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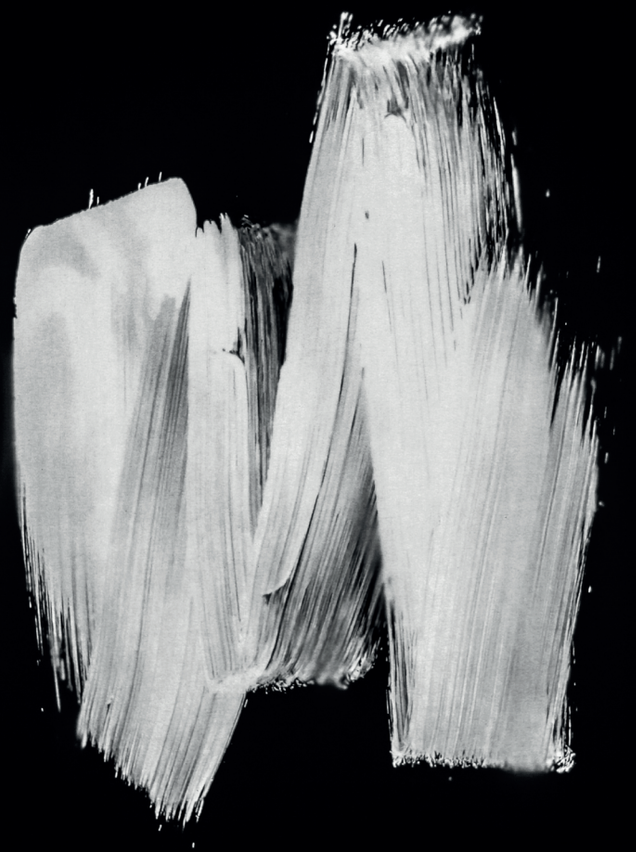

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Aesthetic Education

The Ethical Dimension of Everyday Aesthetics

YURIKO SAITO

Everyday aesthetics was recently established to expand the scope of aesthetics discourse. Its advocates hold that a faithful reflection of our aesthetic life requires a more diverse and multi-faceted content than the experience of beauty and fine arts, the primary subjects of the Anglo-American aesthetics during the twentieth century. Besides broadening the arena of aesthetics, everyday aesthetics has further agendas, one of which is to illuminate the significant role aesthetics plays in our ethical life. This paper discusses several ways in which aesthetic experience and aesthetic sensibility cultivated through our management of everyday life contributes to supporting the ethical mode of living.

1. Enrichment of Aesthetic Life and Its Ethical Implications

One contribution everyday aesthetics makes to our aesthetic life is its enrichment. Art and beauty generally stand out in our life. In particular, art in modern times has been experienced in a setting, such as in a museum, a concert hall, or a theatre, that is demarcated from the daily flow of everyday life. Similarly, beauty captivates us, momentarily takes us out of the mundane humdrum. These aesthetic highlights tend to overshadow other parts of our life experiences. Everyday aesthetics encourages us to attend to those objects, environments, and activities that are usually neglected on our

aesthetic radar that has been calibrated to catch memorable standouts. We generally manage our lives by interacting with objects and surroundings focusing on their practical values and, when they are working well, they tend to be invisible.[1] We take them for granted and pay little aesthetic attention. Little do we realise that what may appear to be trivial, ordinary, and nondescript can have fascinating features and stories behind them, only if we pay attention and seek knowledge about their history.

One of the contributions everyday aesthetics makes is to encourage attentiveness to those invisible aspects of our daily life that are usually considered to be aesthetic misfits because of their predominantly utilitarian values. As one of the advocates of everyday aesthetics, Thomas Leddy, specifies in his book title, everyday aesthetics promotes appreciation of *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary*.[2] He encourages drawing inspirations from the artistic vision presented by various artists whose works help sharpen our sensibility and imagination. By doing so, we find a treasure trove of aesthetic gems buried in our management of daily life.

In addition, everyday aesthetics makes a case for turning those things toward which we normally adopt a negative aesthetic attitude into something positive. One of the best examples is those objects which are deemed imperfect because they show wear and tear, the material's own ageing, and accidental damage, the fate of most artifacts, as well as our own bodies. Particularly today, many of us consumers are manipulated into thinking of the identity of a manufactured object as its mint condition at the end of

[1] I will discuss Martin Heidegger's view on this point later.
[2] Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2012).

the production process and regarding any change afterwards as degradation, a fall from grace, except for items such as jeans and carpentry tools that need to be broken in through use. This 'productionist bias' or 'production-centred ethos', terms coined by a technology scholar Steven Jackson, leads to all kinds of environmental and political problems associated with over-production, consumption, and disposal.[3] Often gaining inspirations from the Japanese *wabi* aesthetics and the eighteenth century British picturesque that created the cult of ruins, everyday aesthetics encourages us to question our preconceived idea about what the aesthetic value of an artifact amounts to and challenge the productionist bias that privileges the pristine and perfect appearance of an artifact.[4]

Everyday aesthetics thus helps broaden the aesthetic arena not only by going beyond art and beauty but also by including those which normally do not garner aesthetic attention or invoke negative aesthetic reactions. Such expansion of the aesthetic palette cannot but enrich our aesthetic life. In addition, it also promotes an ethical mode of being in the world. Our aesthetic indifference or negativity toward many objects and activities in our daily life results from a self-focused mode of our interactions with them. That is, our primary interest in them is how they serve *our*

[3] Steven J. Jackson, 'Rethinking Repair', in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, ed. by Tarleton Gillespie, et al (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014), pp. 221-239.

[4] *Wabi* aesthetics, often associated with imperfection and insufficiency, was established to accompany the art of tea ceremony in Japan during sixteenth century. It celebrates the unique beauty of things such as a cracked bowl and a lacquerware showing wear and tear. See Kōshirō Haga's 'The *Wabi* Aesthetic Through the Ages', trans. by Martin Collcutt. in *Tea in Japan: Essays on the History of* Chanoyu, ed. by. Paul Varley and Isao Kumakura (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), pp.195-230, and my 'The Japanese Aesthetics of Imperfection and Insufficiency', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 55 (1997), pp. 377-85.

practical needs and aesthetic preferences. We are not experiencing them on their own terms, apart from, or irrespective of, our specific interests.

One of the best-known characterisations of aesthetic experience is disinterestedness proposed by Immanuel Kant. It is because, he claims, that 'every interest spoils the judgment of taste and takes from its impartiality'.[5] Despite various criticisms, even the critics of this notion, such as Arnold Berleant, agree that disinterestedness captures a salient feature of aesthetic experience: 'directed attention and open receptivity'.[6] Berleant agrees that disinterestedness 'urges us to an open-minded acceptance in appreciation, a willingness to accept without prejudice sounds, colours, materials, images, and forms that may be strangely dissonant with our customary experience of the arts'.[7] This is an attitude that is necessary for an ethical mode of interactions with others.

John Dewey's observation about the moral function of art is apropos regarding the moral value of aesthetic experience in general. He points out that 'we are now habituated to one mode of satisfaction and we take our own attitude of desire and purpose to be so inherent in all human nature as to give the measure of all works of art, as constituting the demand which all works of art meet and should satisfy'.[8] But it is critical that we not identify our own narrowly circumscribed perspective formed through a specific set of experiences as the one that applies to all. In our effort to

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[5] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, tr. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1974), p. 58 (sec. 13).
[6] Arnold Berleant, *Re-thinking Aesthetics: Rogue Essays on Aesthetics and the Arts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 45.
[7] Berleant, *Re-thinking*, p. 45.
[8] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Press, 1958), p. 332.

overcome our ego-centric perspective and life experience, aesthetic appreciation of art particularly from cultures different from our own, either geographically or historically, is instrumental. 'Works of art are means by which we enter, through imagination and the emotions they evoke into other forms of relationship and participation than our own'.[9] Hence, 'the moral function of art […] is to remove prejudice, do away with the scales that keep the eye from seeing tear away the veils due to wont and custom, perfect the power to perceive'.[10] In order for good art to take me out of my own familiar world, however, I must be able and willing to practise aesthetic engagement. The invitation of good art for me to enter *its* world, in the words of Joseph Kupfer, places 'the burden of entering into an open-ended, indeterminate creative process' without any rules to follow.[11] I gain 'responsive freedom', but it also comes with an 'aesthetic responsibility'.[12]

The observation that this ethical mode of open-mindedness, respectfulness, and humility is needed for the aesthetic experience of the other in general, not only art, is shared by a number of thinkers from different disciplines and cultural backgrounds. Let me give several examples. Iris Murdoch calls this stance 'unselfing'. Concerned with the fact that 'our minds are continually active, fabricating an anxious, usually self-preoccupied, often falsifying *veil* which partially conceals the world', she claims that 'anything which alters consciousness in the direction of unselfishness, objectivity and

[9] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 333.
[10] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 325.
[11] Joseph Kupfer, *Experience as Art: Aesthetics in Everyday Life* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983), p. 71.
[12] Kupfer, *Experience as Art*, p. 73, p. 77.

realism is to be connected with virtue'.[13] Consequently, she regards the appreciation of good art as the reward for successful unselfing, which helps one 'transcend selfish and obsessive limitations of personality and can enlarge the sensibility'.[14] She uses the term 'detachment' to refer to disinterestedness in the sense interpreted above and states that 'this exercise of *detachment* is difficult and valuable whether the thing contemplated is a human being or the root of a tree or the vibration of a colour or a sound'.[15] It is clear that what we need to detach from is our self-regarding interests, but not from the other, whether another person or an object.

In her argument for the compatibility of beauty and justice, as well as beauty's role in assisting justice, Elaine Scarry discusses how the experience of beauty is facilitated by 'radical decentering'.[16] This shift of one's orientation triggered by the experience of beauty requires understanding of the other on *its*, not *our own*, terms:

> Letting the ground rotate beneath us several inches, so that when we land, we find we are standing in a different relation to the world than we were a moment before. […] We willingly cede our ground to the thing that stands before us.[17]

[13] Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 82. Emphasis in original.
[14] Murdoch, *Sovereignty*, p. 85.
[15] Murdoch, *Sovereignty*, p. 64, emphasis original.
[16] Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 109-115.
[17] Scarry, *On Beauty*, p. 112.

For Scarry, beauty can be experienced not only in works of art but in ordinary objects and persons we meet in our daily life. Furthermore, 'the way one's daily unmindfulness of the aliveness of others is temporarily interrupted in the presence of a beautiful person' may also take place 'in the presence of a beautiful bird, mammal, fish, plant'.[18]

That this other-regarding stance applies to nature, as suggested by Scarry, is also recognised by other thinkers as well. For example, Yi-Fu Tuan, a cultural geographer, states that 'one kind of definition of a good person, or a moral person, is that that person does not impose his or her fantasy on another. That is, he's willing to acknowledge the reality of other individuals, or even of the tree or the rock'.[19]

The same theme appears as the most important teaching in Zen Buddhism. A Japanese Zen Buddhist priest, Dōgen (道元1200–1253), characterises this ethical stance regarding the other as overcoming, forgetting, or transcending one's self and as a process necessary for enlightenment.[20] Specifically, in Zen discipline, the respectful engagement with the other, predominantly natural objects like a rock or a tree but also an artifact like a broom, requires me to experience its raw individuality or Buddha nature, without applying the usual categorisations and classifications of normal experience. I make myself 'slender' and enter into the object and become one with it, experiencing its 'thusness' or 'suchness'.[21] The favoured vehicle for Zen discipline is

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[18] Scarry, *On Beauty*, p. 90.
[19] Yi-Fu Tuan, 'Yi-Fu Tuan's Good Life', *On Wisconsin Magazine*, 9 (1987).
[20] The best primary text is Dōgen's major work, *Shōbōgenzō* (正法眼蔵*The Storehouse of True Knowledge*). The most important chapters are translated and compiled by Thomas Cleary in *Shōbōgenzō: Zen Essays by Dōgen* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986).
[21] The notion of 'making oneself slender' so that one can enter into the object was advocated by Matsuo Bashō in the art of making haiku. See Hattori Dohō's record of Bashō's teaching in 'The Red Booklet',

artistic practice that aims not so much at acquiring skills, but rather at becoming a person whose mode of being in the world is other-regarding and ethically grounded. Commenting on Japanese artistic training, Robert Carter points out that 'ethics is primarily taught through the various arts, and is not learned as an abstract theory, or as a series of rules to remember'.[22]

Heavily influenced by Zen Buddhism, Sōetsu Yanagi (柳壮悦), a Japanese art historian who established the folk arts (*mingei* 民芸) movement in the early twentieth century after the sudden and rapid Westernization took place, advocates cultivating one's capacity of 'seeing' or 'intuition' by exercising 'constraints and constrictions' by 'rein(ing) in our tongue'.[23] He recommends: 'you should first adopt an accepting attitude' and not to 'push yourself to the forefront but lend an ear to what the object has to say'.[24] As Yanagi himself characterises this mode of open-minded acceptance of the object of aesthetic experience as 'self-education', it is clear from other writers' uniform exhortation of minimizing self in listening to the other on its own terms that the

trans. by Toshihiko and Toyo Izutsu, in *The Theory of Beauty in the Classical Aesthetics of Japan* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), pp. 159–67.

[22] Robert Carter, *The Japanese Art and Self-Discipline* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), p. 2. I explore this aesthetic approach to nature in 'Appreciating Nature on its Own Terms', *Environmental Ethics*, 20 (1998): pp. 135–49.

[23] Soetsu Yanagi, *The Beauty of Everyday Things*, trans. by Michael Brase (London: Penguin Classics, 2018), p. 282, p. 283 (I refer to his given name as Sōetsu to reflect the long 'o' sound in Japanese). It is noteworthy that the same idea of 'reining in the tongue' is discussed by Annie Dillard in her essay, 'Seeing'. Dillard states that true seeing can happen when one succeeds in 'a discipline requiring a lifetime of dedicated struggle' to 'gag the commentator, to hush the noise of useless interior babble that keeps me from seeing', so that one can 'unpeach the peaches'. Annie Dillard, 'Seeing' originally in *Pilgrim at tinker Creek* (1974), included in *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*, ed. by Richard G. Botzler and Susan J. Armstrong (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), p. 121, p. 119.

[24] Yanagi, *Beauty*, 281.

aesthetic stance taken is also an ethical stance.[25] We don't bring our world and impose it on the other but we invite the other to bring its world to us.

Whether characterised as unselfing, decentering, or transcending, the ethical attitude underlying aesthetically experiencing the other has two dimensions. One is withholding our own worldview and reining in our tongue; it is an act of refraining and takes discipline. The other is actively listening to the other and entering into its world; it requires imaginative engagement. These acts are indispensable in our ethical life, particularly in our social interactions and civil discourses, both of which presuppose the acknowledgement and respect for the other party's reality and world. The number of thinkers I cited share this intimate relationship between aesthetics and ethics, namely that aesthetic experience is premised upon an ethical mode of relating to the other and in turn cultivates such an ethical stance.

In addition to helping us practice the ethical mode of being-in-the-world, this way of experiencing the world aesthetically generates practical benefits, apart from the utilitarian values we derive from our everyday objects and environments that tend to prevent us from attending to their aesthetic dimensions. It can contribute to enhancing the quality of life by providing delight and joy that is free of today's materialist- and consumerist-oriented trappings that are often ethically suspect.

For example, Sherri Irvin points out that cultivating everyday aesthetic sensibility encourages us to gain gratification free of moral cost, such as over-consumption. She points out that 'many people are fundamentally dissatisfied with their

[25] Yanagi, *Beauty*, p. 283.

lives, and are perpetually seeking after some outside stimulus, often a consumer product, to complete them'.[26] The multifaceted problems of over-consumption among affluent nations, particularly in the United States, are well-known: environmental harm associated with resource extraction, energy consumption, factory production, and disposal of goods, as well as human rights violation and environmental injustice.[27] In light of these concerns, Irvin proposes that everyday aesthetics can encourage us to derive satisfaction from our existing surroundings and possessions without seeking new sources of gratification: "if we can learn to discover and appreciate the aesthetic character of experiences that are already available to us, perhaps we will be less inclined to think that we must acquire new goods that make different experiences available."[28] Instead of discarding a piece of still-functioning furniture because it looks shabby and out-of-style, we can learn to take pleasure in its aged appearance through the aesthetic value of *wabi* or we can gain an aesthetic pleasure from engaging in a DIY project of upholstering and repairing. We can derive a quiet satisfaction from sipping a cup of tea and petting a cat instead of getting caught up in the frenzy of 'perceived obsolescence' which compels us to go out looking for the fashionable clothes or most up-to-date gadgets that feature merely cosmetic changes without any functional improvement.[29]

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[26] Sherri Irvin, 'The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 48 (2008), p. 41.

[27] A good and easily accessible overview of various problems associated with today's industrial production can be seen in "The Story of Stuff" (2007) at http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/. I also explore the aesthetics and ethics of consumer products in 'Consumer Aesthetics and Environmental Ethics: Problems and Possibilities', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 76 (2018): 429-39.

[28] Irvin, 'Pervasiveness', p. 42.

[29] Another example illustrating the benefit here is cultivating the taste for vegetarian food, as Sherri Irvin points out:

There is another way in which cultivating this everyday aesthetic sensibility can be considered beneficial. This happens when everyday life and the environment are devastated beyond one's power to literally change it, such as in a battle-plagued zone. Consider the case of living in the Gaza Strip. A Palestinian architect Salem Arafat Al Qudwa points out how its everyday environment damaged by destruction and constrained by limited resources can still offer aesthetic inspirations that should inform architectural practice and planning, as well as providing some pockets of respite in people's daily life. For example, he illustrates the way in which the concrete bricks are piled up has the same geometrical appeal as Donald Judd's construction and how a windowpane of an apartment can be appreciated for the 2-D pattern similar to Mondrian's paintings. In making flat round-shaped breads, 'women lay clean circular surfaces of dough and repeat the pieces of dough in rows and columns. The natural light entering through the aluminium frame of windows into each empty room fills up the actual space of the house, and the metallic safety designs further enhance the general sense of simplicity, order, and abstraction that characterizes the room'.[30] Given that the political situation unfortunately cannot be resolved by individual effort, everyday aesthetic experience can help its residents retain a sense of humanity, dignity, and resilience. Ultimately, he observes, 'in a manner that is convergent with minimalist art,

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'Vegetarianism is construed as a simple case of sacrifice, of adopting a certain kind of asceticism which may seem both aesthetically distasteful and motivationally unsustainable. Attention to the aesthetic character of everyday experience may substantially alleviate this problem. […] Rather than viewing vegetarianism as a matter of giving things up, we can view it as a matter of finding different ways to indulge the tastes that were once satisfied by meat consumption' (p. 43 of 'Pervasiveness').

[30] Salem Y. Arafat Al Qudwa, 'Aesthetic Value of Minimalist Architecture in Gaza', *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 15 (2017), Sec. 4, https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics/vol15/iss1/14/, accessed October 17, 2021. These examples are illustrated with photographs in this article.

though not necessarily directly informed by it, place- and space-making techniques in Gaza display resourcefulness, not hopelessness'.[31] In such a case, everyday aesthetics' contribution to their lives can be considerable.

Thus, one way of facilitating everyday aesthetics is to focus on these moments or pockets of pleasurable experience that otherwise do not receive attention because they become absorbed into the background of our life. Once we adopt an appropriate mindset and cultivate a refined aesthetic sensibility, whether it be through an artistic lens or a Zen-like stance, positive aesthetic values can be found, or constructed, in almost every corner of everyday life. This move to turn mundane humdrum into an aesthetic treasure trove is an attempt to extend the time-honored aesthetic attitude theory to everyday life. This understanding of everyday aesthetics confirms the claims made by predecessors that 'anything at all, whether sensed or perceived, whether it is the product of imagination or conceptual thought, can become the objects of aesthetic attention' and 'anything that can be viewed is a fit object for aesthetic attention', including 'a gator basking in a mound of dried dung'.[32] This sharpened aesthetic sensibility deployed for enriching our everyday aesthetic experience works as a corrective to one writer's observation that 'this catholicity in the denotation of "aesthetic object" […] has gone strangely unremarked', as well as Leddy's assessment that, 'although many aestheticians insist that aesthetic qualities are not limited to the

[31] Al Qudwa, 'Aesthetic Value', Sec. 4.
[32] The first passage is by Jerome Stolnitz, 'The Aesthetic Attitude', in *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics*, ed. by John Hospers (New York: The Free Press, 1969), p. 27. The second passage is from Paul Ziff, 'Anything Viewed', in *Oxford Readers: Aesthetics*, ed. by Susan L. Feagin and Patrick Maynard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 29, p. 23.

arts, even *those* thinkers generally take the arts as the primary focus of their discussion'.[33] Interpreted this way, the strategy to extend the applicability of aesthetics to everyday life is restorative; it is returning the notion of 'aesthetic' to its original Greek meaning of perception and giving a more faithful account of our aesthetic lives.

2. Negative Aesthetics

I have been stressing the importance of open-minded receptivity so that those aspects of our environment toward which we normally take an indifferent or negative attitude can generate a positive aesthetic experience. The cultivation of aesthetic sensibility, however, does not always bring about positive aesthetic experience. Everyday aesthetics cautions against indiscriminate aestheticization of everything, because what appears to be aesthetically negative (or sometimes even positive) may reflect social injustice or inhuman situation and condition. It is one thing for the Gaza Strip residents to desperately seek aesthetically positive pockets in their otherwise devastated living scape, but it is a different story if non-residents like tourists adopt a disinterested attitude and derive an aesthetic pleasure from a pile of bricks. Such outsiders' detached gaze is responsible for today's so-called ruin porn or poverty tourism targeting the depressed areas such as Detroit and hurricane-ravaged districts of New Orleans.[34]

[33] Jerome Stolnitz, 'On the Origins of "Aesthetic Disinterestedness"', originally published in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (1961), included in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by George Dickie and R. J. Sclafani (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), p. 624. Thomas Leddy, 'Everyday Surface Aesthetic Qualities: "Neat," "Messy," "Clean," Dirty"', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53 (1995), p. 259.

[34] It is noteworthy that Mary Wollstonecraft and John Ruskin criticised the British picturesque aesthetics popularised in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that was primarily advocated by the landed gentry. See discussion on this point in my *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 190.

Deriving an aesthetic pleasure from the appearance of destruction seems morally problematic, while being negatively affected by the appearance of destruction and devastation seems both appropriate and necessary. The former shares the same attitude of deriving pleasure from others' misery, contrary to what our ethical relationship with the others demand, which is empathy with the affected others and indignation regarding the cause of such misery. Deriving pleasure from others' misery damages one's ethical integrity and aestheticising the signs of misery and suffering should be called out for its moral impropriety.

Everyday aesthetics calls attention to what is referred to as negative aesthetics. If one is wedded to the usual honorific understanding of the term, aesthetics, as Arnold Berleant points out, 'negative aesthetics' may sound like 'an oxymoron'.[35] By identifying aesthetics as 'the theory of sensibility', he rejects the 'common association of aesthetics with art and its connotation of art that is good or great' and calls attention to occasions and environments where sensory experience 'offends, distresses, or has harmful or damaging consequences'.[36] Particularly when it comes to everyday aesthetics, it is critical that we adopt the classificatory, rather than honorific, sense of the term so as to allow the possibility of negative aesthetics. It is because everyday aesthetics has a surprisingly important role to play in humanity's world-making project, and one of the most important dimensions of such a project is for us to be able to detect and explore parts of our lives and environments that are aesthetically negative. Hideous,

[35] Arnold Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense: The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), p. 166.
[36] Berleant, *Sensibility*, p. 155.

offensive, malodorous, dreary, and tedious qualities found in everyday life *are* aesthetic qualities insofar as they result from our reactions toward the sensible through sensibility. While it is possible to adopt a distanced and disinterested attitude toward them and derive a positive aesthetic experience, it is crucial that these negative qualities be experienced as negative in the context of what I call world-making project in which we are all implicated in participating. How else are we going to detect that something is amiss or wrong with the artifacts and environments with which we interact and interpersonal relationships? Isn't it important to recognise these negative qualities, diagnose the cause of the problem, think of a way to improve the situation, and ultimately act on it?

Arnold Berleant and Katya Mandoki stand out among everyday aesthetics advocates for exploring negative aesthetics. Berleant distinguishes two kinds of negative aesthetics. One is caused by the absence of any positive aesthetic values due to utter blandness. The examples include: 'tract housing, big box stores, and ritual conversation'; 'the bland anonymity of suburban housing tracts and sterile blocks of low income housing, […] sitcoms that pander to the emptiness and crassness of ordinary life, and pulp novels that breed on people's dissatisfaction by offering escape into fictional romance or adventure'.[37] He calls these instances 'aesthetic deprivation' because it 'extinguishes our capacity for sensory experience' and 'conditions of such

[37] Berleant, *Sensibility*, p. 164. The second passage is from Arnold Berleant, *Aesthetics Beyond the Arts: New and Recent Essays* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012), p. 206.

deprivation may be harmful and produce aesthetic damage either through the loss of the capacity for perceptual satisfaction or by withholding aesthetic occasions'.[38]

The other kind of negative aesthetics is 'the actual presence of negative aesthetic value'.[39] Various forms of intrusion and pollution damage not only the environment and health but also our sensibility. Examples include 'cacophony of the roar of traffic and the blaring of loudspeakers in public places […] the soporific blanket of canned music and intrusive private conversations over cell phones […] the gaudy, intense colors of advertising circulars and the bath of all the commercial impingements on our sensibility […]', as well as street litter, utility lines, telephone poles, and billboards.[40] One may quibble over the specifics of examples, but the important point to be gained from his discussion is the presence of negative aesthetics in today's world and in our lives.

Katya Mandoki also calls attention to 'aesthetic poisoning'.[41] She diagnoses modern Western aesthetics to suffer from what she calls the 'Pangloss Syndrome', which she characterises as 'the tendency to deal only with things that are nice and worthy, good and beautiful', through 'a surgical operation of systematic exclusion of all phenomena that are not positive and useful in their supply of pleasure and nice thoughts'.[42] According to her, this syndrome 'explains why aesthetics has dealt only

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[38] Berleant, *Sensibility*, p. 164.
[39] Berleant, *Aesthetics*, p. 206.
[40] Berleant, *Sensibility*, p. 46. Other examples include "the sound from music systems and television sets that infiltrates into virtually every public place, from supermarkets to doctors' waiting rooms, airport lobbies, restaurants, bars, and even public streets." *Aesthetics*, p. 206.
[41] Katya Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), p. 38.
[42] Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*, all from p. 37. The next two passages are from pp. 37-8 and p. 38.

with art and beauty, so when other qualities that are not as pleasing become apparent, they are either only mentioned superficially or swept under the rug'. But, she observes, in our daily life, we are confronted with negative aesthetic qualities every day, such as 'the disgusting, the obscene, the coarse, the insignificant, the banal, the ugly, the sordid'.

Although I would not use the terms 'unaesthetic' or 'anaesthetic', Marcia Eaton also makes the same observation: 'questions concerning aesthetic value become particularly daunting when one considers the extent to which the world daily grows not only more unaesthetic – (ugly, graceless, even repulsive) but also more anaesthetic – (dulling, numbing, alienating)'.[43]

Unfortunately, we do not live in an aesthetic utopia. I don't think anyone would believe that the world which we inhabit and the life we lead are aesthetically perfect with no room for improvement. If everyday aesthetics sometimes encourages adopting a not-so-ordinary attitude toward those aesthetic negatives, it should also encourage exposing negative aesthetics in our life and in the world as negative. If one does not pursue this latter option, one fails to acknowledge that the power everyday aesthetics wields is considerable in determining the quality of life not just for oneself but for the society and humanity at large. The sharpened aesthetic sensibility should thus be directed not simply to enhance one's pleasures and enrichment but, perhaps more importantly, to detect negative qualities which are impoverishing or harming the quality of life and environment. We are affected more intensely and viscerally by the direct

[43] Marcia Muelder Eaton, *Merit, Aesthetic and Ethical* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 210.

encounter with negative aesthetics than a cognitive understanding of the various problems, such as the poverty rate, the number of houses in a ruinous state, the amount and kind of mental disorder caused by sensory deprivation, the number of toxins found in the water, and the like. Being affected profoundly through aesthetic (understood in the classificatory sense) experience is apt to spur us to act for improvement. I share Mandoki's criticism that 'we as aestheticians have evaded our *social responsibility* of contributing to the knowledge of human beings from our particular perspective, and thus lost for this field of inquiry the *relevance* it deserves" and that "aesthetic theory has to deal with social reality here and now to safeguard the quality of life and the respect for the integrity of human sensibility'.[44] In short, everyday aesthetics will be derelict if it does not recognise the existence of negative aesthetics for what it is and explore ways in which our aesthetic life and the society at large can be improved.

3. Aesthetic Expression of Moral Virtues

I have been arguing for the moral significance of developing a sensibility to detect negative aesthetics for what it is. At the same time, the opposite case is equally significant. That is, exposure to and interaction with positive aesthetics should encourage us to be grateful for things, phenomena, and environments that are humane, caring, hospitable, and aesthetically stimulating and delightful, leading to a caring attitude to maintain its aesthetically positive state. The aesthetic positivity here goes beyond what is pleasing to the senses. Particularly with objects of daily use, their

[44] Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*, p. 97, emphases added.

aesthetic value is inseparable from their functionality and user friendliness. As mentioned previously, when things are functioning well in our daily life, they tend to drop out of our consciousness radar. Here we can refer to Heidegger's two notions regarding our relationship with things: ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*) and present-at-hand (*vorhanden*). When things are functioning as they should, the objects themselves become an extension of ourselves, such as a hammer being a part of our hand, hence, invisible: ready-to-hand. Only when they break or malfunction do we become aware of their existence as a material object. They confront us with their reality, present-at-hand, that is conveniently ignored by us most of the time. 'The familiarity itself becomes visible in a conspicuous manner only when what is at hand is discovered circumspectly in the deficient mode of taking care of things. When we do not find something in its place, the region of that place often becomes explicitly accessible as such for the first time'.[45] I do believe that these two different ways in which we experience the material objects capture our experience. Our usual mode of experiencing the material objects is taking them for granted. This 'taken-for-granted' mode of existence relegates objects to a category of second-class citizens compared to us humans who are considered to be the true movers and shakers of the world, including being creators of these objects.

However, everyday aesthetics encourages cultivating a sharpened attentiveness so that we make visible the gifts, both practical and aesthetic, afforded by those objects which help us with our daily tasks. When the objects are designed to meet specific needs effectively, our appreciation goes beyond simply appreciating the well-oiled operation

[45] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), p. 96.

to savouring the care and thoughtfulness expressed in the design. This appreciation is aesthetic insofar as such moral qualities are embodied in the sensuous features of the object, which is different from one gained simply through the object's attractive surface. Consider, for example, the OXO brand of vegetable peeler. Its bulky handles covered by a non-slip, polypropylene plastic and rubber material with flexible fins at the base are redesigned from a commonly found metal peeler with a thin handle that rotates with use. The new design accommodates those whose dexterity is compromised due to arthritis, which afflicted the re-designer's wife who struggled with using the metal peeler. While not stunningly beautiful in the conventional sense, Akiko Busch observes that the OXO peelers are 'instruments not simply of food preparation, but of human behavior, coordinates that can help us calibrate our place in human relations'; they embody 'consideration, empathy, and comfort' and 'the small agents of human decency'.[46] Although this redesign was motivated by addressing the special needs of the dexterity-challenged users, it does not compromise the users without such challenges. Furthermore, any users enjoy the ease of firm grip, which helps make the operation smooth.[47]

This kind of aesthetic appreciation of the care behind the design of objects can be experienced quite frequently in our daily life *if* we exercise a sharpened aesthetic sensibility. It can be experienced, for example, during an ordinary urban stroll. In many parts of the globe, we can enjoy variously designed manhole covers that depict the

[46] Akiko Busch, *The Uncommon Life of Common Objects: Essays on Design and the Everyday* (New York: Metropolis Books, 2004), p. 87, p. 84, p. 87.
[47] This is a good example of 'universal design' that accommodates different capabilities of people.

objects, such as flowers, historical figures, landscapes, or architectures that are associated with the place; a decorative theme such as a wave-like pattern on the pavement, bus stop shelter, and other street furniture seen in the city of Seattle that unifies and gives coherence to its various parts; metal grills featuring an elegant geometrical pattern or a cut-out shapes of leaves around the base of trees on the sidewalk that protect them as well as allowing rain water to seep in; the beautifully-arranged protection for trees and bushes from the weight of snow made with bamboo poles and straws seen in the snowy parts of Japan. Without knowing the designers or creators behind these things, let alone their intention, we appreciate the sense of care and thoughtfulness for providing strollers with a sense of place, hearty greetings for the visitors, and delightful visual feasts, not to mention the expression of care and gentleness toward the trees and bushes.

