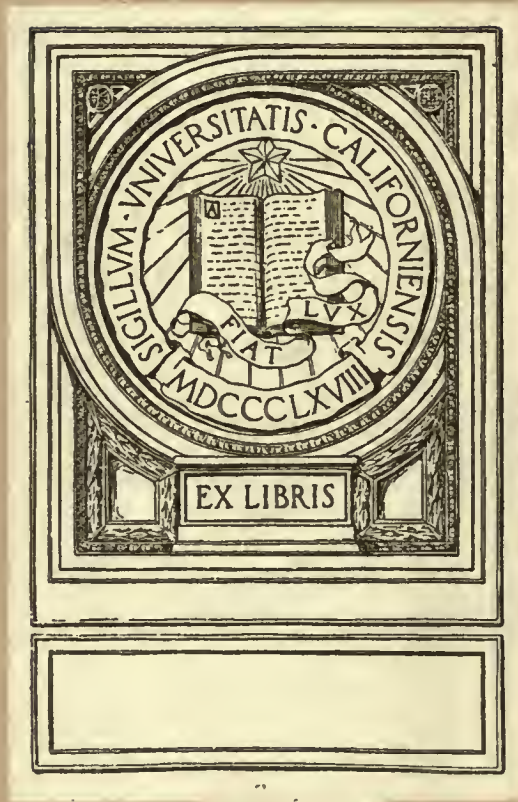


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ON THE GENESIS OF THE ÆSTHETIC
CATEGORIES

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ON THE GENESIS OF THE ÆSTHETIC CATEGORIES

JAMES HAYDEN TUFTS

THE purpose of this article is to consider some of the generally accepted æsthetic categories in the light of social psychology. The thesis to be maintained is that the distinctive characteristics of æsthetic feeling or of the æsthetic judgment (æsthetic value) are due, in part at least, to the social conditions under which the æsthetic consciousness has developed. This thesis may be presented in three parts:

I. The æsthetic consciousness in its beginnings is connected with art rather than with nature.

II. The relation of the æsthetic (appreciative) consciousness to art is not that of cause, but that of effect. Art has not arisen primarily to satisfy an already existing love of beauty. It has arisen chiefly, if not wholly, from other springs, and has itself created the sense by which it is enjoyed.

III. Art has its origins, almost without exception, in social relations; it has developed under social pressure; it has been fostered by social occasions; it has in turn served social ends in the struggle for existence. In consequence, the values attributed to æsthetic objects have social standards, and the æsthetic attitude will be determined largely by these social antecedents. Or, in other words, the explanation of the æsthetic categories is to be sought largely in social psychology.

Before considering the propositions *seriatim*, it will be convenient to note briefly what the characteristics of the æsthetic consciousness are. In this the aim will be, not to present an exhaustive list, but rather to indicate categories which have been generally and widely recognized as distinguishing the æsthetic from other values, such as the ethical, logical, or economic, or from other pleasures, such as the agreeable. And amid the seeming multiplicity of such marks or differentia which have been put forth by writers on æsthetics there is, after all, a considerable degree of uniformity.¹ They may be grouped under three heads:

1. The æsthetic judgment (*a*) expresses a value, and hence implies a subjective element; but (*b*) this value is not apprehended as subjective, private, and relative, but rather as objective, independent of personal states or conditions, and hence as appealing actually or normally to others.

This characteristic has found various terms. Volkelt² denotes it as a fusion of feeling and contemplation (*schauen*), or as the association of an element besides sense-impression, or as the unity of form and content corresponding to percept and feeling respectively. Santayana³ defines it as "objectivity," or "pleasure regarded as the quality of a thing." Home uses the phrase "spread upon the object." Kant employs

¹J. VOLKELT, *Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, Vol. CXVII, pp. 161 ff.

²In the essay cited above.

³*The Sense of Beauty*, 1896, pp. 44-9.

the terms "universality" and "necessity." By "universality" he has sometimes been supposed to mean that all agree in their æsthetic judgments. This is analogous to supposing that when Kant asserts the universality of *a priori* judgments in pure physics he means that a savage and a Newton would agree on the causes of eclipses. Kant means rather that the judgment, "This is beautiful," as contrasted with the judgment, "This pleases me," implies an elimination of the subjective attitude, just as in the judgment, "This body is heavy," there is an elimination of the subjective as contrasted with the statement, "If I carry this body, I feel the pressure of its weight." That such is the correct interpretation, and that by "universality" Kant is giving in the terms of the critical philosophy the equivalent of Santayana's "objectivity," is evident from Kant's own words: "He will speak of the beautiful as though beauty were a quality of the object."⁴ To avoid the misunderstanding to which the term "universality" is liable Cohn⁵ would substitute the term *Forderungscharakter*. The æsthetic value appeals to us with a demand for recognition. It may be actually realized by few, but this does not detract from its imperative character. It is "super-individual." Further, when Bain names "shareableness" as characteristic of æsthetic feelings, we have a recognition of the same attitude. It implies that my attitude toward the æsthetic object is not individual, but is possible for any of my fellows.

