

The Other Side of the Frame

Artistic Experience as Felt Framing Fundamental principles of an artistic theory of relativity¹

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Prologue on the theater: Stagework

Please imagine attending a rehearsal of a theatre production: We are sitting back in the last row, observing the preparations being made for the first run-through of a Shakespeare scene. Stage technicians assemble the scenery, actors and actresses are warming up, names are being called out across the stage; someone is practicing some excerpted sentences, and someone else is testing a new position for a monologue. Finally, all the preparations wind down, and the piece begins with the first sentence.

There is nothing exceptional about all this; nearly every initial run-through of a theater production resembles this description. But some days later, we also attend the premiere. There we experience the very same procedure: the stage technicians assembling the scenery, actors and actresses running through positions, names being called out, and excerpts being practiced. The entire spectacle seems just like a rehearsal, and then the piece begins.

Had we not visited the rehearsal, we would probably consider it self-evident that all of this is just acting, and we might not be capable of believing that anyone might actually consider it real. But we did visit the rehearsal, where we experienced the very same situation. At the rehearsal, we thought that the technicians were doing for real what they seemed to be doing; for us, they were preparing a rehearsal, and not rehearsing their preparations.

Wherein lies the distinction? Why did we not ‘understand’ during the rehearsal that the preparations were actually staged? Were the technicians ‘better’ during the rehearsal because it did not occur to us at the time that they were just acting out their work? Or, conversely, were they ‘not convincing enough’, since their actions allowed the possibility for us to ‘misunderstand’ what they were doing, and take it for real? This shows that the properties of things – or, as in this

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case, the behavior of the performers – are occasionally unable to make much of a contribution to how we see them and what we perceive them to be. The fact that we first saw the technicians as a stage crew and later as performers was not an effect of any sort of change in their behavior (as it did not in fact change), but rather of a change to the way in which we perceived them. In this case, the reason underlying the change is a tiny piece of paper in our hands. What changed for us was not any content but the framework – and along with it, our mode of perception.

First Act: From Presence to Representation

Theorists have suggested various designations to describe the difference between our ways of seeing things (the stage technicians in the rehearsal, the stage appearance of the technicians in the premiere and the appearance of the actors as characters in a drama). These are all intended to subdivide the continuum between acting and non-acting to a greater or lesser degree of fine-cut precision.

Making the distinction that the stage technicians and actors in our experiment were at the center of our attention in the rehearsal situation to a greater degree than, for example, in the cafeteria before the rehearsal, provides us with a first possibility in terms of undertaking this subdivision. While in the cafeteria they were just present in a rather pure manner of existence, we could say, the stage lent them a special *presence* within our perception. Nonetheless, for us, the stage technicians (in the rehearsal) simply were what they were, while the actors presented characters. Thus, the actors were present in a symbolic way, as a *representation* of the characters. In contrast, at the premiere, the stage technicians, who also acted for us, acted as themselves – stage technicians – and not as characters. They kind of demonstrated for us what stage technicians tend to do when a theater rehearsal is underway. This gave them a status somewhere between presence and representation; let us call this the mode of *presentation*.

Non-acting				Acting
	(mere) Present	Presence	Presentation	Representation

These modes show a possible subdivision of the continuum between non-playing and playing. Their categories are not sharp, but overlapping, like colours of a continuous spectrum.

Present: This mode of perception describes the actual, pure, ostensibly untainted state of affairs. Things are simply there or they are not. This can encompass subjects, persons, ambience, and processes as well as imaginings and hallu-

cinations. In this mode, it does not strike us that this fleeting momentariness is conveyed by our perception. We perceive everything directly; our perception is simple, self-evident and transparent. We talk about ‘recognizing’ objects – we have a *that-perception*; we see a blue field, and it is a blue field for us. We see a glass of water and may even stretch out our hand to drink from it without thinking anything of it, perhaps without even remembering it afterwards. It is simply a glass of water; that is that, and we cannot say anything more about it.