These experiences certainly enrich our aesthetic life, particularly with today's fast-paced life which tends to render these objects invisible as we negotiate urban streets to reach the destination as quickly as possible. However, once made visible, these objects enrich not only our aesthetic life but also our moral life by encouraging us to note the expression of care embodied in the objects' features. We appreciate the fact that our experience is taken seriously and attended to care-fully. In contrast, if our environment does not reflect any care or thoughtfulness and is deficient in aesthetic amenities, even if our practical needs are met, we become demoralised that our experience is not taken seriously. The rich aesthetic resources indicative of care

cultivates aesthetic sensibility that is not only tuned into sensory features but also the way in which care is embodied in the sensory appearances of objects and environments.

4. The Aesthetics of Doing Things

Such recognition of care is bound to nurture a caring attitude toward those objects around us. That is, it invites a reciprocal relationship inspired by care or a "pay it forward" attitude to spread the care toward others. This brings up another contribution everyday aesthetics makes to the traditional aesthetics discourse: the aesthetics of doing. I have previously mentioned everyday aesthetics' challenge to the art- and beauty-centric mode of conventional aesthetics. Another dominant theme of conventional aesthetics is its spectator-oriented approach. According to it, we gain an aesthetic experience as a spectator of an object, phenomenon, or event, although, as Arnold Berleant maintains in his notion of engagement, it is never a static and passive process. However, what has not received enough attention is the aesthetics involved in literally doing things, experienced from within as an active agent. For example, food aesthetics has been dominated by the judgement on the food, but not enough has been explored about the aesthetics of cooking and eating. Sports aesthetics is also about the graceful movement of an athlete and the drama of a tight game discussed from the spectator's perspective, but not the first-person account of engaging in a sports activity.

The experience involved in 'doing' things tends to fall outside of the traditional aesthetic radar for three reasons. First, doing things almost always involves physical activities, thus involving bodily engagement, and the Western philosophical tradition

has long neglected issues related to body. Second, doing things in everyday life often involves chores, such as cooking, cleaning, laundering, taking care of the yard, and the like, which also get excluded from the worthy subjects for philosophical examination. Recent developments in philosophy, particularly feminism, as well as in art, help challenge this neglect of the body and daily chores. Third, the experience of 'doing' is not recognised as part of aesthetics because it is not amenable to an evaluative aesthetic judgement. There is no clear 'object' of experience which makes it possible to form an aesthetic judgement. For example, Jane Forsey points out that 'cleaning, chopping, and repairing are clearly quotidian *but not clearly objects of any kind*'.[48] We can dispute about whether a garden is pretty, but can we dispute about whether or not the pleasure I am having while gardening qualifies as an aesthetic experience? Is it rather a trivial and purely subjective feeling that lacks 'aesthetic credentials' and intersubjectivity, as pointed out by Christopher Dowling?[49] But is it appropriate to apply the judgement-oriented mode of aesthetic inquiry to an object-less activity experienced from within?

Let me take three 'chores' from our everyday life, namely cooking, laundering, and repairing, and explore the aesthetics of performing these tasks. As mentioned before, the quintessential candidate for aesthetics regarding food is the judgement we make on what we eat. Is the pad thai at the new Thai restaurant delicious? Is the new recipe I tried for meatball better or worse than my usual one? Does sushi made by Jiro

[48] Jane Forsey, *The Aesthetics of Design* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 237, emphasis added.
[49] Christopher Dowling, 'The Aesthetics of Daily Life', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 50 (2010), pp. 225-242.

deserve three Michelin stars? What is overlooked is that there are many other dimensions of experiencing food besides tasting and making an aesthetic judgement on it. Let me compile some accounts given for the activities (in the most literal sense) associated with food.

Buffalo Bird Woman describes planting and caring for corn in great details. The experience includes a careful observation of nature to determine the best time for planting, bodily movements required in planting, pattern for planting the seeds, the care that goes into protecting it from crows, treating corn as children by singing to them, and communal reciprocity and support. Some of the descriptions are as follows:

> I cultivated each hill carefully with my hoe as I came to it; and if the plants were small, I would comb the soil of the hill lightly with my fingers, loosening the earth and tearing out young weeds.

> We cared for our corn in those days as we would care for a child, for we Indian people loved our gardens, just as a mother loves her children, and we thought that our growing corn liked to hear us sing, just as children like to hear their mother sing to them.[50]

[50] Buffalo Bird Woman, '*Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden*,' in *Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food*, ed. by Deane W. Curtin and Lisa M. Heldke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 274, p. 275.

Many of us lack similar experience (like singing to the plants in our garden), but does this fact make it impossible to empathise with her expression of care embodied in her interaction with the soil, seeds, and singing?

As for the activity of cooking, let us hear from women writing about their everyday home cooking. Consider Luce Giard's 'Doing Cooking' in which the title itself is indicative of her interest in and attention to the activity, separate from the joy of eating.

> […] the everyday work in kitchens remains a way of unifying matter and memory, life and tenderness, the present moment and the abolished past, invention and necessity, imagination and tradition – tastes, smells, colors, flavors, shapes, consistencies, actions, gestures, movements, people and things, heat, savoring, spices, and condiments. Good cooks are never sad or idle – they work at fashioning the world, at giving birth to the joy of the ephemeral; they are never finished celebrating festivals for the adults and the kids, the wise and the foolish, the marvelous reunions of men and women who share room (in the world) and board (around the table). Women's gesture and women's voices that make the earth livable.[51]

[51] Luce Giard, 'Doing Cooking', in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Volume 2: Living & Cooking, ed. by Luce Giard, trans. by Timothy J. Tomasik (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 222.

Audre Lorde also recounts her experience of helping her mother grind spices in a mortar, which includes rhythmic body movement punctuated by the muted sound of thump and the tactile sensation of pressing around the carved side of the mortar. All these sensory experiences 'transported me into a world of scent and rhythm and movement and sound that grew more and more exciting as the ingredients liquefied'.[52] Verta Mae Smart-Grosvenor's account of her so-called 'vibration cooking' explicitly relates the daily home cooking to aesthetics: 'I'm talking about being able to turn the daily ritual of cooking for your family into a *beautiful everyday happening*'.[53]

What can be noted in all these descriptions of engaging in activities is that the experience narrated is synaesthetic based upon bodily engagement (body movement, tactile sensation of dealing with soil, handling a mortar, feeling the heat, and the like, in addition to sound, smell, taste, as well as vision) and it is imbued with memory and associations. It is also inseparable from other values permeating our everyday life such as fellowship, reciprocity, care, and love. If one were to follow a typical trajectory of the aesthetic discourse, these features tend to disqualify these experiences from entering the realm of aesthetics. Bodily engagement is not a typical subject matter for spectator-oriented aesthetics, there is no resultant aesthetic judgement to speak of, and bodily sensations and memory are too subjective and personal to be readily sharable. I can do my best to describe my childhood memory of helping my mother in the kitchen and how my current activity of cooking in my own kitchen conjures up all the sweet

[52] Audre Lorde, 'from *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*', in Curtin and Heldke, *Cooking*, p. 288.
[53] Verta Mae Smart-Grosvenor, 'from *Vibration Cooking: or the Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl*', in Curtin and Heldke, *Cooking*, p. 294, emphasis added.

memories associated with it and how the tactile sensation and the crisp staccato of chopping vegetables give me a pleasure. However, others can only proximate my feeling but cannot share in with my very personal and private experience, unlike the way we can all share our experience of watching a film and debate over its artistic merit. Ultimately, therefore, are such experiences simply pleasurable and enjoyable without being specifically aesthetic?

It may be the case, as Dowling points out, that 'mere first-person reports […] are of little interest of others because others can never share them', hence lacking aesthetic credentials.[54] But does that mean that a substantial part of our everyday life falls outside of the aesthetic purview? Does the experience of the pleasure, often bodily engaged, we derive from daily activities lack aesthetic credentials because we do not, nor do we expect to, make a judgement about it?

When reading the above first-person accounts of cooking, however, we can share in their experience based upon our own experience of cooking. Their accounts resonate with us and we join an imaginary community of home cooks across the globe and history and enjoy a kind of camaraderie. With such an imaginative engagement, the activity gains a dimension that goes beyond a simple chore to be performed in a solitary confinement, but rather experienced as taking part in a time-honoured and intimate activity that has been shared by so many. Even those who have never experienced these different activities associated with cooking are not excluded from joining this community with shared experience of cooking, because the door is open for

[54] Dowling, 'The Aesthetics', p. 238.

them to gain relevant experiences but, perhaps more importantly, they are invited to participate by activating imagination. This imaginative sharing of experience is what we often go through by the experience of art. Intersubjectivity is thus possible in this way, although it is not a means to or results from any judgement-making.

Another home chore many of us engage in regularly is laundering. Not only from my own experience, but also from various people's (not surprisingly all women) writings regarding laundry, it is clear that there can be a quiet pleasure felt when the task is well done. Such delight is subtle and felt quite frequently as we engage in this chore regularly, but it is hidden in plain sight because it is all-too-familiar and all-too-ordinary. Pauliina Rautio's research on the place of beauty in everyday life provides a wealth of materials in this regard.[55] Her research consists of her monthly letter correspondence with a mother of three in a rural area of northern Finland. It is noteworthy that this woman, Laura, chose the act of laundry hanging as the focal point of reflecting on the place of beauty in her daily life. Laura's narrative covers a wide-ranging reflection on seasons, nature, family, life, the purely sensuous experience of colours, scents, and sounds gained during this chore, constantly changing according to the season, weather, and time of the day. Rautio summarises the nature of such an aesthetic experience that is folded into daily life as follows:

[55] Pauliina Rautio, 'On Hanging Laundry: the Place of Beauty in Managing Everyday Life', *Contemporary Aesthetics* 7 (2009) at http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=535, accessed October 18, 2021.

> Everyday life is a contextual process but one that nevertheless defies definitions bound in time and space. This is because as subjectively experienced it entails simultaneously the past, the present, and the future as necessary for managing it. By managing everyday life I mean a practice that consists of constant reflection, evaluation and steering, but one that we are mostly unaware of engaging. In a way we are making our everyday lives. This makes the everyday a subjective construct instead of an objectively definable unit.[56]

For the author of a book titled *Laundry*, Cheryl Mendelson, laundry is 'sensually pleasing, with its snowy, sweet-smelling suds, warm water and lovely look and feel of fabric folded or ironed, smooth and gleaming'.[57] She feels similarly about ironing by declaring that it

> gratifies the senses. The transformation of wrinkled, shapeless cloth into the smooth and gleaming folds of a familiar garment pleases the eye. The good scent of ironing is the most comfortable smell in the world. And the fingertips enjoy the changes in the fabrics from cold to warm, wet to dry, and rough to silky.[58]

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[56] Rautio, 'On Hanging', Sec. 4.
[57] Cheryl Mendelson, *Laundry: The Home Comforts: Book of Caring for Clothes and Linens* (New York: Scribner, 2005), p. xiv.
[58] Mendelson, *Laundry*, p. 99.

She characterises such experience as ‘modest, quiet, private pleasures’ and ‘valuable even though they are nothing that there ever could — or should — be a buzz about’.[59] The additional reward of such a humble delight is further ‘physical pleasures – the look of favourite clothes restored to freshness and beauty, the tactile satisfaction of crisp linens in beautifully folded stacks’; ‘crisp, smooth sheets (that) dramatically change the aesthetic appeal of your bed and heighten your sense of repose’; and ‘the anticipation of feeling good or looking good in garments and linens restored to freshness and attractiveness through one’s own competence and diligence’.[60] Other writers join this observation: ‘there’s something so satisfying about the fresh, steamy scent of just-ironed linens’.[61] Note that there are two layers of aesthetic pleasure described here. One is the physical delight in the process of washing and ironing, and the other regards the end result of such physical labour. The former tends to be neglected in the usual spectator-based aesthetic discourse. The latter is also generally excluded from the aesthetic domain because the pleasure gained by freshly laundered and ironed items is predominantly derived from proximal senses of touch and smell.

Furthermore, writings on laundry indicate that there is a satisfaction in participating in the same task that women over the centuries and across the globe have undertaken: ‘the lifting, hauling, pinning and folding connects me to the generations of

[59] Mendelson, *Laundry*, p. xv.
[60] Rick Marin, ‘A Scholar Tackles the Wash’, *New York Times* (Sept. 29, 2005); Mendelson, *Laundry*, p. 99 and p. xiv-xv.
[61] Irene Rawlings and Andrea Vansteenhouse, *The Clothesline* (Layton: Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 2002), p. 59.

women who came before me, those who had fewer choices in their chores'.[62] This theme of sharing the camaraderie with women throughout ages and across geographical borders is recurrent in most writings on laundry, as indicated by another writer: 'over the years I have come to realize that, throughout shocking political and cultural upheavals, one thing that connects women over the generations is the making and tending of cloth'.[63]

The sense of satisfaction and quiet delight thus experienced are woven into the fabric of daily life and as such rarely stands out from the rest of our lives. However, I characterise such sense of satisfaction as aesthetic insofar as it is rooted in the sensuous feelings gained from the bodily engagement with the activity as well as the condition of the objects resulting from our accomplishing the task.

Finally, let me give one more example from our mundane chore: repairing and mending. While the contemporary capitalistic enterprise systematically discourages us from engaging in these activities in favour of us consumers discarding broken objects and purchasing new ones, the practice of repair is seeing a comeback as a part of the sustainability initiative to promote the longevity of everyday objects. Sometimes repair regards only the functionality, as in automobiles, home appliances, or computers, most of which require specialists and normally do not alter the appearance. The repair and mend that concern me here are those which we can practise without too much specialised knowledge and transforms the sensuous appearance, such as mending a

[62] Marcia Worth-Baker, 'HOME WORK: The Quiet Pleasures of a Line in the Sun', *The New York Times* (July 23, 2006).
[63] Rawlings and Vansteenhouse, *Clothesline*, p. 8.

ripped clothing item and fixing a broken cup. Such an activity is directed by both practical and aesthetic considerations.

First, when repairing an object, we need to involve an aesthetic sensibility in determining whether the sign of repair should be invisible or visible. Invisible repair is the traditionally preferred mode, guiding us to apply a transparent glue to put broken pieces together, match the paint colour when painting over the scratch on a car, and sew in a same-coloured patch to cover a hole on the jeans. Recently, however, repair activists advocate visible repair as a challenge to the conventional aesthetic standard regarding material objects that puts the defect-free, mint condition of an object to be aesthetically superior to those that show signs of their own ageing, wear and tear, accidental damage, breakage, and their repair. They often derive inspiration from the traditional Japanese method of *kintsugi* (金継), repair by gold, that was originally used to mend a cracked or broken tea bowl used in the tea ceremony established in the sixteenth century. Glued by lacquer, which is then adorned by gold flake, the sign of the repair is made prominent and constitutes a new chapter in the object's history, often given a title of a new landscape, such as the "snow-clad mountain peak" piece by a well-known craftsman, Hon'ami Kōetsu (本阿弥光悦1558-1637).[64] The *wabi* aesthetics involved here regards what is generally considered as imperfection and defect to be a springboard for a new aesthetic possibility. Thus, the mender has an aesthetic

[64] The visual image of this piece is the third one at https://www.ebara.co.jp/foundation/hatakeyama/information/collection.html, accessed October 17, 2021.

choice to make, depending upon the nature of the material, damage, and the expected result.

Second, the mending activity engages bodily movement in giving shape to the desired outcome. Similar to the way in which cooking and laundering involve bodily as well as sensory engagement, the mender has to pay close attention to the body's interaction with the material and the tool used in repair. It occurs where 'this active space of at/tending – assessing, touching, thinking, and intuiting – entwines into an embodied knowledge, a soft technique, during which the ameliorative thread is sewn this way and that'.[65] Insofar as the activity of mending requires an embodied knowledge, skills, and working according to the material's dictate, the process can be considered an apt example of the reciprocal, cumulative, and continuous relationship of 'doing' and 'undergoing' proposed by John Dewey when characterizing an aesthetic experience.[66] In addition to providing a possible occasion for 'an' experience, such active and care-full engagement with the object cannot but nurture one's affection for the object, rendering it not only an object of aesthetic appreciation but also a cherished object destined for longevity.[67]

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[65] Morgan, 'Kate Kittredge's Stockings', p. 70.

[66] 'An experience has pattern and structure, because it is not just doing and undergoing in alternation, but consists of them in relationship'. John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 44. I thank Ivan Gaskell for calling attention to this passage.

[67] Tatsushi Fujiwara, a Japanese agricultural historian, observes: 'Clothes, houses, bicycles, and cars are all repaired, used, and repaired again when broken again. They are cleaned, washed, polished, and maintained. After repeating these activities, we develop attachment to these objects and want to keep them with us as long as possible. Attachment does not mean not hurting. Rather, it is to appreciate thoroughly the scars and frays as much as possible and as long as functionality is not lost.' *Bunkai no Tetsugaku: Huhai to Hakkō o meguru Shikō* (*Philosophy of Decomposition: Thoughts on Decay and Fermentation*) (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2019), p. 285, my translation.

The mending practice also cultivates humility and respect because we have to work *with* the particular damage and material, rather than forming a preconceived idea about how to mend and impose on the material. For example, Katrina Rodabaugh characterises her fabric mending practice as 'respond[ing] to each individual repair as the garment demands. It means that every patch, stitch, darn, or other combinations of mending techniques can be in response to that particular damage'.[68] Another practitioner states that 'every stitch requires listening and responding to what the fabric, and the hole, might need'.[69] This way of mending is echoed by a denim repairer: 'Rather than having a predetermined vision of the finished garment, we let the contours of the damage dictate the repair'.[70] This deference to the object and working collaboratively with it shares with appreciation of art which, as explained in Section 1, requires our willingness to transcend our own worldview, expectations, and desires and enter its world.

We have thus excavated those mundane activities of household chore that tend to be buried with their practically-oriented character and thus not caught by the aesthetic radar calibrated to capture standout experiences that we have as spectators. One way in which their invisibility becomes visible is to derive an aesthetic appreciation from the cooked food, cleaned laundry, and repaired objects. But I specifically want to call attention to the aesthetics of engaging in the activities of cooking, cleaning, and repairing. They all involve aesthetic sensibility in interacting with the objects with care,

[68] Katrina Rodabaugh, *Mending Matters* (New York: Abrams, 2018), pp. 141-2.
[69] Lisa Z. Morgan, 'Kate Kittredge's Stockings', in *Manual: a Journal about Art and its Making* (Providence: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design) 11 (2018), p. 70.
[70] Matt Rho cited by Rodabaugh, *Mending Matters*, p. 119.

imagining how best to go about effecting the desired result, and moving our body effectively and efficiently to perform the task. In addition, these house chores are often infused with emotional investment of love and care for the loved ones, as well as for the objects themselves. We cherish and try to take good care of the materials and instruments used for cooking, the linens and clothing items that have served us well so we can maintain them in good stead, and those objects that we have lived with through use and with which we plan to grow together by sharing history. These care acts amount to an aesthetic and moral investment we make in the people and objects with whom and with which we interact in our daily life. They reflect our commitment to living together by nurturing, cherishing, and honouring the relationship through handling of objects. In other words, our ethically-grounded relationship with others is enacted not only by direct interactions by our actions with them (which themselves require aesthetic engagement), but also is conveyed by creating certain results, such as home-cooked meals, clean laundry, and beautifully-mended clothes.

Thus, developing aesthetic sensibility regarding everyday life enriches our aesthetic life by increasing resources and diversifying its content, thereby enhancing the quality of life. More importantly, it contributes to developing an ethically-grounded mode of being-in-the-world through aesthetically engaging with the world around us.

The Intersection of Moral and Aesthetic Factors in the Process of Growing Up

RONALD MOORE

In a recent Peter Robinson's novel, Detective Annie Cabbot offers this response to her colleague's suggestion that a suspect's artistic talent counts against his likely criminality:

> [J]ust because you can draw doesn't mean you've got ability in any other department. Believe me, I've known a few artists in my time, and I could tell you a story or two. There's absolutely no connection between art and personal morality. Or art and emotional intelligence. Quite the opposite, mostly. You just have to study the lives of the great artists to see that.[1]

Hers is not an uncommon view. A great many people — perhaps *most* people — think of aesthetic awareness and moral awareness as being so different from each other that neither can have any real influence on the other. After all, they say, moral awareness involves actions, principled judgment, and engagement with communities, while aesthetic awareness centres on reflection, moody delectation, and a kind of

[1] Peter Robinson, *When the Music is Over* (New York: Morrow, 2016), p. 379.

individualistic attentiveness, even detachment. It is this perceived dichotomy that is invoked when we hold certain artworks to be morally despicable while at the same time aesthetically commendable, or when we deem uplifting public monuments to fail artistically. Behind such claims of axiological independence lurks a sense that, whatever else it involves, the business of ethical engagement involves bodies of thought and frames of mind that simply don't connect up with whatever ideas and frames of mind are pertinent to aesthetic judgment. The two can coexist in a given individual; but they needn't do so. It seems that they are no less contingently related than talents in fly-casting and crossword puzzle solving.

In this essay, I take issue with this way of thinking about ethics and aesthetics. I will argue that, once we turn our attention away from the fully formed adult mind and consider the processes of moral[2] and aesthetic development, the dogma of axiological independence loses its plausibility. In its place we can recognize a conception of personal and social maturity that is built upon, and strengthened by, a combination of factors that contribute jointly to moral and aesthetic growth. This conception reflects the multi-dimensional way in which humans develop as deliberate products within frames set by social practices and bodies of belief. Growing up aesthetically and growing up morally are complementary enterprises. Knowledge and awareness gained in one domain foster knowledge and awareness in the other. Sometimes the aesthetic

[2] In this essay, 'moral' should be understood to be refer to normative characteristics of human social interaction generally. 'Moral education' is simply a less cumbersome way of denoting one's increasingly deliberate involvement in the complex process of growing up ethically, socially, politically, spiritually, etc.

factors are propaedeutic to moral development; sometimes factors of both types are jointly constructive and mutually reinforcing.

1.

The process of moral development is one whose general trajectory and stages have attracted the attention of social theorists throughout the course of Western philosophy. Obvious highlights of this history include Plato's prescription in *The Republic* for training future leaders in the craft of moral authority,[3] Rousseau's argument in *Emile* that moral education should capitalize on students' natural propensity for goodness and sympathy,[4] and the accounts of stages of moral development constructed by Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg[5] and their followers. More recently, scores of social scientists have refined the study of moral development through laboratory research and interviews with young people. The results of their work can be perused in a good many professional journals[6].

The parallel process of growing up aesthetically has been less extensively reported, but its general contours have also been known for centuries. Here again, Plato

[3] Although parts of this account are distributed throughout the text, its key elements are presented in Books II, III, and X, especially sections 376 E – 392 C.

[4] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education,* trans. by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979). The key elements in the account of sentimental training as it relates to the socializing of autonomous individuals appear in Book IV.

[5] Two of Piaget's prominent contributions on this theme appear in *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Tubner & Co., 1932), and *Intellectual Evolution from Adolescence to Adulthood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Kohlberg's theory, elaborating Piaget's account identify six distinct stages of moral development, is presented in *Essays on Moral Development* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981) and *The Philosophy of Moral Development* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

[6] Among them, *Child Development*, the *Journal of Child Psychology*, and *Developmental Psychology*.

is the cornerstone. In the *Republic,* he makes it clear that education in the arts is a vital component of the intellectual preparation of leaders, guiding them to distinguish between what is and what merely seems to be. Renaissance scholars, as well as the earliest universities, organized curricula of studies around Plato's conception of the role of art in public practice.[7] Kant's defence of the notion that aesthetic awareness is both deeply subjective and expansively communal came to set the tone for generations of Romantic educational philosophers and practitioners.[8] John Dewey's contention that aesthetic experience introduces key articulations of the contours of life's natural development[9] laid the cornerstone of education theory in America. And since his day, a steady stream of scholars and teachers have sought to confirm Dewey's views or, in the alternative, to fight clear of their influence.[10]

In the individual, growing up morally and growing up aesthetically are contemporaneous. Each process begins with infant innocence, moves through various phases of awareness and socialization, and culminates in some level of sophisticated appreciation of the roles of norms and values in life (or in a good life). If we take process alignment to be a matter of point-to-point, chronological correspondence of developmental features, then it is clear the processes of growing up morally and

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[7] The foundational Renaissance texts for instruction of young noblemen, Marsilio Ficino's *Commentaries on Plato* and Baldassare Castiglione's *Art of the Courtier* both weave together aesthetic, moral, and social advice.

[8] This idea, one that set the tone for several successive waves of Romantic art theory, is chiefly developed in his *Critique of Judgment* trans. by J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951). (orig. 1790)

[9] The clearest expression of Dewey's ideas on this topic appears in *Art as Experie*nce (New York: Putnam, 1934).

[10] Among prominent contributors to the discussion are Harry Broudy, Maxine Greene, Bennett Reimer, and Ralph Smith. The *Journal of Aesthetic Education* is the leading repository of theoretical development on this theme.

growing up aesthetically are *not* aligned. But this doesn't mean that they don't intersect in ways that have formative effect. In what follows, I identify several elements and nodes of cross-influence, and I argue that the cross-influence can induce alterations of perspective, leading to consequences for choices and actions. Although I believe that moral recognitions often conduce to the intensification and deepening of aesthetic appreciation, I confine my attention here to ways in which factors in aesthetic experience influence the development of moral awareness. I do not claim that they always do. Nor do I claim that every aesthetic factor I identify has the same effect, or, for that matter, *any* effect, on moral development in every individual. The connections I discuss vary widely in force and effectiveness across populations. We all realize that there is no one set of virtues that makes someone a moral (or highly moral) individual. Likewise, there is no one set of sensible features that makes anything beautiful. So, we shouldn't be surprised to find that there is no simple, uniform relation between the two value domains that insures their effective intersection. The important thing to realize is that, in various ways and to varying degrees, they do intersect, and often with salubrious results. Detective Abbott was right to assert that artistic sensibility is disconnected from moral conscience in some individuals, but wrong to conclude that the two are utterly and always disconnected. Some people never grow into moral adulthood; quite a few more don't do so fully. But in instances where people develop the cognitive and emotive capacities leading to moral adulthood, it is often possible to discern contributions of

elements of aesthetic awareness that help create those capacities, contributions that both intensify and deepen the process of growing up morally.[11]

2.

I will focus on six factors in aesthetic experience that conduce to constructive advances in moral thinking.[12] The first is a fundamental element in setting conditions for aesthetic engagement with arrays of objects in both the artifactual and the natural worlds: *framing*. Framing is the learned capacity to appreciate aesthetic objects as *compositions* of multiple components in which attention is circumscribed by limiting conditions. It is the limiting conditions that make it possible to regard parts as parts of wholes, and to take stock of their relations to each other within the whole. Traditional easel paintings, for example, are surrounded by frames that set limits on our range of visual attention and invite us to see their contents as intelligently organized. Similarly, novels are framed by their covers, dramas and dances by the geometry of the stage, orchestral music by their scores, and so forth and so on. Aesthetic framing is by no means limited to the art world. Gardens are framed by their perimeters and internal delineations, vacations by their itineraries, seascapes by the visual limitations imposed by foliage, rocks, strands of sand, etc. As we take stock of the jumbled world about us, we take pleasure in assembling various of its aspects and elements into comprehensible wholes,

[11] I discuss the business of growing up aesthetically, at greater length in *Natural Beauty* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2008), at pp. 227-234.

[12] It is, I believe, equally feasible to show that certain moral recognitions conduce to the intensification and deepening aesthetic appreciation, but that is a project for another day, as is the project of analyzing negative (destructive and disrupting) influences.

experiencing them as assembled against a limited background. Although this process can take place accidentally (as when, for example, we see a forest's contours as we emerge from a cave), we can learn to *impute* frames to many of our experiences, deliberately limiting attention, and thus creating the possibility of coherence[13]. Life regarded as a vast, undifferentiated panorama of *sensibilia* is incoherent and unintelligible. It is only when we set (or accept) limits on attention that we can begin to appreciate, even savour, what we sense. The same holds for social relations. The attention we pay to others is circumscribed by frameworks of understanding and interpretation, and we deal with others — people, institutions, families, etc — within those frameworks. By practicing the operation of framing in relation to perceived things we build a foundation for the thoughtful comprehension of social and moral relationships.

Frames give us a way of intelligently apprehending the other; but sometimes what appears within the frame are images of ourselves. The second factor connecting aesthetic and moral perspectives involves this quality of *mirroring*. We come to be aware of our own images through various mechanisms of reflection. Mirrors, of course, are the obvious, and most common means. But, before mirrors, there were pools of still water, sheets of ice, and the eyes of others. The arts are instruments of mirroring in that they — in countless ways — inspire and provoke self-reflection on the parts of their audiences. Those dramas, songs, movies, etc. that move us most are frequently the ones

[13] John Dewey conceives of this sort of cognitive framing as the conversion of experience into *experiences*, i.e. lived units with distinctive beginnings, middles, and ends. His account appears in *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover Books, 1958).

in which we recognize or discover something about ourselves. Aristotle argues that tragedy works on its audience to call up emotions — especially pity and fear — that, lurking within us, need to be exposed and confronted with a cathartic antidote.[14] Just as we can face our weaknesses in art, we can learn our strengths. It is a familiar fact of primary school education that students become quickly engaged with artworks in which they find themselves, their communities, or ethnic groups.[15] We take pleasure in finding ourselves in a place outside our skins. We awaken to our failings when we read novels, watch movies, or hear songs in which they appear. The pleasures of self-recognition and the pains of self-blame are virtues central to moral development.

Non-artefactual aesthetic features also can provide a powerful stimulus to self-awareness, leading in turn to self-reflection and self-appraisal. Kant and many subsequent Romantic philosophers held that the sense of sublimity evoked by overwhelming natural objects--mountain peaks, ocean vistas, starry night skies, and the like — contained a distinctly moral intimation. Initially overwhelmed by the sublime object, perceivers recover from apparent cognitive defeat by recognizing that we, as humans, have minds capable of putting all this — the vastness of the object itself, the mind's capacity to apprehend it, and the contrapuntal relationship of bounds and limitlessness — into a comprehensible order. Kant held that this discovery has a

[14] The argument is developed in chapter 6 of *Poetics*, Ch. 6, in *Aristotle's Works*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941).

[15] I was told by Barry Gaither, then director of the Museum of African-American Art in Boston, Massachusetts, that when sixth graders from the adjacent Roxbury neighborhood were invited to act as docents, leading visitors through the collection of African and African-American artworks, any initial hesitancy they had was soon overwhelmed by enthusiasm stemming from pride in a shared heritage on display. This enthusiasm spilled over into dramatically improved performance in almost all of these students' classes.

profound moral value in that it reveals a basis of human dignity.[16] One needn't embrace this grandiose conclusion to agree that aesthetic appreciation of overwhelming natural objects can conduce to an edifying sense of humility in relation to natural forces as well as to a liberating intimation of the comprehensive power of thought. These self-reflective realizations can be powerful elements in developing a moral awareness wedding humility to aspiration.

The third factor is, in a way, a converse correlative to the second. It has often been referred to as *aesthetic distance*, the ability to set aside one's immediate and practical interests in order to appreciate qualities disconnected from those interests. Where mirroring was concerned with self-discovery, distancing is concerned with the disintegration of egocentricity, a willingness to lose oneself in the object of attention. Many of us have encountered, and have come to treasure, transformative moments in beautifully performed concerts where, as T. S. Eliot put it, music is 'heard so deeply/ that it is not heard at all, but you are the music while it lasts.'[17] Similar moments are to be had, of course, in an endless range of experiences — walks in the park, vigils to observe solar eclipses, and certain powerfully affecting plays, movies, paintings, and musical performances, etc. Such moments stand out against the vast background of quotidian personal awareness, a world in which the objects of our attention are wrapped in the packaging of our personal desires, anxieties, concerns, and hopes. Shedding these

[16] Kant's account can be found in *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. C. Meredith (Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 60.
[17] T. S. Eliot, 'Dry Salvages,' in *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1956), p. 136. Here, Eliot seems to be echoing Schopenhauer who, in *The World as Will and Representation*, centers his entire theory of aesthetic experience on the loss of individual self-awareness and will in contemplation of objects of rapt attention.

desires, anxieties, etc. — or at least setting them aside — permits us to savour features of experience we would otherwise miss.

