Perspectives (1969-1979)

Volume 10
Number 1 *Winter*

Article 4

1979

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Gary R. Sudano
Illinois State University

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Sudano, Gary R. (1979) "Aesthetic Game-Rules for the Arts in General Education," *Perspectives (1969-1979)*: Vol. 10 : No. 1 , Article 4.
Available at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/perspectives/vol10/iss1/4

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AESTHETIC GAME-RULES FOR THE ARTS IN GENERAL EDUCATION

Gary R. Sudano

I.

Aesthetics is commonly known as the philosophical study of the nature and function of art. As such, it is considered to be a theoretical enterprise of interest to some philosophers and, perhaps, to some arts historians. But, as such, it is not thought to have a great deal of relevance or usefulness to teachers and students in general education arts courses. That this is not the case is the first point of this paper. The second point is that while aesthetics is sometimes a weary and cumbersome subject, there are several important principles to be gleaned from its literature which need not be presented to students in a weary and cumbersome way. I will deal with the second point initially, and hold my comments about the first point for the conclusion of this paper.

I want to consider games for a moment. When we think about games as a class of things and activities, we can find general agreement about what I am going to call "game-rules." One of these is that games are not designed to have practical value in the real world. That is, games are not played for real-world stakes and games are not played by real-world rules. Another game-rule is that we expect each game to have its own specialized language which each of the players must know. Generally, the better players are those most familiar with all the techniques and nuances of that specialized language. Another is that each game has its own specialized techniques for doing. Each demands the development of some kind of skill or knowledge on the part of the players. And, as is generally true in the case of the specialized language, the most skilled players are those who have best mastered the special techniques of the game. Another game-rule is that each game has some type of reward for the successful player. This one is most serious because the game will not be played if the reward is not valuable enough.

These are simple, but I think accurate, game-rules. Each of us who plays any kind of game accepts and plays under them. The literature of aesthetics provides the same kind of game-rules for those who work in the arts. In fact, the four game-rules above can be translated easily into four primary "aesthetic game-rules" which, I submit, are essential to an understanding of the art process and thus are essential components of any arts in general education course. I will translate each of the four now, and then I will interpret each of the four aesthetic game-rules and account for its function in the arts in general education setting.

Game-Rule I: A game does not have any practical value in the real world; a game is not played for real-world stakes; a game is not played by real-world rules.

Aesthetic Game-Rule I: A work of art exists and makes sense only in the aesthetic world, the aesthetic domain. The only usefulness and practicality to either come from or be exhibited by the art activity is derived from or is characterized as being in the aesthetic domain.

Game-Rule II: Each game has its own specialized language which each of the players must know.

Aesthetic Game-Rule II: A work of art is "understood" only by those who understand the language of the art form.

Game-Rule III: Each game has its own specialized techniques for doing. Each part of the game contributes to the whole game, and the function of each part must be understood by the players.

Aesthetic Game-Rule III: Each part of a work of art contributes to the whole both in creation and perception. Thus, the creator and the perceiver must attend to the processes by which artistic ingredients are formulated into the final art product.

Game-Rule IV: Each game has some type of reward available to the successful player. The value of the reward serves as the motivation for playing the game.

Aesthetic Game-Rule IV: The reward for a successful encounter with art is the aesthetic experience, the highest-ordered perceptual value experience available to human beings.

II.

The first aesthetic game-rule — a work of art exists and makes sense only in the aesthetic domain — is surely the most difficult of the four for the teacher to explain and the general student to understand. Saying that a work of art exists and makes sense in the aesthetic domain is like saying that numbers exist and make sense in the world of mathematics. Both are obviously true, but both demand a lot of backing and filling before they make sense simply because their frames of reference are highly conceptual. I have put together a chart which might help in identifying just what this aesthetic domain is.

4. Imagined Objects (Gods)	can occupy	Imagined Space (Valhalla)
3. Imagined Objects (Gods)	cannot occupy	Real Space (Earth)
2. Real Objects (We)	cannot occupy	Imagined Space (Valhalla)
1. Real Objects (We)	can occupy	Real Space (Earth)

4. Imagined Objects (Gods)	can exist in	Imagined Time (before eternity)
3. Imagined Objects (Gods)	cannot exist in	Real Time (now)
2. Real Objects (We)	cannot exist in	Imagined Time (before eternity)
1. Real Objects (We)	can exist in	(Real Time (now)

