

INTRODUCTION

Aesthetics in Performance: The Aesthetics of Symbolic Construction and Experience

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The essays in this volume address aesthetic forms and dynamics with particular reference to performance. Performance itself is considered aesthetically, that is, as a process that continually forms itself before reflection, engaging those embraced in its dynamic field to its constructive and experientially constitutive force.

Broadly, our use of the concept of aesthetics applies to created symbolic genres, or dynamic structures within which human experience, meaning, and value are constituted or emergent. This orientation accounts for the concentration on performance in many of these essays. It is through performance that the capacities and qualities of what may be described as aesthetic genres, styles, or forms are generated and realized.

Conventionally, the study of aesthetics has concentrated on art forms and the issue of aesthetic judgment. Kant is the commanding figure who begins the major discourse that still dominates concerning the relation between subjective and objective (rational scientific) knowledge and understanding. This is not to ignore other major thinkers in the field of aesthetics where Western thought dominates, such as the towering figure of Hegel and his various critics including Kierkegaard, Schlegel, and Nietzsche, whose ideas have been seminal in more recent poststructuralist and postmodern thought. These latter scholars have been important in the shattering of the grand totalizing theoretical schema, for example, that characterize so much modernist thought; this has never been more magnificently epitomized than in Hegel's still grandly stimulating phenomenology as represented by his *Lectures on Fine Art* (1975). Developing from within Kantian ideas, Hegel arranges various aesthetic genres in accordance with objective criteria of value that he establishes and, furthermore, in a great historical and cultural sweep that remains unequalled today, attempts to show the progression of aesthetic form

in terms of his theory of the dialectical unfolding of Spirit. Hegel, of course, is Eurocentric, but no less so than most scholars in the field of aesthetics even in these post-Enlightenment and postmodern times. However, what is perhaps most difficult in Hegel from our perspective is the thoroughgoing subordination of aesthetic judgment to his own overriding conceptual and theoretical scheme. This reduces the capacity of what we will present as aesthetic processes to reveal their own force and import in the practice of human beings.

We will begin our discussion with Kant, whose ideas are still widely debated in the field of aesthetic understanding. This is not to say that key thinkers like Hegel are excluded. The hierarchy of judgment and value that Levi-Strauss establishes in his *Mythologiques* regarding music, myth, and ritual is self-evidently Hegelian, as it is Kantian. Anthropologists (all the contributors to this volume would understand themselves as engaging in an anthropology) routinely return in their analyses to Kantian aesthetics, although, in our opinion, rather too narrowly in terms of an anthropology of art. Frequently, perhaps because of the narrow focus on art, anthropological discussion becomes bogged down in the problem of beauty, which is additionally complicated by anthropological relativism that, nonetheless importantly, inveighs against universalist categories (e.g., see Morphy et al.).

We start by returning to Kant not only because he is the wellspring of so much discussion to the present but also because we wish to demonstrate the importance of other directions that take off from him in criticism and revision and that, of course, lead to much larger issues. For Kant, as with Hegel (though far less deterministically so), aesthetics does not merely concern art but rather lies at the heart of the critical understanding of the human project as a whole. We open with Kant with this interpretive significance of his work in mind, for likewise we argue that the field of aesthetics is at the center of understanding of all human endeavor and practice.

The discussion then extends into a reappraisal of the contribution of such scholars as Cassirer and especially Susanne Langer, who expand Kant in this direction (indeed go well beyond him) in ways relevant to many of the themes explored in this book.

Kant, Aesthetic Beauty and Beyond

Kant affirms that aesthetic judgments, such as what constitutes the beautiful, its modes of appearance to and effect through the perceptual senses, are through and through subjective. This subjectivity, however, is already largely grounded in preexisting conceptual schema. However,

for Kant, this central commitment in his work is problematic, for he indicates that there is much that is intuitive and prereflective in subjective and aesthetic experience. This is the source of the creativity of aesthetic processes and also of potential universals (e.g. regarding the unmediated intuition of ethics, justice, etc.).

The subjective sensory or embodied nature of aesthetic judgments is, for Kant, no less a valid form of human knowledge than scientific knowledge. Of course, in Kant the distinction between objective (rational, disembodied) knowledge and subjective (embodied, sensory) knowledge is by no means absolute. This is apparent in his development in *The Critique of Judgment* of the concept of the sublime, in which Kant recognizes the two forms of knowledge as embodied and sensory. These are at the root of imagination and intuition, which are at the font of all knowledge. It is the embodied ground of knowledge that establishes the horizontal limits of knowledge or what Kant describes as the sublime. The sublime stands at the edge of the orders and schemes of reason. In the interpretation given here, the sublime is at the encompassing extremes where knowledge is encountered as intensely sensuous, which, furthermore, cannot transcend its embodied foundation in which conceptual orientations are already grounded (see Deleuze 1990, for a development of this position).

Elaine Scarry (2000) pursues this argument in Kant developing upon its Platonic antecedents to demonstrate that truth and justice are brought to realization through a confrontation with beauty and perfection (the apices in a hierarchy of aesthetic judgment). The encounter with beauty and perfection is an encounter with a kind of aesthetic sublime, a lived sensuous ideal that discovers its integrity at the edge of reason but not against it. It is a limit that establishes the condition for the reassertion of a realm of order and reason that, in the interpretation pursued here, are both encompassed and provoked by the sublime. Scarry uses the example of the shipwrecked Ulysses' encounter with the beautiful Nausicaa near his home in Ithaca (in effect on the far shores of reason), who leads the way to the restoration of the order of his kingdom (one based in furious judgment). In Scarry's excellent discussion, beauty exists beyond definition, something that appears immediately to the senses as such. Its nature is pre-reflective and conceptually unmediated, already immediately given to perception. (This view is basic to Scarry's attempt to develop a universal notion of justice somewhat similar to Kant's universalist ethics). It is a glimpse or, to escape the dominance of the visual in the discussion of

sensory experience, a visceral encounter with a particular composition of form that is before or beyond reason, at the generative edge of reason.