A particularly vivid illustration of a distancing transformation of this sort is Edward Bullough's account of nineteenth-century passengers on a ship in a fog at sea. At first, the voyagers are filled with anxiety and dread, worrying about the hazards of collision. Eventually, they are able to abstract themselves from the immediate dangers at hand and focus their attention on the aesthetic qualities of the shapes in the fog — the water's creamy smoothness, the veiled, blurry outlines of nearby objects, the curious carrying power of sound, and so on. When this happens, the passengers find that they are able to nullify their fears and take a distanced delight in the phenomena about them.[18] To become social beings in any real sense, we need to able to appreciate a wide variety of things, acts, and persons without having a personal stake in them. This posture is required if we are to be dispassionate and impartial in our relations to others. Likewise, when we lose ourselves in settings of natural beauty, we find our minds opening to a wide range of non-human needs and priorities.

When we make an aesthetic judgment about something, it may seem we are doing no more than rendering a verdict, declaring that it falls into a certain place on a scale of beauty-to-ugliness (or some other scale of valuation). But aesthetic judgments are not only verdictive; they are dispositive. They tacitly declare that, in light of a value found in an object, the person making the valuation is disposed to act in certain ways regarding the object. If the value is positive (beauty, elegance, or daintiness, say), the

[18] Edward Bullough, "Psychical Distance as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle," *British Journal of Psychology*, Vol, 5 (1912), pp. 88-89.

actions implied will be protection, promotion, preservation, or the like. If it is negative (ugliness, grotesqueness, or clumsiness, say), the actions implied will be more in the line of rejection, denunciation, or censorship. We can call this fourth factor *dispositiveness.*

Aesthetic judgments, like moral judgements but unlike many others, 'don't leave us cold.' To say this is to say that they implicitly express emotive attitudes regarding their objects of attention and imply the transmission of those attitudes to others through actions and policies. The claim that the Mariana Trench is the deepest part of Earth's Ocean is a conclusion scientists have reached after a good deal of research and controversy; but acquiescing in this claim does not, by itself, call for a responsive action on the part of the declarer. In contrast, to say that J. S. Sargent's *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* is a beautiful painting is at once to recommend the work to others and to be prepared (in the absence of countervailing considerations) to endorse social measures in its favour — measures aimed at insuring the continued prospects of its viewing, say, or its protection from harm. The degree and extent of disposition toward action entailed will vary, of course, with the objects of aesthetic attention. To say that a jazz tune is lovely may entail no more than that one is positively disposed to encourage others to listen to it. To say that a mountain vista is sublime may entail that one is prepared actively to oppose its ruination by a mining enterprise. In all instances — whether positive or negative, intense or modest — aesthetic valuing involves an adjustment of one's pattern of living-and-willing in relation to the valued objects.

Moral behaviour similarly combines verdictive and dispositive elements. The familiar Humean dictum that moral judgments never leave us cold implies that recognizing deeds to be right or wrong is already a move toward doing or promoting them, and recognizing them to be wrong is already a move toward discouraging or blaming them.[19] Following up aesthetic judgments with actions promoted by the dispositions those judgments entail blazes a trail for following up moral valuation with actions, and in this way to give our moral beliefs social consequences. If I am drawn by the beauty of a rose garden to urge others to join me in visiting it, or to contribute to a fund for its maintenance, I am contributing to a community of valuation, joining with others in feeling and action. In doing so, I am also promoting fellow-feeling and community purpose. Here we can see how moral and aesthetic dispositions blend in the development of a person's deliberative lifestyle.

In the course of ordering our lives, we inevitably find ourselves trying to bring the parts that are under our control into coherent relationships with each other. We want to foster appropriately cordial connections between relatives and between friends. We want to balance our financial accounts. We want to spend our time and our money in ways that are neither extravagant nor niggardly. In these and countless other undertakings, the target is harmony, the fitting together of parts of a complex whole in in a pleasing, successful way. *Harmonizing*, the general project of working toward satisfactory equilibrium, is our fifth factor. We are likely to feel good about our lives when their ingredients and activities seem harmonious in the way music may be

[19] The price of failing to acknowledge the dispositiveness in these instances is incoherence: 'It's the right thing to do, but I don't care whether you or anyone else does it' is a nonsense sentence, on this account.

harmonious. Things within a scope of attention may hang together well, or may come to be arranged well, and we develop a sense for the harmonious outcome. A good novel has a convincing narrative arc, with a beginning, middle, and end. A beautiful flower garden exhibits a balanced display of colour, spacing, plant elevation, etc. In growing up, we learn how to arrange and rearrange countless things, forming patterns that, in their balance and coherence, conduce to a sense of aesthetic satisfaction. The harmonizing of things and activities in our lives paves the way for harmony's role in the growth of moral sensibility.[20]

It was Plato who insisted that the good for the individual as well as for the state was a matter of the deliberate, careful balancing of parts. He recommended that both *psyche* and *polis* be tuned like musical instruments, finding the fine point of equilibrium where every part can do its part. Aristotle presented his famous 'golden mean' as a way of reckoning the appropriate balance between excess on one side and defect on the other in all manner of contexts. Neither of these balancing schemes turns on an algorithmic calculation. Instead, they rely on a sense of harmony we develop in our lives relative to order in the world around us. Flower arrangements look right, or they don't. We can see that that vase is just right for the end table; or maybe it's too large. We keep tasting the stew to find whether the all the ingredients have harmonized. Similarly, social virtues require harmonization of roles and actions within a community. In making the moral judgements that put together school districts, criminal codes, marriages, and other social institutions, we rely on an intuited sense of rightness or fitness. The

[20] We do, of course, enjoy discord and irregularity in music and many other things. But this enjoyment is parasitic on the establishment of a prior appreciation of harmony.

intuition involved very likely arises out a notion of harmony we acquire through aesthetic appreciations all along the paths of our development. In *Merit, Aesthetic and Ethical*, Marcia Eaton deftly describes the interlocking of aesthetic and moral frames within which harmony operates:

> Harmony — elements fitting together in appropriate and pleasing patterns — is achieved by reconciling oneself to one's role and striving for control not of others or the world, but of oneself as one seeks integrity and meaningful relations with family and friends. […] This insight [is built on the] ability to experience the world aesthetically, [and it leads to] sensuous and cognitive satisfaction.[21]

Experiencing the world aesthetically is not, however, simply a matter of harmonizing elements into pleasing patterns. It is also a matter of seeing those elements, or at least in some of them, in multiple ways. The capacity for constructing various interpretations on a single object foundation is vitally important in our appreciation of works of art, and it is a key element in sensible moral reckoning. Aestheticians sometimes refer to this capacity as *aspection*, as seeing the same thing in differing guises. It is our sixth, and final, factor. Wittgenstein took this capacity to be a centrally important function of the interpretation of visual experience and of meaning generally. He alluded to ambiguous images, such as the famous duck-rabbit, as revealing how, when we look at

[21] Marcia Eaton, *Merit, Aesthetic and Ethical* (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 111.

a thing, we can see that, in one sense, it has not changed, yet in another, it has changed entirely.[22] I see the dandelion in my lawn first as a pretty flower then as a weed, and then again, maybe as a source of home-made wine. In one sense, it's the same humble flower all along; but in another, it is transformed by the mode of its apprehension into something beautiful, something ugly, and then again, as something practical or productive.

Young people often take a good deal of pleasure in the practice of *aspection*. A cloud may be a dragon, a leaf in a stream a speedboat, a teacher a bear, and a stuffed sock the Queen of England. The immense popularity of visual illusion books in the 1990s is a testament to this pleasure. The appeal of metaphor and simile as literary devices turns on the reader's willingness to regard things first as this, then as that, and, at the same time, as both. As youngsters grow older, the role of *aspection* in their lives expands and deepens. They see more sides of things, more ways in which a thing may be many things at once. A beautiful sunset may turn ugly when it is seen to owe a good deal of its brilliant colour to pollution. The cop on the local beat has many roles to play, and is many persons wrapped up in one. Political maturation is often a process of coming to recognize the many-sidedness of leaders, and indeed of leadership itself.

Art teaches us that seeing a subject first one way and then another is generally not simply a matter of neutrally flipping through interpretive readings. Polysemy often demands that the readings play off against each other to a cumulative effect. A good example of this is apparent in the painting, *Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg as St.*

[22] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), p. 212.

Jerome, by Lucas Cranach the Elder.[23] It is a portrait of the named prelate seated at a table in a study, surrounded by a veritable menagerie of animals — a lion, partridges, a beaver, a parrot, among others. On first glance, this work looks to be a standard high mannerist studio portrait, flattering to its subject. The cardinal is, to be sure, handsomely wrought, gazing out from his comfortable surroundings, scripture in his hands. But on second glance, we notice that he is paying no attention to the scripture before him, nor are the animals paying any attention to him.[24] Moreover, the sheer luxuriousness of the clerical garments, etc., strikes a discordant note relative to the pose of humble piety. Given that Cranach was a friend of Martin Luther, and thus an ally of the Reformation, we can see that the painting is at once a compliment to its sitter (who, after all, commissioned it) and an insult to him, suggesting as it does that he is more absorbed in luxury than piety. So, in this case, one reading of the painting (that it's an insult) depends on, and plays off against, another (that it's a compliment); it tells us that the first impression is created by the painter to *invite* a second, superseding, impression, and that the cardinal isn't just the cardinal; he is his Church.[25] As young people grow up, they will need to manage multiple, cumulative interpretations of all sorts of things — people, institutions, bank accounts, dinner parties, etc. Aesthetic experience lays a good foundation for this management.

[23] The painting is on display in the Ringling Museum, Sarasota, Florida.
[24] We know from another Cranach painting of the same subject that the animals are stand-ins for parishioners.
[25] We can extend the aspection. In addition to being a compliment and an insult, Cranach's painting is an homage to Dürer's engraving, *St. Jerome in His Study* (1514), as well as an advertisement to potential customers of the painter's own remarkable talent.

3.

Consider now how these six factors come together as an individual grows up both aesthetically and morally. Although the two developmental processes are complementary in that elements in the one induce changes in the other, it is important to recognize that the cross-fertilization is not a uniform process. The factors do not play the same role at the same developmental stage in each individual. Nor does each factor contribute the same degree of influence in all cases. Rather, these elements cumulate in the way most other elements of personal growth cumulate--gradually, unpredictably, and piecemeal. Together, the aesthetic factors facilitate, rather than insure, the achievement of moral maturity. Just as a person who has learned one foreign language usually finds it easier to learn a second and a third, a person who has developed certain elements of aesthetic awareness is likely to find it easier to develop the personal features that constitute moral maturity. But the aesthetic elements aren't mere training wheels. They continue on in the growing-up process, ultimately coalescing with other high values in the reflective consciousness of the mature individual.

In *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley declared that 'the great instrument of moral good is the imagination' and that 'a man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must be his own.'[26] As Shelley saw it, poetry (and by extension, all of the arts) feeds the process of moral development by forcing engaged readers to abandon egocentricity for a broadly sympathetic outlook. Moral imagination,

[26] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defense of Poetry* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1904), p. 34.

the business of learning to see with others' eyes, is a fundamental feature of aesthetic appreciation. You can't really understand a novel like Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*[27] until you put yourself imaginatively in the position of a slave being transported to the new world. You can't get the point of Rodin's *Burghers of Calais* until you absorb the atmosphere of political oppression in mid-fourteenth-century France. You can't fully enjoy the film *Casablanca* until you feel your way into the joyful defiance of Rick's patrons singing *La Marseillalise*. Moral imagination emerges in early youth but expands substantially as one comes to realize the vast range and multiplicity of others' minds, feelings, and practices. It is built upon a foundation of talents of the kind we have discussed: an ability to set frameworks that compose meaningful social wholes; an ability to appreciate acts and institutions without having a stake in them; an ability to set aside immediate and practical concerns; and an ability to see oneself reflected in the world of one's doings.

Growing up is a process in which layers upon layers of imagination and reflection are accumulated as individuals establish their adult aesthetic and moral identities. It is also a process of growing into, and through, one's culture, a process that involves both adopting and amending what the culture hands down. Moral maturity and aesthetic maturity jointly entail making a personal decision to live one's life one way rather than another after having considered a range of alternatives. This decision will be more than staking a claim about the relative values of things. It is, again, dispositive. It is a declaration of intention to *act* in certain ways with respect to the things and people

[27] Charles Johnson, *Middle Passage* (New York: Scribner's, 1998).

in one's life. As we grow older, we repeatedly frame and reframe our views, taking stock of the views of others as we forge our own. We become increasingly self-aware even as we learn to distance ourselves from things we have a stake in; we are committed to what we care about, but also respect what others care about. In the end, the choices we make and the actions we take are almost always holistic. They reflect ideas we have formed about what life is most worth living, ideas saturated with aesthetic no less than moral values. Drawing them together over the course of a lifetime is a continual process of composition. Plato was right to think that the ultimate artwork is the art of living.

Schiller and the Deskilling of Aesthetic Education

TOM HUHN

Introduction

When we reflect on education, and especially on what it should aim to do, we often assume some lack or need that education will remedy. Friedrich Schiller, in his series of 27 letters published as *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, does indeed imagine a particular goal of education but without presupposing any distinct lack or human need.[1] He rather imagines that human beings should aim their education at a restoration of what we once had and once were, that is, self-possessed and replete, whole, and each of us composing a unity with, and within, ourselves.[2] Schiller here follows in the footsteps of that other renowned 18th-century theorist of education: Jean Jacques Rousseau, whose many writings on education also distilled the great variety of needs and desires that education might fulfil to the simple proclamation that human education might be complete in the lesson of how to be kind to one another.[3] So though Rousseau provides Schiller with the crucial backdrop according to which human beings might

[1] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, ed. and trans. by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), hereafter *AE*.
[2] An earlier attempt to contend with the notion of capacity in Schiller and how it impacts his ideas about freedom, can be found in my essay, 'Aesthetic Education, Human Capacity, Freedom,' in *The Aesthetic Ground of Critical Theory: New Readings of Benjamin and Adorno*, ed. by Nathan Ross (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), pp. 177-89.
[3] 'What wisdom can you find that is greater than kindness?' Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. by Barbara Foxley (New York: Dutton, 1974), p. 43.

recover their original wholeness and unity, it was the dyad of Immanuel Kant and Johann Joachim Winckelmann that more directly inspired him to formulate by what means a return to the unity of human life might proceed. What unites Winckelmann and Kant's apparently very different aesthetic theories is that both formulate aesthetic experience or judgment as the expression of a very particular human capacity, even if Winckelmann explains aesthetic expression as a burgeoning forth, a flowering even, of the whole complex of a human culture embedded within its natural environment, while Kant shrinks that complex by locating it within the individual human breast. What the pair share in their aesthetic theories that becomes so fruitful for Schiller is the understanding of the aesthetic primarily as a capacity as well as, equally important, a very particular *relation* to that capacity.[4]

What I hope to explore here, and what I believe contains the ongoing value of Schiller's aesthetic as well as epistemological theorizing (he would of course also at once include its political and moral relevance), is how the great question of where to point human education is to be answered by a curriculum of unlearning.[5] We have, in sum, progressed too far, expanded our abilities beyond ourselves and in such a way that

[4] Here is how Josef Chytry explains this development: 'Through Winckelmann "one becomes something," Goethe later expressed the effect to Eckermann: the reader underwent a conversion. In Hegel's estimation one acquired a new "organ," a *capacity* to intuit the artwork through the concept [emphasis added].' See Chytry's exhaustive study, *The Aesthetic State; A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 34.

[5] Jonathan M. Hess explains: 'Schiller constructs the aesthetic as a domain that in its explicit autonomy *from* the political is called on to perform precisely that essential political task – the production of political freedom – that politics cannot manage on its own. If Schiller's aesthetics represents a politics, the characteristic feature of this politics is that it is not political, properly speaking [….] Schiller represents the final goal of politics within the domain of the aesthetic, offering up aesthetic autonomy as a substitute for the political emancipation is was supposed to bring about.' *Reconstituting the Body Politic: Enlightenment, Public Culture and the Invention of Aesthetic Autonomy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), p. 81.

these very same abilities have turned about and taken aim back at us. Shades here of course of Marx's notion of alienation, of human activities that have been cleaved off from whatever it is that maintains the human as a whole, and as a holistic project. There is no content to the education proposed by Schiller, it is instead an education entirely in service of form, of the adjusting of human capacity to its objects, and still more importantly, adjusting - or let us call it regulating and maintaining - human capacity with itself, with its own proper shape and objects. Here too Schiller shares with Rousseau the conviction that human capacity begins as wholly undetermined and that each subsequent determination, each separate capacity developed, can't help but diminish the integrity of the whole human being.

Form and Disinterest

In his essay 'On the Sublime', Schiller returns once more to the question of form, and specifically how it comports itself in relation to human ability: 'A mind sufficiently refined as to be moved more by the form than the matter of things and, without any reference to possession, to experience disinterested pleasure in sheer reflection upon the mode of their appearance - such a mind contains within itself an inner irrepressible fullness of life, and since it does not need to appropriate to itself those objects in which it lives, neither is it in danger of being despoiled by them.'[6] First note how keen Schiller is to dismiss the value of property, of possession, in order to have the mind place itself

[6] In Friedrich Schiller, '*Naïve and Sentimental Poetry' and 'On the Sublime,'* ed. and trans. by Julius A. Elias (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1966), hereafter OS, pp. 193-212 (p. 196).

in a non-acquisitive mode. So too the qualification of pleasure as disinterested, a term that comes to Schiller from Shaftesbury by way of Winckelmann, as well still more forcefully through Kant's aesthetic theory.[7] Disinterest signals the suspension of the acquisitive orientation to objects, and by extension, through Kant, denotes the capacity to acknowledge and to take things in that are purposive but without any particular purpose. But note too in the passage that what Schiller identifies as form has less to do with any particular shape or structure in the thing perceived and more to do with the *manner* of its appearance. In other words, form is not a characteristic of an object but rather of its appearance. It's just here where Schiller takes up the key notion of representation (*Vorstellung*) in Kant's aesthetics and translates it, or better, displaces it, with the term semblance (*Schein*). This transition, from representation to semblance - and recall that the latter term will become absolutely central to the aesthetics of Nietzsche[8] - shifts the gravity away from a Kantian mental phenomenon (however subjectively universal, as he theorizes it in the *Critique of Judgment*) and toward an actual feature of human life. Semblance, regardless how ephemeral and fleeting within human experience, has a real analogue in the world: human beings make and experience

[7] Paul de Man reads Schiller's *Letters* as the model and preeminent example of regression, of the failure to come to terms with the critical potential of Kant's 'original' *Critique of Judgment*: 'There seems to be always a regression from the incisiveness and from the impact, of the original. … something very directly threatening is present there which one feels the need to bridge – the difficulties, the obstacles which Kant has opened up. So there is a regression, an attempt to account for, to domesticate the critical incisiveness of the original. …Out of a text like Schiller's *Letters*…has been born: a way of emphasizing, of revalorizing the aesthetic, a way of setting up the aesthetic as exemplary, as an exemplary category, as a unifying category, as a model for education, as a model even for the state.' See his 'Kant and Schiller' in *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. by Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 129-62 (p. 130). For a compelling analysis and critique of de Man having made 'Schiller' into a 'signifier of aesthetic ideology,' see Karen Feldman, 'De Man's Kant and Goebbel's Schiller: The Ideology of Reception', *MLN* 124 (2009), 1170-87.

[8] See Timothy Stoll, 'Nietzsche and Schiller on Aesthetic Semblance', The Monist, 102 (2019), 331-48.

semblances. We often call them works of art. Consider how this fact resonates in the continuation of the passage from Schiller: 'But in the final analysis even semblance needs a physical substance in which it can be manifested; therefore so long as a need is present, if only for beautiful semblance, then, too, there remains a need for the *existence* of objects, and thus our satisfaction is still dependent upon nature as a power, for she rules over all existences….That mental temperament which is indifferent whether the beautiful and the good and the perfect exist, is above all called great and sublime because it contains all the realities of the beautiful character without sharing any of its limitations.'[9] It's just these limitations which Hegel will take up in his aesthetics and thus declare that he will confine the scope of his investigations to a philosophy of art, which is to say, to a philosophy of the character of the existing things that happen to be beautiful rather than to the character of the judgments that denominate them so. Schiller will instead move past the limitations of beauty, and beautiful things, by way of his account of the sublime, whose key component includes the absence of any semblance or appearance.[10] Perhaps the best way to formulate this is to say that the sublime is free of appearances, for it is just the freedom from nature as a compelling force that most marks the sublime. We might also say that the freedom which Schiller finds himself most often arguing for is not the freedom from nature and its necessities and limitations but instead freedom from the ways in which we have reinstalled and reconstituted

[9] Schiller, *OS*, p. 196.
[10] A compelling argument to the effect that beauty and the sublime, as outmoded modes of aesthetic experience, ought now to be replaced by the zany, cute, and interesting - our far more profound, or at least prolific categories of contemporary aesthetic experience – is deftly presented by Sianne Ngai in *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

nature within ourselves as what he terms forces and capacities. Our final and most substantive liberation is thus to free ourselves from the constraints that we have mimetically reimposed upon ourselves as masters of nature. This explains why beauty remains for Schiller a problematic phenomenon, as well as an opportunity for demonstrating the dialectic within human development.

Sensuousness and Capacity

It is our creatureliness that makes us susceptible to beautiful things; it is a fault and blessing of our sensuousness that we have become eligible to being moved by - indeed taken up by - that which appears beautiful to us. And yet beauty also signals the possibility of the overcoming of our own determination as sensuous creatures. Beauty is the highest expression, indeed achievement, of sensuous life, and so too thereby also indicates the possibility of what might exist on the other side of our thralldom to beauty, to a sensuousness on the cusp of overcoming itself by having become totally suffused by what Kant calls the agreeable. It's important to note that Schiller follows Edmund Burke here in the latter's characterization of beauty as having a 'melting' effect.[11] Burke's formulation of the sublime, forty years prior to Schiller's, underlines the contrary enlivening effect of the sublime in response to those experiences of beauty which threaten to undo - not to mention unman - us. The agreeableness of nature is just that which presents the possibility that we might slip back into nature, an unforeseen return to what Freud terms the oceanic, the condition of existing without differentiation

[11] See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. by James T. Boulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), pp. 91-118.

from all that otherwise surrounds and penetrates us. That nature and sensation might arrive in us as a state or condition of agreement (and hence pleasure) indicates our full accord with nature, or we might say even an excess of nature. When sensation becomes more than utility, when it suffices as well as exceeds what we need it to be for our mere survival, it then points to the possibility of nature becoming - in us - something more than what it merely provides. The pleasure of the senses is then already an early indicator that nature resides in us, and yet, that we might also be on the verge of ourselves becoming in excess of nature itself. And yet the agreeable state, a kind of equilibrium between us and nature that already points beyond the equilibrium, also shows the extent to which we might become still more in thrall to nature.

The agreeable state is then also a liability, a vulnerability within us of our very connectedness to nature. Nature becomes a threat to us when it appears within us as the power - Schiller calls it a force - to make us still more in thrall to it. The elevation of the agreeable to beauty is at once both a concentration of the force of nature's agreeableness as well as the potential overcoming of that same agreeableness - our very continuity with nature - by exaggerating and extending the range of the gravity of how nature provides us pleasure. This formulation returns us precisely to the role of disinterest. We might imagine beauty as an idea, an image of what a concentrated excess of sensuous pleasure would become in us. It's then easy to imagine that such an experience would in fact undo us, or more precisely: it would undo us as primarily sensuous creatures. And in undoing us as just such creatures beauty then presents the possibility of our becoming something other than primarily sensuous creatures. Our

sensuousness, in being fulfilled and exceeded, transforms itself into another capacity. This is where Schiller's account of the relation between human capacity and nature becomes most consequential. Human action is for him separable from human capacity. The former is what we do in response to our environment and to our perceived needs and desires. Capacity, on the other hand, is a kind of agency installed within the human creature as a standing ability to act and to respond. Each capacity exists for him as both instrument as well as source of power. As an instrument it has a limited scope of what it can act upon; as a force, however, it is a reservoir of energy and potentiality. Schiller thus formulates capacity as a re-inscription of nature within human existence. As a mimetic re-making of nature within the human, Schiller proposes that with what we might also call second nature, the human is at once both liberated from certain limitations of the natural as well as re-confined as a repetition, another instance and iteration of nature. The history of our making and becoming thereby sinks us back into nature insofar as the boundaries of what we have become are inscribed, and re-inscribed, as likewise those of nature. There is then no single capacity, however advanced we might become, that could lift us out of the cycle of scarifying ourselves as ever more elaborate, and powerful, instances of nature. Every capacity is then but the insistent return of nature.

Capacity and Education

What might well lift us out of the vicious cycle of any and every capacity advancing us beyond a natural limit only to reimpose in us a still more powerful instance of nature,

would be an education, and a life, that composes itself within the confines of the aesthetic rather than within the bounds of nature. What makes the boundaries that constitute the aesthetic the only ones from within which human freedom might occur is their existence as semblance rather than as nature, and secondly, the aesthetic refuses to become a capacity by disavowing its own power, and thus forfeits any claim to truth. The aesthetic then in both these regards refuses to bind itself to human existence. It remains only in its tentative, ephemeral state. We might think of an analogue here to the condition of music as the ideal form of aesthetic appearance - already but semblance - and also transitory. Or perhaps also akin to Adorno's analogue of fireworks, a prototype or model of aesthetic appearance insofar as fireworks appear in the sky as a kind of writing, and yet not a writing that we can make any sense of, and thereby also an apt illustration of the Kantian purposiveness without a particular purpose.

This brings us to a key feature of Schiller's aesthetic education: the fact that it is endless and never to be completed. It's as if aesthetic education is the perpetual approach toward and withdrawal from the instituting of aesthetic responsiveness as a completed and whole event. We are always only on the way toward, or in retreat from, committing ourselves to the aesthetic, just as semblance, the material correlate to aesthetic experience, inexorably falls short of becoming actual. A ready illustration of this phenomenon is the distinction between a painting and a picture. The former is the physical material object, the latter is what Schiller would call the form of the painting, that is, the nature of its appearance as semblance. A picture might well depend upon

the existence of the painting, as its support so to speak, but the picture hovers just above, or alongside, or perhaps orthogonally, to the painting.

A proper aesthetic education is an education in suspense, in learning how to be alive in the suspension of our capacities. Schiller's justly renowned play drive (*Spieltrieb*) is only in part a recommendation toward the light-heartedness, the lack of seriousness, in play. Indeed, Schiller writes that the play drive is when human beings are most serious. Play is more central to his conception of human freedom because it instantiates the dynamism of being in the midst of an activity or game. The play drive, and the aesthetic education that would teach how to sustain oneself in it, is not human action without purpose - it is not simply the playful versus the goal-oriented - as it is rather the subordination of the goal of any event or action to the state of being actively on-the-way-toward something or other. And the priority of that state of being on-the-way, when it comes to take precedence over the end toward which it aims, is to allow oneself to be suspended in the activity of one's capacity, though without the capacity being harnessed to this or that end. Put differently: play is characterized by a refusal to be or become an image or instance of nature.

In the very first letter Schiller presents the dilemma regarding how the intellect as a capacity achieves its understanding of the world but at the same time thereby removes whatever is gained by knowledge from any further experience of the object: 'intellect must first destroy the object of inner sense if it would make it its own. Like the analytical chemist, the philosopher can only discover how things are combined by analysing them, only lay bare the workings of spontaneous nature by subjecting them

to the torment of his own techniques. In order to lay hold of the fleeting phenomenon, he must first bind it in the fetters of rule, tear its fair body to pieces by reducing it to concepts, and preserve its living spirit in a sorry skeleton of words. Is it any wonder that natural feeling cannot find itself again in such an image, or that in the account of the analytical thinker truth should appear as paradox?'[12] Philosophy, which stands here as the most consolidated form of intellect, operates as a double-edged sword. It truly penetrates its object to discover something about it, and yet in doing so it destroys the integrity of the same object. Schiller is less concerned about the violence done to the object of knowledge by the 'torment' of the techniques of mind and more interested in how the object of knowledge comes to be removed from the possibility of feeling, which is to say: some other kind of experience.[13] Mind, and especially the analytical understanding, has come to dominate the approach by human beings to their encounters with the world, and we have thereby greatly diminished our ability, or let us say our openness, to allowing the object of experience to make its impress on us in some way other than through the portals of analytical instrumentalization. This criticism of the power of mind, or rather the one-sidedness that it seems to insist upon, will in the 20th century be termed instrumental reason. The dilemma for Schiller can be put as follows: how might the mind become an instrument without mind thereby reducing itself to

[12] Schiller, *AE*, p.5.
[13] Paul de Man's early reading of Schiller struggled with just this question as to what kind of knowledge the aesthetic might consist of: 'in Schiller, the *aesthetic*, is not a separate category of articulation between various known faculties, and modes of cognition. What gives the aesthetic its power and hence its practical, political impact, is its intimate link with knowledge, the epistemological implications that are always in play when the aesthetic appears over the horizon of discourse.' 'Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*,' in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 263-90 (pp. 264-5).

nothing but an instrument. Schiller's remedy for our having arrived at this juncture is of course an ongoing, endless aesthetic education, whose goal cannot be set by the arrival of some new capacity, even the capacity to moderate oneself. Aesthetic education has instead as its goal the constant reigning in of the dominance of any one capacity or another. It is then not intellect, or philosophy even, against which Schiller proposes his alternate education, but rather against the sweep and mastery that every capacity brings in its wake.

Second Nature

The second letter immediately enlarges the scope, as well as the character, of the limitation that human beings have imposed upon themselves by their very development. Recall that for Schiller the growth of human capacity is likewise the imposition upon ourselves of a kind of second nature. Second nature is then not merely the static artifacts, and built environment all about us, but is rather more deeply implanted in us as the *means* by which we imagine and conceive the environment we come to build and inhabit. Second nature, in other words, is a dynamic within us, a force that exercises itself not only in the products we make and the actions we take but still more so in the very orientation that we have toward what might be possible for each of us, as well as all of us together. Second nature, that force which we have implanted in ourselves, has, for Schiller, but one possible *telos*: 'that most perfect of all the works to be achieved by

the art of man: the construction of true political freedom'.[14] Note that the political orientation here is not a programme trained on how we are to get along with one another. Such an education would fall on fallow ground if we have not first learned how to enact a non-adversarial relationship within ourselves. We cannot hope to make peace and find comity with others unless we are at peace with ourselves. The aesthetic state, the polis in which each is self-attuned, arises when we come to provide one another with the opportunity and occasion for self-moderation. In this light, the artwork exists in effect as a fellow-citizen, a member of a free society in which each individual is likewise a model to others of playful engagement. Imagine a traditional Hobbesian-style state, in which each citizen is naturally aligned against every other citizen, and then transplant this war-of-each-against-all scenario into the interior of each citizen, and we have arrived at Schiller's conception of where political strife is truly located: in the conflict of the faculties with one another. Schiller's solution to this strife is not to install as sovereign over all human faculties one or another faculty, reason say, or the understanding, or even feeling, but rather to imagine a regime (an aesthetic regime) in which no faculty might ever become sovereign. One key goal of aesthetic education is to teach how not to allow any one faculty to become dominant. However noble it might be for reason to reign supreme, one unfortunate and unavoidable corollary lesson is in the efficacy of dominance. Schiller would have us instead learn the aesthetic pleasure of non-dominance.[15] Our neighbours, near or far, are not what impede us from a more

[14] Schiller, *AE*, p. 7.

[15] 'Schiller took the side of reason against reason, intending to counter the dialectic of enlightenment by way of aesthetics. Aesthetic semblance, which he conceived in terms of Kant's free play of reason, is to recuperate reason. …Adorno's writings follow Schiller in the specific sense of conceiving the solution

free expression of our lives; our enemy is rather utility: 'Utility is the great idol of our age, to which all powers are in thrall and to which all talent must pay homage.'[16] We find ourselves here not so very far removed from Rousseau's contention that convenience is the first great yoke that we place on ourselves. Utility functions as a premier example of ideology, of a set of beliefs and an orientation that by seeming obvious come to be taken for granted. But Schiller would have the work of aesthetic education disorient us, or better put: disorient our dominant capacities, and put back into play just those actions previously harnessed only for the sake of their usefulness.

