

CHAPTER I

AVANT-GARDE AND NEO-AVANT-GARDE FROM THE PURSUIT OF THE PRIMORDIAL TO THE NIHILISM OF NARCISSISM

The Idealization of the Avant-Garde Artist as Transmuter of Value

Do not
 frighten me more than you
 have to! I must live forever.
 Frank O'Hara¹

“Ah! Sir, a boy's being flogged is not so severe as a man's having the hiss of the world against him. Men have a solicitude about fame; and the greater the share they have of it, the more afraid they are of losing it.” I silently asked myself, “Is it possible that the great SAMUEL JOHNSON really entertains any such apprehension, and is not confident that his exalted fame is established upon a foundation never to be shaken?”

James Boswell²

How little are genuine artists concerned with their artistic prestige! Their primary concern is not the masterpiece itself, but the ability to create, to remain alive, even when this may often push them down below heights previously reached.

Max Frisch³

The apotheosis of the avant-garde or modernist artist as the symbol of heroic resistance to all that is oppressive and corrupt in bourgeois civilization, if not as its savior, has been until recently the major way of stating the significance of modern art. So-called postmodernism or neo-avant-garde art is the symbol of its passing, the indication that the idol has feet of clay.⁴

The avant-garde artist is conceived as a kind of Promethean adventurer, an individualist and risk taker in a sheepish society, an Overman bringing to the more timid world of the herdman, to use Friedrich Nietzsche's distinction,⁵ a new kind of fire, burning away blinding darkness and affording new insight as well as sight, a new vision of what art as well as life can be – a comprehensive new enlightenment.

2 THE CULT OF THE AVANT-GARDE ARTIST

This conception of the avant-garde artist has become the *raison d'être* – at once the centerpiece, backbone, and justification – of modern art. It has been generalized into an adulatory fetishization of the artist as such. Modern thinkers have attributed special authenticity, integrity, and power to the artist. Because he is able to be himself in a way that is impossible for other people, he is able to experience in a more fundamental, original way than they can. Indeed, he is able to experience, seemingly without mediation, what is fundamental or original in experience, while for them experience is so thoroughly shaped, even permeated, by the conventions that mediate it that they would not recognize what is fundamental to it if they stumbled across it. Not only has the artist been sharply differentiated from and elevated above others, but those others have been regarded as too ordinary to comprehend how extraordinary it is to be an artist – although they are obliged to be his audience, in homage to his creativity, if not necessarily to the particulars of his production. They are obliged to give him fame simply for his being, even if they can make no sense of it.

The artist, then, not only can realize himself more than anyone else by reason of his creativity, but is a beacon to these banal others, even a kind of Moses leading them out of their ordinary world of perception and away from their ordinary sense of life to a promised world of perception and an altogether novel sense of life. He is one of those heroes we are supposed to worship, for he has overcome fate through creativity. We submit to him, and to that collectivity called created art, in order to realize vicariously our own creativity.⁶ The artist acts it out for us; by identifying with him we imagine we have a unique identity of our own. An actor on the grand stage of art history, his fame is the audience's surrogate identity and creativity.

There are two kinds of avant-garde constructions – mythologizations – of the artist: those that attribute special perceptual power to him and those that regard him as uniquely authentic in an inauthentic society. In Enrico Baj's words, this is why avant-garde art, even though it takes no "definite stand," is "opposed to things . . . on a formal level," that is, perceptually subversive, and why it "confronts and opposes officialdom," that is, seems socially subversive.⁷ In a final mythifying touch, the artist is idealized for the transmutation of value – for the revolution in the sense of life – that his perceptual and personal authenticity effect and symbolize. Not only do they serve his self-transmutation – his personal release from the agony of life, an agony he is conscious of and a liberation he desperately desires – but, through the art that embodies his authenticity, he transmutes the lives of others, giving them a liberation they were too sunk in suffering to know they needed. Indeed, they did not know that life was as much of a suffering as it was until they were released from that suffering through art. Possessed by art, a new spirit of life awakens in them. By an artistic miracle, despair about life changes into joy at living; ecstatic experience replaces a sense of the futility of existence. Indeed, existence itself seems transfigured – new and fresh where it was once old and stale. Instead of the depressing feeling that one's life, and one's world, are in irreversible decline, they feel alive with possibility. Instead of the debilitating sense of decadence, there is the invigorating sense of confident advance. Our exhilaration sweeps aside all