4. Imagined Objects (Gods)	can perform	Imagined Acts (create a world)
3. Imagined Objects (Gods)	cannot perform	Real Acts (scratch our noses)
2. Real Objects (We)	cannot perform	Imagined Acts (create a world)
1. Real Objects (We)	can perform	Real Acts (scratch our noses)

4. Imagined Objects (Gods)	can have	Imagined Properties (are incorporeal)
3. Imagined Objects (Gods)	cannot have	Real Properties (are corporeal)
2. Real Objects (We)	cannot have	Imagined Properties (are incorporeal)
1. Real Objects (We)	can have	Real Properties (are corporeal)

Notice that each line in the four sets of the chart is numbered. All of the lines preceded by the number 1 describe ordinary reality; that is, real objects or events existing in real space and time. All of the lines preceded by the number 4 describe objects and events in non-ordinary reality. This is the world of fantasies and dreams, images, and ideas. We are familiar with both of these worlds and they offer no problems in our attempt to understand the aesthetic domain.

The lines preceded by the number 3 indicate where the process of *artistic creation* occurs. As these lines are now stated they indicate true situations. Imagined objects do not occupy real space, do not exist in real time, do not perform real acts, and do not have real properties. But this is not to say that they cannot be transformed in such a way as to exist in the real world. The process of artistic creation is just this process of transformation, where imagined objects are brought forth into reality and are given the attributes or abilities to do the things that all the number 3 lines say they cannot do. The sculptor thrusts an imagined object into the real world, and so do the poet and the composer. All artists "can" the "cannots" of the number 3 lines; they transform non-ordinary images, dreams, fantasies, conceptions, and ideas into ordinary reality. Thus, an imagined object transformed to occupy real space is a piece of sculpture. An imagined object transformed to exist in real time is a piece of music. An imagined object transformed to perform real acts occurs in dance or theater or film. And all of these are examples of imagined objects transformed to have real properties, i.e., sound, color, movement, form, physical presence.

The lines prececed by the number 2 indicate where the process of *artistic perception* occurs. As in the case of the number 3 lines, transformation must take place: the "cannots" on the chart must again be "canned." But in this case the perceiver, and not the artist, must do the transforming. As the artist moved his conceptions and imaginings into reality ("canning" the 3's on the chart), the perceiver must allow bits of reality to be transformed through imaginative perception ("canning" the 2's on the chart). The perceiver, through this imaginative perception, allows real objects to occupy imagined space: the color pigment (real object) is transformed to become a part of the "apple" in the still life. Real objects (sounds) are transformed to exist in imagined time (the "beginning" of a sonata); real objects (actors) are transformed to performed imagined acts ("wait for Godot"); and real objects (ballerinas) are transformed to have imagined properties (are "weightless"). Without this special process of *perceptual* transformation (which I will describe more fully in IV below), real objects remain real objects — *outside* the aesthetic domain. And without the special process of *creative* transformation, imagined objects remain imagined objects — also outside the aesthetic domain.

So the aesthetic domain is where special processes allow ideas and conceptions to be realized into objects and events in the real world (the act of creation), and where these objects and events are then perceived through a special imaginative vision which changes them into something they are not in the real world (the act of artistic perception). In the language of the chart, this is movement from the 4's to the "canned" 3's for the artist, and from the 1's to the "canned" 2's for the perceiver. The aesthetic domain is certainly a part of the real world, but it is a special slice of real-world life where imagination and reality mingle and cooperate to give an extra charge to objects and events which, on their own outside this domain, just do not have the same kind of energy. The aesthetic domain is where objects and events are created and perceived according to aesthetic, and not real-world, rules and techniques. Like games, works of art exist in their own domain, and make sense only within the conceptual framework of that domain. And, like games, works of art demand that the players -- perceivers as well as creators — contribute something of themselves in the process.

III.

Aesthetic game-rule II — a work of art is "understood" only by those who understand the language of the art form — is simple to put and understand in terms of analogies. We human beings have invented all kinds of languages. $C_6H_{12}O_2$ is a formulation in one of them; $2 + 2 = 4$ in another; A iff B in another; $PV = nRT$ is another; and Brancusi's *Bird in Space* in still another. One simple fact of human existence is that people become acculturated to a variety of languages through experiences and education. Another is that some languages are more complex and difficult to learn than others.

