

Identity And Mode Of Existence Of Aesthetic Quality

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Abstract

In this paper I try to answer the following question: What is the mode of existence of aesthetic quality? When we judge or evaluate an art work aesthetically, that is, when we attribute to it terms like "good", "sad", "elegant", or "graceful" we mean that these and similar terms refer to the art work, that the art work has, in the sense of "posses" or "own", these qualities. The question which I spotlight in my discussion is: What does it mean for an art work to have or posses an aesthetic quality, or what does it mean for an aesthetic quality to "belong" to an art work? The focus of attention in this question is not merely on the **locus** of aesthetic quality but also on **how** it is related to the art work. But how can we proceed in our analysis of this question unless we try to consider the following question: What is the texture of aesthetic quality?

In the first part of my discussion I argue that aesthetic quality has two modes of existence: potential and actual. In so far as it belongs to the art work, aesthetic quality exists as a potentiality awaiting realization, and in so far as it belongs to an experience in which it becomes actual its mode of existence is that of a **noetic** feeling. But terms like "sad", "joyful", "dreadful" are psychological terms. What does it mean to apply such terms to art works which are non-sentient entities? In the second part of the paper I argue that it is reasonable for aesthetic terms to retain their normal meanings in principle when applied to works of art.

Most, if not all, aestheticians, artists, and art critics would, I think, agree that the principle of artistic distinction -- viz., the factor or aspect which makes an object or an event a work of art -- is possession of aesthetic quality (or value); that is, an object is or can be considered art in so far as it possesses aesthetic qualities. These qualities are expressed in the significant form which constitutes the very being of the object as art, or as an aesthetic object. We usually seek these qualities mainly because perceiving them provides a special kind of satisfaction. The basis of this satisfaction is the intuition, or experience, of the qualities which are somehow pregnant in the given aesthetic object. When I read a novel aesthetically, for example, I do not read it merely as a narrative or with the intention of learning something about a historical event or the nature of human beings; my interest in the novel is not, in other words, psychological, cognitive, or simply to kill time, although a novel may achieve these ends. As a work of art, I read the novel -- say Tolstoy's **Anna Karanina** -- as a human world pregnant with action, conflict, drama, insight, tragedy, charm, elation, exaltation, frustration, dismay, hope, a world in which I am raised from the level of fact, concept, and sensation to the level of feeling, mood, and noetic intuition in which sensation, concept, and fact are transformed into a living image, the image of the world potential in the novel as an aesthetic object, i.e., as a complex of aesthetic qualities. And when I perceive a painting -- e.g., Vermeer's **Kitchen Maid** -- I do not see merely the figure of a certain woman pouring milk or performing an ordinary daily chore; what I live up to when I focus my aesthetic attention on the given canvas is a world of light and color, of time, space, and motion; I live up to a world which emanates with definite human qualities like hope, determination, dignity, purity and faith masterfully adorned with grace, peace, dynamism, with a unique kind of beauty! "A work of art (in the broad sense)," writes Beardsley, "is any perceptual or intentional object that is deliberately regarded from the aesthetic point of view." (Beardsley, 1978:9) Here we should ask: how does one perceive an object from an aesthetic point of view? "To adopt the aesthetic point of view with regard to X," he continues, "is to take an interest in whatever value X may possess." (Beardsley, 1978:9) Aesthetic perception is essentially the perception of the qualities which are present or potential in the art work.

In exploring the nature of this activity philosophers have mostly emphasized: (1) the nature of aesthetic quality (or value); (2) what it means to perceive an art work; (3) the logical or artistic conditions under which it is possible for one to perceive an aesthetic quality. Yet this emphasis is, to my mind, inadequate, if not one-sided -- why? Because they have not, broadly speaking, sought to explicate (1) the essential

texture and mode of being of aesthetic quality and (2) the content of the perceptive process, viz., the aesthetic experience which is the very end of aesthetic perception in the first place. We can in this respect ask: what is the fabric of aesthetic quality and what sort of reality does it have? We generally say that an art work 'expresses' or 'possesses' aesthetic qualities; but these expressions are, if we examine them carefully, both vague and metaphorical, for we can and should ask: how does an art work express or possess an aesthetic quality? People would understand me when I say, "I possess a watch (which may happen to be around my wrist) or a house (which has a certain location)." In such cases the object possessed can be (1) identified and (2) located. Hence it can be described, at least in principle, and we can assert or deny its existence. But what do we exactly mean when we say an art work possesses or expresses a quality? It is, I think, the task of aestheticians to focus their philosophical eye on the texture and being of 'aesthetic quality'.

Moreover, what does the concept 'aesthetic perception' entail? In raising this question I do not at all intend to open up the whole question of aesthetic perception as such about which a large number of treatises have been written -- no, I only wish to direct the attention of my reader to the **structure** of the event called 'aesthetic perception', viz., (1) an object perceived (2) an activity, or process, of perceiving this object, and (3) the content or outcome of this activity. We do not usually seek or crave art works merely in order to 'perceive' them but in order to enjoy them, because they produce in us a certain satisfaction, or because they affect us in a certain way. What is the nature of this content or outcome? Next, since not all art works produce the same enjoyment or satisfaction (in quality and quantity) we judge them as good or bad, and we assess the features which distinguish them as good or desirable. Now the question which we cannot logically escape is: can we form an adequate conception of the activity of aesthetic perception unless we consider its content or outcome? Can we judge the goodness, beauty, or aesthetic impact of an art work except from the standpoint of the kind of perception, i.e., experience, which we have of the work? For, can we make any judgment about the work if we do not first perceive it? Accordingly, is the judgment not in some way dependent for its nature and validity on the activity of perceiving it? It is, I think, loyalty to this demand which prompted C. Bell to say in the opening pages of his book, **Art**: 'the starting-point of all systems of aesthetics must be the personal experience of a peculiar emotion. The objects which provoke this emotion we call works of art.'¹.

