

## RETHINKING ART AND VALUES: A COMPARATIVE REVELATION OF THE ORIGIN OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE (FROM THE NEO- CONFUCIAN PERSPECTIVES)

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*Introduction: "The End of Aesthetic Experience"*

Richard Shusterman's article, "The End of Aesthetic Experience" published in 1997, studies the contemporary fate of aesthetic experience, which has long been viewed as one of the core concepts of Western aesthetics till the last half century.<sup>1</sup> In accounts of aesthetic experience by Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas all the way down to the pre-modern era, the later development of the concept is analyzed to have turned from objective reality to subjective experience for its explanation and foundation, especially after the term "aesthetic" was officially established in modern aesthetics. Aesthetic experience was then expanded to be an umbrella concept for aesthetic notions like the sublime and the picturesque.<sup>2</sup> I agree with Shusterman that aesthetic experience has become the island of freedom, beauty, and idealistic meaning in an otherwise coldly materialistic and law-determined world.<sup>3</sup>

This paper will begin with the main dimensions of aesthetic experience in the history of Western aesthetics that Shusterman sketches out:

- 1) the evaluative dimension of aesthetic experience as essentially valuable and enjoyable;
- 2) the phenomenological dimension as on its immediate presence, vividly felt, subjectively savored; and attention affectively absorbed and focused;
- 3) the semantic dimension as meaningful experience and not mere sensation;

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Shusterman, "The End of Aesthetic Experience," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 55, no. 1 (Winter 1997), pp. 29–41.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

- 4) the demarcational-definitional dimension that is the distinction of fine art and representing art's essential aim.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, the critique of the core values of aesthetic experience has also been the practice of Anglo-American analytical aesthetics in the last half century, mainly because arguments advocating an absolute experience are conflictual. The famous articulation and the elaboration of the concept by M. C. Beardsley, as Shusterman describes for example, has been attacked for the following five features:

- 1) the aesthetic subject's attention is focused on the appearance, form and meaning of objects, highlighting the importance of contemplation leading to the emergence of aesthetic experience in which the qualities of objects manifest;
- 2) it is an experience of some intensity;
- 3) it has the component of coherence, meaning that all the qualities are necessary;
- 4) it has the component of completeness that cannot be analyzed into simpler qualities; and it appears to require or call on nothing outside itself;
- 5) it has degrees of complexity, illustrating the variations, differentiation and hierarchy of its components according to the qualities of the object.<sup>5</sup>

The analysis has been criticized for excluding works that are not capable of producing, or have never tried to produce, enjoyable experiences of unity and affect. While analytical aestheticians stress that concepts of art and aesthetic must allow for bad instances, Beardsley's concept of aesthetic experience does not accommodate bad works as aesthetic objects or art, and hence makes negative evaluations of artworks impossible.<sup>6</sup>

The sensitive criticisms aimed at Beardsley have also come from a growing unrest and discontent that correspond to artistic scenes in actual reality. Shusterman has described some of them, like the anarchical state and the aimlessness of art works, which has also been cut off from popular currents of taste.<sup>7</sup>

It has been suggested that the end of aesthetic experience depends on

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics* (New York, N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958), pp. 527–29.

<sup>6</sup> Shusterman, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

what happens in the non-aesthetic world that affects our very sensibilities and capacity for experience, demonstrating that aesthetic experience is never fixed or natural. Shusterman's accounts include Walter Benjamin's famous idea of loss of aura in fine art, and the notion that aesthetic experience pervades the everyday world of popular culture and even politics; in a word, the romantic conceptualization of aesthetic experience as pure immediacy of meaning and isolation from the rest of life is now in doubt.<sup>8</sup> Gadamer's and Bourdieu's critique of the two features of immediacy and differentiation (different from the scenes in reality) of aesthetic experience are also mentioned, though with different emphasis. Aesthetic experience is said to be never pure, and is full of preconceptions; it is also the product of historical and institutional inventions and inculcated habits of aesthetic contemplation requiring cultural mediation.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, in terms of our fragmentary experiences in modern life and the disjunctive sensationalism of the media, we also agree with Shusterman that people are losing the capacity for deep experiences and feelings, especially since we are undergoing an expansion of technologies of information. The meaningful questions he raises about aesthetic experience include:

