Integral Aesthetics:  
The Evolutionary Function of the Sublime

Shelli Renee Joye¹

California Institute of Integral Studies

ABSTRACT

This paper explores an evolutionary integral aesthetics arising at the end of a two hundred year arc beginning with Immanuel Kant's establishment of modern aesthetic theory,² and culminating with Jean Gebser's integral mutation of consciousness described in The Ever Present Origin.³

I examine Kant's aesthetics of the sublime as an early opening into Gebser's integral mutation of consciousness, and describe how an encounter with the sublime can boost the mind into wider bandwidths of consciousness with the activation of an integral perception.

Beginning with the concept of the sublime in art, I describe how supersensible perception might be evoked and developed through encounter with the sublime. I then examine how experiences of the sublime through encounters with natural phenomena and works of art have the ability to suspend rational and verbal modes of cognition, clearing the way for the rise of supersensible states and the opening into a wider awakening of integral awareness.

Along the way I shall discuss theories of postmodern aesthetics, recent conceptual mappings of consciousness, and how discoveries in electrophysiology and anatomy call for a new model of human consciousness to account for the psychodynamics of encountering the sublime.

My thesis is that an integral aesthetics will catalyze the transformation of consciousness from exclusively mental into the integral by activating a supersensible state that is at the same time a reactivation and a retrofitting of that mode of consciousness operating prior to human language.

A supersensible aesthetics will induce the emergent integral consciousness foreseen by Gebser without loss of previous evolutionary structures. In so doing it will open up to us truly new perspectives, previously unimaginable new visions of the universe.

¹shellijoye@me.com
www.shellijoye.com
The Sublime and the Supersensible

The Sublime and the Beautiful in the Evolution of Consciousness

Almost two centuries ago, the domain of art was separated into two categories, the sublime and the beautiful, by the Greek rhetorician Cassius Longinus. Born in Syria, Longinus wrote On the Sublime in 270 A.D., declaring that "the sublime" works to overcome the rational powers of the audience. Though his book discussed aesthetics in general, he himself was an orator. According to Longinus, ‘intensity’ is greater than sobriety, ‘living emotions’ are higher than ‘good breeding,’ ‘speed, vehemence, and power’ compensate for lack of ‘fluency, smoothness, and charm.’

The distinction between the sublime and the merely beautiful is best described in Kant's observation that links the beautiful with the bounded (a beautiful object will have clear outlines and distinct form), but links the sublime with formlessness. According to S.D. Ross, "Kant's Critique of Judgement is probably the most important and influential work in Western aesthetic theory". In the concluding section of the Critique of Judgement, Kant suggests the existence of a ‘supersensible’ realm to account for the fact that our normal sense of awareness (the rational mental) fails us when trying to engage the formless. The feeling of the sublime, in Kant’s own words:

…is at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgement of the inadequacy of sense being in accord with ideas of reason, so far as the effort to attain to these is for us a law.

The Sublime

Enough beauty already,
we must be sublime!

Jean-Luc Nancy (1993)

The root of the word "sublime," the Latin word "sublimis," is a combination of "sub" and “limen”, meaning “up to” and “the lintel”, or literally up to the top piece of the door. The word “sublime” is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “set or raised aloft, high up”; the dictionary goes on to describe the effect of the sublime as “crushing or engulfing, something we cannot resist.”

Examples of experiences invoking the sublime might include such things as finding oneself in the midst of an unexpected revolution, coming upon the edge of the Grand Canyon for the first time, viewing nebulae via the Hubble telescope, or experiencing images of the twin towers destruct. Intimations of the sublime arise “whenever the power of an object or an event is such that words fail.” Such experiences can push our consciousness into states of apprehension beyond words, to the outer limits of the mental beyond the limits of language or even the clarity of concept. In the words of the postmodern linguist, Jean-Francois Lyotard,
... An event such as the Holocaust is a case in point. All attempts to
give voice to this event necessarily fail since, at present, no idiom
exists by which to do it justice. In terms of the sublime, the pain of the
Holocaust is such that it exceeds our ability to supply a concept.\textsuperscript{11}

Over the past 2,000 years, the understanding of the sublime has undergone
transformations and evolutions. The first full philosophical treatment of the sublime is to
be found in 'The Analytic of the Sublime' by Kant at the conclusion of his \textit{Critique of
Judgement}. The sublime can also be found in epic poetry, in the Romantic poets,
particularly in Milton’s \textit{Paradise Lost}.

