Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics

Volume 12, 2020

Edited by Vítor Moura and Connell Vaughan

Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics

Volume 12, 2020

Edited by Vítor Moura and Connell Vaughan

Design by Fernando Infante Del Rosal

Table of Contents

The Aesthetic Paradox of Tourism

Marta Benenti[1]

University of Turin

Lisa Giombini[2]

Roma Tre University

ABSTRACT. Everyday Aesthetics is known to be beset by a dilemma: how is it possible to reconcile the detached attitude that typically characterizes aesthetic appreciation with the nature of everyday routine? In this paper, the dilemma is addressed by considering cultural tourism as a paradigmatic case of aesthetic appreciation of the ordinary. By examining the aesthetic motivations that animate cultural tourism, the study shows that, while seeking authenticity in the 'un-touristed', tourists remain trapped in their own, detached, 'tourist gaze'. The analogy between the dilemma of everyday aesthetics and the aesthetic paradox of tourism allows for the application to the latter of the strategies that have been put forward to solve the former. What emerges is that, whereas approaches that rely on aesthetic detachment reproduce the dilemma, those that insist on the aesthetic value of the ordinary 'as such' offer tourists a way out of the paradox. Nonetheless, effective as they seem in mitigating the risk of frustration that may derive from touristic activities, these approaches appear to reduce the aesthetic to an extremely thin notion, thereby weakening their own theoretical strength.

1 marta.benenti@unito.it
2 lisa.giombini@uniroma3.it

1. Introduction

Millions of Japanese tourists visit Paris every year. On average, twenty of them are so disconcerted by the gap between reality and their idealized image of the city, that they fall prey to the so-called *Paris syndrome*, a condition characterized by psychiatric symptoms including delusional states, derealization, depersonalization and anxiety (Viala et al., 2004). Interestingly, subjects suffering from the syndrome are mainly travelers concerned with the aesthetic aspect of their journey.[3]

Psychopathology aside, the gap between expectations and reality is a common experience for tourists. Why? And what does this imply from the point of view of philosophical aesthetics? While disappointment may partly result from tourists' preemptive idealization of the place they are visiting, there seems to be a more structural reason at the root of this negative experience, one related to the intrinsic logic of tourism as an aesthetic practice. Marrying insights from tourism studies with everyday aesthetics, we will focus on cultural tourism as a paradigmatic attempt to get to an aesthetic appreciation of the ordinary.

2. The Dilemma of Everyday Aesthetics

In recent years, everyday aesthetics has experienced a blossoming

---

[3] The impact of this disease should not be overestimated. According to Viala et al. (2004) most patients affected by the Paris Syndrome had been previously treated for psychiatric disorders or at least were psychologically vulnerable. It is nevertheless interesting to notice that in the examined cases, crises were triggered by the encounter with a foreign place that had been charged by patients with aesthetic expectations.

in the United States and is currently gaining momentum in many European countries (see: Leddy, 1995; Light & Smith, 2005; Levanto et al., 2005; Saito, 2007, Melchionne, 2013; Matteucci, 2017; Di Stefano, 2017). Most authors agree that one main aim of everyday aesthetics is to widen the unduly limited scope of traditional Western aesthetics beyond the realms of fine arts and nature so as to include phenomena that constitute people's daily life (Saito, 2019). To this extent, the subject matter of everyday aesthetics seem to be those objects, events, and activities that are common, ordinary, and mundane.

One major concern for everyday aestheticians is that if 'everydayness' is characterized in terms of₋ commonplace, familiar and routine practices, it is unclear how we can have an aesthetic appreciation of it in the first place. This amounts to what has been called the fundamental *dilemma* (Carlson, 2014, p. 48; Saito, 2017, p. 44) of everyday aesthetics. The dilemma originates from the fact that there seems to be an inherent tension between our common understanding of aesthetic appreciation and the experience we make of everyday life. While aesthetic appreciation traditionally implies the appreciation of an object that is experienced in a detached and disinterested way, we experience everyday life objects and activities with practical considerations in mind that conceal their aesthetic potentials. This creates a conflict, for "the aesthetic pulls in one direction, and everyday life in another" (Carlson, 2014, p. 49).

Despite the variety of the strategies put forward in the literature

to overcome this difficulty, a distinction seems to emerge around two main approaches. Either having an aesthetic appreciation of the ordinary implies a process of distancing, detachment, or estrangement from everyday life; or it requires an attempt to aesthetically appreciate the ordinary as such.

In the former approach, the ordinary can only be aesthetically appreciated through a process of 'defamiliarization' (Saito, 2007; 2017; 2019), which makes it appear extra-ordinary and worthy of aesthetic interest. According to Allen Carlson (2014), defamiliarization may come in three main forms. The first is a version of classic formalism, and consists in the process of seizing aesthetically appreciable features in the formal aspects of things which are considered devoid of aesthetic value, such as everyday objects.[4] The second involves a sort of "artification"[5], that is, a mechanism through which everyday objects and situations are shaped into something 'art-like' (Naukkarinen, 2012). The third amounts to a process of "aestheticization" of the everyday, through the adoption of an aesthetic attitude that "casts an aura" on the object of experience (Leddy, 2012). What is taken to be aesthetically uninteresting is 'manipulated' so as to acquire an aesthetic appeal.

---

4 Carlson mutuates this conception from art critics like Clive Bell and Roger Fry who defended formalism at the beginning of the 20th century.

5 Introduced by anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake (2001), and developed by sociologists Roberta Shapiro and Nathalie Heinich (2012), the concept of artification has entered the aesthetic debate thanks to Ossi Naukkarinen, who defined it as "situations and processes in which something that is not regarded as art in the traditional sense of the word is changed into something art-like or into something that takes influences from artistic ways of thinking and acting" (Naukkarinen, 2012).

Differences notwithstanding, on all these accounts of defamiliarization everyday life is regarded as so familiar and routine-like that it forms a frameless background. In order for this background to count as a proper object for aesthetics, it needs to be rendered out-of-the-ordinary, unfamiliar, or strange: it needs to be put in a frame. The underlying intuition is that one can discover a surprisingly rich aesthetic dimension in the otherwise mundane parts of our daily life if one isolates them from their ordinary context and sheds a different light on them. In John Dewey's terms (1934), this implies making the anesthetic flow of our everydayness become 'an experience' endowed with pervasive character and a cohesive internal structure, and able to unearth latent aesthetic values in the most ordinary and routine. As it has been noticed, however, by over-emphasizing defamiliarization (be it achieved by means of formalism, artification, or aestheticization) this strategy eventually leads to losing the very "everyday-ness" of everyday experience (Saito, 2017a; 2019; Haapala, 2005; Irvin, 2008; Forsey, 2014).

Out of this concern, the second approach maintains that the main aim of everyday aesthetics should be the aesthetic grasping of the ordinary 'as such'. An option in this regard is to start considering qualities such as the familiar and the ordinary as aesthetically appreciable per se. Arto Haapala (2005, p. 50), for example, has argued that familiar places "give us pleasure through a kind of comforting stability, through the feeling of being at home and taking pleasure in carrying out normal routines in a setting that is 'safe'".

Alternatively, one can point out how aesthetic experiences, judgments, and values are intertwined with other experiences, judgments, and values that are central to people's daily lives. One can focus on the pleasure gained by the appropriate functioning of commonplace tools, thereby considering the intersection of aesthetic and practical concerns (Forsey 2014), or dwell on the role played by the knowledge one has of a familiar object's function for its aesthetic appreciation (Carlson, 2014). In addition to these proposals and countering Dewey's description of everyday routine as anesthetic, Yuriko Saito has remarked that an important part of everyday aesthetics' endeavor is to pay mindful attention to all neglected features of the ordinary. Assuming a mindful attitude, she claims, can make one uncover aesthetic qualities even in those apparently humdrum aspects of our daily grind (Saito, 2017; 2019). This account, however, is not immune from criticisms either. Difficulties arise when trying to explain what is distinctly aesthetic in pleasures provided by comfort, stability, and functionality (Dowling, 2010; Matteucci, 2017).

Perhaps expectedly, there is no agreement among scholars as to which of these approaches is more effective in solving the dilemma. In the remainder of this paper, we will lean on the case of tourism to shed some new light on this debate. Despite its pervasiveness as a cultural and social practice, tourism has obtained only little attention on the part of scholars in everyday aesthetics (and

in philosophy more generally).[6] As we will show in the next section, tourism in general and 'cultural tourism' in particular may constitute a revealing example for assessing the solidity of the field, especially as regards the above-mentioned dilemma.[7]

3. Characterizing Touristic Experience

A widespread and well-established practice, tourism embraces many distinct cultural activities, social relations, and economic interests. Based on what tourists gaze upon, it is possible to distinguish various categories of tourism (Cohen, 1979; Urry, 2002). For example, although most tourists are motivated by an intent to see unique artistic or historical objects such as monuments, many also show an interest in ordinary aspects of social life being undertaken by people in unusual contexts (Urry, 2002, p. 13). The former type of tourism corresponds to what has been termed 'art tourism' (Franklin, 2018) mainly aimed at seeing art somewhere else. The second, which is generally referred to as 'cultural tourism' (Hughes, 1996, 2002; Stylianou-Lambert, 2011), is concerned with experiencing lifestyles, habits, and cultural and social mechanisms as they unfold in the daily

---

6 Relevant exceptions are Tribe (2008, 2009); and Todd (2012). One problem may be that tourism has few defenders, constitutes an embarrassment, and seems such an easy target for those who attack modern culture. (Culler, 1981, p. 1).

7 This is surprising, for everyday aestheticians have considered an astonishing variety of phenomena. including laundry (Saito, 2017), cooking and commuting (Highmore, 2004); weather (Saito, 2005; Diaconu, 2013); fashion and clothing (Schor, 2002; Iannilli, 2017), design (Norman, 2004; Shove et al., 2007); vacuum cleaning (Tuan, 1993); scratching an itch (Irvin, 2008); gardening (Carlson, 1997; Ross, 1998; Parsons, 2008; Brady et al., 2018), landscaping, architecture, and design (Stecker, 1999; Carlson, 2000; Forsey, 2013; Svabo and Ekelund, 2015; Parsons, 2016; van Etteger et al., 2016).

routine of human environments other than one own's. Despite being a heterogeneous field with different characteristics and needs (Stylianou-Lambert, 2011, p. 405), cultural tourism shows a general orientation of tourists to appreciating at firsthand the cultural and social specificity of their destination.

How does cultural tourism impact on discussions in everyday aesthetics? Answering this question implies clarifying in the first place the extent to which cultural tourism can be treated as an aesthetic practice and, secondly, how it relates to an aesthetic appreciation of the 'everydayness' of a certain place. In what follows, we will address each of these concerns in turn.

3.1 The Search for Aesthetic Pleasure

In the tourism literature, it is commonly held that one first motivation for cultural tourism is the fulfilment of pleasurable experiences (Hughes, 1996; Richards, 2013). Yet, the type of expectations animating the practice are not only relaxation, recreation, or entertainment. As studies testify, tourism is often and primarily driven by aesthetic considerations, giving rise to some forms of *aesthetic pleasure* (Todd, 2009; 2012; Maitland and Smith, 2012; Kirillova et. al, 2014).

A crucial notion in this regard was introduced by sociologist John Urry (2002) in his seminal examination of tourism as a social practice, which holds together anthropological, economical, and philosophical issues. Drawing an analogy with Michel Foucault's

concept of 'the gaze', Urry developed the idea of the *tourist gaze*, the attitude adopted by tourists towards the environment, the objects, the people and the events that they encounter during their travel. As an attitude, the tourist gaze is for Urry neither a 'natural' nor a modern phenomenon, but one which emerged under specific historical circumstances in Western culture. In particular, Urry traces its roots back to earlier configurations of travel such as the 'Grand Tour'— the travel through Europe which was considered, from the late seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, an essential part of upper-class education. The tourist gaze, however, only fully formed as a result of the exponential growth of personal travel in the second part of the twentieth century (Urry, 2002, pp. 4—5).

From a theoretical point of view, the tourist gaze can be described as a way of perceiving or relating to places which cuts them off from the 'real world' and emphasizes the exotic aspects of the tourist experience (Harrison, 2013, p. 107). Assuming the tourist gaze implies for Urry (2002, pp. 1–2) to "look at the environment with interest and curiosity [...]" and "engage with a set of stimuli that contrast with the everyday and the mundane". As it has been noticed (Howard, 2016, p. 34) this adoption of a peculiar 'detached' attitude relates Urry's tourist gaze to the notion of 'aesthetic gaze'. Developed during the late Renaissance, Enlightenment and Romantic eras, the aesthetic gaze defines the "disinterested interest" that characterizes, in Kant's terms, aesthetic experience (Scruton, 2007, pp. 28–43). Interestingly, on Roger Scruton's view, the 'visitor'

provides the paradigmatic case of aesthetic gaze in that her interest in the experienced object satisfies "no bodily appetite or need" nor it is aimed at any useful information. "The interest", he writes (2007, p. 36), "is disinterested – an interest in the landscape for its own sake, for the very thing that it is (or rather, for the very thing that it appears)".

When it comes to touristic experiences, this aesthetic detachment seems to be enhanced by the physical distance of the visitor from her own home. Because tourism entails traveling a certain distance, the targeted environment is perceived as new or less familiar to tourists than the usual environment (Kirillova & Lehto, 2015, p. 3). The impression of novelty facilitates the modes of aesthetic appreciation by enabling a process of estrangement or the "casting an aura" (Leddy, 2012, p. 127) on what is experienced; which makes having 'an experience'—in Dewey's terms—possible.

Another way of referring to this process is what Haapala (2005) calls 'strangeness', i.e., the basic experience we undergo when finding ourselves in a new environment, for example when we visit a foreign city for the first time. Experiencing strangeness, according to Haapala, leads to an intensification of sensual perception resulting in a better appreciation of the environment's aesthetic features: "When we face something unfamiliar, we pay special attention to it. We observe the thing, we try to categorize it, we may think as to what to do with the object, whether it is of any use for us or not. We are also particularly attentive to its aesthetic potentiality" (Haapala, 2005, p.

44). Strangeness involves the adoption of what Haapala terms the "outsider's gaze", an attitude that—owing to a lack of practical interests—makes us sensitive to details and features we ignore in our familiar environment.[8]

3.2. The Search for Authenticity in the Everyday

As seen, an important reason why people practice cultural tourism is tourists' attempt to derive aesthetic pleasures from experiencing everyday situations in the selected destination. But how should this attempt be characterized? Looking more closely at tourists' habits and aims, it seems that not only do tourists want to live pleasant experiences. They also expect these experiences to lack those qualities explicitly intended for tourist satisfaction. As remarked by Cain Todd (2013, p. 72), cultural tourism is motivated by a desire to experience people and places "more or less unaffected by the various influences that govern the tourist's everyday reality". This corresponds to what he calls the 'un-touristed'.[9] Thus, on the one hand, tourists strive to find themselves immersed in that special place they have only seen in movies or in the glossy pages of travel magazines. On the other hand, what they perceive as most important is that this experience be a *firsthand* experience. They aim to be

---

8 The need to crystallize the experience by means of pictures and videos attests the role of tourists as aesthetic beholders: "People linger over [the tourist gaze] which is then normally visually objectified or captured through photographs, postcards, films, models and so on. These enable the gaze to be endlessly reproduced and recaptured" (Urry, 2002, p. 3).

9 An evidence of this is that part of what it means to be a tourist is to dislike tourists based on degree of "touristness" of the place visited, the attitude adopted, the look exhibited (Culler, 1981).

present in, interact with, feel connected to and grasp the 'true essence' of the visited place.

The being real and unspoiled of a place represents indeed a crucial value when it comes to assess a touristic experience (Kirillova and Lehto, 2015, p. 12). Interestingly for the sake of our study, the search for the un-touristed gives rise to a particular fascination with the 'lives of others'. Tourists desire to share in the 'real life' of the places visited, even to get in with the natives or at least to see how life "as it really is lived" (MacCannell, 1999, p. 94) is reflected in the appearance of those places. They long for insights in the intimate backstage everyday of the locals: "Being 'one of them', or at one with 'them' (*ibid.*). Such an interest is not limited to contemporary people and cultures but rather spans time, crosses social classes, and embraces the routine of distant eras. Tourists are often fuelled by a wish to travel back in time (Taylor, 1994; MacCannell, 2001; Larsen, 2008) towards idyllic townscapes, where time moves slowly if at all (Waitt and Head, 2002). Ordinary life becomes therefore the object of an aesthetic endeavor that can be accomplished only as long as routines, habits, and daily activities present themselves as genuine and indifferent to the curious gaze of the tourist. In short, tourism, as a social practice, amounts to a quest for *authenticity* (Boorstin, 1961; Cohen, 1972, 1979; MacCannell, 1973; Rojek, 1995; Ritzer, 1998; Wang, 1999; Urry, 2002; Reisinger and Steiner, 2006).

While it seems relatively easy to understand if an object such as a painting is authentic based on some undisputed data or historical

evidence, the meaning of authenticity is much blurrier when cultural items such as rituals, festivals, cuisine, housing, traditions and other social habits are concerned. However, in Jonathan Culler's words (1981, p. 5) "The distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic, the natural and the touristy, is a powerful semiotic operator within tourism". In tourism advertising, for example, not only are we confronted with the classical motifs of 'the *typical* medieval house', 'the *very* place where Napoleon slept', but also with common refrains about locations that are 'off the beaten track', 'off the tourist circuit', 'unspoiled', 'patronized by the locals'.

Stressing the relevance of the notion of authenticity in the tourism discourse, MacCannell (1999, p. 49), for example, has gone so far as to define tourism "a modern version of the universal human concern with the sacred". The tourist, he argues, is a kind of contemporary pilgrim, seeking authenticity in other 'times' and other 'places' (MacCannell 1999, pp. 42–48. See also Turner and Turner, 1978). Like ancient pilgrims, tourists are led in their quest by the search of *signs* of authenticity, genuineness, and unspoiledness. As a place is 'reified', the tourist's gaze searches for a label that makes an element stand out and renders it worthy of observation and reproduction (Cortese & De Nicolai, 2019, p. 173). Tour organizers also use signs and markers of authenticity—souvenirs, postcards, statues, pictures—to influence how tourists think and feel with respect to the visited places (MacCannell, 1999, p. 110).[10] Markers

---

10 The notion of 'marker' stands for any kind of sign (signboards, touristic signals,

of authenticity provide the frame for what is worth gazing upon, so that authenticity ends up consisting in what *appears* or *looks* authentic (Culler, 1981, p. 5). As happens paradigmatically in the case of the aesthetic gaze, the interest is visual, concerned with appearances as "signs of themselves" (Scruton, 2007, p. 36).

This has led some to conclude that tourists' interest in authenticity may in fact be contradictory (Handler and Linnekin, 1984; Spooner, 1986; Cohen, 1988; Bruner, 1989, 1994; Wood, 1993; Taylor, 2001). Whatever it is that the tourist is going to see, it is no longer 'authentic' just because the tourists are there (Turner, 1994). In Culler's words:

> The paradox, the dilemma of authenticity, is that to be experienced as authentic it must be marked as authentic, but when it is marked as authentic it is mediated, a sign of itself, and hence lacks the authenticity of what is truly unspoiled, untouched by mediating cultural codes [...] The authentic sight requires markers, but our notion of the authentic is the unmarked. (Culler, 1981, p. 8)

Authenticity in tourism is thus 'staged' (MacCannell, 1973) or 'pretended', inasmuch as the toured object is designed and set up to be recognized and labeled as genuine or real.

---

pamphlets) that constitutes a touristic attraction by giving information about it, representing it, making it recognizable. We can adopt the expression 'symbolic authenticity' (Culler, 1981) to refer to tourists' willingness to perceive toured objects as being *symbols* of authenticity, and not originals or real in themselves.

4. Tourism and Everyday Aesthetics

There is, however, a further and more structural contradiction undermining cultural tourism, one that does not simply call into question the way tourism is organized and marketed as a social and economic practice, but one that also challenges its value as an aesthetic practice. Cultural tourism can indeed be conceived of as a paradigm of the aesthetic interest for the ordinary, which is spotlighted, framed, and enjoyed for the sake of its specific appearances. In this sense, tourism's internal contradiction may turn out to have implications for the broader philosophical debate in everyday aesthetics.

4.1 The Aesthetic Paradox of Tourism

The tension originates from the two distinct yet intertwined drives that animate cultural tourism. On the one hand, tourists aim to draw aesthetic pleasure from observing how daily life and its routines enroll in the selected tourist destination. Importantly, they do so via the adoption of what we have called the 'tourist gaze', a special kind of aesthetic gaze that leads the subject to a process of aesthetic detachment, estrangement or defamiliarization from what she observes. On the other hand, tourists also show to have an interest that what they see be unspoiled, unaltered, untouristised. For this purpose, they direct their attention towards visible signs that can attest its authenticity.

Although being equally relevant to the tourist experience, these

two drives are mutually in conflict. When tourists gaze aesthetically upon someone else's everyday life, they look for contexts and practices that are not conceived to be gazed upon but are lived in or performed by the locals for functional purposes. What are just practicalities for the inhabitants of Paris, are contemplated by tourists with an aesthetic eye that heightens the "aesthetic potential" of the experience (Haapala, 2005, pp. 43–44).

Here comes the paradox, though, since it is unclear whether one can attain the authentic nature of activities that are not intrinsically aesthetic by adopting and keeping an aesthetic attitude. Observing the everydayness of a place via the tourist gaze means to detach oneself from it, but this precludes the immersive process that allows one to grasp the place's authentic (everyday) nature—which again is not aesthetic but rather primarily oriented towards the satisfaction of practical and functional needs. This creates a friction, for it seems that in the very moment in which everydayness becomes the object of the tourist's appreciation, either the ordinariness of the experience gets lost, or its aesthetic potential. Since tourists cannot escape their tourist gaze (Todd, 2013, p. 72), they find themselves in the paradoxical situation of wanting what by definition they cannot have, exactly because they are tourists, i.e., grasping the authentic nature of the ordinary while appreciating it aesthetically.

These considerations allow us to shed light on the Paris Syndrome, by which we began our study. Clearly, the syndrome depends at least in part on the gap between tourists' preemptive

expectations and the reality of the place they are visiting.[11] But more radically, common occurrence of a sense of dissatisfaction or discomfort in tourists can be explained by reference to the tension arising between the two opposing and self-defeating demands that drive cultural tourism. Like the anthropologist (Malinowski, 1922), the tourist is trapped into a paradoxical situation. Either she manages to have an aesthetic appreciation of what she experiences—at the expense of grasping its authenticity—or, to grasp authenticity, she fails in her attempt to have an aesthetic appreciation of it. Consequently, unpleasant feelings of deception, betrayal or disappointment may follow.

4.2 Implications for Everyday Aesthetics

The paradox of tourism stems thus from a combination between a notion of tourist gaze that entails some form of disinterested aesthetic detachment, and the need to appreciate authentic features of a place's ordinary routine. To this extent, it seems to share the same premises of what has been called the 'dilemma of everyday aesthetics'. This gives us ground to exploit cultural tourism as a sort of test-bench to prove the validity of the strategies that have been proposed to solve the dilemma.

　　To recall, the first strategy, as proposed by author such as

---

11 As Urry notes, touristic destinations are chosen "because there is anticipation, especially through daydreaming and fantasy, of intense pleasures […]. Such anticipation is constructed and sustained through a variety of non-tourist practices, such as film, TV, literature, magazines, records and videos, which construct and reinforce that gaze" (Urry, 2002, p. 3).

Leddy (2012) and Naukkarinen (2012) resorts to so-called defamiliarization as what allows one to have an aesthetic appreciation of the ordinary. Processes of distancing and "casting an aura", that are meant to make us appreciate what we overlook as humdrum routine, are in place in cultural tourism. As the tourist turns sipping a *café noisette* on a *boulevard* into an aesthetic phenomenon, so the everyday appreciator "manipulates" a quotidian activity, e.g., vacuum cleaning, in order to make it the object of aesthetic appreciation. These processes of aestheticization, however, are at the origin of the paradox. As a matter of fact, activities such as having breakfast and vacuum cleaning owe their nature to their being functional to the aims of survival, hygiene and, more generally, wellbeing. Although pursuing these aims can bring about pleasures of various kinds, aesthetic pleasure is not what identifies them in the first place. What makes these things what they are, is that they are not devised for aesthetic appreciation. This explains why their aestheticization leads to a betrayal of their authentic nature. Arguably, the potential frustration that the tourist thereby faces mirrors the failure of this strategy to overcome the dilemma of everyday aesthetics. When the ordinary is gazed through an aesthetic filter, it lends itself to aesthetic appreciation only as long as its inherent ordinariness fades into the background.

In contrast with this attempt to make the ordinary extraordinary, the alternative strategy requires that one tries and appreciates the ordinary as such, instead of putting an aesthetic frame on it. On this

second account, all those perceivable qualities of everyday life that are part of our experience can count as aesthetic properties. Not only beauty and sublimity, but also functionality, comfort, safety, and familiarity (Haapala, 2005; Carlson, 2014); not only traditionally positive, 'honorific' values, but also negative qualities such as dreariness, tediousness or monotony may be considered aesthetically significant (Saito, 2007, pp. 26—27). All what is needed to grasp their aesthetic potential is that one devotes specific attention to them. Attentiveness is indeed what discloses the potential aesthetic value of things: the prerequisite of any kind of aesthetic experience (Saito, 2007, p. 56). Aesthetically appreciating the ordinary qua ordinary amounts thus to adopting an attentive, mindful attitude towards one's surroundings—be it perceptual (Saito, 2007), affective (Haapala, 2005) or cognitive (Carlson, 2014)—so as to seize what is aesthetically valuable in there without distorting their everyday nature.

Applied to the case-study of cultural tourism, this strategy implies that the tourist gaze be reconfigured as a mindful relation to the toured place or cultural habit, rather than a form of aesthetic detachment. Interestingly, this goes in the direction of softening the exceptionality of the tourist gaze compared to the look we devote to our everyday routine. If the tourist gaze is reduced to a conscious attitude towards what one encounters, and if such conscious attitude can be directed towards one's own everyday life, then being a tourist might not be radically different from being able to appreciate one's

own familiar environment. As Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert (2011, pp. 407–408) writes: "Multiple layers of 'gazes', which can be used both at home and away, might be in effect at any time".[12]

Reshaping her own tourist gaze, the visitor is offered an opportunity to grasp and enjoy a wide variety of aspects of the visited resorts, including those that are often hidden by standard marketing advertisement. A more conscious attitude gives tourists a chance to appreciate every aspect of the visited place's quotidian life in a way that is ideally as close as possible to that of the locals. Similarly to what they may achieve 'at home' by disengaging "the autopilot" of the everyday (Saito, 2017, p. 24), tourists may therefore become more receptive to anything the place and its inhabitants may show them. Thus, unlike strategies based on defamiliarization—which keep on reproducing the paradox of tourism—this second account can offer us a therapeutic prescription to reduce tourism's disappointing effects such as the Paris Syndrome.

Promising as it seems to be in increasing people's wellbeing while travelling, however, this approach turns out to be more like a loophole than a real solution for the paradox of tourism. Indeed, the strategy works because it makes no difference between the various

---

12 Challenging Urry's opposition between the ordinariness of everyday life and the extraordinariness of tourism, many recent studies have pointed out that this sharp dichotomy has been artificially construed for research purposes, but it proves to be unfaithful to the reality of contemporary tourism (Uriely, 2005; Bærenholdt et al., 2007; Stylianou-Lambert, 2011). An attenuation of the distinction between the way we look at our daily lives and the way we explore touristic destinations is also advocated by Alain de Botton, who urges the extension of a curious gaze to our everyday, familiar surroundings (de Botton 2002, p. 243).

objects to which one's attention is directed, on the premise that all objects, places, activities, and context can be equally worthy of attention. The underpinning idea is that the difference between one's experience as a tourist and one's experience at home can be minimized to a point where it becomes irrelevant to distinguish between being an outsider and being a local. In this sense, if adopting mindfulness weakens the power of the paradox, it is just because it undermines the notion of tourist altogether.

This has implications for the dilemma of everyday aesthetics. For sure, mindfulness allows us, both as tourists and in our everyday life routines, to become more sensitive to previously neglected aspects of our everydayness. When home, it may equip us to better appreciate our own familiar milieu and to enjoy the practicalities of our everyday life. As tourists, it may lead us to immerse ourselves into the quotidianity of the visited place, thus satisfying our 'quest for authenticity'. What remains unexplained, though, is why the value of these mindful experiences of the ordinary as such— positive as they may be for our overall wellbeing—should be regarded as *aesthetic* in a proper sense of the term. Indeed, although adopting a more attentive attitude towards quotidian life can be satisfactory in many possible ways, it must be specified how these ways should be regarded as aesthetic in the first place. To what extent can the outcome of our attention count as an aesthetic experience? And what ensures that once we have placed the humdrum aspects of everyday life "within the reach of our attention radar" (Saito, 2017, p. 24), they

will appear significant to us from a specific aesthetic point of view and not, as it may be the case, from a different cognitive, epistemological, social, biological, perspective?

