Chapter Six

Esthetic Consciousness

Esthetics as Theory

The description of our relationship to the natural world remains incomplete so long as it fails to account for those qualities of experience that are customarily called esthetic. In spite of the evident importance of esthetic experience in our emotional and intellectual lives, we possess no rigorous definition of esthetics, and lacking this, we rely upon vague and inconsistent notions of what esthetic value might be. Common to all notions of esthetic value and characteristic of them are the pleasure and even happiness which we are able to derive from our encounter with an external reality when circumstances are favorable. Esthetic value is projected to objects and scenes of the world outside of us. Ethical value, by contrast, has its focus within our being. These observations suggest a fundamental distinction between esthetic and ethical values. Ethical value is originally discovered in the subjective experience of individual action. Esthetic pleasure appears to arise primarily from the objective presentation of the world or its parts. In as much as esthetic value is inseparable from the constitution of natural objects, our understanding of the natural world, i.e. our view of reality, necessarily becomes the practical basis of esthetic valuation. Esthetic value is inevitably contingent upon our view of the

world, and when that view changes and our notions of reality are reconstructed, esthetic value will also require reinterpretation. The analyses of chapter three indicated that neither events nor objects as we commonly believe them to constitute our world should be considered real without qualification. The revision of our notions of reality provides an opportunity for reinterpreting esthetic valuation. The validity of the new theory may be gauged by its consistency and by its fruitfulness.

The new definition of esthetics must be distinguished from the conventional meaning of the term that is implied in the academic and popular literature. Our argument will begin with the familiar definition which summarizes the notions that the word esthetics commonly brings to mind. We will make these notions explicit, and we will demonstrate their incompleteness and mutual incompatibility. Conventional notions about esthetics are quite confused. Their lack of clarity suggests the difficulties inherent in the problem and justifies the search for a more consistent definition. However considerately such a new definition may be designed, it cannot avoid some apparent discredit to traditional usage. Ultimately, no definition is 'correct' to the exclusion of all others. All definitions must be recognized as tentative, and none should be considered

conclusive. The present definition of esthetics, like the definition of ethics, of knowledge, of reality, of world, and of self to which previous chapters were devoted, should be understood as an instrument designed for a particular task. One may question the task and its necessity; one may also question the design of the tool and its ability to serve the purpose at hand. The reader has the privilege to put to himself the questions that we have raised and to compare his answers with those here given. The comparison should be instructive. We require that our definitions be at one and the same time consistent with one another, responsive to experience, and harmonious with tradition. They are to be considered experiments in thought, not dictates to usage. Being experimental, they shall not hope to represent reality through an ultimate conceptual scheme but merely to provide a framework within which our thoughts may operate with clarity and precision. Each of the essays that constitute this book may be understood as an exercise in bridging the gap between an old definition and a new one.

Even a superficial survey suggests that the criteria of esthetic valuation are obscure and its boundaries indefinite unless they be arbitrarily determined by some conventional definition of esthetics. We designate many objects as beautiful; why some should be preferred to others is unclear. In a sense that which is recognized is already valued, and that which is ignored is thereby deprecated. To recognize a thing and to value it are acts not wholly separable. Conceivably esthetic valuation might participate in all apperception. In that case, esthetics and epistemology might be discovered mutually dependent. The apperception of reality and the valuation of reality may prove to be intimately related. The self that values is identical with the self that knows, and the object valued is at least superficially the same as the object known. The various conventional definitions of esthetics conflict with one another. The lack of unanimity concerning both its boundaries and its contents suggests that a reliable definition of esthetic value is not at hand. The objects to whioh we attribute extraordinary esthetic value do not always demonstrate unusual characteristics to justify the attribution. Often as not esthetic valuation seems to arise when accidental circumstances create a unique relationship between a particular individual and a specific object. There is also an esthetic sham, akin to hypocrisy in ethics, which is quite difficult to distinguish from the genuine valuation. As the mind of the

morally righteous may be filled with doubt concerning the truthfulness of their motives, so the mind of the esthetically sensitive may become aware of the possibility, indeed of the likelihood of occasional self-deception. Just as the ethical moment is corrupted by an historical reflection upon its value, the esthetic situation is marred by the review of its physical circumstances. Ethical and esthetic falsehood are not so remote from the genuine valuation as moralists and esthetes respectively would have us believe. Indeed ethical or esthetic pretensions seem inevitable concomitants of the authentic experience which they tend to caricature or to conceal, as the case might be.

As we survey the variety of experiences in which esthetic pleasure is to be found, we realize that their diversity no less than their frequent indistinctness make it difficult to define the element that they have in common. The esthetic experience is momentary; esthetic pleasure is focused upon particular objects in turn, and each one of them appears as the self-sufficient source of our satisfaction so long as it dominates our consciousness. In each situation specific qualities of the esthetic object seem to account for the pleasure that it offers us. Each esthetic situation seems different from any other, and the seeming uniqueness that is one of the essential qualities of the esthetic experience tends to embarrass a more general explanation. The delight in a landscape is an esthetic

experience no less than the pleasure of recognizing and contemplating an isolated flower. Our interest in paintings, drawings, photographs, and statuary is usually considered specifically esthetic in character, but in principle it cannot be distinguished from our appreciation of other rare and unusual objects. The concern for the orderliness and decoration of our immediate surroundings and even our insistence upon the physical cleanliness of our bodies are interests esthetically motivated. Ultimately all objects and all situations to which we may justly apply such words as beautiful, pretty, neat, or comely must be construed as occasions for esthetic judgment of some degree and must be explained by an inclusive esthetic theory. In the face of such a diversity of instances, a unitary esthetic theory has been hard to find. Indeed we might well be justified in regarding the whole complex of esthetic questions as constituted not by a single quality of experience but by a mere haphazard coincidence of linguistic usage. We should then be able to deny outright the very existence of esthetic value. Yet such a denial is refuted by the powerful conviction of value that even a single genuinely esthetic experience indelibly impresses upon the human spirit. No logical analysis however sober and well-reasoned, suffices to expunge esthetic value from the fabric of human experience.

An otherwise consistent and complete account of the relationship between self and nature would be undone by its failure to account for esthetic no less than for ethical experience.

The diversity of instances in which we recognize esthetic value suggests that our understanding of these phenomena which we uncritically designate with a single ambiguous concept may be immature. A primary task of esthetic theory should be to reconcile the broad discrepancies between various instances of esthetic value. Spurious examples of esthetic valuation must be excluded; and for those that are genuine a common justification must be found. Aside from mere verbal identification, is there reason why the beauties of landscape, of works of art, of song, and of poem should be comparable to one another? Is it reasonable to postulate that all objects which we 'like' possess esthetic value merely on the basis of our predilection? Is there a quality of the esthetic object that distinguishes it unequivocally from similar objects likewise desired? Is there a contrast between objects that we esteem for their own sake and those that we desire on our own behalf? Is there a quality of esthetic delight that sets it apart from other desires? Esthetic

theory must weigh the claims of various phenomena to esthetic value: then it must define the circumstances and the qualities that distinguish them and find their common denominator.

The very diffuseness of esthetic concerns has made it difficult to bring them all within a single scheme of interpretation. By the same token, the circumstance that esthetic valuation seems to be interwoven into virtually all our relationships with the natural world lends an aura of importance and even of urgency to esthetic problems. Also the readiness with which the term beauty is applied to such a diversity of situations and objects tends to discredit the genuineness of the presumptive experience. When we permit too many objects to be called beautiful, the suspicion arises that this term might have no meaning at all. There are phases in the life of the individual and perhaps also in the history of art when the notion of beauty is so exhausted that it seems trivial and empty, and not even the most passionate stirrings of human nature are able to imbue it with more than fleeting significance. The popular fashion is to call anything 'beautiful' on the flimsiest pretext, as fancy dictates. Consequently the term beauty seems to have become worn, and we have learned to rely on other adjectives for describing the extraordinary significance of the esthetic situation.

If the term 'beauty' is ill-defined, such obscurity reflects an uncertainty in the underlying esthetic experience. Not only do we frivolously designate objects as beautiful from irrelevant and inappropriate considerations, but the esthetic experience itself, as it arises in our confrontation with nature, is seldom so decisive or so forceful as we should like to assume. We have no way of distinguishing initially the esthetic experience of that object which ultimately proves to be a work of art from the presumably spurious esthetic experience which is afforded by a forgery. Often it seems as if we were compelled to find beauty, even when beauty is nowhere particularly apparent. Within the broad range of situations usually called beautiful, there is little order, less explanation, and no certainty. The apparent sources of esthetic valuation are incongruous. To the blunt question, why is this object beautiful, the most diverse answers present themselves. Its color or its shape may impress us, but its rarity and even its price have some bearing on its esthetic valuation. It appears that in many cases tradition and fashion are more influential toward determining the hierarchy of esthetic values than any intrinsic qualities which the objects themselves might present to the eye. Furthermore we designate the phenomena of nature with the same adjectives of approbation with which we praise man-made objects of art. It is the implication of our habits of thought and

speech that the greatest and most enduring objects of esthetic appreciation should be comparable to the smallest, most delicate, and ephemeral. Our esthetic appreciation of the heavens and its uncounted stars is comparable to our admiration of the delicate structure of the snowflake that melts in our breath. We have no criterion for distinguishing the beauty of the butterfly, if it be beautiful, from the presumed ugliness of the spider. We do not know how to tell a flower from a weed. Furthermore, to the popular mind, beauty connotes primarily the pleasing appearance of the human form. The age-long debasement of sexual interests has made this evident coincidence of esthetic and sexual concerns a source of embarrassment for most authors on esthetics. Their attempts to deal with a spurious problem have confused the issues and compounded the real difficulties of esthetic theory.

If the subject matter of esthetics is uncertain, and if esthetic valuation seems variable to the point of being capricious, the function and purpose of esthetics as a discipline are no more clear. Viewed critically, esthetics seems to serve no useful function at all; it is a stepchild among intellectual enterprises. The artist scorns esthetics as soon as it pretends to provide him with rules for creating art. Whatever truth esthetic theory may hold concerning the individual work of art, the processes of

artistic creativity are so largely unconscious that they are not susceptible to logical explanation or to rational account. Nor will the critic of art rely upon esthetic theory. However rigorously esthetics may analyze the quality of beauty, it has never fulfilled its promise to provide a radical exegesis of any specific work of art. The logician rejects esthetics because as a discipline it seems inseparable from the circumstances of artistic production and public appreciation, too much contingent upon historical accident to present an appropriate topic for theoretical treatment. The scientist spurns esthetics because he has been trained to suppress all esthetic consideration that might color his judgment. What would be more absurd than that the physicist, the chemist, or the biologist should be moved by the 'beauty' of the situations they observe or of the objects they study? In a scientific frame of reference, esthetic values appear as irrelevant distractions from the search for truth. Esthetics seems to be a superfluous discipline.

Esthetic theory has always proved futile when it permitted itself to be drawn into a furtive search after a formula of perfect beauty. The appearances of beauty remain diverse; its specific characteristics are undefined. Many a critic has indeed attempted to prescribe the specifications for beauty: yet nothing that has ever been written concerning the form of an

object, its structure, its symmetry, the harmony of its parts, or the appropriateness of its ornamentation was altogether sufficient to explain a given experience of beauty or entirely consistent with it. Such models of esthetic value frequently serve some valid didactic or analytic purpose; yet they have proved without exception to be too parochial in scope and too circumscribed in application to be anything but a hindrance to esthetic theory. Time and again the attempts to define beauty have provided esthetic thought with only a spurious foundation.

Esthetic theory takes on an entirely different appearance when it turns to the study of individual esthetic experience as it is given, relating this not necessarily as paradigm to an ideal of beauty, but understanding it as the relationship of a particular individual to a specific object contemplation of which is a momentary source of beauty to him. Esthetic theory will do well to inquire what this particular experience of beauty implies. To such an analysis the diversity of esthetic experiences and their uncertain definitions are no longer hindrances; on the contrary, the indefiniteness of esthetic phenomena provides occasion for constructing a theory that is all the more decisive in its consequences. The task that presents itself then is the more challenging: to understand and to bring logical order to a wide range of esthetic experience hitherto inadequately defined.

