

# Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics

Volume 16, 2024

Edited by Vítor Moura and Christopher Earley



Published by



## **Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics**

Founded in 2009 by Fabian Dorsch

Internet: <http://proceedings.eurosa.org>

Email: [proceedings@eurosa.org](mailto:proceedings@eurosa.org)

ISSN: 1664 – 5278

### **Editors**

Vítor Moura (University of Minho)

Christopher Earley (University of Liverpool)

### **Editorial Board**

Adam Andrzejewski (University of Warsaw)

Pauline von Bonsdorff (University of Jyväskylä)

Daniel Martine Feige (Stuttgart State Academy of Fine Arts)

Tereza Hadravová (Charles University, Prague)

Regina-Nino Mion (Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn)

Francisca Pérez Carreño (University of Murcia)

Karen Simecek (University of Warwick)

Elena Tavani (University of Naples)

Iris Vidmar Jovanović (University of Rijeka)

### **Publisher**

The European Society for Aesthetics



Department of Philosophy

University of Fribourg

Avenue de l'Europe 20

1700 Fribourg

Switzerland

## ***Making Someone See an Aspect is not Persuading***

Salvador Rubio Marco<sup>1</sup>

*University of Murcia*

ABSTRACT. One of the main attacks against a theory of aspects inspired by Wittgensteinian ideas consists of the claim according to which the fact of making someone see an aspect is just persuading (or convincing) him of something. In other terms, from this critical approach, an aesthetic theory of aspects (or *aspectism*, as I call it) would not, supposedly, be more than a *persuasivism*. The main aim of my paper is to argue against that line of attack. I will develop different sub-arguments to justify it and I will support my ideas with some examples about understanding in music.

One of the main attacks against a theory of aspects inspired by Wittgensteinian ideas consists of the claim according to which the fact of making someone see an aspect is just persuading (or convincing) him of something. In other terms, from this critical approach, an aesthetic theory of aspects (or *aspectism*, as I call it) would not, supposedly, be more than a *persuasivism*. The main aim of my paper is to argue against that line of attack. I will develop different sub-arguments to justify it and I will support my ideas with some examples about understanding in music.

Since the '80s, at least (*vid.* for example, Shusterman, 1983) until the last decade (*vid.* for example, Nachtomy & Blank, 2015) some relevant scholars have dealt with this topic. My theory of aspects (or *aspectism*) defends the idea that the possibility of me being able to come to see

---

<sup>1</sup> [salrubio@um.es](mailto:salrubio@um.es) Research work for this paper was funded by grants from PID2019-106351GB-I00 (Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades del Gobierno de España).

something as being the same object but at the same time seeing it in a completely different way (Wittgenstein, PU II) plays a crucial role in aesthetic understanding. In this respect, the famous example of the duck-rabbit has done a disservice to aesthetics insofar as it has hidden the fact that the scope of the notion of aspect goes far beyond the cases of perception of ambiguous figures and even beyond the realm of the perceptual. Furthermore, the notion of aspect (and there are multiple examples of this in Wittgenstein's works) reaches to the heart of aesthetic understanding, and the singularity of the understanding of works of art.

Of course, Wittgenstein speaks of persuasion in several paragraphs of his work, but always in the framework of an *aspectist*, not reductive, conception of understanding as seeing. In fact, Wittgenstein accepted that much of his philosophical aim, in general, was just persuading his readers to see a particular thing in a particular way, much as the critic tries to persuade his audience to see an artwork in a particular way. "What I'm doing is *also* persuasion. If someone says 'There is no difference', and I say 'There is a difference', I am persuading: I am saying 'I don't want you look at it like that'." (LC, 27)

According to the Cambridge Dictionary of English, to persuade means "to make someone do or believe something by giving them a good reason to do it or by talking to that person and making them believe it". Consequently, from a *persuasivist* view, when I succeed in making someone see the true meaning (or sense) of a work of art (or a part of it) I am merely persuading him because I am making him do or believe something by giving him a good reason.

