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# **Diversities in Aesthetics:**

## **Selected Papers of The 18th**

## **Congress of International Aesthetics**

Editors © GaoJianping PengFeng

中国社会科学出版社

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# Speech for Opening Ceremonies International Congress for Aesthetics Beijing, August, 2010

Curtis L. Carter, President Elect

## I. Introduction

First, let me thank the Nomination Committee of our past presidents, Arnold Berleant, Aleš Erjavec and Heinz Paetzold, and the members of International Association of Aesthetics (IAA, hereafter) who have placed their confidence in me as the next president. It is with considerable respect for my distinguished predecessors that I accept this high honor.

Secondly, my greetings to the representatives of the Chinese government, Mr. Yuan Guiren, Minister of Education and Mr. Liu Lifen of the Beijing Municipal Education Commission. And of course special thanks to our hosts: The organizing Committee of Peking University and the Chinese Society for Aesthetics. They have provided us with a Congress with richness and variety intended to address important issues facing aesthetics, and with the warm hospitality that is characteristic of our host nation, the People's Republic of China. I want especially to thank Professor Ye Lang of Peking University and Professor Ru Xin of the Chinese Aesthetics Society. A warm expression of appreciation, as well, to my friends and colleagues Professor Gao Jianping, Secretary General of IAA and Vice – president of the Chinese Society for Aesthetics, and Professor Peng Feng who have worked diligently with their colleagues in organizing the Congress.

As well, we express our thanks to our current President, Jos de Mul, who has been most helpful in preparing the transition in the office of president. In addition to attending to the leadership responsibilities of IAA over the past three years, Jos has offered his sage advice on many thoughts for the future of IAA and I cherish his friendship as well as his assistance as I assume the duties of president.

A special welcome to the new officers of IAA. Jale Erzen, of Turkey who will serve as First Vice President, Gao Jianping who will assume a second term as Secretary General, with Katya Mandoki as Second Vice President, and Albert van der Schoot as Assistant Secretary General. Jale is no stranger to IAA as we recall the excellent leadership she provided to the IAA Congress of 2007 in Ankara and the publications including her role as Editor of IAA Yearbook 2008 and the 2007 Congress publications.

Also among the newly elected Delegates at large is Professor Wolfgang Welsh of Germany.

Additional delegates at large are to be elected later in this meeting.

To all of these elected by the membership, congratulations and a sincere welcome to your new offices in the IAA Executive Committee. It will be a pleasure to work with you in the advancement of the aims of IAA.

**II. The Beijing Congress**, with some 700 registered attendees is perhaps the largest to date. This Congress is important because it confirms a growing expansion of a global perspective based on collaborative East/West leadership with support coming from a broader range of geographic and cultural perspectives. In effect the IAA serves as the United Nations of national societies to the extent that such exists in aesthetics.

It is especially appropriate that China serves as host of the current Congress. Having successfully launched the Beijing Olympics in 2008, with a flourish of amazing artistic achievement, China has demonstrated its ability to represent aesthetics internationally at the highest level. Through my working with Chinese contemporary artists, scholars and students, and cultural leaders in the arts over the past several years, I have learned to appreciate the richness and complexities of these developments and achievements. Chinese artists working today are at the forefront of global arts developments. At the same time, Chinese scholars are eagerly exploring how to connect their traditional aesthetics culture with contemporary ideas and practices worldwide. It has been very rewarding as I have come to know the scholars and students in aesthetics at Peiking University, the Academy of Social Sciences and other universities. Similarly a hundred or more studio visits as well as gallery and museum contacts, have heightened my understanding and appreciation for the exciting work that is taking place. We will undoubtedly see some of the results in the special arts events arranged for this Congress.

**III. What then shall we say about the future for IAA?** We look forward again to the next Congress in 2013 in Poland. For a program for the future I will leave those thoughts for the General Assembly or the Closing Ceremony.

But let me raise just a few issues for our reflection together in these coming days. (1) As IAA positions itself for the next three years, there is need for reflection on its role and purposes given the existence of strong national societies and emerging regional societies such as the European Association and the Mid East Congress. (2) What precisely is the role of IAA in a changing world of aesthetics and the increasing globalization of cultures? Its principal achievements recently have been organization of the Congresses and publication of a Yearbook of Aesthetics. Is the structure that was adapted 20 years ago in Nottingham still effective? What changes might improve the functions of IAA? Are there other things that IAA might do, within its resources? Should it for example seek NGO standing with UNESCO and the United Nations to gain a broader visibility for aesthetics? (3) What is IAAA's role as the UN of National Societies? Can we improve our communications and collaboration with other organizations? (4) How do we understand the contribution of aesthetics? Is it simply a closed field for a special interest of scholars? How does it relate to the practice of the arts? To people outside academic circles? (5) How

can we build on the collaboration of East West that is continuing, with every future IAA Congress? There is not time here for exploring these questions, but we can think together during the Congress and beyond and try to form some concrete plans.