Presence: If, however, we become aware of the fact that we have the *perception* of a blue field (of, say, the moment when it became for us a blue space, indicative of a specific blue-ness) or of the fact that we have the perception of a glass of water (perhaps because we get the impression that it feels a certain way to perceive this glass of water), then the glass of water or blue field acquire a presence for us. We notice *how* the glass looks, *how* it feels, *how* the water in it tastes and *how* it sounds when we put it back. This is a felt perception, a *how-perception* (a perception that somehow feels), a perceived perception, or, if you like, a perception squared. Many scholars thus pleonastically call this “aesthetic perception.” I would rather like to call this mode of presence the aesthetic *sensing*². This mode of aesthetic sensing is not at all limited to art. On the contrary, aesthetic sensing constantly accompanies us as a part of our perception, although it often flares up only for short moments of time before immediately disappearing again from our awareness.

Presentation: In the presentational mode, we understand things, persons, ambience and processes *as* something. They appear to us to be in a specific relation to us or to our surroundings – for example, as a tableau (a blue wall actually being a painting) or as a function (a door serving as the entryway); as a role (Mr. Hofmeyer being an actor, Mr. Neumayer a stage technician); in relation to something else (a glass of water being *my* glass), in illustrative reproduction (a photo being a photo *of* a glass of water) or in some other referential context (a glass of water being the third from the left and not having been there yet yesterday).

Representation: In the representational mode, objects are no longer just themselves but acquire an additional level as well.³ They become an icon, representing something that does not itself necessarily have to be present. We lend them a meaning that we are able to understand or misunderstand, attribute to them a sense that we can access and develop or interpret them as the expression

2 I propose ‘aesthetic sensing’ as the appropriate correspondent term to ‘ästhetisches Erleben’ instead of the common phrase ‘aesthetic experience’, because the German ‘Erleben’ stresses more the here-and-now liveness in a basic sensuous perception in opposition to the more complicated ‘Erfahrung’ (which also translates as ‘experience’), which should remain reserved for higher (namely artistic) modes of perception – see the explanations later in this article.

3 There are also, of course, non-aesthetic representations. These are distinguished from the aesthetic representations listed here by means of the fact that they are not present for us (which, according to the above-mentioned illustrations, is the same in meaning as the property of being aesthetic) – or, the non-aesthetic icons seem to us to be transparent in terms of their subjects. This also applies for non-aesthetic presentations.

of something or someone else. In this manner, the photo of a half-filled glass of water remind us of optimism, the work of the stage technicians exhibit for us the illusory nature of being, the blue of the blue wall becomes a commentary on Yves Klein's *International Klein Blue*, and the actors become for us Shakespeare characters (Erika Fischer-Lichte calls this their "semiotic corpus", emphasizing that both the presence of an actor and the representation of a character are processes of embodiment that permeate and overlap one another⁴).

	<i>Present</i>	<i>Presence</i>	<i>Presentation</i>	<i>Representation</i>
<i>Things</i>	Here-and-Now Concreteness	Effect Embodiment	Show Relationality	Signify Designation
<i>Persons</i>	Recognize Enter To do	Experience Seem To perform	Perceive Fulfill To play	Access Enact To act
<i>Pictures</i>	Figure	Picture	Image	Icon
<i>Texts</i>	Printed/Written	Seen	Read	(Mis-)Understood
<i>Processes</i>	Ongoing	Event	Gesture	Simulation
<i>Sounds</i>	Sound	Tone	Motive	Signal

Similar descriptions can also be found within other genera, like the examples in the table above. All these categories are modes of perception, and do not describe object-like properties. As we have seen, they can occur occasionally with the very same contents.

4 Fischer-Lichte: *The Transformative Power of Performance*.



Fig. 1: Manuel Klein, A Glass, 2009.