While in the case of cultural tourism this second strategy works by blurring the difference between the tourist and the inhabitant, the outsider and the local, thus undermining the notion of tourism from within, when it comes to the issue of everyday aesthetics, it blends together different values, interests and pleasures, and reduces them all to an undefined notion of aesthetic appreciation. Therefore, although it perhaps puts us in a better position to appreciate the ordinary as such, it does so at the expense of making the aesthetic a fuzzy concept.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we argued that cultural tourism, considered as an aesthetic practice, is intrinsically paradoxical. Though motivated by the fulfilment of aesthetic expectations through the aesthetic detachment that characterizes the 'tourist gaze', cultural tourism is also driven by a quest for authenticity via the immersion in the everyday routines of the visited places. These two desiderata, however, prove to be mutually irreconcilable. As the extreme case of the Paris Syndrome attests, this tension can generate more or less profound forms of disappointment. Treated as a paradigmatic case of aesthetic appreciation of the ordinary, cultural tourism provides a powerful tool for illuminating what has been acknowledged as the

dilemma of everyday aesthetics. Whereas strategies that rely on defamiliarization fall prey of the dilemma anew, those that stress the aesthetic value of the ordinary 'as such' manage to reduce the risk of disappointment. Nonetheless, by minimizing the distinction between the tourist and the local, these latter approaches work round the paradox instead of solving it, leaving us with a residual notion of what is 'aesthetic'. Viewed through the lens of cultural tourism, neither the first nor the second kind of strategies can resolve the dilemma of everyday aesthetics. The aesthetics of the everyday may appear therefore like a promise that can hardly be kept: having an aesthetic appreciation of the ordinary while grasping its authentic, ordinary nature.

References

Bærenholdt, Jørgen Ole, Haldrup, Michael, Larsen, Jonas, and Urry, John (2007), *Performing tourist places*. Hants, Burlington: Ashgate.

Boorstin, Daniel J. (1961), The *Image: A Guide to Pseudo–Events in America,* New York: Vintage Books.

Brady, Emily, Brook, Isis, and Prior, Jonathan (Eds.) (2018), *Between Nature and Culture: The Aesthetics of Modified Environments*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Bruner, Edward (1989), 'Tourism, Creativity and Authenticity.' *Studies in Symbolic Interaction,* 10, pp. 109–114.

— (1994), 'Abraham Lincoln as Authentic Reproduction: A Critique of

Postmodernism.' *American Anthropologist,* 96, pp. 397–415.

Carlson, Allen (1997), 'On the Aesthetic Appreciation of Japanese Gardens.' *British Journal of Aesthetics,* 37(1), pp. 47–56.

— (2000), *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture.* London: Routledge.

— (2014), 'The Dilemma of Everyday Aesthetics', in *Aesthetics of Everyday Life: East and West*, edited by L. Yuedi and C.L. Carter, pp. 48–64. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Cortese Damiano and Denicolai, Lorenzo (2019), 'Fake Tourism e Immagini. Un'ipotesi di racconto visuale (e ideale) dell'esperienza turistica.' *CoSMo Comparative Studies in Modernism*, 15, pp. 169–184.

Cohen, Erik (1972), 'Towards a Sociology of International Tourism.' *Social Research,* 39(1), pp. 164–182.

— (1979), 'A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences.' *Sociology*, 13(2), pp. 179–201.

— (1988), 'Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism.' *Annals of Tourism Research* 15, pp. 371–386.

Culler, Jonathan (1981), 'Semiotics of Tourism', *American Journal of Semiotics I*, pp. 127–40.

De Botton, Alain (2004), *The Art of Travel.* New York: Vintage Books.

Dewey, John [1934](1958), *Art as Experience.* New York: Capricorn Press.

Diaconu, Mădălina (2013), 'Longing for Clouds: Does Beautiful

Weather Have To Be Fine?', *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 15.

Di Stefano, Elisabetta (2018), *Che cos'è l'estetica quotidiana*. Carocci: Roma.

Dissanayake, Ellen (2001), 'Becoming Homo Aestheticus: Sources of Aesthetic Imagination in Mother-Infant Interactions.' *Substance,* 30(1/2), pp. 85–103.

Dowling, Christopher (2010), 'The Aesthetics of Daily Life', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 50(3), pp. 225–242.

Fennell, David A. (2006), *Tourism ethics.* Toronto, ON: Channel View Publications.

Forsey, Jane (2013), *The Aesthetics of Design*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

— (2014), 'The Promise, the Challenge, of Everyday Aesthetics.' *Aisthesis*, 7(1), pp. 5–21.

Franklin, Adrian (2018), *Art tourism: A new field for tourist studies,* Tourist Studies, 18(4), pp. 399–416.

Gumbrecht, Hans U. (2006), 'Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Worlds: Reclaiming an Unredeemed Utopian Motif.' *New Literary History*, 37, pp. 299–318.

Haapala, Arto (2005), 'On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place,' in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, edited by Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith, pp. 39–55. New York: Columbia University Press.

Handler, Richard and Linnekin Jocelyn (1984), 'Tradition, Genuine or Spurious.' *Journal of American Folklore,* 97, pp. 273–290.

Harrison, Rodney (2013), *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, New York, Routledge

Heinich, Nathalie and Shapiro, Roberta (2014), *De l'artification. Enquêtes sur le passage à l'art.* Paris: EHESS.

Highmore, Ben (2004), 'Homework: Routine, social aesthetics and the ambiguity of everyday life.' *Cultural Studies,* 18(2–3), pp. 306–327.

Howard, Christopher A. (2016), *Mobile Lifeworlds: An Ethnography of Tourism and Pilgrimage in the Himalayas.* New York: Routledge.

Hughes, Howard L. (1996), 'Redefining Cultural Tourism,' *Annals of Tourism Research,* 23(3), pp. 707–709.

— (2002), 'Culture and Tourism: A Framework for Further Analysis.' *Managing Leisure* 7, pp. 164–75.

Kirillova, Ksenia, Fu, Xiaoxiao, Lehto, Xinran, and Cai, Liping (2014), 'What makes a destination beautiful? Dimensions of tourist aesthetic judgment.' *Tourism Management*, 42, pp. 282–293.

Kirillova, Ksenia and Lehto, Xinran (2015), 'Destination Aesthetics and Aesthetic Distance in Tourism Experience.' *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing,* 32(8), pp. 1051–1068

Iannilli, Gioia L. (2017), 'How Can Everyday Aesthetics Meet Fashion?,' *Studi di estetica,* 7, pp. 229–246.

Irvin, Sherri (2008), 'Scratching an Itch.' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 66(1), pp. 25–35.

Larsen, Jonas (2008), 'De-exoticizing tourist travel: everyday life and

sociality on the move.' *Leisure Studies*, 27, pp. 21–34.

Leddy, Thomas (1995), 'A defense of arts-based appreciation of nature.' *Environmental Ethics*, 27 (3), pp. 299–315.

— (2005), 'The Nature of Everyday Aesthetics,' in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, edited by Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith, pp. 3–22. New York: Columbia University Press.

— (2012), *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*. Broadview Press.

Levanto, Yrjänä, Naukkarinen, Ossi, and Vihma, Susann (Eds.) (2005), *Taiteistuminen.* Helsinki: Taideteollinen korkeakoulu.

Light, Andrew and Smith, Jonathan M., (Eds.) (2005), *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Maitland, Robert and Smith, Andrew (2009), 'Tourism and the Aesthetics of the Built Environment,' in *Philosophical Issues in Tourism*, edited by John Tribe, pp. 171–190. London: Channel View Press.

MacCannell, Dean (1973), 'Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings.' *American Journal of Sociology,* 79, pp. 589–603.

— (1999), *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. University of California Press.

— (2001), 'Tourist agency.' *Tourism Studies*, 1, pp. 23–38.

Matteucci, Giovanni (2017), 'Everyday Aesthetics and Aestheticization: Reflectivity in Perception.' *Studi di Estetica*, 1, pp. 207–227.

Melchionne. Kevin (2013), 'The Definition of Everyday Aesthetics.' *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 11.

Malinowski, Bronisław (1922), *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul LTD.

Naukkarinen, Ossi (2012), 'Variations in Artification.' *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 4.

Norman, Donald (2004), *Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things.* New York: Basic Books.

Parsons, Glenn (2016), *The Philosophy of Design.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Parsons, Glenn and Carlson, Allen (2008), *Functional Beauty.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Reisinger, Yvette and Steiner, Carole J. (2006), 'Reconceptualizing object authenticity.' *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33(1), pp. 65–86.

Richards, Greg (2013), 'Cultural Tourism.' in Blackshaw, T. (Ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Leisure Studies.* pp. 483–492. London: Routledge

Ritzer, George (1998), *The McDonaldization Thesis: Explorations and Extensions.* New York: SAGE.

Rojek, Chris (1995), *Decentring Leisure: Rethinking Leisure Theory.* New York: SAGE.

Ross, Stephanie (1998), *What Gardens Mean.* Chicago: University of

Chicago Press.

Saito, Yuriko (2007), *Everyday Aesthetics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

— (2017), *Aesthetics of the Familiar*. New York: Oxford University Press.

— (2019), 'Aesthetics of the Everyday,' *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL=<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/aesthetics-of-everyday/>.

Salazar, Noel B. (2014), 'Tourism Imaginaries: A Conceptual Approach.' *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(2), pp. 863–882.

Schor, Juliet B. (2002), 'Cleaning the Closet: Toward a New Fashion Ethic,' in *Sustainable Planet: Solutions for the Twenty-first Century*, edited by Juliet B. Schor and Betsy Taylor, pp. 45–60. Boston: Beacon Press.

Scruton, Roger (2007), *Modern Culture*. Bloomsbury.

Sharpley, Richard (2018), *Tourism, Tourists and Society*. Taylor & Francis.

Shove, Elizabeth, Watson, Matthew, Hand, Martin and Ingram, Jack (2007), *The Design of Everyday Life*. Oxford: Berg.

Spooner, Brian (1986), 'Weavers and Dealers: The Authenticity of an Oriental Carpet,' in *The Social Life of Things*, edited by Arjun Appadurai, pp. 195–235. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stecker, Robert (1999), 'Reflections on Architecture: Buildings as

Artworks, Aesthetic Objects, and Artificial Environments,' in *Architecture and Civilization*, edited by Michael H. Mitias, pp. 81–94. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Stylianou-Lambert, Theopisti (2011), 'Gazing from Home: Cultural Tourism and Art Museums.' *Annals of Tourism Research,* 38(2), pp. 403–21.

Svabo, Connie and Ekelund, Kathrine (2015), 'Environmental Aesthetics: Notes for Design Ecology.' *Nordes 2015: Design Ecologies*, 6, pp. 1–9.

Taylor, John (1994), *A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourist's Imagination.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

— (2001), 'Authenticity and Sincerity in Tourism.' *Annals of Tourism Research,* 28, pp. 17–26.

Todd, Cain (2009), 'Nature, Beauty and Tourism,' in *Philosophical Issues in Tourism*, edited by John Tribe, pp. 154–70. London: Channel View Press.

— (2012), 'The Importance of the Aesthetic,' in *Routledge Handbook of Tourism and the Environment*, edited by Andrew Holden and David A. Fennell, pp. 65-74. New York: Routledge.

Tribe, John (2008), 'The Art of Tourism.' *Annals of Tourism Research*, 35(4), pp. 924–944.

— (Ed.) (2009), *Philosophical Issues in Tourism*. London: Channel View Press.

Tuan, Yi-Fu (1993), *Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics,*

Nature, and Culture, Washington, D. C.: Island Press.

Turner, Victor and Turner Edith (1978), *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Uriely, Natan (2005), 'The tourist experience. Conceptual developments.' *Annals of Tourism Research*, 32(1), pp. 199–216.

Urry, John [1990](2002), *The Tourist Gaze*. London: SAGE.

van Etteger, Rudi, Thompson, Ian H., and Vicenzotti, Vera (2016), 'Aesthetic Creation Theory and Landscape Architecture.' *Journal of Landscape Architecture*, 11, pp. 80–89.

Viala, Annie, Ota, Hiroaki , Vacheron, Marie-Noëlle, Martin, Pascal, and Caroli, François. (2004), 'Les japonais en voyage pathologique à Paris: un modèle original de prise en charge transculturelle,' in *Nervure de journal Psychiatrie*, 5, pp. 31–34.

Waitt, Gordon and Head, Lesley (2002) 'Postcards and frontier mythologies: sustaining views of the Kimberley as timeless.' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 20, pp. 319–44.

Wang, Ning (1999), 'Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience.' *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(2), pp. 349–370.

Wood, Robert (1993), 'Tourism, Culture and the Sociology of Development,' in *Tourism in Southeast Asia*, edited by Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King & Michael Parnwell, pp. 48–70. London: Routledge.

A Reflection on the Criteria for Identifying Design

Monika Favara-Kurkowski[1]

University of Warsaw

ABSTRACT. This paper aims to broaden the account of the aesthetic experience of design objects proposed by Jane Forsey (2013) by leveraging such objects' technological origin. Forsey's theory focuses on the conditions by which it is possible to aesthetically evaluate a design object as beautiful compared to other objects that perform the same function. The present account questions if Forsey's proposal is genuinely a theory of beauty *particular to design*, or if it is a theory of beauty of craft that adapts to design. To pose this question is to highlight the industrial origin as a valuable factor in design's aesthetic experience. This factor is usually considered in negative terms due to its immediate connection to mass consumption. Mass production is taken to emphasize a flat aestheticization and the standardization of consumers due to its depersonalizing effect. This type of explanation implies a hierarchy where the aesthetic experience of crafted objects is richer than the experience of mechanically produced artifacts. In this article, I suggest that the privileged position of the aesthetics of design allows to seek the positive aspects of the aesthetic experience of technological means.

1. Introduction

Jane Forsey (2013) proposes the sphere of design objects as a valid

---

1 Email: m.favara@uw.edu.pl

category for an analysis that brings out everyday life's aesthetic dimension. Her proposal fits in the developing trend that consists of going beyond traditional aesthetics understood as the Philosophy of Art, i.e., Everyday Aesthetics (EA), a theoretical paradigm that overflows into everyday life. However, it should be specified that Forsey places herself among EA scholars who do not deem it necessary to venture into new philosophical conceptualization to establish what is aesthetic in the everyday. Such an approach holds on to the philosophical tradition as a fertile ground that allows us to turn to the aesthetic dimension of the daily round of activities and its objects (expansive approach).[2] For this reason, Forsey finds no obstacles in expanding the Kantian theory of beauty to a new category of objects: objects of design.

2. Intuitively identifying Design

In her book *The Aesthetics of Design* (2013), Forsey examines with particular attention what we intuitively understand as "design" against the backdrop of definitions of art and craft in circulation. After the analysis, Forsey proposes the following working definition: "Design […] is functional, immanent, mass-produced, and mute" (Forsey, 2013, p.68). This definition suggests that the scope of her aesthetics of design is "an *object*" (Forsey, 2013, p.19) rather than the design process behind it. Moreover, this object differs from what we commonly understand as art and crafts for the four features listed

---

2 Among others, Thomas Leddy and Sherry Irvin.

above. First of all, a design object must fulfill a function; it must be a functional object. Secondly, this object must be something we encounter in everyday life, such as a pen, a coffee cup, or a toothbrush; it is a kind of object that does not encompass "the transcendent or the profound" (Forsey, 2013, p.17), so it is immanent. So far, these characteristics could also refer to the ceramic cup we bought in an artisan workshop; therefore, Forsey urges to specify that a design object is also a mass product: "Design is an emergent twentieth-century phenomenon that depends on the means of mass production in a way that art and craft do not." (Forsey, 2013, p.23) Finally, design objects are not designed to convey content that the end-user must interpret as he would do in front of a Duchamp. In everyday life, a urinal is a urinal; it is mute.

Being functional, immanent, mass-produced, and mute, in other words, very *ordinary*, how dare we call design beautiful? Jane Forsey does not feel uncomfortable describing the experience of design's beauty with "the somewhat emphatic conceptual language inherited from the philosophy of the past." (Vattimo, 1998, p.67)

3. The Beauty of Design

Jane Forsey proposes an aesthetics of design based on the appraisal of the object because of "the perfection in the way it fulfills its purpose" (Forsey, 2013, p.162) in connection to the Kantian notion of "dependent beauty" (*pulchritudo adhearens*).

This notion is the starting point supporting the expansive approach in EA and for a general renewal of Kantian aesthetics. In fact, in addition to establishing a debate with everyday aestheticians, Forsey's proposal enters into dialogue with the long tradition that has tried to update the Kantian notion of beauty beyond its limitations linked to eighteenth-century taste. The main argument in this direction is that the notion of dependent beauty, and the judgment related to it, is the most pervasive in everyday life. Still, traditional aesthetics has been mainly concerned with the Kantian notion of *free* beauty.[3] Free beauty, says Forsey, is an exceptional event on which Kant has invested a good part of the *Third Critique* precisely because of its rarity. In contrast, the more common dependent beauty represents the norm. Given the ubiquity of design, Forsey can say that "design exemplifies the way that anything at all can be experienced aesthetically, [and] that these experiences can be more common and intimate than those of art." (Forsey, 2013, p.246)

I am not going to develop this issue in detail. Still, it is worth explaining Kant's distinction between free beauty and dependent beauty briefly, as presented in the *Critique of Judgement*:[4]

---

3 Famous is the attack by Hans Georg Gadamer, who identified the playful element of art "as a self-movement that does not pursue any particular end or purpose," thus excluding from the horizon of beauty "the secondary forms of the decorative arts and crafts." (Vitta, 2011:27; Ref. Gadamer, 1986:23)

4 All quotations from Kant follow the English translations by Werner S. Pluhar in 1987 Hackett edition (see bibliography).

> There are two kinds of beauty, free beauty (*pulchritudo vaga*) and merely accessory beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*). Free beauty does not presuppose a concept of what the object is [meant] to be. Accessory beauty does presuppose such a concept, as well as the object's perfection in terms of that concept. The free kinds of beauty are called (self-subsistent) beauties of this or that thing. The other kind of beauty is accessory to a concept (i.e., it is conditioned beauty) and as such is attributed to objects that fall under the concept of a particular purpose. (Kant, 1987:77)

Real flowers, but also decorative wallpapers and music without topic are for Kant objects that we judge independently from their purposes since they "mean nothing on their own." (Kant, 1987, p.77) Buildings and horses (today we would probably say "cars") are evaluated aesthetically dependent on "the concept of the purpose that determines what the thing is [meant] to be" (Kant, 1987, p.77); that is, its functionality. Forsey, following Kant, claims that we can aesthetically appreciate a specific chair because it performs excellently compared to other chairs we have sat on. She claims that "its beauty comes to light only through everyday use, and only when it succeeds in performing its function to a degree that merits our approbation" (Forsey, 2013, p.242) and "this appreciation is the kind of aesthetic judgment that is *particular to design*. Design excellence is extraordinary in the sense that some objects are better than the norm." (Forsey, 2013, p.241; emphasis added)

Moreover, dependent beauty presupposes adherence to the concept of what the object must be (e.g. "mug," "chair," "telephone," "bathtub"), and the perfection of the object concerning this concept. Forsey is explicit about the fact that

> [d]esigns […] have specific purposes devised by their creators, and if we are to judge them dependently beautiful […], we must know what these purposes are and whether they fulfill them reasonably well, or perfectly. […] if we are presented with an object whose function we cannot determine, we can only, at best, find it freely beautiful if at all. (Forsey, 2013, p.171)

One doubt arises. Formulated in this way, could not the appraisal be equally addressed to an object of craftsmanship? How can Forsey declare that this judgment is *particular to design* objects?

4. Rich experience of craft and deficient experience of design

In the space of this section, it is worth quoting a more extended passage from *The Aesthetics of Design,* where the Canadian philosopher distinguishes between an aesthetic judgment of craft objects and an aesthetic judgment of designs:

> […] the free play of the faculties when faced with a work of craft will consider the contingency of the way that object fulfills its function *by means of* the individual skill at creating it from a

> given raw material. With judgements of design, we do not attend to this aspect of the object: we feel no individual hand at work when we appraise a laptop computer or a car, and we do not judge it according to how a single individual has manipulated some raw material to produce it. (Forsey, 2013, p.180)

Our appreciation of design lacks regard for the craftsman's manual skills since a machine produced the object.

Two issues might be raised here.

(1) Is our feeling, thus described, justified? If something looks handmade, it does not necessarily mean it is. As a matter of fact, advanced technologies can replicate a "manual" touch on products. Typical is the case of ceramics. The ceramic glazing process, even if applied industrially, results as unique and different for each product. Moreover, ceramic products that are manually glazed and decorated are often the result of industrial molds. I will not elaborate on this aspect here, but I hope the next section will render it more explicit.

(2) The aesthetic judgment thus formulated by Forsey is none other than a theory of beauty of craft, which adapts to design by removing the acknowledgment of "the individual (hand) behind that object's manufacture." (Forsey, 2013, p.180) In this sense, we have a proposal of a theory of taste for design in negative terms. Therefore,

this consideration would suffice to exclude the possibility of considering Forsey's proposal as properly relating to design.

What could be a formulation that indeed does justice to the design object? Can this feeling of "no individual hand at work" be seen in favorable terms? Does recognizing that an object is mechanically produced have a positive effect on its appraisal? Even Forsey herself acknowledges that "Design is an emergent twentieth-century phenomenon that depends on the means of mass production in a way that art and craft do not." (Forsey, 2013, p.23) Is it possible that all her enthusiasm for design pales in the face of the im*personal* nature of its creation? Isn't it perhaps the beauty of unspoiled nature that teaches us that the display of human skills is not always to be appraised?

5. Positivity in industrial production?

The philosophical tradition that has seen in technological development a reason for decreeing a crisis of cultural values, often in negative terms, is long. Those philosophers that dealt with the industrial revolution—the historical origin of design—have mainly put pressure on this crisis's negative aspects for the arts. Educated to this approach, even contemporary interpreters appoint industrial production value in terms of negative significance, mostly by identifying its products by their commodity character, which manifests bogus aesthetic traits. This perspective has led to theorize the

widespread aestheticization of contemporary society and the collapse of high art. The products of the industry—mass-produced industrial products, or, more simply, design—from the very beginning, emerged as a philistine threat to the noble purpose of the arts.

In the second phase of his thought, Walter Benjamin emphasized the implications of the new technological advancements that favored the mechanical reproducibility of images in the form of photography and cinema. According to the German philosopher, these processes have involved a change in the perception and attention to art. The well-known essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" from 1935 refers specifically to photography and cinematographic images. Still, we can read his conclusions bearing in mind also mass-produced everyday objects. An essential issue for Benjamin is the loss of art's cultual value—uniqueness and authenticity, the *hic et nunc*, which he identified with the *aura*—in favor of an exhibition value, intended for the masses. In other words, the visibility of the image (and the object) becomes more important than its existence. (Mecacci, 2012, p.115) When the image/object is devised to be mechanically produced, i.e., it is already re-produced at birth, the idea of its authenticity vanishes. Suppose we want to make a parallel similar to what Benjamin proposes. In that case, we can say that we have moved from handcrafted objects' auratic experience towards the distracted

experience of design objects[5], which feeds consumption—the shame of contemporary society. This is the negative idea that generally remains impressed by a superficial reading of Benjamin's text.

Another question, closely related to mechanical production and reproducibility, is the obsolescence of objects related to market laws. More specifically, obsolescence addresses the loss of performance and economic value that everyday objects suffer due to changes in fashion or technological advancements. It is precisely this language that Karl Marx uses in his lecture on the obsolescence of goods in the early twentieth century. As he mentioned in his early writings, especially in "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," this obsolescence finds its place in the dialectic between production and consumption, which generated, in the philosophical discourse, the well-known equivalence between design objects and semiotic fetishism. (Baudrillard, 1981)

Not to mention how Marx made the socio-cultural implications of industrial production public and shared in the collective imagination with the concept of alienation, which arises precisely from the factory. This awareness of the crisis of that era still conditions our approach to things produced in factories and elevates a curtain of artistic individualism around the craft workshop, with its well-aligned tools and the craftsman's hands who carefully shape the rough material.

---

5 It must be emphasized that Walter Benjamin postulates the distracted perception of the mass as the genuine experience of architectural work, and such can also be the genuine experience of other functional objects, i.e., design objects.

This image evokes John Ruskin's criticism of the industry. The often-quoted passage from *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* reads as follows: "all cast and machine work is bad, as work. [...] a piece of terra cotta or of plaster of Paris, which has been wrought by the human hand, is worth all the stone in Carrara, cut by machinery." (Ruskin, 1849, p.81,84) In other words, the elimination of any manual intervention by the designer contributed to the utmost impersonality of design—an impersonality also reflected in the standardization of form and function. All this invests, still today, the general image of design with a specific "cynical power," as a machine that produces needs for an anonymous mass.

Nevertheless, as Rafael Cardoso has noted, there is a habit of misinterpreting Ruskin's thought on design exclusively "as constituting an attack on industry and a defense of handicraft." (Cardoso, 2010, p.325). If at the dawn of industrialization, it is true that Ruskin saw machines as a threat, later, his criticism was mainly aimed at factory work as inhumane and not at mechanical production per se. Cardoso stresses that there have been several shifts in industrial paradigms throughout history whose implications are rarely considered. For example, regarding the industrial developments of the early twentieth century, Cardoso points out how public opinion towards industrial production has changed, resulting in the recognition that "industrial artifacts possess an elegance and integrity of their own, quite divorced from any considerations of the nobility of handwork. The perfection of mass-production technology signaled a

new perfectibility for industrial artifacts; and designers would henceforth play the key role in ensuring that machine work was as attractive as it was efficient and cheap." (Cardoso, 2010, p.327) For a more recent example, it should suffice considering the quality attributed in the second half of the twenty-first century to Japanese industrial production: walkman, stereos, kitchen utensils produced then still work today.

This brief listing intends to bring out a specific bias of perception towards industrial products that has not changed to date, but it is unfounded, or at least simplistic despite everything. Demonizing rhetoric has led to creating a "tired dichotomy" between craftsmanship and design, which still resonates in a common hierarchical perception of the nobility of craftsmanship and the machine product's crudeness. (Cardoso, 2010) This hierarchization depends on the fact that, as the Italian historian Renato De Fusco (1999) has pointed out, design has lacked an apparatus that would promote its culture for a long time. The design museum's phenomenon is something very recent, and, unfortunately, still mimics the exhibition strategies that pertain to art, focusing on displays suitable for contemplation rather than addressing what properly belongs to design: functionality and its technological valence. Thus, design is promoted as an appealing layer to conceal objects' industrial and commercial complexion. Yet, it is not true that the way how a design objects look is divorced from the way how they are made, we are just not acquainted with it.

If Everyday Aesthetics, in Forsey's understanding and in its systematic vocation, wants to start from design must be sensitive to the technological condition, which allows to acknowledge the plurality of taste and to counter the tendency to reduce the aesthetic discourse on design to the phenomenon of aestheticization. The latter results from approaching design from the point of view of a "commodity aesthetics" that is inherently destined to see design in its mere capitalist vocation since it does not distinguish between *means of production* and *medium of production.* The first term, as has been intended in the philosophical tradition, accentuates the question of mass production and distribution; on the contrary, reformulating the issue in terms of *the medium* requires a specific aesthetic theory to define its modes of appreciation. It will then be possible to revalue the question of the aesthetic experience of mass-produced everyday objects. This does not necessarily mean focusing on medium-specificity to feed the old debate on the ontology of art forms for which design, as an art form, needs to be interpreted as a reflection on technology.[6] The appeal I propose is only meant to underline that we appreciate, and are fascinated by, how design objects are produced.

This approach also has additional benefits. The aesthetics of design has an advantage over other aesthetics because it has privileged access to the technological question. In other words, an

---

6 This has already been done by the Futurists in Italy and the Constructivists in Russia in the early 20th century, and today it is extensively covered by the hybrid form of ArtDesign.

account for the appreciation of the outcome of advanced technological mediums might start with design.

Moreover, thus supplemented aesthetic theory of design allows to get closer to the well-established Philosophy of Design, as the design theorist Victor Margolin (2015) suggested in his review of Forsey's book.

6. Conclusion

Jane Forsey succeeds in her task of showing that the everyday must not be plundered of its aesthetic dimension. By proposing an aesthetic theory of design, justified by the ubiquity of industrially mass-produced products—design objects—, the Canadian philosopher shifts the focus of aesthetic theory away from the fine arts, especially by highlighting how functionality can give rise to a sense of aesthetic fulfillment.

Despite this, I identified in her proposal a certain sense of nostalgia for artisan traditions, which renders her philosophical project a negative aesthetic theory of design. Instead, it would be more fruitful for a positive theory of design, without diminishing the role of craftsmanship, to promote the same attention to the industrial dimension of design.

Understandably, Forsey is careful not to fall into the trope of aestheticizing technology. Nevertheless, having made it clear that the appreciation of art is not the measure for the appreciation of everything else, and that an investigation of design deserves to go

beyond the conventional forms of artistic expression, aesthetics thus understood can acknowledge a positive appreciation for industrially made products.

The problem may lay in defining (intuitively) design in terms of mass production (Forsey, 2013, p.23), which brings with it a number of issues. The adjectival modifier "mass" in "mass production" implies, not a distinction between design and craftsmanship,[7] or between design and art,[8] but mass distribution, consumerism, and distracted attention. Forsey avoids in her text the first two issues, making a compelling argument against the absolutization of distracted attention—the fading in the background of everyday objects. She claims, against Martin Heidegger's tool analysis (Heidegger, 1996), that "it is not only when they break down that [objects] come to our attention: we also notice things when they work extremely well." (Forsey, 2013, p.241) In fact, re-proposing Kant's theory and the theory of adherent beauty shows how there is a genuine intellectual pleasure even behind such objects.

Despite this, it seems more intuitive, particularly if we want to keep a distinction between the perception of handicraft objects and design objects, to deal with the *industrial* condition of such objects. Understanding design in these terms has two advantages.