- 1) Is the concept intrinsically honorific or instead descriptively neutral?
- 2) Is it robustly phenomenological or simply semantic?
- 3) Is its primary theoretical function transformational, aiming to revise or enlarge the aesthetic field, or is it instead demarcational?<sup>10</sup>

This paper is thus a response to Shusterman's argument that the concept of aesthetic experience is worth recalling, not for formal definition but for art's reorientation toward values that could restore its vitality and sense of purpose. Shusterman's call for rekindling the notion of aesthetic experience has the following beliefs:

- 1) it still embraces heightened, meaningful, and valuable phenomenological experience;
- 2) its importance and richness should be fully recognized, as it will be strengthened and preserved the more it is experienced;
- 3) its concept is directional and is able to remind us of what is worth seek-

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations* (New York, N. Y.: Schocken, 1968).

<sup>9</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York, N.Y.: Crossroad, 1982), pp. 86–7.

<sup>10</sup> Shusterman, p. 32.

ing in art and elsewhere in life, besides defining art and acting as critical verdicts.<sup>11</sup>

*Aesthetic Experience and the Origin of Values*

The recent calls in Anglo-American aesthetics for values and life concerns in art have also turned to the possible strength of aesthetic experience. Matthew Kieran's article, "Art, Imagination, and the Cultivation of Morals," for example, explores the activity of imagination in aesthetic experience and its possible promotion of morality, trying to trace the inner link of so-called "aestheticism" and "ethicism."<sup>12</sup>

Kieran clearly points out that art engages one's sympathetic imagination with respect to different types of people in possible situations, and thus encourages us to be considerate and to become open to various situations in life.<sup>13</sup> We would be able to attend to a morally relevant feature in a more pleasurable, vivid, and diverting manner in aesthetic experience, and the particularity portrayed in art may enable our faculty of moral perception to become more richly differentiated and discriminating, thus enabling us to avoid making moral judgments only with general principles.<sup>14</sup> Aesthetic experience could evoke a particular imaginative understanding in relation to subjects portrayed in daily life, like representations of life, love, death and war, while artworks attempt to find the right description of them. These descriptions could develop deepened imaginative understanding of the nature of our world and possibilities, including immoral ones, as Kieran points out in detail.<sup>15</sup>

But when Kieran says art cultivates our imaginative understanding in a distinctive way, a way in which our ordinary imaginings cannot, he is referring to the nature of aesthetic experience. While he states that imagination distinguishes human beings as moral agents, and that the cultural practice of art may enhance our imaginative understanding in peculiarly significant and powerful ways, the reference is also to aesthetic experience. The experience could extend or lead us to modify our own concerns, goals and val-

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Kieran, "Art, Imagination, and the Cultivation of Morals," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 54, no. 4 (Fall 1996), p. 337.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 339.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343.

ues and hence would be a close link between art and morality.<sup>16</sup> What will need further reflection and review, Kieran suggests, is the statement that art cannot replace or occlude philosophical inquiry, which would enable us to become clearer about the nature of our relations within, and imaginative understanding of, the world.<sup>17</sup>

Marcia Eaton shares some of her arguments with Kieran when she sees aesthetics as the mother of ethics.<sup>18</sup> We are reminded that common objections have been raised against Kant's formal separation of the aesthetic from the ethical and the cognitive, a separation that ignores the fact that values of intelligible works are based on the appropriate moral emotion and evaluation of viewers.<sup>19</sup> Eaton further suggests that form is prior to content, and hence aesthetics can be construed as before ethics. Her argument, instead of being logical or causal, is rather based on the observation that humans are moved not only by better arguments but also by "more richly textured narratives," which implies that aesthetics can act as a form of "transformative communication" for ethics.<sup>20</sup>

When values are basically inventive, aesthetic objects – being imaginary products – have the nurturing effects in teaching us how to be inventive.

