

**EXPRESSION OUT OF EXPRESSIVE PHYSIOGNOMY:  
PHYSIOGNOMIC PERCEPTION, AESTHETIC ATTRIBUTION AND ART**

**Susan Rebecca Robinson**

**Thesis submitted for award of PhD,  
University of Edinburgh**

**Department of Philosophy,  
Faculty of Arts**

**1997**



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am very grateful for the assistance provided by my supervisors, Mr William Charlton and Mr Peter Lewis in the Department of Philosophy, University of Edinburgh. My very special thanks go to my husband Guy, for his constant encouragement and advice.

The research for this thesis was supported by a Vans Dunlop Research Studentship from the Faculty of Arts, University of Edinburgh, and by a Commonwealth Overseas Research Studentship.

**I certify that this Phd dissertation consitutes my own original work. Where the ideas of others have been employed, these have been acknowledged generously in footnotes and citations.**

## INTRODUCTION

There is no such thing as 'the' problem of expression in art. It would be truer to say that there are as many problems of expression in art as one cares to define.

In the past, talk of expression in art has provided philosophers with a convenient launching point for discussing any one of three clusters of questions which crystallise around the notions of 'expression' and 'art'. The first cluster of questions focuses upon the notion of expression itself, the logic of the word 'express' and its cognates. General philosophical studies devoted to the concept of expression are relatively rare.<sup>1</sup> The concept of expression is defined against the backdrop of three types of activity: the activity of naturally expressing oneself by revealing or evincing emotional states in behaviour; the activity of expressing or asserting thoughts in language; and the activity of creating artifacts such as works of art. One philosophical question to ask here concerns the relationship between the different areas of activity thought to be examples of expression. Can we discover anything in common to all those activities that count as 'expressive'? Is the notion of expression a unified concept in our thinking? That is to say, is there a 'primary' sense of the word 'express' around which we tend to organize a cluster of derivative or secondary uses of the word? In his book *Mind and Art*, Guy Sircello purports to find just such a primary use. Sircello asserts that all uses of 'express' are derivative upon the notion of an expressive 'act'. Sircello conceives an expressive act to be either a manner of acting or a product of acting deemed to be characteristic of a human being who is in a particular emotional or intentional state. Sircello offers the suggestion that works of art, history, philosophy and science, and any activity requiring the use of language, share an important feature with ordinary sorts of expressions like gestures, grimaces, and inarticulate cries. For all of these are construable as 'acts' characteristic of persons who have certain emotions, feelings, and attitudes; who are in particular moods or states of mind, or who possess certain personality-, character-,

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<sup>1</sup>Alan Tormey, *The Concept of Expression: A Study in Philosophical Psychology and Aesthetics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), provides the best general analysis of the concept in recent decades.

temperamental- or mental- traits.<sup>2</sup> Although one might wonder whether the concept of expression is as unified in our thinking as Sircello's analysis would suggest, Sircello's book offers some food for thought.

Philosophers thinking upon the concept of expression might pose the question, which of these three activities - asserting, evincing, creating artifacts - forms the paradigm for our understanding of expression in general. Richard Wollheim describes what he calls the 'conventional' account of expression, which attempts to define expression by contrast with what is indifferently referred to as communication, description or assertion. The conventional account comes up against the hard fact that the dichotomy between expression and assertion does not correspond in any neat way with the distinction between behaviour and language. For we recognize the existence of an expressive use of language, a use displaying the characteristics of behaviour, as when we make interjections. And at the same time, we recognize a form of ritualized or ceremonial behaviour displaying characteristics appropriate to the assertive function of language. These realizations lead to the circular conclusion that

we assert our feelings in language unless we express them, and we express our feelings in behaviour unless we assert them. And to assert our feelings is to reveal them as we do in language unless we happen to express them: and to express our feelings is to reveal them as we do in behaviour unless we happen to assert them.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly an intellectual cul-de-sac the philosopher will wish to extricate himself from!

One issue of particular interest to the philosopher of aesthetics concerns the nature of the concept of aesthetic expression. How is this concept related to the other expressive activities of asserting and evincing? Roger Scruton points at some of the difficulties faced by those seeking a nonaesthetic paradigm upon which to model an understanding of aesthetic expression. Scruton notes that the analogy between expression in art and expression in language remains no more than an analogy. For whilst language is

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<sup>2</sup>Guy Sircello, *Mind and Art: An Essay on the Varieties of Expression* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), p.130.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Wollheim, "Expression", in *On Art and the Mind* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), pp.80-100, pp.85-87.

expressive through the conventions that give it reference, and expressive because it expresses thoughts, a work of art is expressive in neither of these senses. Scruton further notes an important dissimilarity between the expression that takes place in art and the expression or evincing of emotion through behaviour. For the aesthetic use of the term 'express' is generally replaceable by the term 'expressive'. In art there is no expression without expressiveness, and expression becomes expressiveness only when it is in some sense successful. By contrast, a gesture is a natural expression of some feeling if it is a symptom of that feeling, and a symptom need not be expressive.<sup>4</sup> In response to these observations, it might be argued that the fact there is no expression in art without expressiveness probably reveals more concerning the notion of expression in general than it reveals concerning the nature of aesthetic expression in particular. For as Guy Sircello points out, 'express' functions as a 'success' or 'achievement' verb.<sup>5</sup> That is to say, the use of the word 'express' indicates a something captured. Either we have expressed something or we have not; and if we have not, we look to use another verb. Thus, the fact that the action evincing my emotional state is never expressive *qua* symptom, might be used to indicate that there exists a genuine logical or conceptual gap between the concept of expressing oneself and the concept of betraying oneself through ones' emotions.

The second set of questions concerning the issue of expression in art focuses upon the issue of expressive attribution in art. Human beings have a natural inclination to anthropomorphise works of art and parts of nature, describing these with a vocabulary borrowed from the realm of human affective and emotional life. Some philosophers would define the problem of expression in art as one of accounting for this practice of expressive attribution. The last half-century has seen the rise of what I shall call the New Theory of expression.<sup>6</sup> The New Theorists recommended doing away with the excesses

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<sup>4</sup>Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination* (London: Methuen and Co., 1974), pp.215, 214.

<sup>5</sup>Guy Sircello, *Mind and Art: An Essay on the Varieties of Expression* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp.144, 138.

<sup>6</sup>The 'New Theorists' include Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett, 1981), pp.331-332; O.K. Bouswma, "The Expression Theory of Art", in *Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Max Black (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1950), pp.75-101; John Hospers, "Art as Expression", in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,

associated with the traditional theory of expression, “that hopeless theory that works of art are exudates of the soul,”<sup>7</sup> by redefining the problem of expression in art as one of *expressiveness* in art, the problem of explaining the expressive features belonging to works of art. To say that a work of music is sad is not to say that the work expresses or is an expression of sadness. Rather, it is to say that the work is a sad-expression, in much the same way that the features of a dog may carry a sad expression. The New Theory conceives the expressive character of a work of art to be a “human quality” or “feeling quality” of a work of art internally related to the physical and formal properties belonging to the work, so that the relationship between a work of art and its sadness more closely resembles the relationship between a rose and its redness than it resembles the relationship between John and his sadness. In much the same way that the anthropomorphic properties of nature can be explained away by appealing to the physical properties of the situation, so too the expressive character of a work of art might be explained away by appealing to the formal and representational properties belonging to the work.

That the New Theory has tended to set the agenda for contemporary discussions of expression in art may be gauged from the fact that two of the most important theories of musical expression in recent decades tackle the problem of expression in music in the terms laid out by the New Theory.<sup>8</sup> That is to say, both theories assume that, in the words of Peter Kivy, the problem of expression in music is “the ‘special’ metaphysical difficulty (if I may so call it) of how a certain kind of object, musical sound, can possess a certain kind of property, the garden-variety emotion, that can belong only to a very different kind of object, namely a sentient being.”<sup>9</sup> However, despite the undoubted contemporary influence of the New Theory, the view has not been without its critics.

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ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), Vol.I, 46-48; Alan Tormey, *The Concept of Expression*.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur C. Danto, “Introduction” to Alan Tormey, *The Concept of Expression: A Study in Philosophical Psychology and Aesthetics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), p.xii.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Kivy, *The Corded Shell* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980). Reprinted in *Sound Sentiment: an Essay on the Musical Emotions, Including the Complete Text of The Corded Shell* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); and S. Davies, “The Expression of Emotion in Music”, *Mind*, 87 (1980), 67-86. The view is reprised in a slightly expanded form in Stephen Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp.221-240.

<sup>9</sup> *Sound Sentiment*, p.180.

Those objecting to the New Theory typically do so because they believe that at least some descriptions attributing anthropomorphic characteristics to works of art bear greater logical similarities to the expression “John is sad” than they do to the formula “The rose is red”.

Guy Sircello challenges the New Theory by discovering expressive descriptions of works of art that resist the New Theorist’s analyses.<sup>10</sup> When we say “Poussin’s *The Rape of the Sabine Women* is calm and aloof” or that “Breughel’s *Wedding Dance in the Open Air* is an ironic work”, the aloofness and irony described cannot be attributed to these works as features of the subject matter or of the visual design of the respective compositions. The only way to make sense of these statements is to interpret them as descriptions of ‘acts’ performed by the artist in the work. Thus, “Poussin’s *Rape* is calm and aloof” amounts to the claim that “Poussin depicts his subject in a calm and aloof manner”; and “Breughel’s *Wedding Dance* is an ironic picture” becomes “Breughel depicts his scene ironically”. Statements such as “Poussin’s *Rape* is calm and aloof” and “Breughel’s *Wedding Dance* is an ironic work” represent ways of describing works of art that refer in the same breath both to the work of art and to the artist.<sup>11</sup> It is important to realize that the ‘artistic acts’ which Sircello describes do not correspond with a set of facts concerning the historical artist and his methods of production, facts which might be confirmed or denied by appealing to the biography of artist. Instead, in pointing to the existence of ‘artistic acts’ in works of art, Sircello is relying upon a fact which Richard Wollheim draws to our attention, the circumstance that, once we know what the outcome of an activity might be, we can refer to the activity itself in a transparent way that allows us to see straight through the action and focus on its trace. Thus, once we know there is a grey mark on the canvas, we can refer to the artist’s action of placing a grey mark on the canvas, secure in the knowledge that there is no fact of the matter which could emerge refuting the existence of this action.<sup>12</sup> Once an artifact has been produced through human

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<sup>10</sup>Guy Sircello, “Perceptual Acts and Pictorial Art: A Defence of the Expression Theory”, *JP*, 62 (1965), 669-677; *Mind and Art*, pp.19-23.

<sup>11</sup>*Mind and Art*, 27,

<sup>12</sup>Richard Wollheim, “On Expression and Expressionism”, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, XVIII, 67-60 (1964), 270-289; p.282.



intentional activity, it is possible to see the resulting artifact as the product of a particular type of activity: specifically, the activity of producing an artifact of that type. Like the action of placing a grey mark upon a canvas, Sircello's artistic acts are actions that can only be specified in terms of the products of such actions. The act of depicting a scene aloofly is the act of producing a painting that is calm and aloof. Sircello's point in introducing the concept of artistic acts is to make us aware of the fact that human beings have a natural tendency to see intentionally produced artifacts as something more than mere things, for we see these as products of intentional action. Sircello sees a precedent in the realm of human gesture for our tendency, in looking at works of art, to see the trace left behind by an activity as the product of a manner of acting. In much the same way that an 'aloof' picture points to an aloof manner of depicting, so too the fact that Sally has a shy smile upon her face points to the fact that Sally is smiling shyly. A human gesture, like a work of art, may be described both as activity ("Sally smiles shyly") and as product of that activity ("Sally has a shy smile on her face"). This analogy invites for Sircello the thought that the spectator views the work of art as something analogous to a human expressive action. The work of art is, if you like, the artist's 'grimace'.

In introducing the concept of 'artistic acts', Sircello has a much more important point to make than to show that there are ways of describing works of art which resist the analysis of the New Theory. For it is Sircello's contention that the New Theorist shows an inadequate metaphysical understanding when she treats the expressiveness of works of art as of the same order as the expressiveness of natural objects. Works of art are not brute physical objects which happen to possess anthropomorphic characteristics. Works of art are brute physical objects which also happen to be artifacts, the products of human activity. Viewed as the products of that activity, they carry the expressive traces of that activity. The mistake of supposing that we might adequately describe a work of art as nothing more than a brute physical object possessing expressive features, is equivalent to the mistake of supposing that we might adequately describe a human gesture or facial expression as nothing more than a bodily configuration or a lie of the face.



Like Sircello, Virgil C. Aldrich has also expressed dissatisfaction with the New Theory.<sup>13</sup> Like Sircello, Aldrich expresses his dissatisfaction by querying the metaphysical sensitivity of the New Theorist. As the quotation from Kivy indicates, the New Theorist believes that the problem of expression in art is the “special metaphysical difficulty” of explaining how a work of art *qua* insentient thing comes to be the possessor of properties which belong to sentient beings. The New Theorist believes that there is a problem of explaining the expressiveness of works of art because she thinks that works of art are metaphysically queer entities to function as the subject of expressive attributions. Like Sircello, Aldrich diagnoses the New Theorist’s mistake as one of treating works of art, metaphysically speaking, as on a par with natural objects. The New Theorist considers the work of art to be a queer subject for expressive attributions because she accepts a materialist-reductionist analysis of a work of art, one which reduces the work of art to a brute physical thing. Aldrich suggests that, were the New Theorist entirely consistent in her metaphysical instincts, she would subject the concept of a person to the same reductionist analysis and thereby come to realize that the person *qua* brute physical object is also a peculiar subject for expressive attributions. This realization would lead her to seek a more sensitive metaphysical analysis of the nature of persons and of works of art, an analysis explaining how both the person and the work of art may function as the subject of expressive predications.<sup>14</sup> Aldrich suggests that the key to a correct analysis of expressiveness in art and in persons lies in realizing that expressive attributions do not designate properties, and that the notion of expression is necessarily tied up with the notion of a body functioning in a certain way.<sup>15</sup> In particular, Aldrich suggests that it is only after the brute physical thing (human body, work of art) has been subjected to a certain perceptual organisation that it becomes the proper subject of expressive predication. It is a consequence of Aldrich’s theory that, contrary to what the New Theorist supposes, the question of expression in art cannot be conducted in isolation from the question of expression in persons. Aldrich’s critique of the New

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<sup>13</sup>See for instance “‘Expresses’ and ‘Expressive’”, *JAAC*, 37 (1978), 203-217.

<sup>14</sup>Virgil C. Aldrich, *Philosophy of Art* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p.45-46.

<sup>15</sup>“‘Expresses’ and ‘Expressive’”, p.208.

Theory is hidden away within, and presupposes the truth of, a theory of aesthetic perception that is both metaphysically packed and difficult to digest.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, Aldrich's thought-provoking criticisms never achieved the attention they perhaps deserved. In an attempt to partially correct this oversight, Chapter Three below is devoted to explicating some of the dense suppositions contained in Aldrich's theory of aesthetic perception, whilst Chapter Four draws upon this exposition to describe the nature of Aldrich's criticisms of the New Theory.

The third set of issues typically addressed under the heading of expression in art focus upon the relationship between emotion and art, and in particular, the relationship between a perceiver's emotional response and the work of art. In the area of musical aesthetics in particular, the question of expression has in recent years shaped into a debate concerning the relationship between emotion and music. There are two reasons why this should have happened. In the first place, whilst many philosophers believe that felt emotion does not form an essential component in a properly aesthetic experience of a work of art, they also believe that not all ways of emotionally responding to a work of art are aesthetically irrelevant. In particular, an emotional response is deemed to be a properly aesthetic response in the event that the emotion takes the work of art for its object as well as its cause.<sup>17</sup> Many philosophers take it as fact that emotional responses are more frequently felt in the experience of music than they are felt in experiencing other artforms; and that not all of these emotional responses are aesthetically irrelevant responses. In the second place, the tendency to treat the problem of expression in music as one concerning the relationship between emotion and music reflects the hand of the New Theory in shaping the recent debate. For the New Theorists replace talk of expression in music with talk of the expressiveness of music; that is to say, talk of the expressive properties music possesses. Thus, the question of the expressiveness of music becomes a question of the emotion characteristics belonging to works of music and our ways of identifying these; with some philosophers suggesting that we recognize emotion

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<sup>16</sup>Aldrich lays out his metaphysical position in "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", but also in *Philosophy of Art* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963); and "Pictures and Persons - An Analogy", *Review of Metaphysics*, 28 (1975), 599-610.

<sup>17</sup>See for instance Stephen Davies, "The Rationality of Aesthetic Responses", *BJA*, 23, (1983), 38-47.

characteristics in much the same way we happen to notice the expressive character of a person's face or carriage,<sup>18</sup> and others suggesting that our experience of the emotional qualities in music more closely resembles the experience of recognizing emotional qualities in ourselves than it resembles the experience of inferring the emotions of others based upon their behaviour and demeanour.<sup>19</sup>

These two factors have combined to produce a debate between on the one hand, a group of 'emotivists' who believe they experience the emotions they ascribe to works of music; and on the other hand, a group of 'cognitivists' who deny that they experience the emotions they ascribe to musical works.<sup>20</sup> Many emotivists are also arousalists, those claiming that music's expressiveness consists in its power to arouse emotions in auditors. However, not all emotivists are arousalists, for some emotivists would believe that we experience some of the emotions attributed to the musical work whilst not believing that this fact provides an analysis of music's expressiveness.<sup>21</sup> Cognitivists, by contrast, claim that music is sad in virtue of possessing sadness as a quality that we can hear in the music. Many of those contributing to the topic of musical expressiveness in recent years have felt moved, either to argue for an Arousalist position,<sup>22</sup> or else to take exception to a particular Arousalist theory,<sup>23</sup> or to suggest some point of reconciliation between musical cognitivism and emotivism.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Kivy, Peter, *The Corded Shell ; Music Alone: Reflections On the Purely Musical Experience* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), chp.9, pp.173-198; S.Davies, "The Expression of Emotion in Music."

<sup>19</sup>The view of Harold Osborne, "Expressiveness in the Arts", *JAAC*, 41 (1982), 19-29, p.20; and "Expressiveness: Where is the Feeling Found?", *BJA*, 13 (1983), 112-123, p.118.

<sup>20</sup>For the distinction between musical 'emotivism' and 'cognitivism', see Peter Kivy, *Sound Sentiment: An Essay on the Musical Emotions*, p.154. See also Peter Kivy, *Music Alone*, chp.8, pp.146-172.

<sup>21</sup>A point made by Stephen Davies, Review of Peter Kivy's *Sound Sentiment*, *JAAC*, 49 (1991), 83-85, p.83. Jerrold Levinson, "Music and Negative Emotion", in *Music, Art and Metaphysics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp.306-335, p.308, takes the emotivist-but-not-arousalist line when he suggests that "something *very much like* the arousal of negative emotions is accomplished by *some* music."

<sup>22</sup>See for example John Nolt, "Expression and Emotion", *BJA*, 21 (1981), 139-150; Donald Callen, "The Sentiment in Musical Sensibility", *JAAC*, 40 (1982), 381-393; Peter Mew, "The Expression of Emotion in Music", *BJA*, 25 (1985), 33-42, and "The Musical Arousal of Emotions", *BJA*, 25 (1985), 357-361; Stanley Speck, "'Arousal Theory' Reconsidered", *BJA*, 28 (1988), 40-47; Colin Radford, "Emotions and Music: A Reply to the Cognitivists", *JAAC*, 47, (1989), 69-76; and "Muddy Waters:", *JAAC*, 49 (1991) 247-252; Derek Matravers, "Art and the Feelings and Emotions", *BJA*, 31 (1991), 322-331.

<sup>23</sup>Robert Stecker, "Nolt on Expression and Emotion", *BJA*, 23 (1983), 234-239; Peter Kivy, "Sound Sentiment: A Reply to Donald Callen", *JAAC*, 41 (1983), 332-334 and *Sound Sentiment*, pp.153-176; Aaron Ridley, "Mr Mew on Music", *BJA*, 26 (1986), 69-70; and "Pitiful Responses to Music", *BJA*,

# I

This thesis accepts the key assumption underlying the New Theory, that the problem of expression in art is most adequately handled as a problem of expressive attribution. However, this thesis departs from the New Theorist's assumption that the problem of expressive attribution is a free-standing philosophical problem. Viewed in the proper context, the problem of expressive attribution forms part of a far wider problem of aesthetic attribution in general. To see why the problem of expressive attribution might be treated as part of a wider problem of aesthetic attribution, consider the following gushing description:

Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* is a young person's work, a work which exhausts even as it carries the viewer along in the tide of its own momentum. What optimism, what *joie de vivre* does Titian express in this exuberant work! The colours, if they do not exactly shout, certainly speak out in a firm and loud voice. Like the members of the entourage of the young god in the foreground, they jostle one another for the viewer's attention until the viewer doesn't know where to look. At the same time that these mythic beings compete for the viewer's attention in Titian's fantastical landscape, the picture motifs corresponding with each of these beings compete for space in the picture plane. Adding to the sense of competition at both levels is the impression that each of these figures occupies a self-contained world, an impression no doubt accidentally heightened by the fact that the figure in the middle foreground wrestling with snakes represents an overpainting, a late addition to the work. With so much lushness and visual lavishness on offer, the viewer may be forgiven for feeling exhausted by all this vitality.

The New Theorist sets himself the task of explaining the expressive attributions contained in the first two lines of this statement, by appealing to the various nonexpressive properties belonging to the work. Those properties he uses in particular

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33, (1993), 72-74; John E. MacKinnon, "Artistic Expression and the Claims of Arousal Theory", *BJA*, 36 (1996), 278-289.

<sup>24</sup>R.T. Allen, "The Arousal and Expression of Emotion by Music", *BJA*, 30 (1990), 55-61; Jenefer Robinson, "The Expression and Arousal of Emotion in Music", *JAAC*, 52 (1994), 13-22; Alan Goldman, "Emotions in Music (A Postscript)", *JAAC*, 53 (1995), 59-69. Even Peter Kivy, first among cognitivists, has felt moved to make some slight concession to the emotivists. See "Auditor's Emotions: Contention, Concession and Compromise", *JAAC*, 51 (1993), 1-12. Kendall L. Walton's suggestion that music involves the arousal of imaginary emotions, constitutes an interesting attempt at a reconciliationist position. See "What is Abstract About the Art of Music?", *JAAC*, 46 (1988), 351-364. Aaron Ridley's "Musical Sympathies: The Experience of Expressive Music", *JAAC*, 53 (1995), 49-57, is less an attempt at reconciling the claims of the two views than it is a theory purportedly integrating elements of both positions.

will be of two kinds: properties attributable to the representational content or the subject-matter of the work, and certain elements of the visual design. Immediately he faces the problem that the claim “Titian’s *Bacchus and Ariadne* is an exuberant work” constitutes one of Sircello’s artistic acts, translated in the ensuing description into the claim that “Titian depicts his subject-matter exuberantly”. Yet even supposing the New Theorist did find a way of rearticulating this claim without mentioning such metaphysically dubious entities as artistic acts, the New Theorist finds that his philosophical work is not yet at an end. As he works his way through the passage, he finds himself confronted by a host of what look to be philosophically baffling descriptions. What does it mean to say that a brute physical thing, a canvas having had paint applied to it, possesses ‘momentum’? Does it make sense to say that colours may ‘shout’ or ‘speak in a loud and firm voice’? This passage demonstrates that we will fail to make adequate progress in understanding the nature of expressive characterizations of works of art unless or until we understand the nature of aesthetic predications in general.

## II

To lend some order to the ensuing discussion of aesthetic attributions, Chapter One begins with Frank Sibley’s classic distinction between aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts. According to Sibley, the class of aesthetic concepts serves to describe a set of properties which can only be detected through the exercise of a certain perceptivity which Sibley calls ‘taste’. Although careful consideration of Sibley’s account of aesthetic concepts demonstrates that Sibley does not manage to offer a particularly enlightening account of aesthetic perception or aesthetic experience, Sibley’s account does deserve a more sympathetic and attentive reading than many commentators have seen fit to give it. For this reason, I use Chapter One to search for an interpretation of Sibley’s project



yielding a philosophically defensible position which remains true to Sibley's original intentions. Here I argue that Sibley's proposal was far more modest in scope than many of Sibley's critics have supposed, and that in particular, it would be a mistake to suppose that Sibley was using his distinction between aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts to mark out the entire subject-matter of philosophical aesthetics. I also describe the challenge to Sibley's brand of aesthetic realism laid out in an argument given by Roger Scruton,<sup>25</sup> and demonstrate some of the ways in which Sibley might meet Scruton's challenge.

Having made the most sympathetic case possible for Sibley's theory, Chapters Two through Five treat Sibley's views as a launching pad into a wider enquiry into the nature of aesthetic perception and aesthetic judgement. In Chapter Two the suggestion is made that those aesthetic judgements which employ Sibley's taste concepts constitute strongly perceptual judgements: judgements made in the course of acts of perception as opposed to acts of reflective judgement taking the data of perception for their raw materials. This observation provides some circumstantial evidence in favour of Sibley's claim that aesthetic judgement relies upon an ability to notice or detect things. It also represents the final concession made here to Sibley's theory. At the end of Chapter Two, I suggest how a simple perceptual model of aesthetic judgement of the type Sibley offers, one which treats aesthetic sensitivity as an ability to detect a certain species of quality, might be thought to offer an inadequate understanding of aesthetic experience. This is because aesthetic sensitivity might have less to do with the properties detected than it has to do with the way in which the perceiver perceptually organizes the object as she perceives.

The notion that aesthetic perception amounts to a form of perceptual organization raises the possibility that the act of perceiving aesthetically excludes a more ordinary perceptual awareness of the object perceived. With this in mind, Chapter Three examines in some detail Virgil Aldrich's intriguing proposal that aesthetic awareness by its very nature excludes a nonaesthetic awareness of the character of things. Aldrich creates a distinction between a nonaesthetic and aesthetic mode of perception, identified respectively as *observation* and *prehension*, and claims that I cannot simultaneously

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<sup>25</sup>Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination: A Study in the Philosophy of Mind* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), pp.38-44.

observe and prehend the same object. As well as laying out the metaphysical assumptions which underlie Aldrich's distinction, I compare and contrast Aldrich's views on representational perception with the more familiar views of Richard Wollheim. This comparison suggests that there is no obvious implausibility in the use Aldrich makes of his distinction to describe the phenomenon of representational perception. However, as applied outside of the example of looking at a picture, the view runs foul of commonsense. Since no evidence can be discovered in Aldrich's writings to support his claim that aesthetic and nonaesthetic perception represent mutually exclusive modes of perception, I conclude in favour of the commonsense view that perceiving the aesthetic character of things is compatible with what we think of as ordinary acts of perception. That is to say, a sensitivity to the aesthetic character of the object perceived can enter the content of any perceptual act.

Chapter Four previews the account of aesthetic judgement developed in Chapter Five, exploring the nature of physiognomic perception as part of a wider discussion of expression in art. The theories of Aldrich and of Wollheim feature large in this discussion. Because Wollheim draws certain parallels between his theory of pictorial representation and his theory of artistic expression, the discussion, conducted in the previous chapter, of Wollheim's views on the representational perception forms the backdrop to his discussion of expression in art. The reader is doubly rewarded for bearing with the complexities of discussion in the previous chapter, when I draw upon the metaphysical machinery underpinning Aldrich's account of aesthetic perception to explicate his views on the nature of expressive attribution.

In Chapter Five, I suggest how the concepts of aesthetic perception and physiognomic perception may be juxtaposed to provide mutual illumination. The notion that aesthetic perception goes hand in hand with ordinary perception is used to show that aesthetic sensitivity amounts to an assessment of the perceptual character an object possesses for the act of perception, where the perceptual character of an object can be understood as the 'physiognomy' or face the object presents to the act of perception itself. Aesthetic judgements are judgements telling us what it is like to perceive things.

The notion that aesthetic perception constitutes a form of ‘physiognomic’ perception in some extended understanding of the term coheres with the suggestion that aesthetic qualities constitute ‘tertiary’ qualities, qualities of affect which rely upon secondary qualities in much the same way that secondary qualities depend upon primary qualities. I briefly re-examine the question of aesthetic realism as a question concerning the objective status of tertiary qualities, and throw some doubt upon the notion that the doctrine of aesthetic supervenience sometimes used in describing the relationship between aesthetic and nonaesthetic qualities, has any serious theoretical contribution to make in aesthetics.

The model of aesthetic judgement developed here has certain implications for our understanding of the relative distribution of aesthetic taste, or sensitivity. Sibley adopts the traditional understanding of the distribution of aesthetic sensitivity when he confines taste to a small group of gifted individuals. According to the model of aesthetic judgement developed in Chapter Five, perceivers form aesthetic judgements when they determine what it is like to perceive things. This suggests that, in principle, aesthetic judgements can be made by anyone, and may take place in the course of any act of perception. The thesis ends by suggesting that the traditional distinction between those possessing and those lacking taste does not reflect a difference in ability to enjoy aesthetic experiences, but becomes instead a distinction between those possessing and those lacking the ability to articulate the nature of their aesthetic experiences. That is to say, the main difference between these two groups of individuals consists, not in the nature of their experiences, so much as in their command of aesthetic vocabulary.





## CHAPTER ONE

Before we can decide which aspects of the language of art appreciation pose special philosophical puzzles, we will require some grasp of what is meant by an aesthetic attribution or an aesthetic description. The notion of an aesthetic attribution is both *prima facie* obvious yet difficult to make theoretically precise. On the one hand, we might expect to discover some significant connection between aesthetic attributions, aesthetic judgements and aesthetic experiences. On the other hand, we accept that not everything uttered in the context of art appreciation serves to report an aesthetic experience. The man who informs his companions in the art gallery that a picture weighs five pounds, occupies six square foot of space and was painted in 1936, is not making aesthetic attributions. Frank Sibley's famous distinction between aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts<sup>1</sup> articulates the commonsense intuition that not everything uttered in the context of art appreciation constitutes a properly aesthetic remark.

Because Sibley's discussion of aesthetic concepts has achieved the status of a modern classic in the area, I shall use Sibley's insights as a convenient starting point for the theory of aesthetic attribution to be developed in Chapters One through Five. To preview the development of that theory, Chapters Two and Three examine the link between perception and aesthetic judgement. For Sibley, an aesthetic judgement serves to describe a perceptual experience rather than functioning as the conclusion to a piece of reflective reasoning. In Chapter Two I examine and reject two arguments commonly raised against the proposal that aesthetic descriptions serve to designate objective aesthetic properties. The examination of the relationship between perception and aesthetic judgement continues in Chapter Three, where I address the claim sometimes made that an aesthetic awareness of things is incompatible with the performance of more mundane perceptual tasks. Chapter Four focuses upon a special category of aesthetic attributions:

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<sup>1</sup> Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts", *PR*, 68 (1959), 421-450; "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic", *PR*, 74 (1965), 135-159; Frank Sibley and Michael Tanner, "Objectivity and Aesthetics", *PAS*, Supp. Vol.42 (1968), 31-72; pp.31-54. See also some short rebuttal pieces: "Aesthetic Concepts: a Rejoinder", *PR*, 72 (1963), 79-83; and "Symposium on Taste", *BJA*, 6 (1966), 68-69.

expressive attributions, or those descriptions of aspects of works of art employing emotion-terms, terms borrowed from the domain of human affective and emotional life. Although expressive attributions form a proper subset of aesthetic attributions, I shall use the theory of expressive attribution offered in Chapter Four as a starting point for the account of aesthetic attribution developed in Chapter Five.

Here in Chapter One, I offer a more attentive and sympathetic reading of Sibley's discussion of aesthetic qualities than that offered by many of Sibley's commentators. Section I introduces Sibley's distinction, and Section II offers a tentative classification of Sibley's aesthetic attributions. Sufficient time has elapsed since Sibley first introduced the notion of an aesthetic concept to render it both desirable and necessary to say something about the philosophical climate in which Sibley's paper was first received. With this in mind, the remaining sections of this chapter describe the tenor of those criticisms which Sibley's view attracted in the 'sixties and early 'seventies. Here I indicate where I believe the true interest of Sibley's distinction lies, and suggest a plausible reading of Sibley's distinction which counters or avoids the main objections put forward by Ted Cohen and Roger Scruton. In particular, I shall argue that to assume that Sibley was proposing his distinction in an attempt to isolate the subject-matter of aesthetics is not the only, or the best, possible interpretation of Sibley's intentions. What Sibley says is more modest, and therefore more plausible, than many of his critics have chosen to suppose.

## I

Sibley launches his discussion of aesthetic concepts by drawing attention to two different classes of remark we might make. According to Sibley, any ordinarily perceptive person would be qualified to say that something is "large, circular, green, slow, or monosyllabic". However, pronouncing something to be "graceful, dainty, or garish", or claiming that a work of art is "balanced, moving, or powerful" requires

"aesthetic sensitivity, perceptiveness or taste", something beyond ordinary perceptual sensitivity. The first group of judgements involve nonaesthetic concepts, whilst those judgements requiring something beyond ordinary perceptiveness for their formation employ what Sibley calls aesthetic concepts.<sup>2</sup> That something beyond ordinary perceptiveness Sibley identifies as 'taste', in the sense of an ability to notice or discern things.<sup>3</sup>

Sibley appears to believe that aesthetic terms such as 'balanced' or 'moving' or 'graceful' designate dependent, emergent qualities very similar to perceptual gestalts. In the same way that there could not be a grin without a face, aesthetic qualities owe their existence to nonaesthetic qualities, and emerge for us only if we are able to see or otherwise experience those nonaesthetic qualities which are responsible for their existence.<sup>4</sup> Sibley believes that aesthetic attributes have *occurrence conditions*, in the form of those nonaesthetic attributes upon which they causally depend, but that aesthetic terms lack *application conditions*. No set of nonaesthetic attributions is logically sufficient for a particular aesthetic term to apply. To put the same point in a slightly different way, no finite description specifying the occurrence conditions for an aesthetic feature ever puts it beyond doubt that the corresponding aesthetic attribution must apply. Whereas certain features of an object may be causally sufficient to bring about a particular aesthetic feature, reference to these nonaesthetic features will never *belogically* sufficient to ground a particular aesthetic description.<sup>5</sup> This leads Sibley to say that aesthetic terms are not condition-governed, or that they are at best only negatively governed by conditions. While no nonaesthetic quality can count for the presence of an aesthetic quality, the knowledge that a particular nonaesthetic quality is present might lead us to reject a particular aesthetic description.<sup>6</sup> For instance, if I know that the colours of an object are all pale pastels, then it is quite likely the object would not count as garish. Because

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<sup>2</sup> "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic", p.135; "Aesthetic Concepts", p.421.

<sup>3</sup> "Aesthetic Concepts", p.423; "Symposium on Taste", p.68.

<sup>4</sup> "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic", pp.137-138; "Objectivity and Aesthetics", pp.35-36, 39; "Aesthetic Concepts", p.424.

<sup>5</sup> "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic", pp.152-153; "Aesthetic Concepts", p.426. For more on the terminology of *occurrence conditions* and *application conditions*, see Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Descriptivist Account of Aesthetic Attributes", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 28 (1974), 336-352; p.337. See also Jerrold Levinson, "Aesthetic Uniqueness", *JAAC*, 38 (1980), 435-449; p.436.

<sup>6</sup> "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic", p.152; "Aesthetic Concepts", pp.426-427.

aesthetic terms lack governing conditions, the role of the critic is not one of providing 'reasons' for aesthetic judgements, by specifying necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of an aesthetic term. Instead, the role of the critic consists in providing what we might call a 'perceptual proof', pointing out those nonaesthetic features in a work of art most notably responsible for the effect she wants us to see.<sup>7</sup> If you like, the critic's comments serve as a form of verbal gesticulation, an effort to focus our attention in such a way that we come to see the relevant emergent aesthetic qualities for ourselves.

The following represents a master list of the various aesthetic terms Sibley mentions in his discussion, alphabetized as adjectives, nouns and qualifying phrases:

Adjectival aesthetic terms: *anaemic, athletic, balanced, blatant, chaotic, comely, dainty, delicate, dynamic, elegant, exciting, flaccid, forceful, garish, gaudy, gay, graceful, handsome, hideous, insipid, integrated, lanky, lifeless, lovely, majestic,\* monotonous, moving, naive, nostalgic, pathetic, pensive,\* pretty, powerful, sentimental, serene,\* silken, solemn,\* somber, strident, taut, tragic, trite, turbulent, ugly, unbalanced, unified, vertiginous, vivid, wan.*

Nouns functioning as aesthetic terms: *elegance, energy, excitement, flamboyance, frenzy, garishness, grandeur, majesty, plaintiveness, power, sadness, solemnity,\* splendour, stability, strength, unity, vitality.*

Qualifying phrases employed by Sibley in aesthetic descriptions: *conveys a sense of, deeply moving, sets up an exciting tension* (said of a grouping of figures), *exquisite balance, firm line, holds it together, merely touching, never really come to life* (said of characters in a novel), *nobly austere, plaintive tone, powerfully moving; has a certain serenity and repose, (an episode) strikes a false note, subtly varied, telling contrast, tightly knit* (poem), *uncertainty of tone* (in a novel).<sup>8</sup>

In claiming that the person exercising taste notices qualities that others may overlook, Sibley apparently commits himself to a form of realism concerning aesthetic qualities. Precisely what form Sibley's brand of aesthetic realism might take I will be discussing in Section IV below. What is certain is that most persons, Sibley included, would balk at embracing a simple-minded aesthetic realism which claims that each and

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<sup>7</sup> "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic", pp.142-143.

<sup>8</sup>The list has been compiled from "Aesthetic Concepts", passim, especially pp.421-422, 427-428, 448-449; "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic", pp.135, 137, 141, 151, 156; "Objectivity and Aesthetics", pp.31-32, 35, 40, 47, 53. The \* denotes those terms and phrases Sibley attributes to musical works.

every aesthetic description uniquely designates a particular aesthetic property. An examination of Sibley's master list reveals why this is so. Although many of those adjectives Sibley lists ('beautiful', 'comely', 'dainty', 'delicate', 'garish', 'graceful', 'handsome', 'lovely', 'pretty') constitute what I shall call *dedicated* aesthetic words, words whose only or whose primary use is in aesthetic contexts,<sup>9</sup> most of Sibley's aesthetic predicates employ words whose primary use is nonaesthetic. Sibley acknowledges this fact by pointing out that words used in aesthetic descriptions may display varying degrees of metaphoricalness.<sup>10</sup> For instance, Sibley treats the use of some aesthetic terms ('balanced', 'dynamic', 'melancholy', 'tightly-knit') as instances of dead metaphors: terms with nonaesthetic uses which have become a standard vocabulary of criticism following a metaphorical transference. A critic would be employing live metaphor if she were to describe "a passage of music as chattering, carbonated, or gritty, a painter's colouring as vitreous, farinaceous, or effervescent, or a writer's style as glutinous, or abrasive". Sibley suggests that some aesthetic terms ('athletic', 'vertiginous', 'silken'), fall somewhere between live and dead metaphors, and notes words which would seldom if ever be used as aesthetic terms ('brackish', 'clammy', 'curved', 'derelict', 'docile', 'evanescent', 'faithful', 'freakish', 'intelligent', 'noisy', 'red', 'tardy'). The existence of metaphorical aesthetic descriptions serves to undermine the notion that there is, corresponding with each aesthetic quality or aesthetic concept, an aesthetic predicate or aesthetic term uniquely designating that quality or concept. Occasionally, a critic may reach for a metaphorical expression to designate a perceived quality for which she finds no literal expression ready to hand. However, there is no reason to suppose that metaphorical aesthetic descriptions will never be redundant to requirements, in the sense that there will never be occasions when a critic utilizes a metaphorical description where there exists an established literal description to hand.

Before proceeding further with Sibley's views, it will be helpful to clarify some terminology. For most of the time that he speaks of an aesthetic *term*, Sibley has in mind an aesthetic *word*, or a word used to designate either an aesthetic concept or an aesthetic

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<sup>9</sup> Sibley designates these 'characteristically' aesthetic terms. See "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic", p.315.

<sup>10</sup> "Aesthetic Concepts", pp.422, 423 and footnote.



quality. This terminology is unfortunate, since most of Sibley's aesthetic terms really constitute aesthetic uses of words. It is also unfortunate because as the list above suggests, many of those descriptions employed by Sibley - such as 'the characters never really come to life' - descriptions whose use requires a degree of perceptiveness, neither employ a dedicated aesthetic term, nor do these designate readily identifiable aesthetic qualities. To avert potential problems, I shall follow Ted Cohen in treating an aesthetic term as any open sentence of the form Fx which serves to ascribe an aesthetic quality.<sup>11</sup>

Many of Sibley's critics would subject Sibley's aesthetic attributions to a Kantian analysis, treating Sibley's aesthetic judgements as instances of Kant's so-called 'judgement of taste'. For these critics, an aesthetic judgement does not only or not primarily designate some property in the object perceived, but instead serves to express or report the perceiver's experience of the object. Thus according to Ruby Meager, "in saying of a perceptual object or literary work that it is graceful (or ungainly) we are treating the object as the focus of a certain pleasure (or pain) in our imaginative experience of it".<sup>12</sup> To avoid begging any important issues which may be at stake between the Kantian view of aesthetic judgement and Sibley's perceptual account, in what follows an 'aesthetic attribution' will be interchangeable with what Roger Scruton calls an 'aesthetic feature', designating whatever is, or seems to be, attributed by an aesthetic predicate.<sup>13</sup> The notion of an aesthetic attribution or an aesthetic feature constitutes a grammatical rather than an epistemological notion. To say that certain aesthetic predicates ascribe or attribute features or characteristics does not commit us to the claim that each or any of these predicates describes or designates an aesthetic property.

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<sup>11</sup> Ted Cohen, "Aesthetic/Non-aesthetic and the Concept of Taste: a Critique of Sibley's Position", *Theoria*, 39 (1973), 113-115; p.117.

<sup>12</sup> Ruby Meager, "Aesthetic Concepts", *BJA*, 10 (1970), 303-322; pp.315-316. A similar view is proposed by Derek Matravers, "Aesthetic Concepts and Aesthetic Experiences", *BJA*, 36 (1996), 265-277; and articulated by Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination: A Study in the Philosophy of Mind* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), pp.48-56.

<sup>13</sup> Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination*, p.29.

Another crucial point of terminology concerns Sibley's use of the term 'aesthetic quality'. In the widest meaning of the term, an aesthetic feature would be anything which can be mentioned as part of the reason for an aesthetic assessment. Speaking in this wide sense, anything of a perceptible or imperceptible nature affecting the aesthetic value we place upon a particular object, or else contributing to the discovery of an aesthetic difference between two objects, constitutes an aesthetic feature. It is important to note that when Sibley speaks of an aesthetic quality, he is not describing any and every potentially aesthetic feature. This is because Sibley identifies an aesthetic quality as something which can only be detected through acts of perception. In particular, Sibley invites us to think of his aesthetic qualities as emergent qualities: phenomenal features which emerge from the phenomenal nonaesthetic features of objects and in this respect, contrast with those perceptible properties, such as colours, which emerge from the nonperceptible qualities of things. Thus, Sibley points out the contrast between aesthetic qualities and other phenomenal qualities by noting that, while there is nothing about the way a thing looks that makes it look blue, it is the *visible* features of an object which are responsible for its looking graceful.<sup>14</sup> Because he treats an aesthetic quality as a species of emergent quality, it follows that for Sibley, not everything constituting as an aesthetic feature in the wide sense of the term, everything contributing to the discovery of an aesthetic difference between two objects, would count as an aesthetic quality. To illustrate how Sibley would be obliged to omit some would-be aesthetic features from his list of aesthetic qualities, suppose that we are confronted with two paintings whose provenance identifies them as being, respectively, an original Raphael and a copy by the school of Raphael. In the case under consideration, we are to suppose that the original and the school copy are visually indistinguishable in every way, so much so that, were the paintings to be switched in our absence, it would require nothing short of elaborate scientific tests to verify the identify of each painting on re-entering the room. Because the knowledge that only one of the pictures was painted by Raphael would lead us to value the pictures differently, it follows that 'by the hand of Raphael' would count as an aesthetic attribution in the wide meaning

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<sup>14</sup> "Objectivity and Aesthetics", p.35.



of the term.<sup>15</sup> However, in the event that visual inspection alone could not allow us to detect which of two paintings was by Raphael, Sibley would be forced to exclude 'by the hand of Raphael' from his list of aesthetic qualities. Thus, whether intentionally or not, Sibley's discussion of aesthetic qualities serves to replace a more generous notion of 'aesthetic attribute' with the relatively precise notion that an aesthetic attribution ascribes some phenomenal quality. In what follows, I shall mark Sibley's relatively precise, quasi-technical use of 'aesthetic quality', 'aesthetic concept', and so on, by adopting the abbreviated formulae 'a-terms', 'a-concepts', 'a-attributions', 'a-qualities' etc. in place of the more cumbersome 'aesthetic concepts', 'aesthetic attributions', and 'aesthetic qualities'; and 'na-terms', 'na-concepts', 'na-attributions', 'na-qualities', in place of 'nonaesthetic terms', 'nonaesthetic concepts', 'nonaesthetic attributions', and 'non-aesthetic qualities'. I shall revert to the unabbreviated 'aesthetic qualities', 'aesthetic terms', and so on, when discussing the views of writers who may not share Sibley's assumption that an aesthetic quality constitutes a perceivable or otherwise experientially available feature.

## II

Whilst emphasizing the importance of Sibley's contribution to the debate on aesthetic attribution, I would not wish to imply that Sibley provides the final word on the matter. The most notable shortcoming of Sibley's discussion of aesthetic concepts lies in a failure to discriminate between the different forms of taste judgement we make. Roger Scruton begins to hint at the varied nature of aesthetic attributions when he provides a

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<sup>15</sup> Nelson Goodman adopts this wide notion of an aesthetic attribution when he claims that the difference between an original and a forgery currently detectable only through elaborate scientific examination constitutes an aesthetic difference that in time may become apparent to visual inspection. Goodman makes the case for treating such a difference as an aesthetic difference by contending that my knowing which picture is the original and which the fake would bring me to search for differences and thereby shape my perceptions; and makes the further point that there is no way of proving that I shall never perceive a difference between the pictures. See *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), pp.104-107; *Of Mind and Other Matters* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), p.134.

categorization of aesthetic descriptions in *Art and Imagination*. According to Scruton, aesthetic descriptions include:

(a) Predicates used primarily in aesthetic judgements, especially judgements of aesthetic value. Included among these would be such terms as *beautiful, graceful, elegant, ugly*.

(b) Descriptions referring to the formal or technical accomplishment of a work of art, as when we say that a work is *balanced, well-made, economical, rough, or undisciplined*.

(c) Descriptions employing predicates that are normally used to describe the mental and emotional life of human beings. Thus, works of art may be *sad, joyful, melancholy, agitated, erotic, sincere, vulgar, intelligent, and mature*. Scruton notes that almost any mental predicate may be applied to a work of art, and that a proper subset of these predicates may apply to aesthetic objects generally (e.g. *sad*).

(d) Descriptions designating expressive features of works of art. Works of art may be said to express emotion, thought, attitude or character.

(e) Descriptions employing affective terms: terms that are used to express or project particular human responses which they also indicate by name (*moving, exciting, evocative, nauseous, tedious, enjoyable, adorable*).

(f) Statements of comparison using terms in a purely figurative or metaphorical way, as when we speak of a writer's style as *bloated* or *masculine*, a colour as *warm* or *cool*, or a piece of music as being *architectural*.

Realizing that even these categories might fail to exhaust the variety of aesthetic attributions extant, Scruton is moved to observe that we may also describe a work of art in terms of what it represents, its truthfulness, its overall character or genre. Scruton ultimately widens the scope of aesthetic attribution to include anything which can be mentioned as part of the reason for an aesthetic assessment.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, it would be safe to say that Scruton uses the notion of an aesthetic attribute or aesthetic feature in a wider sense than Sibley.

What Scruton offers by way of a classification of aesthetic attributions may be viewed as a rough preliminary sketch of the territory, albeit a mapping with some prominent topological features, in the form of classes of aesthetic attributions, barely indicated or left out altogether. One obvious shortcoming of Scruton's schema lies in the fact that Scruton's category (f) is both too narrow and too broad. Category (f) includes

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<sup>16</sup> Scruton, *Art and Imagination*, pp.30-31.

too little, if (c) and (f) function as mutually exclusive categories. Any serious inquiry into the nature of aesthetic attributions should not legislate from the start that (c) category statements are not metaphorical, since whether or not 'sad painting' constitutes a metaphorical utterance is precisely the sort of matter to be decided in the course of such an investigation. As it happens, many philosophers are not willing to leave open the possibility that 'sad painting' amounts to a metaphorical description. For these philosophers assume that metaphorical language is somehow redundant to theoretical requirements, that metaphorical statements reflect the structure of human thought less well than do literal statements. That which is said metaphorically could be stated more directly and more lucidly in literal terms. According to this view, a metaphorical statement will always be eliminable in favour of a literal paraphrase, and any statement resisting paraphrase will for this reason fail to qualify as metaphorical. It is a point often argued that (c) category statements are ineliminable, to the extent that any attempt to eliminate emotion terms from our aesthetic descriptions would lead to the loss of important truths concerning our aesthetic experience. Those who hold the view that metaphorical statements are eliminable and who accept the fact that category (c) statements are ineliminable would tend to use this fact to demonstrate that (c) category statements are not metaphorical.<sup>17</sup>

As it happens, it is almost certain that Scruton himself would not accept the view that any description which proves to be ineliminable is thereby disqualified from being a metaphor. This is because Scruton believes that a complex system of metaphor underlies our most basic apprehension of music. Scruton points out that our experience of music is structured by metaphors of space, and of objects moving through musical space. These metaphors are ineliminable from our musical understanding to the extent that any attempt to eliminate reference to these metaphors in our descriptions of music would at the same time eliminate the object of musical understanding.<sup>18</sup> In material fact, when we listen to

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<sup>17</sup> Proponents of this view include Malcolm Budd, "Understanding Music", *The Aristotelian Society*, Supp.Vol.59 (1985), 233-248, pp.241-242, and "Music and the Communication of Emotion", *JAAC*, 47 (1989), 129-138, p.132; Stephen Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp.150-151, 162. For more on this proposal, see Chapter Six below.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Scruton, "Understanding Music", in *The Aesthetic Understanding* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1983), pp.77-100, esp.p.85.

music, what we experience is a succession of sounds of different pitches that we move between in our understanding. However, the intentional object of our understanding is not this succession of sounds but a melody that we experience as though it were a single object moving through space. Talk of melodies 'rising' and 'falling', 'advancing' and 'retreating', is more than a convenient way of describing that which we understand when we listen to a piece of music, for any attempt to eliminate these metaphors from our descriptions of music would remove the intentional object of musical understanding, would reduce our experience of music to the experience of mere sounds.

Whilst it is important to leave open the possibility that a variety of aesthetic descriptions may prove to be metaphorical, it is also important to note that the simple act of designating a range of aesthetic descriptions as 'metaphorical' provides little illumination. To call the use of a term 'metaphorical' is not to provide an analysis of that use but to make the historical observation that the term once had a very different use. This suggests that Scruton's category (f), which treats a wide variety of aesthetic descriptions as metaphorical, is almost certainly too inclusive to prove informative. One of the problems here is that Scruton includes within his category (f) synaesthetic descriptions such as 'warm colour' and 'cool colour' as well as the more recognizably metaphorical 'masculine style' and 'bloated style'. Whereas an orthodox metaphor such as 'bloated style' involves a transfer of vocabulary between very different areas of human experience, synaesthetic descriptions such as 'warm colour' and 'bright sound' involve a transfer of vocabulary within the relatively confined area of sensory experience. The experience of sight and sound is so closely related in our minds that for most of the time we fail to realize that calling a sound 'bright' involves a transfer of vocabulary from the realm of visual experience and light to the realm of aural experience. It is only in our more philosophical moments that we would think to question whether what we have here is a transfer of vocabulary, and potentially a metaphorical description.<sup>19</sup> Once again, we

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<sup>19</sup> Perhaps not even in our philosophical moments. Philosophers have been slow to recognize the phenomenon of synaesthetic metaphor. The only two philosophical discussions of synaesthetic metaphor of which I am aware are Glenn O'Malley, "Literary Synaesthesia", *JAAC*, 15 (1957), 391-411; and A.G.Egstrom, "In Defence of Synaesthesia in Literature", *Philosophical Quarterly*, 25 (1946), 1-19. Those looking for insight into the nature of synaesthetic metaphor would be best advised to look to the work of psychologists rather than philosophers. The American psychologist Lawrence E. Marks has made



enter the realm of that which should be determined in the course of, rather than at the start of, all enquiry into the nature of aesthetic attribution.

The existence of synaesthetic descriptions points to the presence of some potentially interesting relationships between aesthetic description in general and our vocabulary of purely sensible description in particular. As J.O.Urmson has observed,<sup>20</sup> we may ascribe characteristics across the boundaries of the sense modalities, and across the boundaries between sensible and non-sensible characteristics. Urmson's observations suggest the existence of two further categories of aesthetic attributions meriting close philosophical attention:

(g) Descriptions of sensations in one sense modality employing terms appropriate to sensations of another sense modality. Thus, warmth and coolness, properties of sensation, may also be attributed to colours. We attribute dullness to pains, but also to colours or sounds. We talk of a *sweet sound* or *sweet taste*; a *sour taste* or *sour note*; and a *mellow taste* or *mellow sound*.

(h) Descriptions employing terms most characteristically occurring outside the realm of appearance as terms of purely sensible description. In "the woman has a *fragile look*", a dispositional term (*fragile*) comes to characterize the look of a person. Similarly, we speak of a *majestic mountain* (mountain with a majestic look); or an *opulent man* (man with an affluent look).

Urmson also notes the existence of the converse case, where terms of sensible description do duty in non-sensible descriptions, as when we speak of a *sweet girl*, a *bright pupil*, or a *bitter quarrel*. Categories (g) and (h) represent subsets of Scruton's category (f). Some might dispute whether the synaesthetic descriptions listed in category (g), statements ascribing characteristics across the sensory boundaries, constitute aesthetic attributions. Provisionally, I would assert that such descriptions become aesthetic attributions whenever they function as descriptions of timbre. When the music critic describes the *whiteness* of a singer's tone, she makes an aesthetic attribution. I would agree with Monroe C.Beardsley's stipulation that a comprehensive theory of

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an extensive study of subjects' reactions to literary metaphor. See for instance, "Synaesthesia: Perception and Metaphor," in *Aesthetic Illusion: Theoretical and Historical Approaches* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), pp.28-40; and other works listed in the bibliography.

<sup>20</sup> J.O.Urmson, "Representation in Music", in *Philosophy of the Arts*, ed. G.Vesey (Royal Institute of Philosophy, 1973), pp.132-146. See in particular pp.142-145.

aesthetic attributions must decide whether timbre terms constitute aesthetic attributions.<sup>21</sup> The theory of aesthetic judgement developed in Chapter Five happily accommodates descriptions of timbre amongst our aesthetic judgements.

Those offering a Kantian analysis of aesthetic attributions typically operate with category (a) cases in mind. Quite how a Kantian would analyse aesthetic descriptions falling into the other categories listed here is difficult to say. Part of the difficulty arises from the fact that the distinction between categories (a) through (h) will often prove easier to fix in theory than in practice. Although undoubtedly there exists a class of dedicated aesthetic words, words whose only or whose primary use occurs in aesthetic contexts, we may experience considerable difficulty when it comes to determining the precise boundaries of that class. For instance, would *delicate*, Sibley's favoured example of an aesthetic attribution, count as an example of a category (a) or category (h) term? When we speak of a person of *delicate constitution*, 'delicate' describes a dispositional tendency of a non-sensible nature. The question arises whether the dispositional, non-sensible use of 'delicate' constitutes the primary use of the term, with aesthetic uses constituting transferred uses; or whether the primary use of 'delicate' occurs in the realm of sensible, or even aesthetic, description; so that talk of a 'delicate constitution' represents an extension of the primary, sensible or aesthetic use of the term. That is to say, do I learn to call a constitution 'delicate' only after I have learned to recognize delicacy in vases; or is it true to say that my ability to describe a vase as 'delicate' presupposes an ability to recognize Sally's delicate constitution? Something like an answer to this question will emerge in Chapters Four and Five below.

Regardless of how we choose ultimately to carve up the domain of aesthetic attributions, this much is certain: there is an enormous variety to be found in the language of art appreciation. In assessing Sibley's account of aesthetic concepts, it is important to keep in mind the variety of forms an aesthetic attribution might take.

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<sup>21</sup> Monroe C. Beardsley, "What is an Aesthetic Quality?", *Theoria*, 39 (1973), 50-70; pp.51-52.

### III

The most obvious questions raised by Sibley's distinction between aesthetic and nonaesthetic qualities are, 'what is the distinction *for?*', and 'does it work?' Any genuine philosophical distinction must meet two criteria: it must create a real separation between two classes of items, and we must possess some motivation for creating this separation in the first place. In the decades immediately following Sibley's original paper, critics have tried to show either that the criterion underpinning Sibley's distinction could never create the precise separation between terms which Sibley was after; or else they have suggested that we could have no motive for wishing to make such a distinction in the first place. Ted Cohen manages to combine these lines of criticism in a manner which misconstrues entirely Sibley's original intentions. In fact, Cohen's criticisms fall so wide of their mark that his paper becomes an object lesson in how *not* to interpret Sibley. I will spend some time on Cohen's interpretation of Sibley in this and subsequent sections, partly because doing so will serve to dispel some common misperceptions concerning Sibley's views; but also because Cohen displays an extreme hostility to Sibley's proposals, and it is important to account for the extremity of that response. In particular, I would suggest that Cohen's interpretation of Sibley serves to reveal an attitude pervading the discipline of aesthetics at the time that Cohen was writing his paper.

Cohen organizes his discussion of Sibley around the following set of claims:

There is, it seems to me, no need to defend the distinction. Once examples have been given to illustrate it, I believe almost anyone could continue to place further examples - barring of course the expected debatable, ambiguous, or borderline cases - in one category or the other. To deny such a distinction is to be precluded from discussing most questions of aesthetics at all, just as one could hardly begin ethics without prior recognition that some judgments and notions do, while others do not, concern morality. One must be able to recognize examples of one's subject matter. Those who in their theoretical moments deny any such distinction usually show in their practice that they can make it quite adequately.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic", p.135.

That is to say, Sibley believes that we make an intuitive distinction between two classes of concepts; and that it is both our ability to make this distinction on an informal basis, and our ability to give form to this distinction in our more theoretical moments, which underpins the discipline of philosophical aesthetics. Cohen disagrees with each point Sibley makes here. According to Cohen, the distinction is neither intuitive nor rooted in our practice. If the distinction were intuitive or rooted in our practice, then people would tend to converge in their attempts to identify aesthetic concepts and nonaesthetic concepts. To show that no such convergence of intuitions exists, Cohen provides a list of terms employed in art criticism which he believes will resist classification under Sibley's distinction. Cohen believes that we wouldn't know how to follow the instruction to divide this list into aesthetic terms and nonaesthetic terms. In the unlikely event that people could perform this task, we would find that individuals complying with this instruction would inevitably generate different lists.<sup>23</sup>

Cohen supposes that if the distinction serves any theoretical function, it must do so at the level of meta-aesthetics. That is to say, the distinction is not itself part of aesthetics but something we make before embarking on aesthetics. As Cohen sees it, Sibley's notion of taste functions as a practical device allowing us to mark out the subject matter of aesthetics, much as someone might employ a tape measure to set out a plot of land. Any terms found to require the exercise of taste for their application will be aesthetic terms. Any judgement employing an aesthetic term constitutes an aesthetic judgement. The mechanical task of gathering together the class of aesthetic terms and aesthetic judgements gives us the subject matter of aesthetics. However, the notion of taste proves at best an inconsistent tool when it comes to sorting the aesthetic from the nonaesthetic. According to Cohen, we don't know how to use Sibley's distinction because we don't know what it means to say we have exercised taste in using a concept. In illustration of this point, Cohen nominates *gracefulness* as an example of an aesthetic attribute that does not require taste for its detection. Cohen points out that whilst taste implies "more than normal ability

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<sup>23</sup> Cohen, pp.137-140. Marcia Muelder Eaton also complains that she does not know how to go on adding to those exemplary lists of aesthetic and nonaesthetic terms which writers on the topic of aesthetic attributions tend to produce. See "The Intrinsic, Non-Supervenient Nature of Aesthetic Properties", *JAAC*, 52 (1994), 383-397; p.387.



to notice or detect things", it requires no special degree of perceptiveness to see that one line is more graceful than another. Far from it being the case that Sibley's distinction informs our notion of the subject-matter of aesthetics, Cohen wishes to suggest that we can muddle along in aesthetics without making anything like this distinction. Cohen makes the further point that the distinction does not apparently inform the way we apply the term 'aesthetic', since we successfully employ the word in a variety of ways which don't draw upon the distinction, as when we object to a mathematical proof 'on aesthetic grounds'.<sup>24</sup>

Cohen is not the only critic who treats the following passage as a would-be argument for Sibley's position. In this passage, Sibley describes an 'aesthetic clod', someone lacking in taste who would not be able to make any a-judgements:

The point I have argued may be reinforced in the following way. A man who failed to realize the nature of taste concepts, or someone who, knowing he lacked sensitivity in aesthetic matters, did not want to reveal this lack might by assiduous application and shrewd observation provide himself with some rules and generalizations; and by inductive procedures and intelligent guessing, he might frequently say the right things. But he could have no great confidence or certainty; a slight change in an object might at any time unpredictably ruin his calculations, and he might as easily have been wrong as right. No matter how careful he has been about working out a set of consistent principles and conditions, he is only in a position to think that the object is very possibly delicate.... Though he sometimes says the right thing, he has not seen, but guessed, that the object is delicate.... He could not be praised for exercising taste; at best his ingenuity and intelligence might come in for mention.<sup>25</sup>

According to his critics, what Sibley offers here is an argument from the existence of aesthetic clods to the conclusion that a-concepts lack governing conditions.<sup>26</sup> If a-concepts were governed by conditions, then an aesthetic clod would have confidence in his a-judgements, and we would praise him when he gets things right. The fact that neither condition obtains supports the conclusion that a-concepts lack governing conditions. However, viewed as an argument for the claim that a-concepts lack governing conditions, this assumes what it sets out to prove. How do we know that the clod's inductions will lead him astray? Only by assuming that no set of na-conditions will entail

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<sup>24</sup> Cohen, pp. 124-125; 135.

<sup>25</sup> "Aesthetic Concepts", p.532. The term 'aesthetic clod' originates with Allan Casebier, "The Alleged Special Logic for Aesthetic Terms", *JAAC*, 31 (1973), 357-364.