2. A second widely recognized characteristic of the æsthetic attitude is expressed negatively as a detachment, or freedom from desire, and positively as an immediacy, or purely intensive quality, in the pleasure experienced. The value does not call us to go farther for its full attainment, and hence that deepest feeling of reality is absent which arises in the actual strain of effort, or in the clash of conflicting wills and egoistic appropriation. This characteristic appears under diverse names: in Plato as the pure pleasures independent of desire; in Schopenhauer as the stilling of the will; in Kant as disinterestedness, or a contemplative attitude; in Schiller as play. In recent writers who, I think, tend to magnify one of the means of this detachment—it is semblance, imitation, conscious self-illusion, or make-believe. Cohn prefers the term "intensive" or "immanent" value; the former as opposed to the "consecutive" value of the useful which is valued as a means to an end; the latter as opposed to the "transgredient" value of the true and good which point beyond themselves for significance or achievement. The work of art is a closed unity. The frame of the picture has an important function. The æsthetic object or world is a world apart.⁶

3. A third characteristic of the æsthetic is that stated by Volkelt as "widening of our life of feeling toward the typical, comprehensive, and universal." This characteristic may not be equally evident in all grades of æsthetic feeling. It is more conspicuous in the art of poetry than in that of architecture. Aristotle and Hegel emphasize the universality of the æsthetic object. It expresses the idea. It gives the human and not merely the particular. An allied principle appears in Tolstoy's requirement that art shall stimulate human sympathy. Kant does not admit it among the

⁴ *Kr. der Urtheilskraft*, § 6.

⁵ *Allgemeine Aesthetik* (Leipzig, 1901), pp. 37-46.

⁶ For a forcible illustration of this in the principles of tragedy see LIPPS, *Der Streit über die Tragödie*, 1891.

marks of pure, *i. e.*, formal, as contrasted with dependent beauty, but it is widely recognized.

There are other marks which have been held to characterize æsthetic value; but as the purpose of the paper is not to enumerate these categories exhaustively, but to explain certain of the more generally accepted of them, the three already mentioned will suffice.

Assuming, then, that universality or objectivity, disinterestedness or detachment from reality, and a widening of sympathy or an apprehension of the broadly significant, characterize the æsthetic, can we go back of these categories to seek any explanation for their genesis? Such an explanation may be sought in three fields: (*a*) in biology; (*b*) in psycho-physics; (*c*) in social psychology.

A convenient illustration of (*a*) is offered by the theory of Groos regarding play and the arts which grow out of play. Play, with the psychological attitude of make-believe, is a practice by the young of activities which are to be of use in the struggle for existence later on. Illustrations of (*b*) are furnished by the usual explanations for universality and objectivity. In many cases æsthetic pleasure is due to ease of adjustment, which, in turn, is favored by unity, symmetry, rhythm, etc. Hence, as the minds of men are similarly constituted in this respect, it may be presumed that objects in which these qualities are conspicuously present will give pleasure to all. As regards objectivity, it may be pointed out that the eye and the ear are the pre-eminently æsthetic senses. But these are just the senses which objectify all their qualities—color, form, sound—and do not demand private appropriation of the object.

Santayana offers a more detailed psycho-genetic explanation. The tendency to regard our emotional reaction as the quality of a thing "is the survival of a tendency, originally universal, to make every effect of a thing upon us a constituent of its conceived nature." Emotions, pleasures, pains were thus all regarded as objective by an animistic and primitive consciousness. We have now transferred most of these elements to the subjective side of the account, but the æsthetic pleasures are still objectified. The reason for this survival is easy to discover. For whereas in eating or touching we may first perceive the object, and then later, when we taste or manipulate it, get a new and distinct sensation of pleasure, in the case of the purely æsthetic pleasures, on the other hand, the pleasure arises right in the act of perception, and hence is naturally regarded as inseparable from the object.⁷