The concept has also been discussed and developed by such philosophers as Edmund
Burke, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and most recently by a contemporary
Oxford professor of aesthetic philosophy Paul Crowther. And it can be seen in the work
of modern painters including Kandinsky, Pollock, Rothko, and Newman.\textsuperscript{12}

\textit{The Supersensible}

Kant links the sublime with formlessness and in doing so he describes how our
judgments of taste as they approach the sublime, the formless, the overwhelming, are
based on some “indeterminate and indeterminable” concept, which is of a “supersensible
substratum.”\textsuperscript{13}

But any judgement of taste must be based upon more than just a concept. The word
taste’ itself has strong sensory connotations. Accordingly, taste must be based on some
category of perception through which the sublime can be perceived, i.e. by means of an
actual sensory system, some actual psycho-physical facility or sense process of the
perceiver.

Crowther refers to such a Kantian supersensible substratum as a ‘faculty’ or
‘supersensible sense’: “to think of infinity as a whole presupposes the capacity for
theoretical reason itself, that is, a ‘faculty’ which (in the terms of Kant’s broader
philosophical position) is a supersensible one.”\textsuperscript{14}

Crowther also gives Kant’s supersensible substratum another definition. He calls it
“the ultimate ground of the self” and “a noumenal or supersensible self,” but he goes on
to warn that “this area of Kant’s philosophy is, unfortunately, deeply problematic, the
relations between the phenomenal, the formal unity of consciousness, and the
supersensible are never adequately clarified by him.” Even so, Crowther ultimately
concludes that Kant offers “the best reasons for believing in the existence of a
supersensible substrate to the phenomenal world.” \textsuperscript{15}

Works of art dealing with the sublime have a pedagogical utility for approaching and
perhaps entering into this supersensible state or ground of the self. Lyotard comments,
“The sublime cannot be taught… it is not linked to rules that can be determined through
poetics. It requires a certain ‘\textit{je ne sais quoi}’ to detect the presence of this ‘inexplicable’
and ‘hidden’ phenomenon, and it takes a ‘genius’ to master its use.”\textsuperscript{16}

Even if Lyotard is correct and the sublime cannot be taught and requires genius to
master, the supersensible can at a minimum be evoked momentary yet directly through
the energetic reaction during encounter of the sublime.
Aesthetics and the Evolution of Consciousness

Evolutionary Considerations

Since Kant’s time, a new perspective has emerged with the work of Charles Darwin, offering evolutionary insight into the relationship of aesthetics and human awareness. The art historian Ellen Dissanayake asserts that there is an evolutionary component to human aesthetic activities whenever humans create objects that they ‘make special.’ She explores various arguments describing how aesthetic objects function as evolutionary selectors.

However Dissanayake does not go far beyond suggesting that the evolutionary selector of aesthetics is one of enhancement, of improving the attractability and thus survivability of a particular human or group. She does not discuss the sublime or the supersensible and as far as art and perception goes, she states “perception remains tethered within the finite limits of our fundamental species sensory equipment.”17 While Dissanayake examines the role of aesthetics in our evolutionary past, thinkers in other fields have been examining shifts in human consciousness itself.

Mutations of Consciousness

In ‘The Origin of Consciousness and the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind’18, Julian Jaynes proposed that approximately 3,000 years ago, human brain function (conscious awareness) evolved radically, shifting abruptly (historically speaking) from a bicameral state wherein the right brain hemisphere ‘spoke’ to the left brain hemisphere, giving rise to the birth of major world religious cultures based on the gods speaking to individual leaders.