I may be told that ordinary people, art critics, and aestheticians do

evaluate and judge art works constantly, and almost all the time, without any reference to **their** perception or experience of these works. Yes, but I can respond: (1) they differ among themselves in these judgments and evaluations -- why? Could it be because they perceive, i.e., experience, them in a peculiar way? (2) It does not necessarily follow that if they do not explicitly or implicitly refer to them, they do not make their judgments and evaluations from the standpoint of the way they experience them! We do not expect from an art critic a genetic explanation of his aesthetic judgment or evaluation, viz., how and what he felt when he perceived an art work; as a critic, his main task is to deliver the right judgment, if this is in any way possible. But we as philosophers should enquire into the ground and conditions under which an art work is experienced properly or adequately. We should, in other words, ask: what is the structure of the experience which is occasioned by the perception of an art work? What does it mean for an art work to be perceived aesthetically? An answer to this and the preceding question is crucially important for two reasons: (1) it explains the nature and dynamics of the aesthetic process in its two-fold pole: aesthetic value and aesthetic experience; (2) it provides a clear basis for aesthetic education; for how can we construct any principles of aesthetic education unless we come to grips with the essence and reality of the aesthetic as such as it is embodied in the art work, on the one hand, and as it is actualized in the experience of the percipient, on the other hand?

In this paper I shall focus my attention on one important aspect of the relationship between aesthetic quality and aesthetic experience, viz., what is the mode of being of aesthetic quality (a) in so far as it belongs to the art work and (b) in so far as it belongs to the aesthetic experience in which it becomes actual? And the proposition which I plan to elucidate is: in so far as it belongs to the art work aesthetic quality exists as a **potentiality** awaiting realization, and in so far as it belongs to an experience in which it becomes actual its mode of existence is that of a **noetic feeling**.

I

When we say an art work embodies and expresses aesthetic qualities we mean, at least implicitly, that the work somehow 'has', 'possesses', or 'contains' the qualities; and when we evaluate or judge the work aesthetically, that is, when we attribute to it terms like 'good', 'sad', 'elegant', or 'graceful' we mean that these and similar terms refer to the art work, that the work has, in the sense of 'possess' or 'own', these qualities. Now the question which I wish to consider is: what does it mean for an art

work to have an aesthetic quality, or what does it mean for an aesthetic quality to 'belong' to an art work? The focus of attention in this question is not merely on the **locus** of aesthetic quality but also on **how** it is related to the art work. We should consider therefore the texture of aesthetic quality. When we attribute 'aesthetic quality' to an object we usually mean that the quality exists, or is 'real', in some way, and in order for it to exist, it should have structure, or identity. Thus when we try to explore the type of relation which holds between an aesthetic quality and an art work should be clear about the nature of the quality whose mode of existence we are seeking.

Our task in this endeavor becomes more difficult especially when we recognize that aesthetic quality is not simply given as a ready made reality. Most aestheticians like Dufrenne, Beardsley, Pepper, Sibley, Osborne, Lewis, and Ingarden, to mention just a few distinguished names, would aver that it 'emerges' (or is revealed) in the process of aesthetic perception. "Aesthetic qualities, it is generally agreed," writes Osborne in a recent study, "belong to the wider class of 'emergent' properties, which means that aesthetic qualities cannot be derived or deduced from non-aesthetic qualities and their interrelations by the application of a system of rules although any change in the relevant non-aesthetic qualities of a construct will effect a change, perhaps disproportionately, in its aesthetic qualities" (Osborne, 1977). This view is articulated in different words by Ingarden in **The Literary Work of Art**. Here, after he stresses that aesthetic qualities are emergent (p. 289), he asserts:

there are simple 'derived' qualities (essences) as, for example, the sublime, the tragic, the dreadful, the shocking, the inexplicable, the demonic, the holy, the sinful, the sorrowful, the indescribable brightness of good fortune, as well as the grotesque, the charming, the light, the peaceful, etc. These qualities are not 'properties' of objects in the usual sense of the term. nor are they in general, 'features' of some psychic state, but instead they are usually revealed, in complex and often very disparate situations or events (Ingarden, 1973: 290 - 91).

In both of these statements we are clearly told that an aesthetic quality (1) is not given to sense perception prior to the event of aesthetic perception; (2) it is not simply a part of the perceived art work as a real object, i.e., as an ordinary object of the natural or imaginary world; (3) it is 'derived' from the properties or features which constitute the natural being of the art work, or, put differently, it depends for its existence on these features or properties; (4) it emerges under certain conditions in the process of aesthetic perception. It should be clear from this account that aesthetic quality does not **literally**, or ontologically, exist prior to its

emergence; its mode of existence before this event is, as I shall presently explain, that of potentiality².

Now what does it mean to say that aesthetic quality 'emerges' in aesthetic perception? It means, to begin with, that it 'comes into being', and that which comes into being appears and becomes available for perception or experience. This meaning of the term is clearly expressed in Webster's **New Collegiate Dictionary**: "to rise from or as if from an enveloping fluid; come out into view; to become manifest; to come into being through evolution." Emergence is an event in which something occupies a definite place within the imaginary or physical realm of reality; as such this something acquires the character of 'fact'. Second, when we say aesthetic quality 'emerges' in aesthetic perception we mean it originates in this event, that is, it derives its being, structure, or nature from this event, from the material which constitutes the substance of this event. This, it seems to me, explains why some philosophers have maintained that aesthetic qualities are dependent on non-aesthetic ones. Frank Sibley, for example, writes: "aesthetic qualities are dependent upon non-aesthetic ones for their existence. They would no more occur in isolation than there could be facial resemblances without features or grins without faces; the converse is not true" (Sibley, 1965: 139). Third, when we say that an aesthetic quality 'emerges' we do not mean that it comes into being suddenly, **ex nihilo**, but that it evolves or acquires its being gradually out of pre-existing data. Emergence is a process of forming, building; thus what emerges is a task. It requires a thoughtful and deliberate effort.

