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Redefining Art as an Experience

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Redefining Art as *An* Experience

by

Pedro Zasciurinskis Lopes

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ABSTRACT

Art is present in nearly every aspect of our lives. The concept of art, however, is not easy to define. When discussing the subject of art, one must consider experience, art, and the aesthetic. These three concepts complement each other, but are difficult to distinguish. As a result, meaningful and coherent discussions about art are difficult to achieve. I believe that in order to discuss what good art, meaningful art, fine art, and useful art are, one must first have a clear understanding of what art is.

In this thesis I attempt to build a foundation for meaningful discussion about art. I utilize John Dewey's concept of *an* experience, and Arthur Schopenhauer's subject-object distinction in order to define and distinguish between art, experience, and the aesthetic. I explore how these three concepts come together in order to compose the artistic process. Finally, I apply the conclusions to an exploration of the bossa nova movement in order to illustrate the validity of these conclusions.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One – John Dewey: Art as Experience	3
Rhythms, Expression, and <i>An</i> Experience	5
Chapter Two – Arthur Schopenhauer	14
The World is My Representation.....	14
Types of Experience	18
Identifying Useful Concepts	19
Chapter Three – What is Art?	21
The Meaninglessness of Objects.....	21
Context.....	25
The Aesthetic	29
Chapter Four – The Value of Art.....	34
Redefining <i>An</i> Experience	34
The Organic Nature of Art.....	36
Applying <i>An</i> Experience.....	38
Experience.....	38
The Expressive Object and the Act of Expression.....	40
The Aesthetic Experience of Bossa Nova.....	44
<i>An</i> Experience of Bossa Nova.....	45
Conclusion	47
Bibliography	50

Introduction

Perhaps it is impossible to measure the impact of art in everyday life. Art is seemingly omnipresent in the human experience, and the origins and definitions of good or bad art have been the subject of debate for as long as the concept has been alive. Equally elusive to definition is the concept of experience. Though we have an understanding of what it is to experience something, the complex processes and interactions involved in the development of experience are possibly responsible for the vagueness of the word. Interestingly, art and experience are inevitably connected – whether considered good or bad, art is known by whatever feeling it produces be it intuitive sensation or abstract ideas, and can only be defined as art insofar as it can be experienced in some form. This connection, or overlap, between art and experience is what I understand to be the aesthetic.

The difficulties in understanding art arise when we attempt to distinguish experience, the aesthetic, and art itself. What exactly is the difference between the aesthetic and art? Is the aesthetic to be defined merely as a result of a work of art, feelings and emotions evoked by an object crafted in such a manner that it has the power to alter the human state of mind? Or is the aesthetic art itself, the quality of being beautiful or provoking something platonic present in the form, shape, and colors of the object that makes the object art and distinguishes it from a mere trinket or souvenir? Do we then define art as a specific object, the qualities of an object, the emotions produced by such an object, or as an experience encompassing all such things?

I believe that the subject of art cannot be seriously discussed nor understood without a clear distinction between art, the aesthetic, and experience. In this thesis I draw heavily from John Dewey's aesthetic theories, with a focus on his concept of *an* experience, as well as from Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy, particularly from his *object-subject* discernment in order to find a distinction between art, experience, and the aesthetic. First I give the reader an overview and criticism of John Dewey's concept of art as described in *Art as Experience* with a particular focus and exploration of what it means to have *an* experience. Schopenhauer's *subject-object* distinction is then utilized for the purposes of defining experience, and finally I analyze the relationship between the object of art and subjective human experience so that a definition of the aesthetic may be achieved. Once each distinctive process that composes the work of art is distinguished, we have a foundation not only for discussing the value of art to human life, but a foundation for identifying how art affects human life, and how it can be improved or modified so that it may become more practical, more meaningful, or more useful as a tool for philosophy, the sciences, recreation, and even medicine.

Chapter One – John Dewey: Art as Experience

Art as Experience is largely a social commentary. The work begins with a criticism of museums, art critics, capitalism, nationalism, and imperialism – forces Dewey believed are responsible for the segregation of art from everyday experience. For Dewey, the aesthetic begins not in museums, but in the “the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man [or woman], arousing his [or her] interest and affording him [or her] enjoyment as he [or she] looks and listens” (Dewey 10). These events are the raw elements of everyday life; the grace of a baseball player, a machine punching a hole in the earth, and zest in the stimulation of fire. Museums and art critics have segregated art from everyday experience. These institutions denounce the sensual and praise the ideal, thus placing fine arts on a pedestal and severing their ability to function as something that enhances the sensual qualities of everyday experience.

Dewey considered that the divisions and dualisms prevalent in western culture and philosophy are plagues. He considered that the full meaning of experience could only be brought to light if these dualisms were eradicated. In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey expressed his belief that science and art differ only in that science is the “handmaiden that conducts natural events” to “art—the mode of activity that is charged with meanings capable of immediately enjoyed possession” (358). According to Dewey, once this perception becomes clearer “thus would disappear the separations that trouble present thinking: division of everything into nature *and*¹ experience, of experience into practice *and* theory, art *and* science, of art into useful *and* fine, menial *and* free” (358).

¹ The italics are found in the original text. Any emphasis not found in the original text will be indicated by brackets.

The ultimate aim of John Dewey's work in *Art as Experience* is "to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience" (9). His criticism of social institutions is therefore a criticism of the dualism these same institutions impose on everyday experience. To explore art one must begin with the raw experiences of everyday life, and understand that art is merely a manifestation of these same experiences.

John Dewey would then likely criticize as impractical my claims that there should exist distinctions between things he held to be individually important, yet essentially the same – the aesthetic, art, and experience. My aim, however, is not to prioritize one concept over the other, but rather to achieve clarity of concepts that are – particularly in Dewey's work – convoluted and difficult to distinguish from one another. In order to discuss good art, important art, the aesthetic, and even art itself, there must exist clear ideas of each of these things.

Having acknowledged the extremely important themes of social commentary and refutation of dualisms I must now excuse myself from them. While these themes are crucial for the understanding of Dewey's work as a whole, the focus of my work will be on the composition of experience, art, and the aesthetic. In the following chapters I take the liberty of restructuring, modifying, and utilizing Dewey's book *Art as Experience*, as the foundation for my thoughts related to art, but before I can do so I first adjust and adapt the meanings of the central concepts found in *Art as Experience*. My discussion of Dewey focuses on criticisms and adaptations. The criticisms relate to two main things: the first is Dewey's failure to recognize the importance of a detailed

discussion of experience, especially in a work written about the very topic; the second is the concept of *an* experience, a concept that is not only dubious in meaning in the context provided by Dewey, but is also a glaring violation of Dewey's own views against dualism. Regarding adaptations, in the following sections I isolate a few concepts, such as the concept of the expressive object, and briefly explain how such concepts function with my own theories.

Rhythms, Expression, and *An* Experience

Dewey claimed that experience should be understood through the conditions of human interaction with the environment. Life goes on in, and because of, the environment. At every moment human beings must adjust to the challenges posed by the environment. Every challenge by the environment produces a need. A human being experiencing thirst finds the need to quench that thirst, and in the process must face and overcome other challenges – time, distance, physical obstacles. Every need is a lack of adjustment with the environment, and the fulfillment of every need is a recovery of, or a readjustment with, the environment. The readjustment of the individual with the environment is enriched because challenges have to be met. The restored harmony with the environment produces happiness and joy in the individual. Dewey claims this interaction with the environment is the origin of aesthetic experience.

Fortunately a theory of the place of the esthetic in experience does not have to lose itself in minute details when it starts with experience in its elemental form. Broad outlines suffice. The first great consideration is that life goes on in an environment; not merely *in* it but because of it, through interaction with it.... At every moment, the living creature is exposed to dangers from its surroundings, and at every moment, it must draw upon something in its surroundings to satisfy its needs. The career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way. (Dewey 19)

Dewey terms the struggle for harmony with the environment *rhythms* – the distinguishing and most important characteristic of humanity is that it is conscious of these rhythms. The aesthetic is the cultivation of the emotion that originates from these rhythms; meaning, action, and feeling are concentrated into the present as the aesthetic experience. The artist cultivates moments of tension and resistance and expresses their culmination, thus presenting the aesthetic ideal found in the union phase of the rhythmic pattern (21-24).

