

Article

Emotions in the Psychology of Aesthetics

Bjarne Sode Funch

Department of People and Technology, Roskilde University, DK-4000 Roskilde, Denmark; bfunch@ruc.dk

Abstract: Ever since Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762) introduced the concept of aesthetics, the prevailing idea has been that the fine arts provide an alternative source of knowledge to the traditional sciences. Art, however, has always been closely associated with emotions. Taking Baumgarten’s treatise on poetry as a point of departure, I argue that Baumgarten laid the ground for a conception of art that emphasizes emotion rather than cognition with a particular appeal to psychology to provide principles of aesthetic appreciation of art. This appeal is met here with a phenomenological discussion of a series of precepts within contemporary emotion theories, which provides the necessary and sufficient conditions for a psychological theory of aesthetic appreciation of art.

Keywords: emotion; aesthetics; phenomenology; art appreciation; existential well-being

1. Science of Aesthetics

Baumgarten is generally credited with introducing the concept of aesthetics to the philosophy of art. With reference to the Greek philosophers and the Church fathers, he distinguishes between things known and things perceived. The things known are understood by the “superior” faculty, i.e., the intellect, and belong to the domain of science. The things perceived are known through the “inferior” faculty of sensation and what he (Baumgarten [1735] 1954, p. 78) calls the science of aesthetics. Baumgarten (ibid., p. 36) introduces his *Reflections on Poetry* by developing the notion of a poem and providing appropriate terminology. He takes his point of departure in a discourse, defined by a series of words designating connected representations. He calls a discourse made up of sensate representations, representations received through the lower part of the cognitive faculty, sensate discourse (ibid., p. 38). The perfect sensate discourse is defined as a discourse “whose various parts are directed toward the apprehension of sensate representations”, and “a sensate discourse will be the more perfect the more its parts favor the awakening of sensate representation”. A poem is, according to Baumgarten, a perfect sensate discourse, and he sets out to determine the rules to which a poem conforms. He finds that clear representations, in contrast to obscure representations, contribute to sensate representations and are therefore more poetic. The more elements a representation embraces, the more particular it is and, consequently, the more poetic. On the other hand, comprehensible representations, comprising distinct, complete, adequate, and profound representations, do not promote sensate representations. Conceptual distinctness is valued by philosophy and science, but it is also contradictory and, therefore, damaging for sensate representation and poetry.

With reference to classical poetry, Baumgarten identifies a number of elements of poetry such as diction, syntax, interconnection, allegories, meter, and rhythm. He also refers to psychological faculties, such as sensation, imagination, and fantasy, the so-called lower faculties, in order to describe aesthetics. His approach allows for an alternative understanding of the psychological impact of art. When Baumgarten ([1735] 1954, p. 39) defines a poem as a “perfect sensate discourse”, meaning a discourse “whose various parts are directed toward the apprehension of sensate representations”, he uses the Latin term *cognitio* (tr. apprehension) that comes from *cognoscere*, “get to know”. It is easy



Citation: Funch, Bjarne Sode. 2022.

Emotions in the Psychology of Aesthetics. *Arts* 11: 76. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11040076>

Academic Editor: Peter Tzanev

Received: 18 July 2022

Accepted: 5 August 2022

Published: 9 August 2022

Publisher’s Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

to conclude that Baumgarten refers to an understanding of the human universe based on sensation similar to scientific knowledge based on logic, but this might be a mistake. Baumgarten defines sensation as a cognitive faculty because sensation is fundamental to scientific understanding and knowledge, but sensation is also directly linked to emotion. Baumgarten shows that he is aware of this when he (ibid., p. 47) states that it is poetic to elicit the affects in the form of pleasure and pain. He (ibid., p. 48) writes, “It is more poetic to excite more powerful, rather than less powerful affects”. Later he (ibid., p. 70) writes, “It is poetic to excite either displeasure or pleasure in the ear”. And “It is supremely poetic to produce the highest pleasure or displeasure in the ear”. Baumgarten (ibid., p. 78) concludes his investigations into the aesthetics of poetry with an appeal to psychology to apply “a science which might direct the lower cognitive faculty in knowing things sensately”.