But if aesthetic quality emerges in aesthetic perception, this certainly means it does not exist prior to or outside the domain of this perception. We should accordingly ask: what kind, or mode, of being does it have before it emerges? As I have just indicated, before it emerges it does not have ontological, or more accurately actual, existence; it would therefore be most appropriate to say that before this event it exists potentially. And when I say it exists potentially I mean it "exists in possibility: capable of development into actuality," (WNCD). Here we should distinguish between two senses of 'potentiality', general and particular. (A) 'General potentiality' refers to the large, yet consistent, number of possibilities, which may be actualized with reference to a thing or event. For example, a rock can serve a number of functions. It can be a statue, a building block, a weapon, a decorative object, a source of energy, an object of worship, etc. In this sense, an object is a potentiality that can be developed into several possible actualities. These actualities are not mutually exclusive of each other. The object -- in the present case, the rock -- can become a number of things; it is, in other words, a bundle of potentialities, and the

richness of this bundle depends on the material conditions in which it exists and the creative vision which conceives and determines what is possible. (B) 'Particular potentiality' refers to the possibilities inherent in a finally formed or conditioned object or event. These possibilities depend on what actually exists; they are a function of this actual existence. But what actually exists is a form, a web of relatedness. This is why we can say that these properties determine the content and direction of the possibilities which are potential in the object.

The kind of potentiality which is peculiar to aesthetic quality is 'particular potentiality'. Thus when we say an aesthetic quality is potential we should mean it depends for its nature and existence on the data which constitute the art work as a **significant form**. This is why I characterized it as a function of this form; that is, 'this', or a certain form, determines, in virtue of what it is, the sort of quality, or qualities, which may emerge in the process of aesthetic perception; or, put differently, the form has the express function of producing that potentiality: it is created for that purpose.

Next, when we say 'aesthetic quality' is a potentiality we mean it exists, i.e., inheres, in the art work as a power. This is tantamount to saying that the work can affect the percipient in a certain way; indeed this is what it means for something to be potential. The term comes from the Latin, **potent, potens**, i.e. power. This concept was pioneered, so far as I know, by J. Locke and ever since recognized by the majority of philosophers. In his **An Essay Concerning Human Understanding**, Locke writes: "whatsoever the mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding, that I call **idea**: and the power to produce any idea in our mind, I call **quality** of the subject wherein that power is" (Locke, 1959: 169). Thus, broadly speaking, being a quality is essentially the ability to produce in someone (or something) a specific impact--an impression, a sensation, or an affect of some kind. But unlike given qualities, viz., secondary and primary qualities, aesthetic qualities are, as I have just indicated, emergent; they do not directly belong to an object the way primary and secondary qualities do; hence the relationship between an aesthetic quality as a potentiality and its actuality is not logical nor predetermined. Aesthetic quality is the outcome of the dynamical interrelatedness of the formal properties which constitute the art work as a significant form; and it would not emerge unless one enlivens this dynamical aspect of the work in the activity of aesthetic perception.

We should now ask: what is meant by saying that the relationship

between aesthetic quality qua potentiality and its actuality is not logical? What is meant is that the texture and content of the quality is not concretely and completely predetermined; its "map" of being is not fully delineated. What is given in it as a potentiality is only a plan--a schema, that can guide the direction and substance of its realization. This plan, which is its fundamental structure, is relatively stable, mainly because it is, as I stated earlier, a function of a relatively stable form. But although relatively stable, i.e., structured in principle, the depth, richness, and extent of its actualization depend upon the aesthetic sophistication of the percipient, upon his knowledge, experience, and cultural refinement. I may, for example, listen to **Valse Triste** by Sibelius and say afterwards: "This piece of music is sad." In making this judgment I attribute the quality of sadness to the music. The element of sadness itself is not given to my perception the way the sounds which I hear when I listen to the piece are given; but when I pay special attention, and this under special perceptual conditions, to the way these sounds are interrelated I cannot but intuit the quality of sadness as belonging to the music. This quality emerges, so to speak, in the activity of listening to the music aesthetically. Now anyone who (1) appreciates western music at least to some extent, (2) knows what it means to be sad, and (3) is capable of some aesthetic refinement cannot but perceive the quality of sadness in **Valse Triste**. It would, I think, be outrageous if he were to say that it is jolly or romantic, primarily because the quality of sadness is the actualization of a fundamental structure which inheres in the music as a unique complex of interrelated sounds. But the depth, richness, and extent of the sadness which I perceive in the music depends to a high degree on my skill in perception, knowledge of human life in general, familiarity with this kind of music, mental habits, beliefs, and perhaps other factors. What an art critic experiences when he reads **Anna Karenina** may be richer than what a young person experiences when he reads the same novel; and what I experience when I read it as an older man is certainly richer than what I experience when I read it as a young man. This perhaps explains why art critics, aestheticians, and ordinary people may agree in general on the aesthetic identity and thrust of art works but disagree on their aesthetic impact and values, for the qualities which make up the aesthetic being of these works are not given as ready made realities but as potentialities awaiting actualization on the hands of creative imagination.

