

## Radical Aesthetics of Filipe de Salles and the Four Aristotelian Causes.

Alex Pentek

31/3/2024

In the latter half of the 20th Century, many artists rejected aesthetics as merely a visual system in favour of a deeper conceptual approach. Despite a recent return to aesthetics in post-conceptual arts practice and critical theory, there is still much debate around the subject (Halsall, Jansen, O'Connor, 2009). Filipe de Salles' radical theory of aesthetics based on Jungian archetypes offers a new holistic and unified approach across the entirety of the field and all media. Charting this through Aristotle's four causes; Efficient, Material, Formal and Final, I aim to clarify the aesthetic process by first showing some historical meanings of aesthetics, then describing de Salles' new theory and how it meets these four causes.

Historically aesthetics has meant different things, and was originally derived from the [Ancient Greek](#) *aisthētikós*, pertaining to sensory perception. In relation to the arts, Plato takes the word 'art' as meaning the totality or gestalt of a subject (Read, 1948), but he also sees the importance of ideas over form in his allegory of shadows on a cave wall, where eternal ideas as light are expressed in the form of shadows. Later, Aristotle mentions 'Mimesis' both as the defining quality of an artwork and the result of the artist's intention. In Western Europe, a rediscovery of classical aesthetics reached peak popularity in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, where individuality was celebrated and beauty was formulated into the tenets of rhythm, balance, symmetry, harmony, and proportion. A modern appropriation and moniker of aesthetics was first given by Alexander Baumgarten in 1735 and his *Aesthetica* in 1750 as a science of natural beauty and individual taste. In other words, how new art-going audiences could judge 'good' versus 'bad' art. For Baumgarten, aesthetics was an Aristotelian way of judging through the senses as opposed to through the intellect, using art as an alternative way of knowing.

In 1781, this view was challenged by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he questions if aesthetics could ever contain objective principles laws and rules of artistic beauty:

"The Germans are the only people who presently (1781) have come to use the word aesthetic[s] to designate what others call the critique of taste. They are doing so on the basis of a false hope conceived by that superb analyst Baumgarten. He hoped to bring our critical judging of the beautiful under rational principles, and to raise the rules for such judging to the level of a lawful science. Yet that endeavour is futile. For, as far as their principal sources are concerned, those supposed rules or criteria are merely empirical. Hence they can never serve as determinate a priori laws to which our judgment of taste must conform. It is, rather, our judgment of taste which constitutes the proper test for the correctness of those rules or criteria. Because of this it is advisable to follow either of two alternatives. One of these is to stop using this new name aesthetic[s] in this sense of critique of taste, and to reserve the name aesthetic[s] for the doctrine of sensibility that is true science. (In doing so we would also come closer to the language of the ancients and its meaning. Among the ancients the division of cognition into *aisthētá kai noētá* [sensed or thought] was quite famous.) The other

alternative would be for the new aesthetic[s] to share the name with speculative philosophy. We would then take the name partly in its transcendental meaning, and partly in the psychological meaning.”

(Weigelt, 2007).

While Kant later adopts Baumgarten’s use of aesthetics around the subject of taste in the Critique of the Power of Judgement in 1790, he maintains that ‘aesthetic ideas’ and feelings of pleasure are the opposite of the sublime, and that these subjective feelings cannot be found externally in artworks or in objects themselves.

More recently, [Hal Foster](#) describes the reaction against beauty and Modernist art in ‘The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture. [Arthur Danto](#) criticises this rejection of aesthetics as "kalliphobia" coming from kallos, the Greek word for beauty (Danto, 2004). From ancient Greek aesthetics of beauty and the senses, and Renaissance aesthetics of classical beauty revived through the individual, to Baumgarten’s material aesthetics, Kants’ aesthetic ideas and later with Baudelaire’s modernity of the transient and fleeting, we see aesthetics being many different things at various points in history. Ranging from empirically descriptive to subjective and emotional meanings, a modern interpretation of aesthetics appears to contain conflicting views possibly inherited from older times. Complicating matters further is the inherent subjectivity of lived experience that we bring to bear when viewing an artwork, which Ernst Gombrich famously called ‘the beholders’ share.’ With subjectivity being self-evident, recent philosophical contributions by Benedetto Croce, Luigi Pareyson, and Umberto Eco still leave questions around the process of aesthetics remaining mostly unresolved (De Salles, p.3, 2021).