Firstly, it acknowledges a distinction between the consequences of mass distribution for aesthetic perception and *how* the result of an

---

7 Mass produced objects involving textiles (sofas, shoes, and the like) are often hand-sewn.
8 See: Carroll, N. (Spring, 1997) "The Ontology of Mass Art" in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 55, No. 2, Perspectives on the Arts and Technology, pp. 187-199.

industrial medium is appreciated. The design product is a mass product as long as technology allows it. However, since technology already allows non-mass production, we cannot reduce the understanding of design to the "mass" condition.

Secondly, it supports a historical account of design, according to which the technological development of industrial production methods is decisive for granting a certain object the status of design. This becomes fundamental, especially if we want to establish a fruitful dialogue between philosophical aesthetics and the philosophy of design.

References

Baudrillard, J. ([1972] 1981) *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, St. Louis: Telos Press.

Benjamin, W. (2009) "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" [in:] *One-way street and other writings*. London New York: Penguin, pp.228-258.

Cardoso, R. ([2008] 2010) "Craft versus Design: Moving Beyond a Tired Dichotomy" [in:] Adamson, G. (Eds.) *The craft reader.* Oxford New York: Berg Publishers, pp. 321-332

Carroll, N. (Spring, 1997) "The Ontology of Mass Art" [in:] *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 55, No. 2, pp. 187-199

De Fusco, R. ([1999] 2006). "Design: de gustibus est disputandum" [in:] R. Rinaldi, F., Martini, A. & Losito, R. (Eds.) *Antologia di*

saggi sul design in quarant'anni di Op. cit. Milano: Angeli. pp. 278-284

Forsey, J. (2013) *The Aesthetics of Design*, Oxford University Press

Gadamer, H-G. (1986) *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, (N. Walker, Trans.) ed. Robert Bernasconi, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heidegger, M. (1996) *Being and time: a translation of Sein und Zeit.* (J. Stambaugh, Trans.) Albany, NY: State University of New York Press

Kant, I. (1987). *Critique of Judgment.* (W. Pluhar, Trans.) Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett Pub. Co.

Margolin, V. (March, 2015) "The Aesthetics of Design by Jane Forsey (Review)" [in:] *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 68, No. 3

Marx, K. (1970). *A contribution to the critique of political economy.* New York: International Publishers.

Mecacci, A. (2012). *Estetica e design.* Bologna: Il Mulino.

Ruskin, J. ([1849] 1903-12) "The Seven Lamps of Architecture" in Cook E. T. & Wedderburn A.(Eds.) *The Works of John Ruskin.* London: George Allen, Vol. 8

Vattimo, G. (1998). "Morte o tramonto dell'arte" [in:] *La fine della modernità.* Milano: Milano Garzanti(IS), Garzanti. pp. 59-72

Vitta, M. (2011). *Il progetto della bellezza: il design fra arte e tecnica dal 1851 a oggi.* Torino: Piccola biblioteca Einaudi.

Against the High Culture – On Leo Tolstoy's Aesthetics

Lilli Förster[1]

Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main

ABSTRACT. Leo Tolstoy, the author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*,[2] dedicated fifteen years of his life to exploring aesthetical theories and the phenomenon of art.[3] Starting with critical thoughts about modern aesthetics, Tolstoy developed his own conception of art and its role in society, some of which are presented in his work *What is art?*, first published in 1897. Unfortunately, in the English-speaking world, there was not much attention paid to Tolstoy's book.[4] What stands out in the critical literature is Tolstoy's exclusion of famous artworks from the world of art, like those of William Shakespeare and Richard Wagner. My objective in this essay will be to show that *What is art?* has much more to offer than the topic of exclusion. Tolstoy not only extended the category of things belonging to art. He also

---

1 Email: Lilli.Isabel@web.de

2 On how Tolstoy's fictional writings and his essays are connected see Šilbajoris, Rimvydas, *Tolstoy's Aesthetics and his Art*, Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 1991. Her judgement is: "Tolstoy's personal quest for moral value invariably extends to the very act of writing fiction, of breathing life into people who must then seek answers to the questions that plague their own creator. As these answers emerge, they become a kind of metalanguage about art itself and can ultimately be articulated also in theoretical terms, as Tolstoy finally did in his essay [*What is Art?*]" Ibid., p. 9.

3 Dörr, Paul: "Nachwort," in: Tolstoi, Leo, *Was ist Kunst?*, München: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, transl. in German by Michail Feofanov, 1993, p. 316.

4 See, Diffely, Terry, *Tolstoy's 'What is Art?'*, London: Croom Helm, 1985, here p. 1f.. Tolstoy's reception in Russia was clearly tainted by his works as a writer. More on this see Zurek, Magdalena, *Tolstojs Philosophie der Kunst*, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1996, p. 105. In France, the country from which most of the literature criticized by Tolstoy originated, he was declared an "old madman." Ibid., 115ff.

developed a definition of art which must include previously excluded titles into the concept. Above all, Leo Tolstoy's conception was directed against the tendencies of autonomy of the art in aesthetic theories of his time. Referring to more than 60 modern philosophers of art,[5] he pointed out significant disadvantages of beauty as fundamental in art. In order to follow his arguments comprehensibly, I will start with a short abstract about autonomous aesthetics. Then I shall move on to Tolstoy's understanding and its most important terms and concepts, including a critical perspective on Tolstoy's approach.

1. The Modern Aesthetics

Putting Tolstoy aside for a moment, it is important to recall the historical setting: the French Revolution and the Industrialisation shaped the 19th century. Especially the industrial revolution brought a lot of cheap and commercial art with it from which the high art wants to distinguish itself.[6] Owning a piece of art did not prove the membership to upper classes anymore, so the taste in choosing a work of "art" became the distinctive factor. The result was a deep gap between high and low art – and between the people who identify themselves with them. Since the raising of literacy in the 18th century,

---

5 Among them: Baumgarten, Schiller, Hegel, Lessing, Goethe, Winkelmann, Hutcheson, Burke, Diderot, Humboldt, Fichte, Schelling and Schopenhauer. It is important to point out that Tolstoy was not in general against European intellectuals, like those examples might suggest. He positioned himself against high art regardless its origin. See, Tolstoy, Leo, *What is Art?*, transl. R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky, London: Penguin Books, 1995, pp. 17–30.

6 Mounce, H. O., *Tolstoy on Aesthetics. What is Art?*, Albershot and Sydney: Ashgate, 2001, p. 14f.. Important to notice, Russia was not as far industrialised as the Western Europe in the 19th century. Most people still lived in the countryside without many options of media to spread art. Ibid., p. 16. But the Russian aristocracy lived a Western live style, often socializing in French.

the group of people being able to consume literature expanded, but the reaction of many artists and philosophers to these developments, for example Hegel and Herder, was to divide the public into ordinary people (*Volk/Nation*) and the mob (*Pöbel*) – with the second one being unable to appreciate art at all.[7]

This phenomenon of social and cultural exclusion was also pointed out by Pierre Bourdieu. The upper classes constantly try to distinguish themselves from lower classes via taste – only the well-educated understand what is good art.[8] Cultural goods go hand in hand with economic distinctions or as Mukařovský states: "It may seem that the hierarchy of aesthetic canon is directly related to the hierarchy of social strata."[9] The art operating on the basis of social exclusion is linked to the autonomy of the art.

It was Immanuel Kant who transferred the term of autonomy from its political and legal origin into philosophy. Autonomy in general is an expression of self-legislation of pure reason. In his *Critique of Judgement* Kant states that autonomy in aesthetics is defined by a disinterested pleasure. He further maintains that beauty is not defined by a priori rules. What is considered beautiful is therefore contingent. But Kant also points out that, if we are free from needs and viewing a

---

7 See Hecken, Thomas, *PoP. Geschichte eines Konzepts 1955–2009*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009, p. 17.

8 More on this see Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.

9 Mukařovský, Jan, "Aesthetic Function Among other Functions," in: John Burbank and Peter Steiner (eds.), *Structure, Sign and Function. Selected Essays by Jan Mukařovský*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1978, here p. 46. Mukařovský also noticed that the hierarchy is not only up-down (high-low), but also horizontal.

thing without interest and then consider it beautiful, we may assume that all people refer to that object as beautiful. [10]

Soon after the concept of thinking art out of itself, not as embedded in the society, gives ground for intellectuals and artists to produce art for an elite circle only. Creating *art pour l'art* became the desirable goal. The German poet Stefan George, for example, handed out his works only to close friends in order to avoid the dictate of the taste of the public. Rubén Darío, on his side, maintained that the majority of readers is simply lacking the mental elevation necessary for his art.[11] Oscar Wilde tried to establish a sharp line between everyday life and the world of art and states that: "[…] Art should never try to be popular."[12] The decadent art is another example for art excluding the mass public from its consumption. It refers to mostly French artists like Théophile Gaultier.[13] For him the aim of art is to produce beauty, not paying any attention to the audience's will or even referring to it at all.[14]

Tolstoy started reading about some modern points of view of art to find an answer to his question what art is and if it is important enough to consume so much time and labor in its creation.[15] But

---

10 Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgement*, (ed.) Nicholas Walker, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
11 Einfalt, Martin and Wolfzettel, Friedrich, "Autonomie," in: (ed.) Karlheinz Barck, *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch*, Vol. 1, Stuttgart, 2000, pp. 431–479.
12 Hecken, Thomas, op. cit., p. 24.
13 See Mounce, H. O., op. cit., pp. 40–48.
14 Ibid., p. 16.
15 Tolstoy, Leo, op. cit., p. 8. It is important to notice that Tolstoy's criticism against those Western approaches to art is deeply embedded in his overall criticism of the West and their lifestyle.

despite the fact that their definitions of art failed to answer his questions, they opened Tolstoy's eyes for the major problems coming along with *art pour l'art*.[16] Not only does this decadent approach to art divide the upper and lower classes with only 1 % of humans having access to art or are able producing it. But it also pushes the artists of the different styles of the high art fight against each other, claiming that their approach to art is the best.[17] Oddly enough, the upper classes postulate that their art is the best and only true art, judging all art from other nations or classes as poorly.[18] As we shall see, for Tolstoy, one of the main objective of art is the opposite: uniting people.

2. Tolstoy's Conception of Art

For Tolstoy the reason behind those aesthetics approaches lies not in the developments of the 18th and 19th century, but in the upper classes losing their connection to religion,[19] starting in the Renaissance. They failed to fill this lack and focussed on beauty

---

16 Interesting to mention, Tolstoy himself was at a certain point in his life quite close to the *art pour l'art,* when he planned to publish a magazine for art's purpose only, without paying attention to readers opinion, but with the aim to educate them. See Eismann, Wolfgang, *Von der Volkskunst zur proletarischen Kunst. Theorien zur Sprache der Literatur in Rußland und Sowjetunion*, München: Otto Sagner Verlag, 1986, p. 28.

17 Tolstoy, Leo, op. cit., p. 8.

18 Ibid., p. 55.

19 Important to notice to understand Tolstoy's connection to religion better: after finishing *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy found himself questioning his life and its value. This turned into a life crisis including thoughts of suicide. It was the Christian teaching, not the church that helped him finding a way to live on. In this process Tolstoy even translated the New Testament form Greek to Russian.

instead.[20]

Reading through the aesthetic theories of prominent modern authors, Tolstoy provides two definitions of beauty: the first one being objective, but mysterious, connects beauty with the absolutely perfect; the second one, being subjective, defines beauty as something pleasurable.[21] Both definitions are clearly harmful for art development.

Above all, beauty cannot be the fundament of art,[22] because it is not a clear, but subjective term and based on conventions.[23] Tolstoy also mentioned that beauty in Russian language (*красота*) refers not to, for example, music, but only to things which can be *viewed* with one's eyes.[24] Calling all sorts of art beautiful (*красивый*) is therefore not quite correct and also indicates the strongest argument against beauty as fundamental in arts: the confrontation of beauty against the good and the truth. The unity of those three – beauty, good and truth – is a mistake, because the more beautiful something is, the less good it will be. For Tolstoy, "[t]he good is the eternal, the highest aim of our life."[25] In contrast, beautiful is simply what one likes, what pleasures. In fact, pleasure is linked with lower

---

20 Ibid., p. 47f..
21 Ibid., p. 31.
22 This topic of beauty as the objective of art was picked up by Arthur Danto in the 1990s again. See Danto, Arthur, *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective*, Berkley: University of California Press, 1998.
23 See ibid. pp. 32–35 and Eismann, Wolfgang, op.cit., p. 59. Exactly this lack of a clear definition makes beauty as a basis of high art appealing. More on this see Poljakova, Ekaterina, *Differente Plausibilitäten. Kant, Nietzsche, Tolstoi und Dostojewski über Vernunft, Moral und Kunst*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013, p. 297.
24 Tolstoy, *Leo,* op. cit., 13f..
25 Ibid., p. 52.

animal instincts[26] and the good is the force preventing humans from following them.[27] Tolstoy concludes that the current aesthetic theories, grounding on beauty, are constructed to justify artworks as works of beauty, only justifying the already built canon.[28] However, other thinkers, for example, Platon, Tolstoy is not advising to abandon art for the well-being of society, but to renew it.

In this connection, it is important to clarify Tolstoy's main terms: feelings and religious perception. The Russian word *чувство* is translated with *feeling* and just as any feeling it is something abstract which can be considered directly measured. The term covers impressions, intuitions, feelings of all sorts – in short; everything arising from a source other than thoughts and objective reasoning.[29] The role of feelings in Tolstoy's conception of art could not be more important: works of art transport feelings and connect people this way. He further compares this system of communication with language. Language communicates thoughts from one to another

---

26 Zurek, Magdalena, op. cit., p. 299.

27 But Tolstoy is not totally banning beauty and pleasure from the arts. The artist may feel pleasure while creating an artwork, and beauty can be, but does not have to be, a characteristic of an artwork. People of different backgrounds like to surround themselves with beautiful things. So, one conclude Tolstoy's position towards beauty in art: It cannot be the scale for judging art, but it can be a characteristic of good art. In this Roger Fly sees a major achievement of his theory: "It was Tolstoy's genius that delivered us from this *impasse* [of beauty], and I think that one may date from the appearance of *What is Art?* the beginning of fruitful speculation in aesthetic." Diffely, Terry, op. cit., p. 3.

28 Tolstoy, Leo, op. cit., p. 33.

29 Jahn, Gary R., "The aesthetic theory of Leo Tolstoy's what is art?", in: *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34(1), 1975, pp. 59–65.

just like art does with feelings.[30] In other words; works of art express something about the soul of human beings that language cannot express.[31] The two are equally important for humans to feel united through space and time.[32] The greatest feelings communicated this way roots in religious consciousness. Tolstoy also insists that understanding the religious consciousness of the time is understanding the meaning of life, what he considers the highest good. Interestingly enough, authors like Zurek suggest that instead of using the critical term "religious consciousness" one should refer to a "philosophical" one.[33]

For Tolstoy, there is also another kind of feelings, which can be communicated through a work of art: particular everyday feelings. On the basis of these feelings humans are able to empathise. In short, Tolstoy states that everyday feelings like sadness, happiness or anger can be shared through a work of art as well.

When those feelings are transported, they infect the audience/the spectators or readers – this is how an artwork is to be understood. This understanding is a universal one: Every person, regardless of her/his age, her/his intellectual background or her/his class attachment should be able to get infected with the transported feeling of religious consciousness or everyday emotions.

---

30 See Milkov, Nikolay, "Aesthetic Gestures: Elements of a Philosophy of Art in Frege and Wittgenstein," in: (eds.) Wuppuluri S., da Costa N., *WITTGENSTEINIAN Yadj.. The Frontiers Collection*. Basel: Springer Cham, 2020, pp. 505–518.
31 Eismann, Wolfgang, op. cit., p. 61.
32 Tolstoy, Leo, op. cit., p. 40.
33 Zurek, Magdalena, op. cit., p. 317.

The term *infection* is causing problems for understanding Tolstoy's theory. Normally used to refer to diseases, it does not have a negative connotation for Tolstoy. Like people get infected with laughter, the same works with successful art. Zurek defends Tolstoy's use of the term, underlying its dimension and the inevitability of infection via artworks, whereas Diffely reminds the reader of the randomness of infections, which stands in contrast to the deliberately process in art creation.[34]

Taking a closer look at the way people get infected with feelings shed light on this discussion. If the audience or spectators are consuming a successful work of art, it can get infected with the feeling that the artist once experienced herself/himself, or with that she/he imagined to experience.[35] Specifically, the spectator or listener of an artwork is "brought to a similar state of mind."[36] To do so, the artist recalls memories or imaginary ones and transforms them into a piece of art. She/he willingly reproduces the feelings, which creates a distance of art to the real life.[37]

In this way, some unconsciously encountered feelings are consciously brought into art, allowing in this way to learn something about life from art – looking through art at the world.[38] But the empathy needed to get infected with feelings of others is a skill also needed to keep societies together. Getting infected by art is also

---

34 Ibid., p. 288.
35 Tolstoy, Leo, op. cit., p. 39.
36 Mounce, H. O., op. cit., p. 24.
37 Zurek, Magdalena, op. cit., p. 273f..
38 Mounce, H. O., op. cit., pp. 65–72.

training social skills of living together. Moreover, it helps to reflect on one's own feelings and life–experiences.[39]

An argument often stated against Tolstoy's conception of infecting via artworks, is the passive role of the spectator or listener or reader and the risk of becoming a victim of propaganda intentions this way. Tolstoy himself was aware that the infection of art is not morally unproblematic. The feelings transported via artworks can be either good (uniting) or bad (dividing), but they infect the same way. Besides, uniting in a feeling can also result in questioning it. Art consumers are not passively consuming the artworks. It can also reflect on their own feelings that they got infected with.

But while an artwork can be good or bad, depending on its ability to unite or divide, what about its aesthetic value? Importantly enough, moral judgement can only be applied to a successful (*gelungene*) piece of art: if it has certain aesthetic value.[40] Due to its involvement with moral issues, art needs to be involved in every area of life and therefore feeds upon life itself. Magdalena Zurek, in this context, points out that ethics and aesthetics go often hand in hand.[41]

The important role of the connection between life and art was underlined in Tolstoy's conception of art, when he is referring to the ordinary people (*мужикъ*), especially children, as natural, unspoiled art consumers.[42] The people of the lower classes often produce good

---

39 Ibid., p. 65.
40 Ibid., p. 29.
41 Zurek, Magdalena, op. cit., p. 315.
42 Tolstoy, Leo, op. cit., pp. 115f. and 141f.. This focus on the ordinary people is also closely related to Tolstoy's life crises. His way out started with looking at farmers and why

art, which is directly linked to the feeling of religious consciousness or to everyday situations. The artworks they produce differs from the high culture, mostly in its form: folklore dances, songs, jokes, puns, children's plays.[43] Tolstoy is opening up the field of art this way, holding that art can be found everywhere.[44] The argument that by opening the world of art and making it universal one lowers its standards, can easily be shattered: allowing feelings to take new forms makes the field of art richer in expressions and also in themes. Tolstoy lists only three major indicators for a good piece of art: (i) the transported feeling must be well outlined; (ii) it should be communicated in a clear manner; (iii) the artist needs to be sincere.[45]

Sincerity is the most important trade of the artist. For communicating a feeling, the artist also needs to understand herself/himself and her/him relations with everything surrounding her/him, even gaining this way a standpoint ahead of her/him time.[46] When she/he has the will to communicate this feeling, the artist also needs talent – sheer skills are not enough. The only skill required is

they do not question they existence. He came to the conclusion that they simply stand with both feet firmly on the ground and live their life. In contrast, people of upper classes get themselves lost in self-made paradoxes.

43 Not only children's play, but also theater performances and operas can be connected to Tolstoy's conception of art. Especially the acting theory of Stanislavski gives grounds to do so. More on this see: Daniel Larlham "Stanislavsky, Tolstoy, and the life of the human spirit" in: *The Routledge Companion to Stanislavski*, (ed.) R. Andrew White, London/New York: Routledge, 2013 pp. 179–194 and Hughes, R. I. G., "Tolstoy, Stanislavki, and the Art of Acting," in: *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 51(1), 1993, pp. 39–48, here pp. 40f..

44 Tolstoy, Leo, op. cit., p. 155.

45 Ibid., pp. 121ff..

46 Ibid., p. 90.

to transfer the feeling understandable for others.[47] In Tolstoy's art of the future, everyone is an artist, owning the basic knowhow from school; no further education is needed. There is no real need for the profession of an artist, as well as for art schools or art critics. Works of art created this way are able to enlarge our experience and increase the understanding of life – ours as well as those of others.[48]

This understanding includes the most powerful feature of art – the ability to unite. Or as Israel Knox points out: "The dearest quality of art to Tolstoy is its power of union."[49] Through the transported feeling, the artist is connected with the audience and the listeners/spectators/readers are also linked to other listeners/spectators/readers through the artwork, regardless of their position in society, their cultural background and the time they live in.[50] Through art, we are able to realize the connections we have with others, independently from nationality, age, gender, education and other distinctive factors. The feeling of this uniting force is also producing a feeling of connectedness. Just recall the feeling of sitting together in a dark cinema room, getting lost in the good movie and being conscious about the others and their emotions surrounding you

---

47 Eismann, Wolfgang, op. cit., pp. 70f..
48 This social utopia underlying Tolstoy's theory of art is pointed out by Thomas Barran this way: Tolstoy's *What is Art?* "remains a profoundly political document." Idem., "Rousseau's Political Vision and Tolstoy's *What is Art?*," in: *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 5, 1992, pp. 1–12, here p. 1. For a connection between Tolstoy and Rousseau also see Zurek, Magdalena, op. cit., pp. 255ff. and Milkov, Nikolay, "Tolstoi und Wittgenstein. Einfluss und Ähnlichkeiten," in: *Prima philosophia*, Vol. 49, 2003, pp. 187–206.
49 Knox, Israel, "Tolstoy's Esthetic Definition of Art," in: *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 27(3), 1930, pp. 65–70, here p. 68.
50 Tolstoy, Leo, op. cit., p. 121.

or remember the last rock concert. Some critics claim that Tolstoy's conception of unity implies that by consuming art humans have to be in a sense identical to feeling the same. But the opposite is true: successful art is raising out of the differences between people. It articulates a feeling which is special and somehow new. Exactly because if this this special feeling is of interest to others and needs to be shared with them.[51]

3. Art for All

Summarizing, for Tolstoy art is a universal medium, which makes it possible to be understood by everyone. Art has the ability to transport feelings and infect people. Tolstoy conclusion is that "[t]he task facing art is enormous: art, genuine art, guided by religion with the help of science,[52] must make it so that men's peaceful life together […]."[53] Based on these arguments, Tolstoy holds that all theories pleading for the autonomy of aesthetics are inadequate. Art in its true form can only be approached as art for all: for all nations, all classes, all people.

After taking a closer look at Tolstoy's theory of art, I am going to pick up one of the most popular critical remarks held against it. As already mentioned in the introduction: Why is Tolstoy excluding

---

51 Poljakova, Ekaterina, op. cit., pp. 319f..

52 Science, just like art, should also not follow a science for science 's sake, but is underlying social responsibility Tolstoy, Leo, op. cit., pp. 157–167. Or as Eismann states: "This art [of the future] has the same aim as science: the well-being of all people." (transl. by the author) Eismann, Wolfgang, op. cit., p. 48.

53 Tolstoy, Leo, op. cit., pp. 165f..

classics of the world of art like those of Richard Wagner[54] from the world of art? Apparently, because he was strongly convinced that artists like Wagner only produce a counterfeit of art that is made for a special group of people. For artists with an educated background those works of art are part of a canon considered good art, but what if those works are viewed from outside of the nation they are created in or with the eyes of next generations? Are those works of art understandable for people from different cultural backgrounds? The problem with a canon of good art is that at some point it is not questioned anymore. So, we cannot answer the question: Do we really think this is a good piece of art or are we just saying so, because we learned it that way? One way of reading Tolstoy today can result in questioning the art canon and in this way prevent nationalistic, one-sided views on art and artworks.[55] Important to notice, Tolstoy himself was also very concerned about the way of living that supports such a canon of artworks – the Western lifestyle of the 19th century.

Although Tolstoy's conception of art is rooted in his social and ideological criticism of his time, the idea of artworks as uniting force of all humans is still present in modern aesthetic theories.[56] Terry

---

54 Tolstoy dedicated a whole chapter to Richard Wagner's "Nibelungen" in ibid., pp. 101–112.

55 Or as W. H. Auden pointed out correctly: "[O]ne can never again ignore the questions Tolstoi raises." Diffely, Terry, op. cit., p. 9.

56 Another critical point against the autonomy of art is made by marxistic theories. They attack the growing dependence of artists on the market and its consumers. This market is enabling the autonomy, while at the same time it is also restricting it. See Einfalt, Martin and Wolfzettel, Friedrich, op. cit., pp. 433f.. Another interesting attempt regarding high and

Eagleton, for example, states, referring to a stronger getting tendency of viewing art as autonomous, that art should not be viewed as an isolated field. In doing so, the ruling powers of society can build up a space for protecting their values of exploitation, owning property and completion.[57]

Finally, a short digression on what can be said about Tolstoy's vision of the art of the future when looking at today's society? Thanks to modern technology the project of art for all is not accomplished, but we are getting closer: music can be produced from laptops at home, movies shot with mobile phones and virtual museums allowing excess for everyone.[58]

References

Barran, Thomas (1992), "Rousseau's Political Vision and Tolstoy's *What is Art?*." *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 5, pp. 1–12

Bourdieu, Pierre. (1985), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Danto, Arthur. (1998), *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective*, Berkley: University of California Press.

Diffely, Terry. (1985), *Tolstoy's ‚What is Art?'*, London: Croom Helm.

Dörr, Paul. (1993), "Nachwort." Tolstoi, Leo, *Was ist Kunst?*,

---

low art can be found in pop art theories. More on this see Hecken, Thomas, op. cit..

57 Eagleton, Terry, *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, New Jersey: Blackwell, 1990, p. 9.

58 Those points are also addressing a topic Tolstoy did not mention in *What is Art?*: not only the product, but also the process of creating art needs to be addressed when it comes to the demand of art for all. Prices of materials or access to machines or works are limited to specific groups of people as well.

München: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, transl. in German by Michail Feofanov.

Eagleton, Terry. (1990), *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, New Jersey: Blackwell.

Einfalt, Martin and Friedrich Wolfzettel (2000), "Autonomie" (ed.) Karlheinz Barck, *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch*, Vol. 1, Stuttgart.

Eismann, Wolfgang. (1986), *Von der Volkskunst zur proletarischen Kunst. Theorien zur Sprache der Literatur in Rußland und Sowjetunion*, München: Otto Sagner Verlag.

Hecken, Thomas. (2009), *PoP. Geschichte eines Konzepts 1955– 2009*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.

Hughes, R. I. G. (1993), "Tolstoy, Stanislavki, and the Art of Acting." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 51(1).

Jahn, Gary R. (1975), "The aesthetic theory of Leo Tolstoy's what is art?" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34(1).

Kant, Immanuel. (2008), *Critique of Judgement*, (ed.) Nicholas Walker, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Knox, Israel. (1930), "Tolstoy's Esthetic Definition of Art," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 27(3), pp. 65–70

Larlham, Daniel. (2013), "Stanislavsky, Tolstoy, and the life of the human spirit," *The Routledge Companion to Stanislavski*, (ed.) R. Andrew White, London/New York: Routledge.

Milkov, Nikolay. (2003), "Tolstoi und Wittgenstein. Einfluss und Ähnlichkeiten," *Prima philosophia*, Vol. 49.

Milkov, Nikolay. (2000), "Aesthetic Gestures: Elements of a Philosophy of Art in Frege and Wittgenstein," (eds.) Wuppuluri S., da Costa N., *WITTGENSTEINIAN Yadj.. The Frontiers Collection*. Basel: Springer Cham.

Mounce, H. O. (2001), *Tolstoy on Aesthetics. What is Art?*, Albershot and Sydney: Ashgate.

Mukařovský, Jan. (1978), "Aesthetic Function Among other Functions," John Burbank and Peter Steiner (eds.), *Structure, Sign and Function. Selected Essays by Jan Mukařovský*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press.

Poljakova, Ekaterina. (2013), *Differente Plausibilitäten. Kant, Nietzsche, Tolstoi und Dostojewski über Vernunft, Moral und Kunst*, Berlin: De Gruyter.

Šilbajoris, Rimvydas. (1991), *Tolstoy's Aesthetics and his Art*, Bloomington: Slavica Publishers.

Tolstoy, Leo. (1995), *What is Art?*, transl. R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky, London: Penguin Books.

Zurek, Magdalena. (1996), *Tolstojs Philosophie der Kunst*, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter.

Nietzsche's Artistic Ideal in Human, All Too Human
and the Case of Music

Charles Lebeau-Henry [1]

Université catholique de Louvain, Centre d'études phénoménologiques

ABSTRACT. The aim of this paper is to consider if and how music can satisfy the demands of Nietzsche's conception of successful art in *Human, All Too Human* and its two supplements. The two main criteria of his artistic ideal, I argue, are the artist's successful demonstration of a "dance in chains" and a certain realism in the work's subject matter. I intend to show that music's satisfaction of this ideal as a whole hinges on its expressive capacities, which Nietzsche progressively reconsiders in these texts, as well as on how the composers manage them.

