

## SOME NOTES ON DEFINING AESTHETICS IN THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL LITERATURE

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### *Introduction*

As is commonly accepted, the term 'aesthetics', or to be more precise *aesthetica*, was introduced in the middle of the eighteenth century by the German philosopher Baumgarten (see, for example, Tatarkiewicz 1980: 311). In a more or less well-defined manner it has since found its way particularly into the art-philosophical and art-historical literature, as well as, of course, into everyday language. In this essay I shall look more closely into the meaning of the concept of aesthetics in the anthropological literature, including art-historical writings focusing on non-Western art. In doing so, I shall provide a critical survey of the definitions of the term 'aesthetics' in that literature.

In those societies traditionally studied in anthropology, it appears that a term comparable to the Western word 'aesthetics' does not exist; but as we have just seen, it did not exist within the Western tradition either until two and a half centuries ago. Yet what is nowadays called aesthetics had at that time been discussed in Western philosophy for more than two thousand years (cf. Tatarkiewicz 1980: 311-12). Similarly, we may expect aesthetics to be part of other cultural traditions as well. Still, as a term or concept, and especially as a systematic study, aesthetics originated in the West against a particular cultural and philosophical background, and with a particular historical evolution. So, if we want to apply the notion of aesthetics to non-Western cultures, we are confronted with 'the risks involved in "exporting" concepts' (Maquet 1979: 47). But, as Maquet has suggested, 'by proceeding cautiously, at the prudent pace of

scholarly endeavors, one may prune off a concept and make out of it a useful cross-cultural tool' (ibid.). The critical examination of definitions will therefore concentrate on testing their cross-cultural applicability by confronting them with relevant empirical data yielded by anthropological fieldwork. In other words, it will be asked whether the proposed definitions of aesthetics are broad enough to encompass all the phenomena that, from the point of view of different non-Western cultures, can be considered structurally and qualitatively akin to the phenomena dealt with in Western aesthetics. Only when this requirement is met can aesthetics be regarded as a useful concept within anthropology.

### *Traditional Definitions*

To begin with, Stout conceives the term aesthetics in a dictionary sense as 'referring to the branch of philosophy dealing with the beautiful, chiefly with respect to theories of the essential character of the beautiful and the tests by which the beautiful may be judged' (1971: 30). Whereas the first part of Stout's definition reflects the concerns of the mainly theoretically orientated Western philosophy of art, the second part ('the tests by which...') could be said to point to the empirical research that is characteristic of much of the anthropological inquiry into aesthetics.

Lawal's definition of aesthetics has resemblances to Stout's: 'aesthetics deals with the philosophy of the beautiful as well as with the standards of value in judging art and other aspects of human life and culture' (Lawal 1974: 239). Just like—in principle—Stout's definition, Lawal's has the advantage of not restricting the object of aesthetics to what is traditionally considered 'art' (sculpture, painting, music etc.)—I assume that this is what Lawal means by 'art'—but leaves room for the study of the aesthetic aspects of cultural phenomena besides art, although his definition is rather vague on this point. The circumscription of aesthetics given by Lawal, however, also has a negative overlap with the one offered by Stout: both researchers confine aesthetics to the study of the beautiful, which, as we shall see, does injustice to the diversity within the aesthetic realm.

This restriction to the beautiful is also found in Mveng's definition: 'aesthetics is both science and art. It has as its object the norms of the Beautiful as they are revealed throughout works of art. Thus its domain embraces the whole of artistic and literary expression' (1975: 68).<sup>1</sup> When one bears in mind, on the one hand, that Mveng's definition restricts itself to the beautiful, and

1. 'L'esthétique est à la fois science et art. Elle a pour objet les normes du Beau telles qu'elles s'expriment à travers les oeuvres d'art. Son domaine embrasse donc la totalité des expressions artistiques et littéraires.' This and subsequent translations are mine.

realizes, on the other, that both in the West, and in, for example, Sub-Saharan Africa, certain art forms are purposely created to convey ugliness (see Van Damme 1987: 53-66), it becomes clear that Mveng's conclusion, namely that aesthetics, as defined as such, refers to the *whole* of artistic and literary expressions, cannot be justified in practice.

