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AESTHETICS AND AGEING

Guest editor
Valery Vinogradovs

Preface

Valery Vinogradovs

It is a pleasant task to introduce our topic and contributors, who are by far more fitting to contemplate ageing than myself. In the year of my birth, John Carvalho attended Michel Foucault's iconic lectures dedicated to fearless speech, while in Boston Babette Babich was studying with Hans-Georg Gadamer. David Konstan, Ken-ichi Sasaki, and Michael Alpert, stepping around octogenary, are about twice as old as I am. Finally, turning 91 in 2023, Arnold Berleant published a new book!

The symposium kicks off in the cradle of the Western intellectual tradition, classical antiquity. We are introduced with a light piece by David Konstan, which seamlessly draws from both poetry and philosophy, with a keen eye on the joys and perils of erotic passion as well as the passion for critical activity. Then, in the manner of a rhapsode, Ken-ichi Sasaki takes us on a self-reflective voyage accentuating the role of creative recollection in the experience of ageing, as well as the special status of "a precious witness", a friend, whose loss thins down one's past, present, and future. Next, we are fortunate to feature an ebullient dialogue between two friends, Arnold Berleant and Michael Alpert, who share their perceptual wisdom with respect to matters as diverse and riveting as the "world of shadows", a fox and bears, trauma, the vivid presence of dead friends and, of course, happiness and beauty. Two essays conclude our symposium. First, engaging with Alfred Schutz and Shaun Gallagher, John Carvalho fleshes out a stylish, enactivist account of growing old in terms of intimate companionship, or a shared performance, comparable to actors in a play we call love. Finally, Babette Babich capitalises on her encyclopaedic understanding of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, among others, and considers paintings, mirrors, and sculpture, so as to unravel the aesthetics of aura, and laugh at death.

As the invited authors share their ethos and arts of thought, our gathering makes it clear that ageing is a pluralist phenomenon demanding our utmost care and, therefore, like human life, ageing is an open-ended enigma. As for my own words below, influenced by the findings of the symposium and emerging in view of today's escalating ecological and geopolitical disasters, in a piece where one would expect a salutary firework of thought, readers will find the traces of a smokework, glimmering.

A process immanent to life itself, ageing presents a radical challenge to the philosopher in search of their feeling of life, and, as a corollary, their feel for ageing with its cycles, ins and outs. A meaningful life is coterminous with meaningful ageing, intercircled, spiralling out into the world – an insight from a drawing exercise Seneca offers in Letter XII to Lucilius.

Naturally, life carries galaxies within, and yet the most basic and universal features of our shared experience are the most politicised, twisted, and policed. It is hard to breathe!

Nominally, one's life begins within an institution, not by a tree or in a creek. Labour and birth in a medical ward, compulsory and yet consensual, surveilled and safe under the LED lights.

State-laid educational rails, via school and the academy, commonly lead to nothing else but a habit of occupation, as normal as a right for vocation and chewing meat, voting and woe from wit. Follow the lead.

The reality is such that the nuances and endless secrets of one’s nature, opening and contracting in relation to their milieu, percolate through the seemingly unavoidable matrix of the workforce, of having to be of service to a dubious, man-made whole. Nation, society, family – alas, the policy of greed bends these arbitrary formations into fearful divisive units under the stars.

The noose tightens: unless chance and our brutal history have privileged one with hereditary assets, rest assured, back-breaking, boring or ground-breaking – workship will turn into the justification of existence, while money and recognition may justify work in turn. No work record – no man. No reason to worry about the wonders of a simple life, grow up – be productive.

Otherwise, the system will threaten, even be prompted to discharge the likes of you to the margins of a common dream, building up to a crystal or pearl anniversary of paying off a private construction undergird by cement, steel, bricks, and plaster. Here, looking up into the window at night you can see your own reflection. You deserve it, you decorate it.

In a time to come, there is also official permission to end the cycle of work due to old age, assuming you're not dead yet, of fatigue or illness, by a fateful accident or suicide. Entitlement to retirement, and an ultimate gamble.

Too tired to resist? Mother, daemons, and tricksters – forgive,
and let this cup pass from me!

1. In the Bowels of Leviathan

> “Can you draw out Leviathan with a hook?
> Or tie its tongue down with a rope?”
> The Book of Job, 41:1

All groaning and grunting muted, a slow zigzagging sequence, “mental asylum” in *Werckmeister Harmonies* (Tarr, 2000a), unreels an unruly rabble passing through the hallway and wards hammering utensils and convalescents to pieces, one by one, the scene guides us to a far room. A limit, in the clinic’s bath. As a light piano theme fills the hollow soundscape, we see a wizened man against the wall, nude and nameless in the tub. Spellbound, the mob retreats back to the streets, swaying like corpses, while young János Valuska, hiding in plain sight in a cavity in the wall, grips us with bright eyes wide-opening ɐ matter deorbiting his health past retrieval. This matter presents an aporia concerning ageing in a dangerous age. When anything is permissible indeed, any rule and crime, in the eyes of the Hungarian artist notorious for screening black-and-white narratives verging on eschatological parables sans special effects, sanctity meets madness in a ceremonial passage.

Like Béla Tarr’s final two works, *The Man from London* (2007) and *The Turin Horse* (2011), *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000) is co-created with Ágnes Hranitzky, Tarr’s spouse. It adopts the novel *The Melancholy of Resistance* (1989) by Laszlo Krasznahorkai and the piano theme *Valuska* by Mihály Víg – Tarr’s old friends and collaborators in-arms. In this intimate film-project, all eyes are on an orphaned soul, János (Ján-Jean-John-Ivan), living quietly in a small town cut from the same worn-out cloth as countless other spaces amidst the late Socialist Bloc. Having grown up in a comparable milieu, the noir anarchy of the mob is no fiction to me, and Valuska is no naive stranger.

We first see him in the opening scene in a taproom (Tarr, 2000b). Lip-licking, one of the patrons approaches János, “Valuska, come on – show us”. The rendition of a great philosophical memory that transpires next will astonish any philosophical connoisseur. In the manner of Ludwig Wittgenstein feeling child-like, circling enthusiastically around Norman and Lionida Malcolm in Cambridge (Malcolm, 2001, p. 44), Valuska choreographs a giddy group in a dance replicating the cyclical movements of celestial bodies, the earth, the sun, and the moon.

A newspaper clerk at night, in-between running errands, János dedicates much of his time to uncle György, a musicologist and savant, his blood-bound relative suffering from ill humours. The key character of György thumbs toward a structural error at the root of European culture. One can approach the global, cancerous crisis of modernity through multiple examples and optics, but in a dialogue with oneself, uncle György asks whether harmony really exists at the basis of a masterwork – a work of art or in the strivings of one’s life – for if it does, it will necessitate “faith” (in truth, mankind, god – contingent on reader’s ontology) (*Legendary Scenes: The Problem with Werkmeister’s Harmonic Principles*, 2016). With János by his side, György argues that, owing to the work of Andreas Werckmeister (1645-1706):

> All the intervals in the masterpieces of many centuries are false, which means that music and its harmony and echo – its unsurpassable enchantment is entirely based on a false foundation.

Out of sync with the basics of the philosophy of music, I asked Arnold Berleant to comment on György's speech and Vig's *Valuska* that exemplifies the ancient, as opposed to the modern tonal system:

> The music is in the genre known as minimal music and is based on simple triadic harmonies in a sequence not governed by 18th-20th century principles of harmonic progression by intervallic relationships of a fifth (i.e. the circle of fifths, as in most Western music from Haydn through Brahms). From what I can make out, uncle György's mutterings are about favouring natural (i.e. pure) intervals (and tuning) rather than altered (or tempered) tuning, which was adopted in the 18th century to make it possible to stay pretty much in tune while modulating through all keys, whether closely or distantly related. Finally, the film's music theme claims to be written in accordance with "seven fraternal stars in the heaven". There is an old tradition beginning, I think, with Pythagoras of relating music and musical intervals to astronomical objects and events, thus giving music a cosmological standing.

In a way inaccessible to words, the film finely attunes the possibility of true cosmic music with the possibility of *Valuska*'s harmonious existence. Indeed, the scenes featuring János and the Valuska theme together are so bright that no one can accuse Tarr of fatalism. Valuska is a messenger of nostalgia, one who refers to many locals as *uncle* and *aunty*, as if related to all of them. He is not troubled by doubt – yet.

Most anticipated by the locals, the central social event in the film is a show by a travelling circus, set up in the heart of the town square. The poster announces two parts: a public display of a whale, which Valuska is yearning to see, and a performance by "The Prince". In the history of mythology and thought, the figure of Leviathan is called upon at least on three major, diverging occasions, which we shall now draw together to cast light on Valuska's premature tragic fate.

The Book of Job (41) portrays Leviathan as a colossal sea monster/serpent, the most magnificent creature that demonstrates both: i. God's (or nature's) might and ii. mankind's humble niche in the grand scheme of things. It would not then be misleading to say that *Job* informs the inclusion of Leviathan in the film as a whale, probably a blue whale, the largest, non-extinct animal on earth. But, much time has worn on since the origin of this myth, and humans have found a way to draw Leviathan out of the deepest waters of being. In *Werckmeister Harmonies*, the prehistoric creature is presented in the form of a rotting carcass, a spectacle for the masses.

The invocation of Leviathan in St. John's *Book of Revelation* (12-3) is more contentious, for it is not mentioned directly by the name, being called "the Red Dragon" instead. Still, the iconographic similitudes have led church fathers and commentators to posit that this "ancient serpent" is Leviathan, now representing "Satan, the deceiver of the whole world", who elsewhere comes by the name of the prince of this world (e.g. Ephesians 2:2). This explains why the whale's corpse and The Prince travel together: lies flourish as nature

degenerates. What is The Prince's service? Here is an instance of fearless speech from the novel:

> A town built on lies will continue to be a town built on lies … What they do and what they will do are both based on lies and false pride. What they think and what they will think are equally ridiculous. They think because they are frightened. Fear is ignorance. He says he likes it when things fall to pieces. Ruin comprises every form of making: lies and false pride are like oxygen in the ice. Making is half: ruin is everything. … His followers will wreak havoc because they understand his vision perfectly. (Krasznahorkai, 2002, pp. 262-3)

The Prince is the antithesis of János, and he attacks everyone, attacks our cultures and achievements, insofar as we consent to thrive out of a sense of foolish pride consistent with pervasive fears. The fear of not being acknowledged as worthy, of one's life and job security, of losing comfort and followers. Don't these fears orient vital choices in our lives? And when one gets these things, do they tend to feel full of themselves? The old seducer!

No wonder these provocations fuel the rabble, having nothing to lose and little left to revere, paving the way for the "mental asylum" sequence. Total control and division, domination in the heart: the wizened man is merely a fugitive, last barrier, overstepped, and followed by an even more abject chain of cruelty, involving mass murder, rape, and, naturally, Valuska's descent into madness. In a world as divided, depleted, and butchered as ours, the question remains if ruin, in the end, is the sum of all things. Sadly, the likes of János Valuska, or Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin/Mouse – the holy fools and heroes, having no enemies, are doomed to spirit away as lightly and surely as their being in this hostile, old world.

Finally, Leviathan makes another appearance – this time in Thomas Hobbes' eponymous book (1651/1668). Like his intellectual predecessor Niccolò Machiavelli, Hobbes had a pessimistic view of human nature: reckless, fickle, predisposed to immoderate self-interest and cruelty. As a political solution to the problem of political governance, he advocated for the establishment of a strong state ruled by a sovereign, a philosopher-king of modern making willing to resort to violence whenever they feel it is right. An imperial state is a criminal *par excellence*.[1] This way Leviathan becomes politicised and comes to signify the entire body of people, counting children and elders, subsumed under the state in command of an almighty ruler.

For Hobbes and his followers, the Leviathan state is God's most magnificent creation on earth. For me, it is a watered-down veneer of The Prince, commanding dominance and "voluntary servitude".[2] Thus, in case readers have begun wondering what Leviathan has to do with ageing, as a matter of fact, we have returned to the point at which the preface erupted. Namely, the appropriation of one's open-ended nature under the machinations of a ruling regime, whether it is monarchy or neo-liberal corporatocracy. Here is a string of anecdotal examples to this effect.

[1] This wording takes many shapes; most recently: "the state is a rapist" in Dilar Dirik (2022).

[2] I borrow this expression from Étienne de La Boétie's (1975) *The Politics of Obedience: The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*, published posthumously by Michel de Montaigne in 1577.

2. Seniors Protest

Protest is a common praxis deployed by a group of people to voice their disagreement with a matter of public significance. In legal terms, an act of peaceful disobedience is one's right. In recent years in Australia, protests have become severely regulated and restricted. In New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, and, most recently, South Australia, a series of anti-protest laws have been passed by the authorities, threatening people with astronomical fines and imprisonment.[3] The officials claim that protesters disrupt peace and normal operations within a polis/business. Should one choose the ethics and politics of freedom and march – against the weapons industry or intergenerational inequity in academia – they are likely to face the hostility of the police, entitled to use violence as part of their contractual duties.

While protest is typically the province of younger generations, it is not an anomaly for elders to gather together to convey their concerns regarding the state's affairs.[4] One precedent is the massive 1973 senior citizens' solidarity march in Chicago, rallying against inflation, unemployment and high taxes. Now, while no massive senior protests have taken place in Australia,[5] let me call your attention to an event that occurred on the 18th of September ‘21 in Melbourne. On one hand, it was an anti-lockdown protest. On the other, an act of breaching public health orders. What matters here is that it was an elderly woman in her 70s, with an Australian flag over her head, who was leading the way, confronted by a wall of policemen, fit and armed with pepper spray and stinger grenades (*Australian Police Concuss & Pepper Spray 70 Year Old Woman*, 2021). In *Werckmeister Harmonies*, the rabble retreats in presence of the elder. In Melbourne, cops go all the way: the senior is pepper-sprayed, shoved to the ground, her head hitting the asphalt, and, as she lay twitching, two young law-enforcement units bent a little to spray poisonous chemical agents directly in her face.[6]

3. Faust and Gretchen

Stuck in the meatgrinder of the Australian migration industry, we picked up a house-sit in Lake Bunga in the first half of this year, in the company of two animals. A cross between a Jack Russell and a Beagle, named Gretchen, and Faust, a common domestic short-haired cat.

When we met, Gretchen and Faust had been completely domesticised. Looking like a pup in her bright moments, other times as a worn-out labourer, Gretchen's rare routines outside of the house would climax in being allowed out to the fenced backyard to do her business. As for Faust, we were advised that he was strictly a home cat, even though their house, overlooking a patch of the bush, is located on a very quiet street. They must have been afraid that

[3] See a brief overview can be found on the Amnesty International site (*Amnesty.org.au*, 2023).

[4] A related issue, that of the crisis in aged care, goes beyond the limits of this piece, but please see the work of Silvia Federici (2012).

[5] There is one curious event worth mentioning though: a group of seniors stripping in Melbourne's CBD to protest humiliating pensions. See *Theage.com.au* (2008).

[6] Is the world without the police imaginable? Yes (see Maher (2021))!

the neighbours would report them. After all, the council's rules prohibit cats outside of homes. In any case, at ten years of age, Faust had never been outside. Like Gretchen, he would be fed fast, greasy and granulated food out of a metal bowl, and sleep throughout the day on a personal mat, causing obesity and boredom. Last but not least, for masters' convenience, both animals underwent the standard procedure of being desexed; anaesthetised in childhood, Gretchen's uterus and ovaries were scraped out, and Faust's testicles snipped, in early preparations for ageing next to men.[7]

But things change, even if temporarily. Gretchen swiftly earned my trust to roam freely in the bush off the track, hopping around and sniffing the world in. Her favourite treats are freshly dug-up bones, the ultimate trophy for someone who knows the difference between flesh, bones, and marrow. Dogs are pack animals and prefer to be included in everyday activities, be it a balloon marathon, dining, or sleeping, so Gretchen and I now rest in one bed, coiled up in a circle of togetherness. When he is not out and about, Faust joins us too, preferring the folds between my limbs. One day, Gretchen and I were sitting outside on the porch, and Faust stretched his tiger-like body over half of the flyscreen's cage and, looking straight into me, made a tenor-like series of meows, which resonated in my heart as follows "Let me the hell out of here, man!" (cf. *Philosophical Investigations*, §327). Well, now he greets me every day with a headbutt, our skulls meeting in a knock of solidarity – Faust is a castrated prince of the block!

4. Roza

February 24th, 2023. Melbourne, a housing commission tower is due to be flattened with the ground. All tenants had been relocated, except one family. Vlad, with broad shoulders and golden hands like a warrior, is from Kharkiv. He loves Plato and Aya, his spouse and a Vedic astrologist, looking like a Persian queen, born in Lugansk. We are on the balcony overlooking a vacant playground, the joint is passed around. Mahmeed drops by, our common friend, born in Afghanistan. He says, "My dream is to return to a home I remember not"; we nod.

In the kitchen, Aya's mother Avrora is doing homework in English. She is grieving. Just before the war and migrating to Australia last year, her spouse passed away in Cambodia. Victor was a free diver. Avrora tells stories of her life. She recalls the early days of Lugansk's seizure by the enemy. Nightmares of bombings. Once she was in her garden weeding a veggie patch and heard the approaching Hailstorm field rockets. Following the instinct, she prostrated over the ground as they flew over her home. As her body got numb and she could not get up back to her feet, she could not stop laughing. Avrora switches between the memories of her eventful life at no effort, with no gaps, and I start noticing that what matters is not so much the captivating stories she tells, but everything in-between, and particularly her friendly face, smiling eyes and something else, something glowing that escapes words.

[7] In Tasmania, as of 2022, apart from mandatory desexing, cats have to be microchipped.

Avrora makes me reminisce about my grandmother Roza, who raised me. At the age of six, she took me across the vast Soviet space to Danilovo, a village tucked away in the Golden Ring, to meet my great-grandmother Shura, born in the late 19th century. Drinking tea from a saucer, hearing mice in the wall, carrots off the patch into my mouth, and playing cards with Shura amount to the deepest grey, almost folkloric memories that live within me. Little Roza knew that this trip had set in motion one of the more significant ageing cycles in my life! The maths is simple: the older parents are when they create a child, the less likely it is for the latter to ever get to connect with their great ancestors. Luckily, my eldest son Seraphim is old enough now to undertake a trip with me to meet Roza, his great-grandmother now aged like Shura. It is my sacred duty, one that however may not be fulfilled, for the state would not let me the hell out of here.

Aya sits next to us, and I ask her if she could recall any pearls that her father Victor brought from the deep blue. Of course, she says, here is one impossible to forget: "Государство не должно мешать людям жить / The state must not ruin people's lives".

5. Stars

One key detail in "the mental asylum" scene is that the elder in the bath is a common man, representing deep ageing in general. Suppose he was a recognisable person, like a famous actor or a politician, and the effect would be entirely different. Suppose we knew that what was hiding behind a deeply aged soma was a person guilty of systematic cruelty, and the effect would be entirely different. The elder's anonymity vouchsafes the effect of sacredness that characterises old age.

However, this precious quality can be easily squandered. While low-profile examples are extremely common, a high-profile example will illustrate my point well. For the most part, we are ruled by gerontocracy: the leaders of the world's most powerful and abusive empires are all aged people, with younger generations desperate to climb the hierarchy. Suppose the elder in the bath is not a common man, Vladimir Putin or Joe Biden, but Queen Elizabeth wearing a brooch with the Great Star of Africa. Taken from South Africa in the 19th century, this monstrous diamond represents imperial being, rule and pride. For peoples and cultures devastated by it, the stone represents tyranny. In previous centuries, it was a full-blooded tyranny; today, it has preserved a symbolic status, enjoyed by monarchs and their followers.

The dreadful irony is that, due to the technological and ideological pollution, in a metropolis like Peking, London or New York, people live and age not being able to engage with the stars above – to echo the stars within one's way to a cosmic being and dignity. Compare the symbolism of the Great Star of Africa with the symbolism manifest in the following breath-taking account in Paul C. Taylor's *Black is Beautiful*:

> It is 1790, and you are at a seaport in South America. The port is part of the Dutch colony that has since become the country of Suriname, and it is a vital part, if the amount of traffic you see is any indication. One of the many ships

> here has just docked, and the crew is busy hustling its cargo above deck. The cargo is, in point of fact, hustling itself above deck. The ship, it turns out, is a slave vessel, just arrived from the Dutch Gold Coast, in what is now Ghana.
>
> The forty or so people who make their way up from the cargo hold appear much the way you would have expected, had you expected them. They are dark–skinned and slender, and some give the appearance of being quite ill. They are solemn, apparently resigned to their new fates in their new world. Some have difficulty standing, and most are blinking in the sunlight.
>
> These new African Americans surprise you in only one respect. They have stars in their hair. Not real stars, of course. The new arrivals have had their heads shaved, leaving patches of hair shaped like stars and half–moons. Just as you begin to wonder how the ship's crew settled on this way of torturing their captives or entertaining themselves, you receive a second surprise. Not far from where you are standing, a man who seems to be the ship's captain is speaking with a man who seems to have some financial interest in the ship's cargo. The capitalist asks the captain why he cut the niggers' hair like that, and the captain disclaims all responsibility. "They did it themselves," he says, "the one to the other, by the help of a broken bottle and without soap." (Taylor, 2016, p. 1)

6. Divine Madness

Many lives end ahead of time and tend to cause us great sorrow because we think that the deceased never got to live life in full, that is, to have enough joy, fun, and meaning. While certainly true, it seems to me that at least some such premature deaths close up a life that is strangely complete, on account of previously experiencing a profound event or events. For someone who recently had two near-death experiences, such stories put into question the value of living the longest possible life at all costs.

One example is Steve Irwin, the Australian naturalist legend, who was licked/kissed by the most poisonous snake on the face of the earth – a fierce snake – and who then died at the age of 44, pierced in the chest by a stingray (*Steve Irwin Meets The World's Most Venomous Snakes | Real Wild*, 2018).

Another example is the songwriter and actor Victor Tsoi (1962-1990), born in the USSR to a Russian mother and a Korean father. In the history of the global rock culture, the ascent of Tsoi to fame can only be compared to Kurt Cobain's (1967-1994). The 1988 release of *Blood Type*, followed by *A Star Named the Sun* (1989) changed forever not only the energy of Russian rock, but also touched the souls of millions, tired of the old regime, poverty, and war. It was a real cultural revolution led by a humble young man drawing together Taoist anarchism and Russian tragism.

Tsoi died suddenly in a car crash on August 15th '90, having entertained his untimely death in several songs. No death in modern Russian history can be compared with this one in terms of its sweeping cultural impact, with a wave of suicides (over 40) cutting through the Soviet space, and newspapers hailing the poet. On June 24th, however, during the Summer solstice, Tsoi and his band Kino performed their last concert at the Luzhniki Arena, akin to London's Wimbledon. For the first and last time since the Moscow Olympics '80, in unanimous recognition of Tsoi's cultural status, the Olympic fire was lit

– for him, and everyone else searching for their way. And so he performed his last songs as an Olympic hero:

> And we know it's always been that way
> That fate loves the one
> Who lives by his own rules
> The one who dies young
>
> He remembers neither "yes" nor "no"
> Remembers neither ranks nor names
> And capable of reaching the stars
> Not reckoning it is a dream
> And shall fall dead, burnt by a star named the Sun

7. Burial

To rehash the timeless dictum from Plato's *Phaedo*, philosophical ageing is a preparation for death; indeed, it is being toward one's death and the final frontier – burial. Ageing philosophically entails not only the pursuit of conditions that would allow one to sense and direct their ageing processes toward their own vision of life, their truth, but it also should influence their own vision of letting go of life, the vision that ends with honouring one's body. Simply put, it is not unnatural to envisage one's own death and to make preparations for leaving one's body behind.