Note that Dewey illustrated that there need not exist a deeper analysis of experience, and this, I believe, is a huge mistake. If we are to understand the causal conditions of the aesthetic, we must begin by analyzing it as a result of the very nuances and processes of experience in its most basic and reduced forms – both intuitive or abstract (what Dewey calls material and ideal) – otherwise we are not engaging in a discussion of the aesthetic as something that can be understood in and of itself, but simply engaging in a discussion about the aesthetic as a quality of the fulfillment of rhythms. There is obviously an experience of struggling with the environment, but there are also experiences of green, sleep, tiredness, as well as countless experiences that do not arise from struggles. How is one to fulfill the experience of green, or the experience of seeing an apple, or the experience of judging someone as a bad person? These are single experiences that do not necessarily arise from a struggle with the environment, but they exist nonetheless. How can experience be understood only as the conditions of life when conditions are experiences in themselves?

Another peculiar element of this definition of the aesthetic is the claim that the aesthetic is an expression of the fulfillment of rhythms. If rhythms are fulfilled by a readjustment with the environment, then inevitably the aesthetic must be something happy, joyful, or pleasant. Such a definition of the aesthetic appears to further rob the aesthetic from its rootedness in experience because not all experiences are pleasant. Why can't there be an aesthetic experience of, or related to, pain? By relegating the aesthetic to something pleasant, Dewey appears to be robbing it of the possibility of being something neutral or unpleasant, therefore creating a dualism of negative and positive similar to the ones he denounces.

Dewey's discussion of rhythms is followed by a discussion of *an* experience. *An* experience, unlike ordinary experiences, is a consummation of events.

[W]e have *an* experience when the material runs its course to fulfillment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation... is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self sufficiency. It is *an* experience. (42)

Ordinary experiences start and stop; they are interrupted by some distracting force and are ended not for the sake of what they were initiated for. In contrast, *an* experience is the fulfillment and consummation of the material being experienced. In *an* experience every successive part flows distinctly, and can be identified as a part of that experience, however, the flow is never interrupted and each of these parts come together as a consummating whole. The phases of *an* experience are constituted of the intention, development, and fulfillment. Works of art are examples of *an* experience, different elements are brought together in order to form a whole. Art as an example of *an*

experience exists as the result of a series of intelligent and well planned steps aiming at reaching a certain quality of product. Once the quality is satisfactory to the artist, the work of art is finished, and each of its distinguishing characteristics – colors and shapes – for example, exist as individual qualities that flow together as a whole while retaining their own specific qualities.

In order to understand the processes involved in *an* experience, let us take use a visitation to Ruby Williams' farm and vegetable stand² as an example. I am driving through Bealsville, Florida, and decide that I would like some strawberries to eat on my way to a neighboring town. I stop and ask a local where I could find some strawberries – the local tells me that the best place to find strawberries would be Ruby Williams' fruit stand – the same person directs me to the stand, and I make my way there. Upon arrival, I find a rustic wooden building. The building is painted bright red, and is decorated by several drawings and paintings. I become curious, and decide to inspect one of the drawings. On a yellow, triangular piece of wood is painted a teenager carrying a red book bag, smoking a pipe. The sign says "Hey, I will not pay you to do cracke ok," and is signed "R.C.W.". I inspect several more signs, and they each have sayings about religion, piano playing cows and buttermilk, money, drugs, cigars, alcohol – the saying are accompanied by drawings of strawberries, cigars, cows, angels, polka dots, and so on. One of the doors has a sign next to it informing me that I should enter it if I am looking for art only. I go through that door, and find walls covered by several paintings, all very similar to the ones outside.

An African America woman greets me, and I ask her questions about the stand. She explains the meaning of one of the paintings, tells me that she wants to educate

² Information on Ruby Williams can be found at Folkvine.org.

people and take them away from drugs, and informs me that she finds the same joy in farming as she does painting. I ask her about strawberries, she points me to their location, and I purchase some. I jump back into my car, make my way back on the road, and begin eating my strawberries.

The whole of what has been described is what *an* experience is. My intention was to eat strawberries – in the process I discovered works of art, analyzed a unique fruit stand, had an interesting conversation, purchased my strawberries, and finally consumed them. I encountered and overcame several processes, enjoyed every one of them individually, but eventually they came together as a whole and were fulfilled when I finally ate the strawberries. The work of art was the process; the aesthetic experience came with the joy of consummation.

There are a few problems with the concept of *an* experience. One of the problems is the idea that there must be unity and form to it. There is no meaningful distinction between *an* experience, and any other experience. Isn't an ordinary experience of the color green a unified event? Several things come together to form the color green, there is my intention to look at something, my seeing of the color green, and my understanding that I saw the color green. Each step of *an* experience occurred, yet seeing the color green is an ordinary experience that shares common characteristics with every other experience. What separates *an* experience from another, more common experience, such as seeing green?

There are at least two problems with the language that Dewey uses. He mentions fulfillment, and consummation. *An* experience, he says, is a particular experience that does not cease, but comes to a consummation. The material of that experience runs its

course to fulfillment. But when we speak of experience, what is the difference between cessation and consummation? The cessation of an experience may also be its consummation. Because experiences do not exist before they are experienced, there cannot be experiences waiting to be consummated into something. Visiting the fruit stand was a series of experiences that occurred after I experienced them – there was no a priori experience in Bealsville waiting for me so that it could run its course to fulfillment.

An experience would only make sense if a priori, distinct types of experiences existed. If, for example, sounds were a priori experiences existing in the universe that human beings came into, we could call such a thing *an* experience. All experiences, however, exist only after human beings experience them – thunder is only thunder after the sound is experienced, the experience of green only exists after green is experienced, and the same can be said of any other experience.

Another criticism of *an* experience is that Dewey arguably contradicts himself once again. Dewey regards *an* experience as an elevated form of experience, a form of experience that should be regarded above others. Once again Dewey is utilizing the very dualisms and hierarchical structures he rejects, placing the quality of a certain experience above the quality of others.

Dewey further pushes his discussion about experience by developing the concept of impulsions. Impulsions, Dewey claims, are the origins of every experience. Unlike impulses, such as reflexes, or a reaction to a sour taste, impulsions are a reaction of the whole organism to a need.

Every experience, of slight or tremendous import, begins with an impulsion, rather *as* an impulsion.... "Impulsion" designates a movement outward and forward of the whole organism to which special impulses are auxiliary.... Impulsions are the beginnings of complete experience because they proceed from

need; from a hunger and demand that belongs to the organism as a whole and that can be supplied only by instituting definite relations (active relations, interactions) with the environment. (Dewey 64)

Like the aesthetic, impulsion also arises from an engagement with the environment. The organism undergoes an impulsion; an absolute need to interact with the environment in some way. If, for example, the impulsion for hunger is felt, the individual must experience conflict with the environment in seeking out food, and in the process adapt obstacles to become useful and meaningful objects. Dewey claims that once these obstacles – clay, pieces of wood, or wild animals for example – are overcome, impulsions “become aware of themselves,” and now “things in the environment that would otherwise be mere smooth channels or else blind obstructions become means, media” (Dewey 66). The experience begins as impulsions, undergoes rhythms, overcomes obstacles, and is fulfilled in its expression as something meaningful through actions.

The individual harnesses the experiences that arise from impulsion, and expresses them through the media found in the environment. Thus, the act of expression can be seen when natives who wish to express a fearful experience of being surprised by a thunderstorm while hunting bang on drums and dance, while the hunter who wishes to express pride in having killed a moose hangs the animal’s head on a wall.

While once again there are problems with Dewey’s concept of experience, the concept of the act of expression is a useful one. Why are impulsions not experiences? Dewey appears to be providing an account of *experiencing* rather than of experience. An impulsion would be my reaction to hunger; it would be my experiencing of a need to satisfy my hunger. But that reaction is an experience, hunger is an experience, and the

color green is an experience. Experiences cannot arise from impulsions, because impulsions are experiences.

The act of expression, similarly, does not arise from impulsions. It is an expression of experiences, and must be related to the most basic forms of experience. Dewey is correct, however, that the act of expressing something is the act of conveying experiences, and later in this thesis I make use of this concept in my development of the components of art.

The product of the act of expression is the expressive object. The expressive object is the result of the interaction between the individual and the mediums utilized in the process of expression.