In the more recent past, a clear example of a shift or mutation of consciousness can be seen in the way humans read.19 In the Middle Ages, the written word was exotic. Writing was scratched by hand using quill and ground pigment on scarce parchment. Reading was a rare technical skill, reserved for holy books and philosophical tracts.

The act of reading was always performed with moving lips, out loud, using the vocal cords to sound the voice, even when the reader was alone. It was believed by all that words must first be heard with the ear, which then passed them on to the intelligence within the soul. In this orderly sequence, words were first to be seen the eye, then voiced audibly with the tongue and throat, only after which could they be heard with the ear and subsequently, perhaps, interpreted by the understanding.

At first, the ability to read silently was an amazing discover, a rare mutation, an extreme shortcut, and even dangerous. Silent reading was seen to be witchcraft, the work of the devil.20

Ironically, modern humans think of thinking as some other form of reading silently to oneself. For most of the human species today, including the illiterate, the prevailing paradigm for thinking is that to think is to verbalize internally, i.e. to speak to oneself silently.21 But it is an abstracted and limited range of consciousness that operates in this mode, a hypertrophied verbal mental rational mode that works by exclusion and selectivity, that functions best by seeing more and more of less and less.
Our interior verbal dialog has grown at the expense of other systems of psyche and now usurps what may be an eventually unsustainably larger share of our bandwidth of consciousness in its pervasive hyperactivity.

But consciousness continues to evolve, though it may seem to be static during the relatively long periods during which a new mode awakens, grows, dominates, and then finds itself at what seems to be an impasse. This verbally chatty mental consciousness and the social fabric now so complexly woven by it, with our twitters, tweets, textings and keypads, is about to mutate yet once again, into what some have tasted as the integral, into that shockingly pregnant deep, wide, and spacious ocean of transverbal communicating radiance and resonance which awaits humanity's emergence from the isolation of the exclusively mental mode.

**Gebser's Integral Consciousness**

Supporting this conjecture that consciousness itself is evolving and will surpass the mental rational stage, Jean Gebser, writing 50 years ago in *The Ever-Present Origin*, observed that the evolution of consciousness was indeed the underlying framework for human development.²²

Gebser concluded that history could be measured in terms of unfolding structures of consciousness. He described how each of these structures reflects a cognitive paradigm or worldview through which human beings naturally progress. He suggested that the next structure of consciousness, the integral structure, was only now emerging and would eventually bring about a radically new individual and global worldview, a new mode, an aperspectival, integral sense, an integral mutation of consciousness both individually and collectively. Gebser called this structure of consciousness “the Integral consciousness.” ²³

**Modern Painters and the Sublime**

Gebser was not alone in his vision of an immanent change in consciousness. Twentieth century artists were also interested in transformation and awakening. Vasily Kandinsky, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman, among others, were deeply and particularly interested in the sublime, and they were all influenced by Theosophy and their inherited religious traditions and practices.

Kandinsky was a practicing Russian Orthodox, a branch of Christianity taken up with “theosis,” a process of transformation that unites the human with the divine, seeking to discover and become one with the "uncreated light." Kandinsky himself believed that we are only just now awakening after years of materialism:

…The soul is emerging, refined by struggle and suffering. Cruder emotions like fear, joy, and grief, which belonged to this time of trial, will no longer attract the artists. He will attempt to arouse more refined emotions, as yet unnamed. Just as he will live a complicated and subtle life, so his work will give to those observers capable of feeling them emotions subtle beyond words.²⁴
Mapping an Integral Evolution of Consciousness

Wilber’s AQAL and Integral Aesthetics

Building upon Gebser’s ideas, Ken Wilber over the past three decades has developed a more elaborate model of evolving stages and modes of consciousness and has created a two-dimensional map, categorically organized into four quadrants. Wilber describes the dynamics of this new structure in a model he calls AQAL: “All Quadrants All Levels.”

Several detailed versions of these AQAL quadrants have been developed (see Fig. 1 below). However Wilber has only cursorily touched upon the aesthetic dimension, states and stages in the evolution of human consciousness, individually and collectively.