2. Contemporary Aesthetics

Nearly three hundred years have passed since Baumgarten presented his reflections on poetry, since then psychology has become an independent academic discipline, but is psychology ready to answer Baumgarten’s appeal? Contemporary psychological approaches are not promising (see [Cupchik and Gebotys 1988](#); [Cupchik and Gignac 2007](#); [Cupchik et al. 2009](#); [Johnson 2007](#); [Leder et al. 2004, 2012](#); [Parsons 1987](#); [Pelowski and Akiba 2011](#)). They all favor a cognitive approach to understanding rather than sensate appreciation, which [Baumgarten \(\[1735\] 1954, p. 77\)](#) warned against because he did not rely on logic to be accountable for the “sensate cognition of things”. This does not mean that scholars in psychology today are unaware of the importance of sensation and emotion when it comes to the appreciation of art. Keith [Oatley \(2004, p. 6\)](#), for example, claims, “When we pick up a book of non-fiction we hope to be informed, but when we pick up a book of fiction, or hear a poem, or go to a play or film, we expect to be moved”. Throughout the history of psychological aesthetics ([Allesch 1987](#); [Funch 1997](#); [Roald 2015](#)) and philosophical aesthetics ([Beardsley 1981](#)), psychologists and philosophers have agreed on the importance of sensation and emotion for the appreciation of art, but they often recognize them as implements for ordinary meaning making and understanding.

What follows is a theory of art appreciation based on emotion, but first, a series of premises deduced from contemporary psychology of emotion are presented in order to pave the way for the hypothesis that works of art contribute to existential well-being by providing an emotion with a distinct form.

3. What Is an Emotion?

In trying to answer this question, the first difficulties arise from the varying vocabulary within the area of emotion. Researchers not only refer to emotions, but they also refer to feelings, moods, sentiments, passions, temperaments, affects, and more. There is no consensus among them as to how to define and differentiate these concepts. In a survey of thirty-five prominent researchers within the area of emotions, Carroll [Izard \(2010\)](#) found no consensus on the use of the concept of emotion. Therefore, it is no wonder that Thomas [Dixon \(2012, p. 338\)](#) claims, “Emotion is certainly a keyword in modern psychology, but it is a keyword in crisis”.

A major reason for this state of uncertainty is that a phenomenology of emotional life has never been carried out. Many scholars within the area claim that there are only a few, about four to eight, primary emotions, such as fear, rage, and happiness, and all other emotional qualities are based on these primary emotions ([Ekman 1982](#); [Plutchik 1984](#); [Panksepp 1994](#); [Johnson-Laird and Oatley 1989](#)). William [James \(\[1892\] 1904, p. 374\)](#), on the other hand, claims that “the varieties of emotion are innumerable”, but like psychologists in general, he refrains from a phenomenological description.

It is from classical treatises such as *The Concept of Anxiety* by Søren [Kierkegaard \(\[1844\] 1980\)](#), *The Art of Loving* by Erich [Fromm \(1956\)](#), and *On Aggression* by Konrad [Lorenz \(1963\)](#), and literary works by authors such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Gustave Flaubert, Marcel Proust, William Shakespeare, Leo Tolstoy, and many others that one gets a proper

perspective of the vast and diverse range of emotions. To get a good idea of its vastness and variety, consider all the works of art you know—novels, paintings, music, films, and so on—and imagine the diversity of emotional qualities that those works of art may elicit in experience. This will give you an idea of how expansive human emotional life is and, at the same time, how emotional life is manifested in the world of art.

Many scholars try to define emotions by their common functions (Ekman 1994; Plutchik 1980; Schwarz and Clore 1983; Zajonc 1980). Oatley (2004, p. 3) sums up their viewpoint in the following way, “... emotions are most typically caused by evaluations—psychologists also call them appraisals—of events in relation to what is important to us: our goals, our concerns, our aspirations”. According to this approach, emotions serve the function to make it possible to maneuver in daily life, but they also serve an adaptive function so that humans become able to adjust to new living conditions. There is, of course, a grain of truth in this widely accepted definition, which relates to the survival of the individual and the human species in general, but when we consider how a variety of emotions characterize our experiences in daily life as well as in the course of life, it seems to be a definition with modifications. Emotions are an integrated feature of human existence. They “color”, so to say, every single act in daily life, and they cause people to dedicate themselves to religious service or to commit suicide when they are rejected or suffer from depression. They are certainly important for navigating through the many challenges that life presents, but this does not mean that people act reasonably because of their emotions. From a phenomenological point of view, emotions are just a condition of human consciousness, and each emotional quality has its own individual experiential characteristics. If they ensure appropriate behavior and the survival of the human species or not remains a question. Emotions are like the motor of a car. The car does not drive without it, but the motor does not ensure that the driver acts reasonably.