It has been customary to approach esthetic questions with the assumption that beauty should be a quality independent of the object perceived, only partially exhibited in any particular instance, and only incompletely recognized by any one observer. Implicit in most esthetic theory is the assumption that beauty was independent of its specific manifestation. The many interpretations that consider a specific instance of beauty merely the dim reflection of a perfect ideal may be grouped together as theories of esthetic idealism. Such idealism in esthetic theory expresses perhaps not so much the quality of beauty as it reflects the disarray and the fragmentation of our esthetic experiences. The notion that beauty should be independent of the specific experience arises not from a primary apprehension of some perfect beauty; on the contrary, we are so poorly satisfied with any given esthetic experience, that we assume that this particular view is indistinct and this momentary appreciation is incomplete. The idealism of traditional esthetic theory becomes not only tolerable but indeed welcome when we construe it no longer as a solution to the esthetic problems, but when we accept it as a vivid and compelling interpretation of their intrinsic qualities. When we separate beauty as an ideal quality from our vague apprehension of it, we admit that esthetic experience strikes us as a mere

approximation to something intrinsically unattainable. This recognition that no esthetic experience is wholly satisfying provides the problems of esthetics with a new dimension. By the same token by which nothing may be considered perfectly beautiful, all things should be assumed to possess some shadow of esthetic value. It then becomes conceivable that beauty, far from being a transcendental addition to apperceptive experience, may be only a particularly trenchant recognition of the intrinsic qualities of the object. Then beauty might potentially be discovered where it is now unrecognized.

Such an approach to esthetics will take account of many situations that would otherwise have seemed alien and irrelevant. The hypothesis of a transcendental source of esthetic value may seem to deprecate the immediacy of esthetic experience, but by the same token, it opens the esthetic realm to a far larger number of potential experiences. If no apprehension of beauty is absolutely valid, then any and to some extent every experience may be postulated to participate in esthetic value, if only to a minute degree. Thus, while on the one hand the postulate of an esthetic ideal reduces the significance of the individual experience, on the other hand the same esthetic idealism makes possible the admission of a far broader group of experiences to esthetic consideration.

These problems were first raised by Plato in his discussion of beauty. When one reads the Platonic dialogues nowadays, one may be enchanted by the argument, but one remains sceptical of a theory that seems unrealistic and impractical. Without presuming to resolve this problem of the history of thought, we may point out that Plato's esthetics is inseparable from his ontology and from his ethics. The esthetically determined distinction of form from matter provided an expression not only of esthetic problems, but it served as an explanation for the reality of objects and as an ethical criterion as well. Plato's views were widely accepted and imitated. The distinction between form and matter is frequently encountered even in modern thought. It is a moot question whether the prevalence of such an idea should be considered the consequence of its dissemination from a single source, or whether such prevalence would be further evidence of its natural universality. Strange as it may seem, Plato's arguments remain applicable to esthetic experience even today, their poetic distortions and exaggerations notwithstanding. Plato tells us that the beauty that is concretely recognized in a given object is merely the dim perception of an

ideal of beauty that exists independent of any and all specific manifestations. It is of more than passing significance that the idea of beauty seems inseparably bound to the idea of the good. The perfection of the ideal, ethical or esthetic, was recognized by the soul prior to its imprisonment in the body. In part it is the reluctance of matter to accept the form of the idea, and in part it is the distortion produced by our physical nature upon our perceptive processes that now prevents our recognition of more than a pale reflection of the idea of beauty. Remembering the ideal in its perfection, we are now stricken with a longing for beauty whenever we recognize its appearance in some physical object. After the death of the body, the soul may once again hope to dwell in the immediate presence of the ideal from which it now endures a painful separation.

The element in this poetic description that demands our attention is not the fanciful invention of mythical entities or the imaginative descriptions of their relationships to one another. Such fancies have often offended the literal mind. The significance of the Platonic theory of beauty lies not in its positive hypotheses, but in its negative implication that the concrete esthetic experience is fragmentary and inadequate, requiring a fanciful conceptual formula to sustain it. The transcendental mythology that Plato invented suggests that

our concepts of beauty are strikingly independent of the specific experience from which beauty was assumed to arise and which was thought to sustain it. The concept of beauty is autonomous; its validity is independent of any particular instance. Invariably the esthetic ideal promises more than esthetic experience can fulfill. However no metaphysical constructions are required to explain why the concept beauty should seem more substantial than our fleeting experience of it. We need merely postulate, altogether plausibly and consistently, that our minds project into esthetic experience qualities that have no sufficient basis in the empirical confrontation. For the present, the cause of such expansion of esthetic experience must remain conjectural. Subsequently we may show that such an expansion of the givenness of experience serves to satisfy a significant need in our intellectual existence.

The Spectrum of Esthetic Values

The individual esthetic experience is poorly defined and evanescent. Furthermore, esthetic experiences seem to differ among themselves in quality to such a degree that a single definition of esthetic value will be difficult to find. These uncertainties of esthetic experience seem to have primarily determined the appearance of the esthetic problem. It is a result of this ambiguity of esthetic experience that theory has come to assume a dominant role in determining our judgment upon esthetic matters. Traditionally, esthetic instances have been arranged in a hierarchy dominated by some presumptive ideal of beauty. Such a hierarchy expresses not only a firmly established philosophic tradition; it also gives rein to our inveterate tendency to grade and to classify what is intrinsically indistinct and incomplete. A conceptual framework of esthetic theory tends to replace the immediately convincing impressions of individual esthetic experience. At the same time the individual esthetic experience tends to become more and more dependent upon the logical framework within which it is rationalized. Evidently there is danger that the particular experience should come to be dominated, perhaps distorted or even obscured by the conceptual scheme invented to explain it. To what extent

such distortion might have hitherto crippled esthetic judgment, we shall not here debate. Suffice it to point out that this difficulty may be circumvented if we postulate a new hypothetical structure for esthetic values. Instead of arranging such values in a hierarchy, one superior to the other, we propose to view esthetics as a spectrum. This metaphor implies that various instances of esthetic experience should be considered fundamentally comparable. No matter how widely esthetic values might differ qualitatively, let it be postulated that they all fulfill a similar function for the individual to whom they are meaningful.

This theory provides the individual esthetic experience with a more prominent position with respect to theory. Although isolated esthetic experience becomes rational only within some broader conceptual framework, the apprehension of beauty in the particular instance is not dependent upon a hierarchy of values. The framework of esthetic theory must be constructed with care because its selection implies presuppositions that will necessarily color all subsequent theory that relies upon them. The most common logical construction assumes that there should be fundamentally some single experience of beauty, and that this beauty should be

responsible for all the manifestations of esthetic value. When their thoughts are carefully examined, most authors on this topic are found to have surreptitiously borrowed a Platonic hypothesis concerning beauty, even when they explicitly reject Platonism. They fail to see that the mere reliance upon the term beauty with all its connotations implies the existence of an esthetic quality distinct from the experience itself. Such an hypothesis of ideal beauty colors and tends to distort the entire analysis. If we assume that beauty as a distinct element is responsible for esthetic experience then the direction and the conclusion of the argument are effectively predetermined.

The task that presents itself then is to find a theory of esthetic phenomena without prejudging the existence of beauty as such. Although one may withhold one's judgment concerning the definition of beauty, one must yet remain sensitive to the experience that seems to flow from it. Otherwise the esthetic discussion will become arid and fruitless. The notion of a spectrum will serve as a solution to the preliminary problems of esthetics. Such a spectrum would have the advantage of accomodating all esthetic experience from what is trivial to what is sublime. It would serve to present a logical display of esthetic phenomena in all their variety without distorting them through a specific preconception of beauty, without exclusion and without endorsement. It will permit the individual

phenomena that are admitted to it to retain their own esthetic persuasiveness; indeed the simple fact that an object impresses us as beautiful would be sufficient cause for admitting it to the classification. The criterion by which experiences should be assigned to the spectrum of esthetic values is a simple one: we recognize that some of our pleasures are referred to ourselves, and we realize that other pleasures are referred to some object outside of us. For all those pleasures and satisfactions which are assignable as qualities to an object outside of the self, the esthetic spectrum has a place.

Our argument will presuppose that the reader is familiar with esthetic experience. On some occasions of his life, frequent or rare, he will have derived pleasure from the contemplation of an object, man-made or natural as the case might be. For many, such esthetic experience will become most compelling when they view the famous objects of art with which our museums are filled. Others will have found esthetic value in the objects of nature, animals, trees, or plants. The appreciation of music and poetry is also a source of esthetic satisfaction. However, the analyses of these arts is complicated by the circumstance that they require performance. The song requires to be sung; the poem will be read. Music and poetry possess an entirely different esthetic structure from the fine arts. We shall reserve a detailed analysis of their esthetic effectiveness for another occasion, but in the present essay we shall be satisfied to indicate the direction in which such an analysis might be pursued.

Esthetic Valuation in Academic Art

That an investigation concerning esthetic value should initially turn to academic art for its material is already highly symptomatic of the problems it faces. It is characteristic of the uncertainty that surrounds esthetic theory that time and again an attempt should be made to discover esthetic value in a segregated and more or less clearly defined group of objects that are called art by academic historians and their followers. For us, who have been taught from childhood that beauty was to be found in the sculpture of Praxiteles or Donatello, in the paintings of Titian or of Rembrandt, in the poetry of Shakespeare or of Goethe, or in the music of Bach or Mozart, it is difficult to comprehend that to the vast majority of mankind the names of these artists are meaningless, and the esthetic experience of their art is incomprehensible. Whenever the question concerning esthetics arises, we invariably try to turn to academic art for its resolution. Art has become among us a social institution with which we would like to answer the uncertainties of esthetics. Yet when we attempt to do so in a systematic way, we are embarrassed to discover that we are not at all certain what art should be, or how art should be identified. Thus the conventional solution of esthetic problems is found to rely upon an ambiguity. We confidently refer to art as the locus of esthetic value, while we ignore the uncertainty that surrounds both the definition and the valuation of art. To one who is able to ignore his own

esthetic sensibilities, the customs of academic art must resemble those of a cult or of a religion. Like sacred objects in temples the statues and paintings of fashionable artists are displayed in our museums where they receive a profane kind of adoration. Their beauty is mysterious, now and again intuitively glimpsed but always accepted as a matter of faith where conviction is lacking. The same situation obtains in the recognition and valuation of literature and of music. It is important to note that certain exemplary works of art provide an intuitively reliable esthetic experience. Yet it has never been possible to define a rational system of criteria by which the merits of art might be assessed.

Time and again the attempt is made to explain the esthetic value of academic art by a pseudo-scientific approach. The artwork itself is intensively studied and minutely analyzed. The historical tradition to which it belongs is painstakingly explored. Evidently the work of a single artist or of a single school exhibits a set of characteristics of technique and style by which it may be identified. The recognition of style is a stimulating intellectual exercise which gives us pleasure and satisfaction. The identification of style is frequently confused with esthetic valuation. Probably style is a more important criterion than any other in determining our appraisal of a work of art. The intimations of style, subtle yet invariable vestiges of the limitations and powers of the artist, are the dominant characteristics of academic art.

Great efforts have been made to give logical descriptions of style, yet it is recognized more surely by mere intuition. It requires relatively little intellectual training, for example, to distinguish a painting of Monet from one by Vermeer. Likewise, it requires no profound musical education to distinguish a Sonata by Telemann from one by Beethoven. Indeed, we may come closest to defining academic art with the requirement that such characteristics of style should be unmistakably present; and in a sense it would be true to say that the more unmistakable and inimitable the style, the greater the esthetic value of the work of art in question. If such characteristics of art are indeed the reliable cause for esthetic valuation, they are almost surely not the only cause and they are insufficient to explain all the qualities of esthetic valuation. To put it differently, these characteristics of style may well provide the occasion for esthetic pleasure. They may make it possible for a particular work of art to receive esthetic valuation. As such a prerequisite, style possesses great significance. However considerations of style will answer only a fraction of our questions about esthetic valuation.

A critical analysis of academic esthetic valuation has numerous points of beginning. Aside from questions of style, there are historical considerations that seem to play a disproportionate role in determining the esthetic value of particular objects.

Only a superficial knowledge of the history of art shows that there have been very few artists, if indeed any, whose achievements have been recognized as such from the very beginning and have never fallen into disfavor. Conversely, the extraordinarily high valuation that is placed upon the production of a particular artist or of a particular period can probably not be rationally justified. The circumstance is illustrative that, for example, the manuscripts of Bach were valued so cheaply that they were neglected and many of them irretrievably lost, until many years after his death their esthetic value was 'rediscovered'. It would be wrong to attribute such loss to the insensitivity of his contemporaries. In time, our own judgments will probably not appear much better. There are undoubtedly living among us today many artists whose work will be unrecognized and unrewarded in their lifetimes, if indeed it is not buried in the overabundance of artistic production of our day. On the other hand, if esthetic value were as unequivocal as we in our pseudo-religious attitudes toward it would like to assume, then the work of art upon its appearance would be self-evident and would identify itself for what it is in the eyes of all men.