1. Introduction

In this paper[2], I would like to examine Nietzsche's well-known

---

2 In what follows, I will refer to Nietzsche's aphorisms directly in the text, by indicating the abbreviated title of the book it comes from and the number of the relevant paragraph in parentheses. The abbreviation used are as follows: HH = *Human, All Too Human* (the first volume of the 1886 edition), MOM = *Mixed Opinions and Maxims*, WS = The *Wanderer and His Shadow*. Unless otherwise specified, I used Hollingdale's translation for the texts from *Human, All Too Human* I and II. See the bibliography for the other translations used. I quote Nietzsche's "posthumous fragments" by indicating the year in which they were

illustration of artistic creation as a "dance in chains" in its application to music. This model is presented with varying levels of emphasis in all three books that together constitute the second edition of *Human, All Too Human*[3], but it is only in the last one, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, that it is explicitly put in relation with music.[4] Very briefly put, Nietzsche's idea is that successful art is a demonstration of artistic mastery in (more or less) arbitrary constraints,[5] so that "both the constraint and its conquest are noticed and admired" (WS140). The kind of artwork thus produced, by exciting "emulation and envy" (MOM99), could have a transformative effect on its public and teach it in turn how to overcome its own feelings of limitations through a similar self-fashioning (MOM172).

Nietzsche initially had some reservations about the possible realization of this goal by music. Before *The Wanderer*, he had limited this possibility to poetry. According to him, for the work of art to serve as a model, it had to depict something determined; but Nietzsche now rejected the idea that music could symbolize anything but affective states. Without a clear, conceptually mediated referent, music, it seems, could not attain the "monumentality" essential to the

---

written (for more clarity in the chronology), their number in the *Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA), as well as the volume and page number in this same edition.

3 For reasons of space and ease of reading, I will shorten the titles of Nietzsche's books after their first mention for the rest of this paper.

4 Compare HH221, MOM99, WS140 & WS159.

5 See HH221 (modified translation): "To fetter oneself in this way can seem absurd; nonetheless there is no way of getting free of naturalization than that of first limiting oneself to what is most severe (perhaps also most arbitrary)." The constraints can obviously hardly be entirely arbitrary, but it is important to distinguish the instrumental character of artistic limitations (which are intentionally imposed to be overcome) and the various limitations history in all its guises imposes upon the artist. See section 2 below for more on that subject.

creation of models of human life made harmonious.[6] Nevertheless, in §159 of *The Wanderer*, Nietzsche applies it to Chopin without any apparent reservations, and implies that music, too, could satisfy this ideal to some extent. But how much, really, could music satisfy the broader formative ideal that Nietzsche links to this notion in *Mixed Opinions and Maxims*? I will try to provide an answer to this question by taking a brief look at the development of his ideas on musical expression, his use of the metaphor of "dancing in chains" and his characterization of Chopin in *The Wanderer*.

2. Expression and Expressivity Before the Second Part of *Human, All Too Human*

In the *Birth of Tragedy*, art's highest task, as paradigmatically exemplified by Attic Tragedy, is to allow the integration of a pessimistic sensibility into a *Weltanschauung* that nevertheless allows for life and action. This is achieved through the interplay of the Dionysian and the Apollonian artistic drives in a tragic *Gesamtkunstwerk* that is both expressive (Dionysus) and beautiful (Apollo). Through its analogy with the deepest structure of the world, Dionysian music allows its auditor a glimpse both into the fundamental contradictions of existence and into its underlying unity. Such an insight, as important as it may be for Nietzsche, is a rather dangerous thing: this knowledge of the contradictions of the world, even if coupled with joy at the perspective of a newfound freedom

---

6 See 1878, 27[96] (KSA 8, p. 502) and MOM99.

from the world of individuation, is incompatible with the conditions of active life, and leads to depressive states. As said by Byron's Manfred, whom Nietzsche liked to quote to make this recurring point (Byron, 2000, p. 275):

> Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most
> Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth,
> The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life.

Despite and because of the importance of this Dionysian insight, illusion must remain essential to life. The constant struggle of these two drives determines art history, beyond ancient history and into the present. Thus, in *The Birth*, Nietzsche understood good art as an artistic transfiguration of unique knowledge of a special and unique value.

By the time he wrote *Human*, Nietzsche had renounced this view of art. In this book, he took his departure from a certain unquestioned Heraclitus-inspired metaphysical stance,[7] but he did not consider the truth to be available in the musical works of genius anymore: it had to be searched for. Moreover, it seems that his approach somewhat agreed with the Socratic optimism he had so thoroughly condemned in *The Birth*, since he could now assert that religion could be overcome through refutation (HH135).[8] He now reflected on the arts separately rather than as an artistic "pentathlon"

---

7 See Heller (1972), p. 4 *sq.*
8 For the idea that this was not an idea he wished to advance, but a sort of *mise-en-scène* of the past development of his own thinking, see the introduction in Meyer (2019).

(Nietzsche, 2013, p. 20) modelled on attic tragedy, and though he still thought of music as an expressive affair, he no longer defended the idea that it could *express* something in any strong, symbolic sense. Without a privileged analogical relationship to the world of the "primal unity" (*Ur-Einen*) music could not symbolize simply in virtue of its nature: it could no longer be a "copy" (*Abbild*) of the "Will" through a metaphysical affinity. Instead, Nietzsche now admitted for all music what he had said to be a limitation of pre-Wagnerian opera,[9] namely, that music's expressive qualities had been carried over from its long association with rhetoric. This meant, first, that they concerned not the expressed thing, but rather the pathos associated with its expression; and second, that this expressivity had been made possible by learned, conventional associations (HH215-216).

This expressivity is, in HH, at the center of Nietzsche's rejection of the arts.[10] The main thrust of this critique, in line with the broader goal of *Human*, is primarily directed at art's (and especially music's) pretensions as a source of profound knowledge, such as that to which Wagner's Schopenhauer-inspired aesthetics purported.

---

9 Wagner was never entirely free of these limitations: he possessed both Dionysian wisdom and an authentically operatic tendency. But that is precisely why he could push the operatic logic to its limit and thus force it to "overcome" itself (1871, 9[48]; KSA 7, p. 293; see also 1871, 9[90, 127 & 135]; KSA 7, p. 306-307, 321 & 323-324]). The experience of the first Bayreuth festival in 1876, to Nietzsche, showed that Wagner could and would in fact do no such thing (see 1878, 30[1]; KSA 8, p. 522) and the letter to Mathilde Maier of early August 1878 [in Nietzsche, 1986, Bd 5, p. 337-338, #734]).

10 Young astutely remarks that, in HH, Nietzsche's attacks are always directed at the art of "the beyond," that is, sublime art (p. 71). I believe this is because he did not believe at that point in the possibility of a renewed art of the beautiful (compare his remarks on Goethe in HH221 with the subsequent MOM99). Thus, I would interpret his focus on sublime art as a focus on what he then took to be the most advanced and the most potent form of art, rather than a door left open for beautiful art.

Despite its lack of epistemic import, rhetorical expressivity could serve as a caution for such claims to knowledge. By triggering learned and automatically occurring affective responses, they could be the cause of an impression of depth and importance in the listener, which could in turn be transferred onto the supposed knowledge and convince the listener of its depth or value (HH161).

The object of Nietzsche's critique was not artistic expressivity in itself, but the fact that it is most often used with dishonesty: it masquerades as a primordial language brought to expression through the mystical power of genius, while it is in fact a conventional language the artist uses to consolidate her privileged social position. In addition to this "symbolic" pretension of music made possible by expressivity, Nietzsche had qualms about the effect expressive music had on its public, or rather the use it made of it. Intensely expressive art has, according to him, a tendency to lead its public to destructive or counterproductive ways of engaging with it. Whether they listen to it to forget and use it as a narcotic of sorts (MOM159); or rather than purged of them, become used and prone to fear and pity (HH212); or perhaps, even, insufficiently trained in the subtleties of music's expressive language and taken by its roughness and brutality, they are made themselves into rough brutes (HH217): in all these cases, the risks, clearly, dwarf the potential rewards.

This expressive character could not, though, be wrested away from music. The affective states we associate with certain perceptual properties of the music, carried over from rhetoric through prolonged association, appear to stick to it no matter what we try, in theory as

well as in practice.[11] Furthermore, as time goes by, music must become more and more expressive as its associations multiply and as the human sensibility grows deeper.[12] The pretensions of the musician to the expression of a valuable knowledge, at this point, could then be seen as no more than a trick, relying on representations regarding the status of the artist and on his capacities, as well as finding confirmation in the expressivity of the music itself. Regardless, this did not necessarily imply that musical expressivity was in itself reprehensible; yet there did not seem, at that point, to remain an open path ahead for the musicians, or indeed for the artists in general.[13]

3. Chains and Fetters

Mixed Opinions, the first supplement to *Human*, saw Nietzsche reconsider his judgment on Goethe's limitations as an artist. No longer marred by the decidedly sentimental posture in which he "lived in art as in recollection of true art" (HH221), Goethe's poetry, Nietzsche now affirmed, was one that could serve as a "*signpost to the future*" (MOM99) and be the source of a renewed artistic practice,

---

11 Hanslick himself, the herald of musical formalism and avowed opponent of Wagner, recognized that music did (vaguely) evoke affects through the analogy of its processes with those of affective events. In fact, he sometimes relied on subjective impressions such as those he criticized in *Vom musikalischen Schönen* in his musical criticism (See p. 17 in Kivy, 1990). See also the developments on the persistence of expressivity in Schönberg's twelve-tone music in the first part of Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music*.

12 See the variant of HH219 from the fair copy, KSA 14, p. 137: "If the thought of a rebirth of the ancient world now surfaces once again, we will long for a more inspired ancient world (*einem beseelteren Alterthum*) than did the fifteenth century" (G. Handwerk's translation in Nietzsche [1997], p. 336). We find echoes of this idea MOM126.

13 See the remarks on Goethe in HH221.

in conformity with that of the Ancients. Regarding music, on the other hand, Nietzsche was more openly critical, naming Wagner (whose name had been entirely absent from *Human*) as the culprit for the transition of music into a baroque period. In the second supplement to *Human*, *The Wanderer* (of which, again, Wagner's name is entirely absent), Nietzsche suggests that music could perhaps do the same as poetry when he implies that Chopin could serve as a similar "signpost" since he, too, could "danc[e] in fetters" (WS159).

This image of a "dancing in chains" (*in Ketten Tanzen)* or in "fetters" (*Fesseln*) as a metaphor for artistic creation came from Voltaire, to whom, incidentally, *Human All Too Human* was dedicated in its first edition. In a letter dated January 24, 1761, Voltaire writes to Deodati de Tovazzi, who had sent him a copy of his book on *The Excellence of the Italian Language*, to contest his hasty declaration of the superiority of Italian over French. After defending the sonorities of the French language and its lexical abundance, he turns to a comparison of the rules imposed on the poet of both languages (Voltaire, 1876, pp. 425–426):

> You have, sir, many more actual advantages [*sc.* than that of creating diminutives], that of inversions, that of making a hundred good verses in Italian more easily than we can make ten in French. The reason for this facility is that you allow yourselves these hiatuses, these gaps in syllables that we proscribe; all your words ending in *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, provide you with at least twenty times more rhymes than we have, and, on top

> of that, you can still do without rhymes. You are less enslaved
> than we are to the hemistich and the caesura; you dance in
> freedom, and we dance with our chains.[14]

Voltaire introduces the image to establish the added difficulty of composing verses in French, not as an ideal, but as a descriptive account of poetical practice. Indeed, he writes a few lines later that, "[i]f the people have formed languages, great men perfect them with good books; and the first of all languages is the one with the most excellent books" (Voltaire, 1876, p. 426).[15] The result, and not the quantity of limitations opposed to creation, determine the quality of the work; the constraints are historically inherited and have to be mastered. In addition, the chains are meant here not to signal just any constraint, but an excess of them: the Italian poet is "free" inasmuch as she is not as constrained as the French, but she is only comparatively free. The dancer and the poet are always limited by rules and other resistances, by the unforgiving regularity of the rhythm, by the inertia of the body or the mind, and so forth. Thus Voltaire, with this image of "dancing in chains," highlights the simple fact that linguistic and artistic conventions oppose much more resistance to the ease of poetical creation to the French than to the Italians.

     Nietzsche uses this same formulation (in the infinitive) in the

---

14 The translations from French are my own. In Nietzsche's personal exemplar of this book (conserved at the *Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar*), he draws two vertical lines in the margin next to the last sentence, and underlines the last word, "chains" (*chaînes*).
15 Nietzsche also marks this passage with a vertical line in the margin of his exemplar.

title of §140 of *The Wanderer*, but he avoids it everywhere else in the three books which together make up the second edition of *Human*, except for a mention in quotation marks in the same aphorism—and this although he discusses the idea a number of times. Everywhere else, Nietzsche speaks of "dancing in fetters" (*Fesseln*) rather than in chains (*Ketten*). This is particularly remarkable in §221 of *Human*, on "*The Revolution in Poetry*," in which there is not a single mention of chains. This may seem like a minor lexical difference, but Nietzsche was not one to approximate with metaphors.[16] By this change in terminology, he signals a shift in metaphorical regime for the idea and a consequent redefinition of its parameters. The chains evoke continuity as well as constraint; the image is linked with ideas such as necessity and history's weight, much like the shadow of *The Wanderer*'s title and of its framing dialogue. The fetters, on the other hand, are an image of immediate constraints, without additional temporal significance. Nietzsche's modification of the terms of the comparison, then, evacuates the reference to history and traditional practice, and focuses instead on the attainment of artistic mastery despite constraints that were added to the ones that already belong to the process of creation.[17]

This was, according to him, how the Greeks made their art, as well as the practice towards which Goethe strived and could serve as

---

16 For a classic treatment of Nietzsche's use of "overdetermined metaphors," see chapter 2 in Blondel (1991).

17 This does not mean that all such fetters are ahistorical, but rather that they must not necessarily be historical. As such, I believe that Ponton's (2004) very interesting treatment of the idea is nevertheless unduly restricted to some such historical "fetters," namely, conventions, while Nietzsche's image is much wider in scope.

a guide. But this condition, to Nietzsche, is still not entirely sufficient. He also demands of art a certain realism in the choice of materials,[18] best realized through a process of linguistic reference. The mastery in arbitrary constraints alone cannot imbue art with an effective formative character: a representation of contemporary reality is also essential if the work is to contribute to its public's (self-)cultivation. This does not mean a mere reproduction of the effective world, nor a sustained depiction of its worst aspects. Rather, realism is essential for the production of a "functional" ideal, one that the public could actively benefit from. The best way to teach harmony to her public is for the artist to take the contemporary conditions of life and provide a model of how to attain liberty and grace within them (MOM 99).

This, for now, kept Nietzsche's broader artistic ideal inaccessible to music. If art has not to merely present a ready-made ideal life, but to exemplify its fashioning out of available materials, then how could music, if it were impossible for it to refer to anything outside of itself but to a conventional affective language, provide such content? Its abstraction appeared to disqualify it from this function, and thus it mostly remained stuck in a dead end in *Mixed Opinions*, as poetry had found a way out.

4. Chopin's Barcarolle

This leads us, finally, to Nietzsche's application of the image to music, in spite of the difficulties he had previously often insisted on.

---

18 See especially MOM114 and 99, as well as the posthumous fragment cited above in note 5.

In *The Wanderer §159*, titled "*Freedom in fetters (*Fesseln*)—a princely freedom,*" he praises Chopin after having pointed out the shortfalls of the composers of the German tradition, and writes:

> […] Chopin had the same princely elegance of convention that Raphael displays in his use of the simplest traditional colours—not with regard to colours, however, but with regard to the traditions of melody and rhythm. He accepted them as he was *born in etiquette*, but playing and dancing in these fetters (*Fesseln*) like the freest and most graceful spirit—and, of course, without mocking them.[19]

Chopin's music, he now argues, succeeds in attaining the appearance of freedom in added constraints that is characteristic of the "dance in chains." Moreover, a preliminary draft of the passage provides us with an even stronger characterization of his success:

> He accepted them [*sc.* the fetters] as he was *born in etiquette*, except that Chopin knew how to dance within the old forms of melody and rhythmical conventions, *as no musician ever succeeded in dancing outside of them*.[20]

Despite the fetters he takes on, "Chopin, the inimitable" (*id.*), dances with more freedom and grace than all musicians, with or without

---

19 Hollingdale's translation.
20 Emphasis at the end mine. The translation of this earlier draft is G. Handwerk's, in Nietzsche (2012), p. 507, note 305.

them. Nietzsche insists a number of times on the proverbial idea that necessity, and not freedom, is the mother of invention; in the case of art, invention of new solutions to artistic problems old or new. Against romantic accounts of free and intuitive creation, Nietzsche now argues that added restraints could foster greater mastery.[21]

   This text, though it may indicate that Nietzsche has now found a musician he believes could achieve this part of his ideal artistic creation, does not tell us whether he could fit the bill entirely and fulfill the formative function of art with its condition of realism (MOM172). Chopin manages to pull the listener's attention away from the subject matter of his music and towards his artistic mastery, but whether he could, like the poet Goethe, provide models of harmonious life in the contemporary world remains to be seen. The following paragraph (WS160), I believe, provides us with the needed indications:

> *Chopin's Barcarole.* —Almost all conditions and ways of life have a *blissful* moment, and good artists know how to fish it out. Such is possessed even by a life spent beside the beach, a life that unwinds tediously, insalubriously, unhealthily in the proximity of the noisiest and greediest rabble—this blissful moment Chopin has, in his Barcarole, expressed in sounds in such a way that the gods themselves could on hearing it desire to spend long summer evenings lying in a boat.

Chopin's music does not paint the ideal figure of "the great and

---

21 See also the account of the origin of genius in HH231.

beautiful soul" that "embod[ies] itself in the harmonious and well-proportioned and thus acquire[s] visibility" (MOM99), like poetry could. Instead, he "expresse[s] in sounds" a "blissful moment" of the gondolier's "unhealthy" existence.[22] Since music can evoke no more than vague emotional states in the listener, the harmony that it represents must be of a passing kind. It cannot, then, be "monumental" in character like poetry and serve as a model: it can at most evoke a fleeting feeling corresponding to this state of realized harmony, but never to its fashioning in the world.

This does not mean that music is devoid of any formative virtues: the dancing in chains of the musician provides, at what we may call a more "abstract" level, a model of mastery in limitations. It is, in a way, an arbitrary reproduction of the limitations one faces in life. Nevertheless, it cannot provide a concrete model of the same, one that would take into account much of the materials that have to be modelled as well as the modelling itself. What music made by "good artists" communicates is an invitation to this work of self-fashioning through the demonstration of the feeling of bliss that can result from it and which it seems to exemplify. Yet even music can, to an extent, be realistic in Nietzsche's sense, since it inherits the affective complexion of the modern individual: with the passing of time, it becomes more and more expressive, as affective sensibilities deepen and as it comes to be coupled with more affective content through habit. Despite its limited capacity to express conceptual or

---

22 The musical form of the barcarolle is meant to mimic the songs of the Venetian gondoliers, as Nietzsche highlights with the imagery he uses to describe the piece.

objectual content, music can point in the direction if not of the contemporary conditions of life, at least to one's affective relationship to them.

In Chopin, this is recognizable, for instance, in the extension of traditional harmony. Nietzsche was likely well aware of this, as made clear by his insistence on Chopin's obedience to rhythmic and melodic tradition[23]—that is, most notably, to the regular bar structure of Viennese classicism and to the expressive melodies of bel canto— with no mention of harmony. Chopin anticipated some of Wagner's harmonic innovation, but as opposed to him, he did not seek to reinforce the effects of expressivity at the expense of form: on the contrary, he maintained a rigorous logic in his compositions that prevented this.[24] In particular, he used ambiguity in a way that allowed him both to maximize expression and to draw attention to the process of harmonic interpretation rather than to the music's expressive effect. Instead of resolving it almost immediately, as the Viennese classics, or to have it persist insistently like Wagner, he integrated tonal ambiguity in the rigorously organized fabric of his works. He often presents, in the words of the musicologist Eduard Cone (1995, p. 144), "a contrast, however brief, between possible interpretations, or between one interpretation and a subsequent reinterpretation." In this coexistence of multiple perspectives, none of which appears to have a privileged role over the others, the listener is presented with a parallel to the process of a fashioning of the self,

---

23 In WS159, quoted at the beginning of this section.
24 See 1878, 28[47] (KSA 8, p. 510)

of trying different configurations to accommodate in an harmonious whole what immovable elements one has to navigate around (MOM174).

5. Conclusion

To conclude, two complementary aspects mark Nietzsche's demands on artistic creation at the time of *Human, All Too Human* and its two supplements: one of mastery, which the expression "dance in chains" illustrates; and one of realism, of a relating to some of the actual content of human existence. This echoes the dual "artist's metaphysics" of *Birth of Tragedy* in a number of ways, but the aim differs: the expression of content is no longer the purpose of the work of art, but rather the fashioning of the given. As such, musical expressivity is placed in a difficult position: it is both, as the means by which music is provided with a certain affective content, an advantage and a risk: it can elevate music by allowing it to attain a certain realism, but it can also drive its public away from reality by reinforcing false representations on music's powers, or by encouraging its public's escapism. Ever the music enthusiast, Nietzsche continued to reflect on music's possibilities, but he eventually had to come to the conclusion that it could only imperfectly satisfy what he saw as art's highest goals. Despite these shortcomings, he found in Chopin a musician that did the most that was possible for music, who could combine the greatest expressivity with a solid sense of form, and who demonstrated great artistic mastery rather than baroque deformity and excess of effect. In this,

though, Chopin stayed short of poetry: in the end, he could be no Goethe.

References

Adorno, Theodor W. (2019), *Philosophy of New Music*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Blondel, Éric (1991). *Nietzsche, the Body and Culture: Philosophy as a Philological Genealogy* (S. Hand, trans.), London: Athlone Press.

Byron, George Gordon Brown (2000), *The Major Works*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cone, Edward T. (1994), "Ambiguity and Reinterpretation in Chopin," in J. Rink and J. Samson   (eds.),   *Chopin   Studies   2*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 140–160.

Hanslick, Eduard (1986), *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution Towards the Revision of the   Aesthetics   of   Music* (G. Payzant, trans.), Hackett Pub. Co.

Heller, Peter (1972), *Von den ersten und letzten Dingen: Studien und Kommentar zu einer Aphorismenreihe von Friedrich Nietzsche*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Kivy, Peter (1990), "What was Hanslick Denying?", *The Journal of Musicology*, vol. 8(1), p. 3–18.

Meyer, Matthew (2019), *Nietzsche's Free Spirit Works: A Dialectical Reading*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm (2013), *The Greek Music Drama (Bilingual Edition)* (P. Bishop, trans.), New York: Contra

Mundum Press.

—(2012), *Human, All Too Human II and Unpublished Fragments from the Period of Human, All Too human II (Spring 1878-Fall 1879)* (G. Handwerk, trans.), Stanford: Stanford University Press.

—(1997), *Human, All Too Human I* (G. Handwerk, trans.), Stanford: Stanford University Press.

—(1996), *Human, All Too Human* (R. J. Hollingdale, trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

—(1986). *Sämtliche Briefe: Kritische Studienausgabe in 8 Bänden* (G. Colli & M. Montinari, Eds.). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter/dtv.

—(1980), *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden* (G. Colli & M. Montinari, Eds.), Berlin: Walter de Gruyter/dtv.

Ponton, Olivier (2004), « Danser dans les chaînes » : La définition nietzschéenne de la création comme jeu dans la convention'. *Philosophique*, vol. 7, p. 5–27.

Voltaire (1876), *Lettres choisies, Tome I*, Paris : Garnier Frères.

Young, Julian (1992), *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moral Aspects' Aesthetic Relevance: on Dickie's Stolnitz, Stolnitz, and aesthetic attention

João Lemos[1]

NOVA University of Lisbon

ABSTRACT: Let us put aside for a while the question of whether there is such thing as an aesthetic attitude. Attitude theories are often criticized for assuming that adopting an aesthetic attitude, or exercising aesthetic attention, excludes consideration of the moral aspects of art. Indeed, George Dickie criticized Jerome Stolnitz for such an assumption. I claim that Dickie missed the target – Stolnitz's conception of disinterested attention does not commit him to excluding any attention to the moral aspects of art. First, I will succinctly point out Dickie's criticisms against Stolnitz's conception of the aesthetic attitude, namely with respect to the relation of morality to aesthetic value. I will then show that, according to Stolnitz, the limits of aesthetic relevance have primacy over the relation of morality to aesthetic value, and that the ultimate criterion of aesthetic relevance is experience's quality enrichment. If the consideration of a work's moral vision may enrich the quality of one's (aesthetic) experience of such work, then the consideration of that property is aesthetically relevant. Finally, I will mention a couple of recent versions of aesthetic attention which stress the inclusive nature of such kind of attention, therefore contributing to overcome Dickie's criticisms.

1. Introduction: Dickie's criticisms

The most influential critic of aesthetic attitude theories is George Dickie. In his widely read paper 'The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude' (Dickie, 1964) Dickie holds that the notion of aesthetic attitude has "little or no connection with the ordinary notion of an *attitude*" (Dickie, 1964, p. 56), that it has "no theoretical value for aesthetics" (ibid., p. 65), and that "the aesthetic attitude is a myth" (ibid., p. 56).

To argue against such statements is not my purpose here.[2] What concerns me is a secondary but influential thesis of Dickie's paper, namely his endorsing the view that, according to attitude theorists, adopting an aesthetic attitude, or exercising aesthetic attention, excludes taking account of the moral aspects of art. Although 'The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude' is known more for its main claim than for this thesis, the influence of the latter in the approach taken by many aestheticians as well as philosophers of art is also wide enough for it to be important that it be considered.

As the explicit target of Dickie's criticisms is Stolnitz's view, I will focus my comments on his notion of 'disinterested attention'. I will consider whether Dickie's reading is right; whether Stolnitz's notion of 'disinterested attention' commits him to excluding any attention to the moral aspects of art.[3]

---

2 Effective responses against Dickie's criticisms have come from Saxena, 1978; Zangwill, 1992; Fenner, 1996; Kemp, 1999 and, more recently, Nanay, 2016.

3 This is rather a paper on the history of contemporary aesthetics and philosophy of art than an exercise of aesthetics or philosophy of art. What is at stake is whether the highly influential criticism performed by Dickie, in particular the one addressed to the purported view endorsed by Stolnitz, is right.

According to Dickie, Stolnitz's conception of the aesthetic attitude has mislead aesthetic theory with respect to "the relation of morality to aesthetic value" (Dickie, 1964, p. 61).[4] Dickie appeals to David Pole's thesis according to which the moral vision which a work of art may embody is aesthetically significant (Pole, 1962).[5] Dickie asserts that Stolnitz's "conception of the aesthetic attitude functions to hold the moral aspects and the *aesthetic* aspects of the work of art firmly apart", that it suggests "the moral aspects of a work of art cannot be an object of aesthetic attention because aesthetic attention is by definition disinterested and the moral aspects are somehow practical (interested)", and that it assumes an "incompatibility of aesthetic attention and the moral aspects of art" (Dickie, 1964, p. 63). In summary, according to Dickie, Stolnitz's view has mislead aesthetic theory insofar as it assumes that adopting an aesthetic attitude excludes consideration of the moral aspects of art.

I claim that Dickie missed the target – at least he seems to have misunderstood Stolnitz in respect to what falls under 'disinterested attention'.

2. Stolnitz: experience's quality enrichment

To begin with, the excerpt chosen by Dickie does not support his

---

4 The relation of morality to aesthetic value is, in Dickie's view, one of three aspects of Stolnitz's conception of the aesthetic attitude which is incorrect. The other two are "the way in which he wishes to set the limits of aesthetic relevance" and "the relation of the critic to a work of art" (ibid., p. 61).
5 Not only does Dickie generally share Pole's view; he adds that "a work's moral vision is a *part* of the work" (Dickie, 1964, p. 64).

view that Stolnitz holds the moral and the aesthetic aspects of the work of art firmly apart. Here is the Stolnitz quotation in full:

> any of us might reject a novel because it seems to conflict with our moral beliefs or our 'way of thinking.' (…) We have *not* read the book aesthetically, for we have interposed moral or other responses of our own which are alien to it. This disrupts the aesthetic attitude. We cannot then say that the novel is *aesthetically* bad, for we have not permitted ourselves to consider it aesthetically. To maintain the aesthetic attitude, we must follow the lead of the object and respond in concert with it. (Stolnitz, 1960, p. 36)

What is at stake in Stolnitz's description of the rejection of a novel on moral grounds is a conflict between (the moral aspects or the moral vision of) the novel and the moral beliefs *of the reader*. In the story told by Stolnitz, such a conflict has precluded the reader from accepting the novel and, what is more, from reading it aesthetically. Now, everyone would acknowledge that a conflict between one's moral beliefs and a novel's moral aspects or vision may be such to preclude one from even reading the novel.[6] However, according to Stolnitz, it does not have to be the case.

It is not with respect to what a work may embody, to what is a part of the work – to use Dickie's words – that Stolnitz brings up the

---

6 Many have not permitted themselves to read – let alone to read it aesthetically – D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, or J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*.

problem of what is, and what is not, aesthetically relevant. He does so with respect to items that "are *not* embodied in the aesthetic object itself, but arise from the *percipient's* previous experience" (ibid., p. 53 [emphasis mine]). Those items are connected with the percipient's past history, with what she has experienced in the past, with her memory. Among them are the beliefs, values, emotional predispositions, recollections, personal memories, thoughts, images, and the bits of knowledge which she brings to the experience of the work. Let me stress that they "are *not* present within the object itself" (ibid., p. 53 [emphasis mine]). Nevertheless, Stolnitz holds that they (too) may be relevant to its aesthetic appreciation.