In the '80s Richard Shusterman (Shusterman, 1983) launched an attack against some Wittgensteinians in aesthetics<sup>2</sup> (such as Hampshire, Sibley, Slater, Isenberg, Macdonald or Casey) for they slid from the genuine Wittgenstein's *perceptualist* (I say *aspectist*) conception of aesthetic arguments to the mistaken conclusion that "deductive and inductive models of critical reasoning are simply wrong and fundamentally wrongheaded" (Shusterman, 1983, 68). Shusterman thought that they were betraying the pluralism that Wittgenstein himself claims and that has room to incorporate those inductive and deductive models into aesthetic arguments. However,

---

<sup>2</sup> In some of my own papers, I have proposed calling those authors the "first generation of antiessentialists".

Shusterman's claim refers to past historic periods and cultures<sup>3</sup> rather than being structural and synchronic models. On the contrary, from my *aspectism*, I am willing to accept the coexistence and functionality of inductive and deductive inferences (and causal inferences also) in contemporary aesthetic arguments, as well as *continuous seeing*.<sup>4</sup> That claim is no excuse for not recognizing the central theses of *aspectism*: the crucial place that the possibility of the dawning of an aspect<sup>5</sup> occupies in the framework of aesthetic understanding.<sup>6</sup> Shusterman equates the *perceptualist* theory (or *aspectism* in my terms) with *persuasivism* (he speaks of "Wittgenstein's perceptual-persuasive account of aesthetic argument", Shusterman, 1983, 69), but he is unable to differentiate *aspectism* from mere *persuasivism*. In fact, for him Wittgenstein's *perceptualism* adopts a "dialectic or rhetorically persuasive form [...] evaluated by its power in convincing or satisfying its readers" (Shusterman, 1983, p. 6)

Let us remember our initial definition of persuasion: "to make someone do or believe something by giving them a good reason to do it or by talking to that person and making them believe it". It is not clear what counts as a "good reason" for a *persuasivist*, but in any case, in his view there is a clear disregard, on the one hand, for the role of feeling (that is, of feelings and emotions), and, on the other hand, for the indirect ways of showing (*further descriptions*, in Wittgenstein terms) which are aimed at making someone see an aspect. Those indirect ways go beyond the "by talking to that person" put forward in the definition of "persuade". Very often, the range of things that we can do in order to make someone see something under the right aspect include non-verbal actions: you can sing or whistle in the right way to play a song, or you can offer a good object for comparison, you can make a gesture, or you can stop doing something (stop moving your body somehow when playing, for example).

Moreover, the *persuasivist* approach seems to reduce aesthetic understanding to a narrow believing or doing something. When I am able to see the painting under the correct aspect it is not

---

<sup>3</sup> "In Aristotle's time there may well have been a shared essence of tragedy to define. In Johnson's time there seem to have been general principles and standards of criticism which were commonly held and firmly established." (Shusterman 1983, 70)

<sup>4</sup> "Chronic phase" in Nachtomy & Blank (Nachtomy & Blank, 2015) terms.

<sup>5</sup> "Acute phase" in Nachtomy & Blank (Nachtomy & Blank, 2015) terms.

<sup>6</sup> Even if, for Wittgenstein, persuasion (integrated into the framework of aspect seeing) is also present in science (Darwin, for example) or psychoanalysis (Freud, for example). (See LC 26-27).

just a matter of having believed a judgement or an argument (such as, for example, “Picasso’s *Crucifixion* is a chromatic scream” or “The augmented seconds in Bach’s *Aria* are lamentations”), but rather some more complex experiences crucially involving ways of feeling and ways of being moved by the work of art. And the consequences of such an experience are re-organizations of the inner relationships with the other elements of my comprehensive dimension.