It is not unnatural, at least for a philosopher, and yet if I were to ask my students or friends about such things, they would probably prefer to switch the topic. Why would one brood over such matters? Well, this critical activity may in effect suggest what kind of life one leads.

A paid, private plot at a cemetery and industrial cremation are not for me. My home is in the wild, and so perhaps one night I would wake up in a self-made earth-shack in the middle of nowhere near the sea, driven by a peculiar inkling to go out, step through the dunes in search for the right, mossy spot under the moonlight. After digging out a perfect small hole, I'd sit in the diamond pose, breathe in and, as Mikhail Bakhtin preaches,[8] take a slow shit, one last, direct connection with the land. Crows and worms can then have my body to celebrate life.

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[8] Read, especially, Chapters 5 and 6 in Bakhtin (1984).

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Valery Vinogradovs
Marlo, Australia
valery.arrows@gmail.com

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Ancients on Old Age

David Konstan

Greek and Roman literature has bequeathed us a variety of perspectives on old age. Old age, in ancient times before there were palliatives for pain and devices to compensate for failing sense, such as eyeglasses and hearing aids, could be painful and humiliating. At the same time, old age commanded a certain respect, for the wisdom that time and experience brought, and it afforded pleasures of its own, such as memories of former goods. If erotic passion and attractiveness were diminished, this might be considered a benefit rather than a loss. An aged person might still be able to manage personal affairs, and if death was closer, it was not something to be feared, if one had lived a full life. Old age was a stage in life, the final one, but not less valuable for that. | *Keywords: Antiphanes, Cicero, Horace, Lucretius, Mimnermus*

Old age is a problem. If it were not, it would not require a defense, like Cicero's essay *De senectute*. It is a time of waning abilities, physical and mental. Take this passage by the comic poet Antiphanes (fourth century BC), from his play, *The Heiress* (*Epikleros*, fragment 94, quoted by the excerptor John Stobaeus under the title, "Against Old Age" 4.50):

> Old Age—how everyone longs for you
> As a happy thing; then, when you arrive, how grievous,
> How toilsome; no one praises you,
> And everyone who is wise reviles you.

Democritus is said to have starved himself to death when he believed that his intellect was failing (Lucretius *De rerum natura* 3.1050-52). And he was not alone in welcoming death. Plato was not the only disciple of Socrates to compose a version of his defense speech of "Apology" when he was charged with corrupting the youth and importing new gods. Several no longer survive, but that of Xenophon does, written on the basis of testimony by those who were present at the trial. Xenophon was perplexed that Socrates would have chosen to antagonize the jury and so invite condemnation. By way of explanation, he quotes Socrates as saying:

> Do you think it surprising that even God holds it better for me to die now? Do you not know that I would refuse to concede that any man has lived a better life than I have up to now? For I have realized that my whole life has been spent in righteousness toward God and man, — a fact that affords the greatest satisfaction; and so I have felt a deep self-respect and have discovered that my associates hold corresponding sentiments toward me. But now, if my years are prolonged, I know that the frailties of old age will inevitably be realized, — that my vision must be less perfect and my hearing less keen, that I shall be slower to learn and more forgetful of what I have learned. If I perceive my decay and take to complaining, how could I any longer take pleasure in life? (5-6, trans. Todd 1922).

If this depressing picture of old age resonates with us even now, imagine life before the invention of eyeglasses (not to mention contact lenses and cataract operations), hearing aids, and palliatives, if not cures, of many painful and disabling diseases.

Nevertheless, this was by no means the only attitude toward old age. A character in the comedy *Cheiron* by Pherecrates, a contemporary of Aristophanes (quoted in the same context by Stobaeus), affirms:

> It's rash of you to goad me at such an age
> into involving myself in many activities.
> When I was young, gentlemen,
> I thought I had sense, but I didn't;
> rather, all my ideas were whatever popped into my head.
> But recently now, old age has given me sense,
> and I analyze matters strand by strand.

Wisdom, it is claimed, comes with the years, and has a value that compensates for the loss of physical powers (would that this were always the case!). A fragment from Epicurus puts it well (*Vatican Saying* 17):

> We should not regard the young man as happy, but rather the old man whose life has been fortunate. The young man at the height of his power is often baffled by fortune and driven from his course; but the old man has come to anchor in age as in a harbor, and holds in certain and happy memory the goods which he once could only hope for.

> Οὐ νέος μακαριστὸς ἀλλὰ γέρων βεβιωκὼς καλῶς· ὁ γὰρ
> νέος ἀκμῇ πολὺς ὑπὸ τῆς τύχης ἑτεροφρονῶν πλάζεται· ὁ δὲ
> γέρων καθάπερ ἐν λιμένι τῷ γήρᾳ καθώρμικεν, τὰ πρότερον
> δυσελπιστούμενα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀσφαλεῖ κατακλείσας χάριτι.

One need only think of the respect accorded to the aged Nestor in the *Iliad*, whose youthful martial prowess had waned, to see that old age had its own esteem (although one wonders at how useful this advice is to those whose accomplishments have been less notable).

The elderly might seem ridiculous, however, or rather, might make a laughable spectacle of themselves, when they sought to compete with the young in their own proper domain, and nowhere more so than in matters of erotic passion. Here, for example, is a poem by the seventh-century BC poet, Mimnermus:

> What life is there, what pleasure without golden Aphrodite? May I die when I no longer care about secret intrigues, persuasive gifts, and the bed, those blossoms of youth that men and women find alluring. But when painful old

> age comes on, which makes even a handsome man ugly, grievous cares wear away his heart and he derives no joy from looking upon the sunlight; he is hateful to boys and women hold him in no honour. So harsh has the god made old age (trans. Campbell)

Three ages are distinguished in the poem: youth (*hêbê*), referring to pre-adolescent or adolescent boys and girls (*paides*); adulthood, that is, the maturity of men and women (*andres* and *gunaikes*); and old age (*gêras*). The first-person perspective of the poem is that of an *anêr*, who delights in amatory pursuits of the sort that make life worthwhile for both adult men and women. Both sexes find the charms of youth alluring; as Kenneth Dover put it in his book on Greek Homosexuality (1989: 172), "The attributes which made a young male attractive to *erastai* were assumed to make him no less attractive to women." Marriage is not in question: these are furtive affairs, beloveds won over by gifts, and the goal is sex, not matrimony. According to the poet's persona, erotic passion is the only thing that makes life enjoyable; once one has lost interest in it, all pleasure is gone. The second half of the epigram shifts the ground. Old age is full of anxieties, which take away the joy in life, not because one does not care about Aphrodite but because one can no longer succeed in the pursuit. With old age, a man (*anêr*) loses, not the "alluring blossoms of youth" that pertain to an *erômenos* (or *erômenê*), which is to say, beauty or *kállos*, but the qualities that render him attractive as an *erastês* – something more like dignity or worth, and so he is no longer "held in honor." This is what renders an old man inimical to the young (*paides*, whether boys or girls) and dishonored in the eyes of women as well.

As is well known, the conversation that is recorded in Plato's *Republic* takes place in the home of Kephalos, the father of Polemarchus, who contributes to the discussion, and the orator Lysias. Socrates observes that he found Kephalos much aged, and that he was sitting on a couch and leaning on a cushion. Kephalos greets Socrates enthusiastically, and affirms that in the measure the pleasures of the body have decreased, his desire for and pleasure in (ἐπιθυμίαι τε καὶ ἡδοναί) conversation have increased (328D). Kephalos explains that many of his contemporaries complain about old age, missing the pleasures they took in sex (τἀφροδίσια) as well as drinking and feasting. He himself, however, feels as Sophocles once replied, when someone asked him his feelings about sex, and whether he could still make love (συγγίγνεσθαι) to a woman. Sophocles affirmed that he rather felt that he had escaped from a rough and violent master, and Kephalos agrees that he now enjoys peace and freedom (εἰρήνη γίγνεται καὶ ἐλευθερία), since his desires no longer torment him and have relaxed (αἱ ἐπιθυμίαι παύσωνται κατατείνουσαι καὶ χαλάσωσιν, 329C). The dialogue now enters upon its primary theme, with Socrates raising the question, as he does also in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (4.2.18), of whether it is always right to give back something one has borrowed. With this, Kephalos withdraws to attend to a sacrifice (an act of repaying the gods, we may note), and leaves it to Polemarchus to proceed with the interrogation. Though he professes a desire for conversation (*logoi*), he is content to leave the serious discussion to younger men, whose yearning is more intense than his. Indeed, I am inclined to think that his name is significant, for it suggests the word

κεφαλή, "head." Kephalos is too mental, and the passion that is necessary for philosophy has dwindled (for further discussion, see Konstan 2022). Be that as it may, Kephalos, unlike many of his aged friends, is happy to be free of sexual desire, and so is not susceptible to being ridiculed like Mimnermus' old men.

Horace offers a nice illustration of the perils of sexual temptation, even in one's declining years. The first poem in the fourth book of his odes, which was published some years after the first three (these appeared together as a set), reads in part:

> Venus now you've returned again
> to battles long neglected. Please, oh please, spare me.
> I'm not prey to the power of kind
> Cinara, as once I was. After fifty years,
> cruel mother of sweet Cupids,
> leave one now who's hardened to your soft commands:
> take yourself there, where seductive
> prayers, from the young men, invite you to return.
> It would be better still for you,
> lifted by wings of gleaming swans, to adventure
> to Paulus Maximus's house,
> if you want a worthy heart to set on fire.
> Since he's noble and he's handsome,
> and he's not un-eloquent, for anxious clients:
> he's a lad of a hundred skills,
> and he'll carry your army's standard far and wide:
> and he'll laugh when he's successful
> despite his rival's expensive gifts, and he'll raise,
> just for you, by the Alban Lake,
> a statue in marble, under a wooden roof.
>
> ....
>
> Women and boys can't please me now,
> nor those innocent hopes of mutual feeling,
> nor wine-drinking competitions,
> nor foreheads circled by freshly-gathered flowers.
> But why, ah Ligurinus, why
> should tears gather here on my cheeks, from time to time?
> Why does my tongue, once eloquent,
> fall indecorously silent while I'm speaking?
> In dreams, at night, hard-hearted one,
> I hold you prisoner, or follow you in flight,
> over the grassy Field of Mars,
> or wing with you above the inconstant waters
> (verses 1-20, 29-40, trans. Kline 2003, slightly modified).

Horace had thought that he was free of such passion, like old Kephalos, but it snuck up on him all the same, only now he is no longer able to compete with younger men, and he is aware of the shame and frustration his new infatuation with Ligurinus will cause him.

Aristotle had indeed said that there is a beauty or *kállos* appropriate to every age, but of it is of different kinds:

> Beauty varies with each age. In a young man, it consists in possessing a body

> capable of enduring all efforts, either of the racecourse or of bodily strength, while he himself is pleasant to look upon and a sheer delight.... In a man who has reached his prime, beauty consists in being naturally adapted for the toils of war, in being pleasant to look upon and at the same time awe-inspiring. In an old man, beauty consists in being naturally adapted to contend with unavoidable labors and in not causing annoyance to others, thanks to the absence of the disagreeable accompaniments of old age (*Rhetoric* 1.5, 1361b7–14, trans. Freese 1926).

There is no mention, in this last group, of a pleasant appearance of the kind that might be attractive to women or boys. The best that can be said for old men (apart from doing some inescapable jobs) is that they aren't a nuisance. Not very consoling.

Cicero, in his essay *On Old Age* (*De senectute*), has the elder Cato[1], his mouthpiece in the work, address the negative evaluations of old age under four headings. These are: (1) that it prevents us from managing affairs, whether our own or those of the state; (2) that it renders the body weak (Cicero includes in this section mental decline); (3) that it deprives us of virtually all pleasures; and (4), that it seems to be on the threshold of death. Cato, who is represented as being now aged, cites his own example among many to show that one can still, even in one's dotage, take care of business and perform those physical tasks that are suitable to that time of life (military service is excluded, naturally enough). He also affirms that one need not suffer intellectual deficits (as he did not), and that one can enjoy a wide variety of pleasures far more worthy and dignified than the pursuit of sex. As for the proximity of death, Cato claims that old age, unlike earlier stages of life, has no defined limit (*certus terminus*; Romans thought of childhood lasting till seventeen years of age, and youth at forty-six; after this, one was a *senex*).[2] One can continue enjoying life as long as one is capable of discharging one's duties, and pay no attention to death, for there is no reason to think that it is closer than at any other time. After all, the young too are vulnerable, and death may overtake them at any moment – a notion no doubt more compelling at a time when wars were incessant and losses unimaginably high, and when retirement was not yet regarded as a natural stage in life's course. Thus, old age is a more confident and bolder stage of life than youth.

The problem with Cato's rosy picture is that it comes close to denying old age any quality of its own. A long tradition, for which we have evidence as early as archaic Greek poetry, divided an ideal lifespan into well-defined segments, with old age as the endpoint. Mimnermus, that inveterate pessimist, had set the terminus at sixty:

> Would that my fated death might come at sixty, unattended by sickness and grievous cares (fragment 6 West, transl. Gerber 1999).

1 Cicero *De senectute* 5.15: Etenim, cum complector animo, quattuor reperio causas, cur senectus misera videatur: unam, quod avocet a rebus gerendis; alteram, quod corpus faciat infirmius; tertiam, quod privet fere omnibus voluptatibus; quartam, quod haud procul absit a morte. Earum, si placet, causarum quanta quamque sit iusta una quaeque, videamus.

2 Cicero *De senectute* 20.72: Senectutis autem nullus est certus terminus, recteque in ea vivitur quoad munus offici exsequi et tueri possis, et tamen mortem contemnere; ex quo fit ut animosior etiam senectus sit quam adulescentia et fortior; text as in Powell 2006.

Diogenes Laertius, who quotes this line, says that the great statesman Solon responded to this:

> But if even now you will still listen to me, remove this — and do not be offended because my thoughts are better than yours — and changing it, Ligyaistades [Mimnermus' patronymic], sing as follows: "May my fated death come at eighty" (fragment 20 West).

Solon himself imagined ten stages in a life, each of seven years' duration. Of the final two he declared:

> In the ninth he still has ability, but his speech and wisdom give weaker proof of a high level of excellence. If one were to complete stage after stage and reach the tenth, he would not have death's allotment prematurely [ἄωρος] (fr. 27.15-18 West).

Anything over seventy is a gift, and death at that age is not to be lamented.[3]

Funerary inscriptions tell the same story: those who die young are thought to die out of season (ἄωροι), and deserve pity, whereas those who pass away at the end of a full life, in which, among other things, they have produced heirs, are celebrated for their achievements. There is a time to be born and a time to die, as Ecclesiastes puts it. I am reminded of an old sitcom from the early 1950's (the radio version was still earlier), called "My Friend Irma." Irma was a scatterbrained secretary, who worked for the stern and stone-faced lawyer, Mr. Clyde. In one episode, she brings a kitten to the office, which is on a high floor, and the kitten crawls out on a flagpole that extends from the building. Of course, pandemonium ensues, and Irma is distraught. Mr. Clyde suggests that she climb out on the flagpole to rescue the animal. Irma cries out, "But Mr. Clyde, I'm too young to die," to which Mr. Clyde replies: "You're just the right age!"[4] Irma, of course, is much too young, but had she been 70 or 80 years of age, then according to Solon the expression would not have been inapt, even if the kitten was not something to die for. Old age, then, contrary to Cicero's relative optimism (he was around 62 when he wrote *De senectute*, and Horace just 50 when he composed *Odes* 4.1.), is a time to be thinking about death. For if indeed some may live till their nineties (like Democritus and Isocrates), or even beyond, it is not simply a matter of quantity but of quality. Prometheus, in the Aeschylean tragedy, *Prometheus Bound*, declares, "I caused mortals to cease foreseeing their doom," by instilling blind hopes in their breasts, to which the chorus replies: "A great benefit was this you gave to mortals" (250-253). Perhaps; but in old age, one knows, as never before, that one's time is limited. And this lends to this stage of life a special quality of its own.

It is not a matter of being obsessed with death, much less fearing it. It is more a question of acknowledging limits, physical, yes, but above all

[3] Cf. Confucius *Analects* 2:4: "The Master said, at fifteen I set my heart upon learning. At thirty, I had planted my feet firm upon the ground. At forty, I no longer suffered from perplexities. At fifty, I knew what were the biddings of heaven. At sixty, I heard them with docile ears. At seventy, I could follow the dictates of my own heart; for what I desired no longer overstepped the boundaries of right"; trans. Muller 1990.

[4] I am quoting the lines from memory, having seen this show when I was 14 years old or thereabouts – but I'm pretty sure they're close to what was said.

temporal. There are things one hasn't the time to do: perhaps this is another reason why Kephalos left the lengthy discussion of justice to the younger guests in his home. Tending to the sacrifice was not so much more important as more suited to his time of life. This does not mean that we cannot continue in the pursuits we have cultivated all our lives. Cicero, in his *De senectute* (7.22), recounts how, when Sophocles was working on his tragedy, *Oedipus at Colonus*, his sons brought him to trial for neglecting family affairs, so that the jurors might relieve him of this responsibility, which would then naturally fall to his male offspring. Sophocles, in his defense, recited the tragedy aloud to the jurors, and asked whether this was the work of someone who was failing mentally. With this, he won the case. We may note, however, that the play itself is about a man at the end of his life, who has a sense of imminent death and transcendence. Oedipus is also extremely irate with his son Polynices, who has come to seek his support in his conflict with his brother, Eteocles. Scholars have commented on the unusual severity of Oedipus' response. I wonder whether it might not have reflected, perhaps unconsciously, Sophocles' irritation with his own sons, after their machinations against him (assuming that Cicero's story is not just invention).[5] Yes, Sophocles was concerned to keep control of his family accounts, a mundane concern perhaps in fact better left to his sons. But his primary interest was in poetry, and here he gave evidence of more sublime interests.

Cicero was right, then, that we can continue to take care of business in our later years, and that our capacities, above all intellectual, do not necessarily wane. It is true, too, that the elderly have many pleasures available, even if they withdraw from the competition for the favors of young boys and girls, which is trivial at any age, despite Mimnermus' insistence that this is the only pleasure worth living for. But Cicero's Cato, in emphasizing at the end of his discourse *auctoritas* and *gloria*, prestige and fame, and preferring to believe in an afterlife that might render his renown eternal, overlooked, I think, the way all the occupations of the aged, vigorous as they may be, are tinged by an awareness of mortality. Our thoughts turn to the welfare of those who will very likely outlive us, a concern that even the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus acknowledged as valid, though in all other respects the school maintained that death is nothing to us, since when we are, it is not, and when it is present, we are not.[6] Did I write "our"? Well, I have now passed the eighth decade of life, which Solon, in his response to Mimnermus, regarded as the right moment for death to arrive, and I am conscious of a subtle change in outlook. The old drives are there, pleasures and passions are not diminished or diluted, but my enjoyments are spiced, even enlivened, by the awareness that I have lived, and everything now is both precious and a gift.[7]

5 For a subtle study of this exchange in the context of the play, see Mastrangelo 2000: 35-81.

6 Philodemus *On Death*, column 25, lines 2-9; for text and translation, along with commentary, see Henry 2009.

7 I wish to thank the anonymous referees for helpful comments, that saved me from more than one error.

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David Konstan
New York University
100 Washington Square East
New York NY 10003 (USA)
dk87@nyu.edu

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Living the Ageing

Ken-ichi Sasaki

Ageing is basically a natural or physical phenomenon. For a human being, it belongs to the body. When this fact is noticed, a drama of oldness and life/death begins: ageing is a problem of experience. There are losses and gains in this experience. Indeed, a particular respect was paid to a rhapsodist/bard and a hermit because of their memory power and deep wisdom respectively. Since we recognize in these cases accumulation and maturation, the core subject in the experience of ageing is memory and the time structure. Vis-à-vis the hard memories such as stone monuments and IC memory, the live memory is characterised by a creativity, which vivifies our past time. I pay a particular attention to friendship, because one of the most painful experiences of ageing consists in the loss of dear friends. Recollecting creatively the time shared with them, we can vivify our past, i.e. our being: that is the appropriation of ourselves. | *Keywords: Memory, Friendship, Stone monument, Time structure, Creative recollection, Aappropriation, The second/third mirror stage*

Aging has several faces. A society can be aged, which presents political problems such as social security, pension and balancing the responsibility of different generations. The ways of coping with these serious problems vary from culture to culture: this is the folkloric aspect of ageing. The problems peculiar to ageing include, among others, physiological and medical matters. We can also investigate the history of the notion of ageing. And so on.

My subject, however, is different. I'll concentrate here on a description of what I am experiencing as ageing particularly in terms of the loss of friends. I think this subject is important, because, as I'll point out later, unnoticed the ageing process is not worth being considered as ageing for our life. So, the basis of the following description is personal, but I believe many people share my experience. The main theme is memory, which has long been regarded as a substantial phenomenon of ageing in a good sense as well as bad one. This shall be developed into a reflection of the time structure of the consciousness of old people. Special attention will be paid to the meaning of friendship -because friendship helps us in order to live well our own ageing.

To begin, I wish to recall the very basis of ageing. Most often 'ageing' means 'growing old'. Literally, however, it signifies more neutrally 'time lapsing'.

Thus, ageing is first of all a natural phenomenon. A used tin can thrown into a street gutter or a bike left in the open-air rusts steadily. Rusting comes from the iron in the tin can or bike's body bonding with the oxygen in the air or water (rain). Concerning a corpse or the remains of a living thing, the lapsed time of the regular disintegration of radiocarbon is known, and that is used to determine its age. Natural ageing then is a temporal phenomenon, progressing regularly and in one direction only. This notion is the starting point of my reflection.

1. Ageing of Live Matter

Among the natural phenomena, the ageing of live or organic matter goes a little bit differently. Live matter is formed from a material body and a non-material function. Ageing belongs to its natural part, the body. We can consider that the ageing of an organism is caused by rust too ("the body rusts"). Oxygen burns and exhausts life. Simone de Beauvoir says: "it seems that from the very beginning every organism contains its old age, the inevitable consequence of its full completion" (*Old Age*, translated by Patrick O'Brian, 1985; original: *La Vieillesse*, 1970. Hereafter I borrow some data from this *summa gerontologica*). This inclusion of old age is a condition of evolution. If the individual lived for ever, there would be no change in life's phenomena. (Under the hypothesis of an individual with eternal life, I wonder what can the extreme expansion of the soul of this eternal being be. There may have been an SF writer who deliberated about this.) Because one individual dies out and is replaced by another new one, variance becomes possible to open the way of evolution. In the case of an advanced creature like a human being of which the spirit is accompanied with consciousness, the ageing arriving at death is coloured with a nuance of fate and weighs heavily on consciousness. If there were a pure spirit or soul, we could not recognize any ageing in it. Therefore, many philosophers have come to think of the immortality of the pure spirit or soul.