Close : I look forward to working with you all as the new president of IAA and thank you in advance for helping to make this a fruitful three year term. Let me close with these words uttered by Robert Musil at the funeral of Rilke, "In the realm of aesthetics, even imperfection and lack of completion have their value."

Thank you and be sure to enjoy the many opportunities offered by our Congress these days in Beijing.

# Opening ceremony ICA, Beijing, August, 2010

Jos de Mul, President of the International Association of Aesthetics

Dear President of Beijing University, Minister of Education, Chairman of the Municipal Education Committee, President of the Chinese Society for Aesthetics, organizers of the 18th International Congress of Aesthetics, delegates and participants,

I consider it a great honor to address you on behalf of the International Association of Aesthetics, at the opening ceremony of this, 18th, International Congress of Aesthetics. It is in fact the first time that the International Congress of Aesthetics is held in China and I would particularly like to thank the organizers for facilitating this major event. I cannot mention all of those who have contributed to the organization, but I would like to mention Professor Ye Lang of Beijing University, Professor Ru Xin of the Chinese Society of Aesthetics, and my esteemed colleagues and good friends Professor Gao Jianping, Secretary General of IAA and Vice – president of the Chinese Society for Aesthetics, and Professor Peng Feng of the Institute of Aesthetics, Beijing University.

Due to the hospitality of the organizers it is a privilege to gather here in the wonderful city of Beijing, a metropolis which combines its millennia – old history and beauty with an often dazzling sense of modernity. More than 700 active participants – I see many familiar faces and many new ones as well – from several dozens of countries have been registered and many more will attend the lectures and ensuing debates. Looking at the impressive congress program I am certain that you not only will enjoy the plenary sessions, panels, round tables, and sections that will deal with a wide diversity of aesthetic subjects, but also – as I can assure you out of personal experience – the cultural and culinary treasures that China has to offer the world.

I would first of all like to address you with a few words concerning our common discipline and the theme of this 18th Congress of Aesthetics.

Aesthetics, understood as the reflection on the nature, creation and appreciation of beauty in nature, art, and human life, belongs to the oldest disciplines within philosophy. We find aesthetic reflections at the dawn of virtually all philosophical traditions, both in the East and in the West, both in the North and in the South. This should not surprise us, because beauty is one of the most valuable elements of our lives. In order to live a happy life, the fulfillment of our basic needs – food, a place to live, good company – is a necessary condition, but it is not

a sufficient one. In order to achieve happiness in life we have to learn to create and appreciate beauty, in nature, in artifacts, in human beings. Although the desire for beauty is a universal desire of human beings, the question what beauty *is*, is not easy to answer. In fact, many different answers have been given, in different times and in different cultures. And even within a single culture at a given time, we witness an enormous diversity in aesthetic creation and appreciation. This plurality in aesthetic experience is also reflected in our discipline, as the chosen theme of the 18th congress of aesthetics aptly expresses: "Diversities of Aesthetics. Diversités dans l'Esthétique. Vielgestaltigkeit in der Ästhetik".

We can read this motto of our endeavor in different ways. One way to interpret it is to understand it as an *empirical* claim. As such the claim certainly is true. Aesthetics is not one, but consists of a multiplicity of traditions, approaches and concepts.

However, we can also read this motto as a *normative* judgment that affirms this multiplicity as something highly valuable. Perhaps the value of beauty lays exactly in the fact that it has so many faces, that it is inexhaustible. Understood this way the variety and plurality in natural and artistic beauty, as well as the diversity of aesthetics are not so much obstacles to overcome, but rather expressions of the inexhaustible wealth of nature, of art *and of* aesthetics.

Without a doubt, the confrontation between different traditions, approaches and concepts, both in the arts and in aesthetics, not always leads to harmony or consensus. A reason often mentioned for this is – as the Latin maxim *De gustibus non est disputandum* aptly expresses – that it is impossible to dispute about taste; there's no accounting for taste. However, instead of disputing about taste, we can certainly take up the challenge to *share* our tastes, our experiences of beauty, and our aesthetic reflections thereof. Maybe creating the space and time for such a sharing is the most valuable characteristic of an international congress of aesthetics such as the one we are about to embark on today.

Let me return to logistics. To those of you who are not yet familiar with our organization, I would like to briefly introduce the International Association for Aesthetics. As an association of national and regional societies of aesthetics the International Association for Aesthetics at present counts 29 member societies. The Chinese Society of Aesthetics is one of the largest member societies. As my colleague Gao Jianping told me, the Chinese Society already counts over 1000 members, half of them being very active within the organization. However, still only relatively few are also member of the International Association of Aesthetics. I trust this congress will inspire more esteemed Chinese colleagues to join our international academic community.

Apart from the national societies the International Association of Aesthetics counts many individual members, especially from countries, which have not yet established a national society of aesthetics. In total about 600 aestheticians from more than 40 countries are member of the International Association of Aesthetics.

