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The Sensory Intention -- Art, Motif, and Motivation: A Comparative Approach

Yves Millet

Abstract

Philosophers like Gilles Deleuze claimed a new outlook for aesthetics asking for a rethinking of the traditional separation between the theory of sensibility and the theory of art. From a comparative standpoint, this article examines the concept of 'sensory intention' which in our view might be able to bridge the gap between acting and doing and therefore to link the theory of sensibility and the theory of art.

Traditional Chinese art, and more specifically the script style *caoshu* [草書], has been chosen as the medium through which to illustrate the theoretical discussion. Analysis of traditional Chinese thought on art allows us to see how approaching art from the point of view of motivation contrasts with early Western aesthetic theory. Aesthetics appears not as the *inferior gnoseologia* mentioned by A. G. Baumgarten (1750) but, on the contrary, as living knowledge of the common fund of our practices and rationalities.

The discussion addresses the following issues: the traditional views of acting and doing found in Western and Eastern philosophies; the place of motivation (related to *qi* [氣]) in Chinese art; and, consequently, the place of motifs in Chinese traditional art and Western modern painting.

Key Words

caoshu, Chinese art, John Duns Scotus, motif, motivation, painting, sensory intention, theory of art, theory of sensibility.

In both Western and Chinese cultures the conception of creation has its roots in cosmology. The Western conception is revealed in Hesiod's *Theogony*, the first verses of which recount how ancient Greece celebrated the final victory of Zeus over the shapeless powers of the abyss; *i.e.* the victory of order over chaos. In contrast, great numbers of strategic, sporting or curative practices in China show that, from a Chinese cultural perspective, there is not a denial of chaos but rather a conscious exchange with it: a search for conciliation rather than a brutal confrontation. In the Chinese tradition, harmony is achieved at the price of mediation; it cannot be achieved by annihilating chaos but by actively and creatively taking the reality of chaos into consideration.

Since we are faced with two very different attitudes *vis-à-vis* chaos or the random forces of nature; the Western attitude of opposition and the Chinese attitude of conciliation, we are consequently faced with two distinct schemes of action. On one hand, in Western civilization action and creation are considered very highly. For Aristotle, acting is the result of having a project. In other words, governed by the will, the *praxis* is teleological. In addition, the Western attitude has been influenced by theology. For example, *Genesis* presents a vision of creation that has the three following characteristics: to be absolute (*ex-nihilo*), universal and instantaneous. Within this

conception there is no intermediary between the Creator and what is created. The limits of creation can be equated with the limits that God gives to himself. Thus, within the Western scholastic tradition, the work of humans is subordinate to the work of nature. In other words, it is subordinate to the divine design and its purpose is to express this design through the use of sensitive signs.

On the other hand, the Taoist notion of non-action (*wu wei* [無為]) [1] directly challenges this Western conception of will and action. *Wu wei* is not inaction and even less idleness, rather it is the practice of a specific mode of action experienced when an individual acts with the spontaneity of nature. For that reason, in Taoism *wu wei* is considered to be the greatest form of action. The purpose is to favor what has to be done in an unconstrained manner; i.e., *sponte sua*. The absence in China of any creationist thought and of any thought of efficacy as a voluntary, direct and finalized action [2] means that *wu wei* is nothing more than a way of acting which is free from the reification of doing. In other words, *wu wei* favors the potentiality of the world and its actualization equally in order to be more in tune with the constant transformational process of nature, i.e. its transitional nature.

In the following sections we will investigate traditional Chinese modes of thought and artwork in more detail, seeing how an awareness of the non-representative way of thinking and practicing based on motivation [3] allows us to rethink the link between art and aesthetic experiences in general. This is possible precisely because in this specific tradition *wu wei* takes place at the intersection of art and aesthetic experiences. What makes traditional Chinese artistic thought such an interesting and relevant topic for closer examination today is the fact that Western art has become released from *mimesis*. In other words, the value of acting has been given priority over the object of reference, and artistic activity seems to have moved towards a type of experimentation. The first consequence is that the idea of an artwork itself is relativized because attention is nowadays more focused on the 'how' than the 'what'; in other words, more attention is paid to the motivation which initiated the artwork than to what is being represented.