Schiller concludes his second letter as follows: 'if man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through beauty that man makes his way to freedom. But this cannot be demonstrated without my first reminding you of the principles by which reason is in any case guided in matters of political legislation.'[17] Famously, for Schiller, beauty serves at once as both a guide toward - as well as an image of - freedom. It's as if unaided we cannot simply enter the condition of true human freedom.[18] We are impeded from entry into a free state by our very capacities and faculties, whose nature

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to the dialectic of enlightenment, the realization of reason, as dependent on aesthetic semblance. Just as for Schiller the aesthetic is the play of reason, so Adorno conceives of reason as inextricable from art.' Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Things Beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 34-5.

[16] Schiller, *AE*, p. 7.

[17] Schiller, *AE*, p. 9.

[18] In the context of freedom and political liberty we might well pose Schiller as offering a more radical version of Shaftesbury's notion of liberty, as explained by Jonathan I. Israel: 'In his post-aristocratic philosophy, "liberty" is the basis for a new and more enlightened culture – "liberty" not just in the constitutional sense defined by the Glorious Revolution, but liberty as a political and social condition, liberty defined by debate, criticism, and cultural exchange.' *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 67.

it is to be useful and pragmatic. This is what Schiller understands as the compulsion of nature, that nature impels us just as it impels every other organic and inorganic substance.

Everything exists under the rule, the dominance, of nature. And reason, as Kant led Schiller to see it, is a faculty of desire, a faculty of choosing apart from the dictates of nature. Reason is then a kind of agency, or potential agency within us that asserts itself as the contrary of the demands of nature. It comes to be, we might say, as the adversary, the other to nature, even if it also begins in a mimesis of nature: 'But what makes him man is precisely this: that he does not stop short at what nature herself made of him, but has the power of retracing by means of reason the steps she took on his behalf, of transforming the work of blind compulsion into a work of free choice, and of elevating physical necessity into moral necessity.'[19] It may be of some help here in understanding more about the role of beauty by locating it in Schiller's schema of nature and reason, with the latter acting as a retracing of the actions of the former. We might then well substitute beauty for nature and thus understand beauty as the model upon which freedom is to arise.[20] Beauty is of course but the *image* of freedom - and one can't help but recall here Stendhal's famous definition of beauty as the promise of happiness - just as nature provides and supports human life without the latter becoming free.

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[19] Schiller, *AE*, p. 11.

[20] Jürgen Habermas acknowledges the *Letters* as the 'first programmatic work toward an aesthetic critique of modernity,' whose aim is political freedom: 'The formulation of the question [how to achieve political freedom] already suggests the answer: art itself is the medium for the education (*Bildung*) of the human race to true political freedom.' 'Excursus on Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*,' in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity; Twelve Lectures*, trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987), pp. 45-50 (p. 45).

Beauty and Semblance

Important to acknowledge here is that beauty appears under constraint. And the constraint is that of sensuousness, for beauty - however much it comes to be as semblance - nonetheless appears, if only momentarily, in the apparitions of deliquescing musical sounds. Semblance itself is thus a dialectical indicator of the need to overcome in the first place the constraint of appearance, so that even if semblance merely undoes the actuality of appearance, it nevertheless shows the motion toward freedom. But note that the force of nature's 'blind compulsion' is not entirely undone by reason, for the latter mimetically installs the 'necessity' of moral life in place of nature. Compulsion, in other words, merely loses its blinders while the echo of its force continues in free moral life. This is akin to Kant's notion of duty.

'Every individual human being, one may say, carries within him, potentially and prescriptively, an ideal man, the archetype of a human being, and it is his life's task to be, through all his changing manifestations, in harmony with the unchanging unity of this ideal.'[21] We are already well aware that harmony is central to Schiller's image of the person reconciled with herself. What is perhaps just as important to note here is the role of unity in his conception of a human life in congruence with the state. The content of the image of the ideal person, of the archetype human being, is of little interest to Schiller, just as the direction of any particular capacity or talent holds no real purchase for him. It is rather, with unity as it is with form, that the character and shape of the whole is what is paramount in aesthetic life and education. Unity as the central

[21] Schiller, *AE*, p. 17.

feature of artworks as well as of aesthetic experience harks back most prominently to Aristotle who in his *Poetics* gives so much force to the techniques and means by which unity comes to be created. In the *Poetics* the emphasis on plot, but so too on action over character, as well as the vaunted - and seemingly obvious - insistence on the value of staging beginning, middle, and end, are all expressions of how the work of art comes into being by means of its appearing as a unity. We need not pause to consider whether unified things, or indeed images of unity, are thereby more effective and attractive, but instead ask what it is for Schiller that unity alone is capable of providing. A key to answering this is provided by his own characterization of reason as a force that 'demands unity.'[22] Nature, on the other hand, insists upon multiplicity. Reason, in its quest for unity, demands singularity, a distilling of variety into a composed whole. This question regarding unity supplies us with an opportunity to highlight a key feature of semblance while at the same time coming to understand why Schiller also emphasizes it as the goal of aesthetic education. Semblance is not merely illusion or fantasy, a made-up picture of things. Far more important to the character of semblance is that it take place as an image, that is, as a *unity* of composed parts. Unity is in fact that which makes an image into a whole out of a jumble of marks and colours, shadows and lights. Semblance, like all aesthetic phenomena, has its grounding in the unity that is the necessary condition for any and all images. Every semblance thus holds a two-tiered lesson: it liberates one from the condition of actuality, by modelling just that, and

[22] Schiller, *AE*, p. 19.

likewise modelling the second lesson, that of the wholeness achieved by dint of the process of becoming a unity.[23]

A still more telling reminder of the value of semblance is to consider in contrast what comes in the wake of the development of each new power. Here Schiller proceeds to summarize this tendency as one belonging to civilization in general: 'Civilization, far from setting us free, in fact creates some new need with every new power it develops in us.'[24] So, in addition to the limitation carried in the development of each new capacity, that capacity is accompanied by the appearance of a new need.[25] Each of our powers limits us - by condensing what we are capable of to the boundaries of that power - and so too each power likewise limits us by producing its own special need. If we think of a power or capacity as akin to a tool, and we take up the example of the hammer as a premier tool, then we soon arrive at the oft-repeated adage to the effect that to the person who has a hammer, everything looks like a nail. But now we might add, given Schiller's claim that each new power brings a new need, that the existence of the

[23] For an intriguing and compelling account of how the meaning and scope of freedom – precisely that which a unified being is capable of – shifts over the course of the *Letters*, see Martha Woodmansee's chapter 'Aesthetic Autonomy as a Weapon in Cultural Politics: Rereading Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters*', where she writes, 'by the end of the *Letters* what had been designated the indisputable instrument of emancipation seems to have become identical with it: the experience of beauty in art has thus become a terminal value. For at the end of the *Letters* aesthetic experience is portrayed as itself the locus of freedom.' In *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 57-86 (p. 59).

[24] Schiller, *AE*, p. 27.

[25] These new modern needs drive the fragmentation of the self. And Terry Eagleton credits Schiller as the primary inspiration for 'the whole radical aesthetic tradition from Coleridge to Herbert Marcuse, lamenting the inorganic, mechanistic nature of industrial capitalism, [which] draws sustenance from this prophetic denunciation.' Eagleton continues with his own lament for the affirmative side of Schiller's aesthetics: 'What must then be emphasized is the contradictory nature of an aesthetic which on the one hand offers a fruitful ideological model of the human subject for bourgeois society, and on the other hand holds out a vision of human capacities by which that society can be measured and found gravely wanting.' *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 118.

hammer brings as its companion the need for things to be struck by the hammer. The hammer works well as a tool and an ability, and yet we cannot fail to acknowledge that in a world stocked with hammers, many more things have come to appear to be in need of hammering. Schiller continues in the following letter (the sixth) to sharpen his attack on civilization: 'It was civilization itself which inflicted this wound upon modern man. Once the increase in empirical knowledge, and more exact modes of thought, made sharper divisions between the sciences inevitable…then the inner unity of human nature was severed too, and a disastrous conflict set its harmonious powers at variance.'[26] Schiller employs here the Winckelmann-infused image of the ancient Greeks as living not only amidst beautiful nature, which they reproduced in beautiful art, but so too that natural and artistic beauty were expressions of the harmonies within each person.[27] This individual harmony likewise resonated with the harmony of the Greek polis and the natural environment. And in that classical ideal state, 'At that first fair awakening of the powers of the mind, sense and intellect did not yet rule over strictly separate domains; for no dissension had as yet provoked them into hostile partition and mutual demarcation of their frontiers.'[28] These passages require us to refine our earlier characterization of the development of human capacities as necessarily leading to a fragmentation of the unity of the human being, of the loss of integrity solely through

[26] Schiller, *AE*, p. 33.
[27] A fruitful path along which to view the growth of this model is according to the notion of the beautiful soul, and although the *Letters* 'does not contain the phrase "beautiful soul," does assume, as its title suggests, its reality. The *Letters* amounts to an attempt to move from the exclusive concentration on the "beautiful" individual to the level of the whole social sphere. Such a consideration of the social dimension of moral beauty had always been an essential element of the ideal, for morality can of course only make sense within the context of a larger civil order.' Robert E. Norton, *The Beautiful Soul; Aesthetic Morality in the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 244.
[28] Schiller, *AE*, p. 31.

the empowerment of one ability or another. But now we can conclude that human development need not be adversarial or fragmenting; it is rather, for Schiller, that the demands of the political state nudge the development of capacities into a fragmenting force. It is the needs of the state that put human abilities at odds with one another. And since for Schiller the state means the whole of the civil environment that human beings inhabit, we can readily appreciate that his discussion here of fragmentation will find a direct parallel in Marx's notion of alienation. The concern for both thinkers is to determine how the organization of human capacities brings discord, fragmentation, and an adversariness within and among human beings.

For both Schiller and Marx the root problem lay in just those demands made on human capacities that turn those same capacities against the human beings in which they reside. How then might a human capacity come to develop itself in opposition to the very host of the capacity? For Schiller the answer has to do with a certain degree of coercion imposed upon the capacity. Alienation occurs when human development happens at the expense of the human being. We note here an interesting parallel with the problem of ideology, which is thinking put in service against the real interests of the thinker, we might then see that the crux of the problem with both alienation and ideology lies in the curtailment of human freedom, in one case the freedom of a capacity to develop according to its own lights, and in the case of ideology it is the curtailment of the freedom of thinking in the act of constraining thought to overly restrictive measures. This formulation then neatly returns to the problem of freedom, absolutely

central to Schiller's formulation of aesthetic education as the most fruitful path to return to a former but now lost freedom.

Freedom and Sublime Incapacity

A little odd perhaps to phrase it this way but it might be put that the greatest impediment to our freedom is not other people but the potential for incapacity that lies at the heart of our existence as beings with ever-expanding capacities: 'It must, therefore, be wrong if the cultivation of individual powers involves the sacrifice of wholeness. Or rather, however much the law of nature tends in that direction, it must be open to us to restore by means of a higher art the totality of our nature which the arts themselves have destroyed.'[29] We shall return to the topic of sacrifice when we consider Schiller's formulation of the sublime and therein encounter Kant's own formulation of the sublime in which sacrifice plays a key role. But for now it will suffice to provide an illustration, by means of an image of the human body, of how the exercise, or better: control, of human activity results in quite different effects. I have in mind Schiller's brilliant illustration of the difference between athletic bodies and beautiful bodies. Both types of bodies - we leave aside the question of whether athletic bodies can be beautiful - exercise the same capacity, the active engagement of as many parts of the body as possible. And yet, for Schiller, athletic bodies are created by the opposition of parts of the body to one another, think of isometric exercise here - whereas beautiful bodies come to be out of the harmonious engagement of the parts of the body with one another.

[29] Schiller, *AE*, p. 43.

This dynamic that brings about beautiful rather than merely athletic bodies can also be glimpsed in Schiller's account of the sublime: 'nothing is so unworthy of man than to suffer violence, for violence undoes him.'[30] To phrase this in the terms of Schiller's discussion in *Aesthetic Education*, we might say that violence is a force or power directed against the human individual that results in suffering, and that the primary force of that suffering is directed against the integrity of the individual.[31]

The specific character of the sublime is that it contains both suffering and relief. Recall that for Kant the sublime is a two-stage phenomenon that begins with an initial experience of a threat to the integrity of the person. It thereby becomes a model for how to maintain a life within the aesthetic that also points beyond it. 'The feeling of the sublime is a mixed feeling. It is a composition of melancholy which at its utmost is manifested in a shudder, and of joyousness which can mount to rapture and, even if it is not actually pleasure, is far preferred by refined souls to all pleasure. This combination of two contradictory perceptions in a single feeling demonstrates our moral independence in an irrefutable manner.'[32] We might think of the sublime for Schiller as a properly post-aesthetic phenomenon. The limitations of the aesthetic have for him everything to do with the power and proximity of the experience of beauty to

[30] Schiller, *OS*, p. 193.
[31] A more contemporary, though quite similar treatment of force is found in the well-known analysis of it by Simone Weil in her essay 'The Iliad, Poem of Force:' 'From the power to transform him into a thing by killing him there proceeds another power and much more prodigious, that which makes a thing of him while he still lives. He is living, he has a soul, yet he is a thing. …The soul was not made to dwell in a thing; and when forced to it, there is no part of that soul but suffers violence.' Schiller's term translated as force is *die Kraft*, Weil's is *la force*. Both thinkers share the insight that the primary direction of force is toward reification, and that the most treacherous feature of force is its attempt to reify that which remains most alive in the human being. In *The Simone Weil Reader*, ed. by George A. Panichas (Mt. Kisco, New York: Moyer Bell Limited, 1977), pp. 153-83 (p. 155).
[32] Schiller, *OS*, p. 198.

our sensuousness: ‘Through beauty alone, then, we should never discover that we are destined and able to manifest ourselves as pure intelligences. But in the sublime, however, reason and sensuousness do *not* accord, and precisely in this contradiction between the two lies the magic with which it captures our minds.’[33] The very thing in beauty that recommends it to us as a genuine expansion of our capacity to move beyond sensuousness, that is, *disinterest* toward sensuousness, nevertheless becomes an obstacle to our further growth toward freedom insofar as the proper aesthetic disinterest toward beauty remains one-sided. However noble our cultivated disinterest in regard to sensuousness, the scope of the disinterest remains limited to sensuousness. The sublime provides the occasion to expand our disinterest beyond sensuousness to the greatest possible realm of self-interest, that of self-preservation: ‘Thus the sublime affords us an egress from the sensuous world in which the beautiful would gladly hold us forever captive.’[34] The most consequential freedom that we might win for ourselves is the freedom from our thralldom to the sensuous world. Beauty is at once both an intensification of that thralldom as well as a dialectical overcoming of it.

Art and Aesthetic Capacity

Beauty recapitulates our bond with sensuousness, elevates it and thereby provides a glimpse, via disinterest, of what freedom from it might look like; or we might more properly say that beauty not only signals how to be free of sensuousness but is also in

[33] Schiller, *OS*, pp. 199-200.
[34] Schiller, *OS*, p. 201.

itself an image of that freedom insofar as it is attractive in such a way that we need not be in thrall to it.[35] Here is where semblance plays such a key role insofar as it provides an image rather than the actuality of sensuous fulfilment. We should thus not lament that beauty is only a promise of happiness, for in being but a promise beauty thereby indicates how we might free ourselves from the spell of nature: 'The sublime, like the beautiful, is prodigally diffused throughout the whole of nature and the capacity to apprehend both is implanted in all men; but the potentiality to do so is unequally developed and must be aided by art.'[36] So although the capacity is implanted in all of us, it is art that is necessary in order to develop it. This also means that art is a peculiar kind of tool, one that serves not only as an instrument to leverage our potential capacities for apprehending beauty and the sublime, but so too is art itself perhaps a kind of capacity and not merely an aid to wholly inward human capacities. In this light art comes to appear as a quasi-capacity, as an agency with the ability not only to aid but to inaugurate the coming into existence of a capacity. It's no mere projection on our part to perceive works of art as doing things like addressing viewers, or making propositions, or even containing truth claims. These and many other activities - likewise a residue of art's origins in magic - are evidence of art being no mere adjunct to social life but a vibrant participant in it. It's as if we have off-loaded, onto a sort of art

[35] John Dewey formulates a remarkably similar path to human happiness, as Martin Jay explains: 'Aesthetic experience was in fact for Dewey the teleological goal of authentic experience *tout court*, in which it attains its "consummatory" character. Here means and ends come together in one organic unity. Or as he put it in *Art as Experience*, "experience in the degree in which it *is* experience is heightened vitality….Because experience is the fulfillment of an organism in its struggles and achievements in a world of things, it is art in germ. Even in its rudimentary forms, it contains the promise of that delightful perception which is aesthetic experience."' *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 164.
[36] Schiller, *OS*, p. 202.

subcontractor, the development of a capacity which we cannot on our own quite fully fashion. How else might we account for the experience of art as being at once in such proximity - its pleasure suffusing us - while at the same time so utterly foreign, marked by our complete ignorance as to the meaning of the beautiful. This formulation helps explain Kant's preference for natural beauty over artistic beauty; the latter places in the artifact a capacity that ought better remain wholly within the human. The sublime then becomes the logical extension of this bias against the artifact as the seat of a human capacity. Or, put differently, we might well understand the sublime, and in particular Kant's formulation of it, as the return of capacity away from the work of art, or even bit of nature in the case of natural beauty, and toward its proper home exclusively within the human being. Recall here the Longinian formulation of the sublime as the echo of a noble soul.[37] Leave aside the question regarding the emptiness, which allows the noble soul to have an echo, and attend instead to the echo as wholly interior to the human being as well as in need of an external device or artifact, however hollow.

Freedom and Determinacy

What we are encountering here in Schiller's insistence upon the moral character of aesthetic experience is his affirmation that the true goal of human development is an ever-expanding capacity for freedom.[38] One of his clearest expressions of this

[37] See Longinus, *On Great Writing (On the Sublime)*, trans. by G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Press, 1991), p. 12.

[38] Anthony Savile addresses directly this question as to whether for Schiller the 'full aestheticization of experience is an *ideal* that we might set ourselves.' Savile instead suggests, 'An alternative conception of Schiller's strategy…which still retains a tinge of Kantian colour, is this. While it is no longer advanced as a constitutive truth about human experience that it is imbued with the aesthetic, it may still be

conviction appears early on in his 1795 essay on 'Naïve and Sentimental Poetry,' where he explicitly cites Kant's illustration of the person who perfectly impersonates the song of the nightingale.[39] In Kant's telling, an innkeeper hires a nightingale impersonator to hide in the bushes and sing in order to entertain the guests at the inn.[40] Kant avers that the deception, in other words the unrevealed imitation of nature, is perfectly acceptable unless and until the deception is revealed to the guests. Kant argues that the pleasure of the nightingale's song is then destroyed.[41] Schiller seemingly agrees with this line of argumentation but he places a still greater gravity on the situation: 'From this it is clear that this kind of satisfaction in nature is not aesthetic but moral, for it is mediated by an idea, not produced immediately by observation; nor is it in any way dependent upon beauty of form.'[42] Schiller argues that it is not merely the natural form of the flower, or the humming of bees, or the chirping of birds that makes them beautiful, it is rather that all these natural phenomena represent an idea to us, and further, that it is this idea which is the thing we love in these beautiful natural phenomena. And yet, fittingly, it is as if the idea has no genuine content but only form, for Schiller declares the aspects of the idea as inner necessity and eternal unity. We find ourselves again quite close to Winckelmann here and thus it is no surprise that Schiller's account next moves to a

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regulative of experience that it be so.' See Savile's *Aesthetic Reconstructions: The Seminal Writings of Lessing, Kant and Schiller* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 202-03.

[39] In Friedrich Schiller, '*Naïve and Sentimental Poetry' and 'On the Sublime,'* ed. and trans. by Julius A. Elias (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1966), hereafter *NS*, pp. 83-190.

[40] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, translated by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), §42, 302, p. 169.

[41] Kant's anecdote of the innkeeper and the song of the nightingale might well be considered an early formulation of what later comes to be called the culture industry, if we understand the focus of that industry as the strategic attempt to create the effects of art, rather than the thing itself.

[42] Schiller, *NS*, p. 84.

description of what we once were. We love beautiful natural objects because '*They are what we were; they are what we should once again become.* We were nature just as they, and our culture, by means of reason and freedom, should lead us back to nature. They are, therefore, not only the representation of our lost childhood, which eternally remains most dear to us, but fill us with a certain melancholy.' And what truly separates us from the idea represented to us by beautiful natural things is that 'We are free, they are necessary; we change, they remain a unity.'[43] Childhood represents an era of integrity and wholeness, and Schiller is happy to deploy it in both its literal sense as well as apply it the Greeks, whose culture and way of life were often likened to be the childhood of the species. What our presumed maturity has brought us is not freedom but the potential for it; and what we have lost is the unity of our existence. The aesthetic is the semblance of the moral insofar as the former functions as the model and deployment of the harmony of the faculties, and the latter, the moral realm, is something we cannot directly aspire to without the aid of both imagery and practice, which is to say: semblance and play. Thus for Schiller our true life would consist of reattaining our lost unity while thereby fully embodying our potential freedom. 'We are touched not because we look down upon the child from the height of our strength and perfection, but rather because we *look upward* from the *limitation* of our condition, which is inseparable from the *determination* which we have attained, to the unlimited *determinacy.*'[44] It is then not the limitation of the child that lends its charm to us but rather the expanse glimpsed of our possible future determinability as we witness the

[43] Schiller, *NS*, p. 85.
[44] Schiller, *NS*, p. 87.

combination in the child of the freedom from compulsion alongside its burgeoning capacity. We perceive at once in the idea or form of the child an image of our not yet being fully determined: 'The child is therefore a lively representation to us of the ideal, not indeed as it is fulfilled, but as it is enjoined: hence we are in no sense moved by the notion of its poverty and limitation, but rather by the opposite: the notion of its pure and free strength, its integrity, its eternality.'[45] What we see in the child is the standing-ready of capacity, and still more importantly, we see the wholeness and integrity - Schiller might in another context call this dignity - of that condition of indeterminacy. But this is to put it just the opposite as Schiller has it, for it is not the lack of determinacy in the child that lends it its ideal character for us but rather its very determinacy, though without yet any very evolved determinations.[46]

Return to Sensuousness

Childhood holds for Schiller still another analogy, in addition to that of the ancient Greeks, which is sensuousness. If the Greeks are the childhood equivalent of the historical and social development of the human being, then sensuousness might be considered the childhood in the development of the species. And for Schiller the

[45] Schiller, *NS*, p. 87.

[46] Another way to understand Schiller's strategy here is to consider that he wants to avoid the Kantian move whereby reason – as a premier developed capacity – comes to have authority over other human inclinations. As Frederick Beiser well explains, 'While he [the human being] is free as a rational being, he is not free as a whole being, for the simple reason that part of his self is under the *domination* of his reason. It is this thesis – the very idea that reason can dominate or create a lack of freedom – that is completely alien to Kant's moral philosophy, and that plays a fundamental role in Schiller's thinking about freedom.' See Beiser's comprehensive study, *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 217.

historical and species development of the human being coincides, or overlaps, in the period of the ancient Greeks. This follows directly the lead from Winckelmann who imagined the Greeks as capable of attaining an aesthetic ideal only by dint of the deep correspondence between the existence of the individual and the natural environment in which it found itself. An aesthetic garden of paradise, if you will. Harmony all around, inside and out, which naturally leads to the Fall, the fragmentation of the unity and integrity of the person, the introduction of disharmony and discord. A key strategy of Schiller's agenda is to tell the story of the Fall in such a way that the seeds of a recovery might already be planted in the very dynamic that inaugurates the Fall. We have already witnessed this dynamic in his account of the advance of the sublime beyond that of beauty, with the latter having its limitations in its sunkenness in nature. Now we might turn to yet another illustration of *aufheben* in Schiller's account of naïve and sentimental poetry, where we'll find a ready kinship between the two modes of poetry with the relation between beauty and the sublime. What characterizes naïve poetry is precisely its unselfconscious affinity with nature; such poetry is an expression of the continuity with nature, very much in keeping with Winckelmann's account of ancient Greek art. Naïve poetry, to be sure, is for Schiller an expression from childlikeness. Sentimental poetry, on the other hand, positions itself as being in relation to nature; it cannot help then but be self-conscious of itself as art, and as artifact. Schiller's division of poetry into two camps maps neatly onto the present-day distinction between fine art and what's called folk or outsider art. At the heart of the latter is the coming into being of the work of art without it knowing itself as art: 'Our childhood is the only

undisfigured nature that we still encounter in civilized mankind, hence it is no wonder if every trace of the nature outside us leads us back to our childhood.'[47] We might then think of sentimental poetry as an attempt - beginning with the acknowledgment that we are no longer in nature - to return to childhood, to the condition in which nature still appeared to be present in us. Poets thus, 'will either *be* nature, or they will *seek* lost nature.'[48] And yet, strictly speaking, it is not the return of an *appearance* of nature in us that Schiller truly seeks. It is rather the *feeling* of nature in us that we wish to recover; any image will always remain - regardless how beautiful - only a likeness of nature. We might best appreciate the importance of this distinction in the light of Schiller's notion of dignity: 'Humanity has lost its dignity; but art has rescued it and preserved it in significant stone. Truth lives on in the illusion (*Täuschung*) of art, and it is from this copy, or after-image (*Nachbilde*), that the original image (*Urbild*) will once again be restored.'[49] The first point to note is the curiosity, the irony, of truth living on in illusion. And next, we might acknowledge that the restoration of the original image will not signal our return to nature. There is no single image of us, or for us, that will restore our dignity and integrity, for we are dynamic, evolving creatures. The purpose of play, and semblance, is to help us learn to withdraw from our thralldom to the image, the spell of its unity, which is but a mere projection of our own lost unity. Our relation to the image, as a category of phenomena, is not unlike how we comport ourselves in relation to each of our capacities. The stasis of the image supports our longing after

[47] Schiller, *NS*, p. 103.
[48] Schiller, *NS*, p. 106.
[49] Schiller, *AE*, p. 57.

unity, just as we corral our potentiality into individuated capacities, each seemingly with its own integrity.

Conclusion

We exist, and indeed thrive, in the in-between. This is the state that aesthetic education hopes to restore. The role of semblance and play, again, is to aid us whenever we fall prey to one affirmation or another of what we are: 'Man, as we know, is neither exclusively matter nor exclusively mind. Beauty, as the consummation of his humanity, can therefore be neither exclusively life nor exclusively form.'[50] We contain - we are - if not multitudes then at least multiplicities. We lose just that feeling and mode of existing, of life, when we retreat into one image, or one capacity, or another. If our potentiality is not to be diminished, if we are to remain who we are as beings in freedom and suspension, then we must learn, via aesthetic education, how not to fall prey to our own affirmations. The role of the image in aesthetic education, or more precisely, that of the beautiful image, is twofold: it works first to conjure up the allure of the image - indeed we might say the beautiful image is in fact the image in its most beautiful, and thus realized, manifestation, the ideal image - and then, second, to puncture the very affirmation of the status of the image, disavowing its own actuality, in other words: as semblance. The notion of the sublime thus enters here with the secondary action of the beautiful image. We might say the beautiful image prepares us for the still more sweeping disavowal of the sublime, in which all imagery, and indeed the imagination

[50] Schiller, *AE*, p. 103.

itself, is surpassed. The sublime is the dialectical advance upon the beautiful by its undoing of any and all remaining ties to sensuousness.

There is a passage in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* where he acknowledges the kinship between Schiller's aesthetic education and how modernist art takes up the role of the sublime: 'This is touched on by Schiller's dictum that the human being is only fully human when at play; with the consummation of his sovereignty he leaves behind the spell of sovereignty's aim. The more empirical reality hermetically excludes this event, the more art contracts into the element of the sublime; in a subtle way, after the fall of formal beauty, the sublime was the only aesthetic idea left to modernism.'[51] In Adorno's telling it is not as if the sublime simply triumphs over the limitations of beauty and the image; it is rather that the dominance of the sublime is a by-product of the historical event of empirical reality shrinking in such a way that it could no longer sustain the illusions of beautiful imagery.

[51] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 197.

Art's Underthought: Art, Presupposition and Immorality

ZOE WALKER

> *For the young are not able to distinguish what has a deeper meaning and what hasn't. Whatever opinions they have formed at their age are hard to wash out and usually become ingrained.*
>
> Plato, *Republic*, 378d-e[1]

Art is dangerous — because of its 'deeper meanings'. So Plato argues in Book II of the *Republic*, claiming that 1) artworks have deeper meanings, 2) these are sometimes immoral, and 3) as such they can be morally corrupting, and of children in particular. My project in this paper is to vindicate these claims: art — both literary and visual — is indeed dangerous, and in just the way Plato feared.[2]

In Section I, I propose that we understand 'deeper meanings' as the *presuppositions* of artworks, because both are inexplicit and hard to identify. This account puts me in a position to consider how the deeper meanings of artworks could morally corrupt audiences.

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[1] Plato, *Republic*, 378d-e.
[2] Or at least, in just the way Plato feared in Book II of the *Republic*.

In Section II, I discuss artworks' capacity to *confirm* evaluative commitments we have already via presupposition, as Noel Carroll argues. Carroll sees this as a resource, offering potential for moral benefit — but this means there is equal potential for moral harm. In particular, I will argue that we can expect artworks to confirm attitudes of its audiences that constitute and maintain oppression.

In Section III, I argue for art's capacity for informative presupposition. If presupposition can be informative, this means the 'deeper meanings' of artworks can not only confirm existing attitudes, as Carroll allowed, but also convey new attitudes. I offer some suggestions for why we might expect artworks to seem particularly authoritative, and so their messages particularly compelling.

Plato ultimately concludes that artists should be banished from the state altogether. My own conclusion is less drastic, but I do offer some suggestions as to how we might mitigate the dangers of art I have outlined.

Section I: *Hyponoia* as Presupposition

Artworks, according to Plato, sometimes have a deeper meaning. What does he mean by this? The Greek word here translated as 'deeper meaning' is *hyponoia* — literally, 'under thought'. On one level, then, we might naturally understand *hyponoia* as being something which is not asserted explicitly in the story, but is implied by what is said: the thought lying under what is explicit. This is why Plato has Socrates assert that '[n]or are any of those stories at all suitable that tell of the gods making war, plotting against and fighting other gods […] if those who are going to guard our state are to consider it

most shameful to fall recklessly into enmity with each other'.[3] The idea seems to be that if stories depict gods warring with each other, this implies to audiences that such behaviour is permissible rather than shameful: the 'under thought' is a message of permissibility about something which is in fact impermissible.

But there seems to be, as Jonathan Lear points out, another way in which *hyponoia* is 'under thought': 'it enters the psyche beneath the radar of critical thought'.[4] It is here that the real danger of artworks resides. Given that *hyponoia* is not explicitly asserted by artworks, audiences (and particularly children) are – Plato suggests — less likely to subject it to rational scrutiny before adopting, for example, the belief that constant fighting and enmity with one's peers is morally permissible.

So *hyponoia*, as Plato conceives of it, has two key features: a) it is implicit rather than explicit in artworks, and b) it is prone to passing beneath the radar of critical thought. It seems that we do commonly acknowledge the existence of something which has these very same features: presupposition.