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Donald Kuspit

Excerpt

[More information](#)**AVANT-GARDE AND NEO-AVANT-GARDE 3**

impediments, opening new horizons. Our self and the world seem reborn and transfigured – as ineradicably alive and authentic as the artist himself. His self-overcoming has shown us the way to our own. No doubt he is in a class by himself, not only because he cannot relapse to ordinariness and inauthenticity, but also because he has shown us the way to experience as he does – even to feel as authentic as he feels – however briefly. We too can, transiently, through the experience of art, know what it is to experience primordial reality and feel personally authentic – to be heroic.

I think it is worth the trouble to spell out the details of this belief system, for while in serious disrepair it has hardly passed from the scene. Indeed, this book is about the conflict between two fundamentally irreconcilable conceptions of the artist – the contradictory sense of the artist we have today. Such contradiction suggests that our idea of – and, above all, our attitude toward – the artist is undergoing a so-called paradigm change. Behind the glowing respect for art is a certain doubt about what it gives us. This book is about the simultaneity of this respect and doubt: it is about the new ambivalence about the artist – in contrast to the old ambivalence, in which his deviance and outsidership were unconsciously admired and envied even as they were consciously deplored. Today, the artist remains an unconventional hero, but he is also perceived as a pretender – all too stylized and privileged in his unconventionality – if not quite a conventional fraud. He is a lover of life and renewer of experience, but also what can only be called a necrophiliac of art, more in love with it – especially if it is dead – than with life. He mediates aspects of experience we never even knew were there, making us aware of it in a way we never knew was possible and disclosing subtleties where we saw only grossly; but he also betrays experience by codifying it stylistically, preserving it in aesthetic amber whose glow in the end becomes more important to him than the experience itself. The artificial aura of art becomes more important than the aliveness of experience. The avant-garde artist is a myth in which we have invested all too much of ourselves; disinvesting, and unmasking him – breaking the spell – we discover the nightmare of the neo-avant-garde artist, giving us a myth of art rather than of experience. He tells us that we can have profound, magical experience by rubbing the Aladdin's lamp of art, while the avant-garde artist tells us that we can have profound, magical art by rubbing the Aladdin's lamp of experience. Who are we to believe and trust?

Alfred North Whitehead writes:

We look up and see a coloured shape in front of us, and we say, – there is a chair. But what we have seen is the mere coloured shape. Perhaps an artist might not have jumped to the notion of a chair. He might have stopped at the mere contemplation of a beautiful colour and a beautiful shape. But those of us who are not artists are very prone, especially if we are tired, to pass straight from the perception of the coloured shape to the enjoyment of the chair, in some way of use, or of emotion, or of thought. . . . I am very sceptical as to the high-grade character of the mentality required to get from the coloured shape to the chair. One reason for this scepticism is that my friend the artist, who kept himself to the contemplation of colour, shape and position, was a very highly trained man, and had acquired this facility of ignoring the chair at the cost of great labour. . . . Another reason for

4 THE CULT OF THE AVANT-GARDE ARTIST

scepticism is that if we had been accompanied by a puppy dog, in addition to the artist, the dog would have acted immediately on the hypothesis of a chair and would have jumped onto it by way of using it as such. Again, if the dog had refrained from such action, it would have been because it was a well-trained dog. Therefore the transition from a coloured shape to the notion of an object which can be used for all sorts of purposes which have nothing to do with colour, seems to be a very natural one; and we – men and puppy dogs – require careful training if we are to refrain from acting upon it.⁸