As the criteria of taste and judgment alter to make an object once despised now honored, and vice versa, so under certain circumstances our knowledge about an object is radically

changed. Then that which once seemed beautiful appears cheap, and what was considered common becomes irreplaceable. Such metamorphosis of the esthetic object may be observed in the discovery of unrecognized art. Even more noteworthy are the circumstances ensuing upon the identification of forgeries. It is regularly reported in the newspapers that some hapless dealer in antiques sells an unknown painting for a paltry sum, whereupon it is recognized as the work of some famous painter or of some famous school. As if by magic its drabness fades and it is transformed into an object of great 'beauty' and concomitantly of great value. It is held to be unfortunate that the art dealer did not have better knowledge of his wares. If only he had examined them critically enough, he might have discovered the treasure in time. It is thought that the esthetic qualities of the object would have been discernible with sufficient study, and that they might have been previously apparent if the same attention had been devoted to the work. The circumstances make it impossible either to confirm or to deny this thesis.

That this assumption, however, may not be entirely correct seems to follow from the obverse situation, namely that in which a work of art previously held in high esteem proves to be a forgery. This characteristic train of events is also a frequent

occurrence in the history of art. It is curious that authors on esthetic topics have not given this circumstance more thought. Typically, such an object of art has been much admired having been examined by many experts and highly praised by them. Then only through accident, occasionally only through the confession of the forger, does it become apparent that the work of art is not authentic. It is then removed from the honored place in which it had been displayed, and loses, of course, virtually all of its commercial value. At the same time its appearance changes not at all. In the absurdity of this situation the contingencies of esthetic appreciation become more apparent. We need not conclude that esthetic valuation should be imaginary or false. However, it is not dependent wholly upon the appearance of the object. The attribution of esthetic value purely to the appearance must be accounted an illusion that deserves further study.

Esthetic valuation is more than a response to the appearance of the object of art. It is conditioned by rationalizations concerning what art should be and by historical considerations concerning this purported object of art. Esthetic valuation is also strongly influenced by diverse social considerations. These circumstances all come into sharp focus when one considers the perplexity of the artist attempting to gain recognition for his work. The attempt to acquire distinction and fame by

creating for one's work a unique place in the history of art is in itself one of the most noteworthy, yet least well understood, phenomena of our civilization. We cannot analyze it in all its details here. Suffice it to point out that it involves genuinely ethical considerations, the desire of the artist to realize himself. It involves historical problems, specifically that concerning the specious immortality conveyed upon the famous man by history, and it involves social problems implied in the elevation by society of one of its members to greatness. What concerns us particularly at this point is that the work of art in itself provides no certain criterion of the esthetic value which such historical tradition will ultimately attribute to it. One should seriously question whether even the most experienced connoisseur will judge a work of art in isolation. Professional appraisals of art are always made by conscious or unconscious comparison with undefined norms. The work is judged as a member of a group. If the professional critic is unable to give an unequivocal opinion concerning the esthetic value of a given isolated object of art, how much less likely is it that the average educated but non-specialized viewer should be able to do so. The history of art criticism and of the public acceptance of changing norms of art such as the bold innovations of modern times, make this question particularly poignant.

If then there were intrinsic criteria to show us which objects belong to art and which do not, such criteria are as yet inapparent. We have, as of now, only tradition, fashion, and our individual untested opinions to guide us. We see many artists striving to represent in their works esthetic values, and we are puzzled why some of them succeed and why most of them fail. There is no specific standard or rule by which those works of art that are thought to possess esthetic value are admitted to our museums and by which the others are excluded. As a matter of fact, when one surveys this field in its entirety, recognizing on the one hand that historical accident, social circumstances, fashion and style have conspired to bestow esthetic value on some objects in preference to others, then it will appear that in spite of the technical rules which have been made concerning form, composition, color or expression, none of these intrinsic qualities in a work of art suffice to give it esthetic value.

The grounds of esthetic valuation are seen in a different aspect when one considers the subject matter of the work of art. Naively considered, all academic and esthetic pretentions apart, a picture is a picture of something. The image must stand in some relationship to the original, and an analysis of this relationship might provide a clue to the value of the image. The subject of the picture is by definition the natural world, if in this term we include not only scenes of nature, the shapes of plants and animals and of the human body, but if we will include the decorative objects, garments, tools, and buildings which man makes for himself as being part of nature also. It would certainly be plausible to accept these man-made objects as comparable to the setting in which they appear. We shall subsequently comment upon the differences.

The most striking characteristic of the natural world which is constantly before our eyes is its changeableness. Human beings and animals age and die, as do the flowers and plants. The seasons come and go, and the sun moving through the sky produces continuing change of illumination. Life itself is inconstant. The bird on a branch outside my window flies away, the face into which I look changes its expression, and many of the scenes that are meaningful to me vanish before I have time adequately to apprehend them. Furthermore, I myself am constantly on the

move. It is difficult for me to remain motionless in one place. My view of the world is always changing in part because the point from which I view it is never the same. And even if it were, the limited attention span of my mind will permit no such duration as would be required for the indefinite preservation of the image before me.

If then there is some such appearance particularly meaningful to me, perhaps I should want it to be engraved upon my mind perpetually. Yet I would have no means of insuring such permanence except I reproduced this scene to the best of my ability upon some substance, be it stone, wood, canvas, or paper. Then, subsequently I may look once more at the construction that I have made to find there a constancy, a reliability and an assurance of perpetuity that virtually no primary experience of nature is able to give me. Thus it is likely that the primary purpose of the pictorial arts was to capture and to preserve the treasured momentary image of the eyes. In fulfilling this function, evidently art tends to displace that image and to provide a new and a characteristically different kind of object for me to appreciate. The image of the natural world that the artist has created is set apart from that of which it is a copy by being placed on a pedestal or by being enclosed within a frame. The artificial boundary denotes the different quality of existence of nature on the one hand and the object which is a copy of it on the other. To be sure, the art image itself requires to be viewed, and in principle the apperception of the art object is as fleeting as the perception of the object in nature. By practice we

learn what may be called an esthetic attitude in which the transient characteristics of the apperception are suppressed and its permanent qualities are reinforced.

In some ways it is difficult for us to establish an esthetic attachment to the world of nature, in spite of the fact that nature everywhere surrounds us with potential objects for esthetic valuation. There may be several reasons why this should be so. Nature does not lend itself to historical description. Nature is unendingly repetitive. Its objects are anonymous. Evidently nature is at once too variable and too diffuse to permit many attachments such as would be required for a satisfactory esthetic relationship. Only a small portion of the objects in nature that present themselves to us for esthetic valuation are permanent in any sense of that word. Most of the objects that we might learn to like either change before our very eyes or at least their change is intellectually known to us. But, for reasons that we shall discuss later, such destruction of the esthetic object is unacceptable to our minds. Also the diffuseness of the potential esthetic objects that nature offers to us is objectionable. The scenes are so numerous, the objects are so many which might possibly become esthetically valuable for us, and the mere fact of multiplicity is an embarrassment to our esthetic needs. It is not difficult to see why this should be so: our minds are such that we can attend to only one object at a time, and inasmuch as the esthetic object is of such dominant importance in our intellectual existence, it would be incongruous for us to depend upon many such objects or to esteem such a multitude of them as we could not possibly all know. There is no more

effective device by which the esthetically valuable object is segregated from the diversity of its background than the deliberate and disciplined attention which the artist expends upon his work. Art imbues the physical world with uniqueness. It segregates the individual phenomenon from the anonymity of nature. Art replaces nature's unending repetitiveness with unique instances and objects.

This function of art has been irreparably compromised by the invention of photographic processes. Photography fosters the illusion of permanence in nature. It captures in permanent form the momentary image that presents itself to our eyes. The availability of photographic processes tends to make artistic reproduction of nature's scenes and objects superfluous. It was not long ago that the only device available by which we might preserve the image before our eyes at the given moment was the brush or the pen of the artist. These relatively simple mechanical methods of photography may well have altered our relationship not only to art but even to nature herself. The scenes of nature among which we live have not changed, but they have a different implication for us now that we are able to preserve each individual aspect as accurately as we please. Granted that we could not possibly photograph all things, yet we are able to photograph enough of them to sustain the illusion that nature was

in fact a series of rapidly shifting scenes analogous to the flickering frames of a motion picture film. Traditionally when the painter copied a scene before him he imbued it with permanence. In contrast with its subject, the painting proved impervious to change. In an evidently mutable world, the endurance of the particular work of art was of great importance. To be sure, the painting or the drawing was never so true to life as to be in danger of being confused with it, its detail was never commensurate with the complexity of the natural scene, but so long as the subject of the painting remained recognizable, so long as the painting conveyed purpose, style and skill, it became a valuable object of esthetic appreciation.

If the desire to preserve intact the apparition of nature before us was ~~the~~ an original motivation of artistic effort, then it is not surprising that when the introduction of photography made it possible to represent nature more convincingly in photographs than in paintings, the esthetic function of art should have undergone a violent metamorphosis. The chief task of painters, namely the preservation of the scene of reality, has now been usurped, and painters deprived of their original function turn to the representation of abstract shapes and figures, remote from the picturesque reproductions at which they no longer excel. On the other hand, photographic processes,

being cheap and mechanical, lending themselves to unending reproduction and requiring little skill, have seemed to bring within our grasps a static reality of nature. It is not usually recognized that the photographic image of nature is deceptive. The demonstration of this deceptiveness is a proof which the reader may wish to complete for himself. For reasons that shall become apparent when we analyze the qualities of esthetic valuation in greater detail, photography has been unable to assume the burden of esthetic value that the fine arts have borne for so long.

Now there has arisen a new relationship between art and nature. If, formerly it was the task of art to mirror, to reproduce the image of nature and to give it permanence in our eyes, the efficiencies of photography have made this function superfluous. However, art is far more than the pictorial reproduction of the images of nature. In the first place, objects of art may be considered the peculiarly human contribution to the reality of nature. Then we would view the object of art as pre-eminent among natural objects, uniquely intelligible to us on account of its human origins. A second possible interpretation of art will become more convincing when the isolation in which we live is brought home to us. The conceptual world is not so satisfactory a bond with our fellow

men as we tend to assume. Insofar as a conceptual world is consistent and complete, it excludes the individual. Insofar as a conceptual world is expressive of individual experience, its universality is illusory. We are able to escape the circle of our loneliness only by finding objects of beauty, in art or in nature, which are able to become bonds between men. The common experience of a great work of art is a powerful bond between the isolated lives of individual men. It may well be that art will now find its task in the elaboration of more effective instruments of communication. Whether art as communication must possess esthetic value is a question open to debate. It is conceivable that for purposes of communication, art should pursue no esthetic goals at all.

All discussions of art are complicated by the circumstance that we use this term to apply to such a variety of objects. Not only the painting is art, but also the statue, the building, the piece of jewelry, the poem, the novel, the symphony and the sonata are considered art. The fine arts, so-called, have this in common, that they culminate in the creation of a physical object, be that a drawing, painting, sculpture, which ultimately stands independent of any particular effort on our part. Poetry and music, by way of contrast, possess the alternate characteristic that they require some activity of ours to attain their ultimate status. The music requires to be played, and the literature requires, at least in the primary sense, to be spoken. When the music is played or the poem is recited then these works of art obtain a physical reality which differs from the physical

reality of the statue or the painting in a way that requires further analysis. Fundamentally, the physical reality of the sound waves must be considered strictly analogous to the physical reality of the canvas and paint. However, the work of art which is performed exists in a succession of events in time, whereas the work of art which is contemplated exists simultaneously. The order of the progression, its intrinsic lawfulness, its rate, and its form must be construed as reflections of our innate intellectual capacity to follow its performance. This limitation upon the characteristics of the human mind is analogous to the way in which the painting, for example, relies on dimensions and colors such as are perceptible by the human eye. We shall show that the esthetic effect of the work of fine art is the epitomization of an object, but the esthetic effect of the work of art that requires performance is the crystallization of the duration of time into a reproduceable pattern of events. In other words, when the music, the ballet, or the play is performed then the inscrutable matrix of time becomes accessible and real to our minds. As we participate in the performance of a musical work, time and the events that occupy it receive for us pattern and form that they can acquire in no other way. For that which is usually inchoate, formless, indistinguishable one moment from the next, receives particularly through the

musical composition specificity, uniqueness, order, and meaning. Poetry possesses many of the characteristics of music. It superimposes upon this fulfillment of time a pattern of conceptual imagery of great potential complexity and diversity. As we read literature, not only does this action of reading give particular significance to the time which it absorbs, this moment being characterized unmistakably by this phrase which coincides with it; but the power of language over our minds, the intrinsic meaningfulness of its phrases, add an entire dimension of meaning to literature. It shall be our contention that the esthetic quality of music itself and of the musical quality of literature is to be sought not in any logical connotations, but in the eminently satisfying form with which they make unique the passage of time. This esthetic quality projected into time must be distinguished from the ethical valuation of time. The esthetic fulfillment of time as in the performance of a musical composition represents the imposition of structure upon time from without. Here is meaning and pattern existing apart from and outside of the individual, recognized by him in the objective world. The ethical fulfillment in time, on the other hand, is the transformation of time into the opportunity for the realization of self. Evidently ethical and esthetic valuation of time are not mutually exclusive. The description and analysis of their intersections is a useful and rewarding exercise for the reader.