1. Nature, Culture and Motivation

In the Chinese tradition what we call motivation is related to *qi* / *ch'i* [氣], the prime and immanent breath of energy which comes from each thing and which has to be brought out in the calligraphic and pictorial works. This is what true literati must look for and learn to master through technique. Furthermore, it is that energy which the spectator likes to find in the works he is admiring and without which there is no real artwork. This focus on the motivation is in direct contrast with the approach found in Western aesthetics and directly questions the Kantian formula whereby *art* is distinguished from *nature* as doing (*facere*) is from acting or operating in general (*agere*); and the product or result of art is distinguished from that of nature, the first being a work (*opus*), the second an effect (*effectus*). By right we should not call anything art except a production through freedom, i.e., through a power of choice that bases its acts on reason." [4]

In Kant's *Critique of Judgment* the dividing line drawn between *facere* and *agere* reveals the same dualism which prevails between phenomenon and noumenon or between the sensitive world and the intelligible world. This line aims to subordinate doing to reason and thus to extract proof of the superiority of humankind *vis-à-vis* nature. Nature is presented in terms of a simple mechanical relation between cause and effect. Humans, on the contrary, act by choice, independently, since they have free will. Art, according to Kant, could only be the result of freedom [*Willkür*]; a specific combination of will and reason.

However, as the written works and practice of the literati demonstrate, the relationship between doing and acting can be otherwise conceived. According to the Chinese tradition, *facere* is directly connected to *agere*; in other words, doing is simply an actualization of acting in general. Each work of art is a variation on this particular actualization. Each artist has a unique mode of expressing this motivation within a given art form. In other words, art is a direct extension of acting, that is to say an extension of that which is enacted by motivation, hence the importance of the concept of *wu wei* [無為]. In fact, the practice of *wu wei*, which is not confined to the domain of art, has no other purpose than to facilitate, in some way, the transition from *agere* to *facere*. Thus, while the Kantian subject poses a distinction between the product of art and the product of nature, the practice of *wu wei* forces us to think about human art from the point of view of nature.

The reversal of the relation between the human and the non-human has wider philosophical implications. For example, in China where the human has never been thought of as separate from nature or, to be more precise, as being separate from the process of transformation and the complementary forces that animate it, the determinism of the laws of nature is not seen as proof of debasement or of submission. On the contrary, in terms of the literati's ideals, the laws of nature are seen as the guarantee of his being able to align his own nature with that which includes him. Consequently, as will be discussed, from a Chinese perspective, that is to say a perspective in which motivation (*qi*) plays a central role, aesthetics, in the original sense of a "science of sensitive knowledge" (*scientia cognitionis sensitivae*, A. G. Baumgarten), places the subject in a milieu [5] where he can extract rhythms (here corresponding to manifestations of *qi* [氣], energy in all things) and signs (as a result of *li* revelation, the regulating principle of everything). Strictly speaking the subject does not pre-exist in the milieu but forms himself within the milieu. In this, as is well highlighted by Arnold Berleant, the environment is not an object but a milieu of action. [6]

In this context, art is the result of a mastered act guided by technique, but a technique which has been "forgotten," or to put it another way, which has become internalized to the point where it has become completely natural, as spontaneous as possible. To some extent there is no original condition or state of nature from which culture emerges. Rather there is a set of processes, of constraints and/or of relations to which it is necessary to adapt. These different forms of accommodation are culture.

In contrast as previously remarked, the Kantian definition of art quoted above, which deals with the *opus, i.e.*, the product of artistic creation, implicitly subordinates creation to evaluation. The teleology which this designates cannot get rid of a certain moral vision whereby, in its own assessment, humans view themselves as the final end of nature. This approach has too often neglected practices in preference to forms. Modern formalism has separated form from process whereas aesthetic and artistic experiences must in fact be linked. Form certainly makes sense, but even more so when that which gave birth to it and which generates it is also taken into account. We have hypostatized form whereas, in fact, from this perspective there is a permanent interaction between *agere, facere* and appreciation which arises from completion of the form.