Figure 1 - Ken Wilber's AQAL Quadrant Diagram
As comprehensive as Wilber tries to be in so many fields of understanding, his account of art and aesthetics, what they are and their impact, real and potential, on the evolution of an ‘integral consciousness’ has not been fully developed. In a recent audio recording on the website www.integrallife.com, "The Integralists Guide to Understanding Art", several times he has emphasized that "We're waiting for an integral artistic community to emerge and develop," and "we haven't seen that arise yet."26

At other times, Wilber has stated: “Integral art is any art that is produced by integral consciousness.”27 Since it is this very supersensible, integral consciousness that has yet to be clearly discerned, let alone defined, this statement is hardly a clarification of an integral art. And even if integral consciousness were well defined, why would we assume that integral consciousness could not produce “bad” art, any more than non-integral consciousness has produced good art?

However Wilber then goes on to elaborate the following definition:

“An integral theory of art is the multidimensional analysis of the various contexts in which—and by which—art exists and speaks to us: in the artist, the artwork, the viewer, and the world at large. Privileging no single context, it invites us to be unendingly open to ever-new horizons, which broaden our own horizons in the process, liberating us from the narrow straits of our favorite ideology and the prison of our isolated selves.”28

Wilber's theory of art as stated above sounds postmodern but less than clear regarding an integral art itself; however, he does begin refining his vision when he describes how integral art might actually assist in the evocation of integral consciousness within individuals when he states at the end of his lecture that:

The intentionality, the consciousness of the creator gets imprinted in the material of the artifact, and so when individuals view that artifact, it tends to evoke the same state or structure that the creator of that artifact originally experienced. So the point of an integral art is that it can actually help to evoke integral consciousness in individuals, and so it can be a type of agent of development, an agent of evolution itself.29

The Integral: A New Mode of Consciousness

Wilber clearly describes the emerging integral consciousness, but he estimates that only 1 percent of the planetary population currently has developed this capacity. Nevertheless, according to Wilber, this tiny but elite population is increasing rapidly due to the power of digital information dissemination and its widening reach. Humanity is reaching, even if unconsciously, for new ways of conscious being. A new modes of consciousness is arising as an alternative to the rational, bitterly divisive modern world culture of globalized greed and manufactured consumption.30

According to Wilber, where once the rational worldview had transcended the mythical, the integral worldview is now unfolding to establish a new totality of perspectives.31 In the lineage of Gebser, Wilber sees conscious awareness itself as experiencing a continual evolutionary process, however any deeper thinking on Wilber's
part concerning integral aesthetics remains for the future, and as for the emergence of integral art itself, Wilber says simply "We are waiting for that emergence."

**The Wilber-Combs Lattice**

The Wilber-Combs Lattice\(^{32}\) (Fig. 2) is a refinement of the AQAL conceptual model described by a grid or matrix with four states or bandwidths of experiencing consciousness indicated on the horizontal axis (Gross-Subtle-Casual-Nondual) and ascending up the vertical axis are six Gebserian stages of consciousness (Archaic->Magic->Mythic->Mental->Pluralistic->Integral). Its effect is that of adding a fourth dimension to Wilber's flat AQAL model.

![Figure 2: A Wilber-Combs Lattice (modified)\(^{33}\)](image)

This lattice shows how the several mutations of consciousness can be interpreted differently according to which bandwidth of experience the perception of the conscious entity is currently operating within: Gross/Nature, Subtle/Deity, Causal/Formless, Nondual), i.e. in different realms of experience. In particular, the Wilber-Combs Lattice
helps us to realize how so many seemingly disparate maps from various cultures and religions point to the same territory, only viewed from different perspectives, different states.

The Wilber-Combs Lattice indicates clearly that though awareness itself, individually and in collective modes, might be evolving vertically through the Gebserian stages, self-interpretation or self-image at any particular stage may vary, depending directly upon the state or bandwidth range of the interpreting consciousness.

Thus, the supersensible operating at the integral stage might be sensed by any state of consciousness but interpreted situationally according to that state. A Gross-Nature response to the Integral might be the envisioning and construction of the pyramids, whereas a Subtle-Deity response to the Integral would be the envisioning and construction of St. Peter's Basilica by Michelangelo.

