

# Creativity and the artwork: the perspectives of a painter and a philosopher

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## **Abstract**

*Creativity in Robert Henri's view is a gratuitous act, shot through with mystery; what is left after such an act is the artwork itself as concrete evidence that such a heightened state of consciousness has been achieved. Behind this view is the notion that once an artist reaches a certain "state of high functioning", as Henri calls it, then creativity is inevitable: creativity is what happens, while reflection, seen as a secondary act, follows. This paper will examine Henri's understanding of the nature of creativity from his perspective as a twentieth century New York painter, in conjunction with Eliot Deutsch's theoretical insights as a philosopher deeply interested in the nature of the experience of an artwork. In his *Essays on the Nature of Art* (1996) Deutsch presents the view that the experience of an artwork involves the assimilation of the work's aesthetic force, the recognition of its meaning, the discernment of its formal dimensions, and "calls for a special appropriation that yields an integrated wholeness". This paper presents commonalities between Henri's and Deutsch's individual perspectives and discusses some general educational implications that could be drawn from these commonalities.*

Robert Henri (1865–1929) was an art reformer and painter at the birth of American modernism and founding teacher of the Ash Can School of painting in the beginning of the twentieth century. In February 1908 he organised the ground breaking exhibition, "The Eight", at Macbeth Galleries in New York as a form of protest against the "National Academy of Design over its restrictive selection and hanging policies" (Greenough, p. 84). This was six years before the successful International Exhibition of Modern Art (Armory Show) that brought a significant number of the works of European Modernists to New York for the first time and first awakened the art-viewing public to modernist ideas in art. Henri "anticipated" and was sympathetic to the modernist movement in America but never fully embraced it (Chipp, p. 502). He saw in modernism a revitalising of what was the true nature of art, its spiritual nature, but rejected much of it as abstract experimentalism.

His emphasis was on the development of a regional art style and he spoke against any trend to unquestioningly follow imported international styles, especially those coming out of Paris, which many New York artists were embracing at the time. New forms of creativity and art were to arise out of where the artist lived and so reflect the locality of the artist; this was integral to his understanding of art. As Forbes Watson wrote, Henri taught his students "self-respect" by encouraging them not to be ashamed "to look at American material with American eyes" (Henri, p. 5, Introduction). His belief was that each artist had to forge his own style through his own efforts. To his students he would say, "Every individual should study his own individuality to the end of knowing his tastes. [He] should cultivate the pleasures so discovered and find the most direct means of expressing those pleasure to others, thereby enjoying them over again" (Henri, p. 87). Yet he was in accord with many local modernists and shared with them an opposition to the prevailing view that defined art as a "rare cultural commodity usually created in Europe, that existed only in museums or as ornaments in the homes of the rich" (Chipp, p. 507). Henri's view was direct and uncompromising: art could not be separated from life let alone be a decorative edition superadded to life. Rather, life and art were inexorably linked: art was a way of living; it encouraged a certain attitude to life, and provided a means for the realisation of wonder that lies at the heart of all experience. From his perspective the artist's task was not merely to understand the meaning of life – for that would be an abstraction from experience, a formula of

words – but to penetrate beyond the sheer experience of being alive to the underlying pulse of life itself. The artwork thus created was a record of this endeavour. The task of artists then was to penetrate into the essence of all life and release that inner attainment in their work. In Henri's words this essence was an "undercurrent, *the real life*, beneath all appearances" (Henri, p. 92 my italics).

I do not say that any master has fully comprehended it any time, but the value of his [*sic*] work is in that he has sensed it and his work reports the measure of his experience.

It is this sense of the persistent life force [at the] back of things which makes the eye see and the hand move in ways that result in true masterpieces. Techniques are thus created as a need (Henri, p. 92).

What makes Henri's writing worth revisiting is that as a writer he belongs to that rare group of artists who are not only fine practitioners in their chosen field of expression but also fine and clear articulators of their ideas. It could be argued that the value of his writing on art is just as significant as the artistic merit of his paintings. They certainly compliment each other. Although, in his opinion painting extended expression where words left off: "art after all is but an extension of language to the expression of sensations too subtle for words" (Henri p. 87). His only published work, *Art Spirit*, which consist of "notes, articles, fragments of letters and talks to students, bearing on the concept and technique of picture making, the study of art generally, and on appreciation", first published in 1923, has recently been published (2007) in a celebratory eighty-fifth edition. Henri's approach is grounded in human freedom, hard-won wisdom, and enthusiasm for life: "Don't belong to any school. Don't tie up to any technique", he argues, "All outward success, when it has value, is but the inevitable result of an inward success of full living, full play and enjoyment of one's faculties" (Henri, p.93).

