



**Foreword to Philip Rubinov-Jacobson's *Eyes of the Soul***  
by Ken Wilber

It is always daunting to make a statement, any statement, about art, especially in today's world, where a firm statement about anything can always be interpreted as marginalizing its opposite. In such a deconstructive climate, many scholars have despaired of being able to define art, let alone comment on it. How can we even recognize art?

Very simply, I believe. As with pornography—and all the other equally important things in life—I know art when I see it. And this, ladies and gentlemen, is a book of art, a book of very extraordinary art.

Throughout the ages, and in different cultures, art has served many functions—crafts and skills, representations of value, mimesis, social bonding, sacred invocation, self-expression, deconstruction, reconstruction, revelation. And we, as viewers of art, have always been allowed to muse on what it means—on what art means—to us, to the artist, and to those who also view it. What is art? Why is art? How is art? And why should it even matter?

To those unafraid of distinctions, art has always represented something more, better, deeper, truer, finer... perhaps something even more real, more sacred, than other endeavors. Art in the highest or deepest sense has always been here to remind us, in a hundred ways and through as many mediums, that there are realities that are higher,

deeper, truer—realities that tell us something incredibly important about ourselves, about nature, about God. When science, business, commerce, technology, morality, and conventional consciousness have finished with their busy, bright and bustling days, art is here to remind us of those clandestine, sacred, sanctified spaces that the mundane world forgot, those radiant spaces where depth and height and glory reside, spaces that sometimes whisper (and sometimes shout) those secrets which the soul has forgotten in all its industriously scrubbed and sanctioned sanity.

Eyes of the soul—and ears of the soul, and hands and feet and tongue and voice. Surely that is one of the most precious functions and services of art—to help us see more, feel more, know more, love more, express more, than we thought possible. If the word “soul” represents, among other things, the best part of the personality, then art as the evocative display of the soul is the best part of art.

This is a book of such art.

In that regard, there are a few items worth mentioning. Although traditionally the “soul” was often taken to mean a mental entity divorced from a material body, more sophisticated notions view the soul as the integrative function of the personality wherever it might appear. That is, “soul” no longer means merely that which transcends, but that which transcends and includes. The highest, deepest, widest art is therefore integrative art, or integral art. Integral art takes as its terrain *body, mind, and spirit in self, culture, and nature*.

It is this comprehensive comprehension that is a hallmark of the integral. Some integral art might focus temporarily on only one of those domains—body or mind or spirit or self or culture or nature—but art to be integral necessarily includes in its

potential scope all of those dimensions. Art that is merely fantastic, or merely realistic, or merely abstract, or merely visionary, is not integral art.

If an artwork does happen to focus on one of those dimensions—perhaps surrealistic, or fantastical, or natural, or abstract expressionistic, or transpersonal impressionistic, or realistic—how can we tell if that art is actually integral?

The primary criterion of integral art is the consciousness of the artist producing it. That is, integral artwork is an artwork produced by integral consciousness. How well the artwork succeeds or not in other categories—technical execution, coherency, clarity, range, style, and so on—are items to be considered in their own right. But whether an artwork is integral is primarily determined by the consciousness that produced it. Not everything that integral consciousness produces is integral art, but all integral art is produced by an integral consciousness.

How do we recognize integral consciousness? Well, like we were saying: we know it when we see it, as long as we are integral as well. And this leads to the delicate and difficult issue of the development of integral consciousness itself. Because integral art is the product of integral consciousness, then the nature and development of integral consciousness becomes a crucial component in our understanding (and creation) of integral art.

There are two basic ways that higher or deeper dimensions of consciousness are made available to individuals: as states and as stages. *States of consciousness* represent temporary, brief, but still often profound experiences, including altered states and peak experiences. Common ordinary states of consciousness include waking, dreaming, sleeping, and reverie. Common exogenously induced (“drugged”) states of

consciousness include drunken, stoned, and psychedelic. Common endogenously induced (“self-induced”) states include meditative states and states of flow. What they all have in common is that they shift the perceived world profoundly, and they are all temporary.

*Stages of consciousness*, on the other hand, are enduring, permanent acquisitions, which unfold or develop in a generally sequential fashion. Typical examples of stages are: atoms to molecules to cells to organisms; or letters, words, sentences, paragraphs. The reason that true stages are sequential is that each succeeding stage builds upon and includes its predecessor. You can’t have words without letters, nor cells without molecules—hence the directionality or sequential nature of evolution. From acorns to oaks and from embryos to apes, much of nature’s growth and flowering occurs in stages or waves.