II

An important, yet curious, consequence follows from the preceding discussion: aesthetic quality has two modes of existence, potential and actual. As potential, it belongs to the art work, and as such it is the capacity of the work to actualize a certain content in the process of

aesthetic perception (Cf. Beardsley). This content is the actuality of the aesthetic quality. As actual, however, it does not, strictly speaking, exist or inhere in the art work, for it is the outcome of a creative effort by the percipient. Indeed it comes to life and acquires its real structure in the very activity of perceiving the art work as an aesthetic object. Since this activity is a process which takes place in time, and since it takes place in the consciousness of the percipient, it necessarily has the character of a mental event (Cf. Pepper, Beardsley, Dewey).

But if it has the character of a mental event, a critic like Roger Scruton might object, what does it mean to attribute, as we usually do, aesthetic qualities to art works? For we do say of a piece of music, e.g., **Valse Triste**, that it is sad. In making a statement of this sort we mean to assert that the quality of sadness is **in** the music--it is a quality **of** the music and not merely a feeling evoked or aroused arbitrarily in the percipient. This assertion is certainly made on phenomenological grounds; that is, when one listens to **Valse Triste** carefully he intuits sadness as belonging to the piece. But if we hold, Scruton's goes on, that the sadness is in the music we would fall prey to confusion in the use of the term 'sad'--how? in presenting Scruton's argument against the theory of emergent qualities I shall begin with a statement of the dilemma which he poses for us: "the principal objection to the idea of an aesthetic property was this: either terms denoting aesthetic properties have the same meaning as they have when used in their normal contexts, in which case, how can we distinguish aesthetic properties as a separate class? or else, they have a different meaning, in which case, what is the point of naming aesthetic properties as we do?" (Scruton, 1974:44) How are we to understand this objection? A term like 'sad' is a psychological term; to understand it is "to know how to apply it to people in order to describe their emotional state. The criteria for the application of the term 'sad' concern the gestures, expressions and utterances of people on the basis of which I describe them as sad, and to grasp the concept is to know how to apply it on the basis of these criteria." (Scruton, 1974:38) But when we apply the concept to art works we face a difficulty, for we can ask: on the basis of what criteria do we apply 'sad' to an emergent property? If the criteria are different from those we employ in defining or referring to a feeling of sadness in a human being, and if no new criteria are specified, then we would not know what one means when he says that **Valse Triste** is sad, mainly because as a psychological state sadness cannot literally exist in a piece of music, or any other work of art for that matter. Art works are not the sort of things which have or can have feelings. but if we apply the term 'sad' to art works on the basis of the criteria which we use in applying it to human beings, and this seems to be how critics and ordinary people usually apply the term when they talk about art works, then the question

arises: what does it mean to assert or to attribute sadness to the music? Or, in Scruton's words, how can we distinguish aesthetic qualities as a class from other classes?

The preceding difficulty which Scruton raises is not restricted to affective qualities like 'shocking', 'cheerful', or 'melancholic', but to all types of aesthetic qualities like 'pretty', 'elegant', 'beautiful', or 'sublime', for this latter class of qualities are emergent. No quality is, as C. I. Lewis indicated sometime ago, simply given the way the whiteness of the sheet of paper on which I am now writing is simply given. I may, for example, observe and assert the existence of the given color which dominates in its various shades Vermeer's **Kitchen Maid**; in making this assertion I expect that others who observe the same object will agree with me that this green color and its various shades do actually cover the said canvas. My statement in this case is a statement of fact; it is a descriptive statement. But in order for me to characterize this green color as 'gentle' I must perceive it in a special way; I must perceive it in its relatedness to the complex of colors and lines which cooperate in presenting the painting as a particular representation. Here the quality of gentleness emerges in the activity of perceiving this representation as a dynamic web of interrelations. It emerges, in other words, when I perceive it as a part of a whole. The other parts which make up the whole create the conditions for the emergence of gentleness as a quality which I intuit 'in' the color when I perceive it aesthetically. Every line, every shade of color, and every detail which belongs to the composition are not painted on the canvas simply to make a certain representation that might have struck the artist's fancy or to please a certain customer--no; all those elements are constructed as a whole in order to provide the conditions for the emergence of definite aesthetic qualities. Even the sensual pleasure which is occasioned by the perception of the green color is made possible by the sort of role it plays in the life of the painting as a whole. This whole contrives to squeeze, so to say, that aspect of the green color and make it manifest for intuition and enjoyment in the activity of aesthetic perception. We can even say that the painting as a whole exists for the express purpose of creating the right conditions for the emergence of the aesthetic qualities which are potential in the dynamic inter-dependence of the details which make up the whole. This point was expressed with admirable clarity by Sartre in a remark he made about Matisse's use of red colors:

some reds of Matisse, for instance, produce a sensuous enjoyment in those who see them. But we must understand that this sensuous enjoyment, if thought of in isolation--for instance, if aroused by a color in nature--has nothing of the aesthetic. It is purely and simply a pleasure of sense. But when the red of the

painting is grasped, it is grasped, in spite of everything, as a part of an unreal whole and it is in this whole that it is beautiful. For instance, it is the red of a rug by a table. There is, in fact, no such thing as pure color. Even if the artist is concerned solely with the sensory relationships between forms and colors, he chooses for that very reason a rug in order to increase the sensory value of the red.³