When Thompson, one of the first researchers to draw attention to the existence of intentional ugliness in African art, introduces the term 'anti-aesthetic' in talking about the deliberately ugly masks of the Yoruba (Nigeria) (1971b: chs. 3 and 4), he suggests similarly that the aesthetic is equivalent to the beautiful (or possibly other aesthetic categories, with the exception, in any event, of the ugly), which would exclude intentional ugliness from the study of aesthetics. This exclusion is avoided, for example, by Biebuyck who uses the expression 'aesthetic of the ugly' (1976: 346) in referring to some intentionally ugly sculptures of the Lega of Zaïre.

Already in 1961 Vandenhoute warned his colleagues that 'as long as the aesthetic experience of a work of art is conceived as equivalent to the perception of the beautiful, it will be difficult or even impossible for us to use the word "aesthetic" in an ethnological study, as well as in a sociology of art in general' (1961: 375). Indeed, as Vandenhoute adds, were we to equate the aesthetic with the beautiful, a great part of artistic production would be excluded from ethno-artistic study. He proposes to remain true to *aesthesis*, in the sense of perception, and to leave room for the perceptive experience not only of beauty, but also of ugliness, the comic, the tragic and so on (1960: 8; 1961: 375).

Armstrong's definition of aesthetics, too, leaves room for categories other than the beautiful: 'the study of the physical properties of one or more affecting works is aesthetics' (1971: 47). For not only beauty—a term which Armstrong himself wants to avoid, since he feels it is too ethnocentrically based (*ibid.*: 10)—can evoke an affective response, but also, for example, ugliness.

Although one could of course give a very broad definition of 'work of art', Vandenhoute seems to restrict himself largely to the visual arts. Such a restriction is absent in Fernandez's definition: 'aesthetics...has as one of its primary concerns the manner in which values, whether colors or tones or even words for the poet, are formally arranged in space' (1971: 357). Fernandez also defines aesthetics as referring to 'notions...of preferred form in object and action' (*ibid.*: 358). Besides avoiding a restriction to the visual arts (see also the definition of aesthetics supplied by Kaeppler 1971: 175), Fernandez thus also leaves room for aesthetic categories other than the beautiful, since what should be regarded as 'preferred form' depends on the context. Again, the existence of intentionally ugly art forms can serve as an example here. I feel that another advantage of Fernandez's definition resides in the fact that form and content are not strictly separated. For Fernandez talks about both 'form' and 'value', and better still, the formal arrangement of values. That in his view, 'value' embraces not only colours, tones or words (as in the definition

given above), but can be more broadly interpreted as referring to culturally defined content, becomes clear from a reading of the whole of his article on the aesthetics of the Fang of Gabon (1971).

Thompson's definition of (African) aesthetics, on the other hand, rather stresses the aspect of form: 'African aesthetics is the application of consensual notions of quality to particular problems of form' (1971a: 374).<sup>2</sup> From his study of Yoruba aesthetics (see especially Thompson 1973), however, it is clear that he does not disregard the content to which the form may refer. Thompson's definition, with a certain emphasis on 'consensual' and 'form' (as regards 'form', see also below), reflects more or less the way in which, as can be inferred, aesthetics is implicitly defined by a large number of the researchers who empirically investigate African (see Van Damme 1987) and other non-Western aesthetics. The same can be said of Bohannan's definition of aesthetics. In an anthropological context, he says, aesthetics refers to 'the relationship between criticism and art objects', and can be defined as 'the study of relationships between art and all that bundle of attitudes and activities which we in the modern world call criticism' (Bohannan 1961: 86).