Interlude: Meta, or the Art of Perception

But when objects gain those statuses by our perception, why do we then often distinguish between categories of objects, as if their attributes were their inherent properties? An aesthetics as a theory of perception should be able to describe both the processes of aesthetic sensings in all their subjectivity and the physical properties of object-like matter in our communication on experiences, while expending the least possible amount of theoretical effort. Thus, an aesthetic theory should also be able to describe *how* individual aesthetic sensings can turn through our communication into the properties of objects that seem to be free of perception (while remaining relative), and how, in turn, these properties retroactively affect the experience of perception and thus our construction of reality. In particular, this means that an aesthetic theory should be dynamic and relativistic.

In the past century, the field of physics was faced with a comparably similar problem. Many of the properties supposedly belonging to physical particles were actually dependent on the observer. Physicians and philosophers sought for an explanation, attempting to establish how the stable properties of the macroscopic objects could possibly be based on the observer-dependent state of quantum objects they consist of. The theoretical solution was: Physical systems outside of laboratory conditions are not isolated enough from their surroundings to aggregate in coherent quantum superposition. With increasing volume of their surroundings (in terms of the degrees of freedom), these effects disappear in a process of *decoherence*. The macroscopic objects attain their observer-independent properties via the redundancy of information present in their surroundings. In other words, the ‘weird’ behavior of quantum objects can only take place if the surroundings “know” relatively little about the observed system. Therefore, many of the supposed properties of objects must be interpreted as a product of the measurement process. While this means many of the classic properties are actually relative (dependent on the form of observation), it also allows for a gauge of the ‘objectivity’ of a state, namely, the *redundancy* with which the surrounding of an object register the object’s state.



Fig. 2: Peter Dreher, *The Glass*, 2004.

So where is the analogy to the aesthetic? An aesthetic sensing serving as the mode of perception is subjective and very difficult to access from the outside – often even for the person experiencing it. It cannot be directly observed. Yet often, a categorization is still made afterwards: One picture of a glass is just an illustration of a theoretical essay (like on page NN-fig1); the other is a piece of art, namely a photo of the 2270th painting in the project by Peter Dreher entitled

“Das Glas” (page NN-fig2).⁵ Arthur C. Danto, in his “Transfiguration of the Commonplace”, describes the exhibition of a collection of nine square red panels unable to be distinguished from one another in terms of appearance and materials – some of which Danto treats as artwork, some of which he does not.⁶ This might lead us to ask what would happen if the works were to be switched when they were returned to their original owners? It is worth noting that distinctions like this between red artwork and red nonsense are often made in connection with the greater surroundings, whether that be the art market, a public discourse or the cultural practices of a specific group. Yet all intersubjective categories of aesthetic experiences are grounded first and foremost in the subjective, individual aesthetic sensings of each individual. But the communication about these experiences is a process of interdependencies containing a mostly increasing amount of redundancy, a process in which many individual subjective experiences are involved; while these experiences, when observed in isolation, seem to be independent of objective categories – but all together forming stable systems of intersubjective cultural constructs.

Coming back to our spectrum of playing, we are able to interpret the dimension of the progression: the variable responsible for this process might be *redundancy*.

Second Act: From Perception to Object

Since Nelson Goodman’s formulation “When is art?”⁷, at the latest, we have considered the question as to whether an object is art or not to be just as unanswerable as is the question of whether an electron is actually a particle or a wave; for none of these properties are so much attributable to the objects as they are to be described as *processes* – an artistic method of perception in the one case, and a physical measurement in the other. *Art*, however, is not a property belonging to an object, but a perceptive process mode. For this reason, let us introduce another variant to the description of our continuum between present and representation: concepts that have more to do with the process of perception and emphasize its

5 <http://www.peter-dreher.de/>.