They may be so if or when they reinforce attention to the object, they get absorbed into aesthetic perception and suffuse it with new significance, they fuse with the object and thereby give it added life, they illuminate it, rendering the percipient's aesthetic perception more acute and subsequently enriching the quality of her experience and thus making it more intense and discriminating. These phrases are scattered across Stolnitz's text (see ibid., pp. 55-60). However, there is a place where he both mentions the possibility and sets the conditions for considering the role of the above-mentioned items in aesthetic appreciation. Immediately after asserting that "we need not (…) condemn all 'knowledge about' as aesthetically irrelevant" Stolnitz states that such knowledge *is* aesthetically relevant "when it does not weaken or destroy aesthetic attention to the object, when it pertains to the meaning and expressiveness of the object, and when

it enhances the quality and significance of one's immediate aesthetic response to the object" (ibid., p. 58).

Now, if this is the case concerning that which is not embodied in the object, then there is no way Stolnitz could hold that a work's moral vision is not aesthetically relevant and, therefore, that it cannot be taken into account within the adoption of an aesthetic attitude or the exercise of aesthetic attention.

I shall note that Dickie keeps his discussion of the way Stolnitz approaches the relation of morality to aesthetic value, and the way in which he wishes to set the limits of aesthetic relevance, separate. However, there is a link between them: the way in which Stolnitz approaches the relation of morality to aesthetic value should be read in the light of the way in which he wishes to set the limits of aesthetic relevance – in short, the latter has primacy over the former. If, as Dickie holds, a work's moral vision is a part of that work, and if, as Stolnitz would never argue against, anything that is a part of a work may be relevant to the aesthetic appreciation of it, then, a work's moral vision is always at least potentially relevant to its aesthetic appreciation.

The reason why I mention 'potential relevance' and not 'relevance simpliciter', by the way, has nothing to do with being uncertain as to whether Stolnitz accepts that a work's moral vision can be relevant to its aesthetic appreciation. It is just that he never asserts explicitly, in the way in which does Dickie, that a work's moral vision is a part of that work. All Stolnitz holds in the story he tells is

that the moral responses of a reader of a book, being moral responses *of her own*, are alien to it. Although it does not entail that a book's moral vision – not its potential reader's moral responses – is alien to it, it does not state explicitly that the moral vision is part of the book.[7]

There is nothing in Stolnitz's view that entails that the moral aspects of art cannot be taken into account within the aesthetic attitude. Attending to the moral vision of a work of art, to its interests, does not prevent the aesthetic appreciation of such work of art from taking place; one may consider those interests – even if they conflict with one's own – and still appreciate it aesthetically, attend to it disinterestedly. Indeed, there may be a conflict between the moral aspects or visions of a book and the moral beliefs of its reader; and yet, she may read that book aesthetically taking its moral aspects or visions into account. She may attend to the moral content of the book and yet without letting the conflict that may occur between such content and her moral beliefs preclude her from reading the book in a disinterested way.[8]

---

7 Surprisingly, I could find only one commentator who has noticed it, Sushil Kumar Saxena: "it is only this externalistic moral checking – this interposition of 'moral (…) responses of our own *which are alien to it*' – to which Stolnitz (in his words cited) objects" (Saxena, 1978, p. 87). As Saxena adds, after all Stolnitz "does not deny that a moral vision may be a part of a work's inner content" (ibid., p. 87). And if it may be a part of a work's inner content, it may in principle be considered.

8 David E. W. Fenner claims that "what Stolnitz advocates is inattention to anything that will *harm* the aesthetic appreciation of the object. If the moral point of view of the critical point of view helps to create a better experience, then these aspects ought to be included in the attention of the spectator" (Fenner, 1996, p. 104). What Fenner takes a better experience to be is one by the occasion of which the spectator takes more of a second-order, cognitively engaged pleasure, whereas "[b]ad experiences occur when one invests attention

If this is so, there is no need to say that the spectator may do something, namely, take a work's moral point of view into account, and *still* appreciate it aesthetically, that is, *despite* appreciating it aesthetically. One may appreciate a work of art aesthetically while taking its moral point of view into account, among anything else that may enrich the quality of her experience. That is, one has a better experience *because* one takes the work's moral point of view into account, among anything else that may help to create a better experience.

3. Other versions of aesthetic attention

If there is something Stolnitz might be accused of, it is that his way of conceiving the aesthetic attitude is too inclusive, rather than too exclusive. This is because, according to him, the very adoption of such an attitude not only admits but often requires a manifold of

---

into the object expecting a return of second-order pleasure, but when this pleasure is either not forthcoming or of a minimal degree" (ibid., p. 117). Indeed, within Fenner's proposal, this dual-character pleasure – or at least the expectation of such – plays a crucial role in aesthetic appreciation, although the pleasure is not taken in the object itself, but rather in the experience of attending to the object – and this is why he describes it as a 'metafeeling' or 'second-order occurrence' (ibid., p. 119). However, contra Fenner, it must be remarked that experience's quality enrichment does not amount to pleasure enhancement, that is, to a more pleasurable experience. Consideration of the moral aspects of art may render the experience richer and less pleasurable. Among the accounts focused on aesthetic attention, the one advanced by Bence Nanay presupposes such difference. Accordingly, Nanay has recently defined 'an aesthetically relevant property' – not 'an aesthetic property', I shall note – in the following terms: "if attending to a property of a particular makes me appreciate my experience of that particular more (or less), *and not as a result of making me appreciate the particular itself more (or less)*, it is an aesthetically relevant property" (Nanay, 2016, p. 73). Meanwhile, as Nanay adds, "it is not aesthetic appreciation that [is] used for defining aesthetically relevant properties, but the appreciation of one's experiences", and this is why the definition "is not circular" (ibid., p. 73).

items that are not embodied in the aesthetic object itself, that are not present within the object itself. This may include "repeated experience of the work, and even, sometimes, technical training in the art-form" (Stolnitz, 1960, p. 38), it demands that one is "persistent in returning to [the works] again and again" and enters a "process of familiarization [that] never ends" (ibid., p. 77).

What is crucial here is that the adoption of the aesthetic attitude "is not always easily come by" (ibid., p. 38) and that it "is not something which is over and done with it, once and for all" (ibid., p. 77). On the contrary, it often requires some contribution, some activity on the part of the percipient. The adoption of the aesthetic attitude is itself an activity – the percipient is an agent:

> as a former teacher of mine used to say, aesthetic perception is frequently thought to be a 'blank, cow-like stare.' It is easy to fall into this mistake when we find aesthetic perception described as 'just looking,' without any activity or practical interest. From this it is inferred that we simply expose ourselves to the work of art and permit it to inundate us in waves of sound or color.
>
> But this is surely a distortion of the facts of experience. (…) To be 'sitting on the edge of the chair' is anything but passive. (ibid., p. 37)

As for other conceptions of the aesthetic attitude criticized by Dickie, I readily admit that the thesis according to which the adoption of the aesthetic attitude is an activity that welcomes the consideration of a

manifold of items, which may be either present or not present within the object itself, embodied or not embodied in the aesthetic object itself, including its moral view, would never be shared by a theorist such as Edward Bullough. According to Bullough, distance "renders questions of origin, of influences, or of purposes almost as meaningless as those of marketable value, of pleasure, even of moral importance, since it lifts the work of Art out of the realm of practical systems and ends" (Bullough, 1912, p. 117). One could also hardly say that Vincent Tomas would accept Stolnitz's view. Although he asserts that "contrary to what Ortega [y Gassett] wrote (…) it is false that 'preoccupation with the human content of the work is in principle incompatible with aesthetic enjoyment proper'" (Tomas, 1959, p. 67), he rejects the claim that effort is involved in the adoption of the aesthetic attitude: "there seem to be people (poor souls!) for whom it involves effort, an 'act of will,' to adopt the aesthetic attitude" (ibid., p. 60).

Things change when one reaches Eliseo Vivas's 'intransitive attention': not only does he mention "the activity, which is a necessary preparation to come into full possession of the poem"; he asserts that "the organic whole which is a poem of quality does not come forward on its own; the reader must make the effort to discover it" and that "to grasp the unity and the central effects of a poem the reader must work and work hard" (Vivas, 1959, p. 231). This hard work may include some 'excursions', but only ones that can be taken "as indispensable preparation for the reading of a poem", that is, "as

indispensable as means to lead the reader as close as he can come to (…) intransitive or contextual experience with the poem", are to be accepted as "of the right kind" (ibid., p. 230).[9]

To be sure, among the authors whose conceptions of the aesthetic attitude are criticized in Dickie's paper, not only Stolnitz, but, to some extent, also Vivas, would reject the thesis according to which the moral aspects of art cannot be taken into account within the adoption of an aesthetic attitude.

What is more, the same might be said about recent versions of aesthetic attention, such as Fenner's or Nanay's.

It shall be remarked that in bringing these versions up, I do not mean, by no means, that they are equally inspired – or even that the latter is inspired – by Stolnitz's view or by the theories of the aesthetic attitude. It would be uncontroversial to include Fenner among the attitude theorists, although he argues that adopting an aesthetic attitude is a sufficient but not a necessary condition for one to have an aesthetic experience.[10] Nanay goes further and holds that aesthetic attention is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for

---

9 Also involved in Vivas' version of the aesthetic attitude is a kind of 'reflection' that is addressed "to the grasping of the meanings and values that the artist informed" or, more generally, to grasping "the objective intention of the poem" (ibid., pp. 230-231).

10 In Fenner's own words, "it is argued that while the aesthetic attitude is not necessary for the creation, sustaining, or flourishing of aesthetic experiences, it may well be *sufficient*, at least in some form. That is, while one need not be in an aesthetic attitude in order to experience aesthetically, it may well be that if she is in *an* or *the* aesthetic attitude, her experience will be aesthetic. It is at this point that my own attitude candidate is introduced" (Fenner, 1996, p. 3).

aesthetic experiences.[11] Nevertheless, he also claims that this kind of attention is required for paradigmatic cases of aesthetic experience,[12] and that such cases have the status of paradigmatic because they "align nicely with the experiences some influential novelists, artists, and critics have tried to capture" (ibid., p. 33). If this is the case, it is advisable to bring Nanay's account up as a recent version of aesthetic attention.[13]

Now, nothing in what one may call an attitude of expectant attention – Fenner's version of the aesthetic attitude – precludes the moral aspects of art from being considered within the adoption of it. On the contrary, as Fenner himself states,

> in viewing an artwork that was explicitly designed to convey some political message, one's aesthetic appreciation of the object may be heightened by realizing the effectiveness of the piece in conveying its message. One's appreciation of Picasso's *Guernica* is enriched by realizing the powerful statement it makes about war and innocents. (Fenner, 1996, pp. 11-12)

---

11 Nanay notes that "attending in a certain way is not something we can always force ourselves to do" (Nanay, 2016, p. 32), that is, "we do not have full control over the way we exercise our attention" (ibid., p. 33).

12 In his own words, "some experiences that may be called aesthetic may not require aesthetic attention. All I claimed was that those paradigmatic cases of aesthetic experience I zeroed in on (…) do)" (ibid., p. 28).

13 As Robert Hopkins writes, "[i]n emphasizing the role of attention in aesthetics, Nanay revitalizes a tradition that ran aground in the hail of criticism directed at the theory of the 'aesthetic attitude'. Repositioning attention centre stage in aesthetics is welcome, offering a refreshing alternative to attempts to characterize the aesthetic by a more direct appeal to a special form of experience or a special class of properties" (Hopkins, 2017, p. 341).

As for Nanay, it must be remembered that, according to his philosophy of perception-based approach, any property, at least any property one can attend to, including properties that are not perceptually represented, can be aesthetically relevant. The *conditio sine qua non* is that it is connected to the object's observable formal properties, i.e., that it is made a semi-formal property.[14] Inasmuch as *Guernica*'s moral vision is connected with *Guernica*'s observable formal properties, that is, as long as it is made a semi-formal property of Picasso's painting, it can count as an aesthetically relevant property. Therefore, it can be considered within the exercise of distributed attention, Nanay's special kind of aesthetic attention.

4. Conclusion

Although there are a number of reasons why interest in aesthetic attitude theories has waned in the past few decades, Dickie's criticisms have played a central role in this historical phenomenon. However, the historical significance of Dickie's criticisms does not lie solely in his view that there is no such a thing as an aesthetic attitude. Dickie also argued that, according to attitude theorists, adopting an aesthetic attitude excludes consideration of the moral

---

14 "Semi-formal properties are properties that depend constitutively on the artwork's formal properties" (Nanay, 2016, p. 113). Among them are the ones that "partly [depend] on our background information and partly on formal properties" (ibid., p. 107). As Nanay holds, "knowledge of non-observable facts about the artwork can indeed enrich attribution of some semi-formal properties to the artwork, thus, it can also enrich our aesthetic evaluation of it. But these non-observable facts are relevant to our aesthetic evaluation of the picture only inasmuch as they are connected to its observable formal properties" (ibid., p. 105).

aspects of art. This have contributed to take attitude theories as of no use when it comes to appreciate such significant and trendy topics as the relation of art to morality.[15]

Unfortunately, authors who have followed the tradition of aesthetic attention – including Fenner and Nanay – have not given any specific account on the topic.

I have shown that there is nothing in Stolnitz's conception of the aesthetic attitude that entails that the moral aspects of art cannot be taken into account within such an attitude. The adoption of the aesthetic attitude is an activity that welcomes the consideration of a manifold of items, which may be either present or not present within the object itself, embodied or not embodied in the artwork itself, including its moral view. According to Stolnitz, consideration of a work's moral vision may enrich the quality of one's aesthetic experience of such work.

Although showing this alone has been my purpose here, I have also given some hints on how a sophisticated account of aesthetic attention can include consideration of the moral aspects of art. Presumably, it would have to embrace some of the tenets of both Fenner's conception of expectant attention and Nanay's conception of distributed attention – namely Nanay's definition of an aesthetically relevant property.

---

15 Many have just moved to proposals such as Noël Carroll's moderate moralism (Carroll, 1996) or Berys Gaut's ethicism (Gaut, 1998).

But before moving to that it is important to stress an historical fact: according to Stolnitz, adopting an aesthetic attitude does not exclude taking into account of the moral aspects of art.

References

Bullough, Edward (1912), ''Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle', *British Journal of Psychology* vol. 5, pp. 87-118.

Carroll, Noël (1996), 'Moderate Moralism', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 36 (3), pp. 223-238.

Dickie, George (1964), 'The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 1 (1), pp. 56-65.

Fenner, David E. W. (1996), *The Aesthetic Attitude*, New Jersey: Humanities Press.

Gaut, Berys (1998), 'The ethical criticism of art', in: J. Levinson (ed.). 1998. *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 182-203.

Hopkins, Robert (2017), 'Nanay's *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*' (book review), *British Journal of Aeshtetics*, vol. 57 (3), pp. 340-344.

Kemp, Gary (1999), 'The Aesthetic Attitude', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 39 (4), pp. 392-399.

Nanay, Bence (2016), *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*,

Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pole, David (1962), 'Morality and the Assessment of Literature', *The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy*, vol. 37 (141), pp. 193-207.

Saxena, Sushil Kumar (1978), 'The Aesthetic Attitude', *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 28 (1), pp. 81-90.

Stolnitz, Jerome (1960), *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Criticism*, Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press.

Tomas, Vincent (1959), 'Aesthetic Vision', *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 68 (1), pp. 52-67.

Vivas, Eliseo (1959), 'Contextualism Reconsidered', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 18 (2), pp. 222-240.

Zangwill, Nick (1992), 'UnKantian Notions of Disinterest', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 32 (2), pp. 149-152.

The Repertoire as Aesthetic Category

Ancuta Mortu[1]

ICUB, University of Bucharest,
New Europe College (NEC)

ABSTRACT. The main focus of this paper is the aesthetic significance of the concept of repertoire and its relevance to research in empirical aesthetics which addresses the question of beholding, understood as engagement in appreciative behavior when confronted with stimuli of potential aesthetic interest. Despite the meta-disciplinary appeal of the concept of repertoire, which is a heuristic device used both in reception aesthetics (Iser, 1976; Moles, 1958) and psychologically informed analytic aesthetics (Wollheim, 1990; Hopkins, 2001), there is no articulate view of the repertoire as aesthetic category. I hold that the innovation in the study of aesthetics that the repertoire might be introducing is establishing a conceptual basis for a cognitive aesthetics of reception and providing a naturalistic alternative to aesthetic categories that are given a transcendental essence.

1. Introduction

Questioning the cognitive foundations of aesthetic appreciation is a topic enjoying a resurgence in the theoretical landscape of recent developments in cognitive science after having been already present in the early layers of traditional philosophical aesthetics and art theory, with their "once prized mental heritage" (Berenson, 1953,

---

1 Email: ancuta.mortu@yahoo.com

270). Concepts of cognition went from playing a central role in philosophical aesthetic thinking (Schaeffer, 2000; Iseminger, 2005; Nanay, 2019) to informing discussions of hierarchical models of information processing in the psychology of art (Bartel, 2014; Seeley, 2018). A consequence of this ongoing development might be articulated in terms of a shift in emphasis from distinctive aesthetic states of mind (Levinson, 2016; Iseminger, 2006) toward more general information-processing states of mind that shape an aesthetic encounter. Comparably, work in anthropology and art theory situate the question of art appreciation within the framework of universal human dispositions – biological and psychological anthropological constants, operating below or above the threshold of consciousness (Berenson, 1953, 20; Morphy and Perkins, 2006). Moreover, the anthropological basis of art appreciation is becoming foregrounded with the expansion of the aesthetic field, which seeks to integrate modes of responsiveness to art forms and creative practices from outside the established canon of fine arts (e.g. indigenous cultural practices, Miner, 2014; Townsend-Gault, 2014) and to account for global artistic circulations of art forms (Espagne, 2015).

The heterogenous sources mentioned above call for a refinement of mental categories relating to appreciative behavior, which are to be kept within nature's bounds (Berenson, 1953, 41). These categories could and do indeed start to make the object of a cognitive repertoire (Schaeffer, 2003, 147; Wollheim, 1990, 104-105),

which is yet to receive thorough analysis.

In this paper I aim to clarify the concept of repertoire in relation to two seemingly divergent theoretical traditions, namely, literary studies in the German tradition, more specifically, reception aesthetics, and philosophical aesthetics in the Anglo-American analytic tradition. My focus will be on the theoretical assumptions of Wolfgang Iser and Richard Wollheim about the repertoire in connection with textual and pictorial artifacts. Both Iser and Wollheim argue to a greater or lesser extent against the irrelevance of psychological considerations in the aesthetic context and, as I suggest, work towards a cognitive aesthetics of reception, given their interests in mental acts underlying episodes of aesthetic appreciation. I hold that the innovation in the study of aesthetics that the repertoire might be introducing is establishing a conceptual basis for a cognitive aesthetics of reception. In what way does the concept of an aesthetic-centered repertoire challenge the problem of beholding, that is, the relationship between the beholder and creative practices? Does it allow for differentiated notions of appreciative response, unique to each form or genre of creative practice, in keeping with their specificity, or does it hold a more generalist appeal? Moreover, what kind of experience does a repertoire foreground (active, contemplative, self-reflexive etc.)?

In addressing these questions, I first settle a technical point by elaborating on the status of the repertoire as second-order aesthetic category. I proceed with a survey of the major theses of reception

aesthetics and psychological aesthetics in order to provide some framing and trace back the notion of repertoire to already established discourses. I then unpack the elements of the literary and pictorial repertoires, as they appear in Iser and Wollheim's writings. My general claim is that by bringing to the fore the complexity of the beholder's cognitive repertoire, one opens the prospect for overcoming the shortcomings of existing models of aesthetics that characterize aesthetic appreciation exclusively in terms of privileged mental states (e.g. attention, pleasure, disinterestedness etc.), and take steps towards reassessing its "compound nature" (Levinson, 2016, 35).

2. The Repertoire as Second-Order Aesthetic Category

The repertoire is a heuristic category for the study of reception which restores the relevance of the beholding subject in discussing aesthetic appreciation. As opposed to first-order aesthetic concepts, understood in Sibley's sense (Sibley, 1959), as terms that we use in making a judgment with respect to features intrinsic to particular works such as unified, balanced or delicate, the repertoire works as an organizing system, capturing links between such first-order concept ascriptions and shedding light on how states and processes that govern aesthetic appreciation connect to each other. Given that it is a category relating to the very nature and conditions of appreciation itself and to the ways in which first-order concepts are instantiated in the first place, whether through "the exercise of taste,

perceptiveness, or sensitivity, of aesthetic discrimination or appreciation", as Sibley (*ibid.*, 421) has it, I take the repertoire to be a second-order category. Generally absent from the art critics' talk, who focus rather on first-order concepts, the repertoire appears in rather theoretical aesthetic discussions, to which I will now turn.

3. Two Frames of Reference: Reception Aesthetics and Psychological Aesthetics

One can trace back the notion of repertoire to two theoretical traditions in which is manifested a concern with the beholding subject, namely, reception aesthetics, developed since the late 1960s in the German literary tradition and psychologically informed aesthetics in the Anglo-American analytic tradition. Wolfgang Iser and Richard Wollheim are in this respect two important reference points for understanding the processing of both textual and pictorial meaning. This section will give an overview of their main theses.

3.1. Reception Aesthetics

Reception aesthetics brings to the forefront an explicit acknowledgement of the beholder and his role in producing an aesthetic object. Building on philosophical discourse – and more particularly phenomenology – rather than empirical evidence (Iser, 1989, 43; Holub, 1984, 84-85), reception aesthetics is not concerned with a historically documented reception of art practices across time, performed by real beholders (past or contemporary), but with the

reception of implied beholders, and, more specifically, as regards Iser's original model, with the aesthetic response that implied readers experience in the act of reading. The proposed model is an idealized, heuristic one, aiming at disclosing the operations which lie at the basis of processing a literary text (Iser, 1989, 49). Literary processing operations are made manifest through textual "response-inviting structures" (i.e. structures that play with the bounds of indeterminacy in a text, between the reader's own experience and the meaning conveyed by the text or between text and reality), understood as inherent structures liable to trigger an aesthetic response and to secure a communicative efficacy (*ibid.*, vii, 5-6, 12).

A question that arises is related to the aesthetic and experiential statements that permeate the aesthetics of reception (Kemp, 1998, 183). If the main object of reception aesthetics is the aesthetic effect felt at the level of the beholder's perceiving consciousness (Iser, 1976, 49), it is questionable whether the primary aesthetic experience of real or empirical subjects is given full due. One of the pitfalls in the method of reception aesthetics is precisely that it "prestructures a certain role for the reader", who is more acted upon than properly activating for himself the aesthetic object, being thus possibly subject to a form of literary determinism, and reduced to a textual condition (Holland, as cited in Iser, 1989, 43, 45). It is hard to tell in what respect or to what extent the idealized aspects of beholding brought into focus by reception aesthetics make a phenomenal difference at the experiential level.

Here is Iser's understanding of reception: "what I call reception is a product that is initiated in the reader by the text but is modeled by the norms and values that govern the reader's outlook. Reception is therefore an indication of preferences and predilections that reveal the reader's disposition as well as the social conditions that have shaped his attitudes. If I wish to access such a product, I must examine the response-inviting structures of the text, so that I can see how much the actual reader has selected from the potential inherent in the text." (Iser, 1989, 50). While it focuses on commonalities in response to an ideated meaning inherent in the text rather than in differences in expectations and response, the model seems to assign no constitutive role to the individual reader's stock of experience in constructing an aesthetic object. Quite the contrary, the individualized store of experience of the reader is assumed to be molded by the very act of engaging in literary reading, which should ideally be resulting in cognitive learning and in an extension of the self or of ones horizons of consciousness, as one can read in the following passage: "Divergent responses would be an interesting basis for investigation into the proliferative effect resulting whenever a literary text is to be incorporated into the individual reader's store of experience. A new idea of research would open up, relating to the degree in which 1) fictionality activates human faculties in a way not called upon during our everyday lives, and 2) why we are able to understand a literary experience that an actual experience has never been our own" (*ibid.*, 53, 56). The new idea of research that Iser

mentions here is reframed in terms of literary anthropology (*ibid.,* vii, 6, 7, 261, 264), a discipline that would investigate ways in which literature reveals the workings of the human mind and its creative responsiveness. This would lead to a reappraisal of faculty psychology whose original partitions may no longer be meaningful and intelligible (*ibid.,* 274-275, 280).

3.2. Psychological aesthetics

The repertoire comes equally under the purview of psychological aesthetics in the analytic tradition, whose main representative is Richard Wollheim. Building on psychological discourse, Wollheim addresses the constitution of pictorial meaning and aesthetic appreciation, which can be comprehended by appealing to the cognitive capacities of beholders or appreciators. As a complement to textual understanding, what Wollheim brings anew in considering pictorial understanding is a conceptual construct that he calls "an internal spectator" (Wollheim, 1990, 102), whose mental activity is determinant for the conception and perception of art. Introducing this pictorial strategy is meant to induce an appropriate mental condition in the mind of the empirical, external spectator, more specifically one that parallels the mental condition of the artist, comprising required sensitivity and required information (*ibid.,* 357). One can see that Wollheim shares with Iser the epistemic assumptions of an appropriate response to works of art, that could not be resumed to sheer unruliness and arbitrary subjective impressions. The success

of the performance of transmitting artistic meaning is tested against the survival of art: the enduring intelligibility of paintings for an appropriate spectatorship would thus be due to a common human nature manifested in human societies (Matravers, 2007, 143) that enables it.

If Iser is not concerned with the individual psyche in his reception aesthetics (Iser, 1976, 50, 58), Wollheim marks a change in the scope of addressing aesthetic response or the effect a works has on us in that he puts emphasis on the constitutive role of psychological traits for appreciation and the active completion of the beholder. He also marks a change with respect to theories prevalent in the analytic aesthetic tradition to which he belongs such as attitude theories, reputed to describe aesthetic appreciation almost exclusively in terms of distinctive or paradigm aesthetic states of mind (such as aesthetic contemplation, aesthetic pleasure, disinterested, distanced or detached aesthetic attitude etc.); Wollheim thus avoids reductive or all-encompassing categories. One of the ambitions of the repertoire is, as we shall see, to demarcate the processes that enable aesthetic experience from the capacities that preclude it, while avoiding segregating aesthetic behavior from other human concerns and general forms of response that define our relation to the world (Schaeffer, 2003, 147; Levinson, 2016, 30). What is needed is an account that would allow to go from simpler, natural responses to more complex ones.

What goes into a repertoire built on psychological premises?

And what are the capacities that occupy the mental space in an aesthetic episode about which psychological theses are supposed to be making a point? In trying to answer these questions, in the following sections I highlight the polarities of the literary and pictorial aspects of the repertoire flowing from the two seemingly opposing traditions of reception aesthetics and psychological aesthetics briefly sketched above.

4. The Literary Repertoire

The repertoire of a literary text is made, according to Iser of "conventions necessary for the establishment of a situational frame", that is, of a common ground between the work and the reader (Iser, 1978, 66-67; 1976, 127). The situational frame within which the act of reading is set is to be distinguished from a pragmatic or situational context of action, wherein meaning is stabilized. Here is Iser's definition of the literary repertoire:

> The repertoire consists of all the familiar territory within the text. This may be in the form of references to earlier works, or to social and historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged— in brief, to what the Prague structuralists have called the "extratextual" reality. The fact that this reality is referred to has a two-fold implication: (1) that the reality evoked is not confined to the printed page, (2) that those elements selected for reference are not intended to be a mere replica. On the contrary, their presence in the text usually

means that they undergo some kind of transformation, and, indeed, this is an integral feature of the whole process of communication. The manner in which conventions, norms, and traditions take their place in the literary repertoire varies considerably, but they are always in some way reduced or modified, as they have been removed from their original context and function. (Iser, 1978, 69; 1976, 128-129).

Thus, conventions serve as a determinate normative background against which one comprehends a work. As mentioned in the passage above, conventions can relate to traditions of past literature alluded to in a text (e.g. Homeric and Shakespearian allusions in Joyce's *Ulysses*; Iser, 1978, 79), to a cultural and social prevailing system, or, to some extent, to the subjective norms and dispositions of the reader (Iser, 1989, 8). Conventions introduce another kind of dependence, different from perceptual determination (i.e. properties that appeal to perceptual senses), in that they appeal to the experience and knowledge of prospective readers and provide a minimal structure for expectations that arise in the reading process. At the same time, literary conventions, which remain to be discovered in the reading process, deviate from, call into question or at least throw in a new light conventions and old norms by reshuffling, depragmatizing and reorganizing them in unexpected combinations while dismissing their regulative function and disrupting the projected expectations of readers (Iser, 1978, 60-61).

The repertoire also consists of unfamiliar territory, of structures

which lead to indeterminacy in a literary text, which needs to be resolved by appeal to the reader's imagination (Iser, 1989, 36, 40-41; 1978, 85; 1976, 304). Through this emphasis on unfamiliar territory, the reader's participation is made manifest (Iser, 1978, 73-74). Indeterminacies take the form of blanks or abstract idealized structures acting as triggering signals for a response. It is this very reorganization of the repertoire of both familiar and unfamiliar elements that is deemed to have an effect on the reader.