Although the International Association of Aesthetics formally came into existence in 1988

at the XIth International Congress of Aesthetics in Nottingham, England, its history goes back many years prior to 1988. It all began with the First International Congress of Aesthetics organized by Max Dessoir in Berlin in 1913. A second congress took place in Paris in 1937. Interrupted by the Second World War, the congresses resumed in 1956, when the third congress was held in Venice. From that time congresses took place at more regular intervals. Until 1984 these meetings were arranged by the *Comité International d'Esthétique*. Its members included many of the most eminent scholars in aesthetics representing countries with a strong tradition in aesthetics, including France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Poland, Japan, and the United States. At various times the Comité included Etienne Souriau, Mikel Dufrenne, Harold Osborne, Luigi Pareyson, Tomonobu Imamichi, Milan Damnjanovic, Thomas Munro, and many other distinguished scholars. At the 10th International Congress in 1984 in Montréal, the Comité International d'Esthétique was transformed into a democratic international association. Since then it is lead by an elected executive committee, consisting of five officers, the ex officio president, at present 29 delegates representing the 29 national societies, 5 delegates at large, and the honorary life members Arnold Berleant, Tomonobu Imamichi and Joseph Margolis.

One of the most important activities of the IAA is the coordination of the International Congress of Aesthetics. Until the end of the last century, the congresses were all held in Europe. Increasing interest in aesthetics and a greater concern for international communication and association led the IAA to enlarge the geographical scope of the congresses. This resulted in conferences in Tokyo (2001), Rio de Janeiro (2004) and Ankara (2007). And today, August 9, we celebrate the opening of already the 18th International Congress of Aesthetics here in Beijing. In 2013, exactly one hundred years after the first congress in Berlin, the congress will return once more to Europe, as it will be held in Krakow, in Poland.

Especially during the past two decades, the IAA expanded its activities to include publication of a IAA Newsletter and, beginning in 1996, the International Yearbook of Aesthetics. The Newsletters and Yearbooks are also available online and can be found at the website of the IAA, which also offers a lot of practical information about the organization and its past and future activities.

The IAA is still expanding. Since the last congress in Ankara new national societies have been accepted as member, such as Mexican Society of Aesthetics, or have put themselves forward for membership, such as the and Serbian Society of Aesthetics. In the meantime all kinds of new initiatives are blossoming. I would like to mention just one of them here. At the end of this year the first issue of *Aesthetics pathways* will be published by Airiti Press. The co-founders and editors are IAA members Arto Haapala and Gerard Cipriani. As I know from the agenda of the meetings of the executive committee that will take place during this congress, we can expect more interesting initiatives in the years to come. And I'd like to take the opportunity to invite you all to actively join the aforementioned activities of the IAA. And of course, new ini-

tiatives are also most welcome.

Let me conclude with expressing my hope that the next five days may bring you many new aesthetic experiences, at the conference, at the accompanying cultural program, and during your personal exploration of Chinese culture and cuisine!

Thank you very much for your attention.

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I



## **New Approaches to Aesthetics**



# The Question of Objective Value in a Global World

Joseph Margolis

Temple University

## Abstract

I find it reasonable to suppose that, in speaking of the “human world,” we must be able to provide suitable grounds for speaking of the “objectivity” and “universal” standing of all our truth – claims; judgments of normative value; defensible interpretations (as of history, language, and art); the legitimation of interests and commitments; the validation of the description, analysis, and explanation of what we find in the world; or, failing in this, to account for and justify falling back to a laxer standard. Both objectivity and universality are profoundly problematic notions, exacerbated by the visionary possibility of adopting a “global” outlook regarding human affairs, which we have now managed to transform into a perfectly ordinary practical or culturally “thick” concern. I take the problem of the standing of normative value (in science, morality, and the arts) to count as one of the most strategically important manifestations of the double puzzle of objectivity and universality; and I offer a proposal for revising our sense of both notions adjusted to the challenge of the global: of what “global” means and of what is reasonably defensible in speaking of what is “objective” regarding normative values in, say, the arts and morality.

Viewed from our present vantage, the arc of human history may be said to span the emergence of language under the conditions of Darwinian evolution and the achievement of a global perspective in every sector of human inquiry and commitment under the pressures of the existential technologies of advanced capitalism. To my mind—though I concede some neglected stepping stones of argument—this signifies that universalism is no more than the disputed toy of competing ideologies, impossible to confirm but distinctly potent enough when applied in all our struggles for hegemony: in war, the sciences, religion, philosophy, the fine arts. The universal and the global are not the same, I say; on the contrary, the global threatens to be the most bitterly contested space shared by parochial hegemonies, whether for oil or bread or water or the minds of bewildered humanity. The philosophy of art, therefore, finds itself confronted by an insistent question thrust upon it by the challenge of evolving history.