It is not necessary, for the purpose of this paper, to deny that each of the explanations cited may furnish elements toward a complete account. But there is a fact not explained by them, and it was reflection upon this which led in the first instance to the theory presented in this paper. The fact in question is this: *Æsthetic pleasure is not always objectified, but under certain conditions wavers between the subjective and the objective.* When I see a new picture, or hear a new piece of music, or attend the presentation of a drama, particularly if I distrust my judgment in the special field in question, I am very apt to express my first judgment in the form, "This pleases

⁷ *The Sense of Beauty*, pp. 44-9.

me," or, "I like it." What kind of pleasure does it give me? It would seem very difficult to maintain that the pleasure is not æsthetic. And yet it is not objectified. But, as I continue to look or to listen, if I find that the work not only gives a superficial and momentary thrill, but rouses a deep and lasting emotion; if it appeals, not merely to a passing mood, but to the wider reaches of thought and feeling; in a word, if it appeals, not to the more particular, but to the more universal within me, my attitude changes. Instead of, "I like it," it becomes, "This is fine!" instead of, "It impresses me," it becomes, "This is sublime!" instead of, "I admire that character," it becomes, "That is heroic!" How is this process of wavering and final fixation of attitude to be interpreted? It cannot be explained upon the basis that eye and ear are the universally objectifying senses, for it is not possible to make my judgment as to color waver between the subjective and the objective attitude. Upon Santayana's hypothesis, we should be obliged to say that in passing from "I like it" to "It is beautiful" we are falling back into a more naïve attitude. The explanation which I desire to submit is that in making this change we pass from a private or individual to a social standard of value. The elimination of a personal and subjective attitude is equivalent to the substitution of a social and objective attitude, and, so far as I can analyze my own processes, the universalizing or socializing of the standard is the ground, rather than the consequent, of the objectifying. I do not mean by this that I look around to see how the rest of the company are affected. I may do this. But it might be that, while all the company approved, I should yet fail to sympathize with them or *vice versa*. The community of sentiment to which my standard refers may not be that of my actual spectators. It is, of course, that of real or supposed experts. It is this which gives it the normative or imperative character. The basis for this social reference, and for the distinction between the numerical and a really social universality will be shown in the exhibition of the three parts of the thesis announced at the outset of the paper, which we may now consider.

I. That the æsthetic consciousness is at the beginning connected with art rather than with nature requires no proof here. Admiration of natural scenery is relatively late in the development of child or race. Even the art which "imitates nature" by reproducing animal or plant form in carving or color, by no means presupposes an æsthetic appreciation of the objects reproduced. The animal or plant may be the ancestral totem, or the prized article of food, or the religious emblem. Nor does the impulse to imitate or reproduce depend upon the discovering of beauty in the object. It is in its beginnings quite independent.

II. The second proposition may receive fuller statement, although the evidence on which it rests has appeared in print. The proposition is that art production is prior to art appreciation, and is its cause rather than its effect. This is a reversal of the usually assigned or implied order. Text-books on æsthetics generally begin with the analysis of beauty or æsthetic appreciation, and treat art production as subsequent, or at least as not determining the sense of beauty. This is probably due to the fact that until recently the art which was studied was the art of peoples at the period

of the highest artistic development. Recent work on the origin and history of art affords the basis for a different interpretation. It has been shown that art has its origin, not in any single impulse, much less in any desire to gratify an already existing æsthetic demand for beauty, but rather in response to many and varied demands—economic, protective, sexual, military, magical, ceremonial, religious, and intellectual. Some illustrations of these varied origins may be briefly considered.

The geometric patterns found extensively on pottery might seem to be evidently intended to gratify the æsthetic sense by the "ease of apprehension." But Holmes has shown these to be due to the conservatism of the savage, who preserves thus the pattern of the basket in which his clay pottery was formed and "fired."⁸ Another illustration of conservation of technical motive which becomes æsthetic in another stage of art is seen in the survivals in Greek architecture of the forms of wooden rafter-ends as ornamental features of the stone construction.

Another slightly different motive appears clearly in the drinking-vessels of the early American Indians, which are exhibited in the Field Columbian Museum, Chicago. The Indians naturally used as drinking-vessels the various forms of gourds which were ready to hand. When they began to make pottery vessels, these were at first made in imitation of the gourds. The series of forms on exhibition shows all stages, from the complete reproduction of the gourd form to the retention of only a few conventionalized features. Animal decorations on pottery cannot be accounted for in this way, but we know that in many cases the reproduction has religious or magical significance.