The genus of the arts language might be the thoughts contained in section II above. The species of that language might be the various branches of the fine arts. And there are subspecies like pre-Columbian Mayan sculpture, New England Transcendentalist poetry, *Bauhaus* architecture, and aleatory music. Following these are sub-subspecies consisting of the works of individual artists in all of these movements. Most of our efforts in general education arts courses are directed toward familiarizing students with paradigm examples of as many languages as time will allow. But the point I want to make here is that there are always two components to any single artistic language, and the functions of both must be understood by students before the language is truly understrood. The first component might be called artistic agent language features, and the second artistic genre language features.

The distinction between these two components is that artistic agent language features are the products of a single artist's creative imagination and skill, while artistic genre language features derive from the development of an art form in a social-historical-cultural climate. The first deals with the conventions stemming from the artist's personal creativity; the second deals with the artist's personal creativity within the conventions of a larger milieu, i.e., a style or genre. If we switch back to the world of games for a moment, perhaps this will become more clear.

We all know the game of tennis, and we all know that there is Arthur Ashe's game of tennis. Similarly, there is golf and then there is the Jack Nicklaus brand of golf. In the arts, rather than considering specific games we talk about movements or styles. There is cubism and then there is Braque's cubism; surrealism and Ernst's surrealism; baroque concerti grossi and Corelli's concerti grossi; modern dance and the Pilobolus Dance Theater's modern dance, and so forth. Despite the fact that throughout history there have been some artistic figures who were hard to place within a style or genre, we are always more successful when we have students try to perceive individual artistic agent language features within the context of artistic genre language features. The language of the Pilobolus Dance Theater will certainly not make sense when perceived through the eyes of a square dancer (although it would probably make more sense than it would if perceived through the eyes of a physicist). There are always two things to be learned: the language of modern dance and the language of Pilobolus.

Each of the two components of the arts language has its own set of rules and conventions. The rules and conventions of modern dance are the stylized and collectively-held and collectively-practiced features generated by all the individual artistic agents who were or are a part of the modern dance tradition. The rules and conventions of Pilobolus are a combination of the styles of the modern dance tradition *and* the styles produced by the artistic imaginations of the group or the imagination of its choreographer. Pilobolus adds new words to an artistic language which has already been established. Braque, Ernst, and Corelli also added new words to further expand the languages in which they worked.

If we chart the thoughts presented to this point in this section, they look like this:

Genus: The Arts Language
Species: Painting
Subspecies: Surrealism (artistic genre language features)
Sub-subspecies: Max Ernst's Surrealism (artistic agent language features)

or

Genus: The Arts Language
Species: Music
Subspecies: Baroque Instrumental Music (artistic genre language features)
Sub-subspecies: Corelli's Concerti Grossi (artistic agent language features)

Two further points need to be made. The first is that there is a category of sub-sub-subspecies consisting of individual works. Under Max Ernst, for example, we could list *Napoleon in the Wilderness*, and under Arcangelo Corelli we could list Op. 6 No. 7 in D Major. But I will not go further, and will say only that an exhaustive knowledge of the language of art would include insights into how the artistic agent language features are manifested in particular ways in particular works of art. The second point is that, when thus considered, the task of learning an arts language appears to be formidable indeed. And it would be overbearingly so save for two things: first, human beings learn quickly, and second, as I stated earlier, most people in a society have become acculturated at least to some extent to the artistic genre language features of that society before serious formal training begins in a general education course. For better or worse, students have an idea about what they are going to get before we give it to them in the classroom.

IV.

Aesthetic game-rule III states that "each part of a work of art contributes to the whole both in creation and perception. Thus, the creator and the perceiver must attend to the processes by which artistic ingredients are formulated into the final art product."

Kant spent a good deal of time establishing a distinction between noumena — things as they really are in the world — and phenomena — things as they appear to us. It was his contention that human beings do not know noumena, but live in a world of phenomena. Leaving the problems of his metaphysics aside, we can use his distinctions in a slightly altered form to further analyze the processes of the art game.

Let us suppose, for example, that when an artist is creating a work of art, the work is a collection of aesthetic noumena — that is, an arrangement of forms, colors, sounds, movements, shapes, or words in space or time. Let us further suppose that, when the noumena are properly arranged into a finished product, the product ceases to be just a collection of ingredients, but becomes instead a phenomenal whole capable of expressing or evoking some kind of human feeling. Most of us would agree, I think, that art functions in this way. Most of us would also agree that a comprehensive knowledge of the work of art would include attention to both the phenomenal object and to its noumenal makeup or, in the language of section III of this paper, the phenomenal object and its characteristic artistic agent language features.

