

## Practices of Art

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However far the work of art may form a world inherently harmonious and complete, still, as an actual single object, it exists not *for itself*, but *for us*, for a public which sees and enjoys it, [so that] every work of art is a dialogue with everyone who confronts it. . . . At certain epochs [however] the public may be corrupted by a highly praised 'culture', that is by having put into its head the perverse opinions and follies of critics and connoisseurs (Hegel, *Aesthetics*, pp. 264f., 1184).

#### 1. Action and Ontology<sup>1</sup>

Works of art, as we shall here conceive them, are the products of deliberate or intentional activity on the part of human beings manifesting certain kinds of competence or skill. Certainly there are aesthetically pleasing objects existing independently of human creative activity. But an object — an arrangement of shells or leaves, let us say — which came into existence by accident and which did not serve as the basis for any shaping or forming activity by any human being would not be a work of art, however many superficial similarities it might bear to other objects commonly accepted as such.

This chapter is a study of the essential interwovenness of objects and actions in the world of art, an investigation of the conditions which objects must satisfy if they are

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to be works of art and which actions must satisfy if they are to yield artistic objects. It is an essentialistic investigation, in the sense that it attempts to describe the essences or structures of the various entities — things and states, processes and events, acts and actions — configured together within the cultural world, starting out from the view that we might best understand such entities by examining first of all the most simple or typical cases. More abstruse or complex cases may then be understood by reflecting on the various possible deformations or extrapolations of the cases already considered.

In a number of respects our investigations will parallel much of what goes on in the writings of Hegel and Marx and the ideas set out below in fact evolved out of a comparison between certain aspects of the Marxist and phenomenological approaches to social and cultural formations.<sup>2</sup> Both Marxists and phenomenologists are concerned to understand the structures of the social world in terms of the interconnections between different segments of reality; that is, they are concerned with the objects themselves in contrast, for example, to analytic philosophers, who are concerned in the first place with the analysis of certain kinds of language. Phenomenology and Marxism differ, of course, in their views as to the nature of the privileged entities in terms of which descriptions should be formulated. Thus phenomenologists tend to assume that the structures of individual human consciousness manifest a peculiar intelligibility, and that the structures of social and cultural reality should be accounted for, as far as possible, in terms of the relations they bear to the individual subject. (Phenomenology has thus inspired the 'micro-sociology' of Alfred Schütz and his successors.) Marxists, on the other hand, believe that the historically existing structures of what they call 'social action' are uniquely intelligible.<sup>3</sup> Hence the Marxists' descriptions of individual consciousness are themselves presented within a framework which assumes that social action is somehow basic, so that Marxist social theory amounts always to one or other form of collectivism.

Within the specific field of aesthetic phenomena, Marxism has often been associated with an action-theoretic approach, an approach which sees the essence of such

phenomena as lying not in special sorts of objects but in the specific nature of the things artists and audiences do in certain sorts of context. This approach, which is not exclusive to the tradition of Marxian aesthetics,<sup>4</sup> is commonly held to be at odds with an essentialistic approach of the sort defended here. Essentialism is seen as dictating a too narrow methodology, restricted to the description of what is static and substantial, where the concern with action and with artistic practice (or 'praxis') is seen as making possible a broader, more dynamic treatment of the matters in hand. The essentialist is not however restricted in his ontology to static categories like those of substance or thing. He can argue that actions, too, and even those much more complex and diaphanous entities which are the competences and practices on which they rest, are no less capable of treatment in essentialistic and ontological terms than are the products to which they give rise. Indeed a certain symmetry between actions on the one hand and objects on the other will make itself felt throughout the present essay.

Art works are dependent, now, not only upon the actions of their creators, but also upon certain correlated activities of an appropriately receptive audience. A shell, or a leaf, or a relic of some lost civilisation, existing in a world lacking every tendency toward appreciative evaluation, would be simply a shell, or a leaf, or a lump of stone. It would lack those intentional qualities which mark off works of art from other, more humdrum varieties of worldly furniture.

What, precisely, is the nature of this two-fold relation between a work of art and its creator and audience? It seems, first of all, that the two arms of the relation are importantly different. The work of art depends upon the artist only for its *coming into existence*. Once created it achieves a certain self-sufficiency, which allows it to float free and enjoy a life of its own, to which the artist may make no noticeable contribution. The first arm, which is thus in place only transiently, we shall refer to as the relation of *ontological source*.<sup>5</sup> and we shall say that an object *a* has its *ontological source* in a second object *b* wherever *a* is such that, in virtue of its essence

or material structure, it could not have begun to exist unless *b* also existed.

The second arm of the relation, in contrast, is more properly a matter of *dependence* in the sense that, as we shall see, the work of art is such as to owe its *continuing to exist* to the activities of the audience. We shall say, accordingly, that an object *a* is *dependent* upon a second object *b* wherever *a* is such that, in virtue of its essence or material structure, it cannot continue to exist unless *b* exists.

We need to go further however: for both source and dependence as here defined would embrace also cases reflecting certain merely ephemeral properties of the things involved, cases we want here to have excluded. Consider, for example, the relation between a husband and his wife. Certainly the husband is such that, as a matter of necessity, he cannot continue to exist *as such* unless his wife exists. This is however purely a reflection of certain analytic relations among the relevant concepts. In the present context we shall require the defined relations to reflect intrinsic properties of the things themselves. Accordingly we shall insist that *a* shall be dependent on or have its source in *b* only in those cases where *a* is sensitive in its material structure to changes in the material structure of *b*. (In the sense, for example, in which an act of visual perception is sensitive to certain changes in the objects perceived.) The work of art is thus not merely dependent on the artist in the analytic sense that it owes its status as a work of art to the fact that it had an origin of this general sort. Rather, the detailed material constitution of the work reflects precise and specific actions of the artist. Similarly, the work is not dependent upon an audience for its continuing to exist in the merely analytic sense that, should all audiences cease to exist, then it, too, would go out of existence as a work of art (reverting to the status of a mere lump of stone). The work will much rather manifest a sensitivity in the qualities which it comes to possess as a work of art to even subtle changes in the constitution or in the habits of its audience.<sup>6</sup>