As regards the implicit definitions of aesthetics mentioned above, Goldwater (1973: 6) remarks: '[aesthetics] usually points to those aspects of art that are left after function, ritual or otherwise, iconography and meaning—if these indeed can be distinguished—are separated out'. He continues by saying that aesthetics 'is sometimes made to include skill or the self-consciousness (on the part of the artist), or the admiration (on the part of the audience) for skill, but only in so far as that skill is employed for the purposes of arrangement and design and not in so far as it is devoted to the accurate making of traditional forms' (ibid.). Aesthetics as used in most discussions of 'primitive' art, Goldwater concludes, may thus 'be said to apply to what in the discussion of our own art world would be called its "abstract" aspects, i.e. those having to do with the pleasing distribution of formal elements' (ibid.).

A lot of researchers indeed seem to implicitly define aesthetics as the study of what Goldwater calls 'the pleasing distribution of formal elements', hereby concentrating especially on the formal aspects of the plastic and graphic arts. In doing so, as Goldwater suggests as well, many students of aesthetics try to discover 'purely formal preferences', by which I mean that in such instances they are looking for evaluations of forms as such, stripped of their content and (other) associative values.

Although adding that they are not mutually exclusive, Thompson, for example, distinguishes between 'associate values', which can influence the evaluation of wood sculpture, and 'true aesthetic sensibilities', which are shown by the critics and which focus on the 'purely formal' aspects of sculpture

2. See also Borgatti (1976: 4): 'Aesthetics refers to the system of rules, either explicit or inferred, by which formal arrangements in space and/or time are perceived and evaluated within a given society.'

(1973: 23). Although space does not allow me to elaborate on this important topic, it may be noted that such a distinction—mostly implicit and without clear boundaries—is made by many scholars, who thereby regard a judgement as ‘really aesthetic’ only if it refers solely to form (or colour) *per se*.

A second and contrasting tendency to be observed consists of studies that show interest precisely in the way preferences for certain formal characteristics are influenced by the associate values that are evoked by a form and/or by the content to which this form refers. A good example of this approach is a study by Vogel on the aesthetics of the Baule of the Côte d’Ivoire. Having referred to Cordwell, who wrote (1959: 45) that ‘aesthetic factors are so intermingled with the religious, economic, political, and social aspects of a culture...that the vocabulary concerning what is beautiful may refer primarily to qualities such as wealth or prestige value, religious or political symbolism’, Vogel (1980: 1) makes the following remark in her introduction: ‘in 1968 I read this as a warning of the pitfalls inherent in a study of formal aesthetic preferences. Today I am interested in the close examination of aesthetic preferences precisely because it can reveal much about religious, political, and social values.’

### *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Art*

As we have seen, in defining aesthetics both Stout and Lawal talk about the philosophy of the beautiful. In what in the Western tradition is known as aesthetics it is not unusual to enlarge this philosophy of the beautiful to include the philosophy of art. Here we want to ask the question whether or not this characterization of aesthetics as philosophy of art is found in the anthropological literature as well.

In reviewing anthropological writings on aesthetics it appears that Senghor is one of the few researchers who explicitly employs such a description. Senghor (1956: 53) talks about the ‘philosophical reflection on Art, by which Aesthetics is defined’.<sup>3</sup> Generally speaking, it is of course very difficult to delineate the field covered by aesthetics as defined as such. After all, both ‘art’ and ‘philosophy’ are terms that can be said to be surrounded by discussion and a certain degree of vagueness. Senghor, however, more or less clarifies his definition by adding that in Africa the study of aesthetics has to look for ‘the fundamental laws of Negro African art’ (ibid.: 43).<sup>4</sup> The problem remains as to what should be meant by ‘art’, both in Senghor’s definition and in others in which this term is used. The question of ‘art’, or more generally what could be

3. ‘...réflexion philosophique sur l’Art, par quoi se définit l’Esthétique.’