4. Emotional Experience

Emotions are difficult, if not impossible, to describe in conceptual terms because, first of all, an emotion is an independent faculty that cannot be referred to or described by anything that is more fundamental to a person’s experience. Emotions can be named, but the essence of emotions is ineffable. Either they are actualized or not. However, emotions hardly ever appear in experience in their pure form. They usually appear in connection with other aspects such as sensation, imagination, and cognition, and when we describe our emotions, we describe the event or context in which they appeared. This means that we use conceptualizations to describe emotions in the expectation that other persons will recognize the emotion in question. But describing the discrete qualities of the emotion seems only possible for artists. In a few cases, emotions are directly depicted in works of art by artists such as Edvard Munch and Arnold Schoenberg. However, one thing is to recognize jealousy in a work by Munch, another is to elicit emotion in the consciousness of the perceiver, and only in the latter do we talk about an emotional experience in connection with art.

What is in mind at the present moment is, from a phenomenological point of view, the basis of experience, although this experience is in a continuous flow and, therefore, sometimes called a stream of consciousness (James [1890] 1950, vol. I, p. 239, [1892] 1904, p. 159). With this approach, a pure emotional experience hardly exists. The emotional aspect is always combined with sensations, thoughts, imagination, or other experiential entities, and only through analytical introspection is it possible to differentiate between an emotion and other aspects. This differentiation is facilitated by our knowledge of different mental faculties. From biology, we know something about sensation and the different senses, but we know very little about the biological and neurological foundations of emotions. The physical manifestations, such as heart palpitations, sweating, and so on, are well-known, but they do not tell much about the psychological nature of emotions. We might not get any closer to a general phenomenological description of emotion as an aspect of experience than the fact that it gives color to every aspect of existence. Some are

brief and some are long-lasting, which has inspired many emotion researchers such as Paul Ekman, Nico Frijda, Richard Lazarus, and Jaap Panzepp, among others, to differentiate between emotions and moods. They define emotions as sudden and triggered by the immediate circumstances, whereas moods arise unnoticed and without obvious reasons. James ([1892] 1904, p. 374) also differentiates between coarse emotions such as anger, fear, love, hate, and happiness and subtler emotions such as moral, intellectual, and aesthetic emotions. But in this context, emotions of any kind are thought to originate from the faculty of emotion, and they all provide experience with a touch of life.

5. Emotion and Sensation

Antonio Damasio (1999, 2003, 2006) makes an important differentiation between emotion and feeling, although he also creates some confusion about the concept of emotion. In the present context, the concept of emotion refers to the emotional experience, while Damasio uses the concept of emotion for innate bodily reactions to the world that in his understanding is non-conscious. Feeling, on the other hand, is the process of perceiving what is going on in the organs when one is in the throes of an emotion. In other words, Damasio uses the concept of feeling about the experiential aspect of the process, which in the present context is called emotion. Damasio's differentiation between emotions and feelings corresponds to a fundamental difference between sensation and emotion, even though such sensations in his understanding usually remain non-conscious.

William James is keenly aware of the differentiation between sensation and emotion, and it forms the basis for his and Carl Lange's theory of emotion. He (James 1884) claims that emotions are the result of bodily sensations or rather that bodily changes directly followed by perception are, as they occur, emotions themselves. Thus, we feel sorrow, for example, because we cry, get angry, lash out, and feel fear and tremble. But in his differentiation between coarse and subtler emotions, he seems to be unsure if his theory is also valid in the case of subtle emotions, such as "the moral, intellectual, and aesthetic", where bodily sensations are usually more elusive. He (James [1890] 1950, vol. II, p. 468) writes, "Concords of sounds, of colors, of lines, logical consistencies, teleological fitnesses, affect us with a pleasure that seems ingrained in the very form of the representation itself, and to borrow nothing from any reverberation surging up from the parts below the brain". Instead of linking emotions exclusively to physical feelings, James-Lange's theory would have had a better prospect had they linked emotions to sensations in general.

Emotions are more easily linked to sensation than anything else. This includes not only feelings in the sense of bodily sensations but also visions, in the form of shape, color, and movement; hearing, in the form of pitch and rhythm; smell; and taste. John Watson's (Watson and Rayner 1920) classical experiment shows how the eleven-month-old infant Albert is conditioned to respond with fear when confronted with a white rat, and as a result, he also responds with fear to other similar objects such as a rabbit, a fur coat, and a wisp of cotton wool. His observations show that emotions are closely related and caused by sensation rather than cognitive comprehension. The infant is most likely responding to the sensate appearance of the objects and has no cognitive comprehension of either a rat, rabbit, fur coat, or cotton. His observations also show that previous experience is influential to the elicited quality of emotion.