Furthermore, the effect on the reader will be determinant for establishing the aesthetic value of a work, which is not formulated explicitly in the repertoire but emerges out of the suspension of validity and recodification of familiar norms: "aesthetic value constitutes the structural 'drive' necessary for the process of communication. By invalidating correspondences between the elements put together in the repertoire, it prevents the text from corresponding to the repertoires already inherent in all its possible readers; in this respect, the aesthetic value initiates the process whereby the reader assembles the meaning of the text" (Iser, 1978, 81-82). Conveying aesthetic value is, in Iser's reception aesthetics, tied to the proper functioning of any communication system entailing the repertoires of producers and recipients. Thus the repertoire of the sender (mainly, the author) is deemed to be continuous, although not identical or equivalent with the repertoire of the receiver (the spectator, the audience etc.), since some minimal overlapping is necessary for the communication to take place (*ibid.*, 82-83). At the

same time, while familiar elements need to be recognizable in order to make the work understandable, the ultimate goal is to change the recipient's repertoire, bringing him or her to revise and reshape his or her background beliefs and familiar schemata. The balance between the representation and alteration of the familiar is captured by the notion of "coherent deformation", a notion Iser draws from Merleau-Ponty which broadly amounts to placing familiar elements in an unfamiliar context, thus disturbing the illusion of an intrinsic orderliness of the world (Iser, 1978, 82-83; 1976, 150). It is a textual strategy that appeals to the reader's experience and individual memory store in order to draw him or her in the literary communication process while seeking to transform this very individualized store of experience.

Iser's deviationist approach appears as a counterbalance to a well-known model of representation and reception in pictorial art, namely Gombrich's model of schema and correction (Iser, 1978, 90-91), whereby correction of schemata takes place through close perception and a continuous matching process of one's familiar classifications against what the world has to offer. Gombrich's model is not operative for literary purposes (nor for pictorial arts that do not aim primarily at naturalism) since it relies exclusively on perceptual normative principles. Iser retains nonetheless from this model the idea of going against norms of expectation, which is common both to pictures and literary texts, even though the norms brought into question have a different nature.

An objection raised against Iser is that, by giving so much weight to deviation or deformation, he promotes an aesthetics of negativity which, rather than bringing into play and broadening the reader's store of experience, it goes against it, negates it – along with conventions of the represented world – rather than transforms it (Holub, 1984, 87; Iser, 1978, 73-74).

The literary repertoire is consistent with Iser's project of literary anthropology which is deemed to capture human nature within a frame. A literary repertoire may be picturing thought systems operative at specific historical moments (e.g. the prevailing norms of eighteenth-century thought systems and social systems, represented as governing the conduct of the most important characters of Fielding's *Tom Jones* such as "norms of latitudinarian morality, orthodox theology, deistic philosophy, eighteenth-century anthropology, and eighteenth-century aristocracy"; human conducts such as "benevolence, corruption of human nature, ruling passion, natural superiority of the nobility" etc.; Iser, 1989, 37-38). The aesthetic object thus becomes "the whole spectrum of human nature" arising from negated possibilities and what the representation of norms occlude, giving access to the diversity of human experience: "the repertoire of the novel … combines and levels out norms of differed systems which in real life were kept quite separate from one another. By this selective combination of norms, the repertoire offers information about the systems through which the picture of human nature is to be compiled. The individual norms themselves have to be

reassessed to the extent that human nature cannot be reduced to a single hard-and-fast principle, but must be discovered, in all its potential, through the multifarious possibilities that have been excluded by those norms" (Iser, 1978, 76). The repertoire would thus give a picture of variations on possibilities regarding human experience. The question remains open as to how an aesthetic-oriented repertoire may be contributing to anthropology and adding to a study of man.

5. The Pictorial Repertoire

If we were to arrange in contrasting patterns the literary and the pictorial repertoire, one would say that the elements of the latter repertoire are here to be tracked in the work (and, more specifically, for Wollheim's purposes, in a special category of representational painting; Wollheim, 1990, 102), not in conventions and extrapictorial norms.

Furthermore, Wollheim, as opposed to Iser, gives more weight to cognitive interaction, to the inner life of the beholder, only that the beholder – here, the spectator – is no longer external or implied, as we have seen with Iser, but internal to the picture, to its virtual space. In other words, there are differences in what the beholder is supposed to be when comparing the two traditions of reception aesthetics and analytic aesthetics. Wollheim's move is to say that the real, empirical spectator of the picture is drawn into the composition of the painting through identifying with an internal spectator, without

having to accrue the picture's content (*ibid.*, 185).

In order to explain pictures that contain an internal spectator, Wollheim appeals to an analogy with perspectival visual imagination (*ibid.*, 103-104), of which we have a more intuitive grasp. Just as one can imagine an event from the inside, from a first-person point of view in which I (or someone else) am protagonist, or from the outside, from a third-person point of view, so one's engagement with pictures may require a perspectival approach, and more specifically, adopting the perspective of an internal spectator. Importantly, protagonists or internal spectators, which remain unrepresented as such although they are given along with the content of the picture (*ibid.,* 101-102), are endowed with an assigned repertoire, by which is meant dispositions to act, see, think, remember and feel (*ibid.*, 104), and this repertoire is to be retrieved by external spectators when engaging with pictures. Here is how Wollheim introduces the pictorial repertoire:

First, the artist determines the identity of the spectator in the picture. In doing so, he has the same options open to him as I have when I engage in centrally imagining. He can choose between a spectator who is a particular person and a spectator who is merely a person of a particular kind, the kind itself varying in specificity.

Secondly, the artist, having fixed the identity of the spectator in the picture, will go on to assign him a repertoire. He will assign him dispositions that will generate and constrain his outer life and his inner life […] what is really significant is that part of the repertoire

which controls the inner life" (*ibid.*, 104-105).

In addition to being a fully-embodied "perceiving, thinking, feeling, acting, creature" (*ibid.,* 130), the internal spectator, in order to give the external spectator a distinctive access to the content of a particular picture (*ibid.*, 129-130; Hopkins, 2001, 217-218) must be a total spectator with an extended repertoire comprising an all-encompassing visual field and acute sensibility, a particular form of enhanced attention to the represented content, as well as expressive elements that match this rich inner life (Wollheim, 1983, 96). Moreover, as stressed in the passage above, it is the artist who constructs the repertoire of the inner life of the internal spectator and inscribes it in the painting during the depictive process (Wollheim, 1990, 164-166, 286-287). In other words, constructing a repertoire is a matter of artistic skill and the retrieval of the elements of the repertoire is conditioned by pictorial devices. With respect to knowing how one accesses the repertoire of the internal spectator, the solution proposed is through an imaginative engagement licensed by pictorial devices which enables an experience corresponding with what the internal spectator experiences inwardly and leaves us in a condition similar to his: "Though imagining from the inside someone's inward responses doesn't require me actually to have these responses myself, the upshot of the imaginative project, or the condition in which it leaves me, is that it is for me as if I had responded in these ways. Imagination, without inducing the experience I imagine, delivers the fruits of experience" (*ibid.*, 129). It

is as if the external spectator were delegating his or her mental processing in order to have an appropriate, enhanced understanding of the pictorial content, the effect of this understanding being free from real consequences or sanctions, an idea that we can also find in Iser. Pictorial experience becomes thus primarily a matter of experience through imagination since the assumption is that the elements of the repertoire enter the content of occurrent experiential states of the external spectator.

One of the main objections to Wollheim's proposal regards the dismissal of the external spectator's psychology (or at least part of it), whose sensory, motor or affective behavior patterns are counted out from the proper understanding of the pictorial content (Wollheim, 1990, 181-182, 237). An undesired consequence flowing from this approach would be to postulate "a distinctive positive psychological repertoire different from ours" (Hopkins, 2001, 229-230) comprising alternative sensibilities, affections and cognitions, only inscribed in a specific category of pictures. It is not clear what resources would be needed in order to comprehend such a distinctive repertoire.

Another problem with the repertoire (both literary and pictorial), is that it may not be too comprehensive enough and may not reflect the intrinsic divisions and ramifications of capacities and functions in the mental realm. Given that both the literary and pictorial repertoires aim to give a picture of variations of inner states (Iser, 1978, 76; Wollheim, 1983, 94-95), further inquiry regarding the possibility of an aesthetic-centered repertoire more anthropologically and biologically

contextualized is needed.[2]

References

Bartel, Christopher (2014), 'Cognitive Science and Aesthetics', in: Michael Kelly (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics,* New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 70-74.

Berenson, Bernard (1948/1953), *Aesthetics and History*, New York: Doubleday.

Espagne, Michel (2015), 'Cultural Transfers in Art History', in: Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann et al. (eds.), *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, New York: Routledge, pp. 97-112.

Holub, Robert (1998), 'Reception Aesthetics', in: Michael Kelly (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics,* vol. 4, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 110-114.

Hopkins, Robert (2001), 'The Spectator in the Picture', in: R. Van Gerwen, *Richard Wollheim on the Art of Painting. Art as Representation and Expression*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 215-231.

Iseminger, Gary (2005), 'Aesthetic Experience', in: Jerrold Levinson, *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 99-116.

— (2006), 'The Aesthetic State of Mind', in: M. Kieran (ed.), *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, Malden, MA: Blackwell,

---

pp. 98-110.

Iser, Wolfgang (1976), *L'Acte de lecture,* Bruxelles : Mardaga.

— (1978), *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

— (1989), *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*, Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Kemp, Wolfgang (1998), 'The Work of art and Its Beholder: the Methodology of the Aesthetic of Reception', translated by Astrid Heyer, and Michael Ann Holly, in: Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, Keith Moxey (eds.), *The Subjects of Art History : Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 180-196.

Levinson, Jerrold (2016), 'Toward an Adequate Conception of Aesthetic Experience', in: Jerrold Levinson, *Aesthetic Pursuits: Essays in Philosophy of Art,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 28-46.

Matravers, Derek (2007), 'Richard Wollheim (1923-2003)', in Diarmuid Costello, Jonathan Vickery (eds.), *Art: Key Contemporary Thinkers*, Oxford: Berg, pp. 140-143.

Moles, Abraham (1958), *Théorie de l'information et perception esthétique*, Paris: Flammarion.

Miner, Dylan A. T. (2014), 'Indigenous Aesthetics', in: Michael Kelly (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics,* vol. 2, New York: Oxford University Press*, pp. 466-470.

Morphy, Howard, Morgan Perkins (2006), 'The Anthropology of Art : A Reflection on its History and Contemporary Practice', in: Howard Morphy, Morgan Perkins (eds.), *The Anthropology of Art : A Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 1-33.

Nanay, Bence Murray Smith (2019), 'Introduction', *Is Psychology Relevant to Aesthetics? A Symposium*, *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 56 (1), pp. 87-90.

Schaeffer, Jean-Marie (2000), *Adieu à l'esthétique*, Paris : Presses Universitaires de France.

— (2003), 'Relativité culturelle ou universalité anthropologique ? Faux débats et vraies questions', in : Yolaine Escande, Jean-Marie Schaeffer (eds.), *L'Esthétique: Europe, Chine et ailleurs,* Paris : You-Feng, pp. 139-151.

Seeley, William P. (2018), 'Seeking Salience in Engaging Art: A Short Story About Attention, Artistic Value and Neuroscience', in: Julia F. Christensen, Antoni Gomila (eds.), *The Arts and The Brain: Psychology and Physiology Beyond Pleasure*, Cambridge MA: Academic Press – Elsevier, *Progress in Brain Research,* vol. 237, pp. 437-453.

Sibley, Frank (1959), 'Aesthetic Concepts', *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 68 (4), pp. 421-450.

Townsend-Gault, Charlotte, Jennifer Kramer (2014), *Native Art of the Northwest Coast: A History of Changing Ideas*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Wollheim, Richard (1983), *On Art and the Mind*, Cambridge MA:

Harvard University Press.

— (1990), *Painting as an Art,* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton
    University Press.

Aesthetic Values, Engaging Perspectives, and Possibilities in Literature

Salvador Rubio Marco[1]

University of Murcia

ABSTRACT: This is a paper on the aesthetics of literature, but also on the phenomenology and axiology of art. I will try to defend: 1) that an approach to the engagement of the reader in literary fiction based on the concept of "perspective" (Donnelly) is compatible with interactionism and moderate autonomism concerning values in art; 2) that such an approach needs to pay attention to the complexity of the aesthetic qualities which contribute to the aesthetic value of the work in order to explain the quality of a "perspective" developed within the work (and thus basing the engagement of the competent reader), and must also determine (in some cases) the aesthetic properties playing a significant role as reasons for the presence of other non-aesthetic properties in the work; 3) that the "adventure" of the engaged reader can be explained in terms of "possibilities" and "aspects" in order to avoid some dangers of epistemic and ontological views; and 4) that some examples from Henry James's novels (*The Golden Bowl*, mainly) may be particularly useful in order to exemplify my ideas.

Nussbaum (1990) and Diamond (1996) have proposed that the experience of the reader of artistic literature creates an "adventure" because through our attentive reading of novels, the emotions, the stirred intelligence, the moral consciousness of her heroes and heroines become our very own adventure[2]. I will take Nussbaum's concept of "adventure" as a conceptual tool in order to take account of the imaginative responses of both characters and readers in literature. Nevertheless, in literary writing there is an asymmetric relationship between author and reader insomuch as literature "does not purport to describe the world either from a common objective perspective (as we find with scientific, historical, or philosophical texts) or from a shared cultural perspective (as in the case of works of genre fiction)". Instead, "literature invites the reader to reach out from his or her own subjective perspective to engage with an unfamiliar perspective" (Donnelly 2019, p. 11).

Some scholars (such as Walsh, 1969; Burri, 2007; or Donnelly, 2019) have defended that such an asymmetric relationship can be solved because, as Donnelly's solution proposes in particular, "excellent literature impels the engaged reader to imaginatively transfer perspectival properties from things as they are characterized in his or her own experience to the fictional entities of the literary work" (Donnelly, 2019, p. 11), Donnelly's "perspective" is "like a grid

---

2 Nussbaum and Diamond have in mind James's quotation of the preface to *The Princess Casamassima* (James, 1937, p. 70) referring to George Eliot's characters: "Their emotions, their stirred intelligence, their moral consciousness, become thus, by sufficient charmed perusal, our own very adventure." Diamond's and Nussbaum's ideas about "adventure" may be found in Diamond, 1996, p. 313, and Nussbaum, 1990, chapter 4, respectively.

through which my experience is structured" (Donnelly, 2019, p. 14). Thus, for example, imaginatively engaging in the perspective(s) developed in a literary work such as Zola's "The Flood" implies that "Imagining that an event is unfolding and horrific only requires that I imagine that it is characterized by the perspectival properties events have when they are unfolding and horrific from my own perspective" (Donnelly, 2019, p. 15). Referring to Louis, the main character of "The Flood", "I have no problem understanding this character's perspective and respecting the motivations behind his decision to remain on his farm" (Donnelly, 2019, p. 18), even though engaging with the perspective of the text does not imply at all having (or having had) an experience similar to the experience of, or endorsing the perspective of, the character; often "we must to learn to temporally set important aspects of our own perspectives on hold" (Donnelly, 2019, p. 19).

The goal of Donnelly's argument is a defense of the "utility" of literary fiction which is not conceived as providing cognitive or moral direct gains, but rather as a means in order to develop tools and skills enabling us to identify, to compare, and to understand other perspectives and experiences. Even so, her argument becomes evaluative when she states that the imaginative engagement enabling that "utility" (which is an indirect or mediated one) constitutes at the same time an evaluative element of the artwork, insofar as "to make sense of characters' actions, at least in a minimal sense, we need only grasp enough of their perspectives to see that

their values, goals, knowledge, and so on have the right sort of structure to support their actions" (Donnelly, 2019, p. 19).

The axiological implications of her theory appear more clearly when Donnelly says that

> part of the aesthetic value of a literary work may lie in the sensory appeal of its combinations of words", but "it seems that an important part of the aesthetic value of a literary work must lie in the quality of the perspective developed within it" and "this requires, at a minimum, that the literary work unfolds through a perspective that is internally coherent and embodies compelling ways of looking at the world (Donnelly, 2019, 21).

What is included in Donnelly's "the right sort of structure to support their actions"? Is it not aesthetically determined by the author's particular work with language (beyond any "sensory appeal")? Is that "internal coherence" a matter of mere logical congruence (the reasons of the "what" of the story), independently of the "how" of the writing?

Recently, M.J. Alcaraz (2018) has defended a version of interactionism concerning values in aesthetics which is compatible with a moderate autonomism and with a certain particularism. In the light of that view (to which I am sympathetic), "grasping aesthetic properties can be a condition for grasping other non-aesthetic properties" and "aesthetic properties can play a significant role as reasons for the presence of other non-aesthetic properties" (Alcaraz,

2018, 29).

Donnelly's approach leaves the door open to the possible crucial relevance that aesthetic properties have, in some artworks at least (as Alcaraz punctuates), in order to explain the presence of moral and cognitive values, even if Donnelly insists (often confusedly) on the "structural" nature of the basis ensuring the engagement of the reader, and thus the artistic value of the text.
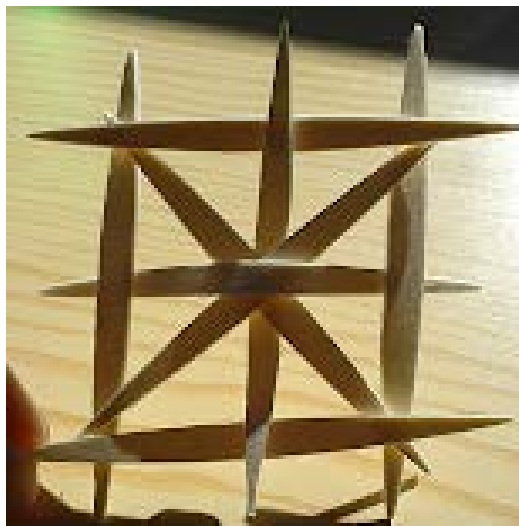
My hypothesis is that recent approaches to this topic (such as Donnelly's example) have not considered well enough the intimate relationship between the quality of a perspective ("internally coherent") developed within the work (and thus basing the engagement of the competent reader), and the complexity of the aesthetic qualities which contribute to the aesthetic value of the work, and also sometimes (in some works), to moral values or other non-aesthetic values.

Furthermore, I am convinced that a theory of aspects may offer a clearer view in terms of possibilities, supporting the idea that:

1)   aesthetic-literary qualities are crucial in order to take into account the reader's engagement, endorsing the concept of perspective, at the same time, through the concepts of "aspect", "dawning of an aspect" and "possibilities" (in both the author's and reader's tasks). It goes beyond Donnelly's "sensory appeal".

2)   some non-aesthetic values (moral or cognitive values) that the work has, even if their "utility" is an indirect or mediated one, are often based on aesthetic properties, which can be explained in terms of aspects in order to endorse a realism about properties that avoids a narrow ontological and epistemic viewpoint.

Henry James's novels (particularly *The Golden Bowl*) are privileged examples because they demand their readers carry out a task which moves in parallel with the "adventure" of the development of the characters and the plot. That task, in terms of "possibilities", is a necessary condition in order to be able to appreciate the adventures of the novels *as* adventures. In fact, the structure of the story of *The Golden Bowl* may be compared with the tensions which allows toothpicks to remain stable in a square-shaped arrangement, like this one:

Roughly summarized, the story of *The Golden Bowl* is also built on the basis of a square structure of main characters: Adam Verver, a widowed American millionaire, his daughter Maggie, Charlotte Stant (Maggies's close friend) and Prince Americo, a young Italian nobleman living in England. Even Maggie's marriage to Prince Americo does not notably change the pattern of her and her father's stable lives, a pattern that she believes to be complete when Mr. Verver marries Charlotte Stant. What Maggie does not know is that before her marriage, the Prince and Charlotte, both short of funds and therefore unable to marry, had been lovers, and now they resume, in a way, their former intimacy. Once Maggie becomes aware of this, being deeply in love with her husband and devoted to her father, she decides to remain silent. Finally, Mr. Verver and Charlotte leave for America and Maggie regains her husband's attention.

Obviously, the interesting thing about that novel (and James's novels in general) is not the events *per se*, but rather the moral adventure of the characters, that is, the interplay of tensions where the characters' agencies are working, or even more, the interplay of reflections from indirect views ("oblique" [3] views, James says) where the few actions inhabiting James's novels are cooked up, and on a metalinguistic level, how that indirect way of taking everything into account is built up by means of literary skills. I will offer some example of that further on by quoting some fragments of the novel.

---

[3] Preface to *The Golden Bowl* (*James* 1908, v).

It is perfectly possible to track in Martha Nussbaum's work some view very close to the theory of aspects with Wittgensteinian roots that I am defending here, and it is possible to do this by appealing to Nussbaum's own words which she devotes to interpreting *The Golden Bowl* in her well-known essay *Love's Knowledge*. Even though Nussbaum's frequent philosophical fulcrum is not Wittgenstein, but Aristotle, I find it highly significant, and an endorsement of my position, the fact that Nussbaum appeals directly to Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* in a passage in *Love's Knowledge*, chapter 5. The context of that passage is, not by chance, a comment about one of the crucial elements of James "oblique" strategy. The adventure of the main characters of *The Golden Bowl* is mediated (especially for the reader) by a secondary character (more exactly, by a couple of characters): Fanny and Bob Assingham's, a retired married couple. Fanny Assingham is a common friend of all the four main characters, and she is an enabler (not at all just a witness) of the events concerning both younger couples. Fanny symbolizes (for Nussbaum) the perception and the complexity of particulars, while Bob (an old Army-officer) symbolizes the attachment to the rules and to the general conceptions.

James shows us how a shared moral "basis", a responsible vision, can be constructed through the dialogue of perception and rule. (Nussbaum, 1990, 158)

A crucial moment in the story is the discussion between Fanny and Bob about the responsibility of both for having feed the

sentimental intrigue because of their blindness for the actual relationship between the Prince and Charlotte.

At the climactic moment, Fanny feels (as the result of *his* effort) a sharp pain of realized guilt; and Bob, responding with tenderness to her pain, opens himself fully to her moral adventure, to the concrete perception of their shared situation. She cries, and he embraces her "all with a patience that presently stilled her" [James, 1908, p. 378]. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 159)

One of the clues of that encounter is Bob's tenderness, abandoning rules and descending until he is in a "sort of vision of the concrete", submerging in himself, and learning

> her [Fanny's] abilities; and he was able to learn them only because there was already something in him that went beyond the universal, namely, a loving, and therefore particular, vision of her." (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 160)

That allows Nussbaum to claim here, in Aristotle's way, for the previous character of perception, insofar as

> if as members of moral communities, we are to achieve shared perceptions of the actual, we have better love one another first, in all our disagreements and our qualitative differences. Like Aristotle, he seems to say that civic love comes before, and nourishes, civic justice. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 160)

Nevertheless, there is another clue of that finding of a "common basis" (the "mystic lake", in James words, where both members of the Assingham couple are, finally, rowing together): it lies on "getting the tip" (or catching the insinuation, or the warning). The narrator's voice of *The Golden Bowl*, this time close to Bob's mind, says:

> He conveyed to her now, at all events, by refusing her no gentleness, that he had sufficiently got the tip, and that the tip was all he had wanted. (James 1908, p. 379)

Nussbaum is quickly ready to interpret the words of James's narrator in those terms:

> Finally, James's talk (or Bob's talk) of "getting the tip" shows us what moral exchange and moral learning can be, inside a morality based on perception. Progress comes not from the teaching of an abstract law but by leading the friend, or child, or loved one —by a word, by a story, by an image— to see some new aspect of the concrete case at hand, to see it as this or that. Giving a "tip" is to give a gentle hint about how one might see. The "tip", here, is given not in words at all but in a sudden show of feeling. It is concrete, and it prompts the recognition of the concrete. (Nussbaum 1990, p. 160)

And just here, at this point, Martha Nussbaum places Wittgenstein's quotation, in footnote 10:

> Compare Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York, 1968) Part II, Sect. 11, 227e:
>
> Correcter prognosis will generally issue from the judgments of those with better knowledge of mankind.
>
> Can one learn this knowledge? Yes; some can. Not, however, by taking a course in it, but through "*experience*." —Can someone else be a man's teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right *tip* [in German original: *Wink*][4]. —This is what "learning" and "teaching" are like here. —What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgments. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experienced people can apply them right. Unlike calculating-rules.
>
> What is most difficult here is to put this indefiniteness, correctly and unfalsified, into words. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 160, footnote 10)

Let us come back, for a moment, to the initial point of all that process of Bob's change of attitude. In chapter XXIII we found the Assingham couple face to face, in silence, before the starting of their "divergent conversation" about the possible delay of Charlotte and the Prince returning together to their respective homes from their visit to Matcham. James's subtleness reaches the narrator's view (and,

---

4 The square brackets are mine.

consequently, the reader's view) concerning the expressive "tip" of Fanny Assingham:

> There might, for that matter, even have been in Mrs. Assingham's face a mild perception of some finer sense —a sense for his wife's situation, and the very situation she was, oddly enough, about to repudiate--that she had fairly caused to grow in him. (James, 1908, 365)

That "There might, for that matter, even have been..." involves ultimately an incitement to the reader to participate in the play of possibilities which constitute the dimensional structure of aspects in the novel. The characters are playing the same play also. Let us pay attention to the fact that James's narrator avoids directly describing the expression in Fanny's face when she perceives a sign of sensibility in her husband's attitude, but rather the narrator throws that tip to the reader ("There might, for that matter, even have been in Mrs. Assingham's face a mild perception of some finer sense"). Thereby he anticipates something which, in terms of the "water metaphor", implies leaving the shore and plunging into the water where she was swimming alone until now. James exploits the "water metaphor" and "the mystic lake" in very crucial moments of the novel. We will see the structural matter of that fact in further passages.

Summing up, Fanny has managed to make Bob see the thing that he was initially unable to see (because of his tendency to "the

rules"), and that thing is her concern about the sentimental tension that has been created between both younger couples. And the tip (*Wink*) has consisted in experiencing the tenderness that his love for her inspires in him.

> If we are to assess the claim that correct judgment is the outcome of a dialogue between antecedent principle and new vision, we need to see the view imbodied in prose that does not take away the very complexity and indeterminacy of choice that gives substance to the view. The moral work involved in giving and getting "the tip" could hardly be shown us in a work of formal decision theory; it could not be shown in any abstract philosophical prose, since it is so much a matter of learning the right sort of vision of the concrete. It could not be shown even in a philosopher's example, inasmuch as an example would lack the full specificity, and also the indeterminacy, of the literary case, its rich metaphors and pictures, its ways of telling us how characters come to see one another as this or that and come to attend to new aspects of their situation. (Nussbaum, 1990, pp. 160-161)

Those kinds of "tips" are what we can call, in Wittgensteinian vocabulary, *further descriptions* or invitations to *see as* (whether successful or failed) and, if it is successful, to *see*. *Further descriptions*, proposed in Wittgenstein's courses of the 1930-1933 period, are explanations of the meaning consisting of comparisons,

associations, analogies, examples, metaphors, connections, juxtapositions, repetitions, transitions, redundancies, gestures, contextualizations, invitations to emphasize this or that element, the invention of new contexts for interpretation, etc. They are the sort of reasons that we utilize frequently in everyday aesthetic situations and they play an essential role in actual artistic and aesthetic practices. We cannot pass over the fact that Wittgenstein is just using here the term "descriptions" regarding *further descriptions*: indeed, there are descriptions that have one foot in some objective feature of the work (or the thing), for instance "listen to this transition...", and the other foot out of the work (for instance "...as a protest against x") in order to endorse an aesthetic judgment ("You will now see that the work is ironic", for example) and set out to excite a reactive *seeing*, but without making its truth dependent on the success of this reaction.

We cannot ignore either the fact that Wittgenstein explains how we manage to catch the expressed thing (in an artwork or in a person) in terms of the concept of "imponderable evidence"[5]. I know (I see) that a musical piece is ironic because a certain transition works as a protest against this other passage of the piece. But I know (I see) also that someone loves actually by means of certain "imponderable evidences" such as "subtleties of glance, of gesture, of tones" (Wittgenstein, 1986, p. 228). Let me quote briefly *Philosophical Investigations* part II, because I think that quotation

---

5 Even if, as Wittgenstein points out, we can also use documentary evidences in order to verify its correction.

allows a direct Jamesian reading. Wittgenstein says:

> Imponderable evidence includes subtleties of glance, of gesture, of tone.
>
> I may recognize a genuine loving look, distinguish it from a pretended one (and here there can, of course, be a 'ponderable' confirmation of my judgment). But I may be quite incapable of describing the difference. And this not because the languages I know have no words for it. For why not introduce new words? —If I were a very talented painter I might conceivably represent the genuine and the simulated glance in pictures." (Wittgenstein, 1986, p. 228)

Nobody as much as Henry James has reflected the "imponderability" of the "imponderable evidences" (no paraphrase replaces completely what the subtle glance or the subtle gesture expresses), but at the same time, nobody as much as Henry James possesses the extraordinary literary skill of using words in order to evoke "imponderable evidences" in the reader's mind by means of an almost-pictorial literature (even though, obviously, James is not a painter, but a writer). Nussbaum says:

> In the preface to this novel, James speaks of the "duty" of "responsible prose" to be, "while placed before us, good enough, interesting enough and, if the question be of picture, pictorial enough, above all *in itself*." (James 1908, ix-x)

(Nussbaum 1990, 161)

Chapter XLI starts with the Prince and Maggie at home when they reveive a telegram from Charlotte announcing that she and Adam Verver will go there for a tea at five o'clock. That tea means in fact the farewell of both before their departure to America. And the chapter finishes with an involuntary contact of hands between the Prince and Maggie, with the sound accompaniment of a "Wait.Wait." where all Maggie's (and now also the Prince's) hopes of giving in to each other are condensed.

