

How can there be Beauty in Participatory Art?

Falk Heinrich

Abstract: *The article proposes a notion of beauty that is relevant to participatory art and culture. The article emphasizes the experiential aspect of the concept of beauty, identifying this part as enacted intensity, in which all heterogeneous constituents create moments of experienced unity. Unity is not understood as static phenomena but as a cycle of intensity and release that relate to (inter)action and understanding. The article elaborates an experiential unity of beauty based on Deleuze and Gadamer. Höller's Test Site and Seghal's This Success/This Failure serve as concrete works of art to test, validate, and specify the proposed theory.*

Keywords: *Beauty, Participatory Art, Intensity, Experience, Performance.*

Introduction: Beauty and beautiful experiences

This article reflects on the notion of beauty as it is relevant to participatory art and culture. For participatory artworks the audience is an intrinsic part of the work because they are assigned a more or less well-defined function or agential role. The participant has multiple points of access to a participatory work of art: as an observer of others' participation, as an actor or agent within and part of the work, and as a retrospective interpreter that relives the experience of participation.¹

Philosophically, beauty is the aesthetic judgment of an object. My premise, however, is that the notion of beauty undergoes constant transformation. My claim is that in participatory art (as in experience culture in general), the concept of beauty has morphed into beautiful experiences. This linguistic change seems minor and without semantic importance; however, a close examination reveals differently, as I intend to show. I will also differentiate between beautiful experiences and aesthetic experiences, showing that beautiful experiences are based on a judgment of pleasure that contributes to the overall aesthetic experience. However, not all aesthetic experiences include the experience of beauty.

¹ The term participatory art is very broad and contains various subgenres and sub-definitions. The concept of participation demands that a person or persons (excluding professional performers) are (an) agential part(s) of a work of art, such that a participatory work of art is never finalized in a distinct form but is completed by each participation. Participants are given poietic agency because the participants' actions within the framework of a participatory work of art model each instantiation of the work. In contrast to the finalized work of art, a work of participatory art is foremost a framework for participant agency. However, participation is an ambiguous term because it depends on the perspective and focus. For example, the psychological participation of onlookers and audiences involves not only that the onlooker/reader/audience projects him or herself into the presented occurrences but also the projection has physical implications. Another example is art's social and societal aspects, which was elaborated by Rancière. Here, the audience participation in art is a societal phenomenon. I want to limit my research to participatory works of art that include the participants' actions as artistic material.

In the twentieth century, art and art theory attempted to convince us that the concept of beauty had outplayed its role. Beauty was considered an aesthetic objective that was mainly relevant to bourgeois art. Modern art, particularly various avant-garde movements, rejected beauty altogether and focused on other dimensions, such as material, perceptual, political, societal, and conceptual aspects (e.g., Danto, 2003; Nehemas, 2007). Beauty seemed to have left the domain of art and found a new habitat in the experience economy of late-stage capitalism (e.g., the beauty industry, architecture, services, design including experience design, food aesthetics, and self-development). Here, the concept of experience is linked to active engagement, agency and interaction.

However, art has become part of the discourse of experience in both economic and epistemological senses. The epistemological sense has been elaborated since at least Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1980). Nevertheless, experiences are not merely the bases for knowledge ascription and personal growth. Experiences have become goods that are bought and consumed as leisure activities. For example, museums and their exhibitions have a decisive experiential dimension. Solo exhibitions of one artist have often been superseded by thematic, historic, or even associative logics of curation that offers the visitor an experiential journey. Today, curating entails designing for audience experiences that exhibit additional dimensions that are intended to be novel and surprising.

Furthermore, audience development programs and activities offer experiences in addition to and different from exhibited works of art. Regarding economics, art experiences have become the products and goods of art institutions that have high visitor numbers. In this respect, the museum shop is also important, not only as an additional source of income but also as a place where audiences exchange elusive experiences with material objects.

Agential participation in all kinds of events, entertainment and art has become a major societal and personal value. The proliferation of gaming, co-design, participatory design, participatory art, and the experience economy has changed our aesthetic valuation, our epistemic discourse, and thus, as I claim, our usage of the notion of beauty. Participatory art can also be seen in this light. Its experiential potential lies in the inclusion of the audience and its transformation into agential parts of art pieces that offer various modes of encounters, such as conceptual realization, communicative encounters, and bodily affective dimensions (including proprioceptive ones) all of which offer experiences.