The relation of dependence so defined may be either one-sided, where *a* is dependent upon *b* but not conversely;

or reciprocal, where objects are dependent upon each other.<sup>7</sup> Wherever an object *a* is dependent upon some other object *b*, all objects which share the material structure of *a* — that is all objects of the same kind or essence as *a* — will manifest a dependence upon some object similar in kind to *b*. This insight has been used in recent years as the basis for a series of fruitful empirical hypotheses in a number of areas, above all in linguistics<sup>8</sup> and in various branches of psychology.<sup>9</sup> The kinds exhibited by the objects which constitute the subject-matters of these disciplines are for example *phoneme, word, sentence, colour, tone, interval, emotion*, all of which are in a certain sense natural or intelligible. What is most important however is that this intelligibility is manifested not only by what might be called the standard or prototypical instances of these kinds, but also by their various non-standard instances. A mottled white, an out of tune middle C, a nonsense word like 'slithy', an objectless fear, and so on, are each such as to involve an intelligible departure from the standard or prototypical instances of the kinds in question.<sup>10</sup> The fact that even the non-standard instances of intelligible kinds are themselves intelligible makes it possible to establish more than merely tentative, empirical laws as to the range of deviations which they may exhibit (as nonsense words are governed by quite precise laws e.g. as to pronunciation and spelling). Indeed, recent advances in psychology are beginning to suggest that the opposition between standard and non-standard instances of intelligible kinds may have a central and hitherto unsuspected role to play in our empirical understanding of the nature of human cognition.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. The Structures of Human Work

Here we are concerned specifically with the standard and non-standard instances of action-kinds and object-kinds manifested within the world of art. A useful starting point for our inquiries is provided by the description of the

phenomenon of human work that is to be found in Book I of Marx's *Kapital*. Here Marx distinguishes six distinct kinds of 'moment' or 'element' involved in human work,<sup>12</sup> which he designates as follows:

- (i) the worker,
  - (ii) the materials upon which he works,
  - (iii) the instruments with which he works,
  - (iv) his actions as a worker,
  - (v) the goal toward which he works,
- and
- (vi) the product of his work (the new form which is acquired by (ii)).

Each of these elements is, as a matter of necessity, indispensable, Marx now goes on to argue, if work is to exist at all. The indispensability of (i) follows from the fact that work is, of its nature, a deliberate or intentional process. Work exists only where the processes of inanimate nature are to a greater or lesser extent steered or directed by an individual human being.<sup>13</sup>

(ii) is indispensable in virtue of the fact that purely mental activity, though it may constitute an essential preparatory phase of certain types of human work, functions as a part of the working process only to the extent that it issues forth in some determinate alteration in the world of material nature.<sup>14</sup>

From this we can infer that (iii) — which Marx defines as 'any thing or complex of things which the worker interposes between himself and the object of his work, and which serves as the director of his activity upon that object' — is also indispensable.<sup>15</sup> Taken in a wider sense, the instruments of work include 'all objectual conditions that are required for the process of work to take place', including the earth itself, with its gradually evolving network of streets and roads, canals and railway lines, and all other means of communication, including human language.<sup>16</sup> The level of development of these external

conditions provides one measure of the development of man himself.

The indispensability of (iv) follows similarly, though only if we recognise, with Marx, that the worker may for example employ his own hands as the instrument of the working process — and become himself transformed thereby.

The absence of (v) reduces work to mere activity, that is: to the level of mere interaction with inanimate nature: work is, in Marx's terms, not an isolated action, but an enduring complex of exertion and will, directed towards the realisation of some given end.<sup>17</sup>

Finally (vi) — the new form that is acquired by (ii) — is also indispensable.<sup>18</sup> For a process of work must issue forth in some product, even though this product need not match precisely the idea in the mind of the worker on initiation of the working process. Marx himself identifies the end-product of work as a material thing, 'a stuff of nature which, by having its form changed has been appropriated to human needs', in virtue of the fact that 'work has bound itself to its object'.<sup>19</sup> We might therefore conceive Marx's 'end-product' as something like the *sum* of materials and newly acquired form.

It is clear, therefore, that these six elements do not exist merely side by side; rather, they interpenetrate or intervolve each other in such a way that each is sensitive, in its material structure, to changes (to 'transformations' in the Marxist jargon) in the remaining elements. It is only in the context of that total structure which is the working process that there can exist, for example, instances of the kinds *working instrument*, or *goal* or *product of work*.

This allows us to make sense of Marx's claim — which derives from Hegel — that the worker himself is changed 'in his essence' by his actions as a worker.<sup>20</sup> Work is, from the Marxist perspective, *anthropogenic*. The worker is shaped by his actions (and thereby also by the materials with which he works) into a new object, only partially coincident with the old. It is important to see how central are these ideas to Marx's entire dialectical conception of human development. The latter rests essentially on the idea that man is capable of being subjected to a whole

series of essential or qualitative transformations, as the caterpillar is transformed into a butterfly.<sup>21</sup>

The actions of the worker are dependent, too, upon the instruments used, upon the material worked and upon the specific goal of the given working process. Actions directed towards distinct goals are distinct actions, even though, from the point of view of an external observer, they may be physically indistinguishable. For action is not merely physical behaviour: it depends necessarily upon a background of beliefs and intentions, as also upon a wider surrounding context. Finally the goal of the working process — as a complex of beliefs and intentions on the part of a given individual subject — is itself of such a kind that it cannot exist unless that individual subject also exists.

We may summarise the results of our discussion in the form of a diagram (a snapshot of the relations obtaining between these given elements), somewhat as follows:

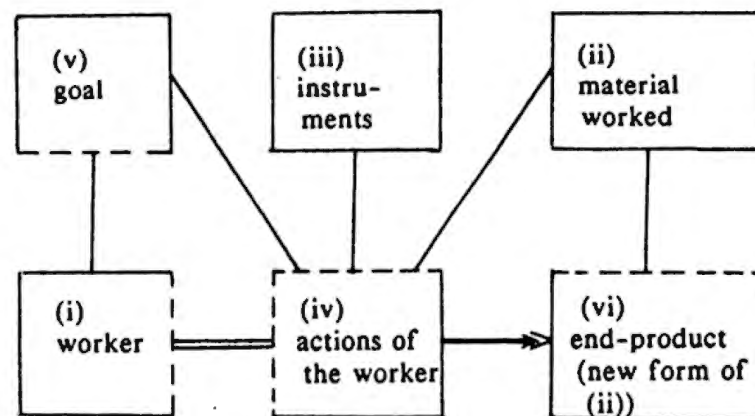


Figure 1: The Basic Structure of Human Work



The solid frames surrounding (ii) and (iii) signify that we have to do here with independent objects (objects which do not depend on other things in order to exist). Broken frames signify dependent objects, and the single and double links connecting such frames to the walls of neighbouring frames signify dependence relations, which are respectively one-sided or reciprocal. The double-headed arrow connecting (iv) to (vi) represents the relation of ontological source.

