Creativity and Aesthetic Theory

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The thesis I elucidate and defend in this book is that an understanding of the creative act is a necessary condition for an adequate explanation of the source, structure, and mode of existence of (a) the artistic dimension of the artwork and (b) the conditions under which this dimension is transformed into a world of meaning in the aesthetic experience. If this proposition is reasonable, and I think it is, it should follow that an answer to the question of the source and nature of the creative act by which the artwork comes into being is a primary task of aesthetic theory. This thesis is based on the assumption that the basic function of aesthetic theory is to explain, that is, to shed a light of understanding on, the source and the factor which make an artifact *art* and an experience a*esthetic*. As I shall discuss in detail in the following pages, the artistic dimension of the work is not given to ordinary perception as a ready-made reality, regardless of whether it is sensuous or mental; put differently, the artistic dimension is not given as an integral element of the work the artist produces during the creative process, and yet it exists as an integral part of the work, indeed as its essence as a work of art: How does it come into being? Does it befall the work under certain conditions or by some invisible force? Does it come into being by a pronouncement of the art world? If so, how? Suppose this kind of world judges a natural or artifactual object as art; does the art quality or aspect exist in the object itself or in the mind of some art authority? If the quality belongs to the work—and it must, for otherwise it would not be called a work of art—how does it belong to it? Again, under what perceptual conditions does the quality come to life in the aesthetic experience? What is the difference between ordinary and aesthetic perception? The object of ordinary perception is given to our senses as a ready-made reality, but the artistic dimension of the artwork is not given in that way either to our senses

or to our minds. How does it emerge in the aesthetic experience? Is this emergence fortuitous, or by inference? Can it emerge without a creative act of perception? Can it be otherwise if it is not given as a sensuous reality or as a ready-made object? However, if creative perception is a necessary condition of its emergence, in what sense is this perception creative?

Now, if the basic function of aesthetic theory is explanatory in nature, it should follow that an analysis of creativity in art, of how the artistic dimension comes into being and how it is realized in the aesthetic experience, is a primary function of aesthetic theory. This makes sense because if the artist is the creator of the artistic as such, if the creative act takes place in her mind, then an understanding of how she transforms her intuition into a symbolic form of expression and how this form is transformed into a reality in the aesthetic experience should be a primary task of aesthetic theory. How can we explain the nature of the artistic dimension, and consequently that of the aesthetic experience, if we do not know *what* the artist creates? Again, how can we provide a basis for aesthetic evaluation or for art evaluation, art appreciation, and art teaching if we do not know the nature of the artistic dimension?

The thesis I propose to discuss in this book may seem bold to some aestheticians, and it may seem irrelevant to aesthetic discourse to others because, as the majority of aestheticians argued in the second half of the last century, it is possible to advance an adequate account of the artistic and the aesthetic without reference to the experience of the artist or the aesthetic perceiver. This is why the central question in the realm of aesthetic discourse during that period was, what makes an artifact art? How can we define *art*? Is a concept of art possible? Can *art* be defined? But, on the other hand, can we really explain the nature of the artistic without reference to the experience of the artist and the aesthetic perceiver? The point I should here emphasize is that the question I am raising is not definitional or analytical but ontological in character: it is a request for an analysis of the nature of the kind of reality the artist creates, the aesthetic perceiver experiences, the art teacher teaches, and the art critic criticizes. If the artistic dimension, which is the substance of the artwork, is not given to ordinary perception as a ready-made reality, the aesthetician should ask, how does it come into being? How does it exist in the artwork? Can we identify a work

as art if we do not know what it means for something to be art? And, how can we answer this question by an analysis not only of the creative act but also of the aesthetic experience?

These questions acquire a greater measure of importance if we consider the cognitive status of the artwork. Are artworks cognitive? If they are—and a large number of aestheticians answer this question affirmatively—how? Can we answer this question affirmatively if we cannot explain the genesis, nature, and mode of existence of the artistic dimension of artwork? But, alas, what kind of knowledge does the artwork communicate? More importantly, how does the aesthetic perceiver comprehend it?

Next, I tend to think that since the artistic dimension is not given as a ready-made reality in the artwork, it is reasonable to hypothesize that we explain its mode of existence in the work and the aesthetic experience. Any nonexistent reality, whether in nature or in human life, comes into being by a creative act regardless of whether the agent that performs this act is a human being or the hand of nature. But, as I shall discuss in detail, this hypothesis is plausible because, as I shall argue, what the artist creates is a world of meaning. Such a world may come into being only by a creative act of a particular human being.

The unfolding of my discussion in the following chapters will be the unfolding of the structure of the arguments in support of the thesis I presented in the preceding paragraphs. A summary of the chapters will give an idea of the structure of the discussion.

The second chapter begins with an account of the explanatory function of aesthetic theory and then advances a new interpretation of its functions. This interpretation revolves around three questions. First, what is the source, structure, and mode of existence of the artistic dimension of the artwork? I here emphasize that this dimension is not given as a ready-made reality in the work the artist produces, but as a potentiality inherent in the formal organization of the work. The fabric of this dimension is human meaning. Second, how is the artistic dimension transformed into an aesthetic reality in the aesthetic experience? The unfolding of the aesthetic process of aesthetic perception is the unfolding of the aesthetic experience. The

meaning that is realized in the aesthetic experience and constitutes its fabric is realized value. Third, what is the nature of the creative act? I argue that an understanding of the ontological structure of this act is a necessary condition for an adequate explanation of the genesis, structure, and mode of existence of the artistic dimension. This is based on the assumption that this dimension is created ex nihilo. How? Though briefly, I try to justify the possibility of inquiring into the nature of experience in general and of the creative act in particular.