It seems that beauty has overtaken art from the inside. In this process, I claim that the notion of beauty has changed, or rather, a new facet of it has emerged. That is not to say that older concepts of beauty have ceased to exist but that a novel notion of beauty has surfaced, which considers the experiential dimension of participatory art. This claim is a hypothesis that might be dismissed as pure speculation without any referential or empirical validity. It seems to collide with the following: first, Plato's incremental notion from Eros to the recognition of eternal forms; second, both Kant's analysis of beauty as an aesthetic judgment of an object and Hume's heuristic notion; and third, mathematical notions of beauty that favor symmetry (which is the axiom of many empirical investigations). Thus, why is it important to describe a novel concept of beauty, when the world of academia and aesthetics seems to circle round Kant's (and others') understanding of pure representational beauty, where contemplation yields the pleasures of the purposeless interplay of cognitive and sensory faculties and where adherent beauty is aligned with moral qualities?

The field of definitional approaches to beauty is much bigger and much more complex than I presented. Beauty has been associated with diverse ideas and ideals. However, in modern

Western culture and its academic approaches, beauty is traditionally either derived or projected onto an object that is external to the human perceiver (e.g., Kant 2007, § 9). Beauty, which is a subjective judgment based on positive feelings such as pleasure and delight, seems to reify itself in an external object. In contrast, an experience, that is significant life events as compounds of “doing and undergoing” (Dewey 1980, p. 44), seems to be excluded as a potential object simply because many experiences cannot be projected onto an object outside the experiencing human. If this is so, participatory works of art cannot be experienced as beautiful because no experience, as defined by Dewey, can be beautiful. An ‘objective’ counterpart seems to be missing. According to this line of thought, an experience can be stimulating, exhilarating, soothing, and interesting, but not beautiful.

Etymologically, *beauty* stems from *deu, a proto-Indo-European root meaning “to do, perform; show favor, revere.” (Harper 2019) Thus, the root of “beauty” entails action and performance. This definition does not undermine that perceiving and purposelessly judging are acts of showing favor, but it emphasizes that actions can be experienced as beautiful. Etymology always opens a field of potentiality. The sentiment of beauty can also be based on action whether as motor-imagery, as Starr has convincingly shown in her book *Feeling Beauty* (2015, p. 82) or as action in participatory art.

However, I want to accentuate that the mere performance of actions is not enough. A reifying dimension must be part of the experience of beauty. This dimension can be established by an enacted understanding of the underlying concept of the participatory work of art or, in the case of important life experience, the creation of *an* experience as a decisive and completed event in the Deweyan sense. I will return to that notion. Furthermore, there needs to be an evaluative dimension that connects the experience of actions to a play of understanding (in the Kantian sense). If this is the case, then the act of judgment and the judged act converge.

Nonetheless, we should not dispose of the existing elaborations of beauty but extract from them sub-concepts and notions that can be reformulated in light of the question about beautiful experiences in participatory art.

Carsten Höller, *Test Site*

My test case is Carsten Höller’s work, *Test Site*. I have chosen this work because it seems remote from what we usually judge to be beautiful, which is the reason it is an effective test for my ongoing investigation of the oppressed or forgotten side of beauty. Höller’s work consists of huge, glass-covered slides that wind like a corkscrew across several stories in the Tate Modern. The slides are made of metal and plexiglass. The mere sight of these slides indicates fast transportation downward, and might, simply by looking at them, elicit feelings of joyful expectation, nausea, and excitement as well as physiological arousal. Slides are sites of action. In addition to having a sculptural dimension, *Test Site* has an experiential one in which visitors are offered the possibility of sliding down.

Höller’s slides were located in an art museum or in an art context. The institutions of art museums demand distinct behavioral and cognitive-discursive scripts (e.g., Schank & Abelson, 1977). The most important is aesthetic contemplation and judgment, which are based on taste, artistic expression, composition, and curatorial arrangement. Only recently has participation gradually become an artistic strategy in galleries and museums, adding new experiential dimensions to the existing ones. Every participatory artwork exhibited in a museum puts the visitor in a double position, in which agential participation is contrasted to aesthetic

contemplation.

