Another Look at Jared S. Moore's Comprehensive View of Beauty

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According to what is known as the classic theory, beauty can be defined as unity or formal harmony. To overcome some of the criticisms that it encountered, the American philosopher Jared S. Moore proposed, in his paper from 1942, a modernisation of such theory, by distinguishing various types and subtypes of harmony which, taken together, are intended to cover both the objective and the subjective sides of beauty. Our goal is to look closer to some of the main principles that emerge within Moore's intricate taxonomy of harmony – most notably, the principles of organic unity, fittingness, and empathy – which in his article are only sketched or implicitly suggested. Employing such supplementations, we hope to make J.S. Moore's comprehensive view of beauty even more complete from a theoretical standpoint and suitable to face the challenge posed by the modernist and postmodern artistic practices, which seemingly undermined the notions of beauty and formal harmony.
| *Keywords: Beauty, Form, Harmony, Unity, Empathy*

1. Introduction: J.S. Moore's modernisation of the classic theory of beauty

In his paper from 1942, *Beauty As Harmony*, the American philosopher Jared S. Moore turns his attention to the "ancient problem" of the nature of beauty, which he finds inexorably tied to issues about art ("aesthetics is as truly connected with art *and* beauty as is Shakespeare's great romantic tragedy with Juliet *and* Romeo"). He takes as his starting point the so-called "classic theory", which defines beauty in formalistic and objective terms, i.e. as an order or formal harmony in virtue of which the object that possesses it affords a pleasurable experience in the observer. While accounting well for our appreciation of beauty, insofar as people (in the first place, art connoisseurs) enjoy how the different parts of an object are unified in a harmonious whole, the classic theory appears to J.S. Moore as partially defective, for two main reasons. On one side, it is deemed by him "too broad", to the extent that not all

formal harmony – or, to recall the most popular definition of beauty developed in eighteenth century philosophy, not all "unity-in-variety" – is aesthetic. On the other side, the formal-objective definition of beauty is judged "too narrow", since it (apparently) ignores "what lies behind the form" and "manifests itself through it", i.e., the meaning or "significance" of a beautiful object as well as the psychological and spiritual attitudes of the subject who perceives it.

In order to avoid these difficulties, J.S. Moore proposes a "modernisation" of the classic theory of beauty by way of extending the very notion of harmony, which lies at the core of such theory. He proceeds to distinguish three main types of harmony, which are: (1) an "objective harmony" among the elements of the beautiful object; (2) an "objective-subjective harmony" between the beautiful object and the mind of the perceiver; (3) a "psychological harmony", which is purely subjective and is internal to the mind of the observer. Within each of these principal varieties it is possible, according to J.S. Moore, to distinguish various subtypes of harmony, which, taken together, result in a "comprehensive", and more satisfying, view of beauty.

While representing an improvement with respect to the classic theory from which it departed, J.S. Moore's "complete analysis" of beauty, as he calls it, still needs to be complemented, insofar as the many facets of the notion of harmony that he envisages are not entirely treated. Thus, in what follows we'll try to deepen some of the main principles that emerge within J.S. Moore's intricate and compelling taxonomy of harmony – most notably, the principles of organic unity, fittingness, and empathy – and which, despite their acknowledged relevance, are only briefly sketched or implicitly suggested in his article. In doing so, we will take advantage of the insights offered by many thinkers who, especially in the last decades, have variously dealt with the topics of beauty, harmony, aesthetic experience, and the likes, and whose reflections can spread light on the above-mentioned principles. We'll leave aside only the third main type of harmony, the "psychological" one (which is a sort of inner harmony), not only because it would exceed the limits of the present inquiry, but also because it is presented as the product of the combined presence of the first two types of harmony, upon which our attention will be primarily directed.

Hence, following the steps of J.S. Moore himself, what we are going to propose here is a further modernisation of the formalist account of beauty as previously revised by the American philosopher, in order both to enhance its theoretical strength and to render it suitable to face the challenge posed by the most recent tendencies in art history, such as postmodernism and conceptual art, which often tried to undermine the concepts of beauty and formal harmony, albeit broadly conceived.

2. Beauty as an objective harmony

The first of the three main types of harmony upon which the beauty of an item relies, the objective harmony, involves, according to J.S. Moore, three subordinate ones: (a) a "formal harmony" among the parts of the material

(or perceptible) object; (b) an "ideal harmony" among the ideas, or the parts of the idea, embodied in the perceptible object; and (3) an "expressive harmony" between idea and form. The word "idea", in J.S. Moore's intentions, refers to the expressive or intellectual meaning of an object – most notably, an artwork – and thus covers the feelings and emotions it expresses as well as the thoughts or mental images it conveys. Despite being clearly outlined, these subtypes of harmony have aspects that deserve to be explored, both in themselves and in their mutual relationships.