4. ‘...les lois fondamentales de l’art négro-africain.’

considered the object of aesthetic experience, cannot be fully pursued in this essay. In anticipation of at least some remarks on this topic, which will follow later on, suffice it to say that in principle no natural or cultural phenomenon should be precluded in advance.<sup>5</sup>

Matukanga, another African scholar writing in French, also appears to equate 'aesthetics' with 'the philosophy of art', for in an article entitled 'Philosophie de l'art en Afrique noire', he sets out to 'reflect on the Negro African aesthetic' (1977: 104).<sup>6</sup>

From the fact that under the heading of 'aesthetics' some students occasionally make remarks that might be considered 'art-philosophical',<sup>7</sup> it can be inferred that besides Senghor and Matukanga, other scholars too—albeit both implicitly and partially—follow the more or less established Western (philosophical) tradition of conceiving aesthetics as the philosophy of art.<sup>8</sup> By and large, however, such an interpretation of aesthetics is relatively rare in the anthropological literature.

### *Ethno-Aesthetics*

Another broad application of the notion at hand can be found in the use some authors make of the term 'ethno-aesthetics'.

In 1967, Gerbrands wrote: 'the term *ethno-aesthetic* was suggested to me in 1959 by the late Melville J. Herskovits, then Professor of Anthropology at Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., after an exchange of letters over a period of some years about how to approach that special kind of art usually called "primitive"' (1967: 7). Dark, who appears to have discussed this matter with Gerbrands (Dark 1967: 132), similarly uses the term 'ethno-aesthetics' to refer to the cross-cultural study of art. The research into the aesthetic values underlying the production and evaluation of art is only one aspect of this kind

5. See, for example, Boas (1927: 9), and Stoller and Cauvel (1979: 95): 'We conceive of aesthetic values as potentially appearing in any nook or cranny of a culture.' Such an approach, they write, 'frees us to be receptive to the aesthetic values which may appear in rituals, storytelling, uses of space and time, and the practical daily activities of the people'.

6. '...réfléchir sur l'esthétique négro-Africaine.'

7. Two recent examples are Onyewuanyi (1984), who deals with the influence of African metaphysics on the interpretation of works of art in Africa, and Stéphan (1988) who, among other things, treats the question of whether certain forms of African art present (*présentification*) or represent (*représentation*) their subject.

8. On the problem of the distinction between philosophy of art and aesthetics, see also Nwodo 1984.

of study. Ethno-aesthetics may thus be considered that part of 'ethnoscience' that deals with art (Dark 1967: 132; 1978: 35-7).<sup>9</sup> Put this way (see also Gerbrands, as quoted above), ethno-aesthetics becomes almost a synonym for the anthropology of art, albeit that, with regard to methodology, the principles of one particular branch within anthropology—ethnoscience—are being followed.

Leuzinger, too, defines the term 'ethno-aesthetics' in such a broad way that one is inclined to think that we are dealing with a description of the anthropology of art, rather than the way aesthetics is conceived within an anthropological approach. According to Leuzinger (1978: 45), ethno-aesthetics has as its goal 'to come to grips with tribal art in the totality of its context and history, meaning and form, and the person and character of the individual creator'.<sup>10</sup> Similar broad definitions of ethno-aesthetics as referring to the general study of the (non-Western) arts 'from within' are given by Mead (1979: 8) and Delange who talks about " 'Ethnoaesthetics' or the sociology of art in preliterate civilizations'.<sup>11</sup>

Over the years, however, the term 'ethno-aesthetics' appears to have become more narrowly defined and, in accordance with the way the word 'aesthetics' is commonly used, has more and more come to refer to that part of the anthropological study of art (or a general ethnoscientific approach to art) that deals with 'emic' or indigenous aesthetic categories and principles (see Kaeppler 1979: 185; Flores 1985: 31-2; Schomburg-Scherff 1986: 28; Seymour-Smith 1986: 50; as well as Hatcher 1985: 246, who also mentions—as the second meaning of ethno-aesthetics—the general study of the [visual] arts of different [ethnic] cultures).

