

# Is Art as Valuable to Society as Science?

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DOI: [10.36348/sjet.2022.v07i02.003](https://doi.org/10.36348/sjet.2022.v07i02.003)

| Received: 08.01.2022 | Accepted: 15.02.2022 | Published: 22.02.2022

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## Abstract

In this article, I argue in favor of the idea that art is as valuable, perhaps even more so than science in a given society. I base this on the principles that art is well appointed to teach morality; as an educational tool; to foster empathy; enabling abstract thought through form and play and governed by aesthetic principles, the precondition for knowledge as it were. I believe this is a timely and necessary argument to be made in an increasingly technocratic and materialistic society where philosophical speculation and art as “deep” are often overlooked. I also believe there is a dialectic between art and science in the first place so that it is not a matter of pitting such disciplines against each other as it were.

**Keywords:** Art; science; aesthetics; play; morality; empathy; knowledge.

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## INTRODUCTION

The question posed in the title of this essay is, I believe a good one. The reason I say this is that in general the paradigm that currently prevails is one where technological progress, the harbinger of scientific knowledge and its myriad applications, is that of an almost obsessive intrigue in technologies of the future and in a quantitatively orientated research output. One might call such a paradigm an essentially secular and materialistic bent – the old argument in the pioneering progress of science as a necessary way to improve the world and to come to know nature. In view of this, one might ask, what value does art have?

In addition, the general understanding of art within such a milieu is that art is simply a non-discursive discipline that, unlike science, cannot and does not produce knowledge. It lacks rigor, logic, rules of play and has no measurable influence on society, let alone the individual. Moreover, at best it is simply an emotional description or expression, without the luxury of aiding understanding, lacking both coherence and discipline. In this regard, one might think of art as simply of entertainment value which surely cannot compare to the great advances in both knowledge and technologies that science affords.

Even if one were to maintain that art might be philosophical, with the implicit assumption that philosophy is worthwhile and valuable, under the paradigm that I defined at the outset, even philosophy is

somewhat vague and unquantifiable and thus suffers the same fate as art when compared to science.

Thus, the question to which I shall respond is both timely and significant, since in arguing that indeed art has a value on a par with and perhaps exceeding scientific research and development suggests an alternative paradigm. Should my argument be compelling and convincing, this new paradigm a) suggests a more integrated and holistic view of knowledge, b) a trend “back” to philosophy and the humanities and c) significance given to the realm of the aesthetic and the empathic towards what I believe would be a healthier and more balanced society, that is to say, a better paradigm or more accurately: a paradigm shift.

### I. Aesthetics and Play

I shall begin by defining “aesthetics” in the Kantian sense as the awareness and appreciation of form that lends itself to a special kind of perception that is “disinterested” and not, in Hume’s sense simply relative, merely a matter of taste, but one that we anticipate might have universal significance under the judgement made. Given that, the aesthetic experience which Bell in his “Art” defined as “significant form” is one where attentiveness to the quality of the object or more specifically, in engaging works of art, is a special aptitude, a proclivity towards beauty.

Nevertheless, beauty as equivalent to aesthetic judgements is misleading and the trajectory of modern art sought to overturn standards of beauty. Today, beauty both as a definition of the aesthetic or as the defining mark of “good art” is certainly not an accepted definition, though by and large, art is yet a grappling with the very concept of beauty even if its often rebellious spirit (used here as not a negative attribute necessarily) often negates such a notion.

Yet there is a better way to define the aesthetic, without recourse to beauty, of amorphous concepts such as “disinterested” or “significant form”. Such ideas have been opposed on the grounds that formalism eschews content with its erroneous “arts for art’s sake” mantra. That is to say, one can expand the horizon of the aesthetic as not as once sought simply applicable to one’s appreciation of nature or art, but in fact as a concept that encompasses one’s very lifeworld. Such a view known today as the “aesthetics of the everyday” suggests that with the right awareness every aspect of life from grooming and domestic chores to sports and games, to research methodology in all fields; to politics and jurisprudence; to education, to the way-we-interact-with-one another, and art itself, can uplift consciousness in some way. In other words, aesthetic education is a necessary bulwark to an inspired lifeworld and its manifold forms of expression. Aesthetics is thus a mechanism where society and the individual might be improved. This applies to all domains: art itself; city planning; fair politics; a good economic system; the rule of law; educational pursuits and just being in the world – aesthetics thus conceived can confer value; heightened perception; reflection and so on which in turn leads to health. This then immediately suggests a better society that might be established.

I would further suggest that the common element of such an aesthetic awareness is the idea of “play” to which I now turn.