This celebration of the artist inaugurates Whitehead's discussion of the distinction between presentational immediacy and causal efficacy, and more generally, between direct sense perception and symbolism. For Whitehead, "sense-perception is mainly a characteristic of more advanced organisms; whereas all organisms have experience of causal efficacy whereby their functioning is conditioned by their environment."⁹ For Whitehead, the artist is clearly a very advanced organism. While the rest of us remain completely dependent on symbols, which more or less facilitate our functioning in our environment, the artist is able to transcend them toward pure "sense presentations," which, as ends in themselves giving us a primordial sense of the environment, have nothing to do with our functioning. The artist deals in "direct experience," which is "infallible" – for "what you have experienced, you have experienced" – while "symbolism is very fallible, in the sense that it may induce actions, feelings, emotions, and beliefs about things which are mere notions without that exemplification in the world which the symbolism leads us to presuppose."¹⁰ As Whitehead says, while it is important that an organism's success in an environment that its "symbolic functionings [be] justified so far as important issues are concerned," the fact of the matter is that "the errors of mankind equally spring from symbolism," necessitating that "reason . . . understand and purge the symbols on which humanity depends."¹¹ Whitehead seems to think that the artist does not use direct sense experience to symbolic purpose, but exhibits it in all its presentational immediacy. As such, what he does is not subject to the correction of reason. That is, one cannot reason about – rationalize, in all the varieties of that word's meaning – sense presentations; one can only acknowledge and enjoy them aesthetically.

It hardly seems true that art can liberate us from symbols, that it has little or nothing to do with them – that the artist can restrain himself so completely from symbolic functioning as to avoid the slightest hint of the symbolic significance of sense presentations. He is not only an artist but an ordinary man who cannot help wondering what his sense presentations mean. By investing them, however unconsciously, with meaning and with his own sense of life, he cannot help regarding them as signs, if obscure, of something in the environment or in his psyche. The artist's phenomenological reduction, as it were, of symbolic functioning can never be complete, by reason of his human condition. Indeed, what we sense is already fraught with symbolic significance, so that to describe the sense presentation as the kernel of experience and its symbolic meanings as so many shells – discardable dross – seems a gross falsification of experience. It

AVANT-GARDE AND NEO-AVANT-GARDE 5

seems impossible that sense presentations could have nothing inherently to do with intention and function. Why should Whitehead think that the artist can avoid the banality of “the causal side of experience,” so “dominating” for everyone else, or disentangle it more easily from sense experience?¹² It is, in symbolic form and fused with sense experience, constitutive of our sense of reality. Indeed, the sense of reality is the by-product of the dialectical integration of sense experience and presupposed symbols. It seems that Whitehead’s attribution to the artist of the power of autonomous sensing idealizes him – and it – beyond the reach of theory. The artist is the exception that proves the rule of experience for everyone else. Whitehead’s conception of the artist also suggests that the artist is more uncannily objective than the rest of us, for in pushing his sense presentations to the fore in his art he is insisting that there is something more fundamental in experience than any symbolization of it indicates – something that every symbolization assumes. Thus Whitehead doubly idealizes the artist, considering the artist’s “sensibility” profoundly “realistic.”

Such idealization of the artist is classically modernist. Whitehead’s seemingly absurd assumption, absolutizing one aspect of art and suggesting a blind spot – even a serious philosophical wrongheadedness and inadequacy – in its inevitable symbolic functioning, is a standard modernist belief about art. Indeed, in being conceived as a direct articulation of sense presentation, art becomes as infallible and unique as that experience, and as such the privileged avenue of approach to what is ultimate in experience. Whitehead even implies that if there were no such being as an artist we would not know what a pure sense presentation is, except fitfully and intermittently. Art not only makes the data of experience directly available but confirms them as fundamental and fated – primordial. Whitehead’s elevation of art over symbolic functioning is hardly novel. For example, Leo Bersani asserts that art has nothing to do with the “communication of knowledge,” which involves “difficulty” and requires interpretation – Whitehead’s “correction” of reason (knowledge would be symbolization of causal functioning for him) – but rather has to do with the “enigmatic display of being” in all its “density.”¹³ Or, in Susan Sontag’s formulation, an “erotics” of art is more to the point than an interpretation of it, which tends to obscure – almost read away – the sense presentations art conveys through its own sensuous presence.¹⁴