Similarly a Causal-Formless response to the Integral would be the paintings of Kandinsky and Pollock, or the envisioning and construction of the Hubble space telescope.

Finally, a Nondual response to the Integral stage can be seen as the full integral mutation. This would include all of the other stages in one diaphonous resonance that is beyond words. Perhaps only now is truly integral art beginning to emerge, but it is as yet outside the radar of the modern art world, still embedded as it is within a corporate postmodern verbal-rational stage.

**Physical Basis of the Supersensible**

*Consciousness and the Supersensible*

If conscious awareness does indeed undergo change, mutation, and evolution, how does this relate to Kant’s supersensible sense, brought on by direct encounter with the sublime? Could there be any physical basis for such a mode of perception? If there does exist some dimension capable of being perceived and explored by a supersensible sense, should it not also fit reasonably into modern theories and paradigms of physics and cosmology?

To perceive within a supersensible dimension, that supersensible dimension must have been created and already exist for it to be “seen. Here we defer to recent results in modern particle physics. The Calabi-Yau manifold (Fig. 3), a recent discovery in string theory, points to six additional, compact dimensions at every point in our universe’s three-dimensional space. One implication of this is that we likely move through one or all of the additional dimensions. Could our own consciousness have components in one or more of these dimensions, perhaps each with its own sensory system evolved or evolving in some fashion within us?

Gebser observed that evolution in consciousness produces categorically new and expanded ways of perceiving. Perhaps it is the very action of the aesthetic experience in human consciousness that catalyzes natural evolutionary forces into opening wider channels of perception into these additional dimensions of cosmological reality.

If so, might there not be some physiological basis for the occasional link between human consciousness and the sublime?
Recent discoveries in human electrophysiology provide clues to possible other sources of consciousness. Joseph Chilton Pearce (2002) describes the electromagnetic toroidal field (Fig. 4) generated by the human heart:

All living forms produce an electrical field because in some sense everything has an electromagnetic element or basis, but a heart cell’s electrical output is exceptional. … electromagnetic energy arcs out from and curves back to the heart to form a torus … that extends as far as twelve to fifteen feet from the body…. The dipole of this heart torus extends through the length of our body, more or less, from the pelvic floor to the top of the skull.36

If there is a correlation between the supersensible and electrophysiology, then the individual human sensitivity should, following the range of the electromagnetic toroidal energy field extending out from the human heart, also extend in some sense “twelve to fifteen feet” from the body.

If human consciousness does have an energy component in the electromagnetic spectrum, then it must be affected, to some degree, by the electromagnetic environment
of the Earth. Many animals possess a “magnetic sense” and appear to be able to track the magnetic field of the Earth that is generated by the flow of molten material in the planetary core and the corresponding flow of ions in the atmosphere.

Magnetoreception is an accepted phenomenon among a wide range of animals: birds, fruit flies, honeybees, turtles, lobsters, sharks, stingrays, whales and even bacteria. Even animals not normally known for their migration habits have been discovered to possess such a sense:

Recent publications from a German research group (Begall et al, 2008), made the discovery that cattle (and other herd animals, such as red and roe deer) tend to situate themselves on a magnetic North-South axis, as if involuntarily directed by the earth’s magnetic field. These surprising results were discovered when satellite images provided by Google Earth were used to analyze herding patterns and behavior. However, the built-in magnetic compass gets out of alignment the closer the cattle get to high voltage power lines, and the cattle then align with the power lines instead.

Research in electrophysiology indicates that our bodies may be more involved in sensing electromagnetic fields than has previously been acknowledged. Traces of magnetite have been discovered in both the human brain and heart, in about the same density as that found in migrating animals, and has proven that onset of rapid eye movement in sleeping humans is shortened in the E-W orientation of sleepers compared to the N-S position.