## II. Play

Eugen Fink (1960) has written extensively on the idea of play. He bases his high praise for the concept on possibly the earliest and most fundamental rendition or expression, arguing for the cosmic symbolism of play, quoting Heraclites (in Krell 1972: 66), who appears to unite the idea of cosmic fire, logos and play in this lengthy but beautiful quote:

“...play becomes a cosmic metaphor for the collective appearance and disappearance of things in the space and time of the world. The foaming and frenzied flood of life, which instills in living beings the desire to reproduce is secretly one with the dark wave, which tears at living things away into death. Life and death, birth and dying, womb and tomb, are sisters, one to the other: the propelling power of the totality produces and

annihilates, creates and kills, uniting the highest desire and the deepest suffering.”

Krell notes that such a dramatic view of play informed Nietzsche’s philosophy, which repelling the tide of the “metaphysical tradition” wherein being and stasis are emphasized, instead focuses on flux, becoming and playful struggle. In this sense, it is argued that it is the artist and child who are said to play without a goal, to enact via the body and “perform” within a world that is both real and unreal, a game defined by rules (later formulated as institutions) and yet spontaneous and free.

Yet the common belief is that play is mere diversion – entertainment – a means to refresh oneself for further labor, work, or war. However, the early twentieth century work of Huizinga overturns a strict polarity between play and work. He argues that play is also serious and permeates most activities because human beings are essentially homoludens, such that education, music, athletics, law and the religious festival are all bound by the same root syllable as is evident in the vocative for Greek in all these domains, namely *pai* (Krell 1972:77).

If one acknowledges the ubiquity of play, then metaphysics and the assumed status of transcendental reason, of logos is called into question. Rather, reason itself derives its objects from the carefree joy in the senses, a kind of “pagan” unity with world, whereas unlike technicist “reason”, subject and object are not separate. There is what one might call a certain empathy and participatory consciousness, where both truth and illusion configure and reconfigure one another, where beings’ essence, as Heidegger put it is “the game itself” (in Elden 2008:52) – *das Spiel selbest*. As Heraclites once put it: “eternity or time (aion) is like a child playing a game” (Elden 2008: 48). In this respect, Fink (1960) argues that play is a theatrical enactment or embodiment of the immaterial – a “speculative metaphor of the world” (Fink 1960: 105). Rather than reason as embroiled in measuring, calculating its object – the world, from the perspective of a transcendent subjectivity, itself is becoming (the game unfolds in time) and constitutes subjectivity itself. Even play itself is in a way playing with the player, as if our language plays us, rather than we controlling the world through language. Such ruminations on play carve out a space wherein joy, delight, fun and pleasure are integral to our interaction in/with the world.

Play has a social function, if at times purely imaginative (one might play-act against an imagined “adversary” or “enemy” for example); it does not elevate reflection as above life-experience but enjoins one to become aware of our activity, a certain living impulse and dynamism, a creativity as we “play with work and struggle, love and death. We even play with play” (Fink 1960:100). One may grimace with pain

while running for example (or even in contemplating), yet in a sense it is not real pain, it is circumscribed within a particular context or game – a race, solving a problem and so on...Running or contemplation are agreed delusions – ways of relating, creating, communicating even if at first only to the self. I mentioned the pleasurable aspect as most such imaginative games require real props (i.e. it is not actually “things” in the ordinary sense), real theatre, but most importantly, a joy in appearances (aesthesis), Freud am Schein. It is thus “redeemed from the weight of real life” (Fink 1960:90); it is a certain freedom and a reveling in the sensory “mask”, an Apollonian and Dionysian reverence. Or what Hegel called “the most sublime expression of true seriousness” (in Fink 1960:105).

It is thus no surprise that sport as play, for example, began in the ancient games as a kinship with magical rites. My understanding of the “cosmic” significance of play reveals to me a bi-polarity. On the one hand, play as in aesthetic play (*that permeates all fields in varying degrees and ways*) is a kind of rhythmic aesthetic redundancy. By the phrase “aesthetic redundancy” I wish to connote both a monotonous repetition and the potential for meaningful, creative rhythm circumscribed by rules in the context of play and various games, where outcomes and performance/s are unpredictable. It also refers to the incessant deluge and overflow of images (sounds...) encountered in relation to entertainment and culture. It is unclear what such signs may mean, for their interpretation conforms to their function in a particular game, though signs may change in meaning over time and in different contexts. The veneer of a plot, a story, an unfolding drama would appear to give sense to the deluge of sensory data. While each game may tell a story peculiar to that game, it may also have other ramifications. The point is that to claim control of the story, assuming there is one, is problematic, in which case one “surrenders” to the deluge of sensory stimuli, to give in to “aesthetic redundancy” and the story of a particular game, without resorting to “deep” philosophy, which transmutes into ideology anyhow. On the other hand, could one then be ignorant of not living Socrates’ vision to live an examined life? Awareness that these sensory stimuli are aesthetic does lead to thought and vice versa, so that life, mediated by various games, can be more subtle, intransitive, or tacit forms of knowing, where we see the borders of a particular game (for example sport or for that matter grooming, sex...and so on) and another (for example art...or for that matter politics, economics...and so on) give way and then interlink.