2. Chinese Art and Motivation

Study of the classical Chinese aesthetic treatises written by literati, notably in the Tang (618-907 AD) and Song dynasties (960-1279 AD), draws our attention to three major themes. First, questions concerning *how* a painting or calligraphy is to be judged are dealt with. Second, questions arise concerning which *techniques* have to be followed or used by the great masters. Finally, the literati's (painter, calligrapher and poet's) motivation, i.e., the nature which makes them [\[7\]](#) act and which consequently reveals what they mean to express, is considered. However, in China these three directions are closely linked. Within the Chinese tradition, all literati know how to find and appreciate both the subject (the 'what') of other literati's work and the way in which they did it (the 'how').[\[8\]](#)

Since the originality of a thought comes as much from the words in use as from their interrelations, we have to devote some space to recalling the literati's position and how, in traditional Chinese thought, the different notions about aesthetic vocabulary come together.

First, every painter is a scholar; that means he knows both the technical vocabulary and the philosophical vocabulary. In fact in the different treatises there is a permanent link between the fields of painting, poetry and philosophy. However, none of these practices is an end in itself but is rather viewed as a means of reaching knowledge or wisdom.

Second, when literati start painting or writing they do it, not to express themselves, but rather to express the relation they have with the flow of the universe. This means that individuality is a secondary aspect of the intended meaning. The literati's role is to be a *mediator* and their work shows their degree of receptiveness towards the continuous metamorphosis of the universe. In other words, his work is a direct proof of his degree of spiritual elevation. Rather than being the expression of an individual, it is in fact, the manifestation of a subjectivised neutral becoming. To achieve knowledge through art means to understand the nature of the relation which exists between humans and nature. Humans can only acquire this knowledge when they agree to be the mediator of this link. In that sense to admit this link is already knowledge.

Third, the search for communion with nature during the making of an artwork, which is insisted upon, seems to characterize the originality of the traditional creative act in China. This search for communion is in fact the search for an adequacy, the response of two rhythms: man's rhythm and nature's rhythm. After a long apprenticeship, one aims to achieve a kind of spontaneity equal to that of nature. Technique, which consists as much of mastery of the tools as it does of educating the eye, is only true when you can forget it, when it becomes invisible; interiorized. Literati are people who can potentially forget themselves and allow spontaneity (*ziran*/自然) to arise. Concentrating this life force on the tip of his brush, the whole body of the painter or calligrapher is then able to guide the primordial flow in a fluid continuity without any constraints. As Yolaine Escande writes, "Great artists, by putting their own intentionality (*yi*- [意]) alongside that of the universe (*li*- [理]), know how to transmit their 'inner resonance' (*qiyun*- [氣韻]); their ability to resonate in sympathy with the world around them (*shenhui*- [神會]) and become united to its movement is shown in their work." [9]

In order to deepen our understanding of Chinese artistic philosophy let us look in more detail at some of the key concepts involved. Motivation (or *qi*) is what underpins the initiative for something; what makes motif(s). In relation to the scholar, it is a transindividual energy which comes from nature. Transmitted by the body, motivation is a consequence of the direct involvement of thought in the body and the body in its environment. The corporal aspect of the artwork implies a transformation of the motivation in an uplifting movement into a *conscious emotion*, in other words, a *sensory intention*. Therefore, the setting of this motivation does not end in an artefact. It is the lining up of two notions; the *yi*[意] (intention, etymologically: "sound of heart") and the *li*[理](principle, inner structure or vein).

