

## Chapter 2: Art, Aesthetics, and Aesthetic Experience

As is outlined in the previous chapter, there is a certain precarity in segregating Instapoetry from so-called traditional poetry in terms of form and content. At least two instances can be cited in this regard to uncover the dubitable basis of generalising Instapoetry and further dissociating it. Firstly, there is Carl Wilson recollecting John Ashbery's lines, "And the poem / Has set me softly down beside you. The poem is you" and subsequently yoking the tone and lucidity of expression in these lines with Rupi Kaur's poetics (2017). Further, it can be seen in the apparent popularity of Atticus's poetry (an "Instapoet"), who was earlier accused by Collin Yost of plagiarising writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, T. E. Lawrence, and Oscar Wilde (Fallon 2018). Poetic felony aside, one can hardly overlook the fact that Atticus's poetry was well-received, not for the features that "Instapoetry" is usually attributed for popularity; it was loved despite and because of its imitation of traditional poets. Although this is not always the case, as Atticus's fame prior to these posts has to be considered before concluding that traditional poetry too receives equal attention—let alone more sincere curiosity—as poetry written specifically for earning popularity on the platform. However, these instances confirm that context, not form, determines the experience of poetry, and in turn, of all art.

Again, it would not be sufficient to suggest pressing conclusions merely out of instances such as those stated above in the presence of an already existing discourse on the definition of art and its experience borne by the discipline of philosophical aesthetics. Consequently, the present chapter attempts to comprehensively discuss some theories relevant to the subject matter at hand, consolidated by experts under the discipline of Aesthetics. As it does so, its objective is to question the adequacy of the frameworks in arriving at a satisfactory understanding of instapoetry, whereas the aim is to arrive, as far as possible, at an aesthetic lens accurate for its study.

Since the criticism of Instapoetry—being low or non-art—predominantly arises from concerns pertaining to its value assessment, the chapter aims to draw a discussion focused on Analytical Aesthetics, which deals with the questions of taste and value in art. The first section takes a chronological course from modern to postmodern conceptions of taste and value in art; while the second section deals with some noteworthy theories on *aesthetic experience*—a framework that the first section surmises to be crucial in the assessment of art (see fig. 2.1).

# Aesthetics: A Timeline

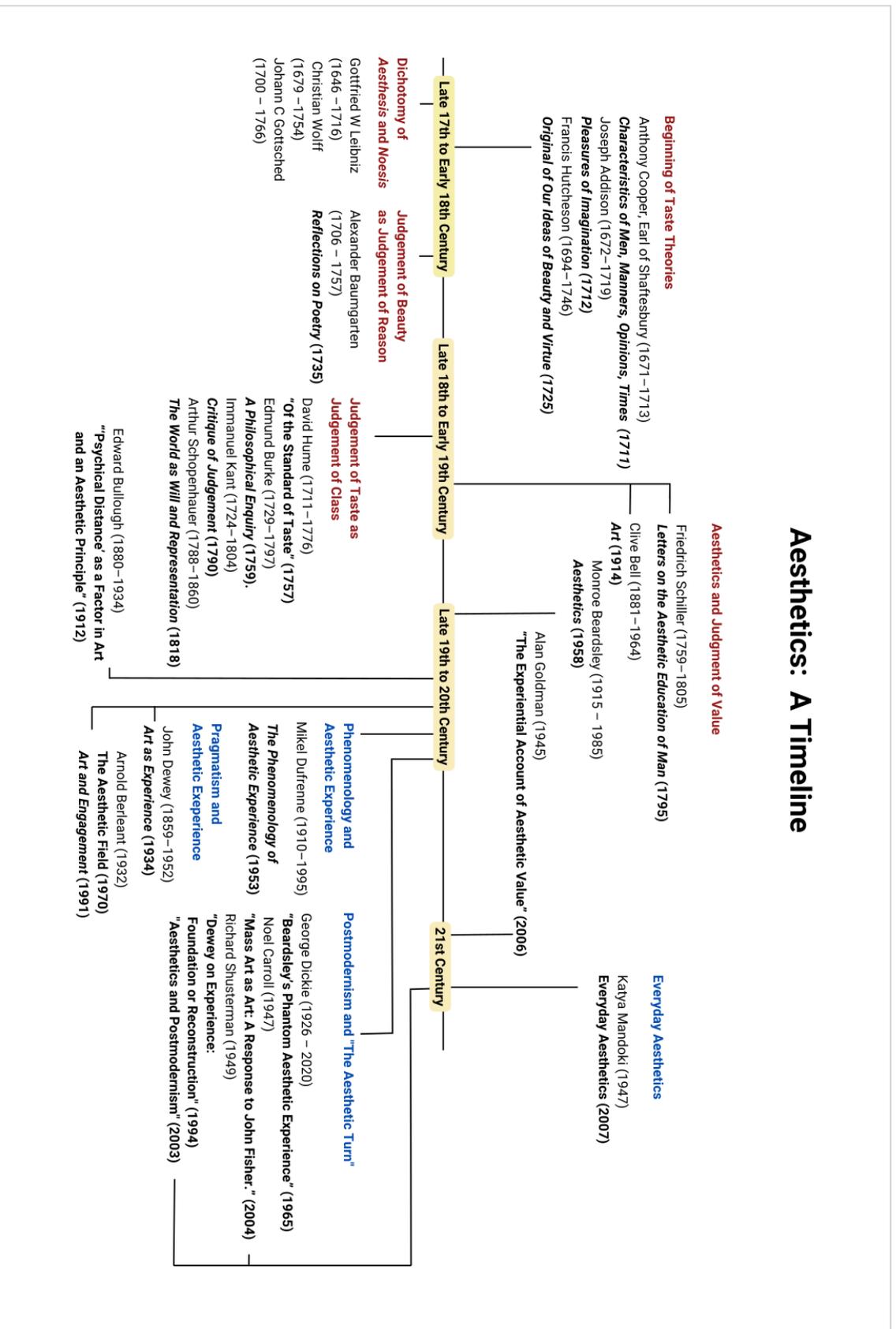


Fig 2. 1 Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Timeline

## 2.1 Modern and Postmodern Aesthetics

Discussions on the study and value of art date back to Greek and Latin philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Panaetius, Plotinus, Augustine and so forth. But what sets modern aesthetics apart from the ancient philosophy of art is its particular focus on the "fine arts" and emphasis on art for its own sake and not merely for moral good.<sup>27</sup> Thus, aesthetics as philosophy of art was initially conceived as a science in the spirit of the Age of Enlightenment, where the thinkers understood it as a rational way to study sensations and imagination associated with beauty in art (Kristeller 5). Therefore, a proper definition of aesthetics as a theory of experience of beauty, would, more so, signify modern aesthetics, where its primary engagement is with the investigation of objects of beauty and their effect on the senses.

Modern aesthetics is said to have developed in the philosophical thinking of German philosophers like Leibniz, Christian Wolff, and J. Chr. Gottsched (Wessel 333), in the dichotomised positioning of *aisthesis* (sensory experience) and *noesis* (reason), and it was not until Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's *Reflections on Poetry* (1954 [1735])<sup>28</sup> that Philosophical Aesthetics (*epistêmê aisthetikê*) was concretised for eighteenth-century philosophers, and consequently their modern successors (Guy 2020). Baumgarten introduced the term "aesthetic" as something that marks the difference between "things known" and "things perceived," where "things known" belong to the superior faculty as the object of logic, while "things perceived" belong to the inferior faculty as the object of the perceptive sciences— aesthetic (1954, 78). Furthermore, Baumgarten maintained in *Metaphysics* that "the science of knowing and presenting with regard to the senses is *Aesthetics* (the logic of the inferior cognitive faculty, the philosophy of graces and muses, inferior gnoseology, the art of thinking beautifully, the art of the analogue of reason)" (Baumgarten 2013, 205).

Benedetto Croce later denied the claim that Baumgarten established aesthetics as an independent philosophical discipline, as he accused Baumgarten of continuing the rationalist intellectualism of his predecessors in viewing aesthetic experience as entailing an inferior form

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<sup>27</sup> To Paul Kristeller, the Greek term for Art (Τέχνη) and its Latin equivalent (ars) encompassed a broader range of human activity, including crafts and sciences, rather than being limited to the current concept of 'fine arts' (4). James O. Young notes the distinction between fine arts and mechanical arts in the work of Charles Batteux. According to Batteux, "poetry, painting, sculpture, music, and dance are clearly identified as the fine arts and distinguished from the mechanical arts... [that] serve practical needs such as providing food and shelter" (18). However, Young argues against this stark distinction.

<sup>28</sup> Alexander Baumgarten's thesis, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (1735), was translated by Karl Aschenbrenner and William Holther as *Reflections on Poetry* (1954).

of intellectual truth (Wessel 334). Similarly, James Shelley maintains that Baumgarten's account of aesthetics was grounded in the rationalist theory, which holds that judgements of beauty are judgements of reason. This means that one judges and attributes beauty to objects by way of reasoning; the inference on the beauty of the object is drawn from a principle or rule (Shelley 2013, 247). In other words, beauty is objective, it lies in the object or form that art is.<sup>29</sup>

Shelley submits that it was against this ideation of aesthetic, as merely that which corresponds to sensory perception, that theories on taste developed in early eighteenth-century England, initiated by Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury and Joseph Addison, which fully and properly culminated into the theories of Francis Hutcheson and David Hume<sup>30</sup>. Beauty, according to the Taste theories, is subjective and lies in the perception of the viewer; they helped shape a more specific meaning of aesthetics by focusing on a way of perceiving the world that is not driven by personal wants or concerns and is characterised by a focus on the object for its own sake. Later, these theories, along with Baumgarten's approach, make the point of reference as well as departure for Immanuel Kant's detailed account of the "disinterested" aesthetic judgement (Levinson 2003, 9).

### 2.1.1 Aesthetical Judgement of Taste

The concept of aesthetic taste and its separation from the rationalist theories on the judgement of beauty based on reason is perhaps best exemplified in Frank Sibley's ideas in his paper, "Aesthetic Concepts" (1959). Sibley mentions some commonly used aesthetic terms/expressions, "*unified, balanced, integrated, lifeless, serene, somber, dynamic, powerful, vivid, delicate, moving, trite, sentimental, tragic*" (535), and asks where and how these terms apply. He explores these taste concepts, what he calls *aesthetic* concepts, to inquire if there are any conditions under which they are formed. Sibley proposes that even if appreciation of aesthetic qualities passes through a process of judging non-aesthetic features of art, Taste concepts are not limited to particular rules; they are not condition-governed. So the presence

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<sup>29</sup> Wessel argues against this charge and proposes that Baumgarten did expand the definition of knowledge, however, not breaking completely from the rationalist tradition. Wessel notes that Baumgarten's content of logic does not completely exhaust this concept of knowledge, because there is one area of knowledge where it is not possible to reduce phenomena to their fundamental substance. *Aesthetics* or "sensitive cognition," is this field. According to Baumgarten, it is the phenomenon and not the various causes of sensation that are of importance to aesthetics, and "beauty" lies in the perfection of this phenomena as phenomena (Wessel 338).