It is possible to read off from a diagram of this kind propositions expressing the relations of source and dependence which bind together the objects pictured. Thus for example the end-product of the working process owes the source of its existence to the actions of the worker. Such propositions may express, first of all, the relations actually obtaining between the different elements of some given process of work. But since what is true of any actually existing goal or end-product is no less true of all objects which share the same material structure, it is possible to read off from the diagram also general propositions concerning corresponding essences or kinds. The truth of such propositions — which are for example of the form: 'any instance of kind *A* depends upon (or has its source in) some instance of the kind *B*' — is then not conditional upon the existence of particular instances of the kinds in question.

But the diagram allows us to account further for the distinctions between standard and non-standard instances of the corresponding kinds: any object recognisable as a potential element in the total structure is, as it exists outside this total structure, a non-standard instance of the relevant kind. Thus a redundant machine, or a piece of flint which has not yet been extracted from the earth, are examples of non-standard instances of the kind *working instrument*; unrealisable goals, or goals which issue in no efforts towards realisation, are non-standard instances of the kind, *working goal*, and so on.

These remarks make clear that Figure 1 is in a certain sense incomplete. Thus it takes only negligible account of the time-structure of human work (it ignores the fact that the instruments of work may themselves undergo changes — be used up — as a result of the process of work). And

most of all it ignores those further elements with which work is inextricably associated, above all the elements of consumption. As Marx puts it in the *Grundrisse*:

The product receives its last finishing touches in consumption. A railroad on which no one rides, which is consequently not used up, not consumed, is only a potential railroad and not a real one. Without production, no consumption; but, on the other hand, *without consumption, no production*; since production would then be without a purpose . . . the product first becomes a real product in consumption; e.g. a garment becomes a real garment only through the act of being worn; a dwelling which is not inhabited is really no dwelling; consequently, a product, as distinguished from a mere natural object . . . *first becomes* a product in consumption. Consumption gives the product the finishing touch by annihilating it, since the result of production is a product, not as the material embodiment of activity but only as an object for the active subject.<sup>22</sup>

Some of the mentioned simplifications will be rectified in the course of what follows. The account summarised in Figure 1 will however serve as a provisional basis for our investigations of the place and structure of human work in the specific field of art.

### 3. Practice and Competence

Work is, in all its dimensions, capable of cumulation. As Marx recognised, not only the instruments and the materials involved in any given process of work but also the worker himself are typically the end-products of previous work. A worker has normally served as material of *processes of training*, through which he has become transformed by the work of others.<sup>23</sup> What is interesting is that we can conceive this process of working on others as a

special case of human work in general, as conceived within the terms of the theory sketched above.

Note, first of all, that all articulate human activity and indeed human maturity in general is dependent upon processes of training of the given kind. These processes may on the one hand be individual in that they are directed toward one single person who is their subject. On the other hand however they must in every case be also in a certain sense social. Certainly it is possible for an individual to train *himself* for some specific end, by using his own body as the material of work — it is this we have in mind when we talk of someone *working himself into* a given culture, discipline or institution. Yet even such self-training must involve others, if not directly, then at least indirectly. For training consists in the attempt — which may be more or less successful — to instill in the individual who is its subject a competence which he himself does not possess. An entirely private process of training, one which did not draw, for example, on manuals or textbooks which had been produced by others, would therefore presuppose that the competence to be instilled was somehow already in the possession of the individual in whom it was to be instilled, and this reduces the idea of such a process to absurdity.

The process of self-training is social also in the sense that its goal will involve — in normal circumstances — the intention on the part of the individual in question to insert himself into some actually existing system of shared rules or practices — to put himself into a position where the correctness or incorrectness of his actions will be capable of being established by others. A private activity which lacked this second moment would not be a process of training in the proper sense, however many superficial similarities it might bear to, for example, processes of learning by rote. Faced with an individual who persisted in such an activity, who insisted that he was training himself, but whose actions were incapable of being understood in terms of any system of publicly shareable rules, we should find it impossible to classify these actions in normal terms at all, but would be tempted, rather, to talk in terms of madness. As Marx writes:

Man is in the most literal sense of the word a *zoon politikon*, not only a social animal, but an animal which can develop into an individual only in society. Production by isolated individuals outside society — something which might happen as an exception to a civilized man who by accident got into the wilderness and already potentially possessed within himself the forces of society — is as great an absurdity as the idea of the development of language without individuals living together and talking to one another.<sup>24</sup>

A process of training is successful if it gives rise in the individual who is its subject to a competence which is, at least in part, identical in its structure to already existing competences on the part of other members of society. Qualitatively similar competences which are possessed by distinct individuals within a society and which are such as to share common historical origins are competences *in* a single practice (for example a language or a system of table-manners). There are of course cases where there is a division of labour in the maintenance of a given practice, so that different groups of individuals manifest qualitatively different though complementary competences for example in virtue of their different levels of authority. In any case however it can be affirmed that, while a given *competence* is in every case the competence of some specific individual (the competences possessed by distinct individuals may be at most similar but never identical), one and the same *practice* is capable of being shared by an arbitrarily large number of individuals. Practices are, in this sense, intrinsically social objects. A given practice depends for its existence upon a group of individuals whose interactions maintain in being the relevant competences. It exists only to the extent that there are individuals in society who share similar competences and maintain these competences in mutual interaction, for example by responding in appropriate ways when the practice is seen to have been flouted. Thus the same processes of training and of critical interaction which typically give rise to linguistic and social competence in the individual provide a foundation for the existence of the associated practices in society as a whole.

It follows from all this, however, that not every practice imaginable in principle can in fact become established in a human culture. Practices are capable of becoming established only if they are consistent with the biological and psychological make-up of human beings, and only if they satisfy those higher level essential laws which flow from the structures of work, inculcation, and correction. A newly initiated practice imposed by authority which did not meet these conditions must gradually mutate into some more complex but also less artificial practice, in ways which are perhaps not capable of being recognised by its instigators.

The interconnections, now, between (a) individual competences (both those already existing and those being acquired), (b) social practices, and (c) processes of training, are relations of source and dependence which reflect the connections between corresponding moments of human work as set forth above.