The deep cosmological and religious undercurrents should be noted in this perspective, undercurrents that are further developed in Christianity (e.g., the Scholastics) but far from exclusively so. The force and potency inherent within an aesthetic judgment, and its thorough intimacy with the sensing body (integral to intuitive knowledge), are part of the Archimedean excitement of objective knowledge, vital in the realization of such knowledge. The forms and schemes of reason, even in their apparent abstraction or transcendence of the body, are aesthetic in their composition and have their potency realized in their appeal to a feeling as much as to a rationating body. Reason is no less capable of emotional production as that which seems to stand outside reason. Indeed, it is the feeling, intuiting body that is vital in the very production of the schemes of reason and in the creation of abstract, objective knowledge.

Jacob Burckhardt expands this observation in his wonderful opening chapter “The State as a Work of Art” in his path breaking *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. Here he argues that the creative artistic outpourings of the period refract a particular rational calculus (for example, epitomized by the political treatises of Guicciardini and Machiavelli) that was integral to the political orders and schemes engaged in the structuring of the Italian city-states. These established the conditions stimulating artistic innovation, which simultaneously produced the enjoyment or pleasure in the reflection upon Renaissance works. The implication of Burckhardt’s argument is more than art reflects life or that it achieves its specific generative thrust in particular social, economic, and political conditions. He recognizes an aesthetic unity between artistic creations and their world. That is, the everyday world in its structuring dynamics, in its emergent symbolic forms, is aesthetic and, most importantly, manifests or objectifies (in architecture and the arts) the forces engaged in its composition, which are thus made available to aesthetic contemplation or reflection. In common with artistic creations, the aesthetic formations, practical forms, of everyday life (re)orients human beings brought within their dynamic emotionally and mentally to their realities, constituting their subjectivities and opening them to new possibilities and sensibilities of action and understanding.

Beyond the Aesthetics of Artistic Work

Such an approach to the aesthetic, of course, underpins numerous anthropological perspectives towards culture. Effectively, culture is approached as a complex aesthetic, a composition upon which to reflect (a view most explicitly expressed by Clifford Geertz), a set of symbolic formations and processes constructed by human beings within which they passionately objectify themselves and come to be directed into diverse realities, the lived schema of their composition and making. In different ways anthropologists, regardless of their theoretical pigeonholing as functionalists, structuralists, or poststructuralists, for instance, have adopted what we outline as an aesthetic attitude to culture as a symbolic ordering that is constitutive and motivating. It is furthermore a formation of reality whose compositional dimensions—dimensions that condition particular intentionalities—must be investigated in their terms in order to gain understanding of their potential distinction and particular potencies. This we maintain is an aspect of Radcliffe-Brown's study of the Andaman Islanders (e.g., where the emotions of mourning cannot be understood independently of the socially mediated expectations of their production), as it is fundamental to Levi-Strauss' structuralist understanding of shamanic cure. We note the centrality, if problematic, of Levi-Strauss' use of musical form in his understanding of mythopraxis (and vice versa) and in his establishment of the identity and difference between mathematical and mythic abstraction. Levi-Strauss indeed follows Kant here, demonstrating the inseparable intertwining of subjective and objective processes—an approach already developed in both Cassirer and Langer's potentially more dynamic perspectives. Cassirer, for example, stresses that each moment of human symbolic action as an aesthetic process is one that both continues and differs from established compositional traditions.¹

The aesthetic, therefore, is not in our usage exclusively the domain of what, regardless of specific convention, is defined as art, a concept that has mainly been shaped in recent and contemporary modernist and postmodernist discourses. As we have made explicit, the Kantian problem of aesthetic beauty and the notion of the sublime extends well beyond art towards a more general and unified approach to the understanding of human being. In other words, art or what is defined as art engages aesthetic processes but is not their necessary or ultimate expression. The aesthetic is primary. In our treatment the aesthetic is what ties art (as all other human endeavors) to life. The aesthetic and its compositional forms are what human beings are already centered within as human beings. This is to say that human beings are beings whose

lived realities are already their symbolic constructions or creations within, and through which, they are oriented to their realities and come to act within them. To concentrate on the aesthetic is to focus on the dynamic forces and other processes engaged in human cultural and historical existence as quintessentially symbolic processes of continual composition and recomposition.² If the aesthetic is to be equated with art, then art is life, an attention to its aesthetic processes being a concern with its compositional forms and forces in which life is shaped and comes to discover its direction and meaning.

While we state that aesthetics is not reducible to art, many, perhaps most, of the issues relevant to an aesthetic focus emerge through discussions of art forms or objects. The way these engage the senses and constitute or produce experience (exert force or power) is a major concern in the work of a diverse field of scholars in the humanities and social sciences towards general understanding of the human condition. One example of this is the philosopher Suzanne Langer who, extending from Kant, Cassirer, and Whitehead, not only explores the shaping of human experience as this is revealed through a study of art forms (*Philosophy in a New Key, Feeling and Form*) but also, in her major synthetic work *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, attempts to grasp the aesthetic unities and differences engaged in all existence within which human existential and creative uniqueness is emergent. In her neo-Kantian orientation, art, as a dynamic organization of symbolic form, is the key that opens the door to human distinctiveness and potentiality in all areas of human practice. That is, art, or attention to created forms in their aesthetic process, accentuates the symbolic qualities critical to developing an understanding—as much philosophical as scientific in Langer’s terms—of human practices that does not separate the logical, the objective, from the subjective, the mental from the material and the sensual.

