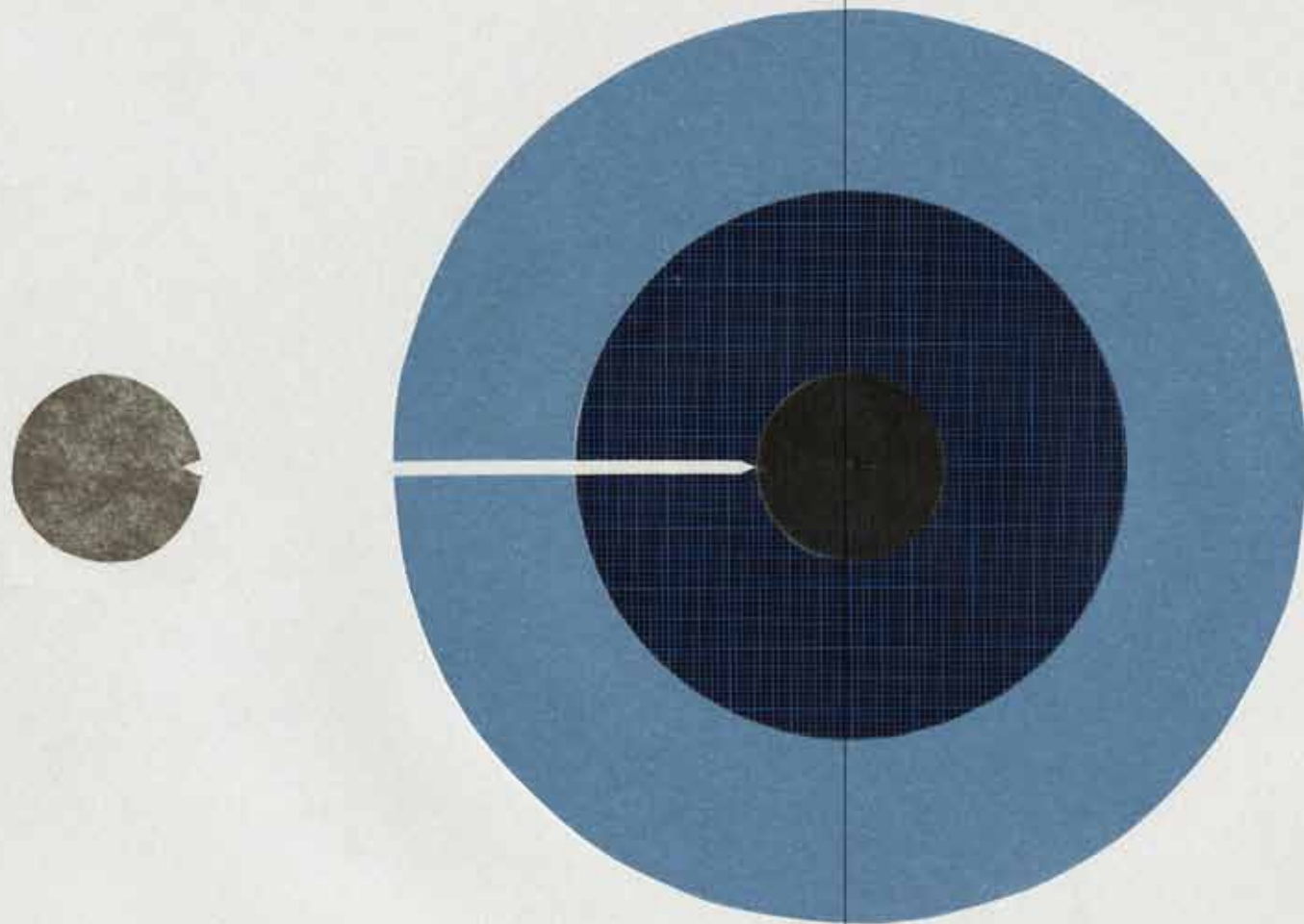# AESTHETIC SEPARATION
## AND THE REFLECTION OF LIFE IN ART

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ABSTRACT – **Aesthetic Separation and the Reflection of Life in Art**
Robert Waters, The University of the Basque Country, 2019.

This doctoral thesis aims to define the practice of art, which is considered as the creation and appreciation of artworks, in terms of separation. It further attempts to determine how the concept of separation can be used to relate biological and cognitive aspects of human life with the aesthetic experience and understanding of artworks. It accomplishes this by establishing correlations between biological and artistic functionality, while showing how separation limits a purely biological conception of artistic practice. The theoretical research focuses on important aesthetic theories of the past two centuries and recent studies into human cognition. The practical research incorporates two postconceptual social art projects that implicate the theoretical research. The results demonstrate two principal separations that define artworks and people in relation to tradition and society respectively. The first involves an internal division of material and form, or object and subject. The second distinguishes internal from external, integral from relational, or the individual from the group. The oppositions that are generated by these separations play vital roles in the reflexive identification of self—the foundation of aesthetic theory—and the ability to recognize human products as artworks. Nonetheless, this thesis finds that the distinct sources of internal and external meaning during aesthetic experience impede a direct correlation between artistic cause and biological effect, and vice versa. Artworks do reflect human life, but their capacity to produce meaning is influenced by social and conceptual relations that escape biological determinism. The practice of art distinguishes its autonomy and tradition on its own terms.

Keywords: aesthetics; art; artworks; biology; cognition; separation; self; reflexivity; tradition.