If human consciousness has a spectral frequency component, then is it not likely that there have evolved in the human biosystem physiological modulators of this frequency component? Microwave cavities are closed structures that resonate with and confine a three dimensional field of electromagnetic energy of a specific bandwidth within the volume of the shape. These microwave cavities are to the invisible frequency energy spectrum what lenses are to visible light energy, acting to direct, focus and transmit energy in precise directional patterns.

The giant waveguide cavity antenna at Bell Labs, shown in Fig. 5, was being used for other reasons in 1965 when scientists inadvertently discovered the microwave background radiation from the Big Bang. Radiation is focused by the tapered horn.

![Figure 5 Giant waveguide cavity antenna at Bell Labs](image-url)
waveguide cavity horn antenna, similar to but much smaller than the one shown in the Fig. 5, for modulation and focusing of microwave energy fields.

In another of my classes, the electrophysiology of the nervous system, I noticed the striking similarities between the waveguide horn antennas in the graduate communication lab and anatomical textbook images of the horn-shaped ventricular cavities located in the midbrain (Figure 6).

**Physiology of the Brain: The Ventricular Horns**

The structures of the ventricular system are embryologically derived from the center of the neural tube. In the developing vertebrate, this hollow tube is the first distinguishing prefiguration of the spinal cord and central nervous system. In the mature human the ventricular cavities (Fig. 6), so similar in shape to the tapered waveguide horn antenna (Fig. 5), are filled with cerebrospinal fluid, an extremely clear, protein free liquid that exhibits unusual electrophysiological properties.

Created within the brain by special cells called the chorid plexus on the inner walls of the ventricular caverns, these frondlike, starfish-like cells are similar in shape to images that have been reported as seen to ripple slowly upon flat monochrome regions of the visual field (e.g. ceiling, walls, the sky, or flat expanses of water) during psychedelic-experienced observations.

The horns or caverns of the two ventricles are separated only by a small opening between them, and the ventricular system is contiguous down the spinal column within the central neural tube of the spinal cord. The optic nerves terminate at the location of the front of the third ventricle, located between and in the center of the ventricular "wings."

![Figure 6 - Lateral view of ventricular cavities within the human brain.](image)

The currently accepted explanation of the role of the ventricular cavities and the clear cerebrospinal fluid within the cavities is as follows: though the system has some thermodynamic-stabilizing properties, its function is primarily a hydraulic one that the body uses to cushion the brain during trauma, and it "protects the brain tissue from injury when jolted or hit."

It should be noted that prior to the 20th century, the accepted physiological description of the functioning of nerve fibers within the nervous system was that nerves were a type of plumbing pipe vessel and that the nervous system and brain operated as a hydraulic system, acting to facilitate the movement of fluid according to Bernoulli’s law in a similar way as the cardiovascular system moves blood.
A better explanation for the nervous system awaited the understanding of electrophysiology in the 20th century, as does yet, perhaps, a better explanation of the ventricular cavities and their clear cerebrospinal fluid.

![Figure 7 - Ventricle cavity system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Lateral_ventricle.gif)


It is not entirely unreasonable to imagine that modern physiologists are as mistaken about the role and function of the ventricular cavity horns and the clear cerebrospinal fluid within as they were over the function and role of the nervous system in previous centuries.

If human consciousness does indeed have a high-frequency energy component, then the horn-shaped ventricular cavities within the cranial cavity indicate the possibility that nature might very well have already designed and implemented its own energy frequency signal communication system.

Is it not then likely that this communication system is being used unconsciously (or consciously) by humans in various processes of the psyche? Could this “cave” be where internal vision is projected during dreaming states? Then might not upper Neolithic shamans have been painting on walls of a cave within a cave, a virtual portal to their deeper levels of consciousness?