The ageing of a human body does not go in any straightforward way. In the course of life, there is a growth period which attains an acme, and after enjoying its full bloom, we enter into its twilight. Similarly, the mature wine or whisky is a stage of growth, which must have its peak: a wine of 100 years old may have deteriorated. Literally, growth is an ageing process too, but we don't call it so for ageing is linked with the old age. The reason for not calling growth ageing is that physical decline is a grave concern for consciousness.

Consciousness itself does not change: one is one, and blue is still blue. But consciousness cannot but suffer a certain deterioration of function. Spheres of action become narrower and we have less chance of getting new stimulation from the external world. Accordingly, the acts of consciousness become duller and are accompanied with a feeling of fatigue. Old age is the state of advanced ageing, and ageing is this process: it is an old age in the present progressive form.

Talking about the ageing of human beings endowed with reflective consciousness, is to consider their experience of time. Indeed, there is so-

called ageing of spirit, but for the moment I take this as a reflection of physical ageing on the spirit (I'll mention later the mature steps).

One person is given a robust body, and another a weak one; there is an insensitive body on the one hand, and a delicate one on the other. Therefore, ageing differs from person to person. That is the case with the fact of the decline of physical ability as well as with its awareness. When B. Berenson, the art historian, said "What a man writes after he is sixty is worth little more than tea continually remade with the same leaves," he was thinking about the whole deterioration of body and mind. (His opinion itself does not agree with my own experience: I feel I became capable of writing something better after sixty. Of course, this might be a delusion because of my own ageing). World Health Organization defines, it seems, old age as the age of someone older than 65, and in Japan, my country, the growth stage after 75 is called later old age. Such definite classifications do not necessarily agree with the consciousness and experience of everyone. They might even determine every person's self-image, as in the case expressed in the complaint: 'Ah, I am finally a later old man/woman!'

2. Consciousness and Recognition of Ageing

Ageing is inseparable from its acknowledgment. An oldness that is unrecognised cannot even be called ageing. Consciousness does not know any ageing. Gide writes in his diary: "I have to make a great effort to convince myself that I am at present as old as those who seemed to me so ancient when I was young". The reason is that his consciousness has not grown old and stays young. The case is the same when we hardly identify ourselves in the old man's or woman's image in the mirror. This is so to speak the second mirror stage, and after that comes the third, where one finds it difficult to consider a photograph of oneself taken in one's younger days as truly representing oneself. In Gide's case as well as in that of our mirror image, the gap between the constancy of consciousness and the changing body produces a psychological conflict. Recognition of one's own ageing consists in taking the bodily change as one's whole state. After overcoming the Gidian consciousness of the gap between body and mind and accepting the reality as one's own ageing, we can say, our old age begins. An old man or woman is someone who has lived long, but the standard of such a length differs from culture to culture, from condition to condition.

Deterioration is not the whole. An old person has accumulated during his or her long life a rich store of experience and knowledge which can contribute to his or her maturity. The Taoist ideal of the hermit consists in attaining a god-like state through a certain longevity. There was a folk tradition in China according to which Lao-tze lived through 100 years to attain the state of 'true man' (真人). A hermit must have gone beyond the consciousness of aging, but we regard him as a long white-haired old man. This means that longevity can be related to wisdom. Whereas a Taoist hermit attains the ideal state through a practice such as meditation, ordinary people of the world also can mature in their own ways. Thus, white hair is taken most often as a symbol of maturity. An old person in a great shape can be respected especially because of his or her age.

It is remarkable that exceptional memory often grants old people an advantage in their society. Beauvoir says “old people acquire a high, privileged status because of their memories” in uncivilised societies. *The Dream of Ossian* is a masterpiece of Dominique Ingres, now a treasure of the museum of his hometown, Montauban. In the foreground is found Ossian sleeping, leaning over his harp. Though his face is hidden by his arm, his hair is white. Behind are painted in a whitish colour characters appearing in his dream. Among them are some bards. In particular the central figure, leaning on a stick for his journey, his harp on his feet, wears long white hair and beard. A poet is someone who keeps and hands down the memory of a tribe’s history, and his length of life and memory of rich experiences guarantee his authority. A robust old man with white hair seems standard for the iconography of bards or rhapsodists (cf. *Ossian*, Exhibition Catalogue, Paris, 1974).

3. Human Memory and Hard Memory

While the memory of bards or rhapsodists is an exceptional ability, that of ordinary people is defective and failure of recollection is usual. Coming to my bookshelf, I have already forgotten what I had looked forward to finding there: I repeat such an embarrassment in my daily life. When we find human memory unreliable, a stone monument is constructed.

In 2011, the pacific seaside of the Northeast District of Japan was stricken by a huge tsunami after a massive earthquake, and more than 18,000 people were killed or missing. The unimaginable power of a tsunami was visually transmitted through television on a real-time basis, and shock waves passed throughout the world. Geographically, this region had been stricken several times by big tsunamis. In the modern era only, more than 20,000 people in 1896 and more than 2,000 in 1933 were killed or missed, and every time many warning stone monuments were constructed in various places.

“After a big earthquake, be cautious of a tsunami”, or “when the tide goes abruptly out, ring an alarm bell”, etc.: on each stone monument a short but pressing alert was inscribed. We find also one telling a story, which shows a feeling of impatience: “Don’t construct a house below this spot. In 1896 as well as 1933, the waves arrived here to demolish the village, so that only two people in the former case and four in the latter could survive. Even after many years passed, be cautious”. This stone document is placed, they say, at a spot 60 metres above sea level, 800 metres from the seashore, and from that place we cannot even see the sea.

Of course, this warning did not reach the people of later generations, so they constructed houses ‘below’ and met with the disaster of 2011. This was the result of a consideration balancing the comfort of life against a rough calculation of the probability of disaster. Since people had lost freshness in their memories, they gave a lower estimate of danger. The fact that people ‘considered’ means that they already had lost the importance of some of their ancestral traditions. It is a problem of the weakness of intellect itself.

A stone document is an instance of hard media. People who experienced such a disaster will not forget it. But with years, the zeal for transmission will

diminish in the later generations. As to the recording of facts, computer memory is the strongest medium. We experience very often that this 'memory' corrects our memory. But just as it is indispensable that the stone document be read and that we have to get access to the hard memory of computers in order to make use of them, so too in this step intervene the human way of life and the function of intellection.

To inscribe not only facts but also a story on a stone document is a means to have posterity read it: it is the turn of literature. Shin Hasegawa, the great Japanese writer of popular literature called his own works (such as historical or biographical novels and dramas) "stone documents in paper (紙碑)", and was proud of paper's power of transmission, which is greater than that of stone documents. He considered that the real problem is the effective communication that does not consist in the hardness of media. If we attribute to the story the real effect of communication, we should reconsider the work itself of an aged poet which does not concern a simple record: it was necessary for it to become an epic. Telling stories, he transmitted the past events of the tribe to his fellow countrymen. Respect for him is certainly based on his outstanding memory capacity. But this memory is not a hard memory, and his chant is not voiced in an AI voice.

If we ask for literal exactitude, soft memory cannot rival with hard one. Besides, hard memory as in the Rosetta stone was rare in ancient times. It is indispensable to ask the real nature of poet's memory in order to elucidate the ageing experience. But as we have seen, lived ageing is interwoven with accumulation and loss (deterioration). The wisdom of ageing consists in how to manage these changes, and we find the key for this management in the mechanisms of memory and recollection.

4. Creativity of Memory

It is known that the metre system proper to poetry in fixed form helped the rhapsodes and bards in memorising and recollecting such a long text as an epic. As bards drawn in Ingres' tableau wear white hair and very long white beards, the visibility of their ageing insured the authenticity of their story. Indeed, their memories were so amazing that they were able to keep some thousands of verses in mind. This volume may somehow be comparable to a computer's memory. But their mechanisms are very different. It is inconceivable that the Homeric rhapsode chanted every time the text of the *Iliad* in the authorised versions available now. His performance, including immediate recall, must have been carried out improvisationally. Even when he follows the text, his narration is brought out spontaneously from inside. Otherwise, his memory does not function—this is the reason why Plato's Ion was proud of enthusiasm in the literal sense of the word. We shall pay attention to what is implied in the fact that the fixed form of an epic supported the rhapsode's memory.

To simplify the case, let us suppose that the form of poetry is regulated by the number of syllables and that a verse counts ten syllables. When a rhapsode happens to be unable to recollect a word of three syllables at the end of

a verse, he can apply any word of three syllables that accords with the context. If the poem is rhyming, the range of choice must be narrower, but some possibilities may still be allowed. The rhapsode chooses *immediately* the word that he assumes the most suitable. Occasionally, orientated by this choice, in the next line, he might skip to a distant part of the same corpus. His narration goes with such a winding irregular movement. He can vivify his narration thanks to his present act of recollection. That is to say, the extraordinary memory of the rhapsode is not a mechanical repetition, but contains as an important factor a sort of creativity. If one asks for literal exactitude, such a character of memory is nothing but a defect. But when we reflect on a human being's memory and its ageing, this creativity is an essential element.

I am not writing here about creativity as value, but simply describing the fact that we supplement partial loss of memory by inventing something. In this part of creation (including deviation) is reflected the poet's or rhapsode's work in the present. His listener shares in this work, when he/she memorize and recollect a part of the epic. This allowance of makeshift can sometimes destroy the effect of literal memory, in such cases as constructing a house too near the seaside, disregarding the warning of the stone document about the possibility of suffering the disaster of a tsunami. That is a result of the weakened power of insistence of memory through ageing.

Memory fading represents the reality of human memory rather than one of its defects and in addition, overwriting it with an optimistic estimation and repeating errors constitute also a human's habit. Taking into consideration an advantage on hand, and describing the future on the basis of this short-run view, we commit serious mistakes. Animals following their instinct don't make any such mistake. (In 1995, a great earthquake struck the region of Kobe, and a few days before the disaster, it is said, dogs barked and cats cried in strange ways and small animals such as rats escaped). The fading of memories, which is supplemented by a creativity of intellect, is not limited to old human beings. It is also an important fact that memory not only restores the past but contributes to create future images and to orient decisions in the present. In this creativity of memory and recollection appears a way to the wisdom of living the ageing.

5. Mutation of Time Structure

Oblivion begins even before ageing. Bergson considered that all experiences were kept latent in memory and took recollection as the focusing of memory search. Even young people in the growth period, however, have many past experiences that they can never recall. Indeed, the Bergsonian theory is a kind of absolute hypothesis which we cannot refute, for even when we cannot recall something now, we might be able to do so someday: a failure in experience does not entail the collapse of the principle. In addition, we occasionally recall to our surprise some cases of past events. However, we should still consider seriously the fact that there is an infinite number of experiences extrinsic to memory. Were we to keep everything in memory, its volume would be unbearable. In particular, we have many heartbreaking experiences in the past

we would never like to recollect. Fortunately, we are relieved by not having to recall them all the time. The lapse of memory is to be regarded, then not as an imperfection but an ability. If, however, I may call memory in the Bergsonian way, the whole of past experience including this latency, it will be possible to consider that we design our future and live our present on the basis of memory. Memory constitutes everyone's person.

Both youngsters and oldsters share this scheme. Of course, an old man or woman cannot be excused from a further reflection just by sharing this normal type of experience. The truth of ageing is that the structure of time changes and the shrinking of the world is its result. Deterioration of the body restricts activities, so much so that even walking becomes painful. Beauvoir writes: "Alain said that we desire only that which is possible: but this is too simple a rationalism. The old man's tragedy is that often he is no longer capable of what he desires." What she alluded to by "old man's tragedy" was "hunger, coldness and disease". In other words, she underlined old persons' inferior quality of life under any poor social security system. Free from the burden of work, old age is not rose-coloured. Reading in Alain's remark seemingly an implication that old people accept such a condition and their own shrunk future, Beauvoir made an insinuating remark. It goes without saying that her awareness of this social problem is important. But that does not concern the experience of ageing. On the contrary, in Alain's remark, we can read the structure of the time experience that is essential to ageing.

We consider the present or the actual phase of our life from the perspective of what to do in future (that is, possibility), and that is determined by the past (that is, what we have done, i.e. what we could have done, in our life). At some time, ageing brings about an awareness that the future is not open as we have long believed (Beauvoir's problem is that of tough old men before ageing): thus, the general structure of time is modified.

Now I cannot deny that my physical power is on the wane, and at the end of this process death is waiting. Such a recognition concerning the basis of existence obliges us to reflect on our own temporal condition ("Being-toward-death"). Far from being a philosophical speculation, however, such a reflection is a deliberation on how to live the present. Old age begins when one arrives at noticing that his or her future is not open any more but closed. Then this limited future flows back to the present and determines it. We can read Alain's words as grasping this situation.

At least I personally experienced such an awakening to my own old age. At one time, I accepted the fact that the rest of my time is limited. I strictly cut down my program of work, and gave up other subjects. To tell the truth, this essay on ageing was not on the program, so you may say that the strictness of my resolution was dubious. Before that time, it was not like that. I was willing to read new works and stimulated by them, and I constantly rewrote my work program to let the space of the future expand. In this way, I could cope with the determining force of the past. Now the experience of ageing triggers a reflux of time from the restricted future. As a result, the past (Alain's "that which is possible") comes into control.

We have to get along happily with our past. Consider especially the third mirror stage, where our own image from our younger days is dissociated from the consciousness of our present. Without overcoming this alienation, our selves are going to grow thinner. We have to regain the accurate image of our younger selves from memory.

6. Appropriation of Memory

It is not only the body that brings ageing to notice. The body is a personal fact. But we are not isolated in our life. Ageing is especially hard because we inevitably lose many friends. Beauvoir mentions Juvenal, who remarked this fact for the first time: "growing old means seeing the death of those we love; it means condemnation to mourning and sadness". But "mourning and sadness" are only surface effects. Loss of a dear friend deforms our existence. I acknowledged that experience when I incurred such a loss. A poignant recognition came to me that my friend was a comrade in accomplishing something together and a witness who insured reality to my life. The word witness may sound like the word of a cool observer, but it is not the case: I just cannot find a better word.

And now to end this short essay I will describe these two aspects of my friend. A friend (とも=*tomo* in Japanese) is one with whom I do something together (*tomo-ni*, adv. means "together"). I see him from time to time and chat with a cup or glass. I send him a mail asking some question. Such a partner is a friend. I profit from his knowledge, but that is not the purpose. Occasionally I read a novel and am interested in its author. Then I remember that my friend once passionately discussed this novel with me. So, I call him to ask about the author. He might have lost his passion. That's OK. That is the chat. Even more precious is his existence, the fact that he is there. Thinking he is in this world, I feel my heart warmer. Someone might object, saying that the situation does not change even if my friend has passed away. That is just "too simple a rationalism." The fact that if I wish, I can see or converse with him through telephone or mail is absolutely different from the fact that even if I am keen to see him, it is impossible. Having dear friends constitutes and enriches my world. So, the loss of a friend shrinks and discolours my world.

I mean by 'world' the feeling of my existence that substantially coincides with the whole of my memory. But it pours out into the external world. Everyone knows that a place once he or she visited is dissimilar to unknown places: it has a certain sweetness. The town where a friend lives is exceptional. When I visit him at his place, the town becomes a kind of my own territory. Because he is living there, his town becomes more or less my town too. 'My town' I mean here in the sense of Thornton Wilder, and we can recall a number from the Musical play *My Fair Lady*, "On the Street Where You Live." Everyone must know this feeling. When I was young, forming a good personal relationship with new friends, I had some towns of mine here and there. So, some spots on the world map were painted in my colour, and thus my world expanded and wore a deep colour. Death of a friend deletes a town of mine. It does not mean going back to the previous state. The town that was particularly dear thanks to

the friend of mine becomes a hard place because of his loss. How can we resist this shrinking of the world and regain its vivid colour?

Even after becoming old, it is not impossible for us to get a new friend. But as the power of action is not so strong, the real chances are not much, for a friend is someone with whom to do something. A special meaning is found in recollecting together with a friend the time shared with him or her. The past curved in my memory is nothing but what I am. To recall something from it is to put life into this entity, that is to get back myself. A friend is a precious witness. Chatting with him or her, I am given the feeling of reality about that past. Not only that, the fact of his or her living supports my recollection. Loss of such a friend weakens my past, which becomes as vague as a vain dream. They say there are people who never look back. They are amazing persons who ignore ageing.

Aging probably is not an experience that we can undo. There are people (such as Kenreimon-in 建礼門院 (12-13 Century), depicted in the *Tale of the Heike*) who devoted their afterlife to praying to Buddha for the happiness of those who had been dear to them while in life. We can consider that such a devotion was not only a religious act. Even dear parents and friends having passed away, we can regain the vitality of our present minds by recalling the shared times with them in the past. Recollection in the manner of the rhapsode. After the recognition of ageing, we can hardly live without recalling vividly our own past, for that is the appropriation of ourselves. I use this word "appropriation" in the sense of Henri Lefevre. It literally means "to make one's own," and usually it is used in the sense "to make one's own what belongs to another person." Lefevre makes it a core technical term in his philosophy in the sense of "to make really one's own what belongs to oneself". With ageing, we absolutely have to restore the colour to our memory, for that is the appropriation of our own being.

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Ken-ichi Sasaki
Professor Emeritus at the University of Tokyo
ken_sasaki@jcom.zaq.ne.jp

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Ageing: A Dialogue

Arnold Berleant - Michael Alpert - Valery Vino

In April 2021, longing to learn first-hand about ageing philosophically, Valery Vino reached out to the legendary Arnold Berleant (who was 89 at the time of writing), to see whether he might be interested in recording a dialogue to this theme, with a companion of his choice. Berleant selected his ideal collaborator Michael Alpert, book designer and collector, poet, senior, and treasured friend. Over the following six months, a rich tapestry of leisurely reading, contemplation and discussion unfolded, culminating in an unrehearsed, free-flowing conversation about ageing, which has been recorded, lightly edited and offered here for readers to share. | *Keywords: Arnold Berleant, everyday ageing, experience, identity, bears*

Vino: We're fortunate to discuss ageing with Arnold Berleant and Michael Alpert. With a few exceptions, the philosophy of ageing is neglected in contemporary philosophy and education. Yet, in classical philosophy, gravitating toward the personal matters of life and death, our subject is common and canvassed by the giants like Aristotle and Epicurus, Cicero and Seneca, the great elders who refer to it as 'old age'. This cross-cultural contrast is both alarming and intriguing.

Berleant: I'll begin by saying that old age connotes a state of being, and I don't think that it's a useful way to deal with our question. For my part, I've never felt myself to be in a state, but always in a process of being. I never thought of myself as being old until I was very old, by anybody's standard. Ageing is a much better descriptive term because it identifies a process; and we're all in stages of ageing, in the process of ageing from birth to death. In this discussion, we're interested in the late stages of ageing, when one has a rich fund of experience and thought to draw on.

Alpert: Thank you, Arnold, I am in basic agreement with what you said. I'd add only that I see old age as a state of brokenness, poor old tired horse, you know, the term itself means brokenness. Whereas ageing is a certain engagement with the world. It's a way of being in the world. And then engagement alters with a certain number of years when one's conception of the future, and of the past and present, change.

Berleant: My friend Michael and I have talked about ageing. While there are many ways in which to approach the subject, we'd like to focus on what we can call a more phenomenological angle, to talk about our perceptions. Our perceptions have changed, our perceptions are changing, and, in particular, how they're more acute in this time of life than they may have been earlier. Of course, sense perception is not all we're referring to because sensory acuteness begins to diminish with the ageing process. In my case, my vision is not sharp as it once was; other people begin to lose their hearing. What is interesting about perception is that it's not a purely sensory phenomenon. It's a form of awareness that is tied to self-awareness: reflecting at the same time as perceiving. It's a reflective perception.

I've found that my perception has become more deliberate, more self-conscious, and also far more acute than earlier in my life. When one is young, one lives more in the moment and with great intensity. With age, the fund of experience has diminished the intensity, to some extent (but not very much in my case). But the awareness has increased, and the self-conscious awareness as well. I don't know what would illustrate this most effectively, but will start with a mundane example. I live in the country, in a countrified area of the state of Maine in the United States. I look out the window. My favorite view is two large trees in a large lawned area, and I've watched these trees grow and change with the seasons, and with the years. I've been living here for 25 years, and I'm seeing more than I saw before, because I'm also seeing not only the trees, but the ground under the trees, the shadows on the ground, and, in winter, snow on the ground. Instead of looking at the trees, I'm now finding myself looking at the ground, because there are patterns of shadows at this time of year, and they vary with the position of the sun. So it's a constantly changing pattern. It's not just all shade, it's interspersed with areas of brightness, the shadows that reflect individual branches, and things like that. It's a panorama that's constantly changing, as the sun changes, as the sky changes with the light and the cloud formations.

I've discovered the whole world of shadows: that's something that I've seen since childhood, but I've not seen with the acuteness and attention that I'm seeing with now. For me, this is a revelation. It's a very mundane sort of thing, but it's nonetheless a revelation because it has opened up a completely new perspective on my experience. What has struck me is that the world has enlarged as my perceptual awareness has increased, and that's certainly one of the ways in which ageing has been a great addition to my life experience.

Alpert: Your example, Arnold, points to the immediate: what you see becomes important, becomes more important; and this immediacy of perception includes also absence. For instance, the end of the Antonioni film *L'Eclisse* (1962), when two lovers are going to meet at a certain street corner. Each of them decides to not show up. So, Antonioni films the street corner for six very long minutes: the cars are going by, people who, in the middle of the city, stopping at that street corner, and so forth. Viewers of the film watch these miniscule events, rather than engage in the film's characters' ambitions and intentions.

At any age, you can experience the world in a very different way. *L'Eclisse* ends without resolution except for the obvious absence of resolution. For another example, I recently went to the unveiling of a gravestone for a lovely person who'd died in his late 90s. As I was entering the cemetery, there was a fox with a mouse in its mouth, the tail dangling. Not afraid, the fox bounded off into the neighboring field. I was aware of the fox's absence. In younger years, I would have had a naturalist's interest in the fox, but I might have not fully noted the absence of the fox.

Berleant: It's not as if this is a single lane highway. As one gets older one has more experiences, usually, more memories. And I find not only do I remember things early in my life, or what happened many years ago, but many of my memories are living memories. I know that they record past experiences, but they're still living in the sense that they are alive in my mnemonic experience. This may be a strange way to speak; but I'm trying to articulate experience, a memory and how it has a certain living presence, even though the events and things remembered are not present.

This is a very rich dimension that increases for people as they get older. It's something worth noting because it changes the present. The present carries with it this backlog of remembered experience and it makes the present more resonant because of the living experiences that are embodied in that present experience – remembered events. I live with the awareness of several very close friends of mine who have since died, but they're quite present when I think of them as personalities, as vital presences.

Alpert: I can give a personal example of this. My older brother, living in Thailand, called me one day and said our parents did things that were mistaken, and that he forgave them. My reply was, "Bernie, forgiveness is not good enough, you need to see them as suffering individuals." I was, of course, thinking about what is called 'the human condition'. As the conversation continued, we modified our memories. As Viktor Frankl wrote, whatever our circumstance, we always retain the freedom of our attitude. By confronting our habitual attitude, my brother and I came to a better place in terms of understanding our past experience.