III

The crux of the objection which Scruton raises against the idea of emergent qualities is that if we apply affective terms like 'sad' to art works we shall run into a paradoxical difficulty, for, as we saw, we usually apply such terms to human beings. But art works are not sentient beings; they cannot feel sad, cheerful, or elated. It would, consequently, be a mistake to apply such terms to them. But we usually do, and Scruton insists that "terms used in aesthetic description must have their normal meanings. (Scruton, 1974:44) But if they do we shall not be able to distinguish aesthetic qualities as a separate class. This whole line of reasoning is erroneous-- why? Because it is based on a mistaken conception of the identity and ontological status of 'aesthetic quality'. For if we assume, as Scruton does, that aesthetic quality belongs to the art work the way whiteness belongs to the paper on which I am now writing, i.e., if we assume that it is sensuous or perceptual, and so non-sentient, it would certainly be senseless to apply an affective term like 'sad' to art works. But the question which merits special emphasis, and which Scruton unfortunately neglected to raise, is; what is the texture and ontological status of aesthetic quality? Consider, for example, the statement: "**Valse Triste** is a sad piece of music." Here 'sad' qualifies the music as an event which takes place, i.e., exists, objectively in time. The statement asserts sadness **of** the music. But this quality **emerges** in the process of aesthetic perception. And when we say it emerges we mean, as we saw, it comes into being during that process. We also mean it becomes actual and acquires its affective identity or being on the hands of the creative imagination which perceives it, and outside this process it does not exist as actual and therefore as affective but, as I argued earlier, as potential. Thus the statement "**Valse Triste** is sad" should not be understood to mean that the musical pieces possesses, **qua** physical object or event, the feeling of sadness or that it feels this sadness the way human beings feel sad. What it should rather mean is: '**Valse Triste**' has the capacity, i.e., potentiality, to actualize a musical experience which has the affective character of sadness. That is, under certain perceptual conditions the complex of sounds usually called **Valse Triste**' can be experienced as

sad. **In this sort of event** when we assert sadness of the music we do literally mean that the affective character of sadness is 'part and parcel' of the music; we mean, in other words, that when we listen to the music we perceive sadness as an aspect or a quality of it the way we experience yellowness as a quality of a pumpkin.

But my critic might ask: first, how can we resolve the paradox that a physical object or event can possess an affective quality like sadness? Or, what do we exactly mean when we say that we experience sadness in, or as belonging to, the music? Second, when we make this sort of assertion, does 'sad' have the same meaning which we usually intend when we apply the term to human beings?

First, we can experience sadness in the music mainly because the music itself as an organization of sounds loses its character as a physical event and acquires a new mental or spiritual identity during the process of aesthetic perception. So the real problem which we are now facing is not the need to explain how an affective quality may join or belong to a physical thing but how that which is physical may, under certain conditions, acquire a new identity. the point which we should underscore is that, as a given physical object, the art work is, as Hegel said, a 'dead' something, i.e., aesthetic-less. But in the event of experience it becomes a spiritual reality; the texture of its being becomes similar to the texture of the mind which perceives it. Suppose I am now listening to **Valse Triste** in a concert hall--what actually happens in this event? In order for this event to take place certain conditions should be fulfilled. I should, for example, have some taste in this sort of music, focus the totality of my attention on the sounds which I hear, dismiss any idea or emotion or interest which may interfere with the activity of attending to the music--I should, in other words, assume an aesthetic attitude. Now let us suppose that I have fulfilled all these and similar conditions--what exactly happens in my perception of **Valse Triste**? Do I listen to the music with my 'ear' or with my 'mind'? Of course, with my mind: it is the 'I', not the 'ear', which listens. When the music begins I hear a stream of sounds rushing into my mind through my ear. These sounds which come from the region of the orchestra, and which I recognize and identify by a special intuition, become real for me **in so far as I hear** them, and what I hear takes place in my mind. I do not here wish to stress the validity of the idealistic dictum: "**esse is percipi**," though this dictum is powerfully valid, with regards to the virtual domain of being at least. My concern is merely to consider what actually happens when I listen to the music. In this happening any meaningful talk about the music is done from the standpoint of what I **actually** hear. I cannot, e.g., talk about **Valse Triste** if I have not heard it,

otherwise the talk would be done on the basis of hearsay, or borrowed description in some way. But if I recognize, and know, the music in perceiving it, i.e., during the activity of perception, then, it would seem to me, any talk or reference to the music should be made on the basis of what happens in this sort of perception. This activity is a kind of 'perceptual field'; it is the ground not only of our description of the music but also of our evaluation or judgment of it.

But we should here ask: how does the music appear in this perceptual field? The source of the sound is certainly external to the mind; but the music as an organization of sounds exists in my mind; that is, what I hear coming from the outside is, as Locke has argued, **reproduced** in my mind as an impression or percept (Cf. Kant, Hegel, Whitehead). The sounds which I hear come to life **as music** in my mind. These sounds, which stream into my perceiving consciousness, do not simply evoke or arouse a certain impression -- no, it, **itself, is organized** in and by mind in a certain way. The point which deserves a special mention here is that the music and its objective properties which I experience in the process of aesthetic perception is an integral part of my experience of **Valse Triste**. I stress this point only to dismiss the possible objection that the view I am elucidating is essentially subjectivistic. The structure and content of my aesthetic experience of **Valse Triste** are determined by the structure and content of the music which I hear. Or, put differently, my experience of the musical piece includes (1) the objective reality of the music and (2) the subjective content which this reality may arouse in my mind: viz., emotions, feelings, images, sensations, or other states of mind. These two elements exist during the process of aesthetic perception as an organic unity; we may distinguish them for the sake of analysis but it is hard to extricate them from each other in a given event or aesthetic experience. This account of 'aesthetic experience' was recently defended by M. Beardsley in "Aesthetic Experience Regained." Here he writes:

the structure of aesthetic experience, then, might be sketched in the following way. As someone listens to a piece of music, say or watches a motion picture, he attends to various features of a phenomenally objective field: to sounds, pictures, etc. At the same time he is aware of various phenomenally subjective events: his expectations are aroused and he feels satisfactions when they are fulfilled, or he has sympathy-like or anger-like emotions toward the events that occur in the film. We can describe the phenomenally objective qualities and forms: these are properties of the work of art that appear in the experience. We can describe the phenomenally subjective feelings and emotions: they may be said to be 'evoked by' or to be 'responses

to' the work of art, and in this special sense these affects can be said to be caused by the objective features. The experience, as such, consists of both objective and affective elements, and, indeed, of all the elements of awareness that occur in the perceiver during the time of exposure to the work of art, except those elements that are unconnected with that work of art (e.g., traffic noises or sudden thoughts of unpaid bills) (Beardsley, 1979: 459-60).