In sum, the myth of the avant-garde artist involves the belief that he is initiated into the mysteries of primordial experience. He is able to display the sensuous density of being with a primordial sensuousness equal to its own, to produce works of art as enigmatically dense as being itself. His art is an amazing act of primordial mimesis, in which he unlearns or suspends ordinary symbolizations of experience – one might say the inhibitory symbolizations of experience that make it ordinary – in order to display its primordial givenness. The intensification of color and shape that art seems to effect – the unusual presence it gives them – bespeaks its power to present them with primordial immediacy. Presentation is all, representation nothing in authentic art.

6 THE CULT OF THE AVANT-GARDE ARTIST

The primordial immediacy of the sense presentation suggests that it is in perpetual process of self-formation, and as such always new. At the same time, it seems the totality of experience. By its very nature, it cannot tempt us to jump to causal conclusions, for it leads nowhere, points to nothing. Even though it is a kind of limit to experience, it has nothing to do with the unavoidable functional and emotional limits of human experience. By reason of the aesthetic glory of its presentational immediacy, which makes it unprecedented and without consequence, it seems the fundamental reality.

Erich Fromm idealizes the artist's spontaneity, arguing that "while spontaneity is a relatively rare phenomenon in our culture," there are "individuals who are – or have been – spontaneous, whose thinking, feeling, and acting were the expression of their selves and not of an automaton. These individuals are mostly known to us as artists. As a matter of fact, the artist can be defined as an individual who can express himself spontaneously."¹⁵ Why is spontaneous expression so important? Because while "emotional and intellectual potentialities . . . are present in everybody, they become real only to the extent they are [spontaneously] expressed. In other words, *positive freedom consists in the spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality.*"¹⁶ In a sense, without spontaneous activity we do not know what our potentialities are. According to Fromm:

Spontaneous activity is not compulsive activity, to which the individual is driven by his isolation and powerlessness; it is not the activity of the automaton, which is the uncritical adoption of patterns suggested from the outside. Spontaneous activity is free activity of the self and implies, psychologically, what the Latin root of the word, *sponte*, means literally: of one's free will. By activity we do not mean "doing something," but the quality of creative activity that can operate in one's emotional, intellectual, and sensuous experiences and in one's will as well. One premise for this spontaneity is the acceptance of the total personality and the elimination of the split between "reason" and "nature"; for only if man does not repress essential parts of himself, only if he has become transparent to himself, and only if the different spheres of his life have reached a fundamental integration, is spontaneous activity possible.¹⁷

Thus Fromm attributes a monopoly on free will and self-integration to the artist, as if he alone could end the dissociation of sensibility – the alienation of thinking from feeling, and vice versa – that T. S. Eliot regards as characteristic of modernity.¹⁸ While Fromm says that "the artist can be defined as an individual who can express himself spontaneously," and thus that "certain philosophers and scientists have to be called artists too," in fact he regards the creative artist's self-expression as the model for spontaneous activity, as suggested by his metaphoric comparison of inartistic philosophers and scientists with artistic ones. The former "are as different from [the latter] as an old-fashioned photographer from a creative painter."¹⁹ Moreover, one needs an "objective medium," such as the artist's, in and through which to be spontaneously expressive. Philosophers and scientists do not, strictly speaking, project themselves into a medium, nor can what they do – communicate knowledge – be regarded as spontaneously expressive. Communicating knowledge inhibits spontaneity and creativity; the

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Excerpt

[More information](#)**AVANT-GARDE AND NEO-AVANT-GARDE 7**

artist, on the other hand, is concerned only with expressing himself spontaneously and with objectifying his creativity in a medium.