If we're going to investigate memory, and how memory works, as one ages, we need to think about the future too. The turning point comes when the future presents itself in a less amorphous way. For young people, the future is indefinite – and, in a way, infinite – because typically they don't think about it in terms of their own person, their perception of themselves and of the world. At a certain point, that assumption changes; the shift has to do with suffering, that one perceives the world as suffered and suffering. I am referring here to the knowledge and acceptance of mortality, or to say it another way, the acceptance of human specificity.

As we age, the present changes, we become more engaged with the present, and the past grows in the sense that we cherish those memories. It's not just that we have them, but that we adore them, even the negative memories – they are *defining*. It all depends on what we do with our understanding of time: if you live in the past, you're in trouble.

When asked what he would advise to his elderly patients, Carl Jung said during a 1959 BBC *Face to Face* interview, "I would advise my patients to live for tomorrow as if they were going to be alive for 200 years." All our internal time consciousness changes as we age. In terms of classical philosophy, to consider time truthfully means to accept the fact of it, to be one with it.

Berleant: I spoke earlier about the vividness of memories in my experience. Michael is right in pointing out how understanding can affect those memories by being more tolerant, and also by other memories to which we can relate any particular memory. I don't want to be so abstract, but I don't want to use specific examples, because the ones that come to mind are not very pleasant. Mnemonic process – of remembering, forgetting, remembering and having more experiences, adding them to the fund memories – is endless. It's not as if we have a slideshow that we can turn on every so often; the slides are always being changed, undergoing modifications.

Philosophically (and prosaically) speaking, I am very aware of how things don't fit into neat categories. We talk about a memory: it's not a thing, it's not a place, it's not a container; it's an aspect of consciousness that draws on past experiences and makes them presently apparent, which is an enrichment of the present. At the same time, one can gain greater understanding, as hopefully Bernie did when you pointed out, Michael, that your parents were suffering, too. To understand something like that, changes memory. So memory is not a thing, it's not an object, it's not a fixed quantity. *It's a process*. When I rethink past experiences, it's rethinking what is present and what is alive. This helps me to put things in perspective, because I can relate different experiences by their similarity in some cases, and so I can make more sense out of the kaleidoscopic profusion of memory.

Alpert: In the present nothing is replaceable. At the present moment, you are where you are, you are who you are. If you're having a memory, it's that memory: nothing in the present is replaceable. As ageing continues, you start seeing all aspects of your life as not replaceable. Your friends, your home, your body. It all exists in the present as an absolute, in terms of one's actual perception of the world, and the perception of one's self.

Berleant: I was thinking about something related, which is the sense of one's identity. It seems to me that when we're young, we don't know quite who we are (becoming, if it's a process), we haven't been tried out in various contexts, we don't have a life pattern or a life trajectory. So we feel a sense of being lost, which I certainly remember experiencing; I'm sure this is quite common, taking the form of students not knowing what to major in, or not knowing what profession to aim toward, or what kind of lifestyle to follow, if they're reflective at all! (I'm sure there are people who don't think about that at all, and just live from impulse to impulse, from need to need.)

One of the benefits of ageing can be the growing sense of one's personhood, one's identity. I can only speak from my own experience, which is that this has grown. While the identity is far more complex than I would have imagined earlier, it nonetheless has a coherence; this coherence is not only historical,

but it's intellectual and experiential. So the idea of finding ourselves, so to speak, is a lifelong process. It's an interesting process, and I am more aware of who I am now than I ever was. While limitations have increased, of course, with the diminution of energy, of strength and endurance, it's nonetheless been an experience of continuous enrichment, complexity, and coherence. While I miss certain physical capabilities, it's a very rich time of life. I have a better idea of who I am, with a huge body of memory and experience, knowledge and understanding.

Alpert: I am not in complete agreement with you, Arnold. A couple of thoughts. One is that I think that from the time you're born, you do know who you are, you know absolutely who you are! You may not be able to articulate it and put it into the realm of ideas, but at the level of perception and feeling: you know. In terms of your place in the world, with other people, you may not know that. I think misfits know that they're misfits; they know it only too well, maybe much too well.

Now, there are some complicating factors. The major one today is technology. Anybody my age has seen the way in which technology has affected the way many people gain affirmation. Today, I see young people with their heads in smartphones all the time. All the time. Part of that behavior is that they're finding affirmation outside of themselves, through technology. This is a sense in which their cognition can be lost in the world of others. Part of that has to do with very young people learning through imitation -- we learn language through imitation, behave through imitation. It takes time to realise that we are independent.

Technology is the ocean we swim in. There's no getting out of it. Whatever the technology is, the specifics of it can affect our ability to live in the present. That's something that I'm seeing right now.

Berleant: I certainly agree with that, and am struck constantly with the tremendous increase in electronic technology changing the world people live in, as well as our behavior. When I was young, I used to wonder at elderly people who couldn't get used to the telephone, or couldn't get used to things when the radio was a new invention. And now I find myself not being able to get used to installing *Audacity* on my computer.

I want to go back to something that Michael said, which was that he thinks we have identity, even when we're very young. I don't think it's an identity that we have; we have awareness of a present or perception, our feelings are very much present, and maybe aware of those. But identity is more stable, complex, and I think that's something that (at least in my own experience) has taken decades to develop and become more coherent. It's something that I'm pleased to have accomplished, because I'm not only aware of my present, but I'm aware of my past. I'm not only aware of my feelings, but I'm aware of memories of feelings that I no longer have. So I can't speak for Michael, I can't speak for anybody else, but only for myself in saying that I am more clear now about who I am than I ever was. It's continued to develop as my experiences increase. Life is always interesting in different ways, and ageing processes have their own unique interests and surprises.

Alpert: I think there's a certain ambiguity in the word 'identity'. I had a clear identity of myself at the age of four, and that hasn't changed. What has changed is my ability to articulate that identity, to fill the content of that identity, but the vital part of it was set very early. I think this is true of everyone, frankly, and that we live in an illusion that we don't know ourselves.

Berleant: Are you thinking of identity as a sense of self?

Alpert: As a powerful awareness.

Berleant: Of the self?

Alpert: Of a person. To paraphrase Simone Weil, the difference between a person and an individual is that the person is there from the beginning, the individual, the individual has to do with particular traits that do change with time.

Berleant: This is one of those questions that we could debate endlessly.

Vino: This notion of coherence is fascinating. As one ages, their memories, conceptions and feelings of the self can be deeply discordant with one another. It's not uncommon, it's difficult to keep it all together.

Alpert: The relationship of trauma to self – to make the issue more emphatic – is always problematic. In ageing, whether you articulate it or not, you realize you've survived whatever trauma you may have experienced. A kind of stoical response that you can overcome trauma by being indifferent to it. Of course, in a psychological sense, you can't do that. Trauma relates to everything we've been talking about: our relationship to time, to limitations of all kinds, and to our accomplishments.

Berleant: I agree with that, too. Any differences in what we're saying are more or less verbal, or conceptual, and not substantive, because we recognize that we're the center of our experiences; and that there's a certain persistence and coherence over time.

I was thinking when I was child I thought of myself as more or less conscious of myself, but I could never have imagined that some of my childhood dreams would be figments of wishful thinking, and some things would come to happen that I couldn't have imagined. Yet, they all form part of my life history and my life present. We can be confused about how we think about ourselves, and we can be clearer. I think we're trying to articulate the clarity that we hope to find in this discussion.

In anticipating this discussion, I've been reading a book by Jean-Paul Sartre, called *The Words* (1963), his autobiography. I'm an admirer of Sartre, as a writer, and also as a philosopher. I certainly do not accept many of his ideas, but he loved to write, and he thought in terms of writing. This autobiography isn't a long book, and half of it is called 'Reading', devoted to reading his early childhood, and his relationship with his grandfather. The other half (which I haven't read yet) is called 'Writing', and I can imagine what that is: to use half of your autobiography to talk about your early

childhood is rather interesting! It's a good account of his articulating the sense of self in a historical and personal context.

I find that interesting, but I thought if I were to write my autobiography, I would never spend much time talking about my childhood; I would spend much more time talking about what we're discussing today, which is what's most interesting to me. Because how I got to where I am, is a historical issue, but what's most interesting to me is where I am, and what I'm thinking now and what I'm puzzling over. It's this perceptual present, that is the center of the world that I live in.

Alpert: To augment that, I think imagination has a very important role in ageing. Imagining your past and the rest of your life as you're perceiving the present, and that is always liberating. It becomes even more liberating as you grow older. If you're a stockbroker in New York, for instance, you're always looking at what's happening at that moment outside of yourself. You're engaged, your livelihood depends on it, and also your personal identity somehow is swept up in this parade of numbers. There are many variations of this; any career involves that kind of ticker tape thinking, where you're not left to daydream, to look at an unusual bird in your yard, imagine the bird's life or your life in relation to it.

I just had an experience where I saw a whole group of bears, close-up. They're beautiful! I was free to look at them. They were not threatening, the big bears, little bears. They were maybe twenty feet from me, with no protection, which made me a little uneasy, but I felt free to imagine their lives, and, in a limited way, to experience their behavior. In cities, people never see bears (except in zoos), but they can, for instance, see a sunset; many of their experiences can be satisfying and can engage their imaginations, as well as their intellect. That's a part of what ageing is about: to be standing in a place instead of being the kind of hiker who is intent on getting somewhere so quickly that he never sees the landscape around him. Surely, just to stand and look is a great blessing.

Vino: Do wisdom and happiness have to go hand in hand? One example is Michel de Montaigne, a wise person, and his evasive self does not tend to appear happy in *Essays* (1993). Let us indulge in a few lines from 'On Repentance' where he defines old age as "a powerful illness which flows naturally" and then remarks:

> But it seems to me that in old age our souls are subject to more troublesome ailments and weaknesses than in youth. I said this when I was young, and they scoffed at me for my beardless chin. I repeat it now that my grey hairs give me authority. We call the queasiness of our tastes and our dislike of present-day things by the name of wisdom. But the truth is that we do not so much give up our vices as change them, and in my opinion for the worse. (Montaigne, 1993, pp. 249–250)

Alpert: I think that Montaigne, at the moment that he was writing those words, was extremely happy. He was happy to be writing those words. He may have been unhappy about the world, but his joy is evident: why would he bother to write anything if writing did not bring him happiness?

[Laughter]

Vino: Thank you!

Berleant: I've got nothing to add to that. I enjoy walking around outside my home, where it is very beautiful. Looking at curtains and looking at trees and looking at the changes as the seasons develop. A little bit like Thoreau's comment in *Walden* (1854) that he never traveled more than 50 miles from his home, but he's seen the world. The world is present wherever you are.

As far as younger people living in urban settings, I was one of those for the first thirty years of my life. I know what that's like, know its sensory qualities and limitations. Like many other people, I wanted to break free and find my own place, not the place I happen to be situated in by circumstance. Not knowing where that place would be was part of the trauma of early maturity. That's why I think identity is something that one acquires, because I know better where I want to be, what that place is, what it offers, what it doesn't offer, and the compromises that one has to make in the life situation in which one finds himself. It's a good place to be, I am glad to be here.

Vino: It's interesting that you both foreground pleasurable experiences. Becoming familiar with some of the thinkers of the past, their own ageing, one can't help noticing sizable disparities, diverse lifestyles and aspirations, even within a single lifetime. One of the texts I read in preparation for our meeting is *Henry Miller's conversation with George Belmont* (1972). I am still grappling with Miller's remark that when he was younger he was very critical of the world, like myself, but having aged he found the world to be not that bad, after all!

Alpert: One of Henry Miller's books is titled, *To Paint is to Love Again* (1968). It's about Henry Miller who writes about himself as a painter. In any kind of academic sense, he was a horrible painter, had no talent whatsoever. He knew that and did not care. He loved painting, and his watercolors are quite lovely in many ways, but they're not what would have earned an MFA. It's strictly amateur. And that's what freed him to like painting into old age. He didn't care about selling it, he just wanted to do it, to engage with it. That's one of the keys to happiness. If you do what makes you happy, you will be happy. If you don't, you won't be. I think Henry understood how to be happy, though he offended a lot of people. To live aesthetically is a part of ageing: in healthy ageing, health and engagement are twins.

Vino: Let's conclude, then, by accentuating the aesthetic dimension of engaging with the world.

Alpert: Well, Arnold's everyday philosophy is important here.

Berleant: Valery, you used the word 'engaging', and that's a key term in the philosophy of aesthetics I've developed, aesthetic engagement, which is central to aesthetic value. It ties in with what we've been discussing, namely our awareness of ourselves in the ageing process.

I began with the example of shadows, noticing shadows, a very particular immediate instance of the perceptual present, of living in the perceptual present. It allows us to experience our world more directly and more readily than all the things that block us from it: inhibitions, traditional moral and social constraints, conventions that have lost their purpose in social living, as well as our own physical and personal impediments.

But the freedom to engage is something that can develop and hopefully will develop as one increases ageing experience, so that perhaps people like Michael and me are more capable of experience than we were earlier. Well, many people deliberately close themselves off from experience, through fear, through inhibitions, through the habit of not noticing. So I'm all for the liberation of awareness. And if age can bring that with it, that's a benefit, a great benefit.

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Arnold Berleant
Long Island University
Brooksville, NY11548, USA
ab@contempaesthetics.org

Michael Alpert
University of Maine Press
5729 Fogler Library Orono
Alpert@maine.edu

Valery Vino
Marlo, Australia
valery.arrows@gmail.com

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Growing Old Together

A Shared Achievement

John M. Carvalho

In this essay, I account for what we mean by old, what it means to grow old, and what we might mean by a shared achievement in the case of growing old together. I turn to the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz for some early insights on the shared time embodied in growing older together and how a 'we-relationship' shored up by this temporal structure is the foundation for constituting the social world. I follow Schutz's attempt to use this temporality to describe the case of making music together and conclude that what Schutz calls growing *older* together is not the same as growing *old* together which is necessarily embodied in a way his account of making music together is not. I give an embodied, enactivist account of making music together as a performance and, drawing on recent work by Shaun Gallagher, offer an aesthetics of growing old together as a performance enacted by individuals whose intimate engagements in that performance accomplish the shared achievement of growing old together. | *Keywords: Anonymity, Love, Schutz, Gallagher, Performance*

1. Introduction

I want to talk about growing old together. My interest is not in ageing but, rather, in the rich and complex process of growing old, the embodied sense of old age coming on, taking hold of you and progressing to the end. And I am especially interested in old age coming on and taking hold in the company of someone who is also growing old in the same sense. I am interested in the reciprocity embodied in caring about our own growing old in the company of someone else and in the course of caring about the growing old of that someone else. By extension, I am interested in how a concern for one's growing old impacts this companion and about how the growing old of this companion impacts us. I will come to call this embodied reciprocity a performance that individuals enact in the company of their companions, not a performance they put on to veil the sense of growing old, but an informed accomplishment performed and achieved to contribute to the growing old of everyone involved. This performance enacts growing old, and in the company of a companion, it enacts a growing old together. The shared achievement of growing old

together, I will argue, can have an aesthetic quality evident and appreciable in its enactment.

To get at this achievement, I discuss what it means to be old, what it means to be together and what it means to enact or perform this achievement. What it means to be old and what it means to be together are both culturally defined, and these cultural designations serve as the material conditions of the performance of growing old together much as the venue and the larger social world serve as the material conditions for the performance of a play, a dance or a piece of music. To clarify what I have in mind, I appeal to the notion of growing older together introduced by Alfred Schultz to account for a shared time that, he believes, subtends the anonymous constitution of the social world, anonymous because it constitutes the world as it might be lived by anyone. This formal, structural condition for the possibility of a truly social reality will prove to fall short of what I mean by growing old together, but it points us in a promising direction.

Schutz uses this same notion to give a provocative account of the shared temporality of making music together where the performers and listeners but also the composer grow older together even when the composer lived one hundred years ago and even if the audience is listening to a recording of performers who are also dead or not the performers they once were when making the recording. This attractive suggestion belies, however, just how disembodied Schutz's notion of growing older together is, and what I have in mind with the shared achievement of growing old together is above all embodied in the very sense of how our growing old alerts us to changes in the body that sign that growing old. There is also a disconnect with Schutz's notion of growing *older* together and our notion of growing *old* together. Young people can grow older without yet growing old in the relevant sense. The population of one or another locale can grow older, China, for example, without everyone populating that environment growing old and without all of them having an embodied sense of encroaching old age.

The example of making music together, nonetheless, includes the role of performance, and if we consider the performance involved in making music together, we note, where Schutz did not, that it is positively and thoroughly embodied. We see this in the presence and arrangement of the players on a stage or occupying a remote, defined space when the performers are separated to facilitate making music in a pandemic or to share recorded music across great distances. We see it in the relation of musicians to their instruments and in the relation of the performers to a live audience (still the gold standard for playing and listening to music). So, we can say that there is music, really music only in the embodied performing of it. This embodied account of performing music together will fall short of what I have in mind, but it points us to the embodied performance of actors in the theater that will emerge as a model for the promised and shared achievement of growing old together.

The aesthetics of performance have been explored by Shaun Gallagher. And we will follow Gallagher in giving an aesthetics of growing old together as a shared performance and achievement with various possible outcomes. Like all performances, growing old together may go well or ill. In every case, where it comes to growing old together, it will be a shared achievement enacted by the parties growing old. In the best case, when the affective mesh attending this performance is enjoined by care and love, it will produce the most beautiful endings with the most aesthetically rewarding results. Such endings are a worthy goal for this performance, perhaps even the most that can be expected in the shared achievement of growing old together. I will conclude by urging that those of us fortunate enough to have someone to grow old together with commit to achieving just those endings.

2. Who Are You Calling Old

Only people who are old think about growing old. Young people may think about growing old enough to drive, old enough to vote or old enough to decide for themselves how they want to live. Generally, however, young people do not think about the process that will bring them to that state, and that state, being old enough, is not yet old. Middle-aged people are old enough to decide for themselves, say, how they want to live, but they are not old enough to think about growing old. Someone middle-aged might think about growing old in the abstract. They might think, for example, about whether they will have saved enough money to grow old or whether they would prefer to spend their last days in a warmer climate, but they will only begin to think about growing old when they are old and growing older. In fact, you know you are old when you start to think about growing old. How old is that? Old is not a number. It is closer to what the slogan – you're only as old as you feel – would have us believe. Old is not a state of mind, however, but a sense of embodiment, a sense of how our bodies are comported or disposed to the growing old of their lives.

Social scientists distinguish between chronological age and the age people say they feel most of the time (Laber-Warren, 2019). Chronological age is a measure of the number of years someone has existed. It offers an index of what people can expect to feel after a specified number of trips around the sun. People who "feel their age" calculate that how they feel matches what a consensus holds that people who have made that many trips feel or should feel. That consensus is not arrived at by collective, deliberative reasoning. It is, rather, a representation of that feeling marketed by the purveyors of popular media that passes as consensus because there is a return on the investment those purveyors make on marketing those representations. People are shown representations of growing old that match what advertisers (and purveyors of popular media are all advertisers) predict they can reasonably persuade people to believe and consume to the advantage of the producers of the products and service their advertisements promote.

Those representations are not invented capriciously, of course, but in concert with what is predicted to resonate with the consumers of the products and

services marketed by them. Often, they seem to lag behind the trends. For a long time, the disposable income of an older population has been outstripping that of the coveted youth market, but only recently has advertising represented that population as healthy and wealthy enough to indulge spending on themselves. Those representations of healthy, wealthy old people aim to persuade people, when they are old, to spend more on themselves and to feel good about it. It also sends the message to those not yet old that they should plan for the same future, seeing old age as the beginning of a new life and not the end of life as they know it. Old age is, by one measure, a representation people are inclined to accept because it gives them reasons for thinking there is a life to live in old age that is worth living.

Of course, such representations of old age are true for a select demographic defined almost exclusively by class. There are plenty of less than wealthy people who enjoy an otherwise prosperous old age, lifted by the riches of familial affections and cultural affiliations, and their lives provide an important guide for what we have to say, in the end, about growing old together. Representations of old age as the beginning of a new life suggest that old age, and the prospect of growing old together, can be deferred by sound investing and planned access to assistance. For the very well-heeled, old age may be deferred indefinitely. Most of us, however, will grow old. Some of us who grow old will think about growing old. Some of us who grow old, whether we think about it or not, will be fortunate to have someone to grow old together with. Those of us who are so fortunate would do well to reflect on our good fortune. Perhaps, then, we will be able to participate in the mutually rewarding performance of growing old together.

Before we can discuss growing old together and how this growing old is a shared achievement, though, we have to get clearer about what we mean by 'old'. For our purposes, we will limit the discussion to a sense of 'old' embodied by human beings (so not pets or university issued laptops), and we can refine this limitation by stipulating that, in the case of human beings, 'old' refers to 'old age' or the later part of a normal life where that norm is a socially agreed upon standard subject to change. As already suggested, that agreement is forged in cultural markers distributed in advertising but also in the demographics of the workplace which trade on media representations to distinguish senior from junior partners and to distribute tasks according to their perceived fitness and experience.[1] Changes in the norm may result from enhanced nutrition and advanced medical technology or the debilitating physical and psychological impact of a pandemic. Life expectancy defines the upper-most limit of a normal life, and 'old age' is the part of a human life lived in proximity to that limit.

Life expectancies vary locally (at the time of this writing, life expectancies range internationally from 54 years of age in the Central African Republic to 85 in Hong Kong and Japan), but at every locale there is the experience of old age

[1] Media representations include visual imagery in movies, television, videos and memes, as well as narrative imagery in theater, literature and dance. Other cultural markers can be found in architecture designed to assist older people with grips and lifts, etc.

(*Life Expectancy by Country and in the World - Worldometer*, no date). Old age also varies within each locale. Among those who struggle to make ends meet, wherever they live, a normal life is regularly shorter and more fraught than it is for those who do not struggle at that same locale. Maladies may befall those who do not struggle and shorten their lives, but they are experienced as exceptions to the norm. That is to say, the life expectancy of people who struggle, wherever they live, may be shorter than that of people who do not, making old age and the experience of growing old different for different people living in the same setting, so that it is not just old age but the experience of growing old that varies locally.

Togetherness can vary locally, too, and those locales can be as expansive as a hemisphere or a continent, a territory or a population of people and as restrictive as that collectivity we call the family, any collection of people with shared goals, values and expectations for a life they live together. Within such collectives, I want to draw our attention to those who are most locally and intimately growing old together, those who have advanced to what, for each of them, is old age and who are growing old together. I am most interested in the environment created by people whose growing old is mutually a concern for others who are near and dear to them, people for whom their own growing old impacts and is impacted by the growing old of others. I am especially interested in the field of affordances sown and turned up by people related by shared plans for a life that includes growing old together.

The specific scene I have in mind involves people who have shared a life together when they were not yet old or even considering old age, who now have become old together and will live out their old age in a relationship that will be modified by the circumstances attending to their growing old. The *locus classicus* of this scene will be the married couple or the long-term relationship between two or more people who are not necessarily married, and this scene may also emerge from an association of close friends who do not share a domicile but who spend considerable time with one another and look out for each other. It will often involve an asymmetry where one of the partners is growing old faster than another for a number of reasons. These individuals may be older, in fact, or infirmed, or they may have suffered some hardship, the loss of loved ones or other resources, for example. In the best case, the scene will be characterized by care, and what I want to explore in this essay is the ecology of this care, the local environment where this care emerges, the affordances that are sown and that turn up in that environment, the skilled handling of those affordances and the dominant affective mesh that attends that care, which is akin to what bell hooks (2001) calls love.