It is a rather long statement, but I quote it not merely to shed some light on what I have been saying but also to emphasize the following important point.

A statement like "**Valse Triste** is sad" is equivocal. We may, first, mean to apply it in general to a given score or recording. Thus I can say to a friend during a visit: "would you like to hear Sibelius's **Valse Triste**? I have a good recording of it." "No," he might respond; "this piece is sad. I am not in a mood to listen to sad music." What are we talking about in this short interchange. When I tell my friend I have **Valse Triste**, and when he refers to it as sad, do I mean by this expression that I actually--at least that very moment--'have' the music? Of course not! What I mean is that I have a record (or a tape) which may create under certain conditions a stream of sounds which has, among other things, the quality of sadness. Thus my invitation to him to listen to **Valse Triste** is a statement of promise, of expectation. I am in effect saying to him: **when** you hear this record, say in a few moments, you will have an experience of sad music. This piece is capable of occasioning an experience with a quality of sadness in it. Similarly when my friend says that **Valse Triste** is sad he means it is the sort of music which occasions a sad experience or that it is potentially sad. Accordingly in this interchange when we attribute sadness to the music, i.e., when we say "**Valse Triste**," the statement does not, and should not, refer to an actual event, or fact, which possesses the affective quality of sadness. Indeed, in ordinary parlance this is not what we mean when we describe art works in general as sad, cheerful, or tragic. What we actually mean is that these works are **capable** of occasioning experiences which have these and similar qualities.

This last point leads me to the second meaning of "**Valse Triste** is sad," namely, the quality of sadness "belongs" to the music; we phenomenologically experience sadness **in** the music. But how does this quality exist 'in' the music? We raise this question for, as we saw, as an objectively given fact the music is aesthetic-less. Thus we ask again: when and under what conditions do we experience the quality of sadness

'in' the music? We do so during and evening of listening to the piece. In this event I perceive the sadness in the music and, as I argued earlier, outside this event its mode of existence is only potential. Let us now assume that I have succeeded in convincing my friend to listen to my recording of **Valse Triste**, and let us suppose we actually proceed in listening to it.

According to the preceding line of reasoning, I should be able to say that in this event, i.e., during the activity of listening, I experience the quality of sadness **in** the music. Now what does it mean to say I experience this quality in the music? We should insist, to begin with, that this quality is not given as a ready-made aspect or reality; that is, it does not jump into my ear the moment I give my attention to the stream of sounds which emanate from the record player. In order for me to perceive it I should listen to these sounds in a special way. These sounds are organized in a special manner. I can listen to them passively or indifferently; if I do this I shall not be able to perceive them as sad: on the contrary, they may annoy me and I may consider them as an imposition on what engages my attention at that moment. But if I attend to them with an aesthetic attitude, that is, if I pay attention to them as a special or significant organization of sounds, if I know what it means to perceive this sort of form, I recognize that apprehending them for what they are is no simple task but requires a creative effort. In exercising this effort I am able to penetrate their being as mere sounds to what is potential in them. I cannot here explain how this happens, but let us grant it happens, and it does usually happen. In this apprehending posture I am able to actualize not only the aesthetic qualities which are pregnant in the sounds **qua** sounds but also other types of qualities: **emergent qualities**. I say 'actualize' mainly because I would like to emphasize that the emergence of these qualities, of which sadness is one, takes place as a result of a creative act of imagination. That is, such qualities do not simply happen or come into being. Their emergence is teleological; it is the result of a sympathetic and deliberate act of imagination. Suppose, for example, I never heard of **Valse Triste**, and suppose you ask me to listen to it for the first time, and suppose, moreover, that I could not intuit its quality of sadness, yet you know it is sad--what do you do to make me **feel** its sadness? Here you give me a lesson in how to perceive it; you teach me how to succeed in making the quality of sadness emerge in my perception of the music, that is, creating it. But in order for this emergence to come about two factors are needed: (1) the percipient and (2) the music. It is the result of the interaction between the listener and the music. The quality of sadness is 'made to emerge' out of the "sonorous image" which I perceive when I listen to the music. It is, as I argued earlier, a function of the unique interrelatedness of these sounds. This is why it cannot exist apart from the sounds which

make up the substance of the music, and this is why we can safely say it belongs to and consequently exists in the music. And the use of 'belong to' or 'in' in this context is not metaphorical but ontological, for the being of the quality of sadness does not only depend on the being of the sounds which I hear, it is also determined in its richness, depth, and identity on them. This is why when the music comes to an end the quality ceases to exist. But from the fact that the quality ceases to exist when the music comes to an end it does not necessarily follow that we cannot characterize **Valse Triste in general**, as sad. We are justified in so characterizing it because this passage of sounds is always capable of realizing the quality of sadness; and because it has (in the sense of 'possess') this capability we can say 'sadness' is potential in it. We rely on the same logic when we predicate moral qualities of human beings. We say, e.g., "Peter is just," and we usually mean that Peter is the sort of person who acts justly when he is in a situation which demands from him a just course of action. This means when he is not acting justly he is not actually just; but he perhaps possesses the disposition of acting justly. (His character is such that he always acts justly when he faces a circumstance which calls for just action. And because he is such a character we normally say, "Peter is a just man," i.e., he is a potentially just man.)