Mass aesthetic delusion (of which I would include the materialistic technology driven culture defined in the introduction) or hysteria or rhythmic repetitiveness (what I term aesthetic redundancy) is not necessarily a positive thing. On the other hand, imaginative and empathetic projection within the

context of life is a desirable form of communication in society, mediated by various games. As communication and on a certain level simply pleasurable entertainment, there is play. One hits the tennis ball in order for there to be a return. Or does one simply want to vanquish one’s opponent and thus expect no return? One might make art to say something to someone or a public (or even just to oneself) or is it to glorify? Are the various games we play and the institutions through which they are played simply a way to assert power? I believe that their power lies in their unifying elements, their way of connecting people, rather than as divisive activities.

In summary, “play” perhaps more so than other models for the world – Thales and water symbol; Plato’s light symbol; Hegel and “spirit”, Schopenhauer and “will” – is overturned somewhat by the concept of “play” suggesting a metaphysics beyond metaphysics. That is, transient being or rather, becoming; noble struggle and a tacit form of knowing, that which is beyond and unites the extremities of life and death as Heraclites beautifully expressed and with which I introduced the concept. In short: play is a creative form of individual and social meaning-making on a global scale. “Play”, in whatever form it may assume, is such that there is a certain physicality or mediation devices that intercede between “reality” and culture. That is why the cultural art-act (performance) is so powerful – it is certainty amidst doubt, and the promise of harmony that functions as a mediating structure or perceptual lens through which “reality” assumes certain cultural forms. The role of art in particular is a form of play perhaps most suitable to such a vision and which lends itself or “mixes” with other forms of play, the aesthetic modality, of which play is a property, inhering all such expressions. This, then, at least in potential suggests that art (or the artistic perceptual capacity) is well-appointed to the bettering of society, for aesthetics itself supervenes over art and other cultural expressions (forms of knowledge), so therefore it is the driving force, and not the particular form itself, for example the sciences.

### III. Form

Fundamentally, if one subscribes to the view that art’s appeal is owing to its formal structure and perhaps beauty, then could one not claim that inherent in the desire to make art is what I term “a will to form”. Secondly, but no less important, this “will to form” is a kind of freezing of time, a capturing of the moment and the creation of an eternal present. It is to this observation that I now turn.

I refer the reader to for example Brancusi’s “Bird in Space” (1928) [<sup>1</sup>], figure 7. In this image, there

<sup>1</sup> 136 Bird in space, 1928. Polished bronze, height: 137.2 cm. Circumference: 9.5-37.7 cm. New York. The museum of modern art. In Art of the 20th century, vol.

is a certain tension, weight, physical aliveness, a sense of grandness, even transcendence. I attribute such perceptions to the fact that such imagery appears to me to exemplify formal mastery. In figure 7, Brancusi makes the viewer feel a sense of upward joyous surge, a sensitive linear mobility that is all the more *sacred* given the gold bronze colour. His sculpture is soft and sharp simultaneously, strongly vertical, and yet curved and organic. Brancusi was quoted as saying: “art must penetrate into the spirit of nature and, like nature, create beings whose forms and lives are independent” (in Walther [ed.] 2005:427). In this quote, the artist reveals the desire to create new, original forms, to create forms that exist independently, that speak the silent language of art. Form is thus the vessel of meaning and formalism, a theory that emphasizes the unique visual language in contradistinction to other languages and the aesthetic disposition that certain artworks may induce in the viewer, helps clarify why we may attend so favourably to a work such as this. In its abstract quality or its abstraction, Brancusi desires to reveal “deep” reality. Now, although this position has been criticized, this modernism certainly holds a kernel of truth and “he (Brancusi) unerringly and painstakingly seeks an increasingly pure and perfect body of form that is transcendental in its immaculate finish” (in Walther [ed.] 2005:425, brackets my inclusion). Formalism therefore may be “spiritual”, as it speaks of the “essential form” containing “metaphysical reality” (according to Bell) or as is the case with Greenberg, materialistic, in that we simply assert the fact of a form without attending to meanings. In either case, it appears that there is an inner need for form, a desire to be graceful, harmonious, rhythmic, effortless, in control, to flow, to hold power and if one cannot be these things or some of them, to realize them through visual perception of form, in an artwork!