Of course, the best way to have students attend to both noumenal and phenomenal features of a work of art would be to have them look over the artist's shoulder during the entire creative act. Since this is not possible, there is an alternative which calls for the teacher to play the role of the artist in the classroom. This method of instruction is based on phenomenological reduction, a variation of the old synthesis-analysis-synthesis approach to teaching. That approach, as you recall, maintained that students should first be allowed to perceive an entire work of art (synthesis). Then the work of art would be taken apart and analyzed before it was put back together in the final synthesis. Phenomenological reduction is the analysis part of the synthesis-analysis-synthesis scheme, but it means something more than just analysis.

Analysis of a work of art consists of breaking the work down into its component parts. Hence, the first big category to be derived from breaking down, say, a movement of a symphony might be its form — an ABA structure. The next might be the use of themes in each section of the structure. Themes might be broken down into an analysis of key relationships or rhythms or instrumentation. It might be discovered at the end of the analysis that the entire movement is built around one or two germinal motives. And there the analysis would end.

Phenomenological reduction does this and more. The secret to the "more" lies in the fact that the process is called "phenomenological" reduction rather than "noumenal" reduction. Simple analysis, as mentioned above, might be noumenal reduction. But when philosophers use the term phenomena they are always referring to essences. Thus phenomenological reduction is analysis *plus* a concentration on how the various elements of the work of art carry their own essences — emotional or feelingful essences — and how these individual essences all contribute to the total essence of the work of art. The process is predicated on the simple belief that if a work of art has an essence or an emotional charge, then its individual components must all have essences and emotional charges which contribute to the whole and, further, that these essences can be discerned — in fact, they cannot remain hidden — when the work of art is reduced.

If we reduced the movement of the symphony I mentioned before in this way, we would find something like the following. The form of the movement is again a simple ABA structure. The first and last sections are the same, the middle section is different. The tempo of the movement is very slow, *largo*, deathlike. The meter is a resigned 4-4, and the key is a somer G minor. A trance-like rhythm forms the slow background. The rhythm is repeated over and over in the lower brass and timpani while the color woodwinds and muted horns play a dark, descending melody which lies in the middle-to-low registers. The dynamic level is always extremely soft; it rises to a wail occasionally in the B section, but returns to soft in the last section. The harmonies are almost static; they change infrequently, but when they do it is almost always from the dark tonic to the dominant and back, giving the feeling of a sigh. And so on.

Without hesitation, we all say "What tragic music!" Why tragic? Well, because all the elements of the piece have dark, somber, soft, deathlike, slow, sighing, and trance-like essences. And all of these essences contribute to the tragic essence of the piece. But in one sense this is begging the question. To say that "tragic" music is made up of "tragic" elements is to say practically nothing. In another sense, to say that music can be tragic at all is absurd. Music is nothing more than sounds and silence organized in some scheme. How can sounds be tragic? The answer is (and here things get metaphysically and phenomenologically sticky) that, as noumena, sounds are not tragic. As phenomena, they can seem to have tragic essences about them. The secret is that we ascribe the essences, the phenomena of tragic qualities, to sounds through a process known as empathy, or "feeling into."

Theodore Lipps (1851-1914), a German psychologist and aesthetician, fully dealt with the concept of empathy. Arnulf Zweig wrote a concise piece about Lipps' empathy in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

> Empathy, according to Lipps, is an act of sympathetic projection into objects or persons distinct from the agent. He defined it as "the objectified enjoyment of self," and meant by this that the agent discovers and identifies himself with "something psychical" in the actual qualities of an object of aesthetic contemplation or in another human being. The subject experiences his own activity, striving, and power in the object, and this is the key to aesthetic experience and to aesthetic production.[1]

This act of sympathetic projection, this "feeling into" is what I was talking about in the second section of this paper when I mentioned "weightless" ballerinas and actors "waiting for Godot." This is the special process of perceptual transformation which I called "canning" the 2's on the chart. Without empathic projection, the ballerinas are merely people moving about in various ways on the stage and actors are just people delivering lines of dialogue and engaging in silly actions. But let's return to Zweig for a moment to get further clarification on empathy.