3. Phenomenology

I was introduced to the idea of growing old together when I was too young to think about it. In an undergraduate class on Modern European Philosophy, Maurice Natanson mentioned in passing the phenomenon of growing older together, taken from Alfred Schutz, to describe a sense of shared time. Little about that sense of temporality made an impression at the time, but the idea

of growing old together, without yet knowing what to think about it, did. As it turns out, now, Natanson was referring to the account of the internal time that Schutz (1967) argued is structurally prior to a "typified" or already constituted sense of time, what we might refer to as "clock time," that is already past. This internal time consciousness, following the idea introduced by Edmund Husserl, forms, for Schutz, the basis for our constituting and accumulating a stock of objects and schemata in a past that we draw on to give meaning to our present experiences (Husserl, 1964).

Consider an example of how we turn to such a stock and scheme. We have a present experience of a woman walking her dog, Schutz might say, by drawing on past constitutions of a certain biped as a human female, a particular quadruped as a dog and the leash connecting them as signifying a relation of ownership, dependence or control. We may be mistaken. It may turn out that it is not her dog but a dog the woman is walking as a service for someone else. It may turn out that the person is not female but male or transexual. And if either or both of these interpretations eventuate, they become a part of our stock of typified schemata that we will draw on in future experiences of comparable scenes. Nevertheless, undergirding and structurally prior to these typified experiences constituted in relation to the past, there is for Schutz, a present flow of time, a *durée* that is shared and that constitutes what he calls a "we-relationship." A pre-thetic consciousness of time, shared by the observer and the observed, is the milieu where the experience of a woman walking her dog is constituted, and Schutz (1967, p. 103) calls this shared sense of time "growing older together".[2]

One important respect in which Schutz advances on Husserl's phenomenology is by conceiving the social world as a phenomenological given (Bregman, 1973, p. 197). Husserl posited a transcendental ego as the condition for the intentional consciousness of the world as meaningful and as mine. From the perspective of my transcendental ego, for example, I intend the scene just described as a woman walking her dog. Someone else, from their perspective, intends the same woman as rescued by a companion animal. Someone else, still, focusses on the dog and the leash and intends an animal restrained by its handler. That leaves Husserl with having to account for how my transcendental ego could have access to the others or could be absolutely confident that there are other transcendental egos or phenomenological subjects in that world. For Schutz, however, other subjects are a given. They are not independent agents needing access to one another but intersubjective from the start, necessarily linked by a shared temporal milieu.

"The 'we-relationship,' whose temporal mode is that of 'growing older together', as Schutz put it, replaces the transcendental ego as the appropriate starting place for phenomenological reflections on the constitution of meaning when the structure of sociality is to be understood" (Ibid.). There is an immediacy in this relationship that is prized by Schutz for the way it surpasses the continuum of anonymity that characterizes our everyday lived

2 See also Schutz (1945; 1953; 1955) all reprinted in Schutz (1973).

experiences. The temporality of growing older together is the pre-given basis for this immediacy. With it, the we-relationship sustains a primordial vitality that resonates beneath the humdrum of human affairs, but this we-relationship in growing older together provides only the structural condition for the possibility of such an experience of everyday social reality. What interests us is the embodied sense of growing old together where individuals in associations with others materially live out the changes brought on by old age in themselves and others and physically accommodate themselves to these changes.

In a later essay, Schutz (1951) appears to make room for our more pragmatic concerns when he extends the shared temporality of the we-relationship to the experience of making music together. There, Schutz appeals to the temporality of growing older together to account for what he calls the polythetic experience of making music when composing it, performing it and beholding it. In the experience of making music, as Schutz accounts for it, we constitute the melody or the theme over time, constituting one tone as the tonic, another as the dominant in relation to a harmonizing constituted as situating these tones in a sequence that completes a musical phrase repeated with variation to establish the tune as a whole. Schutz believes that when we perform or behold a piece of music, we make music together. When we do, we share the time it takes for the theme to be constituted with one another and with the composer who likewise constituted the music over time when she scored it. For Schutz, performers grow older together with other performers playing the same music on the same stage, with the audience beholding that performance, which likewise shares it with those performers and with other members of the audience, and all of them grow older together with the composer who may have written the music one hundred years ago.

Provocative as it may seem, this model raises several challenging questions. Can it really be the case that Mozart, who never grew old in the sense that concerns us, grows older with the musicians from the Borromeo Quartet performing his *String Quartet No. 19 in C major, K. 465* (1785) two hundred years after his death? Does Mozart grow older to the same degree and in the same way when the same quartet is performed by different musicians, say those forming the Brentano Quartet? And what about the musicians themselves? Do they grow older in the same way when they perform a quartet by Beethoven as when they perform one by Mozart? We may think Mozart's music grows older (or does it grow younger) with each successive performance of it by generations of musicians who realize his music according to the musical conventions of their time (in a debate with those who believe that Mozart's music ought to be played according to the conventions of his time), but does Mozart himself grow older? Or are we to think that it's the picture we have of Mozart that grows older and not Mozart himself? But how does a picture grow older?

It seems reasonable to think that musicians who have performed together for several years grow older together. We will return to the example of string quartets in a moment, but to take an example from popular music, the

musicians known as the Rolling Stones have clearly grown older together. In Schutz's sense this shows not in their evident ageing in the public eye but in the we-relationship that subtends their palpable sense of being able to make music together more or less effortlessly even with minor changes to their personnel. They are one of a few exceptions in a pop music industry which thrives on the humdrum of anonymously sedimented culture that Schutz believes the temporality of the we-relation structurally predates. Again, however, difficult questions arise. Isn't the growing older together of a twenty-year-old fan listening to *Satisfaction*, today, much different from the growing older together of the fan who was twenty years old when *Satisfaction* was first popular and the Rolling Stones were not at all old? Again, it is provocative to think that Keith Richards grows older and older, still, with each generation that listens to his music, but it is not clear what this means.

These questions highlight the difference that emerges in the discussion above between growing *older* together and growing *old* together. As a marker of the shared temporality that subtends the constitution of social reality, growing older together is not anonymous, but it is universal. It belongs to no one in particular because it belongs to everyone. Growing older together is the structural condition for the possibility of constituting the phenomenal world as intersubjective and social. That social world is sedimented by all the ways that the world has been constituted by real individuals with know-how and skills and goals they share with others immediately and not so immediately associated with them. The shared temporality of growing older together does not, however, address the material, pragmatic concerns of people intimately engaged in the experience of growing old together. Old age, which is not always involved in growing older together, is necessarily a part of growing old together.

Lucy Bregman (1973, p. 201) alerts us, in addition, to how disembodied Schutz's shared temporality is. Her concern is with the psycho-sexual development of children and their sense of identity. Our concern is with the suggestion that the music Schutz says must be performed to make music, nonetheless, rehearses a musical idea and ignores the material exigencies of making music together. Consider the motion picture *A Late Quartet* (Yaron Zilberman, 2012), an example I have referred to elsewhere (Carvalho, 2019). In it, a string quartet that has performed together for twenty-five years plays the eponymous late string quartet by Beethoven, *No. 14 in C# minor, Op. 131* (1826). The quartet is in seven movements scored to be played without a pause. Ordinarily, in the course of performing such classical music, the quartet pauses between movements to collect itself and to tune their instruments to their exacting standards. Playing without breaks, the performers must adjust their playing to the detuning of their instruments, to the detuning of the instruments of the other performers in the quartet, to their individual and collectively strained stamina as well as to various changes in the environment where they are performing.

In this image, the instruments are extensions of the physical bodies of the performers, the musculoskeletal frameworks which likewise 'go out of tune'

with use over the course of a life just as those instruments tend to do over the course of a performance. Convalescence or sleep can give the physical body time to retune itself, but mostly, as in the performance of that late quartet, attention to and compensation for the body's going out of tune must be accomplished on the fly, in the course of pursuing other ends, without time to pause and refresh. In the course of performing that late quartet, the entire body of the musician is engaged in maintaining her instrument as a means for making the music she is playing, but this engagement is incomplete if it is not shared by the other performers. The engagement of each musician with their instrument must be shared with every other player to make music together with those instruments. Making music together is possible only when a reciprocity is achieved among the players playing it. We have here an embodied sense of making music together that surpasses what Schutz attempted by giving material content to the form of what he called growing older together.

In the film, the cellist, played by Christopher Walken, unbeknownst to the other players, is diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. His flesh-and-bones body is breaking down and cannot keep up with the demands of his instrument and the music he wants to play. Walken's character is not just growing older with the others in Schutz's sense but growing old in the sense that interests us. In fact, he is the elder stateman in the quartet. The others were his students at points in their musical training. And at the end of the film, in the midst of a performance of the late quartet, Walken's character stops after six movements and announces to the audience and his colleagues, that he is too frail to finish the piece. He has arranged for a young cellist, likely another one of his students, to spell him, and he yields the stage to her. Walken's character is growing old but not yet together with anyone.

4. Performance

Walken's character's embodied sense of old age coming on and taking hold, of his body breaking down, led him to a doctor's office and a diagnosis that confirmed and gave a name to that sense. His sense of approaching old age led him to act in response to his growing old. Often, the sense of old age comes in the form of an illness or an accident and a slowed convalescence from that malady. In other cases, it is an awareness of having "lost a step." Your stamina is not what it used to be, your metabolism slows down, you are more quickly out of breath, and you do things to compensate for these changes. You give yourself more time to complete tasks and fewer things to do in the time available. You see a doctor to confirm your suspicions. You adjust your diet. You exercise more regularly, and all of these things, not least of all your embodied sense of growing old, impact you and those in your most immediate circle of companions.

The things you do in response to your body's growing old become a performance when they are enacted with an embodied sense of their impact on yourself and others, when they are undertaken with what Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2012, pp. 184–189) called 'style', when you enact them to navigate the

environment you share with others attuned to how your actions modify that environment for yourself and others. It may be rare when the interactions undertaken to allay the ravages of old age rise to the level of an accomplished performance. More often, people begrudgingly adapt to their limitations and those of their companions. More often, still, they complain loudly about those limitations and demand help from family, friends and healthcare professionals. But it sometimes happens that someone attuned to their own particular embodiment of old age, grows old with style and, when there are close companions involved, the performance of this attunement to their growing old will incorporate a sense of the growing old of those companions who themselves may or may not be attuned to their own growing old.

Our embodied model of making music together seems to approximate this picture, but it is worth considering whether the performance of growing old together shares more affinities with the performance of actors on a theatrical stage than with the performance of music. When making music with others, each performer strives to make music emerge from the tones she is playing in concert with her collaborators. The music achieved in this way is something other than what any one of the performers enacts alone and, even as a shared achievement, it is separable from the performers taken together. A string quartet may perform Mozart's *No. 19 in C major* and Beethoven's *No. 14 in C# minor* and many other compositions besides without becoming different musicians in each case. Rather, the music becomes different because played by this quartet and not another, and there is no exclusive connection between the music achieved by the performers playing together and any one of those performers who could be replaced, as in the example from *A Late Quartet*.

In a theatrical performance, by contrast, actors take on roles they enact in the course of a play with other actors also embodying roles. The differently embodied roles contribute to the staging of a play in the presence of an audience using props, costumes, lighting, dialogue and music (perhaps) to achieve this effect. The effect achieved is a world enacted by actors for an audience that enacts that same world in their appreciation of the play. That play exists apart from those actors and audience as a script for past and future performances of it, but the world enacted in this performance of that script is inseparable from the acting that achieved it. In fact, that world is brought to life and inhabited not by the actors but by the characters enacted in the roles those actors play. The world of the play is achieved only when the actors become something other than they are, when they become the roles that they play.

The relation of actors to the characters they play is often described as empathy (Gallagher, 2021; Gallagher and Gallagher, 2020). Empathy, an English language translation of the German *Einfühlung*, was introduced to account for the animating effect of objects such as artworks, for our way of being moved by such works and feeling or reading ourselves into them (Titchener, 1909, p. 21). Very soon, this was applied to the animating effect of other people to account for how we experience what another individual experiences by projecting our own experiences onto them (Lipps, 1906; 1909). Wilhelm Dilthey identified

two levels of empathy (Gallagher, 2021, p. 102). One turns up in elementary encounters with others where identifying their motives is indispensable for basic interactions. At a higher level, Dilthey thought, empathy builds on these elementary encounters with considerations of context and by drawing on an imaginative representation that stimulates an experience in ourselves of what we encounter with others (Gallagher, 2021, p. 103). For Shaun Gallagher (*Ibid*.), this higher order empathy involves a narrative framework that can be enhanced by the kinds of artistic expression we find in theater.

We can grasp empathy as the affective resonance that attends an actor's playing a part. This affective resonance enhances the actor's embodiment of a role. It adds something to the physical embodiment of the character she is playing with the assistance of costuming and make-up, the assumption of a posture and a gait, a dialect that colors the lines she speaks and expressions that add character to the part. These lower orders of embodiment will be informed by higher order cognitive capacities – memory, imagination, a method – called upon and formed by the embodiment specific to this performance. Gallagher appeals to the concept of a meshed architecture to account for how already embodied cognitive capacities connect with bodily enactments to fill out the actor's embodiment of her role. And he adds to the vertical axis of this architecture a horizontal axis where he positions affectivity and the larger social and cultural context, to fill out the enacting of this performance.

Generally speaking, the concept of a meshed architecture was introduced to explain how so-called higher order functions like memory, imagination and intelligence can be incorporated into patently embodied cognitive acts like playing tennis or making a meal. On this view, it is supposed that mindfulness meshes into habitual bodily behaviors thereby making those behaviors somewhat more than the mindless reflexes Herbert Dreyfus attributed to embodied cognition (Sutton, 2011).[3] In the case of a theatrical performance, meshed architecture can account for how an actor's preparatory thinking figures in the role she enacts (Gallagher, 2021, p. 43).[4] When it comes to theater, we notice, right away, that the mesh along the so-called vertical axis runs both ways, that an actor's embodied rehearsal of a role can influence the otherwise cognitive functions. Something that does not play out as planned, for example, leads to rewriting a line or reconceptualizing a scene. In addition, Gallagher's contribution to this view alerts us to a horizontal axis where degrees of affectivity enter the mesh as well as broader cultural and political economic parameters where the mindful corporeality of the role and the play are staged.

When it comes to growing old together, the embodiments of old age in the form of limited mobility and flexibility, memory and vision loss, exacerbated infirmities, and so on, intersect along a vertical axis with medical and home-spun sciences, memories of the becoming old of others, imagined scenarios for

[3] Also see Dreyfus (2005).

[4] See also Tribble (2016).

accomplishing tasks with a differently abled body and narratives about how that body will live out its growing old. Empathy resonates alongside this vertical axis in the projection of this embodiment onto the actions of our companions. Empathy signs and guides our understanding of what they are going through and is as part of an attempt to communicate to them what we are going through. To this meshed architecture we can add the larger social and cultural context – the specific locale and our history in that place, the affinities shared with our companions, the available social resources – where our growing old together transpires.

5. Aesthetics

As suggested above, the meshed architecture of growing old together rises to the level of a performance when the embodiment of old age in ourselves and our companions is enacted with style. For Merleau-Ponty (2012, pp. 187, 197) style shows up in the body's manner of relating to the world. It is given directly in the body's power of expressing itself, but we can also give style to that expression by consciously directing the manner of that expression, by giving it a lightness or circumspection, for example, in response to its material and emotional environs. An actor may affect a style to make her role more convincing, or she may embody that style in a mesh of cognitive, affective and material exigencies. Someone growing old may likewise affect a style for those in their immediate environs, to minimize or exaggerate their need for assistance, but they do not do so to act a part they can discard when their environment changes. Whatever they may affect for others, their growing old is an embodiment that stays with them wherever they go and that they can style in the company of others.

Someone with an embodied sense of old age coming on and taking hold can give style to their engagement with the cognitive, affective and material exigencies afforded by their growing old. This engagement adds an affective dimension to their style that we may compare with the empathy of an actor playing a part. Old age is both foreign and indigenous to the person with an embodied sense of its onset. It is their body that is slowing down and beset with physical and cognitive challenges, but these symptoms are new to them. Previously, their body expressed an embodied sense of vigor and agility. Now, they have an embodied sense of that same body as needing assistance and as less than lithe. This sense of their body growing old is colored by a feeling that emerges in the projection of their body onto an expression of itself it is trying to understand, and they are moved to share this affect with those who, like them, have a comparable sense of their embodying old age. They have an empathic sense of their own growing old and other than they were, and it will sometimes happen that they express this embodied sense to fit the growing old and other of their companions.

For Gallagher (2021, pp. 99–138), the presence of empathy alerts us to the potential for an aesthetic experience in a performance. He locates the aesthetic in the performer's "attunement" to the character she is playing and in her reflexive awareness of the cohesive, meshed gestalt of the performance

as a whole. He describes this aesthetic as "a mindful being in the flow where the performer's awareness of the performance is one (unified) double attunement to what is happening and to how she is performing when the dynamical gestalt is cohesive" (Gallagher, 2021, p. 136). The aesthetic is achieved by the performer, on this view, just insofar as she enacts the unifying of this double attunement. On Gallagher's account, this achievement is not given but precarious. It may break down at several different levels within the performance itself. (Gallagher is not concerned here with what experience the audience for this performance may have.) I suspect a performer can achieve an aesthetic experience even when Gallagher's exacting standards are not met.[5]

The performance of growing old together seems to confirm that suspicion, and if we focus more on style than on the affective mesh of empathy, it is easy to see why. People genuinely growing old together – attuned, as Gallagher says, to their own actions and to the dynamical gestalt of the world created by their acting – share an embodied mesh of exigencies and share, it is true, an affective sense of this embodiment. They care for one another and in doing so care for themselves. In acting out this reciprocity, they become other than they are, no longer just needing assistance but also capable of assisting. They become something other for the sake of those also growing old, and this generosity redounds to them, making them more capable of caring for themselves and of offering help to others. The willingness to become other for the sake of another, again, is how bell hooks describes love (hooks, 2018, pp. 3–5).

This performance, as suggested at the start, will be complex. There will be limits to how much those growing old together can do for others and for themselves. Where love is present, it can give style to the rough patches by giving unity to the complex expressions of the body enacting its sense of growing old. This unity has to be enacted and appreciated. We need to know how to achieve it and how to appreciate that achievement. In the company of someone we love, someone for whose sake we willingly become something other than we are, that unity exhibits a style that we can appreciate aesthetically, a style we create and estimate for the extent it tends toward a loving relation that may wax and wane but consistently draws a style from our growing old that is attuned to the growing old of others. This complex process takes as many forms as there are people growing old. Whatever resources are available, whatever the exigencies attending their embodiment of old age, love will be a guide and a goal for people growing old together with the aim of achieving the most beautiful ending that can be expected from the good fortune of growing old together with someone who is fortunate to grow old together with them. The shared achievement of growing old together enacts this style and achieves this love.

[5] John Dewey (1934) distinguishes between experience and an experience, the sort of experience that artworks aspire to and ordinary experience approximates. If aesthetics is an appreciation of the unity, complexity and intensity (to borrow Monroe Beardsley's formula) of an artifact, a performance or a form of life, it may admit of degrees. A performance may be more or less satisfying for the performer, but no less aesthetic, to the extent that the double attunement is achieved in a part of the performance or in the performance as a whole (Beardsley, 1958).

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John M Carvalho
Villanova University
Villanova, PA 19085 (USA)
john.carvalho@villanova.edu
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Ageing, Aura, and *Vanitas* in Art

Greek Laughter and Death

Babette Babich

Beginning with the representation of age *in extremis* in the *nature morte* or still life, a depiction of aged artifacts and representations of *vanitas*, artistic representations particularly in painting associate woman and death. Looking at artistic allegories for age and ageing, raising the question of aura for Walter Benjamin along with Ivan Illich and David Hume, this essay reflects on Heidegger on history together with reflections on the 'death of art' as well as Arakawa and Gins and Bazon Brock, both as artists 'at your service,' as Brock would say, contra death, and including a brief discussion of *wabi sabi* and *kintsugi.* The 'ageing' of art includes a review of the (ongoing) debate concerning Michelangelo's forging of the Laocoon as well as ancient views of age together with contemporary philosophic reflections (Simone de Beauvoir and Michel de Certeau). The figure of Baubô in ancient Greek sculpture and cultic context can make it plain, as Nietzsche shows (as Sarah Kofman follows him on this), that laughter and death are connected (along with fertility cults in antiquity). Satire preserves the Greek tradition of laughing at death and the essay closes with Swinburne. | *Key words: Allegory, Nature morte, Aura, Demeter/Iacchus, Sculpture*

Doch uns ist gegeben,
Auf keiner Stätte zu ruhn,
Es schwinden, es fallen
Die leidenden Menschen
Blindlings von einer
Stunde zur andern,
Wie Wasser von Klippe
Zu Klippe geworfen,
Jahr lang ins Ungewisse hinab.
– Hölderlin (1799) *Hyperions Schiksaalslied*

1. Allegories of Age and the nature morte

One may, so goes cliché, count off four ages: infancy, adolescence, maturity, senescence. Shakespeare adds time in his *As You Like It*, to increase the count in his "All the world's a stage" soliloquy: "And one man in his time plays many

parts/His acts being seven stages." Nietzsche keeps his count to the classic *three* intervals in *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, a book dedicated to contemplating the proximity of death. Nietzsche excludes infancy, the ideal of childhood he also challenges: "The happiness of the child is just as mythical as the happiness of the Hyperboreans of whom the Greeks tell" (1980, vol. 2, p. 666). Himself an early starter and professor by the age of twenty-four, Nietzsche counts off the 'Ages of Life' (*Lebensalter*):

> the twenties are … the *summer* of life. The thirties, by contrast, are its *spring*. … Finally the forties: … that is the *autumn* of life. (Nietzsche, 1980, vol. 2, p. 669)

So ends the aphorism. For the Nietzsche who died in his mid-fifties, that would prove to be all there was: exhaustion of vitality and overdrawn finances as metaphors for the end of life.[1]

Art, particularly pictorial art in the West represents the ages of the human, usually the ages of a male human. Although Shakespeare counts seven, the ideal of three ages is classic, matching, numerically speaking, Nietzsche's parsimonious rhythm. And in art history, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl (1926) read *Titian's Allegory of Prudence* (Fig. 1) in terms of the reference to old age (lupine) and its regard for the past, backward looking (citing Macrobius "which is devoured") and mature manhood's present (leonine) and front-looking sensibility (which, according to Macrobius, is always acting, or poised to engage) for the sake of the whelp, the forward looking youth, and thus the future (canine) possibility, "of which hope," so Macrobius, "though uncertain, always gives us a pleasing picture" (Panofsky, 1955, p. 153).[2]

Fig. 1 Titian (1488-1576), *Allegoria della Prudenza* (1565-1570).
National Gallery, London. Public Domain.

[1] See on this, the conclusion to Babich (2022, p. 603). In addition, with respect to the theme of art, Ariadne in antiquity is associated with the theme of mortality (Ariadne is commonly featured with her husband Dionysus on carved sarcophagi). Online, see Babich (2022).

[2] Cf. for another account, Erin J. Campbell (2003, p. 261) and Philip McCouat (2013).