We will turn first to the *yi*. *Yi* translated by the word 'intention' is, as revealed by the etymology, a kind of inner tension which spreads outwards like an emotion. This "sound of heart," which we have to listen to, makes us go to one thing rather than another one, makes us act according to our inclinations. In that sense, *yi*, is intention understood as the conscious will to carry out a project. However, *yi* is equally an inner proclivity which comes towards and joins with the inner structure of the object (*li*).[10] What we are calling the *sensory intention* is precisely this singular combination of intention and proclivity; the capacity to carry in a single movement both the aesthetic sensation and a directed intention. As mentioned above, the object is not simply aimed at or required, rather it is essential to the literati as a consequence of their strength in resonance, their rhythmic adequation. According to Chinese aesthetics, things do not look at us but rather resound in us, their structures marking a rhythm which responds to and echoes our experience.

A second key concept is the *li*. *Li* is what the artist must reveal about a thing; in other words, the invisible line or sign of that thing which the *yi* allows us to see. Through the artwork the *yi* must give in to the *li*; it must follow the path of the *li* that has been opened up by the aesthetic sensation. Hence, it would be accurate to evoke two *tensions* joined together by the literati;

a gesture which is in its turn animated by the motivation.

These two, *yi* and *li*, are of course related to motivation. However, the transition from vital energy to a drawn line, which, though controlled, keeps in its rhythm the initial impulse, is possible as a consequence of the sensory intention (*yi*).

It should be noted that each artwork is only one of the possible actualizations of this motivation. If the motivation is unique, its individualization, that is to say the process the artist-scholar uses for mediation, becomes a source of differences. Therefore, each actualization gives birth to a difference. At the same time, in its realization each actualization links an active moment of moving towards the motifs to a passive moment of return towards chaos. These two movements are held within the sensory intention and the quality of the work depends on this respiration.

Consequently, as said previously, the notion of project becomes relativized. In this conception the subject, linked to his project by the force of his will, disappears. The "heroism" of the doing disappears on behalf of *wu wei* [無為]. In fact, in traditional Chinese completion is possible because any creation is considered on the scale of the transformation of the universe. The subject becomes 'porous'; it becomes the instrument of resonance and amplification: it *interprets*.

3. Forms and Motifs

At first glance, traditional Chinese painting seems to be an untiring repetition of conventional themes: landscapes, portraits, flora and fauna. Variations in the treatment of these themes do exist but they do not at first seem outstanding compared to the great variety of treatments found in the Western pictorial tradition. As a consequence, traditional Chinese painting could seem ossified because of its slow renewal. Furthermore, from the formal point of view the Western and Chinese traditions seem to be working "*a contrario*," with the Western tradition involved in an obvious elaboration of particular forms, while the Chinese tradition is dedicated to a continual repetition of motifs.

However, this view is simplistic. Whereas we must understand is that, from a Chinese and Western painter's point of view, a motif is not a form. A motif is only a transitional element which allows energy to be revealed. This distinction between form and motif can be found in both Western and Chinese art and can be related to two main trends in artistic creation. The first tends towards the use of motifs because it focuses on the interaction of forces and has as dynamic the interplay between difference and repetition. The second is founded on *mimesis* and has as dynamic a dialectic between unity and identity and therefore tends towards form. Nevertheless, despite being separately identifiable, the two streams cross each other and most of the time in most artwork there is modulation towards the more favored tendency.

Focusing now on the motif let us look at some examples from Western painting. Besides the art of Irish manuscripts, Claude Monet is one of the painters who best illustrates the pre-eminence of motif over form. This can be clearly seen in his

Water Lily series where flowers become the pretext for infinite variations in color and rhythmic display. Monet's later paintings lead us to Jackson Pollock's work which provides a perfect sample of what motif as a vehicle of energy can become. Where is the form in Jackson Pollock's paintings? In answer, there is no form but instead a large and open field of dynamic interactions.

This does not mean that Monet's or Pollock's paintings are pure ornament. What is significant about this brief look at Western painting is the fact that Monet initiated conjointly artworks based on motifs and on series. From that moment, through the work of Monet and Cézanne right up to the work of abstraction, the principle of series has become central in Western painting. In the same way a certain number of modern masters (Klimt, Klee or Matisse for instance), rediscovered the use of dynamic patterns to express movement and rhythm. However, series and motifs are the two necessary conditions for an *aesthetics of time* instead of one of representation (*mimesis*). This is a supplementary argument to be considered within any comparative approach to the study of the Chinese and Western painting traditions.