Practices and established competences are reciprocally dependent on each other. A competence in a given practice cannot, of course, exist, unless the practice itself also exists. And a practice can exist only to the extent that relevant competences are established amongst, and are manifested in the interactions of, individuals in society. Note, however, that there is an important difference between the two arms of this reciprocal dependence relation. A practice does not depend for its existence upon the existence of any specific individual competence (and therefore, *a fortiori*, it does not depend upon those individual competences which are in process of being instilled at any given time). A practice depends, rather, only upon competences and their bearers *taken in general*. (Practices are therefore not affected by the fact that individuals manifest the corresponding competences to differing degrees.) This generic dependence of practice on competence, a type of dependence relation not so far considered, may be elucidated, crudely, as follows.<sup>25</sup> We shall say that an object *a* is *generically dependent* upon a population *b* of objects (which may be changing, by increments, over time), whenever *a* cannot exist unless successive subgroups *b<sub>i</sub>* of *b* also exist, *a* being sensitive, in its material

structure, to changes in the material structures of the members of the successive *b<sub>i</sub>*.

We may express these interconnections in a suitably amended version of Figure 1 above, employing an inverted single arrow (' $\leftarrow$ ') to symbolise the relation of generic dependence:

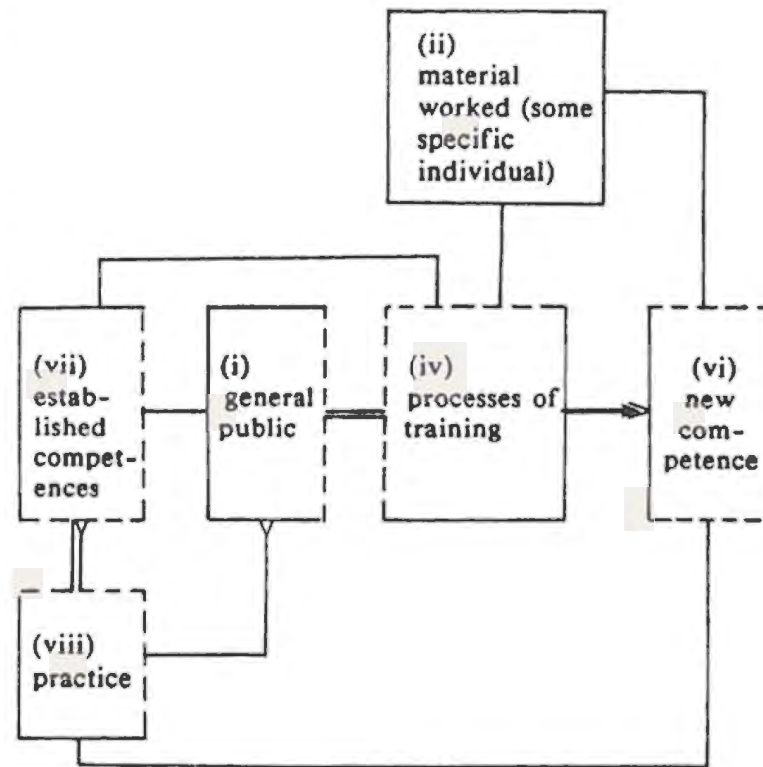


Figure 2: The Production of Competence



Here the two moments of goal and instrument of work have, for the sake of simplicity, been ignored. The core of this diagram — items (i), (ii), (iv) and (vi) — is in other respects identical to the diagram above of human work in general. It contains, however, the two additional elements of *practice* and *established competences*, elements which form the indispensable background of the processes of training here considered. These processes are in the first place mediately dependent upon the practices which they sustain. But there are dependence relations also in the converse direction (from (viii) to (iv) via (i) and via (vii) and (i)). For just as, in Marx's original discussion, the individual worker is shaped, in his nature, by his actions as a worker, so also here: individuals are shaped by their activities in training and criticising others. The practice itself is therefore mediately dependent upon the associated processes of training, and hence it will exhibit a sensitivity in its structure to changes in these processes (as the grammatical structure of the English language has in part evolved as a result of changes in the standards and methods of training people in its use).

In addition to the relation of generic dependence there is a second novel feature of the source-dependence diagram above. The end-product of the process of training, a newly established competence on the part of some specific individual, differs from the end-product of the more mundane processes of work considered above in that it is not an object that is able, once created, to exist independently of the process which created it. The new competence is itself dependent for its continued existence upon elements of the process to which it owes the source of this existence. We shall find in what follows that the presence of both these features is characteristic of all structures exhibited in the world of art. It is the (generic or non-generic) dependence of cultural phenomena on associated mental acts to which reference is made when such phenomena are referred to as 'purely intentional objects'.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. Art Work

Practice and competence are, I now wish to argue, essential moments of the process of artistic creation. There are, certainly, isolated instances of works of art that have been produced by accident, or by work on the part of an individual isolated from the public institutions of art and from all training in technique. Such objects may even serve as inspiratory forces in the subsequent development of artistic forms; but then the given objects are, until they are taken up by others and inserted into the social world of artistic practices, non-standard instances of the kind *work of art*. They become works of art in the strict sense and acquire their capacity to exert an influence upon other artists only where an appropriate background of competence and practice begins to be provided for them.

The true test of the thesis here defended is provided by instances of radically creative art which generate entirely new forms. How can a theory which conceives a background of established competence and practice as an indispensable presupposition of artistic creation acknowledge the existence of entirely original artistic forms? This question will be confronted in the sections that follow. Here we shall consider only those products of human work which are, from the standpoint of their genesis, standard instances of the kind *work of art* (instances of what we might call 'normal art'): novels, paintings, works of symphonic music, consciously and deliberately produced to a more or less determinate pattern by an individual working against a background of accepted rules and techniques.<sup>27</sup> The individual in question is someone who has acquired a competence in the practices of his chosen medium. In the case of the novelist, for example, these practices are most conspicuously of a linguistic nature. But they may consist also in attitudes relating to the sustained exertion of will and technique (the attitudes of the craftsman). More generally, we can say that the artist's total competence is acquired, at least in part, through processes of training involving others: it rests first of all upon association with teachers, critics and audiences, but then also upon asso-



ciation with other artists and with the products of their work.