<sup>30</sup> The other works on theory of taste listed as important by James Shelley are: *An Essay on Taste* (1759) by Alexander Gerard; *Elements of Criticism* (1762) by Lord Kames, and *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790) by Archibald Alison (Shelley 2013, 37).

of a certain shape or colour does not contribute significantly to these concepts. It is rather in the role played by taste or perceptiveness that these concepts are born.

Before affirming that everyone possesses a taste to a certain degree, Sibley also agrees that matters of taste in aesthetic discrimination are not so general and that "people who exhibit a sensitivity both wide-ranging and refined are a minority" (536). One requires a heightened perception or aesthetic sensitivity to unravel the aesthetic qualities that do not perhaps lie in individual features. Thus, this idea of taste, drawing distinctions between individuals with a refined taste and individuals without one, is also an unbeknownst summary to the causes of its criticism by Pierre Bourdieu (1984), which will be discussed later in this section. But first, one must be acquainted with the approximate origin of the theories of taste back in eighteenth-century England, initiated by Lord Shaftesbury's engagement with beauty in the subjects of art and science.

Shaftesbury's dialogue centres on matters of beauty in the second section of the third part of *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), where his concern is with searching for beauty in subjects other than nature, i.e., architecture, music, and painting. Here he proposes a theory of taste and explicates the process of its acquisition, whereby taste is "gained" through long years of practice, as one may not be able to instantly acquire the sense by which beauty is discovered (97). According to him, beauty lies in beautifying rather than the beautified material object. He contends, "That the beautiful, the fair, the comely, were never in the matter, but in the art and design; never in body itself, but in the form or forming power" (98). However, the beauty one receives in the same colours and shapes through the faculty of senses is not alike for every individual. It is possible that the same forms are appreciated by different people in varying degrees, wherein comes the role of mind and opinion (101). Thus, for Shaftesbury, it is the faculty of mind that governs, orders, and regulates the principles of beauty, and towards the conclusion of the section, it is hinted that it takes refined taste to identify objects of beauty.

Joseph Addison's *Pleasures of Imagination* (1712), which was published as a series of eleven papers in *The Spectator* and went on to be one of the formative theories on taste and imagination, follows Shaftesbury in saying that regulation of beauty is a matter of the faculty of mind. Addison builds on the observation to introduce the idea of judgement and attempts at a more polished and systematic definition of taste as a judgement of pleasure. For this, he initially sets pleasures of imagination apart from pleasures of understanding, and then separates

primary from secondary pleasures of imagination—reminiscent of Shaftesbury's three orders of beauty. For Addison, taste relates to the judgement of the pleasure of imagination in an artistic representation, i.e., secondary pleasures. Followingly, one of the three questions he deals with in his papers concerns pleasure arising from representation and its connection with taste. Addison answers this by conceding that in receiving the artistic representation of the object, the pleasure results from the comparison of it with the actual object; here taste is what appropriates judgement on the representation if it is accurately/in varying degrees reproducing the material object. But in comparing thus, the pleasure turns into a pleasure of understanding rather than of imagination (Addison and Steele 1898, no. 418).

His second question engages the judgement of unpleasant objects. In this case, he answers that perfection in taste demands that it be focused only on the pleasure derived from the representation of the object, and not on the pleasure derived from the object of representation. However, in reality, it is hardly possible for anyone to be incapable of or unaffected by the object of representation. Whether it is the artist or the audience, the actual material object will always interfere with the judgement. Two obvious issues can be seen here. Firstly, Addison cannot explain taste as a judgement of immediate pleasure since taste requires understanding, and understanding is not immediate. Secondly, to him, representation (or form) does not always engage everyone in the same way, and so shows a possibility of many different types of pleasures and different judgements of pleasure, making his claim to universal taste a contradiction to itself.

In *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), Francis Hutcheson moves beyond the categories of "sensible" and "rational" pleasures, and tries to understand why complex objects of beauty arouse immediate pleasure, a pleasure that cannot be methodically subsumed under the above-mentioned categories of pleasure. This he then identifies as "internal sense," which is not totally divorced from the considerations of "moral sense" (9). His ideas of beauty and harmony are of great importance. According to him, "uniformity amidst variety" (28) is the primary quality of the beautiful object that is responsible for raising the ideas of 'Beauty' and 'Harmony' in an individual upon seeing the object, and 'sense of beauty' or the "internal sense" is the power of receiving such ideas. So, while an individual possessing the 'sense of beauty' may feel pleasure on seeing the beautiful object (the representation), it is all the more possible that the same individual might not feel pleasure on experiencing that pleasure in existing reality. Thus, it can be concluded that a sense of beauty precedes the idea of advantage or interest.

Patricia Matthews recalls Townsend's remark that Hutcheson's concept of "internal sense," or the sense of beauty, acts not only as a passive sense of beauty as that which arises from mere perception but also acts as a "quasi-rational judge that perceives ideas that have value" (Matthews 250). So here, the "internal sense" is nothing but taste itself, and this taste is unaffected by an individual's worldly interests. Thus far, Shaftesbury holds up the importance of the representative form as the source of the beautiful, Addison understands that one finds something beautiful because one experiences pleasure from it (Secondary pleasure of imagination) and gradually acquires taste to experience it correctly. Hutcheson believes in "internal sense" that contributes to taste, a sense of beauty, which everyone does not possess. Further, David Hume, in his essay "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757), elaborates on the nature of judgement itself and tries to set a standard for the judgement of taste. Hume argues that judgements of taste are primarily based on sentiment rather than reason, leading to absurd and ridiculous judgements (218-219). He explains that beauty exists in the individual's mind, and there are no standards of beauty in the object. However, some works are considered more beautiful due to the appeal of judges with more sophisticated tastes (230) who are sound in identifying the eloquence in the object.

Hume's theory is criticised because of the circular nature of the analysis of aesthetic value, where "aesthetically superior artworks are those endorsed by true critics, but true critics are identified by their endorsement of the best art" (Gracyk). Moreover, the distinctions between superior and ordinary taste raise two concerning issues. Firstly, it erroneously affixes uniformity of taste to the individuals capable of superior assessment, and secondly, it fails to consider differences of culture and custom between what it ascertains as wise and vulgar.

Not very divergent from Hume in his upholding of taste as a judge of art, Edmund Burke, drawing on Addison's theory of imagination, sketches his ideas on aesthetic taste (1759). He separates taste from senses and imagination, whereby *senses* work universally for all individuals; *imagination*, which more so takes the sensory perception into account and is affected by it but is different for everyone, *taste* refers to critical taste, which "does not depend upon a superior principle in men, but upon superior knowledge" (22). Burke does not define a standard of taste as Hume does, but he does point out how wrong judgements result from inadequacy in taste (33).

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the theory of taste reached its peak with one of its most copious accounts in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790), where beauty

and its relation to aesthetic taste are discussed in greater detail. He begins the section "Critique of Aesthetic Judgement" by suggesting that judgement of taste is not a judgement of cognition and, therefore, not logical but aesthetical. Representation of something can be seen as an object, but since taste is a feeling that arises upon seeing the representation, taste is rather subjective and therefore aesthetical (45). Then he offers, following Hutcheson, that this judgement of taste is disinterested (47). To explain this disinterestedness, he differentiates between what is pleasant, beautiful, and good, where pleasant gratifies man (inclination), beautiful pleases him merely (favour), and good is esteemed/approved by him (respect) (52-53). Here, beautiful is alone, free satisfaction, disinterested. Since both beauty and judgement of taste are disinterested, the former becomes the subject matter of the latter (55). According to Kant, pure judgement of taste is independent not only of perfection but also of charm and emotion. In other words, taste must see the *beautiful* object as "necessarily" satisfying without a concept; however, this necessity must not be an objective necessity (since one cannot say that everyone will be pleased the same by the *beautiful*), but it must be "exemplary" (91-93). Thus, taste, according to Kant, must work on the logic of "common sense" (common to all and so universal), which forms the grounds on which judgement can be based (94).

While Kant theorises on the nature of judgement of taste, Arthur Schopenhauer argues that prior to judgement comes subject's experience of beauty, and subsequently elaborates on the same.<sup>31</sup> He proposes that representation of the world is an objecthood of the will, manifested when it is objectified. To explain the concept of "will," Schopenhauer cites Plato's concept of *Ideas*, which present themselves differently based on individual cognition (242). It is because of the Principle of Sufficient Reason that different individuals see things differently based on the context of space, time, and causality (Troxell). But in order to experience art, "will" must be exempt from either by sense or reason and must be devoid of spatio-temporal and causal relations to the object of art. According to Schopenhauer, most individuals lack the capacity to look past the ordinary perspective and appreciate the beautiful qualities of natural objects. He proposes to analyse the content of art by examining genius, which is characterised by the capacity to view nature aesthetically. He describes this way of experiencing as "pure contemplation" marked by objectivity (Schopenhauer 246). But, according to him, only the genius have the capacity to be a "*pure, will-less subject of cognition*" (249) and are able to create and make accessible that moment of will-less experience of beauty in a work of art.

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<sup>31</sup> Schopenhauer's illuminations in Book III of *The World as Will and Representation* (1818) are taken as a point of reference here to understand his aesthetic theory.

Whereas "the majority of people almost always...have absolutely no objectivity, i.e., genius..." (251).