<sup>26</sup> Allan Casebier, p.359ff.; Cohen, pp.120-123.

an a-ascription. Why do we fail to praise the clod? Because it is a matter of luck rather than skill that he manages to arrive at a correct judgement whilst treating a concept which lacks governing conditions as though it were condition-governed. Since we cannot understand what it means to designate someone an aesthetic clod unless we already accept the view that a-concepts lack governing conditions, it follows that we cannot use the existence of persons who treat a-concepts as though they were condition-governed to demonstrate that a-concepts lack governing conditions. Cohen concludes that what Sibley provides here is not an argument, but a form of running on the spot. And since Sibley offers no alternative arguments in support of his view, Cohen suggests that making the distinction is all the philosophy Sibley has.<sup>27</sup>

The ineptitude of this alleged 'argument' should alert us to the fact that here Sibley is not offering anything like an argument, but as he says a 'reinforcement' or illustration of his claim that a-concepts lack governing conditions. Why then does Cohen treat this as an argument? Because if, like Cohen, you believe that Sibley is using the notion of taste to demarcate the class of a-judgements, which is co-extensive with the subject matter of aesthetics, then you will believe that Sibley must try to provide evidence for the existence of taste which doesn't rely on the fact that some people consistently make correct a-judgements. Sibley cannot introduce the notion of taste to explain how we correctly apply a-terms as long as attributing taste to someone amounts to nothing more than the claim that that person has a capacity for forming correct a-judgements.<sup>28</sup> However, as one of Sibley's more sympathetic commentators has pointed out,<sup>29</sup> this line of reasoning reverses the direction of Sibley's discussion. Sibley does not introduce the notion of taste in order to explain how we know when we have applied a-terms correctly. Instead, Sibley discusses the way we apply a-terms in order to illustrate what is involved in the exercise of taste. That is to say, Sibley's distinction does not pretend to carve out the whole subject matter of aesthetics *ab initio*. Rather, Sibley is relying upon our prior understanding of this subject matter while directing our attention to one very important set

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<sup>27</sup> Cohen, pp.120, 123.

<sup>28</sup> R.David Broiles, "Frank Sibley's 'Aesthetic Concepts'", *JAAC*, 23 (1964), 219-225; p.222.

<sup>29</sup> J.F. Logan, "More on Aesthetic Concepts", *JAAC*, 25 (1967), 401-406; p.403.

of judgements which arise in the course of aesthetic appreciation; and he asks us to realize that the ability to make such judgements is what we comprehend under the notion of taste.

To help comprehend the nature of Cohen's attack on Sibley, it will be useful to recall the philosophical climate in which Cohen was writing his paper. It would be true to say that Cohen's hostility to Sibley's proposals is just one example of a widespread distrust of the word 'aesthetic' displayed by philosophers writing in the 'seventies. In particular, these philosophers distrusted what they perceived to be the hidden agenda pursued in philosophical aesthetics in the first half of the twentieth century. As George Dickie characterized this agenda, whenever philosophers in the first half of the century spoke of the 'aesthetic attitude' or else the 'aesthetic object' or 'aesthetic perception', the underlying intention was the same - to distinguish the "proper object of appreciation and criticism," or those features of art objects that critics should be attending to, from those qualities in objects and those ways of attending to objects that were irrelevant to the aims of the critic.<sup>30</sup> The Proper Object of Criticism was to be identified with the 'aesthetic object', or that set of 'aesthetic qualities' revealed when attending to objects in a properly aesthetic way. Attending in a properly aesthetic way might involve exercising a special mode of 'aesthetic perception' or it might involve adopting a special mind-set or mode of attention known as the 'aesthetic attitude'.

Those reacting to this perceived agenda argued for the 'vacuousness' of the term 'aesthetic',<sup>31</sup> and sought to replace talk of the work of art as an 'aesthetic object' with talk of the work of art as an artifact embedded in and arising out of certain cultural practices. George Dickie's *Art and the Aesthetic* represents perhaps the best-known example of an attempt to replace a traditional notion of the 'aesthetic' with a more up-to-date philosophy of contemporary art practices. But Dickie was not alone in proposing to replace the notion that the work of art constitutes an 'aesthetic object' with the notion that the work of art constitutes a culturally embedded artifact. Timothy Binkley was arguing

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<sup>30</sup> George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp.86-87, 135-136.

<sup>31</sup> See for instance George Dickie, "The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude", *APQ*, 1 (1964), 56-65, p.64; Timothy Binkley, "Piece: Contra Aesthetics", *JAAC*, 35 (1977), 265-277, especially p.269.

in a similar vein when he suggested that, viewed as an aesthetic object, the work of art is a 'fragile' entity with changeable qualities. That is to say, the aesthetic qualities belonging to a work of art will change if there are any changes in its nonaesthetic qualities. In addition to the inevitable alteration in aesthetic qualities that would occur as a work of art ages, reports of aesthetic qualities might vary relative to perceivers, and relative to the differing conditions under which the object was perceived. By contrast, viewing the work of art as a cultural artifact turns the work of art into a robust entity with a relatively fixed identity, and serves to explain contemporary art practices not obviously connected with the production of aesthetically pleasing objects.

Cohen's attack upon Sibley's distinction reflects this prevailing climate of opinion in two separate ways. In the first place, when Cohen claims that he can find no use for Sibley's distinction, he is agreeing with the more radical voices in that movement in twentieth century Aesthetics which has sought to replace the traditional Philosophy of the Beautiful with the Philosophy of Art. Cohen apparently agrees with those proposing to eliminate the use of the word 'aesthetic' by replacing talk of aesthetic qualities and aesthetic objects with talk of contemporary art practices and the artifacts issuing from those practices. Interpreting the work of art as a cultural artifact does not involve formulating aesthetic judgements, nor does it require the exercise of taste. We only require a distinction such as Sibley's if we wish to catch ourselves in the act of forming a-judgements, and according to the new agenda being set in philosophical Aesthetics, we would never have a reason to catch ourselves forming aesthetic judgements either in theory or in practice. Yet even as he expresses impatience with Sibley's use of the term, Cohen does not propose to eliminate the word 'aesthetic' from everyday or philosophical discourse. To this end, Cohen points out that the person who objects to a mathematical proof on 'aesthetic grounds' manages to say something intelligible, perhaps something which could not be conveyed in a statement eliminating all reference to the 'aesthetic'; and he manages to do so without committing himself to anything like Sibley's use of the term.<sup>32</sup> In making this latter claim, Cohen apparently sides with those who continue to

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<sup>32</sup> Cohen, pp. 135-136.

find a use for talk of aesthetic qualities in the new Philosophy of Art, because they redefine an 'aesthetic quality' to include any feature singled out for attention within the art practices of a culture. On this definition, the class of aesthetic qualities includes many qualities which Sibley describes as nonaesthetic. Marcia Muelder Eaton displays this temper of mind when she suggests that, in the right circumstances, "how wonderfully loud" is as much an aesthetic description as "how wonderfully balanced". This is because "if loudness or yellowness .... is a property of an object and if it is considered worthy of attention or reflection in a culture and if a viewer shares the traditions of that culture and if the viewer assents to 'That object is loud (or yellow, etc.),' then that viewer appreciates the object aesthetically (to some degree)."<sup>33</sup>

It would appear that at the end of the day, the dispute between Cohen and Sibley becomes a dispute between those adopting a wide, and those adopting a narrow, use of the term 'aesthetic'. This dispute is more apparent than real. Those adopting the wide notion of an aesthetic quality believe that we risk overlooking genuine sources of aesthetic value if we identify aesthetic qualities with all and only Sibley's taste qualities, a fear which would be justified only if Sibley had introduced the notion of an aesthetic quality with a view to capturing the total domain of aesthetic value. I would suggest that, regardless of Sibley's original intentions, it is not necessary to read Sibley's project in this way. That is to say, rather than treating Sibley's distinction as an attempt to isolate the Proper Object of Criticism or the subject-matter of aesthetics, Sibley's distinction may be usefully regarded as a distinction within the wider subject-matter of Aesthetics. This remains true whether we identify Aesthetics with the Philosophy of the Beautiful or with the Philosophy of Art. I would suggest that Sibley's discussion of a-concepts has the relatively modest aim of bringing to our attention that part of our ordinary perceptual competence which poses some interesting questions from the point of view of philosophical aesthetics: our capacity for apprehending a certain species of emergent quality. Pace Cohen and others, there are occasions when we do wish to catch ourselves in the act of forming a-judgements, if only for the theoretical purpose of isolating that part

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<sup>33</sup> "The Intrinsic, Non-Supervenient Nature of Aesthetic Properties", p.390.



of perception which raises special philosophical challenges. Whereas there is no obvious puzzlement of a philosophical nature in the fact that an object appears yellow or that a piece of music strikes the listener as loud, there is much philosophical puzzlement in the idea that a painting is balanced or has a 'sad' character. It is this latter source of puzzlement which Sibley brings to our attention in making his distinction. It is important to realize that, in designating some qualities as worthy of the attention of philosophical aesthetics, Sibley is not thereby committed to saying that those qualities he calls nonaesthetic, qualities such as yellowness or loudness, which do not pose particular problems from a philosophical perspective, could never constitute sources of aesthetic value. Once we realize that there is a difference between saying that a feature is aesthetic (a source of philosophical interest), and saying that a feature is aesthetic (a source of aesthetic value), much of Cohen's criticism of Sibley loses its point.

#### IV

Cohen's paper represents an exaggerated response to Sibley's proposals. In accounting for the extremity of that response, I have rejected the notion that Sibley's distinction was intended as a practical tool serving to locate the subject-matter of aesthetics; and have suggested that Sibley's discussion of a-qualities should be regarded as an attempt to create a distinction within a subject-matter already familiar to us. In suggesting this reading of Sibley's intentions, I am aware that Cohen is not the only critic who has treated Sibley's distinction as a formal attempt to identify the subject-matter of aesthetics. In particular, it has sometimes been suggested that Sibley's observation that a-concepts lack governing conditions constitutes an attempt to isolate a special logic for aesthetic concepts, resembling in this respect Kant's attempt, in the *Third Critique*, to characterize the judgement of taste as a logically distinctive class of judgement.<sup>34</sup> Roger

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<sup>34</sup> This is how Ruby Meager presents the matter, opus cited, especially pp.303, 306-307. For a brief introduction to the view that Kant sets out the logical rather than the epistemological conditions of



Scruton has developed this line of interpretation at some length,<sup>35</sup> and in doing so, has repeated some common misconceptions of Sibley's aims and purposes. For this reason, I shall examine Scruton's arguments in some detail, with a view to refining and focusing my own interpretation of Sibley.

Scruton incorporates his discussion of Sibley within a wider discussion of what Scruton chooses to call the theory of aesthetic perception, a form of aesthetic empiricism tracing its genealogy to Frances Hutcheson. The theory of aesthetic perception amounts to the theory that to appreciate an object aesthetically is to perceive its aesthetic features, aesthetic features being precisely those features it requires aesthetic perception (or 'taste') to discern.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the theory of aesthetic perception distinguishes aesthetic interest from other forms of interest, not in terms of features distinctive of aesthetic experience *qua* experience, but in terms of the characteristic objects that interest takes. That is to say, aesthetic experience is not experience of a phenomenologically distinctive kind, but experience of a distinctive type of object. Because the theory of aesthetic perception distinguishes aesthetic attention from moral or practical attention in terms of the special nature of the objects of that attention, Scruton places a requirement upon the theory of aesthetic perception to provide a unitary logic characterizing the aesthetic use of terms. For "without this unitary logic the concept of aesthetic appreciation, defined merely in terms of an open and indefinite class of features, will be an arbitrary and uninteresting notion, with no ultimate ground, and with no special place in the philosophy of mind."<sup>37</sup> Scruton regards Sibley's assertion that a-concepts lack governing conditions as an attempt to provide such a unitary logic for aesthetic terms.

Scruton believes he can demonstrate that the theory of aesthetic perception cannot work by introducing what I will call the ambiguity argument. Scruton points out that if the absence of governing conditions acts as a criterion for the aesthetic use of a term, it

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aesthetic judgement, see Eva Schaper, "The Pleasures of Taste", in *Pleasure, Preference and Value: Studies in Philosophical Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.39-56; especially p.47. Stanley Cavell, "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy", in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp.73-96, pp.88ff, explores the question whether Kant's treatment of the judgement of taste constitutes a logical or a psychological enquiry.

<sup>35</sup> *Art and Imagination*, pp.32-44.

<sup>36</sup> *Art and Imagination*, p.29.

<sup>37</sup> *Art and Imagination*, p.32.

follows that terms such as those belonging to categories (c) and (f) above, terms having both aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses, will be ambiguous between their aesthetic and non-aesthetic uses. Applied to persons, 'sad' is a condition-governed term, and I can specify criteria for its use in terms of the gestures, expressions and utterances characteristic of sad persons. In its aesthetic use, 'sad' denotes an emergent perceptual property, dependent upon other properties but in no particular way.<sup>38</sup> The notion that 'sad' could be ambiguous between its aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses contradicts the commonplace understanding both that there exists a significant connection between the use of 'sad' in 'sad painting' and the use of 'sad' in 'sad person', but also that the point and meaning of our aesthetic judgements arises from the fact that the former use depends in some way upon the latter. That is to say, 'sad painting' involves something like a secondary or paronymous use of 'sad'.<sup>39</sup> Just as, in Aristotle's example of a paronymous use of terms, talk of a 'healthy body' or 'healthy complexion' is dependent upon a primary nuclear meaning of 'healthy'; so too my ability to call paintings 'sad' relies upon my prior understanding of what constitutes sadness in persons. One who understands the meaning of 'sad painting' displays that understanding by referring at some point to the notion of sadness in persons. It would never be enough to go on referring to parallels with other works of art in order to explain what it means to call paintings sad.<sup>40</sup>

It is important to understand how Scruton deploys the notion of ambiguity in his attack against the theory of aesthetic perception. In his gloss of p.39 of *Art and Imagination*, Derek Matravers apparently reduces the ambiguity argument to a simple reductio, whereby Scruton uses the claim, that (c) category terms refer to aesthetic properties in their aesthetic uses to derive the patently false claim, that (c) category terms are ambiguous between their aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses.<sup>41</sup> Whilst it is true that the

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<sup>38</sup> *Art and Imagination*, p.38.

<sup>39</sup> I say 'something like' a paronymous use because although Scruton asserts in chapter three that there must be a significant connection between 'sad painting' and 'sad person', he rejects the claim that 'sad painting' represents a paronymous use of 'sad' in chapter four. See *Art and Imagination*, pp.44-57.

<sup>40</sup> *Art and Imagination*, p.40. At this point, Scruton apparently echoes *Philosophical Investigations*, II, p.216, where Wittgenstein describes a language-game applying the words 'fat' and 'lean' to days of the week. "Asked 'What do you really mean here by 'fat' and 'lean'?' - I could only explain the meanings in the usual way. I could *not* point to the examples of Tuesday and Wednesday".

<sup>41</sup> "Aesthetic Concepts and Aesthetic Experiences", p.266.

ambiguity argument operates as a *reductio*, this gloss upon the argument fails to indicate where the true interest of Scruton's argument lies. Matravers' gloss also wrongly suggests that the point of Scruton's argumentation at pp.38-41 is to demonstrate, in a way which any opponent would be forced to concede, that it is patently obvious that (c) category terms are not ambiguous between their aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses. What Scruton actually demonstrates here is that the ambiguity of (c) category terms is offensive to the commonsense view of the relationship between the aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses of category (c) terms, a fact which the proponent of the theory of aesthetic perception may or may not find surprising, but may be happy to live with once it was pointed out to him.<sup>42</sup> In this respect, those pressing for the existence of aesthetic properties might follow the lead of Richard Wollheim, who expresses a general uneasiness with the strategy of appealing to the notion of ambiguity to help us out of a philosophical tight-spot, yet who nevertheless embraces the ambiguity of (c) category terms as a viable option to committing some form of the pathetic fallacy.<sup>43</sup> The real point of Scruton's argument is to bring his opponent to see that he should not be happy to accept the fact that 'sad' is ambiguous between its aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses. Scruton does this by presenting his opponent with a dilemma:<sup>44</sup>

The principal objection to the idea of an aesthetic property [is] this: either terms denoting aesthetic properties have the same meaning as they have when used in their normal contexts, in which case, how can we distinguish aesthetic properties as a separate class? Or else they have a different meaning, in which case, what is the point of naming aesthetic properties as we do?

If Sibley asserts that 'sad' in 'sad painting' does not possess its ordinary meaning, then the point of the judgement "This painting is sad" cannot be to make some connection between what we think of as sadness in the personal case, and the emergent property of

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<sup>42</sup> On the question, whether Sibley would be surprised to learn that he had made (c) category term ambiguous between their aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses, see p.61 below.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Wollheim, "Correspondence, Projective Properties, and Expression in the Arts", in *The Language of Art History*, ed. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.51-66; p.54. It is important to note that Wollheim would not count as a proponent of the theory of aesthetic perception. For more on Wollheim's own analysis of 'sad painting', see Chapter Four below.

<sup>44</sup> *Art and Imagination*, p.44.

*sadness* in works of art. Sibley must accept the consequence that in this case we possess no motivation for using the word 'sad', that we might have chosen instead to call the painting 'happy' or used some other word to designate whatever emergent property is found to be present in all and only those paintings we presently call 'sad'. That is to say, Sibley must give up all pretense that he can explain the point or meaning of aesthetic judgements,<sup>45</sup> that he has an explanation for the connections that exist between the aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses of (c) category words. Alternatively, Sibley may retain the claim that the use of 'sad' in this case was motivated, but only if he accepts that 'sad' in 'sad painting' retains its ordinary meaning. However, he then will be forced to concede that 'sad' is condition-governed in its aesthetic uses, and that he has failed to provide a distinguishing logic for aesthetic terms. Having been brought to admit that aesthetic terms do not serve to designate a distinctive class of property, Sibley must give up the project of defining aesthetic interest by appealing to the distinctive nature of the objects of that interest.

In a recent paper, Nick Zangwill offers an interpretation of the ambiguity argument apparently differing in some respects from the interpretation given here.<sup>46</sup> According to Zangwill, pages 38 through 44 of *Art and Imagination* provide a "novel metaphysical argument" demonstrating that the metaphorical nature of much aesthetic description makes it impossible to maintain a realist stance concerning aesthetic properties and aesthetic judgements. The argument begins by observing that (i) much aesthetic description is metaphorical in nature; then introduces Donald Davidson's general doctrine concerning metaphor,<sup>47</sup> which states that (ii) words used in metaphorical contexts have only the literal meaning that they have when used non-metaphorically. The argument concludes that (iii) aesthetic realism cannot be maintained vis-a-vis those aesthetic descriptions which are metaphorical.<sup>48</sup> This is because anyone wishing to claim that (c) category terms serve to designate real aesthetic properties in their aesthetic uses is thereby

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<sup>45</sup> *Art and Imagination*, pp.40-41.

<sup>46</sup> Nick Zangwill, "Metaphor and Realism in Aesthetics", *JAAC*, 49 (1991), 57-62.

<sup>47</sup> Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean", in *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp.29-45. Davidson's paper was first published in *Critical Inquiry*, 5 (1978), 31-47.

<sup>48</sup> "Metaphor and Realism in Aesthetics", p.57.



committed to the claim that (c) category terms are ambiguous between their aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses, in contradiction of (ii). As Scruton's dilemma demonstrates, the would-be aesthetic realist who accepts the truth of (ii) will find it impossible to reconcile (ii) with his aesthetic realism. The realist faces a choice between rejecting a realist stance concerning aesthetic properties and accepting (ii), as per the first horn of Scruton's dilemma. Alternatively, he might maintain his aesthetic realism at the expense of denying (ii) and thereby run the risk of not being able to explain what motivates us to call paintings 'sad'.

The first thing to note concerning Zangwill's interpretation of the ambiguity argument is that Zangwill articulates the second premise of the argument using a theory of metaphor first published some four years after *Art and Imagination*. I see two risks in this procedure. As well as constituting something of an anachronism, the introduction of Davidson's thoughts on the nature of metaphor makes the success of Scruton's argument contingent upon the acceptance of a particular, and some might argue peculiar, account of metaphor. That is to say, the appeal to Davidson's general thesis concerning metaphor makes it all too easy for any opponent of Scruton who remains unimpressed with the general thrust of Davidson's discussion of metaphor to refuse to become entangled upon the horns of Scruton's dilemma. This would be a pity, since it could be argued that the strength of Scruton's original argument lies in an appeal to commonsense that transcends the bounds of whatever theory of metaphor one happens to accept. The anachronism would be justifiable in the event it could be shown, either that Scruton happens to agree with the overriding themes of Davidson's account of metaphor; or, if that should not prove to be the case, if it could be demonstrated that Zangwill's use of Davidson's thoughts on metaphor was limited, judicious, and served to illuminate the nature of Scruton's argument. Unfortunately, neither of these proves to be the case.

I have already hinted at one reason why Scruton might be unwilling to embrace Davidson's theory of metaphor in all of its consequences when I alluded to Scruton's views concerning the nature of musical understanding.<sup>49</sup> To recap: Davidson wrote his

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<sup>49</sup> See above, pp.25-26.

paper on metaphor as a corrective to the commonplace opinion that a metaphorical statement possess a special, secondary or metaphorical meaning over and above the meaning attaching to that statement under a literal interpretation. Hence his general thesis that statements used metaphorically possess only their literal meanings. Davidson insisted that, in a majority of cases, a metaphorical sentence taken literally is either false or trivially true. For Davidson, the point of a metaphor consists not in the surface meaning of the statement, but in what the speaker brings us to notice in using the metaphor. However, Davidson resisted the notion this might be thought to imply, that a metaphor possesses a special coded cognitive content that is systematically related to the literal meanings of the words used. According to Davidson, the things a metaphor brings us to notice are neither finite in scope nor propositional in nature.<sup>50</sup> In view of the meaningless, false or trivial nature of most metaphorical statements taken literally, those following the Davidson agenda on metaphor have suggested that we show our understanding of a metaphor not by explaining the meanings of the words used in the metaphor, but by giving a paraphrase that explains the speaker's point in making the utterance. These writers regard it as a corollary of Davidson's view that the literal meaning of a metaphor can and should be bypassed en route to such a paraphrase, and have treated the availability of paraphrase as a defining mark of the metaphorical. According to this view, any statement failing the eliminability test, any statement where the literal meaning cannot be bypassed in favour of a description of its use, *ipso facto* cannot be a metaphor.<sup>51</sup> Now as described above, Scruton would not accept the eliminability test for at least some of the metaphors we use in describing our musical understanding. Taking the material point of view, what we hear as music constitutes nothing more than a succession of pitched sounds. We hear these sounds as music only when we hear them as tones possessing melodic, harmonic and rhythmic implications. We hear melody in a succession of sounds because we hear those sounds as

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<sup>50</sup> "What Metaphors Mean", pp.30, 44, 45.

<sup>51</sup> Malcolm Budd, "Understanding Music", *The Aristotelian Society*, Supp.Vol.59 (1985), 233-248, pp.241-242, and "Music and the Communication of Emotion", *JAAC*, 47 (1989), 129-138, p.132; Stephen Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp.150-151, 162.



if they comprised an object moving through space. We hear harmony in a set of tones when we hear qualities of tension and relaxation in those sounds, and we hear rhythm in a series of sounds because we hear those sounds as if they were moving about in a particular manner, specifically dancing.<sup>52</sup> Scruton contends that it is impossible to eliminate any of these metaphors from our descriptions of music without reducing the experience of tone to the experience of mere sound. The fact that Scruton is willing to tolerate the existence of ineliminably metaphorical descriptions of our musical understanding suggests that Scruton would not accept Davidson's approach to metaphor as that theory has been developed by some of Davidson's warmest admirers. I conclude that the case for saying that Scruton would embrace the fundamentals of Davidson's theory of metaphor is at best unproven.

Zangwill might object that all of this is beside the point, since the only part of Davidson's theory of metaphor that Zangwill utilizes in his argument is Davidson's general thesis concerning metaphor, which states that words used metaphorically possess only the meanings they possess when used literally: an observation universally acceptable, regardless of the particular position one adopts concerning metaphor. If so, it is worth pointing out to Zangwill that, far from illuminating the nature of the ambiguity argument, treating (ii) as a gloss of Scruton's argument at pp.38-41 only serves to reduce the ambiguity argument to the *reductio* described by Matravers. To reiterate: it misrepresents the nature of Scruton's argument to suggest that Scruton *assumes* that (c) category words do not undergo a meaning change in their aesthetic uses. Scruton's argument is intended to point out that when we as human beings use the word 'sad' to describe an aspect of a particular work of art, the most natural and obvious explanation for our doing so is because we wish to make some connection between an aspect of human emotional life and the experience of that work of art. Anyone who claims that the word 'sad' designates an emergent aesthetic quality in its aesthetic use rejects the possibility that the word functions in the same way across its aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses, and thereby rejects what is the most natural and obvious explanation for the

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<sup>52</sup> Scruton, "Understanding Music", pp.84-85,

connection that exists between the aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses of (c) category terms. The onus therefore falls upon that person to provide some alternative explanation for this connection.

I would suggest that, far from illuminating the nature of the ambiguity argument, introducing Davidson's general thesis concerning metaphor into the argument serves to distract Zangwill from the task of assessing Scruton's original argument and onto the very different task of demonstrating how the aesthetic realist might use the details of Davidson's account of metaphor in order to square a belief in aesthetic realism with Davidson's general thesis. To this end, Zangwill notes that the best hope for the aesthetic realist who accepts (ii) lies in the first instance in retreating to another claim Davidson makes concerning the nature of metaphor. The aesthetic realist might point out that, while 'sad' carries the same linguistic meaning whether it is attributed to a person or to a work of art, what the word makes us think about, the thought-content accompanying the use of the word, will vary between 'sad person' and 'sad painting'. Thus, whilst there may be a meaning-difference at the level of language between the two uses of 'sad', this does not preclude the existence of a meaning-equivalence at the level of thought.<sup>53</sup> This strategy permits the realist to evade the first horn of Scruton's dilemma whilst neatly impaling him on the second. Zangwill suggests that the realist may then extricate himself from the second horn by providing some suitable causal account of the relationship between the two uses of 'sad', an account demonstrating how the use of 'sad' in 'sad painting' causally depends upon the prior use of 'sad person'.<sup>54</sup> Zangwill concludes that *contra* Scruton's argument, "the essentially metaphorical nature of much aesthetic description does not endanger a realist interpretation of aesthetic judgement and experience."<sup>55</sup> In effect, Zangwill purports to discuss one type of problem and ends by discussing another problem altogether. Rather than addressing the problem identified in Scruton's argument, the problem of reconciling the existence of metaphorical aesthetic descriptions with a particular brand of aesthetic empiricism, Zangwill addresses the very

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<sup>53</sup> "Metaphor and Realism in Aesthetics", p.58, 61.

<sup>54</sup> "Metaphor and Realism in Aesthetics", p.59.

<sup>55</sup> "Metaphor and Realism in Aesthetics", p.61.

different problem of squaring the belief that metaphorical aesthetic descriptions possess genuine content with the prejudice, implicit in the views of Davidson and his followers, that regarded as a piece of language, a metaphor is a thing of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

The suspicion that the argument Zangwill discusses differs somewhat from the argument offered by Scruton receives some *prima facie* confirmation from the fact that Zangwill and Scruton apparently disagree when it comes to identifying the target of Scruton's argument. For whereas Scruton identifies the target of the argument as the theory of aesthetic perception, Zangwill identifies the target as the aesthetic realist, someone who holds that aesthetic judgements represent a range of 'distinctively' aesthetic facts or states of affairs; an aesthetic state of affairs being a structured entity consisting of an object or event which possesses a genuine aesthetic property. For the aesthetic realist, an aesthetic judgement will be true in the event that the object or event described in the judgement possesses the genuine aesthetic property which that judgement represents it as possessing.<sup>56</sup> A close examination of Zangwill's discussion suggests that the difference in target between the two interpretations may be more apparent than real. According to Zangwill, the aesthetic realist is committed to the existence of a distinctive range of aesthetic concepts devoted to picking out real aesthetic properties. It is not surprising that Zangwill should assert this, since it is only the aesthetic realist committed to the existence of 'distinctive' aesthetic concepts who could succeed in impaling himself upon the first horn of Scruton's dilemma. That is to say, it is only the aesthetic realist who commits himself to the existence of a set of distinctively aesthetic concepts who strays into thinking that (c) category terms must be ambiguous between their aesthetic and non-aesthetic uses; serving to pick out genuine aesthetic properties in one set of cases but not in the other. Now clearly, to say that the aesthetic realist commits himself to the existence of a 'distinctive' range of aesthetic concepts is to say that the aesthetic realist treats those properties his judgements pick out as the defining characteristic of the aesthetic. In short, what Zangwill encompasses under the heading of aesthetic realism amounts to nothing

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<sup>56</sup> "Metaphor and Realism in Aesthetics", p.57.

more or less than that brand of aesthetic empiricism Scruton chooses to designate the theory of aesthetic perception. If Zangwill does believe that the argument targets the theory of aesthetic perception, then it is unhelpful to identify this target under the general label of aesthetic realism. For it might be argued that not every person who counts herself an aesthetic realist, not every person believing that that aesthetic descriptions serve to pick out genuine properties, thereby commits herself to the belief that such properties serve to define the realm of aesthetic interest.

On the other hand, if what I have suggested is true, that Zangwill conceives the ambiguity argument as a challenge to defend the contentful nature of metaphorical aesthetic descriptions in the face of Davidson's prejudices concerning the meaningfulness of aesthetic statements, then it is no accident that Zangwill conceives the argument as a challenge to aesthetic realism in general. For it is not just Sibley's brand of aesthetic empiricism, but any form of aesthetic realism which must defend the contentful nature of aesthetic judgements in the face of Davidson's attack upon the meaningfulness of metaphorical statements. In formulating the ambiguity argument as an argument concerning the contentful nature of metaphorical aesthetic descriptions, Zangwill draws attention to something all too easily lost sight of in assessing Scruton's argument. Scruton apparently places Sibley on the spot when he suggests that Sibley formulates an account of aesthetic descriptions which overlooks the special case of metaphorical aesthetic descriptions. Yet clearly, if philosophers in general feel a need to give a philosophical account of the nature of metaphor, a philosophical justification of our practice of using statements that are *prima facie* false or meaningless, then Sibley is not the only theorist purporting to give an account of aesthetic descriptions who owes us an account of the content of metaphorical aesthetic descriptions. Realizing this fact serves to remove some of the sting from the tail of Scruton's argument.

In summary, I would suggest that Zangwill's paper does nothing to improve our understanding of Scruton's ambiguity argument. This is partly because what Zangwill offers is less an historically accurate reconstruction of the argument Scruton presents in *Art and Imagination*, than it is a variant argument taking Scruton's text as an opening

theme. The differences between Scruton's original argument, and the argument Zangwill discusses may be summarized as follows. Scruton presents the ambiguity argument as an argument targeting a particular brand of aesthetic realism. The argument requires those asserting that aesthetic descriptions serve to pick out an identifiably aesthetic set of characteristics to reconcile this claim with the commonsense belief that the aesthetic use of a category (c) term is in some way dependent upon the prior, nonaesthetic use of the term. That argument which Zangwill presents in Scruton's name highlights the problem of accounting for the contentful nature of aesthetic judgements in the face of a particular doctrine concerning the nature of metaphor. Each argument highlights a different problem requiring a different solution. Since Zangwill's paper does not succeed in improving the clarity of Scruton's argument, I shall take the liberty of assessing Scruton's argument against Sibley using discussing my own formulation of the argument. The next two sections of this chapter address the problems raised by that argument, and demonstrate how Sibley might go about extricating himself from each of the horns of Scruton's dilemma. In section V, I show why the ambiguity argument needn't trouble that particular brand of aesthetic realism that Scruton attributes to Sibley. In section VI, I go on to suggest that it is perhaps inaccurate to claim, as Scruton does, that Sibley's reflections on the nature of aesthetic experience and taste amount to an attempt to provide a unifying logic for aesthetic terms.

## V

Regarded as an interpretation of Sibley's views, the ambiguity argument is unsatisfactory on two separate counts. In the first place, the manner in which Scruton constructs his dilemma serves to artificially restrict the options available to Sibley. It is incorrect to suggest, as Scruton does, that Sibley faces a stark choice between claiming that our use of 'sad painting' is motivated and claiming that sadness describes a genuine emergent quality found in paintings. Since Sibley is not as limited in his options as

Scruton's dilemma suggests, the ambiguity argument is a failure. In the second place, I believe that Scruton manages to misrepresent Sibley's philosophical intentions when he uses Sibley to illustrate that brand of aesthetic empiricism which Scruton labels the theory of aesthetic perception.

To see why Scruton's dilemma restricts the options open to Sibley, consider the following set of claims:

- (i) some *significant connection* exists between the aesthetic and nonaesthetic use of 'sad'
- (ii) the aesthetic use of 'sad' is *motivated by* the nonaesthetic use of 'sad'
- (iii) the aesthetic use of 'sad' is *conditioned by* the nonaesthetic use of 'sad'
- (iv) the aesthetic use of sad is *condition-governed*
- (v) 'sad' has the *same meaning* in both its aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses

Clearly, (i) through (v) describe distinct possibilities. Whereas (v) claims that 'sad' is governed by the same set of conditions in its aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses, (iv) would fit both this scenario but also the scenario where one set of conditions served to govern the use of 'sad' in 'sad painting', and another set of conditions governed its use in 'sad person'. Statement (iii) claims that my knowing how 'sad' is applied in the nonaesthetic cases provides me with some rule of thumb for its application in the aesthetic cases; whereas (ii) amounts to the claim that there are reasons why we use the word 'sad' to designate this particular emergent property, rather than using another emotion term, or rather than using a term which makes no connection between the emotional life and an emergent quality. Such reasons could be advanced at the level of psychological, rather than logical, explanation. Finally, (i) could be interpreted as equivalent in meaning to any one of (ii) through (v), or it might be synonymous with some weaker claim.

The manner in which Scruton poses his dilemma for the theory of aesthetic perception apparently makes little or no distinction between (i) through (v). This is because Scruton assumes that he has only to bring Sibley to admit that there exists some significant connection between the aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses of 'sad', a connection



providing some motivation for using 'sad' rather than some other term to describe the emergent quality discovered in a painting; and either Sibley has introduced governing conditions for a-terms via the back door, or else Sibley has admitted that 'sad' possesses the same meaning in its aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses, or both. That is to say, Scruton believes that he has only to bring Sibley to admit the truth of either (ii) or (iii), and Sibley will be forced to affirm some version of (iv) and (v) as well. Scruton allows no room for the possibility that our use of 'sad' in 'sad painting' may be motivated in some way by the nonaesthetic uses of 'sad' even in the event that the primary use of 'sad' does not furnish anything like a set of governing conditions for the secondary use of the word. That is to say, Scruton overlooks the possibility that Sibley might be willing to accept (ii) whilst rejecting (iv).<sup>57</sup> In assuming that anyone assenting to (ii) thereby commits himself to (v) as well, Scruton manages to conflate the question, "what is the meaning of 'sad painting'?" with the very different question, "what is our motivation for calling this painting 'sad'?" The difference between these two questions may be brought out by considering the different types of explanation which would satisfy each. Whereas a request for the meaning of 'sad painting' amounts to a purely logical question, a request for the criteria governing this particular use of 'sad', a request for the reason why we use 'sad' rather than some other label to designate a particular emergent quality is a question which would receive a perfectly satisfactory explanation in psychological rather than logical terms. To say that the aesthetic use of 'sad' is *motivated* is not to say that knowledge of how 'sad person' is applied furnishes the type of rule that would allow us to predict with confidence which paintings will count as 'sad'. However, it is to say that when we observe those sortings persons contrive to make between 'sad' and 'not-sad' paintings, the practice of making such sortings will be explicable in terms of the fact that the creatures doing the sorting are creatures who enjoy emotional experiences of a certain degree of richness and a certain range of types. Our understanding of human nature may

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<sup>57</sup> It would also be possible for Sibley to accept the somewhat stronger claim (iii), whilst rejecting (iv). In other words, Sibley could accept that knowledge of the nonaesthetic uses of 'sad' could generate rules which help guide the practice of matching certain emotion-terms with certain emergent qualities; whilst insisting that the rules thus generated would not allow us actively to predict which paintings will count as sad.

not equip us to predict which paintings will count as sad, nor perhaps will such understanding allow us to anticipate precisely which words will be used to designate particular emergent qualities. However, this is not to say that our understanding will not allow us to make sense of whatever sortings we happen to encounter. The aesthetic uses of (c) category terms will not be entirely predictable, but given some understanding of human nature these will not seem to be totally arbitrary.

That Sibley does accept something like (ii) whilst rejecting (iv) is, I believe, demonstrated by the fact that Sibley leaves open the possibility that certain a-terms may be negatively governed by conditions,<sup>58</sup> even once he has ruled out the possibility that any a-term could be positively condition-governed. Some commentators have found Sibley's claim that a-terms may possess negative governing conditions, may be ruled out by certain na-descriptions, to be inconsistent with the claim that no a-term could be logically entailed by some na-description. For once Sibley admits that some set of na-attributions could rule out the a-attribution A, we can use the set of na-attributions entailing -A to entail any a-term B which means -A.<sup>59</sup> That is to say, it would be possible to bring in governing conditions for A via the back door. However, the inconsistency vanishes if the relationship between a-terms and na-terms discovered in cases of negative condition-governing amounts to something weaker than logical entailment. As I interpret the matter, when Sibley introduces the concept of negative condition-governing he is suggesting that, whilst no set of na-descriptions could *logically* suffice for a particular a-description, occasionally we might treat a given na-description as *operationally* or *practically* sufficient to rule out certain a-descriptions. Sibley here draws attention to a curious feature concerning our aesthetic competence, the fact that often we feel more confidence in *withholding* an aesthetic description than we do in *applying* it. If so, then the claim that a-terms may be negatively governed by conditions would amount to nothing more than the claim that those competent in the use of the term feel some confidence in predicting those cases where the term might not apply, but rather less confidence when it

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<sup>58</sup> "Aesthetic Concepts", pp.46-47; "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic", p.152.

<sup>59</sup> Derek Matravers, "Aesthetic Concepts and Aesthetic Experiences", footnote pp.276-277. Allan Casebier made substantially the same point in "The Alleged Special Logic for Aesthetic Terms", p.363.

comes to predicting positive applications of the term. To use Sibley's preferred example here, knowing that all the colours in an object are pale pastels allows us to rule out the possibility that the object is garish. The same knowledge could never suffice to logically establish the conclusion that the object is delicate.<sup>60</sup> I propose that this, or something like it, is what we might understand by negative condition-governing in the case of category (a) terms. Since (c) describes a category of a-terms that have been borrowed from the domain of nonaesthetic emotional experience, we should reasonably expect the negative conditioning of these terms in the aesthetic domain to reflect some aspects of their use in the nonaesthetic home domain. The conditions governing the use of 'sad person' might not determine the meaning of 'sad painting', but these might provide us with some rule of thumb when deciding whether to withhold the epithet 'sad' from certain paintings in the aesthetic case. The aesthetic use of 'sad' is motivated by, or guided by, the practice of designating persons as 'sad' in some way which falls short of the laying down of necessary and sufficient conditions. All of which amounts to a long-winded way of saying that the would-be Sibleyite who accepts the existence of negative condition-governing for (c) category terms accepts (ii) or (iii) whilst rejecting (iv).

I believe Scruton overlooks the possibility that Sibley might accept (ii) or (iii) whilst rejecting (iv) because Scruton attributes to Sibley a peculiar and unsustainable notion of 'taste'. Scruton takes it to be a requirement of the theory of aesthetic perception that taste operates as a special and narrowly perceptual capacity, the aesthetic equivalent of G.E.Moore's moral intuition.<sup>61</sup> The notion that taste is akin to a form of intuition allows the theory of aesthetic perception to reconcile two otherwise incompatible claims: the claim that a-concepts lack governing conditions, and the claim that a-descriptions constitute objectively verifiable true-or-false statements. Joseph Margolis makes just this alignment of concepts when he argues that, unless Sibley is willing to say that a-qualities are detected via some form of intuition, then either Sibley will be forced to admit that a-concepts are condition-governed but enter into judgements that are straightforwardly true or false; or else Sibley must admit that a-concepts lack governing conditions and enter

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<sup>60</sup> "Aesthetic Concepts", pp.426-427.

<sup>61</sup> *Art and Imagination*, p.35.



into judgements that are at most apt or inapt, but never true or false.<sup>62</sup> Scruton assumes that, for those adopting the theory of aesthetic perception, this special faculty of taste is a capacity which may upon occasion operate independently of our ordinary perceptual and judgemental capacities. It is this assumption which leads Scruton to describe an unusual and puzzling scenario offensive to commonsense which he believes represents a genuine possibility under the theory of aesthetic perception.<sup>63</sup>

Suppose that there is some agreement among adults trained in the appreciation of art as to which works of art are sad.... Suppose then, that I classify all works of art as sad or not sad: I classify them into two groups, with perhaps a third group in between where the question whether or not they are sad is undecidable. Now suppose also that someone else carries out the same classification, without consulting me, and groups works of art together in exactly the same way as I do myself. And suppose, finally, that both he and I agree in our application of the term 'sad' to people (its use to denote an emotional state). That is, we agree about the normal sense of the term and use it according to the same criteria. Imagine, then, that while I call the two categories 'sad' and 'not sad', he refuses to apply these terms. He says .... he does not know what to call the property in virtue of which he has made the classification that he has made, but certainly it would be wrong to call it sadness - works of art cannot have states of mind.

According to the theory of aesthetic perception, the fact that this man's sorting coincided with our own, coupled with the fact that the aesthetic feature in virtue of which the sorting was made was an observable emergent quality, should incline us to say that the man has seen the sadness of these works. According to Scruton, the fact that this man's capacity to recognize sadness in a work of art has not been coordinated with his ability to recognize sadness in persons would make us reluctant to say that he has seen the sadness of these works. For unless or until he has seen the vital connection that exists between these works and the emotional state of sadness, he has not seen that the quality these works have in common is *sadness*.

In constructing this scenario, Scruton assumes that the man whose sorting of works of art corresponds with our own shares our understanding of the nonaesthetic use of 'sad'. Scruton's reasons for making this assumption are obvious given the wider context

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<sup>62</sup> Joseph Margolis, "Robust Relativism", *JAAC*, 35 (1976), 37-46; p.40.

<sup>63</sup> *Art and Imagination*, pp.38-39.

of the ambiguity argument. If however taste constitutes an autonomous faculty, uncoordinated with other judgemental capacities in its operations, then it might be possible to take Scruton's scenario a stage further and assume that the person doing this sorting has no experience of the nonaesthetic use of 'sad'. For if this man's only reason for classifying works of art in the way that we do is because he has detected the presence of an emergent quality in some works of art and failed to detect it in others, then he should be able to affect the same sorting in the event that he had no understanding of the nonaesthetic use of 'sad'. Now if Scruton were to regard the first but not the second of these scenarios as a possibility under Sibley's account, this can only be because Scruton accepts the very thing that I have been arguing for here: that our practice of using a term in one experiential domain may serve to motivate, shape, or guide the classifications we make in other areas of experience, even in the event that the original use of the term does not strictly govern the new use.

The notion that taste could operate in the absence of ordinary perceptual and judgemental competence apparently accommodates a feature of aesthetic characterizations noted by Philip Petit: the fact that these are "perceptually elusive", to the extent that thorough acts of perception may fail to reveal the aesthetic qualities of an object.<sup>64</sup> The realization that thorough acts of perception may fail to reveal aesthetic character might tempt the careless thinker to conclude that such thorough acts of perception are not a necessary component in aesthetic sensitivity: a false conclusion, since it does not follow from the fact that ordinary perceptual and judgemental competence are not sufficient for aesthetic judgement that these will not prove necessary, either. It is not a conclusion that Sibley's own discussion of taste would invite. For whilst some of Sibley's passing comments might give the impression that Sibley treats taste as a special, intuition-like capacity, something operating in addition to, or beyond, ordinary perceptual competence; his more extended pronouncements on the topic quickly dispel this impression. According to Sibley, taste involves elements of both perceptual and linguistic competence, "the sophistication that consists in making finer distinctions and employing a

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<sup>64</sup> Philip Petit, "The Possibility of Aesthetic Realism", in *Pleasure, Preference and Value*, pp.17-38; p.26.



more precise vocabulary" than the majority of men. Taste involves a capacity for fine perceptual discrimination that is perfected through experience and coupled with the ability to articulate the variety and texture of one's experiences. The difference between a person with taste and someone lacking this discriminative capacity resembles the difference between the refined perceiver who employs a rich vocabulary differentiating fine shades of red ('vermilion', 'crimson', 'carmine'), and the perceiver who indifferently describes the same shades of colour using the generic term 'red'. Whereas the young child beginning to master an aesthetic vocabulary or any unsophisticated aesthetic perceiver will lump together many things under a generic term ('pretty', 'lovely'), the discriminating few who display a real mastery over a-terms employ a more subtle and specific vocabulary of taste, managing to differentiate between the *beautiful*, the *dainty*, the *elegant*, the *graceful* and the *charming*.<sup>65</sup> In addition to this component of perceptual and linguistic competence, Sibley assumes that an ability to make correct a-judgements requires training in the form of an extensive life's experience, an understanding of human nature and a degree of familiarity with the world. It takes all sorts of knowledge of human nature and customs, and often nothing short of the experience of a lifetime, to get the point of certain jokes or to realize the particularly moving nature of passages in *Othello* and *King Lear*.<sup>66</sup> That is to say, I will come to see the difference between those things which are sentimental or bathetic on the one hand, and those judged to be genuinely pathetic, moving or tragic on the other, only when I have a sufficiently wide experience of the variety and shades of human emotion, and sufficient knowledge of the ways in which emotions may be evoked and sustained to distinguish between, on the one hand, those occasions where I am being manipulated to react in an emotionally trivial way, and on the other hand, those occasions where the object of my experience deserves a sustained emotional response.

This brief summary of Sibley's position suggests that Sibley believes that ordinary perceptual and judgemental competence form essential components in the capacity known as taste. For Sibley, taste does not represent an isolated faculty which we may possess in

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<sup>65</sup> "Objectivity and Aesthetics", p.47; "Aesthetic Concepts", pp.448-449.

<sup>66</sup> "Objectivity and Aesthetics", pp.39-41.



lieu of more ordinary capacities. Nor could this capability fail to be coordinated in its operations with other capacities. If taste represents something in addition to ordinary capacities, it is still very much grounded upon those ordinary capabilities. This means that Sibley would not believe that the scenario Scruton describes, or my proposed extension of that scenario, represent serious possibilities. Sibley would be surprised to happen upon someone lacking the concept of sadness in persons who could manage to sort works of art in a way that corresponds with our own sorting of works between the 'sad' and 'not-sad'. This is not, however, because Sibley believes that the meaning of 'sad person' provides a set of conditions governing the use of 'sad painting'; but because Sibley would not believe that a person lacking the fundamental ability to apply the notion of sadness to persons could be thought to possess taste. Sibley does not believe that our aesthetic judgements occur in a vacuum, that we somehow leave the rest of the person behind when perceiving aesthetically. The man of taste is someone who seeks out and is sensitive to the connections that exist between different domains of human experience. Since the man described in Scruton's scenario refuses, or is unable, to connect that quality he has detected in works of art with his experience of using 'sad' in relation to persons, Sibley would not regard this individual as someone with taste. It is precisely because aesthetic taste presupposes and operates in tandem with other capacities that I believe that Sibley would affirm some version of (ii) or (iii), by stating that talk of sad paintings is motivated by the practice of talking about sad persons, and that our use of (c) category terms is not totally arbitrary or unrelated to our wider linguistic competence.

## VI

The previous section demonstrated why the ambiguity argument should not trouble that version of the theory of aesthetic perception which Scruton attributes to Sibley. For the purposes of that demonstration, I have assumed that Scruton's interpretation of

Sibley's intentions is fundamentally correct; that Sibley set about creating his distinction and noting that a-terms lack governing conditions with a view to establishing some form of the theory of aesthetic perception. However, I would now like to suggest the possibility that Scruton seriously misrepresents Sibley's intentions when he suggests that Sibley was consciously arguing for the theory of aesthetic perception. The Sibley I read is not the Sibley presented by Scruton in the context of the ambiguity argument. As a first step to seeing why this might be so, consider some examples of aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses of (c) category terms:

(A1) Autumn rain has been falling throughout the early afternoon. It stops abruptly, and the sun breaks through. Drops of water sparkle on the leaves and on the grey slates, and they drip down onto the pavement, which glistens with a hard sheen. The sky is blue, but streaked with black, suggesting distant rain. This is a melancholy scene.

(A2) The narrow road rises and falls. Along the verge on either side there are apple-trees in blossom. The fields as they slope away from the road are a brilliant green, dotted with the blue, yellow, and white of wild flowers. A few miles away the mountains rise up sharply from the rolling landscape. They are grey rising to blue, cut by the silver lines of mountain torrents. Patches of snow persist on the rock face. The air is fresh, and there is the sound of cowbells. At the foot of the mountains, beyond the rich orchards, there are large half-timbered farmhouses forming villages. It is a happy countryside.<sup>67</sup>

(N1) Sally's whole demeanour is listless and lethargic. She sits slumped in the chair, and doesn't appear to hear the questions that are put to her. She stares blankly at the wall, or else down at her feet, and there is a misty look in her eye. Sally is feeling sad.

(N2) Sally cannot sit still in her chair. She occasionally stands up, only to sit down again, fidgeting, and wringing her hand. She refuses to look at Arnold, and stammers as she answers questions put to her by other people in the group. A reddish tinge suffuses her face and neck. Sally is embarrassed.

The ambiguity argument exploits the idea that whereas 'sad' in (N1) and 'embarrassed' in (N2) are being used in a condition-governed fashion, 'melancholy' in 'melancholy scene' and 'happy' in 'happy countryside' lack governing conditions. If so, then it is possible that people will react differently to the (A) and (N) cases, perhaps accepting the concluding statements in (N1) and (N2) where they might feel that the

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<sup>67</sup> Richard Wollheim, "Correspondence, Projective Properties, and Expression in the Arts", p.51.

conclusion in either (A1) or (A2) represents something of a *non sequitur*. This is because to say that the use of 'embarrassed' in 'Sally is embarrassed' is condition-governed whilst the use of 'melancholy' in 'melancholy scene' lacks governing conditions, is to say that no extension of the description contained in (A1), however complete, will be logically sufficient for the claim that (A1) describes a melancholy scene; whereas some way of characterizing the situation described in (N2) will put it beyond doubt that Sally is embarrassed. Articulating the difference in this manner sidesteps an objection which might be made, that since (N2) represents a purely behavioural description of Sally's emotional state, and since two or more emotions may issue in similar patterns of behaviour, the situation described in (N2) could be consistent with the fact that Sally is feeling ashamed rather than embarrassed. Undoubtedly, behaviour represents only one of a set of criteria useful in differentiating the emotions. Where patterns of behaviour are common to more than one emotional state, extending the description by appealing to other elements of the case - the thoughts or beliefs of the subject, or the situation in which she finds herself - allows a greater degree of differentiation between the emotions. Thus, where (N2) does not place it beyond doubt that Sally is feeling embarrassed rather than ashamed, (N2') might:

(N2') Sally cannot sit still in her chair. She occasionally stands up, only to sit down again, fidgeting, and wringing her hands. She refuses to look at Arnold, and stammers as she answers questions put to her by other people in the group. She believes that the others are questioning her with a view to discovering whether she harbours any tender feelings for Arnold. A reddish tinge suffuses her face and neck. Sally is embarrassed.

There is no doubt that, as the ambiguity argument predicts, people typically react in different ways to the (A) and (N) cases. Almost invariably, it has been my experience that groups of students introduced to Wollheim's examples object that the description given in (A1) could be consistent with a cheerful scene, whilst (A2) could be taken to suggest a scene of melancholy character. Thus, (A1) and (A2) lend some circumstantial support to Sibley's claim that no set of na-descriptions could be logically sufficient for a particular a-

description.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, I would suggest that in those pre-philosophical moments when we are not testing our statements for governing conditions, most people would accept the concluding statement in (N2), and the reason for this acceptance is psychological rather than logical. To say that I *infer* Sally's embarrassment from the preceding statements in (N2) serves to misdescribe the nature of the language-game we are playing. This is because, as Errol Bedford has astutely noted in his seminal paper on the emotions, statements about emotions act as interpretations, rather than descriptions, of behaviour.<sup>69</sup> From a purely logical point of view, the statement that Sally is embarrassed manages to go beyond anything that has come before it in (N2). Nonetheless, we would tend to accept the claim that Sally is embarrassed based on nothing more than the behavioural evidence offered in the preceding description, because bringing the behaviour of persons under emotion concepts is our way of interpreting and making sense of that behaviour. This suggests that the reason why we accept the conclusion of (N2) but resist the conclusion of (A1) is not, as the ambiguity argument assumes, because emotion-terms possess and aesthetic uses of emotion-terms lack, governing conditions. The same facts can be explained more simply by noting that we have a natural desire to make sense of the behaviour of persons, a desire which leads us to assent to certain emotional characterizations of their behaviour even in the absence of evidence concerning the thoughts and feelings of the persons concerned. And since applying emotional terms to landscapes does not serve to fulfil some latent desire we possess to understand scenery, we are less inclined to agree to the closing statement in (A1).

Let us be clear what these examples are not intended to show. In the first place, I am not denying that emotion-terms are condition-governed in their nonaesthetic uses; or not quite. Nor am I denying that Sibley thought that they were. The foregoing analysis suggests that emotion-concepts are examples of what Sibley, following H.L.A.Hart, would call 'defeasible' concepts,<sup>70</sup> concepts which lack sufficient conditions but which

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<sup>68</sup> It is perhaps significant that when Wollheim introduces similar descriptions in *Painting as an Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), pp.80-81, he accompanies these with illustrations.

<sup>69</sup> Errol Bedford, "Emotions", *Aristotelian Society Proceedings*, (1956-57), 281-304; p.288.

<sup>70</sup> Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts", p.430.

nevertheless are loosely condition-governed to the extent that some description may be deemed sufficient given the absence of voiding conditions. Introducing non-behavioural criteria into a behavioural description of an emotional state might be sufficient for an emotion-predicate to apply because extending the description in this way rules out potential voiding conditions. For instance, knowing that Sally believes she has done something for which she can be criticized would serve as both a necessary condition for the claim that Sally is feeling ashamed,<sup>71</sup> and a voiding condition for the claim that she is embarrassed. Statement (N2'), which apparently removes a voiding condition for the claim that Sally is embarrassed, by making it seem unlikely that Sally believes her actions are open to criticism, thereby inclines us to agree that Sally is feeling embarrassed rather than ashamed.

There is no doubt, then, that Scruton's ambiguity argument correctly attributes these two views to Sibley: the view that a-terms lack governing conditions, and the view that terms lending themselves to both aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses are subject to governing conditions in their nonaesthetic uses. Nor is there any doubt that Sibley would have accepted some version of the theory of aesthetic perception, or rather, that his comments on the nature of taste can be construed as consistent with some weak form of the theory of aesthetic perception. For instance, Sibley subscribes to some form of aesthetic empiricism when he states that anyone who persistently failed to detect instances of delicate brushwork in paintings could not be said to possess the concept of delicacy, that such a person would be lacking the equivalent of a basic perceptual or experiential capacity and in this respect, would resemble someone who was blind to the colour red. The aesthetic clod example is intended to demonstrate that aesthetic enjoyment, appreciation and judgement are beyond those who cannot perceive aesthetic qualities for themselves.<sup>72</sup> In short, I am not objecting to the bits and pieces which Scruton extracts from Sibley's account. However, I am suggesting that Scruton reassembles the pieces in a manner which seriously misrepresents Sibley's methods and intentions. In particular, Scruton misrepresents Sibley's methods and intentions when he supposes that Sibley

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<sup>71</sup> This example may be found in Bedford, p.290.

<sup>72</sup> "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic", p.137.

noted that a-concepts lack governing conditions with a view to providing a simple logical criterion separating the aesthetic from the moral and the practical.<sup>73</sup> As I read him, Sibley never set himself the task of providing a unifying logic for aesthetic terms. When, in his original paper, Sibley set about contrasting a-concepts with a range of familiar condition-governed concepts, this was not done with a view to demarcating the realm of the aesthetic; but with a view to demonstrating the different types of condition-governing he was denying for a-terms. Far from using the fact that a-concepts lack governing conditions as a method of distinguishing the class of a-terms from all other classes of concepts, Sibley leaves it an open question whether there are categories of terms besides a-terms which lack governing conditions.<sup>74</sup>

What the analysis of the (N) examples above is intended to show is that emotion concepts are themselves only loosely governed by conditions. Emotion concepts are defeasible concepts, concepts for which we choose to treat a definition as operationally sufficient in the absence of voiding conditions. I have tried to show that our desire to treat a description such as (N2) or (N2') as sufficient for the claim "Sally is embarrassed" is tied up with our desire to make human behaviour appear comprehensible. In the previous section, I argued that if the claim that a-terms may be negatively governed by conditions amounts to something other than a denial of the claim that a-terms lack governing conditions, it amounts to the claim that occasionally, we treat some description as operationally sufficient for withholding an aesthetic predicate. Now if it is true that Sibley treat emotion-terms as defeasible concepts, and if my analysis of negative condition-governing is correct, this would mean that for Sibley, emotion concepts and a-concepts both constitute examples of concepts that are loosely governed by conditions. In short, what my introduction of the (N) examples is intended to show is that, in Sibley's thinking, there may be no great distance in point of logic between emotion-concepts and a-terms. And if for Sibley there is not that logical distance between category (c) aesthetic-terms and non-aesthetic uses of emotion-terms which Scruton's discussion of the

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<sup>73</sup> *Art and Imagination*, p.42.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic", p.152: "There are no doubt other concepts that lack sufficient or positive conditions (of some specified sort); hence I am not claiming that aesthetic concepts differ from all others in this respect".



ambiguity argument would appear to suggest, this fact should give pause to anyone trying to argue that Sibley was attempting to create logical space between a-concepts and all other categories or concepts.

When Scruton suggests that Sibley made the claim that a-terms lack governing conditions with a view to providing a unifying logic for aesthetic terms that would underpin the theory of aesthetic perception, Scruton manages to create a Sibley who is both naive and clever in all the wrong places. Scruton asks us to imagine a Sibley sufficiently sophisticated in his methodology to provide a simple logical criterion allowing us to separate the aesthetic from the practical and the moral; yet at the same time sufficiently naive in his thinking to overlook the fact that many, perhaps a majority of all a-descriptions, employ a vocabulary borrowed from other contexts. The Sibley I read possessed greater intelligence and less sophistication than this assessment would imply. For the Sibley I read was sufficiently wise to realize that taste cannot operate in isolation of our other faculties; and he lacked the ambition to provide a special logic isolating a unique set of terms. Scruton altogether misrepresents the type of enquiry Sibley was engaging when he uses Sibley's views to discuss the theory of aesthetic perception. What Sibley offers is not a formal attempt to characterize the special logic of aesthetic terms, but an informal piece of smoking room philosophy, comprising a set of commonsense claims - that aesthetic terms lack governing conditions, that aesthetic descriptions characterize qualities available to the sensitive perceiver - which are not necessarily interconnected in any systematic way. These commonsense observations are rooted in the commonsense intuition that not every utterance made in the context of art appreciation constitutes a properly aesthetic remark. The connections that Scruton creates between these claims are connections which Sibley himself never explicitly makes. This is not entirely surprising, given the fact that Scruton's primary aim in presenting the ambiguity argument was less to provide sensitive interpretation of Sibley's position, than it was to use Sibley as a summary illustration of the theory of aesthetic perception, a theory which Scruton himself was keen to reject.

In arguing that Sibley did not create his distinction nor did he make the observation that a-concepts lack governing-conditions with a view to establishing the theory of aesthetic perception, I am aware of the fact that perhaps a majority of Sibley's commentators have shared Scruton's assumption that Sibley was attempting to provide a unifying logic for aesthetic terms; or else they have concurred with Cohen in believing that Sibley set about the task of demarcating the subject-matter of aesthetics. All I can do here is to offer my own reading of Sibley, a reading which, whether or not it remains historically true to Sibley's intentions, I believe manages to cohere with the substance of Sibley's text.

## VII

We are now in a position to examine in some detail that list of terms which Cohen culls from the pages of art criticism in an attempt to demonstrate, firstly, that Sibley's distinction is anything but intuitive or rooted in our practice; but also, that the concept of taste proves at best a clumsy tool for sorting through the judgements we make in aesthetic contexts.<sup>75</sup> As I now plan to show, Sibley has nothing to fear from Cohen's list. Far from undermining the intuitiveness of Sibley's claims, Cohen's list manages to talk right past Sibley's distinction.

To facilitate discussion, and to reveal the challenge which Cohen places before Sibley, I propose dividing the terms in Cohen's list between the following three categories: (1) terms belonging to the vocabulary of art criticism which are 'aesthetic' in some popular understanding of the word, but which do not appear to require for their application any perceptual sensitivity ('colourful', 'dissonant', 'poetic', 'rhythmic'); (2) terms which do not carry an aesthetic flavour in most contexts in which they are used, yet seem to require for their application some nonaesthetic analogue of (aesthetic)

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<sup>75</sup> Cohen, p.139.

perceptiveness or taste ('funny', 'ideological', 'introspective', 'metaphysical', 'moralistic', 'obscene', 'pompous', 'pretentious', 'sad', 'sentimental', 'serious', 'sincere', 'suspenseful'); and (3) style or genre terms ('baroque', 'in the style of Beethoven', 'classical', 'Gothic', 'impressionist', 'Kafkaesque', 'modernist', 'nationalistic', 'realist', 'Romanesque', 'surrealist', 'symbolist', and Wolfflin's familiar distinction between the 'linear' and 'painterly' pictorial styles). These categories will not account for every term on Cohen's list and some terms (e.g. 'metaphysical') will find a place in more than one category. Nor perhaps do these categories exhaust every problem which Cohen would like to create for Sibley. Nonetheless, it would be true to say that a majority of the terms on Cohen's list fall into at least one of these three categories. Dividing Cohen's list in this way exposes the fact that Cohen regards Sibley's taste test to be both too narrow and too broad. By incorporating the terms in category (1) into his list, Cohen suggests that the taste test is too narrow, excluding from the class of a-terms many terms popularly conceived to be aesthetic in nature. The terms in category (2) raise the possibility that the taste test is too broad, since many more terms than Sibley would wish to count among the a-terms require for their application something resembling taste. Cohen includes the style concepts in category (3) for good measure as instances of 'aesthetic' concepts which rely upon something more than perceptual sensitivity. That is to say, the style concepts in category (3) are intended to challenge the primarily perceptual status that Sibley accords his a-judgements. Our concern here is with the concepts listed in categories (1) and (2). I shall defer a discussion of category (3) until we come to discuss the relationship between perception and aesthetic judgements in Chapter Two.