Art historians who have trouble with Panofsky, quite apart from issues of attribution which today's scholars cannot always follow, tending to find it difficult to parse symbols as their significance has fallen out of common knowledge (but these are not mysteries and were common in the renaissance and in antiquity). Another issue may be Panofsky's attention to age.

If it is not typically disputed that Titian's old man (Fig. 1) seems to be a self-portrait, given Titian's age at 77 when he began painting this triptych, the elderly figure fades into obscurity: his aquiline features and red hat as distinctions where the dominant figure is the central figure of maturity but thereby the viewer's eye turns to youth. By contrast, Giorgione's *Lezione di canto* (Fig. 2), similarly known as *The Three Ages of Man*, and likewise painted in the last decade of the painter's life, sets youth in the centre, offset with relatively young maturity in profile on the right, offering advice and judgement. The two figures of youth and maturity occupy the larger portion of the painting, highlighting the pair of them, side-lining the old man who is excluded from their exchange, even as he looks obliquely over his shoulder, but directly at the viewer — Foucault has told us why[3] — with no authority for the present or future.

Fig. 2 Giorgione da Castelfranco (1477-1510) *The Three Ages of Man* (*Lezione di canto* [Reading a Song]), ca. 1500-1510. Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence. Public Domain.

This irrelevance, coupled with the formless red of the old man's cloak (Fig. 2) contrasts with the orange bordered detail of the boy's student cap and purple robe, the necklace at his throat or even the detail of the mature man's embroidered green cassock with white cuffs, and this too is part of the destiny of ageing (Pierre Bourdieu, we will return to this below, assesses the judgement of age as the virtue of *phronesis* when it comes to artistic taste/

[3] See for a discussion, Gary Shapiro (2003, p. 245f) as well as his chapter, *Toward an Archaeology of Painting* (2003, p. 265f). Cf. too, with reference to Gibson and Gombrich, and hence apart from Foucault, F. David Martin (1978, pp. 287-292).

valuation in his *Distinction* (1984, pp. 466–484).[4] It adds to this irrelevance of the aged that the title of the painting is 'reading a song,' as this is what the boy and the man are doing, minus any contribution from the point of view of age (which has a certain musical salience when it comes to the interpretation of popular music or what we today call 'covers'). The painting is thus about the very social rank or status of music or 'mode' (Barilli, 2004).

As Walter Horatio Pater contrasts Titian and Giorgione's *Concert*, it is hard to read this 'lesson' scientifically, that is in terms of art history, art science [*Kunstwissenschaft*], quite to the extent that when it comes to Giorgione, attribution is "from the first uncertain" as Pater emphasises in his influential "School of Giorgione" (1910, p. 143). Nevertheless, one might wish to argue that just this painting, Giorgione's *Lezione di canto*, exemplifies Pater's concern with

> the principle of music; music being the typical, or ideally consummate art, the object of the great *Anders-streben* of all art, of all that is artistic, or partakes of artistic qualities.[5] (1910, p. 135)

For Pater, "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music" (*Ibid*). Pater is describing ambition but also a didactic element as part of the 'school' of Giorgione and one can advert to the pointing finger of the mature man, understanding maturity as a certain voice, owned as such [*Mündigkeit*], instructing youth. One might also refer to the relation between age and music by way of exception, to parallel age and youth as I discuss this elsewhere with respect to Johnny Cash's 'cover' of Trent Reznor's *Hurt*.[6] Thus Alex Howlet (2019) maintains, not without reason I would agree, that Cash "deepens" the Nine Inch Nails' song. In addition, the gesture of the mature man in Fig. 3 makes the case for a particular tact, or counting (and here we should add Nietzsche once again), of time. Thus the music historian, Jane Hatter argues:

> In many Venetian paintings, especially those by Giorgione, Titian and their followers, music, often indicated or reinforced by the performance of *tactus*, can also represent the passage of time. (Hatter, 2011, p. 6)

The 'ages' of 'man' are not generic even as the motif attests to a genre.[7] In addition, representations of aging do not apply across the genders.[8] For woman, the three ages of youth, maturity, and old age is truncated to just young and old, leaving out maturity: as we may quote Nietzsche's offensive proverb, one of seven he lists "for women" in *Beyond Good and Evil*, in one of Walter Kaufmann's better translations: "Young: a cavern decked about. Old: a dragon sallies out" (1980, vol. 5, p. 174). Nietzsche who keeps the connection with learning as we saw above in connection with Pater,

[4] See too, likewise drawing on Bourdieu, Alex Dumas and Suzanne Laberge (2005, pp. 183–205), as well as the reflections on ageing with respect to body aesthetics in Barbara Ehrenreich (2018, pp. 51-70).

[5] Cf, for 'acoustic' discussion, Andrew Eastham (2010).

[6] See Babich (2018, p. 397).

[7] See for a survey account, Heta Kauppinen (1991).

[8] See for an account limited to (specifically) 'feminist art,' Michelle Meagher (2019).

emphasises here that "learning transforms us" and yet he argues that when it comes to man and woman, there is something that cannot be unlearned: 'indicators of the problem that we are," that is to say, "the great stupidity that we are." Expressly incorrigible, the "*unteachable* 'down there,'" [*Unbelehrbar*, '*da unten*'],[9] Nietzsche proceeds to unburden himself of his opinions on women, including his clearheaded insight that to match the fantasy of the 'eternal feminine,' women also have their own (imaginary) ideal of the "*eternal masculine*" (1980, vol. 5, p. 175).

Hans Baldung's *Die drei Lebensalter und der Tod* / *Three Ages of Life and Death* (Fig. 3a) gives us woman under three species, with a young woman at the centre, obliquely confronted with a mirror, a sign of vanity, held up to her by an old woman behind her, blocked out by the edge outside the frame, we only see part of her body, with a baby at their feet, playing with the threads of Clotho's spun web of life — Clotho/Κλωθώ was one of the *Erinyes* or Furies or the Fates, and as such one of the *dramatis personae* along with Hermes and Charon in Lucian's dialogue, the *Downward Journey* — with a 'fourth', masculine, ghoulish, figure of death looming over the figure of the young woman, grasping the gossamer threads of life with one hand and, with the other, a red hourglass held over her the young woman's head. The aged woman with the mirror in her right hand, vainly tries to stay the hand of death with her left.

Fig. 3a
Hans Baldung Grien (1484-1545)
Die drei Lebensalter und der Tod 1509-1510. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien. Public Domain.

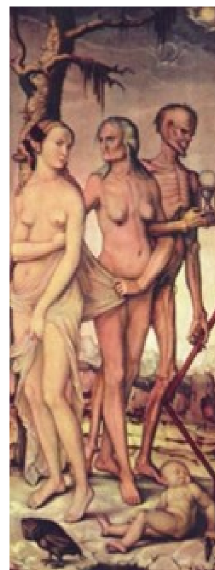

Fig. 3b
The Three Ages of Man and Death, ca. 1540-1543. Museo del Prado, Madrid. Public Domain.

[9] There are many who write on Nietzsche and woman and there is a wide field of scholarship in feminist readings of Nietzsche, but see with specific respect to art, Babich (2000).

The focus is not a little misogynist and Baldung's 1517 painting of *Der Tod und die Wollust/Death and Lust* (not shown here) is usually translated — with romantic serenity — as *Der Tod und das Mädchen/Death and the Maiden* which shows us death carting off what is identifiably the same young female figure by her long hair.

Baldung's later painting of the same name: *Die Lebensalter und der Tod* (shown: Fig. 3b), gives us the same four figures, complete with an hourglass now at chest level as the skeletal figure of death escorts the old woman who looks back at youth. Death carries a crooked stick grasped by the infant lying awkwardly placed at their feet with a dark owl with the features of a drachma, set at the infant's feet, facing in the opposite direction, and staring ominously at the viewer.

Born of woman and, sheerly metonymically, as being born, thrown into this world, one is underway to death. Thus woman is the proximate cause as source of life and thus as source of death quite as Baldung's paintings illustrate (Figs 3a and 3b above).[10]

As a genre of art, the still life or *nature morte* represents the Judeao-Christian value of *vanitas*, art turned on itself. As the literary theorist, Norman Bryson defines it:

> Still life is unimpressed by the categories of soul, consciousness, achievement, grandeur, or the unique. The human subject that it proposes and assumes is a bodily, material entity on a par with anything else in the material field. It is severed from value, greatness, and singularity. (Bryson, 1989, p. 229)

But just this, on Bryson's account, also allows or tolerates or invites various elements of desuetude, 'decay.' For this reason Bryson can argue, using Pompeian still life — Davidson (1999) elaborates on related kinds of still life in his *Courtesans and Fishcakes* — that the liminal comes to light to argue for an edge condition:

> In Pompeian painting, still life is the genre where shadows freely appear, and the link between still life and *trompe l'oeil* is as old as the legend of Zeuxis and his still life of the grapes, so lifelike that the birds came to eat from the painted vine. (Davidson, 1989, p. 229)

In this way, the ancient Greeks faulted the vanity of age, as modern Judaeo-Christian predispositions incline to moraline readings, including mockery of the erotic (key to Plato's *Phaedrus* and which also finds expression in the *Republic*), likewise has to do with a failure of σωφροσύνη or 'prudence.' This must be understood hermeneutico-ethnographically as this irreverence and hilarity can seem to be at variance with today's understanding of age and death.

[10] There is, of course, literature on this theme: see Holger Jacob-Friesen (2019), in addition to Larry Silver (2021), well as Margaret A. Sullivan (2000). On the iconic 'power' of the fourth, see Brandt (2015).

Fig. 4 Arent de Gelder (1645-1727) *Self-Portrait as Zeuxis Portraying an Ugly Old Woman,* 1685. Public Domain.

Thus if artists, fond of channelling Apelles or Zeuxis, as in the case of Arent de Gelder's mocking self-portrait (Fig. 4), sharing his derision with the viewer (and not with his middle-aged subject [Fig. 4]), as de Gelder, like Giorgione's old man (Fig. 2 above), directs his gaze to the viewer beyond the picture plane. Here, we attend to the crucial distinctions made with respect to laughter and death in antiquity, important as the story of Zeuxis is also the story of the artist's death as Zeuxis is said to have perished thereby. If his death is typically read as nemesis, the price exacted for his hilarity at the expense of his subject, for the ancients, death can also be a reward, especially if it involves some accession to the divine (think of Kleobis and Biton, whose mother's prayer of gratitude when they brought her to celebrate Hera's rites, was answered, the very next morning, with the death of her two sons).[11] Zeuxis had painted the goddess Aphrodite 'as old,' as a feigned, aged aspect was associated with Demeter, as we read in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* that grieving Hades' rape of her daughter and thus inconsolable, Demeter took on the appearance "of an old woman" to the daughters of Keleos of Eleusis (Meyer, 1987, p. 23), an aged woman being a disguise for a goddess no one would suspect, setting up the mystery reveal after the child's mother, Metaneira, violently interrupted the gift of immortality Demeter sought to offer Demophon, the child in her charge. Manifest as the goddess she was, Demeter chided them for their ignorance but promised conciliation, if they built a temple in exchange, dedicated to "Demeter, the venerable":

[11] I give a reading of Nietzsche's famous posing of himself along with his friends Paul Reé and Lou von Salomé in a cart, setting Lou in the position of the Kleobis and Biton's mother, in Babich (2011, p. 182), arguing that it is modelled on an altar relief of Kleobis and Biton drawing their mother in a chariot from the Museo delle Terme di Diocleziano, Rome Italy.

> With these words, the goddess altered size and form and sloughed off old age; beauty wafted about her. A lovely fresh smell radiated from her gown and the radiance from the skin of the immortal goddess shone from afar. Her blond hair flowed down over her shoulders, and the sturdy house was filled with light like a flash of lightning. (Meyer, 1987, p. 26)

Understanding the role of laughter in antiquity is challenging. The hymn can be read as suggesting elements of transfiguration as scholars also read this as part of the cult of death and immortality.

The seventh century BCE lyric poet, Pindar insisted (instancing Archilochus[12] whose famous ire is held up as a cautionary tale to qualify the so-called 'Castor song' in the 2nd Pythian ode), that youth — in this case Hieron of Syracuse — tended to misjudgement, needing the arbitration of one of the judges of the damned to sort out: Rhadamanthus as Pindar names him. Today, approaches to age and death do not tend to include, at least not deliberately, the practice of laughing at either. In Greek antiquity, the opposite was true and in the case of art may allow us to understand some of the figures we are confronted with and what their purpose might be, if we permit ourselves to consider that that purpose might be other than our current conventions allow. Thus I consider Nietzsche's discussion of Baubo (and Iacchus) as well as his complex reflections on Archilochus in addition to the more social ethnographic reflections of Lada Stevanović's insightful *Laughing at the Funeral* (2009).[13] In connection with reflections on aesthetic taste, David Hume spent his deathbed reading on Lucian's *Kataplous/Downward Journey* which features the poor shoemaker (poverty being crucial to the jest in the dialogue), Mycillus, who arrives willingly and laughing by contrast with the "fetters" of the tyrant Megapenthes (1915, p. 5, 33). Mycillus was eager to depart, chasing after Charon's barque and insisting on being taken aboard, even though there is no room which means he has nowhere to stand but on the neck, so Hermes directs him, of the tyrant who had in life lived across from him (1915, p. 39). Laughing at the moment of death for the Greek must be matched to the apotropaic significance of laughing *at* death. Adding to the crucial value, as Nietzsche emphasises this, even of the sacrificial animal victim's assent, Stevanović argues that laughter is more than apotropaic. Crucial to the cycle of "the death-and-rebirth pattern in all its conceivable forms," as Richmond Hathorn also argues in his source overview of Demeter (1977, p. 94) , for Stevanović, given the ancient Greek belief in morphological conservation (here one might add a parallel with Augustine), i.e.,

> that the dead in the Underworld keep the same form as in the moment of burial, and, linking this with the laughter in the moment of death, shows that such laughter is not only a sign of a good mood, but actually the most powerful manifestation of life, which accompanies the dead on their way to the world

[12] If Archilochus wrote misogynist invective that would endure beyond two millennia (thereby passing time test for genius, in addition to Nietzsche's reminder that the Greeks set him parallel to Homer), age for Archilochus was the counter-conditional par excellence and he attacked women especially for this offence (although I argue elsewhere that no small part of this may have been inspired by his own ageing condition, quite as he gives the details of his own impotence); see Babich (2019).

[13] On Iacchus/Iakchos, and a more complex account of Demeter/Persephone, see Ivanov (2012, p. 94f.)

> beyond. Thus, if the dying person has the ability to laugh at the moment of death, this capability will exist ever after. Adding to this is a picture of the underworld in which no laughter exists, and so it follows that laughter, as an antidote for death, in the very moment of it, provides immortality. (Stevanović, 2009, pp. 190-91)

One needs a material reflection, all the resources of ethnography and object philology, as I elsewhere try to raise this complex question with respect to Greek bronze (Babich, 2008), to begin to understand the role of – key to reading Jean-Pierre Vernant (1991) – the image or icon as *eidolon*.[14]

What is a mirror? What were Greek mirrors and what is the polish used to give their statues a mirror finish (what was that composed of? what qualities did it lend?).[15] I have argued that it made a material difference to consider the effect of oxidation on metal in order to understand Aristotle's insistence that mirrors that acquire a red cast when used by menstruating women would have to be, as specifically necessary for the claim he is making, "new"?[16] But what is the reflective surface of a Greek mirror and exactly what is reflected? A truth to life? A dark image? Is the life reflected this life or the next life, deities or demons, etc., is this a kind of scrying — not meant to mirror or represent but descry what is otherwise not to be seen as opposed to a true to life, correspondence of the kind we, of our 'pictures are windows' variety, are well used to? Hans-Georg Gadamer challenges this as a conviction or prejudice having only recently been overcome, permitting us to 'read' mediaeval art (1986, p. 8), but what will we need to imagine a Zeuxis, any Zeuxis (we have no originals) not to speak of his last painting? For when it comes to these paintings of Zeuxis, of Apelles, in every case, we make it up: all our images are, *faute-de-mieux*, ekphrases. As Nietzsche says with respect to the copies we cobble together of things seen and never seen, it is the rule when it comes to "paintings" (but also when it comes to people as that is the point of his comparison) that of us "prefer the copy to the original" (1980, vol. 2, p. 239). We prefer the modern reconstruction: it looks 'more authentic' to us.

2. Auras and Age

An aura is a sign of 'age.' Benjamin scholars read his notion of aura variously,[17] but signifiers of age such as patina are also claims to

14 See for further references and discussion: Stevanović (2009, p. 55f). Cf. too David Leeming (2013) in addition to, in the context of art history, Reiner Mack (2002), as well as the contributions to Joachim Whaley (1981).

15 As Nikolaus Dietrich (2021) contends (and there are issues one might wish to take with this contention but for many and complicated reasons, as on the surface of it, he is correct in at least part of his claim if not the causal attribution alone and as such): "we have been deprived of the high polish which was responsible for the mirroring effect." Dietrich despite the nuances of his analysis is not attending to the complicated question of the substantiality of the mirrors themselves, as it were, perhaps as he is largely concerned, as this is true of today's mirrors, of the overlay that makes mirrors mirrors, in this case the specific polish as such as well as the specificities of its application. See my note (and reference) below.

16 See, for loci and further references, Babich (2008, p. 174f.).

17 There is no disputing the value of aura from the vantage of the critic despite critical reservations: "[T]he past seven decades have shown that almost none of Benjamin's central predictions have proven to be right." Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Introduction" to *The Work of Art in the Digital Age* (2003, xiii-xiv). The aura has not disappeared, but conquered even the field of art's technical reproduction as film has not developed along the lines Benjamin indicated into a critical medium for the "masses," etc. But cf. Jae Emerling (2009).

'authenticity.'[18] As Benjamin explains here, "The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity" (1969, p. 220).

This 'presence' is a reference not to a subjective judgement, as Heidegger will also specify the 'presence' of the past object, but the substance of the work, sometimes certified as such by this or that authority, 'the' touchstone of value. For Benjamin, "Chemical analyses of the patina of a bronze can help to establish this, as does the proof that a given manuscript of the Middle Ages stems from an archive of the fifteenth century" (*Ibid*).

Thus on 'authenticity' and aura we read:

> The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.[19] (Benjamin, 1969, p. 221)

In consequence "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition" (*Ibid*). What falls away is the aura: "that which withers in the age of technological reproduction is the aura of the work of art" (*Ibid*).

Age in the sense of enduring through time is what David Hume proposes as the proof or 'standard of taste' as he argues for the literary or poetic work of art:

> The same Homer, who pleased at Athens and Rome two thousand years ago, is still admired at Paris and at London. All the changes of climate, government, religion, and language, have not been able to obscure his glory. Authority or prejudice may give a temporary vogue to a bad poet or orator; but his reputation will never be durable or general. (Hume, 2019, p. 29)

For Hume, the capacity to age (which for Hume can include flexibility and change, *ceteris paribus*) characterises "real genius" and thus "the longer his works endure, and the more wide they are spread, the more sincere is the admiration which he meets with" (*Ibid*).[20] There are parallels with wine as Hume famously illustrates.[21] Steven Shapin (2017, p. 130f), after recalling the complex history of debates concerning taste and any hope for a 'standard,' explains that social reflex will be crucial in understanding (and Shapin quotes Kuhn on) "connoisseurship" in order to remind us that what is at stake is not "taste objectivity but taste intersubjectivity" (2017, p. 135).

Hume — and Shapin — acknowledge that access to such a narrow cadre will not be without challenges but at stake is the need to find or establish a means of discerning, as it were, in advance of the proof of age, works that are estimated as likely, thus Hume's principle anticipates Darwinian selection, to 'survive.'

[18] See on patina and age, Randolph Starn (2002).

[19] See further and conventionally, following the impetus of Lukacs, György Markus (2003).

[20] Cf. Förster and Huchel-Haus (2009).

[21] See Babich (2017, p. 15; cf. p. 4).

With Hume, the parallel with wine futures is clear: what is critical is to judge the fortunes of art (or wine) in advance. And Hume complicates matters as he notes the tastes of different stages of life, allowing for youthful or beginner's foolishness in addition to the superior assessment of age over the course of an individual lifetime. Estimating which work of art is likely to endure will also have to take account of changing societal mores and market contingencies (2019, p. 37), gauging "art futures" (Babich, 2017, p. 15). To this extent, for Hume, ageing well exemplifies the work of art as a work for the ages and the ability to advance judgement on the likelihood of this durability is the 'brass ring' of aesthetic valuation.

For Benjamin, the connection with distance may be added to age or time:

> The concept of aura which was proposed above with reference to historical objects may usefully be illustrated with reference to the aura of natural ones. We define the aura of the latter as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be. If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch. (Benjamin, 1969, pp. 222-23)

The key, and here we note a convergence with Hume's claim, is the creation of demand, as value expressly tied to delay, crucial for desire. Thus ageing enhances value: "One of the foremost tasks of art has always been the creation of a demand which could be fully satisfied only later" (*Ibid*.). Anticipating elements of pop art in his analysis of Dadaism, Benjamin pointed to the challenge of the rare (and to this extent today's hopes for NFTs correspond to the same point), explaining that:

> In recent years, such barbarisms were abundant in Dadaism. What they intended and achieved was a relentless destruction of the aura of their creations, which they branded as reproductions with the very means of reproduction. (Benjamin, 1969, pp. 237-38)

In "Unpacking my Library: A Talk About Book Collecting," Benjamin evokes the age of the books themselves along with "the disorder of crates," specifically, "the dust of wood," recounting "the relationship of a book collector to his possessions" (1969, pp. 59-60). For Benjamin, one has only

> to watch a collector handle the objects in his glass case. As he holds them in his hands, he seems to be seeing through them into their distant past as though inspired. So much for the magical side of the collector — his old-age image, I might call it. (Benjamin, 1969, p. 61)

For Benjamin's collector: "the acquisition of an old book is its rebirth. This is the childlike element which in a collector mingles with the element of old age" (*Ibid*). For her part, Rebecca Comay (2013) muses, adding tactical precision: "every acquisition in the collection is strictly the next-to-last acquisition." By definition informed by the same sense of volatility and vulnerability, ageing infuses Benjamin's reflections on his collector who ages himself as he acquires his books, merging the collector with the consumer:

> A relentless drive to accumulation is sustained by the secret knowledge that the object is destroyed in the moment of possession. As the object enters the

> collection, I take stock of it, I index it, I name my mastery over it, I miniaturize it, and in this very moment I concede its irretrievable disappearance. Hence my unappeasable need for more and more. I take an imprint of the thing, as if making a death mask, and in this way I surreptitiously take leave of it without quite having to relinquish it. Every collection may be seen in this light as an act of impossible or interminable mourning: I destroy what I acquire and assume perverse ownership of what I relinquish. (Benjamin, 1969, p. 61)

Benjamin's 1931 reflection repeats Heidegger's 1927 *Sein und Zeit* concerning "the book we have used" which Heidegger 'unpacks' as having been "bought at So-and-so's shop and given by such-and-such a person" (1961, pp. 153-54/118).[22] There is a hermeneutico-phenomenological haunting acquired books as Benjamin reflects that "inheritance is the soundest way of acquiring a collection" (1969, p. 66). Thus Benjamin observes that the collector's books are phenomenologically *constituted*

> within a magic circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them. Everything remembered and thought, everything conscious, becomes the pedestal, the frame, the base, the lock of his property. (Benjamin, 1969, p. 60)

This property is visceral, or bodily 'having', as Benjamin's cousin, Günther Anders would say. Thus Benjamin invokes *physiognomy* as Adorno does:

> In this circumscribed area, then, it may be surmised how the great physiognomists — and collectors are the physiognomists of the world of objects — turn into collectors of fate. (Benjamin, 1960, p. 60-61)

Thus the reference to authenticity also refers to 'property' and the proprietary participatory dynamic, "Writers are really people who write books … because they are dissatisfied with the books which they could buy but do not like" (1969, p. 61).