The Esthetic Valuation of Nature

The relationship between art and nature represents a perplexing topic in the history of esthetic theory. When esthetics has presumed to be prescriptive, it has often considered whether or not it should direct the artist to imitate nature. When esthetics has been descriptive, it has struggled with the question whether the beauty of nature should be identical, comparable, or entirely disparate from the beauty of art. The distinction between works of nature and works of art is frequently accepted as unequivocal. Yet further considerations always suggest that this distinction is never as ultimate as it appears. Examples readily come to mind: our view of a city from the distance provides us with esthetic pleasure comparable to that offered by a natural scene. A good illustration of this circumstance is to be found in the pictures of Ruisdael whose towns blend into his landscapes as if they were part of it. Also many man-made objects show the traces of nature's design. The grain of the wood and the lustre of metal are natural qualities that greatly enhance the esthetic value of objects made of them. Again, if as human beings we must consider ourselves to be the creatures of nature, ultimately all that we make is also natural. The web of the spider, the nests of birds and insects, and the honeycomb also show much craft,

yet all of them are unequivocally objects of nature. From the anthropologist's point of view all distinctions between man-made objects and objects of nature are only relative. Nature, coming to be without our efforts, is less familiar to us than the objects of art. Nature also lacks that uniqueness which our deliberate creation of objects of art tends to give to them. For these reasons, if for none other, nature will seem neutral, irrelevant, and remote from us; whereas objects of art invariably bespeak their affinity to our interests.

Our relationship to nature proves to be ambivalent. On the one hand we find it necessary to create objects separate from nature and to distinguish them from her in order to obtain suitable objects of esthetic valuation. At the same time we are irresistibly drawn to nature. It often seems that if we were only able to establish the proper relationship to nature our ethical and esthetic inadequacies would disappear. What is it that nature has to offer us? What pleasures, what delights, what gratifications do we expect from her, and in what way do these differ from esthetic satisfactions? Our physical dependence upon nature creates for us value in an assortment of relatively simple phenomena. We take pleasure simply in light, air, and in the space that gives us freedom to move. Probably water, food, and the other physical objects upon which our bodies

depend are also pure sources of delight for us. Yet we characteristically take pleasure in these aspects of nature because we desire them and because we need them. The pleasure, by the same token, accrues not to the objects as distinct from us but as available for our disposition and for our use. If the traditional definition was correct, esthetic value will not arise until such objects are valued for themselves.

It is difficult, as we have already pointed out, to discover the criteria by which esthetic value should be attributed to certain objects and to certain scenes in nature. Nature is changeable, and all her objects are in process of becoming or of passing away. The duration of nature, is always only an illusion created by the limitation of our senses. The constancy of nature fades under more intensive scrutiny. Nor are scientific definitions able to arrest the flux of nature. The history of science is the history of definitions overthrown. We have learned systematically to replace the definition of substance with the intimation of process. This replacement, however, is only a first step, because a process is itself a conceptual entity, and if substance itself is not impervious to change, is it plausible to attribute constancy to change? It remains to be seen whether the resolution of substance into processes implies an ordered systematic relationship of forces to one another or the chaos of what will ultimately prove to be unbounded.

The esthetic appreciation of nature proves to be of two kinds. Esthetic value may be determined either by the structure of the object itself or by our perceptual relationship to that object. An example of the first kind of valuation is the object such as a flower that is recognized as beautiful because of an impressive appearance that sets it apart from the surrounding vegetation. The brightness and color that draw the insect attract also our vision and our admiration. Our attention is temporary; it may be dominated even by a transient apparition. While our senses delight, our soberer thoughts remind us of the physical limitations of the object of our enjoyment, until an air of sadness and resignation blends into the simple pleasures of contemplation. The poet understands that our pleasure in the delicate splendor of the flower is inseparable from our remorse at its withering.

There is a second pattern of esthetic valuation in nature which has frequently been distinguished from the former as the sublime from the beautiful. Pre-eminent among sublime experiences is the peculiarly powerful impression of the starry heavens. There are other magnificent views: scenes of oceans and mountains, of plains and rivers and cities. The effectiveness of such scenes depends primarily on the remoteness of objects disproportionate in size from the observer. Given any vantage point from which we might view nature in its dimensions

utterly disproportionate to our own physical being, we experience through the dominance of our view a feeling of satisfaction and happiness, as if our vision guaranteed that what our eyes surveyed should also be possessed by us. Since the eighteenth century, such esthetic experiences have been called sublime, and authors in those days including Kant were much fascinated by them. The moral superiority of mind over the weakness of the body was held to induce this feeling of the sublime, because the view of so vast an extent made us feel physically insignificant. So complex an explanation is perhaps unnecessary. Let the fact be noted that the discrepancy between our own smallness and the magnitude of what we behold notwithstanding, we are able to comprehend such vast dimensions with our eyes. This comprehension implies a power; the power is incongruous with our physical weakness, but the disproportion accrues to the benefit of self. We shall subsequently refer to this incongruity again; it sheds an important light upon the nature of esthetic valuation.

It becomes then a matter of some theoretical concern whether the esthetic pleasures to be derived from the contemplation of natural scenery should be identical with the delight that we take in physical objects. Such objects of esthetic valuation include trees, shrubs, and flowers, as well as the bodies of animals including our own. Inanimate matter, such as water,

ice, metal or stone, may also assume extraordinary esthetic significance, when as in the case of clouds or icebergs or rock formations in a cave, it is displayed in a form particularly impressive and memorable. Indeed, in a sense it would seem that the object in its discreteness recognized by us induced us to attribute to it esthetic value. Consider for example a raindrop, which isolated and in proper illumination, perhaps as a bead on the edge of a leaf in bright sunlight will meet all the criteria of an esthetically valuable object. When such a raindrop loses either its outline or its particularly favorable illumination, it can no longer be distinguished as a separate object, then like its shape, its esthetic value will disappear. The rainbow fades, the sun sets, the snow melts, the dew evaporates; there are many instances in nature where an esthetic object vanishes. While some natural phenomena, such as the outline of mountains or the ocean waves in their restlessness seem to be of the most enduring sort, most esthetic objects in nature are quite transient by virtue of their very structure. To the poet they sometimes seem to require human memory to sustain and to preserve them and their esthetic value.

We have noted that almost any scene in nature, when viewed from a distance sufficiently great so that our vision encompasses a circle far larger than our powers of action comprehend, may

assume esthetic qualities. We have noted also that objects in nature evanescent as the raindrop, the particles of dust dancing in the sunlight, butterflies, insects, animal bodies, flowers, shrubs and trees, are each of them potential objects of esthetic valuation. Evidently such objects cannot display their esthetic value at all moments; a certain disposition of the object with regard to the observer is required before esthetic value may arise. The class of potential esthetic objects that we have enumerated is so widely inclusive that we may now suggest that nothing whatsoever which our mind may designate as one might not potentially become an object of esthetic value. To be sure, there are certain objects and situations that are biologically offensive and disgusting to us, and these ought not to be expected to become objects of esthetic valuation. (Some objects present borderline problems, for example the embalmed body that has been made pretty for the funeral ceremony, or the cadaver in the Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp. A comparable problem arises also in the contemplation of human relics, as suggested by the metaphysical poem that Goethe wrote upon the skull of his friend.* In any event, the number of objects unsuitable to esthetic valuation is limited.)

* cf. Viëtor, Karl, "Goethes Gedicht auf Schillers Schädel," Publications of the Modern Language Assn. of America (PMLA) Vol. LIX, March 1944.

Indeed we may consider it a general rule that any scene or any object is potentially of esthetic value for us. With this recognition, the problem would seem to have been transformed. We no longer ask what characteristics make this object beautiful, but we might inquire now what relationship between ourselves and a given object makes the appearance of beauty possible.

The esthetic pleasure in contemplation of the human body is for us a special case of valuation of a natural object, and one of consuming theoretical and practical importance. In part this importance derives from the physiological significance that the body holds as the substrate of biological life. The nude human body has been a model for painters and sculptors virtually from the beginnings of art. Such esthetic value as it manifests must also be reconciled with the evident erotic significance of the naked human form. The relationship of these various interests has actually become for our puritanical age a question of some significance, in as much as we permit the exhibition and publication of pictures of nudity which we deem to have esthetic value, while proscribing those that have none. The argument has been made, and not implausibly, that there is little intrinsic charm or beauty of form about the human body. The long limbs, the curious distribution of hair, the

almost exclusive limitation of expression to the facial musculature and to the hands would hardly correspond with any general notion of beauty that we might derive from the totality of our experience. The body itself lacks that unity of form and proportion that we require of most esthetically valuable objects. Indeed, the interest of art in the nude may at least in part be construed as an effort to beautify an essentially ungrateful object; the extent to which it has so often succeeded is a tribute to the artist's perseverance and skill.

The artificial distinction between the erotic and esthetic interest in the human form is unconvincing. There is little in experience or in the history of art to support such a division. It is by no accident that the Greek sculptors, when they protrayed the female form, called her Aphrodite. Indeed, that the erotic drive should be sublimated as an esthetic ideal is as much an accomplishment of our civilization as its emotional and intellectual refinement. By the same token, it is vain to try to distinguish between instinctive erotic desire and esthetic appreciation of the human body. Such a division is still an important theme in our social folklore, and the distinction between art and eros remains a legal point of some conseqeunce. Esthetic theory has also been colored by the attempt to separate 'earthly' and 'heavenly' beauty. Kant was much concerned to

distinguish objects esthetically admired from objects desired. He insisted that the esthetic admiration of beauty must be devoid of 'interest'. This insistence must be interpreted in the light of a religious tradition which held that the desire for physical beauty, especially that of the human body, was sinful. On the other hand, the philosophic tradition held that beauty should be divine. The qualification that esthetic admiration must be without interest was probably made in an attempt to avoid the contradiction that would arise if physical beauty were elevated into the realm of esthetics. The presumed incompatibility of animal instinct and reason precluded that sensual beauty should be accepted as esthetic value.

Such subtlety seems unwarranted and historically incorrect. On the face of it, there would seem to be no valid reason why esthetic considerations ought not involve physical beauty as such or why they should be forcefully excluded from the innate physical desire for the human body. In general, it may be assumed that human beings desire to possess virtually all things which they admire. The reason why they desire to possess is dual: in the first place, possession is frequently prerequisite to the complete use and enjoyment of the object admired. Evidently the ultimate appreciation of its value requires time, intimacy, and devotion. A second reason why esthetic admiration

is frequently accompanied by the desire for possession is the need on the part of the individual to protect and to preserve for himself that which he admires. The object of esthetic valuation in fact becomes part of the individual; as such it requires and deserves protection. Presumably there would be social competition for esthetically desirable objects. Perhaps the desire for possession should be construed as an expression of the individual's concern for protecting his interests in the object in question. The possessive desire for the esthetic object wanes as the esthetic relationship grows mature. The individual then becomes aware that possession is not only not essential but not even desirable as a confirmation to esthetic valuation. Experience teaches that all attempts to preserve the esthetic moment are unavailing. The enduring of the esthetic situation is an illusion and as such it will inevitably prove to be merely the beginning of disappointment.

The Valuation of Ordinary Objects

One of the chief advantages of our hypothesis of an esthetic spectrum is that it creates room beside famous and outstanding objects of esthetic significance for any number of lesser esthetic experiences. These may well be of particular importance to the individual involved yet be without claim to a more universal meaning. On the face of it, the esthetic experience of art is not self-explanatory. A purely empirical view of esthetic valuation makes us cognizant of the diversity of potential esthetic objects and of the lack of unanimity concerning those that are in fact recognized. We discover an esthetic spectrum of great breadth, and consequently we must reject all definitions of esthetics that attempt to define esthetic valuation by pointing to a particular group of objects to the exclusion of all others. The most general definition of esthetics requires nothing more than the existence of a valuative relationship between ourselves and the physical objects of our environment. So broad a definition no longer limits our view to the traditional objects of esthetics. We find ourselves free to make a search further afield.