6 According to Danto, one of these panels is a painting described by Søren Kierkegaard of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea; two paintings entitled ‘Red Square’ (one of the Red Square in Moscow, one being just a geometrical red square), one comes from Giorgione, who unfortunately passed away after finishing the first coating of red for a planned painting ‘Conversazione Sacra’; yet another is from Danto’s dilettantish friend J., who entitled his work ‘Untitled’; and one is simply “a thing with color on it.” Danto: *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, pp. 1ff.

7 Goodman: “When Is Art?”

procedural nature, even if they happen to partially describe the same phenomenon. The advantage is that they are less predetermined by expressions that do not keep in mind the relativity of the aesthetic.

Present	Presence	Presentation	Representation
Reception	Resonance	Frame	Refuge
- >	- >	R e d u n d a n c e	- >

Reception

In describing processes of perception, we must take note that there is a certain primacy of the first person perspective. In analyzing aesthetic processes, we have to consider at least three circumstances of perception: its general limitations, its constructivity and the filtering of perceptual processes.

Limitations: All perceptions are naturally limited by the functioning of senses. Our senses provide us with an access to the outside world, and this access is not always congruent with others. For example, the failure of one sense often leads to a change in the other senses (e.g. a sharpened sense of hearing in the darkness).

Constructivity: At first, even if all of the individual senses are in agreement with each other, the subsequent sensory stimuli processing can still differ. Tonal pieces of music, for example, sound different to people with absolute pitch than to people with relative pitch; people with absolute pitch would know by ear if a pianist were to play the Prelude in C major from Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" in, say, B major. Secondly, we construct interrelationships first and foremost in accordance with that to which we are accustomed, even if we know that our impression is not in agreement with 'reality'. This fact is supported by numerous examples of illusions – which are actually not so much illusions as they are very logical constructions reflecting the world in which we live. Take, for example, the many *Trompe l'œil* works, which are able to pass as three-dimensional illusions because we, in our perception of the construction of these objects, do not approach them with the assumption that they are two-dimensional pictures.⁸ A left-footed amateur soccer player has a different sense for a free kick seen on television than does a right-footed one – or than someone who has never even attempted to make a free kick.⁹ Third, quite often, our perception is also very creative; we are able to see things we know are not there, such as optical illusions

8 The illusionist street pictures by Julian Beever appear three-dimensional when viewed at a specific angle: <http://users.skynet.be/J.Beever/>.

9 Lozano, Hard and Tversky: "Putting motor resonance in perspective".

that seem to be moving.¹⁰ These also provide us with a good example of situations in which we suddenly become aware of our own perceptions without necessarily having intended to do so. We do not just see something but also note how this seeing *feels*, even without actively wanting to – we are simultaneously assaulted and surprised by this process of aesthetic sensing.

Filtering: It is our own awareness that defines the content of our perception. Probably the most-cited example exhibiting the power of our abilities to filter is the film of a basketball game by Simons and Chabris (1999);¹¹ typically, at least half of the people who view it do not even notice a person, uninvolved in the action on which the film focuses, strolling through it in a gorilla costume. This phenomenon is called *inattention blindness*. Our own awareness defines the content of our perception (everything else becomes invisible to us, perhaps even despite our knowledge of its existence).

Resonance

Resonance is a simple, yet helpful model for the analysis of perceptual processes: instead of ‘senders’ and ‘receivers’ we can speak of *agent* and *resonator*; the resonance functions with some degree of fuzziness, since the agent and the resonator do not have to have all properties in common for a successful resonance; and the *medium* of transmission enables the modeling of feedback and reflexivity. Resonance provides us with a precise model for perceptual processes, particularly as the agent needs have no intentions regarding the resonance: The resulting oscillation depends on the current conditions of both the agent and the resonator. Lastly, the agent itself can also be a resonator, which is often the case in artistic contexts. The resonance model is able to integrate many phenomena of perception, such as pareidolia (the ability to recognize shapes within amorphous structures), as well as the dependency of recognition on our experiences and expectancies – our resonance oscillations, so to speak.