“The spontaneous gesture is the True Self in action,” writes D. W. Winnicott. “Only the True Self can be creative and only the True Self can feel real. Whereas a True Self feels real, the existence of a False Self results in a feeling unreal or a sense of futility.”²⁰ From this point of view, Fromm’s idealization of the artist as more spontaneous than other people privileges the artist as more truly himself than others can ever be. Saying that an artist spontaneously expresses himself in his art acquires another nuance of meaning: it means that through his art he makes his sense of feeling-real alive and real for others. He projects it into his medium, which projects it for others. Perhaps creativity consists in such projection: the artist makes others feel real and integral by his own spontaneous activity, his expression of his True Self. Fromm’s differentiation between spontaneous activity and compulsive activity, free activity and automatic activity, the creative expression of an integrated self and the routine doing of things by the unintegrated person, is, in Winnicott’s terms, the difference between the True and False Selves. While the False Self’s “defensive function is to hide and protect the True Self,” and at its healthiest the False Self’s “main concern [is] a search for conditions which will make it possible for the True Self to come into its own,” the False Self, “represented by the whole organization of the polite and mannered social attitude,”²¹ can become all too “compliant . . . to environmental demands,” all too imitative of others, all too ready to be exploited by them.²² One is then not truly oneself, to the degree that one cannot imagine what it is like to be spontaneous or feel really real.²³

Fromm, and to some extent Winnicott,²⁴ privileges the artist as more of a True Self than a False Self, or more true to himself than false to himself, because he is more spontaneously expressive than compliant to his environment, more “primary” than “reactive to external stimuli,” and as such closer to “the experience of aliveness,” associated with “the aliveness of the body tissues and the working of body-functions,” than to conformist experience of the environment.²⁵ Is the artist’s False Self defense inadequate, which is why he looks – only looks – truer to himself than other people seem to be to themselves? Is he really all True Self, or more True Self than anyone else? Might his spontaneity be compulsivity in disguise? Fromm doesn’t consider these possibilities. The artist never forfeits his primordial spontaneity, his basic sense of True Selfhood. Like Whitehead, Fromm cannot think critically about the artist. He confuses a theoretical construct with a perfected person.

These, then, are the basic articles of faith in the avant-garde artist: he is more spontaneous – primordially expressive – than anyone else because he is more absolutely integrated than anyone else, and he can experience in a more primordial way than other people because his sense perception is not bound by symbolic functioning. It is because the artist is spontaneous in the face of an environment asking him to conform to it that he is able to sense reality in all its presentational immediacy. To put this in Whiteheadian language, it is because the artist does not accept society’s symbol systems that he is able to sense with unusual directness what is fundamental. He is more

8 THE CULT OF THE AVANT-GARDE ARTIST

alive, as it were, or rather more sensitive to his aliveness, than the rest of us, which is why he is ecstatically alive to sense presentations. He is able to quintessentialize reality in a sense of the primordial because he is quintessentially himself.

The avant-garde artist's sense of the primordial embodies itself in what Hermann Broch calls "mysticism of the medium."²⁶ In objectifying his expression in the medium, the artist invests it with his primordial sense experience and sense of self, transforming it into a primordial substance, as it were, which seems the mythical whole of experience. The medium seems to have the same immediacy as the pure sense presentation, and the same integrity as the True Self. Such mysticism – mystification and mythification? – of the medium intensifies the avant-garde artist's sense of the world's objective reality and his own subjective reality. The medium, now the primary object of sense experience, the field on which it is played out, becomes the surrogate for – indeed, the advocate of – the self. It becomes external and internal object in one, a mode of relation in itself.²⁷ Indeed, mysticism of the medium means fusing symbiotically with it, establishing a unity of internal and external values. The medium nurtures and supports – indeed, mothers – the artist, embodying his sense of purpose. Insight into the medium gives him his intention as an artist. At the same time, mysticism of the medium is not blind narcissistic investment in it, for the self responds to it instinctively and restlessly, and it is sensuously appealing only when it is sensuously unsettling, that is, when it suggests new possibilities of sensing.