Expression, like construction, signifies both an action and its result.... We are now concerned with the product, the object that is expressive, that says something to us. If the two meanings are separated, the object is viewed in isolation from the operation which produced it, and therefore apart from individuality of vision, since the acts proceeds from an individual live creature. (Dewey 88)

According to Dewey the material utilized to create art is universal. Mud, colors, wood are objects known by all, or most. The individual interacts with these materials, thus creating a unique object that is not like any previous object. The piece of wood that was sharpened to serve as an arrow is a new and unique object, and though the individual may find sharp pieces of wood lying about near a tree, the sharp piece of wood that was crafted by someone is unique because it contains the experiences of the individual as part of it.

Dewey distinguishes objects of expression from objects that convey meaning. To Dewey, a sign pointing to a city has meaning because it conveys where the city is. It does not, however, express the city. An expressive object, however, expresses meaning. A

poem about Tintern Abbey recreates and expresses an experience of Tintern Abbey (90-91).

The difference between an object that conveys and expresses meaning is not made clear in Dewey's text. Is an object, such as a sign, not the result of universal materials and the individual? What makes it so different from an ornate vase, or a statue? Dewey never quite explains the true difference between objects, but merely relies on dubious distinctions between meaning and expression, words that are quite close to each other. Nevertheless, the expressive object cannot be denied. Works of art really are an attempt to convey something through mediums, and I elaborate on this concept in my discussion of the meaninglessness of objects.

After introducing the concept of the expressive object, Dewey begins a discussion towards interpretation, criticism, impact on philosophy, and the roles and effects of art in civilization. I do not address or engage such discussions, because they require a clear foundation and understanding of art, the aesthetic, and experience. While I criticize Dewey in most of his points, his philosophy is crucial to the development of this paper. From him I will draw the following: that art begins in experience, that art is an expression of experience, that the meaning of an object must be understood in some context, and that the elements that compose art are physical, mental³, and emotional. I now turn to a discussion of experience, which may be useful in clarifying the criticisms of Dewey found in this chapter.

³ Because it is debatable and perhaps impossible to determine whether there is a difference between physical and mental experiences, I will from here on refer to the physical or sensual as "intuition," and to the mental or that relating to our first person understanding of thing as the "abstract".

Chapter Two – Arthur Schopenhauer

Having pointed out the flaws and inconsistencies found in Dewey's accounts of experience, art, and the aesthetic I now turn to a discussion of what composes experience. In order to do so, I build on Schopenhauer's observations regarding the world as representation. First there is a description of what constitutes the subject and immediate object, followed by an explanation of the causal constitution of objects, and finally an account of the interaction between individual and objects. I only, however, refer to the first book of *The World as Will and Representation*, namely *The World as Representation. First Aspect*. This is because I can only speak about that which I can myself observe, or have myself experienced – I cannot provide meaningful insights or accounts of eternity, platonic ideas, or the animation and objectification of the will – this being the content composing the bulk of the three other books that complete the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*.

The World is My Representation

"The world is my representation": this is a truth valid with reference to every living and knowing being, although man [or woman] alone can bring it into reflective, abstract consciousness" (Schopenhauer 3). These are the first lines of *The World as Will and Representation*, and no better words could be utilized to characterize a discussion of experience. In order to understand how we receive and perceive experience, a division of the individual between subject and immediate object, i.e. consciousness and the body, is useful. The immediate object constitutes the body, it is part of the world of physical intuition, and it gathers and processes data from its direct interaction with the world. The

subject is consciousness; it deals with the abstract world of concepts and reason. This distinction is not meant as a metaphysical duality – the object does not actually exist in a separate realm from the subject. According to Schopenhauer they exist as different aspects of the same organism.

In order to understand the interaction between the world and the individual there must first be an explanation of the causal constitution of objects. By objects I mean everything in the world that can be perceived in some form: light, trees, cars, shapes, and so on. The body also exists as an object, but for the sake of clarity we shall refer to it as the *immediate* object. Schopenhauer is quick to point out that:

Matter is absolutely nothing but causality, as anyone sees immediately the moment he [or she] reflects on it. Thus its being is its acting; it is not possible to conceive for it any other being. Only as something acting does it fill space and time; its action on the immediate object (which is itself matter) conditions the perception in which alone it exists. (8 - 9)

All matter can therefore be reduced to cause and effect; a red car for example is only the result of light reflecting upon an object that refracts a particular wave of light, and that object is the effect of the interaction of atoms, and these atoms can be further reduced to leptons and so on. All causes are effects, and all effects are causes. That being said, an object only appears as such relative to the causes and effects acting to produce it, including its position in space and time.

The immediate object (the body) interacts with the environment and intuitively; that is, it gathers sense data which produces representations of the causal relationships producing such objects. These experiences are representations of the body. The word “representation” is used here not to rob the world of its objectivity. The body does receive a presentation of real objects that really do exist; for instance, the red car really

does exist as an object that can be directly perceived by however many people come across it. The word "representation" is merely used to recognize the individual's relative position in space and the anatomical differences of the body. Someone who is color blind will see objects differently, a body builder might regard a watermelon as something light, while a child might regard it as something extremely heavy.

Returning to the example of the red car, while the car really does exist, and while it is intuited objectively by whomever perceives it, the intuition of the car will be merely the representation by the immediate object of each individual. The body is susceptible to several anatomical obstacles. Our perceptions of objects are therefore subjectively objective in that objects are directly perceived, but are perceived differently depending on factors – such as light or distance – that affect that perception. In his research on cognition, Kazuto Fujita, a Kyoto University professor, points out that:

Human perceptions of environmental events often differ from what they physically are. Suppose a man who has been talking to you at a distance of 1 m leaves you and walks away for a distance of 10 m. He should shrink 1/10 of his real size because the retinal size of his image becomes 1/10 of what it was before. In fact, this idea never occurs to us; he looks almost as tall as he did at 1m. This well-known phenomenon is called size constancy, and gives us an impressive example that what we see is different from what the real world is. In a sense, all perception is an illusion like this. (Matsuzawa 29)

Representation is therefore always present; depending on the time of the day, how much light is reflecting on the car, the direction from which I approach the car, my distance from the car, I will gather a different representation of the car, and so will everyone else. While we may know the dimensions of the car, the speed of the car, and the location of the car, we cannot intuit every single aspect of these things at once. We can intuit only the aspects that present themselves to us, and this is where subjectivity of

perception arises – and this subjectivity is crucial when attempting to understand experience.

As from the direct light of the sun to the borrowed reflected light of the moon, so do we pass from the immediate representation of perception, which stands by itself and is its own warrant, to reflection, to the abstract discursive concepts of reason, which have their whole content only from that knowledge of perception, and in relation to it. (Schopenhauer 35)

The direct light of the sun is the immediate object, which intuits things as they are physically. The light of the moon, the other half of the individual, is the subject. The subject is the abstract – understanding, consciousness, reason. Without the subject we can perceive the red car, but there is no concept of the red car. The subject receives at least some of the data gathered by the immediate object, and that data is processed into idea. Reason allows for an awareness of perceptions, and allows for relations of ideas to exist. These ideas become separated into what Schopenhauer calls *abstracta*, concepts such as love, virtue, investigations, and so on, and into *concreta*, concepts such as man, stone, horse, car, and so on. Through what Schopenhauer calls reason – a word utilized by Schopenhauer that carries a broad meaning, including understanding, contemplation, and other abstract processes that presumably exist but cannot be defined in physical terms – it is through reason that the individual is able to generate speech, concepts, archetypes, and other processes that allow for the association of principles and images to representations, and the constructions of concepts from other concepts, and the relationship of ideas to other ideas (40-41).

These relations of ideas further complicate the concept of representation. There is the representation itself, the intuition of matter and objects, but there is also the idea of these representations, and our memories of these same representations. Our ideas give

meaning to previously meaningless data, and relate it to further data creating an extremely complex network of perceptions and understandings in each subject.

Types of Experience

Now that we have established a foundation regarding representation, we can further investigate what exactly experience is. From examining the arguments adapted from Schopenhauer, we can gather that there are at least two types of experience. The first a simple experience composed merely of sensory data, the second a more complex experience found in consciousness.