Redundancy

We are able to make our way around in this world with ease because we learned the ability of categorizing early on in our lives. What is needed in order to form categories is repetition – or, stated more accurately, similar, yet not identical repetition: redundancy. In order to be able to form categories, we require repetition, or more precisely: similar but not identical repetition, redundancy. We tend

10 An example is the Rotating Snake by Akiyoshi Kitaoka: http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/~akitaoka/rot_snake.gif.

11 Simons and Chabris: “Gorillas in Our Midst”; the film can be seen at <http://viscog.beckman.illinois.edu/flashmovie/15.php>.

to order the world in compartments – we are taxophiles and taxomaniacs. In any case, categories do not help us to recognize *exactly* what we are dealing with, but they help us to exclude what cannot be meant. Elements of a category neither have to exhibit all features nor do they have to fulfill minimum requirements. Also which individual elements we consider as prototypical varies greatly.¹² We acquire our categories either depending on others or independently, but in any case they form the structure of our realities. One example of this constructivity of our perception is Diana Deutsch's recording entitled "So Strangely"¹³. In it, a segment of a sentence is continually repeated so often that it mutates into song by means of its sheer repetition. Here the escalation of redundancy creates a jump in our perceptive categories.

Feedback

The way feedback takes place in the resonance model can be used for further modeling of aesthetic processes. Different types of feedback can be distinguished from each other in at least three dimensions: subjective-intersubjective, independent-interdependent and synchronous-diachronous. At first, the kinds of feedback we collectively, intersubjectively create when communicating with each other (verbally and nonverbally) regarding our perceptions are different from the kinds of feedback we individually and subjectively create without sharing it or entering into an exchange of ideas about it with others. In a second dimension, both of these respective kinds of feedback can be formed either independently of others, relying mostly on one's supposed 'own' experiences, or interdependently with others, in the sense that one's construction of reality is based on assumptions regarding the other's experiences.

If I have visited a large enough number of dress rehearsals in the theater, I, too, will no longer be startled by the hustle and bustle on stage shortly before the beginning of a rehearsal, but will just "know" that the stage technicians are readying the stage and the actors are warming up. We like to generalize within this independent, subjective and diachronous categorization from the very beginning.

In an interdependent and synchronous case of subjective feedback, we have the impression that others have a particular perception and would like to join in having it as well (amplification) – and if we do take on that perception, we are reaffirmed by the impression that everyone else actually has the very same perception we ourselves have. Alternately, we might decide to avoid this very consonance of perception (dampening).

The intersubjective exchange of ideas is also a form of feedback that influences current and future perception – and even past perception as well, since our

12 Cf. Goldstein: *Sensation and Perception*.

13 Deutsch: *Phantom Words and other Curiosities*.

memories of experiences change with every new activity. This kind of feedback, too, can take place either independently or interdependently. On the one hand, we tend to conform to the behavior of a group unified in agreement within itself, even if this runs contrary to our own intuition. On the other hand, one's own opinions based on aesthetic experiences often seem to be particularly "out of the question." Thus *you* and *I* could discuss at great length whether or not the preparations of the technicians and the actors were staged and perhaps never reach a conclusion, *I* with my subjective (independent) experience, based on many rehearsals, that the preparations always looked exactly the same, and *you* with your subjective (interdependent) conviction that everyone else had watched the preparations as if they had belonged to the whole.

Framing

Objects, processes and persons do not appear isolated to us but are always found within surroundings; only in contrast to those surroundings are they accessible to us as objects, processes or persons. Even if we do not know exactly what (or who) we are dealing with, we often know to a large extent what we are *not* dealing with. We might not know exactly whether the liquid in a glass is water, but since we do know it has no color, it must not be orange juice. We might not know exactly awaits us within the framework of a Shakespeare performance, but we assume with a fairly large degree of certainty that no one will be continuing to build the stage props or working out their lines. If our conviction, however, proves incorrect, we feel slightly affronted and react defensively (perhaps refusing to drink colorless lemonade with orange flavoring or demanding our money back because of the unfinished staging).