Although Langer’s approach does extend an understanding of a variety of art forms, this is not her primary objective. Rather, it is through art (as a relatively autonomous product)—that the symbolic (as a differentiated unity of the sensual, mental, and material) is revealed in its force and dynamic. Langer explores the nature of a variety of “pure” artistic forms defined by the principles governing their appeal to the senses and, among other aspects, the material conditions integral to their particular constructive/creative force (e.g., stone as against canvas, or suppressions or extensions of physical potential as in the elimination of the aural or voice in mime and dance and the simultaneous elaboration of physical movement). One major aspect of Langer’s approach is that the different arts manifest what might be described as a transcendence

of their particular limitation, filling out or generating critical aspects of their symbolic force or potency as a property of what a more recent Lacanian perspective would call their lack. Critically, in Langer's perspective, the different artistic forms manifest in particular and intensely distinct ways the force of the symbolic nature of human being, the symbolic as integral to what Cassirer describes as "entification" or the effective reorigination of human being as a creature recreated in the symbolic that is nonreducible to other forms of existence.³ This is the import of what Cassirer and Langer place upon the symbolic that, in different ways, is shared by many other thinkers (through structuralism to phenomenology). It is a strong view of the symbolic best exemplified in the notion of mythic consciousness. That is, it is through human symbolic creativity that human beings not only reoriginate themselves but achieve total distinction from other forms of life with which they are continuous but also, and most significantly, discontinuous. This powerful symbolic vision that is integral to the aesthetic orientation we present here demands attention to all human practice or work (and not merely that characterized as art or artistic) as embodying mythic potency, a poiesis or power to bring forth. What this potency may be is the chief problematic of the aesthetic orientation that we suggest.

The Compositional Processes of Aesthetic Representation and Symbolic Constitution

It should be evident by now that our aesthetic approach is not bound by such traditional concerns as the problem of beauty or taste, which has caused some to eschew an aesthetic perspective. Bourdieu, echoing many others (e.g., Adorno, Lukacs, Williams), attacks positions that refuse the fact that notions of beauty and taste are the products of historical, cultural, social, and political processes. The symbolic artifacts of human creation achieve their power over the imagination and their virtually magical potency through this fact. Nationalist art and representations (see Mosse, Kapferer, Taussig, and Handelman this volume) exemplify this. However, in this perspective symbolic forms and processes are reduced to deriving their meaning and potency either in the nonsymbolic, in the factuality of reality somehow outside the symbolic, or in the capacity of the aestheticized symbolic to ideologically obscure, or they invert the true force and meaning of objective realities, as in various materialist orientations (e.g., see Eagleton 1990, for a summary).

While the importance of such perspectives is never to be denied, aesthetic and symbolic processes generally are locked firmly into subjectivist/objectivist oppositions. The aesthetic and its symbolic organization or process is widely treated as facilitating expressive activity, something to which human beings respond rather than something that actively, through its compositional dynamic, constitutes the very action that is expressed. In aesthetic processes subjective and objective dualisms are dissolved, aesthetic forces especially in the context of performance constituting the realities—in embodied experience—that they may otherwise reflect. Subjective articulations are integral to the aesthetic object, vital in the conjunction that aesthetic forms and processes establish with subjects. What we emphasize is that aesthetic processes highlight not merely that realities are symbolic constructions but that life exists in these constructions that commands or demands or calls forth ways of living the realities the aesthetic as a symbolic composition may be conceived as objectifying or representing. Immanent in the compositional symbolic dynamic of aesthetic construction is how human beings imagine and form their existential circumstances to themselves and to others. It constitutes both the reality and the emergent possibility of the worlds they come to live. Ranciere (2002) effectively reiterates this hard, effectively material view of the symbolic formation of the aesthetic, which we describe as central to the work of Cassirer and numerous other scholars, specifically in relation to artistic production: art (and the symbolic generally) as potentially both an in itself and a for itself, a process that has the capacity to make real that which it constructs. As a consequence art and other symbolic constructions do not merely represent externalities but act as moments of rupture and of reconstruction or reconceptualization, changing and transforming the worlds in which they are produced. Aesthetic processes, dynamics of symbolic construction and composition, manifest their potency certainly in the internalization of what is already external (frequently transforming or transmuting their import). They may also externalize that which is originally internal or immanent within them effecting, in this way, reformations of those symbolic realities, their meaning and import, to which they extend.

How it is that aesthetic formations effectively relate to their larger symbolic universes of action and meaning should be an enduring issue and not be assumed. What we have referred to essentially as the weak view, aesthetic and symbolic processes as determined by processes outside them, is apparent in certain expressivist and representational orientations. Thus the criticism made by the art historian Erwin Panofsky (in 1955) shortly after his exile from Nazi

Germany of the “art appreciation” approach he encountered in America. Panofsky recommended a rigorous approach to art that he maintained should be no less exacting than that expected of a physical scientist. He opposed dominant schools of art appreciation that he viewed as merely reducing the meaning of an artwork to the independent emotional response of the viewing subject (a practice congruent, of course, with the modernist egalitarian ideology of pragmatic individualism). This refused the autonomy of the art object as constituted within a particular historical symbolic regime following specific compositional orientations and rules, even in their transgression. To overlook this is to ignore the processes underlying the formation of the work of art and the nature of its articulation with its wider realities. Understanding this articulation expands a grasp of how a viewing subject at the time of the work’s production might have emotionally or subjectively responded to it. Panofsky was effectively denying a universal (and ahistorical) emotionality or subjectivity that underpinned the American school of art appreciation (that reduced all art to the viewing subject conceived of as universal and without history). He also indicated how the approach deprived the work of its intrinsic potency to form its emotional response.

Panofsky was strongly influenced by the school of the so-called Vienna structuralists (see Wood and Turner 2000). These insisted on a close investigation of the internal compositional dynamics of aesthetic or symbolic formations initially independently of assumptions often grounded in the historically or ontically constituted subjectivity of the analyst. The method was closely allied to the phenomenological recommendation of bracketing (e.g., Riegl 1900 [2000]). One example from the Vienna school concerns the exploration of Egyptian monumental art that uncovers a particular space/time dynamic of composition that suggests a reformulation of an understanding of Egyptian cosmological orientations hitherto subordinated to Western notions founded in a different history (Weinberg [1933] 2000). The approach effectively insists on discovering through the exploration of symbolic artifacts and processes the way they articulate in their own terms with a political and social environment. In addition the aesthetic formation or symbolic process explored in itself may provide original understanding of the world in which it is already embedded. Moreover, it is an approach that is opposed to untested and over universalized assumptions that often lie at the center of contemporary materialist and subjectivist orientations. These alienate to their own independent interpretive consciousness the import,

meaning, and existential potency of symbolic processes that, in our view, is an overly reductionist and weak view of the aesthetic and of the symbolic.

