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## ADAPTATION OF AESTHETIC TASTE TO TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES

**Abstract:** Aesthetic taste, possessing rather conservative cultural character, has a basic function in the process of human self-evaluation and self-determination thanks to its capacity to ‘differentiate’ and ‘appreciate’, it fails to keep up with rapid changes of technological and social progress. The development of nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science leads towards the improvement of human functions, conducts also significant psychological changes. In this perspective we try to identify the features of the aesthetic taste which would remain invariant during the process of human “technologisation” leading to creation of “techno-human” is analysed.

**Key words:** *Aesthetic taste as a mental skill, internalized image, the holistic structural organization of the artistic object, judgement of appreciation*

The purpose of this paper is to assess the influence of nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science (NBICS) on the evolution of *aesthetic taste* and vice versa. The term “human enhancement” in the context of human evolution promoted by NBICS – implies not only technological enhancement and, therefore, the *increment of human abilities*, but also modification of human intelligence and appraisal of the environment. *Aesthetic taste*, determining our evaluation of the world of nature as well as the man-made world, has a basic function in the process of the human self-evaluation and self-determination. The aesthetic attitude towards what surrounds us is disinterested attitude, which excludes utilitarian or practical aspects, stimulates sensory apparatus, arouses sympathetic attention to take the object in its whole holistic organization and structural correlations. We all remain impressed by the beauty of the sunset or sunrise, the twinkling stars in the sky, reflections of the game of the flame. But only art is the field where people can experience strong cathartic emotions. Art discloses endless space of freedom, it enables to explore new opportunities continually pushing the limits imposed by the rules. Art creates its own world, which

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is constructed on the basis of transformation of reality ... The artist concentrates the power of art in those areas of life in which he explores the outcome of an increased freedom, often violating customs and traditions, the laws of family and society, the laws of common sense and even the laws of space or time. His feeling of greater freedom really makes art a center of experimentation. The artist goes beyond the rules, it is he who gives the rules and adds something new to the world, something that did not exist before.

The problem of analysis of the evolution of aesthetic taste – which has rather conservative character, preserving the spiritual traditions and cultural values of humanity – first of all deals with the changes of the artistic values. It is not our aim to discuss Immanuel Kant's dilemma apparently resulting from antinomy between the objectivity of the aesthetic judgment and the subjectivity of the personal taste. We modestly try to identify the features of the aesthetic attitude which would remain invariant during the process of social transformation of "Homo sapiens" to "Techno-Human". Wherever we deal with an aesthetic judgment the people have no doubt that there is good taste and there is bad taste. On the one hand, we take for granted that the enjoyment of art and natural beauty is a right for everyone and not the privilege of a restricted class of experts. On the other hand, the society recognizes a role of experts of aesthetic values in different fields of human activities. In this sense aesthetic judgments are not merely reports on the observed presence of aesthetic properties but carry an implicit affirmation of value which purports to be right or wrong.

Sometimes, for some reason, a work of art seems to show characteristics of artistic excellence, which we appraise with enthusiasm, but a closer examination of the peculiar properties makes it to be illusion. On the contrary, a work of art that at first glance leaves us perplexed and bewildered, at a later time may appear with a genuine excellence. When these changes occur it means that during the process of appreciation while the physical substrate remains unchanged the *internalized image* changes. This is one of the reasons for tardy appraisal of masterpieces in the history of culture. The materials – bronze, canvas, musical notes – are the same and their structural organization has not changed, but reaction of critics and public differs because of the mode to internalize a work of art. Also it explains the known fact that the same visual or musical piece may be internalized in different ways by different individuals. Each of us resonates, in a way depending on his/her own mood, on a structure in which precise weights are assigned to its components of symmetry and order (G. Caglioti, *The Dynamics of Ambiguity*, Springer Verlag, Heidelberg (1992)

"Two men looking at the same canvas need not see the same picture or all in a concert-hall hear the same music: and this is not a metaphor but basic bedrock fact." (H. Osborne, *Revelatory Theories of Arts*. The British Journal of Aesthetics, vol. 10, N° 5, p. 343).

Hence art contains the potential power for new modes of internalization and interpretation that may ripen at different times. In the aesthetic apprehension attention is directed upon structural and "Gestalt" properties (many of them inter-sen-

sory) which cannot be subjected to quantitative measurement because they cannot be split into elementary non-interactive components. Through awareness of such inter-sensory qualities we sometimes attain a sense of entering into direct apprehension of the essential nature of works of art, accompanied by hedonic quality of our sensations.