If we return to Dewey after this analysis, we can easily see how he was mistaken in his claim that every experience originates from an impulse. The first type of experience is purely intuitive. Intuitive experience is a result of the acting of objects – which we have already established to be causality – upon the immediate object, and the acting of the immediate object upon other objects. Intuitive experience therefore composes every part of our sensual representations, and must therefore be directly connected to the material aspects of art. This is a proposition that I develop further in the following sections. One form of experience therefore can be pinpointed to be representation, bodily interaction with the world, direct sense data. We now have established at least one form of experience, and can build from here how it is related to art and the aesthetic.

The second kind of experience is abstract. This experience is contemplation, perception of representation, and understanding. For every sensual experience there is a corresponding abstract experience that accompanies it, a subjective understanding of that experience that exists solely in the consciousness of every individual.

Neither of these forms of experience exist in a vacuum. Intuitive experience exists in relation with other intuitive experience as well as abstract experiences; we see the red car, but we don't see only red or only car individually. The arrangement of each intuitive experience in relation to another composes an object, or a sensation; red, black, transparent, square, rectangle, metallic, smooth, bright, parked in a field, receiving direct sunlight all come together to form the experience of the car.

From these intuitive experiences are formed abstract experiences. There is the sensation of red, but there is also the idea of red, the sensation of pain, and the idea of pain; abstract ideas become further complicated and sometimes nearly incomprehensible, for example, there exists the idea of the idea of the sensation of red, and the memory of the idea of the sensation of red, and so on. Just as intuitive experience, abstract experience also exists in relation to other abstract experiences; red, love, warm, expensive, rubber all come together in order to form a perception of the reliable red car, owned and loved by someone, parked in a field on a warm day. From these examples we can draw four conclusions.

- Experience is either intuitive or abstract.
- Experiences do not exist in a vacuum.
- Experience is subjectively objective.
- Abstract experience is formed from intuitive as well as other abstract experiences.

Identifying Useful Concepts

Now that we have a solid definition of the concept of experience, we can go back and identify the portions of Dewey's philosophy that are compatible with Schopenhauer's

understanding of the world as object-subject relationship. First we must completely reject Dewey's notions of experience. Rhythms, impulses, and *an* experience are no different from any other experiences. All such concepts result from the relationship between intuitive and abstract experience.

There are no a priori designations for the meanings and roles of experiences. It appears misguided to claim that the aesthetic arises from rhythms, and that a condition for the aesthetic to exist is rhythms. The aesthetic does not exist as a unique, a priori, pre-designated experience per se. The same can be said of rhythms and *an* experience – to claim that art is the consummation of an intentional experience is a misjudgment. Art has to exist as the interaction of several individual experiences, which we identify to be art. These experiences cannot be consummated as if they existed somewhere waiting for a human being to pick them up and carry them to their destination.

We can, however, identify each experience individually. The concept of the act of expression is particularly useful when trying to understand how the artist manipulates objects in order to express his or her experiences. The expressive object is also a plausible concept, and can be utilized in our exploration of how art is perceived. Other concepts that can be utilized in our attempt to define the individual parts that compose art are feeling, emotion, or the aesthetic.

Chapter Three – What is Art?

In this chapter we finally begin to reconcile Dewey and Schopenhauer, paying particular attention to an application of our concept of experience as defined by Schopenhauer, to Dewey's exploration of the act of expression, as well as the expressive object. To understand what is meant by art, I will divide the concept into three distinct parts: the object of art, the act of expression, and the spectator. The object of art, being mere causality like all other objects, is completely meaningless. Meaning must be given to these objects through the complex processes of intuitive and abstract experience, first by the artist, and then by the spectator. The artist harnesses previous experiences, and through what Dewey calls the act of expressions, transfers these meanings to the object or objects of art. The spectator, which includes anyone who has ever experienced these objects of art, be they museum visitors, the artist themselves, or someone actively engaged in the object of art – such as a video gamer – impose meaning upon the work of art based on previous experiences, as well as context. The aesthetic arises from the emotions evoked by what is experienced as art by the spectator – happiness, joy, confusion, sadness, disgust, and so on are examples of aesthetic reactions or experiences arising from the spectator's interaction with the object of art.

The Meaninglessness of Objects

Objects are meaningless. By meaningless I mean that there is no intrinsic, a priori meaning to objects. If we were to take any object apart, we would not find meaning as a chemical or atomic element that is part of the composition of an object. So far as they are objects independent of being perceived by a subject, they are nothing but causality. This

must be understood when attempting to define what I call from here on the *object of art*. The object of art (note that I *do not* mean the objective of art) is the medium through which experiences are communicated: paintings, dance, video games, poetry, statues, buildings, household items are all objects of art. Dewey makes a similar distinction, though he utilizes his broadly generalized concept of experience when claiming that “there is a difference between the art product (statue, painting or whatever), and the *work of art*” (167).

The first part of art is therefore the object prior to its being molded into art, the object or objects being regarded by the artist. For one reason or another the artist wishes to express something through art. The artist chooses a particular medium, and gives meaning to the objects that compose that medium through what Dewey calls “the act of expression” – the incorporation of previous experiences into an object form. From previous experiences then, the artist finds meaning in otherwise meaningless objects. To clarify this claim, let us analyze Salvador Dalí’s painting, *Portrait of My Dead Brother* (1963).

Taking up most of the canvas is a portrait of Dalí’s dead older brother (also named Salvador), composed of different colored cherries, a vulture, and the heads and bodies of soldiers. With their lances raised, Spanish soldiers march from the lower right of the painting towards the boy’s image. Finally, to the left of the portrait, a peasant couple loads something into a wheelbarrow, while three other people sit by and watch. In *The Salvador Dalí Museum Collection*, Robert S. Lubar provides a detailed analysis of the painting accompanied by a quote from *The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dalí*:

[I]n my parent's bedroom – an attractive, redoubtable place, full of ambivalences and taboos –there was a majestic picture of Salvador, my dead brother, next to a reproduction of Christ crucified as painted by Velázquez; and this image of the cadaver of the savior whom Salvador had without question gone to in his angelic ascension conditioned me in an archetype born of four Salvadors who cadaverized me. The more so as I turned into a mirror image of my dead brother.... I had lost the image of my being that had been stolen from me; I lived only by proxy and reprieve. (157)

The quote serves to illustrate that Dalí was haunted by the image of his elder brother throughout his life; an image that was responsible for the fragmentation of Dalí's understanding of his self into two. The painting is an attempt to finally put his brother to rest, each piece playing an important role in Dalí's redefinition of his own self. The child depicted in *Portrait of My Dead Brother* – According to Robert S. Lubar – is therefore neither Dalí, instead the image does not correspond to that of a specific person, because it is meant to "suggest a generic image of wholeness and completion" (157), thus symbolizing the unification of Dalí's two selves into a whole. Dalí himself comments on the meaning of the painting, explaining that

"The Vulture, according to the Egyptians and Freud, represents my mother's portrait. The cherries represent the molecules, the dark cherries create the visage of my dead brother, the sun-lighted cherries create the image of Salvador living thus repeating the great myth of Dioscuri Castor and Pollux" (Lubar 157).

"Thus Dalí comes full circle," Lubar explains, "forging an elaborate network of associations in which he redefines his past in relation to myth and psychoanalysis, using the weight of art history and modern science to shore up a divided, if elaborately constructed, self" (157).

We must begin by considering the meaninglessness of the several objects that influenced the idea for this painting. The cherries, molecules, wheelbarrows, lances, and even the soldiers are merely causality. To art, this meaninglessness is essential, because it

belongs to the realm of intuitive experiences. The object of art is also meaningless, while we may regard it as a masterpiece, the fact that the object is nothing but oil on canvas, a mere product of causality floating in space, cannot be changed. To understand art as experience is to understand that it begins in the realm of experience, particularly intuitive experience.

For *Portrait of My Dead Brother* to materialize, several objects and experiences had to come together. In the painting, Dali gave meaning to each object – cherries became molecules, a vulture became a figure of maternal dominance and watchfulness, a “majestic” portrait of a dead brother became an oppressive object, and so on. Previously to being painted, each of these experiences had special meaning for Dali – the intuitive experiences in the form of the objects themselves, and the abstract experiences in the form of concepts such as the atomic sciences, the self, dominance, confusion. Here with experience defined, we revisit Dewey’s concepts of the act of expression and the expressive object. The artist, from previous experiences, assigns meanings to meaningless objects, and molds them together through some medium in order to express a set of individual experiences that come together as a whole. This molding of mediums into expression is what Dewey calls “the act of expression.” It is the process of harnessing our experiences with the world, and expressing them through the artistic object.