The weak orientation to aesthetic and symbolic processes denudes them of their particular interventional force that they may have on the life worlds to which they are oriented. What is especially at risk is the causative and instrumental effect that symbolic objects and processes might have upon the realities to which they are directed as a function of their own compositional order and process. A contemporary attitude to art and the aesthetic is that their value is in their afunctional, nonpragmatic features. Yet in the orientation we pursue here, it may be precisely the pragmatic functionalism of aesthetic processes that both conditions their composition and yields to them interventional capacity and their potency to act on their environment.

The Aesthetic as Agency

The approach we stress is that symbolic forms and processes in themselves have agency. They do not only represent (i.e., manifest the potencies of their larger context) or represent in the stronger performative sense as perlocutionary causation, as developed by Austin (1954) and those following him (e.g., Rappaport 2000, with reference to ritual acts). Symbolic forms are active in the creation of their realities and have effect or bring about changes in the circumstances of existence through the aesthetic dynamic of their composition. This observation has long been made, for example, by students of comparative artistic forms.

Thus Heinrich Zimmer (1928) notes the distinct way the statue of the Greek Zeus relates to his world as contrasted with that of the Buddha. Zeus is full of ego, demanding to be looked upon and admired. The Buddha, however, usually appears totally impervious to his surrounds, unaware of an audience. These statues are active in creating their realities, in constituting their context and making what might appear as outside them internal to them through the potency of their symbolic formation. The Buddha actively refuses to be looked at in the way that Zeus demands, or, rather, the Buddha in the particular nonaction of his built form shuns the Self. The point can be expanded. The agency of the statues, their particular dynamic, structures the way they are perceived. We hazard that this structuring of perception, vital to their constituting force, occurs independently of whether or not human beings are culturally predisposed to

perceive/conceive them in a particular way. This is a suggestion that we will return to subsequently.

Ethnographers present a wealth of evidence concerning symbolic potency, the power of things, and symbolic processes. The magical fetish is a clear example. As Devisch (2002) has demonstrated through his Congo materials, the power of the fetish acts on the consciousness of victims through the manner of its internal composition whereby it is transmuted into a highly dangerous organization of bodily and social transgression. Gell (1996) has explored the point more generally, showing how social realities are built into objects yielding to artifacts their capacity to have causative effect. These scholars are adopting a strong aesthetic symbolic perspective in which objects, for example, are not merely representations of their realities but particular condensations or organizations of processes within them that, furthermore, give them an autonomous force, even mythopoieic power, in the environment or world in which they are operated. The fetish apparent to the consciousness of its victim has the potentiality to alter completely the victim's orientation to reality actively bringing about his death.

Aesthetization, or making things and processes into art, as this is usually conceived in modernist or postmodernist terms, is widely referred to pejoratively not only because it decontextualizes objects and processes but also because it often removes from them their agentive, functional, and instrumental-technical (*techne*) properties integral to their composition and vital to their aesthetic. This, of course, is a problem with which many contemporary galleries and museums deal. A recent example of aestheticization is Damien Hirst's exhibition of an African trap as a work of art. He aestheticized it. While he might have invested it with a new postmodern force (e.g., after Duchamp), he divested the trap of central tensional dynamics of its compositional form that were critical to its *raison d'être*. The trap was presented unset, devoid of its intentional tension to snare game. It was deprived of its compositional and integrative aesthetic function central to its "trapness" and the time/space dimension by which it was oriented in a potentially violent and changing relation to reality. A larger import of this example concerns our orientation to the aesthetic critical of that aestheticization that refuses what may be described as the life of symbolic forms and processes and essential to what we regard to be their aesthetic functionality intrinsic to their formation.

Performance and the Dynamics of Symbolic Construction

Much of our discussion can be expanded in the context of performance. Most of the aesthetic or compositional symbolic processes explored in this volume only exist in the fullness of their formation in performance. It is through performance that the compositional dynamic of aesthetic forms is set in play. Therefore, an understanding of performance (itself an aesthetic formation) is crucial. We define performance as similar to what is routinely described in the social sciences as action or practice. It is fundamentally symbolic in that it embeds orientations to existence that are meaningful, that is, they are human constructions even if they are not immediately available to the reflective human consciousness of those participants who bring about a performance. This is what conventionally distinguishes action or practice from behavior, which has no necessary meaningful content. (Hence a distinction between behaviorist psychology, which seeks to explain phenomena outside a frame of value, and most sociology, which is value-laden.) However, in our discussion performance is also more than action or practice in that the participants in performance are thoroughly conscious of their action or practice as a performance to be witnessed or participated in as such. We add to this the idea that performance is not mere enactment or the materialization of a preexisting schema or text. This indicates that the text preexists the performance, which of course it often does in some memorized or written form. However, what is stressed in our usage is a notion of performance as a nonreducible emergent phenomenon, a symbolic formation *sui generis*. In this perspective, what might be regarded as the text is created in the performance and is only available through the performance rather than preexisting it (see Kapferer 1997). This, of course, is the case with aesthetic processes, which only achieve their distinctive character and potencies in their performative practice and the way they are made to appear to and through the senses.