Attempts to understand aesthetics beyond subjectivity using modern neuroscientific, and psychoanalytic methods have been unfruitful. Neuroscientist Karl Pribram describes trying to understand aesthetics from a neuroscientific perspective like “trying to find gravity by digging into the earth” (cited by de Salles, p.3, 2021). Echoing Kant’s misgivings that subjective feelings cannot be found in objects themselves, a psycho-analytic approach also falls short, which Jung criticises below;

“Although these two objects [work of art and creative human being] are intimately related and even interdependent, neither of them can explain the other [...] The personal psychology of the artist may explain many aspects of his work, but not the work itself. And if ever did explain his work successfully, the artist's creativity would be revealed as a mere symptom” (cited by de Salles, p. 3, 2021).

In his 1863 essay ‘The Painter of Modern Life’, Charles Baudelaire aesthetically defines ‘modernité’ as “the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable”(Allauthor.com, 2024). Fusing the temporal with the eternal might point towards a deeper understanding of the aesthetic process laying beyond surface appearances. Like the shadows on Plato’s cave wall, what if the formal qualities traditionally ascribed to aesthetics are merely symptoms of a much deeper process? Filipe de Salles carefully illustrates how such deeper processes may be at work in ‘The singularity of aesthetic perception: a psychic approach to artistic phenomenon based on the Jungian theory of Archetype and its correlation with the holo informational model of Karl Pribram and David Bohm.’

Neuroscientist Karl Pribram and physicist David Bohm began working independently and then together on a holographically encoded model of information storage. Combining this holographic model, where information about the whole is stored within each part and ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus' idea that 'everything flows,' - Bohm calls this flux 'holomovement', which he sees as a process occurring on multiple levels:

“consciousness is itself in the implicated order, [...] that consciousness is possibly a more subtle form of matter and movement, a more subtle aspect of the holomovement. - My suggestion is that this implicate order implies a reality immensely beyond what we call matter. Matter itself is merely a ripple in this background”(Weber, 1982).

Pribram applies this implicit holographic model to memory storage.

“It seemed immediately plausible that the distributed memory store, the deep structure of memory, of the brain might resemble this holographic record [...]. In the decades since, many laboratories – including my own – have provided evidence that has sharpened the theory” (Cited by de Salles, p.8, 2021).

De Salles combines the ideas of Pribram, Bohm and Jung to examine aesthetics from a radically broader reference point than has been historically held and/or rejected before now. This considers the universe in which dimensions interact, but all time and space are everywhere simultaneously. We only perceive a specific reality according to our limited perceptual system. What we generally call "reality" is actually, according to such theories, a projection of underlying dynamic energy elements, whose five common senses capture only a tiny part. (De Salles, p.9, 2021) When we consider art in its potential energy state, depending on the theories addressed, we have much broader conditions to recognise a logical synthesis in the aesthetic phenomenon.

De Salles provides such a synthesis in his new approach founded on academic and scientific methods that both celebrate personal subjectivity and which see our broader underlying resonance with archetypal imagery, as the unconscious and emotional basis for aesthetic experience. (de Salles, p.12, 2021).

By combining Bohm's and Pribram's holo-informational models, where information can be stored holographically at a quantum level everywhere and nowhere, outside the standard limits of time and space within what Bohm calls 'the implicate order', de Salles introduces Jung's notion of the collective unconscious as another example of this naturally occurring holistic process.