The meaninglessness of the object of art is also crucial to the spectator. From meaninglessness spring all meanings – each object is a blank slate that exists in some experiential context. When observing *Portrait of My Dead Brother*, the image of a child being approached by armed men will provide a completely different experience – perhaps

an uncomfortable one – to a person who was held hostage as a child, while it may provide a pleasant experience for a person interested in Spanish military history. Someone else, however, might approach the painting's individual characteristics, and find pleasure or displeasure from a close observation of the individual physical details; perhaps this person might interpret the soft light depicted on the painting as peaceful, or perhaps the cherries remind this person of a romantic encounter. Even the artist is spectator, and though the artist is able to manipulate the medium through which experiences are conveyed, the meaninglessness of the object creates the opportunity for infinitely varied and complex experiences of the object that are unique for each individual.

Context

The meaninglessness of objects raises the problem of subjectivity. Obviously meaning can be communicated somehow, otherwise language would not exist, and human interaction would be impossible. Meaning in art is made possible through context – while exploring the different types of experience we established that experiences do not exist in a vacuum. That means everything exists in relation to something else, in a context of some sort. A car in a car dealership is inviting; the same car in a dark forest is suspicious though it remains the same object. The aesthetic is directly related to context, because context is directly responsible for the immediate representation of the object of art. Context is infinitely complex; it's quite literally present everywhere; and, once something is isolated from one context, it is promptly added into another, so that context is an inescapable concept. When relating context to art, I will focus on three distinct types, or manifestations of context – context of meaning, by which I mean the context provided by

an artist, a scholar, or generally anyone else that influences the spectator's understanding and experience of the object of art; context of perspective, by which I mean the conditions surrounding a work of art – location and lighting – for example; finally, context of the object of art itself, by which I mean the manner which an object of art is presented, and how the elements of such a work come together to form meaning.

The manner which we understand someone else's idea of a work of art is completely dependent on context of meaning. A 2006 documentary entitled *Who the #\$&% Is Jackson Pollock?* tells the story of a truck driver named Teri Horton. Horton purchases a painting at a thrift store for five dollars, only to find out that it may be a Jackson Pollock painting worth millions of dollars. Several art critics analyze the painting, and a forensic scientist is hired to investigate the origin of the painting. While the scientist is able to match a fingerprint on the back of the painting to a fingerprint found in Jackson Pollock's studio, some art critics believe the painting is not an original, while others are completely uncertain. Whether or not the painting is authentic is immaterial to this discussion about context, but the mere fact that there is so little difference between a five dollar painting found in a thrift store, and several million dollar paintings found in museums and private collections greatly illustrates the importance of context. The paintings are so much alike that experienced art critics cannot tell the difference between a certified Pollock work, and the thrift store painting. Clearly, however, the certified work is regarded as much more valuable than the thrift shop painting.

Context of meaning and the depth of the spectator's experience are responsible for the value – monetary or otherwise – given to a work of art. If the artist wishes for the

spectator to father a certain meaning from the work, then that meaning must be explicitly communicated. Dalí, for example, communicated the meaning of *Portrait of My Dead Brother* through interviews and autobiographies – the spectator is influenced by such a communication, and is preconditioned to understand the painting in such a manner that it includes not only the content of his or her own experiences, but also includes Dalí's experiences. If Jackson Pollock's work is to be understood as a financial asset, then it must be displayed in the context that it was made financially desirable. His innovative technique, his extremely emotional personality, the rhythmic patterns he employed, and whatever other marketable aspects of the paintings are relevant to an understanding and appreciation of Pollock's work as financially desirable and innovative pieces of art. Since the object of art is meaningless, a Pollock found in a thrift store that cannot be certified as a legitimate Pollock can easily be regarded as nothing but a painting purchased from a thrift store.

Context of perspective is the direct relationship between the work of art and the environment in which it is presented. The intuitive representation of a work of art may be more or less appealing, mean one thing or the other, or be abstractly experienced differently depending in what manner the object of art is perceived. The manner the light is reflecting on a painting may make it appear more majestic, while the absence of light may hide some of the painting's features. A sculpture of a religious figure hanging from the ceiling is perceived differently from one lying about on a pile of trash, a tall person perceives a statue differently from a short person – different lighting, different sizes, different colors all influence the context of perspective.

Any abstract experience can be imposed upon a perspective, thus greatly affecting the individual's experience of the object of art. To experience a band playing on television is extremely different from experiencing that same band live in concert, though the band and the song may be the same. By examining the role of the cherries in *Portrait of My Dead Brother*, we already know that Salvador Dalí was very conscious that objects are causality, but he also often expressed his awareness of context. *Gala Contemplating the Mediterranean Sea which at Twenty two Meters Becomes the Portrait of Abraham Lincoln (Homage to Rothko)*, (1976) is perhaps the best illustration of that awareness.

The painting depicts Gala – Dalí's muse – nude and facing away from the spectator. She is staring at a harbor through a window. Outside of the window the spectator can see the sun, but emanating from the sun is Jesus Christ – a figure Dalí compared to atomic energy – hanging from a cross. The painting is composed of several squares of different hues and shapes, these squares are the homage to Rothko – who painted in that style – and had recently died. As the title of the painting suggests, once the spectator stands at twenty meters from the painting, the images come together to form a pixilated image of Abraham Lincoln.

In this painting Dalí does several things. He emphasizes the multiplicity of meanings based on individual experience, he illustrates the interplay between intuitive and abstract experience, and he demonstrates how context influences every aspect of art. As the perspective of the spectator changes, the meaning and understanding of the painting changes with it.

The final manifestation of context is the context contained within the object of art itself. If a statue is meant to demonstrate someone experiencing pain, the sculptor will

work on the sculpture's expression; if that same sculptor wishes to portray a king, a crown might be sculpted onto the statue. This form of context is present in every object of art: in painting colors and shapes are put together in a context that creates something, in music tones are put together into the context of a harmony, and literature is composed of words pieced together to form whatever the writer wishes to portray through his writing.

Obviously all forms of context interact with one another, and form ever more complex experiences. If we refer back to *Portrait of my Dead Brother*, we can see the direct relationship between context of meaning and context contained within the object of art in the image of the vulture, for example. Knowledge that the vulture is a maternal figure clarifies why a vulture is present on top of the head of the young boy, while someone who is ignorant of that fact will have trouble assigning a meaning to the vulture. Similarly, in *Gala contemplating the Mediterranean Sea...*, we can observe the direct relationship between context of perspective and the context within the object of art in the transformations present within the painting. The perspective directly affects the experience of the objects contained within the object of art.

The Aesthetic

So far we have divided up experience, context, and art into distinct parts so that the whole of each concept could be better understood. The same must be done for the aesthetic, because it originates from the interplay between the object of art and the individual. We have already established that the object of art is meaningless, and therefore completely subjective to the experience of the spectator. We have also

discussed in detail the importance of context if meaning is to be gathered from the object of art. The aesthetic is the result of the interplay between meaning and subjectivity, meaninglessness and context, object and idea, intuition and abstraction.

The aesthetic experience is the emotion evoked by the work of art on the individual. In essence, the aesthetic begins in the imposition of the object of art upon the spectator through intuitive experience – objects, colors, light are intuited by the body, and perceived as distinct, but meaningless objects. The imposition of the object of art upon the spectator is followed by the spectator's imposition of meaning upon the object of art; the flood of intuitive experiences are met by a flood of abstract experiences – memories of childhood, concepts of love, knowledge of history, inclinations, judgments are all evoked at once to produce sensations and emotions. These emotions are the aesthetic.

An object of art, therefore, does not have to be beautiful in order to evoke an aesthetic experience. Fear, pity, despair are all emotions that can be evoked by a work of art, and all such emotions should be regarded as aesthetic experiences. The distinguishing characteristic between the aesthetic and the mere perceiving or representing of the work of art is that the aesthetic is the effect of the work of art upon the spectator. It is rather difficult to give an account of an aesthetic experience, something subjective and unique to each person, though philosophical terms. In order to better understand the aesthetic, let us attempt to illustrate the process by considering an account given by Nelson Motta⁴ in *Noites Tropicais*.