Ritual is a particular class of performance; that is, it is a symbolic formation that is self-consciously performative. It is a domain of practice that has been conventionally treated as the primordial space of the symbolic: where human beings are immersed in mythic consciousness and reoriginate themselves as distinct from other beings. Here scholars have followed on from what is often explicitly asserted in ritual action (e.g., in a host of life crisis rites, see Van Gennep, Hubert, and Mauss). Langer (1964) argues that rite is the source of language. For her, ritual, as language, is a symbolic process that effectively makes present what is empirically absent, discursively engages in the creative materialization of the abstract, and simplifies existential

complexity. Her suggestion is that the formation of language involves the production of a gestural and vocal economy (dance is given preeminent place in her discussion) that is the emergence or evolution of symbolic simplicity from the sensory complexity of concrete existence. Ritual is the bridge into the symbolic, both discontinuous with the thorough teleology or closure of existence (the in itself), whereby the human being becomes for itself (the separation of self and other and their mutual production) and yet still continuous with the presymbolic. That is, ritual insists on the embodied unity of human being in existence (its grounded roots and integration with other forms of life) yet also the distinctiveness of human being. Ritual performance, for Langer and Turner, is the source of aesthetic forms such as music, dance, and drama. Moreover, it is ritual-performance that can highlight these aesthetic forms as manifesting particular organizational processes (e.g., of dynamics of temporality and spatiality, volume, motion, etc.). Ritual—especially those of healing—may also be a context for the demonstration of the differential effect (affect) of aesthetic processes (see e.g., Kapferer 1991, Friedson 1997). The arts, postmodern and premodern in Langer's conception, contain the generative symbolic traces that are more profoundly present in rite.

Langer, as we have already indicated, has been highly influential in anthropology: for example, in Geertz' (1975) general approach to culture and most especially in Victor Turner's early analyses of ritual. We note her critical position (along with Freud and Jung) in Turner's highly important *Chihamba, The White Spirit*, which established the ground for his general approach to ritual. For Turner the ritual roots of what can be called the performance arts, or arts in performance, contribute to his development of a general sociological/psychological theory for the understanding of human being and its self-generative, creative capacity.⁴ Like Langer he strove for a unity of art with science, which is clear in his later work. (Langer argues for a unified approach, of feeling with form.) He also attempted to break free from the kind of Kantian stultification that he identified in Durkheim and structuralism moving in the neo-Kantian direction of both Cassirer and Langer (approaches far more attuned to process and change). In effect, Turner as with Langer developed what amounts to an aesthetic perspective and theory on human being. For this reason they are important for grasping some of the directions taken in the essays in this volume, which are influenced by them even if many of the authors take different paths.

Undoubtedly there is a difficulty in Langer and also later in Turner in what could be regarded as the primordialism detectable both in their focus on aesthetics and ritual (for Turner especially a unified form manifesting the differentiated potential of human being through ritual's aesthetic genres). It is a view that continues in other recent approaches to the symbolic formations of ritual as a domain that exposes the building blocks and symbolic potencies involved in the creative urgency of human being (see Rappaport 2000). Whether or not you are in agreement with such a primordial or originary commitment to the study of ritual, nonetheless, ritual and other kinds of performance regimes (that may bear a relation to rite at the very least in their symbolic intensity) are vital to a comprehension of the power of symbolic processes in the constitution of human experience and in the construction and generation of knowledge.

Earlier we discussed the importance of function and intention in aesthetic processes. Function, we suggested, is integral to symbolic composition and dynamics: the aesthetic includes a function (a purpose) and the intention (consciously or unconsciously) of an effect (affect) in the specific organization of symbolic form that, through its formation in and to the senses, marries feeling to cognition and meaning. Ritual performance makes the functionality of the aesthetic explicit and might be said to put specific aesthetic compositions of the symbolic, as these may structure experience and cognition, to the test. Rituals worldwide place a diversity of symbolic processes, what are identified as music, song, dance, drama into complex interrelation and intermixture and reveal the potentiality of their force. The density of certain aesthetic genres or forms (of drumming, for example, or of masked dance, of chanting or verbal dialogue) at specific moments in the complex unfolding of a ritual project are not there merely to represent processes but are concerned to directly and immediately constitute the realities, factually and experientially, that they present. In this they can demonstrate not only the reoriginating potency of the symbolic (why some ritual can have the semblance of primordality) but also the specific force of particular aesthetic processes. Such force is revealed both in the efficacy of their function or purpose (as defined in the ritual project and participant experience) and in the structural tension that is manifested in their interrelation or intermixture with other aesthetic processes (see Kapferer 1983, Friedson 1996, and Friedson, Kapferer, Hobart, and Handelman in this volume).

We stress the capacity of symbolic compositions to materialize experience. This has been described in relation to emotions or moods. Langer writes of feeling forms or the capacity of

symbolic processes to mould as a property of their form an existential state in participants within the structures or dynamics of aesthetic performance. In this way the constructed reality of the symbolic process becomes thoroughly integral to participants so that they are completely one with the formed experience. The occurrence of trance states corresponds with this argument. Demonic possession in Sinhala rites (and similarly elsewhere in the world, see Bourguignon, Boddy, etc.), during which victims and ritualists fully experience the invasive presence of the demonic are apparently produced at intense moments of drumming (see Kapferer 1983, Kapferer and Papigny 2002).