Experimental studies, as well as random observations in everyday life, show that human beings respond emotionally to sensations in the form of shapes, color combinations, and music even when those sensations do not represent anything known. This link between emotion and sensation forms the basis of Susanne K. Langer's (1953) aesthetic theory. She (Langer 1957, p. 15) talks about "feelings" in a broad sense of the word and includes "everything that can be felt" without differentiating between emotions and feelings in the form of body feelings. She (Langer 1962, p. 90) assumes that the primary function of art is to objectify those feelings. Since feelings have no exterior form, works of art are recognized as having the capacity to supply feelings with a form. Langer (1957, p. 134) maintains that feelings are directly presented in a work of art so that expressive forms are presentations of

the living reality of feelings and they do not signify or refer to something beyond what is represented in the work of art. In other words, since works of art are expressions of human feelings, they also achieve resemblance to the living forms of those feelings.

6. Emotion and Memory

Emotions are elusive and without form and, therefore, cannot be recalled from memory. Any attempt to evoke a specific emotion from memory is condemned to fail unless it is linked to a form or meaning that contextualizes the emotion in question. We can easily recall a situation of anger or joy, and we may even reawaken the emotional quality, although often in a vague version of the original. But pure emotions are characterized by being present or not. They are manifested in consciousness, and this is their only form of existence (Funch 2022).

General observations indicate that emotions can be stored in memory in spite of the fact that emotions cannot be recalled from memory. Most people have had the experience of a mood or an atmosphere from childhood that has been accidentally recalled from a specific smell, for example. This can be the smell of grandma's kitchen or of a mother's jewelry box. Suddenly a scent brings it up not only in the form of a memory but also by reawakening an emotional state that has not been in one's consciousness for many years. This emotion is recognized as being so unique that it seems to be reawakened from memory rather than elicited anew. The phenomenon of traumatic experiences also indicates that emotion can be stored in memory. After a traumatic incident, significant details of the experience or the experience as such are often erased from memory, and therapeutic strategies are necessary in order to recall the incident. Such recollections include a reawakening of the emotional aspect of the traumatic experience. The psychoanalytical theory of childhood traumas and their impact on behavior later in life is based on the idea that emotions are stored in memory, and they exercise considerable influence on the person's state of being without manifesting themselves in consciousness.

With this background, I propose the thesis that significant emotions are stored in a concealed memory and these emotions influence the psyche, occasionally disturbing concentration and provoking states of mind that seem incomprehensible and unintelligent (Funch 2022, pp. 170–72). These emotions in concealed memory are essential to the understanding of art and its influence on the individual and societal integrity.

7. Emotion and Cognition

The link between emotion and sensation is direct, whereas the link between emotion and cognition is far more complicated, not only because cognition includes many different capabilities, such as identification, recognition, analysis, comparison, evaluation, preference, reasoning, problem solving, conceptualization, and so forth, but also because active cognition excludes emotion. Whenever cognitive activity is triggered, emotions are diminished and terminated. This is especially obvious with anger. When one focuses on anger it changes, it starts to diminish, and soon all that is left is just a remnant of the original feeling of anger. Many of these cognitive activities that are commonly carried out in art appreciation, such as identification, analysis, evaluation, interpretation, and preference, rule out emotions. In a few instances, cognitive activities may lead to an outburst of pleasure in the form of an aha experience, but cognitive activities and emotions never accompany each other in experience apart from a lingering atmosphere in the background of the experience.

Cognitive activities are devastating for emotional appreciation of art, but immediate cognitive conceptions might be crucial for the existential profundity of an aesthetic experience. It has been demonstrated that cognitive conceptions such as perception, preferences, and the intentions of others can appear in experience without previous interference of cognitive activities (Gallagher 2008; Becchio et al. 2012; Zajonc 1980). This is also the case in art appreciation. Cognitive aspects of art experience in the form of conceptions that identify the existential theme of the experience provide the necessary specification for an

appropriate emotional quality. In other words, an immediate cognitive conception is a precondition for eliciting the emotional quality that is distinctive for encounters with the work of art in question.

8. Art and Emotions

Throughout history, art appreciation has been associated with feelings of pleasure. Scholars within the psycho-physical and neuro-aesthetic tradition usually talk about preferences, usually based on feelings of pleasure. Within the cognitive psychological tradition, they often talk about pleasure connected to art understanding and meaning making. Psycho-analytical scholars refer to catharsis, and existential-phenomenological-oriented scholars usually describe an exceptional aesthetic experience that transcends the ordinary stream of consciousness, providing a feeling of exhilaration. Scholars of different viewpoints seem to agree on a feeling of pleasure connected with art appreciation, and this feeling of pleasure has often been recognized as the final outcome of art appreciation, and therefore, it is called aesthetic pleasure. Only a few people have attempted to describe aesthetic pleasure as a state of “ecstasy” and “a delicious feeling of self-transcendence” (May 1985), “intrinsic pleasure” (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson 1990), “catharsis” (Vives 2011), and “transcendent pleasure”, in the sense that pleasure in aesthetic experience surpasses pleasure in general (Funch 1997, 2007).