I didn't like Music.... Music, at least the one that was listened to on the radio and musical records, was unbearable for an adolescent living in Copacabana in the late 50s.... To us, middle class kids in Copacabana, the National Radio singers

⁴ Nelson Motta is a composer of Popular Brazilian Music (MPB), a producer, manager, and music critic. *Noites Tropicais* is his autobiographical work which chronicles the evolution of Popular Brazilian Music as well as his involvement in each distinct Brazilian musical movement.

and their low voices, saying things in a language we didn't understand, were abominable. But in the summer of 1958, in Sao Paulo, not only did I start smoking but I also heard in a battery powered radio – a new technological sensation, an absolute novelty that had recently arrived in Brazil – Joao Gilberto singing “Chega de saudade”. It felt like lightning. It was different from everything that I had ever heard, I was shocked, not knowing whether I loved or hated it. But the more I listened to it, the more I liked it.⁵(9-10)

Motta is describing an aesthetic experience. Notice his emphasis on not being able to understand the language utilized in the music that was popular at the time. An unremarkable object of art cannot evoke any emotions, and therefore no aesthetic experience. Bossa nova, however, immediately produced an aesthetic experience on Motta – confusion. The two processes involved in the aesthetic are also mentioned in his description, first the object of art imposed itself upon Motta in the form of intuitive experience – unable to relate the new experience of bossa nova to any previous experienced, Motta imposed wonder upon the object of art, and the resulting aesthetic experience was confusion. Note also that he does not remember his first experience of Bossa nova in a vacuum, he fondly indicates the presence of the battery powered radio, as well as the fact that during that same summer he started smoking. The effect of bossa nova on Motta, however, did not stop at confusion – he further develops the influence it had in his life later on in the text of *Noites Tropicais*.

One show forever influenced the history of Brazilian music. And my life.... One by one the windows on the second floor behind the stage lit up and from each was displayed a flag, with the words “the night” [a noite], “of love”[do amor], “of smile”[do sorriso] and “of the flower”[e da flor]. In the middle of the crowd that overflowed from the two thousand seats in the amphitheater, I deliriously applauded.... That night I saw for the first time the poet Vinicius de Moraes and I heard the voices of the quartet Os Cariocas, with their dissonant harmonies inspired by the great American vocal groups, I heard the astonishingly serpent-like style of Johnny Alf... I loved the young ambience and animated environment, the sensation that I was witnessing the birth of something large and beautiful.... I wished ardently to become one of them. (13-16)

⁵ The text in the quote was translated by the author from Portuguese to English.

The further Motta understood and embraced bossa nova in its different forms and contexts, the more aesthetic experiences arose from bossa nova, and the more meaning it gained within his life. Once again, when describing his aesthetic experiences of that night Motta does so in terms of emotions – love, urgency, desire, excitement. Once again context plays an important role in his experience of the object of art, the crowd in the amphitheater, the young ambience, the theme of the show displayed in the flags. In these two quotes Motta illustrates all the processes I have developed so far: the meaninglessness of the object of art is present in his description of the music he disliked, Motta couldn't find any experiences that he could meaningfully relate to that music; context is present in the manner which he relates specific details and events to the object of art – he started smoking, the crowd in the amphitheater; the aesthetic experience is present the description of his emotions, he experienced love, confusion, awe, and countless other emotions. All of these factors lead to his passion of music.

The aesthetic is therefore the last element in the composition of art. Art begins as the experience of the artist, which is expressed into object form through the manipulation of mediums. The result of this manipulation is the object of art, which as object is completely meaningless until meaning is imposed upon it by the spectator (which includes everyone that experiences that object). The object of art interacts with the spectator, and the intuitive experiences produced by the work of art are related to abstract experiences. These abstract experiences are further deepened by the context in which the object of art is experienced, and different meanings are assigned to the object of art. If the flood of experiences produced by all of these elements produces any emotion upon the spectator, the aesthetic is achieved. The aesthetic is completely subjective, and its

presence or manifestation is uncertain. It is not a quality of art – it only occurs when the interplay of new experiences and previous experiences results in some sort of emotion.

Chapter Four – The Value of Art

So far we have removed ourselves from the work of art and spoken only of the processes that come together to compose it. It is important, however, to remember that art is not removed from experience. My introduction mentions the impact of art in every day life, and we cannot have a discussion of art without acknowledging, or at least speculating, that it is a valuable and enriching process. We must make one more distinction, however.

In acknowledging that works of art play a large role in our lives, I also acknowledge that they must have some enriching value to human experience. But the value of a work of art does not necessarily stem from the fact that works of art produce aesthetic experiences. Aesthetic experiences are subjective, and every individual experiences the aesthetic uniquely and individually. Works of art, however, are objects that can be experienced by most, if not all, people in some form or another. These works of art have value in their organic nature. We must therefore not mistake the whole process that composes art and the aesthetic – which I will call *an* experience in accordance with Dewey – with the work of art.

Redefining *An* Experience

We have established the individual parts that compose what we typically call art. Art belongs to the realm of experience. We identified experience to be intuitive and abstract, though the two are often not easy to distinguish because there exists a complex interplay between both. We identified art as the act of expression, the expressive object, and the experience of that object. We found that though the object of art is meaningless,

meaning can be imposed on it through context, therefore the artist can influence the spectator's experience of the object of art. And finally, we identified the aesthetic, or the aesthetic experience, to be the subjective emotions experienced by the individual when meanings arise from, or are imposed upon the object of art. But we are lacking a term that captures the whole of these processes.

In *Ways of Worldmaking*, Nelson Goodman comments on the relationships among worlds. He identifies one of the processes of worldmaking to be composition and decomposition:

Much but by no means all worldmaking consists of taking apart and putting together, often conjointly: on the one hand, of dividing wholes into parts and partitioning kinds into subspecies, analyzing complexes into component features, drawing distinctions; on the other hand, of composing wholes and kinds out of parts and members and subclasses, combining features into complexes, and making connections. (7)

This description of worldmaking is an accurate portrayal of what I have done so far, but it is also an accurate portrayal of what I regard to be art. Several distinct processes coming together to form one thing. My paper has so far engaged in the decomposition of art, but now we must compose all of these distinct processes into a whole again.

In order to do so, let's redefine a term utilized by Dewey – *an* experience. We have acknowledged that art is experience, or at least the relationship between several experiences coming together to form the impression that art is a whole. We have, however, specifically defined art to be the expressive object, the act of expression, and the experience of that expressive object. But we require a name that describes the whole of an art experience, so that we can distinguish between each part.

Dewey's definition of *an* experience as an experience that is consummated was hindered by the fact that Dewey never really defined what experience is. But now that we have clear definitions of what experience is, we can make a slight adjustment to the concept, and utilize the term for our own purposes.

In my meaning, therefore, *an* experience is the whole process of art. *An* experience means the composition of (1) the artist's harnessing of previous intuitive and abstract experiences, (2) the expressing of such experiences through a medium, (3) the perceiving or experiencing that medium, (4) the representing that medium, (5) the recollection of previous experiences evoked by that medium, and finally (6) the aesthetic experience which is composed of the emotions evoked by the experiencing and representing the object of art, or the expressive object.

All of the processes listed are experience. Steps one through four compose art, while steps five and six compose the aesthetic experience. Steps one through six, however, compose a whole, they compose *an* experience.

The Organic Nature of Art

We have established that the aesthetic is completely subjective because it is contingent upon the experiences of the spectator. An individual may have an aesthetic experience from perceiving a tree, a street sign, a cathedral, or a fresco. A tree, of course, would not be considered a work of art, because it is not human made. The street sign, however, meets the criterion to be considered an expressive object. Someone had to make the street sign, no matter how indirectly so. It may be considered an expression of the Mayor's need to label the streets, or perhaps an expression of the factory worker's need

to craft as many signs as possible in order to get paid more money. Any object that is human made, and that is experienced, can be considered art.