Eaton here shares also some of Beardsley's description of aesthetic experience by saying that aesthetics is what gives experience coherence. Hence moral development entails aesthetic development in the sense that the aesthetic dimensions of experience, including imagination, emotions, and concepts, are those that make the meaning and the enhancement of moral quality possible.<sup>21</sup> Eaton's metaphor that aesthetics is the mother of ethics, situating ethics in a way that provides it with something of value, will be reviewed later in this article from a cross-cultural and philosophical perspective.

We note that in discussing the problem of art and value, American aestheticians have always turned to John Dewey for resource, especially to the insights he gives in his "Pragmatists' Aesthetics." Dewey's explication of aesthetic experience in his *Art as Experience* is as follows:

Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of li-

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>18</sup> See Marcia Eaton, "Aesthetics: The Mother of Ethics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 55, no. 4 (Fall 1997), pp. 355–64.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 359.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

ving [...] we have an experience when the material experienced runs its course to *fulfillment*. Then and then only is it *integrated* within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is *satisfactory*; a problem receives its *solution* [...] Such an experience is a *whole* and carries with it its own individualizing quality and *self-sufficiency*. It is an experience [...] Nevertheless, the experience itself has a satisfying emotional quality because it possesses internal integration and fulfillment reached through ordered and organized movement. This artistic structure may be immediately felt. In so far, it is esthetic.<sup>22</sup>

Under the influences of biological evolutionism and his beliefs in pragmatic implications, Dewey's notion of aesthetics is basically instrumental. He states that the activities of living things are characterized by natural needs and the efforts to satisfy needs, and by satisfactions. These terms are primarily employed in a biological sense as described in another work, *Experience and Nature*:

By need is meant a condition of tensional distribution of energies such that the body is in a condition of uneasy or unstable equilibrium. By demand or effort is meant [...] [to] modify environing bodies in ways which react upon the body, so that its characteristic pattern of active equilibrium is restored. By satisfaction is meant this recovery of equilibrium pattern, consequent upon the changes of environment due to interactions with the active demands of the organism.<sup>23</sup>

But aesthetic experience is more than a recovery of equilibrium pattern. Dewey claims that any activity that is productive of objects whose perception is an immediate good, and whose operation is a continual source of enjoyable perception of other events, exhibits the fineness of art. Artistic activities also directly refresh and enlarge the spirit and are instrumental to the production of further refinements and replenishments.<sup>24</sup>

It is interesting to note that while Dewey states that art and its activities are inevitable in its rightness and coherence, and that its occurrence is spontaneous, unexpected, fresh and unpredictable, thereby hinting that

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<sup>22</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York, N.Y.: Perigee Books, 1980), pp. 35, 38.

<sup>23</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1958), pp. 252-3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.

it is disinterested, art is in fact purposive and instrumental.<sup>25</sup> He says: "A consummatory object that is not also instrumental turns in time to the dust and ashes of boredom. The 'eternal' quality of great art is its renewed instrumentality for further consummatory experiences."<sup>26</sup> Jeffrey Petts follows Dewey and captures his two ideas of aesthetic experience: that it involves a process or "movement" basic to human life, and that this has a distinctive end or "consumption."<sup>27</sup> He explains Dewey's notion of "consummation" as a job felt to be satisfactorily completed, a problem felt to be solved and a game played through "fair and square." He claims accordingly that aesthetic experience is not checking that things have worked according to plan; rather there is a feeling that things are "just so." Furthermore, what is fundamental in understanding the "movement" and "consummation" of aesthetic experience is the distinctly human practice of criticism.<sup>28</sup>