We can at this point of our discussion ask: what is the stuff, or fabric, of the emergent quality of sadness? An analysis of this question requires, I think, an independent study, but I shall in this context make the following remark only to shed as much light as possible on the relationship between an emergent quality like sadness and the art work to which it belongs. In so far as it is a potentiality, sadness **belongs** to the art work as a natural event or object. I say 'belongs' mainly because it permanently **inheres** in the art work as **a capacity** that can be actualized in the process of aesthetic perception. But in so far as it is an actuality sadness is an integral element of the aesthetic experience which one undergoes during an event of aesthetic perception; as such it is affective in character. And when I say 'affective' I do not mean it is a datum or an item which exists in and by itself; what I mean is that it is a quality of the experience which one has when one listens to the music. But this experience is a mental event. Thus any quality which we may attribute to this event should be mental or affective in character. Accordingly the medium in which the quality of sadness becomes actual is **feeling**.

When I focus my attention on **Valse Triste**, for example, and respond to the sounds which I hear as music, I am not in this experiential state aware only of the mosaic of sounds which intermingle in a marvellous way, I am also aware of a rich mixture of feelings, moods, and perhaps images; I am

also aware of one dominant feeling which embraces and colors the whole of my experience--a feeling of sadness. During the event of listening I am not aware of this feeling, for I am then one with the music; yet I can later on reflect on it and identify it. Affective feelings do not emerge in the aesthetic experience as discrete items or entities but as moods which dominate the whole experience and give it a unique tone or motif which lifts the mind to a higher cognitive state of being.

IV

Let us now consider the second question which our critic has raised: when we apply 'sad' to works of art, does the term have the same meaning which we usually intend when we apply it to human beings? An adequate answer to this question is crucially important, for if, as Scruton argues, 'sad' has the same meaning when we apply it to art works and to human beings, how can we distinguish aesthetic qualities as a distinct or separate class? And if it has two different meanings, "what is the point of naming aesthetic properties the way we do?" It would seem at first look that this dilemma is formidable and resists a satisfactory solution, but a careful examination of its assumptions will show that it is erroneously formulated.

To explicate my error, I would certainly agree that the dilemma is valid if we assume, as Scruton does, that an emergent quality like sadness is merely a perceptual quality, a property which belongs to the art work the way yellowness belongs to a pumpkin. We usually assume that a perceptual quality is an aspect which (1) belongs to, or inheres in, an object, and (2) is given as a ready made reality. Thus if we treat sadness as a 'perceptual' quality we commit a categorical fallacy, because it is impossible for physical objects to possess or to have about them affective qualities. A physical object is not sentient, therefore it cannot feel sad. But, as I argued in the preceding section, the texture of aesthetic quality consists in its being a feeling which emerges in the process of aesthetic perception. This is why we can reasonably assert that 'sad' need not have two different meanings when applied to (1) human beings and (2) art works, for in both cases the term applies to affective states of affairs.

(A) I can, for example, say, "I feel sad." This statement refers to an actual event in which I intuit, or undergo a feeling of sadness. This sort of feeling is direct, immediate, and usually certain. He who utters the statement, "I feel sad," (1) knows what it means for one to be sad and (2) knows how to use the term 'sad', i.e., what the word means. But I can also say: "Peter is sad." Here Peter's sadness is not an object of direct

perception or intuition. What is given to me for perception when I focus my attention on Peter is only a bodily configuration which I know, on the basis of past experience, to be Peter. His sadness or the sadness which I attribute to him is not simply given as a property of this configuration. So I should ask: how do I know that Peter is sad? I may know he is sad without necessarily feeling his sadness; for on the basis of observing certain facial and behavior aspects I may be able to **infer** that he is sad. Thus if I observe that Peter is languid, serenely quiet and moody, and if I happen to hear him utter a moan, or a sigh I should be able to infer from these features that he must be sad, for we know in general, from past experience, that a person who exhibits these features is usually sad. And when I state under these perceptual conditions that Peter is sad my statement is **merely cognitive**. But I can, moreover, make the statement, "Peter is sad," on the basis of an **empathic intuition**, in which I feel Peter's sadness expressed in his face or in his bodily posture. In this response I do not sympathize, i.e., feel with, but **feel into**, feel, at least to some extent, the very sadness which covers Peter's face, and I am able to do this because his facial expression or the bodily gestures and movements communicate the sadness which he himself feels. Yes, I am unable to feel Peter's sadness if I do not know what it means or to be or to feel sad, that is, if I had not been sad. But this is not the point in question. What is at issue is that it is possible for me, under certain conditions, to penetrate Peter's facial or bodily configuration as an appearance and participate in it or, as Jacques said in **As You Like It**, 'suck' the feeling of sadness the way he (Jacques) could "suck melancholy out of a song as a weasel sucks eggs" (Scruton, 1974:40). I really think that Gestalt psychology has rendered a great service to the theory of aesthetic perception and experience in advancing the concept of empathy (Cf. Lipps, Stein, Arnheim).