2.1 Harmony as organic unity

According to J.S. Moore, the first of the three subtypes of the objective harmony, i.e. the formal unity among the perceivable parts of an item, corresponds to the kind of harmony supported by the classic theory of beauty. Such formal harmony or unity, we argue, can be effectively matched with the notions of coherence and completeness. According to Monroe Beardsley (1981, pp. 190–200), an (aesthetic) object is coherent when it is "highly organized" so that every part or internal relation is at the right place and "it all fits together", where it is "complete" when "it has all that it needs", which means that no other part or relation outside the object is required in order to satisfy its underlying purpose. He maintains that the features of coherence and completeness represent necessary conditions for being a work of art, since they occur – at least "to some minimal degree" – in any instance of musical compositions, literature, poetry, or visual arts (*Ibidem*). Indeed, we usually expect from an artwork to have internal interconnectedness and self-sufficiency, which elicit a distinctive pleasure in the perceiver; it is in this sense, we claim, that J.S. Moore (1942, p. 42) says that the appreciator of beauty enjoys not only "the unity of the whole", but also "the way in which every detail contributes to that unity".

Another way to enlighten the kind of unity entailed by the notion of formal harmony is by qualifying it as 'organic'. The notion of organic unity, as Richard Shusterman (1992, pp. 62–63) recalls, dates back to Greek philosophers – eminently, Aristotle – who introduced it in order to identify a "complete whole" having parts which are "so integrally connected" that "if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed". Such a notion – which partly overlaps with, and somewhat reinforces, the concepts of coherence and completeness – has been endorsed by several contemporary Anglo-American philosophers. Shusterman names people like Dewey, Beardsley, Osborne and Richards, who located 'organic unity' either in the works of art or in the aesthetic experiences that these are supposedly designed to elicit, and employed it as a useful tool to delve into most twentieth-century art practices, which in various ways discredited the mimetic theories of art. Another, more complex, account of organic unity is that developed by G.E. Moore in his famous *Principia Ethica* (1903). Here, the English philosopher distinguishes between three senses of "organic unity" (or "organic whole"), the second of which is the most useful to ethics and aesthetics. He expresses it in terms of value, and states that an organic whole "has an intrinsic value different in amount from the sum of the values of

its parts" (G.E. Moore, 1959, p. 27). However, since there is no difference in value without a difference in properties, this sense of organic unity can, according to Shusterman, be regarded in more general terms as "a unity where the properties of the whole are different from the sum of the properties of its individual parts and not reducible to them". While this second sense of organic unity obviously applies to living organism, it is likewise considered an "especially characteristic" feature of works of art, as well as a central criterion for their interpretation (Shusterman, 1992, pp. 67, 75).

The notion of formal harmony, as related to the properties of coherence, completeness and organic unity, accounts well for those art genres such as abstract paintings or sculptures, instrumental or absolute music, decorative arts, and, to some extent, dance works. But what about those artworks which, other than formal properties, have a meaning or significance? Actually, most artworks are appreciated also (and sometimes mainly) in virtue of properties belonging to their (representational, narrative, or expressive) content. Think of figurative paintings, program music, songs and lieder, opera, theatre, movies, literature, poetry, comics, and so on. Does the idea of an objective harmony still hold as regards the emotional, semantic or symbolic outcome of this kind of objects, which comprise the majority of artworks? J.S. Moore thinks it so, as he introduces the second subtype of such a harmony, which he calls "ideal", and which occurs between the ideas conveyed by an object. He conceives it as a sort of "logical necessity" which ties together the thoughts or the feelings that a work expresses, and states that unless the various ideas that the object incorporates "are consistent with one another", the "beauty of the whole" would be undermined (Moore, 1942, pp. 45–46). However, we suggest that we can understand this "ideal" harmony in formal terms as well, to the extent that a work's semantic or expressive components, beyond having an inherent value, also serve as means towards the reinforcement of the overall (organic) unity of the work. Think of how the landscapes or the figures depicted in a painting – along with their affective, evocative or symbolic value – constitute additional sources (with respect to the painting's base components, such as lines, colors, or shapes) for the artist to achieve a higher order of coherence and completeness in the design of the work.