Theories of aesthetic attitude acknowledging that beauty is in the eye of the beholder have been severely criticized by analytic aestheticians like George Dickie, who claims that aesthetic attitude is a myth and so is its disinterestedness.<sup>29</sup> Petts thinks however that these critiques do not withstand the more profound account of the "aesthetic" that Dewey offers. It is interesting to review Petts's reading of Dewey's ideas of aesthetic experience, taking "movement" as an example:

[‘Movement’] is used to capture the dynamic of human life in which particular identifiable experiences emerge as successive and progressive adaptations to situations. Dewey notes that human beings are conscious of this rhythm to their lives, and are thus able intentionally to manipulate objects in the environment as creative means to ends, generating their own adaptations; artists are exemplary in caring particularly for this kind of experience.<sup>30</sup>

Petts hints that there is an implication of value here, for the aesthetic value of an object or event is established through a critical discourse that is both prompted and validated by a felt response or feeling of approbation toward that thing. Petts argues that here lies the possibility of all kinds of

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 359.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.

<sup>27</sup> Jeffrey Petts, "Aesthetic Experience and the Revelation of Value," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 58, no. 1 (Winter 2000), p. 62.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> George Dickie, "The Myth of Aesthetic Attitude," *American Philosophical Quarterly I* (1964), pp. 56–65.

<sup>30</sup> Petts, p. 65.

motives and interests in the sense of aesthetic evaluation held in the aesthetic experience – that Dickie’s critique does not rule out, say, personal interest. But Petts stresses that an aesthetic experience is privately felt but intrinsically public in that it is marked by a consummating moment faced as a confrontation with value.<sup>31</sup> The kind of value Petts has in mind and shares with Dewey is basically biological:

My argument, in short, is that aesthetic experience is not simply a socially constructed response to environment [...] but is defining of a more profound natural (to be explained) response of human beings to their environment, without which it would be inexplicable how any cultural preferences could emerge from that experience.<sup>32</sup>

Petts later explained that value is determined by nature, and that our access to the value is by direct feeling. He elaborated that Nature is imbued with “spirit,” which “speaks” to those in direct contact with it, revealing itself and our proper relationship to it. The analogy he used is a shamanistic view.<sup>33</sup> With emphasis on interaction with the natural environment, one can say that Dewey provides a sharply contrasting model of aesthetic experience, which can support a transcultural view and common patterns, as the relationship is structured around human needs. The experience is also said to be revelatory of real value because it marks an adaptive felt response of humans to their environment, and this adaptability is grounded on human needs.<sup>34</sup>

Petts thus interprets Dewey’s notion of aesthetic experience as follows:

A Deweyan account of aesthetic experience as revelatory of value releases the ‘aesthetic’ into intellectual environs beyond those encouraged by aesthetic attitude theorists, and therefore the importance of clarifying the distinction between ‘aesthetic attitude’ conceived as a ‘disinterested’ encounter with artworks and nature, and ‘aesthetic experience’ as the live experience of value for human beings.<sup>35</sup>

The remaining question is: Can the Deweyan account that is still one of the most influential representations of Western aesthetics really provide a satisfying answer to the problem of art and value? Here I would like to refer

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.



to a non-Western model before coming back to this question, though the process may involve a change of terminologies and vocabularies, and even paradigm.

*The Aesthetic Experience in Traditional Chinese Philosophies  
as Introduced by Contemporary Neo-Confucians*

Despite the saying that systematic aesthetics is absent from traditional Confucian and Taoist philosophies, neo-Confucian scholars Mou Chung San and Tang Chun I have reconstructed theories of human primal experience according to traditional Confucianism and Taoism that allude to aesthetic experience.

In one of his latest writings, Mou Chung San presents and recommends the theory of Taoist's "intellectual intuition" that is aesthetic in nature. First, he points out the "subjective principle" of Taoism as "Wu Wei" (no action), which refers to the effort of the human subject's mind to transcend all kinds of human epistemological functions and move toward the realm of a more metaphysical Tao.