Psychologists recognize that human beings possess multiple intelligences (including cognitive intelligence, emotional intelligence, kinesthetic intelligence, mathematical, musical, interpersonal, and so on). How many different intelligences are there? Cross-cultural evidence suggests at least a dozen. But guess what? They all break down into variations on the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. (That is, most intelligences or human capacities fall into the basic categories of self and self-expression; interpersonal or moral; and cognitive or objective.)

Moreover, these intelligences or capacities all show growth or development. In fact, most of these intelligences, like most processes in nature, unfold through a series of stages or waves of increasing capacity, which is what allows them to be permanent acquisitions. Learning a language, learning to play the piano, learning how to play

baseball—these are all slow growth processes, but once the competence is in place, it is essentially permanent. But this is also what makes stages of growth rather slow and laborious, unlike states or peak experiences, which are often available more or less immediately with the right stimulus. You can indeed have a peak experience of being one with nature while you are watching a sunset or making love; you cannot have a peak experience of being a concert pianist without years of practice. As psychologists say, states are free, stages are earned.

Important stages of consciousness include cognitive development, affective development, ego development, and moral development. Cross-cultural research shows that moral development, for example, proceeds from preconventional (or egocentric) stages, to conventional (or conformist) stages, to postconventional (or worldcentric) stages, to integrative (or inclusive) stages. Carol Gilligan, for example, calls these stages as they appear in female moral development: selfish, care, universal care, and integrated. (There might be higher stages, but, as is often the case with higher anything, there are fewer examples of them and so relevant research is harder to come by, and is complicated by the fact that researchers themselves have to be at higher stages in order to see and acknowledge adequate data.)

Notice that you can be at any *stage* of development and still have an almost unlimited access to a variety of altered *states*. You can be at Carol Gilligan's selfish stage, for example, and still get drunk, or have a shamanic experience, take psychedelics, or get into a flow state. In other words, states of consciousness are available at virtually every stage of consciousness. You can have very high state experiences at even the lowest of stages....

Here is the point. There are higher stages of consciousness, and there are higher states of consciousness—and integral consciousness has access to both. That’s the very definition of integral or inclusive.

Integral development—and integral consciousness—means that I have developed to my own highest potentials in terms of *stages* of development, and that I also have access to a wide variety of higher *states*. When my stage development is at or around what Gilligan calls integrative, and when I have gained access to a variety of higher states (through meditation, peak experiences, or other means), then the combined result is an integral consciousness that continues to unfold in its ever-expanding embrace. That is, integral consciousness is not a fixed, finished, or definite state or stage, but an ever-ongoing atmosphere of inclusivity. But for just that reason, integral consciousness is touching bases with as many higher states and stages as is reasonably possible at this time in human evolution.

On the other hand, for evidence that higher states can be accessed at not-very-high stages, one need only look at the history of art. Many artists who are at rather undeveloped stages in many capacities (such as moral, interpersonal, or psychosexual), nonetheless have access to profound nonordinary states, visionary experiences, psychedelic experiences, or peak experiences. The result is a gifted artist who in most other respects has unbalanced or even dysfunctional development. The art might be great, but the human being is not.

This is also why art in itself is not necessarily a means of transformation or integral development. In fact, relying on art by itself for transformation often results in unbalanced development (for example, along the self-expressive lines to the detriment of

the interpersonal lines and the objective lines, which is why great artists are sometimes poorly developed in interpersonal capacities, though they need not be). But, by the same token, this is exactly why art in the broadest sense must be a part of any truly integral development and integral transformative practice. (I'll return to these points in a moment.)

Note that art—the subject matter of art—can come from (or be informed by) virtually any state or stage of development. Art can express or depict events in the world and/or events in the consciousness of the artist, but there are levels of consciousness (states and stages of consciousness), and artists can depict, express, or evoke occasions in any of those states or stages. (See, for example, “To See a World,” written for an exhibit of Anselm Kiefer, in Wilber, K., *One Taste*.)

We said that the “soul” is the best part of the personality wherever it appears. In other words, the soul is the personality in the highest states and stages at this time in human evolution. We also said that the soul is the integrative function of the personality—or, at any rate, it should be. Unfortunately, higher development can also have its own dysfunctions and pathologies, and therefore the soul is not necessarily integrated as it develops.