The third chapter is devoted to an analysis and evaluation of the view that the concept of creativity is irrelevant to our understanding of the nature of the artistic and the aesthetic. I consider the arguments in support of this view and, although the creative act is a subjective event, I try to show that an understanding of its source, structure, and mode of existence is relevant, indeed indispensable to our understanding of the artistic and aesthetic. I also argue that it is possible to inquire into the nature of experience and consequently into the creative act. My discussion is based on two assumptions: first, we know the nature of a reality by an inquiry into its source; second, the method employed in this inquiry is not the naive version of the classical method of empirical science, but an advanced version of the phenomenological method. I argue in this and the following chapters that the artistic dimension is a reality. However, if it is a reality, it should be understood by an examination of its source, structure, and mode of existence in the artwork and in the aesthetic experience. Accordingly, the analysis of the creative act is ontological, not linguistic, in character.

The fourth chapter is devoted to a constructive analysis of the phenomenon of creativity. If an understanding of the creative act is a necessary condition for an adequate conception of the artistic and the aesthetic, then we can, and should, ask: what are the basic features, or differentiae, of the creative act? We can say that, first, creativity is power. This kind of power is inherent in the nature of the facts that make up the scheme of nature. It is derived from the Ultimate that is the source of the universe qua Creativity. It is the basis of change, and change is implied in any kind of creative activity. Second, the creative act in art is a generative power in the sense that its creation is ex nihilo. Otherwise, it cannot be genuine creation. What the artist creates is sui generis. Third, creativity in art is creation of human meaning. The

datum of creation is human meaning as infinite possibility of realization. Accordingly, the fabric of the artistic dimension as potentiality is meaning. It should follow that the substance of the aesthetic experience is also meaning: a world of meaning.

The fifth chapter is devoted to a detailed analysis of the creative act in which the artistic dimension comes into being. Here I argue that, as a creative mind, the artist creates ex nihilo: the artist is a human Jove. But what she creates is not a ready-made reality; she creates a reality that can be realized in countless numbers and ways of realization. We should accordingly ask: What does it mean for a reality to exists as a potentiality? How can a world of meaning exist as a potentiality in the formal organization of the artwork? However, if the reality the artist creates is a slice of human meaning, the question necessarily arises: how does this meaning exist as an artistic dimension? I have tried to avoid words such as *aesthetic quality*, *aspect*, or *feature* only because the concept of artistic dimension conveys more effectively the idea of a "world of meaning." A world is a dimension of being. What kind of world does the artist create?

The sixth chapter proposes a serious, and I think valiant, attempt to present a conception of the aesthetic: how does the artistic dimension of the artwork, which exists as a potentiality in its formal organization, become an aesthetic reality in the experience of the perceiver? An experience is aesthetic inasmuch as it is a realization of the artistic reality the artist creates. But, then, under what conditions is this realization possible? This concluding chapter is devoted to an analysis of these conditions: assumption of an aesthetic attitude, some knowledge of the symbolic language of the arts, possession of an aesthetic sense, and possession of a measure of creative versatility. Aesthetic experience is a creative activity par excellence. After I present a detailed discussion of these conditions, I illustrate their dynamics through a detailed discussion of Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters* with emphasis on the sense in which it is a world of meaning.

The seventh chapter advances an analysis of the basis, structure, and source of the aesthetic judgment and the conditions under which it is constructed. The proposition I defend is that the basis of this kind of judgment is the aesthetic experience and more concretely the artistic dimension of the

artwork as a significant, meaningful form. This dimension unfolds as a world of meaning in the aesthetic experience; it is essentially a creative process. Accordingly, if the aesthetic judgment is founded in this process, if this process is essentially a creative activity, it should follow that the judgment that is founded in it should also be a creative made judgment. This claim is based on the fact that the judgment is inconceivable apart from a creative perception of the artistic dimension of the artwork.

The eighth chapter is a brief analysis of the conditions under which artistic creativity can be taught. As an activity, creativity cannot be taught, but the conditions under which can be taught. In addition to the cultivation of the student's intellectual, emotional, and cultural knowledge, the teacher should cultivate in the student two types of dialogue, the first is between the student and herself and the second is between the student and her medium. This is based on the assumption that the student should master her understanding and command of the content of meaning she aims to communicate or express and the formation possibilities of her medium.

CHAPTER TWO

TASK OF AESTHETIC THEORY

The task of a theory in any area of human knowledge is to shed a light of understanding on the source, essential structure, and mode of existence of a human or natural phenomenon. The phenomenon the aesthetician seeks to explain is art. What about art does the aesthetician seek to explain? The proposition I elucidate and defend in this chapter is that, as a principle of explanation, the primary task of aesthetic theory is to answer three basic questions. First, what makes an artifact, or object, art? Second, what makes an experience aesthetic? Third, under what conditions does the artistic dimension of the artwork come to life in the aesthetic experience? How does this dimension come into being? I shall begin my discussion with the first question.

The First Question: What Makes an Artifact a Work of Art?