Fig. 5a
William Michael Harnett (1848-1892)
Still Life with Pipe, 1883. Mount Holyoke. Public Domain.

Fig. 5b
Evaert Collier (ca 1640-1710),
Vanitas, 1663. National Museum of Wesern Art, Tokyo. Public Domain.

This is an academic, scholarly ethos and, typically, the collector's domain articulates a masculine aesthetic – like brandies and cigars, and Benjamin's books, mostly – if not only, applicable to men, not women. This too

[22] The second page number, also indicated in this volume, refers to the pagination of the German original, *Sein und Zeit*.

bears on the art of ageing and in another study one might attend to the population of still life tableaus especially those including books but also pipes and pocket watches, and abandoned musical instruments set not in domestic counterpoint but the closed genre of still life, as *vanitas* (Figs. 5a and 5b may thus be multiplied *ad libitum*).

We speak of "the odor of sanctity," a phrase, as Ivan Illich, priest and theoretical activist, reminds us, associated with atmosphere and aura, not as such holiness or deity *per se* (although we may here recall the sanctified smell Homer associates with Demeter's revealed divinity), but death.[23] Thus in the case of aged brandy, the process of ageing refines. In the case of old leather, ageing adds character (and friability) to which may be added the smell of the elderly, a smell that is "not necessarily offensive" (Jabr, 2012).

Illich also talks about aura in the more complicated circumstance of the cloaca of ancient Rome as of the tenacity of the South American favela in his *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness* (1985) and his essay on "Dwelling" (1992). Illich does not allow the reader the privilege of remaining in the well-heeled disposition of the 'collector' of Benjamin's aura, no matter whether collecting Klee's paintings or valued books and the like or the speculator estimating art 'futures' as part of an investment portfolio, but takes us instead to the immediacy of the personal, one's own *body* quite in the way that Anders speaks of the "having" of a body.[24]

For Illich (2002), the aura is something one can smell:

> To sense an aura, you need a nose. The nose, framed by the eyes, runs below the brain. What the nose inhales ends in the guts; every yogi and hesichast knows this. The nose curves down in the middle of the face. Pious Jews are conscious of the image because what Christians call "walking in the sight of God" the Hebrew expresses as "ambling under God's nose and breath." To savor the feel of a place, you trust your nose; to trust another, you must first smell him. (Illich, 2002, p. 237) [25]

Illich is attuned to the complex of ageing in his reading of a very specific Japanese term drawn from the Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō: *fûdo* which, telling us that it is linguistically and affectively untranslatable, Illich integrates into his Bremen Peace lecture, relating his earlier, 1980 peace lecture in Yokohama on the collision of bodily sensibilities between two cultures, East and West. *The Smell of Rain on Dust*, a self-help reflection on death and loss (Prechtel, 2015), conveys aspects of *fûdo* as does *Wind und Erde*, the title of the 1992 German translation of Tetsurō.[26] For Illich, *fûdo*, here he repeats his Japanese teacher's definition, recollects the atmosphere, the milieu, of the earth: "the commingling of a particular soil with the

[23] See for a discussion of Illich on the elements of air and breath, Babich (2023, p. 207f.).

[24] See on Anders and having, Babich (2023b).

[25] I discuss this further with reference to the smells of the afterlife in Babich (2021 [2022]).

[26] Watsuji Tetsurō, *Wind und Erde. Der Zusammenhang zwischen Klima und Kultur* (1992), in English (1961 [1935]), and in French (2011).

appropriate waters" (Illich, 2002, p. 239). Thus Illich, invokes water as metaphor for the cycle of life in the phrase taken to title *The Rivers North of the Future*, in conversation with David Cayley at the end of Illich's life.[27]

Illich's concerns might seem distant from ageing in art but he is talking vulnerability. Like Benjamin's focus on the consumer (whether, as we recall the collector, of 'originals' or of reproductions, mechanically, that is more precisely to say *technologically* reproduced), Hume's classic appeal to the dynamic 'durability' of the work of art, "the poet's *monument more durable than brass*" (2019, p. 38), in the face of the changing customs of the age, is a precisely venal concern and those who invest in art as *'Kapitalanlage'* assume this.[28] Art can (or art can fail to) appreciate in value. This is age as rarity and conservative valuation that also risks devaluation, as 'dated' (Ripplinger, 2016) and this outdatedness is another side of age in art.

Like handicapping a race, the goal when it comes to investment and speculation is prediction. Thus, in addition to normative ideals,[29] the 'science' of aesthetics, like the 'science' of wine values,[30] might be supposed to predict what art is most likely to 'age well' as opposed to the devaluing of the 'dated' that is doomed to disappear from memory.

On the level of tactical art, gaming appreciation includes style books for the aged.[31] In this way, Pierre Bourdieu begins his *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* with an epigraph from Paul Claudel, reminding us of what Bourdieu will go on to name "social capital," the entitlement resulting from an 'education' in taste, having "built up an intellectual stock in trade: doesn't it belong to him, as if it were a house or money?"[32]

3. Cultural Antiquities and the 'Presence' of the Past

In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger reminds us that the past persists as present as it logically must, phenomenologically speaking, or we, in the present where we happen to be, would not be able encounter objects that are regarded as remnants "of the past." If we encounter such past objects, hence the conundrum, qua present, such objects are not in the "past." Apart from the inherently destructive element involved in all archaeology and all museum restoration,[33] contemporary efforts at 'restoring' or 'preserving' objects of the past are subject to the constraints of current taste as the historian Herbert Butterfield analyses this issue in his *Whig Interpretation of History* (1931) and which today's scholars, wishing to spare themselves the hermeneutic

27 See again, "Reading Ivan Illich on the Elemental Body."

28 See further, Judith Benhamou-Huet (2001), Horst Wagenführ (1965) and Marc Shell (1995).

29 See Andrej Démuth and Slávka Démuthová (2019).

30 See again, Shapin (2017).

31 Denise Boomkens (2021). This is more a book about the author's art than the self-help book it can seem to be.

32 Paul Claudel, *Le soulier de satin*, day iii, scene ii. Cited in Pierre Bourdieu (1984, p. 1).

33 For a defensive account, see Edward C. Harris (2006).

subtleties of Butterfield's historical exigence, call 'presentism.'[34] Butterfield's point is relevant as curators seek to restore what they judge or assume to have been the 'look' of antiquity — Nietzsche discusses just this in his inaugural Basel lecture on Homer — a point that returns us to Benjamin's auratic look and feel, (typically) as it is supposed the art object once was, *wie es eigentliche gewesen*, whatever that may have been (and conscientious efforts at conservation take some care to raise this question responsibly).[35] But Heidegger emphasises (his *Being and Time* is not coupled with time for nothing), that, "the past"

> has a remarkable double meaning; the past belongs irretrievably to an earlier time; and in spite of that, it can still be present-at-hand 'now' — for instance, the remains of a Greek temple. With the temple, a 'bit of the past' is still 'in the present.' (Heidegger, 1961, p. 430/378)

For Heidegger

> 'antiquities' preserved in museums (household gear, for example) belong to a 'time which is past'; yet they are still present-at-hand in the 'Present.' (Heidegger, 1961, p. 431/380)

To reflect on this double meaning, Heidegger draws on the signifiers of age mentioned above in discussing patina. The household artefacts or equipment preserved in a museum have "become fragile or worm-eaten 'in the course of time'" (1961, p. 432/380). The question for Heidegger does not concern this ontic "*Vergänglichkeit*" but focuses on the hermeneutico-phenomenological, as this recurs at the conclusion of his later essay "On the Origin of the Work of Art," presented three times,[36] where he returns to the 'what' of the temple work. Earlier, in *Being and Time*, he had asked, "What, then, is past in this equipment? What were these things which today they are no longer" (Heidegger, 1961, p. 432/380)?

Heidegger offers us in preliminary fashion (and, as *Being and Time* is a torso, his reflections remain preliminary) a distinction highlighting ageing:

> The antiquities which are still present-at-hand have a character of 'the past' and of history by reason of the fact that they have belonged as equipment to a world that has been — the world of a Dasein that has been there — and that they have been derived from that world. (Heidegger, 1961, p. 432/381)

In his lectures on *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger emphasises the relevance of the 'world' ("of a Dasein that has been there") and its complicated relation to 'earth.' There are discussions of ageing in art and the recognition that art has aged as a referent no longer current allows us to speak of 'classical' and mediaeval and modern and postmodern and contemporary art.[37] Post *l'art pour l'art*, art as such, as Gadamer speaks of this in his *Die Aktualität des Schönen/The Relevance of the Beautiful* (1986), 'art' can seem tired of itself, here

[34] See for a discussion, Adrian Wilson and T. G. Ashplant (1988) along with, contra critics, Richard A. Cosgrove (2000).

[35] See for a discussion, Adrian Wilson and T. G. Ashplant (1988) along with, contra critics, Richard A. Cosgrove (2000).

[36] See for a discussion of the difference between these versions, Jacques Taminiaux (1993).

[37] Patrick L. McKee and Heta Kauppinen (1987) as well as the more sociologically literal: Scott Herring (2022), and the Hollywood problem that goes along with the ageing of movie stars,

to quote Jean Clair/Gérard Régnier (2000) on Duchamp:

> Duchamp was one of the rare [onlookers] to acutely grasp that which others were refusing to admit: art — art such as we knew it, the art of painting, with its rules, techniques, and enslavement to style and schools, art with its status, social recognition, academies, salons, glory — had no reason to exist any longer. Art, an invention of the XV th century, had had its day…

Donald Kuspit (1995) argues that one might read Duchamp as "imposter artist," to the great irritation of art critics who are differently minded, and to this extent qua exemplar of art impotent/incompetent. Nevertheless, the 'death of art' is a metaphor for ageing in art to be added to the others named above and for Clair (2000) (and other theorists of an 'after art,' after the Hegel-infused death of art),[38] post art, Duchamp, contra Kuspit, is a paragon,

> the first to understand that he belonged to a world 'without art,' in the same way one speaks of a world "without history." When he began his work, the death of art had taken place. In this respect, Duchamp is a survivor, not a precursor.

The Fluxus artist, Bazon Brock who organised exhibits on 'the power of age,' *Die Macht des Alters: Strategien der Meisterschaft* (1998), and vociferously follows the theory of "reversible destiny" associated with the conceptual architects, Arakawa and Gins,[39] calls for banning death as such (Fig. 6), circa 1969:

> *Der Tod muß abgeschafft werden. Diese verdammte Schweinerei muß aufhören. Wer ein Wort des Trostes spricht, ist ein Verräter.* [Death must be abolished. This cursed indecency must stop. Anyone who utters a word of comfort is a traitor.]

Fig. 6. Bazon Brock (1484-1545) *Der Tod mußabsgeschafft werden*. 8 June 2005. Sophie-Gips-Höfen, Berlin. Public Domain.

the flip side of Adorno's critique of the shop girl, Timothy Shary and Nancy McVittie (2016) which can be matched with the self-chronicling memoirs of Stanley Cavell (2010).

38 See in addition to Kuspit (2005), Karsten Harries (2009) and Arthur Danto's (and other) discussions of the death/end of art, Gary Shapiro (1986, 1992), in addition to my own discussion, in the context of a discussion of the contemporary, including a discussion of Danto (Babich, 2019).

39 See the review of Arakawa and Gins' 1997 retrospective *The Mechanism of Meaning*, Matthew Shen Goodman (2018).

Beyond the death or end of art, the material of art itself is subject to ageing. In Asian art and literature, this has a complex sensibility associated with *kintsugi* and *wabi sabi*.[40] Ontically speaking, a certain presentation, a certain 'look,' is key. Thus, and this the ancients also knew, there is the look of age which correspondingly entails that a work can be deliberately aged so as to appear aged: a dealer's technique — this also has an echo in Benjamin — as dealers in art and antiquities specialise in producing the 'look' of age. Hence the historian Randolph Starn reminds us that

> art historians have traced traditions and recipes for a patinated look produced by varnishes and glazes, beginning with no less a painter than Apelles. That patina might be a tribute or a burden of time or an artist's trick is a useful reality check on the usual insistence that it must be one or the other. (Starn, 2002, p. 86)

More than a matter of a prejudice in favour of patina, cultivated or, per contra, 'de-mystified' or disabused,[41] no lesser artist than Michelangelo was celebrated for (and, arguably first 'became,' Michelangelo by) 'ageing' his own sculptures. Vasari tells us that after making a St. John figurine for Lorenzo di Pier Francesco de Medici, Michelangelo

> immediately began to carve a life-size figure of a sleeping Cupid. When this was completed, Baldassari del Milanese showed it as a beautiful piece of work to Pierfrancesco who agreed with Baldassari's judgement and declared to Michelangelo: "If you buried it I am convinced it would earn much more than by selling it here." (Vasari, 2008, p. 423)

Fig. 7. *Laokoon in der Antike. Laocoon reset.* Humboldt University Berlin. May 2017. Photograph: Babette Babich.

To this day, art historians argue back and forth as to whether this same gift of 'ageing' statues muddles the attribution of the Laocoon (Fig. 7), at the excavation of which quintessentially ancient sculpture, Michelangelo 'happened' to have been present.[42]

[40] See Babich (2015) and for a self-help parallel, Céline Santini (2018).

[41] See Thiery Lenain (2012).

[42] Lynn Catterson (2005). See for discussion, Kathryn Shattuck (2005). See too: Margarete Bieber (1943). I discuss this, with additional references, most recently in Babich (2020).

Fig. 8. *Laokoon in der Antike. Laocoon reset.* Humboldt University Berlin. May 2017. Photograph: Babette Babich.

Excavated, the Laocoon is in pieces. At issue is the question of how to 'reset' or put the Laocoon together again — see Fig. 8 for a recently 'curated' depiction of the original find.[43] The happenstance that Michelangelo was present made all the difference in the initial restoration quite apart from any questions of ageing or 'faking' statues.

Issues of restoration, whether with respect to archaeological finds and thus the creation of the canonic work is crucial to the Laocoon as Richard Brilliant (2000) argues in discussing the history of the reception/reconstruction of the Laocoon as the difference between a defensive or outstretched arm,[44] important to ensure value. To this day, genuine antiquities are coveted and the museum/culture industry silences reports of the 'faking' of antiquities. Thus although these debates go back for centuries in archaeology, in classical philology, and the science of art history, museum culture has a vested interest in forgetting just such details.[45]

[43] See the catalogue for the exhibit: Laocoon Reset, Susann Muth (2017).

[44] I discuss the Laocoon and its reception history in my several essays on "Greek Bronze" as the Laocoon is a Roman copy in marble — hewn from a single stone — of a Greek bronze.

[45] See Michael Kimmelman (1991). Nor is this limited to Greece as most if not all of the Coptic sculptures in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum seem to be faked, a discovery which is itself grist for an exhibit: Unearthing the Truth: Egypt's Pagan and Coptic Sculpture, see for a journalist's report: Ritsuko Ando (2008). See too, still more recently experts challenged a purchase of a statue which was originally defended by the Getty museum, arguably one of the worst offenders (the museum deals with such challenges by restricting access and downplaying reports where possible). But see Isaac Kaplan (2018). For a different issue concerning the use of fragments for reasons of avoiding other restrictions, see a recent journalistic account: Tom Mashberg (2023). Cf. Anna Mykoniati (2018).

Fig. 9. Barberini Faun, Glyptothek, Munich. July 2018.
Photograph: Babette Babich.

Age is opposed to traditionally, youthful heroic ideals, as pop assessments of antique sculptural art variously focus on sex, specifically: 'gods behaving badly,'[46] e.g., popping boxer shorts on the Barberini Faun, and another tradition of authors explores the literal 'love of statues,'[47] with one scholar describing the faun in the title of her paper, note the licit irreverence: a 'sexy beast' (Herring, 2016). The faun itself (Fig. 9), so I have argued, would have influenced Nietzsche thus the title image of my recent *Nietzsches Plastik* (2021), explores Nietzsche's reflection on object beauty in Zarathustra as I read Nietzsche's seeming ekphrasis of this statue (pp. 239ff.), iconic and specific: "laying his hand over his head, so should the hero rest" in "Of the Sublime."[48]

In addition to depicting the beauty of youth, however, the ancients also give us sculptures depicting age in some 'realist' detail, some more stylisedly dramatic than others.[49] Thus the black marble statue of Seneca (Fig. 10a) depicting the old philosopher in his bath, at the hour of his (forced) 'voluntary' death, epitomises the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius in the Stoic tradition, specifically the reflections on ageing and aesthetics, as does, although, headless the seated statue of an old man, usually said to be of Chryssipos (Fig. 10b) — and supplementing a head (of the curator's choice), to match.[50]

46 I quote the title conceit (of course this is more advertisement than 'conceit') of Marie Phillips (2007).

47 I discuss some of the literature on agalmatophilia in my 2005 lecture "Like Unto Life," published as "Greek Bronze: Holding a Mirror to Life" (2006), in German (2008), and (updated) in (2021, pp. 55-114).

48 See for discussion, Babich, "Zarathustras Statuen" in Nietzsches Plastik. (2021)

49 See the contributions to Susan B. Matheson and J.J. Pollitt (2023) as well as, more generally, M. I. Finley (1981), as well as, as this was often gendered, Jan Bremmer (1987 [1984]), as well as, classically comprehensively, Bessie Ellen Richardson (1933).

50 Instructively, the recent Yale University art gallery collection by Susan B. Matheson and J.J. Pollitt, in a chapter authored by Pollitt, features a "Reconstructed Portrait of Chrysippos" (2023, p. 126). The fact that the head is added on to the headless statue —

Fig. 10a
Sénèque mourant, 2nd Century CE. Louvre, Paris. Photograph: Marie-Lan Nguyen. Public Domain.

Fig. 10b
Vieillard assis. 2nd Century CE. Louvre, Paris. Photograph: Jastrow. Public Domain.

One may contrast this depiction of Stoic ageing of old men (Figs 10a and b), specifically the sage, with that of old women in various poses of unrestraint which also match the depiction of Baubo and Iambe,[51] although Iambe is not always emphasised with respect to her age, but similarly featured in *The Hymn to Demeter* (190–205), where Demeter herself, as already noted earlier in this essay, appears in the disguise of an old woman. To this extent, we may also need, borrowing a bit from the hermeneutico-phenomenological method, to 'bracket' our own sensibilities with respect to these statues — and there are several

Fig. 11a
Die trunkene Alte (1 C. CE Roman copy of a Greek original, 3-2 C. BCE Glyptothek, Munich. Photograph: Saint Pol, April 2007. Public Domain.

Fig. 11b
Marble statue of an old woman, 14–68 CE. Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Public Domain.

likewise a Roman copy and the author is well aware of its location at the British Museum in London as he features it in an earlier chapter, "Attitudes toward Old Age in Classical Literature" (p. 34) — does not hinder Pollitt, a professor of classical archaeology and history of art from including the head in his description of the seated statue, emphasising "the importance of the body in creating the total effect of the portrait. Chrysippos's balding head, the wrinkles on his face and neck" (p. 127).

51 See Andrea Rotstein's discussion of Iambe (and Baubo and ritual or cultic mockery) in (2009, pp. 167-182). And see too Donald Lavigne (2016, pp. 74–98) and, as Nietzsche's reflections are not considered, this is unfortunately routine for classicists, Babich (2019).

versions[52] — of a "Drunken Old Woman" (Fig. 11a) as well as an "Old Market Woman" (Fig 11b) the latter excavated in 1907 and on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.[53] One of the points raised above with respect to Nietzsche's Baubô (and it is instructive that modern readers find it easier to follow Sarah Kofman's "Baubô,"[54] as contrasted with Nietzsche's more esoteric but no less emphatic references), concerns the status of these representations, are they simply representations of age or do they serve another function in the context of a culture that is as foreign to us, so Nietzsche argues, as the Greeks? What is the function of risible old age in a funerary context? Here again, one might recall Stevanović's observations as she for her part argues, alas without a single reference to Nietzsche (although she does draw on the work of Nietzsche's friend Erwin Rohde), that:

> The laughter, jokes and obscenities that are characteristic of the Dionysian festivals and processions are understood by the author not only as a principle of rebirth and renewal (as this may be interpreted using the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin or Olga Freidenberg), but also as having an apotropaic function against the Dead. (Stevanović, 2009, p. 246)

The Stoic, Marcus Aurelius refers to the cracks on the surface of a loaf of bread as it bakes, an aesthetic reflection, but also to beauty in maturity in nature and in ageing humanity:

> We ought to observe also that even the things which follow after the things which are produced according to nature contain something pleasing and attractive. ... And the ears of corn bending down, and the lion's eyebrows, and the foam which flows from the mouth of wild boars and in an old woman and an old man he will be able to see a certain maturity and comeliness; and the attractive loveliness of young persons he will be able to look on with chaste eyes; and many such things will present themselves, not pleasing to every man, but to him only who has become truly familiar with nature and her works. (Aurelius, *no date*)

This is no incidental reflection on the part of the aged Emperor writing to himself — and Nietzsche also picks up on the metaphor of 'ripe figs' (1980, vol. 4, p. 109) and of bursting open – as Marcus Aurelius continues his analogies:

> And again, figs, when they are quite ripe, gape open; and in the ripe olives the very circumstance of their being near to rottenness adds a peculiar beauty to the fruit. (Aurelius, *no date*)

Importantly, Marcus Aurelius' reflections echo in contemporary culture, just dated a century or so ago, in comedy in Gilbert and Sullivan's light opera, *The Mikado* as Katisha sings: "There is beauty in the bellow of the blast, / There is grandeur in the growling of the gale, / There is eloquent outpouring / When the lion is a-roaring, ...", continuing the paraphrase of Marcus Aurelius in her duet with Ko-Ko, her unhappy intended: "There is beauty in extreme old age — / Do you fancy you are elderly enough?" The point, for all its mockery and arguably owing to this comedic force, has a serious side. One must take

52 See for further references and discussion, Rosemary Barrow (2018).

53 See for a then-contemporary report: E. R. (1909). See too, more broadly, the recent contributions to Frima Fox Hofrichter and Midori Yoshimoto (2021).

54 See Sarah Kofman (1988).

account of an imperialism already influential in ancient literature quite with respect to the Latinization of Greek sensibilities that already begins, so Nietzsche argues, before the ascension of Christian values (it is no accident, politically, that Christianity has its seat in Rome).[55] Nietzsche argues that it is challenging to understand the Greeks, particularly Greek tragedy, just given the mocking diminutive of the *Graeculus, "der von jetzt ab als gutmüthig-verschmitzter Haussclave* [henceforth as the good-natured-cunning, house-slave]" (1980, vol. 1, p. 76).[56] The figure has hardly vanished, minus an express connection with the Greek, for example, in the figure of Dobby, the house-elf (and slave) in J.K. Rowling's Harry *Potter: Chamber of Secrets.* I hardly need to say that Dobby, although fans explain that he is in his late twenties, is depicted as small, thus the *Graeculus*, bald and wizened, i.e., 'old,' and wearing what is effectively and roughly 'classically,' a Greek chiton.