There is little point in demonstrating that Sibley's taste test includes or excludes too many aesthetic terms unless you agree with Scruton that Sibley was setting about providing a special logic for aesthetic terms; or unless you share Cohen's belief that Sibley introduced his distinction with a view to demarcating the subject-matter of aesthetics from the realm of practical or moral concern. As I have argued at length, Sibley was attempting neither of the above. Far from using his distinction to isolate the subject-matter of aesthetics, the distinction presupposes our prior acquaintance with that

subject-matter. I have described at some length the basis of Sibley's decision to use the term 'aesthetic' in a somewhat narrower sense than Cohen does. To recap: any term characteristically used in the classification and description of the arts might count as 'aesthetic' in some broad meaning of the word. However, not all such terms are 'aesthetic' in the narrow sense that their use poses interesting questions for a form of philosophical enquiry. Sibley operates with this narrower notion of the aesthetic when he distinguishes those terms occurring in art criticism which stimulate our philosophical curiosity because they lack governing conditions and designate emergent qualities requiring some sensitivity to detect, from those terms (large, circular, green, slow, monosyllabic) which seem to provide no new philosophical challenges whether they are used in specifically nonaesthetic contexts, or used to qualify works of art. This is where the intuitiveness of the distinction lies. It is Cohen, not Sibley, who goes against intuition when he denies that we make any such distinction.

If Cohen produces his list of terms with the intention of illustrating the three categories I have described, then it seems reasonable to suppose Cohen shares the common misconception that the taste which Sibley describes constitutes an autonomously operating, intuition-like faculty owing little or nothing to the activity of the ordinary faculties, a capability to be juxtaposed with ordinary perceptual competence. Why else would Cohen wonder whether that training or informed experience required to judge that various works of Liszt and Brahms are 'in the style of Beethoven' involves "the development of taste or [only] the directed training of one's normal faculties"?<sup>76</sup> As I have argued at length, to understand 'taste' in these terms is to misconstrue Sibley's use of the term. Sibley does not believe we face a choice between saying that a judgement relies upon taste and saying that a judgement requires the directed training of one's ordinary faculties. Any accurate summary of Sibley's discussion of taste demonstrates that Sibley believes that taste constitutes nothing more or less than the directed training of one's ordinary faculties, or else that it represents a special deployment of the ordinary

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<sup>76</sup> Cohen, p.140.

faculties.<sup>77</sup> To suppose otherwise is to misinterpret Sibley's pronouncements on the matter.

In introducing category (2) terms into his master list, Cohen raises the interesting question of mixed judgements: judgements which are neither purely aesthetic nor purely moral, but draw upon both sets of considerations. Marcia Muelder Eaton adduces the example of judging a novel to be sentimental to illustrate the notion of a mixed judgement.<sup>78</sup> Eaton points out that, in the paradigmatic case, we think of aesthetic interest as an interest in certain 'intrinsic' features of an object or situation, formal and expressive features we can directly perceive. Moral interest, by contrast, amounts to an interest in 'extrinsic' features; consequences or principles of action, features which typically cannot be perceived in the performer or in the action she performs. This tidy distinction between the intrinsic and the extrinsic comes apart when we come to determine the sentimentality of a novel; a case where we have a supposedly 'aesthetic' judgement where both aesthetic and moral aspects intertwine. We must go beyond the intrinsic features of the novel, applying knowledge of how people react to death or unrequited love, in order to decide whether these topics are being treated sentimentally. Similarly, a 'moral' judgement of sentimentality must look not simply at what is done, but at how it is done - an intrinsic feature of the action. The question arises whether the existence of mixed judgements should prove an embarrassment for Sibley's distinction. Clearly, the existence of mixed judgements would prove deeply embarrassing for Sibley in the event that he was aiming to distinguish the realm of aesthetic interest from the realms of practical and moral interest. Since he was doing nothing of the kind, Sibley can happily acknowledge the existence of mixed judgements without surrendering his distinction. Nevertheless, the thought may persist that mixed aesthetic judgements must prove at least mildly embarrassing to Sibley, that these will sit uneasily with the notion that aesthetic judgement involves a form of perceptivity. For this reason, Sibley will be obliged to treat mixed aesthetic judgements as less than central cases of aesthetic judgement.

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<sup>77</sup> A point noted by J.F.Logan, "More on Aesthetic Concepts", p.405.

<sup>78</sup> Marcia Muelder Eaton, "Integrating the Aesthetic and the Moral", *Philosophical Studies*, 67 (1992), 219-240; pp.228-229.



To see why Sibley might happily incorporate mixed judgements among his aesthetic judgements, consider once more the notion of taste. Sibley's discussion of taste invites the thought that the person who acquires taste acquires something more than a narrowly discriminative or narrowly perceptual capacity. Now whether we choose to think of taste as a broadly based capability of which the capacity for making fine perceptual discrimination forms a part, or whether we choose to treat a capacity for fine perceptual discrimination as one of a group of capabilities which jointly constitute taste, there seems little reason to suppose that taste will be confined to that intelligence we bring to bear when perceiving works of art. If I exercise taste in seeing that a vase is graceful, I exercise 'taste' or an analogue of this capacity in deciding that a face has a 'sad' rather than a thoughtful or introspective look; in distinguishing between those jokes that are very funny and those that are at best mildly amusing; and in describing a would-be gesture of generosity as both pompous and pretentious. On this view of the matter, the making of aesthetic discriminations reflects a single application of a capability which may be exercised in all walks of life. The same broad capability that is put to service in the making of narrowly aesthetic discriminations will be called upon in the making of mixed judgements or in the making of what are conceived to be narrowly moral judgements. It follows that, whilst mixed judgements may not represent narrowly aesthetic judgements, these constitute taste judgements nonetheless.

If we focus upon the important role which Sibley assigns to life experience in the formation of taste, we derive a further understanding of this capacity that is congenial to our understanding of mixed judgements. The fact that the development of taste requires considerable life experience invites the thought that (aesthetic) taste is just one of a number of capacities that are nurtured together and acquired throughout the course of a lifetime. That is to say, the experience of a lifetime offers opportunities to hone and refine, not just a capacity for aesthetic judgement, but a whole host of other discriminative capacities not directly called upon in most aesthetic situations. We can think of the person with taste as someone who displays a certain 'talent for living', someone who is at ease with the world and who displays her ease both in the number and



in the variety of aesthetic and nonaesthetic discriminations that she makes. What is more, the person with taste becomes the unusually complete perceiver, someone who brings to her aesthetic judgement-making a whole host of discriminative capacities that were forged inside and outside the narrow sphere of aesthetic activity. The aesthetically adept perceiver becomes the emotionally and morally adept perceiver. On this view of the matter, not only would mixed judgements become paradigmatic rather than marginal cases of aesthetic judgement, but it follows that a capacity for forming mixed judgements becomes central to our understanding of the nature of aesthetic perceptivity. For it is the presence or absence of the ability to form mixed judgements that allows us to sort the sheep from the goats, distinguishing those who are aesthetically adept from the aesthetically naive or inexperienced perceivers.

The discussion of Cohen's list may be summarized in the following way. Cohen apparently believes that there are no less than three distinct notions of intuitiveness which Sibley's distinction fails to meet. In the first place, Sibley's division of concepts between the aesthetic and the nonaesthetic is not intuitive in the sense that this is not a distinction we automatically or pretheoretically make. In the second place, Cohen denies the distinction is intuitive to the extent that it relies upon the operation of a special faculty analogous to the faculty of moral intuition. Since introspection reveals no such faculty operating in us, the distinction cannot be 'intuitive' in this sense. And thirdly, Sibley's distinction is not intuitive to the extent it is not one rooted in our practice. I have endorsed the second of Cohen's claims whilst disagreeing with the first and the third. It is indeed true to say that Sibley's distinction does not presume the existence of a special, intuition-like faculty. Nonetheless, the distinction is both intuitive and rooted in our practice. What is more, I would suggest that there is a further sense in which Sibley's distinction might be thought to be intuitive, one which Cohen overlooks. For the fact that 'taste' represents a wide-ranging capacity which feeds upon, incorporates and complements so many of our ordinary capacities demonstrates how intuitive, i.e. deeply rooted in our nature, both the capacity and the judgements based upon this capacity must be.

Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate the relatively modest ambitions which underlie Sibley's 'theory' of aesthetic concepts. To designate the observations contained in Sibley's discussion of aesthetic concepts a 'theory' of aesthetic attribution perhaps overstates the rigour of those observations. I have attempted to show here that it is the very modesty of Sibley's ambitions which protects Sibley's account from many of the criticisms traditionally raised against it. For the purposes of this discussion, I have accepted without question Sibley's reflections on the nature of aesthetic judgement and the nature of aesthetic perceptivity or 'taste'. It is now time to subject Sibley's opinions to more critical scrutiny.

## CHAPTER TWO

Sibley distinguishes his a-judgements from what he calls *verdicts*, the latter being those purely normative judgements we form when we say that things are aesthetically good or bad, excellent or mediocre, and so on.<sup>1</sup> In contrasting a-judgements with verdicts, Sibley is rejecting two different possibilities: the possibility that an a-judgement constitutes an evaluative claim, and the possibility that an a-judgement forms the conclusion to a piece of reflective reasoning. When Sibley speaks of an a-judgement, what he has in mind is not an evaluation or the concluding statement of an aesthetic argument, but either a sensitive perception, or the report of a sensitive perception. This is not to say that reports of aesthetic perceptions will never carry at least some element of evaluation. As an examination of the list on page 19 above suggests, many of the phrases Sibley uses in his discussion appear to carry some element of evaluation ('holds it together', 'never really come to life', 'strikes a false note', 'telling contrast', 'tightly knit', 'uncertainty of tone'). However, in creating a distinction between his a-judgments and what he calls verdicts, Sibley suggests that, as well as providing evaluations, phrases such as "the characters never really come to life" serve to describe qualities we have perceived or otherwise recognized to be present in a work of art. That is to say, aesthetic judgements act as phenomenally objective reports of experienced emergent qualities.

This chapter explores the nature of the links which might exist between aesthetic judgement and acts of perception. Section I gives some support to Sibley's claim that a-judgements constitute perceptual determinations, for here I argue that aesthetic judgements are strongly perceptual judgements: judgements formed in the course of acts of perception rather than pieces of reflective reasoning taking the data of perception for their materials. Section II examines what overlap exists between aesthetic judgements in the wider meaning of the word, and Sibley's a-judgements. Here I provide an analysis of

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic", *PR*, 74 (1965), 135-159; p.136.

style concepts in order to demonstrate that the class of a-judgements potentially incorporates a greater number of aesthetic judgements in the wide sense than we intuitively might suppose.

Many of Sibley's critics have quarrelled with the distinction Sibley wishes to create between verdicts and a-judgements. In particular, the notion that a-judgements serve to report perceptual experiences comes up against two claims sometimes made on behalf of a-qualities and a-judgements. The first of these is the proposal that a-terms serve primarily to evaluate and only secondarily to describe. According to this proposal, since all aesthetic judgements carry an element of evaluation, Sibley is mistaken in supposing that there is a real distinction to be made between aesthetic evaluations and a-judgements. The second proposal would deny the objective status of a-judgements by treating a-terms as affective terms; terms which, while purporting to qualify the object perceived, succeed only in describing the affective state of the perceiver. In the terminology of Beardsley, this view claims that a-attributions describe the 'phenomenally subjective' rather than the 'phenomenally objective' components of my perceptual field.<sup>2</sup> In Sections III and IV, I demonstrate that neither of these proposals undermines Sibley's contention that a-attributions constitute phenomenally objective perceptual reports. Section IV further suggests an analysis of the content of perceptual acts which would allow us to take on board both of these proposals whilst resisting a Kantian analysis of aesthetic judgements.

Sibley's understanding of the nature of a-judgement leads to a perceptual model of aesthetic sensitivity, identifying aesthetic sensitivity as a form of perceptivity. Section V describes how this perceptual model predicts the distribution of aesthetic sensitivity across the population as a whole, and identifies ways in which a perceptual account of aesthetic sensitivity might fail to capture our understanding of the nature of aesthetic sensitivity.

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<sup>2</sup> Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), p.37.

# I

Sibley is not the only writer who chooses to highlight the strong connection that exists between acts of perception and the formation of aesthetic judgements. Marcia Muelder Eaton identifies aesthetic qualities as 'intrinsic' features of objects, where an intrinsic feature F of an object O is such that direct inspection of O is a necessary and a sufficient condition for verifying the claim that O is F.<sup>3</sup> Philip Petit contrasts aesthetic characterizations with colour descriptions in order to illustrate the 'essentially perceptual' nature of the former. In the case of colour descriptions, there are two separate ways in which I may acquire the knowledge that O is red: I may visually inspect O for myself, or I may rely instead upon the testimony of someone I trust. But whereas I may be said to know that an object is red based upon nothing more than the testimony of others, "perception is the only title to the sort of knowledge which perception yields" of the truths which aesthetic characterizations express.<sup>4</sup> Alan Tormey develops the same idea by suggesting that we tend to place a direct perceptual acquaintance requirement upon critical judgements, which he treats as co-extensive with aesthetic judgements. According to Tormey, we react to critical judgements as though these were judgements rooted in eyewitness accounts. That is to say, we expect anyone offering a critical judgement to be acquainted perceptually with the object of their judgement, or in the case of a picture, acquainted with a suitable reproduction or surrogate.<sup>5</sup> Tormey suggests that this direct perceptual acquaintance condition explains a further feature of a-judgements - the fact that these cannot be transmitted between persons. From the fact that a knows that b makes an aesthetic judgement (judges<sub>a</sub>) that p, it does not follow that a also judges<sub>a</sub> that

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<sup>3</sup> Marcia Muelder Eaton, "The Intrinsic, Non-Supervenient Nature of Aesthetic Properties", *JAAC*, 52 (1994), 383-397; p.391.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Petit, "The Possibility of Aesthetic Realism:", in *Pleasure, Preference, and Value*, ed. Eva Schaper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.17-38; p.25.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Tormey, "Critical Judgments:", *Theoria*, 39 (1973), 35-49. Because he places a direct perceptual acquaintance condition upon aesthetic judgements, Tormey's conception of aesthetic judgement coincides with Sibley's narrow use of the term. For this reason, I shall continue to adopt the abbreviated terminology of a-terms, a-judgements, etc. in discussing Tormey's proposal.

p. In this respect, 'judges<sub>a</sub>' contrasts with 'knows'. If a knows that b knows that p, it follows that a also knows that p. That is to say, the inference goes through in (1) but not in (2):

- (1)  $KaKbp \rightarrow Kap$
- (2)  $KaJ_a bp \rightarrow J_a ap$

In the terminology which Tormey borrows from Hintikka, (1) is 'self-sustaining', an epistemic analogue of a logically valid sentence form; (2) is not.

Tormey adopts the strategy of juxtaposing two separate facts - that judges<sub>a</sub> is not transmittable, that aesthetic judgements are rooted in eye-witness accounts - in the hope that these will prove mutually illuminating. Since the facts which Tormey chooses to bring into juxtaposition are not equally rich and interesting, little illumination results. When Tormey suggests that a-judgements are rooted in eye-witness accounts, he is making a highly particular claim concerning the nature of aesthetic judgement. This is because the direct acquaintance condition is a feature particular to a-judgements and not a condition binding upon judgements in general.<sup>6</sup> Outside of the aesthetic case, I can form judgements concerning a variety of objects with which I am not personally acquainted. In order to judge that Darwin experiences a monsoonal climate, it is sufficient to consult the annual climatic graph for the region. I am not required to visit that city before daring to form my opinion. By contrast, the fact that judges<sub>a</sub> is not transmittable in (2) is not a rich and interesting thesis concerning the nature of a-judgements, but a rather thin fact concerning the logical behaviour of cognitive verbs. Non-transmittability is a feature common to all forms of judgement.<sup>7</sup> That is to say, (2) represents a single substitution instance of

- (3)  $KaJbp \rightarrow Jap$

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<sup>6</sup> This is not to deny that some na-judgements will take the form of eye-witness accounts.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Kivy makes this point in "Aesthetic Concepts: Some Fresh Considerations", *JAAC*, 37 (1979), 423-432; p.425.



which is not self-sustaining. What is more, the logical behaviour of (3) is consistent with the logical behaviour of most cognitive verbs. Like (3), none of the following sentence forms utilizing 'believes' expresses a valid inference:

- (4)BaKbp -> Kap
- (5)KaBbp -> Kap
- (6)KaBbp -> Bap.

Contrary to Tormey's intentions, demonstrating the non-transmittable nature of  $\text{judges}_a$  in (2) does nothing to prepare us for the more interesting claim that a-judgements constitute eye-witness accounts. At most, Tormey's juxtaposition demonstrates that the eye-witness nature of a-judgements is consistent with a piece of logical behaviour shared by many, perhaps most cognitive verbs. And since this piece of logical behaviour is also compatible with the fact that we do not automatically impose a direct acquaintance requirement upon na-judgements, the observation does little to illuminate our understanding of a-judgements in particular.

The problem is that the two facts which Tormey places before us are of a different order, requiring different types of explanation. If indeed it is the case that we impose a direct perceptual acquaintance condition upon aesthetic judgements whilst not placing one upon judgements in general, then this is a fact which cries out for explanation. Clearly, this explanation will not consist in pointing out a piece of logical behaviour which  $\text{judges}_a$  shares with most cognitive verbs. On the other hand, if most cognitive verbs are not transmittable after the fashion of 'knows' in (1), then unlike Tormey, we will not feel compelled to reach for a special explanation of the failure of transmission in the aesthetic case. If there is anything concerning the logical behaviour of cognitive verbs that cries out for explanation, it is the fact that (1) is one of the very few sentence forms of its type which is self-sustaining. What is at issue here is a logical point concerning the formal acceptability of (1) as opposed to (2) or (5). It is impossible to secure the condition expressed in the antecedent of (1) without simultaneously satisfying the consequent. I am not in a position to know that p constitutes a piece of knowledge for b unless p also constitutes a piece of knowledge for me. This is why the consequent follows from the

antecedent in (1). By contrast, judging that  $p$  involves assessing some evidence for  $p$ . 'Judges that  $p$ ' describes a more demanding cognitive operation than whatever cognitive operation is involved in ascertaining that  $b$  judges that  $p$ . In most ordinary cases, merely ascertaining that  $b$  judges that  $p$  will not satisfy the cognitive operation of judging for myself that  $p$ , and so the inference fails to go through in (3).

In short, Tormey's juxtaposition proves uninformative, in part because noting the logical behaviour of  $\text{judges}_a$  in (2) does nothing to prepare us for the claim that  $a$ -judgments constitute eye-witness accounts; but also because the direct perceptual acquaintance condition possesses little explanatory power when it comes to illuminating the logical behaviour of 'judges' and 'believes' in (3) through (6). The real explanatory power of the direct acquaintance condition lies in accounting for whatever informal differences we may detect between individual examples of  $\text{judges}_a$  and  $\text{judges}_{na}$ . Thus, in considering instances of schema (3), we discover that there are cases where, on an informal basis, we would accept that the inference goes through. For instance, in highly specialized areas of speculative science where a piece of information is abstruse and difficult to acquire, perhaps requiring a lifetime's work to verify a single result, the judgements of the experts provide the only relevant evidence I could assess. It therefore follows that there is no gap to be bridged between ascertaining what others have judged and assessing the evidence for myself, and that the very act of ascertaining what the experts have judged itself would constitute an act of judgement on my part. It might even be suggested that in cases of this kind, knowing what the acknowledged experts have judged places me under pressure to judge in the same way myself. The direct acquaintance condition helps to explain why no equivalent to this sort of case occurs in the realm of aesthetic judgement. Aesthetic knowledge is information concerning the perceptual appearances of things. Far from being difficult to acquire, aesthetic knowledge constitutes a form of information in principle available to anyone willing to use their eyes and ears. The 'experts' or critics enjoy no particular advantage over Everyman in this respect. Unlike the cognitive activity of ascertaining what the expert critics think,  $\text{judging}_a$  involves assessing evidence of a perceptual nature, and the most efficient

method of accumulating and assessing the relevant perceptual information involves making oneself acquainted with the object concerned, looking and listening for oneself. Thus, to insist upon a direct acquaintance condition for aesthetic judgements serves to emphasize the perceptual nature of aesthetic judgements.

The direct-acquaintance condition serves to identify a-judgements as perceptual judgements in a very strong sense. That is to say, not only are a-judgements perceptual in the weak sense that they rely upon evidence of a perceptual nature; but a-judgements are perceptual in the strong sense that these are judgements formed in the course of perceiving. In an ontology which sharply separates human intellectual activity between acts of perception and acts of pure cognition, the act of judging<sub>a</sub> that p involves a perceptual rather than a cognitive operation. This is how Sibley and Tormey understand the nature of a-judgement. However, others have not shared this understanding. Peter Kivy for one appears to believe that at least some aesthetic judgements are perceptual only in the weak sense. Kivy wishes to reject the direct-acquaintance condition, and to this end argues that reading Tovey may be enough to equip me to make some aesthetic judgements concerning Haydn's *London Symphonies*.<sup>8</sup> Whilst Joseph Margolis does not explicitly reject the direct perceptual acquaintance condition, he apparently believes that aesthetic judgement is perceptual in the weak rather than the strong sense. This is because Margolis acknowledges that perception provides the raw materials for aesthetic judgment, but does not believe this entails that the act of judging<sub>a</sub> in itself must constitute a further perceptual act. As Margolis puts it, whilst I must perceive an object in order to say that it is graceful, I do not perceive that it is graceful.<sup>9</sup> Margolis' understanding of the nature of aesthetic judgment arises from his understanding of the nature of aesthetic dispute. Margolis believes that in cases of aesthetic dispute, two individuals might form differing opinions as to the aesthetic character of an object basing their judgements upon the same nonaesthetic description. Margolis accounts for the existence of such disagreements by suggesting that judging<sub>a</sub> involves an element of reflection as well as perception. My judgement that a certain aesthetic quality is present partially reflects a theoretical decision

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<sup>8</sup> "Aesthetic Concepts: Some Fresh Considerations", p.426.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Margolis, "Sibley on Aesthetic Perception", *JAAC*, 25 (1966), 155-158; p.157.

upon my part as to what I shall allow to count for a given aesthetic quality. Thus, the reason why two persons may agree in describing all the nonaesthetic qualities present in a dance, yet fail to agree that the dance is graceful, is because they are operating with different notions of what constitutes gracefulness in a dance. For Margolis, aesthetic 'reasons' are not offered like scientific reasons, something binding upon all rational creatures, but instead form bases for judgement binding only upon the speaker himself. It follows from Margolis' position that I can never be pressed to accept the aesthetic judgements of another person in the way in which I may sometimes be under pressure to accept the judgements of scientific experts. I can always protest that I agree with the critic's na-descriptions and even agree that I understand why the critic judges as he does, whilst insisting that I appreciate things differently.

Do the considerations raised by Kivy and Margolis throw any doubt upon the direct acquaintance condition? A brief reply to Kivy would agree that reading Tovey may provide me with some real knowledge of an aesthetic nature, might agree to call whatever judgements I base upon my reading of Tovey 'aesthetic judgements' in the wide sense of the word, whilst denying that the resulting judgements would be examples of Sibley's a-judgements. A brief answer to the position adopted by Margolis would show that at least some a-judgements are perceptual in the strong sense, by providing an example of a commonly occurring aesthetic judgement which can only be formed in the course of an act of perception. I here offer the notion of the *balance* we attribute to a painting as an example of such a judgement. This is because the balance of a painting is its *visual balance*. Judging the visual balance of a picture amounts to a perceptual operation, a matter of seeing that the visual design 'looks right to the eye'. Whereas a balanced picture has a settled character that is somehow satisfying to the eye, an unbalanced composition has the appearance of something accidental, transitory. A composition which lacks visual balance is the visual equivalent of an incoherent statement and for this reason, has an unsettling effect upon the perceiver.<sup>10</sup> Judging the visual balance of a picture is not a

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<sup>10</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p.12. The following account of visual balance owes much to Arnheim's first chapter, esp. pp.14-17.

matter of determining the symmetrical disposition of visual motifs on the canvas. For instance, where a picture consists of white polka dots superimposed on a black background, I do not determine the visual balance of the picture by dividing the picture along an imaginary vertical axis and verifying that each half of the picture contains the same number of dots occupying the same positions. A picture displaying a random distribution of dots from left to right may look balanced, whilst a picture displaying perfect left-right symmetry may look too static to present a convincing experience of visual balance. Nor is judging visual balance a function of the representational content of a picture, so that judging balance becomes a matter of determining whether the picture represents an object about to topple. We may decide that a picture is an implausible representation but a highly satisfying visual statement. For instance, in Raphael's *Granduca Madonna*, the child is seated on the Madonna's cupped left hand, her right hand barely enclosing the child's torso. Neither hand apparently supplies sufficient force to support the weight of the child, a fact which, once observed, does nothing to unsettle the overriding impression of serenity and of total visual balance found in the composition. Nor does judging the visual balance of a composition rely upon the representational importance we assign to the various elements of a composition. The way in which a figure is clothed, the sway of a curtain in the background, may carry no representational significance in an annunciation scene. Nevertheless, these same visual elements may serve to deflect the attention of the eye from the main figures in a way that preserves the overall visual balance of a composition.

Rudolf Arnheim has documented various factors influencing the visual balance of pictorial compositions. Arnheim describes the visual 'weight' of a pictorial element, where assigning a relative 'weight' to an element describes the extent to which that element captures my attention within the visual field corresponding with the picture. Given the anisotropy of visual space, shifting the same element to different positions within the picture space may alter its visual weight. Thus the same element looks 'heavier' placed at the top of the picture than it would do if it were placed in the bottom half. This means that in order to retain visual balance, a circle located in the top half of the



picture must be counterbalanced by a larger visual object in the bottom half. Because the same visual motif carries greater visual weight in the right as opposed to the left half of the picture space, reversing a picture around its vertical axis may impair the overall visual balance.<sup>11</sup> Arnheim notes that bright colours look 'heavier' than dark colours, and that the colour red looks 'heavier' than the colour blue. Arnheim also notes the operation of certain 'lever' effects whereby the weight of a pictorial element increases in proportion to its distance from the visual centre of the picture.<sup>12</sup> The lever effect dictates that an object appears 'heavier' as it retreats from the observer in the third dimension. Applied to the pictorial case, the lever effect dictates that a picture motif takes on more visual weight as it disappears into the depth dimension, attracting more visual attention than its size alone would justify relative to the size of other motifs appearing in the frame.

To demonstrate that a judgement of visual balance constitutes a strongly perceptual judgement, consider the following example. Suppose for the sake of argument that I have become friendly with an eccentric millionaire who possesses an important private art collection largely acquired upon the black market. Having gained his trust over a period of time, I am offered a chance to view his most treasured painting - a lost work by a well-known artist. However, to ensure that I will not be able to identify his acquisition to the proper authorities, he proposes to expose only a small section of the painting at any one time, whilst keeping the remainder of the painting hidden from view. I may spend as much time as I like examining each section, and my friend helpfully offers to indicate on a numbered diagram the position each section occupies within the painting overall. Although there is no doubt that I could gain some information of a perceptual nature by following this procedure, it is difficult to say precisely which *perceptual* judgements I would be in a position to make. For one thing, it is doubtful that my knowledge of the prevailing colour tonalities of the individual parts would enable me to determine the

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<sup>11</sup> It follows that where a picture contains the same amount of visual material on both sides, the right side may look heavier than the left. This fact explains why a polka-dot picture possessing perfect left-right symmetry might lack visual balance.

<sup>12</sup> The *visual centre* of a picture should not be confused with the geometrical centre of the picture plane, since the centre of visual interest in a picture is determined by the disposition of visual elements upon the plane. For more on this, see Rudolf Arnheim, *The Power of the Centre: A Study of Composition in the Visual Arts* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1982), esp. ch.1 and p.93.



overall tonality of the colour scheme of the painting, a fact familiar to anyone who has tried matching the shades of colour belonging to individual pieces of a jigsaw puzzle against the shades of colour seen in a larger tonal context within the picture on the box. What is beyond dispute is that I would never put myself in a position to judge the visual balance of the picture by taking up my friend's singular offer. The balance of a pictorial composition describes a relationship between the parts of the picture which is seen rather than inferred. In the terminology adopted by Margolis, not only must I perceive in order to judge that a picture is balanced, I perceive that the picture is balanced. It follows that, as long as I lacked some overall visual impression of the picture, or had failed to visually experience the interrelationship between its parts, I would not have perceived the painting in a way that would allow me to judge its visual balance. The fact that I could never judge the visual balance of the picture by applying the principles enumerated by Arnheim to the sort of visual information gained in this pictorial game of 'peek-a-boo' demonstrates that at least some a-judgements, notably judgements of visual balance, are perceptual judgements in the strong sense that these are judgements formed during acts of perception.

At this point, an opponent hostile to the notion that a-judgements constitute purely perceptual determinations might object that I have chosen a rather poor example to illustrate the strongly perceptual nature of a-judgements. This opponent might point out that the very feature being used to demonstrate the strongly perceptual nature of a-judgements, the fact that the judgement of visual balance can be made instantaneously in an act of perception, only serves to show that the judgement of visual balance is an atypical aesthetic judgement. For whereas the unity or balance of a painting is something we take in at a glance, judging the unity or balance of most other artforms requires at a minimum extended acts of perception, and perhaps in addition an element of rumination upon that which we perceive. To illustrate his point, my opponent might rely upon a distinction which Arnheim creates between the 'synoptic' and 'sequential' arts.<sup>13</sup> The synoptic arts encompass those artforms such as painting, sculpture and architecture,

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<sup>13</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, "Unity and Diversity of the Arts", in *New Essays on the Psychology of Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp.65-77, esp. p.70.

where a work of art exists in its entirety at a single moment in time. The synoptic arts contrast with those 'sequential' arts, such as music, drama and literature, where the entire work of art is never available for perusal at a single instant but unfolds for the viewer through time. The fact that the balance of a painting can be determined in an instant demonstrates less concerning the nature of aesthetic judgement than it demonstrates the highly unusual nature of our perceptual engagement with the so-called synoptic artforms. Changing the original example from the judgement of *visual balance* to the judgement of *musical balance* would not support my conclusion that a-judgements constitute strongly perceptual judgements.

As it stands, the objection overlooks the fact that the distinction which Arnheim creates between the synoptic and the sequential arts is a distinction more ontological than epistemological in nature. This is because the distinction between the synoptic and sequential arts concerns that which is available to perception at a moment in time. Theoretically speaking, a work in the synoptic arts does, and a work in the sequential arts does not, exist in its entirety at a single instant in time. However, this is not to say that in practice, we won't require relatively extensive acts of perception to appreciate in detail the features belonging to a painting or to any other work belonging to one of the synoptic artforms. In much the same way that it takes a certain amount of time to hear a symphony, so too appreciating a work of architecture involves a considerable investment in time, walking around a building and viewing it from a variety of vantage points. Likewise, although the optimal viewing distance for a painting allows the painting to appear in its entirety within the perceptual field of the viewer, only the simplest pictures can be taken in at a glance. Most pictures must be scanned, articulate perception being confined to a small area at any given moment. My opponent might concede all of this, yet persist with his original objection, pointing out that the act of scanning a painting differs from the act of listening to a work of music in one crucial respect. Since the parts of a painting are not presented in a linear sequence in time, it follows that there is no 'correct' sequence in which the parts of the painting should be scanned. For whereas changing the order of the movements would make a great difference when it comes to judging the unity

of a symphonic work, the order in which my eccentric friend chooses to expose sections of his painting could not influence my ability to judge its visual balance. Thus, if my friend imposed the conventions for reading manuscripts upon my viewing of his picture, by revealing the square in the top left-hand corner of the picture, working from left to right across and down the painting until he arrived at the square at the lower right-hand corner, he would succeed in giving some sort of order to what was seen. However, the resulting sequence would lack any *pictorial* logic. As Arnheim points out, the compositional or spatial characteristics in a painting, piece of sculpture or work of architecture, such qualities as symmetry or balance, may be perceived "only when the crisscross of relations between the elements is apprehended synoptically."<sup>14</sup> That is to say, the only sequence that could make pictorial sense is one which allows me to perceive for myself the connections between the parts of the picture. My opponent would use this point to show that judging the compositional characteristics of a painting disresembles the act of judging the compositional characteristics of a musical work, the former requiring momentary visual acts, the latter involving acts of memory, reasoning and reflection in addition to brute perceptual input. Who is to say which of these judgements is more typical of aesthetic judgements in general?

The challenge contained in my opponent's objection is clear: to produce a musical analogue to the judgement of visual balance. Taking up the challenge, I here offer the judgement of musical unity as an instance of a strongly perceptual judgement in the musical case. In claiming that the judgement of musical unity constitutes a strongly perceptual judgement, I am not claiming that the musical listener comes to an instantaneous recognition of the unity of a musical work. Thus, I reject altogether Rudolf Arnheim's suggestion that the listener judging the unity of a musical work creates in his mind a visual image of the structure of the piece, thereby turning what is presented as a sequence into simultaneity.<sup>15</sup> Arnheim's claim is misleading on two separate counts. In the first place, the response that Arnheim describes is not the response appropriate to the average musical listener, but the response of a gifted visual thinker such as Arnheim

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<sup>14</sup> "Unity and Diversity of the Arts", p.70.

<sup>15</sup> "Unity and Diversity of the Arts", p.69.

himself. That large majority of persons versed in the art of musical listening who happen to lack a vivid visual imagination would not utilize such visual props in conceptualizing the unity of a musical work. Arnheim's suggestion is also mistaken for treating the unity of a musical work on analogy with the transcendental self that evaded Hume's empiricist eye, something available to perception only if it is the sort of thing of which we can entertain a Humean impression. Peter Kivy tackles this Humean view when he pronounces that he stands before the emergent quality of unity in a musical work like Hume before his transcendental self. According to Kivy, "we are experiencing the unity [of a musical work] just when we are perceiving the themes, their permutations and combinations in which we say the unity resides."<sup>16</sup> Kivy's comments here target a view which Kivy attributes to Beardsley, the view that the relationship between na-qualities and a-qualities is contingent and causal, with the na-qualities of an object working behind the scenes to produce an emergent a-quality greater than the sum of its parts.<sup>17</sup> Whereas Beardsley conceptualizes the unity of a work of music as something resembling the flavour of pea soup, a quality over and above and greater than the sum of its parts, Kivy treats the unity of a musical work as more akin to the happiness in a happy face, the latter consisting in nothing over and above the features belonging to that face. Kivy's argument here is beside the point, since anyone taking the view that the unity of a musical work constitutes an emergent quality greater than the sum of the parts of the work is not thereby committed to saying that this emergent quality of unity is something only available to an instantaneous act of recognition. Yet whatever the wrongheadedness of his argument, Kivy's comments are interesting for the fact that, despite his professed opinion that there are aesthetic judgements that we can make at second-hand, Kivy here manages to identify one aesthetic judgement of a strongly perceptual nature. The unity of a musical work is no more inferred from what we perceive than is the balance of a pictorial composition. A statement regarding the unity of a musical work serves to report an

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<sup>16</sup> "Aesthetic Concepts: Some Fresh Considerations", p.427.

<sup>17</sup> *Vide* Beardsley's suggestion that, in order to draw a funny face, it is not necessary to draw the lines of the face, then draw in its funny quality. When we have drawn a set of lines of the right sorts, we will unavoidably draw a funny face, "for the funniness will supervene". See Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Descriptivist Account of Aesthetic Attributions", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 28 (1974), 336-352; pp.338-339.

extended experience of the relationship of its parts, or else it serves to describe the music as the source of such an experience. The act of judging the unity of a musical work may involve a relatively extended perceptual operation when compared with the act of determining the visual balance of a pictorial composition. What we have here is an act of perception nonetheless.

It is important to remember that Arnheim's observations on the factors contributing to visual balance do not function as a set of 'rules' enabling me to infer the presence of visual balance given my knowledge of the various perceptible na-qualities of paintings. Instead, Arnheim offers observations of visual effects, a series of generalizations based upon the judgements which people actually make. Because those generalizations Arnheim draws from our practice of judging visual balance are precisely the sort of generalizations the aesthetic clod might employ in making his inferences, Arnheim's principles serve to illustrate Sibley's claim that no set of na-qualities ever entails a particular a-judgement. In this regard, consider an example devised by Jerrold Levinson:<sup>18</sup>

Imagine two paintings of the same size, produced on the same type of canvas, with the same paints, and in the manner of Jackson Pollock, but laterally symmetrical about the centre vertical. Now add that they are indistinguishable to careful normal viewing except for one thing - the first painting has a medium-sized round blue patch somewhere in its left half that is missing from the second painting, whereas the second painting has an exactly similar patch at the corresponding position in its right half that is missing from the first painting. In short, they are mirror images of each other; one has the extra patch on the left, the other has it on the right....it is hard to envision any grounds on which one could maintain that this difference generated an aesthetic one.

Strictly speaking, painting A and painting B could not differ only with respect to the placement of a single blue colour patch since, as I understand Levinson's description of the case, the right half of painting A must present something other than a blue colour patch in the position where we find a blue patch in painting B; whereas the left half of painting B must present something other than a blue colour patch in the position occupied by the blue patch in painting A. Let us therefore suppose a further fact compatible with Levinson's hypothetical example: that the mirror reversal between picture A and picture B

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<sup>18</sup>Jerrold Levinson, "Aesthetic Uniqueness", *JAAC*, 38 (1980), 435-449; p.442.



means that at the position where picture A has a blue patch in its left half, picture B has a red patch, and that at the location where picture B displays a blue patch on its right half, we find a red patch in picture A. If we assume that picture B displays a high degree of visual balance, there is some reason to assume that picture A might not display the same visual balance, in view of the principles of visual balance suggested by Arnheim - in particular the nature of left-right visual asymmetry and the relative visual weight of the colours red and blue. For whereas B places the visually less heavy blue spot in a visually more prominent position, where it may 'balance out' the relatively heavy-looking red spot in the left half, A places the heavier red spot in the visually prominent right half in a way which might not allow the blue spot in the other half to counterbalance. A perceiver who was sensitive to the way that the visual weight of different colours pull against one another could quite possibly find that A was less well balanced than B, whether or not he could articulate the reason why one picture looked more satisfying to him than the other. So contrary to what Levinson wishes to suggest, we can imagine grounds for finding a real aesthetic difference between the two pictures.<sup>19</sup>

When I say that picture A may look less balanced, or appear to have a different sort of balance to picture B, I offer this only as a possibility. The case may be as Levinson suggests, that there are no significant aesthetic differences between the pictures. Arnheim's principles of visual balance are not a tool allowing us to infer that picture A is less balanced than picture B. On the contrary, the sheer number and variety of principles which Arnheim invokes in describing the phenomenon of visual balance indicate that visual balance is sensitive to too many factors to allow any easy predictions. Which factors count most in determining the visual balance in the individual case is something only the eye can decide. As long as we place our faith in general principles, we find that even where we believe we have discovered reasons why a picture might lack balance,

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<sup>19</sup> In the reprinted version of "Aesthetic Uniqueness", Levinson acknowledges that his original paper underestimated "sources of aesthetic differentiation that right/left reversal might provide", and alters his original example to one involving paintings with black and grey dots rather than coloured dots. The new example is invulnerable to the objections I have raised here. See *Music, Art and Metaphysics: Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp.132, 125-126. Although I challenge Levinson's original example, I would endorse the thesis that example was intended to support, that not every perceptible difference between two works of art constitutes an aesthetic difference.



other reasons and principles may direct us to the opposite conclusion. Thus, in contradiction of everything I have said thus far concerning paintings A and B, it could prove to be the case that some lever effect was operating in painting A, so that the distance of the red patch from the central vertical combining with the overall distributions of shapes and colours on the canvas, acted to increase or decrease the visual 'weight' of the red patch in a way that could not be predicted. Alternatively, we might find that because the colour spots being reversed between the two pictures occupy such a tiny amount of space in the overall scheme of each picture; or else, that because the red pigment being used is a bluish red whilst the blue is a reddish blue, no difference of effect can be detected when the spots are reversed between the two canvases. In short, those generalizations which Arnheim provides may serve to indicate the salient characteristics influencing judgements of visual balance, but these provide nothing like a decision procedure allowing us to determine the visual balance of a composition. Once again, we see a graphic illustration of Sibley's claim that a-terms lack governing conditions.

## II

As noted in Chapter One, Sibley uses the terms 'aesthetic quality', 'aesthetic concept' and 'aesthetic judgement' in a narrow, quasi-technical sense. In the previous section, I suggested that an aesthetic judgement in the narrow sense constitutes a strongly perceptual judgement, to the extent that the act of judgement constitutes an act of perception rather than reflection. The question naturally arises, what degree of overlap might we expect to find between the set of aesthetic judgements in the wide and the narrow meaning of the word? Does Sibley's restricted use of the term 'aesthetic' serve to exclude from his list of a-concepts many concepts thought to be 'aesthetic' in the ordinary understanding of the word? Cohen assumed as much when he devised his list of terms as

a potential embarrassment to Sibley's distinction. Not only is it difficult to imagine what form a satisfactory answer to this question might take, but providing such an answer would certainly take us well beyond the scope of this enquiry. So rather than attempting to provide a definitive answer here, I shall tentatively suggest that the area of overlap between the class of aesthetic qualities in the wide and the narrow sense may be more extensive than we suppose. I shall do this by demonstrating how some of those aesthetic concepts which prima facie look to be based upon criteria of a non-perceptible nature might, upon closer inspection, qualify as examples of a-concepts. For the purposes of this exercise, we need look no further than the class of style concepts contained in Cohen's list.

Cohen included style concepts in his list in order to challenge Sibley's claim that a-judgements constitute perceptual judgements, no doubt because he was operating under the opinion that the style of a work of art is not something we can identify by simple inspection. It was Cohen's belief, in other words, that in the majority of cases, the judgement that a work of art is in a certain style relies upon historical or contextual knowledge as well as sensory perceptivity. In support of Cohen's contention that many style concepts prove intractable to the taste test, we may note that the term 'style' designates not a single concept but a whole cluster of concepts which may not be related to one another. What we think of as the style of an individual painter may prove to have little in common with what might be identified as the style of an historical period or a school of painting. It is also the case that many of these operational definitions of the notion treat style as something other than a perceptual determination. For instance, if we treat the style of a work as the artist's way of presenting his subject-matter,<sup>20</sup> or alternatively, as something the writer does in the work that is expressive of the writer's personality,<sup>21</sup> it follows that attention to style will involve attention to more than the so-called 'intrinsic' features of works of art. In general, and given the fact that literary works constitute objects of conception rather than perception, it is difficult to imagine any

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<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of this notion of style, see Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indiannapolis: Hackett, 1978), pp.23-27.

<sup>21</sup> The proposal of Jennifer Robinson in "Style and Personality in the Literary Work", *PR*, 94 (1985), 227-247.

operational definition which could turn the detection of a literary style into a perceptual affair. Likewise, in cases where the notion of style is identified with the notion of an artist's 'repertoire', the set of alternative means of expression with which the artist worked, identifying style will involve attention to more than the intrinsic features of the work.<sup>22</sup> The style concepts listed here would almost certainly qualify as aesthetic concepts in the wide rather than the narrow sense.

However, whilst I would readily concede to Cohen the fact that many style concepts assume non-perceptible criteria, I would suggest that there are cases where a judgement of style amounts to a perceptual determination. To discover some cases where style might be as apparent as the so-called intrinsic features of a work of art, consider a useful distinction which Richard Wollheim creates within the topic of pictorial style.<sup>23</sup> According to Wollheim, some but not all painters possess their own individual style; and talk of the *individual style* of the painter who possesses one reflects a very different conception of style to the concept we utilize under the heading of *general style*. Talk of a general style - be it a universal style (e.g. classicism, painterly, linear), a period or historical style (e.g. neo-classicism, art nouveau), or the style of a school (e.g. Giottesque, Norwich School) - acts as a shorthand for those characteristics which art-historians writing at a particular point in time judge to be particularly interesting, arresting, innovatory, in a stretch of painting. The group of characteristics associated with each general style are not fixed for all time, but vary relative to the changing perspectives and interests of those who are doing the looking. By contrast, an individual style is not identical with whatever characteristics happen to be associated with it. This is because individual style designates something stored in the mind of the artist which is causally responsible for certain characteristics regularly found in his work. Individual styles have psychological reality, and the characteristics belonging to individual styles are fixed immutably. The fact that individual style is something possessing psychological reality is sometimes obscured by a tendency amongst art-historians to disagree amongst

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Wollheim gives a brief discussion of the problems involved in identifying style with repertoire in *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), sec.30, pp.63-66.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (London: Thames, 1987), pp.26-27.

themselves as they struggle to find the ideal formulation of those characteristics. It goes without saying that, where art-historians offer conflicting descriptions of an individual style, at most one of these descriptions will be proven to be correct.

Wollheim summarizes the difference between the two conceptions of style by suggesting that general style lacks the explanatory power of individual style. To subsume an artist's work under a general style is to employ a classificatory tool which explains nothing, although the exercise may draw attention to characteristics we should otherwise overlook. Individual style has explanatory power because it has both psychological and psycho-motor reality. Having an individual style, like knowing a language, is a form of competence that manifests itself in the artist's output. To subsume a work under an individual style serves both to explain those effects we discover, and to describe a psychological fact concerning the artist.

Although Wollheim's definition of individual style concentrates upon the artist rather than the spectator, it is clear that the explanatory power of the concept derives in part from the fact that individual style has psychological reality for the spectator as well as the artist. Whereas general style is a theoretical construct, something the spectator might struggle to find evidence for in a given work, individual style is something that as it were confronts the unwitting spectator. The spectator who hears the style of Beethoven in the piano works of Brahms and Liszt is not making a detailed comparison of the oeuvres of the respective composers, she enjoys an instant perceptual recognition of something previously encountered. Here then are two facts concerning individual style requiring explanation: the fact that individual style possesses reality for the perceiver, and the fact that occasionally, the individual style of one artist may be detectable in the works of another. One simple explanation for these facts would specify that, from the point of view of the spectator, individual style manifests itself as a structural gestalt quality perceptible in some or all of an artist's works. It is the existence of a repeated gestalt pattern in the works of some artists which leads us to say that the artist in question possesses his own individual style. To understand what this structural gestalt quality might be like, consider the striking physiognomic character we encounter in some but not

all human faces; a character which, once it has been found and associated with a particular individual, allows us to recognize and track the individual through the facial permutations of a lifetime.<sup>24</sup> It may not be possible to discover a definite physiognomic character in every human face, and not every artist's works will display an individual style. But for those artists who possess an individual style, that style will announce its presence to the sensitive perceiver as a perceptual gestalt discoverable in many or all of his works. And this gestalt quality, being a perceptual characteristic, may be evident in some works not by the artist's own hand.

I anticipate two lines of objection to this proposal which can be quickly dealt with. The first objection points out that if style were nothing more than a gestalt or perceptible pattern of organization in an artist's works, then the ability to detect individual style could be manipulated as a tool in helping to determine the artist's oeuvre. Since the artist's oeuvre would be identical with whatever class of works happened to display the relevant gestalt or pattern, a knowledge of style could determine a knowledge of the artist's oeuvre. In point of fact, the relationship of dependency most often runs in the other direction. Not only do art historians require some prior acquaintance with the attributed works of the artist to guide their understanding of his style, but changes in the constitution of that oeuvre tend to bring about changes in their understanding of individual style. For instance, once one or two Van Meegerens had been incorporated into the class of known Vermeers, it became easier for subsequent Van Meegerens to be taken for Vermeers. It was only once an attributed class of Van Meegerens was in place that people were alerted to the existence of a Van Meegeren style, and began to distinguish this from the style of Vermeer.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, it might be argued that if our understanding of an artist's style reflects the state of knowledge of his oeuvre, it follows that whatever gestalt quality becomes associated with his style must change as the constitution of his oeuvre changes. A public familiar only with the early works of Titian

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<sup>24</sup> In an essay titled "The Mask and the Face", Ernest Gombrich nicely illustrates our capacity for physiognomic recognition of a person through time using photographs of Bertrand Russell aged four and ninety. See *The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1982), pp.105-136; pp.108-109.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Nelson Goodman's discussion of the matter in *The Languages of Art*, p.111.



would derive their understanding of the Titianesque gestalt by looking at his early works. This means that, should any late works of Titian come to light, these would be excluded from the artist's oeuvre for failing to display the relevant gestalt character. By contrast, a public familiar with a collection of the mature and less mature works of Titian would adopt a somewhat different notion of the Titianesque gestalt, one which would accommodate further instances of the artist's mature works as these came to light. What these reflections show is that the style of an artist cannot be identified as the gestalt pattern read off his works.

The problem with this line of objection is that it mistakenly supposes that we can manufacture at will gestalt patterns to correspond with the styles of artists. The suggestion that the style of an artist may be present in his works as some sort of gestalt quality is the suggestion that firstly, where an artist possesses an individual style, we can look at one of his works and see the parts in that work as forming a whole that is greater than the sum of those parts; and secondly, that other works by that artist will tend to demonstrate the same principle of organization. Looking at the Titian example, there is no reason to suppose that the works of an artist may not display more than one gestalt or pattern of organization, and that therefore the artist might be thought to possess both an early and a late style. Discovering such a gestalt quality is not a matter of looking for similarities across a group of works, and this is why the gestalt corresponding with his style is not vulnerable to changes in the artist's attributed oeuvre. Furthermore, to suppose that we do manufacture stylistic gestalts by looking for properties held in common between the works in the artist's oeuvre is to confuse the notion of individual style with what Wollheim calls *signature*.<sup>26</sup> Signature is something like the notion of general style applied in the individual case, and indicates those features of an artist's work singled out as sure guides to establishing the authorship of individual works. Where an artist possesses an individual style, the artist's style will form his signature. For those artists who lack an individual style, style and signature cannot coincide.

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<sup>26</sup> *Painting as an Art*, p.36.



However, it would still be possible to compile a notion of the artist's signature out of superficial mannerisms repeating themselves across a wide variety of works.<sup>27</sup>

The second line of objection to my proposal suggests that if the style of an artist were something immediately apparent in his work, we would never, or almost never, experience difficulty in assigning works to particular artists. In the very few cases where an attribution was in doubt the dispute would line up, on the one side, a group of experts possessing the sensitivity to detect the relevant perceptual gestalts; and on the other side, those who lack the relevant recognitional capacity or expertise; with those who were conscious of belonging to the latter group agreeing to defer to the superior knowledge of the former. In fact, it is the experts, the art critics and art historians, who differ among themselves; a sure sign that style judgements depend upon background information, inference and reasoning, in addition to the capacity to recognize gestalt patterns. An answer to this objection would point out that the existence of differences in expert opinion does not demonstrate that experts never treat style as a perceptually obvious characteristic in a work. At most, these differences in opinion demonstrate that experts may apply different criteria when attributing works to artists. For example, where a disputed attribution concerns the work of an artist who happens to lack an individual style, art historians will look to characteristics other than style to discover the artist's signature in the work. Precisely which properties a given connoisseur identifies with the artist's signature will reflect the methods and instruments he has at his disposal. It therefore follows that experts adopting different methods and instruments may well disagree over what constitutes the signature of that artist. In cases where the artist whose work is in question displays an individual style, we may find a dispute unfolding between a group of experts who refuse to attribute *The Polish Rider* to Rembrandt using purely perceptual criteria, because they fail to recognize therein the gestalt of a Rembrandt painting; and those who would attribute the painting to Rembrandt basing their opinion

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<sup>27</sup> Nelson Goodman shows no sensitivity to the distinction between the general and the individual style, or the distinction between style and signature, when he identifies style with "those features of the symbolic functioning of a work that are characteristic of author, period, place or school." For Goodman, "a style is a complex characteristic that serves somewhat as an individual or group signature....in general stylistic properties help answer the questions: who? when? where?" See *Ways of Worldmaking*, pp.35, 34; *Of Mind and Other Matters*, p.131.

upon nonperceptual criteria such as questions of provenance or the known history of ownership of the painting. Far from undermining the notion that style may operate as a perceptual concept, the existence of such disputes serves to suggest that at least some of the experts regard style to be something like one of Sibley's a-qualities, an intrinsic and observable quality in a work.

In this Section, I have not begun to demonstrate that all or even most aesthetic concepts in the wider meaning of the word can be assimilated into the class of Sibley's a-concepts. What I have demonstrated is that, prior to an exhaustive enquiry into the matter, it would be premature to suppose that Sibley's restricted use of the term 'aesthetic' serves to exclude too much of what we understand to be 'aesthetic' to be of much theoretical use.

### III

There is a familiar set of examples customarily wheeled out in an attempt to refute Sibley's claim that a-terms function as descriptive rather than evaluative terms. Thus, it has sometimes been pointed out that whilst a person may be identified in terms of his height, weight, hair colouring and distinguishing marks, no court of law would permit reference to the 'sullen' expression of the suspect as a means of identification. Other examples apparently demonstrate that a-terms do not appear to serve as terms of classification, sorting items into categories or classes. I cannot follow the instruction to pick out the only 'clumsy' painting in the gallery as I might follow the instruction to pick out the only man wearing a pink carnation and a brown coat. Whilst a museum director may return a Rothko on the grounds that it fails to meet the size and colour specifications provided by the dealer, she would not be permitted to return the painting on the grounds

that it lacks the dynamic visual tensions some critics discover therein.<sup>28</sup> At the very least, such examples suggest that, to the extent that a-terms do function descriptively, these do not serve to describe things after the fashion of na-terms. Awareness of such examples has led to the suggestion that a-terms function as 'value-tending' terms, terms which describe objects in a necessarily value-tending way.<sup>29</sup> That is to say, every a-term names either an aesthetically good-making or an aesthetically bad-making feature. For instance, 'grace' names an aesthetically good-making feature, and 'garishness' an aesthetically bad-making feature. Although a-ascriptions do not constitute verdicts, they typically act as reasons in judgements of aesthetic value. Because they imply certain value-judgements, a-terms are more evaluative than descriptive in nature. Ruby Meager, who offers a neo-Kantian account of aesthetic judgement, demonstrates the special logic of aesthetic judgements, the fact that these carry little or no descriptive content, by suggesting that a non-English speaker might grasp the meaning of "What a marvellous light!" if it were uttered in a suitable tone of voice in a suitable circumstance. By contrast, there is no context and no tone of voice which could equally convey to someone ignorant of the English language the meaning of "If the train does not arrive punctually at five o'clock he'll miss the connexion."<sup>30</sup>

While the proposal that a-terms constitute terms of evaluation would deny a primarily descriptive role for Sibley's a-ascriptions, the proposal that a-terms constitute terms of affect would reduce Sibley's a-descriptions to a special species of perceptual judgements, statements that at best report directly upon the subject and only indirectly upon the object perceived. For the proposal that a-terms constitute affective terms implies that, when a speaker makes an a-attribution, she intends to tell us about the object perceived, yet only succeeds in telling us about the effect the object has upon her. If I call the music 'insipid', I say something about the perceptual character of the music. If instead I say that the music is 'irritating', I tell you how the music affects me. At most 'irritating' attributes to the

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<sup>28</sup> These and other examples may be found in Isabel Creed Hungerland, "Once Again, Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic", *JAAC*, 26 (1968), 285-295, pp.287-288; and Marcia P.Freedman, "The Myth of the Aesthetic Predicate", *JAAC*, 27 (1968), 49-55, p.51.

<sup>29</sup> Freedman, p.54.

<sup>30</sup> Ruby Meager, "Aesthetic Concepts", *BJA*, 10 (1970), 303-322, pp.303-304.

music a dispositional tendency to irritate those who listen to it, but fails to identify the features of the music responsible for this irritation. Beardsley defines an 'affective term' as "any adjective that, as applied to a work of art, contains as at least part of its meaning some reference to the effect of the work upon the percipient".<sup>31</sup> Here 'irritating' would function as an affective term, 'insipid' would not. The proposal I am now considering suggests that many if not most a-terms function affectively, containing some reference to an effect upon the perceiver as either a part or the whole of their meaning.

The two proposals under consideration here - the proposal that a-terms function evaluatively, the proposal that a-terms are terms of affect - apparently come together in an emotivist account of aesthetic judgement. Goran Hermeren has managed to demonstrate something of the variety extant among definitions of emotive meaning.<sup>32</sup> The common thread running through these definitions is the idea that terms with emotive meaning serve either or both of the following functions: (a) they may be used to express the feelings and attitudes of the speaker; (b) they may be used to arouse feelings and attitudes in listeners. Clearly, an account of the affective use of language will go a long way toward demonstrating how emotive language fulfils function (a), whilst an account of value-tending terms would help to explain how emotive language fulfils function (b). Since the claim that a-terms function emotively adds no new consideration to the two proposals already under consideration, I will not discuss this proposal separately.

I shall now show that neither of the proposals under consideration forces the conclusion that a-attributions fail to ascribe phenomenological features. The first proposal suggests that a-attributions are not descriptions but potential value-judgements. Defeating this proposal would require arguing either that (i) a-terms don't carry any significant value-tendency; or else that (ii) any value-tendency attaching to a particular a-term represents at most a potential to appear in value-judgements, a potential that remains distinct from the meaning of the term. I do not believe strategy (i) can be adopted, since most a-terms clearly do possess a tendency towards positive or negative evaluation. To attribute an a-quality such as *gracefulness* to an object provides potential grounds for a

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<sup>31</sup> *Aesthetics*, p.42.

<sup>32</sup> Goran Hermeren, "Aesthetic Qualities, Value and Emotive Meaning", *Theoria*, 39 (1973), 71-100.

positive evaluative judgement in a way in which attributing *redness* would not do. As Peter Kivy suggests, since grace is an aesthetically good-making feature and garishness an aesthetically bad-making feature, it seems *prima facie* absurd to state, without further elaboration, "the vase is aesthetically bad because it is graceful" or "the garish colours make the vase aesthetically good."<sup>33</sup> So instead, I shall adopt strategy (ii) and claim that the particular value-tendency associated with a given a-term reflects a potential to appear in a certain type of value-judgement, a potential which may not be realized in the individual case. The following example serves to illustrate this point. In most instances, a work of art described as 'formless' may be said to lack one potential source of aesthetic excellence. However, when Wolfflin charts a progressive descent into *formlessness* in the late paintings of Michaelangelo, Wolfflin does not offer the 'formlessness' of these works as grounds for a negative evaluation. Instead, Wolfflin uses the term to describe, in a value-neutral way, a particular representational effect which was sought by the aging artist, who aimed to realize great visual masses in his work. In creating these visual masses, the artist was creating compositions which overwhelm the senses of the spectator; or else he was giving artistic form to objects which by their very nature or size appeared to lack form. Thus, Wolfflin notes that unlike Michaelangelo's early attempts at a sculptured Pieta, where the body of Christ was disposed diagonally in a beautiful line across his mother's knees, the artist's final attempt at such a grouping leaves the dead Christ "partly upright and collapsing at the knees, making a beautiful line quite impossible - but Michelangelo did not want a beautiful line. The last thought to which his chisel gave expression was to be the formless collapse of a heavy mass."<sup>34</sup> If we believe that creating great visual masses which overwhelm the spectator, or else that depicting a human body as a dead weight on the point of collapse, constitute representational achievements on Michaelangelo's part, then to the extent that Wolfflin intends to provide any evaluation when he ascribes formlessness to these works, his descriptions suggest

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<sup>33</sup> Peter Kivy, "What Makes 'Aesthetic' Terms *Aesthetic*?", *PPR*, 36 (1975), 197-211; p.200.

<sup>34</sup> Heinrich Wolfflin, *Classic Art: An Introduction to the Italian Renaissance*, fifth ed. (London: Phaidon, 1994), pp.199, 196.



grounds for a positive rather than a negative aesthetic evaluation. Here is one clear case where the negative value-tendency attaching to a particular term has failed to be realized.

How would we demonstrate that the value-tendency attaching to particular a-terms remains distinct from their descriptive function? Beardsley offers the example of making someone's mouth water by reading out the recipe for a cake, to illustrate and support his contention that there is a difference between what 'unified' and 'graceful' mean as predicates of objects and what their application suggests in the way of potential value-judgments.<sup>35</sup> The fact that Sally infers that the cake is good whilst I am describing the recipe does not convert my description into a value-judgment, and in a similar way, "this is unified" and "this is good" remain descriptions regardless of what they may be taken to suggest in the way of evaluations. However, Beardsley's analogy between reacting to a cake recipe and reacting to an a-description fails to acknowledge the obvious disanalogy between the two cases. If I read out the recipe in a cold and factual way for the purposes of a cookery demonstration, we can attribute Sally's reaction to her suggestibility, or to the fact that she is feeling hungry. If on the other hand I dwell upon the delectable nature of the ingredients because I wish to tempt Sally into making the cake herself, then Sally's response owes less to her suggestibility and more to the intentions underlying my demonstration. Ascribing a-qualities to objects resembles this second scenario more closely than it does the first. This is because the activity of art criticism formalizes that which we all do whenever we recommend an object for aesthetic appreciation. In recommending an object for aesthetic appreciation, the art critic presents those qualities she describes as reasons which will make us want to perceive or otherwise experience the object for ourselves. For this reason, the audience at which she directs her comments typically comes to see the qualities described as qualities grounding aesthetically valuable experiences.

Given the intentions underlying the descriptions of the art critic, it is no wonder that those terms characteristically employed in the course of art criticism seem to carry a particular value-tendency. Nor is it surprising to find that a term which lacks any

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<sup>35</sup> Monroe C. Beardsley, "What is an Aesthetic Quality?", *Theoria*, 39 (1973), 50-70; pp.63-64.



particular value-tendency when used in non-aesthetic contexts may come to acquire a determinate value-tendency when it is employed as a term of aesthetic appreciation. Consider in this respect the notion of *unity*. The unity of an object only becomes a good-making characteristic when that object is being offered as a candidate for aesthetic appreciation. To the extent it makes any sort of sense to say that my car is 'unified', unity would not necessarily constitute a good-making characteristic in motor vehicles. For this reason, I would consider the claim that my car is unified as a trivially true observation that in no way formed the basis for an evaluative judgment. If, however, my companion began to point out the superior modelling of the chassis, the simplicity of the curving, aerodynamic lines, and generally indicated that she was recommending my car as an object of aesthetic appreciation, then the unity of my car might offer grounds for a positive aesthetic evaluation. What this example demonstrates is that it is not the fact that a-terms possess a value-tendency as part of their meaning which allows us to use these in judgements of aesthetic value. Instead, it is the established practice of offering a-qualities as grounds of aesthetically valuable experiences which endows a particular a-term with its perceived value-tendency. In short, a-terms do carry value-tendencies, but these value-tendencies reflect the evaluative nature of critical discourse, rather than any component of evaluative meaning they may carry outside the realm of critical discourse. The notion that a-terms function primarily as descriptive terms remains intact.