What is the nature of the activity in which an artwork, or an object, acquires its artistic identity? Or, under what conditions can an object, regardless of whether it is natural or artifactual, acquire its status as art? Again, what does the term *art* refer to or signify when we classify an object as an artwork? Not all the artifacts that populate the human world, or even the art world, are fine art. Some are works of art and some are not. What is the nature of the aspect, quality, or phenomenon whose presence in an artifact makes it art? How does this reality come into being, and how does it exist in the artwork? Regardless of the kind of reality it is or how it belongs to the artwork, this reality does not exist as an element of the physical reality of the work the way physical objects and their qualities do. For example, when I stand before Cezanne's *Self-Portrait (*1879-1885, Pushkin Museum, Moscow) and look at it with my ordinary eyes, (a) my eyes do not see a

human face and (b) they do not see the painting as a work of art. All they see is a patch of lines and colors organized in a certain way. Seeing it as a human face is an act of interpretation. The basis of this interpretation is resemblance. We know what it means for a certain representation to signify a human face: this representation looks like a human face, therefore, it is a human face. We see the representation in terms of the idea we have of a human face. Put differently, we project our idea of a human face onto the representation on the basis of resemblance: we see the representation as a human face not because we recognize a certain human face in it, but because what we see corresponds to our idea of a human face. The point that merits special emphasis here is that although "being a human face" does not exist as a perceptual element of the given representation, there must be something about the representation, or in its formal structure, that justifies the assertion that it is a human face. This something is, as I have just indicated, a resemblance of certain elements in the face we see to those that make up our concept of a human face. The judgment that *Self-Portrait* is a human face is based on its similarity to our concept of a human face.

But this type of interpretation is not possible in the case of identifying *Self-Portrait* as a work of art because it is not a general work of art the way a human face is; it is a particular, and I can say a relatively unique, work of art. A general work of art does not exist the way a general human face exists as a general idea. What exists is a physical object, i.e., a painting or conceptual object such as a novel, but not the aspect we normally call *art*. *Self-Portrait* is art because it instantiates the aspect that makes an artifact art. We may say, as I shall argue, that possession of aesthetic qualities or a significant form is what makes an artifact art, or that these qualities or form constitute its artistic dimension. But a work that possesses general aesthetic qualities, or a general significant form, does not and cannot exist because these qualities are always particular aspects or realities or because this significant form is always a particular significant form. When I pay a visit to a museum, I do not find myself in a room containing general artworks, that is, works that express a general feature, aspect, or reality called "art," nor do I see it as a part of the different representations that hang on the wall. On the contrary, every room I visit contains individual, particular works of art, that is, works that express individual, particular significant forms.

Accordingly, resemblance cannot be the basis of identifying the artistic identity of artworks because we do not possess a general concept of art in terms of which we can make this kind of identification. The essential function of the concept of significant form is that it serves a principle of artistic distinction: an artifact is art by virtue of the significant form it possesses. I use *significant form* and *aesthetic qualities* interchangeably because, as I shall presently explain in detail, *significant form* refers to the unity of the aesthetic qualities that constitute its artistic dimension. But this form is not given to our sensibility as a ready made reality: we do not perceive it by the mind or the senses when we approach the artwork with the intention of perceiving it aesthetically, and yet, it exists in the work. How does it exist in the work? The proposition I shall elucidate in the following chapters is that it inheres as a potentiality in the form the artist produces during the process of artistic creation.

Most, if not all, the aestheticians have correctly assumed that significant form, i.e., its possession by the artwork, is the principle of artistic distinction, but they have failed to explain how this kind of form belongs to the artwork. An inquiry into its mode of existence is indispensable to our understanding of the artistic as such—"art" as a phenomenon or as a type of reality. What are artistic, or aesthetic, qualities? Do they exist in the artwork the way secondary qualities exist in the physical object? But, if they are not given as ready-made realities, how can they exist in the artwork the way secondary qualities exist in the physical object? Alas! Can we answer this question if we do not proceed in our answer from an adequate understanding of the structure of aesthetic quality? Does it have a structure? Is it skin-deep? Is it a depth? If it is a depth, and I think it is, how can this kind of depth exist as a potentiality in the formal organization of the artwork? Again, what do we mean when we characterize the artistic dimension of the artwork as a depth?

I tend to think that the primary task of aesthetic theory is to provide an adequate explanation of the genesis, structure, and mode of existence of the artistic dimension—significant form or aesthetic qualities—of the artwork. This explanation is important for the following reasons.

First, art is a fertile, profound source of our understanding of the meaning of existence in general and of human existence and destiny in particular. We contemplate artworks in the sphere of music, painting, dance, architecture, photography, theater, literature, film, and sculpture because these types of works produce a special kind of experience. This type of experience is significant not only because it is pleasant, satisfying, or in some way gratifying but also because it promotes human perfection, happiness, growth, and development. Like the philosopher who seeks the meaning of the facts that make up the structure of nature and human life, the artist seeks to promote our understanding of this very meaning, but in a different way. While the philosopher communicates her knowledge conceptually and discursively and tries to establish its truth or significance by means of argument, demonstration, explanation, analysis, or clarification, the artist presents it, and the means of its presentation is image: portrayal, depiction, delineation, or representation. The philosopher invites you to think, which is the medium of communicating understanding. The artist invites you to see, feel, and understand by means of the image she presents; the essence of this kind of image is revelation or disclosure of the truth the artist seeks to communicate. The artistic image is a luminous presence. Whether it is small or large, complex or simple, the artwork qua image is a world of meaning, of something that matters to us as human beings. This world exists as a potentiality in the artistic dimension of the artwork. This potentiality steps into the realm of reality in the process of experiencing the artwork aesthetically.

