

## A Philosophy for Artistic Expression

### Introduction.

This compilation, with commentaries, was triggered by a question asked at a lecture: the question, **“What is the value of shock in art?”**

At the time I did not think the answer, given by the lecturer, adequately explored the scope of the question:

I later spoke to the questioner and agreed I would prepare a one-page answer for him.

Preparing the answer was a bit like opening Pandora’s Box; it catalysed a desire to consider the wider issue of Artistic Expression.

The result is the content of Booklet Six.

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At first I had intended to amalgamate the arguments presented in two reference books but since they approach the problems from different ways, I believe the differences may appeal to a wider audience.

In addition an edited version of the one-page answer I originally prepared is tagged on to the end.

The text, with the exception of the obvious quotes, consists of my perceptions and reactions to the original arguments: I make no claim my perceptions and reactions are original - other than they are undoubtedly conditioned by two of my core beliefs - nor are they intended to be scholarly: hopefully the contents will generate discussion, without too much dispute.

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### Beauty and Shock in Art

This is a personal view unrelated to the main content of the Booklet.

The argument is based upon two core beliefs:

- “Opposites are more alike than they are different.”

In this I have a visualisation of the straight line spectrum - as perceived by the majority - bent into a circle akin to the coil of a spring: thus the extremes are in close juxtaposition, and the furthest point from either is the compromise position diametrically opposite to the extremes. There is a high probability that the consequences generated by the opposites, directly, or indirectly, are similar if not identical.

Thus violence, or killing, is carried out as the result of Love and Hate; or Good and Evil.

Terrorists and Freedom Fighters are contemporary examples.

The coil of a spring seems to be a more logical representation of these situations with each coil of the spring representing a ‘positive’ advance obtained from a position of potential adversity.

It is to be noted that while there is a compromise position on each coil, there can be no advance without passing the potential for adversity.

Philosophically it may be considered that neither extreme can exist outside the presence of the other: thus we can only judge beauty on a scale that includes ugliness.

Without ugliness, beauty becomes a characteristic of a normality our senses would most often choose to ignore.

This could be considered a sufficient reason for shock to exist in Art.

The above helical spectrum may be extended into the form of a flexible spring of infinite length which itself takes the form of a helical spring and so on ad infinitum.

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Such a form, having its beginning and end joined to each other, via some motivating ‘circuit’ or force, represents each space-time.

Could this be considered to be a metaphor for God?

However, this is a position of ultimate paradox because the length must then become finite: though it is immeasurable, incomprehensible, and thus indeterminate.

This is perhaps as it should be if Faith is to remain a Virtue.

To bring the metaphor within the bounds of perception; consider the spring to have sufficient coils to represent the lifetime of a, say, a civilisation, before the ends are connected to the motivating circuit.

We then have a device similar to a doughnut-shaped, electrical rheostat, in which the position of the rheostat handle/s will determine the conditions prevailing in whatever the circuit represents.

Whatever that may be; it is on a different fractal of existence, and can be of no concern other than to a 'God' working as a technician.

Nevertheless each position represents normality for the profile existing at that moment of time.

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This brings me to my second core belief:

- Each individual is relatively unique; each having their own norms of 'Normality'."

Granted, the uniqueness is modified by the conditioning of the group, community, society, and culture: each plays a different role, in each of our lives.

This point is a clear illustration of my first belief. The said conditioning is the basis upon which our civilised state of existence has evolved into positions of dogma that generate, and perpetuate, difference: this is sufficiently diverse to result in continued violence and mayhem; all under flags of variable righteousness.

All such norms are based upon our conscious sensory responses: these, by definition, must be limited to within the limits of our perception.

They are however supplemented by unconscious responses based upon our store of experiences: those our brain has superficially 'ignored,' but retained.

Note: I believe the latest estimate is that we are bombarded by about a billion signal-bits per second of which our brain processes just sixteen, these being the ones necessary for our survival at that moment in time. In addition to this unconscious response there may well be added response from within our subconscious: that which I consider to be Soul.