Turning back to China, for the literati to maintain a permanent link with the chaos from which the fundamental energy emerges is essential. This is the main objective of their work and thus there is a predilection for motif over form. Paradoxically, the repeated use of motifs, this self-contained group of references, seems to encourage an opening since it allows the trembling of the background chaos to vibrate in the lines of the motif. On the contrary, forms that appear open in their interplay of multiple combinations promote a series of closures, confinements or exclusions of confusion in order to perfect their legibility. In other words, motifs allow the unique motivation to become differentiated while forms converge towards a kind of unification. The trend towards using motifs finds the harmonization of motifs in the balance between the opposing movements while the trend towards using forms finds its harmonization through hierarchical organization.

This phenomenon is clearly illustrated in calligraphic work, most specifically in work employing the cursive style. This style developed around the third century during the second half of the Han dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD) At this time, a certain number of scholars, under the influence of both Taoism and Chan Buddhism (Zen), imposed a new manner they called *caoshu*, literally "herb-writing". *Cao* means both 'rough' and 'herb.' This style is what we now commonly call the cursive style. This episode, the birth of *caoshu* [草書], provided an opening for a new aesthetics which demanded a primitive purity closer to the original chaos. Indeed, the grass script style of Zhang Zhi, (second century) was one of the first distortions imposed on the official models represented by the seal and regular script styles. [11] It was the first branching out which produced a succession of differences or growing fluctuations which eventually led to the development under the Tang dynasty (618-907) of *kuang caoshu* [狂草書], known as mad or wild cursive style. This style was employed, for instance, by Zhang Xu (675?-759?) and Huai Su (725-785). This impulse for innovation marks out a border between the formalist side and the expressive side. We should remember

that literati were first of all government officials. Even if regular (or standard) script style was used for administrative purposes and semi-cursive was first used for practical reasons (since it was simpler and faster), these script styles were already thought of as a form of art. As a consequence, the cursive script became a way to express *another* artistic sensibility and gradually became an aesthetics in itself, a full aesthetics. Today each script style is still used and a good calligrapher is able to practice all of them.

In our view the cursive style emphasizes some major aspects of Chinese aesthetic thought. The fact that 'herb' and 'rough' have a common ideogram is significant. By extension the use of this word (herb-writing) could come to qualify the cursive movement of the paintbrush and in this way, the intention to make the jumble of chaos sensitive in various motifs. In this sense, the motif encapsulates the energy flow for a moment. It could be viewed as the equivalent of an operation in a scientific laboratory that allows us to perceive the normally imperceptible aspects of nature. Thus creating comes down to allowing energy to circulate and sensitizing its different degrees of intensity.

At this point, a new divergence between the Chinese and Western traditions comes to the fore. Contrary to the Platonic schema in which creating was recognition or reminiscence of the transcendent relation between the earthly world and the world of Ideas; the knowledge which the literati aim at is obtained through re-creation or, in other words, through a re-processing of the energy flow.

In China knowledge seems to correspond to the unfolding of the immanent relation of the body to its milieu. This knowledge, once obtained is spoken of as *implied* in the sense that the first 'catching' of motivation is made by the body to which we must try to listen and from which the sensory intention is caught through free detachment. Thus when speaking about traditional China, we can say that representation is subordinate to motivation. Furthermore because aesthetic feeling is transitional in nature, works of art and what they represent are not ends in themselves. The artwork of the literati implies a participatory manner since they must pay attention as much to the *qi* as to the *li*. Hence in China, representation has a permanent tendency towards symbolism, although it never becomes a victim of this symbolism. Chinese art only suggests. The apparently unfinished nature of traditional Chinese painting leaves room for the spectator to participate. He or she is invited to use his or her eyes to find the motivation that was at the beginning of the work. Thus this art opens up an implicit silence thanks to which the motivation can be discovered.