### **Art as Integral Living**

Paul Goodman makes the claim that any "artistic method, when it is the grappling of the artist with his attitude toward the subject-matter, is his most integral act qua artist; it is his way of neutralizing the ego and drawing freely on the common immortal energies of life" (Goodman, p.8). For Goodman artistic methods such as "naturalism, expressionism, or cubism, are fundamental theories of the universe, the perception of it, the place of personality in it" (Goodman, p.8). Perceptively he adds that these methods are "proved" by "the successful creation of the unity of a work, for you cannot create a work with a false attitude" (Henri, p.8). Goodman's assessment of the value of an artistic method as a means of "drawing upon the immortal energies of life" and his idea of the existence of an artistic unity within an artwork sit well with Henri's overall approach of art as something beyond mere ego-expression. For Henri too is a seeker, a discoverer of latent forces – a grappler with life. This is evident, for instance, when Henri writes – in a typical example of his distilled style – what could be seen as an elaboration of Goodman's comments:

Art is simply a result of expression during right feeling. It's a result of a grip on the fundamentals of nature, the spirit of life, the constructive force, the secret of growth, a real understanding of the relative importance of things, order, balance. Any material will do. After all, the object is not to *make art*, but to be in the wonderful state which makes art inevitable (Henri p. 226, author's italics).

It needs to be remembered that Henri's writings are addressed, in the main, to his students or past students – all active practitioners in the field of painting. Consequently readers of his work need to be aware of this selected audience to better appreciate his open conversational (many of his published writings are letters) yet didactic style that neither asks for nor needs validation. His point of reference is always his own experience: it is what he speaks out of and returns to. He is in a sense a model teacher, living out what he teaches and inspiring others through his own contagious love of his subject matter. This can be felt – using his own words – as "a constructive force" lying beneath his writing. Indeed it is his personal directness that makes his

writing so appealing. The defining features of his writing style are readability and economy and these directly reflect his personal aspirations to be an artist in all things – to make art integral to his life – as he notes in passing to one of his students “the question of development of the art spirit in all walks of life interests me. I mean by this, the development of individual judgement and taste, the love of work for the sake of doing things well, tendency towards simplicity and order” (Fitzgerald, p. 20). As a teacher, Henri was primarily concerned with engendering, through the practice of art, a state of spiritual awareness in his students and a hope that it would inspire them to live more fulfilled and creative lives.

In his approach to art and the creative process Henri’s ideas present an integral holistic approach that is spiritual at its foundation and yet not in any sense religious. Indeed he has not a kind word to say about institutionalised religion especially when it restricted personal expression. He writes that

institutionalized religion doubts humanity, whereas truth rests upon faith in humanity. The minute we shut people up we are proving our distrust in them; if we believe in them we give them freedom, and through freedom they accomplish, and nothing else matters in the world . . . It is better that every thought should be uttered freely, fearlessly, than that any great thought be denied utterance for fear of evil. It is only through complete independence that all goodness can be spoken, that all purity can be found. (Henri, pp. 149-150).

In contrast to religion, when seen as a ritualised way to make contact with an idea of reality, Henri saw art as a way of living a fully integrated life with reality sensed and penetrated and expressed in the midst of day-to-day living. In this regard he saw no need to create a new artistic method other than for the artist to be in accord with the method already existing in nature: “A tree growing out of the ground is today as wonderful as it ever was. It does not need to adopt new and startling methods” (Henri, p. 56). In a sense his method was no method, but if he were to call it anything it would probably be the “art spirit” method. For Henri, art was not something “beautifully done” to some object or act but rather, as in nature’s acts of creation, beauty was integral to the act of creation itself. Every tree in creation is distinct and beautiful in itself and without need for decorative adornment. And just as growth was the inevitable consequence of nature acting freely, creativity was the inevitable consequence of people (human nature) when allowed to live free and integrated lives in tune with the creative or art spirit in nature. Instead of imitating the forms of nature in art, Henri suggests that the artist needs to imitate the creativity of nature, and so create in its manner, which is that of the art spirit. This is his essential message.

For Henri art appeared in many forms and was not something meant to be “fine” and elitist. In protest he wrote:

I have no sympathy with the belief that art is the restricted province of those who paint, sculpt, make music and verse. I hope we will come to an understanding that the material used is only incidental, that there is [an] artist in every man [*sic*]; and that to him the possibility of development and of expression and the happiness of creation is as much a right and as much a duty to himself, as to any of those who work in the especially ticketed ways (Henri, p. 225).