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A 'S' or 'Z' Curve metaphorically represents the sum-total, of our responses: this is synonymous with a typical transistor curve - which seem to be applicable to most 'Natural Process' - representing the relationship between signal and response.

The middle third of this curve - the part with the steepest gradient - represents the section of 'normal' response.

The gradient of this part of the curve depends upon our individual perception of Normality: the length of this section of the curve will be dependent upon the conditioning factors to which we are subject.

"The position on this section of the curve represents the state of 'bias'.

If we are biased towards beauty we will be shocked by anything perceived as not beautiful, e.g. horror and destruction.

If we are biased towards horror we may become oblivious to beauty.

If we are in balance with a central bias we saturate at each end such that we are in awe of beauty and disgusted by horror.

In practice a position of extreme bias makes it difficult, perhaps impossible, to operate over the whole range of the curve."

Thus the nearer we are to one end of the curve the less we are able to "see' the other end.

Note : Clearly in 'normal' society there will be typical bell-shaped distribution in which the median will be near the middle of the 'S' Curve with a tiny minority at each end capable of filling us with awe, or abhorrence.

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If we take this metaphor literally we are faced with a conclusion that 'beauty' is equally as abnormal as 'horror': for most of us this is sadly patent.

If we consider these metaphors to apply to ourselves as individuals; we will be more comfortable, when we create a picture, if we stay within our personal norms.

It is possible to go outside these norms, provided we stay within our perceptions of the norms of others; particularly those we admire: those who represent our taste.

However, any pictures we produce that do not reflect our personal norms become expressions only of our skills and perceptions: they will always present an element of manufacture.

Within our personal range we have an opportunity to express our feelings/emotions.

When we view the work of others there will be a natural empathy with pictures we believe are expressing emotions within, or near to, our own normality.

Likewise, there will be a natural antipathy towards those outside our range of normality: the strength of antipathy dependent upon the relative positions on the 'S' Curve.

Thus we return to the question of opposites; without the antipathy we are unable to appreciate the empathy.

In conclusion it is unworldly to expect that Natural feelings will automatically prevail: Commercial considerations will inevitably have the position of priority.

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The following is an extract from Part Two of the book entitled Cultural Anthropology: its contents, together with commentary on its relevance to the Nature Faiths, will be the subject of Booklet Ten.

When I read the following extract its relevance to Artistic Expression became apparent.

I have added it to this Booklet in the hope that the reader will observe the innateness of the bond between Artistic Expression and the Human State.

This being so our desire to express ourselves through Art may be judged as doing what comes naturally.

The following sentence is included to introduce the pertinent quotation: there is no necessity to know the context of this sentence, nor, to have any understanding of its meaning within the context of the preceding discussion:

"Although the direct use of phonological models for cultural analysis is somewhat precarious, we can use the way humans interpret speech as a more general model *of the way the mind creates a world from sensory experience*: we do not see objects directly, more in the sense as images on the retina of the eye."

The extract of relevance then follows:

" We see patterns of light and colour, and we use them to create objects in our mind. Perception and thought are creative, constructive processes".

On the basis of internal models of reality - models built in our minds - we construct the things and events we see.

Man does not see in the way he thinks he sees.

"Instead of a passive-receptive act in which scenes are simply recorded, the act of perceiving is one in which man is totally involved, and in which he participates actively, screening and structuring in turn".

The visual process is therefore active and creative.

"The visual perception system 'reads' from optical images, (the) non-optical properties of surrounding objects. For example we 'see' that a table is solid, hard, easily scratched.

It is these non-optical physical properties that are important. *The perceptual system 'infers' the existence of optically hidden features. We 'see' the legs of the table, though hidden.*"

Perception does not mediate behaviour directly from current sensory information, but always via the internal models of reality.

What we see is what we, through cultural experience, have learned to see.

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