We may then describe dance and performance arts as poetry in motion, as a revelation of symmetry, unity, as not been discordant. We may perceive qualities of balance and timing, pattern and design...all this through creating form and/or simply viewing eloquent forms, such as in Brancusi’s sculpture. In a self-same manner, the documentary photograph (Figure 2) recorded in Kodokan Judo (1986:59) inspires a sense of balance and power. The two fighters create a vertical line, offset by the strong horizontals of the background. The sense that the physics of stasis is about to change as the uchi-mate throw will inevitably lead to the demise of the one fighter – that moment before chaos is captured and we momentarily witness the intense, forceful action just before the plunge. Through this image, we can learn what is required to execute a good throw or photograph and choose to identify with the judo player. In so doing, we project ourselves into the form as we empathize with other, as one may do so with

Figure 1, and in this alignment of self with image, our empathic projection “into”, we transform ourselves; we intuit that the form poses a question. Perhaps the question is not only as a result of its aesthetic quality; perhaps it enters the domain of our will – do we wish to feel like a “bird in space”; can we also perform a judo throw with such gusto and verve or fall victim to it?

My contention is that images enter the mind on this level, because we need to see who and what we are and can be in order to think on it: it is the will to form that makes us; it requires an empathic emotion for other. Or in other words, we may say of art that it allows us to see the world from another perspective, as with Hegel’s notion that art is the midway between sensual embodiment and the abstractness of pure thought, or at least the play between these “things”. That which makes meaning is sensibly exemplified, rather than understood in logical terms alone. Sport too, as an example of play and as embodying the aesthetic as such, may also reveal an action, encoded with a picture of the sublime. Brancusi’s “Bird” is finite but its eloquent form hints at the infinite and that which is of the mind, the “realm” of ideas. The sporting documentary photograph captures the singular moment of a series of movements that was the alive, vigorous activity of that sporting event, and in that stillness creates the potential for that which has no limit – the idea of the sublime and the “realm” of ideas. On the other hand, Brancusi’s abstract configuration may be arguably locked into a modernist aesthetic of “pure form” and “disinterested contemplation” and then subsuming the interpretation of the photograph of the judo throw under the same aesthetic, but clearly labels the former as “art” and the latter as “sport”.

Klein’s performance piece (Figure 3) [ <sup>2</sup> ] operates differently. It is art and it is sport (or more accurately art manifested through sport). It exists aesthetically as an embodied art form that is at once a sport-like dive and an artistic intervention breaking the code of the “white cube”. It therefore offers an aesthetic that is neither disembodied contemplation, nor embodied contest against other bodies. It therefore offers, at least in theory, a life-praxis where aesthetic expression is mediated by the body. Of course, the fame of the photograph means that it does suffer the fate of being “merely” an art object with a certain value, a photographic relic of what promised so much in terms of transcendence through action. By transcendence I here mean the going beyond binary categories such as that between thought and action or art and science and indeed between art and sport.

<sup>2</sup> Yves Klein – Le Saut Dns le Vida (Leap into the void [1960]). Photomontage by Shunk Kender of a performance by Klein at Rue Gentil-Bernard, Fontenag-aux-Roses, October 1960

ii, Tachen, Walther (ed.), photography: K. Hannef, p 427



**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**



**Figure 3**

As such one could see a work such as this as one of many significant precursors of performance art, subversive counter culture and the recently so-called somaesthetics initiated by Richard Shusterman where it is the expression of the living body as a “site of sensory appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-stylization” (blurb of somaesthetic online journal - 2008) that make many contemporary artistic interventions in performance, installations and digital art and in particular the way the body in movement, space and time dimensions determines one’s experience of reality, disrupting the old Cartesian mind/body polarity. In this sense neither concepts nor a singular aesthetic defines art or rather defines how one may understand sport (as with a myriad other cultural forms of play as hitherto argued) as artistic. The proximity between art and sport is intuitive, sensed and somewhat conceptually

analogous. Klein’s “jump” expresses the freedom in bodily action like an accomplished diver and at the same time it is an impossibility as he (the body) must plummet to the ground. This reflects our dual desire to both overcome gravity and work with gravity, of being inscribed in and as a world.

This could be seen as a precursor to some contemporary art, especially that linked to somaesthetics, where art and science interlink, where the visceral quality of the senses, movement and actual bodies also suggest a blurring of the distinction between art and other domains of mind-body expression. And in the process, one may surmise that Brancusi’s abstract configuration dissolves into a forceful – gravity-intensive – sport act such as the judo throw. This then resolves itself in a new art performance such as Klein’s, which yet begets another comparison to a sporting moment (though this is not explicitly shown as another illustration as such, one may imagine it so). The only difference then between calling one thing sport and another art is 1) intention of the “actor” and 2) context. It has nothing to do with what is merely visible or aural.

Should we however expand our horizons and choose to see the “world as sculpture” (following James Hall, 1999); should the sports person, for example see himself or herself as expressing an artistic act, and should the artist acknowledge the sport of his craft and its institutional, highly competitive reality, then there cannot be a rigid distinction between art and sport or any other domains of human, cultural expression. Or at the very least, this argument should buffer the thesis that we can talk about sport etc. as art-like. Perhaps, allowing some speculative license, we can say that this discursive assessment points to an art of living beyond both stadium and “white cube”. Art and sport, for example are only a taste of what could be beyond the limitations of a fixed space-and-time constraint.