Clearly, *Test Site* involves recipient participation in either direct interaction (actually sliding down) or indirect interaction (imagining sliding down). Participatory artworks are based on the incorporation of the recipients and/or their actions as a necessary and intrinsic part of the artifact. They are constituent parts of the artwork without which the work would not be complete. Hence, there are many instantiations of one artwork, and the work is completed many times in different variations. Each instantiation is different, depending on the participants' actions and their experiences of those actions as part of the work of art. Most importantly, a participatory piece entails multiple perspectives that are derived from the different types of participant action. Interaction creates one observational perspective; contemplative onlooking creates another kind. Participatory art relies on multiple privileged positions of experience in which both agential and reflective participation are demanded. How can such works be beautiful?

Tino Sehgal, This Success/This Failure

Perhaps one test is not enough. In 2007, Tino Sehgal exhibited the artwork *This Success/This Failure* for the first time. In 2018, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Aalborg, Kunsten bought this piece and thus gained the right to exhibit it. The artwork consists of instructions that are not written but communicated verbally to the museum leadership. The artwork instructs children to execute specific actions—namely, to play in a huge, empty, white room without any objects. They are instructed to ask visitors (mostly adults) to join in their play. They convey that they are the artwork, they say its title and the name of the artist. I joined and played with the children who were present. We mainly played tag, but we also talked about their “job” and when their turn was finished. What is beautiful about playing catch or tag in a museum space while being observed by other visitors (among them my teenage son)? Art-theoretical and art-historical analyses of Sehgal's works often focus on the ontological shift from the artwork as a material artifact to the reification of situations and actions as works that can be bought and exhibited as if they were objects. Certainly, Sehgal's work foregrounds the dominance of art-economics discourses that are tied to artworks as commodities through, for example, visitors' and attendants' involvement the artwork itself. However, situational involvement also yields different and specific kinds of experiences that are worth considering. The aim of this article is to convince the reader that *Test Site* and *This Success/This Failure* might entail beautiful experiences, which therefore might give rise to a notion of beauty that is relevant to participatory art.

Beautiful Experiences of Acts

In reflecting on beauty, one needs to start somewhere. I will start with the assumption that beauty entails a specific way of relating to and being in the world (i.e., the world is represented by distinct objects or artifacts), namely, as a pleurably intensive way that seems to transcend the distinction between the subject and the world by occasioning a perceived unity. This starting point can be modified or even proved wrong. However, it is a valid starting point because this characteristic can be found in many treatises on beauty.² However, precisely what yields this specific self-transcending relation that varies across cultures and epistemic discourses and from person to person? How does the experience of participatory art relate to my presumption?

² I claim that this is one of the few characteristics that many treatises and articles on aesthetics either point out or intrinsically posit. This can be expressed by notions such as love (Nehamas, 2007) promise (Beyle, 1980), occurrence (Kirkeby, 2007), and recognition (Plato, 1998).

As previously defined, participatory art includes persons as agents in artistic occurrences that therefor also become social occurrences. Of interest here is the construction of these events or scenarios. On the one hand, they are fictional (in the sense of being overtly constructed and artistic). On the other hand, they are palpably real because they demand active, bodily participation. The experience of constructed and designed yet very real scenarios has become an artistic and aesthetic value not only within the artworld but also in the experience economy.

Höller's *Test Site* with its huge winding slides is such a scenario. An art space frames the metal slides, which otherwise could be seen as either transport constructions or huge playground devices. The installation of these slides yields various perspectives and thus various possibilities of experience and interpretation: it is a sculpture, a functional construction, a site of (playful) action—for adults as well as children—and a site for the observation of participating, sliding persons. Participation is based on a remarkably simple script (slide down assisted by museum staff). The experience both stands in contrast to and adds to the still-prevalent behavioral script of the museum as an institution that suggests the distancing, imaginative, and hermeneutical reception of artworks. The simple act of sliding adds a decisive bodily experiential dimension to the piece, thus unquestionably shaping the recipients' judgment of the artwork. After the sliding experience, the sculptural entity becomes a reminder or sign of concrete, physical experience: the feel of speed, the banging sound when my derriere and thighs slide over the joints of the different parts, the feeling of enclosure and outlook through the transparent top of the slides, the special feeling of being a child again, and so on.