Thus some of us have paintings hanging on our walls, some of us have body piercings, and some of us have crucifixes in our bedrooms. The value of art stems from the very fact that anything can be art, and that the meaning of the object of art is not fixed. Dewey refers to the Parthenon when attempting to convey the organic nature of art:

By common consent, the Parthenon is a great work of art. Yet it has esthetic standing only as the work becomes an experience for a human being. And, if one is to go beyond personal enjoyment into the formation of a theory about that large republic of art of which the building is one member, one has to be willing at some point in his [or her] reflection to turn from it to the bustling, arguing, acutely sensitive Athenian citizens, with civic sense identified in a civic religion, of whose experience the temple was an expression, and who built it not as a work of art but as a civic commemoration. (10)

The meaning of art is therefore never fixed. The Parthenon has thousands of years of meanings and experiences imposed upon it. Though someone that has studied history may know that the Parthenon is a civic commemoration dedicated to Athena, the casual observer will merely be aware of the immediate presence and occurrences surrounding the monument. But if one studies the history of the Parthenon the understanding that the building has been experienced by millions of people, was built for a goddess, and is part of the early stages of western culture becomes part of the experience of the building.

Though *an* experience might not occur, and though someone might not have an aesthetic experience from experiencing the Parthenon, the fact that the art still has value to human experience is perhaps irrefutable. Our lives are often enriched by the meanings we find in art. When, like Nelson Motta, we experience curiosity invoked by a work of art, our lives can be changed forever. When we learn that someone is using a vegetable

stand as an act of protest and activism, or that a song was sung in protest of social norms and dictatorships, our experiences become more varied and enriched.

Applying *An* Experience

Our discussion about art, experience, and the aesthetic has so far been abstract. We should now apply our concepts to a movement, and shed some light upon what has been discussed so far. Though this renewed concept of *an* experience can be applied to any form of art, I have chosen bossa nova as it is a well documented, cohesive, and well known artistic movement and musical genre. I will divide the development of bossa nova into experience, the harnessing and expressing of those experiences, and the aesthetic reception of bossa nova. All of these notions – experience, expression, and the aesthetic – interact with each other, but by depicting the history of bossa nova and later clarifying where each occurs, I hope to provide a clear application of theory to artistic activity.

Experience

To find the origins of bossa nova one must learn about the origins of samba. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, due to the abolition of slavery and the beginnings of the industrial revolution, plantations were no longer a viable economic option in Brazil. As a result, former slaves were forced to move to the city of Rio de Janeiro in order to secure some form of economic stability. In order to maintain their culture alive, prominent Afro-Brazilian community leaders often organized parties, and religious meetings in a Rio neighborhood called Praça Onze (Buenosaires 3-4).

In these meetings, landu – a dance brought to Brazil from Angola by Bantu Slaves – was mixed with the polka, habanera, march, and maxixe. Slowly these dances and musical styles were fused together into samba. Samba is dominated by percussion instruments, and originally emphasized rhythm over melody. Eventually, as samba evolved, it branched off into several different styles. One of these styles is the samba-canção (samba song). Unlike traditional samba, the samba-canção emphasized melody over rhythm. Eventually, during the fifties, the singing in samba-canção “developed into a style employing a loud, almost operatic voice” (Buenosaires 6).

We will return to samba later, but for now we must set it aside in order to focus on a particular figure. João Gilberto was born in 1931, in the town of Juazeiro, in the state of Bahia. He was the son of Juveniano de Oliveira, one of the wealthiest men in the state. Mr. Juveniano had only a fourth grade education, yet his business acumen allowed him to expand from a small fabric store into the grain industry, farming, real state, cargo shipping, and even oil. The father of nine children, Juveniano de Oliveira emphasized education in his household. He successfully managed to educate eight of his children into lawyers, doctors, and scholars of all sorts. One child, however, João Gilberto, decided he had enough schooling by the age of fourteen (Castro xvi-xviii).

It was also at fourteen that João Gilberto was given his first guitar, by an uncle who admired his passion for music and talent for singing. In little time João Gilberto became a local celebrity, gathering with friends under a giant Tamarind tree and delighting the town with his interpretations of the songs he had heard in old Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire musicals. At eighteen João Gilberto decided that Juazeiro was too small of a town for him, and he decided to go live with a well connected cousin in

Salvador – a coastal town in Bahia – until he managed to get a record deal with a radio station (Castro xviii-xxii).

The Expressive Object and the Act of Expression

João Gilberto's versatile voice – his voice could boom into a loud samba, be softened to the tune of a romantic ballad, or flow with the sophisticated jazz arrangements of a Sinatra – quickly landed him a spot in an upcoming group based in Rio de Janeiro called "Os Garotos da Lua" (The Moon Boys). Os Garotos da Lua worked for a radio station called Radio Tupi, and everyone in the radio station became immediately impressed with João Gilberto's confidence and versatility. Since Juazeiro, when he played songs from his window to the girls walking by his house, the guitar had already become an extension of Gilberto's body. He was far from shy, but was very quiet. He would rarely speak, but would always be singing. He mostly expressed himself through song, and made a point to always push his musical abilities further and further (Castro 33-39).

João Gilberto's dedication to music did not translate into his work ethic, however. He would often miss recordings and gigs, choosing instead to roam around town with his girlfriends, visiting record stores and playing his guitar by the sea. It was no surprise to anyone that he lost his job with Os Garotos da Lua, who were often left to perform in the presence of important people without a singer, and with one less guitar. For three years João Gilberto lead an unstable life in Rio, living with friends in tiny apartments, smoking marijuana, and performing in bars and hotels that would barely pay him enough for his bond fare (Castro 41-49).

It was in one such bar that Antonio Carlos Jobim and the poet and diplomat Vinicius de Moraes struck a partnership. Moraes was in search of a modern and talented pianist in order to help him with the arrangements for a Broadway style show he had been planning. In a bar in downtown Rio, asking managers for suggestions, Moraes found Tom Jobim – a young and talented pianist, who enjoyed playing jazz and nocturnes, sometimes combining both. One night, standing outside a bar hoping for a performance, João Gilberto met Tom Jobim (Castro 45, 55-57, 75-79).

Soon after their meeting, João – who had nowhere to stay, had no money, and often spent change he found in the street on reefers – received an invitation from a friend to live in Porto Alegre for a while. Sick of being ridiculed, without being able to hold a job, and having no place to stay, Gilberto accepted the invitation. In Porto Alegre, a city in southern Brazil, João Gilberto became a local celebrity. Without access to marijuana he dedicated himself full time to playing the guitar. He became a regular musician at city events, upper class restaurants, and the houses of the social elite. Despite his success, however, João Gilberto still had a problem. He had a need to express himself musically in a new way that he didn't know how. He wanted something different, a different style, but he did not know what that style was or how to achieve it (Castro 96-100).

As rumors of his eccentricity and womanizing began to surface in Porto Alegre, and as discontent with his inability to express himself increased, Gilberto and his friend decided it would be best if he went to Minas Gerais – a state south of Bahia and north of Sao Paulo – to stay with his sister for a while. João Gilberto arrived in Minas Gerais uninvited and unannounced to the surprise of his sister, who had just given birth to a baby. His mental distress was so obvious, however, that she decided to let him stay for a

short time. His inability to express himself through words or musically caused Gilberto to have mood swings – he would become angry as easily as he would become euphoric, and neither emotion would stay for long before it was replaced by the other (Castro 101-103).

João stayed with his sister for a few months, mostly locked up in the bathroom experimenting with his guitar and the acoustics. But because of his mood swings and increasingly eccentric personality, his sister decided it would be better if she sent him to stay with their parents for a while. In 1956, seven years after he had left, João Gilberto was back in Juazeiro (Castro 104-105).

In Juazeiro João found no support. His father not only hated the fact that João was a musician, but he also hated the experimental sounds that had come from João's room. He often argued with his son, demanding that he become a doctor or lawyer. Eventually Mr. Juveniano de Oliveira managed to get his son committed into a mental hospital owned by his friend. A week later, however, João was out and moving back to Rio (Castro 105-106).

Back in Rio, João was a new man. He decided that this time he would become a success, and immediately upon arrival began calling his connections. While in Juazeiro, João had his guitar taken away from him by his father. To compensate for the fact that he no longer had an instrument, Joao would now often visit friends, often comment on how special their guitars were, and disappear with the instrument as soon as the opportunity arose. He kept the guitars for a day or two before returning the instruments to their rightful owners. Eventually Gilberto convinced a non-guitar playing friend to purchase a guitar, which Gilberto borrowed indefinitely (Castro 112-114).

When Jobim met João Gilberto again, he was impressed. Jobim had heard that Gilberto had been mentally ill, and was not expecting to see the well groomed and focused man that stood before him. Tom Jobim was certainly not expecting the unorthodox sounds that came out of João Gilberto's guitar and mouth – a simplified samba beat accompanied by a soft singing that hit exact notes (Castro 118).