Bullough's theory on "aesthetic consciousness" in "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle" (1912) is again a study of aesthetic experience that marks a gradual shift from the subjective view of aesthetics to an objective one. He sets out to clarify that he is not talking about spatial or temporal distance; however, they may have effect on the aesthetic experience in a different materiality, rather a distance in a metaphorical sense, to illustrate which he gives the example of fog at sea. Fog can be a very unpleasant thing and yet, he explains, it can be the source of some pleasure and relish. This happens because of a "difference of outlook... due to insertion of distance" (Bullough 314). He proposes that this distance appears between oneself and one's affections or objects that arouse such affections.<sup>32</sup> He further explains that, generally, experience tends to lean towards more practical purposes, where one does not take in those aspects that are indirectly connected to their experience. However, Distance is something that allows us to come in contact with those ignored aspects, which even art unfolds, and thus distance is considered to be a factor of art itself. And it is for this reason that aesthetic contemplation is considered to be objective. He further asserts that it is distance that distinguishes beauty from what is merely agreeable (315). Distance is a midway of experiencing art that is neither completely personal nor absolutely impersonal. Speaking of art, he says that the success and potency of art's appeal are directly correlated with how closely it matches one's intellectual and emotional quirks as well as the specifics of their experiences. But then there is a possibility where the correspondence between art and one's experience of it may be absent, and this he explains through "differences of 'tastes'" (316).

Apparently, while the objective view of art, by seeking beauty in the art object, hierarchises objects of beauty, Taste theories, by claiming that beauty lies in the viewer, discriminate against individuals on the basis of the degree of perceptiveness. In his seminal work, *Distinction* (1984), Pierre Bourdieu provides a social critique of the judgement of taste. He critiques the concept of taste, in one way, as a marker of "class," which sets a socio-cultural hierarchy through the distinctions made in art itself. He says, "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (1984, 6). The other aspect of Taste theories, he marks, assumes the existence of "pure aesthetic" and "pure gaze," which are distanced from the necessities of the social world.

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<sup>32</sup> Affection is "anything which affects our being, bodily or spiritually, e.g., sensation, perception, emotional state, or idea." (Bullough 314).

Such an "aesthetic disposition" not only seeks to validate itself as a universal principle but also denies the existence of a social world, again a marker of a bourgeois tendency. Through this, then, Bourdieu seeks to bring a rupture in the way that "aesthetic disposition" is conceived as distinct or even higher than "popular disposition," making it impossible to impose ideas of taste that originate from an ahistorical understanding of the work of art (1987, 202). He disclaims the domination of taste of one class over another, as he concludes,

through the economic and social conditions which they presuppose, the different ways of relating to realities and fictions, of believing in fictions and the realities they simulate, with more or less distance and detachment, are very closely linked to the different possible positions in social space and, consequently, bound up with the systems of dispositions (*habitus*)<sup>33</sup> characteristic of the different classes and class fractions (1984, 6).

While the Taste theories that deal with the ways of judging form from how it gives pleasure concretise the prevalent social distinctions; theories that engage with the judgement of value in art, by reinstating value in the kind of pleasure the form offers, do so more palpably.

### 2.1.2 Aesthetical Judgement of Value

Friedrich Schiller's partial departure from the judgements of taste can be traced in his work, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795). Moving away from theories on the nature of taste, Schiller follows Kantian formalism to reinstate the importance of the form of art for its intrinsic value. Inspired by Shaftesbury and Burke in viewing art as contributing to an advancement in mankind, he proposes to incorporate "play drive," that lies between "sense drive" and "form drive." This "play drive" is indicative of *determinableness*. It is an aesthetic state, a midway between the physical (sensual) and the moral (rational) determination. This state is achieved through indeterminacy, which then aims to reconcile the viewing subject with the greatest possible fullness, from which something positive must follow (27). He then discusses the qualities of aesthetic excellence in true works of art, which impart "high indifference and freedom of mind, united with power and elasticity." Schiller governs that true aesthetic liberty can only be expected from the form" (29) instead of substance (content).

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<sup>33</sup> Liam Gillespie echoes Bourdieu's definition (in *Outline of Theory of Practice*) of *Habitus* as "a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class" (2019).

Such an emphasis on the form of art, not for its instrumental value as in Schiller but for its intrinsic value, can be seen in Clive Bell's "The Aesthetic Hypothesis" *Art* (2020 [1914]). Likewise, Bell looks at individual aesthetic experiences through the lens of what he refers to as "significant form." He primarily agrees with the subjectivity of the experience of art, as every individual feels a certain emotion in them whenever they encounter a work of art. But he argues against the belief that the experience relies on the outlook of the subject; rather, he propounds a theory that explains that the "peculiar emotion" aroused in the subject through a "personal experience," which he calls "aesthetic emotion," is because of the presence of "significant form" in the aesthetic object itself. Thus, it is the quality of the object, certain "moving combinations and arrangements" (333), that causes the surfacing of the aesthetic emotion in the subject. However, Bell does not break away entirely from the idea of taste in discerning the qualities of great works of art, as he believes that not everyone has the ability to evaluate art. It takes qualification to arrive at a full comprehension of the qualities of the object and thus properly reach the state of aesthetic emotion (332). Apart from being circular (Carroll 2010, 3), his theory—the distinction of life emotions from aesthetic emotions—is problematic for excluding the experiences of common people in interpreting the work of art because it filters out the possibility of aesthetic experience through everyday objects of beauty.

In order to overcome the circularity of Bell's "significant form" theory, Monroe Beardsley replaces Bell's "aesthetic emotion" with "aesthetic experience" (Carroll 2010, 4) in *Aesthetics* (1958). Beardsley proposes a non-circular continuity of value from aesthetic experience to the aesthetic object, which can also be found in earlier theorisation on aesthetic experience by George Santayana. Santayana, in *The Sense of Beauty* (1896), reconsiders the role of human imagination and emotion in the judgement of art, and formulates a theory emphasising the significance of aesthetic experience. His theory on the experience of the expression in the fourth section suggests the existence of a symbiosis between the pleasure evoked and the internal (which he sees in emotional aspects) qualities of the object. Expressiveness becomes an aesthetic value (an expression) continued in an aesthetic object from the experience (124). While Santayana deals with the question of what aesthetic experience is, Beardsley's account tries to etch the qualities of that experience vis-à-vis the quality of an aesthetic object.

To Beardsley, aesthetic experience is independent of the aesthetic object. However, the quality of experience depends on the quality of the object, where the features of the experience (unity, variety and intensity) are attributed to corresponding features in the artwork (Carroll

2010, 5). This becomes clear from Beardsley's definition of artwork as a deliberate arrangement of elements designed to provide an experience with a distinct aesthetic character. In other words, it is an object that has been created with the goal of satisfying an aesthetic interest (1981, xix). Five criteria for understanding the aesthetic character of the experience, according to Beardsley, are: 1. it is directed towards an object; 2. it is marked by a feeling of freedom; 3. it is detached from affect; 4. it must involve active discovery; and 5. it has a sense of unity and wholeness (1982, 288).

George Dickie (1965) represents powerful attacks on aesthetic experience proposed by Beardsley. Dickie claims that Beardsley made a category error by claiming that important characteristics of objects of perception, like unity, intensity, and complexity, are typically paralleled in the experiences of those objects, correspondingly rendering them an aesthetic character. According to Dickie, Beardsley seems to simply confuse "the experience of completeness" with "the completeness of an experience," as experiences in themselves do not admit of features of that kind (133). Thus, Beardsley, if at all escapes the circularity of Bell, he does it insofar as he remains focused on the characteristics of the perceptual object and not on aesthetic experience in particular.

Again, Beardsley's exclusive attention on the characteristics of experience resulting from the aesthetic object, gives much weight to the form. This then goes to be the judge of the intrinsic value of art, whereby it is judged by the presence of these characteristics; the characteristics being crucial to the absolute value of art.<sup>34</sup> Joseph Margolis argues against Beardsley in "Robust Relativism" (1976). He asserts that the appreciation and experience of art are not to be sought in absolutes and universals, rather in its "aptness" and "partiality." He defends such an assertion in regards with the notions of aesthetic concepts and critical judgements of value, and claims that any work of art like a person is a "culturally emergent entity" (Margolis 45). It is for this reason that artworks are not directly, but only indirectly, accessible to the faculties of sense perception. He urges that the primary discussion surrounding aesthetic value must concern itself with social and political issues as well as the apparent inevitability of the partiality of various viewpoints on aesthetic concepts and judgements.

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<sup>34</sup> Matthew Kieran, in "Aesthetic Value: Beauty, Ugliness and Incoherence", discusses the distinction between instrumental and intrinsic value of art and specifically Beardsley's approach that locates aesthetic value in the qualities of the experience of pleasure afforded by the aesthetic object (Kieran 1997, 384). Elsewhere, Kieran, reiterating Malcolm Budd, notes that one "cannot specify the value of artworks without reference to a rich characterisation of the ways they afford us valuable experiences" (Kieran 2013, 290).

Margolis's recommendations are not absolutely inappropriate here. A particular centeredness around the role of formalistic features in evaluating art and its experience, not only overlooks the socio-cultural location of art, but also gives rise to an objective distinction in art and divides it into degrees of high and low. While this stance certainly contributes to the distinctions pertaining to high and low arts, it is not the only condition that advances the divide. John Fisher explicates the conceptual structure underlying the categories of high and low and maintains that high art, having a higher value, is generally associated with 'fine arts' as redefined by Kristeller, and low art is euphemised as popular art (Fisher 2013, 474). Fisher gathers that the hierarchy in value of high/low art may have something to do with the properties of the form, which he explains through the cluster concept of art suggested by Berys Gaut. The presence of these mentioned properties in something counts as its being an art. These properties are, "(1) possessing positive aesthetic properties... (2) being expressive of emotion, (3) being intellectually challenging... (4) being formally complex and coherent..." (Fisher 2013, 475). Consequently, according to Fisher, the degree of presence of these properties in an artwork counts towards its being high or low. To conclude, while Taste theories introduce distinctions amongst perceiving subjects, Form theories initiate a distinction in art itself through the discernment of its value.

Noel Carroll's reflections on popular art as mass art explain why the distinction between high and low does not only derive from the evaluation of artwork's form alone. Carroll presents three conditions under which an artwork comes to be defined as a mass artwork, and calls them "the art condition," "the technology condition," and "the accessibility condition," respectively.<sup>35</sup> These conditions are:

- 1.) X is a multiple instance or type artwork
- 2.) produced and distributed by a mass technology
- 3.) Which artwork is intentionally designed to gravitate in its structural choices (for example, its narrative forms, symbolism, intended affect, and even its content) toward those choices that promise accessibility with minimum effort, virtually on first contact, for the largest number of untutored (or relatively untutored) audiences (Carroll 2004, 62).

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<sup>35</sup> It was John Fisher initially who addressed the second and the third condition as "the technology condition" and "the accessibility condition" (Fisher 2004). In a follow-up discussion, Carroll named all conditions together, readdressing the first condition as "the art condition" (Carroll 2004, 62). Refer to Fisher's "On Carroll's Enfranchisement of Mass Art as Art" and Carroll's "Mass Art as Art: A Response to John Fisher" for the debate on mass art's qualification as art.