(B) Let us now suppose that I am able to participate in Peter's sadness, let us, in other words, suppose that I am able to intuit or configure his state of being sad--do, or can, I feel the depth, and reality of his sadness? Of course not, because the content of sadness which he experiences, or better lives, at the moment is exclusive of his inwardness, but I should be able to feel, at least in principle, the sort, degree, and richness of the sadness which he feels, for, as Hegel repeatedly stressed, appearance reveals the essence of being: the expression of sadness which is embodied in Peter's face reveals to a large extent not merely its reality but also its kind, intensity, and gravity. I stress this point because I am anxious to distinguish my feeling of my own sadness and my feeling of somebody else's. In the first case, my intuition of my sadness is, as I just indicated, immediate; I am able to feel it in its depth, as a whole. But my intuition of another's sadness takes place only partially; yet though partial, it is

nevertheless serious and substantial. The sadness which I feel when I focus my **empathic attention** on the other is real sadness; it is similar in kind to the sadness which I feel when I attend to my own state of being sad. How does this sort of perception take place? I do not need to give here an explanation to this question, though psychologists like Krueger, Stern, Lerch, Werthman, Kohler, Koffka, and other thinkers, have made significant headway in showing how we can feel the psychic state of another person. I underscore the possibility of feeling another's sadness only to spotlight the fact that even though I am unable to feel the sadness of another human being directly, as it is in itself, the way I feel my own psychic states, this feeling is **similar in kind** to the feeling which I have when I feel my state of sadness. Thus when I say "Peter is sad," and when my statement is based on an empathic act of perception, the feeling which I attribute to Peter is a human feeling, not merely because Peter happens to be a human being but especially because the feeling which is embodied or expressed in Peter's facial or bodily features is itself a human feeling. This is why I am able to make the same statement even if Peter chooses **to act sad**. When, for example, I say of a certain actor on stage that he is sad I am indifferent in making this statement to the real identity of the actor; at that moment the actor is given to my aesthetic perception as an appearance. He could be a robot--that does not matter. What matters is that certain bodily or behavioral configurations can reveal certain features which may express a certain quality, e.g., sadness; when this happens I should be able to say: this person, or scene, et., is sad!

Similarly, if I listen to **Valse Triste**, and if I perceive it as sad, here the feeling of sadness which I intuit in the music is not, and should not, be different in kind from the sadness which I feel when I happen to be sad or from the sadness which I feel in others when I perceive them as sad--how? Because the significant form which the artist weaves when he creates his musical piece is capable of expressing the quality of sadness, and it is capable of expressing this quality mainly because, as Langer, Arnheim, and Hospers have argued, the formal properties of the music are similar in kind to the formal properties of man's inner life. Musical form, and indeed artistic form as such, can present some of the dynamical aspects of man's inward world: "there are certain aspects of the so-called 'inner life' -- physical and mental--which have formal properties **similar to** those of music--patterns of motion and rest, of tension and release, of agreement and disagreement, preparation, fulfillment, excitation, sudden change etc.".⁴

But Scruton might still object: how can we distinguish aesthetic items as a class if they have the same meaning which they have when "used in their normal contexts?" I really do not see the force of this objection, for,

as Scruton himself avers, "terms used in aesthetic description must have their normal meanings." We should accordingly ask: in what way does the application of an aesthetic term like 'sad' when applied to a piece of music differ in its meaning when applied to human beings? Is the sadness which one feels in a piece of music identical to the sadness which one feels when he undergoes an experience of sadness? I do not know of any aesthete who would uphold this identity. The sadness which I feel when I listen to **Valse Triste**, is similar **in kind** to the sadness which I feel in ordinary life situations; the former is not 'serious' and I do not take it to heart. It exists and remains with me on the level of consciousness. This is why we can say it is transitory; it lasts as long as the music goes on. In feeling it I experience, and know, what it means for something to be sad. I have an insight, a revelation, of the reality of a kind of sadness in itself, apart from my real life. Thus in giving myself to the music during a given performance of **Valse Triste** I take a holiday from the ordinary course of my normal life. My experience of its sadness is similar to Stendhal's aesthetic perception of a church: though he is not a religious person he cannot stop from becoming a believer for a short period of time when he gives himself to the church as an architectural piece. In this sort of aesthetic experience the ground of my aesthetic judgment, and hence of the application of an aesthetic term, is the sort of feeling which I have when I perceive the art work. The judgment, "**Valse Triste** is sad," is an articulation of the feeling of sadness which I have during the event of listening to the music. The point which merits special emphasis here is that it is reasonable for aesthetic terms like 'sad', 'tragic', 'cheerful', etc., to retain their normal meanings **in principle** when applied to art works.

Notes

1. C. Bell, **Art**, (Capricorn Books, 1958), pp. 16 ff. More recently, F. Sibley writes: "people have to **see** the grace or unity of a work, **hear** the plaintiveness or frenzy in the music, **notice** the gaudiness of a color scheme, **feel** the power of a novel, its mood, or its uncertainty of tone. They may be struck by these qualities at once, or they may come to perceive them only after repeated viewings, hearings, or readings, and with the help of critics, but unless they do perceive them for themselves aesthetic enjoyment, appreciation, and judgement are beyond them. "Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic", **Philosophical Review**. vol. 74, (1965), p. 138.
2. One may certainly ask: If aesthetic quality does not exist prior to an event of aesthetic perception, how do we know that an art work possesses it in the first place? This question raises the issue of the identity of an object as an art work: how do we identify and distinguish an art work from a natural or a commercial object, i.e., non-art work? Here we assume that an object is a work of art in virtue of possessing aesthetic qualities. Usually we learn to identify works of art in the process of cultural

education. In this process we learn that certain symphonies, paintings, operas, buildings, statues, novels, dances, motion pictures, and poems are the sort of objects which occasion a special kind of experience or satisfaction: aesthetic experience, or satisfaction. But identifying an object as an art work does not necessarily mean experiencing it as an aesthetic object: it only means that a certain object is the sort of object which can, under certain conditions, occasion or produce an aesthetic experience or satisfaction. The question which engages our attention at the present deals with the being, with the ontological status of aesthetic quality.

3. Jean-Paul Sartre, **Psychology of Imagination**, Washington Square Press, 1966, p. 248.
4. S. Langer, **Philosophy in a New Key**, Harvard University Press, 1942, p. 46. See also her **Feeling and Form**, New York: Charles Scribner's, 1953, p. 27.

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