A year before this encounter, Tom Jobim had written a song called “Chega de Saudade” (No More Blues). Jobim had been spending time with his mother, Dona Nilza, and was inspired by her maid who softly sang a “chorinho” while she swept the room. The maid skillfully divided a single musical phrase into three distinct musical parts, a feat that greatly impressed Jobim. He decided to imitate the style. Jobim fused a samba-canção with a chorinho flavor, and the result was “Chega de Saudade”. He gave the song to Vinicius de Moraes, who had tremendous difficulty writing the lyrics for such a modern, choppy, and unorthodox composition. The song was put away, until Jobim heard João Gilberto's newly developed style, which matched perfectly with his own modern musical arrangements (Castro 119).

In 1958, after a huge campaign by famous composers such as Dorival Caymmi and Tom Jobim, Odeon records allowed Jobim and Gilberto to pick a studio, and do as they pleased with it. The recording session was far from smooth; there were interruptions by the directors who did not like the fact that João Gilberto had asked for a microphone for himself and his guitar, the musical arrangements had to be changed, and confusion among the performers halted the session several times. But eventually “Chega de Saudade” was recorded and released (Castro 131-134).

The Aesthetic Experience of Bossa Nova

In 1958, Nelson Motta was a teenager vacationing in Sao Paulo. While listening to his brand new battery powered radio, a song by some guy called João Gilberto was played. The name of the song was “Chega de Saudade” and Motta had no idea what it was. Back home in Rio, the new music was a huge hit, especially among middle-class youth. No one knew what to make of this new musical style – it was samba-canção with a hint of chorinho, but it was also jazz (Motta 9-11). But really, it was none of those things. Gilberto sang with a soft voice, and played the guitar with his fingers instead of a pick. The sound was accompanied by a beating against the body of the guitar. The heavily syncopated sound had unorthodox notes that were often dissonant. They called it samba jazz, jazz samba, sambalanco, and samba corrupted by imperialist American influences. But the name that really stuck was bossa nova.

Bossa nova was a new voice to the youth of Brazil who had no music to relate to. Samba was old and tired, jazz was a foreign notion, and traditional Brazilian music was just impossible to comprehend. Bossa nova was something new, it celebrated love and nature in a way that the new generation of Brazilians – who were experiencing the modernization and financial development of the country – could relate to from their newly constructed middle-class apartments that faced the curvy Rio beaches, and stood underneath the open arms of the Christ the Redeemer.

The dissonant sounds of bossa nova represented the dissonant notions of the new generation of Brazilians. When a military dictatorship was instituted in 1964, bossa nova changed forever. It was split into the protest song and tropicalia – the protest song utilized themes of religion and nature in order to convey hidden political messages while

tropicalia, lead by Caetano Veloso, harnessed and heightened the unorthodox variations in Bossa nova in order to express the need for change and evolution in Brazilian culture (Buenosaires 7-11).

An Experience of Bossa Nova

When we turn our attention to the experiences that shaped bossa nova, we can see that they originated long ago in the fingers, dances, and songs imported to Brazil by African slaves. The fusion of African and European sounds created samba, and the fusion of samba and jazz created bossa nova. João Gilberto's experiences come from his youth in Juazeiro – he experienced the dry and hot climate of Bahia, hid under the shadow of a huge Tamarind tree, heard the sounds that came from American musicals as well as local Brazilian accordion players.

But he also experienced love and pain. In Rio he understood what it was to be homeless and penniless after growing up rich and worry free. He sometimes was forced to sleep on the beach, in a soft bed of sand, listening to the symphony of the sea. He was sometimes a loved celebrity, sometimes considered insane, and sometimes homeless and unnoticed.

He had problems expressing himself. He harnessed all of his experiences, but did not know how to express what he felt, or what he knew. It was through music that he always expressed himself best, and it was to express himself that he developed the bossa nova style. He utilized sound as a medium, and his music is the expressive object that he left behind. The meanings he wishes to express are contextualized in his unorthodox rhythms and arrangements. The famous dissonance characteristic of bossa nova is

perhaps an expression of his commitment to being different, to do something different. His words express what himself, Vinicius de Moraes, and Tom Jobim saw in the world.

Those who listened to Bossa nova found new meaning in it. When they heard it they did not hear Juazeiro or a maid sweeping – instead they heard their own experiences. They heard something new that they could relate to the changes that the country was experiencing at the time, to their love lives, and to the awareness that their generation was a dissonant one. Middle-class Brazil was something new that diverted from traditional, rural aristocratic Brazil. They experienced the aesthetic in the confusion, perspicuity, beauty, and love that arose because of bossa nova.

As an organic movement bossa nova kept growing. It was transformed with electrical guitars and protest lyrics. The bossa nova we hear today is no longer the new style of music that consumed Brazil. Bossa nova is now full of history, and every time someone plays it, or someone listens to it, a little more history and context is added to the music.

In its sound bossa nova exists as a meaningless object. The context which these sounds are arranged is the experiences and act of expression of the artist – the expressive object that represents the experiences of someone. Our experience of bossa nova is one full of contexts and meanings – our knowledge of its history, our memories of where it was first heard, and the manner which it is played all affect how we perceive bossa nova. In the final step, those of us who experience emotion when we listen to bossa nova are completing the cycle of *an* experience.

Conclusion

When we speak about art, we are speaking about something that is fundamentally tied to experience. We often wonder what good art is, if art is useful, or even why we like certain kinds of art. Before we can have a meaningful discussion about art, we have to understand that art belongs to experience. If we define experience according to Schopenhauer's philosophy, art begins as intuitive experience, experiences such as the sounds of bossa nova, or colors in a Dalí painting.

The intuitive experiences of every individual – colors, textures, shapes – are objectively acquired by the body. But for every objective, intuitive experience, there is also an abstract experience that is had by the subject. These abstract experiences give meaning to intuitive experiences, and from their relationship more abstract experiences are had, forming a complex flood of experiences that is unique to every individual.

When someone harnesses these experiences and expresses them through some medium, that person has now engaged in what Dewey calls the act of expression. Once someone engages in an act of expression, that person becomes an artist. The object utilized as the medium for expression is now what Dewey called the expressive object. The expressive object is experienced by a spectator, who could be any person, even the artist who created that object. The person who experiences that object undergoes the very process of experiencing something – intuitive experiences are had, abstract experiences arise, meanings are assigned. From this relationship between artist object and spectator art is born.

Meaning is not found in the object itself. Meaning cannot be a property of an object. Meaning is given to objects through the context which objects are presented. The

way an object is arranged, the history and circumstances that caused the object to exist, and the spectator's perspective of that object all affect the meaning that is given to that object.

Art is therefore unique to every individual. Everyone experiences art differently because of the intuitive and abstract circumstances that affect objects. When the individual gives meaning, or has such a powerful intuitive experience of the object that emotion is aroused, the aesthetic is achieved. The aesthetic is therefore not a property of art, but is the resulting emotion that the individual may sometimes have when experiencing certain objects. We can have an aesthetic experience when we see a tree just as we can have one when we see a painting.

If we understand that experience, art, and the aesthetic are individual processes, and that these processes come together to compliment each other, we can understand that the value of art comes from the very fact that this process, which I call *an* experience, is ongoing and unique to every individual. The subjective experience of art changes over time. The meanings of art are influenced by history, by those who experience that art over time, and by the unique situations in which they are experienced.

A work of art can be therapeutic, catastrophic, useful, ugly, beautiful, practical and useless depending on who is experiencing the object, and how that object is being utilized. If, as a foundation for discussion, we utilize the knowledge that art is a process, and that there are different elements involved in it, we can meaningfully discuss the origins, history, movements, and uses that art may have and has had. The bossa nova of forty years ago is one of self exploration, and musical exploration. Our bossa nova, my bossa nova, is a musical movement that represents the birth certificate of a new country.

Contemporary bossa nova is a movement that carries with it not only the dissonant arrangements and guitar strums of a new musical style, but also the history of a country struggling against an oppressive dictatorship – it represents the exportation of Brazilian culture into the world, and the importation of different worldviews into Brazil. It is an artistic movement that, in its meaninglessness, carries infinite meanings.

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