The third condition might guarantee mass art's status as low owing to its simplistic formal properties. But the first two conditions hold much importance in departing from the paradigmatic configurations of aesthetic value and support the pluralist attitude towards the determination of high and low arts. Pluralist attitude, being midway between elitist and populist viewpoints, holds that artworks can be of great artistic value in both high and popular forms and genres; however, the aesthetic values embodied in both can be of different kinds.<sup>36</sup>

Pluralism, in a way, is a result as well as one of the attitudes held in postmodern aesthetic philosophy that seeks to challenge the central orientations of modern aesthetic philosophy. Richard Shusterman lists down these orientations as follows: insistence on art's autonomy, distinction, and ideal position vis-à-vis other spheres of life; disinterested nature of the aesthetic experience; profession over the qualities of monumentality, universality, depth, and profound seriousness; predominance of clarity and purity of the form of art and its purpose. As a result, one observes a propensity to associate art solely with fine art and high art while undervaluing the aesthetic and artistic significance of industrial and popular arts (Shusterman 2003, 781).

### 2.1.3 Postmodernism, "The Aesthetic Turn", and Everyday Aesthetics

Construing and predicting the effects of Postmodernism on the field of aesthetics, Shusterman notes that "pluralism, appropriation, eclecticism, and blurring of high and low" are evidently making their way into the questions regarding "traditional aesthetic distinctions between art and life and between aesthetics and politics." In place of high modernist principles, where "artistic autonomy, unity, originality, monumentality, universality, and progress" promote the conventional division between high art and popular culture, postmodernism advocates eclectic appropriation and embraces popular taste and vernaculars in an artistic creation. The old aesthetic values of permanence and skilfully crafted perfection are challenged by postmodern thought, which emphasises temporality and contingency (Shusterman 2003, 773).

This shift is made possible in Shusterman's observation of "the aesthetic turn" (777)—an analogy derived from "the linguistic turn that corresponds to the dominant shift in understanding language in post structuralist philosophy—that comes about parallelly. As opposed to *Reason*, the supreme value associated with the *Enlightenment* logic of modernity,

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<sup>36</sup> Refer to John Fisher's essay "High Art Versus Low Art" (2013) for a clearer idea on "elitism," "populism," and "pluralism."

he ideates, through the theories of Habermas, Nietzsche and Lyotard<sup>37</sup>, an aesthetic principle as governing most of the postmodern way of thinking and experiencing; he hastens to add that "this aesthetic is demonised as 'reason's absolute other', an anti-rational, Dionysian 'decentered subjectivity liberated from all constraints of cognition and purposive activity'. Postmodernism thus 'reduces everything that is and should be to the aesthetic dimension'" (776). However, postmodern thought is only aesthetic inasmuch as it is not detached, like *Enlightenment* aesthetics, from the political. In that sense, the role of perceptions and sensations in construction and interpretation of the world is taken seriously. Given the seeming divide between politics and aesthetics, there seems to be an even greater tendency to reject the aesthetic principle of postmodernism as politically ineffective and unengaged. But some postmodern theories and artistic practices challenge this dichotomy, and as a result, they align with pragmatist aesthetics in acknowledging that aesthetic experience—not least in some popular arts—has profound and potent ties to the concerns surrounding that which is practical, ethical, and political (779).

In other words, the segmented autonomy of art and aesthetics from their non-aesthetic influences as well as diminution of the profundity of high art are undermined only insofar as they are assumed to be ever-permeating the ubiquitous world (social, ethical, and political). This is especially so because the postmodernists, David Novitz affirms, pointing to Margolis and Nietzsche, assert that individuals are rather historically and socially constructed. The way they perceive, register and understand the world is the result of a historical process of which they are normally oblivious but which is profoundly formative and not dismissible. Subsequently, the existence of ultimate facts, truths, logic, value, and totality of knowledge are also questioned. Instead, everything that is considered to be true is subjective to personal interests and the worldviews these interests produce (Novitz 172-73).

Following this conception, Shusterman estimates two things: the focus of postmodern aesthetic philosophy and the methodological attitudes to arrive at it. The point of departure for him is to see art as intricately intermingled with various facets of life and culture, where

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<sup>37</sup> Jean-François Lyotard understands the postmodern as that which, "in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work" (Postmodern Condition 81).

Social and political issues, popular arts, and everyday aesthetic issues (fashion, environment, lifestyles) all become important for aesthetic theory. Appropriation, eclecticism, difference, pluralism, contingency, playfulness, and even fragmentation, ephemerality, and superficial frivolity similarly come to be appreciated as aesthetic values... And what methodological attitudes characterize a postmodern aesthetic philosophy? Most likely, attitudes of anti-essentialist pluralistic openness, anti-foundationalist fallibilism, contextualism, pragmatic engagement, interdisciplinarity, self-critical irony, and concern for the social, political, and economic forces that structure the artworld and aesthetic experience (2003, 781).

Intriguingly, there seems to be a gap between the conception of postmodernist theory of aesthetics and the critical judgement of postmodernist poetics. Postmodern poetics, in being self-reflexive, self-conscious, and polyphonic, often consist of metafictional aesthetic. However "heterarchical"<sup>38</sup> In nature, comprehending postmodernist poetics in terms of aesthetic principles of the modern philosophy still contributes to the creation of a new order of postmodernist avant-garde replacing the old hierarchy of high and low with a new one. So, the postmodern way of thinking may be successful in re-positing the value in popularity when contested against high art, but the presumption that *popular* is essentially bad cannot be refuted until the classical disinterestedness is completely done away with. The binary stays if one does not switch to an outlook that correctly appropriates the popular, and so, even the everyday. This would mean conflating the boundaries between art and life, between aesthetics and ethics. This very blurring of distinctions worries some contemporary philosophers, like Åhlberg, who fear aesthetics being eclipsed by panaestheticism.

Lars-Olof Åhlberg warns that subsuming ethics under aesthetics would culminate in a new kind of a-morality that forsakes the "hedonistic consumerism" of the hyperreal aestheticization of life-styles, ethics and everyday life (34-38). Nevertheless, given the significant impact of aesthetic processes in new media, he proposes that the examination of the incorporation of aesthetics into theory, ethics, and everyday life should be conducted within the realms of "philosophy and sociology of culture and the criticism of culture" (42). But in pursuing such a claim, Åhlberg departs from the basic tenet of postmodernist thought by hypothesising a fundamental gap between art, aesthetics, and culture. Rita Felski argues against this "beauty and the beast scenario" of separating aesthetics from socio-cultural consequences, bringing the role of aesthetics in cultural studies to the fore (29). She talks about the possibility

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<sup>38</sup> Avishek Parui borrows the term "Heterarchy" from computer science and uses it to signify an order "where the narrative often operates like a distributive chain, directly informs the postmodernist poetics of polyphony and centrelessness" (2).

of bringing aesthetics into the discipline of cultural studies. However, it is perhaps not safe to conclude that opening cultural studies for an aesthetic meditation is ideologically equivalent to extending the horizon of aesthetics to include cultural ruminations. The point here is that the convergence of the aesthetical and the cultural—of art and life—is at the very least conceivable.

On a different tangent, this convergence is observed in the recent discourse on everyday aesthetics that, unlike modern aesthetic theory, advocates a continuity between art and life. Yuedi and Carter (2014) follow Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Dewey in seeing a non-dichotomous relationship between the subjective and the objective in the experience of art. Their focus lies more on "life as art" than "art as life", and "experience as art" than "art as experience" (xii). A clearer theory on everyday aesthetics can be read in Katya Mandoki's understanding of *prosaics* as an aesthetic dimension of the everyday and the ordinary, or an aesthetic sensibility to look at the everyday and the ordinary (77). She maintains that *prosaics* does not believe that all everyday objects are aesthetic (i.e., aesthetic objectualism). Thus, she is able to bring art and life together, disclaiming the charges of panaestheticism (73-74), by introducing the difference between "art as art" and "life as art," which is reflected in the divergence—with multiple possibilities of intersection—between *poetics* and *prosaics*. Mandoki explains that *poetics*, as materially distinct from *prosaics*, is a candidate for aesthetic appreciation owing to its location in what George Dickie and Arthur Danto call "the artworld" (76)<sup>39</sup>. Here, the categories derived from an overlapping manifestation of *prosaic* and *poetic*—*Prosaic prosics*, *Poetic prosics*, *Prosaic poesics*, and *Poetic poesics* (80)—help locate Instapoetry.

The third category, "*prosaic poesis*," means poetics of everyday life. "Everyday" here does not contribute much to the content of the poetics, as it indicates the activity or use of these poetics in everyday life. Further explicating *prosaic poesis*, Mandoki provides some examples, such as rhymed prayers, commercial or political slogans, sport cheers, rhymed duels, etc. (80). Since reading Instapoetry is an everyday activity, it can be proposed that it belongs to this category. However, this conclusion must first go through ruminations on how Instapoetry becomes an everyday affair.

It is all the more complicated if one calculates a singular path in understanding the processes at work in making Instapoetry a *prosaic poesis*, one cannot just arrive at a satisfactory

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<sup>39</sup> Dickie and Danto propose an institutional definition of art, whereby it is perceived as a practice of art only in the context of its location in the artworld (Willette).

closure. At least three things must be considered parallelly here: popularity, everyday activity, and everyday content. Consequently, three questions must be answered: 1. "Is Instapoetry popular because it engages with content about everyday ordinary life?"; 2. "Is Instapoetry popular because it is an everyday activity?"; and 3. "Is Instapoetry an everyday activity because it features everyday content?". One cannot expect to reach exact answers to these, as there is ample room for indefinite probabilities. However, if the questions are inverted, it may become possible to answer them with a certain degree of accuracy. Followingly, the second set of questions would be: 1. "Is Instapoetry's everyday content so because it is popular?"; 2. "Is Instapoetry an everyday activity because it is popular?"; and 3. "Is everyday content featured in Instapoetry because it is an everyday activity?".

The answer to the first question of the second set is that popularity is not the only reason for the theme of the content. Moreover, one must keep in mind the purpose of the medium on which it is circulated. Not all who post poetry about everyday things aim for popularity. It is rather one of the basic aims of the medium, which is specially created for the sharing of such content. The answer to the second question is again a negative. No user uses Instagram because it has popular content. Popularity can be one of the reasons for its use, since frequent formations of online communities for social media identity must not be forsaken. Nonetheless, it remains that popularity is not the only reason here. Answering the third question is crucial to theorising about Instapoetry and understanding it as an art. The answer is yes. Everyday content is indeed featured in Instapoetry, mainly because it is an everyday activity.