When we see an image or picture the flow of time is arrested. When we watch a sports event, the world of make-believe usurps the rather more serious flow of time that is life. In this way, art and sport transports us to a kind of eternal present. Halt (2008), reflecting on Gumbrecht, believes that in the evocation of athletic beauty, the “everyfan” as he calls it, suggests a choreography of beautiful play in which “... the sudden, surprising convergence of serial athletic bodies in time and space” (Gumbrecht in Halt 2008:52) create a larger-than-life moment. In the athletic ideal there is an aesthetic, formal quality. This is also due to the kind of sculptured body of the athlete. The sports arena is an ideal space in which that moment is elevated. Halt argues (following Gumbrecht) that there is a sense of “oneness” in such “moments of intensity”, a feeling of communion, even a “momentary loss of self”, or transcendence of individuality, that actually begins with beauty. He continues by saying that “the unexpected appearance of a body in space, taking a beautiful form

that just as quickly dissolves, can be thought of as a kind of epiphany” (Gumbrecht in Halt 2008:56).

I would claim the same effect may be inspired through the images presented in this section. Figure 7 and 8 imagine the relationship between inner and outer dimensions in making an art object or performing in sports, for example and the reception thereof in visual terms which may or may not lead to the appraisal of the beauty of the art or sports’ “object”. Figure 9 resolves the tension by allowing art and sport, for example to “touch”, and in so doing cannot easily be named. In this sense it is ineffable but mutable in the same way the figure of the artist apparently “flying” will descend to the earth unless gravity should cease. Yet we are the figure, the body that will meet its end. But it is a construction, a game – obviously the artist will be fine after the staged event. But then art and sport, for example are a form of trickery and illusion – or rather “play”.

Gumbrecht makes the point that “Beauty is not the goal of competitive sports, but high-level beauty, the human beauty we’re talking about here is beauty of a particular type. It might be called kinetic beauty. Its power and appeal are universal. It has nothing to do with sex or cultural norms. What it seems to have to do with, really, is human beings reconciliation with the fact of having a body” (Gumbrecht in Young 2008:10). It is the pre-discursive body through which the self acts; it is the body that becomes the very materials out of which form is composed. And in that presence of self through the body, there can be a dramatic moment, a sensual, though aesthetic, perception. One is not referring elsewhere and treating the sports moment or the execution of an artwork as symbolic. That is, like Kant’s ideas, we attend to beauty for its own sake without a definite concept, via the free play of imagination and understanding. It is disconnected from “everyday” life, and not grounded in concepts, since nothing in the “everyday” world is at stake, that is, it’s really a game, fantasy, a picture...though here it serves to elucidate the question of form in and of itself.

What I have also been pointing to is the role of the pre-discursive body in human meaning and understanding, the inscribing of the body to be aesthetically moved by the sensory impressions that constitute both art and sport, for example. I would further conjecture that this “will to form” is predicated on the need humans have for order, pattern and harmony, sensory stimulus that calms or exhilarates us. In that sense, art and sport, for example might offer us a vision of clarity and precision. Form is therefore necessary for intellectual, sensuous, intuitive, and emotive dimensions of being, the four-pronged compass of human agency as expounded by Jung (1875–1961). Allowing some speculative license, one might claim that Kant, for example sensed this integration of the “the four-pronged compass of human agency” in not

being able to define the aesthetic experience in literal, discursive language. Furthermore, the very fact that Kant (1952 [1790]) even deals with humor and its health benefits, implies that he recognized the “other” of universal reason and the gamut of human cognition and affect.

In summery one might apply these observations, with the following assertions: 1) art draws from aesthetic perception, 2) aesthetics imbues form with meaning, such as the appreciation of beauty and motivating contemplation; 3) such awareness” manifest in all cultural domains, such as sport; 4) it further concerns the body as the nexus between the sensory and cognitive and therefore may 5) inspire a science grounded in such aesthetic awareness. The implication of these propositions is that artistic experience may lead to world bettering, a better society.

#### ***IV. Education: the function of history and rules***

To the unjustified common opinion that art, unlike science has no rules, no logic, no discipline and therefore produces no knowledge or at least nothing significant compared to the success of science, one can answer with the following refutations:

1. History of art or the study of visual culture is perhaps the surest way to understanding the various phases of human history. Art is the vestige of a cultures’ very being and although physical relics of the past may be understood in terms of other disciplines, such as archeology; history; literature and so on and so forth, art is one such key to unlocking the understanding of self and of a particular time in human history, of time and place – and therefore constitutes knowledge. Both in relation to other disciplines and as a discipline in itself, art history, aesthetics and studies in visual culture are perhaps even more comprehensive in our understanding than science, since science too, in becoming relics of age upon age, becomes subsumed as merely another iteration of visual culture, of fashions and mores and of a partial knowledge of nature.
2. Endorsing “Aesthetic education” as propounded by Schiller, I maintain in line with my arguments above, that indeed it is the realization of the aesthetic that will lead to: 1) a more robust and integrated knowledge base, 2) self-understanding and therefore 3) a better, more moral society.
3. As in a scientific discipline or any game, making art consists as much with rules and methods as a cognitive discipline or games such as mathematics and has as much application to the “real-world” (in terms of ideas and culture) as does the realm of pure mathematics in its application to the sciences. In addition, these rules may be imbibed and expressed and also develop or counteracted in game changing behaviors and techniques that allow for creative progress, just as a scientific theory may

be replaced or improved by an even better scientific explanation of phenomena.

The upshot is that art is both necessary and instrumental in world bettering.

### V. The Metaphorical

Metaphor (is) the likening of one thing to another in varying degrees of expansive connection between that one thing and that of the other. Metaphor is distinguished from literal language and thus a literal correlation between a thing and its description, that is, the thesis of correspondence thinking. Potgieter (2007:58) writes that "... whilst it is true that the metaphoric instability of language deconstructs the correspondence paradigm, it also inaugurates an understanding of art as a place for the creation of new meanings", which he associates with the "metaphoric paradigm of art". He draws from Heidegger's (1971:62) idea that metaphors, in a sense, assist in establishing new, concrete worlds. That is, metaphors assist in imaginatively projecting, and thus creating new possibilities.

If we concede that the "language turn" implies we do not have access to a "true reality", only endless surfaces, then art is not so much a copy of the real or original, but a new aesthetic, one that embodies the fractured state of signifiers that abound and that could become part of a process of opened discourse on the work of art, both inscribed and yet not inscribed by a specific language system. That is, signifiers may have a definite meaning (content) in the context of a specific language as a kind of Wittgenstein-like "form of life", but the possibility of a signifier coming to mean something else in relation to a different set of rules and language also exists. In this respect, the signifier becomes disembodied from its literal (precise) meaning and functions in another way.

So that when Potgieter (2007:59-60) says that "metaphor is understood as a relation between literal and figurative meaning, transparent and vague meaning, essential and decorative meaning, concrete and abstract meaning, original and imaginative meaning...", this may point to the instability of circumscribing the signifier within a definite language game. Another way to perceive the metaphorical play of images and/or words is to recognize the difference that analytical philosophers draw between different senses of the word "is" or as in mimetic resemblance. On the one hand, "is" means identity as in X "is" Y, that X and Y are necessarily the same entity. On the other hand, "is" specifies that X and Y are not identical but contained within the same set, so that they share in Wittgenstein's terms, a "family resemblance". Metaphor belongs to that second category in as much as one is not equating two seemingly disparate concepts, but rather suggesting a confluence, a similarity, while they still remain distinct entities. For example, to draw a likeness

between a painted tree and the notion of, for example, a life generating principle is not to say that the latter concept "is" the tree in terms of identity, but merely pointing to a shared aspect of both such concepts. This renders the metaphoric play of art akin to a type of "fuzzy logic" [<sup>3</sup>]. This also reflects the oscillation between complementary pairs and "paraconsistent logic" and Godel's "undecidability" that coheres with my task of demonstrating parallels and confluences between art as the paradigm case of the aesthetic and other cultural forms of expression.

If metaphor does function in this way, we may say that art is an activity that can forge new meanings and connections. Thus, although one may not be able to say what the precise meaning of an artwork is, and an artwork is not just a discursive idea, it is emotive, imaginative, instinctive, aesthetic...one can offer another metaphor to engage with the art form. This kind of ineffability prompted Potgieter (2007:56) to remark: "All meaning is a metaphoric interpretation of a metaphoric interpretation". In other words, though postmodernism has discredited the correspondence thesis as applied to the image and/or the word, this does not necessarily foreclose on meaning, and here I suggest this meaning is in that art may evoke a kind of metaphorical "play". Kearney (1988:358) states that postmodernism may "be the twilight of great art or the clearance of a space where alternative modes of communication may evolve". In this sense, Lyotard's paralogy (1984) comes to mind as metaphor may induce a constant changing of the rules of the game so as to inspire new games and ignite a metaphorical subtlety. It is this creative process in art that evolves and opens society to constantly renew itself, a healthy recipe to its success I would maintain, while scientism would lead to a literal, superficial correspondence paradigm.