#### IV

The second proposal under consideration, which claims that a-terms function as affective terms, gains an air of plausibility from the fact that a very large subset of all a-terms are expression words - words characterizing the moods, feelings, emotions and intentions of human beings, but which also function to describe certain aspects of works of art. However, not every term which functions affectively in its primary domain of use

also ascribes an emotional effect when used to describe a work of art. To see that this is so, consider a representative list of those terms typically employed in psychological studies of musical cognition. The list given here was taken from a much larger list of terms presented to subjects in a study,<sup>36</sup> and represents those terms more frequently selected by subjects to characterize works written in the minor mode than they were selected to describe extracts of music written in the major mode:

pathetic	gloomy	dark	dignified
melancholy	restless	hushed	grotesque
plaintive	weird	ponderous	emphatic
yearning	dramatic	sentimental	passionate
mournful	mystical	fantastic	solemn
sad	serious	quiet	lofty
sober	depressing	agitated	martial
pleading	tragic	heavy	yielding
mysterious	dreamy	tender	tranquil
longing	frustrated	stormy	obstinate
doleful	vague	magestic	awe-inspiring
			sensational

I would tentatively suggest the following intuitive classification of the terms appearing on this list. One subset of these terms ('depressing', 'awe-inspiring', 'sensational') most typically function as affective terms when used to describe music, since these place the described emotion firmly in the listener. To describe music as 'depressing' is to ascribe an attitude of response to the listener. A piece of music has a depressing character if it is depressing *in the listening*, or creates a feeling of depression in the listener. This is partly a grammatical observation, and partly a matter of established practice. In point of grammar, if I wished to ascribe the feeling quality to the music rather

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<sup>36</sup> See Kate Hevner, "The Affective Character of the Major and Minor Modes in Music", *American Journal of Psychology*, 47 (1935), 103-108, pp.110-111. Hevner utilizes the same list of terms in "Experimental Studies of the Elements of Expression in Music", *American Journal of Psychology*, 48 (1936), 246-268. For a similar study with a shorter list, see Paul Heinlein, "The Affective Characters of the Major and Minor Modes in Music", *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 8 (1928), 101-142, p.124.

than to myself, I might describe the music as ‘depressed’ rather than ‘depressing’. In point of practice, typically I would not describe as ‘depressing’ music which had not caused me to feel depressed on at least some occasion. However the following counterexample presents itself. Speaking personally, I find the art songs of Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov and Moussorgsky anything but depressing and take enormous pleasure in listening to these. Nonetheless, I am forced to concede that these may count as depressing, on the grounds that most other people I consult on the matter report that they feel depressed in listening to these songs. The persons concerned take steps to avoid listening to the music in question, a fact which gives me reason to trust their testimony. Thinking on the matter, I can recognize a lugubrious quality in this type of song which could create feelings of depression in the listener. What this example shows is that some music is depressing because it has a dispositional tendency to depress those who listen to it, whether or not that disposition is realized in the individual case. Placing a dispositional quality in the music is a roundabout way of referring to potential experiences of listeners. So even on a dispositional analysis, ‘depressing’ functions as an affective term. By the same reasoning, many other terms on the list (‘pathetic’, ‘gloomy’, ‘sentimental’) which ascribe a dispositional emotional effect to the music also count as affective terms.

By contrast with this first group of terms, some terms (‘yearning’, ‘yielding’, ‘longing’, ‘plaintive’) never, or almost never, function affectively in describing music, since these serve to qualify the perceptual appearance of the music. To describe the music of *Tristan and Isolde* as ‘yearning’ is to locate the yearning quality in the music itself, rather than the perceiver. Music which is said to be ‘longing’ wears a longing aspect, it does not create a feeling of longing in the listener. On an alternative analysis, this same group of terms (‘yielding’, ‘longing’, ‘plaintive’) along with such terms as ‘pleading’, ‘mournful’, ‘gloomy’ and ‘agitated’, might describe music appropriate to someone in a state of longing, mourning, agitation or gloom; music which is characteristic of someone making a complaint, pleading a case or yielding to some external force. That is to say, ‘longing’ music is *music of longing*. On both analyses of ‘yearning’ or ‘yielding’, it makes no sense to say that ‘yielding music’ is music which makes me yield before it, or

that 'yearning music' is music that makes me yearn for something. For this reason, neither 'yearning' nor 'yielding' appear to function as affective terms.

In denying an affective meaning to terms such as 'yearning' or 'plaintive', I am not denying that listening to music which wears a particular emotional character might engender in me an emotion or feeling of a similar character. Indeed, the perceived emotional character of some things may be infectious: being around good-humoured people may lift my feeling of depression. 'Yearning' music in particular is likely to be infectious in just this way, creating feelings of yearning in us. However, because the connection between the emotional character of the music and the feeling created in me as I listen to that music is purely contingent, it remains true to say that music is not 'yearning' in virtue of the experiences it causes in listeners. The music would not cease to have a yearning character if people ceased to experience feelings of yearning in the listening, any more than the art songs of the Russian romantic composers cease to be depressing owing to their failure to depress me, a fact which demonstrates that the emotional affect in us is not part of the meaning of 'yearning' as it applies to music.

Casting an eye down this list reveals further variations in use. Terms such as 'mysterious', 'weird', 'vague', or 'fantastic' might qualify as affective because these tell us less about the music and more about the response, or failure of response, of the perceiver. That is to say, a listener who characterizes a piece of music as 'vague' or 'weird' she is not attributing a particular perceptual character to the piece. Instead, she is reporting a failure on her part to determine the perceptual character of the piece. As far as the passage in question has a particular dispositional character, it is the dispositional character of something evading the listener's understanding. Music that is 'vague' is music that in some sense 'resists' the listener's scrutiny, its perceptual character remains opaque. One final group of terms ('mystical', 'tragic', 'sentimental', 'grotesque') would most typically function as programmatic terms, terms ascribing a particular representational content to a piece of music. That is to say, the music is being judged suitable to represent a given subject matter, it has a perceptual appearance in keeping with a particular subject matter. Terms which describe the representational qualities of music

are not functioning as affective terms. This is coherent with the analysis treating 'yielding', 'longing', 'plaintive', 'pleading', 'mournful', 'gloomy', and 'agitated' as terms characteristic of persons in certain emotional states. To say that music described in these terms is characteristic of persons in particular emotional states would be to say either, that the music in question is suitable to represent persons in that particular emotional state, or else that the music provides a suitable accompaniment to artistic representations of persons in such emotional states.

This brief survey of the original list suggests that not every term serving to ascribe an emotional effect in its primary domain of use will attribute an emotional effect when that term is applied to works of music. And if expression words are thought to be the best candidates for a-terms that are also terms of effect, then the fact that not all of these function affectively would make it appear unlikely that a-terms which are not expression terms ('unified', 'graceful') will function as affective terms. However, to argue in this fashion is to assume that the proposal that all a-terms are affective terms amounts to the claim that every a-term serves to ascribe some emotional effect to the perceiver. Should the proposal allow an interpretation which doesn't make this assumption, then the considerations adduced thus far will appear irrelevant.

I believe that treating a-terms as statements of emotional effect is not the most plausible way to capture the idea that a-terms function affectively, and that something along the lines of the following suggestion provides a more plausible interpretation of the claim that all a-ascriptions function as statements of effect. Whatever account of perception we choose to accept at the physiological or psychological level, the following would appear to hold true. When someone perceives an object, the stimulus is experienced both as a sign of the object perceived, and also as a sensation taking place in the organism. Very occasionally the stimulus will create in the organism a feeling of discomfort or of actual bodily pain, as when the flame is hot, the sound is loud, or the light is very bright indeed. However, for most episodes of stimulation, the subject will experience sensations of a neutral or of a mildly pleasant character. We may call the element of pleasant or unpleasant sensation experienced by the subject in the act of

perception the *affective tone* of the experience. Whenever the act of perceiving creates a sensation of discomfort or pain, we shall say that the experience carries a *negative affective tone*. In those cases where the subject experiences pleasant sensations or where she is unaware of any feeling of discomfort as she perceives, the experience carries with it a *positive affective tone*. To say that every a-description functions as a statement of effect amounts to the claim that every a-description serves to report the positive or the negative affective tone accompanying a perceptual experience, that feeling of comfort or discomfort experienced by the subject as she perceives.

Some circumstantial evidence for the notion that there exists an element of affective tone accompanying many acts of perception may be found in the so-called ‘startle’ effect in music. There is no doubt that in some cases of musical audition sound may have a direct effect upon the nervous system, resulting in an experience of tension:

When the pitch of a sound is progressively increased within a fairly wide frequency band, the increase is accompanied by a sensed rise in tension. Conversely, when the pitch is decreased, an accompanying decrease in tension is sensed. The magnitude of the effect can be correlated (within limits) to the magnitude and rate of the modulation. Similar effects can be noticed with the modulation of loudness and tempo. The reader can test these propositions at a keyboard. While repeating a single note, allow its loudness to steadily increase (holding all other variables constant); a rising tension will be sensed. Conversely, a relaxation will be sensed when the loudness is steadily decreased. The same phenomenon will be noticed for rising and falling pitch and for increasing or decreasing tempo. The sense of rising tension can of course be amplified by increasing all tension-raising variables simultaneously, roughly what occurs in a crescendo.<sup>37</sup>

Jenefer Robinson appeals to the ‘startle’ effect when she suggests that music can make us feel tense or relaxed, can disturb, unsettle or soothe. She suggests that it this direct effect upon the perceiver, the element of pleasant or unpleasant sensation accompanying acts of musical audition, which accounts for at least some of the expressive attributions made to works of music. Thus, music that disturbs and unsettles us is disturbing, unsettling music; and melodies that soothe us are soothing.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Stanley Speck, “‘Arousal Theory’ Reconsidered”, *BJA*, 28 (1988), 40-47; p.42.

<sup>38</sup> Jenefer Robinson, “The Expression and Arousal of Emotion in Music”, *JAAC*, 52 (1994), 13-22; p.18-19.



The revised version of the proposal that a-terms constitute affective terms suggests that an aesthetic description simultaneously describes the object perceived and serves to report whatever affective tone accompanies the experience of perceiving that object. When expressed in this form, the proposal displays some affinities with the Empathy theory of artistic expression popular at the turn of the century. Empathy theories claim that when we perceive dynamic or expressive traits in inanimate objects such as buildings or works of art, this is owing to some mechanism whereby the perceiving subject unconsciously treats a phenomenally subjective accompaniment of the act of perceiving as though this were a quality in the thing perceived. In its more plausible manifestations, the Empathy theory identified the subjective component projected into the object with the physical effort expended by the subject as she perceives. The discussion of Empathy theories in Chapter Four will examine the proposal that the physical effort expended by the organism in the act of perception might sometimes enter the content of an act of perception as a quality of the thing perceived.

The proposal that every perceptual act contains an affective tone apparently contradicts the fact that a majority of perceptual experiences will cause nothing like a 'startle' effect, nothing like a determinate sensation of pleasure or of pain in the perceiving subject. It might be thought that the proposal would more closely reflect the situation as it obtains if we assigned a positive affective tone to those perceptual experiences accompanied by feelings of pleasure, whilst assigning a negative affective tone only to those experiences where the subject experiences sensations of discomfort or of actual bodily pain; and if we agreed to say that a great number of our perceptual experiences carried no affective tone whatever. After all, this would remove the awkwardness of saying that any perceptual act where the perceiving subject experiences no feelings of pain or discomfort while she perceives must count as an experience with a positive affective tone. However, applying the notion of a positive affective tone in this liberal fashion seems no more odd or contrived than it would be to say that Sally is happy on all those occasions when she is not consciously experiencing any feelings of unease or unhappiness. Although Sally may not be experiencing feelings of euphoria, the fact that

she can identify no obvious sources of unhappiness in her life at this moment in time probably would lead her to affirm that she is happy now. The proposal that every perceptual experience carries an affective tone might seem less odd or contrived if we recall that popular theory of the emotions whereby every emotion constitutes a thought experienced with pleasure or with pain.<sup>39</sup>

Proposing to limit the scope of the notion of affective tone overlooks the fact that while it is true to say that an average person probably experiences no identifiable affective tone accompanying most of her perceptions, the same might not hold true for an aesthetically sensitive perceiver. In illustration of this point, consider an example engineered to reveal the element of truth in the Kantian claim that, in judging an object to be beautiful, I both refer the representation to my own feeling of pleasure or pain, and I demand that others will find the object as I do. Suppose that a friend whose superior aesthetic judgments you have learned to trust announces that the vase you have called 'ugly' is more than ugly, it is 'hideous'. To the extent that this difference of opinion amounts to a disagreement over the character of the vase, what is the ground of your disagreement with your friend? Either it is the case that you and your friend are using 'ugly' and 'hideous' to designate separate phenomenally objective aesthetic qualities, in which case your friend is claiming that you have misidentified the true perceptual character of the vase; or alternatively she is suggesting that you have failed to capture the degree of negative affective tone associated with this particular perceptual experience. Since your friend is an aesthetically sensitive perceiver, someone possessing 'taste', the second would appear to be the more likely option. After all, possessing a capacity to be pleased by many of the things that count as aesthetically valuable, and to be pained in experiencing things deemed to be lacking in aesthetic value, surely constitutes part of what it means to be an aesthetically sensitive perceiver. The claim being promoted here is that many aesthetic disagreements more closely resemble the disagreement between yourself and your friend than they resemble whatever disagreement is involved when you

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<sup>39</sup> For a brief outline of the theory, see Malcolm Budd, *Music and the Emotions: The Philosophical Theories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), ch.1, pp.1-15.

say the vase is red and I say it is blue. This is because many, perhaps most a-ascriptions record some element of affective response.

Clearly, this second form of the proposal that all a-terms function as terms of effect does nothing to undermine the perceptual status of a-attributions. On the contrary, insisting upon the element of subjective response accompanying an a-attribution brings into focus the perceptual nature of such descriptions. However, treating a-attributions as disguised subjective reports does raise questions concerning the objective status of a-judgements, a matter I will turn to in Chapter Five.

I will end this section on a speculative note. Throughout this section, and for purely rhetorical purposes, I have been enquiring whether a-attributions most typically describe phenomenally objective properties, whether they typically characterize phenomenally subjective components of perceptual experiences, or whether they supply reasons grounding aesthetic evaluations. Of course, posing the question in this way gives the misleading impression that most a-terms must conform to a single pattern of use. A more accurate view of the matter would realize that different a-attributions typically fulfil different functions at different times; and that different descriptions of the same perceptual event may be crafted to highlight each of these functions in turn. For example, I may call a piece of music 'loud' and thereby characterize the music as a source of intense aural stimulation. In describing the same music as 'ear-splitting', I both describe it as loud and at the same time draw attention to the negative affective tone associated with the experience of listening to it, the fact that the music represents a source of unpleasant aural stimulation. Designating the same music 'a terrific noise', serves to describe the loudness of the music in a way which emphasizes my belief that the music possesses no aesthetic value. Examples of this kind suggest that the phenomenally objective, the phenomenally subjective and the evaluative might be viewed as different elements present in a single perceptual act. I have already suggested a story whereby every perceptual act might be thought to contain both a phenomenally objective and a phenomenally subjective component. The idea that every act of perception carries an element of evaluation might be developed by showing that the organism processes as she perceives, comparing the

current percept with previous episodes of stimulation in an effort to determine both the character of the cause of the stimulation, and some strategy of response to that cause. Could this picture of the overall content of perception be sustained,<sup>40</sup> there would be no reason to suppose that a-terms fail to attribute phenomenally objective qualities simply because the same descriptions also appear in affective and evaluative statements. That is to say, there is some reason to suppose that one could defend an empiricist account of aesthetic judgement, in the form of a version of the theory of aesthetic perception, as a viable alternative to the Kantian view of aesthetic judgement.

## V

Many of the comments Sibley makes lead to the conclusion that Sibley operates with a perceptual model of aesthetic judgement. This perceptual model assimilates taste to a form of perceptivity in the individual, something like the possession of a sense or a sensory capacity. In Chapter One, we encountered the person of the aesthetic clod, someone who, knowing that he lacks aesthetic sensitivity, studies without success to infer the presence of a-qualities from the presence of na-qualities. Sibley claimed that whatever judgements the clod might make in forming his inferences would not amount to a-judgements, and that whatever successes the clod might enjoy would not constitute aesthetic successes. Given the fact that Sibley uses 'aesthetic judgement' in a restricted,

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<sup>40</sup> A piece of evidence compatible with this interpretation may be found in Lage Wedin, "A Multidimensional Study of Perceptual-Emotional Qualities in Music", *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 13 (1972), 241-257, another psychological study in music cognition requiring subjects to match words with musical extracts. In applying multidimensional scaling techniques to the results of this experiment, Wedin decided that the data obtained could be fitted along just three bi-polar dimensions which Wedin labelled respectively Intensity-Softness, Pleasantness-Unpleasantness, and Solemnity-Triviality. If there is any truth in the picture I have presented of the content of perception, then it is no accident that Wedin settled upon these particular dimensions. Treating the stimulus as an indicator of the nature of the object perceived would correspond with what I have called the phenomenally objective component of the perceptual experience. Registering the pleasantness/unpleasantness of the stimulation corresponds with what I have designated the phenomenally subjective component of the experience, its affective tone. The dimension labelled Solemnity-Triviality captures an element of evaluation accompanying perceptual experiences, a tendency on the part of the perceiver to assign some significance to that which she perceives even as she perceives it.

quasi-technical sense, the claim that the judgements of the clod are not a-judgements does not amount to a form of abuse, since Sibley is not suggesting that nothing that the clod does when he forms his judgements would be of interest to philosophical aesthetics. Rather, Sibley's purpose in constructing the aesthetic clod example was to illustrate the notion that the ability to form an a-judgement constitutes something like a perceptual capacity: either we see that a particular a-quality is present or we do not, and no amount of studious application or reasoning will make up for our shortcomings if we do not. The aesthetic clod example illustrates one of the consequences of the perceptual model of aesthetic sensitivity, the idea that someone lacking taste is like someone lacking a sense or a basic perceptual capacity.

The fact that Sibley operates with a perceptual model of aesthetic sensitivity has led many of his commentators to believe that Sibley regards taste to be a special faculty, the aesthetic analogue of the faculty of moral intuition, the person of taste as it were judging matters with the inner eye. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that the notion that taste constitutes a special faculty sits uncomfortably with Sibley's more extended pronouncements on the subject. For Sibley's wider discussion of taste treats aesthetic sensitivity as a special deployment of the ordinary faculties, and at times, as something more than a narrowly perceptual capacity. If Sibley does give the reader the misleading impression that he treats taste as a special faculty, this reflects one of the ways in which a perceptual model of aesthetic judgement can distort our understanding of the nature of aesthetic judgement.

The perceptual model of aesthetic judgement models our understanding of the relative distribution of taste upon our understanding of the relative distribution of perceptual sensitivity in the wider population. This becomes apparent when Sibley seeks to establish parallels between the objectivity of a-judgements, and the objectivity of colour judgements. Just as the objectivity of colour-terms relies upon the existence of a core of persons agreeing in their colour judgements, so Sibley wishes to argue that it is the existence of a nucleus of persons agreeing in their a-attributions that guarantees some stability of reference for our a-terms, giving these the status of property terms. Sibley



acknowledges that whereas the core of those agreeing in their colour attributions includes a majority of humankind, when it comes to aesthetic competence only a relatively small number of the population will demonstrate the relevant sensitivity. Around this small 'nucleus' of those more or less agreeing in their a-attributions we find a "large and variable penumbra consisting of groups exhibiting partial and merging areas of agreement corresponding to what we ordinarily call areas of limited sensibility and levels of sophistication".<sup>38</sup> But however tiny this nucleus may prove to be, Sibley believes that the mere existence of a group of persons capable of perceiving aesthetically suffices to guarantee the objectivity of aesthetic judgements.

Sibley's perceptual account of aesthetic sensitivity predicts a population divided between the following groups: an aesthetic 'elite' of individuals demonstrating unusual abilities to detect a-qualities; persons averagely competent in applying a-terms; and those resembling the 'aesthetic clod' who display little or no competence in identifying a-qualities or applying a-terms. This picture of the relative distribution of aesthetic competence may be thought to reflect the 'commonsense' view of the matter, which conceives the competent, the modestly competent and the incompetent as somehow existing along a hierarchical scale of aesthetic performance, with the aesthetically incompetent ranging at the bottom end of the scale, those displaying true taste at the top, and Everyman, representing a majority of the population, sitting somewhere between the two. This commonsense view receives an apparent confirmation from our knowledge of the relative distribution of ordinary perceptual competence, especially as this arises within an aesthetic context. A few examples serve to illustrate this point. The realm of wine-tasting reveals persons who apparently lack any sort of palate for wine, persons for whom any two wines would be almost indistinguishable in flavour. Whereas the majority of persons will display a moderately developed palate, being able to detect a difference in taste character between different grape varieties, distinguishing a Gerwurtztraminer from a Chardonnay, a minority of accomplished wine tasters will apparently distinguish a number of taste sensations corresponding with a single wine, and will be able to name the

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<sup>38</sup> Frank Sibley, "Objectivity and Aesthetics", *PAS*, Supp. Vol. 42 (1968), 31-72, p.47.



characters they detect. Similar differences in perceptual competence are revealed in the realm of musical listening, where we acknowledge the existence of a relatively small number of tone-deaf persons, persons who in some way fail to distinguish the notes of the musical scale. Ordinary musical competence lies with that majority of the population capable of distinguishing the notes of the scale as a series of relative pitches, determining whether a series of notes is 'rising' or 'falling' in pitch, and noticing whether the pitch of a violin string becomes sharper or flatter in tone as it is being tuned. A quite remarkable and relatively rare level of accomplishment is displayed by the listener said to possess 'perfect pitch': someone with the ability to hear the chroma or 'colour' of a tone. Whereas someone with relative pitch will manage to detect some change in pitch moving from an A to a B<sup>b</sup>, the person with perfect pitch will recognize the move as one from A to B<sup>b</sup>. This accomplishment is extraordinary in its rarity. It is a curious fact concerning our perceptual experience that, whilst the ability to perceive colour or 'chroma' represents the rule rather than the exception in the case of vision, in the auditory realm a capacity for colour perception proves to be the exception to the rule.<sup>39</sup> Whether this near-universal capacity for coloured-vision but not coloured-hearing reflects an evolved tendency, on the part of the human animal, to rely upon visual information to the exclusion of the other senses; or whether it is the case that the human animal's superior capacity for coloured-perception in the case of sight rather than sound accounts for the fact that we rely upon visual input to the extent that we do, is a question well beyond the scope of a philosophical enquiry such as this. Here I simply note the anomaly.

It will be difficult to form any accurate assessment of this commonsense understanding of the relative distribution of taste in the absence of a theory of aesthetic judgement giving a better understanding of the nature of aesthetic sensitivity. As I shall be providing that theory and that better understanding in Chapter Five, I shall save until then my assessment of Sibley's understanding of the relative distribution of taste, and of

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<sup>39</sup> One curious disanalogy between the senses of sight and sound lies in the fact that, whereas someone born with only relative pitch may be trained to identify tone chroma, colour blindness is a birth defect which no amount of training might correct. A documented attempt to acquire perfect pitch through training may be found among the studies in Peter Howell, Ian Cross, and Robert West (eds), *Musical Structure and Cognition* (London: Academic Press, 1985).

the commonsense understanding upon which it is based. For the time being, we can concede to Sibley and to the man in the street the fact that a capacity for ordinary perceptual discrimination must underpin any capacity for aesthetic sensitivity. We do expect to discover some positive correlation between those persons making fine perceptual discriminations, and those persons thought to display aesthetic sensitivity. It is a truism that persons lacking a capacity for rich sensory experience do not become art critics or actively pursue aesthetic experiences. However, whilst conceding this much it is important to note that the mere possession of perceptual discrimination is no guarantee of aesthetic sensitivity in the individual. This is because many highly discriminating judgements made in the aesthetic realm, such as the judgement that a note is sharp or flat, do not constitute examples of Sibley's a-judgements.

When Sibley describes taste as the ability to notice or discern things,<sup>40</sup> he conflates what are in reality two distinct perceptual capacities. The ability to *notice* things is nothing more than the ability to register the presence of stimuli or the ability to register a succession of stimuli. *Discernment* is the ability to register either variations across stimuli or changes in stimulation. Someone who (merely) notices things is an *acute* perceiver. Like the unusually observant police witness, the acute perceiver registers the existence of persons, objects and events surrounding him. By contrast, someone with great powers of discernment is a *discriminating* perceiver, a perceiver who makes an unusually large number of distinctions within a single parameter of sensory experience. This is the person who discriminates between different shades or tones of a single colour, or someone detecting a number of fruit flavours in a single glass of wine.

Although the merely acute or merely discriminating perceiver would be capable of forming many judgements that are of interest to the art critic or art historian, the same judgements would, for the aesthetician, lack the interest of Sibley's a-judgements. For instance, someone with fine powers of discrimination might acquire the knowledge that the method of fresco painting at the time of the Renaissance involved applying pigment to an area of fresh wet plaster prepared the same day, a fact artists tended to take into

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<sup>40</sup> "Symposium on Taste", *BJA*, 6 (1966), 68-69; 68.

account in planning their design. This person might then apply her capacity for discriminating subtle variations in colour tone to the skyline of Raphael's *Galatea*, and thereby come to determine portions of the fresco corresponding with the start and end of a day's work.<sup>41</sup> Here is a sensitive judgement, an aesthetic judgement in the wider meaning of the word but not, pace Sibley, an a-judgement. Quite clearly, aesthetic sensitivity amounts to something more than, or something other than, a capacity for fine perceptual discrimination.

One problem with a perceptual model of aesthetic judgement is that such a model apparently reduces aesthetic sensitivity to nothing more than an ability to register the aesthetic features of things, a form of "hyper-sensitive discrimination, an almost extra-sensory ability to notice, see or tell ungainliness from grace, vitality from vulgarity, etc."<sup>42</sup> Sibley never offers anything like an analysis of the nature of aesthetic perception. The tenor of his discussion suggests that for Sibley, perception takes the form of a neutral confrontation with qualities of different sorts, some of them na-qualities, and some a-qualities. That is to say, the difference between the aesthetically sensitive perceiver and the aesthetic clod consists not in the quality or texture of their experiences, but in the number and type of qualities each manages to perceive. To identify the aesthetically sensitive perceiver with an acute perceiver, as Sibley does, is to suggest that the aesthetically sensitive perceiver does whatever the aesthetically insensitive perceiver does, only more of the same, noticing those qualities that the aesthetically insensitive perceiver overlooks. Thus, whereas the clod notices a ball that is red, irregularly spheroid, and heavy, the aesthetically sensitive perceiver detects a ball that is red, irregularly spheroid, heavy, and possesses an iridescent surface. To treat the aesthetically sensitive perceiver as a merely discriminating perceiver is to say that the aesthetically sensitive perceiver makes finer perceptual discriminations than the average person, perhaps noticing irregularities in the shading on the surface of the ball.

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<sup>41</sup> The example derives from Roger Jones and Nicholas Perry, *Raphael* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), p.96.

<sup>42</sup> Ruby Meager, "Aesthetic Concepts", *BJA*, 10 (1970), 303-322; p.315.

To treat taste as nothing more than a species of acute perception is to ignore the perceptually elusive nature of aesthetic characterizations, the fact that aesthetic qualities may be opaque to thorough acts of perception;<sup>43</sup> and to undermine the notion that aesthetic sensitivity constitutes an awareness of emergent qualities. It could be argued that recognizing an emergent aspect involves more than noticing an additional feature of an object, for it involves bringing the object under a whole new perceptual organization. The same object enters into perception in different ways depending upon the qualities we attribute to it. In much the same way that the change from seeing Jastrow's duck-rabbit drawing as a duck to seeing it as a rabbit involves giving the same figure a different structural cast, so too an object that is seen as delicate has a different perceptual character to an object that is (merely) pink and fragile.

The notion that perception involves a neutral confrontation with qualities of different character leaves no room for the possibility that the experiences of certain aesthetically gifted individuals may be qualitatively or texturally different to the experiences of the average person. Consider for instance how the artist Kandinsky describes the character of perceived colour. According to Kandinsky, the warmth or coolness of a colour is perceived as "a horizontal movement, the warm colours approaching the spectator, the cool ones retreating from him." Kandinsky notes a difference in movement between yellow and blue. Yellow displays an 'eccentric' movement, both straining towards the spectator and overrunning its boundaries, whilst blue displays a 'concentric' movement, retreating from the spectator and turning in upon its centre. The "unbounded warmth of red....glows in itself, maturely, and does not distribute its vigor aimlessly", whilst the blend of red and yellow to be found in orange "brings red almost to the point of spreading out towards the spectator".<sup>44</sup> These observations demonstrate that in the experience of Kandinsky, colours do not possess the neutral character of something there to be noticed. Nor is it true to say that Kandinsky merely notices things which the

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<sup>43</sup> See Chapter One, p. above.

<sup>44</sup> W.Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: Wittenhorn Art Books, 1947), pp.57, 58, 61, 63.

rest of us overlook. For a Kandinsky, colours possess a dynamic character, a life of their own.

K.Mitchells takes up this idea that qualities enter the experience of the aesthetically sensitive perceiver and the experience of an ordinary person in different ways when he describes aesthetic perception as nothing short of "the total transformation of the whole object as perceived non-aesthetically".<sup>45</sup> Mitchell's treats aesthetic sensitivity as an ability to appreciate the aesthetic character belonging to the most ordinary things. Kandinsky's observations on the character of perceived colour give a good indication of what Mitchells has in mind when he suggests that even Sibley's na-qualities may take on an aesthetic character when viewed by an appropriately sensitive perceiver. Mitchells suggests that it is only those na-qualities that are perceived to possess a certain aesthetic character which will count for the presence of Sibley's a-qualities. Thus, it is not the *blueness* of its surface, but the 'cool' and 'whispering' quality of that blue, which makes an object appear 'delicate'. On this account of the nature of aesthetic sensitivity, the difference between the aesthetically sensitive perceiver and the aesthetic clod consists not in the number or the type of qualities they each perceive, but in the type of perception they train upon things. The former trains an aesthetic mode of perception upon the objects he perceives, the latter does not. If this captures the true nature of aesthetic sensitivity, it would appear to follow that the distinction Sibley ought to be pursuing is one between types of perception and not one between the types of quality we perceive.<sup>46</sup>

Mitchells goes much further than Sibley in identifying the sensitivity required for making a-judgements with a definite mode of perception. According to Mitchells, awareness of the aesthetic character of things and awareness of their nonaesthetic character amount to distinct but nonexclusive modes of perception that are aimed at different targets.<sup>47</sup> Virgil C.Aldrich has argued for an even stronger conclusion, distinguishing an aesthetic mode of perception, which he calls *prehension*, from a non-aesthetic mode of perception known as *observation*, and claiming that I cannot realize the

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<sup>45</sup> K.Mitchells, "Aesthetic Perception and Aesthetic Qualities", *PAS* 67 (1967), 53-72; pp.53-54.

<sup>46</sup> Ruby Meager, p.314.

<sup>47</sup> Mitchells, pp.55, 57.



same object under both modes of perception simultaneously. Aldrich's theory of prehensive perception is both interesting and complicated, comprising among other things a theory of representational perception, a theory of expressive perception and, if that were not enough, an account of the ontology of works of art. In providing these things, Aldrich at the same time manages to develop considerable insight into the nature of aesthetic description, drawing attention to the existence of logically distinctive categories of aesthetic attribution. Aldrich's proposal certainly deserves better than the caricature it has received at the hands of George Dickie.<sup>48</sup> That the view could lend itself to such caricature is perhaps unsurprising, given the fact that Aldrich spends more time presupposing the truth of his metaphysically dense suppositions than he does articulating or defending them; and his exposition does little to clarify what is a difficult and theoretically packed view. It is only after excavating some rather cryptic comments scattered across several articles and a book<sup>49</sup> that the true ingenuity of the view emerges, along with some unwelcome and perhaps surprising consequences. Uncovering the various implications of Aldrich's theory will occupy the better part of the next two chapters. The aim of this enquiry will be twofold: to uncover some of the logical insights into the nature of aesthetic attributions contained in Aldrich's account; but also to use the assessment of Aldrich's view as a piece of theoretical ground-clearing en route to developing my own account of aesthetic judgement in Chapter Five.

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<sup>48</sup> See George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), ch.6, pp.135-46.

<sup>49</sup> Aldrich's articulates his view in "Picture Space", *PR*, 67 (1958), 342-352; *Philosophy of Art* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963); "Back to Aesthetic Experience", *JAAC*, 24 (1966), 365-371; "Pictures and Persons - An Analogy", *Review of Metaphysics*, 28 (1975), 599-610; "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", *JAAC*, 37 (1978), 203-217. Distressing to say, the book was produced an introductory text in aesthetics!

### CHAPTER THREE

Throughout this chapter, I shall be analysing Aldrich's theory of aesthetic perception with two aims in view: to assess some of the strengths and weaknesses of Aldrich's theory of representational perception; but also, to see whether Aldrich is able to provide any evidence in favour of his assertion that observing and prehending amount to perceptually making over the same material thing in perceptually and metaphysically exclusive ways. To this end, Section I outlines the basic terms of Aldrich's theory, drawing special attention to the way in which Aldrich calls upon the notion of a special aesthetic mode of perception to provide an answer to the question, "What is a work of art?" The next section outlines some of the successes of Aldrich's theory, and in particular, the light it sheds upon the logic of aesthetic attributions. Section III assesses Aldrich's theory of prehension as an account of the phenomenology of pictorial representation, using Richard Wollheim's theory of representational perception as a foil to bring out some of the strengths and weaknesses of Aldrich's account. Here I pose the question whether we require the notion of mutually exclusive ways of looking to capture the phenomenology of pictorial perception; or whether instead the assumption of mutually exclusive perceptual modes serves to undermine our understanding of the phenomenology of pictorial perception. One way in which it might harm our understanding of representational perception would be if it led to an illusionist account of pictorial perception. Section IV produces some circumstantial evidence against the view that adopting the aesthetic viewpoint necessarily precludes an ordinary perceptual relationship with the object of attention, by suggesting ways in which this claim apparently offends against commonsense. Given the strongly metaphysical nature of Aldrich's account of aesthetic perception, Section V examines whether Aldrich is able to produce any arguments of a metaphysical turn favouring the radical separation of the nonaesthetic and aesthetic modes of perception. I conclude that Aldrich is able to provide no evidence

supporting his claim that we cannot simultaneously perceive both the aesthetic and nonaesthetic aspects of a thing.

## I

Anyone attempting to appreciate Aldrich's account of aesthetic perception must pay at least passing attention to the notion of representational seeing. This is because, like many philosophers before and since, Aldrich is intrigued by the perceptual achievement involved in seeing a flat canvas on the wall as a representational depiction. So intrigued is he with this achievement that seeing a canvas as a depiction becomes for Aldrich the paradigmatic example of aesthetic perception. By appreciating how Aldrich understands this single example, we will come to see why Aldrich believes that observing an object and prehending it constitute mutually incompatible achievements.

According to Aldrich, the word 'picture' indifferently designates both the canvas (physical object) and what is depicted therein (aesthetic object). Yet seeing the picture as a canvas and seeing it as a depiction involve two very different species of perceptual achievement, becoming acquainted with objects presenting very different surfaces. That surface which a physical object presents to vision is one we look at or through, obstructing the line of sight in the case of an opaque object such as a canvas; or allowing the line of sight to continue uninterrupted, where the object is a transparent sheet of glass. By contrast, the surface of an aesthetic object such as a pictorial depiction is something we look into, in some mysterious way that is unlike peering into a box.<sup>1</sup> The one surface resists my scrutiny, whilst the other opens out to it. When we switch from seeing the canvas to seeing the depiction, the surface of the 'picture' changes, or rather we cease to be aware of one type of surface while the object takes on characteristics belonging to another type of surface.

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<sup>1</sup>"'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", *JAAC*, 37 (1978), 203-217; p.208.

In formulating his account of aesthetic perception, Aldrich claims to have been influenced in his thinking by those gestalt-switches whereby the eye resolves the same visual design into distinct visual objects. Like the switch between observing the canvas and prehending the depiction, gestalt-switches involve exclusive ways of visually realizing the same object - I cannot see Jastrow's duck-rabbit figure both as duck and as rabbit at the same time.<sup>2</sup> However, here ends the resemblance between the two examples. Experiencing a gestalt-switch does not involve a change in perceptual mode, since I do not experience a change in the type of surface perceived when I switch from seeing the duck-rabbit drawing as a duck to seeing it as a rabbit. However, there is a change in the surface perceived when I switch from noticing the drawing as a physical object comprising ink impressions on white paper, to noticing its representational aspects, comprising a rabbit-figure or a duck-figure standing out against a white background. Whereas gestalt-switches involve changes in visual aspect, observing and prehending involve a change in the *categorial aspects* under which I realize the picture. That is to say, observation and prehension subsume the same entity under distinct metaphysical categories where logically different types of discourse apply. When I see Frith's *Derby Day* as a canvas covered with patches of cracked pigment, I am seeing it as a physical object, and a physical object description applies. When I see the same picture as an expressive depiction of the crowd at the Derby I see it as an aesthetic object, and certain expressive and representational attributions now apply.

We have now introduced the main elements in Aldrich's account. Aldrich invites us to think of a metaphysically neutral, determinable somewhat - what Aldrich calls the material thing - as aspecting under different metaphysical categories when realized under different modes of perception.<sup>3</sup> To adopt the tortured terminology Aldrich introduces, when the material thing undergoes categorial aspection as a physical object, its characteristics are realized as qualities which the object possesses. When the same material thing undergoes categorial aspection in the direction of an aesthetic object (*sic*) its

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<sup>2</sup> Virgil C. Aldrich, *Philosophy of Art*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p.20; "Picture Space", *PR*, 67 (1958), 342-352, p.345.

<sup>3</sup> "Picture Space", p.346; *Philosophy of Art*, p.21.

characteristics are realized as 'aspects' which 'animate' it.<sup>4</sup> Aldrich also introduces the notion of holophrastic perception, a form of noticing where the picture may be located, encountered, and talked about,<sup>5</sup> without thereby committing ourselves to the view that what we are looking at constitutes either a physical thing or an aesthetic object.

At many points in his writings, Aldrich favours an analogy between persons and works of art;<sup>6</sup> an analogy that both sustains and elaborates his views on the nature of pictorial perception. For Aldrich, the way in which we may be acquainted with a work of art as both canvas and depiction parallels our acquaintance with a human being as both a physical body and as a person. In particular, there are two different ways in which the notion of a person's body functioning as a 'point of view' illustrates the exclusive nature of the achievements that are involved in realizing the same picture as a canvas and as a work of art.<sup>7</sup> Firstly, in the third-person case, Sally's body functions as my point of view upon Sally the person; something I look into to discover the 'person' or 'soul' within. It is the person I see when I look into the body who is the proper bearer of those expressive and emotional predicates attributable to 'Sally'. In a similar way, I look into the picture (canvas) to see the 'work of art': the bearer of whatever representational and expressive qualities belong to the 'picture'. Under both scenarios, the bearer of the properties being attributed is not that which I look into (the body, the canvas), but that which is seen therein (the person, the picture). Secondly, in the first person case, my body functions as my point of view upon the world.<sup>8</sup> That is to say, my body becomes an extension of my perceptual apparatus, defining or generating the space in which I see, facilitating perception without itself becoming an object of perception. Aldrich invites us to think of a picture as functioning in a similar way as a 'point of view', a framing device that acts as a window upon its represented subject matter without itself becoming the

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<sup>4</sup> "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", pp.210, 211.

<sup>5</sup> *Philosophy of Art*, pp.22-23, 33; "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", p.210.

<sup>6</sup> The analogy achieves fullest expression in "Pictures and Persons - An Analogy", *Review of Metaphysics*, 28 (1975), 599-610. But see also "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", esp.p.209; *Philosophy of Art*, p.32.

<sup>7</sup> This paragraph uses the analogy which Aldrich develops between persons and works of art in "pictures and Persons - An Analogy", to explicate the meaning of the claim, in "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", esp.211, that a picture functions as a 'point of view'.

<sup>8</sup> "Pictures and Persons - An Analogy", pp.601ff; "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", p.209.



target of attention. As long as it functions as a point of view upon its subject-matter, the picture (physical canvas) drops out of sight, effacing itself in favour of the aesthetic object with its representational and expressive aspects. These two ways of utilizing the notion of a 'point of view' illustrate respectively the mutually exclusive nature of the *logical* and the *perceptual* achievements involved in realizing the picture now as a canvas, now as a work of art.

Drawing upon his analogy between persons and works of art allows Aldrich to give an apparently simple and natural metaphysical analysis of the notion of a work of art. Treating a picture as a (mere) physical object raises the puzzle how a brute physical thing comes to be the possessor of aesthetic qualities, particularly expressive qualities. Treating a work of art as nothing more than what Dickie identifies with the 'aesthetic object', the set of characteristics in the object which capture the educated art appreciator's attention, creates a mysterious relationship between the work of art and its physical basis, reducing the work of art to a set of detached phenomenal qualities supervening upon the physical object.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, we wish to say that a work of art is both a physical object yet something more than a physical object, and Aldrich gives us an opportunity to do precisely that. The key lies in realizing that the work of art is related to its physical basis in the same way that the person is related to a particular physical body. In much the same way that my body cum perceptual apparatus functions as my point of view upon the world, so Aldrich invites us to think of a work of art as a physical object which functions as a 'point of view' upon its subject-matter, whilst itself remaining a thing not in view. That is to say, when the material thing is transformed into a work of art by the prehending eye, its physical object aspects are effaced as the object becomes animated with representational and expressive aspects. In the same way that it takes a certain perceptual organization to switch from seeing the duck-rabbit drawing as a duck to seeing it as a rabbit, so too it takes a certain perceptual organization of a canvas to see it as the bearer of aesthetic qualities; and Aldrich suggests that what we understand to be a work of art is nothing more or less than the *object viewed under this perceptual organization*.

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<sup>9</sup> "Back to Aesthetic Experience", *JAAC*, 24 (1966), 365-371, p.370; *Philosophy of Art*, pp.34-35; "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", pp.212-213.

In short, Aldrich identifies the work of art as a physical object that has been transformed into the bearer of aesthetic qualities for as long as it is subjected to a certain perceptual regard.<sup>10</sup> Any physical object subjected to this type of regard, such as a piece of *art trouve*, has the potential to be transformed into an aesthetic object, but not necessarily into a work of art. This is because, unlike a piece of *art trouve*, a work of art is a physical thing that has been designed for prehension as an aesthetic object.<sup>11</sup>

The notion of aspect-animation is theoretically the most difficult and the least articulated aspect of Aldrich's account of aesthetic perception. For this reason, I shall baldly state what Aldrich says before attempting to interpret what it means. Briefly, Aldrich suggests two respects in which a work of art may be 'animated' by 'aspects'. The first form of aspect-animation describes what takes place when we prehensively realize the material thing as a work of art, and forms the substance of Aldrich's theory of expressive perception. In the prehensive view of things, we are not aware of the materials of the work of art - the colours of a painting, the musical sounds - qua physical entities. Instead, we become aware of the 'medium of the materials' - the timbres or characters of the colours and sounds. We become aware too of the "aesthetic space-values of the thing as structured by colour and sound", with the perceived tonal relationships between the colours or sounds animating the object as the aesthetic space of the composition. The second form of aspect-animation is a feature of representational seeing and involves "seeing the thing as something it is not thought really to be" - for instance, seeing the set of ink marks before me as animated by the image of a lampshade. The representational aspects that emerge in the aesthetic space of the composition constitute the pictorial content 'animating' the medium.<sup>12</sup>

To throw light upon these claims, imagine the artist at work hovering over the canvas, his brush primed with paint. The pigment on his brush may be viewed as a physical blob of paint (physical object); or we may be aware of the timbre or character of the colour of that pigment - its warmth, the way it comes to life - in which case we are

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<sup>10</sup> "Back to Aesthetic Experience", p.368.

<sup>11</sup> *Philosophy of Art*, p.88.

<sup>12</sup> *Philosophy of Art*, pp.22, 48.

already prehending the artist's medium in the materials of the work of art. For Aldrich, the painter's medium is not the physical materials with which he works, but the 'medium of the materials': the timbres or characters which particular colours and lines possess for the prehensive eye. To say that the artist works in his medium is to say that he is aware of the aesthetic character of those elements he selects as he paints. According to Aldrich, "in the artist's experience as he composes, each material is featured as a little, elementary aesthetic object".<sup>13</sup> The artist works in the medium of the materials by sculpting with colour, positioning coloured pigments upon the canvas and allowing the tonal relationships that arise when we view the combination of the timbres of colours and lines to generate the representational and expressive effects of the picture. Such expressive and representational effects constitute what Aldrich calls *qualities of composition* in the work. These qualities are 'compositional', both in the sense that these are qualities brought about through acts of composition; but also 'compositional' in the sense of being composite, or regional, qualities of the work.<sup>14</sup> The mechanism generating these effects is, I would suggest, the type of colour phenomena invoked by Kandinsky, the fact that colours dynamically align themselves at different distances from the eye when perceived aesthetically. The manner in which some colours apparently advance whilst others apparently recede from the picture plane creates the illusion of pictorial depth, generating the effect of a three dimensional space, and encouraging the eye to see the resulting configuration as the three-dimensional *representational space* of the picture. Throughout the process described here, it is the viewer's gaze which transforms the canvas covered in paint into the bearer of representational and expressive qualities. The viewer becomes

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<sup>13</sup> *Philosophy of Art*, p.39.

<sup>14</sup> "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", p.212. The term 'regional quality' derives from Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Indiannapolis: Hackett, 1981), pp.83-88. In "What is an Aesthetic Quality?", *Theoria*, 39 (1973), 50-70, p.51, Beardsley accepts the correction to his own discussion of regional qualities contained in Robert Mathers and George Dickie, "The Definition of 'Regional Quality'", *JP*, 60 (1963), 465-467. Mathers and Dickie, pp.467, 465, offer two different definitions of a regional quality: (1) a regional quality is a quality that a complex has as a result of the relation between its parts; and (2) a regional quality is a quality of a complex that, if it belongs to one of its parts, is a regional quality of that part. Although Aldrich does not take up the matter, it is safe to assume that Aldrich would accept definition (1). Aldrich might also accept (2). This is because Aldrich would accept that the same term might describe both the expressive quality belonging to the picture as a whole, the character or 'timbre' belonging to the various colours viewed in combination, but also describe the timbres of the parts. For Aldrich, both the parts of a picture may be characterized as 'warm', and the picture overall may be expressive of warmth.

enabled to see the representational and expressive compositional qualities that emerge in the picture, but only once she has sensitized herself to the ground-level aesthetic qualities of the work; both to the aesthetic character of each of the elements employed, and to the aesthetic character belonging to the elements when organized by the eye into groups.

The distinction Aldrich creates between two types of aspect-animation no doubt reflects the fact that the representational and expressive qualities of a work of art are qualities of logically different types. As Richard Wollheim has pointed out,<sup>15</sup> describing the representational content of a picture involves attributing qualities of a physical object kind. Although the qualities attributed do not happen to belong to that particular physical object standing in front of me now (the canvas), they are of the same metaphysical order as the qualities which do belong to the canvas. In Aldrich's terms, in seeing representationally, I see the physical object as "something it is not thought really to be", a different physical-object configuration to the physical-object configuration I know to be there. By contrast, to attribute expressive qualities to a human body or to a canvas is to attribute properties belonging to a metaphysically different category of thing to whatever qualities apply to the canvas or body viewed as physical object. Under one species of aspect-animation, I see the canvas as if it were a physical thing of a different type. Under the other type of aspect-animation, I subsume the same object under a new metaphysical category.

Such, in outline, is Aldrich's account of aesthetic perception and of the manner in which different ways of looking may reveal different aspects of a single work of art. Aldrich's account may be summarized as follows. Aldrich agrees with Mitchells that there is a ground-level aesthetic character attaching to the most ordinary objects, and that blindness to this character will prevent our experiencing Sibley's emergent a-qualities. For Aldrich, this character takes the form of the timbres and tonal values of the materials used in the composition, which taken singly or in combination constitute what Aldrich calls the 'medium of the materials'. It is the perceived timbres of the elements of a picture - the timbres belonging to the contours, and the colours of the pigments - that make these

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<sup>15</sup> *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), sec. 10-12, pp. 11-16.

elements appear to express such ground-level expressive qualities as 'warmth' or 'delicacy'.<sup>16</sup> Unless we can recognize the expressive character of these materials, we will remain indifferent to those higher order expressive qualities bodied forth by the timbres or tonalities viewed in combination. These higher order expressive qualities, or 'qualities of composition', may be designated by non-psychological terms ('solid', 'ponderous', 'luminous', 'delicate'), or by psychological terms ('pensive', 'gay').<sup>17</sup> It is only once the material thing has been transformed into the medium of the materials by the prehending eye or ear that it becomes the proper subject of aesthetic predication. Thus, the medium of the materials corresponds with what Aldrich calls the surface of the aesthetic object, something generated by a prehensive view of the work of art, and that part of the material thing to which aesthetic predications apply. The notion that observation and prehension represent utterly distinct modes of perception reduces to the claim that I cannot simultaneously be aware of the aesthetic character of the materials of a work of art, and of the physical object presence of these same materials. To see one or other set of these aspects is to make over a bit of the world in perceptually different ways. Applied to the work of art overall, the notion that observation and prehension exclude one another amounts to the claim that I cannot simultaneously realize the material thing (canvas) qua canvas and qua representational picture. It is the claim that I cannot simultaneously observe and prehend the same material thing which I shall be scrutinizing for the remainder of this chapter.

## II

One of the more obvious successes of Aldrich's theory of aesthetic perception is the manner in which the theory brings to light the complex nature of aesthetic attribution. Aldrich draws attention to the fact that aesthetic attributions do not form a logically

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<sup>16</sup> "Expresses' and 'Expressive'", p.211.

<sup>17</sup> "Expresses' and 'Expressive'", p.212.



homogeneous class of expressions when he demonstrates, firstly, the plurality of ways in which a variety of aesthetic predicates may apply to a single work of art in the course of a single description; and secondly, the fact that a single predicate may be used to qualify the same work of art in more than one way at the same time. Imagine that the picture before me depicts 'a scene of wooded tranquility'. To say that 'the picture contains large expanses of green' is to give a physical object description of the colour palate of the painting; or else it is to partly qualify the representational content of the picture, the fact that the picture depicts rolling expanses of green countryside. Talk of the *coolness* of the picture qualifies either the perceived characters of the individual elements of the picture, or the perceived character belonging to regions of the picture; the latter being one of the compositional expressive qualities of the work. The physical surface of the canvas may be 'flat' rather than warped; and the picture may be pictorially 'flat' in the sense that the relatively limited palate deployed by the artist in the painting serves to thwart the illusion of pictorial depth. This second species of flatness describes the sculptured composite quality presented by the elements of the pigments. The *tranquility* of the painting may be a compositional expressive quality, or else a representational effect, denoting the fact that nothing is seen to be in motion in the picture-space of the composition. In the case under consideration, the colour tones used by the artist and the colours depicted happen to coincide, although they might not have done so, as when Poussin employs dabs of ochre and umber paint rather than gold leaf to depict the golden idol in *Worship of the Golden Calf*.<sup>18</sup>

Aldrich's theory of aesthetic perception manages to account for many features of our experience of pictorial representation. For instance, Aldrich's distinction between two species of aspect animation invites the notion that there are two separate but interrelated aesthetic spaces corresponding with each pictorial composition - the colour space animating the picture in the depth dimension, and the representational space of the

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Podro, "Depiction and the Golden Calf", in *Philosophy and the Visual Arts: Seeing and Abstracting*, ed. Andrew Harrison, Royal Institute of Philosophy (Dordrecht: D.Reidel, 1987), pp.3-22, p.5.

composition.<sup>19</sup> We can think of the representational space of the picture as that which is seen in the picture, a group of objects and the relationships obtaining between them. Although our ability to see the picture as its depicted subject-matter depends in some way upon what I choose to call the colour space of the picture, the representational space animating the picture is not entirely isomorphic with the three-dimensional tonal colour effect arising from the interanimation of the timbres of the colours. This fact becomes apparent when we consider how the pictorial illusion of depth comes about, and how the represented depth of a picture may differ from the apparent colour depth. A picture is judged to be 'flat' if it has a rather shallow projection of colours in the third dimension, especially if the shallowness of this projection conflicts with our awareness that the pictorial objects to which these different pigments belong are represented as standing at a great distance from one other another.<sup>20</sup>

Distinguishing the colour space, defined by our awareness of the medium of the materials, from the representational space emerging in that medium, allows us to characterize the type of visual interest to be found in nonfigurational art. A picture will be said to be nonrepresentational when it explores the properties of aesthetic (colour) space without presenting an explicit image.<sup>21</sup> Thus, according to Aldrich's account of pictorial seeing, a Rothko possesses two different types of aesthetic quality: ground-level aesthetic qualities, or the timbres of the colours employed; and those composite expressive qualities arising when we view these timbres in combination. Distinguishing between the colour space and the representational space also allows us to account for the defective nature of some representations. Richard Wollheim has noted that as well as seeing a drawing of a square or other diagram as a mere configuration, we can also see a drawing of this type as "the representation of whatever it is of which the lines that constitute it are

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<sup>19</sup> The distinction I create here between the *colour space* and the *representational space* of a picture reflects my own attempt to give a sharper focus to some insights contained in Aldrich's discussion of the types of aspect-animation to be found in pictures. Aldrich never makes this distinction as such.

<sup>20</sup> For an example of this phenomenon, see Aldrich's discussion of Kokoschka looking at an Alpine landscape, in "Picture Space", pp.347-348.

<sup>21</sup> *Philosophy of Art*, pp.48-49.

the projection on to a plane surface."<sup>22</sup> Distinguishing between the colour space and representational space of a picture explains why we might agree with Wollheim whilst feeling that such geometrical figures are nonetheless representationally deficient. Such diagrams are at best weakly representational because they fail to create an illusion of depth. In the language of Aldrich, there is little or no expressive character attaching to such a configuration as a whole when viewed prehensively.

The distinction between the colour space and the representational space corresponding with a particular picture enables us to notice the fact that a colour may seem to occupy one position within the colour-space of a visual composition, a position determined by the intrinsic position which that colour would ordinarily take up relative to the eye, whilst apparently occupying another position when it is seen as belonging to one of the objects represented in the picture. For instance, a bright motif seen on its own may tend to protrude, yet will tend to be recessed if seen as a sunlit wheat field in the background of the composition. Likewise, although a gray-bluish green tends to be seen as occupying a position further back in the space of the picture than the position occupied by a bright tan, Aldrich describes the reversal of this relationship in a Derain still life, where the turquoise sits ahead of the tan because it is seen representationally as a jug in front of a table.<sup>23</sup> Aldrich is right to suggest that our awareness of such dynamic tensions adds to the aesthetic enjoyment a picture may provide. However, his insistence that I cannot simultaneously perceive the picture as both canvas and work of art means that my awareness of the aesthetic space values of the composition will inevitably cancel out my awareness of the physical space values of the picture viewed as canvas. This rules out the possibility that we could be aware of further dynamic tensions which may arise between the position that a pictorial element is seen to occupy within either of the aesthetic spaces Aldrich describes, and the position that element occupies in the flat, two-dimensional picture plane coinciding with the space of the canvas. At the very minimum, Aldrich is committed to denying that awareness of such tensions could figure in the aesthetic

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Wollheim, "On Drawing an Object", in *On Art and the Mind* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), pp.3-30, pp.28-29. See also *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), sec.12, 13, pp.15, 17.

<sup>23</sup> *Philosophy of Art*, pp.44, 65.

experience of looking at a picture. That is to say, Aldrich leaves no room for an *aesthetic* noticing of the way in which the painter uses the two-dimensional space of the canvas. Yet we lose the whole point of Breughel the Elder's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* if we fail to realize the tension created when Breughel relegates his representation of the putative subject of the composition to the margins of the two-dimensional picture space. Aldrich falsifies our aesthetic experience when he assumes that noticing where a pictorial element is placed on the canvas, noticing how full or empty the canvas looks to the eye, excludes a simultaneous recognition of the sensuous presentation of the surface and whatever images may animate this presentation.

Although Aldrich manages to provide some penetrating insights into the nature of our perceptual involvement with works of art, there are crucial respects in which Aldrich's account of aesthetic perception does little to illuminate the concept of pictorial representation. Aldrich claims that the representational field of a picture is generated by our taking the aesthetic point of view, prehending the timbres and tonalities of the colours and lines and in so doing, allowing the represented image to form as it takes on properties of aesthetic space.<sup>24</sup> I have explicated this as the claim that we become aware of the representational space of the picture when we become aware of the dynamic, three-dimensional relationship between the colours. Of course, the three-dimensional colour effect of the picture is only one of the devices the an artist might use to create the illusion of pictorial depth. Other devices at the artist's disposal include the overlapping of images in the picture plane, so that one part of the picture gives the appearance of being 'in front of' the other, obscuring part of the latter from view. Hand-waving references to a prehensive awareness of the timbres of lines does nothing to explain the fact that where we see two contiguous shapes on a page, one of them 'complete' and the other not, we tend to see the configuration in such a way that the complete figure stands out three-dimensionally in front of the incomplete figure. The gestalt psychologists explain this phenomenon by pointing to two principles which underlie all acts of perception: the notion that all perception involves the seeing of 'figure on ground'; and the principle that

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<sup>24</sup> *Philosophy of Art*, p.33.

perceivers always seek out the simplest interpretation possible for a set of perceptual data. To see even a simple line or an outline figure on a page involves seeing that line or figure as standing on top of an uninterrupted background. That particular figure-on-ground resolution that we make when we see a configuration of lines as a circle standing in front of a square reflects a simpler resolution of the visual data than one which treats the same configuration as a single irregular figure lying in a single plane.<sup>25</sup> Of course, once you start to account for three-dimensional representational effects by appealing to the principles underlying all acts of perception, talk of a prehensive awareness of the timbres of lines becomes surplus to theoretical requirements.

### III

One way in which Aldrich might demonstrate that observation and prehension amount to distinct and mutually exclusive modes of perception would be to show that the radical separation he proposes between these two modes of perception leads to a superior account of the phenomenology of pictorial perception. Prima facie, this is not a promising line of enquiry. The notion that I can't simultaneously observe andprehend a picture poses the threat of an illusionist account of representational perception. To see how a separation between the aesthetic and nonaesthetic modes of perception runs the risk of an illusionist account of pictorial perception, I shall contrast Aldrich's account of the phenomenology of representational perception with Richard Wollheim's well-known account of representational seeing.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), pp.168, 214, 241-243.

<sup>26</sup> The following discussion draws upon Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, sec. 12, pp.15-16; "On Drawing an Object", pp.3-30; "Seeing-as, Seeing-in and Pictorial Representation", in *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp.205-226; *Painting as an Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), pp.46ff; "Imagination and Pictorial Understanding", *PAS*, Supp. Vol.60 (1986), 45-60; "A Note on *Mimesis as Make-Believe*", *PPR*, 51 (1991), 401-406.



It could be argued that any account of the phenomenology of representational perception must show willing to account for the following set of data:

- (i) The experience of seeing a pictorial representation of a lion more closely resembles the experience of seeing a lion than it resembles the experience of reading a description of a lion.
- (ii) The experience of seeing a pictorial representation of a lion more closely resembles the experience of seeing a lion than it resembles the experience of seeing a zebra.
- (iii) In certain crucial respects, the experience of seeing a pictorial representation of a lion more closely resembles the experience of seeing a zebra-picture than it resembles the experience of seeing a lion in the flesh.

Whilst (i) captures the idea that a picture, unlike a denoting term in a language, acts as a natural sign of its object, (ii) stresses the recognitional aspect of pictorial perception. Taken together, (i) and (ii) suggest the visual component to the experience of looking at a pictorial representation. That is to say, pictorial interpretation draws upon ordinary perceptual skills, and in particular, our ordinary capacity for perceptually recognizing objects, in a way in which the interpretation of sentences in a language does not. As such, (i) and (ii) act as a constraint upon anyone who, like Nelson Goodman, opts for a conventionalist account of pictorial representation. Formula (iii) recognizes the conventional or configurational aspect to the experience of looking at a picture. (iii) acts as a constraint upon an illusionist account of pictorial representation. Different accounts of representational perception have tended to emphasize one or other of these aspects at the expense of the rest. Thus a conventionalist account of depiction tends to emphasize (iii) at the expense of (i), whilst an illusionist account of pictorial perception, like the one offered by E.H.Gombrich in *Art and Illusion*, pays attention to (i) at the expense of (iii).<sup>27</sup>

One way to summarizing the constraints which (i) through (iii) place upon an account of representational perception would be to say that to have an experience of x as a picture of y is to have a non-illusory experience of some pictorial appearance of y. In

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<sup>27</sup> Criteria (i), (ii), and (iii) are loosely based upon Richard Wollheim's discussion of conventional and illusionist accounts of representation in "On Drawing an Object", pp.25-26.

looking at a picture of y I have a visual experience that resembles or recalls in some ways the experience of seeing y. However, the experience is not an illusional one to the extent that I do not hold the belief that I am looking at y rather than x, a picture of y. It is an interest in the non-illusional aspect of a pictorial experience of x which leads Wollheim to place a twofold requirement upon acts of representational seeing. According to Wollheim, in looking at a picture of y, I have a single visual experience with two theoretically distinguishable but phenomenally inseparable aspects to it:<sup>28</sup> I have a visual experience that is both the experience of seeing a surface and the experience of seeing y. When I look at a picture x of y as a picture of y - as opposed to seeing x as a flat surface marked with paint, or believing that I am looking at y - the twofold visual awareness that I bring to the task is a species of a widely occurring perceptual genus which Wollheim dubs 'seeing-in'.<sup>29</sup> Wollheim believes that I exercise my capacity for seeing-in whenever I see figures in clouds or images in damp stains on walls, and whenever I see a canvas covered with paint as the picture of a woman. The practice of pictorial representation presupposes and exploits this basic human capacity for seeing-in things. That is to say, it is the existence of this basic perceptual capacity which allows artists to mark surfaces in such a way that spectators exercising their capacity for seeing-in will have certain recognitional experiences. What distinguishes pictorial representation from standard cases of seeing-in is the fact that in the former case but not the latter a standard of correctness applies to that which is seen in the surface, a standard of correctness determined by the fulfilled intentions of the artist.<sup>30</sup> Wollheim believes the twofoldness he attributes to representational perception both captures the phenomenological feature distinctive to the experience of seeing-in, and serves to guarantee that the experience I have in looking at a representation is not an illusional one.<sup>31</sup> In seeing a picture of a woman, I have a visual experience as of looking at a woman, and my attention simultaneously is drawn to a configuration of elements on the page. It is because my experience possesses what

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<sup>28</sup> *Painting as an Art*, 46.