Before going on to my example, I would like to just set out a contemporary philosophical approach<sup>7</sup> from the perspective of accounts of agency in epistemology<sup>8</sup> which in my opinion may help us to illuminate that topic in tune with my *aspectism*. The reduction of *aspectism* to a mere persuasiveness seems to confer a marked epistemically reductive imprint on aesthetic understanding. By contrast, the perspective of agency makes it possible, on the one hand, to grant feelings, judgement, and the particular context of the aesthetic experience, the very role that corresponds to them. On the other hand, the perspective of agency allows us to justify the idea of a pluralism in aesthetic understanding which avoids, in turn, relativism. From the epistemic perspective of agency, truth and knowledge are present in understanding insofar as they are the basic assumption shared by the stories in dispute, namely a space of reasons between antagonistic stories. From that perspective, knowledge is not just there as a mere instrument, but as the achievement of an agency in some of the dimensions in which that human characteristic is displayed. And that achievement of an agency takes place in particular personal, social, and political situations. In other words: the exercise of our aptitude as agents is a situational one. Normativity is also not absent because, even if there is always room for reasons (but no guarantees for a dialogue) between antagonistic narratives, not everything counts (intelligibly) as a reason. Knowledge, then, is an achievement of the agent supported by a narrative which is not a-normative insofar as the structure of narrativity where the narratives are based and the dialogue between narratives are themselves normative (that is, engaged with the question of truth).

If we import the epistemological concept of story (or narrative) to aesthetics, it is not difficult to think about critical truth obtained in the framework of a situation of aspect seeing as an

---

<sup>7</sup> I will also set out (more briefly) some other possible developments based on recent scholars’ works (such as Appelqvist or Nachtomy and Blank) in the second part of that paper.

<sup>8</sup> I’m inspired here by the *agential turn* in epistemology, motivated by E. Sosa and developed recently by scholars such as F. Broncano, J. Corbí or J. Medina. Corbí (Corbí 2022) combines some ideas from the *agential turn* with Bernard Williams’ epistemology.

achievement of an agency, rather than a mere instrument for the goals of a particular person or institution. Aesthetic judgement, from an agential (and aspectual) view, becomes a voice of the knowledge of an agent, supported by a story whose narrative nature must be normative.<sup>9</sup>

In the last part of my paper, I will need to deal especially with the second part of the definition of “persuading” in order to show that being able to see an aspect is not the same thing as believing something, and being able to see an aspect is not the same thing as doing something. Even if we will never have absolute guarantees that someone has come to see the adequate aspect, very varied things can make the difference between having understood the true meaning or not: there is “imponderable” (*unwägbar*) evidence (PI II, xi: 194; LW II: 95) that includes “subtleties of glance, of gesture [and] of tone” (PI II, xi: 194), “internal connections” with other elements of the comprehensive dimension of the agent, coherence with other behaviours, but also moods, emotive expression, etc. which are implied in and involved in both the effective *doing* and *saying*.

In order to illustrate my arguments, I will propose a thought experiment (with some musical samples) based on the performance of the beginning of the 3rd movement (*Adagio*) of Mozart’s *Serenade* No. 10 for 13 Winds in B-flat major, K 361/370a “Gran Partita” (1781-82). Here goes my story.

Diego has been commissioned to play second oboe in the performance of Mozart’s *Serenade* that his young orchestra is preparing right now. His oboe teacher, Jesús, tries to make him understand the correct way to catch the relevance of that musical line, and then, the correct way to play the beginning of the *adagio*.

Diego is quite proud of his *naïve* performance, but Jesús is not happy at all. The performance is inexpressive, almost shy. He has not caught the real importance of the second oboe’s role here. Diego is a diligent student and tries to react to Jesús’ objection by means of adding some *crescendo* and *diminuendo* to the phrasing structure, every two measures. Jesús, the teacher, replies

---

<sup>9</sup> The aesthetic space of reasons allows the coexistence (and perhaps the dialogue) of narratives even opposing ones, similarly as it occurs in the field of ICD (Inter-Cultural Dialogue) or in the field of moral judgements. Corbí (Corbí, 2022) has proposed the idea of a “locked point of view” (my translation of *punto de vista atrapado*) in order to explain the survivors’ *aspectuality*. Every aspect is a locked one while until a change of aspect occurs the alternative perspective is not a *seeing*, but just a *seeing-as*. Even though, the aesthetic aspect does not have the significance of a “locked point of view” (nor the costly requirements of access to an alternative point of view) that it has in the case of the survivor.

immediately that there is no indication of such *crescendo* and such *diminuendo* in the score, there is just a *piano* indication. The only secret to create the inner energy of the phrasing is to make the proper accents in the proper syncopated notes, but respecting the *piano* indication, not inventing false dynamics. I remember now Wittgenstein (LWPP 555) saying: “When I see a change of aspect I have to pay attention to the object”. Then, Jesús realizes that the student hasn’t really understood the right new aspect, or maybe that he hasn’t properly identified the actual features involved in that new aspect of the line.