When speakers perform speech-acts, there are often many things they do not say explicitly but rather take for granted: they *presuppose* things. So for example, when I say "the former president of the United States was terrifyingly underqualified", I require the presupposition that there was a former president of the United States, and when I say "even Joe Biden will do a better job", I require the presupposition that Joe Biden will not do a fantastic job either.[5] The acceptability of many of the things that are said

[3] Plato, *Republic*, 378c.
[4] Jonathan Lear, 'Allegory and Myth in Plato's *Republic*', p.27.
[5] I have adapted this discussion of presupposition from David Lewis, 'Scorekeeping in a Language Game'.

in a conversation will depend in part, then, on which presuppositions there are in the shared pool of beliefs and attitudes between interlocutors: what, following Robert Stalnaker, I will call the 'common ground' between interlocutors.[6]

Moreover, it looks as though, just like speakers in a conversation, *artworks* make presuppositions that must have corresponding attitudes in the common ground between artwork and audience if the audience is to be able to fully engage with the artwork. Take narrative artworks in the first instance. As Noel Carroll puts it, '[i]t is of the nature of narrative to be essentially incomplete. Every narrative makes an indeterminate number of presuppositions that the audience must bring, so to speak, to the text'.[7] Narrative artworks do not spell out, nor would it be feasible for them to spell out, everything that is supposed to be true in the fictional worlds their characters inhabit. Rather, they 'depend […] upon the audience to fill in a great deal and that filling-in is an indispensable part of what it is to follow and to comprehend a narrative'.[8] When Virginia Woolf writes, on the first page of *Mrs Dalloway*, '[Peter] would be back from India one of these days, June or July, she forgot which',[9] she does not explicitly state that, as in the real world, India is a country, and one that is far away from the United Kingdom, and June and July are consecutive months; rather, the reader brings this knowledge to the text. This ability to 'fill in' the presuppositional gaps and thus fully engage with the narrative depends on the relevant presuppositions having corresponding attitudes in the common ground between artwork and audience, such as

[6] Robert Stalnaker, 'Common Ground', p.701.
[7] Noel Carroll, 'Art, Narrative and Moral Understanding', p.138.
[8] Carroll, 'Art, Narrative and Moral Understanding', p.138.
[9] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p.3. (Page one is the title page, and page two is blank.)

certain beliefs about India, June and July: if they do not, the audience cannot fill in the gaps and thus cannot fully engage with the artwork.[10]

The examples of presupposition so far mentioned have all been of propositions whose corresponding attitudes in the common ground would be *beliefs*; for example, the proposition that June and July are consecutive months would correspond to the *belief* that June and July are consecutive months. However, presupposed propositions may correspond to other kinds of attitude too. For example, in *Mrs Dalloway*, if we are to respond to Septimus' death in the manner solicited by the work,[11] we must not just *believe* the presupposed propositions that the avoidable death of a young man is sad, and that being in some way responsible for it is morally condemnable, but also have the attitudes of sadness towards the death and condemnation towards Dr. Holmes respectively.[12]

I have hitherto been focusing on presupposition in *narrative* artworks, using examples that are exclusively literary, but I also want to argue that *images* are capable

[10] Note that here the audience are taking propositions that are true in the real world, for example the proposition 'June and July are consecutive months', to also be true in the fiction. That artworks sometimes demand us to import beliefs – and other related attitudes – we have about the real world into the fiction in this way is all I want to establish at this point. In the final section of this paper, when I discuss the capacity of artwork for *informative* presupposition, I will look at the reverse process: exporting beliefs and attitudes from the fiction to the real world.

[11] In this paper I will be assuming that there is a way to engage with and respond to the artworks with which I am concerned that is solicited by the work in question, where clues to the solicited perspective include the elements that are foregrounded in a depiction and those that are backgrounded, the aestheticization or not of certain elements, and whether the narrative ultimately rewards or punishes the characters depicted in it. I hope that the examples of solicited responses I give throughout – sadness at the death of Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway*, viewing the rape as erotic in *Rape of Europa*, condemnation of Andrea Sachs in *The Devil Wears Prada*, and so on – will demonstrate my assumption's intuitive appeal. I do not wish, however, to equate the solicited response to a work with the response the artist intends, as there are at least some cases where the two come apart (see e.g. Levinson, J., 'Intention and Interpretation in Literature'). To avoid implying this, I will talk throughout of what the work presupposes, rather than what the artist presupposes.

[12] This point about presuppositions sometimes corresponding to attitudes other than belief is made about the presuppositions of hate speech and pornography in Langton, R., 'Beyond Belief'.

of presupposition in just the same way that linguistic representations are. I will illustrate this with Anne Eaton's useful discussion of the female nude. She notes that the female nude typically 'calls upon its audience to 'see' […] the woman represented […] as primarily a sex object'.[13] So for example, in Titian's *Rape of Europa*, the rape in question is eroticized by Titian's use of beautiful glowing paint to depict Europa's body and sumptuous colours for the scene around her, the erotic positioning of her body, and the backgrounding of her distress at what is happening to her. In this way, the audience is called on to find it sexy, and view Europa, qua woman, not as a *person*, who might be afraid of her impending rape, but rather as a sex object. Failure to view the work in this way is failure to fully engage with it. 'A viewer could', Eaton notes, 'be either *unable* or *unwilling*… to look upon the nude in the way that the pictures prescribe […] but such resistance is bound to interfere with one's appreciation of the work in question'.[14]

This 'way of seeing'[15] the woman represented, constituted of attitudes such as the belief that the rape of Europa is sexy, has a similar role to the belief that the avoidable death of a young man is sad in *Mrs Dalloway*. Although neither is explicitly asserted by the work, both need to be in the common ground between artwork and audience if the audience is to respond to the work in the manner solicited by the work.

[13] Anne Eaton, 'What's Wrong with the (Female) Nude?', p.293.
[14] Eaton, 'What's Wrong with the (Female) Nude?', pp.294-5. This unwillingness/incapacity to engage with artworks in the prescribed way is closely linked to the phenomenon known in the literature as 'imaginative resistance' (see e.g. Gendler, T.S., 'The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance').
[15] This is John Berger's phrase (Berger, J., *Ways of Seeing*), and I take the application of it here from Eaton, 'What's Wrong with the (Female) Nude?'.

In other words, *Rape of Europa presupposes* this objectifying way of seeing, just as *Mrs Dalloway presupposes* the belief about the sadness of death.

A good contrast with *Rape of Europa,* which makes vivid what is presupposed, is the film *The Accused*. As Lynne Tirrell puts it, 'although [*The Accused*] graphically depicts the abuse and degradation of a woman being gang-raped, it does not glorify the rapists. It does not portray rape as providing pleasure to the woman or as something she sought or deserved'.[16] Crucially, unlike *Rape of Europa*, it '[p]resent[s] the woman *as a person*'.[17] Although both artworks depict rape, they differ in how they call on the audience to see the rape: *The Accused* does not presuppose seeing rape as something erotic.

These remarks about how a work calls on its audience to *see* the work suggest that in fact, many of the beliefs and attitudes one might be required to share with a work in order to fully engage with it can be systematically related into a whole outlook on the world and the people in it. For instance, an artwork might presuppose Langton's 'objectifying attitude' towards one or more of its characters: an attitude where a person is viewed as 'something to be looked at, to be pursued, to be consumed, to be used, to be possessed'.[18] This objectifying attitude is constituted by a number of beliefs and other attitudes, all of which connect to form a whole perspective on a person. Similar

[16] Lynne Tirrell, 'Aesthetic Derogation: Hate Speech, Pornography and Aesthetic Contexts', p.299.
[17] Tirrell, 'Aesthetic Derogation: Hate Speech, Pornography and Aesthetic Contexts', p.299.
[18] Rae Langton, 'Sexual Solipsism', p.331. Langton's 'objectifying attitude' functions in a similar way to Strawson's 'objective attitude' in P.F. Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment', only with different relational gerundives: when one adopts the objective attitude one views a person as 'something… to be managed or handled or cured or trained' (p.9). The objective attitude is then a further instance of a particular 'way of seeing' someone, although it is less readily imagined as being presupposed by an artwork than the objectifying attitude is.

to the objectifying attitude is the attitude commonly referred to as 'the male gaze',[19] which, as Eaton puts it, 'refers to the androcentric attitude of an image; that is, its depiction of the world, and in particular of women, in terms of male or masculine interest, emotions, attitudes, or values'.[20] Again, the male gaze is an attitude constituted of a number of beliefs and other attitudes which connect to form an outlook on the world: an outlook which may be presupposed by an artwork.

So both literary and pictorial artworks can, just like speakers, make presuppositions which are not asserted explicitly by the artwork. In other words, presupposition has the first of the two features of *hyponoia* noted above: it is something which is implicit (rather than explicit) in artworks. Moreover, as a result, presupposition also has the second feature of being prone to passing beneath the radar of critical thought. As Rae Langton notes, presuppositions are in a sense '*stronger* than assertion, presenting information as uncontroversial and not at issue—as shared knowledge or received wisdom, to be taken for granted'.[21] As such, we can imagine that audiences, and in particular children, will be more likely to accept presuppositions without critical scrutiny than they would explicit assertions which are not presented as to be taken for granted. Indeed, Langton uncannily echoes Lear's claims about *hyponoia* when she remarks that speech acts enabled by presupposition 'can have an under-the-radar quality absent in assertion'.[22] I will offer more support for this claim in due course but for now it suffices to note that it is at least plausible that presupposition has the second of the

[19] The term was coined by Laura Mulvey in her 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.
[20] Anne Eaton, 'Feminist Philosophy of Art', p.878.
[21] Rae Langton, 'Blocking as Counter-Speech', p.28.
[22] Langton, 'Blocking as Counter-Speech', p.28.

two features we wanted from *hyponoia*. I take it that this is enough to show that presupposition is a plausible cashing out of *hyponoia*.

If we understand Plato's concept of *hyponoia* or 'deeper meaning' in this way, we can see that the first of his three claims about art listed above has been vindicated: artworks do sometimes have deeper meanings.

Section II: Confirmatory Presupposition

Having answered these questions of scope, I am now in a position to turn back to the main task of this paper: vindicating Plato's claims and showing that art can indeed be dangerous. Thus far we have seen that Plato's first claim is true: artworks can indeed have deeper meanings, when we understand deeper meanings as presuppositions. What remains to be seen is whether these deeper meanings can corrupt in the way Plato feared.

An initial response to the admission that artworks can have deeper meanings in the way described above might go as follows: so artworks require us to fill in presuppositional gaps — so what? Are we not just filling in the gaps with attitudes that we already have? In which case, it does not look as though we are going to *acquire* any immoral attitudes from engaging with artworks in this way, so we have no need to worry that this gives artworks the potential to be morally corrupting.

In the next section, I will argue that in fact, the attitudes we use to fill in the presuppositional gaps need not be ones we already have. But for now, I will assume, as Carroll does, that they are attitudes we already have. I will argue that even when this is

the case, artworks have the potential to be morally corrupting. I will start by outlining an account Carroll proposes of how the presuppositions artworks require us to make can be morally beneficial, by confirming our pre-existing moral attitudes. I will then argue that if we buy into this plausible account, we are by the same token equally committed to the possibility of artworks being morally corrupting: we must concede that art can, as Plato feared, be dangerous.

So let us assume that the presuppositions we use to fill in the gaps are all attitudes we already have. Even still, Carroll argues, engaging with artworks by employing these presuppositions can be morally beneficial for us:

> [I]n order to understand a narrative properly, we must use many of the same beliefs and emotions, generally rooted in our common culture, that we use to negotiate everyday human events for the purpose of filling in and getting the point of stories. In this sense, it is not the case that the narrative teaches us something brand new, but rather that it activates the knowledge and emotions, moral and otherwise, that we already possess.[23]

In Carroll's view, narrative fiction can confirm[24] moral beliefs and concepts we already hold in a number of different ways. Engagement with artworks constitutes

[23] Carroll, 'Art, Narrative and Moral Understanding', p.141.
[24] Carroll's own term for this confirmatory process is clarification ('the *clarificationist view*', p.142), but while this term suits the morally beneficial side of the process, it is less suited to the morally corrupting version I am arguing for, hence my use of the more neutral 'confirm'.

practising applying our moral attitudes to specific situations, and might require us to '*reorganise* the hierarchical orderings of our moral categories and premises, or to *reinterpret* [them] in the light of new paradigm instances and hard cases, or to *reclassify* barely acknowledged phenomena afresh [my italics]'.[25]

An illustration of a couple of these confirmatory processes can be found in feminist novels such as Marilyn French's *The Women's Room*. In the novel, French details the dull, time-consuming and back-breaking work of a housewife in the seventies in excruciating detail. The reader may already believe that getting no recompense for one's labour is an injustice, but engaging with the novel could encourage them to *practise* applying this to the thankless lives of housewives, or even to *reclassify* this familial structure as an injustice if they did not already.

We are not acquiring any new *propositional* moral knowledge in engaging with artworks, but we are reorganising, practising, extending — in short, confirming — the moral knowledge we already have. We are deepening our moral *understanding*, where understanding is understood as 'the activity of refining what we already know, of recognizing connections between parts of our knowledge stock, of bringing what we already know to clarity through a process of practice and judgment'.[26]

What Carroll has given us here is a plausible account of how engaging with the presuppositions of an artwork can be morally beneficial. However, if we buy it, then it looks as though we are equally committed to the possibility that art can, in the same way, morally corrupt us.

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[25] Carroll, 'Art, Narrative and Moral Understanding', p.142.
[26] Carroll, 'Art, Narrative and Moral Understanding', p.144.

Activating and putting into motion our existing moral attitudes does seem to be, as Carroll argues, a way of confirming them. However, whether confirming them is morally beneficial or morally corrupting will depend on the moral attitudes in question. What of artworks which presuppose *immoral* propositions? We have already seen that the female nude for example typically seems to presuppose objectifying propositions about women, such that viewers are required to adopt the male gaze/objectifying attitude in order to properly engage with works like *Rape of Europa*. If Carroll is right about the confirmatory potential of artworks, then, it looks as though proper engagement with *Rape of Europa* could confirm objectifying views of women one has in one or more of the ways suggested above: viewing the painting may constitute *practising* the adoption of the male gaze, *reorganising* the hierarchical ordering of our moral categories and premises in such a way as to privilege objectifying attitudes, and perhaps even *reclassifying* cases of rape as cases of normal or unobjectionable sex. *Rape of Europa* may not give us *new* immoral attitudes, but it could deepen our commitment to and extend the scope of immoral attitudes we already have.

Another example from a different medium is the film *The Devil Wears Prada*. The protagonist, Andrea Sachs, prioritizes her very demanding and career-advancing job at an influential fashion magazine over her boyfriend, and for this offence he ends up breaking up with her: "You know, in case you were wondering, the person whose calls you always take — that's the relationship you're in. I hope you two are very happy together."[27] In its depiction of the break-up scene in particular, the film encourages us

[27] David Frankel, dir. *The Devil Wears Prada*.

to condemn the apologetic Andrea and side with her self-righteous boyfriend – an interpretation supported by the narrative, which ends with Andrea ultimately quitting her job and telling her now ex-boyfriend he was 'right about everything'.

In other words, it looks as though the film presupposes something like the proposition that a woman choosing her career over her family life is condemnable, and so to fully engage with the work we are required to fill in the presuppositional gap with the belief that a woman choosing her career over her family life is condemnable, and perhaps with the attitude of condemnation towards Andrea's actions. The exercise of filling in the gaps in this way again looks like it might constitute, for example, *practising* applying this belief and attitude, and perhaps *reclassifying* specific cases like Andrea's as instances of this broader condemnable behaviour.

These examples serve to vindicate Plato's claims that artworks can be morally corrupting by virtue of their deeper meanings. The presuppositions of artworks —– their deeper meanings — can be immoral, and when they are, engagement with the artwork requires audiences to practise applying their own immoral attitudes in such a way as to deepen their commitment to those attitudes.

However, it might be thought that this phenomenon is rare, and so not overly troubling, because it relies on a big coincidence: that a work will presuppose immoral attitudes and its audience will have those very same immoral attitudes already. What I want to argue now is that this confirmation of a reader or viewer's immoral attitudes is neither infrequent nor coincidental, but rather that we can expect artworks to frequently confirm a particular variety of immoral attitude in audiences: those that constitute and

maintain oppression.[28] This argument will require a brief segue into the nature of oppression and the ideological framework that underpins it, which will then put me in a position to show that we can expect artworks to consistently confirm oppressive attitudes in audiences.

Tirrell describes oppression as being a matter of how the social system 'grants power to members of one group because they are members of that group and denies it to those who are not members of that group.'[29] Marilyn Frye illustrates this well in the case of the oppression of women by enumerating many instances women face of 'the double bind — situations in which options are reduced to a very few, and all of them expose one to penalty, censure, or deprivation'.[30] For example:

> It is common in the United States that women, especially younger women, are in a bind where neither sexual activity nor sexual inactivity is all right. If she is heterosexually active, a woman is open to censure and punishment for being loose, unprincipled, or a whore, [such as] criticism, snide and embarrassing remarks, being treated as an easy lay by men, scorn from her more restrained female friends… On the other hand, if she refrains from heterosexual activity, she is fairly constantly harassed by men who try to persuade her into it and

[28] I am plausibly assuming here that attitudes which constitute and maintain oppression are immoral. Perhaps this assumption will be contested; however, I take it that at the very least, oppressive attitudes are just as worrying as immoral attitudes, so the point about the danger of artworks to one's beliefs and attitudes goes through, even if not in quite the way Plato envisioned.
[29] Tirrell, 'Aesthetic Derogation', p.303.
[30] Marilyn Frye, 'Oppression', p.11.

> pressure her to "relax" and "let her hair down"; she is threatened with labels like "frigid," "uptight," "man-hater," "bitch" and "cocktease." […] Women are caught like this, too, by networks of forces and barriers that expose one to penalty, loss or contempt whether one works outside the home or not, is on welfare or not, bears children or not, raises children or not, marries or not, stays married or not, is heterosexual, lesbian, both or neither.[31]

These barriers and penalties are ones women face *by virtue of being women*, and they serve to trap women into situations in which they are powerless.

These systems of oppression are (partially) constituted and maintained by people's *attitudes* towards people in the subordinating and subordinated groups. For example, the sexual activity double bind is largely constituted and maintained by the widespread beliefs and corresponding evaluative attitudes — held by both men and women — that a young woman who is sexually active is loose and unprincipled and 'easy' and deserving of censure, and that a young woman who is not sexually active is repressed and uptight and in need of sexual activity. In other words, the said attitudes will be part of the dominant cultural ideology: 'the background cognitive and affective frame that gives actions and reactions meaning within a social system and contributes to its survival' as Haslanger puts it.[32] The dominant ideology, including these attitudes that constitute and maintain oppression, will be found everywhere, from art, the media

[31] Frye, 'Oppression', p.11.
[32] Sally Haslanger, 'Ideology, Generics and Common Ground', p.447.

and advertising to the minds and mouths of employers, parents and friends, such that it is 'pervasive and unavoidable'.[33] For example, the sexually objectifying way of seeing women is found in artworks like *Rape of Europa* which eroticize the rape of women, newspapers which constantly report on how women look and whom they are dating rather than what they do, adverts like the recent *Protein World* 'The Weight Loss Collection' advert which depicted a slender, fair-skinned and fair-haired woman in a bikini next to the words 'Are you beach body ready?', and employers who demand that women wear high heels.[34]

What this means is that if an artist and her audience are from social systems with the same or a relevantly similar dominant ideology, we can expect that frequently they will share oppressive attitudes. In such cases, artworks will confirm immoral – namely, oppressive – attitudes in audiences.[35] The very same ideology by virtue of which *The Devil Wears Prada* presupposed that it is condemnable for a woman to prioritise her job over her family life, and thus made a film containing that same presupposition, is the one which frames the lives of hundreds of thousands of viewers of the film, and as such all these viewers are likely to share the presupposed attitudes.

All of this suggests we should be particularly wary of artworks that do not disagree with us: as Lynne Tirrell puts it, 'the less a film or image *seems* to have a perspective, the more likely it is that the perspective matches the dominant cultural

[33] Haslanger, 'Ideology, Generics and Common Ground', p.447.
[34] See the following articles for discussion of the latter three examples: 'Five things about women in the press', 'Are you beach body ready? Controversial weight loss ad sparks varied reactions', 'Is it legal to force women to wear high heels at work?' (full references in bibliography).
[35] See footnote 28 on the inference from oppressive to immoral.

ideology'.[36] When we are unaware of being morally challenged by an artwork is when this process of immoral attitude confirmation is most likely to be in effect. In this way, the confirmation of our oppressive attitudes is a process of which we are not conscious: the moral corruption happens under the radar, just as Plato feared.

We have seen then that the deeper meanings of artworks can sometimes be immoral, because of the oppressive attitudes of the dominant cultural ideology. Moreover, as such, they can sometimes be morally corrupting, because audiences are likely to share the immoral attitudes of artworks, and when they do, their immoral attitudes are confirmed. As for Plato's concern about the particular danger to children, if the confirmatory process is a deepening of one's commitments, then presumably there is more potential for harm to people whose commitments do not already run deep. It seems plausible that children will typically be such people.

Section III: Informative Presupposition

Thus far, we have assumed, with Carroll, that one can only fill in the presuppositional gaps in artworks with attitudes one already possesses,[37] and hence that one cannot acquire any *new* attitudes, immoral or otherwise. In this section I will argue that this assumption is false, as presupposition can be informative, and therefore that one can acquire new immoral attitudes from artworks. I will start by noting a feature of

[36] Tirrell, 'Aesthetic derogation', p.299.
[37] '[T]he successful author requires an audience that can bring to the text… what is not explicit in it. This further dictates that, to a large extent, the author and the audience need to share a common background of beliefs about the world and about human nature' (Carroll, p.139).

presupposition in conversation that Carroll overlooks, and then show what the implications are for art.

We have seen that the acceptability of many of the things that are said in a conversation will depend in part on which presuppositions there are in the common ground. But as Lewis notices, in conversation, it turns out to be rather difficult to say something which lacks a presupposition. If I say "even Joe Biden will do a better job", and my interlocutors tacitly acquiesce (i.e. no one jumps in with "Whadda ya mean, '*even* Biden'?"), then that presupposition 'springs into existence, making what [I] said acceptable after all'.[38] This feature of presupposition leads Lewis to formulate a *rule of accommodation for presupposition*: 'If at time *t* something is said that requires presupposition *P* to be acceptable, and if *P* is not presupposed just before *t*, then — *ceteris paribus* and within certain limits — presupposition *P* comes into existence at *t*.'[39]

Clearly, this phenomenon will have implications for our account of presupposition in art, too. If we are right to construe engagement with an artwork as a conversation of sorts between artwork and audience, then it looks as though the artistic engagement process too will obey a rule of accommodation for presupposition, whereby typically, if an attitude that is presupposed by the artwork is not already shared by the reader/viewer, then it will, at the moment it is needed, *become* part of the common ground. In other words, it looks as though an artwork could actually, via

[38] Lewis, 'Scorekeeping in a Language Game', p.339.
[39] Lewis, 'Scorekeeping in a Language Game', p.340.

presupposition, *give us new attitudes*, and, most pertinently, could give us new *immoral* attitudes.

The first point of contention is surely whether I am right to construe artistic engagement as a conversation: is this not just metaphorical, in which case we should not expect the rule of accommodation to apply here? To respond to this concern, it will be useful to get clear on why exactly presuppositions in conversation do obey this rule of accommodation, as it will then become evident that we should expect presuppositions in artworks to obey it too.

Marina Sbisà suggests we consider presuppositions as 'assumptions which ought to be shared';[40] that is to say, we take it to be a norm of discourse that presuppositions are to be shared. This suggestion is compelling because 'if the hearer takes the objective context not to contain the presupposed propositional element, he or she will be bound to consider the speaker not only as being wrong about the facts… but also as violating some norm of discourse. Violating norms of discourse […] is in fact a kind of behaviour which makes it difficult to continue conversational cooperation'.[41] The idea, then, is that refusing to allow a presupposition into the common ground brings communication to a grinding halt. We are forced either to end the conversation altogether, or to change the subject to a discussion of whether or not the contested presupposition should be allowed into the common ground. But this latter solution 'is laborious, because it involves a change of topic from what was explicitly at issue to what was merely presupposed, as well as being risky, because it amounts to openly

[40] Marina Sbisà, 'Ideology and the Persuasive Use of Presupposition', p.501.
[41] Sbisà, 'Ideology and the Persuasive Use of Presupposition', p.502.

challenging the entitlement of the speaker to issue the utterances he or she has issued, which may once again lead to a breakdown in the communicative relationship'.[42] This is why, *ceteris paribus* and within certain limits, 'the hearer will avoid treating the speaker as someone violating norms of discourse'[43] and will instead allow the presupposition into the common ground: not doing so risks stymieing and perhaps ending communication altogether, which will come at the cost of any useful information the hearer might have gleaned.

This explanation of the rule of accommodation for presupposition in conversation makes it clear that we should expect the same phenomenon in the artistic engagement process. Just as in conversation, if the reader/viewer does not accept an artwork's presupposition into their shared common ground, then they are bound to consider the artwork as violating some norm of discourse. The difference in the artistic engagement case is that the second course of action is not available to the reader/viewer of the artwork: there is no possibility of changing the conversation to a discussion of whether or not the presupposition should be accepted into the common ground. Rather, the reader/viewer must either accept the presupposition into the common ground, or end communication and walk away. This will come at the cost of the aesthetic enjoyment of the work, and is hence, *ceteris paribus*, undesirable.

It is important to note that this is a *pro tanto* phenomenon: *to the extent* that one refuses to accept a presupposition into the common ground, one stops engaging with

[42] Sbisà, 'Ideology and the Persuasive Use of Presupposition', p.502.
[43] Sbisà, 'Ideology and the Persuasive Use of Presupposition', p.502.

the work. That is not to say that refusing one presupposition means one cannot engage with any aspect of the work at all.

So it does look as though artworks will obey Lewis' rule of accommodation for presupposition.[44] It does not straightforwardly follow though, that this means they can give people beliefs and attitudes, immoral or otherwise, for two reasons. First, as Lewis says, in the case of conversation, the presuppositions in the common ground are taken for granted by interlocutors either 'sincerely or just "for the sake of the argument"'.[45] Why not think, then, that when people engage with artworks that presuppose things they do not already believe, they accept these presuppositions into the common ground just for the sake of argument — or in other words, merely *entertain* them — without permanently adopting them? Second, this problem is compounded by the fact that artworks are fictions, whose presuppositions are about things that are true in fictions, not in the real world. This suggests that we are even less likely to *sincerely* accept presuppositions of artworks than we are to accept presuppositions of conversations about real life.

I take the second problem first. Audiences might take the presuppositions of artworks to be true in the real world as well as the fiction because, as Langton and West point out, 'most fictional stories play out against a background […] of *purported fact*.'[46] Often, this background of purported fact will be actual fact, and we can learn from it: as Gregory Currie observes, 'the reader of Patrick O'Brien will learn a good deal about

[44] For a detailed discussion of how the rule of accommodation applies to attitudes other than belief, see Langton, 'Beyond Belief'.
[45] Lewis, p.339.
[46] Rae Langton and Caroline West, 'Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language Game', p.191.

Nelson's navy, and the reader of Hilary Mantel's *A Place of Greater Safety* will learn about revolutionary France'.[47] But Langton and West are right to note that if authors (and presumably other kinds of artist) 'are ill-informed, indifferent, or outright deceivers […] then some propositions belonging to the background class [of purported facts] may well be false'.[48] In this case, it looks as though readers/viewers could take background propositions in fiction that are false in the real world to be ones that are true in the real world, and thus acquire false beliefs[49] about the real world from fiction. For example, viewers of *The Devil Wears Prada* might take the proposition that it is condemnable for a woman to choose her career over her family life to be one that is true about the real world as well, as they mistake this proposition for a background fact in the fiction. It is particularly likely that audiences will take *moral* propositions to be true in the real world in this way because moral propositions are more often taken to be necessary truths — true in all possible worlds, including the worlds of fictions — than, for example, geographical or biological facts. Moreover, plausibly children are at particular risk of acquiring false beliefs here, because they have less experience of the real world and so will struggle more to identify which propositions in fiction are (supposed to be) true in the real world, and which are not.

So it seems plausible that audiences, and particularly children, will often take artworks to be presupposing propositions that are supposed to be true in real life as well

[47] Gregory Currie, 'The Moral Psychology of Fiction', p.250.
[48] Langton and West, p.191.
[49] It is worth making clear that while I talk about belief here, false propositions could lead one to acquire other attitudes about the real world too — such as an attitude of condemnation towards women who prioritise work over family life — which, while they will not be *false* per se, because they are not truth-evaluable, could be immoral or inappropriate in other ways.

as in the fiction. The question that remains, then, is why we should think that people will adopt these presuppositions *sincerely*, rather than merely entertaining them. In other words, what, if anything, gives the presuppositions of artworks credibility?

It is here that the inexplicit and under-the-radar nature of presupposition really comes to the fore. Recall an example of an assertion containing a presupposition that we saw earlier: "Even Biden will do a better job". The explicit assertion is that Biden will do a better job. The inexplicit presupposition is that Biden will not have do a fantastic job either. If I respond by saying: "That's false!" or "You're wrong!", then unless otherwise specified I will be taken to be denying the explicit assertion rather than the implicit presupposition; I will be taken to mean that Biden will not do a better job, rather than that he will not do a fantastic job either.[50] This is because when I make an assertion containing a presupposition, it is the explicitly asserted part that I am proposing as new information and presenting as at-issue. The presupposition is something I am taking for granted as being common knowledge already, and is presented as not-at-issue.[51] As Sarah Murray puts it, the at-issue content is 'information proposed to be added to the common ground',[52] whereas not-at-issue content, such as presupposed content, is 'information directly added to the common ground'.[53] A proposal can easily be blocked ("You're wrong!"), but it is much harder to block content that is taken for granted.

[50] This point is made — although not first made — by Jason Stanley in Stanley, J., 'Language as a Mechanism of Control'.
[51] This point is also made in Stanley, J., 'Language as a Mechanism of Control'.
[52] Murray, S., 'Varieties of Update', p.4.
[53] Ibid.

This is why, as I suggested above, it follows from the inexplicit nature of presupposition that it is prone to passing under the radar of critical thought. By virtue of being not-at-issue, presupposed content can easily pass a hearer by unnoticed, slipping directly into the common ground without them noticing and questioning whether to accept it as true or not. And even if they do notice, the presentation of the presupposed content as not-at-issue/taken for granted/common knowledge, means that the hearer will likely feel they are already supposed to believe what is presupposed, and as such, the presupposed content is more compelling than it would be had it been asserted explicitly. This is particularly likely in the case of children, who are typically more credulous than adult hearers.

These remarks on the nature of presupposition suggest that we should be wary of presupposition in *any* context, be it in art, advertising, journalism, pornography or wherever else presupposition is possible. In the last part of this paper I want to tentatively suggest some grounds for thinking that (at least some of) the presuppositions of (at least some) artworks are *particularly* compelling, in part because (many) artworks have a perceived authority that other media lack.

To do this, I will expand on some remarks Eaton makes in her discussion of the female nude, in which she claims that '[t]he female nude not only eroticizes but also aestheticizes the sexual objectification of women, and it does so from on high'.[54] Here, Eaton identifies two features of the female nude which make its messages particularly compelling: first, its *aestheticization* of the way of seeing women that it presupposes,

[54] Anne Eaton, 'What's Wrong with the (Female) Nude?', p.307.

and second, the *venerated status* of the female nude in the artistic canon. I will discuss these in turn.

First, then: artworks *aestheticize* their messages. As Eaton says, 'the nude demands to be looked at as art, to be appreciated for its composition, textures, portrayal of light and shadow, and other formal and material features',[55] and this high artistic value of the works 'makes the message of female inferiority and male superiority more compelling'.[56] Eaton does not spell out exactly what is compelling here but I take it she means that it is the *beauty* of these works that lend their messages power. Perhaps one way of cashing this out is that the more beautiful the vision of the world the artwork presents to its audience, the keener the audience is to inhabit it.

A further suggestion about the effect of artworks' *aestheticization* of their messages, is that perhaps the skill these works demonstrate could suggest to the audience the ingenuity of the artist. This might in turn lend the artist an apparent authority as a source of information, and as such make the message(s) of their artwork more compelling.

Moreover, these remarks about aestheticization seem applicable to at least some other art forms. Many films are shot with stunning cinematography, many novels written with dazzling prose, many ballets performed with staggering feats of grace and athleticism. It seems plausible that the high artistic value of these works of art also serve to make what these works say or imply more compelling, in both of the ways I have suggested.

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[55] Eaton, 'What's Wrong with the (Female) Nude?', p.307.
[56] Eaton, 'What's Wrong with the (Female) Nude?', p.307.

I now turn to Eaton's other point about the *venerated status* of art: '*Art* with a capital 'A' is a hallowed category of works that demands our undivided attention, respect, special care and maintenance […] [and] Art's venerated status invests this message of male superiority and female inferiority with special authority, making it an especially effective way of promoting sex inequality'.[57] The idea is that the respect and awe with which we treat works like *Rape of Europa* grants them an authority that, say, adverts, simply do not have. Of course, this status is not attributed to all artworks alike — an airport romance novel will not have this canonical, venerated status — but it is not restricted to the female nude, nor painting more generally; many works of literature and indeed some films are similarly hallowed.