<sup>29</sup> "Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation", p.209.

<sup>30</sup> *Painting as an Art*, p.47-48; "Imagination and Pictorial Understanding", p.46.

<sup>31</sup> "Imagination and Pictorial Understanding", pp.46-47.

Wollheim calls both *recognitional* and *configurational* aspects<sup>32</sup> that I never lose sight of the fact that what I am looking at is a picture of a woman rather than a woman in the flesh.

I have described the distinction, implicit in Aldrich's discussion of pictorial representation, between the colour space and the representational space of a picture. This distinction, coupled with Aldrich's claim that different properties belong to an object under the observational and prehensional modes of perception, suggests that Aldrich anticipates the existence of three types of property which may feature in the experience of a picture: (1) physical object properties belonging to the picture surface; (2) pictorial properties of colour, whereby one colour may be pictorially in front of or behind another colour; (3) representational properties attaching to whatever is visually recognized in the picture. Wollheim's discussion of pictorial representation also demonstrates an awareness of these three property kinds. Wollheim distinguishes between the *physical* and the *pictorial* dimension of my experience of looking at a patch of black paint that has been applied to a white canvas.<sup>33</sup> To say that the black is on the white in the physical dimension is to say that I see the black paint as concealing a patch of white canvas which would be revealed again to sight if the paint were rubbed off. To say that the black is on the white in the pictorial dimension is to see the black as standing in front of the white. Whereas in the first case, the black and white are seen as occupying a position in space that is materially speaking equidistant from the eye, in the second case the black appears to be closer to the eye than the white. No fact concerning the physical relationship in which the black paint stands to the white canvas - the fact that the paint might have been applied to the canvas, or the fact that the canvas may have been cut away to reveal the black lying underneath - could serve to confirm or disconfirm the fact that the black is pictorially on the white, an observation confirming that the two facts described occupy separate dimensions. Wollheim acknowledges the representational properties of a picture when he stresses the recognitional aspect of my experience of seeing-in. Because Wollheim acknowledges the existence of three and not just two classes of property

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<sup>32</sup> "Imagination and Pictorial Understanding", p.47.

<sup>33</sup> "On Drawing an Object", pp.26-27.

entering pictorial experience, this raises the question what sorts of properties belong to each of the aspects of the twofold visual experience of seeing-in.

Wollheim does not provide us with any obvious answer to this question, his description of the twofold nature of pictorial perception apparently changing with each new account he gives of the matter. In the earliest formulation of his theory, Wollheim invites us to think of our ability to see a representation on analogy with the way in which we can see black paint on a white canvas as standing out (pictorially) against the white. He also suggests that an awareness of the pictorial fact of black on white does not preclude an awareness of the physical fact of black on white.<sup>34</sup> This suggests Wollheim believes that the twofoldness of pictorial perception amounts to a simultaneous attention to facts in the physical and pictorial dimensions of experience, my awareness of explicitly representational properties presumably falling into the latter category. This would cohere with the account given in *Painting as an Art*, where twofoldness amounts to the notion that I am visually aware of the surface, and I discern something standing out in front of (or perhaps receding behind) something else.<sup>35</sup> But it is to ignore the fact, brought to our attention by Aldrich, that the pictorial and representational properties in a given picture may not coincide, as when the pictorial fact of turquoise-behind-tan is contradicted by the representational fact of turquoise-before-tan in the Derain still life. Elsewhere, Wollheim describes the twofoldness of pictorial experience as an attending to the recognitional and configurational aspects of the visual experience. In looking at a picture of a woman, I recognize a woman, and I have a visual awareness of a marked surface.<sup>36</sup> In this account, it is uncertain where the experience of pictorial properties would come into the equation. Is my twofold attention to, on the one hand, the representational properties of the picture, on the other hand, both pictorial and physical properties of the marked surface? Elsewhere again,<sup>37</sup> Wollheim suggests that in seeing y in x, I have a simultaneous awareness of y and of features of x sustaining the experience of seeing y.

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<sup>34</sup> "On Drawing an Object", p.27-28; *Art and Its Objects*, Sec.12, pp.15-16.

<sup>35</sup> *Painting as an Art*, p.46. This is also the view given in "A Note on Mimesis as Make-Believe", *PPR*, 51 (1991), 401-406, p.403.

<sup>36</sup> "Imagination and Pictorial Understanding", p.46.

<sup>37</sup> "Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation", pp.212-213.



Awareness of sustaining features is here equated with awareness of the medium of the work of art, where it is indeterminate whether attention to the medium amounts to awareness of a set of facts in the physical dimension, a set of facts in the pictorial dimension, or both.

Michael Podro has made the complaint that Wollheim's account of pictorial perception demonstrates an indifference to the material substrate of the painting which distorts the phenomenology of pictorial perception. According to Podro, Wollheim treats the act of looking at a picture as one of looking at a surface in which we catch likenesses, rather than as one of seeing a depiction we resolve. Wollheim ignores the fact that when we see say a Raphael drawing of a Madonna, not only do we see the figure in the pen marks, but we also see the marks, the intervals of shadow and light, in the figure. In looking at a drawing, we are aware of a drawing procedure that could have other realizations. The sense of the depicted thing does not saturate the 'look' of the drawing for us, any more than a particular prospect of an object saturates our sense of the object.<sup>38</sup> Aldrich's own very clear account of what is involved in perceiving the medium of a work of art makes it possible to clarify the nature of the dispute between Wollheim and Podro. According to Aldrich, I may attend to the surface of a picture as a physical object surface. Alternatively, I can see the same surface as the drawing procedure that Podro draws to our attention: the 'medium of the materials' in which certain expressive and representational properties emerge. Podro believes that Wollheim ignores the second of these ways of attending to the surface of the picture, and in so doing, falsifies the phenomenology of our pictorial experience. Because Wollheim is noncommittal on the question whether that half of my twofold pictorial attention directed to the medium is an attending to the surface *qua* physical object surface or an attending to the surface *qua* drawing procedure, it is very difficult to assess the justice of Podro's objection. The fact that Wollheim does apparently change his description of the nature of twofoldness over time might reflect an attempt on his part to meet objections of this type as he was made aware of them.

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Podro, "Depiction and the Golden Calf", pp.18, 9, 10, 15.



Whatever points of indeterminacy may be found in Wollheim's description of the medium of a work of art, Podro's interpretation of Wollheim is correct to this extent: Wollheim does not believe that my twofold attention to a picture involves an indifference to the physical object properties belonging to the picture surface. Twofoldness amounts to awareness of representational or pictorial properties or both, without losing sight of the physical properties belonging to the marked surface. And since Aldrich explicitly denies that I can be aware of physical object properties whilst attending aesthetically, it follows that Aldrich is committed to denying the twofoldness of pictorial experience, at least as Wollheim understands the term.<sup>39</sup> Whereas Wollheim treats my awareness of a picture as a single visual experience possessing two inseparable aspects, Aldrich treats my awareness of a picture as an alternation between two different sorts of visual experience. Aldrich claims that having an experience of a picture may take the form of an aesthetic object experience of seeing the represented subject-matter appearing in the medium of the materials; or else it may take the form of a physical object experience of seeing a piece of canvas occupying a certain portion of the surface area of a wall. I can attend to the physical fact that the black paint is on the white canvas, or I can attend to the fact that the black is pictorially upon the white, but I cannot attend to both. Wollheim by contrast believes that where my perceptual awareness takes the form of seeing-in, I not only can but must be attending simultaneously to the two aspects of the situation. Although my attention need not be divided evenly between recognitional and configurational aspects at each point of the experience, I must continue to pay some attention to each of type of aspect if my current act of looking is to count as an instance of seeing-in rather than an instance of seeing-as or just plain seeing.<sup>40</sup> Losing sight of the configurational aspects of my experience of seeing y in the painting would turn the experience into one of seeing-as rather than seeing-in. Losing sight of the recognitional aspects of the experience would reduce the experience to one of looking at x.

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<sup>39</sup> I.e. Aldrich is not committed to denying that I can have a 'twofold' awareness of both the pictorial and representational properties of the picture.

<sup>40</sup> *Painting as an Art*, p.47; "Seeing-as, Seeing-in and Pictorial Representation", p.213.

If Wollheim is correct when he claims that twofoldness is the phenomenological feature distinctive to seeing representationally, and if he is correct in claiming that some twofoldness requirement is necessary to avoid an illusionist account of representational perception, then it would follow that in denying twofoldness, Aldrich manages to provide both an inadequate account of the phenomenology of representational perception, and an illusionist account at that. With Wollheim's own superior account of representational perception to hand, we would have two reasons to reject Aldrich's account of pictorial perception. On the other hand, if it could be demonstrated that appealing to twofoldness does not lead to a superior understanding of the nature of pictorial perception, and if it could also be demonstrated that our experience of pictorial representation is essentially illusionist in nature, then these reasons for rejecting Aldrich's account would evaporate and Aldrich would live to fight another day.

As it happens, I am not persuaded that the appeal to twofoldness does lead to a superior account of pictorial representation. Flint Schier points out that the twofoldness requirement would be met in a case where I was seeing a diaphanous image of you superimposed upon a portrait of you, whilst experiencing your portrait not as a portrait of you, but as a dark object appearing behind the diaphanous image of you.<sup>41</sup> Schier devises this example to demonstrate that twofoldness is not sufficient for pictorial perception. However, the same example could also be taken to demonstrate that twofoldness does not capture what is phenomenally distinctive to our experiences of looking at pictures. At a minimum the example demonstrates that, if there is something like a feature distinctive to acts of pictorial perception, then Wollheim requires a more sensitive description of twofoldness to capture this feature. In light of this observation, I can imagine someone who claimed to be unimpressed with Wollheim's account of pictorial perception arguing as follows. Wollheim's account of pictorial perception was originally crafted to avoid the pitfalls of an illusionist account of pictorial representation, and all too clearly shows the traces of that origin. Far from providing a rich and interesting description of the phenomenology of pictorial perception, twofoldness

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<sup>41</sup> Flint Schier, *Deeper Into Pictures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.200, 203.

functions as the barren stipulation that illusion shall not be entered into during the course of pictorial perception. For twofoldness specifies a minimum requirement upon a non-illusionist account of picturing: that in looking at a picture of *y*, I am having a non-illusional experience, and my experience is of a (pictorial) appearance of *y*. In using the notion of twofoldness to lay out the conditions for a non-illusory perceptual experience of a picture, Wollheim has not thereby described what is phenomenologically distinctive to the class of representational perceptions. If Wollheim believes that laying out the conditions for a non-illusory experience of a picture is to specify what is distinctive of pictorial perception, then this only goes to demonstrate the slippery way in which Wollheim uses the phrase “seeing appropriate to representations.”<sup>42</sup> For this phrase coincides in Wollheim’s thinking both with the notion ‘a way of seeing appropriately representational’, i.e. a way of looking which allows me to see pictures of *y* as representations rather than taking them for the real appearances of *y*; but also with ‘a way of seeing appropriate to, or unique to, representations’. It is a tendency to slide in his thinking between the two notions of ‘seeing appropriate to representations’ which leads Wollheim to suppose both that twofoldness holds the key to an non-illusionist account of pictorial representation, and that twofoldness serves to characterize the phenomenology of pictorial perception. Realizing that the phrase “seeing appropriate to representation” carries these two meanings leads one to see that in describing the seeing appropriate to representations, Wollheim is not making a rich and interesting point concerning the character of our visual experiences of pictures, but simply laying out the conditions which must be met if those experiences are not to be illusional ones.

Wollheim’s account of pictorial perception claims that (1) recognizing the subject of a pictorial representation amounts to a visual experience; and that (2) there is a phenomenological feature distinctive to those visual experiences corresponding with acts of representational seeing, namely twofoldness. As (i) through (iii) above demonstrate, identifying the subject of a pictorial representation amounts to a perceptual operation. However, some might believe that it is by no means obvious that we will find a

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<sup>42</sup> For Wollheim’s use of this phrase, see “Seeing-as, Seeing-in and Representational Perception”, esp. p.205.

phenomenological feature distinctive to all acts of looking at representations, and that it requires something of a leap in thinking to go from the notion that recognizing the subject of a representation requires an act of perception, to the claim that there is a feature phenomenologically distinctive to all those acts of perception whereby we come to recognize the subject of a pictorial representation. Wollheim makes the move from (1) to (2) via the claim that (3) acts of perception involved in seeing representationally form a species of a wider genus of phenomenally distinctive acts of perception called seeing-in. The opponent unsympathetic to Wollheim's views on representational perception might suggest that there is no class of phenomenally distinctive perceptual acts corresponding with the notion of seeing-in, although he believes he can see why Wollheim might have been misled into supposing there was. This is because, in earlier versions of his account of pictorial perception, Wollheim sought to assimilate representational seeing within the wider genus of seeing known as 'seeing-as,'<sup>43</sup> but later came to think that the type of visual experience involved in seeing a pictorial representation *qua* representation could be better elucidated through the notion of seeing-in rather than seeing-as.<sup>44</sup> Wollheim's professed reasons for the shift in view were because he came to believe firstly, that seeing-as draws upon no special perceptual capacity over and above straightforward perception; and secondly, that seeing-as and seeing representationally amount to very different visual projects.<sup>45</sup> In twentieth-century philosophy, the notion of seeing-as has come to be associated with the Wittgensteinian notion of 'seeing an aspect'. That the notion of seeing-as or aspect perception is anything but an experientially well-defined phenomenon can be demonstrated by pointing to the diversity of phenomena which Wittgenstein chose to discuss under the topic of "the dawning of an aspect".<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, the sheer familiarity of the concept of seeing an aspect would for many philosophers lend the notion of seeing-as the air of a clearly-defined phenomenon; and this is no doubt why Wollheim originally persuaded himself that seeing-as amounted to a

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<sup>43</sup> *Art and Its Objects*, sec. 12, p.16.

<sup>44</sup> The reasons for this theoretical shift form the subject of the essay "Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation". See in particular pp.209.

<sup>45</sup> "Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation", pp.219-224.

<sup>46</sup> Malcolm Budd demonstrates something of the range of phenomena Wittgenstein covered under this heading in "Wittgenstein on Seeing Aspects," *Mind*, 96 (1987), 1-17.

phenomenologically distinctive form of perception. Having begun with a theory which identified pictorial perception as a species of what he mistakenly thought to be a phenomenologically distinctive perceptual genus, Wollheim persisted in the error of believing that the form of visual project he was attempting to characterize formed a distinctive perceptual genus when he made the shift from talk of seeing-as to talk of seeing-in.

Wollheim's opponent might go on to suggest that, far from enabling Wollheim to locate acts of pictorial perception within a wider class of phenomenologically distinctive perceptual acts, Wollheim's attempt to explicate the notion of representational perception in terms of seeing-in rather than seeing-as only serves to weaken his original theory. For as Flint Schier demonstrates, treating the experience of seeing a picture as the experience of seeing *y* in *x* reduces our pictorial experience to a double-decker experience as of seeing *y* and seeing *x*, and does nothing to explain the structure or articulation of pictorial experience. By contrast, the seeing-as model of pictorial perception at least gestures in the direction of articulating that structure, to the extent that it analyses seeing *x* as a picture of *y* via the notion of seeing *x* as bearing various resemblance-relations to *y*. If I see a Matisse as a group of dancers, I have more than a double-decker experience (of paint and dancers); I also see the work as having dancer-like features.<sup>47</sup>

If Wollheim's opponent is correct in his line of argumentation, then twofoldness does not describe the phenomenological feature distinctive to acts of looking at pictures. Instead, the twofoldness requirement recommends a way of focusing attention upon pictures that will avert an illusory experience. It follows that Aldrich cannot be accused of failing to do justice to the phenomenology of pictorial perception for no other reason than the fact he denies that my experience of a picture involves a form of dual attention. However, if as Wollheim's opponent concedes, twofoldness describes a basic requirement that any non-illusionist account of pictorial perception must meet, then Aldrich would still stand accused of proposing an illusionist account of pictorial perception. Or would he? At this point, Wollheim's opponent might deny that

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<sup>47</sup> *Deeper Into Pictures*, pp.203-204.



twofoldness does represent a requirement that any non-illusionist account of pictorial representation must respect. The opponent might point out that Wollheim's account of pictorial representation is less a non-illusionist account than it is an anti-illusionist account. In building twofoldness into the visual basis of our experience of a picture, Wollheim takes excessive precautions against the possibility of illusion; resembling in this respect the man who feels the need to prick himself at regular intervals to persuade himself he is awake. In insisting upon the twofold nature of pictorial perception, Wollheim apparently believes that to cease even for a second to attend visually to the features of *x* sustaining the experience of seeing *y*, would result in succumbing to some sort of illusion. Wollheim fails to do justice to the phenomenology of looking at pictures when he suggests that my experience of the picture changes from one of seeing representationally to seeing-as the moment I lose concentration upon the material basis of the picture. On a more generous interpretation of the matter, the person who has an illusory experience of a picture is not the man momentarily losing sight of the fact that he is looking at a mere configuration; but the man whose overall experience of the picture displays the correct belief-structure, namely, the belief-structure of one who knows he is looking at a picture of *y* rather than *y*. I am not having an illusory experience of a picture if I momentarily allow my visual attention to run over the subject matter to the exclusion of all else. I would be having an illusory experience of a picture if I were to shake the hand of the subject in the portrait. On this more generous interpretation of an illusory pictorial experience, Aldrich does not provide an illusionist account of pictorial representation merely because he allows me to switch attention between the canvas or configuration on the one hand and the representational content on the other.

As a final consideration, Wollheim's opponent might point out that Wollheim's anti-illusionist instincts have led him to characterize the experience of looking at a picture in a way that rules out the illusionist mistake of supposing that in looking at a picture *x* of *y*, I am looking at *y* not *x*. In gearing his own account of the phenomenology of pictorial perception to ruling out this mistake, Wollheim perhaps loses sight of the fact there is a sense in which the experience of a pictorial representation is necessarily an illusional

experience, to the extent that it constitutes the experience of looking at one of the appearances of *y* rather than the experience of looking at *y* itself. Any adequate theory of the phenomenology of pictorial representation should try to characterize in a sensitive way the form of illusion involved in looking at the pictorial appearance of *y*.<sup>48</sup> This suggests that rather than criticizing any account of pictorial representation which, like Aldrich's, carries the hint of a possibility that there is an illusion involved in looking at a picture, we should look to see whether what is on offer amounts to a benignly illusionist account, one that does justice to whatever element of illusion legitimately attaches to our experience of pictures.

The arguments aired in this section suggest that it is not immediately obvious that Aldrich provides an inferior account of the phenomenology of pictorial perception to that offered by Wollheim. They also suggest that it would not be fair to hold up to ridicule Aldrich's account of representational perception simply because his theory fails to display the anti-illusionist instincts built into Wollheim's account of pictorial representation. I conclude that the evidence for or against Aldrich's characterization of the phenomenology of pictorial perception is inconclusive. If we do decide to reject Aldrich's account of pictorial representation, we require better reasons than the fact that Aldrich's theory lacks some of the anti-illusionist features built into Wollheim's account.

#### IV

Prima facie, the claim that I cannot simultaneously observe andprehend the same material thing is intuitively implausible. Taking this claim seriously makes the most innocent-sounding remark seem problematical. Section II introduced the Breughel example to demonstrate the fact that we run the risk of losing many important aspects of the artist's performance when we treat the medium of a work of art as something

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<sup>48</sup> Alastair Hannay, "Wollheim on Seeing Black on White as a Picture", *BJA*, 10 (1970), 107-118, pp.113-114, offers some suggestions as to the form that such a benignly illusionist account might take.

available only to a special mode of perception. As another example of the problems Aldrich inadvertently causes for himself, consider how the belief that we can only apprehend and never observe the medium of the materials trips Aldrich up when he comes to describe the nature of pictorial representation. Aldrich believes that a work of art will count as representational in virtue of some perceived resemblance between properties of the materials arranged in the design and the properties of the depicted subject-matter. However, he insists that "this resemblance itself is not seen or noticed in the aesthetic experience; it is not part of the object of prehension".<sup>49</sup> Those assuming that this is a piece of stipulation on Aldrich's part, an attempt to maintain the purity of the aesthetic experience by refusing to treat an interest in visual resemblances as a properly aesthetic interest in a representational work of art, would be mistaken.<sup>50</sup> For it follows from the way in which Aldrich divides our perceptual competence that I cannot apprehend the resemblance between the subject of a portrait and the disposition of the materials of the painting in virtue of which I see the subject in the picture. That is to say, Aldrich rules out the possibility that there could be an *aesthetic* noticing of the representational fidelity of a work of art. Here Aldrich is not denying that I can simultaneously observe the subject *x* and apprehend the portrait *y*. But he is committed to denying that I can *prehend* any resemblance that obtains between *x* as observed and *y* as apprehended, since the only way in which I could apprehend the similarity between *x* and *y* would be to have *x* as well as *y* enter my experience as an object of prehension. By a similar line of reasoning, I cannot *observe* the resemblance between an observed *x* and a apprehended *y*, since in order to observe this similarity I must simultaneously observe and apprehend *y*. Thus on Aldrich's account, I cannot enjoy an aesthetic awareness of the likeness between portrait and sitter. In effect, Aldrich admits that there exist visual resemblances grounding my experience of pictorial representation, that these resemblances cross whatever operational boundaries are imposed by his distinction between two modes of perception, and that I will remain oblivious to these resemblances as long as I am operating within the constraints of these

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<sup>49</sup> *Philosophy of Art*, pp.52-53.

<sup>50</sup> No doubt it is comments such as this one that have led George Dickie to classify Aldrich's theory as an aesthetic attitude theory. See *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), p.135.

boundaries. I can think of two reasons for dissatisfaction with this observation. In the first place, the notion that there are unobservable resemblances grounding my experience of pictorial representation would appear to make the whole notion of pictorial resemblance somewhat mysterious. In the second place, the existence of brute perceptual resemblances crossing the boundaries of Aldrich's distinction tends to make this distinction look somewhat contrived. That is to say, the fact that Aldrich is able to appeal to the notion of visual resemblance to explain the phenomenon of representational seeing suggests that seeing is a more unified phenomenon than Aldrich's distinction suggests. The fact that we cannot do justice to these overriding perceptual similarities when we accept Aldrich's view operates as a powerful disincentive to anyone tempted to adopt the view in the first place.

The claim that I cannot simultaneously observe andprehend the same material thing creates further problems for Aldrich when he makes the seemingly innocent-looking suggestion that prehension constitutes an 'impressionistic' way of looking, and one which remains "fairer than usual to the integrity of experience as a whole".<sup>51</sup> The notion that aesthetic perception is both impressionistic and unusually whole captures what we might call the 'commonsense' view of the phenomenology of perception. From the common-sense point of view, it is easy enough to understand what it means to refer to an impressionistic way of looking. Beardsley presupposes this commonsense view when he characterizes aesthetic perception as a form of seeing that surrenders itself to what is given, rather than forcing the perceptual field to disgorge a predicted datum. To illustrate the impressionistic and holistic nature of aesthetic perception, Beardsley offers the example of someone who ceases to scan the openings between trees for the sight of someone she expects to appear, and applies a more diffuse attention allowing her to take in the 'regional' qualities of the woods as a whole, its bunchiness, bushiness, heaviness, stateliness or ominousness.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, once Aldrich establishes observation and prehension as utterly distinct modes of perception, he leaves no room for any sensible

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<sup>51</sup> *Philosophy of Art*, pp.17, 18, 22, 25.

<sup>52</sup> "What is an Aesthetic Quality?", pp.58, 57,

interpretation of the commonsense claim that prehension involves an 'impressionistic' way of looking.

Intuitively, to look at something impressionistically involves taking in some of the properties belonging to the object experienced whilst ignoring or failing to do justice to the rest. When I look impressionistically, I fail to see all that there is to see. This suggests that when Aldrich describes prehension as an 'impressionistic' way of looking, he means to suggest that prehension involves a selective way of attending to the thing perceived. Aldrich, who treats the notion of aspect-perception as central to his account of aesthetic perception, offers two examples of what are ostensibly gestalt-switches purporting to illustrate the 'impressionistic' character of prehensive seeing. One case involves seeing snowflakes as comet-shaped with tails extending upwards. Here the change of aspect is brought about by failing to attend to the flakes themselves and focusing instead upon a point in the dark beyond the snowflakes. The second example involves looking at "a dark city and a pale western sky at dusk, meeting at the sky line" in a way which alters ordinary perceptual relationships, so that "the light sky area just above the jagged sky line protrudes toward the point of view. The sky is closer to the viewer than the dark areas of the buildings."<sup>53</sup> These examples suggest that one possible model for the type of selective attention involved in prehensively realizing an object might be that change of attention required to bring about a gestalt-switch. For it might be thought that achieving a gestalt-switch involves altering the character of what I see by selecting different features of the design to act as figure and ground for each new interpretation, with those features demoted to the background within a given perceptual interpretation having no determinate character for the purposes of that interpretation. One simple example of this change in foregrounding would be the 'double cross' introduced by Wittgenstein at *Philosophical Investigations*, II.xi. However, if prehension resembles the sort of selective attention required to bring about a change in gestalt, the question then arises, to what do I selectively attend when I prehend? Aldrich cannot claim that prehension works by selecting the *aesthetic* characteristics of the object and ignoring the nonaesthetic ones,

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<sup>53</sup> "Back to Aesthetic Experience", pp.368-369; *Philosophy of Art*, p.22.



because he takes it as given that I cannot perceive both aesthetic and nonaesthetic characteristics at the same time. This is why Dickie is mistaken when he supposes that prehension reveals "which aspects of a work of art or nature are aesthetic (that is, are proper parts of an aesthetic object) and which are not".<sup>54</sup> For Aldrich, it is not the case that an object simultaneously possesses both aesthetic and nonaesthetic aspects in a way that allows me to attend to one set of aspects but not the other. Rather, the aspects an object possesses are generated by the way in which I look at that object. That is to say, prehension does not isolate the aesthetic object out of what is already given to perception, it realizes the aesthetic object by bringing the material thing under a new mode of perception, or a new perceptual organization. For as long as I am perceiving prehensively, I endow the object with one type of structural cast, whilst remaining temporarily oblivious to a quite different structural cast which would be realized for the object were I perceiving in the physical object mode.

The type of perceptual reorganization that takes place when I switch from observing to prehending the same material thing is far more drastic than any perceptual reorganization taking place under a gestalt-switch. For this reason, prehension cannot amount to the sort of selective attention involved in a change of gestalt. However, Aldrich might preserve the claim that prehension constitutes an impressionistic form of perception by claiming that prehending involves selectively attending to whatever characteristics belong to the object viewed holophrastically. The notion of holophrastic perception is problematic, partly because Aldrich devotes relatively little space to the notion in his overall discussion; but also because what little he says on the topic changes as the theory matures. The cynical reader could be forgiven for thinking that the notion of holophrastic perception functions for Aldrich as a theoretical convenience,<sup>55</sup> allowing Aldrich to explain away the fact that for most of the time, the act of perceiving carries none of the metaphysical commitments implied in the notions of observation and prehension. That is to say, because Aldrich asserts that our ways of perceiving are metaphysically loaded, he requires some notion of the sort of perceiving we do when we are not committing

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<sup>54</sup> *Art and the Aesthetic*, pp.135-136.

<sup>55</sup> See for instance *Philosophy of Art*, pp.33, 23.

ourselves to specific metaphysical categories. I can refer to Sally without making explicit reference to Sally as a person or as a human body, and there must be a way of looking which underpins this sort of case. Of course, introducing a form of perception that is divorced of metaphysical presuppositions raises the question why we require metaphysically charged ways of seeing in the first place. This is presumably why, in the earliest formulation of his view, Aldrich blocks the possibility that any of our perceiving could be totally divorced of metaphysical presuppositions when he identifies holophrastic perception as a confused sort of attending to both the physical and aesthetic aspects of an object simultaneously, with the different aspects tending to cancel each other out.<sup>56</sup> In the late account of the theory contained in “‘Expresses’ and ‘Expressive’”, Aldrich replaces talk of ‘holophrastic perception’ with talk of perceiving in the primary perceptual field. By this stage in the development of the theory, a neutral description of the ‘material thing’ (painting) resembles nothing so much as a physical object description. Thus, to describe the surface of the painting in this neutral vein is to describe the canvas that has had paint applied to it - a surface that can be too absorbent, too rough, too smooth, for the paint to apply - or it is to describe the surface of the paint itself - the fact it is dull red, rough, cracked, beginning to peel in places.<sup>57</sup> This enriched notion of a metaphysically neutral way of looking apparently leaves no room for the notion of a physical object way of looking, a fact which fails to worry Aldrich, who at this late stage in his thinking appears to believe that realizing something as a physical object is not really a matter of perception after all. Whereas in the earlier account, realizing something as a physical object involved an awareness of “end-to-end coincidences of rigid units of measure structuring the field and thus determining distance intervals and volumes,”<sup>58</sup> we are now given to understand that “appearances are irrelevant to anything qua physical object. A physical object description of a thing is concerned with what the thing is ‘in itself’ - an object of conception, not of perception.” Physical object properties are now the sorts of properties ascertained by measuring things or performing scientific tests rather than pure acts of

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<sup>56</sup> "Picture Space", p.346.

<sup>57</sup> “‘Expresses’ and ‘Expressive’”, p.210.

<sup>58</sup> “Picture Space”, p.347.

perception. Realizing a material thing as a physical object involves dislodging it from its logical place in the primary perceptual field, and making its perceptible features less and less relevant to the account of it.<sup>59</sup> Given the very different things Aldrich says about holophrastic perception over the course of time, the reader is left wondering whether the later pronouncements on the topic represent a shift in Aldrich's thinking, or only an elaboration of the full implications of a view that remains invariant over time.

Let us sidestep some of the problems of interpretation raised by Aldrich's differing pronouncements on the topic of holophrastic perception by concentrating upon the view given in the paper "Picture Space," whereby holophrastic perception amounts to a confused attending to both physical and aesthetic aspects at the same time. Under this interpretation of holophrastic perception, prehension could count as a form of selective attention to what is given holophrastically. However, there are two serious problems with this proposal. In the first place, if holophrastic perception allows me to attend to both physical object qualities and aesthetic object aspects simultaneously, albeit in a confused fashion, this would appear to contradict Aldrich's claim that I cannot realize both sorts of property for the object simultaneously. Since cognitive processing of what is given to perception in a confused way may reveal for me the physical properties and aesthetic aspects of things, I do not require additional modes of perception to realize the two; and the notion of mutually exclusive ways of perceiving becomes surplus to theoretical requirements. In the second place, if prehension counts as impressionistic because it involves a selective attention to what is given in holophrastic perception, observation would count as impressionistic for precisely the same reason. It follows that calling prehension 'impressionistic' does not serve to characterize the phenomenology of aesthetic as opposed to nonaesthetic perception.

In treating prehension and observation as distinct perceptual modes, Aldrich rejects the prevailing view whereby physical object perception constitutes perception in the default mode, with aesthetic perception representing a deviant or unusual way of looking at things. Aldrich insists that observing something should be regarded as an

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<sup>59</sup> "Expresses' and 'Expressive'", pp.209-210, 216.

'achievement' under a categorial requirement every bit as much as prehending the representational content of a depiction. What we have are "two modes of perception, each of which has its own standard of objectivity and its own sort of rapport with things that accommodate both", and neither way of realizing objects asserts ontological priority over the other.<sup>60</sup> However, Aldrich puts this view at risk when he suggests that prehension is an 'impressionistic' way of looking compared with observation. Describing prehension as 'impressionistic' suggests that the structural cast of the material thing as prehended either fails to agree with the 'true' structure of the object, or agrees less well, than does the structural cast of the material thing as observed; perhaps because the aesthetic object interpretation assigns fewer characteristics to the material thing than does the physical object interpretation. However, if observation and prehension reflect autonomous ways of perceiving the world, then it doesn't matter whether the physical object interpretation assigns a million properties whilst the aesthetic object interpretation assigns a single aspect. It is impossible to compare these descriptions because the material thing possesses no particular structure unless or until it is being realized under a given mode of perception. Suppose however that holophrastic perception does assign some sort of structural cast to the material thing and that this structural cast resembles the structural cast of the material thing as observed, but not the material thing as prehended. Then prehension would count as an impressionistic way of perceiving when compared with observation, but only because we have decided to treat holophrastic perception, or observation, or both, as somehow constituting the default mode of perception.

The foregoing discussion suggests that we will only make sense of the claim that prehension reflects an impressionistic way of seeing by stepping beyond the framework imposed by Aldrich's perceptual distinction. The assumption must be that when Aldrich calls prehension 'impressionistic', he is speaking for rhetorical effect, rather than characterizing the phenomenology of aesthetic perception. That is to say, Aldrich realizes that most people identify perception with physical object perception. In light of what most people ordinarily, mistakenly, take perception to be, Aldrich concedes that aesthetic

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<sup>60</sup> "Picture Space", pp.345, 346; *Philosophy of Art*, p.26.

perception counts as an 'impressionistic' way of looking. Here I have devoted so much attention to what appears to be a stray comment in order to draw attention to the fact that establishing the existence of mutually exclusive ways of perceiving conflicts with ordinary ways of thinking about and talking about aesthetic perception, ways into which Aldrich himself is prone to lapse in his less guarded moments.

## V

In Section I, I demonstrated the metaphysically demanding nature of Aldrich's account of aesthetic perception. Aldrich makes such metaphysical demands upon his reader in the belief that it is only by giving some attention to the logical and metaphysical distinctions underlying our aesthetic descriptions, distinctions which commonsense thinking tends to overlook, that we can hope to progress in understanding the nature of art, and the nature of representation and expression in art. To this end, Aldrich offers the analogy between persons and works of art as a means of demystifying the ontology of art. Aldrich exploits the analogy between persons and works of art in order to alert us to the fact that a satisfactory account of expressive attribution must give some attention to those metaphysical issues that arise in understanding the expressive nature of persons. I shall say more about this analogy, and the use to which it is put, in the next chapter.

In the previous section, I demonstrated how the claim that observation and prehension amount to mutually exclusive modes of perception might be thought to conflict with the commonsense claim that aesthetic perception is an 'impressionistic' way of looking. The fact that Aldrich's views are in conflict with commonsense might make many hesitate to adopt Aldrich's views. However, Aldrich himself probably would not be distressed to learn that his views were an affront to commonsense. The analysis of holophrastic perception contained in "Picture Space" suggests that Aldrich believes that commonsense thinking is by its very nature confused. That is to say, Aldrich believes



that people are prone to confuse important metaphysical distinctions both when they perceive and when they describe the things they perceive. Aldrich devotes considerable space in the paper "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'" to explicating the logic of the preposition "in" as it applies to pictorial perception and contrasts with the "in" of physical inclusion,<sup>61</sup> with a view to demonstrating some of the important distinctions that philosophers 'fudge' in their unthinking use of this humble preposition. Aldrich would probably believe that, in cases where the views of commonsense were found to conflict with theory, commonsense should give way before metaphysically enlightened theory.

Given the strongly metaphysical nature of Aldrich's account of aesthetic perception, and the considerable metaphysical machinery which underpins that account, it is natural to wonder whether Aldrich might be able to provide some sort of metaphysical argument in favour of treating observation and prehension as mutually exclusive modes of perception. Aldrich apparently offers such a metaphysical argument for his view when he insists that we will struggle to make sense of the various logical and metaphysical categories that we use unless we realize that these logical differences are grounded in metaphysical differences which are grounded in turn in distinctive ways of looking at things. Our logical, metaphysical and perceptual categories act to reinforce one another in a symbiotic relationship which the notion of categorial aspection is intended to capture. Thus, it is Aldrich's contention that an aesthetic use of terms presupposes an aesthetic way of looking at the things thus articulated,<sup>62</sup> whilst our physical-object language presupposes a way of visually realizing things as physical objects. It is only through realizing that our words apply in virtue of different ways of looking at things that we can hope to avoid certain category mistakes. To illustrate the point, consider Sibley's suggestion that a-terms lack governing conditions. Aldrich would agree with Sibley that no set of na-descriptions ever entails an a-description, on the grounds that such an entailment involves a category mistake, one which can be avoided by realizing that na-descriptions and a-descriptions apply to the same object in virtue of metaphysically distinctive ways of looking. Even in those cases where the same term does double duty,

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<sup>61</sup> "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", p.206-207.

<sup>62</sup> *Philosophy of Art*, p.35.

applying to the same object both as na-term and as a-term, there can be no valid inference between the aesthetic and nonaesthetic uses of the term. The solidity belonging to an apple-depiction by Cezanne relies in no way upon the solidity of those physical materials Cezanne employs in his composition. To describe the solidity of the canvas, the pigments used or the apple depicted, reflects a physical-object awareness of items located in a physical space, an awareness of "end-to-end coincidences of rigid units of measure structuring the field and thus determining distance intervals and volumes". By contrast, the solidity of the apple-as-depicted is a structural quality of the aesthetic composition as prehended in an aesthetic space defined by colour relationships; involving an awareness of, amongst other things, what protrudes and what recesses in the colour arrangement.<sup>63</sup> These examples serve to demonstrate Aldrich's belief that aesthetic discourse conceals a variety of logical and metaphysical distinctions grounded in distinctive ways of looking at things.

Aldrich's opponent might respond to what he perceives to be Aldrich's metaphysical agenda in one of two ways. In the first place, the opponent might treat Aldrich's argument here as a piece of metaphysical grandstanding which he can match. Thus, the opponent who lacks Aldrich's metaphysical convictions might agree that if our ways of perceiving are metaphysically charged in the manner that Aldrich describes, then our perceptual, metaphysical and logical distinctions will serve to reinforce each other; yet he might insist that the onus falls upon Aldrich to provide some evidence for the existence of these metaphysically charged ways of perceiving. Aldrich cannot use the notion that ways of perceiving generate metaphysical categories to support his claim that there exists a special form of aesthetic perception that is utterly distinct from ordinary perception, for the reason that the former claim is as much in dispute as the latter. The opponent might further contend that far from using the notion of distinctive ways of seeing to explain those category-mistakes which are already in existence, Aldrich manages to generate a whole raft of new category mistakes when he introduces his perceptual distinction. This is because, for someone who refuses to countenance the existence of metaphysically

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<sup>63</sup> "Picture Space", p.347; "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", p.212; *Philosophy of Art*, p.86.

charged ways of looking, the claim that na-descriptions entail a-descriptions might count as a false claim, but it would not count as a category mistake. In effect, Aldrich's opponent would be pointing out that Aldrich is describing the understanding that comes with a certain type of metaphysical conviction; but that simply laying out the nature of that understanding - as Aldrich has done here - does not provide any evidence in favour of the underlying conviction.

Alternatively, Aldrich's opponent might be willing to embrace some part of Aldrich's metaphysical agenda. That is to say, he might be willing to take seriously the suggestion that there exists some distinction at the level of perception corresponding with each significant metaphysical distinction that we make. For the possibility that there might exist metaphysically distinctive ways of looking at things grounding our metaphysical distinctions carries with it the appealing notion that there is nothing arbitrary about the number and type of metaphysical categories we happen to operate with. The fact we happen to have precisely these metaphysical categories and no others reflects the fact that our metaphysical categories are generated by the different sorts of bodily, especially perceptual, encounter we have with the world. Let us assume therefore that Aldrich's opponent is willing to go along with the proposal that the distinction we make in language between the painting *qua* physical object and painting *qua* work of art requires a corresponding distinction at the level of perception. Has the opponent thereby conceded the notion that I cannot simultaneously view a painting in an aesthetic and a nonaesthetic way? Clearly not. For all that Aldrich has succeeded in showing is that we have a metaphysical difference in categories (painting *qua* canvas, painting *qua* work of art) that requires a perceptual difference to bring it about. He has not demonstrated that the metaphysical difference in question requires a perceptual incompatibility to bring it about.<sup>64</sup> The fact that a painting is metaphysically different viewed as a canvas or a work of art does not entail that I cannot simultaneously perceive the object under both categories. Thus, what at first bears the appearance of a piece of elegant metaphysical

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<sup>64</sup> As Richard Wollheim points out in "Reflections on *Art and Illusion*", in *On Art and the Mind* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), p.280, the fact that two interpretations are (metaphysically) different does not entail that these must be (metaphysically) incompatible.

economy on Aldrich's part, an attempt to account for the groundedness of our metaphysical categories, proves on examination to be a piece of metaphysical extravagance. For Aldrich is here making greater metaphysical demands upon his reader than Aldrich's own agenda requires. It follows that Aldrich has given us no metaphysical reasons for supposing that observation and prehension operate to the exclusion of one another. I conclude that Aldrich's metaphysical argument for the exclusivity of operation of his two modes of perception fails.

Having humoured Aldrich this far in the argument, the opponent might then retrace his steps, by wondering whether Aldrich really wishes to assert that we will find a distinction in modes of perception underlying each significant metaphysical distinction that we make. To give Aldrich credit, Aldrich is willing to assert just that in the case of that other metaphysical distinction which interests him, the distinction between the human being as the subject of moral judgement and the human body as the subject of medical research. Aldrich claims that detecting the hidden sadness of another human being involves "a kind of (Ur)-prehension, since it involves looking at something to see what is "in" it, isomorphic with perception in the aesthetic case, but reports of which have no special aesthetic significance on the ground level of primary perception." In much the same way that observation and prehension involve mutually exclusive perceptual achievements, so too observing a human body and (Ur)-prehending it involve mutually exclusive achievements, with John's body disappearing from view as long as it functions as a point of view upon John the person. Aldrich even goes so far as stating that where there is a meeting of minds, the bodies involved are not primarily in view but only "shadow" the encounter as objets *manques*.<sup>65</sup>

At this point, Aldrich's opponent might be forgiven for supposing that it is the sheer momentum of that two-way analogy Aldrich draws between persons and works of art which leads Aldrich to suppose that whatever might be found to be a feature of the aesthetic case will also feature in the personal case. Thus, if the work of art as something animated by representational aspects can be realized only in a special act of perception,

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<sup>65</sup> "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", pp.215, 209.

then so too the person as a body animated by a mind must require some analogue of prehension for its realization. Unfortunately for Aldrich, the analogy between prehension and Ur-prehension is less than perfect, since it is difficult to see how Ur-prehension and observation could represent mutually exclusive modes of perception after the manner of observation and prehension. It might be true to say that our ability to perceive the work of art presupposes that we have left certain physical object determinations far behind. For instance, the heaviness of a piece of sculpture depends upon the bulky look of the thing rather than its physical weight, so that a papier mache Epstein could be heavier, aesthetically speaking, than a bronze statuette of the same dimensions. However, a large part of our talk concerning persons only makes sense if we keep both the person and her physical body determinations simultaneously in view. This is because the bodily states of a person are often partly constitutive of her emotional states. Behaviour signifying embarrassment - blushing, awkward shifts in posture, restlessness - is not just something we look through to see the embarrassment underneath, but itself constitutes part of what we attribute to the person when we say she is embarrassed. To adopt the terminology preferred by Aldrich, when we perceive someone else's embarrassment, her bodily disposition both functions as a point of view upon her underlying affective states, and itself remains very much a thing in view. It would seem therefore that the distinction between a person and her body does not and cannot require the existence of special ways of perceptually realizing the two. Having admitted one metaphysical distinction which carries no particular perceptual implications, the notion that every metaphysically charged way of speaking is grounded in a metaphysically charged way of looking would appear to be false. The onus then falls upon Aldrich to explain why the particular metaphysical distinction which interests him, the distinction between the canvas and the depiction, can only be realized by exercising distinct modes of perception.

If Aldrich allows himself to be carried away by the momentum of his own analogy on this point, Aldrich is also capable of making selective use of that analogy when it suits his purposes to do so. The reader will recall that Aldrich describes two different ways in which a human body functions as a 'point of view'. A person's own body may



function as her point of view upon the world; and others may use her body as a point of view upon the owner-occupier.<sup>66</sup> In the first case, to the extent that the person's own body acts as an extension of the perceptual apparatus, it functions as nothing more than a framing device, and ceases to be a thing in view. In the second case, the body appears as one item amongst others in the perceptual field and to this extent remains very much a thing in view. Following through the consequences of this analogy in the aesthetic case suggests the existence of two different ways in which a work of art might function as a point of view. Parallelling the case where my own body functions as my point of view upon the world, to say that a picture functions as a point of view is to say that I cease to regard the picture as one item among many in my perceptual field and choose instead to treat the picture as the sole object of my attention, allowing the boundaries of the picture to define the boundaries of my perceptual field as I look into the picture and its content. Parallelling the way in which the body functions for others as a point of view upon the moral subject, I see the canvas as the image of its pictured content, with the canvas itself occupying only a portion of my perceptual field. In allowing this one portion of my perceptual field to present a pictorial content, I do not lose sight of the fact that what I am looking at is just a picture, and the picture remains one item among many in view. Aldrich of course chooses to overlook the second of these possibilities when he suggests that a picture *qua* physical object (canvas) functions as a point of view upon the work of art within, and in doing so, overlooks that part of his analogy between persons and works of art which might be used to demonstrate that I can simultaneously be aware of a picture as both canvas and as work of art. That is to say, Aldrich rejects the possibility that a picture may both become animated by representational aspects and sit squarely as a flat canvas in my perceptual field. Aldrich chooses instead to think of the canvas functioning as some sort of perceptual framing device. Now it is true to say that some sort of visual transformation takes place when I allow the picture to become the lone occupant of my visual field. If you like, there is a shift in the way I look at the picture. However, this visual transformation is adequately described as a shift of focus within a

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<sup>66</sup> "Pictures and Persons - An Analogy", p.602; "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", p.209.

single mode of perception; it does not constitute a shift from one mode of perception to another. Thus, careful analysis of the analogy Aldrich develops between persons and works of art demonstrates that whilst Aldrich uses that analogy to support his contention that a work of art cannot simultaneously be seen as picture and as physical object, Aldrich might have used the same analogy to yield a very different conclusion.

The notion that a work of art *qua* physical object functions as a ‘point of view’ upon the expressive and representational properties attributed to the work represents an attempt upon Aldrich’s part to capture the fact that the properties attributed to an object in the course of perception are not always identical with the properties thought to belong to that object materially speaking. There is a real distinction to be made here between the *object of perception*, the object towards which the act of perception is directed; and the *perceptual object*, the notion of the same object that is generated in the course of perception. One cannot help thinking that Aldrich would be able to do away altogether with his original distinction between two modes of perception, and with the notion of a work of art functioning as a point of view upon its representational and expressive properties, if he were willing to countenance some simple distinction along these lines. By the latest version of his theory, it does appear that Aldrich’s original distinction between two distinct modes of perception incompatible in their operation has sifted to a distinction between a way of experiencing objects that is primarily perceptual, and a way of experiencing objects that is in part perceptual, part conceptual. For at this point, Aldrich tells us that “appearances are irrelevant to anything *qua* physical object.” That is to say, “a physical object description is concerned with what the thing is ‘in itself’ - an object of conception, not of perception.” Realizing a material thing as a physical object involves dislodging it from its logical place in the primary perceptual field, and making its perceptible features less and less relevant to the account of it.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> “‘Expresses’ and ‘Expressive’”, pp.209-210, 216.

In summary, Aldrich believes we may perceptually realize the world in two different ways which go hand in hand with certain metaphysical and logical distinctions. The example which influences his distinction is one of seeing a canvas *qua* physical object and *qua* work of art. Here I have outlined the metaphysical assumptions underlying Aldrich's proposal, and looked for any evidence Aldrich might be able to offer in support of his theory. I made some concession to Aldrich's proposal when I pointed out that, viewed as an account of representational perception, his theory is not as counterintuitive as anyone superficially acquainted with Wollheim's theory of representational perception might think. At the end of the day, we can grant Aldrich's point that there is a real metaphysical separation to be made between the picture viewed as a physical object and the picture viewed as a work of art, whilst denying that these different metaphysical realizations represent perceptual as opposed to conceptual realizations. This view of the matter is supported by the fact that, in the late version of his theory, Aldrich apparently modifies his original distinction between ways of perceiving into a distinction between an acquaintance with objects that is purely perceptual, and an acquaintance that is in part conceptual. Given the fact that Aldrich's views are so much at odds with commonsense, I shall take the liberty of rejecting his suggestion that we cannot simultaneously perceive the aesthetic and nonaesthetic character of things, and accept the commonsense opinion that it is possible to perceive both the aesthetic and nonaesthetic properties of an object at the same time.

## CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter focuses upon one distinctive class of aesthetic attributions: expressive attributions, the class of (c) category attributions identified in Chapter One. The commonplace practice of borrowing the language of human affective and emotional life to describe works of art and natural phenomena raises a number of philosophical questions. What do we mean when we call a work of art 'sad'? How is the practice of using anthropomorphic predicates to describe works of art related to human emotional life? Do anthropomorphic predicates apply to parts of the natural world for much the same reasons they apply to works of art, or do the reasons underlying the attributions differ between the two cases? Is a melancholy landscape more like a melancholy person, or a melancholy work of art?

Because my immediate goal in this chapter and the next will be to develop a theory of aesthetic perception, I shall focus my discussion of expressive attribution around the notion of expressive perception. This means that I shall be assessing theories of expression in art purporting to give some insight into the nature of expressive perception. In particular, I shall be looking to characterize the concept of physiognomic perception, a form of expressive perception which we train upon works of art and inanimate objects alike. I am aware that this focus upon the topic of artistic expression represents something of a departure from the way in which philosophers tend to discuss the issue, and for this reason, I use Section I to outline something which I call the New Theory of expression in art, a theory which I believe has tended to set the agenda for current philosophical discussions of expression. I also discuss two interesting lines of objection to this theory developed by Guy Sircello and Virgil Aldrich. Aldrich's critique of the New Theory draws heavily upon the rather elaborate metaphysical machinery underpinning his account of prehensive perception. In the previous chapter, I gave reasons for doubting whether that mode of aesthetic perception Aldrich dubs 'prehension' provides any particular insight into the nature of pictorial representation. Aldrich does not explain why I interpret a set of ink marks upon a canvas as the pictorial appearance of

something else, he merely asserts that I do so; and he spends more time answering the question why I don't take what I see for a mere canvas. The reader who has patiently endured the discussion of Aldrich's views in the last chapter will no doubt be wondering why I have chosen to devote so much attention and space to what I believe to be a patently false view. That patience will now be rewarded as I demonstrate how Aldrich puts his metaphysical machinery to use in his attack upon the New Theory.

Section II begins the discussion of expressive perception by assessing Richard Wollheim's theory of expression in art, demonstrating those affinities which Wollheim strives to create between his theory of artistic expression and his theory of representation in art. Our discussion of the latter in the previous chapter serves to provide some background for this critique. Section III introduces the concept of physiognomic perception, distinguishing a wide and a narrow use of the term. Here I demonstrate how Stephen Davies presumes a narrow understanding of the concept in his theory of musical expression. Sections IV and V respectively examine two theories based in psychology attempting to account for the range of phenomena incorporated under the wider notion of physiognomic perception: the Empathy theory, and Rudolf Arnheim's version of the Gestalt theory of expression. I close the chapter by suggesting reasons why we might prefer Arnheim's broadly-based approach to physiognomic perception to the narrower concept implied in Stephen Davies work on musical expression.

## I

It would be true to say that, for the last half century or so, theorizing about the nature of expression in art has been much under the influence of what, for want of a better title, I shall call the New Theory of expression.<sup>1</sup> This is an unfortunate name in view of the

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<sup>1</sup> Proponents of the New Theory include Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett, 1981), pp.331-332; O.K. Bouswma, "The Expression Theory of Art", in *Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Max Black (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1950), pp.75-101; John Hospers, "Art as Expression", in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,



fact that the theory is no longer new. However, I have christened it the “New Theory” to reflect the fact that, at the time of its inception, the theory marked a major departure from more traditional discussions of expression in art such as those offered by Tolstoy, Croce and Collingwood. The New Theory is less a theory than it is a proposal for realigning the interface between the concepts of ‘expression’ and ‘art’ in a manner designed to bring about the destruction of “that hopeless theory that works of art are the exudates of the soul.”<sup>2</sup> The New Theorists detected two false assumptions underlying traditional discussions of expression in art. The first of these was the assumption that “expression” and all its cognate forms must display the same logical behaviour in every context of use. Because “express’ is a transitive verb directing attention to an expresser and expressandum, traditional discussions of expression in art tended to assume that the existence of expressive qualities in works of art implied a prior act of expression,<sup>3</sup> and some reference to an emotion expressed. In the second place, the fact that “expression” is one of those terms that can refer both to a process and to the product resulting from that process<sup>4</sup> tempted traditional theories of expression into what Haig Khatchadourian called the ‘Genetic fallacy’,<sup>5</sup> the false assumption that the product of a given activity possesses properties belonging to the activity generating that product, and that therefore, features belonging to the process of artistic creation must also belong to the product issuing from that process. In light of these two false assumptions, traditional discussions of expression became sidetracked into speculations concerning the relationship between the work of art and the emotional history of the artist; issues irrelevant to answering the question, “what is a work of art *expressive of*?”<sup>6</sup> The New Theorists suggested that statements attributing expressive properties to works of art should be construed as statements concerning the works themselves rather than statements concerning the

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ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), Vol.I, 46-48; Alan Tormey, *The Concept of Expression: A Study in Philosophical Psychology and Aesthetics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Arthur C. Danto, “Introduction” to Alan Tormey, *The Concept of Expression*, p.xii.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Tormey, *The Concept of Expression*, p.104.

<sup>4</sup> John Hospers, “Art as Expression”, p.46;

<sup>5</sup> Haig Khatchadourian, “The Expression Theory of Art: A Critical Evaluation”, *JAAC*, 23 (1964), 335-352, p.337.

<sup>6</sup> Hospers, 47.

relationship between the work of art and the artist.<sup>7</sup> They supported this suggestion by pointing to a commonplace use of “expression” which makes no inference to emotion, as when we speak of the “sad expression” on the face of a beagle.<sup>8</sup> Whereas an expression of sadness cannot occur without an accompanying episode of sadness, sad expressions may occur in the absence of particular episodes of felt sadness. The grammatical construction “o-expression” displays a very different logical behaviour to that transitive use of “express” displayed in the construction “expression of o,” functioning as an unbreakable one-place predicate and in this respect, mimicking the logical behaviour of such simple property attributions as “The rose is red”. Like “The rose is red”, talk of a o-expression is talk of certain observable features of a situation.<sup>9</sup> In light of this use of “expression,” the New Theorists proposed that expressive attributions should be analysed as statements concerning the properties perceptibly present in a work of art. In the words of Beardsley,

When we say the rose is red, we have only one thing, namely the rose, and we describe its quality; in exactly the same way when we say the music is joyous, we have only one thing, namely the music, and we describe its quality. There is no need for the term “express”.<sup>10</sup>

For the New Theorists, all the interesting questions regarding expression in art become questions of expressive attribution. “It is no longer necessary to say that the work of art is expressive of feeling qualities; it is only necessary to say that it has them - that it is sad or embodies sadness as a property.”<sup>11</sup> Likewise, “‘The music is joyous’ is plain and can be defended. ‘The music expresses joy’ adds nothing except unnecessary and unanswerable questions.”<sup>12</sup>

The New Theory replaces the notion that a work of art is the product of an act of expression, thereby coming to display the expressive character of the artist’s action, with

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<sup>7</sup> Tormey, p.106.

<sup>8</sup> Tormey, p.39.

<sup>9</sup> Tormey, p.40.

<sup>10</sup> Monroe C.Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, pp.331-332.

<sup>11</sup> Hospers, “Art as Expression”, pp.47-48.

<sup>12</sup> Beardsley, p.331.

the notion that a work of art is an expressive object: an object possessing ‘human’ or ‘feeling’ qualities that are explicable in terms of what Beardsley calls the ‘local’ and ‘subregional’ qualities of the work. According to the New Theory, *qua* expressive objects, works of art are no different to those parts of nature we anthropomorphise. Just as a hill may be ‘austere’ in virtue of its colour, its contours, or its lack of vegetation, so too a painting may be ‘austere’ in virtue of visual features of its design, features belonging to its subject-matter, or features belonging to both the design and subject-matter viewed overall.

In brief, what I have called the New Theory of expression may be identified with the following four recommendations:

(1) To treat the problem of expression in art as one concerning the properties works of art possess, rather than the relationship between works of art and human emotional states.

(2) To analyse “express” and its cognates along the model of “o-expression” rather than “expression of o”, treating this as a logically complete expression, an unbreakable one-place predicate. Thus, “The music is sad” more closely resembles “The rose is red” than it resembles “John is sad”.

(3) To understand the relationship between a work of art and what it expresses on the model of a thing and the properties it possesses, rather than on the model of a person and her emotional states.

(4) To treat the expressiveness of works of art as of the same order as the expressiveness of natural phenomena rather than the expressiveness of persons. Thus, a work of art or a part of nature possesses expressive qualities in virtue of the other characteristics it possesses; and we can point to those other characteristics in justifying a particular expressive predication.

Writing in 1973, Guy Sircello dubbed the New Theory the “Canonical Position” on the grounds that the theory had been ‘canonized’ by its inclusion in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.<sup>13</sup> The intervening years have lent this tongue-in-cheek christening an air of prophecy. The New Theory has become the Canonical Position, and looks set to determine the agenda for discussions of artistic expression for the foreseeable future.

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<sup>13</sup> Guy Sircello, *Mind and Art: An Essay on the Varieties of Expression* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), p.

Thus, in what has proved to be the most influential theory of musical expression in recent decades,<sup>14</sup> Peter Kivy follows the New Theorists' recommendation that the phrase "sad music" should be analysed on the model of the phrase "the music is a sad expression" rather than "the music is an expression of sadness",<sup>15</sup> and for this reason, he compares our ability to recognize emotional qualities in music with our ability to recognize the sadness in the face of a St Bernard dog. Kivy claims that the sadness of a perceptual object is as immediately perceived a quality as is its colour or shape;<sup>16</sup> that music 'contains' emotions in the sense of possessing them as perceptual properties the way objects possess (say) colours.<sup>17</sup> At the centre of Kivy's theory of musical expression is a 'contour' model of musical expressiveness, enabling Kivy to explain the expressiveness of music by the congruence of musical 'contour' with the structure of expressive features and behaviour in human beings. Our experience of sad music is of a heard resemblance between the structure of the musical sound and the characteristic features of human emotional behaviour. According to Kivy, we hear a musical line as a musical resemblance of the gesture and carriage appropriate to the expression of our sadness, constituting a 'sound map' of the human body under the influence of emotion.<sup>18</sup> It would be almost impossible to overestimate the influence Kivy's theory has exerted upon contemporary discussions of expression in music.

Despite the undoubted success of the New Theory in shaping the current agenda for discussions of expression in art, the view has not been greeted with universal jubilation. Here I shall concentrate upon two interesting lines of criticism developed against the view by Guy Sircello and Virgil Aldrich. Sircello argues that, whilst there are some anthropomorphic or expressive descriptions of works of art amenable to the New theorist's analysis, there are ways in which works of art are deemed to be expressive that

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<sup>14</sup> Kivy, Peter, *The Corded Shell* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980). Reprinted in *Sound Sentiment: An Essay on the Musical Emotions* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> *Sound Sentiment*, p.12.

<sup>16</sup> *Sound Sentiment*, p.168.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Kivy, "What was Hanslick Denying?", *Journal of Musicology*, 8 (1990), 3-18; p.5.

<sup>18</sup> *Sound Sentiment*, pp.50, 77, 53.

the New theorist cannot cope with.<sup>19</sup> To illustrate his thesis that there are descriptions of expressiveness in art which remain untouched by the New Theorist's analyses, Sircello draws attention to descriptions of the following kind:

Poussin's *The Rape of the Sabine Women* is calm and aloof.

Breughel's *Wedding Dance in the Open Air* is an ironic painting.

Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait* of 1660 is an unflinching depiction of the descent into old age.

John Cage's *Variations II* is impersonal and detached.

Sircello points out that, contrary to what the New Theorist would have us believe, it is not possible to analyse the expressive characteristics contained in these descriptions into statements concerning the subject-matter of the work in question, or statements regarding the formal properties of the work, or statements concerning both the formal properties and subject-matter viewed overall. Cage's work possesses no subject-matter. What is more, we feel that the 'anthropomorphic qualities' of Cage's music depend upon the fact that the sounds presented are completely lacking in human properties. Sircello analyses the statement that Cage's music is impersonal and detached as amounting to the claim that *Cage offers a set of noise-like sounds in a totally uninvolved, detached, impersonal way*. Arguing along similar lines, Sircello points out that the qualities of calm and aloofness found in Poussin's painting owe nothing to the depicted subject-matter, for what Poussin depicts is a scene of violence. Nor could it be said that there is a calm and aloof spectator depicted in the scene, or that the compositional properties of the visual design amounted to a 'calm' and 'aloof' painting. To say that Poussin's painting is calm and aloof is to say that *Poussin calmly observes the scene and paints it in an aloof, detached way*. Likewise, Breughel's painting is superficially happy and light-hearted to the extent that it depicts a happy occasion. The irony of the painting lies in the fact that *the painter 'observes' or depicts the happy scene in an ironic way*, and he does so by depicting peasants with bland, stupid, brutal-looking faces. And in a similar fashion to the other

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<sup>19</sup> Guy Sircello, "Perceptual Acts and Pictorial Art: A Defence of the Expression Theory", *JP*, 62 (1965), 669-677, p.669; *Mind and Art*, p.23.



cases discussed here, Sircello recommends that we make best sense of the statement that Rembrandt's self-portrait is an unflinching depiction of the descent into old age when we analyse this as the claim that *the artist scrutinizes in an unflinching way the effects of aging in the face of a man*.<sup>20</sup>

Examples such as these lead Sircello to believe that sometimes, anthropomorphic predicates apply to a work of art in virtue of something the artist has done in the work.<sup>21</sup> Sircello dubs the acts described in the phrases italicized here 'artistic acts'. Although Sircello claim that he does not want the notion of an 'artistic act' to carry any metaphysical import,<sup>22</sup> nonetheless he insists that these are truly acts of artists, things artists have done. The New Theorist cannot say that talk of artistic acts describes the artist and not the work of art, for the fact of the matter is that these describe *both* in a single breath. Artistic acts are peculiar to the extent that descriptions of these at once and necessarily describe the artworks themselves.<sup>23</sup> Descriptions of artistic acts exploit the fact that the same adjective used to describe the work of art may be applied adverbially to the activity undertaken by the artist in bringing that work of art about. When we say that *The Rape of the Sabine Women* is calm and aloof we have in the same breath ascribed to the artist a calm and aloof manner of acting in the production of this depiction. Sircello sees a parallel here with the way in which we can say, either that Sally has a sad smile, or that Sally is smiling sadly, a grammatical shift made possible owing to the fact that, where human gestures are concerned, the act is inseparable from the thing brought about by that action.<sup>24</sup> If Sally is smiling, then necessarily, she has a smile upon her face; and if there is a frown upon her face, then necessarily, she is frowning. That is to say, 'smile' and 'smiling' constitute two grammatically different ways of referring to a single action. Sircello uses the grammatical parallels he thinks he finds between smile-smiling, pout-pouting, portrayal-portraying, view-viewing, etc. to argue that artistic acts are

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<sup>20</sup> *Mind and Art*, pp.20, 23; "Perceptual Acts and Pictorial Art", p.673.