Esthetic valuation cannot be understood except as an individual relationship. Each individual establishes for himself an esthetic bond with the objects in his purview. By the

same token that the esthetic relationship is a private one, it is frequently unexpressed and concealed. There is indeed no reason why a man should publicize his esthetic predilections, and it is plausible that in most cases he would be unable to do so even if he wished. Such esthetic choices as become explicit are seldom rationally defined. Side by side with the great esthetic convictions exist the common, unpretentious esthetic preferences. These find expression only in exceptional circumstances, and it is not surprising that when these naive predilections do become explicit, they frequently appear inappropriate and incongruous.

There are confusing connections between the esthetic valuation of art and the personal, largely unexpressed valuation of common objects. In days gone by the individual craftsman would assimilate himself to an artistic tradition, and if his work succeeded beyond expectation, he would then appear as a representative of that tradition. In our day the designers of the mass-produced articles of commerce are also conversant with academic art. Their familiarity is reflected in their rejection of tradition no less than in their conformity to it. Many of the products of our factories reflect in their design a memory of the traditions of art. When we recognize the esthetic value that we place upon a house, for example, or upon an automobile we try to persuade ourselves that this value should be derived from

an esthetic ideal which we assume to be enshrined somewhere in our museums. The household objects that are frequently conscious imitations of or deliberate efforts at fine art serve to sustain such an illusion. Yet it is farfetched to assume that the valuation of familiar objects should be dependent, however indirectly, upon the canons of academic art. The purposeful introduction of the styles of academic art into the manufacture of familiar objects serves not so much to demonstrate an actual relationship between the two as to create and to perpetuate a myth.

The veil of secrecy that shrouds common esthetic valuation notwithstanding, it is evident both from our own experience and from the activity of our fellow men that we value not only designated works of art and their imitations but numerous proximate and unpretentious objects as well. It is worthwhile to prepare for ourselves a catalogue of such objects in order to see more clearly the range of experience that is included. Only then do we recognize the significance of the common esthetic experience in our daily lives. In such a catalogue must be included a large variety of common and useful objects to which a genuine esthetic relationship exists,

for example articles of clothing, furniture, jewelry, automobiles, and buildings, both public and private. As a matter of fact nothing made by human hands or by human intention lacks possible esthetic value. Whenever we have a choice about how an object should look we become aware that we value its appearance, to however slight a degree. The mere mention of such articles of use, and especially the commercial importance that is attached to their appearance, suffices to convince us that esthetic valuation should indeed be involved. Yet it is problematic how the esthetic valuation of such a common object should be related to the apparently totally distinct and different valuation in works of art. This distinction is a source of difficulty because in comparison with works of art the valuation of common objects seems trivial and unconvincing, so that even if it existed it should hardly merit our attention.

Perhaps the esthetic value that we place upon common objects creates a spurious problem. It is possible that the extraordinary and relatively isolated experience of art has led us to attach an unwarranted and disproportionate importance to conscious esthetic experience in our lives. As a rule, esthetic experience may well be unconscious and unexpressed. It is usually taken for granted and it is frequently ignored. It enters subtly into our decisions and judgments

without requiring to become explicit. It is able to exert its influence without our specific attentions. The esthetic valuation that is inapparent may yet prove of greater importance in our intellectual existence than that which is explicit. Perhaps we have misunderstood the significance of art all along. Perhaps the celebration of art serves not so much to present a perfect or ultimately satisfactory esthetic experience as to make explicit a more widely effective esthetic relationship. Although we usually become aware of esthetic experience only in the special circumstances that we have described, it is plausible that these circumstances far from unique should prove to be exemplary exhibitions of relationships that obtain more generally.

Esthetic valuation is usually considered limited to the extraordinary and unusual product of an academic art. If we attempt to stretch the meaning of the term esthetic to apply also to the more common and mundane experiences of day to day existence, we may expect to encounter formidable difficulties. These difficulties arise from the unique importance that esthetic experience may come to have in the lives of sensitive men. Then paradoxically the very forcefulness and impressiveness of esthetic experience may be a barrier to its adequate comprehension. For reasons which will become apparent as we

proceed, the love of esthetic beauty may become excessive, until the appreciation of esthetic beauty occasionally appears as the ultimate if not the only purpose of living. This overweening significance is reflected in the transcendental, metaphysical, or mystical quality that is so often attributed to academic esthetics by those who prize it most. To them the suggestion that any profane object might possess esthetic value will appear as a sacrilege, by the same token that the selection of esthetic objects presents itself as a process of elimination of baser things. To this argument there is but one answer, and this arises not extrinsically, but from that prized esthetic experience itself. The conscious esthetic experience is never absolutely adequate to the demands which the insistent self makes upon it. Consequently traditional patterns of esthetic interpretation fail to provide answers to the most important questions about esthetics. This inadequacy of academic esthetics and its conventional explanation justifies the tentative extention of the investigation to the valuation of common objects as well. To trace the threads between primitive and complex esthetics is not to imply their equation to one another. It is quite possible to construe the two expressions of esthetic need to stem from the same capacities and propensities of human nature. They would not necessarily be either identical or equivalent.

There are significant advantages to any explanation of esthetic phenomena that would attribute the capacity for esthetic appreciation to all human beings instead of limiting it to a select few. Such an approach would explain not only the difference between primitive and complex esthetic experience, but it would also obviate the evident discrepancies within the realm of academic esthetics itself. It would permit the recognition of esthetic experience as a basic psychological fact of human nature; at the same time it would provide an opportunity for explaining the powerful functions of esthetic valuation in the extraordinary instance.

The art which we call academic is arbitrarily defined. Evidently academic art is surrounded by and is always on the verge of being confused with a variety of less sophisticated patterns of esthetic valuation. Academic art seems always in process of self-purification. It must exclude all foreign elements that insinuate themselves as authentic; it criticizes and arranges in hierarchical order even that which it tolerates. The very measures to which academic art must resort for maintaining its purity strongly suggest that many men do indeed derive pleasure, spurious or real, from esthetic delight in objects that cannot be included in the framework of academic

art. The favor found by forgeries, cheap imitations, the effectiveness of fad and fraud can lead to no other conclusions. The fine arts have customs and canons by which esthetic value is assigned. More primitive esthetic experiences lack such criteria. But it is not satisfactory to designate the circumstances of primitive esthetic valuation wholly by an analogy to academic art. Such an analogy would lead us only a very small distance into a complex and uncharted realm of experience whose dimensions we must yet explore.

Until we discover more specific criteria of esthetic value, we must entertain the hypothesis that potentially at least all invented objects as well as all natural objects might possess some degree of esthetic value. Such an hypothesis lays open virtually the whole realm of experience to potential esthetic valuation. When we recall from a prior discussion that objects are not intrinsically defined, but that their limitations and forms are to some extent projections of our own perceptual capacity, then we face the question whether the definition of an object as such and its valuation might not in some way be related to one another. The very act of perception that defines the object may in itself prove to be the most fundamental instance of esthetic judgment. Perhaps

all objects possess actual or potential esthetic value to the extent that they are recognizable as entities. If this hypothesis seems extravagant, its excesses may be mitigated by the indefiniteness of the term 'value'. In order to 'value' or to 'like' an object it is not necessary to exalt it, or even to attach to it an extraordinarily high price. Nor is value or liking necessarily so specific an approbation as we are accustomed to assume. All objects are valued to the extent that we feel deprived by their disappearance. If we review the world to which we have become accustomed, we will recognize that there are few if any objects in it whose loss should not aggrieve us. Even where we rationalize that such loss brings compensatory benefits to us, we are conscious of some deprivation. The very recognition of an object as such implies its value, and to the extent that all objects are unique, no exchange, no compensation, no replacement can satisfy their loss.

We have made it plausible to say that all objects known to us are objects of value. This statement becomes all the more true when we absolve the estimation of esthetic value from conceptual constructions and when we habituate ourselves to limiting esthetic valuation to the here and now. All objects that are now before me are objects of value; all objects that have been or might become present to me are potential

objects of value. This restriction of valuation to the present implies that we should reserve the term valuation for a specific focusing of our attentions upon the valued object. Evidently we cannot address ourselves to all the world: the significant differences of various esthetic systems result from our choice of attending and valuing one kind of object in preference to another. What a man attends to is what he values. In the general experience of mankind some objects are traditionally valued above others; some are bought with a higher price, some are more sorely missed, and some are more readily sacrificed for.

Individuals differing in character and education will value a wide variety of objects. It is not our task but that of anthropology to describe the patterns of valuation among different peoples and in different strata of society. Some objects are valued merely for their unusual appearance, a bright bead, a crystal of quartz, for example, or brightly colored cloth, a stone or a piece of wood of exquisite grain. Then there are objects whose value is associated with their use; for this reason clothing and furniture, eating and cooking utensils, silverware and glassware may be esteemed. One of the chief purposes of modern commercial advertising is to make such objects even more attractive to the prospective purchaser. In a modern industrial society advertising excites the desire for

objects actually or imaginarily needed. Indeed, there has been deliberately fostered a cult of fashion and style which provides manufacturers with objects for sale and which pleases purchasers with delusions of esthetic value. We must recognize the esthetic or pseudo-esthetic elements in large areas of modern commerce.

The rare object in itself impresses us. That which is 'common' is esthetically cheap. Conversely, by being beautiful, an object seems to become priceless, for that which is inimitable appears esthetically valuable and vice versa. The esthetic experience as such seems to be characterized by its rarity. Even when we are face to face with the object of acknowledged esthetic value, esthetic experience does not of itself continuously accompany the confrontation. On the contrary, esthetic valuation is like a brief glimpse, like a flicker of consciousness, momentary and transient. We anticipate esthetic value and we prepare ourselves for it. Then before we recognize ourselves to have participated in the esthetic experience, its moment has passed. Only the certain memory of it remains and the confidence that it will return. Meanwhile, the painting that we analyze radically becomes noting but colored canvas, the poem, a series of words. Beauty is evanescent, and no matter how determined to possess it, we are unable to capture it permanently. Thus a notion of rarity and uniqueness becomes attached to the experience

of beauty. In our day, when mechanical reproduction has become so commonplace, such valuation of uniqueness is of particular significance. Uniqueness is a quality that belongs to objects by virtue of their history. The original, that object of which there is only one, the rare coin, the rare stamp no less than the unusual and irreplaceable work of art, appear to merit special interest. History itself, attaching itself to the object and making it unusual, seems to be capable of imbuing objects with esthetic value. It is dubious whether the value conferred by historical circumstance is genuine, but the mere fact that such apparently spurious valuation is possible should suggest an intrinsic inconsistency of esthetic value. In any event, this obvious dependence of esthetic valuation upon circumstantial factors confirms our suspicion that esthetic value should not be exclusively a function of the structure or appearance of the object, but should at least in part reflect the particular situation in which we perceive and appreciate it.

It is often necessary that objects for potential esthetic value should be brought to the attention of the viewer by extraneous concerns. The longing for esthetic experience becomes explicit only in unusual circumstances. Most men are indifferent to their esthetic capacities and to their esthetic needs, these being fulfilled unawares

concomitant with more mundane and practical endeavors. Thus it is not by accident that we attach peculiar significance to those physical objects that are requisite to our nutritive and reproductive needs. When we are hungry, the sight of food possesses for us an attraction over and beyond that which it would hold for us if we were biologically indifferent to it. This is not to say that hunger is a genuine source of esthetic value, but hunger will attract our attention to a certain group of objects and attention itself, focused intensively enough and for a sufficient time upon these objects, will imbue them with at least superficial esthetic value. Perhaps it is by virtue of a comparable physical need that the form of the human body has gained such extraordinary significance both in the history of art and in the abstract idealization of beauty. We should be surprised at the blandness with which it has been maintained that this interest in the human form should be entirely unrelated to physical necessity, and understood on a purely 'esthetic' plane. We encounter here once more the wholly unjustified convention that would separate the substance of our esthetic experience from all practical concerns and needs.