According to Stéphan, who seems to suggest (1979: 330) that the term was called into existence by Delange (which can be doubted), '*ethno-esthétique*' refers to both the traditional aesthetics of illiterate societies and the specialized study of them (1988: 279). As a study, he says, ethno-aesthetics may refer to different types of research. It may have as its object the particular aesthetics of one society, say, Yoruba aesthetics or Baule aesthetics (in this case the prefix ethno- could be said to stand for ethnography). On the other hand, Stéphan writes, ethno-aesthetics is also used to refer to the kind of comparative study that bases itself on the results of the different inquiries into these particular aesthetics (here ethno- can be considered short for ethnology). As an example he cites Vogel's (1979) comparison of Baule and Yoruba aesthetics. Such comparisons are made, so to speak, from the outside, but others, says Stéphan, can be carried out from within, by studying the way a given society evaluates

9. As regards ethnoscience, see, for example, Sturtevant 1964.

10. '...die Stammeskunst in ihrer Summe von Umwelt und Geschichte, Sinn und Form, Person und Charakter des individuellen Schöpfers zu erfassen.'

11. ' "Ethnoesthétique" ou sociologie de l'art dans les civilisations sans écriture.'

the art of another society against the background of its own particular aesthetics. Stéphan does not provide an example of this kind of inquiry, but I could point here to a study by Silver (1983), who investigated the evaluations of the Asante people of Ghana of sculpture from other African ethnic groups, as well as from Oceania.<sup>12</sup> Stéphan proposes to call these last two types of research '*ethno-esthétique comparative*'<sup>13</sup> and to reserve the term '*ethno-esthétique*' for studies that limit themselves to an inquiry into one particular aesthetic.

### *Towards a Multimedia and Multisensorial Approach*

In general, such ethno-aesthetic studies have been restricted to research into the aesthetic principles underlying the production and evaluation of such static objects as anthropomorphic sculptures and ornamented utensils. This approach should be expanded to include the aesthetics of objects (most notably masks) and their accompanying art forms in time and space, as well as the aesthetics of events occurring in space and/or time without necessarily using objects (dance, music, oral literature etc.). A static, object-orientated approach to aesthetics, which may be considered a rather typical Western approach that is only partially applicable to, for example, African aesthetic reality (cf. Van Damme 1987: 67-8), would thus be avoided.

Even then, however, aesthetics would pertain particularly to perception through only two senses: those of the eye and the ear. At least if aesthetics were to remain true to its etymology as deriving from the Greek *aísthesis*, meaning sense-perception, thereby taking into account, at least in principle, *all* the senses (Liddell, Scott and Jones 1968: 42, s.v. *aísthánomai*, *aísthesis*), the sensations of smell, touch and taste should be considered too. As Berleant (1964) has noted, since classical Greek philosophy, followed by the Christian

12. See also Graburn (1978) who recorded the reactions of North Americans to an exhibition of commercial Inuit and Amerindian arts and crafts, and Delange-Fry (1979) who reports on a similar project carried out in Winnipeg, where questionnaires were handed out to visitors to an exhibition of African sculpture. Other examples are a study by Child and Siroto (1971) in which photographs of Kwele (of Congo and Gabon) masks are judged by art experts in New Haven, and Wolfe (1969) who asked Western Africanists to evaluate the degree of development of the plastic and graphic arts of several African peoples.

13. Normally this element of comparison is not part of the definition of ethno-aesthetics (which could perhaps be partly explained by the fact that only recently has enough empirical material become available to allow for comparisons to be made). It is, however, mentioned by Hatcher (1985: 246). I too have regarded the comparative aspect as part of ethno-aesthetics in general (1987: 8).