Other participatory artworks do not have material components but construct a scenario of participation and interaction through explicit or implicit means, such as rules and instructions or the modification of the space by sound, light, and projection. Some use digital technology (e.g., Rokeby's *Very Nervous System*); others do not. Sehgal's *This Success/This Failure* involves neither digital technology nor physical objects. It consists of only actions. There is no object to which audience experiences could be attached. However, our memory needs such hooks, onto which remembered actions and feelings can be fixed. There is only the white room, its specific atmosphere, and the playing children can be seen as objects (indeed, I have forgotten how many there were and what they looked like; in my memory, they are generic schoolchildren). I remember the running and the touching when I was caught before reaching the base or when I caught a child. Our playing was on display, not only to the onlooking museum visitors but also to the room and the institutional setting itself. I was playing and at times watching myself playing, mixing different aspects of this experience, such as bodily actions, proprioceptive awareness, the atmosphere of the space, and the ongoing sensemaking process into one complex and ambiguous investigative field. Sensemaking processes entail both the intrinsic realizations of the game and the potential significations of the experience as a work of art.

Intensity and unity

Because participants' actions and their individual experiences are constitutive elements of participatory artifacts, it seems reasonable to make actions and acts the focal point of an investigation of beautiful experiences and experiences of beauty. In my book (Heinrich, 2014), I scrutinize three dimensions of actions: first, the visceral dimension of sense-perception, especially proprioception; second, the agential dimension of actions that establish interaction systems; third, the reflective, conceptual dimension brought about by the incorporated external perspective of the onlooker in the participant. Inspired by the gravedigger in Shakespeare's

Hamlet, I termed these dimensions “to do, to act, and to perform.” In the book, I further argue that a complex sentiment of beauty is based on the synthetization of these three dimensions into one significant whole, occasioning a feeling of coherence and even unity.³ This figure of thought has a certain affinity with beauty as a dialectic between integral parts and a coherent whole (i.e., variety and uniformity).⁴

In this article, I want to elaborate on the kind of unity that this act produces and how the assumed unity of an act yields beautiful experiences. I also seek to answer the often-heard question of how participation entails or occasions the sentiment of beauty, while those pieces seem to absorb, or even consume, the participant in and through action, leaving no space for the recognition and sentiment of, for example, beauty.

Sliding down several stories increases the level of arousal. Furthermore, it yields sense perceptions and proprioception; that is, sensing the slides’ material and architectural construction and sensing one’s own body being modeled by the slide. Sliding down might also elicit memories and fantasies. Second, it works with agency: the decision to slide down, the interactions between personnel, the slide, and the participant. Third, the big slide installations in an art space contain conceptual dimensions. All participatory artworks are based on a scenario that includes an inherent or explicit script that has to be understood to enable participation and the generation of meaning. All these dimensions are constituents of the artwork, and they inform each other in one way or another.

The instructed children in Sehgal’s *This Success/This Failure* tell the audience that they and their playing are the work of art. Thus, my playing with them in the white space was also the work of art. I was aware of being observed, and I observed myself while I was playing. Playing, running, talking, the museum space, the white wall, the marble floor, the diffused light, the observing people standing in one corner of the room, my knowledge of the piece and its conceptual art-historic stance, my ambition to get rid of my awareness of being observed, feelings of pride and nervousness, the smiling faces of the children: those and many more were this artwork’s constituents (at least for me).

How can both artworks, with very different constituents, create an experience of unity?

First, I want to specify my notion of unity. It seems clear that different constituents do not yield a unity in the platonic sense, that is, as a form or idea that unites plural characteristics into one universal—at least not on an experiential level. On this level, felt unity is brought about by acts of correlating, differentiating, and creating internal correspondences and linkages between the components. This is not an (academic) analytical undertaking aimed at the formation of concepts, but rather the creation of fields of intensity where the constituent parts feed into each other. Here, the very concept of a participatory work of art is one constituent.