Thus the medium catalyzes introspection as much as it invites inspection; that is, it affords awareness of internal as well as external states of being. It becomes a medium of feeling presentation as well as of sense presentation – the total expression of the self. The avant-garde artist is supposedly privileged to have more intense feelings as well as more intense sensations than the rest of us, and to be able to know and articulate both in a better way. One might say that sense presentations, which quintessentialize currently experienced external objects, are themselves quintessentialized by being objectified in the medium, and as such quintessentialize feelings embodied in internal objects. These are primordially experienced objects, that is, objects constituted when we were in the process of formation; they constitute our psychic form. The medium becomes the perfect transitional space,²⁸ not unlike Leonardo's wall;²⁹ it induces hallucinatory images that are as much representations of internal reality (fantasies) as of external reality (descriptions). Indeed, art's aim is to fuse both seamlessly.

In its decadent appropriation of avant-garde art, the neo-avant-garde is narcissistic, however much the avant-garde art produced under the auspices of the idea of art for art's sake seems to be narcissistic as well. If art for art's sake implies narcissism, it is secondary or defensive narcissism,³⁰ rather than the consummate, cynical, self-celebratory narcissism of neo-avant-garde art. Art for art's sake is in fact a refined mysticism of the medium, in which the feeling presentations implied by the sense presentations count more than they do, or rather in which the sense presentations are spontaneously experienced as – rather than simply seeming to symbolize – feeling

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Donald Kuspit

Excerpt

[More information](#)

AVANT-GARDE AND NEO-AVANT-GARDE 9

presentations. Art for art's sake is art's final defense against the threat posed to it by modern science and technology, which seem to deprive it of any realistic function, even of any reason for being.³¹ Art for art's sake asserts that art may no longer be the most adequate expression of external reality, but that it is still the best expression of internal reality.

Fear of decadence and the wish for rejuvenation haunt – indeed, terrorize – modern thinking about art. Nietzsche's conception of art as the only means of transmuting values – of rescuing life from decadence by rejuvenating it – epitomizes this dialectic of decadence, as I have called it.³² Nietzsche's artist is an "Overman" – *the* Overman for modern times – signifying, in the words of a commentator, "the possibility of transmutation as a new way of feeling, thinking, and, above all, as a new way of being."³³ He represents the will to power, involving a "reversal of values" in which "the active" replaces "the reactive," and, on the basis of this reversal, the "transmutation of values, or *transvaluation*," in which "affirmation takes the place of negation."³⁴ In Fromm's terms, then, personal spontaneity replaces socially automatic reaction; in Winnicott's terms, the True Self's feeling-real replaces the False Self's feeling futile; and in Whitehead's terms, direct sense experience, epitomized in aesthetic awareness of presentational immediacy – the freshness of primordial sense presentations and feeling presentations – replaces symbolic functioning for the sake of causal efficacy. In every case socially induced decadence – one might say the decadence of self necessary for social functioning – is overcome by the power of self-rejuvenation, catalyzed by art. To the freshly young self, the world itself becomes young again: indeed, it is rejuvenated in the artist's senses, which have been rejuvenated by his spontaneity.

Nietzsche's Overman artist is the model of self-rejuvenation, self-transmutation, self-transfiguration – all nuances of the same transvaluation. Through his self-rejuvenation, articulated in and transmitted through his art, he rejuvenates – transmutes, transfigures – his audience. In 1884, when avant-garde art was still in its infancy, Nietzsche wrote, "Disintegration characterizes this time, and thus uncertainty." Later he wrote, "If this is not an age of decay and declining vitality, it is at least one of headlong and arbitrary *experimentation*: – and it is probable that a superabundance of bungled experiments should create an overall impression as of decay – and perhaps even decay itself."³⁵ But he has a ready solution to the problem of "our religion, morality, and philosophy . . . decadence forms of man," namely, the "*countermovement: art*."³⁶