If human consciousness is an electromagnetic flux within the ventricular cavities, what about the individual neurons and nerve fibers which are exclusively focused upon by neurophysiologists? An MIT physicist concludes that it is likely that the neurons have assumed a more automatic, instinctual, computer-like role in human electrophysiological function. Danah Zohar says:

In the model of consciousness I am suggesting, the brain has two interacting systems – the coherent Bose-Einstein condensate associated with consciousness and the computer-like system of individual neurones.
Zohar's view is that the function of neurones in the human can be seen more as communication wiring between various bodily systems but not the cause of the manifestation of consciousness. It is not the firing of neurons that give rise to consciousness, it is consciousness residing in the electromagnetic field that gives rise to the firing of neuronal groups. The "coherent Bose-Einstein condensate" is a radiant energy field flux which triggers the neurones to fire, not the other way around. This view is corroborated by Johnjoe McFadden, a professor of molecular genetics at the University of Surrey, who states categorically:

The brain's electromagnetic field represents an integrated electromagnetic field representation of distributed neuronal information and has dynamics that closely map to those expected for a correlate of consciousness. I propose that the brain's electromagnetic information field is the physical substrate of conscious awareness.\textsuperscript{44}

Artifact and Consciousness

The existence of a radiant electromagneto-neuronal toroidal field enveloping the artist and artwork has significant implications for the work of art, the artifact, and for resonant communications from artists in the past to viewers in the future. If we consider that during creation of a physical work of art, a myriad of electromagnetic occasions interpenetrate both artist and artwork and remain imprinted in both long after the creative moment, then we are prepared to understand how in this way art objects act as recorders of consciousness, carrying imprinted experiences of consciousness on through time into the future.

As we have heard Wilber says: "The consciousness of the creator gets imprinted in the material of the artifact, and so when individuals view that artifact, it tends to evoke the same state or structure that the creator of that artifact originally experienced."\textsuperscript{45}

This accords well with mystical aesthetic traditions such as Egyptian and Christian iconography and South Asian yantra painting, which hold that the state of consciousness of the artists must be of a pure, high state as it will be impressed into the very material of the work of art. Contemplatives subsequently viewing the work will be influenced by the traces of the original conscious vibrations of the artist within the very artifact itself, and the viewers themselves will leave their own energy impressions within the radiant resonance of the artifact. In such a way art objects and holy locations build up charges of transformational energy that can lead to mutations in states of consciousness.

Conclusion: Towards an Integral Aesthetics

Art of the Supersensible

Our electrophysiological image of a radiant consciousness challenges us to open to supersensible dimensions by allowing our consciousness to be moved by and to approach all true experiences of the sublime. Supersensibly resonant encounters catalyze changes of consciousness by jolting the consciousness of the artist and experiencer of the art into new and wider ranges of conscious awareness.
My thesis has been that the evolution of consciousness in human individuals and societies from pre-Neolithic times to the 21st century has been mirrored and cultivated by sublime art in every epoch. Such art not only reflects the stage of evolution at that period, but also acts to catalyze the evolutionary transformative required for moving the individual and the culture into the next stage of more comprehensively inclusive aperspectival cognition. And it is such art, integral art, the art of the sublime, that will help push humanity through crisis into the radical new mutation of consciousness required for individual and collective survival in a radically changing environment.

Channeling the Collective

Eric Neumann, a student of Carl Jung, has described in Art and the Creative Unconscious how during times of cultural and individual stress on the psyche, the collective unconscious responds by "coming down," collapsing into the creative moment to work through the channel of the artist, communicating with the culture to initiate a healing process by effecting a transformation of perception of place in the cosmos. The artist becomes a channel for this collective consciousness to the extent that he/she "gets out of the way" of the connecting stream and allows a sustained communication to be forged and subsequently strengthened with each encounter.

How can we understand this "collective unconscious" described by Neumann? Some would dismiss it as something less than consciousness, some inferior consciousness below our individual everyday waking consciousness, as if it were a muddle of almost-but-not-quite-dead set of reflexes or lost memories or instincts. But if we regard the "collective unconscious" as a domain or bandwidth of consciousness aware in its own right then it is only "unconscious" to us because we have not yet tuned into its domain, so firmly fixed are we within our limited habitual mental and verbal cognitively conditioned constraints.

It seems that we are caught by a sort of homeostatic filtering of a mental consciousness trying to maintain its territory by keeping its awareness within familiar bounds somewhat in the manner of software operating systems designed to remain operationally stable within known but limited parameters.