Theorists within aesthetics seem to a large extent to be satisfied with an understanding of aesthetic pleasure as the emotional result of art appreciation, although they are well aware that an individual work of art elicits a specific emotional quality. *Guernica* (1937) by Pablo Picasso elicits an emotion that is very different from *The Black Square* (1915) by Kazimir Malevich or the *Mona Lisa* (1503–1506) by Leonardo da Vinci, not to mention the emotions elicited by the *Moonlight Serenade* (1801) by Beethoven or *Madame Bovary* (1857) by Gustave Flaubert. Each individual work of art elicits a specific emotional quality or a specific series of emotional qualities, although within the oeuvre of an individual artist, there may be some reiterations.

Emotions other than aesthetic pleasure have hardly ever been ascribed any importance to the understanding of art appreciation. The theory of aesthetic empathy is a remarkable exception. In the late 1800s, Robert Vischer (1873), inspired by Johann Gottfried von Herder, introduced the thesis that works of art elicit different physiological reactions that stimulate specific emotional qualities. His theory attracted great attention among aestheticians of his time, especially Theodor Lipps (1903–1906) who specified the idea of aesthetic empathy as an emotion experienced as if it belonged to the artistic subject matter. The theory has recently been revived within a neurological perspective by Freedberg and Gallese (2007) and a phenomenological perspective by Moeskjær Hansen and Roald (2022) after many years of neglect.

9. Expanding Emotional Life

Studies carried out by Paul Ekman and his colleagues (Ekman and Friesen 1971) show that people of different cultures use the same facial expressions for emotions such as happiness, anger, sadness, disgust, surprise, and fear. These observations have led to the conviction that emotions are universal and independent of time and place. Furthermore, they have reinforced the idea that emotional life consists of a limited number of emotional qualities. This does not prevent Ekman from acknowledging the fact that most scholars within the area agree that the emotional life changes with age, although investigations have concentrated on the early stages of life (Ekman and Davidson 1994, p. 373). Panksepp (1994, p. 368) states, for example, “After birth, a great deal of neural unfolding remains to be completed in every species, and we can be reasonably confident that the maturation of specific neural systems does establish essential conditions for the unfolding of certain forms of emotionality”. Without dismissing the biological argument, Judy Dunn (1994, p. 352) points out how children’s emotional expressions and experiences are related to their social relations and understanding of others. Anger, fear, joy, and frustration in a ten-month-old

infant are different from what makes a four-year-old child angry, frightened, and so on. Dunn (*ibid.*, p. 353) asks the rhetorical question, “In what sense is the amusement of an 8-month-old tickled by his father the same emotion as the amusement of an 8-year-old at a dirty joke? Is the fear of a baby picked up by an unfamiliar person the same as that of an adolescent waiting for her exam results?” Dunn is not in doubt that they are different qualitative emotional experiences.

Dunn’s approach indicates that new emotional qualities arise throughout the course of life. From a phenomenological point of view, these emotions have their individual characteristics, and even if we use the same term, they vary in an infinite number of ways.

Furthermore, the repertoire of emotional states is continuously expanding throughout the course of life. This emotional increase is not only caused by biological maturation and age but also, and mainly, by existential encounters, i.e., new conditions that are essential for the individual. Whenever new conditions in life appear, and this includes technological inventions, ethical convictions, wealth, and working conditions, among others, they give rise to new emotional qualities. Our vocabulary is often too limited to describe these new emotions, but they are captured in works of art. They are captured in such a way that a work of art elicits a specific new emotion in viewers if they have a certain background of experience, rather than there being something represented or signified in the work of art itself, as in the case with cognitive understanding. Whereas cognitive understanding can be communicated by signs, emotions can only be communicated through elicitation because they have no representations. Emotions exist only in their manifestations, and therefore, they can only be “represented” by being revitalized. When emotions are cognitively represented, they lack an emotional quality.

10. Emotions and Cultural Changes

The psychology of human emotions seems to be burdened by many contradictions. Ekman’s (1982) identification of a limited number of basic emotions and facial expressions seems to contradict James’ ([1892] 1904, p. 374) view that emotions are innumerable, but this may be a result of conceptual variation. When Ekman talks about emotions, he refers exclusively to reactive emotions, i.e., emotions that occur suddenly and last only a short time. Secondly, he uses categorical concepts for emotions. A fear of a snake, for example, is different from a fear of thunder or a fear of the dark, and the breadth of the term becomes obvious in examples such as the fear of missing a train, fear of losing one’s job, fear of the future, fear of God, fear of telling the truth, and many other kinds of fears. From a phenomenological point of view, the concept of fear includes various emotions. They may all have an aspect in common, but they illustrate how one fear has many iterations.