My usage of the notion of unity has much in common with the idea of *communitas* formulated by researchers of rituals, such as Turner (1967), and applied by performance researchers, such as Schechner (2003). Here, *communitas* is understood as an experiential space without structured hierarchies of the participants in the ritual. In Turner’s view, this is a characteristic of liminality. I want to extend the notion of *communitas* to include concepts, feelings, perception, the space, other participants or onlookers, thoughts, and so on, as I described earlier. It is not exclusively a *communitas* of people but of all the constituents included in a participatory artwork.

3 I describe the emergent characteristics of an act in chapter 7 of my book, *Performing Beauty in Participatory Art and Culture*.

4 See, for example, Hutcheson (1726) and Diderot (2011).

Intensity is generated by the constituents' feeding each other; that is, by the tensions, collisions, and momentarily insolvable contradictions that enable and even necessitate (inter)actions in the attempt to resolve them. However, the components' interplay and feeding into each other both enable participation and are based upon participation. The art recipient must participate in order to create these points of intensity. The concept-based demand for participation is thus both a necessary constituent and a result of intensity.

In participatory art, unity must be seen as a defined field of possibility within which ongoing performative interplaying between all the different constituents occur. Participatory unity cannot be understood as a completed entity or representation. On the contrary, representations (e.g., the concept of a slide) and interpretations are also constituents. Interpretations and representations must be validated by interactions. Validation is an act of realization in the double sense of recognition and elicitation. The notion of intensity should be understood in two ways: first, simply as felt psychophysical intensity (i.e., arousal); second, in the Deleuzian sense of compression and potentiality (Deleuze 1994). Intensive linkages are not only emotional and cognitive occurrences, even though they might be perceived as such, but also extend to a space, its objects, and its occurrences (e.g., the slides, other participants, the building, my curiosity and nervousness, the children, the white space, other onlookers, my steps, the movement of my hand while trying to tap one of the children, my feeling of being observed, etc.).

There is a difference between the perception of intensity and the intensity that makes up a participatory work. This difference is important because the heterogeneous reality of the constituents cannot be grasped by the participant. The participant can only be attuned to it by interactions and by forming ideas about it. The ungraspable heterogeneous simultaneity of a participatory work of art's constituents might bring about the idea of unity. However, this idea of unity is not only a concept (i.e., a uniting form). It is, first of all, a feeling and a longing to be or act as part of something. The cognitive idea of unity is just another constituent. It yields participant engagement that is aimed at the realization of unity. Engagement is not an unreflective immersion, not a kind of "flow" in which the sense of self disappears, but self-awareness and the idea of unity flow in connection with all other constituents. It is not a dissolution of the subject because the image of the subject as agent is also a constituent.

In my experience and view, these felt intensities and the longing for unity harbor the sentiment of beauty in participatory art. Needless to say, not all participatory artifacts and not all participation yield intensity and thus possible beautiful experiences. Hence, beauty also emerges from ongoing judgments of and within the ever-changing situation. The sentiment of beauty arises in the relationship between bodily felt intensity and the idea of partaking in something that transcends the participant. Thus, intensity is also an act of transcending my subjectivity and the perception of immanence (i.e., to partake). Intensity is an almost material occurrence and expression of the anticipated unity. Thus, beauty emerges (Kirkeby, 2007) as a moment of pleasurable engagement and surrender.

In *Test Site*, the participant has to decide to participate and get in line at the top of the slide. From the decision to the actual sliding down, intensity increases. Thoughts, expectations, anxieties, memories, and perhaps tiresome waiting combined with the sounds, atmosphere, and materials of the art space (Tate Modern) create a specific felt intensity, depending on the individual participant. This intensity is expected to be transformed into one main action: sliding down, which is the point of no return. However, many other decisions are possible (e.g., going away, hesitating, arguing with the personnel, or preventing others from sliding down). The specific intensity is pre-forming the experience of sliding down: is the anxiety sustained

or released? Does the bodily experience of sliding add a different dimension to the conceptual understanding?