Between the physical reality of an object (its irreducible corporeal presence, its resonant corpus) and its external boundaries (the convictions and opinions we hold about it) there is room, sometimes more, sometimes less, for various transformations and superimpositions (literally stated, room for play). That means these boundaries have an internal and external surface area, and between them is a dimension that is sometimes infinitesimal and sometimes voluminous. We interpret the things *to be* something when they present themselves to us *as* that something. Frameworks are often decisive factors in artistic work, and thus, they often provide a vital tool in the creation process.

There are many reasons to define the artistic (rather than the purely aesthetic) mode of perception on the level of the framing. In the artistic mode of perception, having an artistic experience means simultaneously finding yourself outside of a framework while still being inside that framework. This can be understood as a process that is analogue to the aesthetic sensing (the aesthetic sensing being that of sensing the perception) on the level of the framing. If the framework more

or less continues ‘all the way through us,’ we are capable of feeling that. Erika Fischer-Lichte calls this a *liminal* state, a “betwixt and between.”¹⁴

The artistic way of seeing the world encompasses an awareness that we find ourselves in a reality outside of that which we regard as the content of our perception. A sort of brink exists for us, an edge separating us from ‘the other reality,’ whether that be ‘the assumed reality’ or ‘the invented reality.’ This does not mean that a ‘real’ reality is less constructed than an ‘invented’ one, nor does it mean that we are ‘more’ in the ‘real’ reality than we are in the ‘invented’ one (on the contrary!); it solely means that we know ourselves to stand with one of our feet in one reality while operating within another reality.¹⁵

This distinguishes the artistic mode from other modes of framing, like the framework of a game. In a non-aesthetic game, we typically find ourselves *completely* within the framework of the game – as a soccer player, as a chess player or as a ballroom dancer. If a portion of our awareness, however, is still watching the framework from the outside, it is *precisely this* that forms the artistic part of our perspective; the point at which we see ourselves as being within a second framework is always the point at which we observe ourselves from the outside and thus from an artistic perspective. In an event parallel to the aesthetic sensing, we become aware of how it *feels* to enter the framework.

The artistic way of looking at things is a perceptual mode that accompanies us constantly and everywhere, just as aesthetic sensing does. Because of this, art (as a means of observing reality) cannot be separated from perception, since it is always present at the very least as a possibility – even outside of art-works and art-places. This is the main reason to speak of *artistic experience* instead of art in the sense of works or artifacts.

A further analogy proves interesting at this point. Cognitive scientists are currently discussing some of the networks found in the brain about which comparatively little is known, including a network encompassing what is called the *medial anterior prefrontal cortex* and its projections (a frontal region resting just behind the forehead). The functions brought into play by this part of the cortex include *introspection*, the ‘parking’ of *meta-intentions* and the simultaneous *representation* of multiple identities for the very same content (*decoupling*).¹⁶ The question as to which common roots are behind all these functional effects remains unexplained. However, the finding that the very same network is responsible for each of these capabilities shows that they are closely interrelated. As it is most certain that a large number of cognitive functions are needed for the artistic experience, defining a specific ‘art network’ within the brain may be a very ambitious project, but this example still at least provides evidence strongly affirming the idea that three means of experience and behavior are decisive to the artis-

14 Fischer-Lichte: *The Transformative Power of Performance*.

15 Cf. Klein: “On Relativity”.

16 Cf. Frith and Frith: “Development and Neurophysiology of Mentalizing”; Ramnani and Owen: “Anterior Prefrontal Cortex”.

tic perspective: *reflection* on oneself or on one's individual perspective, purposefully framed observations of the world on a *meta-level*, and the multiplied presence of objects and/or persons that appear simultaneously in various embodiments *inside and outside* a framework. These three capabilities, according to the research, appear to be closely linked to one another not only in terms of the artistic experience but also functionally.