To be fair, this "second level" of formal harmony can likewise be discovered in works of abstract art. As Jerrold Levinson (2016, pp. 102–103) states, the beauty of the patterns or configurations as they occur in the canvases of painters like Kandinsky, Klee, Mondrian, Barnett Newman, or Frank Stella – but the same holds true also for, say, a Bach's prelude, or a Bartók's string quartet – is always "dependent" beauty (to speak in Kantian terms), since such patterns or configurations always have a "potential significance", i.e., "a content that must be grasped". In a similar vein, J.S. Moore himself, near the end of his paper (1942, p. 48), spoke of an "impressive beauty" to refer to those "beauties" – belonging, in the case of artworks, to absolute music and abstract visual arts – in which the idea or meaning, contrary to what one might think, is not absent, but is found "entirely" in the "material form" of an object (its tones, lines, colors, and so on). Conversely, we have "expressive beauty" when

the idea partly “overflows” the material (but not the ideal, if our reading is good) form, as in poetry, traditional paintings and sculptures, narrative arts, and so on.

As we mentioned, one of J.S. Moore’s worries about the classic theory of beauty was that the notion of formal harmony is too broad to be useable to define the class of beautiful objects, since not all formal harmony is aesthetic. Such worry may look even bigger, in the light of the extension of the same notion that we just have advanced in order to cover also the relations among the meaning components of an (aesthetic) object. However, here we should remind ourselves that what determines the aesthetic character of the form of an object are exactly those features which we identified as central to the notion of formal harmony – i.e., coherence, completeness, and (organic) unity – and that, due to their emergent character, they are features that only some objects (most notably, artworks) possess. Indeed, as John Dewey (2005, pp. 106–133) pointed out, we must differentiate between the mere configuration of an object (which he named “shape or figure”) and its aesthetic form: the latter – wherever it occurs – requires the “interfusion of all properties of the medium”, so that a material (sensuous as well as intellectual) becomes adequately (“completely and coherently”) formed, and “an experience” of an unusual and remarkable level of immediacy, vitality and intensity (i.e., an aesthetic experience) is produced. In a similar vein, as we have seen, Beardsley (1981, pp. 190–200) talks of a “special” – i.e., evaluative – sense of “form”, as applying to those aesthetic objects that are “well ordered” or highly “unified”, i.e., “coherent” and “complete”. It is true that we can list some of the conditions that will tend to increase the degree of coherence or completeness of a work. In the case of the coherence of a visual artwork, for instance, such conditions include “focus” (i.e., the presence of a “dominant pattern” or “compositional scheme”), “balance”, and “similarities among the parts of the design”. Nonetheless, as Beardsley points out about music (but the same holds true for, e.g., visual art and literature), it is impossible to set forth all the conditions that might be combined to make a work cohere, since this is “something that composers discover and critics take note of”. Moreover, these conditions are usually broad enough – think of the principle of “symbolic convergence and thematic affinity” in literature, or that of melodic and rhythmic parallelism in a musical composition (Beardsley, 1981, pp. 253, 198) – to leave room for artists to move freely and creatively within them.

The revised, twofold account of formal harmony that we have put forward, not only helps us to clarify the first two subtypes of objective beauty envisaged by J.S. Moore, but can also work as a classificatory criterion in the art field. As Noël Carroll (2001) rightly remarked, several theories of art in the twentieth century – most notably, the aesthetic definitions offered by Clive Bell and Monroe Beardsley – while not explicitly employing the term ‘beautiful’, absorbed various relevant features of beauty theories. If Bell’s theory of art can be seen, according to Carroll (2001, pp. 31, 35), as an “updated version” of Francis Hutcheson’s theory of beauty – insofar as Bell’s notion of “significant form”, which he regards to be the invariant feature of (visual) artworks, closely

resembles the property of "uniformity amid variety" that Hutcheson indicates as what causes the sensation of beauty – Beardsley's attempts to define art, in our opinion, can be paired with Moore's formalist account of beauty. Indeed, in his paper of 1961, Beardsley identified the properties of unity, coherence and completeness – which, in our view, play a central role in Moore's notion of formal harmony as well – as the common features of all aesthetic objects (belonging to different art forms, such as literature, paintings, music, and so on), and claimed that they can be used to give a definition of an "aesthetic object", i.e., of a work of art (see Beardsley, 1961). He went even further by saying that progress in the arts depends on the ability of the great artist to discover "new and profoundly valuable" ways of making a work of art cohere (Beardsley, 1981, p. 194). But then, if this is the case, another, even thornier, worry arises, since – as several aestheticians as well as art historians and critics typically maintain (see, e.g., Zecchi, 1990) – most of the artistic avant-gardes of the twentieth century moved away from the principles of proportion, harmony, and pleasantness, in favour of asymmetry, deconstruction, and discomfort. This trend to reject beauty – if not to "destroy" it, as the American abstract painter Barnett Newman famously stated – seemingly continued into the recent developments in art practices, most notably postmodernism, which further challenged the idea of organic unity by emphasizing fragmentation, decentring, and eclecticism (see Shusterman, 1992, p. 63).