While sliding down, intensity might be transformed into an immanent unity, in which all the elements seem to “work” together, sense perceptions add to understanding and vice versa, the curves of the slide oscillate with the sensation of the space, adults fall into a child’s enthusiasm while sliding again and again on childhood’s playground. According to Dewey, “The moment of passage from disturbance into harmony is that of intensest life.” (Dewey 1980, p. 17) The experience of beauty is an experience of accepted and lived presence where the experiencing subject resonates with other constituents of the event within the framework—the scenario—of a particular artwork. However, the participating subject, the I, is not a finite entity but consists of various constituents in addition to the other parts of the piece. Enjoying sliding down, the speed, the curves, and the impression of rotating space is both a culmination and a release of intensity: beauty happens.

Your Success/Your Failure does not offer release as easily the act of sliding does. It builds tension from the moment one enters the room and realizes the rules of the artwork. It increases (dramatically for some) when one is invited by the children to play with them. Transgress the invisible line between the space of the onlookers and the playground! Now one is part of the work regardless of what one is doing: standing, running, walking, talking, and so on. The simple fact of being observed increases the intensity, but this is the psychological intensity of the participating subject. Another kind of intensity builds up based on the declaration that this is an artwork, and I am part of it. The declaration (and its recognition) dissolves the established order of the art museum (e.g., a museum is a space that contains and displays works of art). By crossing the threshold, the space, the children present, everything craves a new local meaning, another ordering of the constituents’ internal relationship. The order can only be established by my concrete participation and by the actions I undertake. My actions are concrete sensemaking practices and continuous tests. The emerging sense is only one formational image of the constituents’ simultaneous but fluctuating connections. Fluctuation is intensity yearning for form or forms. One form is the idea of unity, the feeling of being at the right place at the right time, doing the right thing, ordering the universe of this piece into a momentary cosmos; in my case, form was accepting and finding pleasure in playing with children in a museum hall. Beauty happens.

Gebilde

Let me try to approach from another angle. As I reiterated, participatory artworks distribute agency among all the partakers. In the case of *Test Site*, this includes the participant, the slide, the onlookers, and the museum. In *Your Success/Your Failure*, the components included me, my actions, my words, the gaze of the audience, the whiteness of the space, the children’s fatigue, and so on. By means of a conceptually determined structure of interaction, the artifact determines how, when, and where the participant is seen as a participant that is able to interact. Of course, the participants can do what they want, but if their actions should make sense within the framework of the work, then the inherent interaction structure must be respected (or otherwise considered).

Participation can be seen as a form of playing, as conceptually framed, rule- or script-based interactions. According to Gadamer, playing means to be “transformed into a structure.” The participant is thus also “being played” (Gadamer, 1973, p. 103). Hence, a participatory artwork

appropriates the partaking subject; the subject delegates agency because the structure (or what I have called interaction mechanics) determines how to interact/play. Appropriation is also a form of self-transcendence that yields “one-anotherness” (*das Einander*) (Gadamer cited in Scheibler, 2001, p. 124) “[D]as Einander” is a neologism expressing the simultaneity of being oneself and being part of something else. By playing, the participant willingly assumes a conceptual and agential function and thus becomes part of the structure. In *Test Site*, this happens by the participant’s being a performative part of the winding, speed-producing slides and vice versa, and by the slides as part of the participants’ body and bodily experience. In *Your Success/Your Failure*, it happens by talking and playing with the children and observing yourself as a palpable instantiation of Sehgal’s artistic concept.

It is important to notice that Gadamer’s notion of structure does not negate the form of intensity that I attempted to describe earlier. On the contrary, the field of unifying intensity depends on a well-defined structure, which determines the playground for participation. Within this structured space–time, the intensity of tension, collision, momentarily insolvable contradiction, correlations, and so on unfold. In Turner’s description of *communitas* as an unstructured ritual space, he meant the momentary annulment of societal structures. (Turner 1988, p.133; 1985, p. 124) However, each ritual has a performance structure that allows for *communitas* to happen, which must be recognized. Gadamer discusses the performance structure that each work of art constructs.