> "'Wait!' It was the word of his own distress and entreaty, the word for both of them, all they had left, their plank now on the great sea", [...] "She has saved herself [...]" (James, 1908, pp. 352-353)

The echo in terms of the water metaphor from the Assinghams's conversation gains here a structural role to play. But there is still a new echo of it in the last paragraphs of the novel, when the Prince and Maggie find themselves alone again after the departure of Adam and Charlotte.

> "Isn't she [Charlotte] too splendid?" she [Maggie] simply said, offering it to explain and to finish.
> "Oh splendid!" With which he came over to her.
> "That's our help, you see," she added —to point further her

> moral.
>
> It kept him before her therefore, taking in —or trying to— what she so wonderfully gave. He tried, too clearly, to please her —to meet her in her own way; but with the result only that, close to her, her face kept before him, his hands holding her shoulders, his whole act enclosing her, he presently echoed: "'See'? I see nothing but YOU." And the truth of it had with this force after a moment so strangely lighted his eyes that as for pity and dread of them she buried her own in his breast." (James, 1908, pp. 368-369)

The subtleness of James's style allows us to glimpse that this in not at all the case of a *happy ending*; but rather like toothpicks in tension in the square structure (the moral tension, the balance of feelings) remains standing in its complexity and in its irreducible partiality ("complexity and indeterminacy" said Nussbaum in his pp. 160-161 quotation). The Prince is "trying to" take in (not simply "taking in") what Maggie so wonderfully gave. The scene culminates with a half-embrace (or almost-embrace) of the Prince and Maggie: "she buried her own in his breast". But, is this actually an embrace? Is it the Prince embracing Maggie? It seems not so at all. Is it rather a half-embrace made by Maggie's gesture to the Prince? But, most of all, there is the echo of the (complete) embrace of the Assinghams, the elderly couple, and the contrast that we have remarked on previously. And there is also the contrast between the two words which dominate Assingham's embrace ("tenderness and care",

Nussbaum, 1990, p. 132 footnote 11) and the two words which dominate that almost-embrace ("pity and dread"). The reader has, no doubts, an active role in order to answer all of those questions.

James puts everything on the line when he describes the gestures in the very final scene of the novel, accompanying "she buried her own [eyes] in his breast". Maggie ends up covering her eyes. If my hypothesis endorsing the central role of "seeing" is right, that detail is highly significant because it confirms that the whole of the final passage pivots on the "seeing": " 'See'? I see nothing but YOU." And there is a contrast between the two ways of "seeing" (the second one having been denied by the gesture of the almost-embrace in itself), insofar as the truth of the Prince's words ("the truth of it") leads into his eyes ("strangely lighted") which inspire Maggie's "pity and dread". Nussbaum has remarked on this when she says:

> It is instructive to examine the many places in the novel where a person is praised with the aesthetically linked word "splendid". It usually emerges that to call a human being that is to refuse that person a properly human tenderness and care. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 132 footnote 11)

Finally, we cannot overlook the associations of the expression "to *bury* her eyes in his breast" (I italicize *bury*). There is a strange "truth" that has to be evaluated by the reader in the overall context of the gesture and its meaning, but also by comparing it with other previous

gestures, words, and feelings, which participate in a slippery and complex chemistry of writing.

Nussbaum interprets Maggie's final gesture and the words "pity and dread" in a decidedly Aristotelian tone:

> Aristotle argued that tragedy brings illumination concerning values: through the "pity and dread" inspired by tragic events, we learn about what matters to us, and we are clarified. Maggie, in the last sentence of the novel, recognizes that the keen vision and acknowledgment of the good tragic spectator are themselves values which can, in the world of nature, collide with others values. To see all, to be present to all, requires of the spectator a narrowness of love; to surrender to love requires an infidelity of the soul's eyes. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 137)

Even though, later on Nussbaum makes Maggie's blindness and the reader's blindness the same when the reader, focusing his attention on Maggie (with the narrator's guide), no longer focusses on the "passion" of Charlotte. My emphasis on the comparison with the Assingham's embrace intends to suggest a less optimist interpretation than Nussbaum's one. Anyway, the issue of the final interpretation of the novel is not the actual goal of my paper.

Let us now retake the schedule of hypothesis promised at the beginning of this article:

1)   aesthetic-literary qualities are crucial in order to take into account the reader's engagement, endorsing the concept of perspective at the same time, through the concepts of "aspect", "dawning of an aspect" and "possibilities" (in both the author's and reader's tasks). It goes beyond Donnelly's "sensory appeal".

Donnelly's approach has the undoubtable advantage of avoiding the radical epistemic argument, insofar as it does not base the utility and the value of the novel on a knowledge directly derived from the characters' descriptions or actions, but rather on the development of tools and skills when we share, as readers, the "adventure" of the characters, to the extent that it allows us to compare and understand the other's perspectives and experiences.   Properly sharing the adventure of the characters involves, for Donnelly, "to grasp enough of their perspectives to see that their values, goals, knowledge, and so on have the right sort of structure to support their actions" (Donnelly, 2019, p. 19).

I am not aiming to exploit here all the descriptions in terms of a theory of aspects that James's novel, Nussbaum's interpretation of it, and Donnelly's perspectivist approach offer us, but I think that James, particularly in *The Golden Bowl*, makes it possible for us to to see three characteristics under a very special light which are central in a typical structure of aspects:

a)   its simultaneously perceptive (experiencing) and cognitive (interpreting, thinking, reasoning or reflecting) constitution; the *seeing* (experience) involves something more than a mere *interpreting*, even though it starts very often with an invitation to *see as...* (possibilities or hypothesis)

b)   the intimate relationship between the understanding side and the evaluative side concerning the "downing of an aspect" (there are no "epiphanic guaranties")

c)   the role of *trigger* played by the "tip", which is conveyed through the words in literature, even if it is open-ended, by means of the words, to a huge *ut pictura poesis* in the reader's mind.

I do not think that *a* and *b* need much more explanation: when I see an aspect, I am not simply asserting to a hypothesis, but rather I have to be able to *see* the object in accordance with the way proposed by the hypothesis (or possibility). At the same time, the evidence that my *seeing* is the proper one (or the correct one) is not something guaranteed by the properties of the object (even if my *seeing* has to be in accordance with them), and the criteria by which someone (me or another person) is able to test that you have come to actually *see* the object under the proper aspect is not guaranteed

either[6].

The third characteristic *c* allows us to see specially well that Donnelly's perspectives have to work necessarily on the basis of the double articulation previously mentioned (perceiving/ knowing, understanding/ evaluating, stating/ imagining), and they do it in a way that is never standardized or guaranteed for the reader, rather they lie on the square-shaped structure of toothpicks which is ultimately the literary warp, the text of the novel itself. The efficacy of the "water metaphor"[7], of the deployment of "tips" (glances, tears, embraces, contacts, words, tones of voice, etc.)[8] when expressing what they are not merely representing, but rather what is behind those representations (that is, an aspect, a *seeing*), all those issues acquire an undoubtable tone in terms of a theory of aspects. And Henry James is every time being careful about never closing the interpretation of his "tips", about leaving them ever open while we are tempted by him to find our guide with the help of them. What has Maggie really come to *see* in the Prince's gesture? And what has the Prince really come to *see* in Maggie's gesture? How do those examples of "seeing" compare with the Assingham's "seeing"? What is the reader's "seeing"? And what is the "seeing" of James's narrator

---

6 I have developed those characteristics of aspects in previous works as for example *Comprender en arte*, Valencia: Cimal, 1995, or "Aspectos, razones y juicios en la comprensión estética: una aproximación wittgensteiniana", in Julián MARRADES (ed.).: *Wittgenstein: Arte y Filosofía*, Madrid: Plaza y Valdés, 2013, cap. 6, pp. 155-178.
7 Is this an unnatural metaphor or not?
8 The deployment of "tips" works between the characters, for the reader, or for the author himself guiding his aim (whether he succeeded or not?)

who organizes all the plot[9]?

For, if we follow Nussbaum's thesis, James thinks that moral knowledge is a perception (the proper way of seeing something):

> Moral knowledge, James suggests, is not simply intellectual grasp of particular facts; it is perception. It is seeing a complex, concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there, with imagination and feeling. To know Maggie is to see and feel her separateness, her felicity; to recognize all this is to miss least of all. If he had grasped the same general facts without these responses and these images, in all their specificity, he would not really have known her. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 152)

On the one hand, Adam's moral learning consists of being able to come to see Maggie as a "water creature" (that means his daughter's sexuality and free maturity) by paying attention to the words that she employs in order to describe her passion for Americo (Nussbaum, 1990, pp. 279-280). On the other hand, Maggie's learning takes place when "her imagination, like his [Adam], achieves its moral goal in the finding of the right way of seeing", [...] "to imagine him not as father and law and world but as a finite human" (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 152).

Ultimately, the structure of aspects regarding the conferring of

---

9 Here lies above all the complexity of the Jamesian poetics which is shown, for example, in the prefaces of the New York edition (*vid.* James, 1937).

meaning and value to the artwork is explicitly present at the heart of *The Golden Bowl* in the object of the golden bowl itself. Now let us remember again that, for Donnelly, "part of the aesthetic value of a literary work may lie in the sensory appeal of its combinations of words" (Donnelly, 2019, p. 21). That "sensory appeal" needs to be extended to the expressive power of the combination of words which, after all, constitutes every literary text. The "sensory appeal" can work on a microstructural level (for example, the use of the word "wait"[10], or the use of the conditional formula when interpreting the expression of the gesture in the perceived face); but it also works on a macrostructural level (the contrast between Assingham's embrace and the final embrace between Americo and Maggie, or the water metaphor). Understood this way, it is no just a "part", but all of the aesthetic value of the literary artwork that is grounded on the "sensory appeal of its combinations of words". Furthermore, the connection between aesthetic value and moral value is very intimate, as the proper object of the golden bowl shows. And once again, this is true regarding the different layers of the literary communication: the way the characters interpret the actions of each other, the way the narrator leads us to interpret the novel, and the way every reader finally interprets all those data, even in the frame of the complete work of James considered as a whole. And that issue leads us to the

10 No by chance, the world "wait" is the crucial word also in the final passage of *The Portrait of a Lady*. *Vid.* my "Imagination, Possibilities and Aspects in Literary Fiction", in Vaughan, C. (eds.) & Vidmar, I. *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, vol. 11, 2019, pp. 506-521. http://www.eurosa.org/wp-content/uploads/ESA-Proc-11-2019-Rubio-Marco-2019.pdf

second hypothesis proposed at the beginning of this article:

2)   some non-aesthetic values (moral or cognitive ones) that the work has, even if their "utility" is an indirect or mediated one, are often based on aesthetic properties, which can be explained in terms of aspects in order to endorse a realism about properties that avoids a narrow ontological and epistemic viewpoint.

Alcaraz (2018) has defended a version of the interactionism concerning the values in aesthetics which is compatible with a moderate autonomism and with a certain particularism. The interaction between aesthetic values and moral values is implicit in the efficacy of the "adventure" shared by the characters and the reader, following Nussbaum's proposal to which I am sympathetic. In fact, Donnelly's "perspective" may be understood as a condition of the possibility of such an efficacy. Aligning with moderate autonomism, we may assume that "grasping aesthetic properties can be a condition for grasping other non-aesthetic properties" and "aesthetic properties can play a significant role as reasons for the presence of other non-aesthetic properties" (Alcaraz, 2018, p. 29). I think it has been clearly shown that a deficient understanding of the aesthetic properties (and values) of the novel, or, in Donnelly's terms, a deficient assumption (or judgement) of "perspective" may frequently involve other non-aesthetic (mainly moral) properties and values, even if we conceive of consequences in the non-immediate

terms (through the development of moral skills or tools) as proposed by Donnelly and Alcaraz. And the last "may" has to be decided concretely for every particular work; we can think, for example, that the *oblique* literary strategy used by James is more or less successful or efficient in this or that chapter of James's novel and thus what kind of moral consequences result from it.

Furthermore, a theory of aspects according to which we understand an artwork when we are able to catch its correct aspect, that is, when we come to *see* it (the complete artwork or some of its elements) properly, is perfectly compatible with stating that the aesthetic properties *are in* the artwork. At the same time, it is perfectly compatible with an axiological position according to which both the aesthetic and the moral values of the artwork are substantially dependent on the reader's ability to base these two such kinds of values on the aesthetic qualities (literary qualities, in that case) of the work. The immanent character of those properties does not deny the role of the author, or the role of the reader, in the process of determining those values.

Nussbaum's view is aligned with that idea when she says:

> In the preface to this novel, James speaks of the "duty" of "responsible prose" to be, "while placed before us, good enough, interesting enough and, if the question be of picture, pictorial enough, above all *in itself*" (James, 1908, pp. ix-x) (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 161)

I have to underline "responsible" here. Certainly, it is a duty of the author to provide his prose whith the assumption of a proper "perspective" (in Connelly terms). The efficacy and the value of his work depend on that. It is subject to a normative (evaluative) regime insofar as the reader comes to *see*, or not, independently of the fact that he has experienced (or not) a situation similar to that described in the novel (for example, a suspicion of infidelity[11]), thanks to the skill of the writer in order to create the proper literary conditions for the engagement (an aesthetic and moral engagement) of the reader.

The adventure of reading *The Golden Bowl* implies that the reader has to take sides for in that adventure, an aesthetic, moral (and philosophical, Nussbaum would add) adventure which consists mostly of conferring the proper expression and meaning to the gestures and words of the characters, while assuming the high degree of indetermination which is the signature of Henry James's writing style and a key component of his particular and timeless value. And this also implies that the conferral of meaning entails the acknowledgement of the intimate link between gesture and expression as possibilities which have to be *seen* (by the characters, but also by the reader, if the representation is "pictorial enough, above all *in itself*"). Those possibilities (for example, the attention to the fact that the Prince is unable to embrace as Bob Assingham

---

11 Or rather, we could say the experience of managing an evidence of infidelity in the frame of a stable relationship (a "loving" relationship, maybe?). I think that those answers are part of the reader's final decisions.

does) allow the readers to assume a perspective from which they are able to *see* the moral value of a certain character's actions that the reader has never experienced in his proper life. That is the deep sense of Nussbaum's idea (after James's words) when she says that the experience of the reader of artistic literature creates an "adventure" because through our attentive reading of novels, the emotions, the stirred intelligence, the moral consciousness of her heroes and heroines become our very own adventure[12].

The main goal of Martha Nussbaum is to prove that literature is genuine moral philosophy, even though she bases that goal on a statement that Cora Diamond ignores (or rather she places secondarily): that this is made "through" (or "by means of") the aesthetic properties of the literary text itself. My intention has been to underline that idea, while to coming to a less "moralistic" view than Nussbaum's view and coming to one closer to Donnelly's or Alcaraz's view which would conclude that novels (like art in general) do not make us morally better necessarily. In other words, that novels do not provide us with the acquisition of knowledge (moral knowledge, in particular) directly, but they contribute (most often) to the development of tools and skills which may come to enrich our moral knowledge.

Obviously, people do not read novels with the main goal of enriching their moral knowledge. And we can even remove the word "moral" from the previous sentence: people's main reason for reading

---

12 See previous note 2.

novels is not in order to acquire knowledge, while they may do so in order to enrich their lives (and here "enrich" involves typical aesthetic ends such as, for example, to enjoy the reading). Usually, it is "through" that enjoyment (an involved or engaged one) that novels find a way to place us in proper perspectives from which we are able to better understand others (characters) or we can take in some situations never experienced actually in our lives, by living the adventure of the novel as readers. And, ultimately, (maybe) to come to develop skills and tools for our moral actual life.

My thesis has been that the "learning" (if we can use that word here) from novels (artistic novels at least) has to be something conveyed through an aesthetic (literary) elaboration which may be clearly emphasized from the approach of a certain theory of aspects. In the case of Henry James's novels (and particularly of *The Golden Bowl*), that elaboration is most especially sophisticated, subtle and complex.

And probably (I leave it for moral philosophers to consider) this works as a metaphor of the actual character of moral life[13], where "moral exchange and moral learning" are "inside a morality based on perception" and where the concrete thing (a word, a story, an image, a gesture as a sudden show of feeling (and never the teaching of an abstract law) are the "tip", the guide, in our moral learning, "by leading the friend, or child, or loved one [...] to see some new *aspect*

---

13 And even we may extend it to "expressive live" also (which is almost to say the "life" in general)

of the concrete case at hand, to *see* it *as*[14] this or that." (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 295)

References

Alcaraz León, María José (2018) "Aesthetics Makes Nothing Happen?", *JAAC* 76:1, 21-31.

Burri, Alex (2007), "Art and the View From Nowhere" in *A Sense of the World: Essays on Fiction, Narrative,and Knowledge*, J. Gibson, W. Huemer, & L. Pocci, 308-317, New York: Routledge.

Donnelly, Maureen (2019) "The Cognitive Value of Literary Perspectives", *JAAC* 77:1, 11-22.

Diamond, Cora (1996), *The Realistic Spirit*, Cambridge: MIT Press.

James, Henry (1908), *The Golden Bowl* (1908 New York Edition, etext at SUNY [The State University of New York] at New Paltz, prepared by Richard Hathaway) https://www2.newpaltz.edu/~hathawar/goldenbowl1.html, accessed 29/08/2020.

James, Henry (1937), *The Art of the Novel*, New York/London: Ch. Scribner & Sons. https://archive.org/details/artofthenovelcri027858mbp/page/n389/mode/2up, accessed 29/08/2020.

Nussbaum, Martha (1990), *Love's Knowledge*, Oxford: Oxford UP.

Walsh, Dorothy (1969), *Literature and Knowledge*, Wesleyan University Press

---

14 The last three italics are mines.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1986), *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Beyond 'Visual' Art: Non-Sighted Modes of Beholding Contemporary Art

Ken Wilder[1]

University of the Arts London

ABSTRACT. This paper investigates new engagements afforded people with visual impairments by hybrid or intermedial forms of art, such as – pre-eminently – installation art. Against ocularcentric models of 'spectatorship' championed by someone like Clement Greenberg, it argues the centrality of non-sighted modes of beholding to a number of paradigmatic examples of installation art. In so doing, the paper proposes the importance of such modes in bringing the beholder's orientation into play, and in negotiating the unstable relation between the virtuality of the artwork and the 'real' site context. Thus considered, visual impairment might be reconceived not an impediment to an aesthetic encounter (a *lacking* or *deficiency*), but rather a 'gap' to be creatively negotiated as part of a fully embodied experience. This takes on a particular importance in installations that explicitly seek to activate the space of reception using senses other than sight, and the paper concludes by examining concrete examples of such art practice.

1.

If aesthetics is to have continuing relevance to the experience of contemporary art practice, then it is important that it reflects not only

1 Email: k.wilder@chelsea.arts.ac.uk

the reality of new aesthetic modes of encountering art, but the needs of diverse audiences. These two issues are, I believe, closely linked; that they are rarely discussed together reflects, on the one hand, a disconnect between the philosophy of art and the reality of much contemporary practice, and on the other a 'default' beholder often conceived (putting to one side intersectional issues of race, sex, gender, sexuality and class) as an able-bodied 'viewer' or 'spectator'. My particular concern in this paper is the theoretical consequences of such ocularcentric norms when considering contemporary art practice, integral to the very characterisation of what is still referred to as the 'visual' arts. In so doing, the paper will address an area of research that has received little critical attention outside of the writing of blind artists and/or theorists.[2] In particular, it will consider the significance of new engagements afforded people with visual impairments by hybrid or intermedial forms of art, such as – pre-eminently – installation art.

2.

For many years, the experience of 'visual' art afforded those people with more severe sight-impairment was limited to rare opportunities to touch objects in a museum's collection (often while required to

---

2 See, for instance, Fayen d'Evie (2017), Georgina Kleege (2018). This paper has emerged out of an ongoing research connected to a joint funding bid with the visually impaired artist Aaron McPeake, and I am immensely grateful for his invaluable contribution to my thinking about the subject matter. McPeake and I have previously collaborated on artworks, including our 2017 work *Circumstantes*, an installation within Sigurd Lewerentz's Sankt Petri church in Klippan, Sweden.

wear gloves) or, more problematically, mediated access through tactile facsimiles of objects or paintings. This situation has somewhat improved, at least in part in response to disability discrimination legislation. Most major museums now offer guided tours and audio-descriptions aimed specifically at a blind and partially-sighted audience; and some museums, galleries and heritage sites commission exhibitions or works of art that offer a multi-sensory experience. However, there is still a tendency to treat blind people as a unitary group, defined *by* their 'disability' and undifferentiated in terms of their degree of sight impairment and levels of art knowledge. Writing in 2003, Fiona Candlin notes:

> However diverse individual blind people might be, as museum visitors they are primarily defined in relation to a lack of sight. The continuing lack of basic provision means blind people can only visit in a disabled capacity; tactile flooring is still virtually non-existent, good lighting is often sacrificed for ambience and large print labelling generally comes in a distant second to the designer's overarching exhibition concept. Museums and galleries may flaunt their access credentials (especially in funding applications) but access is often tokenistic and tends to remain low on the list of institutional priorities. Blind people are constituted as a marginal group not because their blindness makes them so, but because the ocularcentricity of museums and galleries ensures that non-visual engagement with art and

artefacts remains virtually inconceivable in all but the most innovative of institutions. (2003, p. 101)

This situation has not significantly changed in the intervening years, and institutional priorities continue to prohibit touch. When the second of the five casts of Henry Moore's *King and Queen* (1952-3) was first installed in 1954 on remote moorland at Glenkiln, in Dumfries and Galloway, everyone (including livestock) could rub-up against, or climb over, the bronze work; by contrast, when a cast of the same work (owned by the Tate) was installed at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, in 2013, alongside paintings by Francis Bacon, no touching was allowed. Such a situation is exacerbated by the increasing use of laser-beam alarm systems in galleries, which make the close viewing of paintings almost impossible for anyone with visual impairment.

Sometimes the lack of awareness of how blind people encounter art can be almost comical; a blind acquaintance was stopped (for health and safety reasons) from entering, alone, Anthony Gormley's immersive installation *Blind Light* (2007), an illuminated glass room filled with mist, installed at the Hayward Gallery in London. Yet this was a work where everyone's experience was to blunder into unseen strangers in the dense fog. On a more serious note, those charged with improving accessibility are rarely given the kind of voice afforded curators within their organisations. And, of course, Covid 19 has served to reinforce this marginalisation,

reinforcing an institutional fear of 'touching' the artworks while presenting particular difficulties for visually-impaired people in terms of negotiating virtual tours.

Such concerns with access are not, however, the primary focus of this paper. Rather, I intend to focus on how this marginalisation is mirrored by a gap in philosophical thinking as to how engagements beyond the optical might potentially expand the experience of art: not only for the partially-sighted and blind community, but for *all* beholders. This challenges what David Bolt refers to as 'ocularnormative' epistemological approaches that equate seeing with knowing, prioritising visual perception over other forms of knowledge (2014, p. 18). In confronting this issue, I propose the centrality of non-sighted modes of beholding art to a number of paradigmatic examples of installation art.[3] Indeed, I will argue that such fully embodied, multi-sensory modes are essential to the experience of 'situated' installations that we have to physically enter, or (in some circumstances) to which we are pointedly excluded.

3.

Let me return to my opening claim. Elsewhere, I have sought to counter suggestions that postconceptual art is non- or even anti-

---

3 Of course, in so doing we might make a convincing case for galleries/museums to rethink the kinds of spaces they make available for the commissioning of installation works (beyond the generic white-cube), and the kind of intrinsic haptic and auditory locational cues such host spaces afford. But that is another story.

aesthetic – a position held by someone like Peter Osborne (2013). This requires confronting misconceptions about the nature of the 'autonomous' art object as necessarily self-contained (Wilder, 2020b). In so doing, I share Juliane Rebentisch's contention that installation art transgresses not so much the 'idea of autonomous art' but rather 'an objectivist misunderstanding of it' (2012, p. 14). If, by 'bracketing' a world from the spheres of practical and theoretical reason, installation art offers an experience that demands the performative role of the subject (in bringing forth something that is not, in and of itself, given by the work), then as Rebentisch argues the aesthetic experience "does not transcend the concrete empirical subjectivity of the subject of experience but rather reflects on it in a specific way" (2012, p. 271). This demands reflection not only upon the beholder's productive role (what we might call the beholder's share), but on the need to confront 'silent' social and cultural assumptions by disrupting or invalidating norms and conventions (such as the ubiquitous 'do not touch'). The resulting dehabitualisation – a characteristic feature of much installation art – necessitates (i) shifts in spatial and ideological orientation towards the work in question, and (ii) (and this is where my position differs from Rebentisch's) a central role for the imagination. In particular, I have argued that the latter is critical to negotiating the intrinsically unstable relation between our perception of the 'real' situation and the bracketed 'virtual' realm of the artwork (Wilder, 2020a).

My argument is therefore that non-sighted modes of beholding are integral to both bringing our bodily orientation into play and *binding* the resulting imaginative processes, whereby we experience the work as both a virtual space (i.e. a semblance) and a spatially-situated reality. Thus considered, visual impairment might be reconceived not an impediment to an aesthetic encounter (a *lacking* or *deficiency*), but rather a 'gap' to be creatively negotiated as part of a fully embodied experience. And while this bodily orientation might be considered as a factor in *all* situated art, it arguably takes on a particular importance in installations that explicitly seek to activate the space of reception using senses other than sight.

4.

This paper therefore maintains that the engagement afforded blind and partially-sighted people – marginalised not by their blindness, but societal attitudes – should not be solely thought of in terms of 'disability access' or 'social inclusion' (though these *are* important), but one that expands our understanding of the distinctive ontology of postconceptual art. This encompasses – but is certainly not restricted to – works appreciated through senses other than sight. Moreover, such a position intersects with the problem of defining a distinctive phenomenological experience for installation art (distinct from, for example, our engagement with sculpture, where the immediate

environment is organised by the kinetic potential of the sculpture itself rather than the situation we occupy).[4]

However, if such 'expanded' experiences are to constitute more than tokenistic gestures towards widening participation, there is a need to identify where the criticality lies in such an engagement: an encounter that should, of course, be as challenging for a blind audience as it is for a sighted one.[5] The issue is pressing given that intermedial works often seek to *problematise* the beholder's orientation towards the work, dehabitualising the beholder-position by disrupting or negating norms and conventions. Crucially, such a theoretical process should be distinguished from the very real practical problems of access for people with disabilities that some installations present (as the recent controversy over wheelchair access to the 2002 work *Your Spiral View* at Olafur Eliasson's retrospective at Tate Modern demonstrates).[6]

This discussion takes place against a backdrop where the 1960s and 70s witnessed a fundamental challenge to the kind of medium-specific modes of art championed by the likes of Clement

---

4 See Susanne Langer (1953). This is a position I share with Elisa Caldarola (2020), who has argued something very similar.

5 As Candlin (2003) notes, there can sometimes be a tendency to 'dumb down' on touch tours, though this is certainly not always the case as more blind and visually impaired artists are increasingly involved in organising and leading them. In the UK, organisations such as VocalEyes, founded in 1998, have been pivotal in transforming the quality of touch tours and audio-description.

6 See the media response to Irish journalist Ciara O'Connor's Instagram then Twitter thread about her experience of being excluded as a wheelchair user by Eliasson's installation. O'Connor's objection was not just that she was excluded, but Eliasson's rhetoric around the installation offering a fully-embodied experience that she was not able to participate in.

Greenberg and Michael Fried, dominated (at least in Greenberg's case) by reductive notions of the 'optic' that negate the beholder's bodily engagement, even in the case of sculpture. Thus, Greenberg claims: "The human body is no longer postulated as the agent of space in either painting or sculptural art; now it is eyesight alone, and eyesight has more freedom of movement and invention within three dimensions than two" (1993, p. 59). The supposed self-sufficiency of modernist painting and sculpture was criticised by a new generation of critics and practitioners: not only for its demarcation of the virtual space of the artwork as distinct from the space of the beholder, but also for its explicit ocularcentrism and disavowal of haptic modes of engaging art. By contrast, new forms of intermedial art explicitly sought to *activate the space of reception*, in what constituted an ideological rejection of the very notion of context-independent art.[7] Here, not only was the context of a work's reception considered constitutive of a work's meaning, but intermedial art potentially offered a more complex physical engagement, inviting multi-sensory perception including sound, touch, smell, proprioception and even (on rare occasions) taste. Early examples might include Michael Asher's air flow works of 1969, where industrial fans created tangible columns of air, or Lygia Clark's 1967-8 *Máscaras Sensoriais* [*Sensory Masks*], which enveloped the face of the wearer, integrating sachets that were both aromatic and textural.

---

7 See, for instance, Alex Potts (2001). Of course, this should not hide the fact that many of these early installations were notoriously inaccessible for many people with disabilities.

5.

A number of questions arise here. If, as noted above, a stated intention of much intermedial art involves an intentional problematising of the beholder-position, prompting acts of ideation, how might such perspective-shifting (to use Wolfgang Iser's term)[8] be achieved through non-sighted modes of beholding art? How might non-sighted modes of beholding likewise dehabitualise perception and impede ideation (i.e. our attempt to grasp different levels of meaning)? And how might such an expanded notion of such processes feed into the wider question of defining a distinctive mode of virtual space (in Susanne Langer's sense) for intermedial forms of contemporary art such as installation art?