Taoist's philosophy promotes the annulments of subjective activity and knowledge to recover the presentation of nature in itself, which has been hidden and distorted by the self's understanding, perception and conception. According to Taoism, to know is *not* to know, to be wise is to be ignorant, and only so-called fools are able to grasp the truth of nature.

Mou further explicates the wisdom of Taoism, *Xuan Gi*, as a form of intellectual intuition. In the realm of the Tao, when the human mind has stopped 'knowing' and travels with the basic universal element *Chi*, it would, together with other things, present itself in its original nature. These are not "phenomena" in the Kantian sense of epistemology, but the original nature of things that can be manifested only after the abolition of the dominant scheme of subject-object relation exerted by the knowing subject. The state of "intellectual intuition" of the mind in the Taoist sense stated above is the "calmness of mind" described by Chuang Tze's "*Xin jai*" and as described by Chuang Tze:

Do not be the master of knowledge [to manipulate things]. Personally realize the infinite to the highest degree and travel in the realm of which there is no sign. Exercise fully what you have received from Nature without any subjective viewpoint. In one word, be absolutely vacuous (hsu). The mind of the perfect man is like a mirror. It does not lean

forward or backward in its response to things. It responds to things but conceals nothing of its own. Therefore it is able to deal with things without injury to [its reality].<sup>36</sup>

In the “calmness of mind,” there are no differentiations of mind and body, form and matter or subject and object but the emergence of all things (including the minds) in themselves. They juxtapose with one another without being known. Mou calls the state ‘a negative and static form of birth’ that basically is disinterested, non-intentional and non-regulative, and is therefore aesthetic in nature. Mou’s elaboration of this state is as follows:

The state of mind of Xin Jai is the termination, tranquility, emptiness, and nothingness that follow the abolition of the quest and dependency on learning and knowing. The Wu Wei of the above necessarily implies a certain kind of creativity which form is so special that it can be named as negative creativity [...] that in the light of the tranquil state [...], things present themselves in the way that they are [...] not as an object, but as an ideal state [...] and this is the static ‘intellectual intuition’.<sup>37</sup>

In the transcendental realm of the Tao, a thing is not an object but an “ideal state,” a form in itself, appreciation of which is capable only with Taoist wisdom, that is, the “intellectual intuition” or “the principle of no form” in which the sense of beauty and aesthetic pleasure, the real form of freedom, spring up in tranquility. Achievement of this state requires first the effort of transcendence of all human epistemological constraints or judgments that Kant’s aesthetics prescribes and then an engagement in the metaphysical realm of the Tao. These are the criteria and aesthetic categories in Taoist aesthetics: for example, Lao Tze’s “Chi,” “Wei,” “Miao” and “Xu,” which refer to the activities and characters of the realm and which are applied in the evaluation of Chinese arts.

We should note that according to the readings of Mou Chung San and Tang Chun I, human primal experience of similar nature also happens in Confucianism. Mou names this experience the Confucian “intellectual intuition” in which the human mind transcends the subject and object relation before engaging with Nature. Here Nature fills the human mind with its attributes of benevolence and creativity, and enables things to actualize them-

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<sup>36</sup> Wing-tsit Chan (trans. and compiled), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 207.

<sup>37</sup> Chung-San Mou, *Intellectual Intuition and Chinese Philosophy* (Taipei, Taiwan: Commercial Press, 1974), pp. 208–11.

selves under the ‘light’ of the mind that is ‘coping’ with things. Mou emphasizes that this intuition involves his so-called “Principle of Ontological Actualization,” in contrast with the “Principle of Cognitive Presentation” in the Western epistemological sense in which things are perceived as objects.<sup>38</sup> The deeper the engagement of the human mind with Nature or Heaven, the more moral the mind that initiates fuller actualization of things under its light; and the more beautiful the form, the greater the potential to lead one to stronger aesthetic emotion. This helps us to understand both the moral and aesthetic categories central to Confucian philosophy, such as the “harmony,” the “vividness” and so on.