Now returning to the first question from the first set, "Is Instapoetry popular because it engages with content about everyday ordinary life?" There is a fair possibility for this to happen. While all arts that thematise the everyday may not be popular, one of the basic necessities of the popular to be popular is that it must affect the everyday sensibilities of the people. By this logic, it can also be said, answering the second question in the first set, that Instapoetry is popular because it is an everyday affair. Looking at things in this fashion connects the gap between the two aspects of aesthetics that Mandoki mentions separately: the popular and the prosaic. Thus, Instapoetry is indeed *prosaic poesis* along with being popular, both of which have been assumed to have an inferior value. However, seeing Instapoetry as *prosaic poesis* reinstates it as art in its own right, following the movement of *prosaic poesis*, i.e., "art as life as art."

Thus, the postmodernist perspective, even the discipline of everyday aesthetics, does not work to defend the poetics of popular art to reassess it in terms of the so-called "high arts." They rather see popularity as what it actually is and thereby assess its aesthetics by locating it in its context of production and reception. The goal of postmodernist aesthetics is therefore to eschew the discernments of traditional aesthetic tastes and values. It ruptures the distinctions of high and low, where the former and the latter must not always be confused with good and bad, respectively (Fiedler 256).<sup>40</sup> What, then, must be a new way to look at art? Answers to this can be found in Richard Shusterman's suggestion to revisit the idea of aesthetic experience. Freeing the ideation of aesthetic experience from the stark separation of objective and subjective views, this new understanding of aesthetic experience overcomes both, subjectivity of the Taste theories and objectivity of the Value theories and aligns with the postmodernist aesthetic turn (Shusterman 2003, 779-781). How, then, must this aesthetic experience be construed?

## 2.2 Aesthetic Experience

Aesthetic theory or the theory of art in the classical age, can be distinguished from modern aesthetic theory by identifying the shift in their approach to art. The former understood art as an activity that is at once "cosmic, social, and individual...an activity that may be salutary and even exalting, as in Aristotle's celebrated discussion of tragedy and its cathartic effects." (Berleant 1991, 9). The latter understands art as an experience where philosophy places primacy on epistemology over ontology. This shift results from the philosophy that the world and whatever it holds can only be encountered and known through human experience. Thus, the question regarding what makes art is often answered through how art is experienced (Berleant 10). A specific interest in aesthetic experience can be observed in the aesthetic philosophy of last century philosophers like John Dewey, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Mikel Dufrenne, Monroe Beardsley, and in contemporary discussions by George Dickie, Arnold Berleant, and Alan Goldman. Mikel Dufrenne, like Merleau-Ponty, theorises an aesthetic experience that marks continuity between the subject and the object in art experience and explains it from a phenomenological position. Goldman aligns more with Beardsley in asserting the significance of aesthetic properties to determine the success of the aesthetic

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<sup>40</sup> Leslie Fiedler suggests that postmodernism signifies the elimination of the divide between the critic and the public, particularly if one defines the critic as a tastemaker and the audience as a follower. However, the most significant implication is the reduction of the distance between the artist and the audience, or at least between professionals and amateurs in the field of art (256).

experience. Arnold Berleant's theory conceives of aesthetic experience in a broader sense, connecting art with life itself, which ultimately explains the cultural and contextual consequences of the experience.

Since Berleant's theory emerges by consolidating and departing from the previous discourse, it is important to understand the major representative theories in the discipline.

### 2.2.1 Dufrenne's *Phenomenology* and Goldman's *Experiential Account*

Mikel Dufrenne, in *The Phenomenology*, emphasises the metaphysical and ontological aspects of aesthetic experience.<sup>41</sup> To Dufrenne, aesthetic experience has humanist significance as it unites men. It is through this experience that men transcend their singularity and become open to the "universally human," that men discover the sheer essence of "man within himself" and join forces with others in the "aesthetic community" (Enneson 7-10, Dufrenne 68).

There is a stark distinction between the aesthetic experience of the artist and that of the spectator, of which Dufrenne proposes to focus on the latter (Dufrenne "Introduction", xlv), where the *spectator* is the spectator of a work of art and *spectation* is a spectation of an artwork. Enneson notes that aesthetic experience must involve "artistic spectation," which involves "aesthetic perception." Aesthetic perception, which means contemplation of work of art, is again defined normatively and described in terms of faithfulness and purity (lii -lxiv). Such a perception helps establish and maintain an attitude of vigilant and undiverted attention to the work of art (Enneson 24). It must be clear, though, that aesthetic perception is not the same as aesthetic experience; the former is only a prerequisite for the latter. This follows Dufrenne's explanation of aesthetic objects, which are ontologically different from works of art (lii). Nonetheless, a work of art may be perceived non-aesthetically; in that case, it is not an aesthetic object, while if it is perceived aesthetically, it becomes an aesthetic object. The question is would anything turn into an aesthetic object if perceived in that manner, and would that aesthetic object then be called art.

To limit this circularity, Dufrenne's rudimentary concepts of artistic spectation and aesthetic perception can be used. Any object cannot be a work of art just because it is perceived aesthetically, as artistic spectation mandates that only works of art can be viewed as aesthetic

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<sup>41</sup> The researcher's inferences on Dufrenne's ideas rely on primary reading of "Introduction" and "Aesthetic Object and Work of Art" from *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* by Mikel Dufrenne. In addition to this, Peter Enneson's thesis *On Speciation: Mikel Dufrenne's Valuation Of Aesthetic Experience* serves as a secondary point of reference.

objects (xlvi). Again, aesthetic perception is responsible only for completing an aesthetic object, not creating one (lii). So it becomes clear that works of art can be viewed as aesthetic objects, but aesthetic objects cannot be viewed as works of art. Two sets of questions can be raised here. Firstly, what about those objects on which aesthetic perception is practised, but are not works of art? And speaking practically, can one stop from aesthetic contemplation of other objects and limit it only to the works of art? Secondly, what about those works of art on which the viewers do not practice sustained contemplation since the medium of artwork does not demand it? Do they entirely fail to prompt an aesthetic experience if not perceived aesthetically? What kind of experience do they prompt, then? Can they be pushed into the category of non-art or just non-aesthetic?

The first set of questions may be answered in Harold Osborne's definition of aesthetic object. Aesthetic object, according to Osborne, can be anything on which particular attention is directed. And so, to separate works of art from any aesthetic object, he calls only those aesthetic objects deliberately created to invite such attention as works of art (331). So, anything upon which aesthetic attention is sustained becomes an aesthetic object, but it cannot necessarily become a work of art. Answering the second set of questions, the works of art that fail to prompt experience are still works of art, as they were created at least with the aim of delivering an aesthetic experience and still hold ties with paradigmatic art. They do not become non-art. With reference to this, Alan Goldman suggests that the success in providing experience marks good art from bad and not art from non-art (2020, 584).

Even Osborne goes on to the extent of defining an aesthetic object in relation to its power for commanding an aesthetic experience (331). He argues that the value set upon the things of beauty is in fact a reflection of (also derivative of) the value conferred upon a successful aesthetic experience. For this, the object must have such qualities to sustain perception in the attention directed at it, so aesthetic complexity becomes a necessity in the aesthetic object, which is then "tempered by perceptual coherence or unity" (334). This marks the success of the aesthetic object in rendering an efficient aesthetic experience. Osborne's view agrees with Alan Goldman's experiential account of art, which places the value of art on aesthetic experience.

In "What is Aesthetic Experience", Goldman describes three accounts of understanding aesthetic experience: 1. Objective or the Content account, 2. Subjective or the Affect account, and 3. External Attitude account. He rejects the objective view on two grounds. Firstly, it is

too formalist and sidelines some structural properties to highlight others. Secondly, the value of art derived thus is merely its artistic value, not its aesthetic value. Again, artistic value is derived only at a fair comparison with other artworks. Goldman also rejects an extremely subjective account of experience as it "singles out one affect as essential" to aesthetic experience. So if one has a feeling of awe towards an artwork, such an effect will inspire the audience to have an initial response and then move towards its appraisal. Again, according to him, emotional involvement is indeed a part of one's experience with art, but there is not necessarily a single emotion that is consistently present in aesthetic experiences (2020, 582).<sup>42</sup>

Goldman then defends a broad subjective account based on John Dewey and Monroe Beardsley. This account of experience demands a simultaneous and active presence of perception, imagination, emotion, and cognition, i.e., full absorption in the work of art. Inclusion of cognitive aspects with imagination makes such experience inclusive of thematic content as well as moral insights and marks a continuous interaction with the work of art. Thus, he attempts a definition of aesthetic experience that includes phenomenological aspects or "internal mental features," as well as objective qualities, which he does not limit to the content alone. Then the definition of aesthetic experience for Goldman is, "Perception of both sensuous qualities and structure, informed by cognition, enlarged by imagination, and prompting emotional identification and response, is the intense experience we seek in fine art" (583).

Goldman's defence of the broader subjective view, however, pre-empts the necessity of formal properties for a successful aesthetic experience. To argue in favour of form over content, he differentiates between the aesthetic experience resulting from the original painting by Van Gogh and its copy (2006, 336). He claims that the copy rather lacks the expressive anguish (in brushstrokes) present in the original; while perceivable properties might be the same in both, the aesthetic properties (which are relational) will be different. Because the value of the aesthetic object comes from these aesthetic properties and their experience, the value of the original will be dubbed much higher (336). And following this, he maintains, taking a Kantian stance, "The experience is not aesthetic experience, that is, fully engaged, if detached from its

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<sup>42</sup> The External Attitude account is outrightly dismissed as it is considered unnecessary, but here is where Goldman misses. By External Attitude account he means the experience that is valued in itself. This happens because the external attitude that subjects have towards art is taken into consideration here. This equates the aesthetic experience with every other experience. Goldman avoids it since his focus is more on the experience, which relies heavily on the form to be successful or otherwise. While John Dewey, as will be suggested later, from the onset brings aesthetic experience on par with general experiences and uses the term aesthetic to describe the fullness or richness of any experience.

object... [This experience] is prompted by and remains true to the work's non aesthetic or base properties" (339-40).