When we delve deep into artworks such as Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling, Raphael's *School of Athens*, Picasso's *Guernica*, or Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, we delve deep into a human world, a world of joy, love, tragedy, creation, sin, hope, ugliness, power, death, time, beauty, the sublime, happiness, misery, aspiration, and absurdity, to mention a few realities, values, questions, and problems that matter to human beings. For example, who can experience Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* in the fullness of its aesthetic depth and not emerge with a feeling of puzzlement, enlightenment, irony, or loneliness; without becoming aware of the overpowering presence of time and the infinite; and without encountering the question of the meaning of existence and

especially the existence of humanity in this infinite cosmic process? Who can read *Wuthering Heights* aesthetically and not gain an understanding of mystery, glory, grandeur, joy, tragedy, and the constructive and destructive powers of love? Who can contemplate Rodin's *The Thinker* aesthetically without considering the depth of the human mind—of the riddle of human existence and its meaning, the challenge of infinity, the mystery of human nature, or what it means to be a philosopher, a scientist, or an artist? Who can read Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* aesthetically without having an existential encounter with the human condition—time, waiting, absurdity, loneliness, happiness, reason, injustice, the irrational, death? Who can read Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* without emerging from her reading with a shudder, a slap on the face, a feeling of guilt, or an awareness of the frailty, fickleness, and perhaps frivolity of humanity? Who can watch Shakespeare's *Hamlet* on stage aesthetically without newly comprehending the ultimate question of human life, viz., what it means "to be" and "not to be" as a human being, or without an encounter with the triumph and tragedy of moral conscience?

The artistic dimension of the artwork is not an accidental quality, and it is not skin-deep; it is a depth, a human depth; as such, it is a world of meaning. This world is, as I shall argue, cognitive in nature. The kind of knowledge it communicates is not less important or useful than the kind of knowledge advanced by the scientist or the philosopher.

Second, if the artwork is a depth, if it is a human depth and as such reflects the artist's understanding of the values, questions, and problems of human life, and if knowledge of the content of this depth is essential for the perfection of human life, then an explanation of how the artistic dimension exists as a potentiality in the artwork should be a primary task of aesthetic theory. The more we understand the dynamics of this dimension, the more we shall successfully explore the conditions under which we can realize this potentiality in the aesthetic experience. Moreover, knowledge of these dynamics and conditions is indispensable for art education and appreciation, as I shall explain in detail in the last chapter. How can an art teacher, or a teacher of appreciation of any art form, teach a student what it means for a work to be art if she does not possess an adequate idea of the mode of existence of the artistic dimension of the artwork and how it can be

appreciated or created? For example, how can a student look at *Mona Lisa* and identify its artistic dimension or perceive it aesthetically? When the student looks at the painting, she certainly sees the representation of a woman seated against a natural background, looking into space. How can the teacher show the student how to move from what her ordinary eyes see to what her mind should see? How can she teach the student how to recognize that a human depth permeates the representation of this painting, one that buzzes with enigma, with a confrontation with infinity, time, life, death, and the meaning of human life? Put differently, how can the teacher seduce the eyes of her student to move into this human depth? How can she entice her to enjoy what she sees? Again, having played a musical piece to her teacher, the student (frequently) receives the following response: "You have played all the notes correctly. Bravo! I commend you for this important achievement, but where is the music, my dear?" Playing the notes is not enough. The music the teacher is looking for in this kind of situation is the artistic depth of the piece the student played. But how can the teacher explain to her student the difference between playing the notes and playing the music if she does not know how this element of the musical piece exists in the notes and how it can be identified or felt? An adequate understanding of the artistic dimension of the artwork and its mode of existence is, I submit, a necessary condition for art education and for teaching art appreciation.

Third, this type of understanding is, moreover, a necessary condition for the possibility of aesthetic criticism and evaluation. If I am to express this point succinctly, I can ask how we can say, e.g., that *Mona Lisa* is great, elegant, profound—in short, aesthetically beautiful—if our judgment is not based on an adequate comprehension of the artistic dimension of this artwork, that is, on the dimension of human values, questions and problems it communicates, and that inhere in its formal organization, and not merely on its technical, ideological, political, religious, or monetary value, or on a factor external to its artistic dimension? This question is founded in the assumption that *artistic* refers to this dimension. The artwork may exhibit unusual, innovative, admirable artistic skill, and it may be artistically seductive and important as a means of propaganda, religious worship, education, or psychological therapy, but no one of these or similar factors is directly

relevant to the aesthetic criticism and evaluation of the artwork; but if they are, it is because they contribute to the enhancement of its artistic expression. A keen observer of the history of art, one who is enamored by the artistic as such, would, I think, readily admit that a large number of the aesthetic judgments made about the multitude of the artworks that make up the structure of the art world are based more on technical, religious, ideological, monetary, or psychological rather than purely artistic factors or reasons. I do not underestimate the importance and sometimes relevance of the non-artistic factors or purposes, but I think the aesthetic judgment as such should be based on the artistic dimension of the artwork. If this is the case, and I believe it is, then an aesthetic judgment would be sound inasmuch as it is based on the artistic dimension of the artwork. But how can we make such a judgment if we do not know the nature and mode of existence of this kind of dimension?

The Second Question: What Makes an Experience Aesthetic?