The artist, who has "a kind of youth and spring, a kind of habitual intoxication,"³⁷ is the antidote to the "decadence" forms of man, which signify loss of vitality and will, and finally decay and disintegration. Decadence is expressed bodily, as Nietzsche makes clear. It involves a loss of "bodily vigor . . . the *primum mobile*."³⁸ Nietzsche believes in the "biological value of the *beautiful* and the *ugly*,"³⁹ with beauty signifying "*enhanced strength*" and ugliness "a decline in . . . strength."⁴⁰ But decadence is ultimately psychological: the loss of the power to will is reflected in a sense of the body's loss of strength, indeed, in a weakening, even complete loss, of the sense of its presence and power; and eventually in a sense of its

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Donald Kuspit

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10 THE CULT OF THE AVANT-GARDE ARTIST

nothingness, of being nothing. Decadence of the body – saying no to the body – reflects decadence of the spirit, that is, the spirit of saying no to everything. The decadent, like Goethe's Mephistopheles, is *der Geist der stets verneint* (the spirit who forever negates).

For Nietzsche beauty is “the expression of a *victorious* will, of increased co-ordination, of a harmonizing of all the strong desires, of an infallibly perpendicular stress,” while “ugliness signifies the decadence of . . . contradiction and lack of co-ordination between the inner [forces] – signifies a decline . . . in ‘will,’ to speak psychologically,” “in organizing strength.”⁴¹ For Nietzsche, physical strength follows from inner strength and is in part a metaphor for it. For while physical decline brought on by aging may not be reversible, decadent loss of will is – by the “*aesthetic state*”⁴² induced by art. Like intoxication, it affords “an exalted feeling of *power*,”⁴³ an “altered” state of being and consciousness. Presumably this can be “bestowed” on one, to use Nietzsche's word, whatever one's age.

It is worth quoting Nietzsche at length to get a full sense of the miraculous therapeutic effect he thinks the aesthetic state has on life – the state “in which we infuse a transfiguration and fullness into things and poetize about them until they reflect back our fullness and joy in life”:

The sensations of space and time are altered: tremendous distances are surveyed and, as it were, for the first time apprehended; the extension of vision over greater masses and expanses; the refinement of the organs for the apprehension of much that is extremely small and fleeting; *divination*, the power of understanding with only the least assistance, at the slightest suggestion: “intelligent” *sensuality* – ; strength as a feeling of dominion in the muscles, as suppleness and pleasure in movement, as dance, as levity and *presto*; strength as pleasure in the proof of strength, as bravado, adventure, fearlessness, indifference to life or death – All these climactic moments of life mutually stimulate one another; the world of images and ideas of the one suffices as a suggestion for the others: – in this way, states finally merge into one another though they might perhaps have good reason to remain apart. For example: the feeling of religious intoxication and sexual excitation (– two profound feelings, co-ordinated to an almost amazing degree. . .)⁴⁴

It is as if Nietzsche is describing the expressive aura of the avant-garde work of art and its effect on its invariably decadent perceiver – the healing sense of “‘intelligent’ *sensuality*” it ideally emanates and evokes. Awesomely erotic, it signals its service in the religion of excitement, where the feeling of transcendence is the ultimate intoxication. It is in the intoxicated state of artistic transcendence that “the inner need to make of things a reflex of one's own fullness and perfection” is completely satisfied, evoking an exalted “feeling of enhanced power.”⁴⁵

Nietzsche's ecstatic account of the aesthetic state clearly involves much wish fulfillment, although he was perhaps so sensitive – one might say desperately sensitive – to art that it did indeed induce in him the extraordinarily enhanced sense of being he reports. However, as he describes it, the aesthetic state is one of hallucination or hallucinatory exaggeration brought on by self-intoxication. That is, it is a narcissistic state of self-affirmation, a state in which the wish to be an integral self with a strong