Now, two points can be made in order to reply to these assumptions. First, we can observe that they appeal to a "monolithic" concept of organic unity, which ignores what "a whole skein of thinkers" stretching back to Heraclitus and Aristotle witnessed, i.e, that unity can involve radical "oppositions and conflicting forces" (Shusterman, 1992, p. 64). The two Greek philosophers argued that the harmony of a work of art is supremely beautiful only when, far from removing any form of internal opposition, embraces contingencies, dissonances, and heterogeneity, and is enhanced by the tension they generate (see Curi, 2013). Along similar lines, many authors of the eighteen and nineteenth centuries (such as Hutcheson, as we have already seen) supported the view that beauty is a "compound ratio" of uniformity (i.e., unity) and variety: if, on one side, variety without unity would be "a confused jumble of details", on the other side unity without variety is "monotonous and uninteresting" (Moore, 1942, p. 42). Second, we should not think that the goal of achieving unity limits artists' creativity and forces them to work within a fixed set of compositional rules. Rather, as Shusterman (1992, p. 76) rightly remarks, even "fragmentation and incoherences" can have their own "stimulating aesthetic effect" and can result in "more complex forms of coherence".[1] Actually this is what, in our opinion, most avant-garde and post-modern artists sought, and for the most part managed to reach, by experimenting novel compositional strategies and formal procedures, such as deconstruction, abstraction, seriality, hybridization, polystylism, and many others. As Roger Scruton (2011, p. 119) points out, features like harmony,

[1] It should be observed that unity and complexity are, together with the intensity of regional qualities, the three critical standards by which, according to Beardsley (1981, pp. 524–543), it is possible to assess and weight the aesthetic value of an object.

order, closure, and the likes – which as we just said can coexist with, and even be increased by, the urge for novelty and excitement – have "a permanent hold on the human psyche". This, in turn, explains why our interest in art is motivated by our "human need" to perceive and experience rich and satisfying unities (Shusterman, 1992, pp. 75–76), even when approaching the most experimental and daring art forms. Such a need, according to Shusterman, also works as a "principle of interpretive holism", which presumes a work's unity of meaning for it to be intelligible, so that if a work seems, at a first reading, "incoherent", we look for an interpretation that helps us to understand the work's incoherence and disunity "within a larger coherent totality of meaning" (Shusterman, 1992, p. 77); that is, to say it in J.S. Moore terms, to discover the work's "ideal harmony", along with its "purely" formal one.

2.2 Harmony as fittingness

So far, we focused on the first two subtypes of objective harmony, i.e., formal harmony and ideal harmony, and found some common traits that they share, namely, coherence, completeness, and organic unity. It might nonetheless seem that, having treated them separately – in line with J.S. Moore's general scheme – they are inhabiting two distinct fields, which invite independent considerations. But it would be a serious mistake to think it so, inasmuch form and meaning are "inseparable aspects" of an aesthetic object, as J.S. Moore (1942, p. 44) acknowledges, to the point that "each finds its value only in its relation to the other". Consequently, he introduces a third subtype of objective harmony, which, from this standpoint, can be considered the most important one: the "expressive harmony" between form and significance, which accounts for how the material object "exactly embodies" the intended ideas (Moore, 1942, p. 45). With the introduction of expressive harmony, J.S. Moore believes that the list of the objective conditions of beauty is complete. However, the picture is still incomplete unless we address the following issues: what kind of relation is that referred to as 'expressive harmony'? Is it formal or otherwise? Does expressive harmony occur in every instance of artistic activity?