There has been considerable debate concerning the power of drumming and other musical forms to produce trance states. The broadly accepted argument is that it is not the music in itself that produces the existential state but what the music signs and symbolizes (see Roget 1987). The point is Kantian. Thus in the Sinhala example the musical structures of the drumming are part of a culturally and historically established set of lived conceptualizations. The body is belief and effectively predisposed to the demonic meaning pattern of the music, the body becoming demonic in accordance with the demonic structure of the music. This kind of understanding is confined within a circle of meaning and overlooks the potential of symbolic processes to create existential circumstances, material realities, independent of conceptual or interpretive frameworks. Friedson (1997, also this volume) demonstrates such a possibility in the context of his trance-dance ethnography among healers (*nganga*) in Malawi. He shows how a particular patterning of drum rhythms creates an intensely felt experience of an external agent entering within the body and then moving around inside the body as if it were an independent life force. Friedson argues that this effect is a musical illusion akin to but nonetheless distinct from the illusion of visual perception created, for example, by the psychologist's Necker cube. The illusion is not unreal but real in its experiencing (along the same lines as *maya* or illusion, which is a factuality of consciousness in the Buddhist or Hindu sense). The experience that Friedson describes is repeatable by means of a rhythmic structure quite independently of any meaningful conceptual frame. Non-Malawians, in other words, when engaged in this aesthetic process or particular compositional form will encounter the same physical effects independently of any cultural predisposition. The importance of Friedson's work in the context here is that it indicates how symbolic processes can constitute the ground of experience beneath a framework of meaning—and indeed how these processes can provide the material basis upon which specific

meaning frameworks can build (thus, drumming creates the effect of something concrete and alive entering the body that then can be culturally interpreted as spirit possession). Furthermore, he demonstrates the significance of attending to the dynamics of performance structures as far more than processes of representation, rather as formations that can powerfully intervene in situations radically organizing or reconstituting the conditions of experience. We have concentrated on the example of music (see Beeman, this volume), but the argument can be expanded to include other aesthetic forms as scholars in the field of the plastic arts have shown (e.g., Panofsky, Arnheim).

Much of the work on aesthetic performance concentrates on audience effects or the way non-specialist participants are conditioned through performance. This is so with Langer's orientation and other very similar perspectives (e.g., that of the important phenomenological work of Mikel Dufrenne). The emphasis by and large has not articulated thoroughly enough the conceptual/technical logics whereby performance specialists understand the production of their work and especially their understanding of the relation of technique to effect. Some of the essays in this volume aim to correct this neglect (see Shulman, Kersenboom, and Friedson) and also to address what some might see as the hegemony of what may be glossed very broadly as Western aesthetic traditions.

One attraction of Langer's work is that she is sensitive to cultural variation and, as we have said, strives through a close attention to processes of symbolic composition to arrive at general understanding. Nevertheless, a closer attention to constructive principle and technique may indicate more cogently not only important culturally based distinctions and similarities but also other constructional bases of symbolic formation that may break new ground in the understanding of how it is that human beings constitute and come to act in the worlds of their creation.

Overall, the essays in this volume attempt to open out to an understanding of aesthetic processes that has general implications for the exploration of the nature of human action. While the essays are by and large grounded in the detailed analysis of ritual practices or specific aesthetic or artistic genres, they are intended as a general contribution to the comprehension of the symbolic forces alive in social and political life and in other knowledge practices. They are oriented to the grasping of aesthetic processes in a general sense, processes that are present in all

areas of human activity and extend in their implication beyond the restriction that would confine the discussion of aesthetics to the realms of art.

The Essays

The book opens with essays concerned directly with particular aesthetic and art forms, proceeding to the concern with aesthetics of ritual forms directed to the problematics of everyday life (in worship and healing), and concluding with the aesthetic organization of practices in public secular settings (carnival, circus, political gatherings). There is a shift, if you will, from a concern with the life of art to a discussion of the art of life.

Beeman's contribution is the most generalist in the collection. Exploring the problem of why song can provoke intense emotional response, Beeman examines human physiological reaction to specific structuring of sound. He is thoroughly aware of cultural variations to the organization of sound in song but is directed to the effect of certain qualities of pitch and tone, for example, on human responses that may be independent of cultural conceptualizations or categories. Thus, he makes an intriguing link between singing and the crying of a baby. Both have intense affect on listeners despite themselves and, perhaps, despite the meaning frames whereby they may place interpretations upon the emotional dimensions of song or crying. Beeman addresses the power of aesthetic practices to reach human beings across cultural and social differences. He is concerned, in other words, with a question that lies at the heart of the discussion of aesthetics certainly since Kant—the power of aesthetic forms to appeal to universal subjectivities, to break through the categories and limits of reason.

The chapters by Shulman and Kersenboom enter into more culturally specific arguments, by this pointing up the deep historically and culturally layered dimensions of any discussion of aesthetics and performance. But far more important, both contributors demonstrate how other theories of aesthetic performance (using examples from India) expand understanding of such processes. They break out of the confines of a predominately Western-focused consideration of aesthetic processes, suggesting possibilities not merely relevant to Indian materials but perhaps also critical in the exploration of aesthetics anywhere.

Shulman, taking us beyond the relatively familiar *rasa* theorists, concentrates on music as emergence, linking it with language and especially poetics. Working from Sarngadeva's *Sangitaratnakara*, written in the thirteenth century, Shulman examines music, that particular

“unfolding of sound into form,” as impelled in that inner physical desire to speak and building from that subtle buzz or drone from which ultimately the world itself is born. Through this orientation to the construction of music, Shulman extends towards a grasping of the musical experience and its inseparability from performance in which the listener is a crucial participant. As Shulman beautifully elaborates, the excitement of a musical performance (and, perhaps, in much performance generally), as well as poetry, in the Indian traditions he explores comes not from their expressiveness in a Romantic sense but from what they can bring forth from the vast reservoir of what is already empirically there: in the case of music, to make audible what is already humming beneath the surface.

Kersenboom also leads the reader through the complexities of southern Indian musical performance and into a further consideration of the aesthetics of performance. She seeks to build a bridge between, on the one hand, the orientation developed by Victor Turner, who stressed performance as founded in experience (extending from Wilhelm Dilthey’s phenomenology), with ancient Indian traditions, on the other hand. Turner opposed what he conceived to be the stasis of abstract philosophical systems or debates about cosmology, which refused a concern with the pragmatic struggles in existence. Turner’s is a voice for freedom against restraint that is directed to uncovering the energies of human creativity, hence his stress on the arts and the dynamics of performance. Kersenboom argues that the notion of performance is an ancient category and that what Turner discards, such as convention and rules, the exactitude underlying performance (so critical in southern Indian music and dance), is far from antithetical to the creativity and expressive qualities of performance. The care in performance is at the root of its praxis to which the abstraction of theory must be enduringly subservient. The poiesis of performance, its bringing forth of that which is deep within the existential ground of human being and made manifest in its cosmological production or, more accurately, repeated cosmogenesis, is vital in the memory or embodied knowledge that enables the repetition of performance, which in its repetition always creates something new and different. Here Kersenboom joins with Shulman in opening up properties of performance that the Indian materials point towards so acutely.