### VI. Empathy

During intensive philosophical debates on aesthetics in nineteenth century Germany, Robert Vischer introduced the concept of *Einfühlung* in relation to art. Theodor Lipps subsequently extended its use from art to visual illusions and interpersonal understanding. While Lipps had regarded *Einfühlung* as basically similar to the old notion of sympathy, Edward Titchner in America believed it had a different meaning. Hence, he coined the term empathy as its translation. This term came to be increasingly widely accepted, first in psychology and then more generally. At around this time, Vernon Lee explicated a theory of empathy in art wherein she studied body movements in

<sup>3</sup> This term refers to a form of multivalued or probabilistic logic. It deals with reasoning that is approximate rather than fixed and exact. In contrast to traditional logic theory, where binary sets have two-valued logic, true or false, fuzzy logic variables may have a truth-value that ranges in degrees between 0 and 1.

relation to aesthetic form. She developed an empirical-based empathy theory of art. As she states: “is not what we call the conception of the abstract relation outside as a perception of a concrete relation inside us? The innervation of certain movement, the basis of a movement itself” (in Lanzoni 2009:330). In these terms, she develops a physiological and emotional response as vital elements for the appreciation of beauty and she conducted her experiments in gallery and museum settings in the 1890s. She showed that there is a kinaesthetic of art reception that moved the body in a manner both emotional and actual.

Robert Vischer argued that such movement in art is not simply physiological but psychologically rich involving a projection of movement, bodily feeling and even the self into the object of aesthetic appreciation, an expansive ego-based immersion in the art-object. For Lee this constituted the confluence of body-mind reactions – that is, while Vischer focused more on feeling derived from, in the main, optical pleasure, Lee’s focus is on motoric response mechanisms influenced by aesthetic experience. And this bodily resonance sharpens and focuses the aesthetic repose and contributes to the general well-being – a certain “tactile sense” and “muscular sense” is involved in judging of weight, resistance, impressions of the object that are mirrored by the perceiving subject. This in turn produced a “sense of living in those who experienced it...and gives us the life-enhancing qualities of the object” (Lee in Lanzoni 2009:339). This draws from Nietzsche’s belief that art and aesthetic experience results in a heightened sense of the capacity for life – derived from that which is otherwise beyond the ordinary, everyday life. It requires imaginative projection to see from the others (or perhaps even the artist’s) projection and emphasizes in what Merleau-Ponty might describe as lived bodily experience rather than pure abstraction, of play and desire and compassion.

Yet this rare experience can be found in everyday objects and Lee uses the example of a chair and a bowl to show that we somehow intuit and perceive in the object of attention a physical (and mental) “positioning” in relation to it that is a visceral effect which may be empirically measured so that, for example, “spatial dimensions were translations of perceptual modes bound to bodily extensions” (Anstruther-Thomson 1924:67). Consequently, harmony and pleasure is a kind of “aesthetic instinct”, deeply rooted in the needs of the organism and leads to well-being.

Worringer in 1908 in his work *Abstraction and Empathy* takes a different track to Lee. He argues that representational art is comfortable and “objectified self-enjoyment” (Worringer 1908:16), whereas abstract art thwarted the empathetic impulse producing an unease. Both abstraction and representational art, however,

existed on a continuum of self-estrangement, relinquishing autonomy in absorption in the art-object; in the case of abstract art inducing emotional discomfort. For Lee, empathy was just as possible for geometric as for organic forms. One could say much of these discussions centered around the implied energy and movement of shapes and patterns particularly as abstraction began to take root. It seems that a confluence of the haptic and optic requiring the active experience of the individual spectator – and the birth of cinema heralded an emotive projection with the moving narrative and optical “visual music” akin to realistic representational art. The waning of narrative in painting and sculpture via abstraction was perhaps fueled by the increasingly popular cinematic arts – the moving image.

One can perhaps sum up the fascination for “reaching out” to the aesthetic form as the senses becoming more spiritual and the spirit more sensual. While Robert Vischer found a lexicon of such terms to express this: *Auführung* (responsive feeling), *Nachführung* (attentive feeling) and *Zuführung* (immediate feeling), it was *Einführung* (empathy) that inspired much discussion. It conjured a resonance between spectator (viewer, listener...) and “object” that permeated perhaps both with a sense of striving, activity, power and energetic repose. Wolfllin held a similar view, namely that “we invest inanimate objects with inward states by analogizing between their physical shape and endowing on the other body posture and mood” (in Podro 1982: XXIV). Moreover, even verbal expression and written poetry is rooted in our ways of speaking which is based on the biological evolution of the tongue, palette, teeth, gut and thorax – we cannot separate mind and body as such.

Whether this could be grounded as a universal aesthetic – described both physiologically and psychologically – is debatable, and often subsides into mere elitism. It also could be construed as attentiveness to “pure form” and thus falls to the criticism levelled at formalism, or as expressive in been concerned with definite emotional dispositions of the maker and viewer in relation to the aesthetic object, which falls to the “intentional fallacy” and utopian Tolstoian brotherhood through the arts – both of which are contentious. What is interesting is that the “faculties” for “sympathetic” and “empathetic” responses in humans are neurologically identical (Gladstein 1984:42) so that the sympathetic and empathetic are similar human experiences even as the former initially held sway in aesthetics. Both, however, are signs that do seem to constitute a universal language both formally and emotionally, for example, we “read” the facial expressions on another person or his/her gestures in communication (cultural differences aside).