Now, the idea of an intimate relation between form and content in art has a long history in aesthetics; we can trace it back to Kant, Santayana, Croce, Collingwood and Dewey, up to the works of several contemporary analytical philosophers, such as Danto (who, in turn, refers to the use Hegel made of it), Budd and Eldridge. Among the latter group, it is of particular interest the ways Levinson works out this idea, which he explored in many of his writings. The essay where it is most straightforwardly deployed is *Evaluating Music*, where he seeks for some principles that could work as primary sources of goodness in music, and states that the most adequate of these principles amounts to "a particular wedding" of the form and the content of a piece of music, that is, to the "fusion" of the "how it goes" of music (i.e., its temporally evolving form) with "what it conveys" (the emotions, qualities, actions, or events it suggests). Such a "wedding" or "fusion" is more appreciable and satisfying than following music's (kinetic) form and responding to music's expressive aspect, when these are experienced separately (Levinson, 2006, pp. 198–200). Considerations of this kind are not restricted to musical

field. Levinson discusses instances of the principle of fusion or coalescence of form and content in many other art forms, from tragedy to pictures and literature, where he speaks of an "inseparability" of the two aspects. And even in those cases, such as humorous artworks, where inappropriateness, in the form of "incongruity" (that is, of "non-fittingness of items or elements one to another") plays a crucial role in engendering amusement, still an aspect of congruity and fittingness has to be perceived: only grasping "the 'why' of the incongruity" and solving the puzzle it poses (though in a "relatively effortless way"), we can get an "amusement of a higher order" that the best humorous works are likely to offer (Levinson, 2006, pp. 389–399).

The thesis of the inseparability of form and content is likewise endorsed by Scruton (2011, pp. 91–111). On the one hand, he states, the meaning of a work of art is so closely anchored in the structure that conveys it, that it can never be fully explained or paraphrased (think of, e.g., poetry). On the other hand, every instance of formal art – be it an abstract painting, a piece of "absolute" instrumental music, or even a church – inherently carries within it a symbolic or emotional content which, in order to be grasped in its qualitative uniqueness, invites the use of metaphorical language. He refers to such interconnectedness of an artwork's form and content as "fittingness", which is, "in art as in life", at the "heart of aesthetic success". However, it is in the artistic field that aesthetic fittingness reaches its highest degree, since the artist, by "fitting things to each other" in order to express his ideas or feelings in the most intense and effective way, presents "complete instances of human actions and passions" as guided by a sort of "compelling artistic logic", which is exemplified in the "supreme artistic achievements", i.e., in "the highest form of beauty" (Scruton, 2011, pp. 105–109).

Now, in the light of the insights offered by Levinson and Scruton, we can assume that J.S. Moore's "expressive harmony" denotes the intimate relation through which an artwork's content is embodied in its form, and is inseparable from it. This relation can be likewise described as coalescence, fusion, or fittingness, which are, in turn, formal notions. Moreover, it seems clear that such harmonious interconnectedness plays a central role with respect to the aesthetic, if not the artistic value *tout court*, of a work, and according to some (see, e.g., Eldridge 1985)[2] can also serve as an art-defining condition. However, there could be cases in which the content of an artwork demands modes of expression other than formal beauty or harmony, which would then be "inappropriate" or, to say in Arthur Danto's words, "external" to the intended meaning. This is, according to Danto, particularly evident when a work refers to such subjects as war, violence, suffering, and so on, which are embodied in several artworks which would be misleading to describe as beautiful instead of, say, dramatic, powerful, tragic, anguished, and the likes (see Danto, 2003, pp. 86-102). But then, at least in those cases – which are anything but marginal in art history – in which the content deeply exceeds, so to say, any kinds of coherence or unity, the principle of "fittingness" would seemingly work against

[2] Richard Eldridge claims that the primary condition for classifying something as art is the "appropriateness to one another of a thing's form and content".

the notion of formal harmony. If so, this would render J.S. Moore's comprehensive view of beauty as harmony (albeit complex) partly defective, as far as objective beauty is considered.

The question is whether an artwork can be, say, dramatic and, at the same time, beautiful, or even dramatic *because of* its formal beauty, i.e., its inner harmony or unity. This possibility was explored, among others, by George Santayana in the fourth part of his *The Sense of Beauty* (1896). He says that "in all expression" we can distinguish two terms: the first is the "expressive thing", i.e., the object "actually presented" to our senses and imagination, while the second is the "thing expressed", in terms of the thought, images, or emotions evoked by the formal/material object. An expression has aesthetic value only if there is an intimate union between the two aspects, more specifically, if the evoked ideas or associations are "incorporated" in the present object, in its material and formal components. Now, what Santayana labels "second term", which approximately corresponds to what an (expressive) object conveys, comprises all subjects, emotions, circumstances of life, even the most repellent, tragic, violent, and painful. Nevertheless, these can be "observed with curiosity" and "treated with art", i.e., transformed and embodied in beautiful forms that partly mitigates their negative values and effects. Indeed, the most complex, intense and profound emotions that an artwork can arouse are, according to Santayana, the outcome of a fine balance – i.e., of a harmony – between the variety of the subjects expressed (which have to do with our thoughts and experiences of "labour, ambition, lust, anger, confusion, sorrow, and death"), and the aesthetically agreeable modes of their presentation. If we remove from any drama "the charm of the medium of presentation", it would be reduced "to a mere account of the facts and of the words spoken", and we would be left with only "literal and disjointed renderings and suffering" (Santayana, 1896, § 56–57).