The aesthetic experience is a logical counterpart to the artistic dimension of the artwork, just as the artistic dimension is a counterpart to the aesthetic experience. We can express this relation differently: the artistic dimension exists for the sake of the aesthetic experience, and the aesthetic experience exists as a response to the existence of the artistic dimension. Put differently, the artwork exists for the sake of the aesthetic experience. This is based on the assumption that the artwork is valuable, that is, an object we need and desire. The aesthetic experience is the destiny of the artwork. Broadly speaking, the kind of experience we usually have of the artwork qua art is called *aesthetic experience*. The artistic phenomenon (dimension) by virtue of which an artifact is called art is transformed into an aesthetic phenomenon in the process of the aesthetic experience. Inasmuch as the aesthetic qualities exist in the artwork as a potentiality, or as a significant form, they are the basis of artistic distinction, and inasmuch as they are realized in the aesthetic experience as meaning, they are the principle of aesthetic distinction. I say “transformed” because the artistic dimension that exists as a potentiality in the work undergoes a change of identity in the aesthetic experience in three ways. First, what was potential becomes actual

in the experience; second, the potential, which exists in the work as an indeterminate being, becomes determinate in the aesthetic experience; and, third, what becomes determined is, in turn, the potential for numerous possible realizations. The perceiver of the work translates the artistic dimension of the work according to her intellectual, affective, cultural, and perceptive versatility and her social endowments. A different perceiver with different endowments and perceptive versatility would translate the same dimension differently. We should always remember that human beings are individuals. They respond to their environment and to themselves differently. What matters for the sake of my discussion is that the aesthetic phenomenon comes into being in the process of experiencing the artwork aesthetically. This process is a gradual development of the aesthetic experience. I emphasize this point because the artistic dimension, which undergoes a change of identity in this process, becomes, or emerges as, the aesthetic experience; in other words, the artistic dimension of the work, including its physical dimension, are transformed into a new reality, and this reality is the totality of the event we usually call *aesthetic experience*. It is crucial to underline this fact because, as I shall explain in detail, the artistic dimension that exists in the artwork as a potentiality is a human world of meaning. Yes, what comes to life in the aesthetic experience is a human world. Accordingly, aesthetic is not a feature that qualifies an experience the way heat or cold qualifies a physical object. On the contrary, the aesthetic experience is a type of experience by virtue of the fact it is a human world, one realized or, as I shall argue, created, in the event of perceiving the artwork aesthetically.

But a critic might remark: "The philosophical, scientific, and phantasmagorial world of people in ordinary life is a human world. What makes the human world of the artist aesthetic in contradistinction to these types of worlds? Or what justifies the characterization of the human world of the artist as aesthetic?" This characterization is justifiable for three reasons.

First, the human world in art is a perceived world; it comes into being in the medium of perception. The word *aesthetic* comes from the Greek word *aisthanesthai* ("to perceive"). The artistic dimension of the artwork, which inheres in it as a potentiality, (a) comes into being by an act of perception and (b) exists in the medium of perception. This is why Hegel and the

phenomenologists have in general argued that the artwork is spiritualized in the process of the aesthetic experience. The spiritual as such does not exist as a fact in the realm of nature. Its home is human experience. I would venture to add that value experience is the essence of the spiritual as such in human life; put differently, value constitutes the fabric of the spiritual. When I speak of value in this context, I mean the values of goodness, beauty, holiness, and truth.

Second, the aesthetic experience is a lived experience. Unlike the scientific or philosophical experience, which is conceptual or intellectual in character, the aesthetic experience is a living experience, one that engages not only the intellectual but also the affective and imaginative faculties. Its content is not abstract ideas; on the contrary, it involves the whole being of the perceiver. It is not an event in which we hope, desire, or aspire. It is a drop of human life. This drop exists in the medium of perception.

Third, the aesthetic experience is not merely enjoyed, or had as a gift, and it is not something that befalls us. It is, as I shall presently explain, a personal creation; as such, it is real, and it is a personal possession. How can it be otherwise if it comes into being and lingers for a while in the medium of personal perception? However, when I say it is a lived experience, I do not mean it is an experience that belongs to me or exists to me, or for me, as a significant element of my life, although it can be viewed this way, in retrospect. No, I mean it is a slice—a stretch—of my life: I am the experience that endures during this stretch, and the experience is the "I" that is identical with it and presides over it. I become one with the world I experience during the process of aesthetic perception. This necessarily implies that my existence becomes one with its existence. The time that unfolds in this process becomes my time; but I am my time. Accordingly, the life I live, which is the life potential in the artistic dimension of the artwork, is my life: I am my life during that stretch of time. Would it be strange, then, if I say that during this stretch, I not only communicate but also commune with the artist? When we contemplate a painting, a sculpture, a dance; when we watch a dramatic performance on stage; or when we read a novel, do we not at once become participants in and authors of the world of the work? Do we not take a break from the stream of ordinary life and surrender ourselves voluntarily to this new world?