The palaces and sculptured reliefs of Assyria tell the story of the king's achievements in war and chase, and sprang from the desire to commemorate his glory and minister to his pride. The great achievements of Greek art, in temple, in sculpture of the gods and heroes, and in tragedy, were in source and purpose chiefly religious, although, no doubt, the keen æsthetic sense developed rapidly in appreciation of the qualities of line and measure due originally to constructive or other demands, and became a stimulus and reinforcement of the original purpose.

Self-decoration, whether in the form of dress, ornament, or tattooing, is due to a variety of motives. To show that the wearer belongs to a group or an order is one of the most common, which appears even today in military or other uniforms and insignia. Religious or other ceremonial or historic motives are prominent in the decorations with totemic emblems or for festal occasions. Protective or erotic purposes are served by special articles of dress.⁹

The marvelous development of realistic sculpture in Egypt was due, according to Perrot and Chipiez,¹⁰ not to any æsthetic motive, but to the magical or religious belief that by providing a statue which should be the exact likeness of the deceased, the "ka" or "double" would find in it a second body or dwelling, when the embalmed body should have perished. The beautiful painting on the walls of the Egyptian

⁸ Report, Bureau of Ethnology, Vol. VI, 1884-5, pp. 195 ff.

¹⁰ *History of Ancient Egyptian Art*, chap. iii.

⁹ SCHURTZ, *Urgeschichte der Kultur*, 1900, pp. 380-411, is a convenient recent account.

tombs owed its existence to the connected belief that the "doubles" of the slaves and of the food there portrayed would be at the service of the deceased in the other world.

In the arts of motion the influence of magical, military, erotic, and religious motives is also prominent. The dance before the chase or battle, the mimes at agricultural festivals, or at initiation ceremonies, which seem to the uninstructed onlooker crude forms of art, are to the mind of the actors entirely serious. They give success in the real activities which follow these symbolic acts. They bring the rain or sunshine or returning spring. The stimulating effect of music for the warrior, the influence of sex in dance or song, the influence of the desire to convey information upon pictorial art, the influence of the desire to commemorate the orator's deeds, or those of a patron, upon the development of epic and ballad, need no illustration.

No allusion has been made in the above to the play factor which, from Plato to Schiller, Spencer, and Groos, has been found in art. But, as a result of the studies of Groos and other recent writers, it is now possible to place this play factor in closer relation to the serious activities than was formerly the case. It has been shown that the play of children as of animals is largely an experimentation with instinctive activities. It is as real to them as anything which they do. On the other hand, the interest felt is immediate, not remote, as in the case of most employments of adult civilized life. It is this which gives play its sense of freedom. And it is the sense of freedom and of power which finds added enhancement in the make-believe activities of certain of the arts, and hence gives to drama and music a part of the fascination which makes them enjoyed for their own sakes, though originated for other ends. Moreover, just as many of the games of childhood, and as the hunting, races, and sports of men represent former serious activities of the hunting stage, when the elements of hazard and tension and immediate interest were present, which have now disappeared from the commercial and agricultural life, so the arts of civilization, many of them, reproduce, in elaborated and refined form, the emotions of stress and contest and victory, which belonged to the earlier life. In any case, for the purpose of this paper, it is sufficient to note that art, as giving expression and reinforcement to the sense of freedom, has been a powerful factor in the development of the appreciative feeling.

Granted, however, that, as regards its end and content, art has sprung into being, not for its own sake, but from the various motives noted, is not all this beside the mark as regards the essentially artistic element—the form? Granted that primitive man wished to propitiate the deity, or gain the favor of the opposite sex, or heighten his courage, or relate the deeds of himself or his clan, why need he do it in dance or music, in epic or lyric, and not in less artistic form? The answer to this has already been given in part. In the case of magical representations and conventional reproductions from conservative tendencies the end determines the form. Secondly, it is freely admitted that the principles of ease of apperception and of heightening or stimulating the consciousness—principles of individual psychology—may be used successfully to explain part of the artistic development and æsthetic delight. But for

still other factors we must seek an explanation in the third proposition stated at the outset, viz.: Art is essentially social in its origins and development. Before considering this, however, we may sum up the significance of the second proposition in the statement that the value of early art was not distinctively isolated and differentiated as æsthetic. Such distinct emergence was the outcome, not the origin, of artistic production.

III. The third proposition, concerning the social origin of art needs no proof. Grosse, Bücher, Brown, Wallaschek, Hirn, Gummere, and others have brought together the evidence from a multitude of observers, as well as from historic examples. Dance, song, and mime have always been social expressions and implied attendant social satisfactions and pleasures. Decorations, ceremonials, temples, pictures, and stories have evoked social feeling, and have been created and developed with constant reference to social approval.