As a final, extremely tentative suggestion, I want to point to a possible connection between the authority of artworks and the speech acts they are able to perform. As Langton notes, subordinating speech acts such as *ranking* some people as inferior to others, and *legitimating* discriminatory behaviour, 'require that the speaker occupy a position of authority in a relevant domain'.[58] If someone without the requisite authority attempts to perform a speech act *legitimating* a certain form of behaviour, that speech act will 'misfire',[59] and the behaviour in question will not be taken by hearers to have been legitimated. Not just anyone, then, can legitimate discrimination. However, if we think artworks are perceived to have some sort of special authority — by virtue of their venerated status, and so on — then we might think them capable of

[57] Eaton, 'What's Wrong with the (Female) Nude?', p.308.
[58] Rae Langton, 'Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts', p.37.
[59] This is J.L. Austin's term. See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*.

being taken by audiences to have legitimated certain kinds of behaviour that media without this authority are incapable of legitimating. Again, this indicates that (certain) artworks might have more power to influence audiences' beliefs and evaluative attitudes – for better or for worse – than other media. There is much more to say here, and I mention this primarily to indicate an avenue for further discussion.

I do not of course intend these remarks as definitive proof that artworks have greater attitude-influencing power than other media, but merely to suggest the plausibility of this claim. In any case, as long as one accepts that *sometimes*, people will adopt new immoral attitudes that have been transmitted to them via the presuppositions of artworks, then once again, Plato's claims are vindicated: artworks have deeper meanings which are sometimes immoral, and as such they can be morally corrupting. We have seen that this seems particularly plausible in the case of children, given that they tend to be more credulous than adults.

Section IV: Concluding Remarks

My projects in this paper have been multiple. Principally, I have tried to vindicate the concerns with art that Plato voices in *Republic* Book II. To this end, I have proposed a cashing out of '*hyponoia*' as presupposition; I have turned Carroll's account of the moral benefits of art on its head to argue for the possibility of art confirming our immoral attitudes, and particularly oppressive ones; I have drawn on discussion of presupposition in the philosophy of language to argue that art is capable of transmitting new attitudes to us; and I have argued that these new attitudes are plausibly made

compelling by particular features of presupposition and of art. Throughout, I have emphasized that, as Plato suggests, there is a particular danger posed to children here.

In the *Republic*, Plato ends up concluding that we should banish artists from the ideal state altogether. This seems extreme, but what less drastic measures can we take to try and mitigate the morally corrupting potential of art?

Broadly speaking, the moral is surely that we should be more mindful of the art to which we expose our children. This is not necessarily to advocate censorship, just care, and perhaps an intention to try and match every potentially damaging book, film or painting with one coming from an entirely different perspective, to ensure that at their impressionable age children are subject to a variety of different impressions, and nothing is impressed too deeply, and 'become[s] ingrained'.[60]

I think Adeimantus, in *Republic* Book II, gets to the crux of the matter:

"My word," he said, "these stories are dangerous stuff!"[61]

[60] Plato, *Republic*, 378e.
[61] Plato, *Republic*, 378b.

Aesthetic Alchemy: Feature Construction and Conceptual Enrichment through Literature

JOHAN HEEMSKERK

Introduction

Aesthetic experience often takes the form of a revelation, a feeling of gaining something valuable, even when we have no words to articulate what is gained. In what follows I focus on literature and argue that this form of aesthetic experience is bound up with the creation of new conceptual features. I suggest that certain literary aesthetic experiences induce the reader to construct representations of non-obvious features such as unique shapes, exotic sounds, or novel multisensory complexes. Initially engendered by the requirement to step beyond existing conceptual vocabulary, the aesthetic experience then guides the reader through the process of constructing new featural representations. These constructed features are sub-lexical: they are *parts* of concepts rather than wholes, and cannot be straightforwardly expressed in words. Once created, conceptual features can be deployed in concepts, enriching our expressive vocabulary and adding nuance and depth to our thoughts and experiences in a few key ways. *This* is what we gain.

I begin by briefly introducing the theoretical framework of feature representation, explaining how feature representations are typically thought to be created, and the role they play in our cognitive lives. I then argue that conceptual features can be generated by two literary techniques, which I call reduction and combination: literary techniques which shape perceptual representations into novel features. I finish by suggesting that this process has profound effects on cognition more broadly, enriching our concepts and providing the means to cut new, subtle joints in nature.

1. Features and categorisation

Mentally representing features of objects is crucial for categorisation . We use feature representations to discriminate between otherwise similar objects, and to find similarities between otherwise distinct objects[1]. As a prosaic example, consider the features of frogs and toads. They have similar skin colour, texture, pupil shape, tongue and so on. However, we can discriminate frogs and toads based on a feature of their back legs – frogs have longer back legs than toads. Storing two representations, of legs of different lengths, each associated with their respective animal concept, facilitates discriminations between frogs and toads. We can also see the sub-lexical nature of the stored features: both feature representations could be expressed by the word 'leg' but

[1] Schyns, P. G., Goldstone, R. L., and Thibaut, J. P., 'The Development of Features in Object Concepts.' *Behavioral and Brain Sciences,* 21 (1998), pp. 1-17.

they nonetheless differ along the metric of size, the representation of which receives no linguistic marker.

Conversely, representations of features can be used to categorize two superficially distinct objects as the same type. Although there are many design differences between chairs, one can still categorize a chair based on knowledge of a functional feature which belongs to chairs — you can sit on them. In fact, though I shan't labour the point, this is presumably what allows the creative extension of the word 'chair' to things such as tree stumps or the ground. These diverse objects have the crucial feature of being something you can sit on. Featural representations are central to the conceptual apparatus required for categorisation, in both its ordinary and creative use.

1.1. The theory of features

Theoretical accounts of the representation of features typically make two basic assumptions. First, they assume that new featural representations are only acquired, if they are acquired at all, from direct perceptual experience with objects. Second, it is assumed that featural representations form a fixed set[2]. That is, either the stored set of features is acquired early in ontogeny or is innate and immutable. Either way, once you have your set, you are stuck with it. If this were true, one could not expand the

[2] For a classical fixed-set 'geons' view, see Biederman, Irving, "Recognition-by-Components: A Theory of Human Image Understanding." *Psychological Review*, 94.2 (1987), p. 115. For a theoretical statement of this position see Fodor, Jerry A., *The Language of Thought,* Vol. 5, Harvard University Press (1975).

expressive power of their feature set beyond what can be represented by the conjunction of existing features. Both of these assumptions will be questioned in what follows.

Schyns et al. question the second assumption. They argue that novel feature representations can be dynamically created during categorisation, leading to feature sets being flexible. They speculate that 'features could be progressively extracted and developed as an organism categorizes its world'[3]. This view is shared by Lawrence Barsalou[4] who argues that feature representations are constructed by selective attention over parts of perceptual scenes[5]. Selective attention, in addition to isolating the feature, allows for storage in long-term memory[6].

I will endorse this position, though we lack the space to assess the empirical evidence which is typically brought to bear on the proposal. Luckily, there are some compelling theoretical reasons to endorse the position.

First, Schyns et al. note that empirical studies which purport to provide evidence for fixed feature sets[7] are compatible with flexible feature sets. Researchers typically argue for fixed feature sets on the basis that the features posited would be advantageous for categorisation. However, Schyns et al. argue that a feature set which facilitates categorisation is a feature set that would be dynamically constructed to facilitate

[3] Schyns et al. 'The Development of Features in Object Concepts.', p. 4.
[4] Barsalou, L. W., 'Perceptual Symbol Systems', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 22* (1999), pp. 577-660.
[5] For evidence of selective attention see e.g. Shiffrin, R. M. 'Attention', *Stevens' Handbook of Experimental Psychology: Vol. 2. Learning and Cognition*, eds. Williams, B. A., Atkinson, R. C., Herrnstein, R. J., Lindzey, G., and Luce, R. D. (1988).
[6] See e.g. Nelson, Douglas L., John R. Walling, and Cathy L. McEvoy, "Doubts About Depth." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Learning and Memory,* 5.1 (1979), p. 24.
[7] For example, Biederman, I., 'Recognition-by-Components: A theory of Human Image Understanding' *Psychological Review,* 94 (1987), pp. 115–47.

categorisation. Thus, 'evidence in favour of a particular set of features does not entail that the set of features is hard wired'[8]. While not an argument in favour of flexible feature sets, this addresses concerns of incompatibility with existing research. Flexible feature sets can address existing evidence — and more.

Second, considerations of efficiency speak against views in which feature sets are fixed. Schyns et al. maintain that 'most features of the fixed set would never be used; they would keep waiting for their "Godot category"'[9]. If we store a fixed feature set but never have any need for half of the features we store, we are unnecessarily using vital resources for tasks we will never carry out. Conversely, the ability to flexibly create new conceptual features as and when they are needed means that efficiency can be maximised — features will only be created for tasks they are used in.

It may be thought that flexibility is in fact at odds with efficiency; fixed representations surely allow for ease of processing, since cognitive effort is required to construct a new feature. Perhaps flexible sets require less initial storage, the thought goes, but occurrent cognition requires fixed representations. This can be conceded with the following caveat. It may be that much occurrent processing relies on stored features, but this is not at odds with the current proposal. Fixed *features* no doubt play an important role in facilitating effortless cognition, but fixed feature *sets* face a serious limitation when it comes to occurrent processing, as set out in (1), below. This point bears emphasising: certain fixed representations may be crucial for any cognitive system. What is being rejected is that *only* fixed representations are required.

[8] Schyns et al. 'The Development of Features in Object Concepts', p. 10.
[9] Schyns et al. 'The Development of Features in Object Concepts', p. 10.

Positive arguments for flexible construction of features are that they (1) allow for straightforward categorisation rules and (2) allow for ongoing refinement in categorisation. As an example of (1), consider that we are asked to categorize a new type of object with a strange shape. I can either combine my existing shape-based feature representations together according to some complex rule, or I can create a new shape-based feature matching the shape of this new object. The former is cognitively demanding, especially as I need to reinstate this rule every time I encounter a token of the newly encountered type. If, however, I can create a new feature to add to my repertoire, I simply need to token this representation each time I encounter the strange-shaped object, reducing the complexity and hence cognitive effort. In short, feature construction requires an inaugural bout of cognitive effort with a resulting ease of future processing, while combination of existing features requires cognitive effort upon each successive categorisation.

As for (2), imagine that you have a featural representation roughly corresponding to leaves in your feature set. Or, if you prefer your features more fine-grained, imagine that you have features representing leafy colours, and vaguely leafy shapes. Now imagine you take up botany. As you become more and more involved with botany, you will be able to discriminate between trees and leaves with increased reliability and speed[10]. A natural explanation of this improvement is that you have refined your set of features, creating much more specific and differentiated leaf shapes

[10] For explicit evidence of this, see Medin, D. L., Lynch, E. B., Coley, J. D., and Atran, S., 'Categorization and Reasoning Among Tree Experts: Do All Roads Lead to Rome?', *Cognitive Psychology,* 32 (1997), pp. 49-96.

and colours. When encountering a tree with leaves with a subtle but distinctive shape, the fact you have created and stored a representation of just this shape associated with this tree allows for quick and accurate categorisation. You see the leaf: you token your new feature and bring along the concept of the tree.

The argument from (2) demonstrates the indispensability of flexible feature sets throughout ontogeny as we develop more sophisticated categorisation s. However, it might be thought that cognitive flexibility is proprietary to early ontogeny, with fixity becoming the norm during development. It is often thought, for instance, that there is a 'critical window' for first language acquisition. However, we need not be in general pessimistic about the persistence of flexibility. To cite just one example from another area of research: while it appears that categorial colour boundaries are present from 17 weeks' old[11] new discriminative abilities can be generated far into adulthood[12].

These arguments are inferences to the best explanation: more complex models may be available, but simplicity favours the creation of new features. In addition to the foregoing considerations, the content of the next section should make the rejection of the second assumption (that feature sets are fixed) more attractive in light of the plausibility of the analysis on offer.

Neither Schyns et al. nor Barsalou reject the first assumption – that new features are derived from direct perceptual experience of external objects. They contend that new features are generated via categorisation during occurrent perception. In the next

[11] Franklin, Anna, and Ian, R.L. Davies, "New Evidence for Infant Colour Categories." *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 22.3 (2004), pp. 349-377.
[12] Drivonikou, Gilda, et al. "Category Training Affects Colour Discrimination but Only in the Right Visual Field." *New Directions in Colour Studies*, 112.3 (2011), pp. 251-264.

section I reject this assumption. The basic structure of the argument is: reading elicits perceptual representation. Creative sentence constructions, unique to literature, manipulate these perceptual representations to create novel features. During aesthetic experience these featural representations stick in long term memory, creating a store of new features for use in future categorisation. In this way, literary experience adds to our conceptual repertoire without the requirement of occurrent perception of some object in the world.

2. Literature and the construction of novel features

2.1. Reading elicits perceptual representation

I do not dispute that *some* form of perceptual experience is required for the creation of new features. After all, it is natural to think of features in terms of perceptual properties such as shape, colour and texture. However, I contend that direct perceptual experience of the world of objects is not required for the elicitation of perceptual representation. In this subsection I present some evidence which suggests that reading elicits perceptual representation.

A number of studies attest to the activation of sensory systems in the brain during reading[13]. However, activation of sensory systems alone does not indicate that perceptual representations are being deployed – it is just possible that the activation of sensory systems may be entirely unrelated to representation. Perhaps more convincing

[13] For a review see Kiefer, M., and Pulvermüller, F., 'Conceptual Representations in Mind and Brain: Theoretical Developments, Current Evidence and Future Directions', *Cortex,* 48 (2012), pp. 805-825.

are studies which indicate striking behavioural similarities between perception and reading comprehension.

One such study[14] found that when subjects are required to verify whether an object has certain properties, switching costs are incurred for switching between modalities. For example, verifying whether 'blender' has the property of 'loud' after verifying whether 'cranberries' have the property of being 'tart' takes longer than if the property of 'rustling' has just been verified of 'leaves'. This is consistent with what has been found for processing costs when switching between processing in different modalities during perception[15].

Similarly, Solomon and Barsalou[16] found that a feature (e.g. mane) takes longer to verify of an animal if the subject has just read the name of an animal in which the same feature has a different look (e.g. lion versus horse) than if it has the same look (e.g. pony versus horse). This is to be expected if the represented feature, MANE[17], is perceptual, since thinking about manes in relation to a different-looking animal will involve a perceptual representation which is not obviously the same in both cases, requiring more processing time to note the sameness of the feature.

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[14] Pecher, D., Zeelenberg, R., and Barsalou, L. W., 'Verifying Different-Modality Properties for Concepts Produces Switching Costs.', *Psychological Science*, 14 (2003), pp. 119-124.
[15] For example, Spence, C., Lloyd, D., McGlone, F., Nicholls, M. E., and Driver, J., 'Inhibition of Return is Supramodal: A Demonstration Between All Possible Pairings of Vision, Touch, and Audition.', *Experimental Brain Research*, 134 (2000), pp. 42-48.
[16] Solomon, K. O., and Barsalou, L. W., 'Representing Properties Locally.', *Cognitive Psychology*, 43 (2001), pp. 129-169.
[17] Throughout, I use capitalisation to refer to conceptual representations.

This cursory glance at the empirical literature provides good reason to think that reading activates perceptual representations[18]. If so, literature is well-placed to provide the conditions for the construction of feature representations. To anticipate: by forcing us to combine these perceptual representations in complex ways, or by inviting us to focus on just some crucial element of a representation, literature enables the construction of new feature representations from perceptual representations.

2.2. How literature generates features

Literary feature construction is the process by which new representations of features are created by a reader through aesthetic experience. In the remainder of this section I will provide a close reading of a few texts, which provide examples of some of the conditions under which literature can facilitate the construction of new feature representations. The examples will of course lose some of their force in the process of being detached from their original context. I therefore begin by spelling out two of the general introspective phenomena which isolate the relevant aesthetic experience, and the interpretation these phenomena receive on the current theory. I can only appeal to the readers' own aesthetic experiences to confirm my characterisation.

First, there is a feeling of resistance: the text defies superficial interpretation. We must push through *aporia* to join the text in a place where our usual conceptual vocabulary does not allow us to go. Many different strategies may be employed to

[18] Although for an alternate view see Weiskopf, D. A., 'Understanding is Not Simulating: A Reply to Gibbs and Perlman.', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A*, 41 (2010a), pp. 309-312.

achieve this, including explicit visualisation, although how the process consciously manifests will surely be unique to each reader.

It is here that aesthetic experience plays its first and crucial role in the construction of feature representations. It is not enough that we exert cognitive effort to parse the meaning of the text. The uniquely contorted literary constructions explored in this paper certainly begin the process: parsing the text can often be difficult, and require new conceptual resources. However, the construction of these resources is a subtle affair, which must be *guided*. Below (*2.2.1*) I consider aesthetic experience as a variety of metacognition. Consistent with this characterisation, aesthetic experience plays the role of subtly guiding one through the feature construction process. Not only do we monitor the tension involved in generating new conceptual vocabulary, we then become involved in a feedback loop as the aesthetic experience develops over time. The increasing richness of the experience reflects our increasing success as we are nudged towards the construction of novel features.

The result of following this aesthetic experience through is the complement of the feeling of revelation, which is the second element: we have gained something, perhaps intangible, but there is an acquisition. We *know* something a little more than we did before. We may not be able to express precisely what it is, and this is the third element: the inability to articulate what has been revealed. This is unsurprising in the light of the current theory; we have created a *sub-lexical* feature, not a whole concept, not expressed by a word, but a perceptual feature to be used in future categorisation.[19]

[19] One may wish to extend the term 'concept' to cover feature representations. I am using the term as shorthand for a representation which can be lexicalised.

Last, we ruminate. Features are stored in long term memory, and we place them there by pausing over a passage or line. The aesthetic experience, induced, so I will contend, by exactly this mechanism of effort and revelation, causes us to provide ourselves with adequate time and attention to process and store the newly created feature. I do not pretend at deep understanding of the mechanisms of memory. However, as mentioned previously, studies suggest that attention naturally leads to storage in long-term memory[20]. In addition, we may hypothesise that the positive valence of the experience provides motivation to retain what we have acquired.

2.2.1. Metacognition

How should we characterise the aesthetic experience bound up with these introspective phenomena? It is helpful to think in terms of metacognition, the name given to the 'awareness and understanding of one's own thought process'[21] facilitating cognitive control. Joëlle Proust distinguishes between attributive and evaluative accounts of metacognition[22]. In short, attributive theories require that one have concepts of what one's cognitive process involves, to explicitly represent the mental process *as* the process it is. Evaluative accounts, on the other hand, require only that one possess *feelings* about the mental process which do not require determinate representations of the mental process those feelings are about.

[20] For example, Nelson et al. "Doubts About Depth".
[21] Smith, J. David, Michael J. Beran, and Justin J. Couchman. 'Animal Metacognition.' *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Cognition,* eds. Zentall, T.R., and. Wasserman E.A., Oxford, Oxford University Press (2012), pp. 282-305.
[22] Proust, Joëlle. 'Metacognition' *Philosophy Compass,* 5.11 (2010), pp. 989-998.

Aesthetic experiences of the sort identified here can then be defined as *purely evaluative* metacognitive states, since the experience is associated with no determinate propositional content. Indeed, we are unlikely to have concepts of the cognitive mechanisms at work. The term 'purely' is intended to convey that the content literature operates over can only result in this form of metacognition. I spell this out later (*2.3*). In terms of cognitive control, this aesthetic experience reflects our tenebrous awareness of the first stages of the construction of a representation, and guides us towards its fulfilment and storage. In the remainder of this section I posit two literary techniques which give rise to this variety of aesthetic experience. The first is information reduction, and the second is conceptual combination.

2.2.2. Information reduction

It has been found that certain representations can be created through information reduction[23]: aspects of rich perceptual representations can be processed and independently represented, often in service of further cognitive goals. A concrete example of this in the domain of perceptual processing is found in the P-I pathway of V1, an early part of the visual system. The P-I pathway contains representations of differences between perceived colours, without maintaining the information required to specify colour values. The visual system can represent that there is a significant difference between two adjacent colours without representing what those colours are.

[23] Tovée, M. J., *An Introduction to the Visual System*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press (2008), p. 67.

This is thought to be used in edge detection[24]. It has also been suggested that perceptual information can be reduced in order to facilitate motoric function[25]. Part of the incoming perceptual information is siphoned off, leaving only information relevant to location and size, which is then passed on to motor systems to guide action. It does not matter what the colour of the mug is for the purposes of picking it up.

The claim of this section is that poetry and prose can both function to produce representations with reduced information. Indeed, Milan Kundera suggests that a key function of the modern novel is to reduce information. Kundera argues that, in response to the increasing complexity of the world, the author must employ the 'technique of ellipsis, condensation'[26]. The overall information contained in the novel is reduced relative to the world, but we do not affect a simple omission. Instead, information is processed and compacted. Thereby, uniquely literary constructions are formed. We should not, of course, view this as a normative requirement for the novel, and we shall see in the next subsection that it is not universal. However, the employment of this technique aids in the construction of novel features. Let us view a few examples.

In leaving an impression, a poem can direct attention to subtle features which cannot be captured by our existing feature set. What is left when we read Wallace Stevens' description of the flight of a blackbird in 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird'? 'When the blackbird flew out of sight, / It marked the edge / Of one of

[24] Tovée, M. J. *An Introduction to the Visual System*, p. 67.
[25] For example, Zhan, J., Ince, R. A., Van Rijsbergen, N., and Schyns, P. G., 'Dynamic Construction of Reduced Representations in the Brain for Perceptual Decision Behavior.', *Current Biology*, 29 (2019), pp. 319-326.
[26] Kundera, M., *The Art of the Novel*, London, Faber and Faber (1988), p. 71.

many circles'[27] There is no concept which has been conveyed, or no concept which can be expressed either in a sentence or with a lexeme. There is a unique geometry to the blackbird's flight — a natural, spontaneous exercise — when considered as an intersection of static, precise circles. This is emphasised by the specification of the 'edge' of the circles, explicitly bringing out the feature to be entertained or to be 'marked'. If our existing perceptual representations cannot capture this unique edge form, we will be forced to construct a new perceptual feature. If the poem induces the particular aesthetic experience we are interested in, we will retain our new feature. Our future categorisation s of the movement of birds, of metaphorical movements of metaphorical birds, will attain new specificity.

Negation works to remove information. It is as though one is being admonished ('no, not like that. Or that') when holding up new perceptual features for appraisal. An initial statement supplies a picture, the negations reduce information until we arrive at a feature. Stevens describes 'Tomorrow' as 'Brightly empowered with like colours, swarmingly, / But not quite molten, not quite the fluid thing'[28]. The use of the neologism 'swarmingly' forces us to search for features, to bring them before us explicitly, especially when applied to a day, especially when the neologism is combined with terms which do not correspond to the associations we already make with the word the neologism is constructed from. Swarmingly, empowered, but with colours. The negations are, of course, not simple negations — they first invite additional constructions before dismissing them. Would we have considered that 'Tomorrow'

[27] Stevens, Wallace, *Selected Poems*, Kent, Faber and Faber (1953), p. 45.
[28] Stevens, *Selected Poems*, p. 88.

which is ‘empowered’ in a manner which is ‘swarmingly’ to be ‘molten’ or a ‘fluid thing’? Not obviously. One might think not at all. So what is the effect of this introduction and negation? Precisely to sheer off the relevant aspect of the introduced feature. It is not molten, but one cannot help but maintain some feature of what is molten, since it has been introduced at all: it *must* be relevant, somehow.

Other times reduction is not so simple: not a case of a single line or passage which encourages one to directly remove features of features. There is no prescription for reduction: features may be generated by some, not by others, from purely serendipitous passages which are merely the accidental occasions for feature generation, which in reality are induced by the impression of the whole. At no point does Hemingway, for example, explicitly instruct us to remove information. He removes information as a point of methodology. When we read his terse descriptions of the land, of people, or of war, we are not directed to any particular feature. It is up to us how we demarcate the descriptions, but it is certainly true that lacking the richness of ordinary experience of the world, vectors of featural integration become more stark. Hemingway discretises nature and people, leaving us with reduced representations as the lasting impression.

Sometimes, reduction is more straightforward: Sartre asks us to find nothingness in being.

> They would come and slap me on the back and say to me: “Well, what’s special about that glass of beer? It’s just like all the others. It’s bevelled,

> and it has a handle and a little coat of arms with a spade on it, and on the coat of arms is written *Spatenbräu*." I know all that, but I know that there's something else. Almost nothing. But I can no longer explain what I see. To anybody. There it is: I am gently slipping into the water's depths, towards fear.[29]

Again we have the pattern of introduction — in this case deliberate, detailed — and negation. We almost have too much information; it's a beer glass, we get it. But Sartre does not just want to tell us about a glass. He invites us to construct the representation in full, the raw material which negation whittles down to the features. There is a good reason Antione, the narrator, cannot explain what he then sees. Certainly, in one sense he cannot explain it because he feels himself alienated from the quotidian world and its inhabitants. They would never understand. This should not be overlooked, it is an important element of the novel. However, there is a further reason with which we are more concerned: he 'cannot' explain it to others simply because there is no concept for his experience: he has isolated a feature which is sub-lexical.

The feature in question is unlike the features we have so far been considering: it is not a visual or auditory feature of the beer glass. Indeed, intuitively the feature is not 'perceptual' in any ordinary sense. The isolated feature is what we may call the

[29] Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Nausea*, trans. by Robert Baldick, Aylesbury, Penguin Books (1965), p. 19.

Being of the glass. This observation provides us with an opportunity to say some more about the nature of the features we construct during aesthetic experience.

Any feature constructed during aesthetic experience is a feature derived from an original perceptual *representation*, whether or not this representation corresponds to a real object with those features. In this sense we can construct representations of features which have no correlate in the external world. It is not required that a beer glass actually have a phenomenologically accessible Being for one to represent it as such. Nonetheless, if the representation is supposed to be derived from a perceptual representation, there had better be some sense in which the resulting representation of Being is perceptual. But we have said that intuitively what Sartre is describing is not perceptual. It is therefore crucial to make it clear that 'perceptual' is being used here in a technical sense. Following Lawrence Barsalou[30], I expand the scope of the perceptual to include introspective phenomena. On this reading, representations of emotions and cognitive operations are considered perceptual (for instance, I might represent to myself the mental act of deciding). Although I cannot defend this usage here, it is the one I am using.

How does this relate to the Sartre quote? There are many ways of thinking about how essence or Being is represented. To mention just one way which is compatible with the current approach: Susan Gelman[31] hypothesises that we represent essences — the dogginess of the dog, the glassiness of the glass — in the form of emotions. There are

[30] Barsalou, L. W., 'Perceptual Symbol Systems', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 22 (1999), pp. 577-660.
[31] Gelman, S. A., *The Essential Child: Origins of Essentialism in Everyday Thought*, Oxford, Oxford University Press (2003).

feelings associated with dogs or with glasses which pick them out as that specific thing, quite independently of any physical properties. However, while Gelman forcibly argues that simple categories developed during childhood are structured around these feelings, there is no reason to think we have these specific feelings for each *possible* category. I am suggesting that reading Sartre can provide precisely this feeling for the beer glass. By running through the physical properties of the glass and negating them, Sartre leaves us with only a residual feeling, an uneasiness (or 'fear') perhaps, which can be stored as a new feature associated with beer glasses. The aesthetic feeling we gain from Sartre's work induces this construction by subtly guiding us through the careful process of representational merging and reduction – leading us towards our goal.

2.2.3. Conceptual combination

Feature representations can also be created through conceptual combination. This can be achieved in two ways. First, features of two or more concepts constituent to the combination can interact and produce emergent properties, thereby generating a new feature. Second, features of two or more concepts can be transformed so as to force an otherwise impossible analogy. This second mode of feature creation is unique to literature. Literature abuses the specificity of language together with its productivity — our capacity to productively recombine and understand novel conjunctions — to drive through new constructions.

An example of the former type of feature construction is given by Wisniewski and Wu[32], who suggest that concepts combine according to 'interactions' between features which naturally give rise to further emergent features. For instance, the concept ZEBRA FOOTBALL may contain a representation specifying stripes which become smaller towards one point on the ball's surface. Neither ZEBRA nor FOOTBALL contain such a representation. Wisniewski and Wu argue that the feature STRIPES taken from the concept ZEBRA interacts with the representation of FOOTBALL, which entails that the represented shape of the latter constrains the pattern represented by STRIPES. In this case, there is no suggestion that the created feature is *new*: we have all seen precisely the kind of stripes Wisniewski and Wu are referring to. It is literature which is in a better position to offer conceptual combinations with unique constraints. Unique combinations create specific perceptual features by overlaying several perceptual representations: a Venn diagram with our feature perched at the intersection of myriad circles. For example, Thomas Pynchon describes the 'sound of hoofbeats through a metal speaker across a hundred yards of oildrums'[33]. Different readers can of course interpret this sentence in different ways. We may first constrain the sound of hoofbeats through a metal speaker, then project this out across the oil drums, just as in the order of the text. It is also open to us to construct the sound of hoofbeats across the oil drums before passing this sound through a metal speaker. A metal speaker will have multiple interpretative realisations — one may be the representation of a tinny sound,

[32] Wisniewski, E. J., and Wu, J., 'Emergency!!!! Challenges to a Compositional Understanding of Noun–Noun Combinations', in *The Oxford Handbook of Compositionality*, eds. Werning M., Hinzen W., and Machery, E., Oxford: Oxford University Press (2012), pp. 403-417.
[33] Pynchon, Thomas, *Gravity's Rainbow*, London, Vintage (2000), p. 293.

another a low, deep brass. How far is a hundred yards? I might simplify to one hundred meters, a distance I know much better. Perhaps — and there is nothing inherently contradictory about this — the reader may have heard the sound, in which case there will be 'extensional feedback' — associations unique to that reader's experience[34].

The point is that the sound eventually represented, which — if stored, if the surrounding passage induces that signal aesthetic experience — can serve as a feature in future categorisations, will be a result of interactions between the constraints imposed on each of the elements of the sentence by the other elements of the sentence. The perceptual representations elicited by the text in the reader will interact in previously inaccessible ways, producing novel features. It is not impossible that the sound can be heard, as we have noted. However, only literature systematically delivers such distinctive configurations of elements. The CLACK of a hoofbeat, the TINNY sound of the speaker, the hollow PANG of the oildrums, the CLACKING TINNY PANG echoing across a hundred yards. There is an emergent element to this aural representation, another sub-lexical, which the concepts themselves cannot capture, because they are above it (are super-lexical).

Pynchon's description makes *sense*. It might be unusual, but our cognitive effort is not dedicated to parsing the surface-level meaning of the sentence. Rather, it consists in producing an aural representation within the constraints which we have interpreted as given. The second variety of conceptual combination is quite different. It forces together words which are difficult to interpret, leading one to search out which features

[34] Machery, E., and Lederer, L. G., 'Simple Heuristics for Concept Combination, in *The Oxford Handbook of Compositionality*, pp. 454-472.

of the constituent concepts could possibly be relevant, and once one has settled on the features, to transform them to make the sentence meaningful. Gertrude Stein produces the following definition of 'malachite': 'The sudden spoon is the wound in the decision'[35]. A spoon SCOOPS, it can make a wound, a ROUND, CONVEX wound. The spoon is sudden, it is UNEXPECTED, the decision is wounded, it is, perhaps, a decision which is IRRESPONSIBLE, REGRETABLE, or otherwise BAD. How can the scooping spoon unexpectedly make a convex wound in a decision and render it bad? What relation does this have to malachite, an ore used to produce copper (a copper spoon?)? Some feature of decisions, spoons, or malachite falls out of careful reading of this passage, although it resists lexicalisation.

Of course, one may interpret Stein in any number of ways. The suggestion is just that forcing through an understanding can produce a new feature representation. This representation is the result of sampling a little from each input representation — the parts one takes to be relevant given the constraints imposed by the act of interpretation — which are combined to create a new feature.

The two varieties of conceptual combination can occur together, along with reduction. This is (one way) Stein defines a box:

> Out of kindness comes redness and out of rudeness comes rapid same question, out of an eye comes research, out of selection comes painful cattle. So then the order is that a white way of being round is something

[35] Stein, Gertrude, *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein,* New York, Vintage (1990), p. 471.

> suggesting a pin and is it disappointing, it is not, it is so rudimentary to be analysed and see a fine substance strangely, it is so earnest to have a green point not to red but to point again.[36]

Stein once again forces together words the combination of which is hard to parse. Cognitive effort is required to grasp even a surface-level meaning. She combines this with the Venn-like overlap of Pynchon, redoubling the effect at every level. Only moments after we have finished constructing a representation corresponding to 'a white way of being round' we are told, as an 'order', to consider this as 'something suggesting a pin' which is 'disappointing'. Not an easy task. It is almost certain that the representation will be unique to each reader, unable to be presented in lexemes. It is equally clear that not all readers will develop conceptual parts, but those who do will have something ineffable. Who can say where the part will end up, which concepts it will play its part in? To ensure it is a part we have created, not a whole, Stein makes sure that what we have is too 'rudimentary to be analysed' by also employing the tactic of reduction, by immediately negating the order to consider what we have as disappointing: no, 'it is not'.