We have as yet failed to specify the particular cause that makes a given object appear desirable to us. In the case of the last mentioned group, of course, our physical dependence upon the object is so evident a cause as to require no further comment. But objects upon which we are absolutely dependent represent the exception rather than the rule in esthetic valuation. Most objects that we value independently of our need for them, and we soon accept a distinction between our desire to possess an object, and the valuation that we place upon it regardless of our practical interests. The appearance of the object itself, its contours and colors evidently play an important role in determining its capacity to become an object of esthetic value. It is these variables that the experienced eye has learned to distinguish and to classify with great precision. According to the tacit presuppositions of traditional esthetic theory, it is such distinctions that separate a work of art from an inartistic, profane object. Yet, in spite of all the studies that have been made concerning the symmetry, the shape, the color, the composition of works of art, it has been impossible to find anything but an empirical definition of these qualities in order to account for the esthetic value of the object.

Although esthetic experience is an individual experience, it is profoundly affected by the emotional and intellectual environment in which man lives. Our minds and feelings are molded by society, and none of our judgments will stand independent of the social structure that has formed us. Hence, traditional esthetic theory notwithstanding, the consensus of our fellow men, fashion as we call it, concerning a given object is of the utmost importance in determining the esthetic experience that we shall have of it. The awareness that our experience is not isolated but corresponds with that of our fellow men is of dominant importance in our esthetic lives. Similarly, our understanding of the object before us is not limited by the instant of our confrontation. To an extent easily ignored, both the function and the content of mind depends upon memory. Whatever personal experience we ourselves may have had with the object joins in determining for us its esthetic value: we live in a conceptual world. Our memory of our own experience fuses with the conceptual structure. Our past view of the object influences the present apperception. In other words, the appearance of the object to our minds fuses with its history. And the history of the object, for example its age, its price, its rarity, the place and circumstances under which it was

made or found, all these contribute to the esthetic appreciation of the object, and these also confute all theory that relies solely upon the appearance of the object as the source of esthetic valuation.

According to the outline that we have made, esthetic valuation may no longer be considered an ecstatic experience of a small group of individuals only. Esthetic experience, on the contrary, must be considered a fundamental human propensity constituting an integral part of our mental activity. It applies to the rare and extraordinary objects no more than to those that we use daily in our necessary and unpretentious affairs. To some extent such esthetic valuation becomes conscious and deliberate, enhanced with hortatory and contemplative expressions. Yet the primary esthetic relationship, the apprehension by an individual of the object before him in its reality, remains the basis of all varieties of esthetic experience. Hence it is not surprising that such esthetic value should play a very significant role in the experience of mankind. People who never visit art museums select from catalogues and store displays, they purchase or construct objects that they consider 'pretty' or 'beautiful'. It is characteristic of primitive esthetic satisfaction that this interest, although real, is

relatively less powerful, and is readily superceded by other interests. The primitive esthetic experience tends to be evanescent. Like the toys in which children take pleasure, one 'pretty' object is readily replaced by another, and if the loss of the former object is mourned, this sadness is temporary and is readily relieved by the pleasure provided by its successor.

Esthetic Valuation in Childhood

If we were correct in suggesting that esthetic valuation is an innate activity of all minds, it should be possible to trace the development of this activity from childhood. Such an investigation might shed some light upon the qualities of esthetic valuation in general. It is not necessary to reach a dogmatic decision whether the child does in fact possess esthetic sensibilities, nor to designate the moment in adolescence at which such sensitivity first becomes apparent. The child recognizes and values objects in a manner comparable to that of the adult, but he is more responsive to his natural desires, and these have not yet become blunted or concealed by custom or accomodation. The study of the immature mind in its relationship to the object that it fancies might well be a long step forward on the path to a convincing definition of esthetics.

Although we live among children, the quality of their experience is emotionally and intellectually more remote from us than we realize. Our own memories of childhood have almost without exception become overlaid with the sophisticated rationalizations of later years, with the result that it is now virtually impossible for us to recapitulate how we felt then. Although we are in the midst of children, we have become remarkably adept at ignoring their thoughts and feelings; the

lessons that their actions might teach us have gone unlearned. We ask whether the child has esthetic sensibility. The unhesitating answer is no. The child is not considered to participate in esthetic experience. The conventional view of esthetic theory, centered as it is on the intricate and complex work of art, looks for an experience far more sophisticated than the naive and innocent pleasures of childhood. The willful, arbitrary, and unreflecting delights of the child are antithetical to the distanced, deliberate, and judicious appreciation that we usually consider esthetic. Yet, if we look for a simpler definition of esthetic valuation, and if we accept a more general description of esthetic experience, an attempt to discover the roots of esthetic valuation in childhood is not at all incongruous. We may first observe how the child accepts objects in the world about him: later we may ask whether or not this relationship is an esthetic one.

Of course the child does not participate in the complex esthetic judgments with which the educated adult struggles. He does not understand such judgments: objects of esthetic value in the usual sense do not enter within his sphere of cognition, and when they do, they will seem to differ not at

all from other similar objects. Yet evidently in his own way the child becomes extremely fond of many things. The very limitation of his knowledge of the world heightens his interest in the limited realm of his acquaintance. His attachment to many of the objects of which he is fond is the result of the fascination aroused by what is only partially known. That this is in fact the case is confirmed when his interest in them begins to wane as he becomes more and more familiar with them. Being surrounded by many objects most of which appear indistinguishable one fron another, the child is primarily attracted by those objects that on account of the clarity of their outline or the brightness of their coloration commend themselves particularly to his attention. It is this interest in brightly colored objects that is subsequently taken up by esthetic valuation in the popular vein. The child is also drawn to objects with which he can play, which on account of their small size or their mobility fit well into the world of his imagination and experience. Those are suitable toys for him, and he becomes familiar with them by daily use. They in turn come to appear indispensable to him and to represent a very important part of his world. Finally there are objects, such as dolls and stuffed animals, in which the child recognizes the image of a living being such as himself, and to them he

projects his thoughts and his feelings until he comes to consider them his special companions. Within the broad definition of esthetic valuation that we have suggested, all these affections of the child deserve consideration.

If none of the objects that please the child ought to be called esthetic in any strict sense of that word, yet his relationships to all of them appear to contain rudiments of esthetic experience. As characteristic of esthetic valuation we must recognize the simple childish satisfaction with the mere presence of desired objects. The child is as yet ignorant of their perishable, transient nature. He delights in their apparent permanence; he is terrified by their loss. The objects of his acquaintance represent to his mind a world in themselves; his conceptual powers are not yet sufficiently developed that he could rationalize their being replaced. With their loss this world of his is at least temporarily shattered. The present impression is far stronger than the memory of the past or any convincing expectation of the future. Even more than the adult, the child lives in the present; and to the extent that he does so, he is dependent upon his immediate relationship to physical objects. Consequently his thoughts and his feelings exhibit some of the characteristics of esthetic valuation in a very striking way.

It is instructive also to observe how the child's devotion to the objects of his affection declines. Their newness wears thin; their brightness no longer dazzles him. He becomes bored with his toys, and he realizes that the stuffed animals which he once accepted as his playmates are inanimate after all, and he forgets about them. Probably the most important cause for the altered relationship to esthetic objects is the progressive enlargement of the conceptual world that takes place as the mind grows. Images and expectations are made more vivid and compelling by language; they usurp many of the functions that the immediate confrontation with physical objects once held in the child's experience. He remembers, anticipates, infers; he begins to imagine more and more abstractly. As he learns to think, he becomes progressively further removed from the powerful, often tyrannical, impressions that physical objects once made upon him. Then the primary esthetic relationship to physical objects is attenuated and becomes less specific. The capacity to esteem specific objects on account of their uniqueness grows, and the special need for an objective world that is both sympathetic and familiar diminishes. The ordinary esthetic valuation of adulthood as we have described it is a continuation of the childish pattern of experience. The adult, however, has lost the directness and naivete of childhood

experiences. Their intensity has waned but the uncritical attitude toward them remains. He knows how transient his esthetic pleasures are, but this knowledge remains isolated and is not applied to guide or to refine actual experience. On the contrary, when a given esthetic object loses its lustre, a new one is acquired to replace it, never a thought being given to the impropriety of the replacement.

The Esthetic Hypothesis

Having surveyed such a variety of instances of esthetic valuation, we must return once more to the central question. With what justification do we designate the various esthetic experiences with a single adjective? Is the esthetic valuation of some trivial or haphazard circumstance really to be considered akin to the monumental esthetic valuation of great art? For that matter, does it not appear that the generalization of esthetic valuation has deprived it of any genuine meaning? The specific phenomenon of esthetic valuation may well seem to have been disparaged to the point of insignificance by the demonstration of its variable and inconstant characteristics, its tendency to be affected by predisposition and fashion. Our exposition may have made esthetic phenomena to appear wholly irrational. However it would be wrong to assume that by ignoring it or by pointing to its inconsistencies the problem of esthetic valuation will be solved. We come to the conclusion that within the framework of our conceptual thoughts esthetic experience holds an anomalous position. We may accept the fact that our conceptual rationalizations fail to

give an adequate explanation of our esthetic experience. Perhaps we should permit our esthetic awareness to express itself more directly, unencumbered by the rational contradictions in which it so readily becomes ensnared.

It appears then that esthetic experience such as we expect to find in the fine arts, music, literature and in nature, is actually an extraordinary example of a much more prevalent relationship. We are constantly cognizant of objects, but our awareness of them as such leaves us dissatisfied. The source of this dissatisfaction is difficult to estimate. We might say that we recognize the objects before us as being perishable, as lacking uniqueness. They seem trivial in comparison with the entirety of potential objects accessible to our minds. Thus we lose interest in them, and we search for objects and scenes that might do justice to this longing of ours which desires that the object valued should be unique and should be veritably distinct from all others. It is for this sort of object that our esthetic sensibility prepares itself. This almost routine dissatisfaction of our normal perceptive activity with itself may be construed as an underlying deficit of the human personality. Esthetic valuation compensates for this deficit. Evidently many apperceptive experiences are open to us. It remains to be considered why esthetic valuation focuses upon the very objects that it does.

Our dissatisfaction with perceptual experience in general leads us to concentrate our attention upon those aspects and objects the contemplation of which gives us most pleasure. It is likely that fundamental to our appreciation of art and to our love of nature is a simple naive happiness that we experience in the contemplation of certain colors, forms, and compositions. What these fundamental characteristics of the likeable object might be is not apparent. Yet we may say with certainty that there are no fundamental esthetic rules, and that the larger element in esthetic valuation hinges upon custom and habit. These facts are substantiated by the way in which our esthetic sensibility is mirrored in the object of art to which we deign to assign such extraordinary value. Recognizing in them some pattern of style, some subtlety of representation, or the individual expression of a famous craftsman, we suspect that they are indeed inimitable and unique. Demanding that the work of art should be the product of a dedicated and skilled individual, we learn to prize the minutest evidence of such esoteric skill and application, lacking which we would disdain the work of art for not being genuine. It is, moreover, a symptom of our exaggerated and perhaps somewhat distorted relationship to art that we are generally unwilling or unable to recognize the existence of more than a relatively small number of works of art in comparison with the large number of

potential objects available for this distinction. We convince ourselves that between the art which we accept and that which we reject there should be a basic difference. But history, which teaches us about the fickleness of fashion, betrays our assumption. Much that was valued as art years ago is now despised, and centuries to come may choose to ignore what is now held in high esteem.

The diverse considerations concerning esthetic phenomena that we have offered require now to be summarized and reconciled to one another. Are different esthetic experiences indeed manifestations of a single valuative capacity? Or are they generically disparate experiences superficially related only by linguistic accident? In the latter case the spectrum of esthetic value would represent a false unity. Then the beauty, for example of a scene in nature, of a statue, of a musical composition, of a familiar object would each be distinct one from the other, and their identification would be an error of conventional patterns of speech. We have already suggested some of the reasons that make it more plausible and theoretically far more productive to assume that these diverse esthetic experiences should indeed be cognate, that they should express and reflect a single capacity of the human mind. On these grounds we must look for a uniting formula capable of adequately explaining esthetic experiences in their diversity. Such a formula, if it were found, would represent a major methodological advance.

The mere re-examination of the world in which esthetically valued objects exist side by side with neutral ones is not likely to produce an answer to the questions we have phrased.

