NEGLECTED KNOWING:
SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF POSITIVE
AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE IN PAINTING

By
John Tarlton
(MEd, MA, BA, BTrain)

School of Education and Professional Studies
Faculty of Education
Griffith University

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April, 2007
ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the human aesthetic experience. It does so through phenomenological investigations of two artist-educators, one full time artist and one art theorist-educator. This investigation is motivated by a curiosity to identify and explain the characteristics of ‘positive’ aesthetic experiences engendered by and used in paintings as an artistic art form.

An eclectic blending of qualitative and phenomenological methods is used to address the guiding research question: What are the bases for the perception and description of the phenomena of aesthetic experience in painting?

The findings suggest that understanding aesthetic experience requires reconciliation between intrinsic/essentialist and subjective/contextualist positions. Only by acknowledging both of these positions’ contributions and reconciling their paradigmatic differences can a comprehensive account of the aesthetic experience be advanced. Despite certain characteristic similarities, it is suggested that heightened pleasurable response to a painting remains fundamentally a subjective concern for the viewer and that the attainment of pleasurable response may incorporate any and all such relational or essentialist manifestations which the viewer believes or deems necessary. Here, divergent importations, analytically elusive and non-conforming natures inherent in personal experiencing, rather than theoretical cannon, drives heightened aesthetic response. By implication, it is suggested that the quality of the desired experience should also drive the nature of pedagogical and curriculum implementation.

Nine major characteristics and five sub-characteristics (subsumed within the first characteristic) of positive aesthetic experience in painting are identified through this investigation. These characteristics relate to: (i) immediacy and totality of experience, (ii) associative aspects being embedded in form, (iii) metaphorical response replacing measurement, (iv) awarenesses of technical virtuosity, novelty and the idea of identifying with the ‘artist’s eye’, (v) personal remembrances associated with the experience, (vi) the acknowledgement of a sense of mystery, (vii) presumed transformative characteristics are present and relate to the subject self image, the view that paintings transcend their physical objective status and the idea of an on-going power of experience, (viii) aesthetic experience stems from a perceptual sensitising of ordinary experience, and that (ix) both mind and body are one within the experience.
The five subsumed characteristics within the characteristic of immediacy and totality of experience concern notions of: (a) regard for pre-knowledge and a presumption of (b) effortless cognition. In addition, there is the (c) belief in a non-sequencing or ordering of the experience which can be (d) entered into from any number of divergent points of interest. Finally, an acknowledgement of the (e) concept of the sublime is suggested that conflates both modernist and postmodernist thought.

These characteristics, drawn from phenomenological reflections of the research participants, are set before informing concepts relating to aesthetics, the explicated characteristics of aesthetic experience as proposed by a selection of prominent scholars in the field and the influences of two generalised opposing epistemologies; those being intrinsic/essentialist and subjective/contextualist in nature.

The key theoretical contributions arising from this investigation are nine fold. These contributions concern: (i) a further explication of characteristics of positive aesthetic experience in painting, (ii) a conciliatory positioning of epistemologies, (iii) the contribution of immediacy, (iv) qualities and meanings, (iv) self-justifying experience with underlying contextual importations, (vi) the relevance of modernist paintings in a postmodernist climate, (vii) intensified experience, (viii) a conciliatory sublime, and (ix) dominance of the experiential.

The key pedagogical and curriculum implications concern aspects of experiential knowing, corresponding strategies for experiential knowing, the questioning of contemporary curriculum: a critique and drawbacks within the implications.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

______________________________

John Tarlton
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisors Dr Stephen Billett and Dr Glenda Nalder for their expertise and encouragement. In addition, I would like to thank Jill Ryan for her succinct editorial advice and my fellow research participants Chris Worfold, Caroline Penny and Dr Elizabeth Ruinard for their interest and enthusiasm throughout the project.

Paintings used in the dissertation


World War Two American propaganda poster (Rosey) (1941-45). History1900s.about.com/.../photos/blywwiip86.htm (15-5-05).


Participants’ selections of paintings for reflection

(John Tarlton)


(Chris Worfold)


(Caroline Penny)


(Elizabeth Ruinard)

Selected works (13) by Chris Worfold used in the creative synthesis (elaborated narrative) in Chapter Nine

*Night Chair* (2001). Oil and mixed media on board
*Sail into an Ocean Leave a Sea* (2000). Oil and acrylic adhesive on board.
*Forked Tree* (2006). Oil and mixed media on board.
*Southern Cross* (2001). Oil and mixed media on board.
*Sunflowers on the Dining Room Table* (2001). Oil and mixed media on board.
*Mother-in-law’s Tongue* (2001). Oil and mixed media on board.