Participatory art can only be recognized as works of art if the participant considers his or her actions an intrinsic part of *something*. This something is reified by the conceptual framework that the participant is able to observe and realize as artifact. According to Gadamer (1973, p. 126), this something is a performative *Gebilde*. Arthos wrote that the term *Gebilde* “allows [Gadamer] to play on the capacity of art to be both a work (*ergon*) and work (*energeia*), just as *Spiel* is both play and a play” (Arthos, 2013, p. 28). The artwork as *Gebilde* constitutes the conceptual and performative framework without which an act could not be recognized and performed. Furthermore, a participatory *Gebilde* (*ergon*) has to be “realized” in each (inter) action (*energeia*); I use the term “realized” (to make real) in both its senses: “constructed/initialized” and “comprehended.” Thus, *Gebilde* in participatory art is *energeia* based on and enabling *ergon*, which is a conceptual understanding that composes the aforementioned constituents into a structure. It is my hypothesis that the simultaneous congruity of *energeia* and *ergon* is experienced as pleasurable intensity and subject-transcending integration. Beautiful experiences are pleasurable oscillations between the two forms of realization: *ergon* and *energeia*.

In *Die Aktualität des Schönen* (Gadamer 1977)⁵, Gadamer traces the importance of beauty in modern art by investigating three aspects: play, symbol, and festival. He did not analyze participatory art that did not exist as an art form at the time of writing, yet in his chapters on art, he prioritized the performative aspect of art works as play and art as festival. In his view, all art invites the audience to be a player that enters and is an active part of the *Gebilde* of each work of art. According to Gadamer (1986, p. 28), “The concept of play was introduced precisely to show that everyone involved in play is a participant. It should also be true of the play of art that there is in principle no radical separation between the work of art and the person who experiences it.” However, in participatory art, acts of playing (i.e., participating) are a constitutive part of the work and not only hermeneutic play. The proprioception of one’s acts melds with the perception of the other constituents of a participatory work of art. Gadamer (1977, p. 38) applied

5 Gadamer, H.-G. (1986). *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

the term “*die ästhetische Nichtunterscheidung*” (“aesthetic non-differentiation”) to characterize the aesthetic perception of art as playing. Aesthetic non-differentiation is tied to a holistic perception that aims neither at recognizing artistic means nor at definite interpretations. It is a performative conglomerate of sense impressions and momentary and preliminary cognitions. In other words, “aesthetic non-differentiation” is the perceptual intensity of heterogenetic space–time of which the participant is part. Gadamer compared his notion of non-differentiation with Kant’s interplay of understanding and imagination. I would like to extend Kant’s notion by claiming that in participatory art, understanding as a concept-based activity interacts not only with imagination as the synthetization of the manifold of sense-perception but also with all the present constituents of a singular work of art and its spatial and social contexts. Intensity is both a subjectively felt state and the atmosphere (Böhme, 1993) that includes the participant.

In his chapter on art as festival, Gadamer (1986, p. 42) seemed (among other aspects) to reiterate this intensity by claiming that each work of art establishes its own time outside everyday time. He discussed “fulfilled or autonomous time.” In the original German text, he used the term “*Eigenzeit*.” He explained, “It is the nature of the festival that it should proffer time, arresting it and allowing it to tarry. This is what festival celebration means” (42). Tarrying time resembles compressing, thickening time (at least in the perception of it); arresting time creates intensity. He continued, “In this respect, the work of art does resemble a living organism with its internally structured unity. In other words, it too displays autonomous temporality” (43). He explicitly tied this idea of autonomous temporality to the notion of beauty.

However, intensity alone is not enough. To be pleasurable, intensity needs release or resolution. I propose to equate the pleasurable resolution of intensity with sensemaking. Here, I am inspired by Luhmann’s terminology, in which sense is not only a hermeneutic-based meaning of generation but also indicates an act (or a systemic operation) of selection (Luhmann, 2000). Sense (in German *Sinn*) is produced as and through selections. It is an act based on the difference between potentiality and actualization. Potentiality entails multiplicity (in Deleuzian terms, virtuality), which must lead to actualizations (i.e., concrete actions). Sense resolves an intense multiplicity into action that reduces complexity and that makes the situation available to the sensemaking system. In participatory artworks, actions reduce the complexity of the situation. In the case of a participatory artwork, participatory action ensures the continuation of the work. In the case of the participant’s cognitive system, it is any act of consciousness (thoughts, interpretation, associations, feelings, etc.).