In one form or another, such examinations have often been attempted, and invariably they have ended in uncertainty or deadlock. These difficulties of traditional esthetic analysis are most convincingly explained by the fact that such investigations invariably accept the conceptual world as being identical with reality. It is assumed that reality should be comprehended by our perceptions and that the world of objects and relationships which our minds recognize should be unequivocal and real. It is assumed also that the subject of apperception, self, person, individual, however we may wish to refer to him, is in fact integral and independent of the scene and of the objects perceived. That these presuppositions are not unassailable, the preceding chapters have tended to show. If those chapters carried some conviction in their own right, their value would be enhanced if on the basis of conclusions reached there, cogent and effective theories of ethics and esthetics might be constructed. The actual design of such ethical and esthetic theories would serve to complete an intellectual framework the symmetry and harmony of which would be both satisfying and productive.

Problems of esthetic valuation will appear in an entirely different light once it is recognized that the self, the subject of perception is not so independent of the perceptive process as one is accustomed to assume. It must be remembered that how-

ever confidently we refer to it, the constitution of self is not unequivocal. That self should be satisfactorily explained by equating it to the human body is a myth. It is a vain hope that self might be adequately explained by a religious concept such as soul. Upon further study it becomes apparent that the definition of self which we call person or personality is contingent, variable, and haphazard. The conclusion of our investigation was that self cannot be understood except as absolutely dependent upon the moment of consciousness. Consequently, self may not be construed as separable from that instant in which consciousness appears. That instant of consciousness, however, is determined not only by subjective factors but by the objective world which is mirrored in the moment of consciousness as well. Consequently, it is an error to attempt to separate self from that which it confronts. Clearly, the self must be determined, controlled, and limited by what it does on the one hand and by what it perceives on the other.

Similarly, the traditional assumptions concerning the reality of the world that is known stand in the way of cogent esthetic analysis. Our assumptions concerning reality are highly effective, yet we have shown that they are neither consistent with themselves nor are they completely exhaustive of our experience. At this point, we must recapitulate the con-

clusions of a previous chapter, to the effect that it is not wholly justified to consider the event a discrete entity in time or the physical object a discrete unity in space. We showed that the definitions both of event and of object are dependent upon the dynamic inter-relationship between the subject and the world about him. Ultimately, the constitution of reality as events and objects must appear at least in part to be a projection into nature of our particular forms of consciousness. Evidently a world that is constituted and continuously revised through the efforts of consciousness is an entirely different locus for objects of esthetic value from a discrete and independently existing universe.

Finally it is necessary to note once again that the apperceptive recognition by self of world which we so blithely call knowledge, is far less unequivocal than is usually assumed. To be sure, our knowledge has great functional value, yet to whatever extent it presumes to exhaust reality, it is deceptive and inadequate. The inadequacy of knowledge is pertinent to esthetic theory, because esthetic valuation itself is a relationship between self and nature. The occasional conflict between the presumptions of knowledge and the assertions of esthetic valuation make it imperative that the previously described limitations of conceptual knowledge be kept in mind.

With these conclusions concerning self, world, and knowledge, we may review once more the spectrum of esthetic valuation. Once it is isolated from the apparently overwhelming continuity and power of the conceptual world, esthetic valuation may be more equably appraised. If self is no pre-established entity, then apperception should be at least in part the process by which self is defined. If reality is not unequivocally comprehended, then the apperception of reality is in part its definition and its construction. When self and reality no longer appear independent and separable from the act of perception, then it is incongruous that esthetic valuation should be construed as the valuation of a discrete object by a definite self. It is all the more likely that esthetic valuation, binding as it does self and object in the processes of perception, should be discovered as an integral, perhaps an inseparable part of both.

Another consequence of these considerations is that esthetic valuation, whatever it might be, must be capable of being exhibited and demonstrated in the present moment. Otherwise it should have to be assigned to a rank subordinate to the many complex conceptualizations with which our minds represent to ourselves the world. Thus, esthetic theory must make for esthetic valuation a place in the present moment. The hypothesis of an esthetic spectrum

makes it plausible that there should exist for every moment of consciousness an esthetic experience. We recognize the apperception which fills the mind at any given instant as an example of esthetic valuation. Such valuation need not be equivalent to the most exalted of esthetic experiences, but in theory it is comparable to them. If the esthetic valuation implicit in each moment of perception is generically akin to the most impressive of esthetic experiences, we must ask wherein the two differ, and why so common an experience is capable of such overwhelming expansion.

It is undeniable that most of the apperceptions of mind seem esthetically insignificant. Precisely the fact that beauty is rare provides the solution to the esthetic problem. Indeed our analyses of self and world imply that all apperceptive experiences are fragmentary, incomplete, and to a great degree deceptive. Fortunately we are seldom explicitly aware of the extent to which we ourselves depend upon this apperception. Our awareness of ourselves and of the world about us is relatively dull and undemanding, insensitive both to its limitations and potentialities. Consequently the inadequacy of apperception troubles us usually not at all. This situation is analogous to the fact that the insignificance of our actions is usually no cause of concern to us. Even if the inadequacy and the

evanescence of our selves is usually inapparent to us, logically ignored and intuitively repressed, yet some dissatisfaction with the apperceptive relationship of self and world does at times become vivid. This dissatisfaction is the beginning of the search for beauty.

The origin of esthetic value may then be defined as follows: I, as an individual being, am dependent upon my apperception of the world about me. This apperception is imperfect, yet my dependence upon this apperception is unconditional. In spite of this imperfection, my apperceptions have for me an absolute value in that they constitute my self. When I become aware of the inadequacy of my apperceptions, I long for and I begin to seek apperceptive experience that should be uniquely satisfying to me, and I am inclined to identify such apperceptive experience with particular objects that seem especially fitted to provide it. These objects I call beautiful, and to the extent that the contemplation of them gives me pleasure and satisfaction, all other apperceptive experience is enhanced in value, and the integrity of my self is secured. But to the extent that I still recognize in every apperception, no matter how exalted, the essential shortcomings of the apperceptive process, I am compelled to postulate that a yet more perfect esthetic experience is possible, and I hypothesize its objective

equivalent, beauty. Thus the recognition of beauty is not an unmixed blessing. When self is confronted with an esthetically satisfying object, beauty seems to substantiate and endorse the integrity of self. However, more closely examined, beauty as an unattainable ideal also throws new doubt upon the integrity of self. That is why the extraordinary esthetic experience is frequently the prelude to religious conviction, why in traditional formulas, beauty is the path to the divine. The religious experience may serve to resolve otherwise irreconcilable anomalies of esthetics. Where the religious reconciliation is precluded, the ideal of beauty becomes a detraction, a threat to the presumed integrity of self. The poet to whom religious experience is closed discovers that beauty is the beginning of terror. We admire it, he says, while it serenely disdains to destroy us.*

The equivocal relationship between self and the esthetic ideal suggests at least one explanation for the selectiveness, if not indeed idiosyncracy of esthetic valuation. This uncertainty of esthetic experience explains the vagaries of esthetic appreciation, the cult of the ancient and of the rare, the subtle identification of style, the illogical concern with the original, the compulsive demand for artistic perfection. Esthetic valuation is selective, and the criteria of this selectivity are not rational. Esthetic valuation represents the exaltation of one object at the expense of many others, just as

* Rilke, Duino Elegy I.

ethical valuation implies the exaltation of the present moment to the slighting of many others. Such arbitrary selectivity, for which ultimately only empirical explanation is available, tends to conceal the highly indefinite and uncertain quality of the esthetic relationship. In one respect esthetic valuation is amplification, exaggeration perhaps even distortion of intrinsic characteristics and requirements of perceptual experience. The ambiguity of esthetic valuation explains also why our desire for beauty is insatiable. Our deliberate attempts to find esthetic satisfaction in particular objects of beauty fail, but we, unwilling or unable to admit the failure, discover ourselves committed to an unending search for the ideal.

The generalization into which we have succeeded in resolving esthetic valuation has made it possible for us to formulate a definition of great potential significance. For, as our lives of action were more effectively described in terms of the ethical moment, so our apperceptive experience should be the more completely and universally described in terms of an esthetic situation. The esthetic situation is a schematic designation for the confrontation of self with the physical world. To the self we must ascribe merely conscious sensitivity, and we must specifically caution against the assumption of that pretentious unity of

self as body, soul, or person which is otherwise invariably presupposed in discussions of this sort, and which irremediably blocks the investigation. By world we mean the phenomena of experience; we have no right to speak of objects, because the entity and integrity of world and its parts as they come before us is, as we have shown, a characteristic projection of our minds. By the same token by which we deny the intrinsic reality of objects of perception as they constitute themselves to our minds, we must plead ignorant of the source of that order which they exhibit. We may then assume that the beauty which we recognize in the objects of our world and in their relationships to one another is at least in part an expression of the self-assertion of consciousness.

One of the most striking aspects of the esthetic situation is the dependence of the subject of apperception, namely the self, upon that which is comprehended by it in the confrontation. Literally, the mind is that which it sees, and self cannot be distinguished at this moment from that which it apperceives. It is from this dependence, which is so subtly concealed in the customary rationalizations of psychology, that the absolute quality and the compulsion of esthetic valuation must be derived.

It is necessary also to inquire whence the awareness of an objective reality stems. If we are correct in our assumption that the content of all perception is conceptual, and if it is true that everything which the mind apperceives of the physical world is irrevocably limited by the physical, physiological, and psychological characteristics of apperception, then it is a pertinent question whence the notion of reality arises. This much is evident: the notion of reality cannot be derived entirely from the object perceived. The notion of reality is first recognized as a phenomenon in the process of perception, and no other confirmation of it is found. In the apperception I am conscious on the one hand of the self as the subject of the perception, and of nature, that which is other than self, as the object of the perception. The cogency of the apperception demands that self and nature should be real, each in its own way. It does not necessarily follow that nature should be strictly comparable to self. It is quite plausible that two qualitatively entirely disparate determinants might arise in the apperception. However, these two determinants, self and nature, arise simultaneously, as a pair. Though in the history of science subjectivity has been consistently disparaged, linguistically the two notions of self and nature, of subject and object, have maintained a striking parallelism. This fact suggests that we might do well to consider them together.

When we then examine the parallelism of the notion of self and reality as they seem to arise concomitantly in experience, we observe that neither of them is complete. In chapters two and three some of their deficiencies were demonstrated by an inductive method. Self is always more than we are able to grasp; and so is reality. We must not permit ourselves to be misled by the pretensions of contemporary science to discover and to define nature as an objective reality, any more than we should pay heed to an outmoded theology that presumed the definition of subjective entity. If our analyses of the origin of the notion of self and of nature in the esthetic situation are indeed correct, then, as we initially intimated, the study of esthetics as the study of the characteristics of the esthetic situation might far exceed the scope traditionally assigned to it. The study of esthetics might then reassert its classical Platonic position as the basis both of ontological speculation and of the theory of knowledge.

We may now complete our description of esthetic valuation by suitable inferences from the preceding conclusions. We may summarize them by saying that we call the temporal existence of self action, and the spatial existence of self perception. However sharply we may distinguish self as conceptual entity from its surroundings, the self that we experience is

undeniably dependent upon perception. Furthermore, the esthetic situation, in which perception occurs, is itself the most likely source of our notion of the unity both of subject and of object. The discovery of the unity of objects is perhaps the most primitive of esthetic pleasures; the unity of self as a responsible agent is, correspondingly, the most fundamental of ethical postulates. We conclude that the esthetic valuation of art, for example, is merely one of many instances in which esthetic valuation appears. The confrontation with art possesses dramatic and impressive characteristics, on account of which it is treated as a pre-eminent example of esthetic valuation. These premises lead to the conclusion that in all esthetic valuation, and perhaps in that of art most explicitly, there is fulfilled a certain desire for the assertion of self. This need, if we may thus describe it, is compensatory of the inadequacy of self in space; stated differently, it is the confirmation and the preservation of the integrity of self in the extended world. The fervent valuation that at one time or another we place upon a particular esthetic experience must be understood to be nothing more or less than the demonstration of this need. The individual is dependent upon the immediacy of esthetically valuable objects to sustain the reality of his being. The more esthetically sensitive an individual becomes, the more explicit his consciousness of self, and the more acute will be his awareness of this dependency.