Jesús has a wider range of things to do in order to make Diego see the right aspect of the line (and then to make him perform it properly): Jesús can play, for example, the two ways of phrasing to make the student compare the result, or he may suggest the student to listen to a version by the Members of the Orchestra of St. Luke’s (the best version for him) and to compare it with other versions. Jesús has even invited Diego to watch the scene of the film *Amadeus* where an invidious and wrong Salieri describes that beginning of the *adagio* as “a rusty squeezebox” preceding “the voice of God” (that is, the entry of the first oboe). Of course, Jesús has proposed it just in order to reinforce the idea of the relevance of the rest of the instruments (including the second oboe). And well, finally Jesús asks Diego: “Have you understood my idea?”, and Diego answers with conviction (apparently, at least): “Yes, I have understood, I agree, I see now that this is the right way to play that line”. Jesús invites Diego to play his line again with all the group and everything seems to be going very well: Diego imitates almost exactly Jesús’s way of playing and curiously even Jesús’s slight and characteristic body movements when playing. Great! A big success! Jesús has managed to persuade Diego! But has Diego really seen or really understood the very meaning of the line and of the musical passage?

Let us now imagine some possible subsequent scenes. A few bars later, the same compositional scheme reappears, and Jesús realizes that Diego reverts to the mistaken way of playing it. Or maybe this happens some time later, in another similar passage from another of Mozart’s work. Maybe it was no coincidence that yesterday, while they were commenting on the viewing of *Amadeus*, it seemed to Jesús that Diego had not grasped the irony regarding the character of Salieri, outraged that “the monkey” Mozart was capable of expressing “the voice of God”. Jesús now starts to suspect that Diego has always been a little obsessed with being a soloist



(and perhaps a little jealous of his friend Carlos, the first oboe of the young orchestra). And the worst thing is not even that, because now Jesús suspects that Diego has not understood the importance of the structural contrasts in Mozart's compositional style, and maybe not in polyphonic music in general. And even more serious: Diego has not understood the importance of the secondary parts and secondary instruments in a musical group.

There is room for a more optimistic possibility in my story: some time later, (when Diego has matured a little as a student and as a person), Diego is rehearsing some passages of the *adagio* with Jesús and, suddenly, says: "That is it! Now I understand the idea of the second oboe line!" And, since then, Jesús has realized (no doubt) that Diego has started to play not just the *Serenade* and Mozart in a much more expressive and fluent way, but all his parts in general. He has asked Jesús to watch *Amadeus* together again and he has asked to borrow Jesús' CD recording of the Orchestra of St. Luke's version of the *Serenade*.

Let us go back to the definition of persuasion proposed at the beginning of this paper: to persuade means "to make someone do or believe something by giving them a good reason to do it or by talking to that person and making them believe it". In the first part of my example, perhaps Diego seems to have *believed* my version about the correct way of playing the *adagio* and the reasons (spoken or not) by means of which Jesús has tried to persuade him, but I keep having serious doubts (as well as Jesús, the teacher) that he has really come to see the true aspect of that passage. Is this a mere matter of persuasion? I think not.

My story includes, in my opinion, other elements which may help us to illuminate my proposal of a non-reductive *aspectism*:

- 1) Before the optimistic turn of my story, we can say that Diego has been blind to the proper aspect of the musical line of the *adagio*, and we can also say that he is blind to the meaning of the line. Some recent developments about aspect blindness and meaning blindness (such as Nachtomý and Blank, 2015) would enrich that angle of my example.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> If seeing an aspect is something more than being persuaded, then aspect blindness (the incapacity to experience the meaning) and meaning blindness (that is, being unable to follow a rule, and being unable to see something as a sign) are intimately linked. When the reader is aspect blind, he is meaning blind also, because he is not in a condition to see the right aspect of the thing, and then he is unable to correctly play the language game consisting of following a