Ekman’s research leads also to the conviction that emotions are independent of culture and time in history. But examples such as fear of flying, fear of missing a train, fear of pregnancy, fear of cancer, fear of nuclear war, and fear of pollution illustrate how culture influences the character of fear. Furthermore, fear might be one of the most fundamental and simplest emotions we know, and therefore, it serves as a useful example to illustrate how the emotional life is not only infinitely varied but also how it expands according to existential encounters dependent on individual differences as well as cultural differences. This is a subject that has hardly been touched upon by psychological researchers, but historical studies show, according to Oatley (2004, pp. 15–18), that emotions have changed within historical time. This is obviously the case from one historical period to another, but it is also the case within shorter periods of time. Technological inventions provide new options for information and social relationships, wealth provides new health problems, pollution, and options for visiting other countries and cultures, changes in ethics are continuously under way, and so forth. Larry Rosen (2012) is one of many who points to the fact that communication among people has changed from mainly face-to-face to virtual, and he believes this may cause new problems of mental health, which he calls “iDisorders”. Not only the material and social conditions change, but also mentally based ideas, dreams, and values undergo changes—sometimes for the better, sometimes not. The point here is

that new existential encounters, i.e., encounters that in some way challenge life for a new and necessary evaluation, create new emotional qualities.

Recognizing contemporary art as an indicator of existential and emotional changes also explains why art throughout history is characterized by continuous changes in style. In order to capture new emotions caused by new existential challenges, art has to find new forms to evoke the specific quality of those emotions. It also explains the increasing changes in style during the last century. Since the late 1800s, there has been a remarkable increase in technological inventions, and living conditions in the Western world have in general been under rapid and continual transformation, and this has caused new existential challenges. This is reflected in the use of new media in art and frequent developments in artistic expressions. Furthermore, the increase in internationalization and globalization has caused an increasing focus on international art. Whereas art up until the 1960s, to a large extent, was divided into local, national, and international art in art museums and art magazines, now there is an increasing concentration on international art. Even small local art museums have undergone a change in collecting and exhibition practice with an increasing focus on international art; this reflects an increasing uniformity in living conditions across borders.

11. Psychology of Aesthetics

Baumgarten ([1735] 1954) laid the ground for a science or psychology of aesthetics by differentiating between things known and things perceived and by pointing to sensate representations as being fundamental to aesthetic creation and the appreciation of works of art (poems). He demonstrated how a number of formal features ensure or characterize perfect sensate representations, and he hinted at pleasure and displeasure as an appropriate response to perfect sensate representation, but he did not pursue the psychological nature of these responses. Baumgarten's inquiry reached its conclusion with a definition of the aesthetics of a poem, and he appealed to psychology for an aesthetic theory that could provide an understanding of art appreciation in which logic and scientific reasoning were excluded.

Precepts for a psychological theory that meets Baumgarten's appeal were described in the preceding subsections. Sensate representations are directly connected to sensation in a direct response to formal features in the immediate surroundings, the body, and imagination. Those sensations are spontaneous and directly linked to emotion. In cases where a work of art excites an emotion, this emotion is essential for the appreciation of art. The question is, can an emotional response have equal validity as scientific insight and understanding?

My thesis proposes that ease with one's life is just as essential to human existence as understanding the conditions of life. They are two features of human existence that are equally important, and they complement each other.

Being at ease with one's life is a question of emotional differentiation and clarity. The emotional universe of the individual is built up through continuous new existential challenges that excite new emotional qualities. These new qualities are either immediately, gradually, or never constituted, by being linked to adequate sense impressions. They are excited by and linked to the basic forms of the sense impressions. When a new emotional quality is constituted, it is spontaneously revived when the person encounters the same or similar forms of sense impressions as the original that constituted the emotion in question. Most emotional qualities need differentiation along the course of life because the existential circumstances have grown more complex. New living conditions and new aspirations excite new emotional qualities, but they may remain linked to the original forms of sense impressions. In such cases, the emotional response remains undifferentiated in spite of the existential situation requiring a more specific emotional response. In order to achieve optimal emotional coherence, the new emotional distinctions have to be linked to new or differentiated forms of sense impressions.