Essentially then art was something constructed “and to whatever degree one shows the genius [art spirit] of construction in work of any sort, he is that much an artist” (Henri, p. 221). Henri admired the work of gardeners and carpenters and the practical form of workman’s tools, which he described as “so beautiful, so simple, and plain and straight to their meaning” (Henri, p. 56). He even went as far as to say that art need not be intended – in many ways conscious intention blocked the flow of the art spirit – but it was always the inevitable result of when people lived integrated lives. “After all”, he wrote, “the goal is not making art. It is living a life. Those who live their lives will leave the stuff that is really art. Art is a result. It is the trace of those who have led their lives” (Henri, p. 198). And yet for Henri, it was through the active cultivation of personal understanding and taste in art that such an integrated life could start to be developed and lived.

## Individual Connection with the Art Spirit

In an often-quoted line Henri wrote, “Don’t follow the critics too much. Art appreciation, like love, cannot be done by proxy: It is a very personal affair and is necessary to each individual” (Henri, p. 126). And the beginning of this “personal affair”, as with love, was seeing. This is a point Henri re-iterated time and again with his students, in a typical example he wrote: “It is harder to *see* [author’s italics] than it is to express. The whole value of art rests in the artist’s ability to see well what is before him”, and further on in this same passage he remarks that a great painter like Rembrandt had “the rare power of seeing deep into the significance of things” as if this ability was the essential pre-requisite to a painter’s life (Henri, p. 87). It is a fact that no one sees “in general”, seeing is specific to each person, but the problem is that every person’s seeing is conditioned by outside influences beginning from childbirth, it cannot be avoided; schooling being the biggest contributor. And for Henri this generated a real challenge that faced every person: how to see clearly.

A metaphor that Henri often used that fits in nicely with this same idea was that each person had to find “their song”, one that they could live by and express themselves through: “Find out what is really important to you [by seeing clearly]”, he says, “Then sing your song. You will have something to sing about and your whole heart will be in the singing (Henri, p. 126). And the first notes of this song were for Henri mysteriously bound up in those unique and precious joy-filled moments that each person occasionally felt in the midst of living; moments of epiphany or what the Australian poet Francis Brabazon called moments when a person is able to “through-look-clearly” as opposed to solely looking outward or “seeing-in-self [ego]” (Keating, p. 53). These felt experiences of penetrative seeing are for many artists like intimations of a deeper spiritual joy that secretly propels them forward (Fitzgerald, p. 25). They may be only slight and fleeting experiences at first but they were for Henri highly significant. It was these gratuitous experiences that the artist had to tune himself to if he wished to paint well for they heralded the presence of the “art spirit” as a kind of individual guide in art and living – a personal source of inspiration. In other words, it was these experiences in life that artists had to respond to if he or she wished to live a fully integrated and creative life. The poet Irish Brenden Kennelly in his poem, “The Gift”, captures a sense of these personalised and inspiring moments coming through nature yet emanating from the one source, and his acceptance of them as treasured moments of inspiration:

It came slowly.  
Afraid of insufficient self-content  
Or some inherent weakness in itself  
Small and hesitant  
Like children at the top of stairs  
It came through shops, rooms, temples,  
Streets, places that were badly lit.  
It was a gift that took me unawares  
And I accepted it. (Kennelly, p.15)

These moments could come at any time, in any situation, as Kennelly’s poem suggests, but they always needed to be acknowledged and acted upon. As far as Henri was concerned this acknowledgement was where a creative, integrated life began. In contrast, the dismissal of these moments as inconsequential was for him the beginnings of a personal life of disintegration, lethargy, and boredom. Henri was saddened when he saw his students ignoring or not “accepting” these moments and instead succumbing to forces, authorities, outside of themselves. He cites the example of some of his students who

A hundred times, perhaps, they have walked by their own subject, felt it, enjoyed it, but having no estimate of their own personal sensations, lacking faith in themselves, pass on until they come to this established taste of another. And here they would be ashamed if they did not appreciate, for this is an approved taste, and they try to adopt it because it is what they think they should like whether they really do so or not (Henri, p. 86).