To conclude, an aesthetics based on representation which makes use of a dialectic between the visible and the invisible, is opposed to an aesthetics based on motivation, which is thought of as the flow and emergence that arise out of chaos as dynamics and patterns. Rather than being a difference between representative thought and motivated thought; it is a question of the difference between conception of thought as a succession of representations, the main consequence of which is a logic of identity and conception of thought as an

actualization of the formless being for which the tools of interpretation pick out the qualitative and intensive aspects.

4. The Sensory Intention

If we now leave the Chinese context and relate what we have been able to learn from it to the wider context, we should be ready to rethink the nature of the aesthetic experience as well as to consider artistic experience from another perspective; that is to remove it from the rigid opposition between nature (as a series of causes and effects) and culture (as a consequence of free will).

First we examined the specific processes involved in an act of creation. This creative act could concern painting, poetry or thought since, as is well known, literati practiced those three activities in a complementary way. Let us remind ourselves of the main aspects of the creative process: 1) motivation as energy which must be directed as spontaneously as possible; 2) the sensory intention which links the embodied aesthetic sensation to the artistic gesture; 3) the rhythms and signs "captured" which are subject to reorganization through 4) the different motifs.

So far the focus of our discussion has been the artist. However this is limiting, and the discussion should be seen as applicable to anyone having any kind of aesthetic experience. Whenever we look at something, touch, listen, feel or taste, we are involved in an aesthetic experience, since aesthetic experience is not restricted to the exercise of judgment or to the creation of an object. Aesthetic experience is first and foremost an "autopoietic" complex where rhythmic lines of resonance develop, where signs gather and become lines of interpretations, constructions of meaning (s) and action (s) that in turn *inform* the person.

Consequently, before concluding, we would like to consider the notion of sensory intention in more detail in order to see whether such an investigation can reveal a possible equivalent to the Chinese notion *yi* in Western philosophy. Since we have been discussing a conception of will which is not in opposition to nature, at this point it might be fruitful to borrow from John Duns Scotus the distinction between will as nature (*voluntas ut natura*) and will as free (*voluntas ut libera*). It is important to understand that this distinction should be viewed as a difference in aspect rather than an opposition between nature and will. It is a *modal* distinction, not a difference of kind. For Duns Scotus, 'will as nature' must be understood as a natural tendency while 'will as free' must be understood as a power of nature. The first is characterized by passivity while the second is characterized by activity. More precisely, *voluntas ut natura* corresponds to an inner proclivity tending towards its own accomplishment whilst *voluntas ut libera* corresponds to a faculty able to produce chosen acts. [\[12\]](#)

If we compare this conception of will to our previous analysis of the sensory intention, it can be remarked that in the same way in which we had a duality of aspect within the notion of *yi*, i.e. intention coupled with proclivity; we have a corresponding duality in Duns Scotus analysis of will; i.e., as being both an active faculty of intellect and a receptive tendency. As in the Chinese context, both are natural, have modal applications

and tend towards their own perfection. Precisely what is important is that the modal duality of the sensory intention is the condition under which it is possible to think of a link between motifs and forms. This is a key point in being able to think of *agere* and *facere* in combination since they are in fact two modalities of action rather than two separate regimes of action. (See the synoptic board below.)

Synoptic Board

A	Agere	(a1)	Facere	(a2)
B	<i>Motifs</i>	(b1)	<i>Forms</i>	(b2)
C	Theory of sensibility	(c1)	Theory of art	(c2)

From a Western perspective, the question is how to go from line A to line C; or more precisely, how to go from (a1) to (c2). This progression is much more difficult in a context in which there is a separation between nature and culture and, as we have shown, such a separation is more commonly found in the West than in a Chinese context. Ultimately, to go from A to C it is necessary to pass through B which should thus be considered as a bridge. However, in order for B to play this role, (b1) and (b2) must be linked, which is where the sensory intention comes in since its duality of nature makes the operation possible.