The emotional universe of the individual is never fully clarified by emotions that are adequate to the current existential situation. Emotional growth, as with the acquisition of new knowledge, is a continuous and infinite process of life. Many emotional experiences remain unconstituted during a shorter or longer span of life. These unconstituted emotions not only provide insufficiently precise responses, but they may also influence the stream of consciousness in a disturbing and destructive way by popping up without warning in inappropriate situations and by lingering in the background of consciousness. They disturb concentration, they create unfounded emotional responses, and they are disastrous for existential well-being.

An emotional quality that is not yet constituted needs a distinct form in order to be constituted. The forms of sense impression in daily encounters are often sufficient for constituting ordinary emotional qualities, but the more complex the existential being-in-the-world becomes and the more existential themes in life become nonconcrete and abstract, the more difficult it is to come across adequate forms for constituting those emotions. It is at this point that art becomes an appropriate implement for constituting emotions.

Works of art elicit emotions that are spontaneous and without any or much cognitive inference. The quality of the emotion indicates a reference to a specific existential theme, but only the emotion is revived. The existential theme in question is represented in such a way that it elicits the emotion rather than conceptualizes it. When works of art are exceptionally appropriate for constituting subtle qualities of emotions, it is because they are distinguished by their distinct and original sensate form. They often appeal only to one sense. Paintings, for example, appeal to the visual sense, music to the sense of hearing, and fiction to imagination, and as a result of appealing to one singular modality, their sensate form becomes conspicuous.

The constitutions of emotions that are caused by existential challenges are essential for being at ease with life. Whether they are constituted by distinct forms in real-life situations or in fiction is not important. When an emotion is constituted, it provides a state of preparedness that is differentiated according to the individual's present life situation and ensures more specific emotional responses in future encounters. Each emotional quality that is constituted contributes to existential well-being because spontaneous responses to real-life situations become adequate and appropriate to the situation in question. At the same time, a disruptive emotion has been eliminated. In this context, the primary psychological function of art is to contribute to existential well-being.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Allesch, Christian G. 1987. *Geschichte der Psychologischen Ästhetik: Untersuchungen zur Historischen Entwicklung eines Psychologischen Verständnisses Ästhetischer Phänomene*. Göttingen: Verlag für Psychologie.
- Baumgarten, Alexander G. 1954. *Reflections on Poetry*. Translated by Karl Aschenbrenner, and William B. Holther. Berkeley: University of California Press. First published in 1735.
- Beardsley, Monroe C. 1981. *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, 2nd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Becchio, Cristina, Valeria Manera, Luisa Sartori, Andrea Cavallo, and Umberto Castiello. 2012. Grasping intentions: From thought experiments to empirical evidence. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 6: 117. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, and Rick E. Robinson. 1990. *The Art of Seeing: An Interpretation of the Aesthetic Encounter*. Malibu: J. Paul Getty Museum and Getty Center for Education in the Arts.
- Cupchik, Gerald C., and Robert J. Gebotys. 1988. The search for meaning in art: Interpretive styles and judgments of quality. *Visual Arts Research* 14: 38–50.
- Cupchik, Gerald C., and Allison Gignac. 2007. Layering in art and aesthetic experience. *Visual Arts Research* 33: 56–71.
- Cupchik, Gerald C., Oshin Vartanian, Adrian Crawley, and David J. Mikulis. 2009. Viewing artworks: Contributions of cognitive control and perceptual facilitation to aesthetic experience. *Brain and Cognition* 70: 84–91. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
- Damasio, Antonio R. 1999. *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*. Boston: Harcourt Brace.
- Damasio, Antonio R. 2003. *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain*. London: Vintage.
- Damasio, Antonio R. 2006. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, 2nd ed. London: Vintage.
- Dixon, Thomas. 2012. "Emotion": The history of a keyword in crisis. *Emotion Review* 4: 338–44. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)