Refuges

Mostly we have multiple frameworks available that interfere with one another. For this reason, we are often especially thankful for stable frameworks that define conventions. These stable frameworks grant us the feeling that we can 'understand' things. This is why we yearn for a hideaway, a safe haven, a place of refuge. Refuges are stable, highly redundant frameworks that have cultivated conventions of representation. In terms of art, concert halls, museums, theaters, movie theaters and books provide such safe havens. Or, also, discourses, social groups, rituals, and institutions. One important property of refuges is their *insularity*.¹⁷ Conventions and representations are only valid within a protected sphere, and entry into it is often marked by material or virtual thresholds. Only in terms of such conventions are we able to make a distinction between form and content, inside and outside, regular and irregular behavior, norms and the abnormal, correct and incorrect understanding, and superior and poorer workability. All these evaluations are relative to the refuge from which we view things, persons and processes. And only within a refuge we are in the position to attribute such properties to objects. When changing between systems, the extensions, representations and logical values also change their contents alongside the changing perspective.

We always want to know what it is we are dealing with, to know the essence conclusively. Yet this kind of security cannot be guaranteed, because the meaning of things is relative to the framework within which we are confronted by them. This referential relativity is important. Refuges are not related hierarchically, and they have no comparative value from the outside. They are referential systems that are equal to each other in value and able to interfere with one other. We can enter and leave safe havens of refuges, and upon entry, we appropriate the refuge's frameworks, and we usually strip them off again when leaving the refuge. None of these standards are 'better' or 'worse' than each other; none are 'more appropriate' or 'more adequate' or are in any integral, objective way able to weighed up one against the other. Each refuge defines for itself a kind of system of coordinates, a gauge system in which things appear in different shapes. Sometimes this includes artistic models, sometimes not. The really interesting

17 Gumbrecht: *Production of Presence*.

questions are: What is the reason behind each case of entering the artistic mode? What circumstances provoke particular modes of perception? How does content change in the process?

Artistic action likes refuges; on the one hand, wherever conventions are established, they allow themselves to be creatively used, served, avoided, expanded, and demolished. On the other hand, there is a consistent tendency for frameworks within refuges to become so stable that they no longer allow themselves to be moved or reshaped. Generally, such stiff frameworks allow only very little space between their internal and the external, a space in which we might tarry and play within an artistic mode. As a result, we only either enter or exit, and they no longer provoke us to enter the artistic mode. Once the redundancy becomes great enough to create stable representations, genuine artistic experience becomes less likely; because we tend to establish ourselves within the stable meanings. However, if every new event (including complex processes such as Shakespeare pieces) is just one more redundant confirmation of a meaning already known – that is to say, if we begin to know what the things are and stop asking about their possible frameworks and meanings because we already *understand* everything – that then marks the end of art.

Finale: Towards an Artistic Theory of Relativity

We now have, on the one hand, the concept of *art* (which is a mode of our perception), and on the other, of course, that of specific *works* (the result of a chain of intentions on the part of the persons involved). But now we run up against the fact that there is no such thing as a category for specific creations that all have in common the property of being art. Thus, by avoiding the term and concept of ‘artwork’, it becomes possible for us to recognize the relativity of artistic observation as being a mode of our perception. A meaningful re-definition of the concept would be as follows: The intentionality of our artistic observation serves as the foundation for the ‘work’ that shapes the content of our perception into art.

Taken as a whole, the question as to whether a blue wall or a glass of water is art is dependent on our use of it and our perspective, just like the question as to whether a bicycle is a sports equipment. Riding a bicycle always has elements particularly inherent to sports, such as bodily exertion; but whether or not we see it as a sport depends on such things as the extent to which we undertake it for its own sake whenever we go on a bike ride and what we otherwise associate with the concept of the sport. Often enough, the sport mode is also mixed with other modes, such as when we ride our bicycle to work for the sake of the sport instead of driving the car. Also, in asking the question, “Sport or non-sport?”, the distinc-

tion depends not so much on which bicycle is actually involved but the perspective from which we are describing it.