<sup>21</sup> *Mind and Art*, p.26.

<sup>22</sup> *Mind and Art*, p.26. In the earlier account in "Perceptual Acts and Pictorial Art: A Defence of the Expression Theory", Sircello describes these as 'virtual acts' rather than acts of the artist carrying no metaphysical import.

<sup>23</sup> *Mind and Art*, p.28.

<sup>24</sup> *Mind and Art*, pp.28, 30.

remarkably like common facial, vocal, and gestural expressions,<sup>25</sup> and therefore expressive in much the same way as these. In Sircello's reckoning, the work of art is expressive because it functions in much the same way as the artist's 'grimace'.

The New Theorists' most obvious line of defence against Sircello's attack would be to demonstrate that statements incorporating Sircello's so-called artistic acts can be reduced to statements concerning the two other types of expressiveness which The New Theorist allows. That is to say, the New Theorist could attempt to show that those descriptions Sircello employs to qualify both artist and work of art can be analysed as statements concerning either features belonging to the subject matter of the work, features belonging to its formal qualities, or features belonging to both subject-matter and formal design viewed as a whole. Jenefer Robinson attempts to do just that.<sup>26</sup> In line with her professed intention, Robinson contends that Breughel's *Wedding Dance* is one of those cases where the artist 'borrows' the expressiveness of nature rather than 'creating' the expressive qualities of his work by means of artistic acts. The *Wedding Dance* is ironic, not because Breughel portrayed the scene in an ironic way, but because he has accurately recorded an ironic scene. Breughel has recorded a scene that would be seen as ironic by a disinterested observer because it would be seen to have ironic features. These features include the fact that the peasants are brutal-looking, the dance is heavy, and the other wedding accoutrements are innocent-looking and joyful. The painting is ironic because it depicts a scene which, were it to exist in real life, would be seen as ironic.<sup>27</sup>

Robinson picks a most unfortunate example to illustrate her thesis when she attempts to explain away the irony of Breughel's creation in terms of the ironic nature of the depicted subject-matter. Typically, there are two ways in which we speak of irony: irony of statement, and dramatic irony, exploiting irony of situation. The person who speaks ironically intends his interlocutor to search for an utterance-meaning that diverges from the surface meaning of his statement.<sup>28</sup> Treating Breughel's painting as an ironic visual

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<sup>25</sup> *Mind and Art*, p.35.

<sup>26</sup> "The Eliminability of Artistic Acts." *JAAC*, 36 (1977), 81-89.

<sup>27</sup> "The Eliminability of Artistic Acts", pp.83-84

<sup>28</sup> For an account of irony as a figure of speech, see Robert J. Fogelin, *Figuratively Speaking* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), pp.13ff.

'statement' brings us back to talk of artistic acts, and for this reason, Robinson considers the notion that the painting depicts an ironical situation. I would dispute Robinson's suggestion that a situation is ironic because it possesses ironical features. The features of a situation only become ironical when there is a perceived incongruence between these features and some human expectation. In this case, the perceived incongruity arises from the fact that the features belonging to the depicted scene - brutal-faced peasants engaged in a heavy dance - are incongruous with the expectation aroused by the title of the picture that this is a happy and light-hearted occasion. That is to say, the only way to make sense of the statement that *Wedding Dance in the Open Air* is ironic is to treat the act of producing a picture with that title and those features as an expressive act on the part of the artist, the making of an ironic statement.

Robinson admits that in the case of Poussin's *Rape*, the 'aloofness' in question cannot be analysed away by appealing to the aloofness of the scene depicted. For this reason, Robinson appeals to the notion that the feature of aloofness attributable to the painting consists in the aloof point of view from which it is portrayed. Realizing that this comes dangerously close to talk of an artistic act, and after much struggling on her part to make sense of the notion that a work of art contains an aloof point of view not attributable to the artist, Robinson finally hits upon the formulation that Poussin's painting is aloof because it represents the rape scene as if it were being viewed in an aloof manner. Putting the same point another way, Poussin represents the Sabine rape as seen through the eyes of an aloof observer. If anyone were to view the scene of the Sabine rape in the way Poussin represents it, he or she would be viewing it in an aloof way. Robinson is now able to comfort herself that she has analysed the "somewhat mysterious" notion of representing something from an aloof point of view in terms of the perhaps slightly less mysterious notion of seeing something from the standpoint of a particular psychological attitude. "What Poussin gives us is a view of the Sabine rape by someone who ignores the violence and cruelty, the frenzied movement, the anguish of the victims and the brutality of the attackers. Instead this hypothetical observer has seen the rape as a study

in form, in which the figures are merely graceful constituents of a harmonious composition.”<sup>29</sup>

Robinson’s paper, “The Eliminability of Artistic Acts”, might with equal justice have been titled “The Ineliminability of Artistic Acts”, since Robinson’s long-winded and convoluted analyses do nothing to persuade that the art critic can do without descriptions employing artistic acts. If nothing else, Robinson manages to demonstrate the economy of Sircello’s talk of artistic acts, the fact that artistic acts provide a succinct and elegant way of articulating what might otherwise only be indicated at rather tedious length. Although Robinson concedes that explanations of expressive characteristics in terms of artistic acts are not impossible, it is her professed intention to show that such explanations could be replaced with something simpler.<sup>30</sup> If the length of her analyses is anything to go by, the only simplicity Robinson could have in mind is the metaphysical simplification that comes with eliminating ‘artistic acts’ from our ontology. I doubt that Robinson’s analyses do represent a greater metaphysical economy than Sircello’s, since her analysis of the *Rape* replaces one metaphysically mysterious entity, a virtual act attributed to the artist, with another mysterious entity, the hypothetical observer or hypothetical viewpoint.

The very fact that Robinson attempts to explain away descriptions containing artistic acts demonstrates, I believe, that she neither comprehends the nature of an ‘artistic act’, nor does she understand precisely what motivated Sircello to draw attention to these in the first place. To understand the nature of artistic acts, it is important to note that talk of artistic acts underlying some of our anthropomorphic descriptions of works of art does not constitute a return to the bad old days of the traditional expression theories. This is because artistic acts are known to be true, regardless of how much or how little we know about the creator of a work of art.<sup>31</sup> Descriptions employing artistic acts are descriptions of the work of art which cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed by biographical facts concerning the artist himself. Thus, were we to learn that one of Poussin’s nearest and

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<sup>29</sup> “The Eliminability of Artistic Acts”, p.85-86.

<sup>30</sup> “The Eliminability of Artistic Acts”, p.83.

<sup>31</sup> *Mind and Art*, p.26.

dearest had been the victim of an indecent assault prior to the composition of Poussin's picture, this might lead us to believe that Poussin produced his picture with a view to exposing the horrors of rape. In light of this information, we might come to see the act of publicly displaying the work as a piece of anti-rape propaganda on Poussin's part; and we would be totally justified in believing that the historical artist regarded the subject of the picture in anything but a calm and aloof fashion. Nevertheless, this piece of information and this assumption would not remove the truth of the claim that, in saying that the painting is calm and aloof, we are saying that Poussin observes and depicts his subject-matter in a calm and aloof fashion.

To explain why Sircello's 'artistic acts' cannot be disconfirmed by historical knowledge concerning the artist, consider Richard Wollheim's discussion of two different ways in which we might be tempted to infer between the trace left behind by the artist, and the artist's action in bringing that trace about.<sup>32</sup> Wollheim considers the view which says that inferences from the trace to the activity bringing it about are more securely grounded than any inferences running in the opposite direction from the artist's activity to the trace. According to this view, whilst the mark left by a confident attack upon a canvas might not itself be expressive of confidence, if a certain grey mark left on the canvas is expressive of gloom, then it cannot be doubted that the activity of setting that mark down is expressive of gloom. Wollheim notes:

The acceptability of thinking of the activity as derivatively expressive, i.e. as having an expressiveness that derives from its trace, is simply a reflection of the fact that the activity has been described in a way that is itself derivative: for the activity has been described, it will be observed, by reference to the trace in which it issues. For the activity merits the description "setting a grey mark on the canvas," solely in so far as on its completion there *is* a grey mark on the canvas. It is, we might say, only because nothing of the activity is caught or fixed by the description except its outcome, that we can safely concede that expressiveness passes from the outcome to the activity so described.

Wollheim brings out the difference between the two descriptions by suggesting that, in a situation where the the canvas was totally porous, causing the paint to vanish as it was applied, whilst it would still make sense to talk of someone "attacking the canvas with

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Wollheim, "On Expression and Expressionism", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, XVII, 67-70 (1964), 270-289.



great panache”, it would never be true to describe the activity as one of “setting a grey mark on the canvas.” Wollheim continues:

Once we know what marks are set by the painter on the canvas, we are likely to describe his activity in what might be called a *transparent* way: that is to say, in a way which permits us to see straight through the gesture and focus solely on its trace....When, however, we are as yet uncertain what the trace will be...we have no alternative but to describe the activity in terms that are logically independent of its outcome: that is to say, in a way that makes explicit reference to the painter's behaviour.

Wollheim concludes that it is the existence of these two ways of describing the artist's activity and their different conditions of appropriateness, which misleads us into supposing that there is an asymmetrical relationship between the inferences we can make from the gesture to the mark and from the mark to the gesture.<sup>33</sup>

In light of Wollheim's observations, it is now possible to formulate in a more precise way the notion of an artistic act. Sircello's 'artistic acts' are ways of referring to the activity of the artist which transparently focus upon the product of that activity. This is why, as Sircello admits, artistic acts are not describable or even identifiable independently of the works in which they are done.<sup>34</sup> Artistic acts can only be individuated by appealing to the particular objects in which they issue. Poussin's activity in producing *The Rape of the Sabine Women* constitutes a calm and aloof manner of depicting rather than a passionate and frenzied portrayal because the product of that activity was a calm and aloof picture; and we can confirm or disconfirm the claim that *The Rape of the Sabine Women* exemplifies an aloof manner of depicting simply by looking to the nature of the painting itself. Of course, the fact that artistic acts can only be individuated by appealing to the particular objects in which they issue, raises the question whether we require the notion of an artistic act in the first place. After all, if the expressive character of an artistic act is something we only discover by looking to the expressive character of the painting produced, then we can look directly to the painting and its character and bypass talk of artistic acts altogether. I believe that Sircello would answer this objection as follows. The New Theorist treats the expressiveness of works of

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<sup>33</sup> "On Expression and Expressionism", pp.281-282.

<sup>34</sup> *Mind and Art*, p.28.

art as on a par with the expressiveness of natural objects. That is to say, the New Theorist treats a work of art as a brute physical object which happens to possess certain anthropomorphic characteristics. Sircello believes that to view Poussin's painting in these terms, as an object possessing the properties of calmness and aloofness, is to fail to view the painting with understanding. In his attitude to works of art, the New Theorist resembles the man who sees a smile as nothing more than a configuration of the human face. To view a smile as a facial configuration is not to view it with understanding. For to view a human gesture with understanding is to view it as a facial *expression*; and we only view this as an expression when we see the lie of the face as the product of an activity, the activity of bringing about a particular facial configuration.<sup>35</sup> In a similar way, to see the expressive character of the work of art with understanding is to see it as the product of a manner of acting.

We can now see that, when Sircello introduces the notion of an artistic act, he has a much more important point to make than to show that there are ways of describing works of art which resist the New Theorist's analyses. Sircello believes that the New Theorist demonstrates a defective metaphysical understanding when she treats the expressiveness of works of art as of the same order as the expressiveness of natural objects. The New Theorist overlooks the fact that a work of art is, metaphysically speaking, a very different entity to a natural feature of the environment.<sup>36</sup> A work of art is not simply a brute physical thing, it is an artifact, a physical object that is the product of human intentional activity. To view it with understanding is to view it as an artifact, rather than as a piece torn out of the natural environment. And viewing it as an artifact means that we cannot help but interpret it, *qua* product, as something carrying the expressive traces of the activity which brought it into being.

The second set of objections to the New Theory that I would like to consider here are those presented by Aldrich in the paper "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'". As the title suggests, the paper constitutes an extended polemic against the New Theory of

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Wollheim, "Expression", in *On Art and the Mind* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), pp.80-100, appeals in a similar way to the notion of activity in order to bring out the difference between seeing a gesture as a facial configuration and seeing it as an expression. See in particular pp.97ff.

<sup>36</sup> Guy Sircello, *Mind and Art*, pp.18-19.

expression, a polemic drawing upon the considerable metaphysical machinery described in the previous chapter. Aldrich finds more than Sircello did to argue with in the theory, although like Sircello, his interests are largely metaphysical ones. Aldrich agrees with Sircello that the New Theorist is wrong to compare works of art *qua* expressive objects with such natural objects as hills, trees, and rivers. Aldrich believes that it is this tendency, on the part of the New Theorist, to treat works of art as metaphysically speaking on a par with natural phenomena, which leads her to to misdescribe the problem of expression in art. The New Theorist identifies the problem of expression in art as a problem peculiar to aesthetics, the problem of explaining away the commonplace human practice of ascribing ‘human’ or ‘feeling’ qualities’ to works of art. As Peter Kivy formulates it, the problem of expression in music becomes “the ‘special’ metaphysical difficulty (if I may so call it) of how a certain kind of object, musical sound, can possess a certain kind of property, the garden-variety emotions, that can belong only to a very different kind of object, namely a sentient being.”<sup>37</sup> There is some explaining to be done because ordinarily, things which are sad *feel* sad; and no one seriously believes that works of art are the sorts things to experience sadness.<sup>38</sup> Aldrich believes that the New Theorist defines the problem of expression in these narrow terms because she applies her metaphysical instincts in an inconsistent fashion. The New Theorist applies a physicalist-reductionist analysis to the concept of a work of art, then wonders how a brute physical thing can function as the subject of expressive predication. Aldrich implies that, were she being entirely consistent in her reductionistic instincts, the New Theorist might choose to apply the same reductionist analysis to the notion of a human being; and she might then come to question how a human being comes to be the subject of aesthetic predication.<sup>39</sup> The problem, as Aldrich sees it, is that the New Theorist allows herself to be puzzled by the expressiveness of works of art because she does not allow herself to be puzzled sufficiently by the expressiveness of persons. For once she allowed herself to be puzzled by the expressiveness of persons, the New Theorist would come to see that the problem

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<sup>37</sup> *Sound Sentiment*, p.180.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen Davies, “The Expression of Emotion in Music”, *Mind*, 89 (1980), 67-86; p.67.

<sup>39</sup> Virgil C.Aldrich, *Philosophy of Art* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962), pp.45-46.

of expression in art is not a uniquely aesthetic problem, but part of a general metaphysical problem of expressive predication.

Aldrich believes that the New Theorist brings a defective metaphysical understanding to her task when she identifies the problem of expression in art as a matter of properties which human beings may, and works of art may not, possess. Not only does Aldrich disagree with the New Theorist's assumption that expressive predicates applied to works of art function as simple property attributions, but he argues that expressive attributions *never* designate expressive 'qualities', whether applied to persons or to works of art. Sadness is not an expressive quality, it has no reality as a nature-in-itself in the way in which an ordinary quality such as redness constitutes a nature-in-itself. I do not see sadness as a property present in a sad thing in the way in which I see the redness of a red object. The very notion of psychological predicates being denoting terms, with which one can refer to various qualities and describe things having them, is suspect. Sadness represents a 'state' of the person or the work of art that is expressed by the set of elements that are in that state. What is realized in the expressans (person, work of art) has no reality as a nature-in-itself. Rather, the expression entifies it.<sup>40</sup>

Aldrich points out that neither works of art nor human beings *qua* physical objects 'possess' the attributes they express, for the simple reason that psychological predicates have *no* direct application to bodies at all, whether living or not.<sup>41</sup> For Aldrich, the notion of expression is necessarily tied up with the notion of a body functioning in a certain way.<sup>42</sup> It is only the physical object (human being, work of art) that has been subjected to a special form of perceptual organization, the physical object regarded under a special mode of perception (Ur-prehension, prehension) which becomes the proper subject of expressive predication. In the terminology familiar from the previous chapter, it is the physical body categorially aspecting as a human being or a work of art that functions as expressans, expressively revealing the state it is in.

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<sup>40</sup> "Expresses' and 'Expressive'", pp. 213-215, *passim*.

<sup>41</sup> "Expresses' and 'Expressive'", p.213.

<sup>42</sup> "Expresses' and 'Expressive'", p.208.

Aldrich's proposal for a general theory of expressive predication applying to both works of art and persons faces two serious difficulties. At the end of the previous chapter, I threw doubt upon the notion that the difference between a human being *qua* subject of moral argument and human being *qua* subject of medical experimentation could be attributed to the operation of distinctive modes of perception.<sup>43</sup> If anything, the suggestion that there exist two modes of perception allowing us to metaphysically make over the human person in different ways seemed even more unlikely than the suggestion that there exist two modes of perception allowing us to contemplate the work of art in metaphysically different ways. In raising doubts concerning the utility of the notion of Ur-prehension, I hinted that it was Aldrich's desire to maintain his analogy between persons and works of art, rather than the innate plausibility of the suggestion that we see human beings under different modes of perception, which led Aldrich to propose the existence of Ur-prehension. If I am right in claiming that it is the momentum of his analogy which leads Aldrich to propose the existence of a form of perception (Ur-prehension) paralleling prehension, then this raises a serious difficulty for Aldrich's account of expression, given the fact that Aldrich is trying to ground an understanding of the expressiveness of art upon our prior understanding of the expressiveness of persons, and not vice versa.

Any theory of expression in art resembling that on offer from Aldrich, a theory stressing the similarities that obtain between the expressiveness of persons and the expressiveness of works of art, inevitably fails to do justice to whatever parallels might exist between the expressiveness of art and nature. Whilst Aldrich does not rule out the possibility that we canprehend aspects of nature, he does rule out the possibility of extending the notion of prehension to explain the anthropomorphic characteristics found in nature. Aldrich claims that natural objects function as aesthetic objects when weprehend the 'medium of the materials' in them. Natural objects which function as aesthetic objects 'express' their lower-order aesthetic qualities of timbre or character, such qualities as tempo, crescendo, contour, pitch and brightness.<sup>44</sup> However, Aldrich

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<sup>43</sup> See above, pp.153-154.

<sup>44</sup> "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", pp.211-212.



apparently rules out the possibility that natural objects *qua* aesthetic objects ‘express’ the sorts of higher-order aesthetic qualities generally designated by psychological predicates, on the grounds no doubt that natural objects *qua* aesthetic objects do not ‘categorially aspect’ either as persons or as works of art. If Aldrich believes that psychological predicates do not apply to natural objects *qua* aesthetic objects, it follows that Aldrich’s theory of aesthetic perception rules out the possibility of finding parallels between the expressiveness of nature and of art; a fact which inevitably limits the usefulness of his account of expression.

## II

Sircello’s criticisms of the New Theory are valuable for bringing to attention a form of expressiveness in art which the New Theorist overlooks. This having been said, Sircello does not deny that the New Theorist identifies one of the ways in which art is expressive when she treats the expressiveness of art as of the same order as the expressiveness of nature. The fact that there are forms of expressiveness common to both nature and works of art raises the possibility that there exists a form of expressive perception that we train upon things, and that it is the exercise of our capacity for expressive perception which grounds the emotion ascriptions we make, to persons in the first instance, and to works of art and natural features in the second. Richard Wollheim offers a theory of expression in art which exploits this very possibility.<sup>45</sup> Wollheim’s theory introduces two technical terms: *projection* and *correspondence*.<sup>46</sup> I shall begin my discussion of Wollheim’s theory by explicating these.

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<sup>45</sup> Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), pp.80-89; “Correspondence, Projective Properties, and Expression in the Arts”, in *The Language of Art History*, ed. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.51-66. Hereafter *CPPE*. The essay, which constitutes an elaboration of the account given in *Painting as an Art*, is reprinted in Richard Wollheim, *The Mind and its Depths* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp.144-158. See also *The Thread of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp.154, 214-215.

<sup>46</sup> Wollheim introduces ‘correspondence’ as a technical term in two earlier discussions of expression. See *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), sec.18, p.31; “Expression”, in *Art and the Mind* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), pp.84-100, p.95.

Projection describes a process in which emotions or feelings flow from us to what we perceive.<sup>47</sup> Wollheim gives the notion a more technical meaning when he identifies projection as a psychological mechanism whereby the subject learns to cope with his feelings, moods and emotions by projecting these upon his surroundings and then emotionally reacting to his altered environment. A psychological subject will tend to project his emotion onto a part of his environment both in cases where he wishes to rid himself of an emotion, and in cases where he values the emotion he is experiencing and wishes to preserve it.<sup>48</sup> Wollheim distinguishes between a simple and a complex form of the mechanism. *Simple projection* describes that form of projection characteristic of the immature or psychotic mind. In cases of simple projection, the subject relieves himself of an emotion that is causing him anxiety by projecting his emotion onto another figure or some other part of his environment. Through the act of projecting his emotion, the subject comes to believe firstly, that he no longer experiences the emotion; and secondly, that the emotion belongs to the figure or part of the world onto which it was projected. An individual who is melancholy may project his melancholy onto the world, thereby coming to believe that it is the world, not himself, that is melancholy.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, a young man may project his hatred of a rival in love onto that rival, and in his projective fantasy come to believe that it is his rival, not himself, who feels the hatred. In cases of complex projection, the subject projects his own feeling of sadness upon the world. As well as coming to believe that he is no longer sad, the subject also comes to experience the world as of a piece with his sadness.<sup>50</sup> Whereas in cases of simple projection, the subject merely acquires a belief concerning the figure onto which he projects his emotion, complex projection gives the subject a way of experiencing the external world.<sup>51</sup> In cases of simple projection, the subject treats the figure or part of the environment onto which he projects his emotion as the possessor of a psychology, and experiences that figure or part

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<sup>47</sup> *Painting as an Art*, p.82.

<sup>48</sup> *Painting as an Art*, p.84; *CPPE*, p.57.

<sup>49</sup> Of course, in cases where the emotion projected is a desirable one, projection leads not to the purging of the emotion, but to the emotion living on in a form outside of the subject. See *Painting as an Art*, p.82.

<sup>50</sup> *Painting as an Art*, p.82; *CPPE*, p.58; *The Thread of Life*, pp.154, 214.

<sup>51</sup> *Painting as an Art*, p.83; *CPPE*, p.58.

of the environment as possessing the property which he himself began by experiencing. By contrast, because complex projection is more responsive to features of the environment, the property which the subject experiences the world as having is not the same as the property the subject originally projected. The man who was sad does not think of the world as something possessing a psychology, the sort of thing that could be sad or on the brink of tears. Instead, he experiences the world as being of a piece with his sadness or as in some way *corresponding* with sadness. Wollheim calls the property the individual experiences the world as possessing a *projective property*.<sup>52</sup>

Wollheim draws attention to the developmental nature of projection, to the way in which the maturing mind moves from acts of simple projection to acts of complex projection. In the early stages of development projection is a haphazard affair. Because the subject pays no attention to the nature of the object he projects his emotion upon, his acts of projection are not rewarded by an ability to sustain his projective fantasies for long. As the subject matures, he begins to take account of his surroundings in his acts of projection. Through a process of trial and error, the subject discovers that some but not other parts of his environment will be more suited to the projection of a particular emotion. As projection matures, the subject learns to adjust his moods and emotions in harmony with that environment, so that projective properties start to owe something to the features upon which they are overlaid.<sup>53</sup> It is in this process of constant adjustment that correspondences are born. Wollheim treats the human capacity for expressive perception, the capacity to see the sad or melancholy character of a landscape, as an extension of the human capacity to project emotion.

To gain further insight into Wollheim's claim that in acts of complex projection, a sad scene is thought to correspond with, but not possess, the garden-variety emotion of sadness, consider J.M. Howarth's account of anthropomorphic descriptions of nature. Howarth suggests that many of the emotion ascriptions made to nature are mood ascriptions: the sky is 'angry', the seasons 'melancholy' or 'joyful', the brook

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<sup>52</sup> CPPE, p.56.

<sup>53</sup> CPPE, pp.59-60; *Painting as an Art*, p.83.

'cheerful'.<sup>54</sup> Howarth characterizes moods as affective states that tend to colour everything we think, do and perceive. The person experiencing a mood seeks out and focuses upon features of her environment which form an appropriate backdrop or atmosphere for the mood, the appropriate atmosphere being one which 'feeds' and helps to prolong her mood.<sup>55</sup> A change of atmosphere may be enough to dispel a mood, so that bright sunny skies and balmy breezes might put one's depression at bay. According to Howarth, when we apply labels such as 'gloomy', 'sombre', 'dismal', 'serene', 'tranquil', to skies, hills, countryside, lakes, rivers and forest glades, we are describing these as the appropriate atmospheres for the corresponding human moods. A 'gloomy' sky is thus a sky appropriate to prolong feelings of gloom. The fact that we use the same word to designate the mood and its atmosphere reflects the way in which moods spread to colour one's environment.<sup>56</sup> For Howarth, to describe a scene as 'melancholy' is to identify it as a scene forming the appropriate backdrop for a melancholy mood. To make the same point in the language of Wollheim, a melancholy scene is a scene that corresponds with the human emotion of melancholy.

Wollheim's theory of pictorial expression enjoys a similar structure and articulation to his account of pictorial representation. The reader will recall from the previous chapter how Wollheim relates the practice of pictorial representation to a basic human capacity for seeing-in, that capacity we exercise in catching likenesses in clouds, in damp stains on walls, and whenever we see a three-dimensional pictorial image in a two-dimensional surface. In the words of Wollheim, seeing-in precedes representation, both logically and historically. Seeing-in is logically prior, because there are many cases of seeing-in which do not count as instances of pictorial representation, as when I see horsemen in the clouds. Seeing-in precedes representation historically, because the practice of pictorial representation arises out of and exploits this natural human capacity to see images in a

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<sup>54</sup> J.M.Howarth, "Nature's Moods", *BJA*, 35 (1995), 108-120, p.113.

<sup>55</sup> Ronald Hepburn describes how one might nurture and prolong a mood: "In my compartment I make into one unity-of-feeling the trainwheels drumming, the lugubrious view from the window (steam and industrial fog), and the thought of meeting so-and-so, whom I dislike, at the end of my journey. My depression is highly particularized." See "Emotions and Emotional Qualities: Some Attempts at Analysis", in *'Wonder' and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), pp.75-87; p.82.

<sup>56</sup> "Nature's Moods", pp.113-114.

variety of surfaces. What distinguishes garden-variety cases of seeing-in from cases of representational perception is that not everything that we can see in a work of art has been represented in that work. The artist's intention imposes a standard of correctness upon what the spectator recognizes in the work, so that what a picture is thought to represent is determined by the intentions of the artist insofar as these have been fulfilled.<sup>57</sup>

In much the same way that the practice of artistic representation arises out of a fundamental visual capacity, so too Wollheim suggests that the practice of artistic expression arises out of the basic human capacity for expressive perception, a capacity for experiencing correspondences between parts of our environment and human emotional states. Wollheim further suggests that the capacity for expressive perception precedes the practice of artistic representation, both logically and historically. Wollheim further maintains the parallels with his account of pictorial representation when he claims that there is a standard of correctness imposed upon that which we see in cases of artistic expression, but that there is no one correct expressive way to see a stretch of landscape.<sup>58</sup> Against the background of these two human perceptual capacities, the capacity for seeing-in and the capacity for expressive perception, the artist marks a surface in such a way that others will see therein certain representational and expressive effects. As Wollheim sees it, expressive perception differs from representational perception only to the extent that the latter does, and the former does not, constitute a narrowly visual capacity. The reason why our capacity for expressive perception is not a narrowly visual capacity is, of course, because it is based in part upon a *psychological* mechanism, the mechanism of projection.<sup>59</sup>

In Section III of Chapter III, I rehearsed some arguments which might be used by someone unimpressed with Wollheim's account of representational perception. For those persuaded of the merits of Wollheim's account of pictorial representation, the formal similarities which Wollheim creates between that theory and his theory of pictorial expression will no doubt lend an immediate air of plausibility to the latter. Perhaps it

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<sup>57</sup> *Painting as an Art*, pp.46-48.

<sup>58</sup> *Painting as an Art*, pp.85-86.

<sup>59</sup> *Painting as an Art*, p.80.



would be unfair to suggest that Wollheim uses the similarities between the two theories to give his account of expression in art a greater plausibility than it deserves. However, it would be fair to say that the similarity in exposition between the two accounts serves to disguise some important points of dissimilarity between the two theories, and that a failure to appreciate the differences in detail between the two theories could lead us to miscomprehend the nature of the account of pictorial expression which Wollheim offers.

One crucial dissimilarity between the theory of pictorial representation and the theory of artistic expression concerns the explanatory role played by the underlying perceptual capacity within the context of each theory. In the theory of representational perception, the existence of a human visual capacity for seeing-in serves to underpin the practice of pictorial representation in a general way. At the same time, it would be true to say that in a majority of those cases where I identify the subject of a representational picture, my act of pictorial recognition itself constitutes an instance of seeing-in. By contrast, whilst the practice of pictorial expression is underpinned in a general way by a prior capacity for expressive perception, itself a refinement and development of the emotional mechanism of projection, it is not the case that all expressive perception takes place in the immediate aftermath of projection.<sup>60</sup> Wollheim is not postulating an occurrent emotion in the perceiver that is being projected into the object perceived. Rather, in cases where I experience a part of the world as being sad this is owing to the fact that I experience a correspondence between that portion of nature, and a form of emotional response familiar to me. The experience of the felt correspondence between the two is the experience of a projective property. Projective properties are unlike the properties encountered in ordinary acts of perception to the extent that the former but not the latter are properties of a kind that intimate a particular sort of history. My experience of the projective property of sadness intimates to me, not how the occurrent perceptual experience came about, but how experiences of its kind come about in general.<sup>61</sup> The experience intimates to me that the sadness I perceive in a landscape is not an occurrent emotion of sadness, but the projective property of sadness.

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<sup>60</sup> *CPPE*, p.60.

<sup>61</sup> *CPPE*, pp.57, 60.

Another point of difference between Wollheim's theory of pictorial representation and his theory of pictorial expression concerns Wollheim's claim that what a picture is seen to represent or to express is determined by the fulfilled intentions of the artist. Maintaining the symmetries with his account of pictorial representation, Wollheim states that, whereas there is no one correct expressive way in which to see a landscape, there is a right and a wrong expressive way to look at a landscape painting; the right way ensuring an experience that concurs with the fulfilled intentions of the artist.<sup>62</sup> In making this claim, Wollheim is not denying what happens to be the case, that people will tend to concur in identifying the expressive character of a piece of scenery. Instead, he is making the point that there is no one stipulated way of seeing the piece of scenery; whereas there is a way of seeing the painting that is required of me if I am to perceive its expressive character with any accuracy - the way which happens to concur with the artist's intention. However, in allowing the fulfilled intention of the artist to set the standard for what must be expressively seen in the painting, Wollheim overlooks the fact that artists are obliged to respect the human capacity for expressive seeing in a way in which they need not respect the human capacity for seeing-in. Artists are free to exercise a certain amount of innovation when it comes to pictorial representation, pushing forward the boundaries of their art by challenging the boundaries of what can be seen in a painting. This means that at times, as happened with the early Cubist painters, artists will present to the public supposedly representational works of art where no one (else) yet can see what is in them. However, it would be a total nonsense to suggest that artists are free to push forward the boundaries of what can be expressively seen in a work of art. If an artist manages to see-in his art what almost no one else can see, this may be because, like the early Cubists, he has discovered a way of seeing-in surfaces that his public must be educated to appreciate. By contrast, if an artist expressively sees in his work what few others can see, this is owing to the fact that he lacks skill as an artist. It is he, not his public, who stands in need of education. The limits upon what an artist might expressively convey in his work reflect the inbuilt limitations of the human capacity for perceiving correspondences.

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<sup>62</sup> *Painting as an Art*, pp.85-86.

Sircello's objections to the New Theory described in Section I above suggest a distinction between two different ways in which works of art qualify as being expressive. In the first place, as the New Theory suggests, works of art may be expressive after the manner of natural objects. Wollheim's talk of projective properties serves to capture this notion of expressiveness. To say that a landscape or a work of art corresponds with melancholy is to assign a particular expressive character to it. In the second place, Sircello taught us to see that works of art may be expressive after the fashion of human expressive gestures. Wollheim demonstrates some awareness of the distinction between these two notions of expressiveness in an earlier account of artistic expression,<sup>63</sup> when he distinguishes between the artist's relationship to the work of art, and the spectator's. However, Wollheim's late theory of artistic expression demonstrates a confusion between these two different notion of expressiveness. For whilst Wollheim operates with the second of these notions of expressiveness when he allows the intention of the artist to determine what a work of art expresses, he operates with the first notion when he suggests that the artist's relationship to the work of art is that of the first perceiver. It is because he fails to distinguish adequately between these two forms of expression that Wollheim's theory allows the intention of the artist to be both decisive and nondecisive in determining the expressive character of the work of art.

Although Wollheim offers a projectivist account of expressive perception, there are two reasons why Wollheim's brand of projectivism does not amount to a form of naive projectivism. In the first place, the projective mechanism Wollheim describes is a relatively sophisticated one, constituting in its complex form nothing short of an ongoing process of emotional adjustment to the world. In the second place, Wollheim avoids the pitfalls of the sort of naive projectivism that postulates, corresponding with each and every aesthetic quality that we perceive, an act of perception on the part of the perceiver projecting that quality into the object perceived. Wollheim is not suggesting that on each and every occasion where I perceive sadness in a portion of nature or a work of art, I am guilty of unconsciously projecting my occurent sadness onto the object I perceive. As

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<sup>63</sup> *Art and Its Objects*, sec.18, pp.31-32.

Wollheim points out, we can and do perceive nature as of a piece with our feelings in cases either where we can no longer recall having projected those feelings onto it, or where we have not done so. To say we perceive expressively in such cases is to say we recognize parts of nature as those into which we might have projected this or that kind of feeling.<sup>64</sup> Likewise, in identifying the activity of the artist as an expressive activity, Wollheim is not saying that the artist creates his art under the influence of an occurrent episode of emotion that will be reflected in some way in his work. Rather, the expressive activity of the artist occurs within and reflects a pattern established by a career or a form of life.<sup>65</sup> The emotion the work of art expresses is not something felt by the artist or spectator, but “something that the artist or spectator has in mind, or (perhaps better) it is something with which they are put in touch, or (perhaps best) it is something upon which, or upon memory of which, they can draw.”<sup>66</sup> However, the very feature which prevents the theory from looking naive deprives it of the richness of explanation to be found in Wollheim’s account of representation. To the extent that Wollheim’s account of representational perception possesses genuine explanatory power, this is for the reason that Wollheim is able to posit an act of seeing-in corresponding with each and every act of representational perception. When it comes to cases of expressive perception, all that Wollheim can tell us is that it is the habit of a lifetime, of emotionally interacting with the world, which encourages human beings to see certain parts of nature but not others as being of a piece with melancholy. Michael Podro has made the complaint that Wollheim’s account of pictorial representation is more concerned with the question, “what is the origin of painting?” than it is with the question, “how do we look at paintings?”<sup>67</sup> A similar complaint could be made here concerning Wollheim’s account of expressive perception. For Wollheim displays more interest in the question, “what is the origin in human psychological development of our capacity for expressive perception?” than he

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<sup>64</sup> *CPPE*, p.60.

<sup>65</sup> *Painting as an Art*, p.87.

<sup>66</sup> *CPPE*, p.64.

<sup>67</sup> Michael Podro, "Depiction and the Golden Calf", in *Philosophy and the Visual Art: Seeing and Abstracting*, ed. Andrew Harrison, Royal Institute of Philosophy (Dordrecht: D.Reidel, 1987), pp.3-22, p.18.

does in the question “what causes human beings to assign expressive characteristics to the things they see?”

I would suggest that there is a vacuousness at the heart of Wollheim’s account of expressive perception that the appeal to correspondences tends to conceal. For talk of correspondences carries an explanatory air about it, hinting at the existence of formal similarities between human emotions and parts of the environment which human beings take into account in projecting their emotional states. However, to see that the notion of correspondence does not trade upon the notion of formal resemblances between our emotions and features of the world, let us re-examine Wollheim’s description of the developmental nature of projection. In the early stages of projection, the subject haphazardly projects his emotions, only later coming to project in a way that respects the features of his environment. To say that the individual comes to respect features of his environment as he projects is not to say that late acts of projection exploit natural similarities between human emotions and parts of nature. If that were the case, then Wollheim could appeal to the existence of these similarities to explain our acts of expressive perception, and the notion of projection could be dispensed with altogether.<sup>68</sup> Instead, Wollheim must have something like the following in mind. The immature subject will consider his acts of projection to be a success in the event that he is able to maintain the illusion that his emotion belongs to the thing it was projected upon rather than himself. When he retraces his steps and comes to interrogate nature in the wake of his early, haphazard acts of projection, the subject discovers that the illusion has taken in some places rather than others. As he develops the maturity to modify his behaviour in the face of experience, the subject attempts to repeat earlier successes by seeking out those parts of nature resembling the scenes of his earlier triumphs. This is the limited sense in which the notion of resemblance has a role to play in the account. It is important to remember that whatever similarities might exist between the emotional states of the individual and parts of the environment are not ones he discovers but ones he imposes.

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<sup>68</sup> A point which Wollheim himself acknowledges. See *CPPE*, p.60.



As Wollheim puts it, correspondences are *forged*<sup>69</sup> in acts of projection. They are not discovered there.

The vacuousness at the heart of Wollheim's account of expressive perception amounts to this. In saying that we see nature as corresponding with, or being of a piece with sadness, Wollheim has hit upon an elaborate way of saying that when we apply emotion predicates to works of art or to nature, we believe that it is appropriate to do so. This is less to provide an account of expressive perception, than to redescribe the thing we wanted to explain in the first place. Far from providing insight into the nature of our projective experiences, the notion of correspondences functions as a label, a place-holder for the thing we wish to explain: the fact that human beings see nature as being of a piece with their emotions. From the earliest writings where he introduces the term, Wollheim treats the human experience of such correspondences as a brute fact from which all theorizing must begin. Perhaps, at the end of the day, this is all we can say about the phenomenon of expressive perception: that people do perceive expressively, and there's an end on't. However, I believe it is too early into an enquiry into the nature of expressive perception to succumb to such a pessimistic conclusion.

### III

To say that there exists a form of expressive perception underpinning an awareness of the anthropomorphic characters of nature and of art suggests that the expressive perception in question is a form of 'physiognomic' perception: a form of perception detecting a 'human' face in inanimate things. Although there is no doubting the fact that human beings perceive physiognomically, the notion of physiognomic perception is difficult to fix precisely. From the point of view of the psychologist, physiognomic perception represents an atavistic tendency, a throw-back to a more primitive form of

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<sup>69</sup> *Painting as an Art*, p.83.

perceptual response. The idea is that, just as everything in the world of the infant revolves around the smiles and frowns of the mother, so too in the world of the 'primitive', everything is interrogated to reveal a friendly or a hostile face. Under this primitive form of perception, every object encountered is classified according to the facial type it presents: whether it is friendly or hostile, promotes the well-being of the organism or not. As the mind matures, this initial primitive response is overlaid by the practical or scientific attitude which brings with it a more sophisticated set of perceptual categories. It follows that those who would join the artist in seeing the physiognomic characters of things must learn to throw off the practical or scientific attitude.<sup>70</sup> Gombrich assigns a certain limited value to a form of 'physiognomic intuition' we bring to bear in assessing the dispositions of other persons. The gloomy look of a person's face allows us to form a first estimate of his emotional state or character, an opinion which may be confirmed or refuted as we see his smile, hear his voice, or generally come to know more about him. According to Gombrich, this physiognomic response is valuable for providing a perceptual hypothesis which we can subsequently modify and adjust to the evidence provided by life or by history.<sup>71</sup> It is, of course, this physiognomic intuition which leads stage directors to classify or 'type-cast' actors according to facial type, and operatic voices according to vocal type. Whatever the age of the singer, the baritone or bass is more likely to play a king or a father-figure than he is the young lover, and this is simply because physiognomically speaking, he has a 'mature' sounding voice. Gombrich's 'physiognomic intuition' points us in the direction of one feature of physiognomic characters: the fact that the physiognomy or facial-type a person presents and the emotion his face expresses may diverge. Because the physiognomic character of a face may depend in large part upon one's biological inheritance, a man naturally inclined to sagging of the facial muscles may have a sad-looking face. Such an individual would continue to

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<sup>70</sup> E.H.Gombrich, "On Physiognomic Perception", in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, 4th ed. (London: Phaidon, 1985), pp.45-55; p.47-48; K.Koffa, *Principles of Gestalt Psychology* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1936), pp.359-360; Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p.430.

<sup>71</sup> "On Physiognomic Perception", p.50.

possess a sad physiognomy, even on those occasions where he was smiling in a way that others interpreted to be an expression of happiness.

At this point, it will prove useful to distinguish two ways in which the concept of physiognomic perception might be employed. Physiognomic perception in the first and narrower use of the concept ‘anthropomorphizes’ the object perceived. The human being, the St Bernard dog, and the weeping willow are ‘sad’ because they are in some way reminiscent of the emotional appearance of a human being. To assign the St Bernard and the weeping willow a physiognomic sadness is to assign these a human, rather than an arboreal or a doggie sadness. Speaking in this narrow sense, an object physiognomically perceived is thought to present a ‘face’ or a form of behaviour to the perceiver, and the anthropomorphic adjectives applied to the object describe the nature of this facial type or form of behaviour. In the second and wider use of the concept, physiognomic perception serves to assign a certain ‘character’ to the object perceived, a character which may or may not be described using emotion terms. Whereas too close attention to the human cases might tempt the belief that all physiognomic perception involves assigning an expressive or emotional character to the object perceived, this conclusion should be avoided. Although generally speaking, a description of the ‘character’ belonging to a human face will employ emotion terms, it might not have done so; and in a similar way, the physiognomic ‘character’ of an insentient thing may or may not be described using emotion terms. In general, whilst only objects enjoying a certain structural complexity will possess the sort of physiognomic character inviting emotion ascriptions, relatively simple objects of perception such as lines and geometrical figures may possess a physiognomic character describable in non-emotional terms. A curved line becomes ‘limp’ or ‘graceful’ when physiognomically perceived,<sup>7</sup> an angular geometrical figure looks ‘abrupt’, the same tone played on different musical instruments announces a ‘warm’ or ‘cool’ timbre. To describe the physiognomic characters assigned to simple lines, shapes and sounds, is to describe what Aldrich calls the ‘ground-level’ aesthetic qualities ‘expressed’ by the ‘medium of the materials’, the ‘aesthetic surface’ of the

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<sup>72</sup> Helge Lundholm, “The Affective Tone of Lines: Experimental Researches”, *Psychological Review*, 28 (1921). 43-60, offers a psychological study of the link between physiognomic character and line.

aesthetic object.<sup>73</sup> Even words may possess a physiognomic character for the language-user, a fact which becomes apparent in those cases where repeating a word in a monotone serves to reduce the phoneme to a meaningless noise. The 'meaning' lost in such cases is not the semantic function of the word, the external relationship between the word and its object of reference; but instead whatever physiognomic character the language-user customarily assigns to the word as a result of the habit of associating the word with its referent.<sup>74</sup>

Sections IV and V are given over to examining two different theories looking at the wider notion of physiognomic perception. For the time being, I would like to look at the way in which a well-known theory of musical expression exploits the first notion of physiognomic perception described here.<sup>75</sup> Stephen Davies' theory of musical expression is very much in the mould of the New Theory. Davies points out that sometimes, we apply emotion predicates to persons in a way which happens to describe, not an episode of felt emotion on the part of the person concerned, but simply the appearance of that person. In such cases, to say that John is sad is to say that John is sad-looking, in a no-reference-to-feelings use of 'sad'. In this no-reference-to-feelings use, emotion words refer solely to what Davies calls 'emotion characteristics in appearances' (hereafter e.c.i.a's). According to Davies, music is expressive by presenting e.c.i.a's. These e.c.i.a's are emergent properties belonging to the music itself. In hearing the emotions expressed in music we are hearing emotion-characteristics in sounds in much the same way that we see emotion-characteristics in human appearances. Thus for Davies, the expressiveness of music depends mainly on a perceived resemblance between the dynamic character of music on the one hand, and human movement, gait, bearing, or carriage on the other.<sup>76</sup> Davies' theory hints at the existence of two separate sets of e.c.i.a's - emotion characteristics as these appear in human behavioural appearances, and

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<sup>73</sup> "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", p.212.

<sup>74</sup> Heinz Werner and Bernard Kaplan, *Symbol Formation: An Organismic-Developmental Approach to Language and the Expression of Thought* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1967), esp. p.31.

<sup>75</sup> S. Davies, "The Expression of Emotion in Music". The view is reprised in a slightly expanded form in Stephen Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp.221-240.

<sup>76</sup> "The Expression of Emotion in Music", pp.69, 77; *Musical Meaning and Expression*, pp.229, 239.

emotion characteristics as these appear in musical sounds - and thus promises to provide some insight into the physiognomic characters we perceive in persons and in art. Rather than offering a general assessment of Davies' theory of musical expression, here I shall look at the extent to which Davies' discussion of e.c.i.a.'s determines the nature of the physiognomic characters that can be ascribed to works of music.

Davies points to several pieces of evidence suggesting that talk of emotion characteristics in *human* appearances is not talk of feelings or experiences. Whereas episodes of felt emotion may be experienced internally without any external manifestations, e.c.i.a.'s may be worn by a person 'on the outside' without being 'experienced on the inside'. Whereas a person is less likely to be mistaken about the emotions she feels than is an onlooker, a person who wears a sad look enjoys no advantage over anyone else when it comes to identifying the emotion characteristics displayed in her appearance. A person might deceive us as to her true feelings by adopting a sad look, but in so doing, she could not deceive us concerning the sad appearance given in her look. Davies further points out that, whereas a person who changes or suppresses whatever made her appear to be sad-looking thereby ceases to have a sad appearance; a person who changes or suppresses the expressions of her occurrent emotion does not thereby cease to feel that emotion. According to Davies, emotion characteristics are attributed to the appearances people present rather than the persons themselves. That is to say, an e.c.i.a is something 'worn' by a face or piece of behaviour, as opposed to something expressed by the face or behaviour. E.c.i.a.'s and the criteria for e.c.i.a.'s are given solely in appearances.<sup>77</sup>

When Davies speaks of e.c.i.a.'s in the sphere of human emotional behaviour, what he has in mind are the appearances of expressive human emotional behaviour detached from episodes of felt emotion. It is with a view to distinguishing e.c.i.a.'s from episodes of behaviour expressing felt emotion that Davies makes the following set of claims:

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<sup>77</sup> *Musical Meaning and Expression*, p.223; "The Expression of Emotion in Music", pp.68-70.



Since e.c.i.a.'s do not involve the occurrence of feelings and thoughts accompanying an episode of felt emotion, those forms of behaviour which are expressive of an emotion only to the extent that they reveal the emotional object of the emotion, cannot give rise to a corresponding e.c.i.a.

E.c.i.a.'s are revealed in those actions which are directly expressive of the feeling component, rather than the thought component, of an emotion.

Of behaviours naturally and characteristically expressing emotion, those most likely to feature in a corresponding e.c.i.a. are ones a face, voice, gait or deportment might fall into without conscious pretense or genuine feeling.<sup>78</sup>

In light of these and related considerations, Davies concludes that e.c.i.a.'s correspond with those emotions which can be identified from a person's behaviour in the absence of any knowledge of her intentional states or of the object those states are directed towards. This means that e.c.i.a.'s correspond with the 'lower emotions', such emotions as sadness or joy, rather than the so-called 'higher emotions' or 'Platonic attitudes', emotions such as embarrassment, hope, acceptance, despair, puzzlement, annoyance, amusement, nervousness. In particular, e.c.i.a.'s correspond to happy and sad emotions and moods.<sup>79</sup> To see why Davies chooses to restrict in this way the range of emotions giving rise to e.c.i.a.'s, consider the following example. Gary and Jane have both applied for a job with the same firm. Today, Gary and Jane compare notes on the situation and discover that whilst Gary has had no news concerning his application, Jane received notification last week that she is on the shortlist for a job interview. Jane is now looking forward to her interview, and hopeful of being offered a job. Gary is resigned to the fact that he has no future with that firm. At this point, Tom walks by. Jane and Gary are making no effort to hide how they feel; their behaviour is expressive, respectively, of hope and resignation. However, their behaviour would only be seen as expressive of hope and resignation to someone who was aware of their current intentional states and the news they had just received. To someone like Tom, going on nothing but the appearances

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<sup>78</sup> *Musical Meaning and Expression*, p.225; "The Expression of Emotion in Music", pp.71-72.

<sup>79</sup> *Musical Meaning and Expression*, p.226; "The Expression of Emotion in Music", p.71. The term 'Platonic attitudes' derives from J.M.E.Moravcsik, "Understanding the Emotions", *Dialectica*, 36 (1982), 207-224.

given in their behaviour as he walks by, their behaviour could not be construed as expressing anything more determinate than happiness and sadness, respectively.

It is a consequence of Davies' enquiry into the logic of e.c.i.a.'s in the human case that the emotion words which designate the e.c.i.a.'s or physiognomic characters discoverable in musical works and parts of nature will be confined to those words designating emotional states that can be identified from a person's behaviour without any knowledge of her intentional states or the objects those intentional states happen to be directed towards. That is to say, the physiognomic characters we perceive in human beings, musical works and non-human objects such as trees, dogs and cars, are designated by words describing the lower rather than the higher emotions, words describing sad and happy emotions and moods.<sup>80</sup> Davies does not rule out altogether the possibility that some of the higher emotions might be expressed in an indirect way in musical works. However, what we physiognomically recognize in those cases where, say, hope is expressed in a work, is not the aural appearance of hope, but rather the aural appearance of a natural pattern or progression of feelings of which hope forms a predicatable element. In such cases, provided the outline of the pattern of feelings was sufficiently distinctive and complex, we might feel entitled to 'fill in' the missing element in the series, and to this extent, hear the music as being expressive of hope. Davies notes that since not all of the higher emotions would form an element in such a natural progression of feelings, only some of the higher emotions could be expressed in this indirect fashion.<sup>81</sup>

I must confess to feeling some qualms concerning the way in which Davies identifies the physiognomic characters discoverable in nature and in music. My qualms relate to the fact that, whilst Davies' discussion of e.c.i.a.'s issues in an account of the physiognomic characters which may emerge in musical works, his account of e.c.i.a.'s was not primarily devised with that end in view. To understand the purpose underlying the discussion of e.c.i.a.'s, it is important to go back to the beginning of Davies' account of expression in music. If Davies sees the problem of expression in music in the terms set

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<sup>80</sup> *Musical Meaning and Expression*, pp.226-227.

<sup>81</sup> "The Expression of Emotion in Music", p.78; *Musical Meaning and Expression*, pp.262-263.

out by the New Theory, a problem of explaining away a certain use of emotion vocabulary, he believes an answer to that problem must address the concerns raised by Scruton's ambiguity argument. Davies points out that, in the primary use of 'sad', things which are sad *feel* sad. Since musical works are not thought to feel the emotions attributed to them, it follows that the use of 'sad' in 'the music is sad' must constitute a secondary use of the term, but not a uniquely aesthetic secondary use. For if it were a uniquely aesthetic secondary use, then talk of the sadness of music would in no way reflect upon the world of felt emotions; and we would be powerless to explain, either why music moves and interests us as it does, but also the importance we attach to the expressiveness of music. So emotion words ascribed to music must retain some link with their primary use. Davies believes that we will maintain the link between emotions in music and emotions in life, and the link between the primary use of 'sad' to indicate felt emotion and the use of 'sad' to describe the expressiveness of musical features, in the event that we can discover an ordinary secondary use of 'sad' that is both reliably related to the primary use, and also applies to the musical case. For this reason, Davies sees the problem of expression in music as the challenge of finding an established secondary use of emotion words that will also apply in the musical case, a use in which emotions are unfelt, necessarily publicly displayed, and lack emotional-objects.<sup>82</sup> Davies discovers that secondary use in the no-reference-to-feelings use of emotion words to refer to emotion characteristics in appearances. It follows that explaining the physiognomic characters attaching to musical works is perhaps not the only or the primary reason why Davies introduces the notion of e.c.i.a.'s; that his interest in e.c.i.a.'s is in part an interest in explicating the logic of a special secondary use of emotion words.

Once we realize this fact, we see that throughout the discussion of e.c.i.a.'s, Davies is holding two very different notions before his mind: the notion that (a) talk of e.c.i.a.'s is talk of a no-reference-to-feelings use of emotion words; and the notion that (b) e.c.i.a.'s are the appearances of emotional behaviour which may become detached from episodes of felt emotion. We can dub this second notion the reference-to-appearances use of

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<sup>82</sup> "The Expression of Emotion in Music", p.67-68.

emotion words. The fact that Davies thinks of e.c.i.a.'s in these two different ways explains the very different criteria Davies produces in order to exclude the higher emotions from the class of e.c.i.a.'s. It explains, for instance, why Davies makes the rather curious claim that "to say that a person looks envious is always to refer, I think, to how they feel, or are prone to feel, or could be feeling, and is not to refer to an emotion characteristic paying no regard to feelings,"<sup>83</sup> as part of his rationale for excluding the higher emotions from the class of e.c.i.a.'s. This claim reflects Davies' interest in the logic of the no-reference-to-feelings use of emotion words. It is a very puzzling claim if you assume that e.c.i.a.'s constitute the appearances of emotional behaviour which may be detached from episodes of felt emotion. For in the reference-to-appearances use of emotion words, to say someone is sad-looking is to say that he presents the appearance of someone who feels sadness. Why can we not then say, in the same reference-to-appearances use, that someone looks envious, thereby meaning that he presents the appearance of someone who feels envious? Although as Davies rightly points out, in cases where we were ignorant of Jane's beliefs, there would be no logical justification in inferring from Jane's appearance to the fact she is feeling hopeful, who is to say that we always speak in this logically careful fashion? Often, we might surmise that Jane is feeling hopeful based upon nothing but the appearance of hope in her behaviour; and it might be thought that in a similar way, we could read the appearance of hope in inanimate things. Davies strays onto much firmer ground when he excludes the higher emotions such as hope or envy from the class of e.c.i.a.'s on the grounds that these lack characteristic and easily recognizable emotional behaviours. That is to say, Davies might agree with the observation that sometimes we may carelessly infer that Jane is hopeful based on nothing but appearances. Nonetheless, he would point out that to the extent that there is the appearance of hope which may be read from someone's behaviour, this appearance would be visually indistinguishable from the appearance of happiness, and

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<sup>83</sup> *Musical Meaning and Expression*, p.226.

this is why we do not detect the physiognomic character of hope in music in addition to the physiognomic character of happiness.<sup>84</sup>

In raising these qualms concerning Davies' exposition, I am not suggesting that Davies might be wrong when he claims that the higher emotions do not feature amongst the physiognomic characters discoverable in music and nature. I leave it an open question whether the physiognomic characters that we attribute to music and nature in the narrow sense of the term are confined to the lower emotions. What I am suggesting here is that the rather indirect way in which Davies goes about characterizing the human emotions which may issue in characteristically behavioural responses, does little to inspire confidence that Davies has managed to capture the class of physiognomic characteristics attributable to musical works. I shall have something more to say concerning Davies' narrow use of the concept of physiognomic perception when I come to discuss the Gestalt theory of expression in Section V below.

#### IV

We say that mountains 'rise', hills 'roll', the facade of a baroque building 'heaves', the spire of a gothic cathedral 'soars', lines 'move', 'spread out', 'flow', 'bend' and 'twist', when there is no material fact of the matter corresponding with these claims. Mountains do not move,<sup>85</sup> hills, buildings, spires and lines stay stubbornly put. The doctrine of empathy sometimes has been enlisted to account for these and similar descriptions. The term *Einführung*, or empathy, which means "feel oneself into" derives

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<sup>84</sup> It is worth noting at this point that not all philosophers share Davies' pessimism that there exist characteristic behavioural expressions of the higher emotions which may be reflected in and therefore expressed by the structure of musical works. Thus Jerrold Levinson suggests that "Davies is unduly pessimistic as to the existence of subtle behavioural/figural/postural manifestations that might characterize one who is hopeful, particularly at peak moments, and thus contribute to a characteristically hopeful appearance, which music might, in turn, reflect, independent of any light cast by the passage's contextual situation." See "Hope in the Hebrides", in *Music, Art and Metaphysics: Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp.336-375; p.357.

<sup>85</sup> Ignoring such factors as plate tectonics, and planetary motion, of course!



from the writings of Theodore Lipps.<sup>86</sup> According to the doctrine of empathy, when we say that mountains rise, spires soar and lines spread, we say that “they do...what we should feel ourselves doing if we were inside them.”<sup>87</sup> The intuition underlying the doctrine of Empathy is that the subject somehow ‘feels himself’ into the aesthetic object in the course of aesthetic contemplation, so that sensations taking place in the perceiver are attributed to the object as qualities perceived. According to the empathy theorists, perceivers are inclined to merge the activities of the perceiving subject with the qualities of the perceived object,<sup>88</sup> a practice that could be used to account for the dynamic properties attributed to inanimate things. Although highly popular at the turn of the century in the writings of psychologists and particularly, philosophers and psychologists of aesthetics, the theory is now little more than an historical curiosity attracting the occasional philosophical mention in the context of musical aesthetics.<sup>89</sup> Here I choose to revive that historical curiosity for the light it might shed upon the notion of physiognomic perception in the wide sense. As the texts of the original empathy theorists are no longer in common circulation, I shall take the liberty of quoting generously from source, in an attempt to convey something of the flavour of the theory.

At this point, it will be useful to distinguish the notion of empathy as it occurs within general psychology from the notion as employed in aesthetic theory. As a doctrine of general psychology, the notion of empathy was enlisted to explain a whole host of perceptual qualities which could not be accounted for in the sensory dimensions of the classical psychology which dominated the discipline at the turn of the century. A psychology which confined the attributes of vision to hue, tint, saturation, protensity, intensity, extensity, lacked the resources to explain how lines could be ‘graceful’ or

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<sup>86</sup>English extracts from Lipps’ writings may be found in Vernon Lee and Catherine Anstruther-Thompson, *Beauty and Ugliness and Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics* (London: John Lane, 1912), pp.36-43. See also Theodore Lipps, “Empathy, Inner Imitation, and Sense-Feelings”, in Melvin Rader (ed.), *A Modern Book of Aesthetics*, 4th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), pp.374-382.

<sup>87</sup> Vernon Lee, “Anthropomorphic Aesthetics”, in *Beauty and Ugliness*, pp.1-35; p.19. Vernon Lee is the pen name of Violet Paget.

<sup>88</sup> Lipps, “Empathy, Inner Imitation, and Sense-Feeling”, p.381; Vernon Lee, “The Beautiful”, in Melvin Rader (ed.), *A Modern Book of Aesthetics*, pp.370-374; p.372.

<sup>89</sup> The view is briefly mentioned in Olga Meidner McDonald, “Motion and E-Motion in Music”, *BJA*, 25 (1985), 349-359, esp. pp.350-351. See also Roger Scruton, “Understanding Music”, in *The Aesthetic Understanding* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1983), pp.77-100, esp.pp.95-97.

‘awkward’, and was helpless to explain in its own terms how buildings could be ‘heavy’ or skies ‘depressing’.<sup>90</sup> It was therefore suggested that when we attribute dynamic properties to inert matter, we unconsciously treat some of the movements that the perceiver makes in the course of perception as qualities belonging to the object perceived. Thus, a line is ‘graceful’ because the movements of the eyes in surveying it are smooth and easy-flowing. Speaking at this elementary level, the notion of empathy was used to explain the spatial and formal qualities which we attribute to shapes and lines. The experience of extension in a line “must be *our* extension, for the inert cannot *extend* or indeed *tend* in any literal sense, and the attribution of extension is therefore an attribution of an item of our own active experience.” In directing our attention successively to the different parts belonging to a form made up of lines and planes, “we go through an incident or a drama, and this incident is projected by us into the form on which our energies are concentrated.”<sup>91</sup>

In the course of empathy, the perceiver commits the projective error of treating processes taking place in himself as qualities of the object perceived. The empathy theorists found a precedent for this projective error in the projective error whereby we come to describe secondary qualities as genuine properties belonging to things. Just as we say “The object is red” rather than “The object looks red”; so too, the formula of perception is not “The line scans smoothly and easily” but “The line is graceful”. Because we remain unconscious of the physiological processes taking place in ourselves in the course of perception, and because the actions of rising up, lifting, pressing down, expanding, bulging out, attributed to two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms are so complex, it does not occur to us that the movements in question are in the mind any more than colours or musical tones are in our own organs of perception:

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<sup>90</sup> Carroll C. Pratt, “The Design of Music”, *JAAC*, 12 (1954), 289-300; p.292-293.

<sup>91</sup> Vernon Lee, “Anthropomorphic Aesthetics”, p.22; “Aesthetic Empathy and its Organic Accompaniments”, in *Beauty and Ugliness*, pp.45-76, p.53.

Instead of being conscious of changes of condition in our eye and ear, we are incapable of knowing them otherwise than as objective qualities, colour or pitch, of the non-ego; and to a lesser degree, our attention has become engaged not with the change in ourselves productive of the sense of height, or roundness, or symmetry, but with the objective external causes of these changes. The formula of perception is not 'I feel x' but 'this object is x.'<sup>92</sup>

The simple form of the empathy theory described here was apparently undermined at an early stage by photographic evidence demonstrating that the eyes move more or less in the same way regardless of the content of the visual field.<sup>93</sup> However, not all of those treating empathy as a physiological process were equally impressed with or perturbed by the counter-evidence from eye movement. Herbert Sidney Langfeld attributed the phenomenon of empathy occurring in both aesthetic and nonaesthetic perception to the fact that all our perceptions depend upon the motor attitudes the perceiver unconsciously assumes towards the object. According to Langfeld, during the course of the most ordinary acts of perception physiological processes, in the form of kinaesthetic processes and muscular adjustments taking place in the subject, are projected back into the object perceived.<sup>94</sup> Langfeld rejected the counter-evidence from eye movement, reasoning that, in a majority of cases of empathy, no overt action could be detected on the part of the perceiver because the 'movements' the perceiver projects into the object amount to nothing more than a shifting of tensions in the muscles. Thus, argued Langfeld,

It is not necessary to empathize with the eyes, any more than it is necessary to imagine ourselves walking in a spiral in order to appreciate the curves. A tendency to move any part of the body that is capable of moving in the way suggested is sufficient.