Thus aesthetic taste triggers a game of mind and imagination, stimulates sensations, feelings and thoughts and gives us the opportunity to experience a lot of emotions. The essential mechanism of its operation is to ‘differentiate’ and to ‘appreciate’

- Aesthetic judgment involves an analytic evaluation: *to differentiate* implies the comparison of particular features under a common description of artistic field and the affirmation of standards of aesthetic value according to which particular aesthetic objects are assessed, that is *know-what*.
- Aesthetic judgment is not derived theoretically but is based on personal experience: *to appreciate* means to perceive what has been made and how it has been made, that is *know-how*.

We follow the concept of Harold Osborne, who thinks of appraisal of aesthetic value not only as a kind of theoretical knowledge or as an instinctive emotional reaction, but rather as a mental *skill* of cognitive nature, a form of *connoisseurship* that must be refined, which is essential e. g. for a sommelier or a piano tuner. He differentiates appreciation from other cognitive mental skills, he puts “emphasis not only or even primarily on a discriminatory acuity but perhaps even more on an ability to apprehend complex organizations of visual and auditory wholes and the recondite overall qualities of such wholes”. (H. Osborne, *Appreciation Considered as a Skill*. The British Journal of Aesthetics, vol. 9, N° 4, 1969, p. 336). Skill is the outcome a trained or cultivated ability to perform in a certain way. An artist represents not only a creator but also a craftsman as well as a connoisseur of his materials and the procedure to organize them.

Removing personal preferences, the aesthetic evaluation of the genuine values of a work of art, in the sense of connoisseurship specified above, identifies and highlights the characteristics of the artistic object. Other experts in the field should verify or share the outcome of the evaluation. A reliable judgement of appreciation should be intersubjective, cannot be influenced by subjective likes and dislikes: *I do not like Malevich, but he is a great painter. I do not love, but I appreciate him*. The professional knows very well that to like is not to judge.

Analyzing the current trend of the development of aesthetic taste, it becomes evident that the widespread use of IT instruments limits greatly both principles of aesthetic evaluation previously adopted by the clichéd mass culture and iconic culture for the elite (*to be cool*). Quickly changing stereotypes of fashion brands are absorbed by consumers bypassing the differentiating principle of the aesthetic attitude. The screen of the Ipad or the PC acquires the power of the main source of all kinds of information, it hampers a direct communication with the world of nature and the world of art. It induces us to ignore the diversity of the cultural world and social life and to focus our attention on the overwhelming variety of the web proposals. It is not easy to develop the capacity of appreciation when famous works

of art, handicrafts products, pieces of film stars' clothes are represented at the same level of aesthetic value. The attitude with which we look at handicrafts must be different from the attitude with which we look at works of art. Genuine aesthetic values derive from the intrinsic value of an artifact or phenomenon which stimulates and sustains a high level of aesthetic emotion and awareness.

It seems that new technologies give more and more freedom for creativity. Interactivity of the new technological instruments not only permits to look at a masterpiece and to inform about it, but eventually discloses also the possibility to modify it. This attitude towards a work of art loses its aesthetic, disinterested character. The way to explore the masterpiece for different kinds of purposes influences not positively on human capacity to grasp the unique character and the holistic structural organization of the artistic object.

The process of human "technologisation" promoted by nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science assists creativity and amplifies human abilities. There is no doubt that art will survive during this process of appearance of new forms, new topics, new materials, innovative instruments, technological applications etc. It is hard to believe that art would change its paradoxical property to transform the conventional reality into a personal reality with emotive character of perception. New images appear but their symbolic character will remain. Symbol in all its manifestations is the instrument through which a person passes from the visible to the invisible, from reality to imaginary field and thus enters a new dimension of life. The need to create and to perceive "man-made dreams for those who are awake" (Plato's definition of art) is a part of the human being nature. The high level of creativity is the prerequisite of art. For many centuries artists have declared that real art each time reveals in the world something, which has been not yet disclosed by means which nobody has yet used. Aesthetic apprehension is one of a few human activities which is capable to grasp the revelatory character of artistic creativity. It can be assumed that in the process of social transformation the ability to identify the level of artistic creativity would remain invariant feature of aesthetic taste. It implies identification of the original element, presentation familiar things in an unfamiliar significance, recognition of a new theme, apprehension of application of new materials, appreciation of new artistic forms.

Other features of aesthetic taste which would be not so much changed are the appreciation of the level of complexity of the structural organization of a work of art and the evaluation of the capacity of the art to generate a rich variety of hedonic sensations.

"Piece of art, as well as any other product create a public that understands the art and is able to enjoy the beauty. Hence labor produces not only an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object" (K. Marx, Critique of Political Economy")

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