It is clear that what Stein aims for is not conventional truth or falsity: there is no that-clause involved such that we are invited to believe, for instance, 'that out of selection comes painful cattle'. Rather, the literature we are considering differs fundamentally from other types of writing and linguistic comprehension. We are not

[36] Stein, *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, p. 463.

looking to evaluate the truth of the proposition under consideration. Indeed, the inexpressibility of precisely what it is that we are invited to entertain provides some compelling evidence that the content of Stein's work is *non-propositional* in nature. The explanation for this given in this paper is that the content, which is constructed by the reader, is of perceptual featural representations. I explore this in more detail in the next section.

2.3. The specific role of literature

What these examples suggest is an effect inherent to the production of literature. Perceptual representations, elicited by reading, are disassembled and fused, are 'gathered, packed, transmuted, realigned' into 'rewoven molecules'[37]. By the dual processes of information reduction and combination we expand our conceptual vocabulary in ways previously unavailable.

What distinguishes literature from other textual works such as textbooks?[38] Insofar as this question concerns the aesthetic experience, it can be rephrased as the question why literature evokes a (type of) purely evaluative metacognitive state. There are many possibly relevant reasons that literature would be distinct from other forms of text. In this essay I wish to isolate just two of these distinct aspects of literature as relevant for feature construction. We saw the first above (*2.2*); literature guides one through the subtle art of feature construction due to the unique nature of the aesthetic

[37] Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, p. 698.
[38] Thanks to the editors for asking this question.

experience. Now we can answer why it is that this form of aesthetic experience is generated.

Literature operates, at least in part (*2.1*), on perceptual representations. More broadly, the relevant literary content is *non-propositional*. As mentioned above (*2.2.3*), the literary works under consideration do not aim at fully articulated *belief*. Propositional content is typically understood as contributing to the truth value of a sentence, and in belief contexts is taken to be expressed by that-clauses. It is clear that what we gain from reading Stein, for example, does not fit this profile. Which belief is generated which can feature in a that-clause? Rather, we may consider that the representation produced operates according to compositional principles which fundamentally differ from those which generate propositions. Instead, as has been argued throughout, they give rise to feature representations.

Of course, literature can operate over metacognition itself — over feelings, ideas and all mental phenomena including beliefs. Sartre's Being is an example of this — the feeling sometimes thought to be a stand-in for essence in thinking[39]. However, even this form of literature is *about* metacognition, not about the content of the cognitive states themselves, as one would expect in a textbook. In general, the aesthetic experience isolated above (*2.2.1*) will be associated with non-propositional content with transformation rules[40] unlike those associated with propositions. It is for this reason that literature generates purely evaluative metacognition, since the lack of propositional content ensures attributive metacognition cannot arise.

[39] Gelman, *The Essential Child: Origins of Essentialism in Everyday Thought*.
[40] Perhaps, for instance, geometrical transformation rules.

3. Implications: creativity, categorisation, and concepts

3.1. Creative categorisation

What do we gain from literary construction of features? Typically, featural representations facilitate categorisation. As Schyns et al. point out, and as we discussed in section one, mental representations of features allow us to 'detect and internally represent commonalties between members of the same category as well as differences between categories'[41]. Ordinary features facilitate ordinary categorisation, allowing us to group the world into everyday things like trees, chairs, paving slabs. These categorisation s are pragmatic, they enable us to navigate our world effectively. It is not so clear what categorisation s could be facilitated by features derived from literature, and what those categorisation s are for.

A greater part of creativity — in art, science or the humanities — consists in connecting disparate ideas in new and interesting ways. Armed with an expanded set of rarefied features, previously undiscovered featural overlaps between categories will reveal themselves. An object in the world can be brought under a new category in virtue of it being interpreted as possessing a strange feature, a feature which we would never have created via perceptual attention. Once these initial connections have been made in virtue of featural overlap, new and important comparisons can be made, revealing a network of previously undiscovered relations.

[41] Schyns et al. 'The Development of Features in Object Concepts', p. 16

Conversely, non-obvious distinctions may present themselves between categories previously taken to be similar or the same. If we represent a feature which we passed by in silence before, which had not entered our minds, two superficially identical categories can be discovered to be the distinct entities they are. The discussion of this section is of necessity schematic, lacking concrete examples. Ordinary examples abound; consider the frog and the toad, or alligators and crocodiles (the difference is in the shape of the head). Examples available following creative categorisation are more subtle, and none will be convincing without detailed analysis, a paper of their own.

However, this lack of specificity is not problematic and should, in fact, be expected if we have correctly identified the role of features created by aesthetic experiences. It is not always clear how one makes the creative distinctions and connections one makes. Creativity is often described by those who have it, no matter the discipline, as coming from elsewhere, from a source they cannot describe. When we cut a new joint in nature, the subtle move which makes the cut can seem inexplicable. I proffer one source among many: the creation of novel features engendered by reading literature.

3.2. Conceptual enrichment

In cognitive science and psychology, theorists typically treat concepts as entities which decompose into features. Consider traditional theories of concepts[42]: prototype theories

[42] For reviews see Margolis, E., and Laurence, S., eds. *Concepts: Core Readings*, Massachusetts, MIT Press (1999) and Margolis, E, and Laurence, S., eds. *The Conceptual Mind: New Directions in the Study of Concepts*, Massachusetts, MIT Press (2015).

treat concepts as containing features which are weighted according to how typical they are of the category the concept is about (sweetness is a more typical feature of fruit than the feature of bearing seeds). Classical and neo-classical theories treat concepts as lists of definitional features. However, while each of these theories do treat concepts in this way, they do not necessarily consider the features to be psychologically real elements of concepts. Rather, they are often taken to be theoretical models which the cognitive scientist can use to explain how concepts function.

On the other hand, increasing in popularity are theories which *do* treat features as psychologically (and neurophysiologically) real. Theorists such as Barsalou[43], Connell and Lynott[44] and Koriat and Sorka[45] take concepts to be distributed across featural representations, which are combined into conceptual representations proper. If they are right, and while I cannot defend their proposals here — they are, the implications for the generation of novel features goes further than categorisation.

If esoteric features generated by literature can be built into the fabric of our concepts, the potential benefits are widespread. Daniel Weiskopf[46] points out that psychologists typically use concepts to explain a wide range of phenomena such as planning, linguistic comprehension, inference-making, decision-making, and theory construction. Again, I will not undermine the subtlety of the contribution features can make to our cognitive lives with prosaic examples. Instead, I submit that conceptual

[43] Barsalou, L. W. 'Perceptual Symbol Systems'.
[44] Connell, Louise, and Lynott, Dermot. 'Principles of Representation: Why You Can't Represent the Same Concept Twice', *Topics in Cognitive Science,* 6 (2014), pp. 390-406.
[45] Koriat, Asher, and Sorka, Hila 'The Construction of Category Membership Judgments: Towards a Distributed Model.', in *Handbook of Categorization in Cognitive Science,* Elsevier (2017), pp. 773-794.
[46] Weiskopf, Daniel A., 'The Theoretical Indispensability of Concepts', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences,* 33 (2010b), pp. 228-229.

enrichment benefits us in myriad ways. Concepts are the building blocks of thought. A diverse and expressive array of concepts unlocks the potential for ever more complex thought. Adding features to these concepts multiplies the complexity, providing a set rich in information which can be exploited in thought for all manner of cognitive tasks. Beyond this, richness in our conceptual repertoire is an intrinsic good. In representing the world, richness becomes depth of meaning in experience. Literature can quite literally add more meaning to the world.

4. Conclusion

Implicit categorisation s along subjective lines, using esoteric features derived from experience with literary works, imbue experience with a new depth. Categorisation s of ideas, of the world, along creative lines can open us to important associations and distinctions which can ground new theories in science and the humanities, or engender a new round of artistry, continuing the chain of featural generation. I began by spelling out reasons to think that new feature representations can be constructed. I then presented evidence that literature elicits perceptual representations, so satisfies a requirement for the construction of feature representations. I then speculated that a certain form of aesthetic experience is caused by cognitive effort resolving into the construction of representations. At least, aesthetic experience of this form facilitates the storage of feature representations. I then performed close readings of several literary texts to bring out the mechanisms of information reduction and conceptual combination. I claim these are mechanisms which bring about the construction of new

features. This claim is wholly speculative and its plausibility depends on the plausibility of the close readings, as well as the psychological validity of the proposed mechanisms. I hope, at the very least, to have motivated interest in one potential role literature plays in our wider cognitive lives.

A Symposium on Catherine Homan's A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education: The Play of the In-Between (Lexington Books, 2020).

This author-meets-critics symposium on Catherine Homan's book, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education: The Play of the In-Between*, was hosted by the Society for Philosophy of Creativity. Homan proposes that whereas aesthetic education emphasizes the cultivation of taste, poetic education, as responding both to finitude and tradition, calls for giving shape to oneself though holding open sites of meaning with others through conversation. The papers in this symposium explore the implications of poetic education, focusing particularly on the political implications and potential limitations of such education. If tradition has both marginalized and liberated, how can and should we respond to a poetic education this fraught and ambiguous? How might these limitations point toward possibilities of better futures?

Rebecca Longtin takes up Homan's description of poetic education as a conversation that requires us to be open and attuned to our shared world, but challenges the ontological framework of hermeneutics insofar as it emphasizes unity and wholeness. Taking up Homan's description of the space of play — which is essential to poetic education — as textured by various social frictions, Longtin suggests there is an irreconcilable tension between tradition and resistance. She asks whether a liberatory poetic education remains within the hermeneutic tradition or in opposition to it.

Corey McCall considers the political significance of Homan's project. McCall worries that Gadamer's account of play assumes equal partners, and considers how we might extend Gadamer's account (and Homan's reconstruction of it) to non-egalitarian accounts of play. He draws on the work of Ariella Azoulay, James Baldwin, and Maria Lugones in order to consider play from a non-egalitarian perspective.

Drawing on Homan's discussion of poets Friedrich Hölderlin and Paul Celan, Jessica Elkayam traces the question of what it means for the human being, like the poem, to be underway. She suggests that the analogous relation between poetry and life implied in Homan's argument may help us to see how poetry both embodies and teaches the appropriate measure for the movement of life. On this basis, she inquires whether the central role played by Hölderlin's poetry in Homan's account may rely on nostalgia for a singular or pure origin potentially inappropriate to the measure.

Catherine Homan responds to these invitations for conversation regarding concerns about marginalization and problematic traditions while still holding open possibilities for new futures. She turns to Hans-Georg Gadamer's discussions of the speculative nature of language to argue that because language must be attuned to what remains unsaid, we must also remain open to what is other. Poetry, as teaching us to listen, furnishes us with a critical stance that protects against totalization and reminds us that we are always already in interdependent relations of meaning and action. Moreover, because poetry and play open possibilities we could not otherwise engage, they allow us to begin to give shape to the future in our own present. Poetic education's political dimension lies in this giving shape to the conversation that we are

Introduction to *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education: The Play of the In-Between*

CATHERINE HOMAN

In reading Friedrich Hölderlin's plan to create "New Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man"[1], I began to wonder what it would mean for aesthetic education to be new. Although Hölderlin agrees with Friedrich Schiller that art and beauty possess harmonizing and educative capacities, he remains concerned that the harmony achieved through play relies on self-forgetting. Such play is frivolous in its escapism. Poetry, conversely, is serious because it unites a people not through self-forgetting, but through a recognition of manifold differences within the Absolute. The Absolute, as the primordial unity that grants each thing its existence, is beyond all comprehension. Poetry, he explains, gives form to what is formless, thereby providing a finite instantiation of the movement of the Absolute. Poetry is 'teacher of humanity'[2] because it allows us to attune ourselves to that original unity in which we are all equal. Whereas aesthetic education emphasizes judgments of taste and rational autonomy, poetic education foregrounds self-formation and openness to the other. The "new" here is as

[1] Friedrich Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 68.
[2] Hölderlin, p. 155.

much an instantiation of new modes of orientation as it is a hearkening to what has always already existed and gives rise to our own existence.

Hölderlin's vision of education is not the aesthetic education of Kant and Schiller that emphasizes the cultivation of taste, but a poetic education that teaches us how to give shape to ourselves and our lives and to orient ourselves in our finitude to the infinite. Because poetry is not held to the laws of logic, it can speak what could not otherwise be articulated in philosophy or political thought. Yet, while poetry is speaking, it is also listening. To articulate what cannot fully be-articulated, such as the infinite, poetry must preserve what is other. Poetry teaches us to give shape to ourselves through openness to alterity.

Following Hölderlin's outlines, I suggest that poetic education is a process of learning to cultivate ourselves in response to this poetic existence. Although this cultivation develops out of what we are, we must create anew in our own way, using tradition as a model for how to think about and respond to what is our own. Thus, our attitude toward the past would not be nostalgia, but transfiguration. The role of tradition in education is-not static, but dynamic. In this way, education also seems to be a kind of conversation that listens to tradition while giving voice to our current age.

Despite Hölderlin's misgivings, I argue that poetic education is fundamentally playful. Play is not frivolous, but quite serious. Because play is for its own sake, it is not beholden to the structures of reality in the same way as other activities, such as production, would be. Play takes up objects, themes, experiences from the everyday world, but is also able to engage them in ways not otherwise possible. Play does not

escape reality, but returns to it in different ways. Following Hans-Georg Gadamer and Eugen Fink, I demonstrate that play is a liminal site of the in-between as the space and movement between self and other. Play, like poetry, tries not to collapse but to respond to difference.

To respond to difference, I must remain open to what addresses me. This is as true of my encounter with another human as it is with a work of art. In recognizing the claim to truth, my own understanding is transformed. Through the movement of question and answer, a free, playful space is held open. One of the central tasks of the book is to think through and along with this liminality. How is it that we can attune ourselves meaningfully to what is beyond us? To what we do not yet understand? In what way is this liminality transformative? Paul Celan writes of poetry as the meridian between self and other, between past and future, that crosses and returns. It is like a message in a bottle, a form of address, that requires us to respond. Rather than collapsing dualisms or ruptures, poetry opens new sites of meaning and navigation between self and other, familiar and foreign. If I take seriously what addresses me, I cannot remain unchanged.

Human existence shares in this playful in-between. We are finite, but aware of our finitude. We have multiplicitous identities that are founded in and through our relationships to others and what surpasses. We are born into traditions and practices that inform our development, but, again, our relation to tradition is dynamic. We continue to create tradition as we respond to what is past but give form to new avenues for the future. Education is not so much an epistemic project as an ontological one of

developing ways of being in the world that reflect our in-between condition. Such an education never comes to an end, but is a ceaseless task of vision and revision, of holding out and creating new spaces of meaning through conversation.

Poetry, Play, and the Space of Meaning-Making: A Response to Catherine Homan's *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*

REBECCA LONGTIN

Catherine Homan's 2020 book *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education: The Play of the In-Between* invites us into a conversation that reveals who we are, how we relate to others, and who we can become. For Homan, we are poetic beings with a drive to create, we are a conversation in a shared world that requires us to be open and attuned to others, and we are an ongoing and open-ended process of becoming ourselves. At the centre of her book is the role of art and poetry in education. For Homan, poetry contributes to education and the cultivation of society because it creates a more expansive way to ground ourselves in the world and to encounter conflicts that arise in philosophy, politics, and life. As Homan describes, poetry orients us toward 'the opening of a space for possible encounters, that allows the possibility of doing otherwise, and thus the possibility of freedom'.[1] Poetry invites new possibilities that transform ourselves, our relations to others, and the world in which we live. A poetic education channels this power toward the cultivation of freedom. In other words, 'poetry teaches us what it is to be ourselves'.[2]

[1] C. Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 97.
[2] C. Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 61.

As the title suggests, play — an important concept within German aesthetic theory and the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Eugene Fink — is central to Homan's concept of poetic education. Her main argument rests on the meaning and value of play, which she describes as 'a bridge, or threshold, between poetry and education'.[3] For Homan, play allows poetic education because it orients us to others in ways that are more open, receptive, and transformative than our ordinary modes of being. While I find Homan's account of play and poetic education insightful and promising, I am suspicious of some philosophical commitments that come from her adoption of the hermeneutic tradition — specifically, its ontological framework. In the last chapter Homan responds to recent critiques of hermeneutics and revises the theories of play that Gadamer and Fink offer by taking up contemporary Latinx decolonial theory. I would argue that within *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, there is a tension between tradition and resistance, between what we inherit from the past and the vision we have for the future.

My essay addresses this tension. The first section will summarize Homan's poetic account of play, especially in relation to Fink and Gadamer. The second section will explain the limits of the hermeneutic tradition that require Homan to introduce a different concept of *play-space*. I will also suggest a more radical concept of poetic education is available through the decolonial concept of world-travelling in Anzaldúa's and Lugones's works. My conclusion will reflect on the challenges of developing resistance within a tradition.

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[3] C. Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 97.

1. Poetry, Play, and Meaning-Making

For Homan, poetry and play share a common comportment toward the world in the sense that both allow expressions and engagements that are creative and generate meaning without determinate rules and concepts. Both poetry and play are activities of freedom, and part of this freedom comes from their relation to ambiguity. She notes that both poetry and play are ambiguous in the positive sense of the word: 'Like poetry, play possesses its own logic, yet this logic is at times ambiguous.'[4] Ambiguity is important to poetic language. Rather than providing the clarity and distinctness of a logical proof, a poem offers a more complex and nuanced expression. Poetic ambiguity often captures the mysterious contours of experience — *what it's like* — without overdetermining it. For example, Carl Sandburg's poem somehow captures the exact experience of seeing fog roll into a harbour.[5] Poetic ambiguity also allows for multiple interpretations. It invites conversation and multiple perspectives and requires us to continually revisit something. It shows us that there is always more to understand and that meaning-making is a shared activity. We see this in Audre Lorde's poem 'Recreation,' which plays with both meanings of the term—re-creation as 'making anew' and recreation as a pleasurable activity—as well as the relations between these two ideas. In this poem about poetry, she writes, 'my body / writes into your flesh / the poem / you make of me. / Touching you I catch midnight / as moon fires set in my throat / I love you flesh into blossom / I made you / and take you made / into me.'[6] For

[4] C. Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 9.
[5] "The fog comes / on little cat feet. / It sits looking / over harbor and city / on silent haunches / and then moves on." Carl Sandburg, "Fog" Chicago Poems (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1916), p. 71.
[6] Audre Lorde, *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (W. W. Norton and Company, 1997).

Lorde, poetry is not simply words. It is a practice that touches us, connects us, makes us, and remakes us. We do not just write poetry, we are poetry. Rather than a concept to be pinned down, poetry allows us to play with an experience or idea or with meaning itself.

Play also delves into the richness of ambiguity rather than trying to simplify or clarify it through concepts. Like art and poetry, play unfolds freely. There are guidelines to play, but if we engage in it fully, we invent as we play along. Moreover, learning the rules of a game is a very different experience than playing a game. We only understand the game in playing it, seeing how it unfolds, and responding to the other players. Homan writes, 'because of its fundamental ambiguity, play resists conceptualization, yet it is not devoid of knowledge or content. Rather, play is also always a movement of understanding, but because there always remains something more to be said and understood, it evades the mastery of concept.'[7] Like art and poetry, play allows us to participate in the world in ways that cannot be fully conceptualized or laid out. Play is spontaneous and free, not fixed and determined. When we play, we must be open and respond to what happens. There is vulnerability in that openness. Yet in playing, we discover new things and are transformed by those discoveries. For this reason, Homan describes play as a mode of self-formation.

Like poetry, play transforms us by reorienting us and shifting our horizons. Play allows the world to be bigger, broader, and stranger than we normally experience it. Gadamer, as Homan explains, considers the task of play 'to actively attune oneself to

[7] C. Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 10.

what surpasses the self, rather than to solve a predetermined problem with a definite solution'.[8] Rather than a *res cogitans* or disinterested spectator, the person who plays must be actively engaged. Yet the activity of play does not involve interest in the sense of having a specific purpose or outcome. Homan uses conversation as a primary example of play. A conversation between two people unfolds in a concrete way that is grounded in their relationship, former interactions, and shared history, and yet there is no determined path the conversation must follow. As Homan describes, 'the conversation grows out of and grounds itself.'[9] Both participants in the conversation must be open and responsive to what the other says. The engagement is what matters, not a specific goal that is determined in advance, and both people walk away transformed. The conversation moves to-and-fro. It exists in-between. Play involves a fluid mode of relation to others.

Homan's account of play takes on a more cosmic, ontological meaning when she discusses its ability to make the familiar unfamiliar. Here her analysis rests on Fink's hermeneutical phenomenology. In his lecture course *World and Finitude* (*Welt und Endlichkeit*), Fink emphasizes the way that play inverts the familiarity of the world. As Homan explains, 'Although the world is the most familiar thing we encounter, we have very little understanding of what it is.'[10] Play, like philosophy, evokes our sense of wonder by unravelling our assumptions about the world to reveal its complexity and mystery. For Fink, we make the familiar unfamiliar by relating our finite existence to

[8] C. Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 97.
[9] C. Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 101.
[10] C. Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 135.

the Absolute. As Homan describes, the Absolute is 'the groundless totality that gives rise to all being […] the play between being and nothing, presence and absence'.[11] Here, Fink's Absolute serves as a description for the space of the in-between, a non-totalizing totality that describes the world as resting on a groundless ground, which he calls the earth.[12] The world reveals, while the earth conceals. While the world brings beings into appearance and provides the conditions for experience, the earth conceals and withdraws so that we can never grasp anything completely. Homan describes the earth as the *site of alterity* and explains, 'There always remains something that resists totalization.'[13] Fink's phenomenology rests on this tension between world and earth, which describes the idea that there is always a surplus of meanings and interpretation is an ongoing and infinite task. Not everything is available to our experience and understanding, so we often find ourselves in ambiguous in-between spaces. For Homan, this ambiguous in-between is the space of play.

I, however, would argue that the ontology of the Absolute and the description of the world as a singular totality demonstrate conceptual limitations within the history of philosophical hermeneutics, which tends to bring relations into a whole through frameworks that emphasize coherence and unity, rather than alterity. These appeals to the Absolute and totality seem to limit the ability of hermeneutics to serve as a site of resistance — which this book intends it to be — particularly for those who are so often excluded or harmed when conversations about culture and tradition arise. In the

[11] C. Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 137.
[12] Fink's description echoes the strife between earth and world in Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art*.
[13] C. Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 138.

following section, I will develop this critique of hermeneutics and argue that Homan introduces a more radical concept of play than Gadamer or Fink and in doing so offers more possibilities for poetic education.

2. The Complicated and Troubled Space of Play

The last chapter of *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education* offers a panoramic view of hermeneutics by looking at how contemporary thinkers like Anzaldúa, Lugones, Yancy, hooks, and Alcoff expand and redefine some of its central concepts. I will focus on how Anzaldúa and Lugones challenge the hermeneutic tradition by writing from the perspective of someone who finds themselves in between cultures and in between worlds.

Anzaldúa's works emphasize how one can simultaneously have multiple ethnic and racial identities (the new *mestiza*) and explore the meaning of crossing boundaries and occupying spaces that are in-between (*nepantla*). As Homan notes, Anzaldúa frequently places her various identities with her name — 'Chicana, tejana, working-class, dyke-feminist poet, writer-theorist' — to convey her plural sense of self.[14] Her writing also interweaves multiple languages (English, Spanish, Aztec, Nahuatl, and Toltec) to express each culture, perspective, and voice of her multiplicitous identity. In *Borderlands/La Frontera = The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa defines the new *mestiza* as a complex identity that weaves or kneads (*amasamiento*) together multiple conflicting

[14] G. Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, edited by AnaLouise Keating (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 164. C. Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 166.

selves.[15] Being American, Mexican, and indigenous brings together conflicting cultures and perspectives, particularly between the oppressor and oppressed, the colonizer and colonized. She describes this plurality as a 'clash of voices' that results in 'mental and emotional states of perplexity', insecurity, and indecisiveness.[16] For Anzaldúa, the 'mestiza's dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness'.[17] This is because, as Anzaldúa explains, 'we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates.' [18] She describes that having multiple cultural perspectives leads to 'multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision.'[19] The Aztec term *nepantla* means a state of being in-between, which Anzaldúa says conveys being 'torn between ways'.[20] Her later works discuss *nepantla* (a liminal in-between terrain or state of being) and *nepantlera* (someone who crosses borders and lives in-between cultures or identities), rather than la mestiza.[21] In these works, she considers how crossing borders and occupying liminal spaces create a multiplicitous self that does not easily resolve into one identity. Throughout her works Anzaldúa describes *la mestiza* and *la nepantlera* as restless but creative, as conflicted but able to tolerate the contradictions and ambiguities of life. It is important to note that she sees la mestiza consciousness as participating in *divergent* thinking, which challenges

[15] G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera = The New Mestiza*, edited by Norma Cantú and Aída Hurtado. 4th edition. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), p. 81.
[16] G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, p. 78.
[17] G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, p. 78.
[18] G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, p. 78.
[19] G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, p. 78.
[20] G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, p. 78.
[21] G. Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 180, 302.

hierarchical frameworks and does not try to resolve conflicting points of view — unlike the *convergent* thinking that characterizes Western traditions.[22]

For Anzaldúa, the poet, theorist, writer, 'Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create. It is like a cactus needle embedded in the flesh.'[23] Like Homan, Anzaldúa sees poetry as a way to engage with and understand the complex contradictions and ambiguities that life presents. However, Anzaldúa describes poetry as a way of grappling with a deep pain that has pierced the body. It is a way of transforming pain into new life.

Both Anzaldúa and Lugones describe their experiences of belonging to multiple worlds and existing between cultures. Lugones explores this idea through *playfulness*, which is important for Homan's development of *the play of the in-between*. Lugones describes playful world-traveling as a process of shifting between different worlds of meaning-making that fundamentally transform the self — which is a creative process of undoing and remaking oneself. For Lugones, a *world* is not a collection of things, a definitive place, or a worldview, but a 'construction of life'.[24] People are constructed differently by different worlds such that moving between worlds changes the construction of self. For this reason, Lugones describes traveling as the 'shift from being one person to being a different person'.[25] Lugones argues that traveling between worlds shows us 'we are not fixed in particular constructions of ourselves' but instead

[22] G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, p. 79.
[23] G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, p. 73.
[24] María Lugones, 'Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception', *Hypatia* 2 (1987), 3-19 (p. 10).
[25] Lugones, 'Playfulness', p. 11.

'we are *open to self-construction*'.[26] Moreover, for Lugones such travel must be playful and loving, rather than self-centred and arrogant. Playful world-traveling is about going outside of oneself and identifying with others by entering their world. At the same time, the stakes and challenges of doing so are very different. Lugones acknowledges that she is unable to be playful in certain worlds, particularly when she is not at ease. One has to have a sense of belonging and comfort to feel at home in a world.

Anzaldúa and Lugones's concept of border-crossing and world-traveling as transformative activities of self-construction clearly describe the hermeneutics of poetic education developed throughout Homan's book. Play involves attunement to others and an openness to being undone and remade. Anzaldúa, Lugones, Fink, and Gadamer all understand the self as an on-going, creative project and reject dualism and false binaries. Yet Homan introduces a new idea here when she acknowledges that border-crossing, world-traveling, and self-creation are radically different challenges for the marginalized and oppressed. Homan addresses these challenges by describing the play-space of the in-between as more complicated, difficult, and disruptive than past thinkers have allowed. She states that we should think of this space as *textured* insofar as meaning-making does not 'happen without friction or without some attention to the environment'.[27]

For Homan, play-spaces are not unproblematic. They involve conflict and complications that draw us toward recognition and call for greater responsibility. Homan also explains that hermeneutics necessarily involves recognizing the limitations

[26] Lugones, 'Playfulness', p. 16.
[27] C. Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 174.

of understanding. In the introduction, Homan describes poetry as formative and educational because it is world-disclosing in a way that 'never fully lays bare its subject.'[28] This is a way to acknowledge alterity, rather than trying to encompass all cultures, all perspectives, all experiences into one totality — which would express a colonial mindset. Homan recognizes the *limits* of play and poetry, but I am concerned about whether this recognition is sufficient, especially when we think about education's role in preserving some cultures and erasing others. How does a hermeneutic understanding of limits resolve issues of marginalization? Or does hermeneutics merely point toward possibilities that could resolve such issues?

Here I want to emphasize why I question Fink's appeal to the Absolute. Given Anzaldúa's and Lugones's descriptions of multiple worlds and multiple selves that travel between those worlds, does it make sense to speak of a singular world at all? Do we need to revise the framework of hermeneutics or does it allow for *worlds* whose horizons do not intersect or fuse into one totality? Can hermeneutics assert a shared world without asserting it from a dominant position? My second concern is that extending the concept of play to a 'cosmic metaphor' for all of time and space like Fink does not ground our ways of engaging with others, but instead elevates this idea into an ontological stratosphere purified of politics. Perhaps Homan's sense of the textures and contours of the poetic in-between offers a smaller scope but also greater possibilities for concrete sites of resistance.

[28] C. Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 5.

3. Education and Meaning-Making — Resistance within Tradition?

In the introduction, Homan explains that poetry is situated within a tradition but that it also invites us to 'create anew in our own way' with an attitude that calls for transfiguration rather than nostalgia.[29] Her concept of poetic education takes up tradition in a dynamic way, rather than a static method that merely preserves the past. Yet one of the enduring critiques of hermeneutics is its rootedness in tradition. In the last chapter, Homan defends hermeneutics from a variety of critics, all of whom raise the issue of tradition because it asserts a sense of authority and belonging that can justify — or simply ignore — social and political inequality. Habermas argues that hermeneutics lacks a critical edge by privileging the authority of tradition.[30] Caputo thinks Gadamer should be more suspicious of power plays within tradition,[31] and Fleming questions Gadamer's use of an all-encompassing 'we' because it ignores important differences in who is included or excluded from the conversation.[32] Homan acknowledges these problems while asserting that hermeneutics has the tools for preventing and recognizing oppressive and exclusionary attitudes.[33] Homan asserts throughout her book shortcomings of the thinkers she references, so her work approaches tradition critically, which she argues hermeneutics encourages. Tradition is

[29] C. Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 4.
[30] J. Habermas, 'A Review of Gadamer's Truth and Method', *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricouer*, ed. by Gayle L. Ormiston, Alan D. Schrift, and Thomas McCarthy, trans. by Fred Dallmayr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 213 – 44.
[31] J. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 108.
[32] M. Fleming, 'Gadamer's Conversation: Does the Other Have a Say?', *Feminist Interpretations of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. by Lorraine Code (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 109-32 (p. 119).
[33] Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 156.

not a set of rules or unquestionable values, but conversations we belong to and transform through our participation. At the same time, a poetic education seems to demand resistance to tradition in a way that is more unsettling and revolutionary.

Homan suggests that hermeneutics is a tradition that constantly calls tradition into question. She states that 'hermeneutics challenges the very tradition to which it belongs'.[34] Yet, I would argue that a tradition challenging itself is not the same as a tradition being challenged from the outside, especially when that challenge comes from a radically different cultural perspective that has been ignored, erased, or subordinated. I am not convinced that questioning oneself is a form of resistance. However, Homan's concept of play — especially in relation to Lugones' playful world-traveling, which requires us to see with love rather than arrogance—offers a stronger sense of how education can be a site of resistance. Tradition focuses on one's identity in relation to cultural heritage, while play can happen between cultures and between worlds. Tradition describes a foundation that grounds a culture, but play, as Homan describes it, grounds itself and unfolds in unexpected ways. Tradition has an orientation to the past — even if we must take it up in the present and use it for the future — but play seems less attached to what has happened and more open to possible futures. For these reasons, I see tension between the hermeneutic tradition and playful resistance in Homan's project.

[34] Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 174.