However, each actualization brings about new multiplicities, altered constellations of sensations, perceptions, agencies, and understandings in a changed landscape of all constituents. If the cycle of building and releasing intensity is able to create an experience of oscillation or swinging, then I claim that participation can be experienced as beautiful. Expressed differently, the cycle is experienced as beautiful when involvement makes sense and when sense-making enforces immersion.

Conclusion

Participatory art contains the promise of sense-making through the fulfilling and pleasurable experience of presence, which is the promise of unity experienced here and now. However, unity has to be realized through participatory acts, through actually playing with children, and through feeling the curving slide on my derriere. The beautiful is no longer a veil that is projected onto an object. Instead, it is the sense and sensation of the congruence or harmony of

possibility and realization. Judged as beautiful, the act contains an oscillating movement between intensity, release, another intensity, another release, and so forth. Of course, the experience of a participatory artwork can be remembered, analyzed, and judged *post festum*, but it necessitates the rudimentary reliving of intensity and release (or no intensity and no release because not every participatory artwork offers this oscillating movement, and not every participant can effectuate and experience it).

A beautiful experience in participatory art is still an aesthetic judgment based on a comparison between promise and felt realization. However, it is not primarily an evaluative judgment of a participatory art piece. It is primarily a particular judgment in the process of engagement. The beautiful experience becomes one constituent among others. Beautiful experiences are evaluations of each cycle of intensity and release. Only then could one judge a participatory piece of art—based on one precise instantiation of it—as a beautiful experience or not.

References

- Arthos, John. 2013. *Gadamer's Poetics: A Critique of Modern Aesthetics*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Beyle, M.-H. (Stendhal). 1980. "De l'amour, Coll. 'Folio.'" Paris: Gallimard.
- Böhme, Gernot. 1993. "Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics." *Thesis Eleven* 36: 113–26.
- Danto, Arthur. 2003. *The Abuse of Beauty*. Peru, Illinois: Open Court.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1994. *Repetition and Difference* 1994. New York: Columbio University Press.
- Dewey, John. 1980. *Art as Experience*. New York: Perigee Books.
- Diderot, Denis. 2011. *On Art and Artists: An Anthology of Diderot's Aesthetic Thought*. Heidelberg: Springer.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg: 1973. "The Play of Art." In *The Philosophy of Art*, edited by Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- . 1977. *Die Aktualität Des Schönen*. Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag. <http://www.reclam.de/print/detail/978-3-15-019041-8>.
- . 1986. *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Edited by Robert Bernasconi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harper, Douglas. 2019. "Online Etymology Dictionary." Online Etymology Dictionary. www.etymonline.com. 2019.
- Heinrich, F. 2014. *Performing Beauty in Participatory Art and Culture*. *Performing Beauty in Participatory Art and Culture*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315797984>.
- Hutcheson, F. 1726. *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*. Edited by W. Leidhold. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.
- Kant, Immanuel. 2007. *The Critique of Judgement*. *Library*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford Univerity Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjaesthetics/20.2.135>.
- Kirkeby, Ole Fogh. 2007. *Skønheden Sker*. Frederiksberg: Forlaget Samfundslitteratur.

- Luhmann, Niklas. 2000. *Art as a Social System*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Nehama, and Alexander S. 2007. *Only a Promise of Happiness - The Place of Beauty in a World of Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Nehamas, Alexander. 2007. *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in the World of Art*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Plato. 1998. *The Symposium*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schank, Roger C., and Roger P. Abelson. 1977. *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Publisher.
- Schechner, Richard. 2003. *Performance Theory*. *Performance Theory*. Vol. 10. London, New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2804307>.
- Scheibler, Ingrid. 2001. "Art as Festival in Heidegger and Gadamer." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 9 (2).
- Starr, Gabrielle. 2015. *Feeling Beauty The Neuroscience of Aesthetic Experience*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Turner, Victor. 1982. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. PAJ Publications. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>.
- . 1988. *The Anthropology of Performance*. New York: PAJ Publications.
- Turner, Victor W. (Victor Witter). 1967. "Betwixt-and-Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage. In *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*." In . Ithaca (N. Y.): Cornell University Press.
- Turner, Victor W. 1985. *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience*. The University of Arizona Press.