If this thesis sounds somewhat farfetched, perhaps the obverse will make it more plausible. What contents has the consciousness of the individual other than the objects which he perceives at the time of the perception? To be sure, there are memory, anticipation, imagination, and the reassurances of habitual action. But is the sensitive and intelligent mind convinced or satisfied by the past, remote as it is? Or by the contingency of things imagined and anticipated? The past cannot be recovered, ~~but~~ the future permits no effective anticipation. Nothing that mind may assert about past or future or distant objects can ever be more real to it than that situation in which the self discovers itself in this instant. Since this is the case, the criterion of the reality of self must be the actuality of those objects that it experiences from moment to moment. But these objects, as we have shown, are fallible. What then becomes of the self? Is it to be wondered at that these objects, if they are uncertain and transient, should be fortified and buttressed by the most meticulous and exquisite of conventions and crafts? And does not this constellation of circumstances explain adequately, and as a matter of fact exclusively, that religious fervor with which the most sensitive and some of the most intelligent among men are inspired when

they find themselves face to face with the object of art? The intrinsic qualities of the object of art, the intricacy and style of its construction or composition, the historical aura with which it is surrounded, all serve to distinguish it from the rest of objects and render it capable of sustaining the rich and powerful significance that the mind of man attributes to it. We conclude that ~~the~~ certain specific characteristics of the object make it possible for us to value it, but the valuation itself proceeds from the enduring need to find in the outside world a confirmation of the integrity of self.

World and Nature in the Light of the Esthetic Hypothesis

A fortunate by-product of our analysis of esthetic apperception is the light which is shed on various obscure problems of theory of being and of knowledge. The first of the problems in question has often been phrased as follows: if all our knowledge of the world about us is the result of perceptual activity, and if this perception is able to inform us only of the phenomenal appearance of objects, how then is it possible for us ever to know anything other than that appearance? What gives us the notion that the appearance should be appearance only, a mere facade to a realm of reality? What right have we to assume that the phenomenon is not ultimately real but conceals behind it the thing itself? When modern thinkers have encountered this question, they have more often than not attempted to skirt the issue by pointing to the complexity of our perceptual processes and to the intricacy of the conceptual constructions based upon them. They have then assumed that our notion of the thing in itself should be a logical inference from the multiplicity of observations. They argue that the apparent remoteness of the real object is an illusion which arises from the incompleteness of any single one of our apperceptions or the inadequacy of any specific number of them taken together. Our analysis of the

esthetic situation suggests that the notion of the reality of the object, the notion of the object itself or of the thing in itself, is an unavoidable inference from the subjective necessity of the perceiving self. In other words, the self is dependent in its momentary existence in space upon the object that it perceives and identifies. The self says, as I am so must the object be. If the object cannot be, neither may I be. At the same time, the self recognizes its perceptions to be fragmentary and incomplete. For obvious reasons it is intolerable to live in a world of phantoms. Self needs to recognize reality, and this need is the source of the notion that reality exists somewhere behind or beyond our apperception. The postulate of reality, then, is an implication of the process of perception itself. In the individual instance we call this reality the thing in itself. It is such a thing in itself that we must consider to be the true object of esthetic apperception. In a more general sense, we speak of the objects beyond the phenomena that enter into our apperceptions as nature. The presumed but entirely unproved constancy and reliability of nature is the indispensable presupposition of all scientific investigation. Esthetic apperception therefore may be said to provide a unique and direct access to reality; indeed reality

is the implication of esthetic experience. This esthetic hypothesis of reality then serves as a foundation upon which our conceptual faculties build the edifice that we recognize as the world of science.

The quality of objects will now appear at least in part to be a perceptual projection. One of the chief weaknesses of our exposition has been the indefinite and circumstantial manner in which we have referred to objects, and the attendant reluctance to designate just what the qualities of objects should be. There is a great diversity of objects; their number is limited only by our physical powers of perception and our intellectual powers of conceptualization. Our world is full of apparitions, and there is scarcely a one of them which would not in some perspective appear as an object. The traditional theory holds qualities of object to be dual, distinguishing those that belong to objects by nature, such as mass, extension, dimension, and unity, as primary. Secondary qualities, on the other hand, such as color, taste, odor, were thought to be attributed to objects by virtue of the structure of our apperceptive organs. We now recognize that the so-called primary qualities of the object are projections of the particular limitations of our perceptual apparatus. It would be

erroneous however to plead that the so-called secondary qualities, being more specifically associated with the particular perceptual occasion should be more truly properties of the object itself. They are no less than the primary qualities limited by the physiological and psychological structure of our minds. Both primary and secondary qualities require an objective substrate in nature, although this substrate is often difficult to identify and invariably impossible to demonstrate. Yet the secondary qualities, those that impress us most forcefully in our individual encounter with the object, are significant insofar as they tend to characterize the uniqueness of confrontation. It is, after all, secondary qualities so-called that constitute the criteria of esthetic valuation in the practical instance. It is the color of the painting, the texture of the sculpture, the mellowness of the tone that seem to give the esthetic situation its particular value. The fact remains that the particular angle at which we view an object, the reflection that we see of it, for example, its scent, its color, are all characteristics evident immediately from our confrontation with it. On the contrary its dimensions, its weight, its mass, its structure, its composition, all of which we would consider primary characteristics according to the traditional

scheme, are already results of a complex rationalization concerning the object. The primary qualities of objects are primary not in nature; they are primary constituents of the conceptual world. However valuable such rationalizations may prove in the prediction and control of nature, they are relatively remote from the experience that arises in the immediate confrontation with the object.

The classification of objects by their primary qualities is the task of the various natural sciences. It is possible for them to proceed with such classification because the laws of mind are operative even where they are not explicit, perhaps not even discovered. Thus it is of no advantage to the progress of science that the characteristics of apperception should become explicit. It may be noted that the processes of thought themselves are not valid objects of criticism or correction. Only the inference of thought may be emended, and such misconceptions and misapprehensions as arise require only to be recognized in their origin and in their limitations to stand corrected. As scientists themselves have vigorously asserted on many occasions, the attempt to correct scientific misconceptions from a priori viewpoints is no profitable undertaking but invariably proves to be a source of confusion.

When empirical investigation remains within its limits, it is unassailable by criticism. When it exceeds these limits, it becomes meaningless. In either case, criticism is inappropriate.

The way in which the quality of objects must be construed in part a product of perception and in part a product of the structure of the object will become more convincing when we consider the simplest qualities of objects, namely their oneness or unity. By definition this quality must belong to all objects. That which is not one is not an object, and if anything be an object, to that extent it is one. If such an object, having appeared as one, subsequently divides into several fragments, then the object as such no longer exists but has been replaced with a group of other objects, each one of which rightfully possesses the same unity that belonged to its antecedent. Unity is the necessary and perhaps also the sufficient condition for our designation of an object as such. The object of our experience whose only characteristic is unity is the point. Phenomenologically the point may be described as the appearance of any object which has receded from us until our vision recog-

nizes no other quality or characteristic of it than its mere presence.

We may then inquire of some of the many objects that enter into our patterns of thought in what their unity should be thought to consist, and what justification we have for calling them one. Initially it might be said that objects are 'one' by nature or by the fact that their parts cling to one another to form a physical unity. It would be argued that we call a particular object 'one' because of previous conceptual, or apperceptive experience with it. But evidently we encounter many objects for the first time; we designate them as one with confidence, and we have no prior experience of them whatever to warrant our assumption of their unity. The problem is of much theoretical importance, even if we have acquired much agility in circumventing it practically. I call the tree 'one' with all its leaves, each of these is also one. The desk, for example, is one, and so is each of its drawers and each of the fibers of its wood. Presumably each of the molecules and atoms of which the scientist says that the table is composed is one also. Or, to give another example, I call this carpet one when I survey it, yet I also call each ~~one~~ of its figures 'one', each ~~one~~ of its knots, and each of the threads that enter into every knot. It would not be too far-fetched to say, especially

in view of common physical theories of matter, that the judgment of an object's being 'one' is always only temporary and that upon analytic manipulation such objects would also resolve into smaller ones or fuse into larger ones for the attentive mind. Consider only the qualities of 'oneness' of the Milky Way, which, we are told, consists of an uncounted number of galaxies and stars, each of which is comparable in size to the earth that itself presents so many varied objects to our eyes. These considerations suggest that unity of the object should hardly be construed as a characteristic of reality. Unity must always be understood as an interpretation by our minds of a particular perceptual experience. At the same time, we must recognize that the object itself possesses certain physical characteristics by virtue of which unity is assigned to it. Take a simple case: two points sufficiently close to one another, viewed from a large enough distance, will fuse into a single point. This proximity of the two points to each other is an independent physical characteristic which remains distinct from our perception. We discover this characteristic as we physically approach the object with our eyes. It has been the task of science to analyze the qualities of objects and to classify them according to their relative independence of the perceptual circumstance. From what we have said it follows that such classification will always remain only relative.

The esthetic situation that we have described is not only the prototype of all esthetic valuation. It is also, by the very broadness of its definition, the exclusive source of all our knowledge of nature. In other words, there is nothing that we know at this time, nothing that we may ever learn from nature, which will not be acquired through the confrontation of the esthetic situation. To be sure, the esthetic situation has many implications and consequences; it is, as it were, the raw material of subsequent intellectual activity. Yet so far as the actuality of the object of that confrontation is concerned, none of the concepts derived from it can ever approximate that object more closely than does the individual mind in the primary experience. This fact deserves not to be forgotten.

When we expand our notions of object, and when concomitantly we project widely our notion of space as we do in the descriptions offered by scientific theory, we tacitly assume that the eye of the mind should be transported to all the possible points of view that are hypothesized. The skill with which we are able to ~~present~~ represent such expansions and the congruity with which primary perceptual situations may be hypothetically multiplied must not blind us to the fact that the quality of such primary perception remains to a large extent enigmatic, unrecognized and undefined. Perhaps by projecting this undefined quality of esthetic experience

into the most diverse situations, we may on some occasion succeed in eliminating the uncertainty, as an unknown quantity might be made to cancel out in the manipulation of an equation. When such cancellations are successful, our projections are often highly productive. When, however, this unknown and indeterminate quality of perceptual experience is not cancelled out, as is also frequently the case, then the irrational remnant in our conceptual construction brings to all considerations in which it inheres a degree of uncertainty that is never less and that is frequently compounded of all the indefiniteness pertaining to the primary esthetic situation. We must recognize that no matter how complex and how intricate its logical manipulations might become, the primary uncertainty of esthetic experience will not be solved except in the primary instance.

We have proceeded with the description and analysis of the esthetic situation on the assumption that the object of esthetic valuation occurs in nature independent of our intellectual activity, while many of its characteristics are determined by the limitations of our mind. We must recognize that our mind is so constituted that the confrontation with nature is not essential as stimulus to esthetic experience. It is within the power of our mind to imagine and to conceive of

objects and thoughts far beyond the narrow confines of what is physically immediate to us now. We imagine the existence of places and of objects that we have seen only once. We imagine even the existence of places and objects that we have never seen. Thus, for example, I imagine that the houses in which I have dwelled, that cities which I have seen, the ships on which I have sailed, the people whom I have known, still exist even when the moments of our confrontation are long since past. Moreover, I visualize such situations as a continuing present unless and until I am informed that what I once knew no longer exists. Thus the being of my friend whom I have not seen for months continues to be real to me until I receive the news of his death. In point of fact, it is real to me even though he may have died, until the news of his death comes to my ears. Similarly, I assume that the house in which I lived still stands, until I am told that it has burned down. But such projections of esthetic experience apply not only to scenes that I have once beheld with my own eyes; they apply also to places where I have never been. Frequently pictures or photographs have given me some expectation of what I might find there. Scientific accounts, statistics, descriptions of a city where I have never been provide me with a fair expectation of what I would find if I should go. In this way I imagine virtually the entirety of the earth as if I had visited it, and in our age, more adventurous souls than myself

might also imagine the moon and the planets in a similar relationship to them. Similarly, I treat the microscopic and sub-microscopic structures of which I am told matter consists as if they were particles visible to my eyes. Cells, molecules, atoms, electrons and such, I imagine rightly or wrongly to possess outline, form, and density comparable to the objects now before me. I am aware that modern scientific theory has tortuously, deliberately freed itself from such imaginative representation. Yet, to my knowledge, no satisfactory substitute for it has been invented. Scientific method, scientific conscientiousness compels us to return to the physical objects immediately accessible to us and to re-examine our apprehension of them as the basis of all our knowledge.

But we must go further to recognize also the esthetic quality of concepts that can in no way be equated with physical objects. Words, representing concepts as they do, and the concepts themselves assume esthetic qualities both in their discreteness and in their relationships. It has been aptly pointed out that the potential sum of our knowledge itself has much esthetic charm for us. Our minds are accustomed to view knowledge as consisting of facts, and facts themselves appear as entities, distributed in an intellectual universe in a manner analogous if not strictly

comparable to the way in which physical objects are distributed in nature. These concepts and facts, appearing as objects independent of ourselves, assume to our minds many of the qualities of real objects, both individually and in relationship to one another. Consequently our conceptual knowledge in its totality displays a semblance of esthetic value.

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