Perhaps it was to avoid this kind of situation that Henri repeatedly insisted on telling his students: “Educate yourself, do not let me educate you – use me, do not be used by me” (Henri, p. 176). The simple clarity and power that permeates *Art Spirit* gives added measure and support to his message. Outworn conventions and external standards were the death of art for Henri; nothing in his classes was to be practiced simply because it was part of an accepted tradition. For instance, he discouraged students from spending hours developing their drawing technique as an end in itself with the hope in mind that it may prove useful in the future. He insisted that one does not become an artist over time but rather, “is an artist in the beginning and [should be] busy finding the lines and forms to express the pleasures and emotions with which *nature has already charged him*” (Henri, p. 80 my italics). He kept repeating like a catch-cry throughout his text, “The greatness of art depends absolutely on the greatness of the artist’s individuality and on the same source depends the power to acquire a technique sufficient for expression” (Henri, p. 122). And again, “The most beautiful art is the art which is freest from the demands of convention, which has a law to itself, which as technique is a creation of a special need (Henri, p. 182). Regarding his own painting he made a similar assessment, “Perhaps whatever there is in my work that may be really interesting to others, and surely what is interesting to me, is the result of a sometimes successful effort to free myself from any idea that what I produce must be or must respond in any way to any standard” (Henri, p. 124).

### **Deutsch’s Notion of Creative Being**

The philosopher Eliot Deutsch has written extensively in the field of comparative aesthetics. *Studies in Comparative Aesthetics* (1975) and *Essays on the Nature of Art* (1996) offer a unique global perspective grounded in Indian, Japanese, and Chinese traditional aesthetics. As a philosopher Deutsch provides new perspectives on art (at least for many Western readers) and a framework of finely worked ideas in which to examine Henri’s reflections as a practitioner of art and art teacher. Both Henri and Deutsch are writers who seek to understand the nature of art in broad universal terms (although generally unfashionable today), Henri from his experience as an artist involved in the creative process and Deutsch as a philosopher of aesthetics attempting to fully appreciate the created artwork as an aesthetic object.

According to Deutsch, “a work of art, even though culturally embedded . . . has its own intentionality, which is precisely its aiming to be aesthetically forceful, meaningful, and beautiful” (Deutsch, p.33). What needs to be noted here is that in Deutsch’s estimation an artwork is in a sense a “living” thing, it has being. It has its “own intentionality”. But this intentionality can only be known intuitively in the same way that a person can only intuitively know the existence of his or her own being, or that of another person. Henri strongly supported this view and quoted to his students the forceful words of the French critic of the late nineteenth century, Hippolyte Taine, (words he found in Walt Whitman’s writing) as if stating his own position: “All original art is self-regulated; and no original art can be regulated from without. It carries its own counterpoise and does not receive it from elsewhere – lives on its own blood” (Henri, p. 86).

Although Deutsch names “aesthetically forceful, meaningful and beautiful” as three separate aspects of an artwork, he stresses that these are not experienced as distinct in an aesthetic experience. Rather they “interfuse, intermingle, and together are the *process* of our relating to works of art” (Deutsch, p. 32 author’s italics). However, in the analysis that follows I will keep to Deutsch’s three categories and add remarks from Henri’s writings that I consider enriches each of them from a painter’s perspective.

Firstly, Deutsch states his case that a work of art is aesthetically forceful “to the degree to which it manifests an immanent spiritual power, which power or rhythm of being is everywhere present in the work and is discerned as a unique vitality” (Deutsch, p. 33). To have any aesthetic experience, according to Deutsch, the artwork has to become “an object of consciousness” that is totally assimilated by the viewer. By assimilation Deutsch means that we “take on” the artwork “as a condition of our own being; we incorporate it into our emotional texture and freely accept it. Assimilation is a kind of empathetic embrace . . . an *awakening* of our feeling to what is presented in the artwork” (Deutsch, p. 31 author’s italics). In other words, aesthetic experience is not simply a surface aesthetic shock but an “opportunity” to enter more deeply into an “intimate and transformative relationship” with an artwork. (Deutsch, p. 31). In a most revealing letter to one of his students Henri highlights how this same “opportunity” might occur in the creative act of the artist:

The object of painting is not to make a picture – however unreasonably this may sound. The picture is a *by-product* and may be useful, valuable, interesting as a sign of what has past. The object, which is back of every true work of art, is the *attainment of a state of being*, a state of high functioning, a more than ordinary moment of existence. In such moments activity is inevitable, and whether this activity is with brush, pen, chisel, or tongue, its result is but a by-product of the state, a trace, the footprint of the state.

These results, however crude, become dear to the artist who made them because they are records of states of being which he has enjoyed and which he would regain. They are likewise interesting to others because they are to some extent readable and reveal the possibilities of greater existence (Henri, p. 159 author’s italics).