What applies to the *creator* of genetically standard instances of works of art, to the artist working within a framework of established practices, applies also to the members of his *audience*. The capacity of the reader to appreciate a novel as a work of art, no less than the capacities of the writer, depends upon the acceptance of shared practices of an appropriate sort. A manifested competence in the given practices is a necessary presupposition of someone's counting as a member of the literary audience. These practices, and the associated competences, are sustained by a never-ending process of self-training on the part of the audience as a whole, by a process of work, whose instruments are existing works of literature and whose materials are the individual members of the audience themselves.<sup>28</sup>

Because the receptive practices of the audience will, of necessity, reflect the structures of actually existing works of art, and because the creative practices of the artist will be sensitive, at least in part, to the practices shared in common by the members of his audience, it will follow that these two sets of practices are reciprocally dependent on each other. Each is to some degree sensitive in its internal structure to changes in the structure of the other. Both sets of practices are, in their turn, generically dependent upon the totality of individuals in whose behaviour and competences they are manifested. These individuals constitute what we shall call the *general public* (for some given art, within some given culture or society). The audience within this public is that ever-changing group of individuals who have acquired, to differing degrees, the relevant receptive competences, and who manifest these competences in their appreciative association with specific works of art. But the general public comprehends also artists: individuals who have acquired relevant creative competences and who manifest these competences with varying degrees of success in the production of works of art.<sup>29</sup>

What, then, is the structure of the process of artistic creation for genetically standard works of art? Here again, it is useful to return to our original description

of the structure of work in general. We can distinguish, as before, six interconnected elements:

- (i) the individual artist,
- (ii) the material upon which he works,<sup>30</sup>
- (iii) the instruments of his work,
- (iv) his creative actions as an artist,
- (v) the goal of these actions,
- (vi) their end-product (the new form that is acquired by (i)).

These elements are connected by relations of source and dependence precisely as in Figure 1 above. Where we are dealing with genetically standard instances of works of art, we must recognise also at least the following additional elements:

- (vii) the specific individual competence of the artist (which has its source in prior processes of training) — it is upon these competences that both the specific goal of the given process of work and also the creative actions of the artist will depend.

This competence will in turn reflect:

- (viii) practices which the artist shares in common with his fellow artists.

We are assuming that the end-product of a given process of artistic production is in fact a work of art.<sup>31</sup> But of course it is not within the power of the artist himself to determine that the product of his activities shall be anything more than, say, a lump of stone. That this end-product should be *art* would seem to depend upon certain qualities of the relevant audience. Imagine, for example, a piece of chiselled stone, produced for private (devotional) purposes by an individual living in isolation from other

human beings in a world lacking any tendency toward the acceptance of lumps of stone of the given size and shape as works of art. Such a tendency may, of course, come to be induced by the activities of some second individual who has conceived for himself the task of advocating the aesthetic merits of objects of the given kind and who succeeds in establishing pertinent practices. But it is only to the extent that preparatory work of this sort has been undertaken that the given objects are works of art.<sup>32</sup>

Where we are dealing with genetically standard works of art we are of course assuming, in effect, that this preparatory work, preparatory self-training on the part of the general public, has taken place already, i.e. that there is an established tendency on the part of the relevant audience to accept objects of a given form and genesis as works of art. For in the absence of all practices held in common by the members of this audience which would enable given objects to be the targets of appreciative reactions, such objects could not be works of art, no matter how great the degree of artistic competence that had been invested in them.

The process of production of a genetically standard work of art involves, therefore, also the following additional elements:

- (i') the general public (and specifically the audience for works of art of the given kind),
- (ii') the process of training which gives rise to the relevant appreciative practices of this public,
- (vi') these practices themselves.

These elements are connected to the remaining elements of the total productive process by means of relations of source and dependence somewhat as indicated in the diagram opposite.<sup>33</sup>

Those frames situated above the horizontal line running through the middle of the diagram are assumed to designate specific individual things, processes or states, connected together by relations of individual dependence. The frames below the line designate not individual but

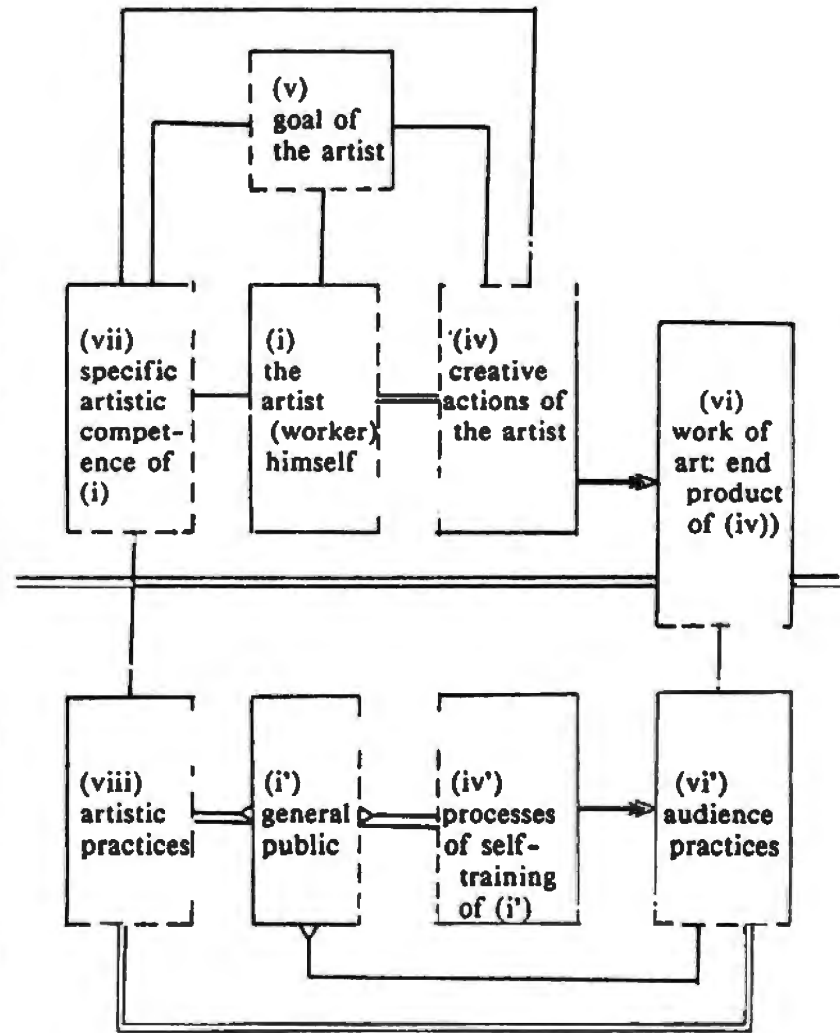


Figure 3: The Interdependence of Artistic Product and Audience Practices

essentially social phenomena, connected by relations of generic dependence. The work of art itself can be seen to straddle the boundary between what is individual and what is social. On the one hand it may be a specific individual thing (for example a lump of stone). On the other hand, however, in virtue of its dependence (as a work of art) upon appropriate audience practices (upon a tendency existing in society toward appropriate kinds of receptive appreciation), it must also be an intrinsically social phenomena, and in the case of music and literature this intrinsically social nature is clearly manifested in the fact that here the work itself is an *abstractum* which can be identified with no specific individual object.