De Salles describes Jung's journey into the collective unconscious began with the conscious self residing within the individual unconscious, that we experience when we are asleep or anaesthetised. Here, within the unconscious self, Jung says all our individual lived experiences are stored. When certain historical traumas surface to create 'psychic structures' within the unconscious, they can affect our waking conscious lives. Learning how to identify and deal with these traumas or unwanted behaviour is the accepted, proven basis of psychoanalysis. Jung then asked the

question, where does the individual unconscious reside? His answer to this question was the collective unconscious, where all of humanity's experience is stored in the collective psyche within each of us (De Salles, 2021).

Given the vastness of this collective experience, Jung proposes we can access this information by resonating through certain 'nodes' or archetypes that are globally repeated images and patterns of human behaviour, saying there "constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us." (cited by de Salles, p.11, 2021). De Salles describes Jung's collective unconscious as a "depository of non-located knowledge distributed throughout the implicate order and accessible to anyone by resonance of psychic [psychological] energy." (de Salles, p.11, 2021).

Seeing beyond a traditionally formal descriptive view of aesthetics, the above describes aesthetic experience as an emotional resonance with textures, images and archetypal patterns that we recognise on a largely unconscious level from within the collective unconscious. This describes a process of subjective interaction between the viewer, the sound and/or form of the work, and archetypal imagery stored within the collective unconscious that we recognise and resonate with emotionally. While this radical new approach offers a holistic and scientific understanding of aesthetics that reaches far beyond the traditionally limiting references of taste and formal qualities, it remains at the early stages of being understood in a broader contemporary context.

To clarify the above aesthetic process, I will make a brief comparison to Aristotle's four main causes, which for over two thousand years have stood the test of time. To more clearly illustrate these causes in relation to de Salles' theory of the aesthetic process, let us also consider these causes in relation to the familiar object of a tree as a conceptually grounding point of reference.

#### 1. Efficient Cause:

- For a tree, the efficient cause is the planting of a seed. Without this action, the tree could not exist.
- For the aesthetic process, (relating to the arts), the efficient cause would be creation of an artwork in any medium. This includes the inspiration process. Without artwork to consider and the intentionality of the artist, and assuming the viewer already exists, aesthetic experience (relating to the arts) could not exist.

#### 2. Material Cause:

- Material causes of how a tree comes into being are described by physical processes of change. These can be found in the DNA structure of growth, and other material processes including osmosis of water from the roots, sap running beneath the protective layer of bark, the fibrous grains of annual growth and by the green Chlorophyll in its leaves converting energy from sunlight and carbon dioxide into oxygen through photosynthesis, among other processes. By these material causes (that vary small amounts between species), we can describe how any seed grows into a fully mature tree, keeping in mind that these are only descriptions of material causes and not qualities of the tree itself
- Seeing aesthetic experience as an emotional resonance between viewer, artwork and archetypal ideas, the material causes of this process begin with aesthetic

descriptive qualities of the medium. Like the material causes for a tree, these causes do not describe the resulting aesthetic experience. A post-modern updated version of these aesthetic qualities can include the classical tenets of beauty, but may also include any physical descriptive quality such as discord, unbalance, asymmetry, disharmony and distortion. Overlooking the subjectivity of the viewer for now, these material qualities act as a doorway to a deeper aesthetic experience in the viewer through the process of empathy. While empathy varies subjectively no aesthetic experience is possible without it, and is essential as DNA is for the tree. These formal descriptive qualities can include textures, patterns, motifs, images and expressive styles. While these aesthetic qualities change our perception towards possibly having an aesthetic experience, knowing the difference between cause and effect means they do not describe the aesthetic experience itself.