Tang Chun I introduces his so-called “host-and-guest” relation to describe the relationship between things and the mind in the human primal experience, in contrast to the subject and object relation in Western epistemology in which subjects are dominant and objects are subordinate. According to Tang, objectification of the mind happens only after the primal experience that he describes as “the totality of intuition” (his understanding of the experience is very similar to that of Mou). The subject is thus divided from the object. Functions and activities of the former (including the artistic ones) then begin to exert their influences and judgments onto the latter.<sup>39</sup> These judgments can be differentiated into the cognitive (truth), the perceptive or the aesthetic (beauty) and the will (goodness). They are made according to the subject’s state of mind.

The human mind is said to be basically moral in nature; once it is free from desires, it will act as a mirror to the objects (as things-in-themselves) that are present to it. We should note that all the judgments are conducted in terms of the subject’s temperaments, which may have developed from personal history, experiences and preferences, and leading to values and tastes.

### *A Comparative Revelation*

We have seen two philosophical approaches in the introduction of the origin of aesthetic experience. Both models state the relation of art and value and trace them to what happens in the aesthetic experience.

The Deweyan model represents a belief in the biological and natural needs of a human subject, viewing aesthetic experience as an intense, direct,

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>39</sup> Chun-I Tang, *Spiritual Values of Chinese Culture* (Taipei, Taiwan: Ching Chung, 1987), p. 187.

immediate and integrated manifestation of the interaction of human beings and the natural living environment. Dewey also recognizes a sense of happiness as the product of the subject's physical adjustment or adaptation fitness, leading to an experience with a satisfying emotional quality, for "it possesses internal integration and fulfillment reached through ordered and organized movement." The fulfillment refers to a feeling that things are "just so," and that is the rightness and coherence manifested in art. Hence, the aesthetic experience is described as the living experience of value of human beings, referring to equilibrium and harmony attained in interaction and adjustment, which also directly refresh and enlarge the spirit and is so "delightful" from the physical base upwards.

We can also detect the harmonious state in aesthetic experience in both the Taoist and Confucian philosophies, yet the differences between them and the Deweyan model are both epistemological and metaphysical. The Taoist emphasizes that the achievement of this state requires effort of transcendence of all human epistemological constraints. The more clear and tranquil the human mind, the more it is able to know – in the light of the tranquil state – that things will present themselves in the way that they *are*, not as an object, but as an ideal state, which is also a "just so." While the "just so" or the rightness Dewey describes refers to the successful adjustment between the subject and the living environment, which is a part of the "Principle of Cognitive Presentation" in the sense that things or the environment are being perceived as objects, the "just so" in the Confucian "Principle of Ontological Actualization" is an ontological manifestation of things under the light of the human mind, which can see things-in-themselves when it is engaged with the metaphysical Nature and Heaven.

This explains the suggestions of Deweyans like Beardsley, who discusses the aesthetic values of aesthetic objects in terms of the measurement of intensity, coherence, integrity and complexity of the aesthetic experience. These measurements are conducted under the "Principle of Cognitive Presentation" from the Confucian perspective, and we may wonder if they can be ultimate answers to the question of art and value. Happiness or delight in the Deweyan sense, if based on a biological dimension, should be different from what is at and from the spiritual level or what in the light of wisdom is implied in Confucian ontology. The former lacks the depth of the meaning of ultimate concern with what things and their values should be, despite the description that meanings of secondary levels like the social one may evolve on the ground of the biological one. In brief, successful environmental adjustment is not equal to an enlightenment revealed in essential

manifestation of things or situations, in their respective contributions to an answer related to art and value.