Danto (2003, pp. 103–123) thinks that, in cases where the content of an artwork concerns (especially sensitive) social, political or psychological issues, beauty – either as an artistic mean or a critical assessment – would be inappropriate. The reason why he claims this is, in our opinion, that he relies on a narrow concept of beauty (which, as far as visual arts are concerned, he associates with qualities such as "simple forms", "smooth outlines", elegance, and the likes), to the point that he finds it wrong even to call a painting like Matisse's *Blue Nude* of 1907 'beautiful' (Danto, 2003, pp. 36–37). However, on a broader perspective, if beauty, conceived as formal harmony or organic unity, can embrace dissonances and heterogeneity, then it can likewise be "inflected" – to borrow a term from Danto himself, who refers to beauty as one of the many "inflectors" in art (Danto, 2003, p. 121) – so that it becomes "internal" to an artwork's intended meaning, without overshadowing its possible painful or dramatic character. Thus, there is no reason to think that upsetting, despairing, or disorienting experiences, which gained a special attention in modern and contemporary art, require unpleasant, if not "ugly", means of expression. Instead, as Santayana rightly claimed, "the more terrible the experience described, the more powerful must be the art which is to

transform it" by means of an harmonic interrelation of elements, even the most angular and disturbing ones, where these are needed in order to fittingly convey the work's intended meaning. It is true that beauty, even in the multifaceted version advocated here, is absent, or at best "optional", in those works belonging to Conceptual Art (from Duchamp's readymade up to Hirst's most famous works) that partly influenced Danto considerations on the "abuse" of beauty. I leave it open if works of this kind, having eschewed any kind of aesthetic trans-formation, are capable of doing something more than either merely mirror the reality to which they refer or elicit uncomforting and disorienting responses in the audiences.

3. Beauty as a relational property

According to J.S. Moore, a complete theory of beauty should take into consideration three factors: the perceptible form of an object; the idea or meaning that the object embodies; and the subject of the aesthetic experience. While the notion of objective harmony accounts for the first two factors, in the manner described in the previous chapter, the third still has to find its place in J.S. Moore's comprehensive view of beauty. In order to fill this gap, he adds a second main type of harmony, which he labels "objective-subjective", and which indicates the harmony between the beautiful object – considered in its formal structure as well as in its significance – and the mind of the observer. We suggest that such type of harmony could be equally described as 'relational', insofar as it is not so much a property of the object than a relation between the object and something that stands outside it, i.e., the subject who perceives it. Since the subject or perceiver can be regarded, from J.S. Moore's perspective, either in its spiritual or psychophysical nature, two subtypes of relational harmony accordingly emerge: a "spiritual" harmony and a "psychophysical" harmony. To grasp the former is, J.S. Moore maintains, admittedly a difficult task, insofar as it would bring into play the so-called "spiritual" or plotinian theories, which are as "profound" as, to a certain extent, "obscure" (Moore, 1942, p. 43). Hence, he prefers to focus on the latter subtype of relational harmony, and to this end he introduces a number of psycho-physiological principles which, nonetheless, are in need of some supplementation.

3.1 The principle of empathy

As we just mentioned, the second of the three principal varieties of harmony, i.e. the objective-subjective or, if you prefer, relational harmony, is divided by J.S. Moore in "spiritual" and "psychophysical" harmony. About the first, J.S. Moore offers a – quite general – definition, derived from Carleton Noyes' *The Enjoyment of Art* (1904). It states that spiritual harmony occurs when "the spirit of man" encounters a harmony outside itself, in the artwork.

On the contrary, the definition of psychophysical harmony is not directly addressed. Instead, it is presented according to three principles. First and most important is the principle of empathy, which J.S. Moore (1942, p. 46) takes to be so "well known" that there's no need to describe it further. Despite this lack of specifics, we can be quite confident that J.S. Moore has in mind a restricted

‘psychological’ meaning of empathy, introduced in 1909 in English-speaking countries by the British psychologist Edward B. Titchener, widely and commonly used thereafter. The term translates the German *Einfühlung* (‘feeling within’ or ‘in-feeling’) and accounts for the (somatic) ways in which bodies experience the felt environment. Aesthetically, it justifies how our perceptual encounter with aesthetic objects and our appreciation of them appear to be as direct as our mere perception of an object (see at least Coplan and Goldie, 2011, pp. IX–XLVII).