tradition, there has been a discrimination between the 'higher' senses (eye and ear) and the 'lower' senses (smell, touch and taste). The 'higher' senses are the 'distant' receptors that have been accredited high status because they are most closely related to the operations of reason or the meditative spirit. The 'lower' ones are the 'contact' senses that have been given low status because they are associated with practical, manipulative work and call attention to the body and sexuality. The largely unquestioned emphasis on visual and auditory perception in Western aesthetic theory may thus be shown to rest on a metaphysical and moral basis. Although it may safely be assumed that in human experience in general those of the eye and the ear are—none the less—the two most important senses,<sup>14</sup> it should be pointed out that this legacy of the Western mind-body dualism, mentioned by Berleant, should not hinder us in empirically studying non-Western (as well as Western!)<sup>15</sup> aesthetics by restricting a priori the field of inquiry to visual<sup>16</sup> and auditory perception. Indeed, it can be shown that other modes of sensorial perceiving should not be excluded in advance. In writing on Oriental aesthetics, Munro (1965: 44) remarks that, although the innate limitations of the lower senses in perceiving complex form are recognized by psychologists everywhere, this 'has not prevented Eastern art from endowing lower sense-qualities, such as those of perfume, with meanings which tend to dignify, refine, and incorporate them in the realm of fine art'. Elsewhere, I have referred to some examples indicating the importance of, particularly, tactile aesthetic experiences in Africa (Van Damme 1987: 68, 76 n. 51). I shall not repeat them here, but continue with an example from Oceania showing how different senses can be involved in perceiving aesthetically.

14. See, for example, Boone (1986: 133), who mentions that among the Mende (of Sierra Leone) 'elders explain that we live by the eye, and that sight is the sense that first draws our attention to a thing'. The Mende, furthermore, 'consider smell as the lowest of the senses and the closest to the animal' (ibid.: 172) (cf. Aristotle as discussed by Tatarkiewicz 1980: 314). It may be noted, however, that among the Luba of Zaïre the term *impe* can be applied in both a visual sense, as in *mukaji mwimpe*, 'a beautiful woman, attractive, nice' ('*une belle femme, attrayante, gentille*') and an olfactory sense, as in *mupaya mwimpe*, 'a pleasant smell coming from the kitchen' ('*une bonne odeur venant de la cuisine*') (Matukanga 1977: 107). Although caution is required, the semantic analysis of words pertaining to the several modes of perceiving may provide some clues as to the relationship and hierarchy of the different senses in a given culture.

15. Inspired by Boas, who already in 1927 suggested we should consider all the senses when dealing with aesthetics (1927: 9-10), Forrest, in an anthropological study of aesthetics in a white American community in North Carolina (1988), takes into account smell, touch and taste, as well as sight and hearing. See also Roudnitska's (1977) 'olfactory aesthetics' discussing Western perfumes.

16. As regards the emphasis on the eye in the Western philosophical and scientific tradition, and its consequences for anthropological inquiry, see also Carpenter (1969), who blames literacy, and Fabian (1983: ch. 4) on what he calls *visualism*.

As Steager (1979: 352) reports, the people of Puluwat, a small island in the central Carolines (Micronesia), seem 'to apply aesthetic criteria to the sound of the human body in motion, but only in the context of dancing'. The sound referred to here is made by the grass skirts, worn by the women, and the wreaths of coconut palm fronds, worn around the waist and on the upper arms and ankles by male dancers. The sounds made by these skirts and wreaths are regarded as very pleasing. In a similar vein, traditional jewellery appears to have been worn, by both men and women, not only for its attractive appearance, but also because of the pleasing sounds it produced when moving with the body. More importantly, Steager also mentions the lavish use that is made of flowers in everyday body adornment: 'although flowers are regarded as visually attractive, they may be worn as much for their aroma as for their appearance' (ibid.). Some flowers are even especially prized after they have wilted and turned black, because of the heavy sweet aroma these withered flowers emit. Western perfumes and sweet-smelling hair tonics are also used to enhance the body aroma. 'The smell of a person', Steager writes, 'is clearly the focus of aesthetic sensibilities. These interact with visual aesthetics in the use of flowers to create an aesthetic complex like that produced by the interaction of visual and auditory aesthetics in traditional jewelry' (ibid.).

Steager also seems to point, furthermore, to the importance of yet another way of sensorial perceiving among the Puluwatans, namely through tactile sensations—resulting from touching or being touched. Having noted that traditional tattooing appears to be disappearing, he mentions that he was told 'that women also tattoo the insides of their thighs and that these tattoos have great erotic significance' (ibid.). Besides some examples from Africa referred to above, I may also point here to Swinton (1978: 85-6) who attaches much importance to the sensation of touch in Inuit aesthetics.