### 5. The Problem of Creativity

In offering a description of the creative process which places so central an emphasis upon training, competence and practice, we may be accused of having propounded an exaggeratedly conservative theory of art. This emphasis upon the essential role of practice (of tradition, observance, respect) seems, however, to be unavoidable where we are dealing with what we have called genetically standard instances of works of art, with works of art produced according to accepted patterns by artists who take for granted established standards and techniques. But what account is to be given of exceptional works of art, of those products of truly creative activity which overturn existing standards and, by instituting new patterns and techniques, serve as the motor of artistic development?

There are, as we have already had occasion to mention, isolated instances of works or forms of art which have been brought into existence in part by accident. Innovations generated by accident raise no difficulties for the conservative theory: here society itself constitutes the filtering mechanism which determines the sorts of accidental innovation which will be allowed to survive and to

exert an influence upon subsequent developments in practice and technique.

What, however, of those cases where it is impossible to assert that an innovation is merely the result of accident? The history of art bears witness to the existence of individuals who seem to manifest a power or capacity to initiate new forms or styles, and to carry their audiences and fellow artists with them to such a degree that, through their influence, a succession of novel practices comes to be established. Here, surely, it is the individual, and not society as a whole, who serves as filter through which innovation flows.

The problem of providing an account of what might be called radical creativity must be faced by every theory which would wish to draw attention to the essentially social nature of the phenomena of art. It is particularly pressing for conservative or traditionalistic theories of the type sketched above, for the insistence upon the determining role of practices, i.e. of entities inextricably social in nature, may seem in the end to be capable of being supported without reservation only in relation to works of art which are such as to exhibit no trace of originality whatsoever. Theories of this kind, it could then be argued, would have ignored precisely what is essential to the artistic process.

How, then, are we to give an account of artistic innovation or originality, of the capacity of exceptional individuals to initiate new artistic forms or techniques or to produce works of art which are exceptional in some relevant respect? It would be straining credibility to assert that such individuals are extraordinary only in the sense that they had served as the point of convergence for a whole series of innovatory accidents. It would, on the other hand, be to seek refuge in irrationality to talk instead of the given individuals as manifesting peculiar, not further explicable qualities of 'genius' or 'inspiration'. This would be to abandon the project of a *theory* of creativity.

Such considerations have given rise to the attempt to construct psychological theories of the artistic process, to conceptions of the creative artist as an individual who has a capacity to *think out for himself* new standards and

rules, to instill in himself novel competences and to manifest these competences in his creation of works of art, independently of any background of established practices. Such conceptions lead, when taken to extremes, to the denial of any social conception of art. For if the individual artist is conceived as having the capacity to think out new artistic forms for himself, then it would begin to appear as though the present or future acceptance of his creative efforts on the part of society as a whole were nothing more than a dispensable trimming to his activities. To grant to the artist this independent power of creation would seem to imply that innovatory works of art may still exist, *as works of art*, even in the face of total apathy, or antipathy, on the part of all actual or possible audiences. This would imply a complete inversion of the dependence relations between the individual and social moments of the process of artistic creation as set forth above. The social moments are no longer the governors of the artistic process, but are reduced to the status of mere epiphenomena.

It may be thought that since the two sorts of doctrine were developed initially to deal with two different sets of case, there must be room in a total theory for elements of both. Psychologistic (individualistic) intuitions could be brought into play to deal with those artistic processes which seem to manifest a breaking free from established practices, where the individual artist is apparently striding forward in advance of his audience; conservative (social) intuitions to deal with processes which are essentially reproductive of existing styles, where the artist is working in such a way as to accommodate himself to the tastes and competences of his audience.

For all its superficial attractiveness, however, there are serious difficulties with an eclectic theory of this kind. For how are we to account within its terms for the mechanisms which establish, for any given instance of extraordinary or innovatory activity on the part of some professing artist, that the products of this activity are innovatory *art*, and not, in the terms of our discussion above, mere lumps of stone (or mere manifestations of aggression or pique)? Some innovations do indeed prove to be of such a nature that they are able to call forth

corresponding practices from society as a whole. But this is just to say that they do, at some stage, satisfy the requirements of the conservative theory. The proponents of extreme forms of psychologism may be prepared to issue a blanket acknowledgment of *all* products of innovatory activity as works of art, simply because they appear novel or strange, and doctrines of this kind are reflected in many currently popular conceptions of the artist as essentially a rebel or baiter of society. Against these 'perverse opinions and follies', however, the proponent of the conservative doctrine must once more have the last word: for only some products of innovatory activity will — at some point in the future — manifest a capacity to call forth associated practices in society as a whole, will become, that is to say, accepted in the *practice* of society as works of art (and the condition that an object be accepted in the practice of society is, of course, considerably stronger than the condition that it be, say, hung in a gallery).

The proponent of extreme psychologism is prepared to reject any distinction between true and false innovation, and therefore he is prepared also to erase the distinction between the truly creative artist and the rebel or deviant. One might, however, be tempted to suppose that a less extreme eclectic theory can be developed, a theory which would rescue the distinction between truly artistic creation and spurious innovation by offering a substantive account of this distinction, for example by providing a specification in psychological terms of the different kinds of attitudes or processes of thought which are the accompaniments of creative activity. But is it really possible to distinguish true from false innovation by reference to a distinction among kinds of mental states or processes? The desire merely to provoke may after all, in isolated instances, give rise to truly creative art, and there is no guarantee that the intention to produce creative art will lead to anything more than the production of lumps of stone.

More careful reflection suggests, in fact, that to seek a criterion of innovation in any objectively determinable feature of the processes of thought of individual artists must be a fruitless enterprise. These processes are accessible, at best, through autobiographical reports whose



reliability is incapable of being independently established. And even the evidence that is provided by such reports suggests that what goes on in the artist's mind during the process of creation is at most connected only loosely to his productive actions. But how could this be otherwise? For if these actions are to lead to the production of works of art which are, in the strict sense, innovatory, then it seems difficult to imagine how their creation could have been the result of any *articulate* process of thinking out beforehand. For such thinking must itself, by the arguments advanced above, depend upon a background of already existing practices,<sup>34</sup> and thus the products to which it may give rise cannot be innovatory, but at best the realisation of forms and structures that are already latent in these existing practices. Society, once again, asserts its authority over the claims of the individual artist.

The only remaining alternative for the proponent of a psychologistic conception is to assert that the mental processes which accompany creative activity are essentially *inarticulate*.<sup>35</sup> To adopt such a view, however, is to abandon the attempt to provide a substantive theory of the nature of innovatory activity. For its appeal to the notion of inarticulate thinking, like the appeals of earlier, romantic philosophers to the notions of genius or inspiration, leads us back once more into the realm of the inexplicable.