But what did we mean the whole time, then, when talking about ‘artworks’? Well, against the backdrop of all our thoughts and considerations, we can now formulate an answer: ‘Artworks’, or, even better, ‘art objects’, are a category of perceptual experience brought forth by means of stable, redundant societal processes that we typically encounter in safe havens of refuges. According to this answer, an ‘art object’ is not literally an object but a constructed category of perceptual experiences – like an aesthetic equivalence class of perceptions.

Representatives of such classes might come in the form of scripts (e.g. musical scores), of imaginings (e.g. individual or collective memories), of crystallizations (enactments or objects) or of verbalizations (such as contemporary reports). The works of Shakespeare, for example, do not just consist of letters printed in books, but are living organisms with variform members that all make a contribution to its existence. The text of a drama only marks a region of what belongs to a class, more through setting certain limitations than in defining properties, because on the other hand, such a text clearly fulfills one of its purposes in an enactment. The most suitable model for the structure of one such meta-object is an arrangement of various embodiments all making reference to one another while forming a larger, open-ended whole.

Reprise

We began by visiting a theater rehearsal, thus entering into the framework of the ‘theater rehearsal’ refuge. In doing so, there was no particular reason for us to aesthetically experience the activities of the stage technicians. Our observations of the preparations for the rehearsal did not constitute an art process; we had completely entered into the theater rehearsal framework, so we did not view ourselves and the stage from outside. There was, in our perception, no art taking place. This provides an example of how a stable representation may serve to repress the artistic mode, even in such a veritable temple of art as the theater.

It is therefore neither necessary nor possible to classify the doings of the stage technicians in the Shakespeare rehearsal into the categories of ‘playing’ or ‘non-playing’ – and also not necessary or possible to classify them as ‘art’ or ‘non-art’ – because the simple result of our analysis must be that it can be both at once, depending on the observer’s perspective and framing.

Art – or better, the artistic – is a mode of our perception, a way of seeing and dealing with the world. Art is a process that we can support or avoid; art is the act of playing with frames – or a framed aesthetic experience, or an aesthetic experience of frameworks, or the perception of framed perceptions, whichever order best describes to the situation at hand. In any case, in the artistic mode, a framework and a doubled perception come into play, interacting with each other.

No we have come to the point where we can notate the formula of the artistic relativity theory – so please stand with the drum roll: *Art equals framed perception of perception.*

$$\mathbf{A} = \mathbf{f p}^2$$

Coda: The value of aesthetic relativity

We should not only make a distinction between *art* and *work* but also between the terms *value* and *judgment*, because an object (whether physical or a perceptual category) can only have aesthetic value relative to an observer, a group of observers or a refuge. Qualitative evaluation, therefore, is always relative to this. A judgment, however, mostly claims objective or at least factual validity. I hold the combination of both to reach a “value judgment” to be categorically senseless and contradictory. Does this mean an objective (observer-independent and inter-subjective) judgment of art processes is impossible? No. It only means that this objective judgment cannot be based on an *aesthetic* value, as it can only exist relative to the observer’s perspective. An objective judgment regarding aesthetic experience, that is, art, is impossible if it is not related to an experiential perspective. The aesthetic sensing itself exhibits a value that we might, with good reason, be able to see as absolute.

After all, why is the artistic perspective mostly so fun? Perhaps because it is so vitally essential. In the artistic mode, we play with the framework of our perception because only in a situation we experience from within and without at the same time are we able to experience how our reality is constituted from perception. In the end, we use art not for art’s own sake but because without it we would not have a sufficient concept of reality. Without an individual perspective and a chosen framework – which above all needs our own individual engagement – we would be unable to encounter the world. The artistic perspective is the human means of finding our bearings in such a world.

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