Goldman further uses this understanding to deal with two claims. Firstly, art also has other values, apart from aesthetic, like moral, political and social. However, it is not always that these values are non aesthetic in nature. He says that insofar as truth is mobilised in the experience of art through its aesthetic properties, truth value remains an aesthetic value for that artwork (338). And secondly, that the same aesthetic object may provide a different aesthetic experience to different people in distinct ways and in a range of varied contexts, because an "artwork prompts or stimulates thought, imagination and feeling without rigidly dictating them in the same way for observers" (340). Goldman fixes this quandary of myriad experiences by asserting that these experiences are merely as good as responses; they are not specifically aesthetic experiences. Thus, by his definition, artworks are aesthetic objects created to prompt an aesthetic experience. If an individual only responds to it, not experiencing it aesthetically, does the artwork still remain an artwork? Does it reduce to non-art and lose its value? To answer this, he reintroduces the category of qualified observers to whom "an object is aesthetically valuable in providing rich experience." So the experience of only this group of individuals counts as aesthetic, while others are merely private idiosyncratic responses (340).

Coming back to the context of experience, this theory hardly seems to work out from a practical perspective for two reasons. Firstly, it fails to see a continuity between art and life. To Dufrenne, Osborne, and Goldman, it is aesthetic experience that defines both aesthetic object and art, where the continuity between subject and object of art makes movement from art to aesthetic object possible. However, the movement of aesthetic objects into art is still not conceivable under this understanding. By this principle, artworks provide an aesthetic experience. But it holds true that aesthetic experience does not necessarily result only from artwork. Also, by Goldman's definition, the aesthetic experience of art is distinct from the experience derived from other objects of life. But when postmodernism belies the distinction between art and life, it becomes important to ask, "What is the difference between aesthetic experience prompted by art and that initiated by everyday life objects?"

The second reason for its failure in pragmatic considerations is that this view sees only those artworks encountered or observed in an isolated environment and discharged of any context as providing the aesthetic experience. It does not examine those experiences in different environments and for different purposes. In that case, the intermittent experience of art in new

media would be reduced to mere responses. A more recent theory on engagement by Arnold Berleant appraises this very aspect of aesthetic experience. Berleant reviews the cultural influence on aesthetic experience, which affects one's perception of features that art objects exhibit (2005, 170). And so he insists on looking at the aesthetic situation to comprehend aesthetic experience. Doing so helps to ground interpretation of art culturally.

However, before delving into the specifics of Berleant's theory, it is important to properly understand the explanation of aesthetic experience provided by Dewey, as it was Dewey's pragmatist philosophy that initially made it feasible to view the experience's component parts, such as the object, subject, and environment, differently.

### 2.2.2 Aesthetic Experience in Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934)

It was John Dewey (1859-1952) who first initiated a systematic understanding of the interactive process, whereby he defined art as an experience (a culmination and coming together of views of art as form and art as expression). From Dewey's lens, one envisions the reciprocated interaction that the encounter with art results in.

Through his theory of experience,<sup>43</sup> Dewey seeks to establish two things: 1. a non-dual understanding of the subject and the object of experience, and 2. continuity between experiences of art and everyday life events. He construes of the non-duality (as mentioned in the first point) by proposing that the subject (or the mind) is not an outside entity that observes the natural world of objects but is an emergent and evolving part of nature itself. Experience is something that bridges the mind with nature and brings them in a unity that engulfs both—that which is experienced and that which experiences. Shusterman admits that this theory of experience is reconstructive since it advances a "naturalistic humanism" that overcomes the traditional dualisms of mind and matter, which tend to separate metaphysics from epistemology (Shusterman 1994, 128). Dewey thinks that when "intellectual experience" and the material from which it arises are conceived separately as the primary factors in knowledge, the ties between experience and nature snap (Dewey 1929, 23). Scott Stroud calls this an "intellectual fallacy" (Stroud 29).

Dewey sees art primarily as a human experience. And so, following the above conception of experience, he sees two possibilities for defining art. Art is either a continuation of nature

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<sup>43</sup> John Dewey's theory of experience here is drawn from various sources, mainly: *Experience and Nature* [1929 (1925)], "Qualitative Thought" (1930), *Art as Experience* (1980 [1934]), and *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* [1986 (1938)].

by a deliberate selection and arrangement of natural tendencies of natural occurrences; or it is a distinctive addition to nature that arises from something that resides entirely inside of man. Here he subscribes to the first scenario, where aesthetic appreciation is of the same nature as consummatory enjoyment of any object of human life (Dewey 1929, 389). Thus, throughout his theory, his aim is to "restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, sufferings that are universally recognised to constitute experience" (Dewey 1934, 2).

This need to restore continuity emerges because, like religion, art is thought of as separate from community life. Dewey is against this "museum attitude" towards art that isolates it from the human conditions under which it comes into existence and human consequences that mark its actual experience. Such an approach limits art to a physical thing and further governs object-subject duality. A distinct realm of art is thus created where the consideration of artistic objects is cut off from the living materials and aims that reside in actual human efforts realised in doing and undergoing the process of creating and experiencing an artwork (1-2). Instead, he shows that art has been an integral part of daily life but somehow theory pushes it away from everyday living experiences (7). He also points out that it is not theory alone that seeks to reduce aesthetic perception to the level of transient experience of pleasure and excitement. The separation, moreover, is embedded in extraneous conditions of institutions and habits of life that work unconsciously.<sup>44</sup>

What follows this distancing from art is a gradual outlook towards everyday as unaesthetic, where only art holds the licence to be aesthetic. But according to Dewey, art is only a representative of experience in its integrity. Art is only one instance, perhaps the best one at that, to comprehend the unity possible in all experiences. Everyday life is not very different from art. The only thing that sets them apart is the way they are experienced. Everyday life can be experienced just as art is experienced. After all, the experiences of both arise out of the same ecological transactions that fund different experiences, may they be moral, cognitive, or religious (Hildebrand 150).

The aesthetic qualities implicit in normal experience do not become explicit as they do in the experience of art. This happens because subjects are too closely involved in the former

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<sup>44</sup> Dewey does not specify the process in detail, his goal is merely to restore the continuity of aesthetic experience with other processes of living, as he says, "even a crude experience, if authentically an experience, is more fit to give a clue to the intrinsic nature of aesthetic experience than is an object already set apart from any other mode of experience (Dewey 1980, 9).

to stop and reflect on the experience. Thus, art is not a refined experience; it is rather an experience reflected upon. But this reflection is often distanced and limited. Therefore, Dewey suggests bringing the subject to look as close as possible at art to arrive at a total or a whole experience—just as close as subjects are to ordinary experiences. After total involvement, one may start to extricate the features of that experience. Dewey delineates these features by first describing the nature of *general experiences*, as it is through this knowledge of organic nature of experience and its materials that one can begin to formulate a theory on *aesthetic experience*.

His three major foci in propounding a theory of experience are: 1. Primary experience; 2. Materials of experience; and 3. Consummatory Experience. Primary experience is the experience had in immediacy before reflecting on the experience. It is a pre-discursive experience that cannot be *known* since *knowing* an experience is not the same as *having* one. In *knowing*, one grasps only those features of experience that one can think of or make sense of consciously. In reality, there is much more to an experience than what one can knowingly recollect. In other words, Primary experience denotes that experience which is prior to any further analysis or linguistic description, because "once one has an incentive to analyse the experienced subject matter, one moves to the secondary sort of experience—what Dewey calls "reflection" (Stroud 15). Primary experience is neither exclusively present in the object, nor exclusively born in the mind of the subjects detached from their context. Instead, it is the experience that one "has" or "feels" in their interaction with the overall environment (McClelland 47).

Dewey offers that this primary experience is ineffable but guides discursive thought and contributes significantly to one's ways of thinking and knowing.<sup>45</sup> McClelland reiterates the significance of primary experience by suggesting that this experience acts as a quality that pervades the phase of reflection, i.e., it marks the initial phase of absorption between the organism and its environment that helps understand how the secondary phase (reflective phase) of experience is guided, led, or even controlled. It is therefore important to construe how this experience contributes to epistemic processes.

Such an experience may be ineffable but can be identified through introspection (Shusterman 1994, 132). Because, however unreflexive, it is not isolated. It is embedded in a

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<sup>45</sup> Expansive discussions on the conception and effects of this immediate experience on knowledge are found in "Qualitative Thought" (1930) and *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* [1986 (1938)].

"contextual whole" that Dewey chooses to call "situation."<sup>46</sup> This, in the context of art and aesthetic experience, becomes "aesthetic situation," a concept that Arnold Berleant later develops on. Dewey marks the movement of immediate experience from its location in a "situation" towards building a "*field*" of observation that leads to form knowledge...

In actual experience, there is never any such isolated singular object or event; an object or event is always a special part, phase or aspect of an enviroing experienced world—a situation. The singular object stands out conspicuously because of its especially focal and crucial position at a given time in determination of some problem of use or enjoyment which the total complex of environment presents. There is always a *field* in which observation of this or that object or event occurs. Observation of the latter is made for the sake of finding out what that *field* is with reference to some active adaptive response to be made in carrying forward a course of behaviour (Dewey 1986, 72-73).

Thus, the environment becomes an active and dynamic field of participation, where the interaction of subjects with the environment is constant and their career and destiny are tied up with those interchanges in the most intimate way (1934, 12). What is this interaction then made of? Dewey states that humans constantly root for order in a world that is threatened with disorder. Humans seek harmony not without but within and only through the tensions arising out of the disorder. Equilibrium in experiencing comes not inertly but because of these tensions. This equilibrium is stable but moving, coherent but enduring. It is not an end but an ongoing process. It is in this moving interaction that equilibrium is achieved and form is experienced. Dewey explains the unity and totality of an experience induced as much by the discord as by the restoration of union in form, both of which an artist cultivates through living and reflective materials on his hand and harmonises them in an object (14). Thus, experience for Dewey is not distanced or "shut up within one's own private feelings and sensations, it signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height, it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events" (18).

The reason behind distancing and compartmentalising the experience of art as a non-organic part of the everyday is assumed to be the monotony attached to the everyday experiences. Experience of any everyday life event in itself is not of that nature. It becomes so because it is not treated with fullness. He points out that the sentiment that results from a

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<sup>46</sup> Dewey notes that life goes on not just in an environment, but it runs because of the environment and through the interaction with it (Dewey 1934, 12).

profound comprehension of intrinsic meanings only sometimes permeates the lives of many subjects, and that most of the time one sees without feeling and hears only second-hand reports that are second-hand because they are not reinforced by vision (21). In order to experience any event in fullness, one must evoke an awareness of the materials of experience.