Oh, how many people stand for no more than a few seconds before the paintings and sculptures they see in museums; walk around architectural works as voyeurs; or listen to music because it is soothing, exciting, or therapeutic, or to inform the social world around them that they are culturally sophisticated! How many people read novels in the evening because it helps them to sleep peacefully! How many people go to opera performances more to show off their beautiful clothes and to engage in social encounters than to have aesthetic experiences! It is difficult to say that such people have genuine aesthetic experiences when they attend aesthetic occasions or encounter works of art. Again, how many people who read literary works, listen to serious music, contemplate paintings, or attend dramatic performances are spiritually moved, feel guilty, or elated? How many experience a shiver in the heart, feel a jolt of consciousness, or undergo inner growth when they emerge from a serious encounter with such works? Who can remain silent or the same person after they penetrate the world of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, or Melville's *Moby Dick?* The aesthetic experience is not an island in the stream of our lives; it is a living experience in which we grow in the power of understanding, feeling, willing, desiring—of the spark that makes us human. It is a moment in which we celebrate the rite of human living, in which we witness the unfolding of our destiny as human individuals. Unlike the philosophical, the scientific, or the ordinary experiences in which the contents of the experiences are demands, obligations, or tasks into which we drift, or that happen to us, the aesthetic experience originates from us.

Experience as a Principle of Explanation

A concept, a theory, or a conception in any area of human knowledge functions as a principle of explanation inasmuch as it sheds adequate light on a problem, enigma, recalcitrant question, or dimension of human or natural reality. The performance of this function consists of analyzing, clarifying, evaluating, revealing the significance of, and spotlighting the causes, structure, and implications of the elements of the problem, enigma, question, or dimension of reality in a way that enables us to comprehend it in the fullness of its being and truth. For example, what is the nature of

physical reality? What is the stuff out of which it is made? The concept of matter has been used as a principle of explaining the nature of physical reality. But what is matter? An understanding of the concept of matter in its various manifestations is tantamount to an understanding of physical reality. Ever since Democritus, scientists have been analyzing matter by breaking it down into its elements: atoms, sub-atomic particles, and the fabric of these sub-atomic particles. It has been assumed that if we acquire a clear and adequate comprehension of these microscopic particles and the causal relations between them, we shall understand the nature of physical reality regardless of whether it is living organisms, lifeless matter, or human consciousness.

Similarly, a concept of experience functions as a principle of explanation inasmuch as it enables us to adequately understand the different types of experiences we undergo in the various spheres of our lives—social, religious, metaphysical, moral, aesthetic, political, or intellectual. In the present context, the questions we need to answer are: What makes an artifact a work of art? What makes an experience aesthetic—especially, how does the artistic dimension of the artwork come to life in the aesthetic experience? Our quest in our attempt to answer these questions is a quest for the art-making factor: How does the artistic dimension come into being? What is its mode of existence in the artwork and in the aesthetic experience? Can our concept of experience provide a basis for answering these two questions adequately? My response to this final question is yes, as I shall momentarily explain. It is important for me to discuss this whole issue because the concept of experience as a principle of explanation has been the subject of contentious debate among aestheticians for almost a century now. But although this debate has not abated, the proponents' and opponents' positions regarding the possibility of experience being a principle that explains the genesis, structure, and mode of existence of the artistic dimension of the artwork are, to a reasonable extent, defined and articulated. However, a brief comment on the logic of this debate is in order, primarily because awareness of this logic will shed ample light on why I use "experience" as a principle of explanation.

Concept of Experience

My response to the first and second questions is based on two types of experience: artistic and aesthetic. The first results in the creation of the artistic dimension of the artwork, and the second results in the creation of the aesthetic dimension of the aesthetic experience. The artwork qua art exists for the sake of the aesthetic experience. But regardless of whether it is artistic or aesthetic, an experience is a subjective event; as such, it is a private happening. It takes place within the domain of a particular human mind, which is a center of thinking, feeling, willing, and acting. This domain is private. It is mutually exclusive of other minds. As a mind, I can reveal some of my thoughts, feelings, emotions, or desires by means of verbal or bodily language or gesture, but no one except me can know what takes place within my mind because no one can take a peek or pay a visit to my mind. Metaphorically speaking, the human mind is a kind of windowless box, as Leibnitz said. This feature is the basis of the concept of the privacy of the human mind. But in fact, the mind is not a kind of mental or metaphysical box because it is not a physical reality; nevertheless, it is real, and it is no less real than the objects that make up the scheme of nature. Phenomenologically speaking, it is the essence of our humanity. It is more appropriate to say that it is a kernel, or a center, of power that gives rise to the intellectual and affective activities we perform in the course of our theoretical and practical lives. It is, as Plato and philosophers such as Hegel, Husserl, and Whitehead suggested some time ago, the seat of consciousness—of all the activities we perform daily, even in our dreams. As a power, this seat is an inexhaustible source of thought, feeling, willing, and acting. It is, moreover, dynamic and capable of constant growth and development. It is constantly interacting with its social, physical, cultural, religious, and political environment in countless ways. Whether consciously or unconsciously, rationally or emotionally, these interactions also produce in the mind countless diverse impressions. In recognizing the ideas and insights of the pioneers of modern psychology, Freud and Jung, not to mention the major philosophers, I can say the human mind is a maze of mental states.

An experience is an event that takes place in the mind in which it responds to an internal or external stimulus, one that produces an intellective or

affective response, that is, a rational or an affective state. However, I shall restrict myself in this discussion to conscious experience, the kind that people perform knowingly, purposefully, voluntarily, deliberately. I shall not concern myself with the physical, environmental, or unconscious factors that may influence the decision-making process that actuates the experience. I shall suppose that an experience is a deliberate act in any of the different spheres of human life. Broadly speaking, philosophers have this concept in mind when they discourse about experience, and I shall do the same when I talk about experience in this book.