Some Political Considerations of Catherine Homan's *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*

COREY MCCALL

A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education is a wonderful book that engages the concept of play within various German philosophical traditions in order to formulate a poetic pedagogy focusing on self-formation within the context of a world. Extending from the German Idealism of Kant, Schiller, and Hölderlin through the hermeneutic and phenomenological tradition of Fink and Gadamer, Homan shows that this philosophical tradition can itself be read as a series of reflections on worldmaking through *Bildung.* Homan answers Nietzsche's question regarding how one becomes who one is with a reflection on self-formation in nineteenth and twentieth century German thought. One fully becomes oneself by becoming part of a shared historical world; in other words, by becoming part of a tradition. Put differently, one fully becomes an 'I' by becoming part of a 'We', though this identification with an historical tradition also entails that I recognize those who are 'not us', hence an 'I-We-Them' triad is basic to identity formation. This identity rests upon a recognition of difference. Homan uses Gadamer's hermeneutic model of conversation to make sense of how individuals become part of a tradition. I argue that the exclusive focus on this hermeneutic model disregards models of tradition-formation that depend upon domination.

I sketch three alternatives to Gadamer's egalitarian model of tradition-formation through conversation. I begin with Ariella Azoulay's recent account of imperialism and the invention of art in order to present an eliminationist model that seeks the assimilation of cultures through the elimination of traditional worlds. Second, I turn to James Baldwin to sketch a model of exclusionary misrecognition, according to which one realizes that one is not part of a world in which one had previously thought oneself a member. Finally, I look at Maria Lugones's work to show how participation in dominant cultures can prove burdensome for those who are not part of a dominant world. With these three models, I merely seek to supplement the conversation model, which functions as an ideal. Furthermore, these are not meant to exhaust the modes of cultural encounter and transmission. Of course, these are sketches that would need to be fleshed out more fully.

In these reflections, I want to extend Homan's political discussion that concludes her book, and I wish to focus on Gadamer's hermeneutic account of play. Put simply, I worry that Gadamer pays insufficient attention to the political dimension in his account of world-building through play. Drawing upon Homan's engaging analysis, my critique of Gadamer focuses on his hermeneutics of play, for I worry that this inattention to the political dimension of play represents a more fundamental problem for Gadamer's hermeneutics at the same time it signals another, more political, way to reflect on this German philosophical tradition of poetic play.

This critique of Gadamer's inattention to the political dimension is certainly not new. Homan cites critics of Gadamer such as Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida,

John Caputo, Marie Fleming, and Robert Bernasconi who argue that Gadamer's account of tradition espouses a model of conversation between equals at the expense of an agonistic account of tradition in which a dominant tradition is imposed on some in ways that prioritise identity at the expense of difference. Homan summarizes this critique: 'One of the primary objections to Gadamer's hermeneutics is that an insistence on the fusion of horizons and the priority of traditions precludes the possibility of difference. Indeed, one of Hölderlin's primary concerns is that tradition stifles the creativity and formation necessary for becoming who we are. Habermas famously charges Gadamer with fusing hermeneutics and tradition into a single point, thus sacrificing the potential critical dimension of hermeneutics to the authority of tradition.'[1] By prioritising conversation as the basis of tradition, Gadamer ignores the fraught political dimensions entailed in becoming part of a tradition.

Whereas conversation implies two conversation partners talking on equal terms, there are often inequalities that structure the encounter between self and other that this ideal situation of conversation (even an open-ended conversation) fails to capture. In other words, we must consider how tradition can, and indeed often does, entail a failure to understand and interact with another on equal terms and thereby make another person a part of my world on their terms instead of on mine. To reiterate, I briefly consider three different ways that inequality and dominance (or the threat of dominance) can structure one's initiation into a tradition. First (and most extreme) is the attempt at world destruction that Ariella Azoulay has recently argued is one of the primary technologies

[1] Catherine Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education: The Play of the In-Between* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), p. 155.

of imperialism. Second is the exclusionary misrecognition that one discovers when one is not part of a tradition that one had previously thought oneself a part. Finally, I want to consider how dominant traditions are necessarily burdensome for those who do not belong.

Ariella Azoulay's *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* conceives of imperialism as a project of world-destruction. In addition to the incalculable devastation wrought in terms of lost lives and mangled bodies, empire works through the erasure of material worlds and the cultural identities that these material worlds support. Agents of empire erase worlds through the establishment of political and academic institutions that advance imperial aims, the two most important of which are the museum and the archive. Azoulay argues that scholars and soldiers are both agents of empire. While soldiers use power to advance imperial aims, scholars have used knowledge to erase traditional worlds and impose a unified imperial one. Museums appropriate artefacts that performed definite functions within traditional societies and transmute them into artistic objects that are now meaningful only within the context of an art historical account, their utilitarian or ritual function within the traditional world of their origin utterly forgotten.

This means that imperial violence is a condition for the possibility of the institution of art, which Azoulay claims is both a modern and an imperial invention. She discusses the work of scholar and activist Kwame Opoku, who seeks to rescue looted objects from French museums and return them to Benin. 'In his advocacy of the restitution of the looted objects from Benin, Kwame Opoku refutes legal claims to

ownership of these objects by Western museums, as well as the connoisseurs' approach that recognizes art in looted objects rather than the genocidal circumstances of their museal display, making the blood of the people who were expropriated of these objects invisible to them […] Imperial violence is not secondary to art but constitutive of it.'[2] Museums serve to whitewash the violence that made it possible for these artefacts to be included in their collections. Imperialism demands the destruction of traditional worlds of meaning and the imposition of a standard, hegemonic context of meaning derived from the world of the imperial power that can only figure the identity of the oppressed as someone inferior in order to justify the oppressive practices of empire.[3]

Nevertheless, despite this desire to erase traditional worlds of cultural meaning through the imperial encounter, world destruction is never complete. Remnants of these lost worlds persist and form new hybrid worlds within the context of the dominant imperial identity (think about the ubiquity of American culture today, and how various cultural artefacts of film and advertising are reinterpreted within various local cultural contexts). Despite the aspirations of empire, world destruction is rarely total. Another, brief note on Azoulay's book that might prove relevant here: she presents a negative pedagogy, and argues that Americans and Europeans have already been initiated into this world of imperial meaning, so that a project of unlearning imperialism will be a necessary first step if we are to have any hope of overcoming imperialism.

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[2] Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019), p. 59.
[3] This paragraph draws on my review of Azoulay's book. See Corey McCall, 'Ariella Aoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*', *Contemporary Political Theory* (2021).

https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057%2Fs41296-020-00454-w

Let me illustrate a second dimension of asymmetrical tradition-formation, that of exclusionary misrecognition**,** by drawing upon the work of James Baldwin. In his famous Cambridge debate with William F. Buckley in 1965, he discusses an instance of misrecognition that remains all too common among African Americans and members of other marginalized groups who grow up in a world that prioritizes whiteness:

> In the case of the American Negro, from the moment you are born every stick and stone, every face is white. Since you have not yet seen a mirror, you suppose you are, too. It comes as a great shock around the age of 5, 6, or 7 to discover that the flag to which you have pledged allegiance, along with everybody else, has not pledged allegiance to you. It comes as a great shock to see Gary Cooper killing off the Indians and, although you are rooting for Gary Cooper, the Indians are you.
>
> It comes as a great shock to discover that the country which is your birthplace and to which you owe your life and identity has not, in its whole system of reality, evolved any place for you. The disaffection and the gap between people, only on the basis of their skins, begins there and accelerates throughout your whole lifetime.[4]

[4] James Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, ed. by Toni Morrison (NY: Library of America, 1998), pp. 714-715.

Here Baldwin recalls his realization as a child that the white cultural and political world of the United States to which he had previously and mistakenly believed he belonged, in fact was not his world at all. The only way to overcome that terrible realization is to seek out or create other worlds of cultural meaning within (and often in opposition to) the long shadow of the hegemonic white world that had no place for him. The result is a hybrid African-American identity that can only be achieved through the painful realization that you have no place within the dominant white world of the United States. This is where Azoulay's concept of unlearning becomes important: in order to become part of the African-American cultural world, Baldwin had to unlearn the things that had made him mistakenly believe himself a part of the white cultural world. Of course, he still must move through this world, thus enacting the condition of 'double-consciousness' that W.E.B. Du Bois had diagnosed in *Souls of Black Folk* (1903).

Remaining within the cultural contexts of the United States, the negotiation of this dominant cultural identity invariably places a burden on those who must negotiate it that is not borne by Americans who enjoy the privilege of this white identity (and a similar sort of dynamic is at work if we look at the German cultural context of the Enlightenment that demanded assimilation on the part of Jews and other ethnic minorities or Middle Eastern refugees in Germany today). Homan concludes her book with a discussion of Maria Lugones and her concept of world-travelling, but it must be remembered that world-travelling is demanded specifically of those individuals who must negotiate the dominant cultural world in a way not necessary for those privileged to be a part of a dominant culture. For example, learning to speak English is often

necessary for first-generation immigrants, but there is not a reciprocal demand that I learn to speak Spanish. In specific cases, this may be demanded of me, but typically it is not. Laws that mandate English-only classrooms enforce this burden by forcing children to speak the dominant language. World-travelling is often not done on equal terms. Consider how Maria Lugones begins her essay 'Playfulness, World-Travelling, and Loving Perception':

> The paper describes the experience of 'outsiders' to the mainstream of, for example, White/Anglo organization of life in the U.S. and stresses a particular feature of the outsider's existence: the outsider has necessarily acquired flexibility in shifting from the mainstream construction of life where she is constructed as an outsider to other constructions of life where she is more or less 'at home'. This flexibility is necessary for the outsider but it can also be wilfully exercised by the outsider or by those who are at ease in the mainstream. I recommend this wilful exercise which I call 'world'-travelling and I also recommend that the wilful exercise be animated by an attitude that I describe as playful.[5]

Lugones responds to her outsider status with a loving and playful flexibility, but her outsider status is a given. She makes the choice of how to respond to this status; other

[5] Maria Lugones, 'Playfulness, World-Traveling, and Loving Perception', *Hypatia*, 2:2 (1987), p. 3.

responses, those of anger or resentment, for example, are certainly possible and perhaps even common. Note that she begins with the burden of this outsider status as a given — it is something that must be negotiated (she characterizes world-travelling as 'a necessity' for women of colour), and it is therefore a burden that members of the dominant white culture need not face.

In my response to Homan's thought-provoking book, I have briefly examined three ways that self-formation can be complicated and rendered burdensome once we attend to the political dimension implicit within her examination of the German tradition of *Bildung* or self-formation as poetic education. Gadamer privileges the reciprocity of conversation. In an ideal world, we would always encounter one another on equal terms, but in this messy, non-ideal world this does not always happen. In addition to urging that we examine the oppressive and unequal political dimensions to which this tradition does not always adequately attend, I hope to have also shown how we might begin to apply Homan's careful reconstruction of this worldly pedagogy to other cultural contexts.

Propriety to the Measure: A Response to Catherine Homan's *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*

JESSICA S. ELKAYAM

A good book reminds us that we can delight in our finitude. Though there is never enough time to travel to all places and parts unknown, should we accept the invitation to self-transformative discovery issued by a good book, we may realize that in the end we were invited not only to travel from cover to cover, but — to favour Homan's formulation — to play, as if reading could afford us that risky glance at the abyss to which the spirit of all adventure is undoubtedly attuned.

Suffice it to say, Catherine Homan's *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education* is both one such 'good book', and a formative analysis of what it means for any book to be good — i.e., to invite us to delight in rather than decry our finitude by reconnecting to play. Play, Homan argues, is fundamentally a liminal, to-and-fro movement open to encounters that exceed us. Therein does its transformative potential lie. Likewise, the exegetical efforts front and centre in *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education* subtly call attention to the play between author and reader underway in and as the unfolding of its central argument for self-cultivation. *Unterwegs*, underway — a fundamental

characteristic of poetry as conceived by Paul Celan,[1] and, indeed, of the human condition, as Homan encourages us to recognize.

But what does it mean for human being to be underway? In the remarks to follow, I will explore the meaning of this key term so as to open the possibility that poetry and life may be analogous, i.e., that the analogy that obtains between them might furnish a proportion or measure that helps us to understand when poetry has indeed approximated (the dynamics of) life. Bearing this in mind, I suggest, could better situate us to negotiate some of the political pitfalls of a nostalgic relationship to the origin I worry may result from Homan's choice to make Hölderlin the figural axis around which her project turns.

1. Time, Poetry, and Life

Returning now to the meaning of being underway (*Unterwegs*), we might begin with the claim that the spatio-temporal interval opened by the allotment of time to all mortals as a stretch to occupy is singular insofar as it originates and ends *chaque fois unique*.[2] In other words, because the human being is, strictly speaking, (underway as) a span or stretch of spatialized time and temporalized space — or, put another way, a liminal movement between spatio-temporal boundaries — the play of time and space in poetry

[1] Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education,* p. 60.
[2] Referring to Derrida's formulation, *chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*, whereby the death of each person is singular, each time the end of the world. See the volume of the same title, ed. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Paris: Galilee, 2003).

attunes us to our own conditions of possibility and expands our self-awareness, initiating growth. Summarily:

> […] poetry, because it spans between past and future, teaches us that education, as self-formation, is nonlinear. Poetry discloses the world and what exceeds us, but in a way that never fully lays bare its subject…education requires a movement and negotiation between past and future, self and other, familiar and foreign. Here again, we find that the path of human life is eccentric and expansive […].[3]

Two key claims take shape here. First, the poem spans past and future, reaching through time in remembrance (*Andenken*) — casting out and returning to itself — home, but altered. Accordingly, education requires a movement enacted as negotiation of past and future that transforms the educated, not into someone wholly different, but into a more cultivated version of themselves. The fundamental activities that define both poetry and education, therefore, align. And yet, 'parallel' fails to capture their relation.

Hence second, because the human condition, the 'path of human life', is eccentric[4] — not merely as unusual or unconventional, but as not having its axis in the centre, or stretching out away from and returning to a groundless source — poetry

[3] Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education,* p. 61.

[4] Cf. Homan's discussion in Chapter Two, pp. 39-41 especially. In explaining the inner workings of Hölderlin's titular character Hyperion, Homan writes, '[Hyperion recognizes] that the world consists in 'an alternation between opening and closing, between going forth and returning (H 29). If this is the nature of the world, then then so too must it be "so with the heart of man' (H 29)"' (p. 41).

accomplishes something singular for self-formative education (*Bildung*). Poetry is capable of this accomplishment for (or perhaps as) education insofar as it embodies the very conditions that make human life what it is.[5] Though we might be tempted to call the function of poetry a kind of mimesis, an imitation by poetry of the movements of life, I wonder whether we better serve the spirit and the letter of Homan's argument by naming the relation between poetry and life an analogy.

2. Analogy and Propriety to the Measure

Etymologically, analogy, from the Greek *analogos,* means proportion. As the meaning evolves over time and the term is incorporated into Latin, French, and late Middle English, analogy acquires the sense that the measure of likeness between the terms it compares is considered (on the basis of a proportion or measure), appropriate.[6] Thus, if we explore the connection Homan elaborates between poetry and life to ground poetry as central to education (self-cultivation), and if we posit this connection as an analogy, we might wager that life is to breath as poetry is to the breath-crystal that turns it

[5] Homan writes of poetry, as indeed we might say of life, 'Poetry, as the in-between, is fundamentally liminal in this traversing between past and future, self and other, imagined and realized, said and unsaid' (p. 7).

[6] This analogy wager gains some ground in light of Hölderlin's reversal from the aesthetic to the poetic, to which I return in the closing of these remarks. As described by Homan (*A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 2), 'rather than progressing from aesthetic taste to moral universals, [Hölderlin] wants to move from reason to the harmonizing, utopic nature of poetry…[which] gives us access to this already existing [primordial] unity [of subject and object].' In other words, *because* the individuated human being is able to get in touch with the whole from which she is (tragically) sundered in being born (i.e., in being allotted time and death), what we seek for education as self-cultivation is the *way* to get in touch. For Hölderlin, this way is poetry – but not as an instrument, a mere means subordinated to the end it serves. Instead, poetry is that activity that embodies the playful, albeit tragic, movements of life through an articulation that never fully captures the whole, but hearkens to it nonetheless.

(*Atemwende*).[7] Life, as breath, has a rhythm to which the poet becomes attuned. Correspondingly, a poem that merits the name crystallizes life by turning breath corporeally with language — by inflection, meter, rise, fall, sound, and silence. Moreover, this corporeal turning of breath, concretized as the poem's dynamic of address and response, underscores poetry's fundamental openness to alterity. In Homan's words, 'The poem teaches the turning of the breath and the comportment necessary to understand what is addressing us.'[8] Put simply, poetry is integral to education because poetry is intimately attuned to life, which — given a robust understanding of life as finite — means poetry is at the same time, attuned to death.[9] Thus, our task, borrowing from a formulation of Gadamer's, is to 'return to what has been allotted…to the measure' [of the human], i.e., to be subject to the measure and, thereby, free. Such a return to the measure Homan argues is 'what it is to live in poetry,' attuning ourselves to our finitude while remaining open to encounters with the other.[10]

Recalling that the appropriateness of the measure, i.e., the proportion, is what grounds the comparison undertaken in analogy, it seems we could say with some confidence that poetry is analogous to life. We'd have to be careful with this, however, because it is tempting to stop there. Instead, if we take the analogy seriously, we have to consider another question, one that I think points to an unresolved tension in the book that Homan contends with at numerous intervals, viz. the question of the extent to which

[7] Cf. Chapter Two, pp. 77-79.
[8] Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education,* p. 91.
[9] Homan, *A Hermeneuics of Poetic Education,* p. 91. Notably, Homan emphasizes this double attunement with the imperative not to split the 'no' from the 'yes,' which issues from Hölderlin, but which, she holds, is a common thread between Hölderlin and Celan (62-65).
[10] Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education,* p. 91.

the analogy between poetry and life is, in any instance, indeed appropriate. How and when are we to know we have 'returned to the measure', subjected to which we find ourselves free? The matter comes to a head in Chapter Two, in the encounter Homan stages between Hölderlin, Heidegger, and Celan.

3. Is Nostalgia Inappropriate to the Measure?

In response, I frame my question with the following distillation: Hölderlin, for Homan, clearly plays a key role in grounding her turn away from aesthetic and toward poetic education. She argues, 'rather than progressing from aesthetic taste to moral universals, [Hölderlin] wants to move from reason to the harmonizing, utopic nature of poetry.'[11] Thus, rather than overcoming our animal nature to attain to reason, we should stretch reason to its limits via poetry so as to reconnect to the abyssal ground of our origin. Because our origination is individuation from a primordial unity, it is tragic, and the poetry that reconnects us to that unity (however without ground it may be) is likewise tragic. That said, for Homan, Hölderlin falls prey to the prevailing conception of play in the aesthetic tradition, i.e., as a kind of frivolity that makes space for freedom but that cannot be taken seriously. However, Homan stipulates, if we are faithful to Hölderlin, we will discover that it is precisely in his understanding of tragedy that we can locate the dynamics of play, that liminal movement between past and future, birth

[11] Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 2.

and death. Play recast by Homan (to save Hölderlin) is then, perhaps paradoxically, serious business.[12]

Such a conception of play is the common thread between Hölderlin, Heidegger, and Celan as theorists of tragic poetry. But whereas Homan cites a certain affinity between her primary figure and Celan, she argues for a divergence from it in the work (and, more or less intentionally, the politics) of Heidegger. Though all three figures have a keen sense of the recuperative liminal play of past and future that enriches life and gives form to self-cultivation, Heidegger, on Homan's reading, elides conversation and the historical, fixing conversation through his epochal destining of history.[13] Put plainly, Heidegger in effect closes his ears to the entreaty of Celan's poetry to listen, to attune to the burned-out meanings left behind from profound exile at the edge of annihilation. Heidegger is too busy attending to the destining of the history of being to recognize not just the alterity of Celan (and of his experience), but the radical space of possibility Celan's poetry holds open.

For Celan, on Homan's reading, 'when the poem speaks, it is 'mindful of all of our dates' because what is its ownmost is time.'[14] Celan's poetry thus embodies the dynamics of the spatio-temporal movement of human life, but it goes further even than

[12] Further meditation on this theme leads the curious reader to Chapter Three, and specifically to the sub-section 'Playful Freedom'. Therein, Homan reintroduces her reader to the "as if" dimension of play in her treatment of Kant's categorical imperative. She writes, 'This 'as if' is serious, though, even if it is playful (or, perhaps, because it is playful).' Noting prior associations of play and a tragic orientation to life/human reality, we might say that the 'as if' is serious because it is playful. Thus, the question becomes: is the comedic denoted by the reverse of this formulation? If tragedy is serious because it is playful, is comedy playful because it is serious? Cf. Aristophanes' speech in Plato's *Symposium* for one example that might answer in the affirmative.

[13] Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, pp. 81-82.

[14] Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 63.

this: what is beyond the given (that futural stretching of poetry and of the human) remains open, as possibility (hence utopia, the not yet of a possibly different world). Instead of delineating a history/source to be more originarily recovered, Celan submerges the source underwater, choking the breath whose speech would turn to recuperation/recovery. It seems, then, that Celan not only breaks from Heidegger but also from Hölderlin, insofar as recovery of the original 'source' — usually affiliated in the German idiom with self-withdrawing or hiding earth — becomes impossible. Accordingly, the movement (of poetic play) becomes, for Celan contra Heidegger and perhaps Hölderlin, a traversal of not just a finite but of a strangulated space between burned out ashes/traces and annihilation (of both language and person).[15] But as soon as that 'beyond the given', that space of possibility poetry strives/stretches toward, moves to recovery of the original — as soon as that striving is nostalgic for an actual past, a remembrance that intuits an actualized forgotten (as a species of *anamnesis*)[16] — we end up in a conservative ethos that drives poetry to the imaginings of totalitarian ends. If we capture the past in fixity, it seems we foreclose the future, eventuating a future of nightmare proportion.[17]

My question to Homan, then, is this: if it is clear that Celan's radical possibility — the possibility opened up in the strangled space and breath of the poet's exile — is simultaneously a utopic space of play that returns us most appropriately to the measure,

[15] Homan, *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education*, p. 74.
[16] See the first paragraph of 'Do Not Split the No from the Yes: The Language of Life and Death' in Chapter Two, 62.
[17] Like, for example, the Shoah – the initiation of which though not reducible to, nevertheless cannot be divorced from, a nostalgia for a German past to be remembered or recovered by German tragic poetry.

why does Hölderlin remain the central pillar of a project with such liberatory aspirations as yours? Is Hölderlin not subject to further criticism on the grounds that he, too, is nostalgic for a German past, a recovery of the Greeks by the German *Volk* that deradicalizes the possibility to which he otherwise argues we should remain open? Does not Celan's plunging of the source under water suggest a fluidity to origins we would do well to counterpose to the roots or soil of the German nationalist imaginary? I see hints that you may be headed in this direction, and thank you for the occasion to consider this more deeply. To close with the question, once more, what say you to poetry as analogous to life and Hölderlinian nostalgia as potentially inappropriate to the measure?

Imagining New Futures: The Politics of Poetic Education

CATHERINE HOMAN

The very soul of hermeneutics, says Gadamer, lies in recognizing the limits of our own perspective and in understanding another by seeing 'the justice, the truth, of their position. And this is what transforms us'.[1] In this spirit, I begin with sincere gratitude to the respondents for taking up and advancing our conversation in significant ways. Each prompts me to see the justice and truth in their position and each is in turn transformative. The questions and challenges raised are invitations of friendship and learning as much as they are critical engagements, particularly in pointing to the implicit political dimensions of my work. I see this in two ways. The first follows what Gadamer takes to be the soul of hermeneutics, namely a political consideration, a call to do justice, in interpretation. The second follows from concerns regarding the oppressive elements of tradition. I aim to take up these suggestions to show how poetic

[1] Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Interview: The 1920s, 1930s, and the Present: National Socialism, German History, and German Culture', in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, ed. by Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, trans. by Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 135–53 (p. 153).

education sheds light on these political concerns and contains the resources to work toward more liberatory futures.

To reiterate some of the central questions from my respondents, if my claim is that play and poetry create new worlds of meaning, how do we determine whether we have replicated oppressive conditions or whether we have made possible something more liberatory? Does appealing to the mutuality of play and conversation obscure differences in power and access? What do we do with the tradition and figures that are problematic or at odds? How do we know when we have found the proper proportion and not fallen into nostalgia?

To address these questions, I would like to argue that doing justice to another's position is the very basis of responding to our current conditions and working toward better futures. Gadamer suggests that being a thinker and practicing the free exercise of judgment is already sufficiently political because judgment finds its limits when encountering another who also exercises their power of judgment.[2] Here, justice is not the preservation of autonomy or personal liberties, but a recognition that the self can develop only out of an interdependent context through shared language and meaning and that another may be correct in their position. Self-cultivation is a political project.

The speculative character of language affords this recognition and cultivation. In a speculative proposition, the predicate does not add on to the subject, but rather mirrors the subject to show what is otherwise unseen. Gadamer argues language itself is speculative. As finite, each word points both to itself and to what is beyond it. The

[2] Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Von Lehrenden und Lernenden', in *Das Erbe Europas* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), pp. 158–65 (p. 158).

unsaid is always contained within the said. One who speaks also speaks the whole of being.[3] Speculative thinking is an act of memory that moves us out of our everyday forgetful state toward deeper understanding. It reminds us of our own finitude. Hermeneutic experience, as the movement of question and answer, is speculative in continuously reaching toward the totality of meaning. Yet, speculative experience also reveals that things can always be otherwise and are at risk of further rupture. The point is not to protect against disruption, but to remain open to it.

For Gadamer, poetic speech epitomizes the speculative because it 'represents the new appearance of a new world in the imaginary medium of poetic invention.'[4] Poetic speech is an intensification of everyday speech. Both speak the whole, but the poetic word is aware of its limits and what is beyond. As such, poetry teaches us that we are also limited. Gadamer identifies this dynamic at play in Plato's dialogues. In 'Plato and the Poets', he argues that the *Republic* is not an actual guide for education, but instead holds up a mirror to the current conditions of Athens.[5] Plato's target is not poetry, but sophism. As the play of question and answer, the poetic dialogue reveals that education and the development of the just citizen occur not through aesthetic consciousness, but through philosophy. The dialogues initiate a speculative experience by disrupting the current order and pointing to a different future. The ideal city is utopic not as perfect, but as the non-place that does not yet exist. We reach closer to that ideal

[3] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer (New York: Continuum Publishing Group, 2004), p. 465.
[4] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 466.
[5] Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Plato and the Poets', in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, trans. by P. Christopher Smith, Reprint edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 39–72.

not through nostalgia, but a recognition of the limits of our current conditions and a listening to the other.

As one respondent notes, 'In an ideal world, we would always encounter one another on equal terms, but in this world this does not always happen.' I agree. We should neither pretend we already exist in an ideal world nor abandon hope for the future. The speculative experience of hermeneutics shows that we can attune ourselves to the past and present without accepting them uncritically. Our current traditions do entail failures to understand and initiation into them may be due to world destruction or exclusionary misrecognition. If Gadamer is correct, then our task as humans requires us to call our presuppositions into question. Members of dominant groups must critically investigate practices and beliefs that may otherwise seem self-evident or given. Current conditions are challenged by listening to, doing justice to, perspectives that have been marginalized. Attempting to get outside of tradition is self-defeating; our own linguistic practices that allow for understanding give rise to and derive from tradition. Gadamer clarifies that he does not defend any particular tradition, but rather believes that 'there is a horizon of tradition, which always constitutes the background for change'.[6] Tradition exists not as a monolith, but through dynamic creation and recreation. What appears as continuity is often much more complicated, fraught, or ambiguous.

Still, it is not obvious that listening to the other automatically improves conditions. I admit this is a real challenge. Poetic education, as the teaching of how to

[6] Gadamer, 'The Verse and the Whole', p. 150.

listen, could at least move us in better directions and help us identify which directions are indeed better. Here I would follow Alexis Shotwell's argument that we can and should work to create better futures not by rejecting the past, but by 'remembering for the future'.[7] We take responsibility for the future through collective, relational unforgetting.[8] We find ourselves amid traditions and practices, yet we can continue to give shape to understanding and actions that prefigure better futures.

Shotwell locates imaginative possibilities in the speculative fiction of Octavia E. Butler 'because it offers another world — many another worlds — that are better in certain key ways, more liveable for more people, but not completely fixed'.[9] Such worlds are yet to come, but even as better, they are imperfect and dynamic. Similarly, although Butler opens these imaginative possibilities, they rely on themes, such as biological determinism, that remain worrisome and which we must confront.

While Shotwell may not employ 'speculative' exactly as Gadamer does, she similarly demonstrates the speculative experience of engaging with literature and tradition. Works of art point to new futures by orienting us in different ways to our past and present. Moreover, any movement toward the future is necessarily imperfect. There is no perfect primordial ground we can rehabilitate, nor is there an authority who stands beyond criticism. We can draw from figures like Butler or Hölderlin while also retaining critical attitudes. Prefiguration is not predetermination. Our imagined futures are likewise open to constant revision. We cannot guarantee the future, but we must

[7] Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (U of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 48. Shotwell draws this idea from Sue Campbell.
[8] Shotwell, p. 39.
[9] Shotwell, p. 191.

still seek out places of freedom where we can open, even imperfectly, new futures through remembering the past. I agree that play provides precisely such opportunities to reimagine the future.

Yet, how can we tell whether have remembered the past or prefigured identities in non-oppressive ways? How would we distinguish between bad forms of play and those that open new futures? After the January 6th U.S. Capitol insurrection, some commentators suggested that the insurrectionists were merely playing, or that their play acting failed in mistaking fiction for reality.[10] What I would argue, though, is that the insurrectionists surely were not playing, at least not in the way I understand play. The insurrectionists get it wrong in several ways. First, play requires awareness that one is playing; such knowledge allows for the transformative relation to reality. If the insurrectionist mistakes fiction for reality, that is not play, and I would hazard that the insurrectionists were also not simply engaged in fantasy. Second, there is no listening to the other. There is no exchange or movement between self and other, whereas genuine play requires openness to alterity. Third, play is groundless and for its own sake, meaning that it cannot be predetermined or derived. The insurrectionists, however, sought to achieve very specific, predetermined aims. Fourth, many insurrectionists called to rehabilitate a purity that never existed in the first place. Gadamer contends that 'Whoever appeals to authority and tradition will have no

[10] John Ganz, 'Costumes at the Capitol Can't Disguise the Ugly Truth of Far-Right Violence', *The Guardian*, 13 January 2021 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jan/13/costumes-capitol-far-right-violence-washington-dc> [accessed 1 July 2021];
Spencer Kornhaber, 'The Superhero Fantasies of Trump's Mob', *The Atlantic*, 2021 <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2021/01/alternate-reality-trump-capitol-mob/617596/>.

authority. Period. The same goes for prejudgments. Anyone who simply appeals to prejudices is someone you cannot talk with'.[11] Authority derives not from dogmatism, but from the willingness to grant that another may be correct. While I do not know precisely what the insurrectionists were thinking, it does seem that an insistence on conspiracy and a pure tradition reflects a misunderstanding of the meaning of the past and a failure to do justice to another's position. On my account, we can distinguish between bad, pseudo-play that refuses openness and the more liberatory, genuine play that preserves difference.

Returning to the theme of justice, we can see how the hermeneutic experience as speculative is also political. The recognition of the possible correctness of another and the pursuit of understanding hold open both disruptive and unifying moments. If our experiences with art and poetry are speculative, then they also open possible worlds of transformation. Gadamer holds that 'The task of our human life in general is to find free spaces and learn to move therein'.[12] As free spaces, art and poetry allow us to learn to move within them. The spirit of hermeneutics that recognizes its own limits also marks the limits of play and poetry. Both, as finite human activities, are limited while also uniquely bearing this limit in mind. Poetic education fosters listening and the practice of interdependent cultivation.

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[11] Hans-Georg Gadamer, Carsten Dutt, and Glenn W. Most, *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary* (Yale University Press, 2001), p. 44.

[12] Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'The Idea of the University-Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow', in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, ed. by Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, trans. by Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 47–60 (p. 60).

In ‘The Verse and the Whole’, Gadamer reflects that we exist in ‘essential futurity […] in expectation and hope’.[13] Aware of our finitude, we find ourselves outside of ourselves and on the way back out to ourselves. The symbol for this movement is *nomos*, law, measure. To become who we are is to orient ourselves to that measure through an act of remembrance. We cannot cling to what was or what is, but must renew what we hold to be true and to live in the totality of existence. Learning to live in poetry moves toward this renewal because poetry is such a play between verse and whole and a rhythm appropriate to the measure. Our education, our capacity to do justice to new futures, will have to learn again what living in poetry means. To become who we are is to preserve and do justice to what is other.

[13] Hans-Georg Gadamer, ‘The Verse and the Whole’, in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, ed. by Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, trans. by Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 83–91 (p. 90).

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