Putting those items together, we can say that “soul art” is art that comes from any higher state or stage (whether integrated or not); and “integral art” is any art that comes from a comprehensive, balanced, or integrated consciousness in touch with both the highest states and highest stages of its own being. Put somewhat crudely, soul art is art from a higher realm; integral art is art from a healthy higher realm (which means, integrated with itself and with its lower realms).

We said that integral art might focus on merely one dimension of the totality available to it. Integral art, for example, might include the abstract painting of a single bamboo stalk. The defining hallmark of integral art is not the nature of the object depicted but that the consciousness that produced it is integral (or integrally informed). The subject matter of the artwork itself might be very specific, very particular, very “not comprehensive.” An integral artwork might be a single piano concerto, a sprawling 800-page novel, a painting of an apple, a Wagnerian-sized opera, a Zen landscape, a rock-and-roll song, a fantastical painting, a architecture project, a haiku poem. What all of those artworks would have in common—if they were integral artworks—is that the consciousness of the artist that created them was integral. Which means, the artist was in touch with, and had generally integrated, his or her highest states and stages of being-in-world.

The subject matter of the artwork itself might merely a particular, single object, or it might be a sprawling, encompassing, totalistic type of artwork. Likewise, the artwork might succeed or fail in various categories—technical finesse, creative novelty, balance and composition, narrative flair, harmonic boldness, visual acuity, and so on. But in all those cases, the artwork qualifies as integral artwork if its creator is operating in the space of an integral awareness at the time of its composition (and, indeed, it can be judged specifically on how well it does *that*).

Does that really matter, and by looking at an artwork can you really tell the nature of the consciousness that produced it? Yes and yes, I believe. This is not very different from, say, Zen calligraphy, where a painting consisting of only a single brush stroke can

reveal the degree of enlightenment of its creator—if we ourselves are enlightened enough to be able to tell in the first place.

Exactly that is a distinguishing hallmark of all soul art and all integral art: its actual subject matter can only be “seen” from the correspondingly high state or stage that produced the artwork. Anybody can see the calligraphy brush stroke on the piece of paper, but only those with some degree of enlightenment can tell whether that brush stroke was produced by an enlightened Hakuin or a run-of-mill calligrapher. It’s the identical *subject matter* in both artworks, but an entirely different *subject of consciousness* producing each—and yes, you can definitely tell the difference, if you have the appropriate eyes to see....

What, then, can soul art and integral art—that is, art from any higher realm—do for the typical audience? In my opinion, all great soul art and integral art does at least two incredibly important things.

First, it can evoke in virtually anybody a temporary *state* experience of the higher realm. As we were saying, you can be at Carol Gilligan’s stage 1 in moral development and still have a profound peak experience of a higher realm. Great soul and integral art can do just that, can hit you with such profound presence that it takes your breath away, takes time itself away, takes space and flings it to eternity, opens you to the deepest and highest and most radiantly shimmering spaces of your own soul, all at once and just like that. You come away from such art just a little bit better than you were a moment ago, you see a little bit more, you feel a little bit more, you know yourself a little bit better, you touch others a little more intimately, you awaken a fraction more toward your own infinity....

There is a general rule of thumb that developmental psychologists have slowly learned from their research: the more you experience profound states of consciousness, the more rapidly you develop through the stages of consciousness. You cannot skip stages, but you can accelerate your development through them. And one of the means of doing so is by experiencing some of the higher realms as peak experiences, as nonordinary states—perhaps as meditative states, contemplative states, flow experiences, visionary experiences, “aha” experiences, or experiences evoked and induced by great soul and integral art. For example, research indicates that somebody at Gilligan’s stage 2 (the care stage), by practicing meditation (and meditative states) will move into stage 3 (universal care) more rapidly than somebody who does not (Wilber, K., *The Eye of Spirit*).

Likewise, although the effects are not as pronounced, those exposed to great soul and integral art will more quickly evolve to their own higher potentials. We have always known—known!—that great art can make us better people (and we knew this until the deconstructionists attempted—and almost succeeded—in convincing us otherwise). And this is the likely psychological mechanism (discovered through sophisticated research) by which such betterment occurs, namely: repeated exposure to higher states of consciousness and peak experiences and “aha” experiences (evoked by higher art) accelerates development through the stages of our own growth.