Experience as a Principle of Explanation

At the turn of the last century, it became clear to philosophers and scientists alike that knowledge of nature, which was viewed until then as the aim of the philosopher, is the task of the natural scientist. Not only had physics, chemistry, geology, and biology already abandoned the generally established method of philosophical inquiry, but the social sciences, viz., sociology, psychology, economics, and even history, began to follow suit. Philosophers could not stop this trend; they acknowledged it. The transfer of this task from the hand of the philosopher to that of the scientist was prompted by the success of the empirical sciences, namely, observation and experimentation and the use of instruments and mathematics. According to this method, the meaning of a statement is determined by the method of its verification, and the method of its verification is the empirical method. Implicit in this view is that the only facts that exist are empirically verifiable facts. Broadly, these are the facts that make up the fabric of nature. Accordingly, the realm of nature is the true realm of reality and knowledge. It follows from this conclusion that any discourse about objects that are not empirically verifiable is meaningless, in the sense that it does not communicate knowledge. The source and basis of knowledge is empirical verification.

There is no need for me to discuss in any detail the immediate response of the philosophers to this remarkable development or to its impact on theology, art, and philosophy because it is commonplace among philosophers and because it is not relevant to this discussion. Suffice it to say that this development was revolutionary. It called into question the basic principles

of explanation in the major areas of the theory of values—ethics, aesthetics, political philosophy, philosophy of religion, and philosophy of human nature. One of these principles was the concept of experience. It was used, until then, as a principle of explanation in aesthetics. Like many metaphysical concepts, it was banned from the realm of aesthetic discourse because the mind was treated as a metaphysical category: it is not a natural fact. It and its experiences are subjective; they are not empirically verifiable. A principle of explanation should be founded in knowledge, but knowledge of the mind is not possible; therefore, it cannot be used as a principle of explanation in any area of human experience, whether religious, moral, aesthetic, social, or political.

But, as I have just emphasized, neither the concept of the mind nor the concept of experience is amenable to empirical observation or verification. Most of the aestheticians who accepted the consequences of that revolutionary development of science opposed any attempt to use "experience" as a principle of explanation in their attempt to explain (a) the nature of art and (b) the nature of aesthetic experience. First, they embraced the new scientific principle of verification as the criterion by which we establish the true meaning of propositions. How can any concept function as a principle of explanation if it is not valid, and how can it be valid if it does not stand the test of verification? For example, how can we claim that the genesis of the artistic dimension of the artwork is the mind of the artist if her experience is subjective and if this type of experience is not amenable to empirical verification? Again, how can we say that expression or communication of feelings or emotions, or any type of subjective experience, is the defining feature of art if we cannot empirically verify this claim? Furthermore, how can we say the artistic dimension of the artwork comes to life as a world of meaning in the aesthetic experience if this experience is subjective? First, was it an accident that the first casualty in aesthetics, after that remarkable development, was the theory of expression? Instead of seeking an understanding of the artistic as such, of how it comes into being in the mind of the artist, most aestheticians endeavored to examine the concept of art: What does *art* mean? What does it mean to say that a certain object is a work of art? What makes it art, of course without recourse to the artist? The task of the aesthetician was no longer to explore

the genesis of the artistic, or art as a phenomenon, but an analysis of the concept of art. This entailed a radical change of the method of analyzing the basis or tasks of teaching art, criticizing art, and enjoying art. Second, was it an accident that in their attempt to explain the nature of art, aestheticians moved their attention from the artist to the artwork? Again, was it an accident that, in their attempt to explain the nature of aesthetic perception, they moved their attention from the aesthetic experience as an analyzable event to the subjective experience of the perceiver? The assumption that underlay this shift in our attempt to understand the artistic and the aesthetic is that the ontic locus of these two phenomena is not the artist; absence of this locus implied a denial of the possibility of an objective aesthetic judgment.

Accordingly, instead of the attempt to seek or explore the distinctive feature of the aesthetic experience in the process of perceiving the artwork, many aestheticians tried to ban any reference to "aesthetic attitude," "aesthetic experience," and "aesthetic perception" as a special type of perception. They argued that any type of object is a possible candidate for being an art object. This twofold tendency undermined the possibility of an objective basis for defining *artwork* or *aesthetic experience*. Some of the aestheticians who recognized this necessary but understandable consequence of banning "expression" and "aesthetic experience" from the realm of aesthetic discourse introduced the concept of the "art world" as a basis to explain the nature of the artistic and the aesthetic. But this concept did not fare well.

But the question that was forging its way into the sphere of aesthetic theorizing in the second half of the twentieth century was on target: Is the empirical method of inquiry even appropriate for investigating the nature of the artwork and the aesthetic experience? What kind of reality does the artist investigate? Or, what is the stuff that constitutes the artistic dimension of the artwork? Philosophers and artists would readily assert that the datum of inquiry and contemplation in the sphere of art is human values, or meaning. The realm of values is as essential, as real, as the realm of nature. This realm is not physical; it is human in character. Could it be that there is, or should be, another method for inquiring into the nature of the artistic and the aesthetic? This question, which was explored critically and constructively by Husserl in the first part of the twentieth century, and by his successors

Heidegger, Ingarden, and Dufrenne in the second half of the same century, became the central focus in the examination of the nature of art and the aesthetic. The method these philosophers introduced is generally known as the phenomenological method of inquiry. It neither rejects nor undervalues the empirical method of inquiry. It simply raises the concept of experience, and the subjective in general, to a higher level of interpretation. Experience is not viewed merely as an empirical concept, but assimilates and transcends the empirical to a human level that makes the sensuous possible, that is, it rises to the source of the sensuous. Consciousness is the domain that entertains both the sensuous and the spiritual object. Both types of objects justify their existence in this domain, first as phenomena and then as particular types of objects, regardless of whether they are physical or mental. The empirical concept of experience as the paradigm of experience is, to my mind, naive and one-sided. It fails to account for all the genuine experiences people undergo as human beings in the course of their theoretical and practical lives. I shall assume the phenomenological concept of experience in the following analysis of the fundamental questions of aesthetic theory.