Thus, our visual awareness of the 'weight' or heaviness of an object may be due to strain in all muscles of the body which would be used in lifting the object, or in only one small muscle group, such as that which moves the finger.<sup>95</sup> Langfeld extended his physiological account of empathic projection to cases of aesthetic perception. According

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<sup>92</sup> Vernon Lee, "The Central Problem of Aesthetics", in *Beauty and Ugliness*, pp.77-151, p.102; "Beauty and Ugliness", in *Beauty and Ugliness*, pp.156-239, p.159. See also Herbert Sidney Langfeld, *The Aesthetic Attitude* (Harcourt Brace: 1920. Reissued 1967 by Kennekat Press), p.118.

<sup>93</sup> Pratt, "The Design of Music", p.293.

<sup>94</sup> Langfeld, pp.111, 109-110.

<sup>95</sup> Langfeld, pp.124-125.

to Langfeld, aesthetic perception differs from ordinary acts of perception in virtue of the special empathic adjustments that the subject makes toward the object perceived:

Two attitudes may be assumed toward the outstretched hand of a statue: either one of grasping the hand, or of feeling the “outstretching” of the hand. It is through this latter attitude, which gives us the feeling of tension and the weight of the arm, the angle at which it is raised, and the bend at the elbow and wrist, that we can get the true aesthetic effect.<sup>96</sup>

That is to say, in cases of aesthetic perception, the perceiving subject unconsciously ‘mimics’ in his own body the posture of the object perceived, and in so doing, projects the physiological processes taking place inside his body as he perceives back into the object as qualities of the object perceived.

In her early writings of the topic, Vernon Lee agrees with Langfeld in treating empathy as a physiological process in the perceiver, and to this end, devotes a large portion of her early work “Beauty and Ugliness” to answering the question, *what portions of our organism participate in the process of perceiving form?* Like many psychologists of the period in question, Lee was operating at this time under the influence of the Lange-James hypothesis regarding emotion and for this reason, she specifically wonders whether adjustments of balance and alterations in breathing take place in the course of aesthetic perception. Of course, notes Lee,

it will always be difficult to obtain information about phenomena which, if they exist, are normally subconscious and, by the very nature of aesthetic perception, are translated into qualities attributed to the visible objects, qualities thought of as existing *outside* ourselves, and for which we have as little the habit of looking inside our bodies as we have the habit of looking for the colour red in the eye, the middle *la* of the violin in our ear, or the smell of a flower in our nose.<sup>97</sup>

This sobering reflection does not prevent Lee from calling upon her artist-friend, Catherine Anstruther-Thompson, to test out the Lange-James hypothesis by introspecting upon her own aesthetic experiences. Anstruther-Thompson obligingly delivers, reflecting that

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<sup>96</sup> Langfeld, pp. 211, 113.

<sup>97</sup> “Beauty and Ugliness”, p.161; “The Central Problem of Aesthetics”, pp.128, 137.

We are always balancing ourselves more or less...But as soon as we see something else adjusting equilibrium, our own balance seems to swing on a wider scale, and this wider balancing brings a sense of our limits being enlarged in every direction, and of our life being spread over a far wider area.

According to Anstruther-Thompson, the horizontals in a great French cathedral

curve up very slightly, as if overcoming the force of gravitation, so that one feels the horizontal movement as actually taking place. We feel out of step with our surroundings unless we put our weight almost entirely upon one foot, and when we have done so, we can fully perceive and, so to speak, feel incorporated with our surroundings.

Perception of movement in a work of art calls for some fancy footwork on the part of the perceiver:

When we feel movement in a work of art, it is not as the opposite of standing still. We feel movement in art as the contrast between opposing movements, which we are forced to initiate in the process of seeing. For instance, we perceive a movement forward by balancing forward, and then moving back again; the rapid movement forward contrasted with the rather passive swing backwards gives us the sense of having gone forwards.

To give a particular example, “the movement of an arch consists of the balance of its two half-arches, and this balance we follow by shifting our own weight from one foot to another.”<sup>98</sup> Anstruther-Thompson also assigns a crucial role to the respiratory apparatus in the course of aesthetic experience:

We realize bulk by breathing backwards and forwards in longer or shorter breaths; breathing a short breath, for instance, up to where the object stands, and a much longer succeeding breath immediately beyond the object as the eye moves past it into the distance.

In looking at mountains, we do something which ‘feels like’ breathing in on the right side and out on the left, although in a rare moment of diffidence, Vernon Lee leaves it up to the physiologists to decide whether these adjustments really take place in the lungs or only in the throat and nostrils. Anstruther-Thompson even goes so far as to say that we seem to ‘inhale’ colour, and that “the scheme of colour of a picture has the power of, so to speak, *placing* the respiration.”<sup>99</sup> On a facetious note, one cannot help wondering what

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<sup>98</sup> “Beauty and Ugliness”, pp.199, 200-201, 215, 216.

<sup>99</sup> “Beauty and Ugliness”, pp.214, 198 fnote, 204, 206.



other bodily adjustments Anstruther-Thompson would have discovered had she been operating under a different initial set of instructions; or what respiratory difficulties she might have encountered in following an operatic aria!

Vernon Lee's later work on empathy, which shows the influence of Theodore Lipps, identifies empathy as a psychological rather than physiological process. Lee rejects the naive projectivism inherent in her earlier view that empathy involves attributing what goes on in us when we perceive a shape to the shape perceived. Lee now thinks that when I see a mountain rising, my particular present act of raising my eyes to look at the mountain acts as "the nucleus to which gravitates our remembrance of all similar acts of raising, or *rising* which we have ever accomplished or seen accomplished", a nucleus around which gathers the general idea of rising as such; and it is this idea embodying our cumulative experience of acts of rising which we project into the mountain.<sup>100</sup>

For the modern reader, perhaps the most puzzling aspect of the theory of aesthetic empathy is the assumption, built into the theory, that perceivers will adopt a particular motor-set towards the object perceived by somehow mimicing the posture of the object in their own posture. The puzzle dissolves once we realize that we are in the era of the aesthetic attitude theory. That is to say, the prototypical empathy theorist is not *describing* the way people actually perceive so much as *recommending* a mode of perception that is peculiarly aesthetic. To perceive aesthetically is to give oneself over to the object in such a way that one is thereby able to project one's own life forces into the object. Vernon Lee regards aesthetic acts of form perception as 'thorough' acts of form perception. Reflecting upon the nature of these 'thorough' acts of form perception leads her to theorize on the nature of our judgements of beauty. According to Lee, the projection of our experience into the forms of inanimate objects involves the more or less vivid revival of that experience in ourselves. Those forms leading to the revival of pleasurable experiences are deemed to be 'beautiful', whilst those forms leading to the revival of dynamic experiences that are biologically unfavourable to ourselves will be avoided as 'ugly'.<sup>101</sup> In light of some of the excesses contained in Anstruther-Thompson's

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<sup>100</sup> Vernon Lee, "The Beautiful", pp.371, 372.

<sup>101</sup> Vernon Lee, "Anthropomorphic Aesthetics", pp.17, 21.

descriptions, many modern readers will no doubt feel that giving oneself over to the object in the way that the empathy theorists were suggesting is too great a price to pay in order to guarantee a properly aesthetic experience.

As the extracts from Catherine Anstruther-Thompson suggest, those looking for it can have much fun with the Empathy theory. This fun arises in large measure from the fact that many empathy theorists tend to confuse the bodily sensations accompanying acts of aesthetic form perception with the sensations arising in the body as one imaginatively empathizes with the representational content of a work of art. Vernon Lee makes just this complaint with a passage from Bernard Berenson in mind,<sup>102</sup> and the same accusation might be levelled against a number of passages in which Langfeld illustrates his thesis with examples drawn from the fine arts.<sup>103</sup> To understand the concerns Langfeld expresses in these passages, it is important to recall his belief that, necessarily, the subject perceiving in a properly aesthetic way must be attending to the object rather than the sensations taking place in his own body.<sup>104</sup> In Langfeld's thinking, cases of aesthetic perception where the mimicing posture of the perceiver leads to the arousal of violent bodily sensations would tend to threaten the break-down of the aesthetic attitude, by distracting the attention of the perceiver away from the object and onto the processes taking place in his own body. Although Langfeld starts well in chapter six, noting that the strength of the empathic response is not determined by the amount of movement represented in a statue or picture, he is soon observing, in the spirit of Lessing's *Laocoon*, how signs of physical effort in the faces and muscles of depicted human figures might lead to an unpleasant empathic experience on the part of the spectator, with a consequent lessening of the properly aesthetic response. Thus, the Greeks of the classical period are praised for offering the spectator an empathic experience of the

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<sup>102</sup> "The Central Problem of Aesthetics", p.115. The extract Lee has in mind occurs in Bernard Berenson, *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (London: Phaidon, 1967), p.59, where Berenson describes how visual artists create the pictorial illusion of represented motion by appealing to our "tactile imagination": "I see...two men wrestling, but unless my retinal impressions are immediately translated into images of strain and pressure in my muscles, of resistance to my weight, of touch all over my body, it means nothing to me in terms of vivid experience - not more, perhaps, than if I heard someone say 'Two men are wrestling'."

<sup>103</sup>Langfeld, *The Aesthetic Attitude*, chp.6, pp.143-159.

<sup>104</sup>Langfeld, p.118.

stretching of muscles, weight of limbs and body, and poise of the head, without representing the muscles so realistically that the spectator feels an unpleasantly violent mimicking response in his own body. Langfeld suggests that we can empathize without pain in the posture of the Caryatides supporting the roof of the Erechtheum because, whilst there is sufficient evidence in the bodies of the women to suggest weight being supported, the faces are without lines of effort. In these and other extracts, Langfeld is guilty of confusing the spectator's *emotional* empathic identification in the plight of the subject of a representational work of art, with the *motor accompaniments* of aesthetic form perception. In what must be the crowning absurdity in that long list of absurdities which constitutes the sixth chapter of Langfeld's book, Langfeld suggests that the artist must himself experience the empathic response he wishes to convey to the spectator, and that consequently "the physical strength of the artist is a condition of the amount of empathy suggested". Not surprisingly, the statues of women sculptors come in for particular dispraise. "One feels the listless droop of the arm, the lack of weight of the body, and the relatively slight expression in the posture."<sup>105</sup>

In both the realm of general psychology and the realm of psychological aesthetics, the notion of empathy has been called upon to explain a wide range of phenomena, of which the following would be a representative sampling:

- (1) Perception of process as unity, as when we attribute rhythm to a series of musical sounds or poetic syllables.
- (2) Perception of form and space in simple lines and shapes.
- (3) The attribution of such 'aesthetic' qualities as *grace* and *awkwardness* to lines, shapes and objects.
- (4) The visual perception of *weight* or *mass* in objects.
- (5) Perceptions of movement in visual patterns and lines; the phenomenon whereby lines move, spread out, flow, bend and twist.
- (6) Perception of the representation of movement in two-dimensional visual patterns.
- (7) Perception of the emotional states of another sentient being.

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<sup>105</sup> Langfeld, p.143, 145-146, 144.

The sheer range of phenomena which the doctrine of empathy has been invoked to explain constitutes both the strength and the weakness of the empathy theory. For those looking to understand the nature of physiognomic perception, the range of items incorporated under the theory might bear the appearance of a strength. This range is also a weakness, since it points to the fact that there is no such thing as *the* empathy theory, that instead there are as many empathy theories as you care to enumerate. What we find in (1) through (7) is not a well-defined spectrum of cases which a single empathy theory employing a single mechanism of explanation could account for, but instead a set of cases that a patchwork of empathy theories utilizing different empathic mechanisms might be brought to explain. In order to assume that (1) through (7) represent a spectrum of cases permitting a single mechanism of explanation, one must conflate three very separate concepts which empathy theorists like Langfeld do not always manage to disentangle in their minds:

- (a) Empathically perceiving such dynamic qualities as stresses and strains in a pillar as one's eyes run over the pillar. That is to say, attributing qualities to the pillar as a piece of form perception.
- (b) 'Feeling oneself into' the same pillar by mimicing the 'posture' of the pillar in one's body, then projecting the dynamic sensations arising in one's body from this act of mimicry into the pillar itself;
- (c) Imagining oneself into the body of a represented human being, by mimicing their posture and imaginatively responding to the emotions that arise in one's own body as a consequence.

As we examine (1) through (7) on a case-by-case basis, we discover that the cases most plausibly explained by the empathy theory exist at the high and the low end of the spectrum. This is hardly surprising since the cases at the opposing ends of the spectrum are those cases corresponding with, respectively, the theory of empathy viewed as an aesthetic hypothesis, and the theory of empathy functioning as an explanation of perceived dynamic qualities in general psychology. It is a point often observed that adopting the posture of another person arouses certain kinaesthetic sensations in my own body which can go some way towards putting me in the same emotional state as the

person I emulate. Understanding another person through imitation represents the limiting case of the procedure recommended under the theory of aesthetic perception, whereby I can come to have a 'properly' aesthetic experience by 'mimicing' the disposition of parts in the object in my own bodily posture as I perceive. The cases at the lower end of spectrum represent the simplest applications of the concept that perceivers treat their own bodily movements in perceiving as qualities of the perceived object. Lipps' explanation of the perception of rhythm must count as one of the minor successes of the empathy theory. According to Lipps, the rhythm attributed to a piece of music or to a line of poetry is the rhythm belonging to my act of perceiving the parts of the object projected into the object perceived. More formally, the act of perceiving accented and unaccented items grouped in a certain way forces upon the perceiver a certain manner of proceeding as his attention moves between the items, and that manner of proceeding, or 'rhythm', becomes the rhythm of the object.<sup>106</sup> However, as the counter-evidence from eye movements suggests, even some of the explanations occupying the lower end of this spectrum must be taken with a pinch of salt. Consider in this regard one of the illusions arising from the anisotropy of visual space, the fact that the top half of a line bisected horizontally looks 'longer' than the bottom half. Langfeld attempts to explain this illusion in empathic terms by suggesting that there is an increasing strain in the eye muscles as we look towards the top of the picture, an increase in effort that is experienced as an increase in distance travelled by the eye.<sup>107</sup> It goes without saying that the greater effort of eye movement will occur only in those cases where the picture is centred at eye height, or where the lower half of the picture is located at eye height. Place the divided line at such a distance from the eye that the whole can be taken in at a glance, and Langfeld's explanation for the illusion disappears, but not the illusion itself.

The answer to the question, *what can the Empathy theory teach us regarding the nature of physiognomic perception?* is, not a lot. Despite some localized successes in accounting for specific aesthetic attributions, the theory is too patchy and inconsistently

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<sup>106</sup> Theodore Lipps, quoted in *Beauty and Ugliness*, pp.38-39. Lipps' account of rhythm receives a brief discussion in c.K.Ogden and I.A.Richards, *The Foundations of Aesthetics* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1922), p.66.

<sup>107</sup> Langfeld, p.224.



applied to provide anything like a unified account of the nature of perceived dynamic character in inanimate things. Perhaps the greatest success of the theory lies in drawing attention to the physical nature of the act of perception itself, the fact that the act of perception amounts to something more than the passive reception of sensation in a single organ of sense. For the empathy theory brings us to see that, even in those cases where a person does not overtly move his own body in the act of perceiving, there may be extensive adjustments taking place in the perceiver towards the object on a physiological or kinaesthetic level, adjustments which might be reflected occasionally in the character attributed to the object perceived. The notion that perception constitutes a less-than-passive affair involving the whole body of the perceiver is a theme taken up in the Gestalt theory of expressive perception, to which I now turn.

## V

The final theory of expression in art that I shall examine here is the Gestalt theory of expression as developed by Rudolf Arnheim.<sup>108</sup> Arnheim treats expression as a more pervasive phenomenon than the external manifestations of the human personality as these appear in human behaviour in the first instance, and in natural objects and works of art in the second. Expressive qualities include the 'aggressive' stroke of lightning, the 'soothing' rhythm of rain, the 'weariness' of slowly floating tar, the 'passive limpness' of a telephone receiver.<sup>109</sup> Thus, like the Empathy theory, Arnheim's Gestalt theory of expression functions as a theory of physiognomic perception in the broad sense, accounting for the dynamic perceptual character attributed to most of the things we perceive. Arnheim follows Kurt Koffa in suggesting that the physiognomic character or

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<sup>108</sup> See in particular Rudolf Arnheim, "The Gestalt Theory of Expression", in *Towards a Psychology of Art: Collected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), pp.51-73; "Perceptual Dynamics in Musical Expression", in *New Essays on the Psychology of Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp.214-227; *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, 2nd. ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), pp.396ff.

<sup>109</sup> "The Gestalt Theory of Expression", pp.51, 52, 53, 65.

expressive quality of an object is something given directly to perception, as much a quality of the percept as its colour or shape:

The terrifying character of the thunder is its outstanding characteristic, its description as a noise of a certain intensity and quality, quite secondary; similarly, a snake is uncanny before it is brown or spotted, a human face happy before it is of a certain hue and chroma. All these descriptions imply something like a force, something that goes beyond the mere static thing and affects ourselves. This force, which may have the character of a thing, is also a property of things, or, otherwise expressed, thing and force, substance and causality, are, as parts of our behavioural environment, often not two separate objects but closely interrelated aspects of one and the same object. Discursive thought has separated what to naive experience is in many cases a unity.<sup>110</sup>

Arnheim also follows Koffa in maintaining that the dynamic physiognomic qualities found in percepts point to the existence of 'forces'. According to Arnheim, objects possess dynamic physiognomic qualities in perception because we perceive objects as animated by 'forces', or what he also sometimes calls 'directed tensions'. A tree or a tower is seen as reaching upward, a wedge-shaped object like an axe advances in the direction of its cutting edge. To the sensitive eye, a dark spot on a light ground presents the spectacle of an object expanding from its centre, pushing outward, and being checked by the counterforces of the environment. Not only are such physiognomic qualities inseparable from shape, but they often create a more immediate impact than shape itself.<sup>111</sup>

According to Arnheim, although neither a tree in a painting nor a human body in a sculpture is driven by physical forces, their visual images are experienced as configurations of forces.<sup>112</sup> Arnheim accounts for the visual 'forces' or dynamic qualities attributed to visual images by suggesting that these represent the psychological counterpart of the physiological forces taking place in the perceiver in the organization and interpretation of visual data. Like the Empathy theorists, Arnheim believes that perception amounts to something more than the passive reception of stimuli in a single

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<sup>110</sup> Kurt Koffa, *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*, p. 72.

<sup>111</sup> "The Gestalt Theory of Expression", p.53; *Art and Visual Perception*, p.400; "Perceptual Dynamics in Musical Expression", pp.214-215.

<sup>112</sup> *Art and Visual Perception*, pp.399-400; "The Completeness of Physical and Artistic Form", *BJA*, 34 (1994), 109-113, p.112.

organ of sense; and for this reason he invites us, in somewhat dramatic language, to think of stimulation, not as “stable patterns peacefully printed upon a passive medium” but rather as “a hole being torn into a resistant tissue”. Perception involves nothing short of “an invasion of the organism by external forces, which upset the balance of the nervous system.” A battle ensues in which the invading forces try to maintain themselves against the tendency of the physiological field forces to eliminate the intruder or at least to reduce it to the simplest possible pattern. If the outcome of this struggle is reflected in the formal properties attributed to the object perceived, the actual struggle, the play of physiological forces, finds its correlate in the directed tension or dynamic qualities attributed to the percept.<sup>113</sup> To express Arnheim’s thesis in less florid language, it is Arnheim’s suggestion that the projection of the perceptual stimulus on the brain, and particularly on the visual cortex, creates a configuration of electrochemical forces in the cerebral field. The stresses and strains taking place in the cerebral cortex whilst retinal stimulations are subjected to organizational processes in the brain, represent the physiological correlate of what is experienced as the expressive quality of the object; whilst the dynamic physiognomic qualities attributed to the object perceived are the psychological correlate of those dynamic physiological processes in the subject which result in the organization of perceptual stimuli.<sup>114</sup>

It is a short step in Arnheim’s thinking from the notion that a percept possesses dynamics or directed tensions to the notion that the percept enjoys a certain expressive character. Unlike the other components of the perceptual stimulus, such as the hue of a colour or the size of a shape, the directed tensions are phenomenal forces, illustrating and recalling the behaviour of forces elsewhere and in general. Thus, “by endowing the object or event with a perceivable form of behaviour, these tensions give it ‘character’ and recall the similar character of other objects or events. This is what is meant by saying that these dynamic aspects of the percept ‘express’ its character.”<sup>115</sup> Arnheim defines expression as “the capacity of a particular perceptual pattern to exemplify through its

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<sup>113</sup> *Art and Visual Perception*, pp.399-400.

<sup>114</sup> “The Gestalt Theory of Expression”, pp.61-62.

<sup>115</sup> “The Gestalt Theory of Expression”, p.53.

dynamics the structure of a type of behaviour that could manifest itself anywhere in human experience.”<sup>116</sup>

To help comprehend the nature of the theory on offer, it will be useful to compare and contrast Arnheim’s theory of expression with Stephen Davies’ account of musical expressiveness. Davies’ approach to musical expression assumes the priority of human expression over all other forms of expressiveness. That is to say, the ability to recognize the physiognomic or expressive characters belonging to inanimate objects and works of music assumes a prior thorough familiarity with the nature of human emotions, and with the ways in which people manifest their emotions in behaviour. Physiognomic characters will be assigned to the relatively small number of things that can bear a striking resemblance to human emotional behaviours, the relatively few things that can, in the words of Davies, “wear an expression or have a gait, carriage or bearing in the way in which a person’s behaviour may exhibit these things.”<sup>117</sup> Only given a familiarity with emotional human beings can we begin to identify those parts of nature and of works of art bearing a sufficient resemblance to human emotional behaviours to warrant extending emotion predicates to them.

In contrast with the view expressed by Davies, Arnheim’s account of expression explicitly denies the priority of human expression in determining the expressiveness of other objects. Arnheim denies that the expressive characters belonging to natural objects and works of art are confined to the resemblances these objects bear to human emotional behaviours, what Davies calls emotion characteristics in appearances (e.c.i.a’s). According to Arnheim, a work of music counts as ‘expressive’ because the aural percept corresponding with that work embodies a dynamic structure that exemplifies and therefore ‘expresses’ patterns of behaviour or dynamic processes that are familiar to us both from our experience of human beings, but also from our experience of the ‘behaviour’ of natural objects and processes. Arnheim believes that only some of those dynamic processes which the aural percept exemplifies in its structure correspond with those dynamic processes identifiable as the characteristic behaviours of human beings in

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<sup>116</sup> “Perceptual Dynamics in Musical Expression”, p.222.

<sup>117</sup> “The Expression of Emotion in Music”, p.76.

the grip of emotions. It follows that a work of music may be expressive of a whole range of dynamic concepts besides those corresponding with the human emotions.<sup>118</sup> Since human emotional behaviour is one among many kinds of behaviour which the dynamics of a perceptual pattern might express, Arnheim believes it would be a mistake to suppose that inanimate things are expressive only and to the extent that these display dynamic perceptual patterns exemplifying human emotional behaviour. So far, there would appear to be little point of difference between Davies and Arnheim when it comes to the nature of musical expression. For whilst Davies' own theory of expression in music is specifically designed to explain the attribution of emotions to music, this is not to say that Davies is committed to denying that music may express other things besides the emotions. However, Arnheim's denial of the priority of human expression in fixing the expressive qualities of works of art goes much further than pointing out that emotions are not the only things that works of art express. For Arnheim wishes to argue that, where a percept could be seen as exemplifying, both the dynamic pattern of a form of human emotional behaviour, and the dynamic pattern of some other process, it is our awareness of the latter which will dominate:

A weeping willow does not look sad because it looks like a sad person. It is more adequate to state that since the shape, direction, and flexibility of willow branches convey the expression of passive hanging, a comparison with the structurally similar psychophysical pattern of sadness in humans may impose itself secondarily.<sup>119</sup>

That is to say, in those cases where an object is 'physiognomized' in the narrow meaning of the word, where it is seen as expressive of human behavioural characteristics, an awareness of the resemblance the object bears to human beings in the grip of emotions is secondary to our recognition of the direct expressive character of that behaviour.

It would appear to be a corollary of Arnheim's view of expression that the behaviour of human beings may present in its perceptual dynamics both forms of behaviour that are deemed to be emotional, and forms of 'behaviour' common to both human beings and

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<sup>118</sup> "Perceptual Dynamics in Musical Expression", p.226.

<sup>119</sup> "The Gestalt Theory of Expression", p.64.



natural processes. It is therefore not surprising that Arnheim should point out that the way in which we visually organize the appearances of human behaviour does not always give priority to the emotionally expressive character of that behaviour - that sometimes, we give priority to the forms of behaviour which may be exemplified by human beings and nonsentient things:

We perceive the slow, listless, 'droopy' movements of one person as against the brisk, straight, vigorous movements of another, but do not necessarily go beyond the meaning of such appearance by thinking explicitly of the psychical weariness or alertness behind it. Weariness and alertness are already contained in the physical behaviour itself. They are not distinguished in any essential way from the weariness of slowly floating tar or the energetic ringing of the telephone bell.<sup>120</sup>

In denying the priority of human expression in fixing the expressiveness of natural objects, Arnheim rejects the explanatory mechanism underlying Davies's account of musical expressiveness. Arnheim does not believe that the expressive character we attribute to human behaviour is the result of an inference we habitually make from the emotional states of individuals to the forms of behaviour characteristically associated with those emotional states. Nor does he believe that we see inanimate, non-human objects as expressive in virtue of any perceived similarities between the forms of human emotional behaviour and the appearances of these objects. Instead, whether we are looking at a human being or at some natural object, any similarities between the dynamic structure of the percept and behaviour characteristic of emotional human beings is incidental to our awareness of the expressive character directly given in the percept. For Arnheim, expressive character is not something present by inference, but something directly given in perception. As he sometimes puts it, expression is part of the 'primary content' of perception, an integral part of the perceptual process.<sup>121</sup> We can summarize Arnheim's discussion of expression by saying that an object is expressive to the extent that it exemplifies in its perceptual dynamics a form of behaviour. In Arnheim's thinking, behaviour is not something belonging to human beings and extended by analogy to

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<sup>120</sup> "The Gestalt Theory of Expression", pp.64-65.

<sup>121</sup> *Art and Visual Perception*, p.430; "The Gestalt Theory of Expression", p.63.

honorary human beings - that is to say, anything else capable of motion. The concepts we form of behaviour are general concepts of dynamic processes that may be exemplified in the actions of sentient beings and in other natural processes. We do not think of slowly floating tar as 'weary' because it somehow resembles the behaviour of persons who are feeling weary. It would be more accurate to say that the concept 'weariness' designates a form of behaviour that is exemplified in people who feel tired, and in slowly moving tar. The person who understands the concept of *weariness* is someone who can recognize a certain perceptual dynamic both in human beings but also in viscous liquids.

It is not my intention to argue for the gestalt theory of expression here. Given the types of claim Arnheim makes in his theory, the business of supporting or refuting the gestalt theory of expression is best left in the hand of psychologists and physiologists rather than philosophers. Thus, rather than arguing for the theory, I shall adopt the strategy of sketching some of the beneficial consequences of adopting such a broadly-based approach to the phenomenon of physiognomic perception, as opposed to the rather narrow notion of physiognomic perception implicit in Stephen Davies' theory of musical expression.

If we take seriously the narrow notion of physiognomic perception contained in Stephen Davies' theory of musical expression, then we would expect to find that human beings become acquainted with the expressiveness of persons before they become acquainted with the physiognomic characters belonging to non-human objects. In point of fact, this expectation does not reflect the manner in which we would go about teaching emotion concepts to children. Here an analogy may be useful. You would not teach a young child the concept 'airplane' by showing him a coloured photograph of a Boeing 747. Instead, you would begin by showing him the simplified, schematic icon of an airplane appearing in a child's picture book, along with some cartoons depicting airplanes and other objects in flight. At the same time, you would introduce him to things that fly, such as birds, and teach him to imitate the motion of a plane in his own body. At the end of all this, you would hope that when it came time to board a Boeing, he would grasp the fact that the entire rigid object surrounding him, containing row upon row of seated

persons, was airborne and travelling from point A to point B. In a very similar way, a child cannot be taught overnight to recognize and react to the emotions of others and relate these to his own internal states and feelings. The child understands the concept of sadness when he can recognize it both from without and within, when he has learned to identify the manifestations of sadness in the behaviour of others and to relate these forms of behaviour to the internal feeling of sadness in himself. One of the ways in which you would go about teaching the young child to experience an emotion both from without and within involves teaching him to recognize non-human objects that are 'sad', such as weeping willows; teaching him to mimic the drooping posture of these 'sad' objects in his own body, and in this indirect way, teaching him to identify the feelings which he experiences in his own body when he adopts this slumping posture with the feeling state of sadness. If this is anything like an accurate picture of the way in which the very young acquire emotion concepts, then it follows that our understanding of human emotional behaviour does not predate our understanding of the expressive character of inanimate things, that we acquire both types of understanding simultaneously. That is to say, the expressiveness of natural objects is not derivative upon the expressiveness of persons, in the way in which the narrow concept of physiognomic perception would tend to suggest. There may be some truth in Arnheim's suggestion that our concepts of behaviour are generalized concepts of dynamic processes which may be exemplified in the actions of human beings and in natural processes. So the first benefit of adopting a broad rather than a narrow understanding of the concept of physiognomic perception is that this provides a more faithful picture of the human acquisition of emotion concepts.

The reader will recall that, way back in Chapter One, in the course of assessing Scruton's ambiguity argument, we examined a scenario offensive to commonsense which Scruton believed would be a natural consequence of Sibley's brand of aesthetic realism. Under this scenario, an individual possessing the faculty of taste but lacking the concept of sadness in persons would be capable of applying the concept of sadness to works of art. The assumption implicit in the narrow notion of physiognomic perception, that our understanding of the expressive character of non-human things is contingent upon a prior

understanding of human emotional behaviour, suggests a variant upon Scruton's original scenario. This companion scenario describes an individual who is fully competent in identifying and discussing the emotional states of human beings, yet who possesses no understanding of how the same words might be used to identify physiognomic characteristics in nature and in works of art. Of course, if the story provided here of the acquisition of emotion concepts is correct, then it is unlikely to say the least that someone would have acquired the notion of sadness in persons without simultaneously acquiring a competence in applying the same concept to inanimate objects. However, for the sake of argument, let us accept the assumption implicit in the narrow use of the concept of physiognomic perception, that our ability to apply emotion concepts to human beings precedes an ability to apply these same concepts to non-human objects. What would we wish to say concerning this variant of Scruton's original scenario? Although we would not say that the individual described under the scenario fails to understand the human emotions, we would wish to say that this individual displays an inferior understanding of the emotions to the man who can apply the concept of sadness both to persons and to inanimate things. Adopting the wide notion of physiognomic perception contained in Arnheim's account of expressive perception allows us to say why we believe this individual's understanding is defective: because he has not realized that the dynamic pattern inherent in his percept of another persons's behaviour exemplifies a form of behaviour (limp passivity) which may be detected visually in the behaviour of sad persons, but also in the 'behaviour' of willow trees and telephone receivers. Thus, Arnheim's account of expression respects our belief that the person who cannot identify the physiognomic characters belonging to inanimate things possesses a poorer understanding of the emotions than the person who is able to apply emotion concepts to persons, to nature, and to works of art.

The third and final benefit to be derived from adopting the wide notion of physiognomic perception contained in Arnheim's theory of expressive perception relates to the concerns raised at the start of this chapter. The chapter began by examining the New Theory of expression, a theory built on the premise that the practice of attributing

category (c) emotion terms to works of art constitutes an idiosyncratic use of language requiring a special philosophical explanation. Aldrich's criticism of the New Theory amounted to the claim that we will never understand this use of language as long as we treat the aesthetic use of (c) category terms in isolation from other uses of the same vocabulary. Aldrich invited us to think of the 'problem' of category (c) emotion attributions as a piece torn from a much wider philosophical problem, the metaphysical difficulty of explaining how any 'mere' thing - be it a human body or a work of art - functions as the subject of expressive predication. Arnheim also sees the attribution of category (c) terms to works of art as part of a wider problem, albeit a different problem to the one identified by Aldrich. According to Arnheim, the problem of emotion attribution in art is part of the problem of accounting for the various dynamic properties perceivers attribute to inanimate objects. Like most aesthetic attributions, category (c) attributions reflect the fact that human beings 'animate' that which they perceive, by treating the dynamic processes belonging to acts of perceptual interpretation as qualities in the thing perceived. Whereas the narrow notion of physiognomic perception implied in Stephen Davies' theory of musical expression invites us to see category (c) attributions as atypical of the class of aesthetic attributions in general, the wide notion of physiognomic perception which Arnheim employs provides a mechanism for treating most aesthetic attributions in the same way, and teaches us to see category (c) attributions as natural denizens of the class of aesthetic attributions. This reflection offers a convenient point to rejoin those issues of aesthetic attribution and aesthetic perception left behind in Chapters One and Two.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Plot So Far

This thesis began by examining Sibley's distinction between aesthetic concepts and nonaesthetic concepts as a means of tackling the question whether there is an intuitive distinction to be made within aesthetics between judgements which are, and judgements which are not, narrowly aesthetic. This question amounted to the question whether some judgements are more deserving of the curiosity of philosophical aestheticians than others. We discovered that Sibley identified a narrowly aesthetic judgement as the report of a sensitive perception. Pursuing the connection between aesthetic judgement and aesthetic perception endorsed this notion of aesthetic judgement when it was revealed that those aesthetic judgements that interested Sibley amount to strongly perceptual judgements - that is to say, judgements formed in the course of perception, as opposed to reflective judgements or pieces of reasoning taking the data of perception for their raw materials. The realization that aesthetic judgements are both strongly perceptual and perceptually elusive led to the question, firstly, whether the experiences of the aesthetically sensitive might not prove to be qualitatively different to the experiences of the aesthetically insensitive; and secondly, whether perceiving aesthetically and perceiving non-aesthetically might not amount to incompatible ways of looking at things. As a method of focusing upon this second question, we examined one account of aesthetic perception which made the claim that I could not entertain simultaneously both the aesthetic aspects and the nonaesthetic aspects of an object. Although Aldrich's account of aesthetic perception provided substantial insight into the complex and diverse nature of aesthetic predication, we could find no reasons supporting Aldrich's claim that an aesthetic awareness of things simultaneously excludes a nonaesthetic awareness. I used the failure of Aldrich's account to endorse the commonsense view that if aesthetic perception proves to be a phenomenologically distinctive species of perception, this fact does not imply that aesthetic perceiving cannot be carried out during the course of ordinary acts of perception.

We then proceeded to assess Aldrich's theory as an account of expressive attribution. This enquiry provided an excuse to assess, and ultimately reject, a series of familiar accounts of expressive attribution. Placing a discussion of expressive attribution in Chapter Four was no accident for, as I now intend to show, far from viewing expressive attributions as an idiosyncratic subclass of aesthetic attributions, one requiring special analysis and explanation, we can think of expressive attributions as forming the paradigm of aesthetic attributions in general. To the extent that there exists a phenomenon of aesthetic perception remaining distinct from scientific perception or ordinary perception, then aesthetic perception constitutes something very like physiognomic perception, or an awareness of the perceptual character of things. The notion that aesthetic perception constitutes a form of physiognomic perception records one of the main findings of this thesis.

In light of issues raised in preceding chapters, it is now possible to make good my promise to deliver a theory of aesthetic judgement. To this end, I use Section I to recast the distinction between aesthetic perception and nonaesthetic perception in a new way, by suggesting that aesthetic perception amounts to an awareness of the perceptual character belonging to objects - that is to say, an awareness of the way in which objects present themselves to perceivers. Here I suggest that the notion of physiognomic perception introduced in Chapter Four and the notion of aesthetic perception may be used to illuminate one another. The claim that aesthetic perception constitutes an awareness of the way in which objects present themselves to the perceiver reduces aesthetic qualities to qualities of appearance, and thereby raises in a particularly urgent way the question of the objective status of aesthetic judgements. For this reason, Section II tackles the topic of aesthetic realism and the claim, often made, that aesthetic judgements lack objectivity. According to this line of thinking, aesthetic qualities form a proper subset of a much wider class of qualities and judgements which are projected upon the world rather than being embedded in the world's fabric. The focus of discussion is John McDowell's critique of J.L.Mackie's claim that moral values are not part of the fabric of the world. Here I argue that those seeking an understanding of aesthetic attribution will find little

enlightenment in the type of projectivism which tars all secondary qualities, aesthetic qualities, and moral values with the same metaphysical brush. Section III continues the same theme from a different direction, examining the claim that aesthetic qualities *qua* properties projected upon the world supervene upon a set of more fundamental, natural properties. In reviewing the manner in which the doctrine of supervenience has been employed by those writing in aesthetics, I find some justification for Marcia Muelder Eaton's claim that the notion of supervenience does little theoretical work in the aesthetic realm.

Finally, Section IV contains a reassessment of that perceptual model of aesthetic sensitivity attributed to Sibley at the end of Chapter Two. In particular, I question the picture of the relative distribution of taste contained in that model in light of the view of aesthetic perception developed in Section I, a view which suggests that the ability to form Sibley's so-called aesthetic judgements is not something confined to the gifted few, but lies within the province of Everyman.

## I

In the course of Chapters Three and Four, I have devoted much time to considering the faults of Aldrich's theory of aesthetic perception, and his theory of expressive attribution. Despite the various weaknesses that I have attributed to Aldrich's views, I would not wish to suggest that Aldrich has nothing of value to teach us concerning the nature of aesthetic attribution and aesthetic judgement. In particular, I would suggest that there are three features of his discussion of aesthetic perception which provide something like a minimum requirement upon an adequate theory of aesthetic judgement. I shall specify these, then discuss them in turn:

- (i) Aesthetic perception involves a form of sensitivity to the ground-level aesthetic features of things.

(ii) Aesthetic perception should not be contrasted with perception *simpliciter*. Rather, the contrast between aesthetic perception and nonaesthetic perception is a contrast between different perceptual projects.

(iii) The so-called problem of expression in art identified in recent philosophy is best tackled as part of a wider philosophical problem.

(i) In the course of this investigation, we have encountered a variety of opinions concerning the nature of aesthetic descriptions and aesthetic attributions. At one end of the spectrum of opinion we find Philip Petit's suggestion that aesthetic characterisations are perceptually elusive. The claim that aesthetic characterisations are perceptually elusive amounts to the claim that thorough acts of perception may fail to reveal the aesthetic characteristics of things. The view that aesthetic characteristics are perceptually elusive apparently chimes with Frank Sibley's assertion that it takes a certain perceptivity or 'taste' to detect a-qualities. Whether he intended to or not, Sibley demonstrated the elusive nature of aesthetic characteristics when he introduced the person of the aesthetic clod. The clod, it will be recalled, was an individual aware of his own deficiencies of taste, and who studied to make up for inadequacies by employing rules and generalizations in forming his aesthetic judgements. Sibley used the fact that such an individual could never have great confidence in the results of his aesthetic inferences to illustrate the contention that a-terms lack governing conditions. Although Sibley engineered the example of the aesthetic clod with a view to illustrating his assertion that a-terms lack governing conditions, the example of the clod equally might be used to illustrate the perceptually elusive nature of aesthetic characteristics, or the fact that someone could perceive thoroughly and intelligently and still fail to detect aesthetic qualities. The notion that it takes taste or extraordinary powers of discrimination to locate perceptually elusive aesthetic characters suggests that aesthetic qualities constitute occult or hidden qualities lost in a sea of nonaesthetic qualities. Occupying the other end of the spectrum of opinion is the view of the gestalt psychologists, who claim not only that expressive aesthetic characteristics are given directly in perception, but that these qualities

loudly proclaim their presence to the canny perceiver, being more overt characteristics of a percept than such nonaesthetic characteristics as size, hue and shape.

Running like a leitmotif through the views of aesthetic perception we have encountered thus far is the notion that aesthetic perception involves a sensitivity to what K.Mitchells called the aesthetic character lurking in the most ordinary things, and what Aldrich calls the medium of the materials of a work of art. In addition to these lower-order aesthetic features, Aldrich thinks that works of art possess certain higher-order or global aesthetic characteristics, features Aldrich designates as qualities of composition. Aldrich believes that it is impossible to be sensitive to these qualities of composition unless or until we are aware of the medium of the materials. That is to say, Aldrich agrees with Sibley in regarding these higher-order aesthetic qualities as emergent qualities, but departs from Sibley in believing that they emerge out of the lower-order aesthetic qualities, rather than the nonaesthetic qualities, of works of art. Arnheim also commits himself to the view that there exist certain higher-order aesthetic qualities, the qualities which objects express in their perceptual dynamics. Like Aldrich, Arnheim believes that these qualities emerge from a form of lower-level aesthetic quality. For Arnheim, the various elements of a visual design must be dynamically animated by directed tensions if I am to see the design overall as exemplifying and hence 'expressing' a form of behaviour. The notion that the global aesthetic characteristics of works of art do not emerge directly out of nonaesthetic characteristics suggests that Sibley provides a misleading picture of aesthetic sensitivity when he treats acts of aesthetic perception as unusually careful acts of perception in which we detect emergent qualities that the clod overlooks. Instead, it would appear to be the case that it is the form of perceptual organisation one brings to an object which makes an act of perception 'aesthetic' or not, and that the same form of perceptual organization may be directed upon both works of art but also what are seemingly the most trivial aspects of things.



(ii) Talk of the perceptually elusive nature of aesthetic characteristics misleads us into supposing that it is possible to perceive competently whilst failing to recognize the aesthetic characteristics of things. That is to say, to suggest that aesthetic characteristics elude the ordinary perceiver is to suppose that nonaesthetic perception, comprising an awareness of all and only nonaesthetic characteristics, constitutes ordinary perceptual competence; whilst an ability to recognize aesthetic features represents more than ordinary perceptual competence. The result of this view is the opinion that the person displaying aesthetic competence displays an extraordinary and admirable sensitivity that is in no way necessary to the business of understanding language and the world. We do have the notion of a type of perceiver who perceives competently and thoroughly whilst failing to take account of aesthetic characteristics. That perceiver is the scientific observer. The notion that the perceiver incapable of detecting aesthetic qualities may nonetheless display ordinary perceptual competence - the notion, in other words, that nonaesthetic perception corresponds with perception *simpliciter* - arises from the unreflecting commonsensical view that the 'ordinary' perceiver does in a less formal way whatever it is that the scientist does when he observes and measures things. The fact of the matter is that scientific perception does not exhaust the nature of ordinary perceptual competence. For as Rudolf Arnheim draws to our attention, the attitude of the scientific perceiver is an artificial one.<sup>1</sup> The scientific perceiver is a perceiver who consciously sets out to ignore the aesthetic characteristics given to ordinary perception, someone who chooses to see a fire as merely a set of hues and shapes in motion instead of noticing the exciting violence of the flames; someone who ignores the expression of a face as he determines the shape of the jawline and the space between the eyes. Aldrich introduced his distinction between observation and prehension, contrasting these with ordinary or 'holophrastic' perception, in part as a corrective to the notion that an exclusively 'scientific' world view, comprising an awareness of physical objects located in physical space, represents our bedrock rapport with things, the default mode of perception in terms of which we make sense of

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<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, "The Gestalt Theory of Perception", in *Towards a Psychology of Art: Collected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), pp.51-73; p.63. See also Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, 2nd. ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p.430.

the world.<sup>2</sup> Aldrich teaches us to see that, if whatever the aesthetic perceiver does represents a departure from ordinary perception, the same point can be made concerning the activity of the scientific observer. Aldrich lays down the idea that the scientific and the aesthetic perceiver are not persons displaying different levels of perceptual competence, but perceivers in pursuit of separate perceptual projects.

What we might call the scientific world view regards the capacity to detect aesthetic qualities as something of little or no importance to our understanding of language and the world. In his earlier accounts of aesthetic perception, Aldrich attempts to check the prejudicial attitude to aesthetic perception implicit in the scientific world view by identifying our sensitivity to aesthetic features with a distinctive and autonomous form of perceptual competence, to be placed alongside the perceptual competence which allows us to perceive physical objects existing in space. There are times when Aldrich apparently expresses the view that prehensive perception amounts to something more than the ability to perceptually make over a piece of canvas as the pictorial appearance of a three-dimensional landscape, when he wishes to suggest that prehension vies with physical object perception to provide an alternative comprehensive perceptual structuring of the world. This is how I interpret the casual allusion which Aldrich makes to “the aesthetic space and time in which things appear as aesthetic objects, a milieu in which they have a history.”<sup>3</sup>

It is a simple enough matter to demonstrate that there does not exist the form of aesthetic space which Aldrich hints at here. The notion that there could exist a form of aesthetic space in which different aesthetic objects appear takes a foothold from our experience of listening to music. As mentioned several times previously, we experience musical melodies as ‘objects’ travelling through a virtual, musical ‘space’. For musical compositions written in the Western tonic system, the diatonic scale describes a structure for that space, making it possible to think of musical melodies as realizing different possibilities inherent in a single musical ‘space’. However, when it comes to the visual

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<sup>2</sup>*Philosophy of Art* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p.24; "Picture Space", *PR*, 67 (1958), 342-352, pp.342-343.

<sup>3</sup> *Philosophy of Art*, p.34.

arts, it is impossible to maintain the notion that pictures constitute objects located relative to one another in a structured pictorial space. Whenever Aldrich talks of the aesthetic space of a picture, what he invariably has in mind is a structure unique to that picture which happens to instantiate it. The problem is that, as Aldrich admits, the aesthetic space of a pictorial composition emerges from our awareness of the timbres as well as the tonalities of the elements employed, an awareness of the smoothness, harshness, warmth, sharpness or delicacy of colours and lines.<sup>4</sup> To put the same point in a slightly different way, the tonality of visually perceived colour cannot be divorced from its timbre in the way in which the tonality or 'colour' of perceived sound can be divorced from its timbre. A musical tone, say a 'C', possesses the same colour and thus the same tonal relationships with other notes of the diatonic scale, regardless of the octave range in which it occurs and regardless of the timbre of the instrument upon which it is played. By contrast, the tonal relationships generated by the combination of pigments used to create a given pictorial composition are partly determined by the timbres belonging to the pigments in question. Replacing a patch of blue pigment in a picture with a pigment of a slightly redder shade of blue would alter the tonal relationships between the colours in the picture, perhaps generating a different three-dimensional colour projection and thereby altering the representational content of the picture. Attempting to extend the boundaries of the aesthetic space of the picture by placing it edge to edge with another picture would serve to alter the colour relationships within each picture, and create a new aesthetic space assigning a new set of properties to each of the constituent aesthetic spaces. What this demonstrates is that the aesthetic space corresponding with a pictorial composition is a one-off. The notion of an aesthetic space as an overarching structure or milieu in which individual works of art appear as aesthetic objects and have a history gains no foothold when it comes to the pictorial arts. And since the notion gains no foothold in the case of the pictorial arts, we can discredit the notion for the arts in general.

Aldrich does not pick the best method of correcting the prejudicial view of aesthetic perception implicit in the scientific world view when he treats the ability to perceive

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<sup>4</sup> *Philosophy of Art.*, p.44.

aesthetic qualities and the ability to view things scientifically as mutually exclusive modes of perception. The problem with Aldrich's account of aesthetic perception is that separating our awareness of aesthetic and nonaesthetic qualities into two mutually exclusive modes of perception gives a misleading and at times paradoxical view of the nature of perception. What is more, isolating our awareness of aesthetic aspects from our awareness of physical properties may serve to accord aesthetic perception an equal status with scientific perception, but it leaves intact the pretensions of the scientific view to represent an exhaustive account of reality. A more satisfying answer to the scientific world view would attempt to demonstrate that aesthetic perception and nonaesthetic perception constitute different parts of a single perceptual competence. The person who attempted to negotiate the world after the fashion of the scientific observer would struggle to survive, being oblivious to such emergent features as the friendliness in one face and the hostility in another. Assuming the scientific perceiver survived his experiences unscathed, he would not be demonstrating what we understand to be ordinary perceptual competence. Rather than conceiving the scientific perceiver to be the ordinary or baseline perceiver against whose performance all forms of perceptual competence can be measured, it would more adequately reflect our understanding of the nature of perceptual competence to treat the perceiver aware of both aesthetic and nonaesthetic qualities as the baseline perceiver against whose performance other acts of perception may be judged. To this end, we should think of 'scientific' and 'aesthetic' perception, not as distinct modes of perception generating alternative conceptions of reality, but as separate perceptual tasks, tasks which may be performed in the course of a single act of perception.

Taken together, (i) and (ii) lead to the suggestion that what we call aesthetic perception involves a special perceptual project, specifically the project of opening oneself up to, or becoming aware of, the ground-level aesthetic character lurking in the most ordinary things. Aldrich at one point in his thinking believed that the pursuit of this special project involved adopting a special mode of perception which served to exclude an awareness of the physical characteristics of things. The empathy theorists made the less-

than-plausible suggestion that I open myself up to the aesthetic character of an object through a form of sympathetic mimicry, adapting my own bodily posture to the disposition of parts in the object perceived. The question we need to ask ourselves is this: is there something special that we do when we perceive aesthetically, something which puts us in touch with the aesthetic character belonging to the most ordinary things, but which falls short either of adopting a special mode of perception that precludes an awareness of nonaesthetic aspects, or of indulging in sympathetic mimicry of the object perceived? I believe there is. The person perceiving aesthetically interrogates reality after a different fashion to the nonaesthetic perceiver. The aesthetically sensitive perceiver allows the object to tell her what it is like, rather than telling the object what it must yield to her gaze. If the scientific perceiver poses the question, 'what are you like?', the aesthetic perceiver poses the question, 'what are you like to perceive?'

Understanding the nature of that character we are sensitive to when we perceive aesthetically requires a distinction between what I shall call the *perceptible character* and the *perceptual character* of things. The distinction between perceptible and perceptual character recalls and complements a distinction made at the end of Chapter Three. This was the distinction between the *object of perception*, the object towards which the act of perception is directed, and the *perceptual object*, the set of properties generated for the object in the act of perception. *Perceptible character* is that character or nature we discover in an object through perception. The perceptible character of an object is a 'thing in itself', something constituting the nature of the object, or deemed to be a property of the object. By contrast, the *perceptual character* of an object is the character that object possesses for the act of perception itself. We can think of the aesthetic character of an object as its perceptual rather than its perceptible character. Quite simply, my proposal is that to perceive aesthetically is to look for the perceptual rather than the perceptible character of things, by posing the question 'what is this object like to perceive?' When a wine critic detects a number of fruit flavours in a single glass of wine, she is not describing the perceptible character of the wine, the character of the fruit juices used in its production. Instead, she is describing the perceptual character of the wine, the character



of the experience to be had in drinking the wine; and she does so by suggesting that the experience of drinking the wine resembles the experience of these different flavours. Speaking nonaesthetically, the unity of an object is its perceptible unity, and designates some relationship of coherence between the parts of the object. By contrast, the *aesthetic unity* of an object describes its perceptual unity, the fact that perceiving the object in question generates experiences of a unified kind. Likewise, the visual balance of a painting designates not its real balance, the struggle of a physical object to maintain its position against the countervailing forces of gravitation, but instead its *apparent balance*, the settled aspect a visual design possesses for the perceiving eye.

(iii) Aldrich criticised the New Theory of expression for the way in which it separated the aesthetic from the nonaesthetic uses of category (c) terms, then identified the problem of accounting for the former as a free-standing philosophical problem requiring a localised solution. Aldrich believed that the question of expressive attribution in art cannot be understood without considering what it means to attribute emotions to persons. This is because, according to Aldrich, treating with understanding the problem of expression in art involves viewing it as part of a wider metaphysical problem: the problem of explaining the nature of an expressive object. For Aldrich, any answer to the question, *why do we attribute emotions to works of art?* must form part of the answer to the question, *why do we attribute emotions to persons?* Rudolf Arnheim also tackled the issue of expressive attribution in art as part of a wider concern. Arnheim identified this wider concern as the phenomenon of physiognomic perception. That is to say, Arnheim treated the problem of expressive attribution in art as part of the problem of accounting for the dynamic character attributed to most of the things we perceive. Arnheim's answer to the question, *why do we see expressive qualities in art?* also functions as an answer to the wider question, *why do we see ordinary objects as animated by dynamic tensions?* Here I shall be taking on board Aldrich's suggestion that the problem of expressive attribution in art forms part of a wider issue. I shall also be taking on board Arnheim's suggestion that the wider problem concerned is one of physiognomic perception broadly conceived. Discussing the notion of expression in art under the heading of physiognomic

perception respects the element of truth in Aldrich's suggestion that, *qua* expressive objects, there exist important resemblances between works of art and persons, so that a proper understanding of the expressiveness of works of art presupposes a proper understanding of the ways in which persons might be deemed to be expressive.

If (i) and (ii) come together in the suggestion that aesthetic perception involves an awareness of perceptual character, then (ii) and (iii) come together in the claim that aesthetic perception is nothing more or less than what I identified in the previous chapter as physiognomic perception in the wide sense or the term. At the end of Chapter Four, I suggested some reasons why anyone interested in the phenomenon of expressive attribution might wish to employ the broad notion of physiognomic perception contained in Arnheim's theory of expression. Those 'physiognomic' properties that Arnheim examined in the context of his theory of expression are, of course, aesthetic qualities under another name. In tackling what I have called the issue of physiognomic perception in the broad sense, Arnheim was doing nothing more or less than tackling the issue of aesthetic perception. Arnheim informs us that the aesthetic perceiver, the perceiver aware of the grassroots aesthetic character belonging to the most ordinary things, is the perceiver who sees objects as animated by dynamic tensions. For the aesthetic perceiver, simple shapes are animated by vectors of force, spreading laterally in a rectangle, resting in balance in a circle or a square.<sup>5</sup> Even a dark spot on a light ground becomes, for the aesthetic perceiver, a living thing animated by 'forces', an object expanding from its centre, pushing outward, and being checked by the counterforces of the environment.

Points (i), (ii) and (iii) come together in the reflection that the notion of physiognomic perception, and the notion of aesthetic perception, where the latter is viewed as an awareness of perceptual as opposed to perceptible character, serve to illuminate one another. The reason why the notion of physiognomic perception illuminates the notion of aesthetic perception is because the task we undertake in physiognomically perceiving a human face provides a model for the task we perform

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<sup>5</sup> For more on the vectors of force contained in simple patterns and shapes, see *Art and Visual Perception*, pp.401-402.

when we attempt to determine the aesthetic or perceptual character of an object. To perceive another human being physiognomically is to look with the eye of the casting director, viewing the individual as someone presenting a certain physiognomy or facial type. On analogy with the human case, when we move to cases of physiognomic perception in the wider sense, we think of the object as presenting a physiognomy or 'face', and the job of the perceiver becomes one of determining the character or type of that face. In a very similar fashion, to view an object aesthetically is to view it as something with a physiognomy or 'face' of a type we must decipher. The aesthetic perceiver treats an object as something presenting a physiognomy or face to the act of perception itself. In forming an aesthetic assessment of the object, she attempts to decipher the character or type of that face. Whether one is perceiving physiognomically or perceiving aesthetically, the task in hand is the same: to identify and articulate the nature of what we might call the object's 'face'.

It is important to distinguish three factors in the case where we view a human being physiognomically: the facial expressions of the individual which allow us to infer to his underlying emotional states; the personality or character of the individual; and the character belonging to that person's face. It is only the third of these which is physiognomically perceived. We think of these three things as coinciding in the ideal case. Not only is the sunny disposition of an individual displayed both in his frequent smiles, and the habitually relaxed muscles of his face; but we believe that we can infer from his relaxed disposition and characteristically happy facial expressions to an underlying happy disposition. In point of fact, the physiognomic character of a human face may belie both whatever facial expression the individual happens to be wearing at a given time, and his personality type. Arnheim's account of aesthetic perception illuminates the concept of physiognomic perception in the human case, because it offers an explanation for the fact that the character worn by a face might fail to coincide with the true 'character' or personality belonging to the individual concerned. In the terms of Arnheim's theory of expression, to perceive a face physiognomically is to look at it aesthetically, so that the face becomes a study in animated form perception. The reason

why a person of sunny disposition might be assigned a melancholy physiognomy is because, viewed as a study in animated form perception, the parts of his face display a dynamic pattern exemplifying and recalling the dynamic or behaviour of a person of melancholy disposition.

In much the same way that the physiognomic character of a face may fail to concur with both the facial expressions of the individual and the underlying personality, so too the perceptual (aesthetic) character of an object and the perceptible character may come apart. A person of sunny disposition might, physiognomically speaking, possess a melancholy facial type. An object that is, materially speaking, light as a feather may look 'heavy', in the aesthetic sense. The notion of aesthetic perception serves to illuminate the notion of physiognomic perception, because understanding the fact that aesthetic perception involves an attention to the perceptual rather than the perceptible character of an object helps us understand the difference between reading a human face physiognomically, and reading a human face as an indicator of the person within. In the aesthetic case, we look at an object, not in order to determine how things are with the object, the material relationships between that object and other things; but in order to discover how the object presents itself to the perceiver, the type of 'face' it wears. By analogy, to view a human face physiognomically is not, in the language of Aldrich, to treat the face as a 'point of view' upon the person or soul within, an indicator of the underlying affective states of the individual. Rather, to view a face physiognomically is to assess its perceptual character. Applied to the human case, the distinction between perceptible and perceptual character becomes a distinction between the *expressive character* of a face, and the *physiognomic* character. Just as the perceptible character of an object refers us to its material condition, so too the expressive character of a face is a 'property' of the face allowing us to infer to the emotional states and personality traits of the individual. The scare quotes are necessary because, as both Sircello and Aldrich have taught us to believe, the emotions and the 'character' or personality I find when I examine the expressive character of the face are strictly speaking properties belong to the person rather than the face itself. According to Sircello, to say that John is smiling, to describe

the expressive character of John's face as 'happy', is to say that John expresses his happiness by gesturing (smiling) through the medium of his face. According to Aldrich, the expressive character attributed to the face (happiness, melancholy, mirth) is a property of the individual whose face it is, rather than a property of the face *qua* material thing. Happiness, viewed as the expressive character of a face, is not a property belonging to the face in the way in which redness is a quality of the apple.<sup>6</sup> Whilst Aldrich is correct about the expressive character of a face, we should like to say that the sad character physiognomically attributed to the face *is* a property of the face, one serving to qualify the face and not the person. Aldrich makes the mistake of supposing that the only way in which emotion words might apply to material objects is if these serve to identify an expressive character, applying to the metaphysical entity known as the person or the work of art through the transparent medium of the material thing. Aldrich overlooks the possibility that there is a way of using emotion terms physiognomically, to apply directly to the appearance of a material thing.

The distinction between perceptual and perceptible character is not, of course, one perceivers always consciously make, any more than they will always distinguish the physiognomic character of a face from its expressive character. For much of the time, awareness of the physiognomic character of human faces functions as Gombrich's 'physiognomic intuition,' the least reliable among a number of tools we may use as indicators of the personality of individuals. The aesthetic or perceptual character of an object can also be an unreliable tool in determining the way things are. Sometimes, we will assume an object is 'heavy', going on nothing but the physical appearances, the fact it is a large public sculpture apparently made of stone. It is only on discovering that the object is made of papier mache that we realize it isn't heavy, after all, that the heaviness ascribed is a purely visual heaviness that describes the way in which the object fills the field of vision and relates to other objects in that field, rather than describing any fact concerning the materials of its construction. However, in much the same way that the perceiver may look past the expressive character of a human face, and adopt the perceptual attitude of

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<sup>6</sup> See Virgil C. Aldrich, "'Expresses' and 'Expressive'", *JAAC*, 37 (1978), 203-217; pp.213-215 *passim*. See also p.173 above.



the casting director who seeks the visual type of the face; so too we may consciously set about to discover the perceptual appearances of things, and thereby perceive aesthetically. To say that aesthetic and nonaesthetic perception form parts of a single perceptual competence is to say that an awareness of perceptual or physiognomic character is one of the devices human beings use in interpreting their environment, a device that is backgrounded during so-called acts of 'scientific' perception, but which will be brought to the forefront of attention in the context of aesthetic judgement.

In short, it is my proposal that the man who judges aesthetically, in the non-verdicative sense of judgement outlined by Sibley, is the man who consciously seeks out and reports the aesthetic character of an object, the 'facial' type that object presents to the act of perception. This is to replace Sibley's formula that an aesthetic judgement constitutes the report of a sensitive perception, with the formula that an aesthetic judgement is the determination of the perceptual character of an object. Treating the aesthetic character of an object as its perceptual character captures the fact that aesthetic appreciation is a form of discourse telling us what it is like to perceive things. Yet at the same time, this proposal places aesthetic qualities squarely within the realm of qualities of appearance. This raises the question whether aesthetic judgements, *qua* judgements describing properties of appearance, are properly objective after the manner of primary or secondary quality determinations. It is to the matter of assessing the objectivity of aesthetic judgements that I now turn.

## II

Aesthetic qualities are often classified as *tertiary* qualities. Tertiary qualities resemble the so-called secondary qualities in being qualities of affect, ones standing in the same relationship to secondary qualities as secondary qualities stand to primary qualities. The intuition which underlies the distinction between secondary and tertiary qualities is that, in much the same way that secondary qualities are conceived to be qualities of or

emerging from configurations of primary qualities, so too tertiary qualities constitute qualities of or emerging from patterns of secondary qualities.<sup>7</sup> There would be no secondary qualities in the absence of primary qualities, and in a similar way, removing secondary qualities from the world removes at a stroke their dependent tertiary qualities.<sup>8</sup>

Given the fact that we already have a two-tier distinction in place between secondary qualities, or qualities of appearance on the one hand, and primary qualities on the other, it might seem something of a metaphysical extravagance to introduce a third tier to this distinction, especially when that extra tier takes the form of a further class of qualities of appearance. I would suggest three reasons why we might wish to distinguish aesthetic qualities from the ordinary run of secondary qualities. In the first place, classing aesthetic qualities as tertiary qualities fits nicely with Sibley's claim that aesthetic qualities are qualities which emerge from the way things appear.<sup>9</sup> In the second place, treating aesthetic qualities as a distinctive class of quality to the ordinary secondary qualities coheres with the claim made in the previous section, that aesthetic judgements amount to judgements of perceptual character. Aesthetic descriptions tell us, not simply how the object seems, but how it seems to perception. Aesthetic descriptions tell us what things are like to perceive, describing the experience of perceiving the object in the same breath that they describe the object perceived. Talk of tertiary aesthetic qualities emerging from secondary qualities captures the notion that aesthetic qualities describe the appearances of appearances. In the third place, incorporating aesthetic qualities within a wider set of tertiary qualities allows the philosopher to class these with such entities as moral values, providing an opportunity to apply to the aesthetic case arguments originally aired in discussing the objective status of moral values. Here I shall follow the commonplace

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<sup>7</sup> Ruby Meager, "Aesthetic Concepts", *BJA*, 10 (1970), 303-322; pp.307-308. For more on the nomenclature of tertiary qualities and its genesis, see Carroll C.Pratt, "The Design of Music", *JAAC*, 12 (1954), 289-300, pp.294ff.