- Dunn, Judy. 1994. Experience and understanding of emotions, relationships, and membership in a particular culture. In *The Nature of Emotion: Fundamental Questions*. Edited by Paul Ekman and Richard J. Davidson. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 352–55.
- Ekman, Paul. 1982. *Emotions in the Human Face*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ekman, Paul. 1994. All emotions are basic. In *The Nature of Emotion: Fundamental Questions*. Edited by Paul Ekman and Richard J. Davidson. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 15–19.
- Ekman, Paul, and Richard J. Davidson. 1994. Afterword: What develops in emotional development? In *The Nature of Emotion: Fundamental Questions*. Edited by Paul Ekman and Richard J. Davidson. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 373–75.
- Ekman, Paul, and Wallace V. Friesen. 1971. Constants across cultures in the face and emotion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 17: 124–29. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
- Freedberg, David, and Vittorio Gallese. 2007. Motion, emotion and empathy in esthetic experience. *Trends in Cognitive Science* 11: 197–203. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
- Fromm, Erich. 1956. *The Art of Loving*. New York: HarperPerennial.
- Funch, Bjarne S. 1997. *The Psychology of Art Appreciation*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press.
- Funch, Bjarne S. 2007. A psychological theory of the aesthetic experience. In *Aesthetics and Innovation*. Edited by Leonid Dorfman, Colin Martindale and Vladimir Petrov. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Funch, Bjarne S. 2022. *The Psychology of Artistic Creativity: An Existential-Phenomenological Study*. London: Routledge.
- Gallagher, Shaun. 2008. Direct perception in the intersubjective context. *Consciousness and Cognition* 17: 535–43. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Izard, Carroll E. 2010. The many meanings/aspects of emotion: Definitions, functions, activation, and regulation. *Emotion Review* 2: 363–70. [[CrossRef](#)]
- James, William. 1884. What is an emotion? *Mind* 9: 188–205. [[CrossRef](#)]
- James, William. 1950. *The Principles of Psychology*. 2 vols. New York: Dover Publications. First published in 1890.
- James, Willam. 1904. *Psychology*. London: MacMillan. First published in 1892.
- Johnson, Mark. 2007. *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Johnson-Laird, Philip N., and Keith Oatley. 1989. The language of emotions: An introduction of a semantic field. *Cognition and Emotion* 3: 81–123. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1980. *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*. Translated by Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson. Princeton: Princeton University Press. First published in 1844.
- Langer, Susanne K. 1953. *Feeling and Form*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Langer, Susanne K. 1957. *Problems of Art*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Langer, Susanne K. 1962. *Philosophical Sketches*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press.
- Leder, Helmut, Benno Belke, Andries Oeberst, and Dorothee Augustin. 2004. A model of aesthetic appreciation and aesthetic judgments. *British Journal of Psychology* 95: 489–508. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
- Leder, Helmut, Gernot Gerger, Stefan G. Dressler, and Alfred Schabmann. 2012. How art is appreciated. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 6: 2–10. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Lipps, Theodor. 1903–1906. *Ästhetik: Psychologie des Schönen und der Kunst*. 2 vols. Hamburg: Leopold Voss.
- Lorenz, Konrad. 1963. *On Aggression*. Translated by Marjorie Kerr Wilson. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.
- May, Rollo. 1985. *My Quest for Beauty*. Dallas: Saybrook.
- Moeskjær Hansen, Jannik, and Tone Roald. 2022. Affective depth and value. On Theodor Lipps' theory of aesthetic empathy. In *Empathy and Ethics*. Edited by Magnus Engländer and Susi Ferrarello. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Oatley, Keith. 2004. *Emotions: A Brief History*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Panksepp, Jaak. 1994. Emotional development yields lots of "stuff" ... especially mind "stuff" that emerges from brain "stuff". In *The Nature of Emotion: Fundamental Questions*. Edited by Paul Ekman and Richard J. Davidson. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 367–68.
- Parsons, Michael J. 1987. *How We Understand Art: A Cognitive Developmental Account of Aesthetic Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pelowski, Matthew, and Fuminori Akiba. 2011. A model of art perception, evaluation and emotion in transformative aesthetic experience. *New Ideas in Psychology* 29: 80–97. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Plutchik, Robert. 1980. A general psychoevolutionary theory of emotion. In *Emotion: Theory, Research, and Experience*. Edited by Robert Plutchik and Henry Kellerman. Cambridge: Academic Press, vol. 1, pp. 3–33.
- Plutchik, Robert. 1984. A psychoevolutionary theory of emotions. *Social Science Information* 21: 529–53. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Roald, Tone. 2015. *The Subject of Aesthetics: A Psychology of Art and Experience*. Leiden: Brill.
- Rosen, Larry D. 2012. *iDisorders: Understanding Our Obsession with Technology and Overcoming Its Hold On Us*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Schwarz, Nobert, and Gerald L. Clore. 1983. Mood, misattribution, and judgments of well-being: Informative and directive functions of affective states. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 45: 513–23. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Vischer, Robert. 1873. *Ueber das optische Formgefühl: Ein Beitrag zur Aesthetik*. Leipzig: Hermann Credner.
- Vives, Jean-Michel. 2011. Catharsis: Psychoanalysis and the theatre. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 92: 1009–27. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]

Watson, John B, and Rosalie Rayner. 1920. Conditioned emotional reactions. *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 3: 1–14. [[CrossRef](#)]

Zajonc, Robert B. 1980. Feeling and thinking: Preferences need no inferences. *American Psychologist* 35: 151–75. [[CrossRef](#)]