## 6. Outlines of a Theory

Can we, then, develop a more adequate version of the conservative theory, which — while acknowledging the central determining role of practice and tradition in the world of art — is nevertheless able to recognise some creative power in the exceptional individual? Is it possible, that is to say, to develop a substantive theory of individual creativity which does not appeal to spurious powers of reason, or to a spurious freedom, of the individual artist?

A still provisional starting point for such a theory may be formulated as follows: the creative individual is not someone who has an extraordinary capacity somehow to think out new forms or practices for himself; he is, rather, someone who is able to immerse himself in an existing practice — or be immersed by his master — to an extraordinary degree. An account of this kind brings us back once more to our comparison of the artist with the craftsman. It stresses the importance of those kinds of rigorous processes of training which endow the creative artist with a total competence in his medium, and presents a view of radical creativity as the achievement of an individual who manifests an exceptional tractability in relation to a given practice, to the extent that he is able to move within it with perfect (thoughtless) ease and so tease out its hitherto unforeseen possibilities.<sup>36</sup> All human beings are, it would seem, born with a tractability of this kind in relation to the rudimentary practices of ordinary language, but some infants would seem to manifest the same tractability also in relation to the practices of, say, music or chess or mathematics.

This provisional theory offers an account only of that kind of artistic creativity which consists in drawing out the possibilities of an already existing practice (in bringing to consummation a form or style already established in the work of others). Products of creative activity of this kind are not, of course, truly novel at all. The truly creative artist is normally conceived not as an individual who brings to perfection the work of others; he is, rather, someone who himself initiates forms and practices hitherto unrecognised. Thus he works ahead of, and not in the wake of, the relevant public. We should not, however, be misled into exaggerating the differences between these two kinds of creative activity. As the arguments above were designed to show, even the products of truly innovatory activity cannot be entirely alien to already existing practices. They must embody a latent tendency to call forth that *work* on the part of an audience which would give rise — at some point in the future — to corresponding appreciative reactions. And we can reasonably suppose that an audience will manifest a willingness to undergo the processes of self-training which would be necessary to

come to terms with such products only if it recognises something in them which would justify such expenditure of effort. An object which was, in all aesthetically relevant respects, entirely alien to existing audiences, could embody no tendency to call forth appreciative reactions, and it would be inexplicable how an object of this kind could become accepted as a work of art.

Truly creative activity — where it is not a matter of accident — must therefore reflect existing practices. How, then, is it possible that it should bear the mark of innovation? This paradox might, perhaps, be resolved along the following lines: the truly creative artist is, again, an artist who has been able to immerse himself in existing practices to the extent that they have become plastic in his hands. His creativity consists, however, not in the fact that he has drawn out hitherto unforeseen possibilities of these practices; it consists, rather, in the fact that he has been able to immerse himself in disparate systems of practices in such a way that, through his productive activities, practices hitherto alien have become *fused together*.<sup>37</sup> This revised account of creativity is able to reconcile the possibility of truly innovatory activity with a commitment to the dependence of all artistic processes upon corresponding socially established competences: an audience is able to bring itself to a position where it can appreciate innovatory works of art, because these works have themselves been created against a background of practices with at least some of which its members are familiar.

The revised theory is able to do justice to the fact that the creative individual seems in almost every case to have no explicit awareness of the nature or root of his innovation. One may argue, indeed, that a fusion of practices of the given kind, if it is to give rise to successful works of art embodying styles or forms which are truly novel, could not, in the relevant respects, be the intended result of any deliberate process of thinking out on the part of the artist in question. The necessary processes of thinking could exist only to the extent that the relevant fusion of practices had taken place already. Thus there is no higher level of practice-independent 'pure reason' which would enable practices to be compared and contrasted, their

fusibility to be established by means of some kind of rational process of calculation.<sup>38</sup> The truly creative artist is indeed typically someone who is so completely immersed in his medium that he may remain unaware of the fact that a process of fusion, and the initiation of a novel practice, has taken place at all.

It is worth stressing, finally, that the revised theory — in marked contrast to psychological theories of the type mentioned above — admits of an empirical evaluation. Thus it would be possible, by investigating a range of particular examples of artistic creativity — and perhaps also by looking at similar phenomena in, for example, the sphere of economic innovation or scientific theorising — to establish the extent to which creativity, where it is not simply a matter of accident, does in fact reflect the fusion of practices in which the individual in question has been immersed. The consideration of, for example, the creativity of the late Habsburg Empire,<sup>39</sup> or of the influence of Japanese art upon Western painters, of the role of Italian forms in the music of the German baroque, or of Lessing's fusion of Greek and native German dramatic forms, to choose just a few examples at random, suggests not merely that the theory would receive some considerable degree of support from such inquiries, but also that the very process of putting the theory to the test in this way may throw new and interesting light on the phenomena investigated.

## Notes

1. Thanks are due to Lydia Goehr, Ed Swiderski and Johan Wrede for valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper.

2. As concerns phenomenology, the ideas presented are derived from the work of the Polish philosopher Roman Ingarden, whose investigations of the stratified structures

exhibited by works of art have in recent years become increasingly familiar to writers on aesthetics. I have paid particular attention also however to Ingarden's purely philosophical writings, especially to his *The Controversy over the Existence of the World* (1964/5), a treatise on ontology in very much the same essentialistic vein as is adopted in the present paper. As concerns Marxism — a term here employed in the loosest possible sense — my account has been influenced not only by a very limited reading of Marx himself, but also by Ingarden's Marxist critics in Poland and by the works of the Italian Marxist philosopher Ferruccio Rossi-Landi.

3. On the role of this assumption in the thinking of the later Wittgenstein, see Rossi-Landi 1981, sec. 3f.
4. See e.g. Wrede 1980.
5. This terminology is derived from the first volume of Ingarden 1964/5, vol. I, sec. 13.
6. A human being, similarly, is sensitive in his internal constitution to variations in environmental conditions relating to climate, diet, and so on. See Ingarden 1964/5, vol. I, sec. 15, vol. II/2, pp. 53f. and sec. 62.
7. Similarly they may be either single-rayed, where an object is dependent for its existence on precisely one other object, or multi-rayed, where an object is simultaneously dependent upon a manifold or plurality of other objects. These and related distinctions are discussed in detail by Husserl in his third Logical Investigation. Cf. also the papers by Mulligan, Simons, Smith and aggregates thereof, in the list of references below.
8. One thinks here particularly of Jakobson, Bühler and the Prague School: see e.g. Holenstein 1975, 1975a and 1979, though similar ideas have been propounded also more recently by proponents of linguistic and cognitive universals. Note that talk of essences or kinds and of essential or material structures can be granted varying degrees of ontological credence. Thus it need not be un-

derstood as involving any commitment to entities existing in some Platonic realm in addition to the specific individual objects which are their instances; it may for example be taken as a shorthand device for talk about the similarities or affinities which obtain between objects taken purely as individuals.