Selected works (12) by John Tarlton used in the creative synthesis (elaborated narrative) in Chapter Nine

*The weight of all that beauty* (1998). Oil on wood and plywood construction.

... with cake ascending (2005). Watercolour/gouache/collage.


Selected works (12) by Caroline Penny used in the creative synthesis (elaborated narrative) in Chapter Nine

Along the lane, NSW (1994). Oil on canvas.

Spooky’s Beach, Angourie, NSW (2002). Oil on canvas

Sunflowers and Gladioli (2002). Oil on canvas.

Across the flat (1999). Oil on canvas.


Among the Azaleas (2000). Oil on canvas.

Ibis and Cootes (2001). Oil on canvas.


Taking the horses home (1999). Oil on canvas.

Pathway to Peace (1993). Oil on canvas.

View from McPherson’s Point, Brisbane (2005). Oil on canvas.

Under the veranda, Leatherhead (1993). Oil on canvas.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1- Explicated characteristics and discriminating qualities of aesthetic experience................................................................. page 15

Table 2- Some characteristic comparisons of intrinsic/essentialist and subjective/contextual properties................................................................. page 94

Table 3- General attributes of modernism and postmodernism .................... page 96

Table 4- Structural elements (characteristics) of aesthetic experience by Csikszentihalyi and Robinson (1990)........................................................................................................... page 118

Table 5- Knieter’s (1971) characteristics of aesthetic experience .................. page 125

Table 6- Shared characteristics of aesthetic experience ................................ page 130

Table 7- Moustakas’ (1990) critical processes .............................................. page 142

Table 8- Epistemological orientations of observed characteristics................. page 194
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgments .............................................................................................................................v
List of Tables ....................................................................................................................................... vii

CHAPTER ONE -- INTRODUCTION .........................................................................................1
The scope of the study ..........................................................................................................................1
Purpose and focus of the study ..........................................................................................................5
  Implications for education and justification of goals ..............................................................6
Motivation .........................................................................................................................................7
Theoretical underpinnings .............................................................................................................8
Initial conceptual influences ........................................................................................................10
  The dilemma of conflicting epistemologies ............................................................................11
The nature of the inquiry ..................................................................................................................11
  The research question and participants ................................................................................11
Contributions arising from the dissertation’s findings and an overview of its
implications for art education ......................................................................................................13
Structure of dissertation ...............................................................................................................16

CHAPTER TWO -- ESTABLISHING THEORETICAL BASES .................................................20
Introduction and Overview .............................................................................................................20
Intentions ..........................................................................................................................................21
The aesthetic as a mode of knowing ..............................................................................................22
Fortification of the aesthetic ........................................................................................................26
The sublime .....................................................................................................................................28
  An intrinsic/essentialist account ..................................................................................................30
  A subjective/contextualist account ...........................................................................................31
  Summary .......................................................................................................................................32
Aesthetics as a discipline ................................................................................................................33
  Essentialist beginnings ..................................................................................................................33
  Introducing contextualist concerns .............................................................................................35
  The confusional air of aesthetics ................................................................................................36
  Influences of feminist theory .......................................................................................................40
  Theoretical pressures from the left ..............................................................................................43
  Practice and pedagogy ................................................................................................................45
Discipline based art education (DBAE).........................................................................................47
  DBAE in practice ........................................................................................................................49
  Summary .......................................................................................................................................51

CHAPTER THREE -- INTRINSIC/ESSENTIALIST PERSPECTIVE ............................................52
Introduction and overview ..............................................................................................................52
The aesthetic attitude and disinterestedness ....................................................................................54
  Psychical distancing ......................................................................................................................60
  Regarding human agency .............................................................................................................61
Formalist qualities ...........................................................................................................................62
Elements of elitism, percipience and sensibility .............................................................................63
Summary ..........................................................................................................................................65
CHAPTER FOUR -- SUBJECTIVE/CONTEXTUALIST PERSPECTIVE ..........68
Introduction and overview .................................................................68
Influences from Dewey .................................................................69
Art cognition ......................................................................................71
Looking is thinking .........................................................................72
The intelligent eye ............................................................................74
Cognition as interpretation ............................................................75
Aesthetic experience in postmodern and visual culture ....................77
Postmodernism ..............................................................................77
Deconstruction ..............................................................................78
Reconstruction ..............................................................................79
Visual culture ..................................................................................80
The further marginalisation of high art ..........................................82
Resistance ......................................................................................84
The search for meaning .................................................................87
Feminist viewpoints .......................................................................89
Socialising art ................................................................................91
Summary .......................................................................................92