John Duns Scotus never wrote about art. However there is much in his work which is relevant to the present discussion. John Duns Scotus' epistemology offers a way of resolving the oppositions in the Western aesthetic tradition, as epitomized in the views of Kant, by suggesting a different way of thinking through the relation between *agere* and *facere*. Furthermore, Duns Scotus' work permits a reinterpretation of Baumgarten's definition of aesthetics as a science of *sensitive* knowledge, even *inferior* knowledge.

There are two reasons for this. First, aesthetics was said by Baumgarten to be inferior knowledge for the simple reason that art and even our perception of nature were thought of in terms of resemblance or analogy. However, as we have seen through our investigation of traditional Chinese art, it is possible to have another perspective which draws apart the dialectic of model and copy, defect or truth in representation (what Gilles Deleuze calls a "representative theology" [13]). Strictly speaking, within this perspective, we are not dealing so much with resemblance as with resonance. [14] What makes Duns Scotus work relevant to the present discussion, and what differentiates it from that found in the tradition represented by Baumgarten, is the distribution of the value of terms which for Duns Scotus is not hierarchical but modal. More precisely, Duns Scotus does not invalidate the hierarchical relation between sense and concept but rather relativizes it. As we have seen, '*voluntas ut libera*' cannot exist without '*voluntas ut natura*'. Therefore the question no longer concerns the superiority of one term over another since the terms refer to two (modally) interacting aspects of knowledge rather than to two hierarchically separated entities.

Based on rhythms and signs that the artist captures and interprets, the artist elaborates a series of forms or motifs that he or she will redistribute (*i.e.* organize in the work) and that will constitute transitional objects between the artist and the

world. Motifs, as the result of actualization of rhythms, have the power to generate differences through repetition, notably by the use of series. If rhythm as pre-subjective reality has been regularly repressed in Western culture, it is because we overestimate the importance of forms and neglect where they are from, because in general we pay excessive attention to the result (the 'what') instead of the process (the 'how'). In these circumstances, the processes of creating and the products of that creation become more and more disassociated from one another. On the contrary, using the modal distinction of Duns Scotus, we should think about acting and doing in terms of complementary modalities of a common natural reality of action instead of as being in opposition.

In a way Duns Scotus shifts from an opposition of essences to a qualitative distinction, from the logic of identity to the logic of intensity. This leads us to consider rhythms as manifestations of motivation, as the real condition under which *living* art is created.

Secondly, turning to the idea of aesthetics as a science of sensitive knowledge, Duns Scotus was the first to seriously reconsider the Scholastic-Aristotelian disjunctive opposition between sense as a tool of knowledge of existence and intellect as a tool of knowledge of essence. For him, those two types of knowledge are not only compatible but operate together. What John Duns Scotus named abstract knowledge (*cognitio abstractiva*) and intuitive knowledge (*visio intellectualis*) are only differentiated intellectually; they are not differentiated acts of cognition. Since they are part of a single unique act; any distinction between them is modal and related to the presence or absence of the object of consideration.

Thus aesthetics can be viewed as a science of sensitive knowledge, but not with the Aristotelian meaning that prevails in modern epistemology as seen in Baumgarten or Kant and that survives today to some extent in the often-made distinction between sensation as matter and concept as form. Following Duns Scotus, since his conception of intuitive, intellectual knowledge is sufficient to relate sense and intellect, [15] we might be able to bridge the gap between *agere* and *facere*, joining them together in a non-hierarchical manner as a consequence of the sensory intention which goes beyond the distinction between matter and form and therefore links the theory of sensibility and the theory of art.