> Lipps distinguished four main types of empathy. General apperceptive empathy is shown when we animate the forms of common objects, for example, when we see a line as movement. Empirical empathy, or empathy in nature, manifests itself when we humanize natural objects, as when we speak of a howling storm, the groaning of trees, a murmuring brook. Mood empathy (*Stimmungseinfühlung*) projects our feelings into colors and music (yellow is joyful, dark blue is serious, music is full of rejoicing, struggle, tears). Empathy for the sensible appearance of living beings is shown when we take other people's gestures, tones of voice, and other characteristics as symptomatic of their inner lives. All four types of empathy are exploited by the artist and utilized by the spectator of a work of art.[2]

Notice Zweig's last line. This, I think, is the heart of the entire art process. I have already mentioned perceiver or spectator empathy in terms of "canning" the 2's on the chart and the resulting "weightless" ballerinas. But now we must focus on the creator of the work of art and his function in "canning" the 3's on the chart. We can do this with our piece of tragic music.

Why tragic? For us, the perceivers, it is tragic because of our empathic projections of the qualities of tragedy into the aesthetic ingredients of the work. But beneath this is the artist's manipulation of these ingredients according to what he knew their empathic capabilities to be. And he knew their empathic capabilities *because he perceived them himself* during the act of creation. He canned the 3's all right, but in a way determined by his function as both creator and sensitive spectator or perceiver at the same time. *That* rhythm, *that* tempo, *that* melody, *that* instrumentation, and *that* key all worked together for him. They had to. If an element in the compositional process did not work, it was quickly replaced by one which did. And the composer knew which worked and which didn't because he too was an empathic perceiver.

Near the beginning of this section, I mentioned that the teacher had to play the role of the artist in the classroom. In the absence of the artist, the teacher is the one with the knowledge, the perceptual skills, and the artistic sensitivity necessary to reduce a work of art into its components and show students how aesthetic game-rule III works. Students must be allowed to "see" the work — all of it — before they can render it fully alive. "Seeing" all of the work is what phenomenological reduction is about. "Rendering it fully alive" is a result of empathy.

V.

At this point, aesthetic game-rule IV needs very little interpretation. It states that "the reward for a successful encounter with art is the aesthetic experience, the highest-ordered perceptual value experience available to human beings." Only two points have to be made.

First, the activity of encountering a work of art or a natural object and projecting emphatically into it, of feeling oneself into it, of "humanizing" it, is called the aesthetic experience. Second, the aesthetic experience is the highest-ordered perceptual value experience because its value is intrinsic rather than instrumental. The kind of perception I have been describing is the only kind which leads nowhere in the world of everyday affairs. There is no use or function attached to it. The value of the experience is a detached value, removed from want or gain, winning or losing, the push and pull of life. It is always there, available, and valuable for its own sake alongside the other intrinsic value experiences which make human life worthwhile: the religious or cosmic experience, the moral experience, the social experience, and the intellectual experience.

The aesthetic experience is a celebration of that aspect of human nature through which we are fascinated with the appearance of the world. As a result of our capacity to have aesthetic experiences, the world and all its objects serve potentially as works of art, as objects transformed by our delighted contemplation.

VI.

It seems to me that the preceding discussion allows two conclusions to be made about the usefulness and relevance of aesthetic theory in general education arts courses. The first is that aesthetic theory provides an interpretive dimension to the arts enterprise. Concepts such as art and language or communication and the aesthetic experience are central to that enterprise, and yet the arts themselves provide no interpretive discourse about them. Aesthetic theory is a meta-language for the arts in the same way that the philosophy of science is a meta-language for science: it is *not* science; it is *about* science. It is an attempt to codify, explain, evaluate, and make logical the constructs of central importance to science. The authors of the literature of formal aesthetics — philosophers, psychologists, and historians as well as artists and critics — have endeavored over the years to do the same with the arts. Their task has been to talk about and interpret art in an attempt to make logical thoughts and beliefs about its capabilities, functions, and values.

When we attend to the business of aesthetics, we do so not as artistic creators or perceivers, but as seekers of philosophical truths about the arts. And, as is the case with most philosophical endeavors, the truth usually turns out to be something we already know, have known, in our souls but not in our minds. True knowledge, of course, consists of both parts.

The second conclusion is that aesthetic theory should be used to generate introductory teaching and learning activities in the arts. Those aesthetic principles I have treated and others should be presented to students as a *first* activity in general education arts courses. Obviously, the level of instruction will determine the extent to which each principle must be translated, but students should be given opportunities to understand and make sense of them before we can expect them to understand and make sense of art. Through a combination of these game-rules and the usual sort of activities associated with general education arts classes, our students will come to know the arts as a very special game, one with a potential for life-long consequences.

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[1] Arnulf Zweig, "Lipps, Theodore," *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. and The Free Press, 1967), IV, 485.

[2] Ibid., p. 486.