<sup>8</sup> Roger Scruton, "Understanding Music", in *The Aesthetic Understanding* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1983), footnote 16.

<sup>9</sup> F.N.Sibley, "Objectivity and Aesthetics", *PAS*, Supp.Vol 42 (1968), 30-54, pp.35, 39. Prima facie, there is no reason to suppose that aesthetic qualities could not emerge directly from the primary qualities of an object. After all, could not delicacy arise from the shapes in a line drawing as well as from the pastel shade of a watercolour? What this example shows is that whether or not tertiary qualities emerge directly from primary qualities depends upon whether you treat the determinate shape of a particular object as a primary quality, or whether you follow Ruby Meager in treating perceived shape as a secondary quality. Reasons for adopting the latter course will perhaps emerge in what follows here.

procedure of assessing arguments for the objectivity of aesthetic values and moral values in the same breath, by considering J.L.Mackie's attempt to demonstrate that moral values lack objectivity; and John McDowell's answer to Mackie's assessment of the nature of value.<sup>10</sup>

Tertiary qualities will not count as objective qualities in the scientific realist's conception of the world. J.L.Mackie adopts the scientific realist's stance when he asserts that moral values and aesthetic values are not 'objective', equating this statement with the claim that moral and aesthetic values are not embedded in the fabric of the world.<sup>11</sup> Mackie reasons that, if moral values are to count as thoroughly objective, it would need to be the case both that values present themselves as they do, as a form of subjective concern, and that there was something embedded in the world's fabric which served to back up and validate that subjective concern.<sup>12</sup> That is to say, there would need to be intrinsic features of the world corresponding with values as we experience them. And since there are no such objective values answering to values as we experience them embedded in the fabric of the world, Mackie concludes that moral qualities are not objective.

Mackie admits that such objective values, were they to exist, would be 'queer' entities.<sup>13</sup> However, he treats the claim that such objective moral values exist to be factually false rather than theoretically incoherent.<sup>14</sup> According to Mackie, the person who supposes that such objective values exist commits a form of projective error. Mackie finds a precedent for this projective error in the commonsense understanding of the nature of coloured perception, a projective error brought to philosophical awareness by Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities.<sup>15</sup> For commonsense thinking identifies secondary qualities as being both qualities of appearances and qualities

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<sup>10</sup> J.L.Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977), esp.pp.15-49; John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities", in *Morality and Objectivity: A Tribute to J.L.Mackie*, ed. Ted Honderich (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), pp.110-129; John McDowell, "Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World", in *Pleasure, Preference and Value*, ed. Eva Schaper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.1-16.

<sup>11</sup> *Ethics*, p.15.

<sup>12</sup> *Ethics*, p.22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ethics*, p.38.

<sup>14</sup> John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities", p.113.

<sup>15</sup> *Ethics*, pp.19-20.

revealing the genuine structures of things. That is to say, commonsense assumes that the phenomenal aspect of colour, colour as it appears to us, is as much a property of the object perceived as are such primary qualities as shape, size, and hardness. Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities cautions against the commonsense error of supposing that colour-as-we-see-it is embedded in the world in the same manner as such primary qualities as size and shape. Mackie contends that in much the same way that the claim that colour judgements are objective amounts to the naive projectivist view that there exist "thoroughly objective features which resemble our ideas of secondary qualities,"<sup>16</sup> those making the claim that moral values are objective naively project primary qualities like values-as-we-experience-them into the fabric of the world.

John McDowell responds to Mackie's argument by suggesting that those objective values and colours which Mackie describes, primary qualities like values-as-we-experience-them, colours-as-we-see-them, represent a theoretical as well as a practice impossibility. Not only would it be false to claim that such items exist, but the very notion of a "thoroughly objective" value of the kind which Mackie describes is incoherent. According to McDowell, the invitation to think of a primary quality like redness-as-we-perceive-it asks us to do that which we could never do: form an idea of a colour which did not make essential reference to the idea of how its possessors would look.<sup>17</sup> The invitation is to construct a conception of a quality such as amusingness, a conception which was fully intelligible otherwise than in terms of the characteristic human responses to what is amusing, but which nevertheless contrived somehow to retain the 'phenomenal' aspect of amusingness as we experience it in those responses.<sup>18</sup> McDowell contends that to credit commonsense with the projective error which Mackie describes is to accuse commonsense of possessing a "wildly problematical understanding of itself."<sup>19</sup> It is not necessary for commonsense to entangle itself in this projective error in order to make sense of the fact that colours are objectively there to be experienced. For

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<sup>16</sup> J.L.Mackie, *Problems From Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp.18-19. The terminology of colour-as-we-see-it, taste-as-we-taste-it, etc., derives from Mackie's discussion of the primary and secondary quality distinction on p.22.

<sup>17</sup> "Values and Secondary Qualities", p.113.

<sup>18</sup> "Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World", p.4.

<sup>19</sup> "Values and Secondary Qualities", p.113.



we can make error-free sense of the thought that secondary qualities are authentic objects of perceptual awareness without postulating the existence of primary qualities resembling colour-as-we-see-it; and we do so by characterizing colours as essentially phenomenal qualities. To use McDowell's own convoluted formula, we can think of a secondary quality as a property the ascription of which to an object is not adequately understood except as true, if it is true, in virtue of the object's disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance: specifically, an appearance characterizable by using a word for the property itself to say how the object perceptually appears. Thus an object's being red is understood as obtaining in virtue of the object's being such as to look red.<sup>20</sup> According to McDowell, commonsense is not guilty of supposing that colours will only have experiential reality for us if there is something in the world formally corresponding with the experience of colour-in-us.

McDowell suggests that when Mackie reduces the claim that moral values are objective to the claim that moral values are part of the fabric of the world, Mackie succeeds in confounding two very different notions of objectivity.<sup>21</sup> According to the first of these notions, a quality is objective<sub>1</sub> in the event that it can be adequately conceived otherwise than in terms of dispositions to give rise to subjective states. In the notion of subjectivity contrasting with objectivity<sub>1</sub>, a quality that is subjective<sub>1</sub> is a quality such that no adequate conception of what it is for a thing to possess it is available except in terms of how the thing would, in suitable circumstances, effect a sentient being. An object of awareness is objective<sub>2</sub> in the event that it is there to be experienced, as opposed to being a mere figment of that subjective state purporting to be an experience of it. Corresponding with this second notion of objectivity, an object of awareness will be subjective<sub>2</sub> if it is a mere figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it.<sup>22</sup> This second distinction between objectivity and subjectivity concerns the

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<sup>20</sup> "Values and Secondary Qualities", pp.111-112.

<sup>21</sup> "Values and Secondary Qualities", pp.113-114; "Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World", p.2.

<sup>22</sup> A piece of evidence supporting McDowell's contention that Mackie's argument presumes a single notion of objectivity can be found in the fact that at one point, Mackie rules out equating objectivity with intersubjective agreement, thereby ruling out the existence of a further type of objectivity, according to which a matter is objective in the event there exists widespread intersubjective agreement. See Mackie, *Ethics*, p.22.



distinction between veridical and illusory experiences. Mackie claims that our experience of secondary qualities and aesthetic values will count as veridical only if it resembles primary quality experience in one particular respect: that what it is for an object or situation to possess a secondary quality or moral value is conceivable without any notion of how that quality presents itself to a sentient being. As most people would view the matter, the claim that value is in the world amounts to the claim that value is objective<sub>2</sub>, there to be experienced by sentient beings, and not as Mackie suggests objective<sub>1</sub>, or conceivable independently of its effect upon sentient beings.<sup>23</sup> The fact that a matter is subjective<sub>1</sub>, does not entail that it is also subjective<sub>2</sub>. Yet this is precisely what Mackie assumes when he identifies the thesis that moral values are objective with the claim that moral values are part of the fabric of the world. Although McDowell is not unkind enough to say it, Mackie commits the rather elementary philosophical error of assuming that anything tainted with subjectivity to the extent of reflecting the perceptual awareness of a human being is thereby tainted with subjectivity in the sense that it is non-veridical.

Whilst I broadly support the method of argumentation which McDowell brings to bear against Mackie, some of the detail of his argument should be questioned. As we have seen, Mackie's argument concerning the objectivity of moral values relies heavily upon an understanding of Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities. The understanding which Mackie shows on this point deserves greater respect than McDowell's argument tends to give it. For whilst it is no doubt true that McDowell succeeds in demonstrating an understanding of secondary quality experience which is free of projective error, he never succeeds in demonstrating that the error-free understanding which he describes coincides with what we might call the commonsense view of the matter, either in Locke's day or in our own. If the error-free understanding of secondary quality perception that McDowell describes reflects the views of commonsense, it is not a pre-philosophical commonsense he describes, but a commonsense heavily indebted to a philosophical education. In its unreconstituted form, commonsense is very much guilty of the error Mackie's own argument falls into, the

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<sup>23</sup> "Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World", p.2.

error of confusing objectivity<sub>1</sub> with objectivity<sub>2</sub>, a fact which will be familiar to anyone who has taught undergraduate philosophy. Thus, if it came to a showdown between Mackie and McDowell as to whose view of secondary quality perception best champions the views of commonsense, then Mackie would win hands down. On a purely historical footnote, it is also worth pointing out that the projective error contained in the commonsense understanding of secondary qualities which Locke's own discussion of secondary quality perception was intended to correct, owed less to the views of commonsense than it did to the Scholastic philosophy of the time.<sup>24</sup> Once again, if the view under attack reflects a form of commonsense, it is not a naive commonsense, but one enlightened by philosophy.

McDowell strays onto much firmer ground when he argues that the brand of scientific realism implicit in Mackie's argument craves a description of reality corresponding with "a view from nowhere".<sup>25</sup> For Mackie, a thoroughly objective description of reality is one making reference only to those properties that can be understood without essential reference to their effects on sentient beings.<sup>26</sup> Mackie's brand of scientific realism excludes any input from perceivers, and in this respect starkly contrasts with that brand of scientific realism espoused by John Locke, the figure commonly identified as the popularizer of the primary-secondary quality distinction.

Given the prominence accorded to Locke's primary-secondary quality distinction within the context of Mackie's argument, I shall pause briefly here in order to clear up some common misconceptions which have tended to taint discussions of the distinction. These misconceptions concern Locke's intentions in making the distinction, and the manner in which Locke is thought to have argued for his distinction. Locke's discussion

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<sup>24</sup> Edwin McCann describes how "the Aristotelian-Scholastic doctrine of qualities held that most, at least, of the sensible qualities of objects are real qualities, that is, that they are real entities existing or inhering in the objects, and that perception of them involves the mind taking on the form of these qualities as they exist in the object. This is facilitated by the transmission through a medium - light, for example, in the case of qualities perceived by means of vision - of an intentional species that becomes the form of the relevant perception or act of mind; this intentional species is the form that exists in the object, except that this form exists not in matter, as it does in the object, but in the mind. The idea in the mind is thus qualitatively identical with the quality in the body that initiated the whole causal process, since these two are the same in form of species; and so it can properly be said to resemble the quality as it is in the body." ("Locke's Philosophy of Body", in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, ed. Vere Chappell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.56-88, p.64).

<sup>25</sup> "Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World", p.6.

<sup>26</sup> "Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World", p.2.

at *Essay* II.viii is all too often lifted out of its original context and treated as a weapon in the arsenal of the would-be scientific realist whom Mackie describes, someone who wishing to distinguish between those qualities which should and those which shouldn't belong to a fundamental description of the world.<sup>27</sup> Locke's original exposition of the distinction is then taken for a philosophical argument in favour of the distinction, employing examples of the invariability and freedom from illusion of our perceptions of primary qualities, in contrast to our perceptions of secondary qualities.<sup>28</sup> The now orthodox interpretation of Locke's discussion of the primary-secondary quality distinction is that Locke was not *making* the distinction at *Essay* II.viii.6-21, but attempting to popularize a scientific distinction that was familiar to him from his contact with Robert Boyle. The examples of sensory illusion he produces in his text are offered by way of illustrating the distinction rather than arguing for it, with Locke using the distinction to explain how these illusions come about, rather than using the existence of these illusions as evidence in favour of his distinction.<sup>29</sup> The second point I would make is that Locke was not objecting to the commonsense understanding of secondary qualities from the perspective of any and every type of scientific realism. Instead, Locke was attempting to familiarize his reader with one particular brand of scientific realism, the corpuscular hypothesis or atomism of the day. What arguments Locke offers for his distinction are not arguments from within perception, but conceptual arguments relying upon the commonsense notion of what it is to be a body, and what is involved in the causal efficacy of the notion of body.<sup>30</sup> These arguments reflect his interest in the corpuscular hypothesis. Thus at *Essay* II.viii.9 Locke invites his reader to identify primary qualities with those qualities belonging to bodies as we perceive them which

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<sup>27</sup> Mackie for instance suggests that some of the evidence for the distinction would point out that secondary qualities are redundant to a scientific description of the world. See *Problems From Locke*, pp.17-20.

<sup>28</sup> Thus making his view vulnerable to the Berkeleyan objection that primary qualities are as variable under changing conditions of perception as are secondary qualities. It is no doubt the realization that primary qualities are as viewer-dependent as secondary qualities which leads Ruby Meager to declare that the philosophy of secondary qualities is mistaken and incoherent. Meager does however concede that the notion of a tertiary quality might not be as muddled as the notion of a secondary quality. See Ruby Meager, "Aesthetic Concepts", *BJA*, 10 (1970), 303-322; pp.307-308.

<sup>29</sup> See Peter Alexander, "Boyle and Locke on Primary and Secondary Qualities", in *Locke on Human Understanding: Selected Essays*, ed. I.C.Tipton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp.62-76.

<sup>30</sup> Edwin McCann, "Locke's Philosophy of Body", pp.60-67.

must belong to any body, however imperceptibly small, if it is to maintain the character of a body; and to identify secondary qualities with the set of qualities the object would cease to possess as it underwent modifications. Thus, in the event that a grain of wheat were to be subdivided until it became imperceptibly small, it would cease to have colour, but still possess bulk and motion.

Given the background of Locke's interest in the corpuscular hypothesis, it might be argued that when Locke cautions the common man to guard against the supposition that secondary qualities really belong to the object perceived, Locke is not making a principled objection to any and all perceptual representations which purport to make some essential reference to the way things look to perceivers. Instead, Locke is objecting to that particular set of perceptual representations we happen to make now. From the point of view of the corpuscular hypothesis, the human perceptual apparatus is too coarsely-grained in its operations to do justice to the true texture of the world. What the human eye perceives to be a macroscopic-sized object of uniform colour, an opportunity for undifferentiated sensation, the microscope of the seventeenth-century scientist revealed to be an intricate arrangement of tiny bodies. A more powerful and more discriminating organ of sense than the human eye would replace our current secondary quality ideas with their inaccurate representations of the textures of things, with secondary quality ideas more closely resembling the microscopic structure of the world.

To illustrate my point, consider the following extract:

Had we senses acute enough to discern the minute particles of bodies and the real constitution on which their sensible qualities depend, I doubt not but they would produce quite different ideas in us; and that which is now the yellow colour of gold would then disappear, and instead of it we should see an admirable texture of parts, of a certain size and figure. This microscope plainly discover to us; for what to our naked eyes produces a certain colour is, by thus augmenting the acuteness of our senses, discovered to be quite a different thing; and the thus altering, as it were, the proportion of the bulk of the minute parts of a coloured object to our usual sight produces different ideas from what it did before... Blood to the naked eye appears all red, but by a good microscope, wherein its lesser parts appear, shows only some few globules of red, swimming in a pellucid liquor; and how these red globules would appear, if glasses could be found that yet could magnify them a thousand or ten thousand times more, is uncertain. (*Essay*, II.xxiii.11).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. John W. Yolton; 2nd ed. (London: J.M.Dent and Sons, 1976).



There are two distinct interpretations which might be placed upon a passage such as this one. In the first place, it might be assumed that Locke's intention in this passage was to point out that the secondary qualities assigned to an object are relative to the perceptual apparatus being used to determine them; and that consequently, this passage constitutes an argument from the relative nature of secondary quality judgements to the fact that secondary qualities are not objective features of reality. An alternative reading of the same passage would stress the fact that Locke apparently leaves it an open question whether seeing the object under even greater magnification would continue to raise secondary quality ideas in us, albeit secondary quality ideas more closely resembling the true microscopical textures of things than those secondary quality ideas we entertain now; or whether, under even more powerful magnification than the microscopes of Locke's time, properties such as colour might disappear altogether, so that what are now secondary quality ideas would become primary quality ideas, and a true reflection of the particulate nature of reality. That is to say, Locke leaves it an indeterminate question whether the secondary quality ideas aroused in human perceivers may be explained away as a form of 'noise' accompanying any perceptual message received by the organs of sense; or whether this perceptual 'noise' could be eliminated if we were operating with suitably refined senses. On the first of these interpretations, Locke is making a principled objection to any use of the perceptual organs, on the grounds that these will always create secondary quality representations distorting the true nature of reality. Under the second interpretation, Locke is only objecting to those secondary quality representations we make now, given the fact that the human perceptual apparatus is woefully inadequate to do justice to the corpuscular nature of reality. Whereas on the first interpretation, Locke is keen to demonstrate that any use whatsoever of the perceptual organs inevitably leads to some projective error on the part of the perceiver, on the second interpretation, Locke objects only to that particular projective error we happen to be guilty of now. In short, I would suggest that not all would-be scientific realists are committed to the claim that all perceptual representations making reference to how things look to perceivers must be eliminated from a properly scientific description of the world. For this claim is not an



immediate consequence of the primary-secondary quality distinction; and it is something alien to the thinking of Locke, the figure popularly associated with the introduction of this distinction.

According to McDowell, Mackie's conception of the thoroughly objective constitutes a "thin conception of genuine reality" and a "metaphysically disparaging attitude to values."<sup>32</sup> That variety of projectivism which Mackie attributes to the commonsense point of view, one which treats primary qualities as somehow embedded in the fabric of the world, with all other qualities representing human projections upon this basic matter, is by its very nature uninformative, partly because it excludes so much from the fabric of the world that it results in a thin characterization of the world's fabric; but also because it fails to do justice to any differences in texture which might obtain between the different classes of entity excluded from the world's fabric. Many of those wishing to argue that aesthetic qualities lack objectivity being from the conviction that aesthetic qualities lack objectivity in some different way to the manner in which secondary qualities might be thought to lack it. They would argue, in other words, that whatever degree of objectivity ordinary secondary qualities might be thought to lack vis-a-vis the so-called viewer-independent primary qualities, tertiary qualities such as aesthetic qualities are pathological in some further respect. For instance, the argument has been made that whereas the existence of intersubjective agreement regarding colour judgements makes room for a distinction between objects which are red because they create sensations of redness in ordinary perceivers under ordinary conditions of perception, and objects which merely seem red to the extent of causing sensations of redness in individual perceivers under nonstandard conditions of perception; because aesthetic qualities are by their very nature qualities of appearance, properties characterized in terms of how they present themselves to individual perceivers, they allow no similar distinction between merely seeming F and actually being F.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "Values and Secondary Qualities", p.121, "Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World", p.5.

<sup>33</sup> Isabel Creed Hungerland, "Once Again, Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic", *JAAC*, 26 (1968), 285-295, pp.288-289. Joseph Margolis also expresses doubts that an is/seems distinction can be made for aesthetic qualities. See "Robust Relativism", *JAAC*, 35 (1976), 37-46, p.40, and "Sibley on Aesthetic Perception", *JAAC*, 35 (1976), 155-158, p.158.

I can think of three different ways in which we might interpret the claim that aesthetic qualities are “qualities of appearance,” each one of them yielding a different interpretation for the argument. I shall work through them in turn. In the first place, the idea that aesthetic qualities are qualities of appearance might amount to the claim that these are essentially phenomenal properties and therefore subjective<sub>1</sub>. In which case, since secondary qualities are also both phenomenal properties and subjective<sub>1</sub>, either the argument contradicts itself, or there is no argument here at all. For the argument makes the false claim that anything that is subjective<sub>1</sub> is thereby excluded from being objective<sub>2</sub>, whilst at the same time permitting secondary qualities to be both subjective<sub>1</sub> and objective<sub>2</sub>. Alternatively, the reference to a form of intersubjective agreement grounding the objectivity of colour-descriptions might point to another type of objectivity being appealed to here, objectivity<sub>3</sub>, whereby a matter is objective if it allows the possibility of intersubjective agreement. In which case, the argument claims that the fact that aesthetic qualities are subjective<sub>1</sub> disqualifies these from being objective<sub>3</sub>. Once again, the argument contrives to go nowhere, telling us as it does that, on the one hand, secondary qualities are both subjective<sub>1</sub> and objective<sub>3</sub> (or possibly subjective<sub>1</sub> and both objective<sub>2</sub> and objective<sub>3</sub>), and on the other hand, that the mere fact that aesthetic qualities are subjective<sub>1</sub> is sufficient to exclude them from being objective<sub>2</sub> or objective<sub>3</sub>. In addition to displaying a lack of conceptual clarity on the part of those framing it, this argument demonstrates that it is impossible to claim that there exists intersubjective agreement regarding colour-judgements and deny the same for aesthetic judgements without assuming the truth of the thing you set to prove in the first place, namely, that aesthetic judgements are hopelessly relative.

Clearly, those wishing to argue that aesthetic qualities *qua* qualities of appearance lack the objectivity enjoyed by secondary qualities must believe that aesthetic qualities are not just phenomenal qualities after the fashion of secondary qualities, these are ‘flagrantly’ phenomenal qualities. Someone arguing along these lines might seize upon my own characterization of aesthetic judgements to make her point. For treating aesthetic judgements as judgements characterizing the way things look to the act of perception

itself involves treating these as phenomenal characterizations of what already possesses a phenomenal presentation. However, this line of argument might be turned upon its head. For rather than taking the fact that we can enjoy another perceptual 'take' upon the object subjected to an aesthetic description to show that aesthetic descriptions are somehow lacking in objectivity; the same fact might be taken to demonstrate the fact that aesthetic characterizations enjoy a species of objectivity lacking to colour-judgements. This is because the fact that I can have another perceptual take upon the object viewed aesthetically opens up the possibility of reason-giving in aesthetics. When a dispute arises concerning coloured perception, there is no opportunity to appeal to criteria of a perceptible nature to solve that dispute. By contrast, where a dispute arises concerning the aesthetic character of an object, the disputants enjoy the option of justifying their aesthetic claims by appealing to the perceptible nonaesthetic facts of the matter.

Margolis provides yet another gloss upon the notion that aesthetic qualities are qualities of appearance in a way in which secondary qualities are not, when he provides what he believes to be a factual description of the nature of aesthetic dispute. Margolis observes that two persons may agree when it comes to describing all the nonaesthetic features of an object, yet disagree regarding the aesthetic character of the object concerned. Here, Margolis is not simply alluding to what was earlier described as the "perceptually elusive" nature of aesthetic characterizations, the fact that thorough acts of perception may fail to reveal the aesthetic qualities of an object. For the type of dispute Margolis has in mind here is not one between an aesthetic sophisticate and an aesthetic clod, between someone who perceives the gracefulness of a dance and someone who fails to assign any aesthetic character at all to the dance. Rather, Margolis envisages a dispute between two aesthetically sensitive perceivers who assign conflicting aesthetic characterizations to the same object, as happens when one person judges a painting to be garish where the other sees a composition that is vibrant, lively and full of vitality. Margolis believes that aesthetic discourse tolerates and allows participants to defend incompatible aesthetic characterizations, and the reason why he believes this is because he

believes that the 'reasons' backing aesthetic judgements function as personal reasons, binding only upon the speaker:

You may be prepared to say that you quite understand why, given *my* reasons, *I* say (or 'see') the dance is (or 'as') graceful; but you do not find yourself logically bound in any sense, having admitted the nonaesthetic qualities (which I am advancing as reasons), to support or share my *claim* or *judgment*. In a word, you insist that you appreciate things differently. You see why I say it is graceful all right, but the qualities mentioned do not *count* as decisively for grace for you as they do for me.<sup>34</sup> [italics in text]

In line with Margolis' description of the nature of aesthetic dispute, someone might argue that aesthetic judgements are judgements of appearance to the extent that these draw upon what we might call 'personal' reasons, a form of reason-giving alien to the making of colour-judgements.

It might be suggested that the notion of a personal reason introduced here is thoroughly unintelligible. A private reason of the sort Margolis envisages might serve as some sort of psychological reassurance to the reason-giver, giving him the comforting reflection "I have my reasons;" but this would not function as a reason in any intelligible meaning of the word. Prima facie, to say that my reasons are private ones, reasons I could never expect to apply to someone finding themselves in a specifiably similar situation to the one I find myself in now, is to say that I have no reasons at all. Unless we can make sense of the notion of a personal reason, we will be unable to make any sense of Margolis' proposal.

To throw some light upon the notion of a personal reason as it operates in Margolis' argument, consider how, in a very similar description of the nature of aesthetic dispute to the one offered by Margolis, Jeffrey Olen characterises aesthetic descriptions as 'theories' or 'interpretations' of works of art. Olen notes that whereas some of the terms employed in aesthetic descriptions, terms such as 'red', 'large', 'straight', 'dark', and 'triangular', would be agreed to by anyone who looks at the work, other terms occurring in aesthetic descriptions, terms such as 'graceful', 'gay', 'powerful', 'sombre' and 'dainty', are

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<sup>34</sup> "Sibley on Aesthetic Perception", p.157.

'theory-laden' to the extent that people will only agree to these if they agree in their interpretation of a work of art. To someone who views the *Bridgewater Madonna* as a calm and serene work, the hands of the Madonna are expressive of tenderness. An opponent might see the Madonna's hands as 'languid' and 'lifeless' because he views the painting as a 'flat' and 'insipid' work. Olen uses examples of this type to suggest that aesthetic terms do not apply to works of art independently of our interpretations of works of art.<sup>35</sup> In the unusually broad sense in which Olen uses the notion,<sup>36</sup> an interpretation of a work of art includes those all statements concerning the work that are intended to form a coherent description of the work and intended to unify the work according to aesthetic principles. Thus, statements regarding the 'meaning' or 'significance' of the work, about the representational or suggestive functioning of the work form part of the interpretation. In fact, almost anything intelligible we choose to say regarding a work of art would, to Olen's way of thinking, constitute an interpretation. In another piece of loose nomenclature, Olen dubs these interpretations of works of art 'theories'. In its role as a theory, an interpretation of a work of art explains why a work has the qualities it does, serves to unify the non-theory laden qualities of the work, and serves to demonstrate that the theory-laden qualities 'posited' by the theory are suitably connected to each other and to the non-theory laden qualities.<sup>37</sup>

Olen is happy to point out an obvious disanalogy obtaining between the notion of a theory as it operates in science, and the aesthetic theories he describes. Olen suggests that, unlike the theories of science which must meet standards of internal consistency and explanatory coherence, no aesthetic theory counts as false simply because it contradicts another aesthetic theory. Where two scientific theories are seen to be in conflict, we preserve explanatory coherence in our total world view by judging one of those theories to be false. In the aesthetic realm, we do not feel similarly constrained, in the interests of preserving explanatory coherence, to decide upon the truth or falsity of conflicting

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<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey Olen, "Theories, Interpretations, and Aesthetic Qualities", *JAAC*, 35 (1977), 425-431; pp.427-428.

<sup>36</sup> See Olen, footnote 6, p.431.

<sup>37</sup> Olen, p.428.



aesthetic theories or interpretations.<sup>38</sup> The explanatory coherence of our total world view does not stand or fall according to whether two people agree that the hands of the *Bridgewater Madonna* are 'tender' or 'insipid'. Olen's discussion of the nature of aesthetic theories provides the following gloss upon the notion of a 'personal' reason. To say that the reason underlying my aesthetic judgement is a personal one is to say that I do not feel compelled, in the interests of preserving explanatory coherence, to defend my reasons or to decide between my reasons and those of another person. The reasons supporting my aesthetic judgements are personal reasons because, in aesthetic matters, we agree to disagree. To adopt the manner of discussion that Margolis suggests, I might listen as you describe the *Bridgewater Madonna* as 'flat' and 'insipid'. I might feel moved to observe that for someone who views the work in those terms, the hands will look 'languid' and 'lifeless'. I might even agree that describing the painting overall as 'flat' and 'insipid' is perfectly coherent with all the non-theory laden properties the work possesses. And there I allow the matter to rest, resisting the urge to demonstrate to you why treating the work as a timeless statement of serenity would lead to an even more cogent explanation of the properties you describe, an explanation that might be utilized with success in describing other works. For in matters of aesthetic opinion, we operate a gentlemen's club agreement that there will be no entangling in messy aesthetic disputes which can have no bearing upon those laws of mechanical explanation that dictate whether or not I will be able to catch the bus on time tomorrow morning.

If this description carries an air of parody about it, I make no apology for the fact. For what Margolis and Olen provide is not *argument* in favour of the relativity of aesthetic description, but *assertion* of the conviction that all aesthetic judgement is hopelessly relative in nature, and assertion of the accompanying conviction that the participants to an aesthetic discussion will recognize the fact that no opinion is defensible, and will adapt their rhetoric accordingly. Whilst it is no doubt true to say that the explanatory coherence of our total world view does not stand or fall according to any decision we make or fail to make concerning the hands of the Madonna, almost

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<sup>38</sup> Olen, p.429.

everything else we might choose to say in the realm of aesthetic discussion does. Unless we are willing to examine reasons, to consider whether those features of the work in virtue of which I find the Madonna serene could function as serenity-making features in other works of art, the very *possibility* of aesthetic discussion evaporates. What remains in the place of discussion is the mere outward form of discussion, the diffident exchange of observations, the sterile opportunity to talk at or past one another in a polite fashion, that I have attributed to Margolis' account. To suppose that nothing else we say in the realm of aesthetic discourse could possibly depend upon what you or I say concerning the *Bridgewater Madonna*, is to assert without proof the hopelessly relative nature of aesthetic dispute. The problem with Olen's proposal is that simply giving various aesthetic attributions the grand-sounding name of 'theories' or 'interpretations' of works of art does not make them so. Far from being embarrassed by the obvious disanalogy that obtains between the theories of science and the theories he describes, Olen uses the fact that aesthetic theories are not subject to the constraints of explanatory coherence to illustrate the relative nature of aesthetic judgement. It goes almost without saying that those not already persuaded of the relative nature of aesthetic judgement would probably use the same fact to demonstrate that the aesthetic 'interpretations' which Olen describes do not function as 'theories' in any meaningful use of the word.

Another way of expressing dissatisfaction with the proposal put forward by Margolis and Olen would be to point out that the assertion, that a determinate set of nonaesthetic qualities counts for gracefulness for me but not for you, apparently violates the intuition underlying the doctrine of aesthetic supervenience. Although the doctrine of supervenience will be discussed in detail in the following section, it will be useful to anticipate some findings here. The doctrine of aesthetic supervenience tells us that things cannot vary aesthetically without varying nonaesthetically. It is a conceptual impossibility that two things should be identical in every conceivable respect yet one be F and the other not-F. In the event that Sally and Jane are indistinguishable in every way, then it is impossible that Sally should be beautiful if Jane is not. Applying the same doctrine to a situation where one object is viewed by different persons, then it is impossible that an

object should change aesthetically between two perceivers unless the aesthetic change happens to be accompanied by some nonaesthetic change in the situation. Although much thought has been given in recent years to specifying the type of nonaesthetic change which would accompany a change in aesthetic qualities, few if any writers would share Margolis' belief that it requires nothing more than a change of perceiver to alter the aesthetic characteristics of an object. One person who does make this claim is Marcia Muelder Eaton. Eaton asserts "I do not have to believe that someone must differ 'sensibly' from me to grant that he or she may apply different, even contradictory aesthetic terms to the same object or event. Even I myself may, staying sensibly the same, come to apply different or contradictory terms myself to an object whose non-aesthetic properties are stable."<sup>39</sup> It is significant to note that Muelder Eaton actively argues against the usefulness of the doctrine of supervenience. As I shall argue in the next section, supervenience is best viewed, not as a doctrine concerning the dependency of classes of qualities upon other classes of qualities, but as a doctrine describing some minimum consistency requirement upon emergent or dependent properties. To treat dependent qualities as qualities which may vary in their application from speaker to speaker is to deprive these of the status of properties. I conclude that the aesthetic realist will not rush to endorse that description of the nature of aesthetic discourse on offer from Margolis or Olen or Eaton.

In summary, the fact that aesthetic qualities constitute qualities of appearance, and in fact, the appearances of more fundamental qualities of appearance, drove us to question the objective status of aesthetic judgements. I have not been able to find any good or persuasive arguments supporting the contention that aesthetic judgements lack objectivity. Those objecting to the claim that aesthetic qualities are 'objective' do so, either out of the metaphysical conviction that these qualities are less 'real' than, say, primary qualities, because unlike primary qualities, tertiary aesthetic qualities are not deemed an essential ingredient in the scientific realist's description of the world; or because they tend to confound two very different notions of objectivity. Here I have attempted to demonstrate

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<sup>39</sup> Marcia Muelder Eaton, "The Intrinsic, Non-Supervenient Nature of Aesthetic Qualities", *JAAC*, 52 (1994), 383-397, p.387.

that disentangling the two species of objectivity and subjectivity which McDowell places before us reveals the confusions underlying these objections. It is true to say that, *qua* qualities of appearance, aesthetic qualities are not objective in the sense that these can be adequately conceived without making reference to the way they present themselves to perceivers. Nonetheless, the fact that an understanding of the nature of aesthetic qualities makes essential reference to the representations of perceivers does nothing to demonstrate that these are subjective in the sense of being nothing more than figments of perceivers' perceptual representations. Nor does the fact that aesthetic qualities make essential reference to the representations of perceivers undermine the possibility of achieving some form of intersubjective agreement concerning the nature of these perceptual presentations. That is to say, there is every reason to suppose that aesthetic qualities enjoy whatever objectivity attaches to those other qualities of appearance with which we are familiar, the so-called secondary qualities. Those claiming that aesthetic qualities lack the level of objectivity attaching to secondary qualities do so for one of two reasons: because they confuse in their own minds the two species of objectivity which McDowell has helped to separate; or else because they believe that factually speaking, aesthetic descriptions do not attract the same high level of intersubjective agreement afforded to secondary quality descriptions. As we discovered in considering the proposals of Margolis and Olen, those who adopt the second position do not offer arguments for their claim that aesthetic judgements fail to attract intersubjective agreement, but instead assume the hopelessly relative nature of aesthetic judgement, and adjust their own descriptions of the nature of aesthetic discussion accordingly. In light of the inadequacies of these various lines of argumentation, I conclude that there is every reason to suppose that aesthetic judgements are no more, and no less, objective than secondary quality judgements.

### III

Where Sibley and his contemporaries tend to speak of aesthetic qualities depending upon or emerging from the nonaesthetic qualities of an object, the current generation of articles devoted to the topic of aesthetic attribution speak of aesthetic qualities 'supervening' upon a base of nonaesthetic qualities.<sup>40</sup> Judging by the recent literature devoted to the topic, no discussion adopting a realist stance upon the question of aesthetic judgement would be complete which failed to pay some attention to the concept of aesthetic supervenience. What is aesthetic supervenience, and why are aestheticians determined to expend so much paper and breath on this topic? Does talk of supervenience help to throw light upon the relationship of dependency between aesthetic qualities and the nonaesthetic qualities these emerge from?

The doctrine of aesthetic supervenience states that two objects possessing precisely the same nonaesthetic attributes will be indistinguishable with respect to their aesthetic attributes. If we assume the nature of human sensibilities to be relatively fixed, it follows that in order to change the aesthetic attributes of a work of art it is necessary to change at least some of the nonaesthetic attributes belonging to that work. The doctrine of supervenience takes one of two forms. According to *weak supervenience*, if we assume a complete, base description of a thing, B\*, telling us everything that could be relevant to determining its A-state, then necessarily if there is a thing which is B\* and A, then anything resembling it in being B\* is like it in being A as well. *Strong supervenience*

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<sup>40</sup> Recent discussions include Jerrold Levinson, "Aesthetic Supervenience", reprinted in *Music, Art and Metaphysics: Essays on Philosophical Aesthetics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp.134-158; John Bender, "Supervenience and the Justification of Aesthetic Judgments", *JAAC*, 46 (1987), 31-40; Gregory Currie, "Supervenience, Essentialism and Aesthetic Properties", *Philosophical Studies*, 58 (1990), 243-257; Marcia Mulder Eaton, "The Intrinsic, Non-Supervenient Nature of Aesthetic Properties". These articles variously derive an understanding of the nature of supervenience from the work of Simon Blackburn and Jaegwon Kim, including: Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word: Groundings in the Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), esp.pp.181-189; Simon Blackburn, "Supervenience Revisited", in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. G.Sayre-McCord (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), PP.59-75; Jaegwon Kim, "Supervenience and Nomological Incommensurables", *APQ*, 15 (1978), 149-156; Jaegwon Kim, "Concepts of Supervenience", *PPR*, 45 (1984), 153-176. The account of supervenience developed in this section is derived almost entirely from Simon Blackburn's discussion in *Spreading the Word*.



states that necessarily, if a thing is B\*, it is A.<sup>41</sup> Strong supervenience differs from weak in ruling out the possibility that there are things which are B\* and not -A. For weak supervenience recognizes the possibility that, whilst the world as we know it is such that human beings regard things which are B\* as being A, things might have been so constituted that human beings reacted to things that are B\* as if they were not-A. That is to say, whereas strong supervenience functions as a ban upon possible worlds in which things are B\* and not-A, weak supervenience permits the existence of worlds differing from our own in this respect. What weak supervenience bans is the existence of 'mixed' worlds, worlds in which there are both things which are B\* and A, and things which are B\* and not-A.<sup>42</sup> Weak supervenience simply points out that, as the facts now obtain for use, once we have discovered one thing that is B\* and A, we can expect to find that anything else that is B\* will also be A.

The following intuition suggests that it is appropriate to adopt the weak rather than the strong form of the supervenience relationship in the aesthetic case. Whilst it seems conceptually or logically necessary that two things sharing a total basis of natural properties should possess the same aesthetic properties, it does not seem to be a matter of conceptual or logical necessity that any given total natural state of a thing should give it some particular aesthetic property rather than another.<sup>43</sup> As John Bender points out, if our cognitive, sensory, and emotive faculties were significantly different from what they are, then facts about the aesthetic properties of objects would be altered. Bender illustrates this point by suggesting that, if human colour vision were very much more sensitive to greens than to yellows, the interplay of colours in a Cezanne still life would no longer be subtle.<sup>44</sup> Weak supervenience is coherent with the fact that which aesthetic qualities happen to be matched with which total natural states would appear to be a matter for empirical rather than conceptual investigation. Accepting weak over strong supervenience also allows us to articulate the nature of that form of objectivity enjoyed by aesthetic qualities. As demonstrated in the previous section of this chapter, to say that an

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<sup>41</sup> Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, p.183.

<sup>42</sup> Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, pp.183-184.

<sup>43</sup> Blackburn, p.184.

<sup>44</sup> John Bender, "Supervenience and the Justification of Aesthetic Judgments", p.37.

aesthetic quality A is objective is not to say that things which are B\* would continue to be A in the absence of all sentient beings. Nor is it to say, as strong supervenience suggests, that things which are B\* would be A for all sentient beings in all possible worlds. Rather, to say that aesthetic qualities are objective is to say that they are there to be perceived as opposed to being figments of the subjective states of which they purport to be experiences. It is to say that aesthetic qualities are qualities of appearance which are qualities of stable appearance, presenting themselves to all or most similarly constituted perceivers in the same way. Talk of weak supervenience captures the objectivist claim that once we know that things which are B\* seem A to reliable perceivers, we can stably predict the same correlation between B\* and A for other reliable perceivers within a possible world.

The question naturally arises, what attributes belong to the supervenience base for an aesthetic attribute? Jerrold Levinson divides the potential candidates for the supervenience base for a given aesthetic attribute between three categories: the *structural*, the *substructural*, and the *contextual*. Levinson defines a structural attribute as a perceivable attribute, and a substructural attribute as any physical attribute that is not perceivable, in the sense that it is not discernible from an alternative at the same level of of specificity. Thus, if the copy of an original painting contains a line 6 centimetres in length where there is a 5 centimeter line in the original, this would amount to a structural difference between the pictures. If on the other hand, the line in the copy was precisely 5.0005 centimetres in length, then this would amount to a substructural difference, and 'having a line exactly 5.0005 centimetres long in the upper right corner' would count as a substructural attribution. Contextual attributes include any "appreciatively important relation of the object to the artistic context in which it occurs,"<sup>45</sup> and would include such attributes as being painted by Mondrian, being in a certain genre, being influenced by the Mona Lisa.

Intuitively, one would expect to operate with the notion of weak supervenience as follows. You specify B\* by specifying a set of attributes in a given object responsible for

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<sup>45</sup> "Aesthetic Supervenience", p.135. See also "Aesthetic Uniqueness", also reprinted in *Music, Art and Metaphysics*, pp.113-115.

the A-ness of the object. You project that anything else discovered to be B\* must also count as A, accepting at the same time that counterfactually speaking, had things been different, you might have been matching some other A with B\*. The most likely-looking candidates for base properties underlying those A qualities which do not vary between the perceivers within a possible world are structural attributes. The assumption would therefore be that, in the terminology provided by Levinson, aesthetic properties are 'centrally supervenient' upon structural rather than substructural or contextual attributes.<sup>46</sup> The claim that aesthetic attributes are centrally supervenient upon structural attributes reflects the fact that we are more likely to discriminate aesthetically between two works of art in the event that the works were perceptibly, rather than imperceptibly, different. It further reflects the fact that that two works of art might differ substructurally - say, by differing in their chemical composition - without differing either structurally or aesthetically.

The problem with claiming that the aesthetic attributes of a work of art are centrally supervenient upon the structural attributes is that, whilst it is true to say that substructural differences failing to issue in structural differences will probably not influence the aesthetic attributes of works, it is far from obvious that contextual factors play little or no role in determining aesthetic character. Kendall Walton demonstrates the contextually sensitive nature of aesthetic qualities when he argues that those aesthetic properties we perceive to be present in a work of art will be determined in part by the category to which the work belongs. This is because the category under which a work of art is subsumed determines which features belonging to the work are seen as standard and which are seen as variable for that kind. Those features taken to be variable for an artwork of that kind will be judged to be the noteworthy or expressive features of the work, those contributing to its perceived aesthetic character. Walton illustrates this point by imagining a society lacking the established medium of painting but which produces *guernicas*, an artform consisting of versions of Picasso's "Guernica" done in various bas-relief dimensions.<sup>47</sup> Whereas the flatness of "Guernica" is a feature we judge to be standard to paintings and

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<sup>46</sup> Levinson, "Aesthetic Supervenience", p.136.

<sup>47</sup> Kendall L. Walton, "Categories of Art", *PR*, 79 (1970), 334-367, p.347.

therefore tend to overlook in determining the aesthetic character of Picasso's painting, the same feature becomes the most noteworthy and expressive characteristic in a society familiar only with bas-relief guernicas. Whereas we see "Guernica" as violent, dynamic, vital, disturbing; to those seeing it as a guernica, Picasso's picture will appear to be cold, serene, bland and lifeless.

Some have wished to argue that it is not only the nonaesthetic structural properties that a thing possesses which determine its aesthetic qualities; but that the situation in which an object is viewed, as well as the nature of those doing the viewing, could play some part in determining aesthetic character. For Walton, the categories to which we assign works of art are not interpretations or theories in the attenuated sense employed by Jeffrey Olen, but reflect the cumulative art experiences of specific social groups. That is to say, Walton's suggestion that the aesthetic qualities of a work depend upon the category under which the work is seen reflects the fact that both the art-historical context of a work, as well as the art-historical experiences of different perceivers, may influence the aesthetic qualities thought to belong to a work of art. Gregory Currie takes up Walton's theme when he suggests that aesthetic properties depend upon 'historical' properties which might include relations to individuals, the community, and to other works of art. In some cases, the aesthetic impact of a work will partially depend upon the originality assigned to the work, where being original is a matter of being significantly different from other works available at the time.<sup>48</sup> Arguing in a similar vein to Currie, one might observe that a perceiver with a wide and varied experience of art objects is less likely to assign properties of originality to each new work of art that comes along, than is a naive perceiver who has witnessed far fewer works and artistic genres. Currie demonstrates the falsity of the claim that aesthetic qualities are centrally supervenient upon structural properties by pointing out that even those A-properties most plausibly thought to be dependent upon structure alone - such properties as beauty, dynamism, vibrancy - are partially dependent upon historical properties. A work which strikes us as 'vibrant' or 'dynamic' would not so strike us if we saw it as merely repeating a formula

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<sup>48</sup>Gregory Currie, "Supervenience, Essentialism, and Aesthetic Properties", p.248.



exemplified by countless other works with which we were already familiar.<sup>49</sup> The dispute between those believing that more than the structural properties of works determine their aesthetic character, and those who believe that aesthetic properties are centrally supervenient upon structural properties, amounts to the dispute between those adopting the wide notion of the term 'aesthetic', and those adopting Sibley's narrower use of the term.

John Bender draws attention to the fact that, once you set about specifying the supervenience base for a given *A*, it is difficult to know where to stop. Bender argues that, however we decide to specify the supervenience base for an aesthetic attribute *A* in a work of art *s*, we cannot reduce the notion of aesthetic supervenience to one of aesthetic determination. This is because the supervenience base for *A* inevitably includes more than those properties of *s* thought to determine its *A*-ness. Bender reasons that an interpretation of the supervenience base which leaves outside of the base properties any which could defeat the *A*-ness of *s* while being compatible with those properties mentioned in the base "will violate the logical claim which supervenience makes, namely, that indiscernibility in regard to the base insures indiscernibility in regard to supervenient properties."<sup>50</sup> For this reason, the supervenience base for *A* must include not only all the positive, *A*-making properties belonging to *s*, but the complements of whatever *A*-defeating properties *s* lacks. Bender points out that the metal version of Brancusi's sculpture *Bird in Space* has a 'rarified calm and elegance' deriving from its seamless, polished surface, its tapered and flowing form, its ratio of height to base, the purity and coolness of its materials. The base description for the elegance of Brancusi's sculpture must include these elegance-making properties, but also such properties as the fact that the sculpture is not smeared with blood after the manner of the works of Soutine.

Bender is right to suggest that the notion of aesthetic supervenience does not capture the notion of aesthetic determination. To argue that the supervenience base for *A* should include only those properties of *s* directly responsible for *A* is to project or predict laws of correspondence between aesthetic and nonaesthetic qualities. This moves in the

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<sup>49</sup> Gregory Currie, pp.255-256.

<sup>50</sup> "Supervenience and the Justification of Aesthetic Judgments", p.34.



direction of the formula of strong supervenience, towards the notion that there exist essential connections between sets of nonaesthetic properties and particular aesthetic properties in all possible worlds. Weak supervenience makes the more modest claim that whatever else besides *s* happens to meet the situation before me now, the situation bringing about the *A*-ness of *s*, must also count as *A*. Yet clearly, the more accurately and clearly I specify the conditions which must stay the same to bring about *A*, the less likely it will be that anything besides *s* can fulfil those conditions. If the supervenience base for *A* must include every conceivable factor in the current situation contributing to the *A*-ness of *s*, it follows that the supervenience base must list historical as well as structural properties. As Currie points out, this means that at the end of the day, the works being compared for *A*-ness will be works which originated in the same community from the hand of the same artist, displaying the same relations of precedence and influence to other works. That is to say, the works being compared will be numerically identical with one another. Because weak supervenience collapses into the tautology that identical things have identical properties, Currie concludes that weak supervenience is an uninformative and uninteresting claim.<sup>51</sup>

Marcia Muelder Eaton has suggested that the notion of supervenience is of dubious value to aesthetics. This is because, according to Muelder Eaton, epistemological questions concerning the justification of aesthetic attributions receive little illumination from introducing what is a primarily metaphysical notion describing how certain properties depend for their existence upon others.<sup>52</sup> As it happens, a large part of Muelder Eaton's hostility to the concept of aesthetic supervenience can be attributed to the fact that Muelder Eaton believes that there is no intuitive distinction to be made between aesthetic qualities and those nonaesthetic qualities upon which they supervene. Muelder Eaton replaces the notion of an aesthetic quality as Sibley uses the term with the notion of a quality that has been appreciated aesthetically. That is to say, for Muelder Eaton, an aesthetic quality is any quality that has been elevated into an object of aesthetic appreciation by a perceiver. Even a supposedly nonaesthetic quality such as a colour has

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<sup>51</sup> Gregory Currie, pp.248-249.

<sup>52</sup> Marcia Muelder Eaton, "The Intrinsic, Non-Supervenient Nature of Aesthetic Properties", p.391.

the potential to be elevated into an object of aesthetic appreciation in a suitable context and thereby function as an aesthetic quality.<sup>53</sup> That having been said, John Bender's demonstration that aesthetic determination does not coincide with the notion of aesthetic supervenience, apparently endorses Marcia Muelder Eaton's suggestion that supervenience captures a metaphysical rather than an epistemological notion of dependency. I would suggest that the doctrine of weak supervenience does function as a metaphysical notion, one serving to lay out the consequences of a certain form of metaphysical understanding. That is to say, talk of aesthetic supervenience lays out the scientific realist's view of how aesthetic qualities should relate to his base description of the world. The scientific realist regards aesthetic qualities as queer entities unnecessary to his own world view. In laying out a supervenience requirement placing a ban upon mixed worlds, the scientific realist specifies those conditions under which he would tolerate talk of aesthetic qualities as an addendum to his base description of the world. The scientific realist does not pretend to explain or predict whatever matches might obtain between these queer entities and the properties in his base description. He simply demands that, if and where and when a match has been established between some B\* and some A, the match should be carried through consistently if A is to be accorded the status of a property-concept. Talk of supervenience does lay down a type of minimum property behaviour for aesthetic attributions, no doubt making it attractive to those aesthetic realists looking to accord our aesthetic attributions the status of property terms. However, if the doctrine of supervenience is nothing more than a statement of grudging tolerance on the part of the scientific realist for those properties which he has chosen to exclude from his base-level description of the world, then talk of supervenience in the aesthetic realm becomes an empty intellectual exercise, an attempt on the part of the aesthetic realist to court the approval of the scientific realist by adopting the rhetoric of the latter. I concur with Marcia Muelder Eaton's assertion that the notion of supervenience has no real role to play in the area of aesthetics, that this notion can tell us very little concerning the

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<sup>53</sup> See "The Intrinsic, Non-Supervenient Nature of Aesthetic Properties", esp. p.390.

relationship between aesthetic properties and the nonaesthetic properties from which they emerge.

#### IV

At the end of the second chapter,<sup>54</sup> I described how Sibley's belief that aesthetic sensitivity constitutes something like a perceptual capacity led him to endorse a version of the commonsense understanding of the relative distribution of aesthetic competence. This commonsense model, it will be recalled, describes a population ranged along a scale of aesthetic competence, with those incapable of forming any aesthetic judgements at all - the so-called 'aesthetic clods' - occupying the lower end of the scale, the aesthetic experts or those possessing 'taste' occupying the top end, and Everyman ranging somewhere between the two. Everyman would represent that majority of the population who, though not excluded in principle from forming aesthetic judgements, would display their aesthetic competence on a less frequent basis than those judged to be aesthetically adept. I made the suggestion that this commonsense understanding of the relative distribution of taste reflects and parallels our understanding of the relative distribution of ordinary perceptual competence. That is to say, operating within a given parameter of sensory experience, we understand the concept of a person incapable of producing adequate perceptual judgements within that parameter; the concept of an averagely competent perceptual performance; and the concept of an extraordinarily sensitive performance. How closely Sibley follows this commonsense model of the distribution of taste is difficult to say. Certainly, Sibley admits the existence of persons occupying either end of the scale, clods and persons of taste. The confusion arises over whether Sibley believes that the possession of taste is an all-or-nothing affair. If taste is something you either have or you don't, then the population must be divided between the sensitive and the

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<sup>54</sup> See above, pp.107-109.

clodish, with nothing in between. However, if persons may possess different degrees of taste, then we would expect to discover persons existing between the two extremes of the scale, persons capable of demonstrating aesthetic sensitivity only some of the time. That Sibley assumes the latter is suggested by the contrast Sibley draws between the agreement that exists within the population over coloured judgements, and the agreement that exists over aesthetic determinations. Sibley acknowledges that whereas the majority of humankind agree in their colour judgements, when it comes to aesthetic dispute we find a small 'nucleus' of those more or less agreeing in their aesthetic attributions, surrounded by a "large and variable penumbra consisting of groups exhibiting partial and merging areas of agreement corresponding to what we ordinarily call areas of limited sensibility and levels of sophistication".<sup>55</sup> I shall therefore assume that Sibley does endorse a version of the commonsense view. In light of the theory of aesthetic judgement developed in the first section of this chapter, it is now possible to assess the accuracy of Sibley's picture of the relative distribution of taste.

However closely Sibley follows the commonsense model of the relative distribution of taste, what is beyond dispute is that Sibley broadly distinguishes between those who possess and those who lack taste. If his description of the relative distribution of coloured perception reflects his understanding of the relative distribution of aesthetic competence, then Sibley believes that those who possess taste represent a minority of all perceivers. The notion that aesthetic sensitivity is confined to a gifted elite is premised upon the perceptually elusive nature of aesthetic characteristics. As argued in the first section of this chapter, the perceptually elusive nature of aesthetic characteristics is something of a myth. Aesthetic characteristics only elude us during the course of ordinary acts of perception if we choose to adopt an artificial perceptual attitude which consciously excludes them. The perceiver who perceives and perceives thoroughly without noticing aesthetic characteristics is not the ordinary perceiver who lacks 'taste', but someone who adopts the artificial perceptual perspective of the scientifically detached observer, a perspective that encourages her to ignore the aesthetic aspects given directly to ordinary

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<sup>55</sup> Frank Sibley, "Objectivity and Aesthetics", *PAS*, Supp. Vol. 42 (1968), 31-72, p.47.

acts of perception. If what I have argued is correct, what Sibley characterizes as 'taste' amounts in a large part to a sensitivity to the perceptual character of the things we perceive, a form of awareness which might enter the content of any and every act of perception. It follows that anyone capable of perceiving not only possesses the capacity to form aesthetic judgements, but necessarily entertains ideas concerning the aesthetic or perceptual characters of objects in the course of ordinary acts of perception. We should expect to find a majority of persons capable, in principle if not always in practice, both of determining the perceptual character of the objects they perceive, and of using an aesthetic vocabulary with some success. That is to say, any attempt to treat taste as a broadly perceptual capacity should place the capacity for aesthetic judgement within the province of Everyman, rather than the province of a few gifted individuals.

To reject the perceptually elusive nature of aesthetic characteristics is to reject the notion that there could be 'ordinary' perceivers who lack altogether the capacity to form aesthetic judgements. It follows that the greatest problem with Sibley's reworking of the commonsense view of the distribution of taste rests in the person of the aesthetic clod. The notion of the clod is, of course, premised upon the perceptually elusive nature of aesthetic characteristics. Sibley conceives the aesthetic clod as a person who demonstrates considerable competence when it comes to detecting nonaesthetic qualities, yet little or no competence in detecting aesthetic features. Conceived in these terms, the notion of the clod is incoherent. We can make sense of a person whose 'clodishness' was confined to some areas of her aesthetic experience; and we would attribute her insensitivity in those areas to some underlying perceptual deficiency. The element of truth contained in the commonsense view that the relative distribution of aesthetic competence reflects the relative distribution of ordinary perceptual sensitivity amounts to this: that those individuals displaying an incapacity in some basic parameter of sensory experience are thereby excluded from forming whatever aesthetic judgements might rely upon the exercise of that capacity. Thus, the aesthetic character of colours would elude someone who was colour-blind, who could not identify the 'face' that a colour possesses for the perceiver, could not experience the warm liveliness of one colour, the cold passivity of



another. Admittedly, this basic incapacity would have a knock-on effect in preventing the individual concerned from recognizing whatever compositional aesthetic qualities emerged from an awareness of the aesthetic character of perceived colour. However, colour-blindness in itself would not be sufficient to render someone an aesthetic clod across all areas of aesthetic experience. Colour-blindness would not prevent the afflicted individual from forming visual aesthetic judgements which did not rely upon the ability to detect colour. Nor would it deprive her of the ability to form ideas concerning the aesthetic character of musical sound - unless, of course, she had the misfortune to be tone-deaf as well as colour-blind. Thus, whilst it is possible to make sense of the notion that someone could be an aesthetic 'clod' across some part of her sensory experience, it is not possible to imagine that someone could function as an aesthetic clod in all areas of her experience. We may lay it down as a law: the person who cannot perceive any aesthetic characteristics whatsoever is the person who lacks the ability to *perceive*.

Sibley conceives the clod, not as someone displaying a deficiency in ordinary perceptual competence, but as someone displaying a form of aspect-blindness. The question arises whether the clod's aspect-blindness is a general aspect blindness, extending to all emergent or gestalt qualities; or whether her aspect-blindness is confined to those aspects amounting to aesthetic characteristics. Neither of these options bears up under scrutiny. Arguably, someone who was blind to all perceptual gestalt qualities would have experiences that were chaotic and quite unlike our own. Such an individual would be confined to experiencing the world as a series of sense data, and would never form recognizable perceptual judgements. She might experience a piece of music as a sequence of sounds, but not as a melody moving through space, rising and falling, possessing rhythmic qualities. Being blind to all emergent qualities, the clod would fail to recognize those things most crucial to her survival in the world - the friendliness in one face, the menace in another. On the other hand, to suggest that the clod's aspect-blindness is confined to a failure to detect all and only aesthetic qualities is to paint a picture of perceptual and linguistic schizophrenia. It seems improbable, to say the least, that the clod would be capable of noticing the soaring quality of a bird in flight, but that

no amount of training could bring her to see that a gothic spire or a soprano vocal line possess a perceptual character suitably described as 'soaring'. Nor does it seem reasonable to suppose that the clod could recognize the menace in the face of an assailant, but that no amount of introspecting upon the character of her experiences could bring her to hear the menace in the music accompanying the Sacristan's entrance in Act One of *Tosca*. As the discussion of Arnheim's theory of physiognomic perception brought to light, we would be suspicious of anyone who, whilst laying claim to competence in applying emotion terms to persons, showed no ability to apply the same terms to works of art or parts of nature. I suggested that part of the reason we would be baffled to discover someone who lacked this wider competence is because part of the process of acquiring an emotion concept involves recognizing how the same concept applies to the appearances of inanimate things. I also suggested that an ability to recognize the latter might well predate the ability to recognize the former in the developing individual. Very similar observations might be made concerning those aesthetic attributions failing to employ emotion terms. It seems unlikely that someone could have acquired the concept of 'soaring' in the flight of a bird without being able simultaneously to recognize a 'soaring' character in a cathedral spire or a musical line. It is doubtful we would be willing to say that the individual who lacked the ability to apply the term 'soaring' to all three cases truly possessed the concept of soaringness. We would certainly question Sibley's claim that such an individual was displaying a form of ordinary (nonaesthetic) perceptual or linguistic competence.

I recommend that we think of Sibley's aesthetic clod less as a creature of flesh and blood and more as a theoretical construct. That is to say, talk of aesthetic clods does not serve to describe a type of aesthetic perceiver we might meet up with in the flesh. Instead, the notion of the aesthetic clod functions as a pedagogical device, one allowing Sibley to highlight, by its absence in certain perceivers, that part of our perceptual and language-using competence that is of most interest to the philosophical aesthetician. If the aesthetic clod looks to be someone we might meet in the flesh, this is owing to an unfortunate tendency on the part of most people to assume that what I have called 'scientific'

perception, a perceptual sensitivity to the world which strives to eliminate our awareness of the perceptual character of thing, represents our bedrock perceptual rapport with the world. In the event that full-blooded perception amounted to the ability to register all and only nonaesthetic qualities, then not only would we find in existence persons displaying no sensitivity to the perceptual character of things, but these creatures would count as ordinary perceivers. At the same time, anyone displaying a sensitivity to what I have called perceptual character would be deemed to display more than ordinary competence as a perceiver.

At this point, the reader might well question whether, in opening up the ability to perceive aesthetically to every perceiver, I haven't succeeded in obliterating the natural distinction that exists between those who are and those who are not aesthetically adept. I would argue that, far from obliterating this distinction, I have managed to demonstrate where the true nature of the distinction lies. The aesthetically competent individual is not, as Sibley suggests, someone displaying hyper-sensitive powers of sensory discrimination who manages to notice things that others overlook. The aesthetically adept perceiver is someone alive to perceptual character, someone who is aware at all times of what it is like to perceptually engage with things. The difference between the aesthetically adept and the less adept reflects the extent to which different individuals bring the aesthetic character of things to the forefront of their consciousness during ordinary acts of perception. Where we do discover differences in aesthetic competence between individuals, these amount to differences in linguistic competence as much as differences in experiential sensitivity. The aesthetically competent are the linguistically competent, those who display their competence as much in the language that they use, the ability to re-employ the language of perceptible character to describe perceptual character, as they do in the number and the type of experiences they enjoy. A very large part of the linguistic competence displayed by the aesthetically adept is an ability to employ metaphor in aesthetic descriptions.

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<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Psychology</i>
<i>APQ</i>	<i>American Philosophical Quarterly</i>
<i>BJA</i>	<i>British Journal of Aesthetics</i>
<i>JAAC</i>	<i>Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism</i>
<i>JLS</i>	<i>Journal of Literary Semantics</i>
<i>JP</i>	<i>Journal of Philosophy</i>
<i>PAS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society</i>
<i>PPR</i>	<i>Philosophy and Phenomenological Research</i>
<i>PR</i>	<i>Philosophical Review</i>
<i>PS</i>	<i>Philosophical Studies</i>

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