This point brings us to contemporary philosophy. In his seminal work: *Difference and Repetition*, which is based to some extent on Duns Scotus's conception of the univocity of being (*ens univocum*), Gilles Deleuze makes a claim for a new outlook for aesthetics. He suggests that we should not separate the theory of sensibility and the theory of art and should not subordinate them to the categories of representation and identity. Instead we should think of them together so that "the being of sensitivity reveals itself in artwork and, at the same time, artwork appears as experimentation." [16]

In that sense, the example of China serves to highlight the degree of convention of the categories used in early modern Western aesthetics. This is not to say that the categories currently in use are false; rather it is being claimed that they

are not exclusive. If we consider what the sensory intention allows us to state in more general terms, we find that, contrary to the Kantian interpretation, we can say that in any aesthetic experience or practice of art, sensation and cognition, reception and intention are linked. They can be thought of as complementary constitutive parts of aesthetic experience and the practice of art. If linking motifs and forms involves linking aesthetic experience and artistic practice, then the conditions under which acting and doing, and consequently the theory of sensibility and the theory of art, are also linked and are real. It is for this reason that the importance of the concept of sensory intention has been emphasized in this article. To conclude, understanding the interaction of motivation and motif can be seen to a certain extent, as one of the main achievements of modern and contemporary art, as well as of contemporary aesthetics.^[17]

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Endnotes

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[1]The difficulty of finding an English word or phrase which expresses the concepts encapsulated in "wu wei" has led us to keep the Chinese transcription in the text. However, "wu wei" has also been translated as 'effortless action.'

[2]See: François Jullien, *Traité de l'efficacité*, (Paris: Ed. Grasset, 1996). (English translation: *Treatise on Efficacy: Between Western and Chinese Thinking*, University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

[3]The term must be understood with its full etymological ancestry. Let's recall that 'motivation' comes from the Latin *motivus* (related to movement, mobile) and, initially, from *movere* (to move) which led in the thirteenth century to *motivum* (motive, reason).

[4]Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Translated by Werner S. Pluhar, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1987, p. 170.

[5]The term 'milieu' has been chosen in preference to the term 'environment' since, in the author's opinion, 'milieu' better expresses the idea that we are embedded in a singular and transitional complex of feelings and interpretations in every moment.

[6]Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Temple University press, Philadelphia, 1992)p.128.

[7]The author is fully aware of the practice of employing gender-neutral terms in academic discourse. However the masculine gender has been employed when referring to the literati as this function was in fact only open to men during the historical period under discussion.

[8]It is a revealing fact that in China, where all the conditions were in place for the development of an aesthetics and philosophy of art of an analytic type, the literati did not aspire to exhaust their topics in so-called scientific objectivity. Rather, their purpose seems to have been to leave the emotion intact at the source of their 'line-gesture' performance,refusing to freeze it into categories or concepts.

[9]Yolaine Escande, *Guo Ruoxu. Notes sur ce que j'ai vu et entendu en peinture*, Ed. La lettre volée, Bruxelles, 1994, p. 24. The Chinese characters were added by the author.

[10]To understand the double nature of *yi* let us remind ourselves that the organ of thought in Asia is the heart [*xin* /心].

[11]For those who are not familiar with Chinese calligraphy script styles, please visit: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_asian_script_styles Furthermore, clicking on the names of the Chinese calligraphers where they appear in the article will lead the reader to examples from their major works.

[12]Gérard Sondag, *Duns Scot*, (Paris :Vrin, 2005), pp. 212-213.

[13]Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, (Paris: PUF, 1968)p. 341. (English translation by Paul Patton (Norwich: Columbia University Press, 1995).)

[14]This is first highlighted by the fact that the tools of interpretation used in reference to most Chinese traditional visual arts and Western modern painting could also be used when music rather than the visual paradigm is being considered.

[15]Gérard Sondag, *Duns Scot*, op.cit., p. 233.

[16]Gilles Deleuze, op.cit.,p. 94. See *Idem*, p. 364. Univocity of being is, of course, the metaphysical presupposition which makes the comparison with China possible.

[17]This last point is dealt with by Gilles Deleuze in the introduction to his *Difference and Repetition*and is discussed in detail by Christine Buci-Glucksmann in her "philosophy of ornament." See, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Philosophie de l'ornement. D'Orient en Occident*, (Paris: Galilée, 2008).