While discussing African aesthetics, Ottenberg, in addition, points to the importance of 'the physical feel of movement—not quite the same thing as touch' (1971: 9). In general this 'kinaesthetic' feeling may be regarded as not only resulting from the movement of the body as, for example, in the experience of a dancer, but also from experiencing this 'muscular sensation' (Boas 1927: 10) vicariously as a spectator. As an example I may refer to Kaeppler's remarks (1971: 177, 182) on the way a Tongan onlooker may have an aesthetic experience through participating in a dance by empathy with the performers.

Another sort of what may be considered kinaesthetic experience is suggested by Pieper. In an anthropological study of Indian architecture, he writes (1980: 65) that 'in the context of urban architecture the term "haptic" denotes those spatial qualities which are experienced not by looking at the settlement structure, but by moving in and about it'. It is this 'haptic'<sup>17</sup> experience of urban space through body movement that 'evokes a sense of the "spirit of the

17. Remaining true to its etymology, the term 'haptic' (from the Greek verb *haptein*, 'to touch') is more commonly used as a synonym for 'tactile' (see, e.g., Haselberger 1961: 346).

place” and that decides our aesthetic judgement in architectural terms’ (ibid.: 65-6).

In suggesting a multisensorial approach to the art of Japanese gardens, Slawson (1987: 77) includes an observation comparable to Pieper’s. Although the garden is primarily a visual art form, he writes, ‘it can also directly engage our sense of hearing (a waterfall, leaves rustling in the wind) and our sense of smell (flagrant wisteria, pine needles)’. Further, the sense of touch, by which Slawson not only means the sensations received through the skin, but also the kinaesthetic sensations resulting from the interaction of muscle groups, ‘is directly addressed as one moves physically through a garden designed for strolling in’. Tactile sensations, however, are more often involved indirectly, ‘through visual clues such as those of texture, shape and line’. Be it even more indirectly, Slawson adds, the sense of taste is engaged as well, since certain gardens are spoken of ‘as having an “astringent” or “dry” flavor’.<sup>18</sup>

### *Concluding Remarks*

I shall not attempt to define aesthetics myself, since I feel that several other elements, which cannot be elaborated upon here, should be taken into account. In this respect, I may for example point to the influence of cognition, more particularly of knowledge of the culturally defined content and/or associated values, on the evaluation of what is being perceived. From the analysis given above, however, it is clear that to be applicable cross-culturally (not excluding Western society), aesthetics, as an empirical study, can no longer be regarded as pertaining to the study of the *visual* perception of the *beauty* of a material *object*. First, remaining faithful to its etymology, aesthetics should take into account not only the eye and the ear, but also the olfactory, tactile and gustatory experiences, and even the experience of movement, as well as possible combinations of the different senses in perceiving. Secondly, aesthetics has to deal not only with beauty or what comes close as an equivalent, but also with the perceptive experience of the ugly, the comic or other categories that in a given culture may be discerned as descriptions of what are deemed qualitatively different feelings resulting from perception. Thirdly, aesthetics should pay attention to the evaluations resulting not only from beholding static objects, but also from perceiving objects and events occurring in space and/or time.

Admittedly, studying different media as well as sensorial experiences other than those involving sight, will pose problems for Western anthropologists and art historians who are raised and trained in a visually and object orientated

18. Such a phenomenon will generally be considered a form of synesthesia, which refers ‘to the transfer of qualities from one sensory domain to another’ (Marks 1984: 427).

culture. With regard to the multimedia approach, a way out of this difficulty may be that researchers should seek the help of colleagues specializing in the anthropology of dance, music or oral literature.<sup>19</sup> With respect to the study of the role of the different senses in aesthetics, less visually biased non-Western researchers may lead the way.

19. In her study of the Okpella (of Nigeria) art of masquerade, Borgatti (1979), for example, calls in the assistance of Margaret Thompson Drewal (ethno-choreologist) and Allen Burns (ethno-musicologist).

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