CHAPTER FIVE -- BRIDGING ESSENTIALIST AND
CONTEXTUALIST PERSPECTIVES .................................................98
Introduction and overview .................................................................98
Bio-evolutionary theory ....................................................................99
Aesthetic experience as a hybrid concept .......................................100
Post-formal aesthetics .....................................................................101
Pragmatist aesthetics .....................................................................102
Aesthesia .........................................................................................105
The eclectic imperative .....................................................................105
Conclusion and Summary ...............................................................106

CHAPTER SIX -- EXISTING CHARACTERISTICS OF
AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE ............................................................109
Introduction and overview .................................................................109
Intrinsic/essentialist characteristics of aesthetic experience ..............110
Monroe Beardsley ..........................................................................110
Harold Osborne .............................................................................114
Contextualist and conciliatory characteristics of aesthetic experience ..117
Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Rick Robinson ..................................117
Gerald Knieter ...............................................................................124
David Hargreaves and Rod Taylor ................................................126
Summary .......................................................................................129

CHAPTER SEVEN – METHODOLOGY .............................................132
Introduction and overview .................................................................132
The research question .....................................................................133
How the research aim was approached .........................................134
Separating theory from experience ..............................................135
A qualitative approach .................................................................136
The de-privileging of a conceptual framework ...............................138
The selection of a heuristic/phenomenological approach .................................................. 139
   Heuristic research ........................................................................................................... 140
   An overview of Moustakas’ heuristic research methodology ........................................... 141
Potential weaknesses within the selected methodology .......................................................... 147
Participant involvement in this study .................................................................................. 148
   My inclusion as participant .............................................................................................. 148
   Participants’ selection and assessment and their chosen paintings .................................. 149
   Criteria for selecting participants ...................................................................................... 156
   Disclaimer on the preponderance of modernist paintings within the selection of paintings .............................................................................................. 159
Sites ..................................................................................................................................... 160
Ethical concerns and protocol ............................................................................................... 160
Selection of tools for data collection ..................................................................................... 161
   Personal reflective writing and associated gatherings ......................................................... 162
   Responding to set questions .............................................................................................. 163
   Interview .............................................................................................................................. 166
Collecting, collation and analysis of data ............................................................................. 168
   Moustakas’ six phases of heuristic research ....................................................................... 169
Further aspects of collation and analysis .............................................................................. 174
   Coding ............................................................................................................................... 174
   The search for themes ...................................................................................................... 175
Triangulation and validity issues ........................................................................................... 176
Limitations of study .............................................................................................................. 178

CHAPTER EIGHT -- PREVIEW OF THE EXPLICATED CHARACTERISTIC OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE ........................................... 182
Overview ............................................................................................................................... 182
Aesthetic experiences ........................................................................................................... 182
Explicated characteristics of aesthetic experience ............................................................... 183
   Nine observed characteristics of aesthetic experience ..................................................... 185
   Comparison of the existing theories with the characteristics of aesthetic experience explicated within the study .................................................................................. 196

CHAPTER NINE -- ELABORATION OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE THROUGH EMBELLISHED NARRATIVE (CREATIVE SYNTHESIS) ................................................................................. 202
Overview and introduction ..................................................................................................... 202
Creative synthesis .................................................................................................................. 204

CHAPTER TEN – CONCLUSION ......................................................................................... 292
Overview ............................................................................................................................... 292
Purpose .................................................................................................................................. 292
Summary of findings ............................................................................................................ 293
Key theoretical contributions and implications ................................................................. 295
   Explication of characteristics of aesthetic experience ......................................................... 295
   A conciliatory positioning ................................................................................................. 295
   The contribution of immediacy .......................................................................................... 296
   Qualities and meaning ..................................................................................................... 297
   Self-justifying experience with underlying contextual importations .............................. 298
   The relevance of modernist painting in a hostile postmodern climate ......................... 298