When aestheticians take the theories of critics like Danto and Bourdieu seriously, and at the same time, have doubts about the end of aesthetic experience, they suggest retracing the values of art from the vividness and the directness of aesthetic experience.<sup>40</sup> As Kieran and Eaton believe, there are moral implications and values in the experience because it can promote imaginative understanding and “transformative communication,” which can then enhance morality and ethics. These quests for human purposes and meanings of human life obviously have to go beyond environmental interaction and turn to the capacity of the human mind for hopes and potentials.

The Taoist and the Confucian “intellectual intuition” believe that the human mind is able to transcend the subject and object relation and to engage with Nature. Here Nature fills the human mind with its attributes of benevolence and creativity, enables things to show their completeness under the ‘light’ of the mind that is accorded with Nature and ‘coping’ with things. The objectification of the mind happens only after the primal experience of the united encounter; the division of the subject and object ensues, and the activities or the judgments of the former (including the artistic ones) exert their influences onto the latter. Hence, the cognitive, moral and aesthetic judgments emerge.

We should note that both the Deweyan and the Confucian models share the view that aesthetic experience in the broad sense comes before all other human experiences. For Dewey, an experience arises, having a satisfying emotional quality as it possesses internal integration, and the fulfillment achieved through ordered and organized movement is an aesthetic structure itself, which may be immediately felt, and it enables an intellectual (and a moral) experience to be complete.<sup>41</sup> In the Taoist and Confucian traditions, Neo-Confucian scholars read aesthetic experience as an upsurge from the life experience itself, when the mind witnesses the completeness and full manifestation of things-in-themselves. The mind has capacity only when it is totally engaged with Nature.

After the objectification and the division are done, the various forms of judgments emerge, including the aesthetic or artistic one in the narrow sense. Thus, the worries for excluding works that are not capable of produc-

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<sup>40</sup> See Arthur C. Danto, “The Art World,” *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 61, no. 19 (1964), pp. 571–84 and Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 23.

<sup>41</sup> See note 22.

ing enjoyable experiences or bad instances of art will not occur, as they are the results of related judgments.

We can describe the aesthetic traditions of the Taoist and the Confucian as the “Ontological Aesthetics of the Realm,” which has its own problems to solve in its

discourse of aesthetics. This discourse has to answer the problems of the art world, like the mediation process and artistic knowledge, for example. Yet it has provided a more ultimate answer to the problem of art and value.

We can conclude the possible origins of value emanating from the following:

- 1) an ultimate Mind or Spirit;
- 2) a metaphysical Nature or Heaven;
- 3) an empirical body.

When the origin of value is said to come from a physical and empirical body, it is designated to be fluctuating, dependent and unstable. And it is difficult to see the values as ultimate or universal when they depend on the body and its environment. This form of attribution may explain the notion of “The End of Aesthetic Experience,” and the suggestion is that the end of aesthetic experience has gone through things that happen in the non-aesthetic world that have affected our very sensibilities and capacity for experience, revealing that aesthetic experience is never fixed or natural.<sup>42</sup> In the Neo-Confucian reading, when the aesthetic experience happens in the engagement of the human mind with metaphysical Nature, the answers to Shusterman’s three meaningful questions about the aesthetic experience that I cited earlier in this paper will then be all positive, which are as follows:

- 1) the concept of aesthetic experience is intrinsically honorific;
- 2) it is robustly phenomenological;
- 3) this concept’s primary theoretical function is transformational instead of demarcational, aiming to enlarge it to be the base of the field of truth and goodness.<sup>43</sup>

If the end of aesthetic experience is linked to the anxiety that people are losing the capacity for deep experiences and feelings in the contemporary era, then an aesthetics concerned with – and that has the belief in – the

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<sup>42</sup> Shusterman, p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

evaluation capacity and the potentiality of the human mind may provide a way to reflect on the reconstruction of experience – as well as on the differences and the possible integration between an Oriental ontology of art and Western analytical aesthetics.