9. See the survey in Holenstein 1986.
10. This holds also in relation to many of the structures studied in other human sciences, such as economics or jurisprudence: see Smith 1986a and the references there given.
11. Cf. above all the works of E. Rosch and her associates. For the use of the opposition between standard and non-standard instances in linguistics see e.g. Hudson 1984 (discussions of the "selective inheritance principle"). The basic idea goes back at least as far as Aristotle. For some discussion of related ideas in more recent philosophy see Wolterstorff's account of properties 'normative and non-normative within a kind' (1980), and Ingarden's discussions of 'borderline cases' (1931, ch. 12 and 1976).
12. Marx 1975, pp. 193ff. Cf. also Rossi-Landi 1975, 2.3.2 *et passim*. A moment is, in the terminology introduced above, a dependent part. The use of the terminology of *Momente* and of the theory of dependence relations which join *Momente* together in different kinds of wholes is one further point of contact between Hegel and Marx on the one hand and the early phenomenological tradition on the other.
13. Marx 1975, p. 192.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 195.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 194f.
16. The conception of human language as an instrument of certain kinds of human work is defended in Rossi-Landi 1975.

7. Marx 1975, pp. 194f.

18. Again, it must be borne in mind that we are at this stage dealing always with standard instances of the kinds in question.

19. Marx 1975, p. 195.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

21. See Sowell, p. 14 *et passim*, for a useful discussion of this aspect of Marx's thought.

22. 1971, p. 24. Compare also Marx 1975, p. 198.

23. Cf. Marx 1975, pp. 196f.; Rossi-Landi 1975, especially 2.3.2.

24. 1971, p. 18.

25. Generic dependence is in some respects a generalisation of the multi-rayed dependence introduced in note 7 above. A related notion of generic dependence is discussed in Simons 1982.

26. See e.g. the discussion of derived and non-derived purely intentional objects in Ingarden 1931, esp. pp. 126f. of trans.

27. Because Ingarden, in his aesthetic writings, concentrates almost always on such genetically standard works of art, it has often been supposed that his theory is unable to account satisfactorily for innovatory forms (see e.g. Lissa 1975). This is, however, to misunderstand the more general philosophical background to Ingarden's views. His concentration on standard cases derives simply from the fact that the non-standard case can be understood only against the background of a prior understanding of the standard cases. Thus it is in relation to the latter that the ontological peculiarities of works of art, and of in-

tentional objects in general, must first of all be established.

28. The instruments of this process will include also, for example, works of criticism and of literary history, courses of lectures on literary theory, and so on. Ingarden's extensive writings on literary concretisation and on the 'life' of the literary work (see e.g. 1931, ch. 13) consist, in effect, in a discussion of these systems of mutual interdependence between literary work and literary audience.

29. For the sake of simplicity we shall ignore further aspects of the complex institutional structure and subdivisions of this general public. Thus we shall ignore, for example, the special roles of critics, teachers, publishers, gallery owners and so on.

30. It is not always clear what this material is: consider, for example, the case of literature. (Rossi-Landi would have argued that it is here language itself that is the material worked.)

31. More precisely: that the new form which comes to be possessed by the materials of this process is the form of something which can properly count as a work of art.

32. It should be noted that we are not committing ourselves to the stronger claim, characteristic of the subjectivist current in much recent philosophy of art, that a work of art exists only to the extent that it is the object of specific appreciative reactions on the part of some individual member of the relevant audience. Ingarden sees the literary work as a complex but unified structure, dependent for its existence upon but not reducible to certain tendencies towards appreciative reaction on the part of its readership (1931, sections 18 and 64ff.). The subjectivist, on the other hand, sees the work itself as being reborn in each successive reading. Thus he rejects the very idea of a literary work as a common pole of the responses of its readers. There exist, he argues, only the various readings which each successive subject creates for



himself. It is a consequence of Ingarden's view that a given reading may be more or less right or wrong, more or less correct or incorrect, according to the degree to which it succeeds in concretising structures latent in the work itself. One principal task of the literary theorist consists, on this view, in the rigorous statement of the criteria by which the degree of correctness of a given reading may be established. From the standpoint of subjectivism, in contrast, each reading is as good (or as bad) as any other, and the search for publicly acceptable criteria of correctness is misconceived.

33. This diagram may be compared to the diagram of the structure of action provided by Nordenstam in his 1978, p. 71. Nordenstam's views on these matters seem to coincide in some respects with those presented here; they are however formulated within the framework of the later Wittgensteinian philosophy, rather than in the vocabulary of Husserl and Ingarden; thus they dispense with all varieties of essentialism, talking instead of 'family resemblances').

34. Aesthetic concepts cannot be attributed to those who are known to lack the relevant skills: cf. Nordenstam 1980, 1981.

35. Views of this kind are nowadays popularly formulated in the vocabulary of psychoanalysis.

36. The associated competence becomes, in effect, a part of his physiology. See Smith 1986a, Grassl and Smith 1986.

37. I owe this account of creativity to J. C. Nyiri, whose formulation in turn has its roots in ideas put forward by Wittgenstein and by the Hungarian art historian Arnold Hauser. Note that the conception of creativity as a matter of the fusion of disparate practices is to be distinguished from views of creativity as consisting merely in the bringing together of hitherto separate elements and forms. See, on this, the discussion in Grassl and Smith (1986) of the opposition between what we there call the 'crude diversity theory' and the 'parallel reference system theory'.

38. Hence one cannot agree with Wrede when he suggests that 'The inventive or creative activity of the artist or author does not in any significant way differ from that of any problem solver, a philosopher, an engineer, or a carpenter' (1980, p. 140). Wrede seems to defend a view of this sort also in section 6 of his paper in the present volume, though it now seems to play a less important role in his general conception of the creative process. Note that a similar running together of two quite different sorts of phenomena — calculation, and what one might call instantaneous perception — is manifested also in many writings on the phenomenon of entrepreneurship in economics. A more adequate theory of entrepreneurial perception has however been put forward by the economists of the Austrian school, most persuasively by Israel Kirzner (1979).

39. See the arguments in Grassl and Smith 1986.

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