Bastin, still in the context of South Asian materials, explores the cosmological dynamic implicated in the built-form of Hindu temples, their vital architectonics. Developing from the work of Mikel Dufrenne, whose phenomenology of aesthetics perhaps remains unsurpassed,

Bastin effectively conceives of the temple itself as an active force, a dynamic ritual structure that directs the opening up of human imagination to reveal the potentiality of the images that the temple contains and organizes. The temple orients participants or worshippers towards the diversities of their creative experience. The Hindu temple can be conceived as in itself a rite conditioning, if not necessarily determining, the performances that occur within it.

The three following chapters, those of Friedson, Hobart, and Kapferer, develop their arguments through an explicit discussion of the aesthetic dimensions of ritual performance in the contexts of the problematics of everyday life. In numerous ways Friedson's magnificent account of music and trance-dance at an Ewe shrine of a *vodun* order of the Guinea Coast takes us firmly into pragmatic and lived daily realities. Here one finds a powerful break with the linear, relatively fixed, and certain world of a Western aesthetics. Friedson concentrates most of his discussion on music making and possession. His account of possession takes up what phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty and Schutz have most fruitfully discussed—that a good deal of human activity involves no firm will, or conscious bodily emplacement: he draws attention to the processes of entering into sleep, daydreaming, driving a car, or listening to a Beethoven symphony in which it could be said that we are away from our selves. Trance is an even more radical way of being away. In the former processes, the “I” or ego is dimly present but in trance appears to be relinquished completely, the entranced becomes totally other or, rather, the space in which the multiple modalities of the god, in the Ewe instance, are revealed. Friedson introduces us to the exciting dance music of the Ewe shrine, in which trance opens to the revelation of the god. The music of the shrines, which Friedson describes as a “barrage of cross-rhythms,” forms a reality of shifting centers, breaking beyond the more centered certitudes and linearity of Western musical understanding. In grasping the kind of experience produced within the musical contours of the trance-dance, Friedson presents what he describes as a performance aesthetics, an understanding that is thoroughly and irreducibly created in performance-practice. I believe that Friedson radically extends an understanding of African dance and, too, the dynamics of possession.

Both Hobart and Kapferer concentrate on ritual performances and their aesthetic drive towards establishing ethical and moral unities of community and society, themselves aesthetic formations perhaps only achieved in the dynamics of ritual and festival. Hobart addresses the Balinese Galungan festival and the marvelous processions of Barong and Rangda. The aesthetic

wonder of Balinese performances is widely known and too often reduced to European and North American conceptions of the arts and theatrical performance. Hobart shows the radical distance of these from Balinese lived understandings, showing how the dynamics of performance reveal dimensions of everyday life that Balinese in the aesthetic of everyday etiquette hide from themselves.

The aesthetics of Balinese festival and ritual is directed towards the formation of communal balance and harmony—this is the orientation in the dramatic struggles of god, demon, and human being in the performances that Hobart describes. Such striving towards balance is an ultimate aesthetic aim that contains the ethical and moral principles, the virtues that are the conditionality for communal existence and reproduction. It is out of the repeated performance that the potential for aesthetic union is both generated and placed on reflexive display.

Here Hobart, through the Balinese, returns to universal questions that concerned the European Kant but that are worked out differently in a world like that of the Balinese. Kapferer follows a similar course to that of Hobart. He presents what Sinhalese healers or exorcists regard as their masterwork, a ritual known as the *Suniyama*, which develops as its performance the Buddhist virtues, the ultimate conditionality for the harmonies of body and world. A Sinhalese exorcism is intended to be beautiful; this is the crux of its seductive intensity, which, while it generates the impossible antinomies of existence, leads the way through to the realms of justice and the release from suffering. Beauty in the aesthetics of the ritual practice of the *Suniyama* is the focus of that generative desire or force that is vital to the emergence of the orders of human existence but that simultaneously is the root of their instability and collapse. Through the discourse of the ritual practice, Kapferer argues for a reconsideration of the work of Turner and also of Kant, who in different ways (Kant in his stress on the sublime and Turner in his concern with the liminal) discover in the aesthetic an extension to worlds outside the closure and dictates of conventional reason, a generative creativity, and an opening towards universal questions vital to the human subject.

As we have stressed throughout this introductory essay, the aesthetics of performance is concerned with compositional dynamics wherein human beings come to constitute and reflect upon their realities. Thus Handelman presents the aesthetics of the Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Day in Israel, as expressing the compositional process of the bureaucratic logic of a modernist state. Such a logic “insists on the exactitude of definitions and categories”

building a whole from the fitting together of modular elements. Impatient with traditional philosophies of aesthetics that concentrate on such matters as beauty and truth, Handelman's close analysis of the remembrance day demonstrates how such matters are part of the "aesthetic feel," the sense of intuitive rightness, that is generated through the compositional dynamic of bureaucratic logic; in other words, they are the feelings of rightness or truth integral to the self-legitimation of the unfolding process of the remembrance day and vital to its force. One of the crucial arguments that Handelman develops, which is shared by many of the authors contributing to this volume, is how processes commonly sectioned off into more esoteric discussions of the arts are deeply rooted in everyday life and its ordinary aesthetics.