From this statement, and what has already been presented in this paper, it could be argued that Henri’s “art spirit”, sensed in a moment of inspiration, or “high functioning” is similar in kind to what Deutsch senses in the artwork as an “immanent spiritual power”. Henri further hints at this when he writes, “both nature’s tree and the artist’s painting [show] the manifestations of the principles of its origin” (Henri, p. 67). Or again, “The brush stroke at the moment of contact carries inevitably the exact state of being of the artist at the exact moment into the work, and there it is, to be seen and read by those who can read signs, and to be read later by the artist himself, with perhaps some surprise, as a revelation of himself” (Henri, pp. 16-17). On a practical level, Henri’s advice to capture this “exact state of being” was “to work at great speed. Have your energies alert, up and active. Finish as quickly as you can” (Henri, p. 26).

Deutsch also mentions that an artwork needs to be meaningful if it is to have “life”. He writes, “A work of art is inherently significant, is meaningful, to the degree to which it realizes the possibilities that it itself gives rise to; realization being a bringing of the work to a right conclusion and exhibiting of the process by which the right conclusion is reached” (Deutsch, p. 33). Here again, when the artwork is seen as a work of consciousness then meaning is “recognised” or “apprehended” by the viewer (Deutsch, p. 31). Deutsch, however, goes on to warn “We are not called upon to know what the work “means” but to apprehend that meaning as it is the work” (Deutsch, p. 32). What Deutsch is perhaps suggesting here is that the viewer should not project his or her meaning onto the painting through interpretative thinking but let the painting speak for itself on its own terms. Deutsch’s view can be illustrated by Henri’s comments to a fellow painter after viewing one of his paintings: “The lines with which you have indicated the rain appear to have an easy haphazard look. But they cannot be haphazard for they have a fine rhythm they make me follow you into the spirit of the rain” (Henri, p. 181). And concerning another painting of seven pears, he wrote that it “evokes everything – cathedrals, beautiful ladies. Such was the spirit of the artist that for me he projected universal essentials of beauty. In his seven pears he evidently found a constructive principle and expressed it” (Henri, p. 227).

Lastly, according to Deutsch, “a work of art is beautiful to the degree to which it presents as its own presence a formal achievement, a radiance and splendour of form, that is appropriate to it” (Henri, p. 33).

Here the viewer of the painting is asked to “discern that the work is rightly beautiful”, and this means “discrimination and judgement” in an “active engagement between a work and the contemplative participant of it” (Henri, p. 32, author’s italics). Here again, Henri’s words support rather than oppose Deutsch’s remarks. In an address to women students at a School of Design in Philadelphia, Henri comments:

Thus two individuals looking at the same objects may both exclaim “Beautiful!” – both be right, and yet each have a different sensation – both seeing different characteristics as the salient ones according to the prejudice of the sensations.

Beauty is no material thing.

Beauty is not copied.

Beauty is the sensation of pleasure on the mind of the seer.

No *thing* is beautiful. But all things await the sensitive and imaginative mind that may be aroused to pleasurable emotion at the sight of them. This is beauty (Henri, p. 79. author’s italics).

What comes through very clearly here is the agreement between Henri and Deutsch that beauty is something “discerned” – and does not exist apart from this – by the “active engagement” between an artwork and a “sensitive and imaginative mind”. It resides in the mind’s eye of the beholder.

### **The Minimal Self**

Our present culture, such as it is, appears to have forgotten the important role that art plays in awakening a person to what Henri calls the “undercurrent, the real life, beneath all appearances” (Henri, p. 92). “There are always a few”, he writes, “who get at and feel the undercurrent, and these simply use the surface appearances selecting them and using them as tools to express the undercurrent, the real life” (Henri, p. 92). These few are what Henri calls artists. However, from Henri perspective, as already outlined, everyone should be engaged with this task whatever is their daily occupation. Not to be so engaged; to be confined only to a surface experience of life, with no knowledge of how to penetrate beyond this superficial existence can only lead, following Henri’s thinking, to a life of increasing disengagement with reality and to inevitable and debilitating boredom. From his experience, Henri notes, “If I cannot feel an undercurrent then I see only a series of things. They may be attractive and novel at first but soon grow tiresome” (Henri, p. 92).