- 2) The evidence which Jesús appeals to in order to know if Diego has not really seen (and finally to know that Diego has really seen) highlights the consequences of such an experience running into a re-organization of the inner relationships of that element with the other elements of my comprehensive dimension, and not just regarding the organization of parts of the work.
- 3) Such consequences underline the concentric and expansive character of those kinds of aspectual changes: understanding a dynamic indication (such as *piano*), understanding a piece (as the *adagio* of Mozart's *Serenade*), understanding polyphonic music, understanding the secondary roles of the members of an orchestra, etc.
- 4) The fact that Diego is (or is not) able to play correctly a few bars later when the same compositional scheme reappears illustrates the presence of Wittgensteinian *rules-following*<sup>11</sup> and reinforces the idea of a basic normativity governing the criteria for checking the actual *seeing*.
- 5) In order to be able to see, very varied kinds of reasons may be involved (not excluding inductive, deductive or causal partial arguments), but also (and crucially) feelings, diversity of contexts, social interactions, etc.: Diego's musical process of maturing runs in parallel to Diego's personal process of maturing, including his *ego* management and social abilities and interactions, and even the relationship between music and other media (such as movies, or literature).
- 6) If Diego is finally able to see, then it is not because the goal of Jesús, or Mozart, or the School of Music has been attended to (as the *persuasivist* would defend), but as an

---

certain rule (he is unable to perceive the sign as sign). "We become conscious of the aspect only when it changes" (RPP 1: 1034). The thought experiment that I propose in the final part of this paper wants to illustrate that idea.

<sup>11</sup> In Appelqvist 2017 we can find an interesting way of explaining the limits and developments of the rules-following in the framework of an aesthetic normativity which is, in my opinion, compatible with my *aspectism*. According to Appelqvist, Wittgenstein's remarks on aesthetics and the arts, especially music, allow us to distinguish between "two different aspects of rule-following [...], one for which we can find justification by means of a conceptual rule-formulation, another for which such justification is not available" (Appelqvist 2017, 125). In the first case... In the second case, Appelqvist is referring mainly to such aesthetic situations where the only possible answer to a demand for justification may be a grammatical sentence, as for instance "Every wall has some length" (when measuring baseboards) (Appelqvist 2017, 132). "But this does not mean that the basic moves in the game are not genuine cases of rule-following. It only means that some moves in those games are necessary for the possibility of others, and for such moves, that is, for grammatical statements, I can offer no other justification except the fact that 'this is simply what I do' (PI § 217)".

achievement of an agency. And even then, the truth of that content is not objectively guaranteed before nor beyond the intersubjective space of reasons.

- 7) In my story, there is another feature of “aspect seeing” which makes a difference with mere persuasion: its relationship with time and process. In despite of the sudden nature of the dawning of an aspect (the *click*), exhortations to see something under a certain aspect are largely attempts at persuasion aimed at educating the sensibility of others, not simply at obtaining the acquiescence of my interlocutor at a specific moment of discussion. Other notions, such as that of “the trained eye”, that of “education for sensibility”, or that of “imponderable evidence” can be invoked, from Wittgenstein himself or from his recent interpreters, in support of my idea. But that will be the subject of other later works, I hope.

## References

- Appelqvist, H. (2017), “What Kind of Normativity is the Normativity of Grammar?,” *Metaphilosophy*, Vol. 48, Nos. 1-2 (January 2017), pp. 123-145.
- Corbí, J. E. (2022), “La epistemología como epistemología política: conocimiento, daño y relato,” *Quaderns de Filosofia*, Vol. IX, No. 2 (2022), pp. 39-49.
- Shusterman, R. (1983), “Aesthetic Argument and Perceptual Persuasion,” *Crítica: Revista Hispanoamericana de Filosofía*, Vol. 15, No. 45 (December 1983), pp. 51-74.
- Nachtomy O. & Blank A. (2015), “Wittgenstein on Aspect Blindness and Meaning Blindness,” *Iyyun The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*, No. 64 (January 2015), pp. 1–20.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1967), *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: UCP.
- (1976), *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell (orig. 1953).
- (1988), *Wittgenstein’s Lectures on Philosophical Psychology: 1946-47*. Notes by P.T. Geach. Ed. P. T. Geach. New York: Harvester.