Carnival in Brazil cannot be understood outside the context of the everyday. If the Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Day in Israel can be described as an aesthetics of conformity and convention (the crushing power of the state and of the people in compliance with it), Carnival is a bursting through of everyday worlds against the absurdities of restriction and the distortions of reason's power. In DaMatta's excellent turn towards the Brazilian Carnival, one sees an exciting resonance with Friedson's account of the continual decentering of Ewe drumming. Carnival works at decentering and depositioning, and thus it is able to embrace and totalize in nonconformity. It is not so much an inversion of order and reason. This would be to sustain a dialectical stance—one that characterizes many approaches to play and ritual subversions that develop into the endless circularity of chaos and order, play and control, etc. DaMatta points beyond this kind of dialectical closure. The decentering dynamic and the multiple and shifting positioning of Carnival does not turn the centralizing forces of state, reason, and power on their heads so much as overcome them, swamp them, drown them out in the exuberance of the flow and spilling over of the city-possessing crowd of Carnival. For DaMatta, Carnival demonstrates post-modernity's explicit critique and play with the forms and effects of modernist oppression.

Carmelli expands such themes in his discussion of the contemporary circus and the changes that are overcoming it, especially with regard to the treatment of animals, the critical focus of the circus' symbolic work. Here Carmelli effectively addresses the secularism of modernity and its postmodern continuities. He marks the point at which (since Darwin) the traditional play of Nature and Culture, central in one dominant formation of circus acts, has come under increasing attack. Organic to a secularist modernism, this finds continuity in a

postmodernist discourse against cruelty and torture. Animals have effectively and metonymically taken the place of humankind. The symbolic play of the traditional circus, of animal-becoming-human, which fascinated audiences with its “culture-fication” of animals, has lost some of its effect in realities where the animal/humankind division is obscured and the rights of one are either synonymous with or metaphoric of the rights of the other. Carmelli shows how another oppositional play, already powerfully present in the circus, humankind-becoming-machine, has perhaps achieved greater emphasis. He notes the anxiety and danger that circus acts encapsulate and the crisis of unity, disunity, and of totalizing distinctions and coherences with which circus performers play and that is the aesthetic wonder of the circus. Conventionally in liminal space, usually outside the regulated order of state/society, the circus works between the marginalized world of the performers and the emplaced world of the audience constantly decentering, destabilizing, and shifting perspective. Carmelli’s enjoyment of the circus suggests a sadness. The discourse concerning the cruelty to animals (an audience perception that is integral to the play of performers but by no means empirically the case) indicates the domestication of the circus (the last arena of the “wild” performer) to the governmentality of a popular will, the Foucauldian paradox of postmodernity.

The essays in this volume address the compositional dynamics of aesthetic formation, or the way human realities are constructed before and through the senses. The stress is very much on the practice of construction, and this has demanded an attention to the interface between the artist or the performer-creator (musician, dancer, ritualist) and other participants drawn within the aesthetic formation as this is mediated through the dynamic of the work itself (musical form, dance dynamic, trance-dance, rite of healing, festival, ceremony). These concerns have demanded an attention both to the compositional skills and intentions of the performer-creators and to the effects of their work, which of course frequently transcends the reduction to compositional intention. Indeed, the intentional structure of a created work may be, as Dufrenne, Langer, and other students of aesthetic formation insist, ultimately and irreducibly with the work itself and especially with the work in the practice of its performance, which is constitutive of the aesthetic, its being and life. Performance as an aesthetic formation is very much the emphasis of these essays and therefore their enquiry into the logics and potencies of performance-aesthetic dynamics.

In many ways, the essays mark a return to issues and questions that were at the root of philosophical investigation, in Europe certainly from the Enlightenment and, as the essays here insist, present in the long-term in other religio-philosophical discourse. These questions concern the force that consciously created and manipulated symbolic formations (organizations of the perceptual-conceptual sense field engaging the human organism with its life world) have within and upon the existential realities of human action. If there is a return to such issues, we underline the difference. This is to demonstrate how such questions are raised and approached differently in diverse traditions and, most importantly, how they manifest implicitly in practices that have no philosophical pretensions of an ultimate nature.

These essays depart from issues that have occupied in recent years what might be regarded as aesthetic concerns. We refer to the vast body of materials being published on museums, artistic representations, popular art, etc., especially in the fields of cultural and media studies, the anthropology and sociology of art, and so on. These address matters relating to class and taste, the political role of art forms, museum display, markets and consumption. The importance of such approaches is undoubted, but the direction here suggests the importance of returning to some of the questions that are raised through an attention to the dynamics of aesthetic formation itself. As a few of this collection's essays suggest, such a return may also extend an understanding of the power of aesthetic structures in furthering, resisting, and overcoming the political and social exigencies and problematics of other lived realities of human existence.

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Notes

¹ A development of a very similar argument in anthropology is that of Sahlins' (1980) analysis of cultural transformation in ancient Hawaii following the death of Cook.

² In this sense there is a continual aesthetic in all human formations of a social and political character. Domains of human habitation such as villages, neighborhoods, and cities may be conceived as manifesting a particular aesthetic in the constant process of their formation. This is created out of the manifold symbolic forces engaged in their construction. For example, villages in northern Zambia express a particular aesthetic form as a result of the symbolic forces involved in the contradictions of matrilineal kinship that contributes to a particular residence pattern. This contrasts with the much larger and densely populated village formations among populations to the south who are patrilineal and far more hierarchical in the forces conditioning their structuring.

³ Here Cassirer is sharply opposed to those understandings that would reduce human processes to nonhuman processes conceiving the shift from the nonhuman to the human as a single continuous progressive incremental flow. "No matter how the question of the becoming of natural forms is answered, the field of intellectual becoming follows not the law of evolution, but the law of mutation. Here there is not simply wave after wave in uniform flow; rather, here one clear and distinct configuration confronts the next. Even when a new configuration immediately

follows upon the earlier ones it is not simply their result, but represents something unique and independent.” (Cassirer 1996, 40)

⁴ Turner (1965) sees ritual as the key domain of human origination and reorigination. In particular he isolates one moment—clearly present in transition rites—that, following Van Gennep, he called the liminal (from which Turner also developed his notion of *communitas*) within which reoriginating symbolic processes discover a density.