My suggestion is that the above questions are, in fact, necessarily linked; that in bringing our full bodily orientation into play, non-sighted modes of beholding art are integral not only in terms of our orientation towards the work, but to processes of dehabitualisation. They constitute a distinctive (if not defining) feature of the phenomenological experience of installation art (a space into which we physically enter), playing a particular role in terms of destabilising the conventions of a work's reception. Of course, I am not the only one to make such a claim. Claire Bishop, for instance, notes in the introduction to her 2005 book *Installation Art: A Critical*

---

8 See Iser (1978).

History that installation art "loosely refers to the type of art into which the viewer physically enters", such that:

> Rather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance, installation art presupposes an *embodied* viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision. This insistence on the literal presence of the viewer is arguably the key characteristic of installation art. (2005, p. 6)

Bishop's position, with its emphasis on touch, smell and sound, clearly intersects with my own concern with non-sighted modes of beholding art. And while the importance of an embodied beholder might be said to characterise many 'situated' historical works (prior to the Greenbergian fallacy of the self-contained art object),[9] it is undoubtedly true that the intermedial work emerging out of the 1960s marked a paradigmatic shift in practice away from a modernist emphasis on the optic. However, Bishop's two claims need to be prised apart. To reduce the beholder (as Fried notoriously does)[10] to a 'literal presence' denies her role in negotiating the unstable boundary between real and virtual, something which Bishop's own writing emphasises throughout the rest of her book.

---

9 See Wilder (2020a).
10 See, for instance, Fried's 1967 essay 'Art and Objecthood' (1998).

This has certain consequences. If our engagement with installation art is one which brings our situated perception into play (a perception *already* enmeshed within the world, in Merleau-Ponty's sense), then non-visual modes of orientation *are also constitutive of the critical reflection that installation art prompts*. They are vital in activating our imaginative and ideational orientation towards the work, facilitated not only by the ease with which we move between frames of reference (coordinated between different sense modalities), but in their use of demonstrative frames of reference shared between perception and mental imagery. This conceives non-sighted modes of beholding art as integral to what I hold to be the *locative*, or *indexical*, functioning of situated art (Wilder, 2020a) – exemplified by (though by no means limited to) certain forms of installation art – and to the subsequent destabilising effect of the work in question when our perception and/or wider orientation (including ideological) is then challenged. Bishop (2005) similarly refers to this as the 'decentring' of the subject, though I prefer to describe it as a problematising of our orientation towards the work in question, in that any displacement is dependent upon what I am calling the work's locative function. And, to repeat, non-sighted modes of beholding art are integral to the very processes of dehabitualisation

The artist Fayen d'Evie, for instance, has likewise written about the radical potential of blindness, employing the metaphor of 'blundering' as a stumbling blindly, 'a staggering or pitching

movement with lurching shifts in perceptual perspective, or an unanticipated discovery' which 'allows for uncertainty, tenuous threads, and peripheral distractions, while also affirming wayfinding through blindness' (2017, p. 43). For d'Evie, "blindness may activate attentiveness in audiences" and "destabilise performer-spectator conventions" (p. 43); she reminds us that "blindness and visuality need not be mutually exclusive", but rather "introduces a complexity and diversity of embodiments and relationships to perception, imagination, and consciousness" (p. 44). Drawing upon her own "unstable" functional vision, she writes: "To retrieve the agency of blindness, the definition I carry instead as we blunder onwards is blindness as a mode of perceiving that, to a radical extent, makes tangible the limits of normative constructs of vision, impairs ocularcentrism, and destabilses 20/20 cultural paradigms" (p. 44). And as she notes, blindness is a mode of perceiving that connects us more explicitly to the ground as a point of reference for navigation, whether through the use of a mobility cane or echolocation; we might add, it also connects us to the reality of a work's context.

Indeed, installation art constitutes a space that while virtualised – removed from functional imperatives – compels acts of imagination/ideation that, at least in the most critically pertinent forms of practice, *do not take place in isolation from the work's situated context*. Indeed, it is the tension (or slippage) between these two superimposed but miscalibrated realms that arguably destabilises the beholder. This varies from work to work, in that the extent to which

the wider conditions of access enter into the work's semantic content varies widely. At one end of the spectrum are works that make little connection to their site and can be relocated without fundamentally changing the work's meaning; at the other are site-specific works that are entirely dependent upon their site context and make little sense (or at least suffer a considerable loss) when removed from that situation.[11] Thus conceived, we might set out a series of interconnected ways installations orientate us within their virtual worlds, which overlap with (while distinguished from) the real space

11 Of course, the same artist can make both types of work, which highlights definitional problems based on the imposition of necessary conditions. An example might be Mike Nelson's narrative-driven work. Claire Bishop uses Nelson's work as paradigmatic of what she calls the "dream space" type of installation: "Such work is characterised both by psychological absorption and by physical immersion – the viewer does not identify with a character depicted in a scene but is placed in the position of the protagonist" (2005, p. 47). However, different works by Nelson construct very different relations to site. *Coral Reef*, for instance, is a completely immersive installation entered through an unassuming door into a completely internal world of fifteen rooms with interconnecting corridors. Originally constructed in late 1999, and opened in 2000 at Matt's Gallery in London, the whole complex installation was then reconstructed in 2010 at Tate Britain, with little impact upon the work's meaning. Here we navigate our way through a confusing set of intersecting, and seemingly abandoned rooms using the same orientation skills we employ when faced with any real sequence of rooms for the first time; nonetheless, we are not only lost within this labyrinthal space but confused as to 'where' we are, such is the reality of the replicated spaces that do not belong to the space of the gallery – a confusion intensified when we encounter the doubled-up space of the mini-cab office for a second time, throwing any residual sense of orientation into disarray in an even more destabilising moment of déjà-vu. It is as if we have entered a parallel world, both familiar and strange. By contrast, *Mirror Infill* (2006), a site-specific work installed at the Frieze Art Fair and commissioned by Frieze Projects, constructs its labyrinth of interconnected spaces in a parallel realm that relies for its impact directly upon its juxtaposition of disconnected worlds. The work, entirely invisible on the outside apart from its entrance door (concealed by the warren of commercial gallery stands), seemed to defy reality, opening up an impossible space dominated by the red photography lights in a fictional darkroom and printed images of the site's transformation from building site to art fair.

that we occupy as beholders. Here, Langer's notion (alluded to earlier) of sculpture making virtual 'kinetic volume' out of real, three-dimensional space might be contrasted with works where the organising role is enacted not by the sculpted object, nor, indeed, the sculpture itself (in the case of non-gestural abstract sculpture), but the *entire spatial situation* and the potential of our movements within.[12] Proprioception plays a particular role here; indeed, I would suggest that this organising of the kinetic potential of the spatial situation takes on its full potential (in Merleau-Ponty's terms) when it comprises a kind of bodily-readiness to the virtual involving *all* the senses: in other words, it utilises locational cues that engage multiple senses, and in so doing also involves our imaginative orientation towards the virtual realm of the artwork.

6.

How is this manifest by particular examples of art practice? In the final section I will offer some paradigmatic examples; but first, I believe it is worth briefly digressing in order to discuss the problem of defining the elusive categorisation 'installation art'.

If intermedial art (which by definition occupies a territory *between* media) gives rise to new 'genres' under umbrella terms

---

12 See Langer (1953, ch. 5 and ch. 6, pp. 69-85 and pp. 86-103). See, also, Wilder (2020a, ch. 8).

such as 'video art', 'sound art', 'performance art' or 'installation art',[13] then we need to distinguish between the former terms – distinguished by a particular type of content – and the latter term, which describes not so much a *content* as a distinctive format in which individual objects (in the analytical sense of calling forth a reciprocal subject) are unified into a single work. These categories overlap, in that we can coherently talk of 'video installations' or 'sound installations' or 'performance installations' as subgenres of 'video art', 'sound art', and 'performance art', distinct from, say, single-channel video works, monophonic/stereophonic sound works, or performances that happen in conventional theatrical settings (rather than a gallery situation). This has led to a certain confusion, in that the term installation art has been taken to encompass both specific manifestations of these other genres *and* a genre in and of itself, while many artists work across all these genres (such as, pre-eminently, Bruce Nauman). This is further complicated by other overlapping categories such as *expanded cinema*, *land art*, *environments*, *happenings* or *expanded painting*.

In trying to define the latter's multiple manifestations one might benefit, as Anne Ring Petersen suggests, from Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance, which he famously applies to the problem of categorising various kinds of games (Petersen, 2015, pp.

---

13 See, for instance, Juliane Rebentisch (2012). Other terms such as 'haptic art' or 'olfactory art' have not really taken off to the same degree.

35-6).[14] Such an approach conceives of resemblances not as unchanging and fixed, but as relational and shifting, with malleable boundaries between categories that are subject to challenge. This creates 'a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing' (Wittgenstein, [1953] 2001, p. 27).

However, as both Wittgenstein and Petersen suggest, at least some resemblances might be conceived of as exemplary or paradigmatic. Petersen usefully identifies three recurrent tendencies that have dominated discourse about installation art: (i) the phenomenological approach, with its broad emphasis on spatial and temporal experience; (ii) the contextual approach, which identifies connections with external circumstances, both institutional and historical, social, cultural, economic, political and technological; (iii) the performative approach, which emphasises the experience of the work as constitutive of a situation and process (2015, pp. 75-89).[15] These are not, however, mutually exclusive, and the most interesting installations might be said to address all three discourses.

Might we likewise conceive 'situated' works perceived through different non-sighted modes of beholding (such as sound, smell or

---

14 See Wittgenstein ([1953] 2001). Petersen, however, compromises her position by then blurring the distinction between an *art form*, *medium*, or *genre*.

15 These tendencies, reflected in particular works of installation art, have much in common with Claire Bishop's historical genealogies of installation art, which she divides into: (i) the dream scene ('organised around a model of the subject as psychological, or more accurately, psychoanalytical'); (ii) a heightened perception ('a phenomenological model of the viewing subject'); mimetic engulfment (encompassing 'different returns to late Freud and his idea of libidinal withdrawal and subjective disintegration'); (iv) an activated spectatorship (with a poststructuralist informed critique of 'the activated viewer of installation art as a political subject') (2005, p. 10).

touch) as constituting an overlapping and criss-crossing set of resemblances within the wider category (or genre, if we want to use that term) of installation art?[16] And might this also acknowledge differences in experiences (*which in itself might be thought of as constituting a case of overlapping resemblances*) of differently abled beholders? This shifts the emphasis on 'resemblance' from a likeness in appearance to the sharing of certain characteristics or properties beyond the mere visual. In Wittgenstein's terms, this might be thought of as a shift from considering the enduring physical properties of games to characteristics of the rules of engagement and the consequent experiences intrinsic to the *playing* of different games. This, to use the language of Wittgenstein, is a drawing of boundaries for a 'special purpose'.

This shift of emphasis is not, therefore, to submit to a subjectivism where the experience is removed from the constraints of the work (which would posit the subject's aesthetic experience *as its own object*), but rather to acknowledge that the art 'object' (for want of a better word) is aesthetic not by virtue of qualities that *precede* the experience, but in its enactment.[17] This is not an escape from the particularities of the work and its context, but rather reflects upon the

16 This usefully conceives of what Krauss terms artistic 'invention' (countering the so-called post-medium condition of contemporary art) not in terms of artists *inventing their own new medium*, but (as Dairmuid Costello has suggested) in terms of novel juxtapositions of existing media (often using extra-aesthetic technologies, or technical supports, co-opted by artists) (Costello 2012).

17 Again, my position here echoes Rebentisch's defence of the philosophical turn to aesthetic experience from the charge of subjectivism (2012, p. 10, pp. 130-131).
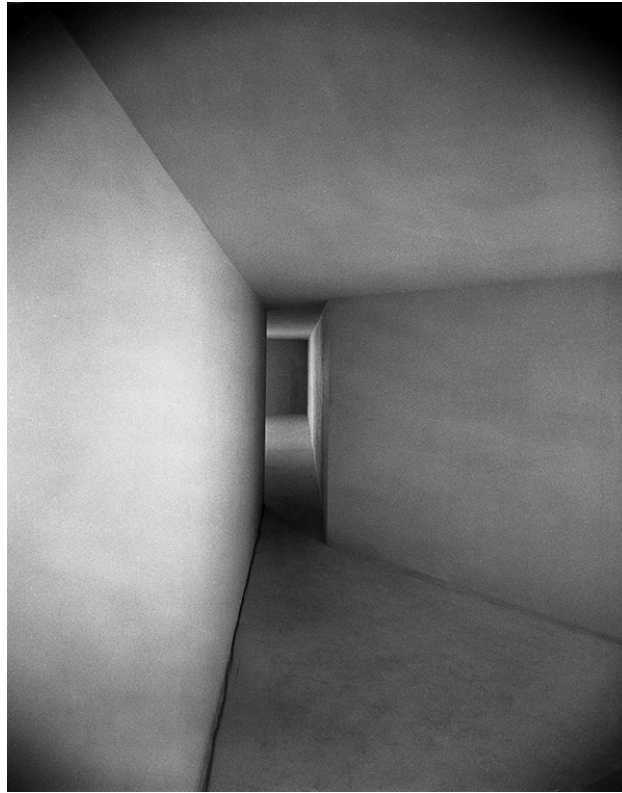
experience occasioned by the work (and its instructions) in a specific way, such that the beholders role is genuinely performative. I conclude with a series of key examples, demonstrating the importance (if not centrality) of senses other than sight. To quote Wittgenstein:

> Here giving examples is not an *indirect* means of explaining – in default of a better. For any general definition may be misunderstood too. The point is that *this* is how we play the game. (I mean the language-game with the word "game")'
> ([1953] 2001, p. 29^e).

7.

Figure 1. Michael Asher, installation at Pomona College (1970)
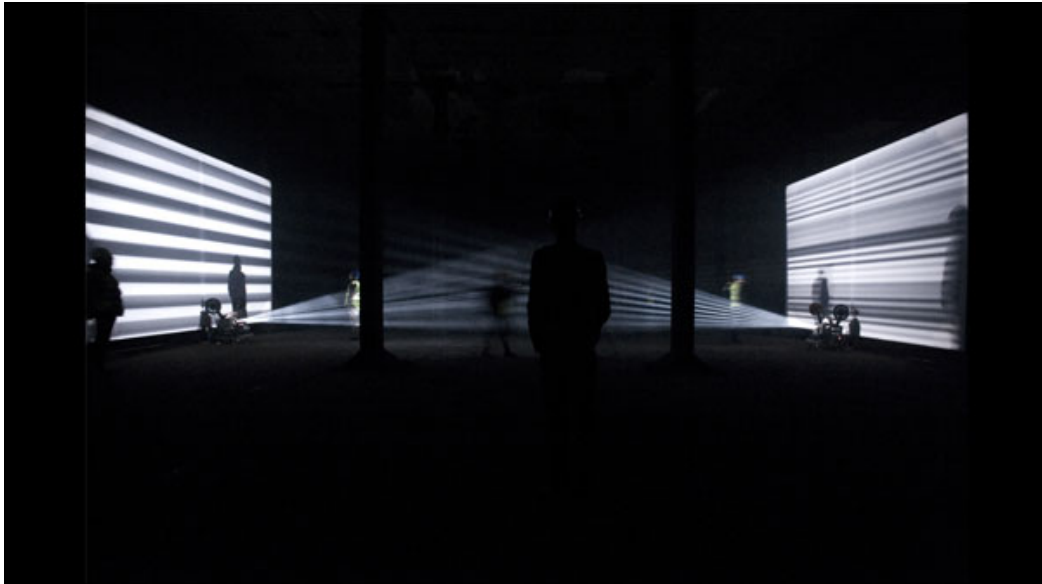
Figure 2. Michael Asher, installation at Pomona College (1970)

Asher's site-specific 1970 installation was originally conceived as an amplification of his earlier air flow works (Asher, 1983, p. 38), which had sought to deal with 'air as an elementary material of unlimited presence and availability, as opposed to visually determined elements' (p. 8); but at Pomona he eschewed mechanical devices in favour of natural ventilation by opening up the lobby to the gallery by removing the doors, such the work's two interlinked triangular spaces could be entered at any time of the day or night. This had certain

consequences, abstracting the surrounding ambience such that 'exterior light, sound, and air became a permanent part of the exhibition' (p. 34). Of particular concern here, the sound of people moving through the installation became key, such that 'exterior and interior sounds were collected and amplified in the smaller triangular space and transmitted through the corridor' into the larger, and darker, triangular space (which had no lighting other than that which passed through the interconnecting space). The installation offered an experience that while visual, would amplify the sounds of someone moving within the space, especially using a white mobility cane, providing audible clues as to the work's formal configuration. The work thus heightened perception, visually, acoustically, and haptically. Nonetheless, as with Asher's wider work, this intersects with a critique of the political and economic role of the exhibition, and an expectation as to the beholder's familiarity with such an institutional context (thus allying sensory immediacy to an institutional critique).
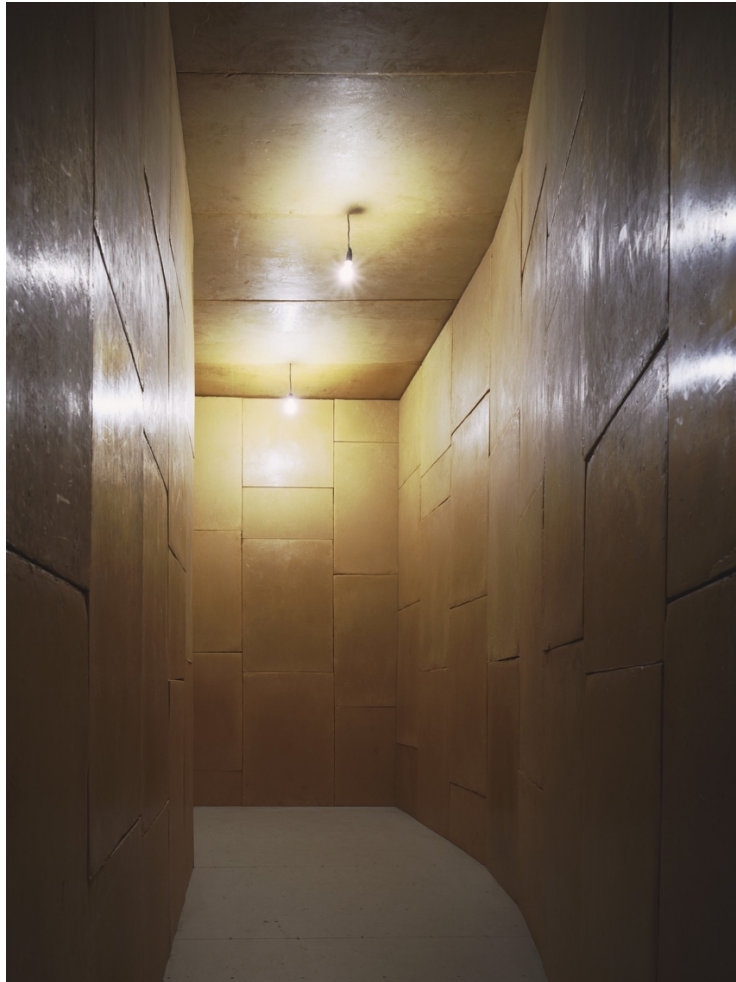
Figure 3. Lis Rhodes, *Light Music* (1975), as installed at The Tanks, Tate Modern, London, in 2012

Figure 4. Lis Rhodes, *Light Music* (1975), as installed at The Tanks, Tate Modern, London, in 2012

Rhodes's *Light Music* is a two-screen 16mm black and white film installation, conceived within the remit of what if often referred to as expanded cinema. First installed at the Serpentine Gallery, London, in the Festival of Independent Video (1975), it was re-installed at the Tanks at Tate Modern in 2012. The two screens face each other at opposite ends of the haze filled room, such that the two beams traverse each other, and the apparatus of projection are incorporated into the work. The work addresses the relation of sound and image in a novel way by printing the abstract, visual pattern of the films (a

series of different horizontal and vertical black and white stripes made without a camera) over the audial tracks, thus generating a synchronised sound and visual experience through optical means. The image thus constitutes a visual score of what one is simultaneously hearing, such the experience is akin to an aural equivalent to the flickering patters on the two screens. These patterns are also apparent in the beams themselves, such that one can enter into the cones of striated light. The spatial arrangement creates a dynamic, immersive environment that invites the participation of the beholder, who disrupts the beams as she passes through the space. This is an experience that engages beholders with even minimal residual vision, while the audio tracks (and the not inconsiderable sounds of the projectors themselves) create dynamic interference patterns as one moves through the space.

Figure 5. Wolfgang Laib, *The Passageway* (1988), MoMA, New York

Since 1988, when he built the demountable *The Passageway* at MoMA, Laib has been creating a series of aromatic wax rooms lined with golden beeswax, the most ambitious example being the 40 metre long underground passage entitled *From the Known to the Unknown – To Where is Your Oracle Leading You* (2014), installed at

La Ribaute, Barjac, France (fig. 6), in what was the former studio of Anselm Kiefer. The earlier works were made from slabs, whereas the later works, such as the one at La Ribaute, involved applying the wax directly to the supporting walls in one, irremovable piece. Beeswax is a natural material secreted from the abdominal glands of honey bees, and which is used to form cells for honey storage or larval and pupal protection. It has long association with candle-making, for sealing/casting, but also in burial rituals; it is thus rich in associations, which Laib exploits while refusing to close down the work's meaning. Beeswax is one of a limited number of intrinsic materials found in nature that Laib employs extensively in his work, a list which also includes pollen, stone, rice and milk. These enclosed, confined spaces (lit only by bare lightbulbs), intensify the sense of smell, yet they are not so much claustrophobic as meditative, the smell unlocking memories to transport us to someplace 'elsewhere'. The inspiration was Laib's own extraordinary experience of making his smaller beeswax works, which involved having his head inside the work. The translucent walls reflect the light in such a way as to seemingly emit a soft glow. Here, the beholder is given a very concentrated experience: a heightened perception rich in historical associations. And not surprisingly, Laib is critical of categorising himself as a 'visual' artist, stating that if it was only the visual experience that mattered he simply wouldn't be an artist.

Figure 6. Wolfgang Laib, *From the Known to the Unknown – To Where is Your Oracle Leading You* (2014), installed at La Ribaute, Barjac, France

Figure 7. Mona Hatoum, *The Light at the End* (1989), Showroom Gallery, London

Originally installed in a triangular-shaped space at the rear of the Showroom Gallery in London, the Palestinian artist's work has been re-staged at various venues. The work is constructed out of iron, steel, brass, glass, aluminium and electrical elements. The tunnel-like space is darkened, other than a single light which reveals the blood-red colour of the painted bricks, and the sculptural installation itself, which emits a soft and enticing glow. But the work's most memorable aspect is the palpable change in temperature as one

walks towards the glowing lines of light. Lizzie Wright describes the work thus: "As progress into the tunnel is made, the temperature rises until the heat becomes oppressive: it becomes clear that the grill glows with a dangerous heat that would burn the skin if touched." The title of this work suggests optimism – a pathway through the tunnel of despair – yet the installation cruelly shuts of this possibility and instead leads the viewer into a confined and oppressive space. Hatoum has described how the work concerns "the idea of imprisonment, of torture, but it is also a seductive image. Once people have adjusted to the dark and watched the bars glow … then they begin to see them as beautiful bands of light. I was interested to explore this feeling of being attracted and repulsed" (Wright, 1990). Here, the experience is problematised to the extent of constituting a very real threat of harm, while keeping the beholder distanced by the wall of heat emanating from the electrical elements.

Figure 8. Ernesto Neto, *Navedenga* (1998), MoMA, New York

The Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto makes immersive sensorial environments, that while highly visually evocative (with their anthropomorphic rounded appendages and orifices) foreground the tactile and olfactory senses. Indebted to the participatory work of Neo-Concrete artists such as Lygia Clark, his biomorphic forms are constructed out of stretchable materials such as translucent polyamide fabrics, often weighed down by sand (revealing the forces of gravity). The resulting organic forms are in stark contrast to the orthogonal geometry of the host space. Here, the cuboid tensile form

is stretched in each corner at the top by extended, pendulous forms, filled with sand, and at the bottom by sand-filled cloven 'feet'. Neto's characteristic suspended forms often include aromatic materials, though in the case of *Navedenga* it is the fabric that is impregnated with the smell of cloves. This experience is much stronger when the beholder enters into the tent-like structure through a narrow, slit opening in one corner, and is forced to tentatively step onto the flexible fabric in order to stumble through the inherently unstable space. When two people occupy the space together, this intensifies the experience, one person's movement destabilising the other; one is forced to cooperate in order to effectively move, as one negotiates the central hanging form and the soft, Styrofoam-filled appendage which partially fill the space. As the beholder manipulates the enclosing fabric, she also experiences the sound-deadening effect of the fabric enclosure, a strangely comforting experience rich with childhood associations and evocations of the body, while also steeped in a tradition of institutional critique.

Figure 9. Susan Philipsz, *War Damaged Musical Instruments* (2015), Tate Britain, London

Philipsz's *War Damaged Musical Instruments* was installed in the

Duveen Galleries at Tate Britain in London. The work comprised fourteen audio recordings of British and German brass and wind instruments damaged during conflicts stretching over some 200 years, and left gathering dust in various museum storage rooms. The earliest instrument was a Bugle salvaged from the Battle of Waterloo, found beside the body of a 14-tear-old drummer boy; the latest were four German instruments (an alto saxophone, a keyed bugle, and two transverse flutes) salvaged from the Alte Münz bunker in Berlin, in 1945. Each recording, where the instrument had to be coaxed back into some sort of life (however discordant and tentative) was played through a separate speaker, located throughout the entire length of the space. In her essay 'Beyond Borders', Philipsz notes that "while making the recordings we were aware that we were probably the first people to hear these instruments since they were damaged" (2019, p. 286). The instruments were, literally, reanimated through the player's breath. Philipsz writes:

> The notes I recorded were based upon the four tones that make up the military bugle call "The Last Post", a signal to soldiers in the theatre of war that fighting was done, and to follow the sound of the call to find safety and rest. The tune was deconstructed and fragmented to such an extent that it was practically unrecognisable. In the space the long tones and silences allowed each tone to sustain before the others sounded. That audible spacing helped reinforce a feeling of

length within the long physical space. I used sound to define distance and used the volume of the space to add volume to the work (pp. 286-288).

As Philipsz notes elsewhere in her essay, the acoustics of museum spaces are seldom given consideration; but here, in the reverberant spaces of the Duveen Galleries, they become a means of navigating through both a present reality and the poignant echoes of the past. As Adrian Searle wrote in his *Guardian* review:

> For all its mournful aspects, the music is as uplifting as it is painful; close then distant, clear then broken, a cry then a whisper. The sound is wonderful. The shrapnel damage and bullet-holes, mutilated bells and mangled tubing add their own flavour. The players have to work around the instruments' injuries. Often they have to substitute one note for another. Some instruments are irrevocably out of tune. Brass and woodwind, trumpets and saxes are the most bodily of instruments; what we hear are damaged, tremulous bodies, gasps and tremors. Sometimes the voice collapses altogether (Searle 2015).

References

Bishop, Claire (2005), *Installation Art: A Critical History*, London: Tate Publishing.

Bolt, David (2014), *The Metanarrative of Blindness: A Re-Reading of*

    Twentieth-Century Anglophone Writing, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Caldarola, Elisa (2020), 'On Experiencing Installation Art', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 78:3, pp. 339-343.

Candlin, Fiona (2003), 'Blindness, Art and Exclusion in Museums and Galleries', *The Journal of Academic Development and Education*, vol. 22:1, pp. 100-110.

Costello, Dairmuid (2012), 'Automat, Automatic, Automatism: Rosalind Krauss and Stanley Cavell on Photography and the Photographically Dependent Arts', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 38, pp. 819-54.

d'Evie, Fayen (2017), 'Orienting through Blindness: Blundering, Be-Holding, and Wayfinding as Artistic and Curatorial Methods', *Performance Paradigm*, vol. 13, pp. 42-65.

Fried, Michael (1998) 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Greenberg, Clement (1958/1993), 'Sculpture in Our Time', in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, ed. John O'Brian, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Iser, Wolfgang (1978), *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Kleege, Georgina (2018), *More Than Meets the Eye: What Blindness Brings to Art*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Langer, Susanne K. (1953), *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art*,

London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Osborne, Peter (2013), *Anywhere Or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, London and New York: Verso.

Petersen, Anne Ring (2015), *Installation Art: Between Image and Stage*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press.

Potts, Alex (2001), 'Installation and Sculpture', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 24, pp. 7-23.

Rebentisch, Juliane (2012), *Aesthetics of Installation Art*, translated by Daniel Hendrickson with Gerrit Jackson, Berlin: Steinberg Press.

Searle, Adrian (2015), 'Susan Philipsz's War Damaged Musical Instruments review – as uplifting as it is painful', *The Guardian*, 20 November 2015.

Wilder, Ken (2020a), *Beholding: Situated Art and the Aesthetics of Reception*, London and New York: Bloomsbury.

Wilder, Ken (2020b), 'Installation Art and the Question of Aesthetic Autonomy: Juliane Rebentisch and the Beholder's Share', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 78:3, pp. 351-356.

Wright, Lizzie (1990), 'Mona Hartoum: The Light at the End (1989)', notes for Accession Number ACC2/1990, *Arts Council Collection*:

https://www.artscouncilcollection.org.uk/artwork/light-end.