My responses to the central questions of aesthetic theory are based on two concepts of experience as a principle of explanation: artistic and aesthetic. The first is involved in the creation of the artistic dimension of the artwork, and the second is involved in the experience of the work. The ontic locus of the first is the artist, and the ontic locus of the second is the aesthetic perceiver. However, when I say that the concept of experience functions as a principle of explanation, I mean that the logical and conceptual analysis, clarification, demonstration, and verification, which constitute the structure of explanation as an intellectual activity, take place in terms of a specific concept of experience. The concept of experience functions as a basis of the activity of explanation. Implied in this assertion is the assumption that, as a principle of explanation, the nature and truth of the artistic and aesthetic can be revealed in the fullness of their being within, or in terms of, these two concepts. Accordingly, the questions that will engage my attention in the first part of this book are, first, since the artistic dimension of the artwork is not given as a perceptible part of the work, how does it come into being, or how does it emerge in the process of artistic creation? What kind of reality

is it? Next, what is its mode of existence? What is its structure, if it has one? Second, since the aesthetic experience is real, and since its reality is not physical in nature, how does it come into being? In what sense is this kind of experience real? An experience in general, or in itself, does not exist, and yet it is an experience. What makes it aesthetic? I shall discuss the genesis of the artistic and the aesthetic in the last two chapters of this book. In this section, I shall focus my attention on the essential nature of the artistic and the aesthetic.

Ever since the publication of Clive Bell's provocative, cogent, and insightful book *Art* in 1910, aestheticians have, directly or indirectly, argued that significant form, which is the unity of the aesthetic qualities in the artwork, is the principle of artistic distinction. That is, the presence of this kind of form in the work is what makes it art. Some aestheticians who shied away from the concept of significant form have nevertheless maintained that possession of aesthetic qualities is what makes an artifact art. Whether it is conceived as a significant form or simply as aesthetic quality, the realization of the significant form or the quality in the aesthetic experience is a realization of a dimension or aspect of human meaning. The artwork is the kind of work that embodies human meaning. The medium of this embodiment is its significant form, or aesthetic qualities. Ontologically speaking, this form is the source and basis of the aesthetic experience. It is the artist's main contribution to the medium she works with. As I shall explain shortly, she does not create her medium; she simply forms it in a certain way. This "certain way" is the locus of her creative act. We do not perceive the content, viz., the meaning, the artist communicates by its means; we intuit it when we contemplate it under certain perceptual conditions. In this intuition the imagination moves from contemplating the given form to its signification. Again, the artistic activity in which the form comes into being is generally characterized in terms of expression, communication, or representation. The artist speaks, so to say, in and through the kind of form she creates. But if this form is essentially expressive, if it is expressive by virtue of communicating meaning, if the meaning inheres in it, then it is reasonable to say that the artwork is an expressive object and that it speaks the way the artist speaks. The expressiveness of the artwork is the basis of characterizing the activity, of

perceiving it as "aesthetic": the perception of the meaning inherent in the form of the artwork is what distinguishes ordinary from aesthetic perception.

Notwithstanding this brief characterization of the generally accepted understanding of *artwork* and *aesthetic perception*, it is critical to explain in some detail the implications of the first question I presented in the first part of this chapter: What kind of reality does the artist create, express, or communicate? Is it a feeling, an experience, an emotion, a certain mental state? Is this activity one of "transferring" a particular content of meaning from the mind to the medium she is forming? How? Is it something that moves to the mind of the perceiver as a feeling, as momentary experience passively, as something that befalls the mind? Is it something that moves into my mind the way the color of the paper I am writing on moves into my mind when I look at it? How can that which exists in or is intended by the mind of the artist move into the mind of the perceiver? But can we answer this question if we do not proceed in our answer from an adequate understanding of the structure of the significant form that is the locus of the meaning the artist seeks to communicate, and if this form is the means of communicating it? We can cast this question in a different way: What is the fabric of the significant form? How does it exist in the artwork? Certainly, it does not exist in it the way whiteness exists in this sheet of paper. The whiteness I now perceive exists in the paper as a given, or ready-made, reality; this reality produces an impression of whiteness when I look at the paper. The relation between the quality of whiteness of the paper and my mind is interactive, a stimulus-response relation. But this is not the kind of relation that exists between the artistic aspect of the artwork and its perceiver, primarily because this aspect is neither sensuous nor given as a ready-made reality. The relation between them is interactive but it is not a stimulus-response relation because, as I shall argue in detail in the following chapters, the artistic aspect of the artwork is not merely a feeling, an emotion, or a certain mental state, but a dimension, or a domain, of being—an artistic dimension or domain. In creating her work, the artist proceeds from a vision. This vision is a potential world of meaning. This meaning revolves around a question, a problem, an interest, or a slice of human reality that matters to human beings: justice, friendship, love, hate, life,