Nevertheless, empathy (like sympathy) captures a sense of both identification with other (or the aesthetic object) and alienation (as self cannot fully

know other). In this regard, *Einfühlung* describes both a powerful egoist urge and identification and its demise or lack of conceptual awareness when aesthetic experience and its physiological and psychological base are not circumscribed by culture (when the game is over). In this respect, a tendency towards the aestheticization of the everyday and the extension of the boundaries of art through considerations of the “living body” (or *soma*) as well as the lack of a cultural distinction between the everyday and the high seriousness of fine art, it would perhaps be useful to renew theories of *Einfühlung*.

Feelings of awe, fright, love, horror, beauty and so on are because of one’s embeddedness and relationship between ourselves and “things”. Understanding presupposes a certain intimacy (empathy). Understanding is also not just making sense; it also means learning how to inhabit a new world so that hermeneutics – how to interpret what is there – is a “practical philosophy” which shows itself in action. For Danto it means entering into the history and theory – the hermeneutic circle – of the art world. Though this theory could be construed as a vindication of high art, Shusterman’s pragmatist aesthetics by contrast takes an active role in reshaping art, particularly in the direction of awareness of the facile distinction between high and low art and between art and life. One implication is that other aspects of life may overlap with art. But most poignantly is that empathy in art is the way we relate, connect and share; it enhances a world consciousness.

### VII. Morality

The reason art may be shocking or in its less severe form simply original, is that we assume art to be the vehicle for moral truth. Certain behaviours in art would not be tolerated; how much more so in life proper? However, art is marked by an on-going aesthetic revision and thus by implication, no clear moral standard. The institutional realities of art recognizes that indeed art is a reflection of extraaesthetic designs, namely philosophical, religious and political concerns which have moral implications. The upshot is the ideals of political regimes end up usually prescribing what kind of art is acceptable and the form that other cultural domains, including science, should take and in the process art becomes less than ideal, and simply a reflection of a philosophical and political system. In other words: both art is a platform for moral ideals that may reflect an overarching political dispensation or may be a site for a critique of those ideals or neither (as a self enclosed game). However, intentionally or not, reflects a moral concern. For example: Minimalism reflected a positivist philosophical ideal and critiques that in its emptiness (Bell 2007).

Moreover, it is here argued that a healthy skepticism mitigates the human propensity towards “final” truths and moral prescriptions which we tend to

idolize and venerate in the name of some ideal. This tendency to find a stable form or image and thus restrict the “light” with the appeal to a set of ideals, I dub “idolisation”. This begs the question as to whether there can be a moral agenda that permeates art. Historically and based on theoretical perspectives the answer has been affirmative, but the consequences often dire, so that the very notion of “the moral” is not necessarily tenable as an ideal in art. In saying that I have projected a moral imperative, which in itself should not be idealized. In other words, there is a tenuous boundary between idealization (aesthetics) and ideology (extra-aesthetic) and it is not clear how to negotiate that borderline. We are left with an existential abyss. Or we consign art and sport to that of an idyllic realm, an imaginative construction.

Education through art, I suggest does at the very least bring the question of morality to the fore, while at the same time offering a liberal vision of critique and individualism, a questioning of traditions and norms. This same rebellious spirit, if you like also marks the scientific venture in which conclusions can only come at the price of research and proof. This I believe might be indispensable for a better society.

### CONCLUSION

The arguments in this essay for the reorientating or rather the shifting of the mass blind following of science and technology at the expense of art, is both mistaken and unfounded. I have argued this by establishing aesthetics; play; morality; form; empathy and intellectual robustness of the arts as key to cultural expressions in general, and science in particular, and that such an appreciation and reorientation might lead to a better, more balanced and healthy society.

So, in answer to the question that this essay posed, an emphatic and resounding “yes” in favour of the arts as a site for both the generation of knowledge and a deepening of the sciences, in respect of advocating a space for philosophical, metaphoric thinking and an open-ended creative play. This leads to aesthetic formal awareness; heightened perception; symbolic thinking and while beauty may not always be the prevailing sign or outcome, health is defined as not simply in the physical, materialist sense exclusively, but, in addition, in terms of inner, psychological and what might be termed, spiritually elevated states of being. It is at this point that art can begin to contribute to the true improvement of societies. And science will follow, rather than simply claim epistemological supremacy and dominance. For what I have been describing can perhaps best be understood to mean that there are different levels and kinds of knowledge: while science may describe and explain nature in a physical sense, it is mute on other levels – levels where art is more apt to so describe – and it is that level that should motivate scientific effort in the first place, for science is

still, at best human knowledge. Such a prognosis, constitutes, I believe a paradigm shift.

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