### 3. Formal Cause:

- The form and qualities of a tree begins with a mixture of pre-existing ecological and environmental factors that the tree responds to. With the species of tree governed by its DNA, other unique formal qualities include branch direction, size, height, maturity and lifespan. These qualities are caused by a form of resonance with an ecology of external environmental factors including climate and wind patterns, soil composition, reaching towards a canopy of surrounding trees, and natural or man-made disasters. In this way, even trees of the same species uniquely echo their environment resulting in no two trees being exactly alike. Regardless of specific details, experience tells us these formal causes are true for any tree.
- Seeing aesthetic experience (aesthesia), as our individual, subjective, and emotional resonance with pre-existing archetypal ideas, the formal cause of this experience begins with an ecology of these archetypal ideas stored in the collective unconscious within each of us. This infinite repertoire contains the whole of human experience, that Jung says falls into repeated patterns of 12 archetypes he defines as; Sage, Innocent, Explorer, Ruler, Creator, Caregiver, Magician, Hero, Outlaw, Lover, Jester, and Everyman. This ecology also includes other archetypal figures, textures, motifs and ideas that we see repeated across world cultures. (musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, 2023). This ecology resonates with subjective aesthetic emotions that include fragility, Beauty, joy, attraction, disgust, grief, love, empathy, anger, wisdom, etc, and mixtures of these and other feelings at varying levels of intensity. Like the above example of a tree, despite sharing this ecology with our fellow viewers, no two interpretations are exactly alike. Yet, by de Salles' theory we can apply these formal causes to all aesthetic experience in any medium without being reductive or deterministic.

### 4. Final Cause:

- Aristotle's final cause importantly asks the question of purpose, and why? The purpose of a tree is simply to be a tree; to live and experience life as a tree. Its purpose is to uniquely contribute to the greater ecology of life, death and renewal. To ask why ultimately brings us to an ecology of cosmological and/or religious causes, which is why it has been largely ignored by modern science and phenomenology as being 'unscientific,' preferring instead to focus only on the data or phenomena on the assumption that this bigger question will answer itself in the

future. But is not the question 'why'? One of the most basic scientific questions we can ask?

- The final cause of aesthetic experience is to ask the purpose and reason for art. Albert Camus describes the procedure of art is also the procedure of rebellion, which is to resist the real while conferring unity upon it (Camus, p.10, 1956). Seeing resonance with archetypal ideas through the material qualities of the chosen medium by the viewer as the formal cause for aesthetic experience, these very same frictions, resonances and emotions also generate and inspire the creation of artwork. The lifespan and final cause of an artwork is to add to this ecology of experience perhaps beyond the limitations of the viewer and artwork. This returns to Aristotle's own definition that "The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance."

With a life cycle that begins and ends in the emotional psychic realm of the subjective and collective, by the above comparisons we can see that de Salles' aesthetic process meets Aristotle's four causes which importantly includes the often neglected fourth final cause. If the final cause or purpose of aesthetics is to 'confer unity,' seeing beyond the surface appearance of things to find their inner meaning and emotional resonance through the archetypes, then perhaps we can also say the final purpose of aesthetics is to feel re-connected to the collective unconscious residing within each of us, to our inner self, to each other, and to the surrounding world.

#### References:

Baudelaire, C. Quotes. (n.d.). allauthor.com. Retrieved March 31, 2024, from allauthor.com Web site: <https://allauthor.com/quote/51957/>

Bohm, D. 1982. "The enfolding-unfolding universe: a conversation with David Bohm," Interview by Renée Weber, in *The Holographic paradigm and other paradoxes: exploring the leading edge of science*, ed. Ken Wilber. (Boulder: Shambhala,

Camus, A. 1956. "Rebellion and Art [excerpts]." *The Rebel*. New York: Vintage.

Danto, Arthur C. (2004). "Kalliphobia in Contemporary Art". *Art Journal*. **63** (2): 24-35. doi:10.2307/4134518. JSTOR 4134518.

Read, H., 1948. *Education through art*. London, Faber and Faber.

Halsall, F. Jansen, J. O'Connor, T. (Ed.) 2009. *Re-Discovering Aesthetics. Transdisciplinary Voices From Art History, Philosophy, and Art Practice*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California.

de Salles, F. (2021). The singularity of aesthetic perception: a psychic approach to artistic phenomenon based on the Jungian theory of Archetype and its correlation with the holo informational model of Karl Pribram and David Bohm University of Campinas - UNICAMP, Brazil. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356082669>

Weigelt, M. 2007. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Marcus Weigelt. Penguin Books. ISBN 978-0-1404-4747-7.