation

Pure artistic characteristics

Abstract formalism – Organic formalism

Representation – Imitation

Expressiveness – Expression

Applied artistic characteristics

Pragmatism – Utilitarianism

Art-like artistic characteristics

Interpretation – Naturalism

Distinguishing and cultivating the above-mentioned artistic characteristics in training practice is important because they consistently fill the medium between objects and/or phenomena and ideas and thus partly solve the problem of dualism of material and ideal. The fact that along with the pure arts the most popular ones are mixed domains of aesthetic and artistic activity (such as artistic gymnastics and figure skating, applied arts and design, oratorical skills and artistic expository writing, background and ritual music, highly theatricalized forms of cultural life and the like) and that they are included in artistic training, testifies to the consistent filling of the vacuum between the ideal and the material. Nevertheless, in every respect the mature artistic manifestation sphere (pure art) should have the greatest masters' works as the main object of artistic cognition.

As the outcome of the action of different sub-systems, the articulation of the artistic experience can promote understanding of the continuum of the artistic field and can further development of the arts curriculum. The multifaceted approach to the arts experience presented in this paper is especially beneficial for *extensional comprehensive arts education* the main focus of which is concentrated on prospects of an extended arts education curriculum. The general idea is based on the principle of continuum and reveals the possibilities of unifying all characteristics of the arts and of the aesthetic manifestation. The main emphasis is put on the rejoining of aesthetic, applied, interpretative, and natural properties of artistic/aesthetic activity which were fatally disconnected for a long time within the eighteenth-century philosophical thought. However, the aesthetically intentional human activity and achievements of the institutional theory of art, as well as post-

institutional conceptions, were not overlooked. Applied and intentional aspects of different arts domains (verbal, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic) are in close interaction with the experience of major characteristics of the pure artistic characteristics, including the neighboring aesthetic characteristics in the unified field of arts education. This extends significantly the possibility for a more reliable, comprehensive arts curriculum strategy. At the same time, arts education comes into proximity of everyday life practices in various meaningful realms of culture. Simple participation in everyday cultural phenomena could induce the process of education (including arts education) to achieve its goal and help implement the ultimate purpose of a curriculum which is to enhance individual understanding and develop personal identity.