Many social commentators describe contemporary culture as one glutted with passing “images, which don’t even have the substantiality of a “series of things” but rather just their phantoms (Anderson, 1990; Gergen, 1991). From their perspective, to live in such an image-saturated world is to inhabit a world of fakery: a world of endlessly reproducible kitsch, of Clayton’s art, of Barbie and Ken as celebrity idols, with no avenue open to make any contact with what’s real in life. These pervasive, superficial images, they argue, unconsciously infiltrate the psyche and impose on unsuspecting minds a phoney reality pretending to be real. Consequently, over time, a person’s ability to judge what is of real value becomes increasingly difficult. Ultimately this can lead to the formation of a distorted self-image or self-identity. Christopher Lasch suggests that one such distorted self-image, which now inhabits an increasing number of people, is what he calls the “minimal or narcissistic self”. Lasch does not define the word narcissistic in the popular sense of self-love but rather uses it to indicate a psychological state of confusion in which people are unable to differentiate between what is their real self and what is not. He writes:

The minimal or narcissistic self is, above all, a self uncertain of its own outlines . . . The current concern with “identity” registers some of this difficulty in defining the boundaries of selfhood. So does the minimalist style in contemporary art and literature, which derives much of its subject matter from popular culture, in particular from the invasion of experience by images,

and thus helps us to see that minimal selfhood is not just a defensive response to danger but arises out of a more fundamental social transformation: the replacement of a reliable world of durable objects by a world of flickering images that make it harder to distinguish reality from fantasy (Lasch, p. 19).

One of the real challenges facing educators today, in the light of Lasch's comments, is to help students not only get in touch with what's real in life, "the reliable world of durable objects", but to discover an experiential way of contacting the "undercurrent, the real life, beneath" this world (Henri, p. 92). This is where Henri expansive approach to art and self-education is so valuable.

### **Self-Education and Self-Identity through Art**

Henri's strong comments on self-motivated education such as, "No matter how good the school . . . all education must be self-education" and "A man who goes into a school *to educate himself* and not be educated will get somewhere", run as a type of refrain throughout his work (Henri, pp. 120-121, my italics). Self-motivated education takes the emphasis off the teacher and places it squarely on the self-directed and responsive student. It places importance on the exploration of experience as the ultimate teacher; personal experience aroused by moments of significant wonder engendered by "durable objects of the world" and not evanescent images. Wonder is nature's teaching method and the real starting point of all education. Plato expressed his agreement with this point of view in his often-quoted statement, "Wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder", (Theaetetus 155d).

Only wonder can open consciousness to the possibility of insight; to stray too far from wonder in education is to run the risk of becoming disengaged with and losing all interest in life itself. From Henri's perspective, the process of art is critical for it provides the means for an artist to realise wonder in concrete form and thus to directly comprehend something of the underlying pulse of life. This process was for him at the heart of all genuine educational enterprises, and formed the unifying foundation upon which all so-called subject categories or disciplines were later established. "I am not interested in art", he wrote, "as a means of making a living, but I am interested in art as a means of living a life. It is the most important of all studies, and all studies are a tributary of it" (Henri, p. 158). From his point of view then, the process of art, of concretising or realising wonder, was what education should be all about. Education in the sense of *educare*: a process of "bringing forth" knowledge in an unformed nascent state out of a deep personal engagement with life and then giving it expression in an artwork. By way of contrast, living in the midst of an endless parade of cosmetic images that can only momentarily fascinate the mind but cannot engender or sustain wonder is to live in a virtual wasteland in which no art or real education can occur. This is Lasch's "minimal or narcissistic" world.

When Deutsch defines an artwork as a creation that is "aesthetically forceful, meaningful, and beautiful" he is conceptualising wonder in philosophical terms (Deutsch, p.33). Interestingly, in his definition he gives no value to what a specific artwork is actually representing, figuratively or otherwise, and nor to its inevitable cultural and historical references. What Deutsch is possibly suggesting here is that these ever-changing features have their importance in the initial appreciation of an artwork but to place sustained and sole emphasis upon them is to avoid making "contract" with the artwork as a work of art. On a more subjective, existential level it could be argued that for the artist (defined by Henri as any person working out of a deep engagement with life), the artwork (defined by Deutsch as possessing a kind of universal, spiritual potency) presents a significant window into the wonder that is also the mystery of the artist's own soul or self-identity. And it is this presence of the artist's self in the artwork that equally makes it "aesthetically forceful, meaningful, and beautiful", in other words, contributes to its distinct life and vitality. From this understanding, art can be seen as playing a unique role in the *educare* or the "bringing forth" into the world



of an experiential sense of the self: a real sense of self that is discovered in all powerful art to be vital, meaningful, expansive and beautiful.

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