These materials, as outlined by Kenneth McClelland (2005) from the second and the third chapter of *Art as Experience* (1934), are: *Habit*, *Sense* and *Imagination*. Unlike physical materials of art like words, brushes, paint, and so forth, the materials of experience, as mentioned above, are of psychological or phenomenological nature. *Habits* provide the presumptive field of meanings that create the background of a situation. Instead of acting as external means of identification, habits act as atmospheric media that enter every circumstance to create a field that is meaningful yet ill-defined, a field where specific events are brought to focused attention. In light of a challenging circumstance, *Sense* denotes the organism's embodied movement, in which the body itself takes on a lived meaning. This movement takes place within a spatial and temporal drama in which the body and mind become fused in heightened awareness of the potential outcomes. Finally, imagination is something that separates itself from the energising and limiting capacity of the present and may turn into pure fancy. Therefore, it is in imagination that the ideal possibilities are conjured up, and it is there that the ability for creativity and expansion of human intelligence is also reflected (McClelland 50-54).

The dynamic relationship between past and future expectations, i.e., between *Habit* and *Imagination*, gives the present its meaning and direction, i.e., *Sense*. To the extent that the organism's senses are attentive to the transactive movement, the experience takes on a "heightened vitality." It is during these moments of "heightened vitality" that experience becomes "consciously manifest" to the degree that it assumes an aesthetic quality. This implies the deeper levels of meaning that are felt both within and through the experience. And it is at this moment that experience becomes entirely consummatory (McClelland 55).

Hence, one may experience things all the time, but not all experiences are consummatory; all experiences do not turn into *an experience*. One has *an experience* only when "the material experience runs its course to fulfilment" (1934, 36). Thus, the conclusion of such an experience is fulfilment and not terminality; its end is consummation, not cessation. Consummation is a process by which experience organises and unifies itself; it is a cumulative movement (39). To Dewey, art is one such consummatory experience because the emotional quality that imprints

on past experiences (*Habits*) is fraught (43) during the experience of art. In the case of everyday experiences, the opposite is true. However, most certainly, one *can* look for consummation in any other everyday experience.

The real work of art is then complete, neither in the account of expression intended by the artist nor in the claims of form perceived by the audience. The real work of art, for Dewey, is the manner in which an art object (or art product) interacts with the audience (Alexander 63). And *aesthetic experience* lies in the consummation of interaction between expression and form. This interaction, as stated before, is not isolated but located in a situation. This *situation* cannot be evaluated by referring only to the environment in which the art object is situated. A proper understanding of it can be attained by fathoming the experience of the perceiving subject as well as the creative artist. These experiences can be named as "aesthetic experience" and "artistic experience," respectively. Expression is the artist's experience (associated with the act of production), while Form is the subject's (associated with perception and enjoyment). The former is realised through the producer's point of view, while the latter is appropriated through the consumer's standpoint.

Dewey lapses the radical difference between the two and says that in order to be artistic, a work must also be aesthetic. Artist frames the expression keeping in mind both "inceptive emotion" and "receptive perception" (1934, 49). Hildebrand rephrases this as, "Besides possessing technical skill and a sensitivity to material qualities, an artist must both know his own mind and embody 'in himself the attitude of the perceiver while he works' if he wishes to communicate meaningfully" (160). Emotion alone is not enough for an artist's expression that shapes the work of art; it is only an essential ingredient, not art's significant content. The artist must conceive of the audience's reaction. And so, emotion as well as the way in which it is expressed contribute to the total experience.

If expression is the "means" (action) by which a work of art is shaped, then form is the "end" (result) of it. The result of any artistic expression is not "the delivery of an emotion, but a transformation of an experienced situation" (Hildebrand 168). By way of transformation, one arrives at form. Materialisation of the form through the subject's intellect is as important an experience as expression is. Because receiving is not passive. In realising form, one connects sympathetically with the artwork's perceptual characteristics and conceptual implications and actively participates in rebuilding these elements. Art stirs the perception of the subject into responding. The perceiver, just as the artist, consciously orders the elements of the form and

organises them into an experience. When the experience is consummatory, the unity of materials of experiences in expression and form comes to a full circle. And the extent to which art fulfils its role involves a reshaping of the experience of the community in the direction of better harmony and cohesion (1934, 84). This is how Dewey puts the means and ends of art's experience in a circular continuity rather than separating them (Stroud 36).

### 2.2.3 Consummatory Experience and the Predicament of Social Media Art

Dewey's explanation of aesthetic situations, primary experience and materials of experience is indeed very useful to contextualise the experience of art before evaluating it. And this also helps him see the possibility of everyday events affording an aesthetic experience if the materials of experience are fully utilised. But for this, one needs to refrain from hyperactivity, passivity and interruptions of the everyday life flow because consummation of an experience is limited by all those causes that affect a full percipience accompanied by an active commerce of undergoing and doing. If there is excess in action or reception of underdoing, it may result in deficient experience because, in a hurried environment, experience does not get sufficient time to complete itself (1934, 46). This soon makes art, imagined with everyday interferences, impotent of aesthetic experience. One may ask what happens to the art one encounters *as* an everyday event on social media platforms.

In the specific case of social media, art is a rushed activity of scrolling through a multitude of posts at a time. In such conditions, according to Dewey's argument, aesthetic experience is made a dead-ended impossibility. Does art then become anaesthetic and therefore pass into the non-art category? At least, the majority criticism of social media art centres around the judgement that it does. But how do social media and its capacities make art anaesthetic? And more importantly, how can the nature of art upturn completely into something it does not claim to be, only by its appearance in a new medium?

To begin with, it is true that aesthetic experience is a result of the consummation of materials of experience; this consummation, in turn, is a result of focused reflection upon materials. But on a medium (social media in particular) on which art is experienced hurriedly, without sufficient reflection, it still affords an experience that is aesthetically charged, and there is a reason to believe in the veracity of such a hypothesis.

On any given medium, art still maintains its institutionalised characteristics and can be identified through them, even on a new medium. The subject of experience at once, on

identifying these characteristics, is motivated to respond relevantly in accordance with the situation in which the experience takes place. As a matter of *Habit* on the part of the subject, the art object commands a concentration of cognitive and imaginative energies towards an experience and stimulates the senses to culminate in an aesthetic experience. Furthermore, the medium, with its aspects and scope, certainly changes the way art is experienced. It may interfere with experience, but it does not completely forestall all the features of experience to render the characteristics of art empty. Hence, the experience doesn't become anaesthetic, and art does not turn into non-art.

Again, it is condoned that experience cannot be ruptured. Experience is almost always complete in itself and always goes through two phases—primary and reflective. The primary experience, born out of an active commerce between the environment and the subject, is present in all the experiences; it may differ in nature, adapting to different situations, but is present nonetheless. Without it, the reflective phase cannot proceed with its course. Then, what one may argue in the case of social media experience is that there is an absence of reflective phase since one does not impart enough time to furnish all the materials of the experience. But it is also true that without reflection, the experience cannot be registered at all. There is always some or another response directed towards the object of perception, which carries on and makes the material for future primary experiences. The design of any experience may be revealed through a conscious reflection of it. However, the state of obscurity of experience (caused by the lack of reflection) hardly negates the prospect of its consummation.

The nature of reflection must instead be assessed in terms of how far it is toned with the nature of the context in which an experience occurs. Reflection as well as the materials of experience will then be found complete for the ends they serve on social media platforms. This is so, firstly, because one knows that the experience will be hurried prior to opting for the use of social media. Therefore, by becoming so accustomed to the event of social media, one's past habits act up, and even before consciously knowing it, one is already prepared for the ephemerality of the medium. Now, engagement with art, as with any other post, may be temporary. However temporary, the experience does not reach a cessation. It continues, builds on, and imprints on further experiences. Secondly, the quantity of consumption takes over the quality of each experience. Generally, quality is given more importance than quantity. True as it may be, the impression of experiences in such a large quantity left on the quality of experience of each post cannot be ignored. Lastly, in reflection, one does not pursue the

completion of materials of experience all by themselves (which happens in the pre-reflective phase), but rather seeks to establish completeness through a coalition of the psycho-phenomenological materials with the artistic features. This is how reflection is prone to being form-oriented.<sup>47</sup> Again, form is subject to variance in perception, which in turn is itself not universal. And so, the experience of art on social media cannot be deemed worse on the basis of the amount of attention employed towards the appreciation of artistic endeavours put into art and understood as manifesting in form.

Since the experience of art on social media cannot be better or worse, it can only be classified as different. The idea of this "difference" in aesthetic experience is rooted in Dewey's relativist approach, which is criticised by many for being too subjective (Hildebrand 170). There are claims following Dewey's theory that one cannot achieve specific judgement on art as it eliminates all criticism. However, Dewey's project does not claim to pass judgements of any kind in the first place. As a pragmatist, his attempt is to "reeducate" by inspiring readers "away from 'conventional wisdom' towards active, experimental engagements with art." (Hildebrand 180). The purpose of criticism for Dewey is not to provide a fixed structure or criterion that can work as a touchstone, but to understand and interpret art in experimental ways. According to Dewey, this approach of critical education is 'moral' since it dispels prejudice, promotes tolerance, and overall improves one's capacity for experiencing life (Hildebrand 180). Scott Stroud foregrounds this very aspect of Dewey's theory to probe into the question of integrating art into everyday life for moral purposes—what he refers to as meliorism.

By the same token, a pragmatist notion of aesthetic experience also reconsiders the unpacking of the *attitude* towards the art object. Attitude is one of the two most useful of Dewey's elucidations, the other being *situation*. Stroud expounds on attitude and asserts its importance for an experience, following William James's "The Will to Believe." The former

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<sup>47</sup> It is possible that Dewey's theory is latently form-oriented. Another reason to believe this is Dewey's influence on Goldman, who is expressly form-centred. The probability can be observed in Dewey's omission of the radical difference between artistic and aesthetic experience (perceiver), where he says that an artist always presumes aesthetic experience while she expresses her emotions. Her expression, therefore, is directed towards the perception of a subject that allows the subject to construct a form. This means that the expression's end is form. If expression fails to render this form, the experience of the artist ceases to be aesthetic, and the work of art is ineffective in delivering an aesthetic experience. So, Goldman regards "perception" as crucial in surmising the form to discern the aptness of the expression (Goldman 2006, 336). This then explains why Goldman adds "Perception" to three other elements of aesthetic experience, "Emotion", "Imagination", "Cognition", that correlate with Dewey's materials, "Past emotion" or "Habit", "Imagination" and "Sense."

believes that attitude vitally impresses on how humans interact with each other and the environment. It "holds a very influential and causal role in creating certain realities" (Stroud 28), and, in turn, depends largely upon the situation in which art is experienced. Consequently, one has to register, in evaluating aesthetic experience, the aesthetic attitude as well as the aesthetic situation. This aesthetic attitude differs greatly from Bullough's definition of distance. It is not a descendant of disinterestedness, purged of the context it emerges in, but in fact is contextually conditioned.