Following the criteria and the agenda of nineteenth-century experimental science, such a conception wanted to overcome the ‘classical’ conception of empathy as ‘sympathy’ (in general, see Greiner, 2012). The idea of sympathy has a long history, which can be traced back until the Greek word *sympatheia*. Nonetheless, it became a widespread philosophical concept especially in eighteenth-century Britain, thanks to well-known authors such as David Hume, Francis Hutcheson or Adam Smith. Sympathy is here conceived as the mental capacity to predict outcomes and form beliefs about natural processes. It represented, therefore, a primarily ethical concept, derived from a close observation of every-day life mechanisms. In general, sympathy was studied in order to understand the practical functioning of society. In the field of morals or taste, for example, it represented the medium toward others’ ideas and impressions, arousing moral approbation or disapproval (see at least Frazer, 2010).

Such a background appears to be not relevant to J.S. Moore, as he leans toward a “psychologistic” reduction of empathy. Not surprisingly, the principle of empathy is associated with two other “neurophysiological” principles: “the principle of absorption”, which is “the familiar fact that when one is intensely interested in an object of contemplation he has a feeling of oneness with the object”, and “the principle of neural assimilation”, according to which “the sense of beauty depends on the ease with which the stimuli from the beautiful object are assimilated into the neuronic patterns already existent in the brain”.

Overall, J.S. Moore’s psychophysical framework appears to be rather sketchy and too tied to cultural ‘positivistic’ assumptions, insofar as the notion of empathy is posed as a widespread and established notion. In other words, the late – positivistic – definition of empathy is presented here as a proper improvement of the modern definition, without any need of historical or critical contextualization. Moreover, his conception of empathy makes “objective-subjective” harmony rather weak, inasmuch as his “reductionist” stance on psychophysical harmony forces him to build a separated and abstract “spiritual harmony”. In our opinion, J.S. Moore underestimated the ethical dimension of empathy or, rather, its connection to human nature. We call, therefore, for a deeper, anthropological understanding of empathy, which will show both its “spiritual” and “psychophysical” nuances.

This anthropological standpoint shows that an aesthetic conception of empathy cannot be reduced to the empathetic bond between artist and enjoyer. Indeed, we must always keep in mind a certain ‘artistic character’ in

those who are said to be artists. Such 'artistic character' should be seen as what conveys and embodies the act of empathy, putting 'the artistry' in the empathic act. We cannot be satisfied here with the empathic bond between two generic individuals, as we are seeking for the empathic bond between artist and enjoyer. As for the definition of character, we can simply refer to its common meaning: the development of a certain temperament or set of inclinations, within a favorable context. Furthermore, we can now link artistic character and artistic practice, as the former blossoms into a 'style', becoming peculiar and recognizable, in a given time and place. Overall, we maintain that an anthropological embodiment of empathy represents the necessary presupposition for beauty evaluation: if we are to grant aesthetic relevance to empathy, we must assume, for the one who possibly makes beautiful objects, a peculiar artistic ability to empathetically experience things in life.

Thereby, the core-relationship between empathy and artistic character unveils a deeper meaning for empathy in aesthetic context. Empathy[3] can now be seen as a form of inspiration experienced by the artist, as a feeling of empathy towards nature, experienced through its own character. Surprisingly enough, we already find this framework in nineteenth century continental debate. Specifically, it's the generation of philosophers that preceded the advent of experimental science that tried to revive eighteenth-century notion of sympathy through this anthropological connotation. See, for example, this quote from Frederik Christian Sibbern:

> It is clearly our original sympathy with the whole of humanity, indeed with the whole of Nature, that we harbour for the same reason, namely the fact that we constantly carry in our innermost selves this common ground of all humanity, from which in nature and reality all characters arise: this is evidently what makes the poet able to bring Nature so vividly and with such truth to life, and who feels the living impulse to do so, as he feels his innermost self to be powerfully touched and directed by Nature (Sibbern, 1834, p. 32).