But, while it is unnecessary to repeat here the evidence for this, it is necessary to analyze what is denoted by the term "social" in this connection. To say that art is social in origin means—

(a) First and least important, that it arises—whether as dance, song, drawing, decoration, recital, or mime—when several people are together. Hence, by the simplest law of contagiousness, or "imitation of the emotions," its effect is not only shared by all, but is strengthened and reinforced, both by the infection from the joy or grief of others, and also by the mere social or gregarious feeling itself. These effects are experienced even by such a merely numerical group as now assembles to hear a concert or see a play. Even this measure of sociability goes beyond a numerical multiplication of the feeling experienced by an individual. It transforms its quality as well as increases the quantity.

(b) More important than the sociability resulting from contiguity and imitation is the social consciousness of a group bound together by ties of a common blood or common interest. In the first place, the art expresses the joy or grief or pride or heroism, not of an individual, nor of an indifferent person, but of a member of a group. Before any of the group can enter into the art and experience the emotion, he must be a member of the group; *i. e.*, he must know the ideas and imagery, must cherish the beliefs and ideals, must share the common interest, and hence be in a condition to feel as a social consciousness. In the second place, the member of a group of this sort has his feeling reinforced, not merely by imitation of the emotions of others, but by the constraining and compelling group authority. For the Hebrew not to join in the song of praise to Jehovah, or for the Australian at an initiation ceremony to decline to play his part, would mean, not merely æsthetic indifference, but disloyalty to the group. The quality of the æsthetic feeling is further heightened and transformed, not only by gregariousness, but by the joys of common glory, common victory, and common possession, or by the grief of common loss.

This second and higher kind of social consciousness is very commonly the condition under which primitive art is exercised. The festal observances celebrated at

birth, marriage, and death, at initiation into manhood or in connection with change of seasons; the celebrations of victories in chase or war; the recitals and chorals; the work-songs and war-dances; the temples and emblems—all appeal to such a social consciousness.

A peculiarly striking example of this group-influence is seen in certain phases of the comic. It is not necessary to accept in its entirety Bergson's thesis that the comic is the equivalent of the strange or the odd, to recognize that at least this is often the case, and that the weapon of ridicule is one of the most potent in the armory of the group for enforcing the group standards upon the would-be individualist. The man who "doesn't see anything to laugh at" is usually the subject of the joke, and therefore, temporarily at least, out of the group. The ingenuity which groups of children display in controlling the new scholar by ridicule is well known. Aristotle's definition of the comic as a species of the deformed is thus given a more social standard by which the deformity is estimated.

(c) Yet a third aspect of the social origin of art is the relation between the artist and the spectator or hearer. Even more palpably in primitive art, and in the child, than in the artist of maturity, is the expressive function of art and its appeal to social judgment apparent.¹¹ Any intercommunication presupposes certain social standards and may be held to lead to the categories of the "world of description."¹² Communication intended to kindle the emotions or voice the purposes of others, as in military, religious, erotic, or magical performances, must necessarily imply a more intimate identification of the parties, and an emotional, as well as ideational, community of attitude.

This aspect of the social character of art becomes identified with that under (b) above in many forms of primitive art. For in the dance, the corroboree, the Dionysus choral out of which grew the Greek drama, the religious or military chant, the funeral wailings, and the labor songs, the artist was not the individual, but the communal group. Hence the influence of the social upon the whole æsthetic consciousness was the more direct.¹³

The influence of the social origin upon the form as well as upon the content is also apparent in at least one of the most important elements of art-form, viz., rhythm, which Plato regarded as a distinctive mark of human art in contrast with the play of animals. Allowing any physiological basis we please for rhythmic action and its enjoyment, we must in any case recognize that any act performed in common by a group takes on naturally, if not necessarily, a rhythmic form. The sculptured figures of Egyptian laborers, with the præsul clapping his hands to mark time for their efforts, the sailors on the ship, the section hands on the railway, the mourners expressing grief, college students in a college yell, the pack of children deriding some unfortunate with their chanted "cry ba-by, cry ba-by"—all testify that, if people would do an act together, whatever it may be, or whatever their grade of culture may be, they fall into

¹¹ Cf. BALDWIN, *Social and Ethical Interpretations*, pp. 147-53.

¹² Cf. ROYCE, *Spirit of Modern Philosophy*, pp. 397 ff.