In our half-awakened states of relatively ordinary human adult consciousness, it is art and the momentary sublime experiences of nature then that pull us into new pathways of consciousness, new modes of awareness. Such sublimity does this by invoking previously unfelt or dimly felt resonances of communication. It takes us beyond words. The sublime works to catalyze such resonances and sustain and reinforce them, to nourish them until they become the growth tips of a new branch of perception, what Kant called "the supersensible" sense.

And why can we not imagine that "out there" (or "in there") within that vast ocean of consciousness there exist other entities only listening for such a call to respond with a return answer? Through such a call and response, the channel first opens through which Neumann's collective unconscious then pours through into visible, aural, or verbal patterns. These messages from the collective find resonance not only with the psyche of the artist but also of future viewers, future listeners, future readers through whichever media these trans-normal psychic entities are able to manifest.

The bad news is that we are journeying inexorably into the concluding stages of a mental mutation that is swiftly coming up against its limiting ceiling. This failing...
mutation is presently culminating in a nexus of insoluble economic, political, social, and environmental problems with which a mental mutation of consciousness alone can no longer effectively deal. But the good news is that the demise of the mental will also ring in the necessary opening to the next mutation, the integral.

An integral aesthetics will open individual and collective consciousness to dimensions previously concealed beneath the waves of mental chatter and the scheming deliberations of small ego-dominated empires. What was previously mental will not be completely disregarded but will be available as needed as one of several major subsystems of consciousness, finely tooled algorithmic device of psyche to be brought to the fore as needed but then to be put away at times when the integral transparently opens wide all shutters to the blaze of a wider, deeper, richer cosmos. As Gebser says: "We must, in other words, achieve the new integral structure without forfeiting the efficient forms of the previous structures."  

The Integral Vision

As surely as the cosmos guided the first fish up out of the ocean onto the light and spaciousness of the beach, an integral aesthetics will open the eye of the mutating human mind to the vast cosmic supersensible world of the sublime much as the Hubble telescope has opened the world of the astronomer to a new vision and understanding of cosmos.

And this new integral vision, evoked and nurtured over the centuries by encounters with sublime works both in human art and cosmic nature, will once again see clearly the truth that we are a larger being than we had ever imagined, a truth Plato saw 2,400 years ago around the last axial age. Perhaps the collective unconscious is Tielhard de Chardin's noosphere, the soul of the world, already awakened and awaiting for us individual incarnations to rejoin that integral resonance. As Plato says in Timaeus:

Therefore, we may consequently state that: this world is indeed a living being endowed with a soul and intelligence ... a single visible living entity containing all other living entities, which by their nature are all related.  

We have seen how it is that an integral aesthetics will work to open the eyes of our soul ever wider to this next holism of consciousness toward which we have been evolving. The integral consciousness will diaphanously encompass all prior states and stages as depicted in the Wilber-Combs lattice.

Such an aesthetics will use sublimity as a tool to embrace infinity. As the great East/West art historian and Sanskrit scholar at Rice University, Thomas McEvilley, has said:

The act of really seeing a sublime picture, then, would involve a special kind of seeing related to that of the mystics, as when P.D. Ouspensky described his experiences in the Fourth dimension by saying, "I 'see' infinity."  

Or simply in the words of Van Gogh to his brother Theo:

"I paint infinity."
NOTES

The Sublime and the Supersensible


5 Ibid., 88.


7 Ross, p. 93.

8 Kant, 106.


13 Kant, 108.


15 Ibid., 99.


Aesthetics and the Evolution of Consciousness


20 Ibid., 29.

21 Ibid., 37.

22 Gebser., 72.

23 Ibid., 93.

**Mapping an Integral Evolution of Consciousness**


Ibid., 50:10.

Wilber (2007), 76.


Ibid., 143.

**Physical Basis of the Supersensible**


Gebser, 334.


Ibid., 195.


Ibid., 21.
Conclusion: Toward an Integral Aesthetics

47 Gebser, 299.
50 McEvilley, 11.

REFERENCES