What must be stressed here is that this 'embodied' act of empathy becomes very much recognisable by every average-trained art-enjoyer. Such an act pertains indeed to a natural language that is rooted in our constitution and brought to light by character. Although not everyone develops an artistic character, everyone develops their own character. In this respect, depicting what is characteristic (in the sense of peculiar, not ideal), the artist echoes the common structure of every human being:

> The whole of human nature is found entirely in the poet, therefore everything that gives human nature a peculiar character, a peculiar form in any individual, everything that is stirred up in human beings and sets them in motion, can emerge in the poet and revive in him. This is precisely what it means, or as one should say, to put oneself into all kinds of human individualities and constitutions. The poet recognizes them all in himself; he feels the same thing reviving in himself as if it were his own, if only he deals with it sufficiently, with sufficient desire and interest, so that what is in him can now also be set in motion and taught in order to grasp it (*Ibidem*).

[3] From here on, we will use the term 'empathy' in a broad sense, pointing at an 'embodied' definition in which empathy and sympathy intermingle.

Returning to our dialogue with J.S. Moore, we must add an important *caveat*: here we are not advocating for a hard-boiled naturalism. This core-relationship between empathy and the artistic character does not recall the naturalistic motto of Emile Zola, "art is a corner of nature seen through a temperament". Precisely by studying naturalistic tendencies in nineteenth-century art-history, Hans Rookmaaker pointed out how the language of art, especially of modern art, unveils its potential exactly against naturalistic claims (see Rookmaaker, 1972, and 1973, pp. 11–28). Art's "iconic" nature – in Panofskyan terms – eludes the mimetic command of naturalism, choosing alternative languages based on images: "in front of his easel, a painter is not a slave of the past, nor of the present, not of nature nor of his fellow-man" (Rookmaaker, 1972, p. 242).

The artwork gains beauty inasmuch as the artist gains his own artistic freedom; he gives an identity to his artwork, inasmuch as he hovers above its character.[4] In this sense, the artist depicts something which does not seem to belong to the thing depicted or, to rephrase it, something which does not pertain to the explicit (mimetic) definition of the thing. And yet, it is exactly this something that represents its proper and individual expression, as much as it eludes and overcomes styles, fashions, or schools.

In light of the above, we now understand that the core-relationship between empathy and character sheds light on the human ability to create new meanings, to create beauty. Most importantly, this connection between human action and human nature echoes the connection between human beings and nature, deepening the meaning of beauty-creation acts. Art, in this sense, recovers a relationship with the world, while beauty heals open wounds (see Rookmaaker, 2003, pp. 138–144). The very feel of empathy becomes the medium of a common shared experience – a harmonic and spiritual relation, to return to J.S. Moore's terminology – that involves human beings and nature as a whole.

4. Concluding Remarks

In this paper we gave a closer look at J.S. Moore's comprehensive view of beauty, as developed in his essay of 1942. The theory he advocates is as multifaceted as the types of harmony through which the notion of beauty, as relating mainly to the artistic field, is articulated. It combines traditional ideas on beauty, while suggesting novel ways of displaying them. He distinguishes various types and subtypes of harmony and traces a complex net of relations among the material, ideal, and spiritual components of beauty. However, due to its concise approach, in some points J.S. Moore's view has to be complemented, which is what we tried to do here. We focused on the first two main types of harmony on which the notion of beauty relies, which he labels

[4] Character's scope as a necessary correlate of empathy can perhaps be associated with the notion of 'interface' proposed by Kiianlinna and Kurjenmiekka in a recent paper. Bringing together phenomenological and analytical frameworks, they attempted to reform aesthetic judgment by overcoming the partial incommunicability of aesthetic experience as a whole. They have thus identified a notion, that of 'interface', which allows to intuit the possible aesthetic value experienced by others, although not necessarily in the same way. See Kiianlinna and Kurjenmiekka (2023, pp. 108-128).

“objective” and “objective-subjective”. As regards the former, which is internal to the aesthetic object, at first we introduced and explored the concepts of coherence, completeness, and organic unity, which the notion of formal harmony, as applying to both the perceptive and the ideal components of an object, brings into play. We then considered the (harmonic) relation between an artwork’s form and meaning, and argued that it can be conceived as particularly intimate union or fittingness. By analyzing how these concepts operate as general guidelines for the artist as well as for the audiences, we were able to address some issues raised by modern and contemporary artists with respect to formal beauty. Finally, we delved into the topic of empathy, which is at the core of J.S. Moore second main type of harmony, which we re-named as ‘relational’. More specifically, we have tried to restore an ‘embodied’ notion of empathy, not distant from ordinary experience, which in artistic production emerges as the artist’s relation to the world, to the artwork, and to the enjoyer.

Of course, there remain some other questions to be tackled on these subjects, especially as regards the subjective and spiritual implications that they can bring out. But we would be satisfied enough if we managed to show that beauty and harmony still have a lot to say, both in the philosophical and in the artistic fields.

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10489478