¹³ On this see especially GUMMERE, *Beginnings of Poetry*.

rhythm.¹⁴ In common rhythmic action the stimulus and reenforcement of sympathy and social accord are felt, and whatever of pleasure there may be in the physiological process is immensely strengthened by this action of social forces.

We come now to the inferences as to æsthetic feeling and the æsthetic judgment which may be drawn from the above considerations.

1. The universality and objectivity of the æsthetic judgment. Universality means as we have seen, the elimination of the personal, individual, subjective attitude. Now this is precisely what is required by a consciousness in the attitude analyzed under (b) and (c) above. My attitude, when I hesitate to say positively and impersonally, "This is beautiful," and venture only to assert, "I like it," may be due in part to a query as to how far I am really viewing the object as an expert; *i. e.*, how far I am aware of its full purport, and also able to estimate the efficiency and appropriateness of the means to express the end; but, in addition to this, it is due to the query as to whether the object stirs a genuinely social feeling, and as such has normative and objective value. The conviction that the object is really appealing to a social standard finds expression in an objective judgment. In pronouncing the judgment I do not consciously appeal to the actual spectators, the "man without the breast," of Adam Smith. Universality of this merely numerical form may belong much more to a judgment respecting strawberries than to judgments respecting Wagner. The æsthetic universality is qualitative and internal, not quantitative and external. It means that I judge as from a standpoint that is *allgemein-menschliches*, and that this *allgemein-menschliches* has been created and developed within me largely by the social experience and expression. An illustration of the extent to which a social attitude may transform even the most non-æsthetic of senses is seen in the difference between eating alone and sitting at a banquet. The music, the decorations, and the conversation are not merely æsthetic additions, which comprise the whole æsthetic value of the occasion; even the attitude toward the viands is affected until it becomes at least *quasi-æsthetic*.

2. The second category of the æsthetic was stated as disinterestedness or detachment and freedom. There are several aspects of this category to be distinguished. The "disinterestedness" or "immediacy" of æsthetic value may refer to its quality as pleasure. This would be a matter of individual psychology. It may also, however, have reference to a certain absence of egoistic desire, and this quality stands in direct relation to the social origins of art. Whatever is to be enjoyed in common and without egoistic appropriation must, almost necessarily, be enjoyed by contemplation—*ἐν τῇ θεωρίᾳ*. And while we may not convert this simply, and assert that all pleasure of contemplative quality is due to social antecedents, it is obvious that nothing could conduce more effectually to the creation and development of a taste for such pleasure than the social attitude involved in the festivals and other fostering occasions of primitive art.

There remains to be noted under this category the aspect of freedom, of detachment from reality, or "make-believe." It is evident that this, as an aspect of æsthetic

¹⁴See especially BÜCHER, *Arbeit und Rhythmus*.

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 appreciation, is fostered, if not wholly created, by the social aspect of artistic production. Whether the work of art owed its origin to economic, or religious, or magical, or military purposes, on the one hand, or grew more directly out of the instincts which at an earlier period show themselves in what adults call play,—in either case the imagination of spectator as well as of artist must widen beyond the present reality. As the magical performance takes the actor and spectators into the unseen world, as the recited deed of prowess, or the carved or painted form revives the past, as the festival of victory enables all the tribe to live over the triumphs of the warriors, as the ceremonials of initiation, or marriage, or funeral, or of religion, project the imagination into the future, the range of conscious freedom is broadened, and the broadening process, although due to other forces, brings with it a thrill and satisfaction of its own. It is not, of course, claimed that the child does not find instinctive delight in the free play of imagination, with all its flight of make-believe. The claim is, that the various forms of art have been the most effective means of developing this free-play and the attendant delight. Further, in certain of the arts, notably the drama, we find a form of tension and excitement which, like certain of the games of childhood, or certain of the sports of maturer life, suggests previous periods in the race-history when life itself, as maintained by fishing or hunting, in battle or strategy, was a process containing far more of emotional strain and stimulation than the life of civilization.¹⁴ May not the tingle in the nerves of the romance reader or the theater goer, like that of the gambler or the hunter, be reminiscent of the time when capacity for such tension was bred into the race by the struggle for existence?

3. The third category of the æsthetic was given as a widening of sympathy and an appreciation for the broadly significant. The bearing of the social origin of art and of the æsthetic sense upon the genesis of this category is too obvious to require any detailed statement.

¹⁴ W. I. THOMAS, "The Gaming Instinct," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. VI, pp. 750 ff.

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