#### 2.2.4 Aesthetic Engagement in Berleant's *Art and Engagement* (1991)

Like Dewey, Arnold Berleant argues against aesthetic experiences being passive. He too, like Dewey, contends that aesthetic experiences require active participation and interaction from the viewer. For this, the viewer must not consider intellectual experience and its source material as separate sources of knowledge (Shusterman 1994, 128) (Berleant 1991, 16). When they are considered separate, it results in value judgements that precede one's understanding of an artwork's distinctive bent and one's ability to engage with it. Instead, Berleant suggests that value must be determined as a conclusion of the process of engagement, of how well an object performs in the "aesthetic situation." Because following this process opens the possibility of experiencing the novel and unexpected (43-44).

"Aesthetic situation" for him does not only entail the physical environment or the psychological space affected by the medium of experience. "Environment" or "situation" also signifies the mental space affected by the change in cultural disposition. This is what sets Berleant apart from the previous theories on aesthetic experience. He locates both art and its experience in the contemporary cultural disposition, rather than looking at them from the same old frames modelled to look at the same old forms of art. Berleant moves away from enlightenment and disinterestedness to propose that the history of taste must also recognise the changes in the ways one exists, lives, perceives, and acts in the practical world. Followingly, he calls for a need to replace "pure perception" with a perception that is direct, immediate, and unreflexive. Such perception leads to an aesthetic experience that engages with not only art but also its environment (Berleant 2005, 170). He proposes that

aesthetic experiences pervade the many regions of life, from practical activities devoted to food gathering and craftsmanship, to ceremonial observances and other social occasions. In pursuing a cultural aesthetic, we must abandon the ethnocentric assumptions of modern Western aesthetics that restrict art and the aesthetic to the carefully circumscribed objects and occasions

of museums, galleries, and concert halls. Art is more inclusive and aesthetic experience far more pervasive than Western aesthetics has allowed, and their forms and appearances exhibit endless variety (177-78).

Building on this foundation, Berleant points out that the changes and developments in society and culture of the contemporary world have profoundly impacted how one engages and appreciates art by reshaping one's perceptual activities into new and distinct forms (Berleant 1991, 33-40). The materials, objects, and techniques brought about by industrial production and new media have so permeated the art world that they have almost infused the very grammar of an artist, building an impalpable presence into the artwork that is only sometimes traceable. Given that art is ever-changing, the change encountered post industrialisation and more so after the emergence of new media like TV, Radio, and Internet indeed implores a fundamental scrutiny. This scrutiny is almost indispensable in the process of arriving at a new theory to appropriate the change in practice and form of art as well as the manner in which art is experienced.

The continuity between art and life in contemporary art seems to be integrated into the practice of art as well as the attitude towards it. As art's affiliation with daily life has freed it from isolation, becoming absorbed with the diurnal course of ordinary human activities, "artists now make free use of materials from the new technology... [and] utilise everyday articles, such as newspapers, kitchen utensils, and theatre marquees, and ordinary situations, such as factory work and assembly lines" (Berleant 1991, 35). Again, this affiliation is reaffirmed by the contemporary arts "by stressing their continuity with the technological aspect of artistic production and the functional aspect of social uses of the arts" (42).

With this, the attitude towards art as something higher than life is overridden by envisaging it as a part of everyday life. The ties between art and life open aesthetic experience to considering the interplay of factors contributing to a dynamic unity of general experience, such as: "perceptual, material, environmental, formative, and performative." And so it becomes crucial to involve the active and constitutive role of the audience in experiencing art. Berleant calls it participatory aesthetics or an aesthetic of engagement (3). More than just mental involvement, the audience is engaged as a culturally emergent entity. It is then possible to see art as reflecting endlessly, like an infinity mirror. And because of a constant reciprocity between the subject and object, they blend in complex ways, blurring the duality previously assigned to them.

Thus, Berleant goes a step further from Dewey and advances the theory of aesthetic engagement to assess artworks holistically. As mentioned above, "aesthetic engagement joins the perceiver and object into a perceptual unity" (46) where coherence is established by three key characteristics of this perceptual unity. These three characteristics are: 1. Continuity; 2. Perceptual Integrity; and 3. Participation.

Continuity plays a role in adding to the perceptual unity by indicating the inseparability of factors and forces by which an aesthetic experience is identified. Continuity cannot be mistaken for indistinguishability of these factors and forces, however. The factors responsible for aesthetic experience, like Dewey's materials of experience, can be seen distinctly to identify each individually. Nevertheless, they must not be considered so because it is not possible to trace back the interaction that occurs amongst these factors. And therefore, accepting their inseparability is the first step towards comprehending continuity, which contributes towards perceptual unity. Another continuity that Berleant stresses, following Dewey, is by establishing inextricability between art and other human activities and modes of experience, may they be social, practical, or religious (46-47). He shows how there is an intimate relation between art and life, and proposes that art as well as other objects of human activity share the same origin—in conscious awareness of the materials of experience. He accounts for the difference between art's experience and other activities through the application of "aesthetic situations." With changes in "aesthetic situations," the uses of art change too (for social or personal uses), and ultimately, the experiences too are diverse.

Perceptual integrity, which is the second characteristic of aesthetic experience, denotes experiential involvement in aesthetic encounters. It is through perceptual integrity that one grasps continuities in aesthetic experiences and all the elements come together to form a unified experience (47). The elements mentioned here pertain to the categories of artist, art, and viewer, which, in perceptual integrity, are all fused together. Moreover, talking about the merger of elements, Berleant intends to refer to "a fusion of the various sensory modalities as well, a phenomenon known as synaesthesia" (48). In synaesthesia, influentiality of different sensations on one another is not taken for granted. Also, sensory perception is not considered aloof from the cultural context. Berleant suggests that unfolding perceptual integrity can be helpful in drawing inferences on the effects of art in a multimedia model. However, he points out that synaesthesia is conceptualised only on a perceptual level; it does not mean a material synthesis of different sensory media.

The third trait of aesthetic experience, i.e., participation, governs a continuous reciprocity between the perceiver and the object of perception in aesthetic situations. Participation is the most important feature of aesthetic experience because its outcome is an experiential unity, where art consists of situation rather than object (or form). Berleant notes that in unified aesthetic experience, the aesthetic field is created by the following four factors: object, perceiver, creator, and performer; all of which are affected by "social institutions, historical traditions, cultural forms and practices, technological developments in materials and techniques, and other such contextual conditions" (49). Aesthetic field constitutively affects the experience, and therefore Berleant adds a "performative" dimension to the participatory model to trace the response of the individual subject in an experience. The Engagement Model, thus, reveals the broad spectrum there is to aesthetic experience; and so, holds potential to accurately estimate art experiences.

Berleant apprehends that criticism of the aesthetics of engagement may claim that the theory gives up everything exceptional about the arts in an attempt to make art more accepting and inclusive. He wards off these claims by strongly suggesting that modifications to creative and aesthetic practices cannot be allowed to hover gratuitously above the philosophy of the arts. They must be subject matter to the theory of art. But in doing so, one must also not ban innovation by legislating against it or by changing it through ad hoc justifications that maintain its fundamental structure (Berleant 1991, 44). Aesthetic of Engagement then becomes that new theory, which may help to correctly appropriate these changes in art and its experience

#### 2.2.5 Participatory Aesthetics and the Arbitrament on Social Media Art

Berleant's Engagement theory is a philosophical framework that emphasises the significance of active participation in aesthetic experience. While Berleant's theory was not developed expressly to study social media art, it may be used to see the relevance of the concept of engagement as being "occupied" in a participatory social performance in the particular context of social media.

Participation, which is usually implicit in the experience of art, manifests itself on Social media. The nature of participation in the form of *Like*, *Share* and *Comment* is more material than what Berleant recommends. But unlike traditional art forms, even the material presence of participatory gestures on social media allows viewers to interact with and contribute to the artwork. Additionally, dialogue and collaboration on social media foster a better connection

between artists and viewers. The distance between art, artist, and the viewer is minimal in such an environment, and it further allows for a freer awareness of the aesthetic field.

Furthermore, Berleant's approach emphasises the value of experiential involvement in the aesthetic encounter. Through the use of diverse multimedia components, interactive features, and storytelling strategies, social media art can produce immersive experiences. Users can engage with the art through a variety of sensory media, including music, video, and visual images. Of course, Berleant warns against the material synthesis of sensory media (Berleant 1991, 48), but social media art, with its multimedia components, can be a place to start realising the potential of art experiences in achieving perceptual synaesthesia. After all, engagement in social media art does take place on a more intimate and emotional level. And this is attributable to its immersive aspect, which also enables a heightened aesthetic experience. Hence, through the lens of aesthetic engagement, it is possible to see how social media art encourages inclusive aesthetic experiences, transcending the traditional boundaries of art and engaging a broader audience.

## Conclusion

Traditional forms of media in the fine arts, like literature, painting, and sculpture, have been regarded for a long time as the primary means of cultivating aesthetic experiences. However, with the advent of new media, such as digital art, virtual reality, and interactive installations, the conception of aesthetics has expanded to include a wider range of sensory and immersive experiences. Social media too, as a part of it, has transformed how one interacts with artistic expressions, distorting the lines between artist and audience and challenging traditional notions of aesthetics. The incorporation of technology into artistic practices has enabled artists to manipulate and combine diverse media forms to elicit new sensations and emotions. For instance, Mike Chasar, thoroughly studying the relationship shared by poetry and new media, records the role of magic lantern in providing audiences with various means of experiencing and engaging with previously well-known texts, rendering them fresh and perhaps even "contemporary," and as a result, revitalising them. By the same token, aesthetic experience is uniquely defined on social media as well; and this dynamic interaction between technology, art, and the viewer necessitates a new perspective that takes into account the distinctive qualities and capabilities of new media. Subsequently, it can be concluded that if the framework of Aesthetics addresses the question of how art is interacted with, a new media

framework is important to gain insights into the intricate relationship between aesthetics and technology and how this transaction modifies the user's interaction with art.