And that is the second thing that contemplating great soul and integral art can do. The evocation of a higher state might be temporary, but the cumulative effect is not. We come away from great, great art just a little, little bit better....

So let us say that part with the bluntness it deserves: contemplating a great van Gogh, expanding into a Hakuin landscape, reading a Thomas Mann novel, contemplating a Gehry building, studying an essay by Jurgen Habermas, flowing with a poem of Lady Tsogyal, watching Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, resonating with a plea from Sojourner Truth, contemplating a Tibetan tankgha of Avalokitesvara, can make you just a little bit better person....

If we ourselves happen to be fortunate enough to already be in touch with the higher and deeper realms evoked by a great artwork, we can always learn some nuance, some new delicate curve, some new glorious notes in the song of our own soul, conveyed now by the inspired artist in whose presence we are honored to be. In this and so many other ways, great art is the servant of the soul in its gentle unfolding.

And what of the artist? What does the production of soul or integral art do for the artist? Can such artistic endeavor be a vehicle of growth for its creator?

Well, certainly. But as we were saying, even higher development can be fraught with turmoil, dysfunction, pathology, miscarriages. It is often the case that an individual who is extremely gifted in one of the dozen or so intelligences becomes increasingly unbalanced by focusing on his or her gift to the exclusion of other dimensions that, although they will likely never shine as brightly (nor do they need to), nonetheless cannot be merely ignored, denied, or repressed. Such a person may become a great soul artist, but never a great integral artist, by definition.

When an artist reaches deeply and highly into herself or himself, and brings forth a soul domain, a domain just a little bit higher or deeper than their own selves are at that moment, then their art is indeed acting to transform them, to move them into those higher

and wider spaces. I, as an artist, might glimpse a deeper or higher realm, and every time I do so, I glimpse myself as I might be in my own betterment: I see myself as I might be tomorrow if I live up to my own art.

Soul art can have a micro-transformative effect on an audience—and on the artist, the creator of the artwork, as well. But, as we were saying, although this might help the artist to grow in one respect—namely, the getting-in-touch with a higher, deeper, wider realm of consciousness—it might not be integrated into the rest of the personality. This is why the practice of art ought ideally be part of an Integral Transformative Practice, a practice that exercises body, mind, and spirit in self, culture, and nature. (For a further explanation of ITP, which is beyond the scope of this simple introduction, please see K. Wilber, *One Taste*.) In this way, great soul art can become great integral art, as the artist who is evoking the higher soul realms is also integrating them with the other realms and dimension of his or her own being-in-the-world. And, for the same reason, anybody who is undertaking a truly Integral Transformative Practice ought to exercise the artistic/aesthetic dimension to some degree, lest that dimension become not over- but under-developed. And every time we dip into the greater beauty of our own tomorrow, we are developing more of our own greater potential, brief but glorious glimpses of which speak to us in soul and integral art.

I am sitting quietly in front of the computer, typing mundane words into a mundane keyboard on a mundane Monday morning. Slowly I begin to notice something unusual in the air, in the atmosphere around me, a soft, incredibly fine flickering of rain, a gold-dust twinkling, a wistful mist sprinkling and shining everywhere, a quiet riot of psychedelic platinum enlivening every direction I look, the world becomes alive with the

articulate beating souls of every single raindrop, each being a small opening, all of them small apertures, into a radiant infinity that slowly invades my mind and soul as well, my heart begins to fill with that radiance, to spill gratefully out of itself and gracefully back into the world, an ecstatic painful radiant bliss that touches each with wonderment, the yearning of love and the dreadful tears of tender embrace, each shimmering raindrop a hidden soul reaching out to me and then, suddenly, a collective cacophony of Gods and Goddesses all singing as loud as they possibly can, looking at me and calling to me and urging me louder and louder, more and more thunderous, and me to them, and then spontaneously, uncontrollably, we all start shouting and crying and singing in unison, lord what a sound, what a thunder there was, as we all sobbed and we all shouted: is not this simple, present moment the very face of spirit itself? And a total revelation that could never be improved in any way at all?

And with that, with the utter obviousness of it all, the rain simply stopped. I type the next mundane word into the mundane keyboard on this mundane Monday morning. But then, somehow, just a little, the world will never be the same.