4. Aging and the Artist's Depiction of the Death of Death

Elsewhere I argue that life-sized ancient Greek bronzes, as polished as Plato tells us they were and as numerous as Pliny tells us they were, were literally *reflective* surfaces in antiquity: a 'mirror' of life.[57] To illustrate Rilke's *Archaic Torso of Apollo* and the role this plays in Hans-Georg Gadamer's *The Relevance of the Beautiful*,[58] I drew a parallel with my old friend, Paul Feyerabend (1924-1994), citing his recollection of his own experience of ageing, failing to recognise himself (and de Beauvoir analyses a related phenomenon, phenomenologically, writing about women and mirrors), in Feyerabend's experience of himself as anti- or counter-exemplar. Thus Paul regarded a dishevelled figure with some contempt only to realise, with the dissonance of 'recognition,' of self as other, that the figure was his own mirrored image.

Ageing is only part of what is at issue. When it comes to mirrors, the paradigmatic text for self-recognition for psychologists, what we 'recognise' in the mirror is not a directly sensed correspondence between our proprioceptive sense of ourselves, facial features, say, and the mirror-image before us. We recognise an 'other.' This other is the self, our face as we remember or recognize this mirrored image, having seen it *before*. Ageing too as a social construction is a problem in this respect, absent proprioception.

Simone de Beauvoir points out in *The Second Sex* that men and women experience ageing very differently. It is not that men mind it less and it is also not true that they age more slowly, apart from valuation and regard for their (quite comparably aged) appearance. Men, de Beauvoir argues, continue to be valued in age and such is not the case for women as de Beauvoir emphasises:

55 Cf here: Pierre Hadot (2001) and cf., on the Greek influences as these permeate classical Latin literature up to and beyond Augustine, Hadot's account, with specific reference to Pierre Courcelle, (1995).

56 This is a theme, oblique but key for Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* and repeated in *The Gay Science* where Nietzsche contends that the problem with today's society and democratic ethos, corresponds to "American-faith that is increasingly wants to become a European-faith" that anyone can do "just about anything, capable of nearly any role," complete with self-experimentation, improvisation, etc. (1980, vol. 3, p. 596). For Nietzsche on the challenges of being an actor, which he expresses with regard to women and their gift at role-playing and illusion, see Babich (2000).

57 See, again, Babich (2006).

58 Cf. Babich (2008) and Gadamer (1986, p. 40).

> she is still relatively young when she loses the erotic attractiveness and the fertility which, in the view of society and in her own, provide the justification of her existence and her opportunity for happiness. With no future, she still has about one half of her adult life to live. (Beauvoir, 1989, p. 575)

De Beauvoir's observations remain relevant as is her contrast between the experience of men for whom "the passive qualities of an object are not called for, the changes in his face and body do not destroy his attractiveness" whereas, well before she is, as de Beauvoir underlines above, in any sense *old*, woman is already "haunted by the horror of growing old" (*Ibid*). In her study of ageing, *La force de l'age*, de Beauvoir explores the differences and dissonances across the board while retaining the force of her original analogy between women and blacks, adding the aged as a yet more disadvantaged group especially when it comes to women.[59]

Detailing the revulsion expressed in literature and convention specifically contra old women, de Beauvoir reads Villon's painful verse on the decay of age, pointing out that lurid as it is:

> This is not an allegory; it is a precise individual portrait, yet it is one that has reference to all of us. The whole human condition, the whole of man's estate, is called into question in the person of this decayed old woman. (1973, p. 219)

Without discounting the insights Anders offers as noted with respect to the 'having' of a body, Heidegger may be read in terms of his understanding of human (including, *pace* Anders), *sexual* care. This understanding of care, concern, solicitude, *assistance*, is complex because in Heidegger it is mostly *negative*, as "care" for Heidegger is commonly expressed by the active doing that is what we, very actively, *do not do*.[60] At the same time there is for Heidegger, as any reader of his correspondence with Arendt will have noted, a masculinist distinction between feminine and masculine.[61]

In art, to return to the art of allegory, as we began with a classical, renaissance example, the masculine can rule. Thus we explored the leonine aspect of Titian (via Panofsky) but woman seem to be the generic subject of age, a preoccupation that may be a matter of magical thinking or projection.

Hence Batoni's allegory of *Time* — depicted as a winged figure of an old man leaning on his scythe — *directing 'Old Age'* — depicted as a threatening old woman — *to ravage 'Beauty'* — depicted as young woman, with the bloom of youth on her cheeks — (Fig. 11) is not as heavy-handed as the moral lessons in physiognomy explored in Charles Le Brun or William Hogarth.

59 Thus de Beauvoir reprises: "It has been said that the Negro problem is a white problem; and that of women, a masculine problem: yet women are struggling for equality and the blacks are fighting against oppression; the aged have no weapons whatsoever, and their problem belongs strictly to the active adults. It is the adults who decide, according to their own interests, practical and ideological, the role that can most suitably be given to the aged" (1973, p. 133).

60 See for discussion of Heidegger's 'negative' solicitude, Babich (2018b).

61 See for discussion and further references, Babich (2019c).

Fig. 12 Pompeo Batoni (1708-1787) *Time orders Old Age to destroy Beauty.* 1746. National Gallery, London. Public Domain.

Social Darwinism, an unchecked moralising conviction, had consequences that led to eugenics in political expressions in the past (Nazism) and, as the past three years highlighted prejudice with respect to the aged, such convictions are still with us.

Fig. 13 William Hogarth (1697–1764) *The Analysis of Beauty, Plate 1* (1753). Public Domain.

If the physiognomic traits of Johann Caspar Lavater or, famously, Hogarth pointed to moral dissolution and could be assigned to vice as a plea for health and virtue, age is another category. Nevertheless, the mathematical, geometer's ideal of beauty in Hogarth's allegory of *The Analysis of Beauty* (Fig 12), includes sexist overtones,[62] presented as calculatedly necessary, and contractual, as we recall Peter Greenaway's 1982 film, *The Draughtsman's Contract*.

[62] See for a discussion of Hogarth, Abigail Zitin (2016), and see, for example, Andrej Démuth and Slávka Démuthová (2019).

I cited Bourdieu above, who reminds us that specifically 'social ageing' (assuming one is able to avoid some of the seductions of *vanitas*), corresponds to nothing other than a

> slow renunciation or disinvestment (socially assisted and encouraged) which leads agents to adjust their aspirations to their objective chances, to espouse their condition, become what they are and make do with what they have even if this entails deceiving themselves as to what they are and what they have, with collective complicity, and accepting bereavement of all the 'lateral possibles' they have abandoned along the way. (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 110-111)

Bourdieu *describes* rather than *prescribes* even as he summarises this 'slow renunciation.' In his film, Greenaway overskips contemplation of ageing *per se* (there is no greater taboo than depicting age, as Adorno argues using the example of the shop girl and "the old woman who weeps at the wedding services of others, blissfully becoming aware of the wretchedness of her own life"),[63] chronicling aspects of death and decay (film is an ideal medium for this as Greenaway does in his 1985 *Zed and Two Noughts*).[64]

Fig. 14 William Hogarth (1697–1764) *Tailpiece, or The Bathos etching with engraving,* 1764, on laid paper. Public Domain.

Death is beyond age and a final allegory may serve to recall the mockery and irony we began with by citing Nietzsche who stops the count of ageing when one reaches one's forties. Thus overdetermined, Hogarth's final illustration

63 The full quote is helpful: "Hollywood and Tin Pan Alley may be dream factories. But they do not merely supply categorical wish fulfilment for the girl behind the counter. She does not immediately identify herself with Ginger Rogers marrying. What does occur may be expressed as follows: when the audience at a sentimental film or sentimental music become aware of the overwhelming possibility of happiness, they dare to confess to themselves what the whole order of contemporary life ordinarily forbids them to admit, namely, that they actually have no part in happiness. What is supposed to be wish fulfilment is only the scant liberation that occurs with the realisation that at last one need not deny oneself the happiness of knowing that one is unhappy and that one could be happy. The experience of the shop girl is related to that of the old woman who weeps at the wedding services of others, blissfully becoming aware of the wretchedness of her own life. Not even the most gullible individuals believe that eventually everyone will win the sweepstakes. The actual function of sentimental music lies rather in the temporary release given to the awareness that one has missed fulfilment" (Adorno, 1941, p. 41).

64 Michael Walsh (2006) adverts more to the political undercurrents than the sexism in Greenaway's films.

(Fig. 12), executed as a 'last work,' entitled *The Bathos*, but also (Hogarth is a satirist): "Tail Piece" or else, as the fallen Time himself expires, with the word Finis on his lips — Hollywood kitsch *avant la lettre* —, a jumbled depiction of mess and ruin, more chaos than drama, to match the exact bathos, elegiac, of the closing lines of Algernon Charles Swinburne's 1878, *Forsaken Garden*:

> Here now in his triumph where all things falter,
> Stretch'd out on the spoils that his own hand spread,
> As a god self-slain on his own strange altar,
> Death lies dead.

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Babette Babich
Fordham University
113 West 60th Street, 925H NY, NY 10023 USA
babich@fordham.edu

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RESEARCH ARTICLES

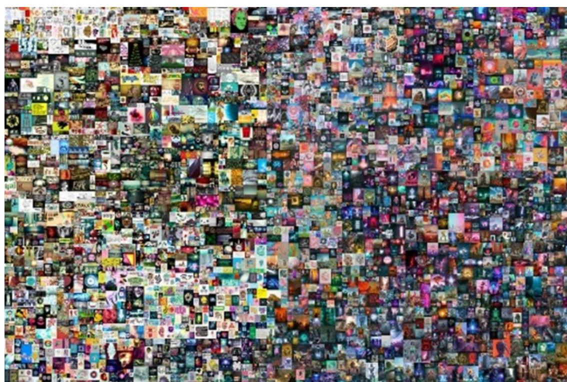
The Original in the Digital Age

Doron Avital – Karolina Dolanska

In 2021, an NFT of a digital artwork by the artist @beeple was sold for $69 million. This sale is the starting point for a logical-historical journey tracing the fate of the Original in the digital age. We follow the footsteps of two seminal works exploring the concept of the Original, the celebrated *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* by Walter Benjamin and Nelson Goodman's book, *Languages of Art.* We examine two case studies: the Lost Leonardo - a recently surfaced painting claimed to be by Leonardo da Vinci, which remains highly disputed, and the grandiose saga of van Meegeren, the famous counterfeiter of Vermeer's works from the 1930s and 1940s. Both tales are read as fascinating detective stories. We provide an analysis of our own that anchors the idea of the Original with the logic of Singular Rule - thereby giving structure to the 'one-of-its-kind' property that we associate with the Original. Our final remarks discuss the relevance of our analysis to the digital art of today. |

Keywords: Digital Art, The Original, Singular Rule, Walter Benjamin, Nelson Goodman

1. Digital Art Today: from NFT to AI



Beeple's collage, *Everydays: The First 5000 Days*

In March 2021, Christie's announced that they were proud to offer *Everydays: The First 5000 Days* by artist @beeple as the first purely digital work of art ever offered by a major auction house. Until October of the prior year, the most

Mike Winkelmann (the digital artist known as @beeple) had ever sold a print for was $100. On March 11th, an NFT of his work was sold for the price of $69 million. According to Christie's, this sale positions @beeple "among the top three most valuable living artists".

The explosion of the phenomenon of NFTs, which is the acronym for Non-Fungible Tokens – the term NFT was picked by Collins Dictionary as The Word of the Year 2021 – redirects us both to the question of the meaning of ownership in the digital age as well as in general to the question of art in our digital times. What is NFT? It is a unique file that lives on a Blockchain that reads like a digital receipt confirming ownership, and in the context of our interest here, an ownership of a work of digital art. The novice visitor to the world of Blockchain can imagine a network of participants registering transactions among themselves in a manner that is completely immutable and all the same requires no central authority confirming the validity and integrity of these transactions. In this fashion, in the context of the auctioning of *Everydays: The First 5000 Days*, the transaction of purchasing the work from the artist, and consequently the new fact of ownership of the piece, is an undisputed fact registered on the Blockchain for all visible times to come.

Questions may now arise as to the significance of this newly registered fact of ownership. For one, it signifies the trivial fact that only the new registered owner is in a position to resell the work. However, given the reproducible nature of digital artworks, ownership here does not always entail exclusivity. The work is indisputably owned by the buyer, be it an art lover or dealer, yet the work is generally open to view to all members of the general public equipped with the minimal machinery required for it to be viewed on screen. This new sense of ownership is sometimes referred to as 'bragging rights' and on occasions may even include some restrictions or limited rights on display of the works. However, in essence, the radical departure from a traditional concept of ownership lies here in the fact that we have an object owned by an individual, while being open for viewing and accessible to all.[1]

The hype surrounding the novelty of NFTs in the context of digital art is now giving way to the new emerging hype around Artificial Intelligence. While NFTs and blockchain technology enable the potential decoupling of ownership from exclusivity - ensuring both the *reproducibility* of digital art as well as

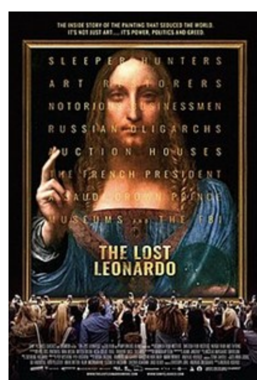
1 It is important to note that NFT ownership is not exclusively limited to digital objects but can also extend to physical objects, with their ownership claims registered on the Blockchain. However, the true novelty of NFT ownership lies within the digital realm. This can apply to a digital artwork but equally well to a recorded basketball play from an NBA game. While the recorded basketball play may be accessible to all, only a limited number of NFT ownership registries for it are made available for public purchase. In this context of the physical versus the digital, it is worth noting an exercise undertaken by an early pioneer of the concept of NFT, @TaschaLabs. @TaschaLabs bought a diamond, NFT-ed it, and then publicly destroyed it, demonstrating that the NFT, the Blockchain receipt of ownership over the now-absent diamond, maintains its metaphysical existence on the Blockchain, despite the physical diamond no longer existing. Adding a touch of humor, it's worth noting that shortly after, the diamond-NFT surpassed the value of the original $5K physical diamond. Here is @TaschaLabs on her experiment: "If you make an NFT of a real diamond, and the diamond itself gets destroyed in a fire tomorrow, you still have the same asset. Because the token still exists and is in limited supply just as before. Nothing has changed. What NFT is doing to the concept of asset, few understand." For more information, see Tascha (2021).

the viability of an economic model to sustain the digital art market - the emergence of powerful AI technology seems to offer an unlimited inventory of new ‘*means of production*’ for creating digital art. With the advent of these AI engines, we are now able to employ verbal text as our new *digital brushes*, thereby enabling us to generate a vast multitude of digital images in a single instance. In this process, we have at our disposal, in fact an unlimited inventory of images that we can utilize. Moreover, in a single instance later, we can produce an unceasing number of variations for any of the digital images that we have created.

All this brings the subject of digital art to the forefront of today’s discussion about art. At the core of this discussion, we believe, is the question of the “Original”. Can the traditional concept of the Original, as it has been understood throughout history, withstand the challenges posed by the digital revolution? In this paper, we aim to explore this question and offer a possible resolution.

To address this subject, we will follow the footsteps of two seminal works exploring the concept of the Original, the celebrated *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935) by Walter Benjamin - both the *Production and Reproduction* and of digital art certainly bring in with greater urgency the concerns and insights that Benjamin expresses in his seminal essay - and Nelson Goodman’s (1968) book, *Languages of Art*. In addition, we will examine two historical case studies. The first case study revolves around the Lost Leonardo, a recently surfaced painting claimed to be the work of Leonardo da Vinci. However, its authenticity remains highly disputed. The second case study involves the captivating saga of van Meegeren, a notorious counterfeiter of Vermeer's works during the 1930s and 1940s. Both tales are read as intriguing detective stories and are very telling to the case we purport to make in this paper. We will provide in conclusion an analysis of our own that anchors the idea of the Original with the logic of Singular Rule - thereby giving structure to the ‘one-of-its-kind’ property associated with the Original - and show how the general resolution we offer bear on the question of the Original in the Digital Age.

2. The Lost Leonardo



Salvator Mundi by Leonardo da Vinci [attribution to Leonardo is debated]

The analog to the NFT notion of ownership in the arts in the pre-digital era could be the note "on loan" from a certain individual, which you may find in museums or exhibitions as they are attached to works on display. But here lies the difference between the analog/physical works of art and their digital equivalents. We may consider, say, an "on loan" note attached to the *Mona Lisa* but then we may consider the true owner, if there were such a person, claiming back the work restricting it from public view. This clearly is not the case for the *Mona Lisa* but surprisingly is and was the case for another work of art attributed to Leonardo, the painting titled *Salvator Mundi* (1499–1510). As a word of caution, we should note that the attribution of this work to Leonardo remains highly questionable. The reader my refer here to a beautifully done documentary tracing the story of the work since it was bought for the meager sum of $1175 in New Orleans in 2005, until it was finally sold in Sotheby's auction for the staggering sum of $450 million in 2017. In a highly publicized affair, the *Salvator Mundi*, which was purchased for this price, was intended to be showcased in a Leonardo da Vinci retrospective in the Louvre Museum in October 2019. It was alleged that the owner of the work, Mohammed bin Salman, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, conditioned the loaning of the work on it being displayed in the same room against the *Mona Lisa.*

It was further alleged in the press and the aforementioned documentary that the discussion on the matter had escalated to the extent of an exchange between the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, and the Crown Prince. What transpired in this conversation on art and politics is still a mystery, but as a result of it the Louvre exhibition opened up without the display of *Salvator Mundi* to the disappointment of many. Since then, the whereabouts of the work are unknown. It was rumored to be guarded at the Crown Prince's Royal yacht or to be brought back to Saudi Arabia.

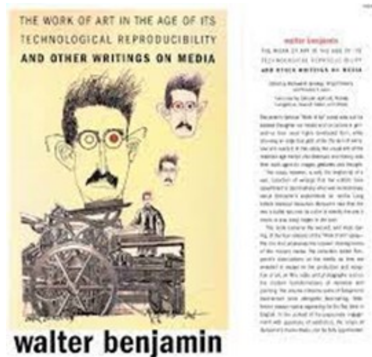
The reader may assume that if the artwork in question had been digital, such a chain of events probably would not have taken place. This is so because the nature of ownership of an NFT registered on the Blockchain is shaped by ideology and technology in a way that does not mandate restrictions on the public viewing or displaying of the artwork. Ideology here is the insistence that truth and beauty, say, science and art, should be openly accessible to the public. We witness the 'open access' revolution in software, for example. Advocates of this revolution clearly consider that scientific papers, as well as works of art, should be open to public viewing. This leaves open the economic model, for scientists and artists would need to be able to trade their goods in order to continue to prosper and further create. How would Picasso manage to offer us the wealth of his ingenious work if not for art dealers and the machinery of the economy of the art world in general. But when we go digital, we observe that the gates guarding the concept of *scarcity of access to goods*, which is essential to the logic of an economy, can be rather easily lifted. Here enters the logic of NFT on the Blockchain, as it separates the ownership of the artwork from its availability for public display and visual consumption. If there is a solid sense in an economy for buying and selling digital art while all the

same having the art accessible and open to view to the general public, it would seem we are venturing into a new landscape for art and its economy.

Yet the persistent difficulty that seems to haunt us as we discuss digital art must be that in the analog world, we seemed to have a sound notion of what the original work of art is, and the notions of ownership and value thereof are attached to the original work. Clearly the claim of being in ownership of a postcard of the *Mona Lisa* would carry little attention and the little financial value attached to it would register this fact accordingly. We can trace a digital work from its first registered transactional entry into the Blockchain, say, the artist successfully sells his works as an NFT as @beeple does, but what merit this transaction has to the claim that the new owner is holding on here to the original work? Since any other digital version of the work played on any public screen must be of (roughly) equal value, what value does ownership mean here?

The two questions, the digital reproduction and ownership, are surprisingly connected. If any digital reproduction of the work is almost literally the same as its predecessor, almost binary identical, what merit has the claim that I own the original version? What meaning at all could we attribute here to the notion of the original version? What meaning could be ascribed to one of the oldest questions of the philosophy of art about the distinction between the Original and its copies or forgeries?

3. The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction



The question of the original work of art versus its copies or possible forgeries has had a long standing presence in the history and study of the philosophy of art. Seminal in this tradition is Walter Benjamin's essay *The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935, 1968) where he claims that: "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin, 1968, p. 220). To this he reserved the term *aura* and then concludes that: "One might subsume the eliminated element in the term 'aura' and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art" (Benjamin, 1968, p. 221).

In today's commercial times, we find common uses in the notion of *aura* that can be telling for our discussion. Here is a 'substitutions allowed' policy of a flower shop in Paris:

> However, due to the regional and seasonality availability of the flowers, making necessary substitutions of equal or greater value is unavoidable. Rest assured that we will ensure that the 'look' and *'aura'* of the arrangement will be maintained using the same colour combination, shape, style, and size of flowers.

What we learn here is that *aura* is this unique quality that must stay intact under substitutions or alterations. This is the essence of the commercial commitment that the flower shop makes here in its policy. If this is an artwork, we can consider alterations or modifications of it whose effect either *withers off* its unique *aura* or keeps it intact. It is here that Benjamin alerts us that in the age of mechanical reproduction, the *aura* withers off either as it were with each reproduction cycle or that the very idea of *art designed for reproduction* undercuts the very meaning or possibility of *aura*.

Walter Benjamin connects the uniqueness of the artwork with the traditional context in which the work originated and the role it plays in this context. We must bear in mind, for example, that the neutral museum context that we nowadays associate with art is relatively a modern notion that has to do with the secular character of Modernity. Here, Benjamin makes this point:

> The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. An ancient statue of Venus, for example, stood in a different traditional context with the Greeks, who made it an object of veneration, than with the clerics of the Middle Ages, who viewed it as an ominous idol. (Benjamin, 1968, p. 223)

He then goes further to claim that the age of mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from what he calls "*its parasitical dependence on ritual*". Since the capacity to be reproduced allows the work to be accessed in principle by anyone and in any location and time, the work is no longer tied exclusively to a "*ritual context*". In fact, these two formulations are equivalent - art designed for mechanical reproduction and art emancipated from the singular context of the *ritual*. This, Benjamin argues, is the essential character of the new art:

> An analysis of art in the age of mechanical reproduction must do justice to these relationships, for they lead us to an all-important insight: for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever-greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. (Benjamin, 1968, p. 224)

He rightfully connects the revolutionary aspects of the mechanical reproduction of art with the politics of Modernity, the possibility of mobilization of mass movements, as well as, we should add, the democratic essential thread that runs through Modernity. For analogy, we may consider here the unmediated access to the scriptures that the printing revolution

enabled. Here, too, the Christian religious practice is emancipated from the necessary mediation of ritual and priesthood. This enabled the mobilization of the Reformation movement in Christianity and, to follow on Max Weber's thesis *On Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, the rise of capitalism as a matter of ideology and practice. The mechanical reproduction by design of the new art enables the *reproduced* art to be *reactivated* and *accessed* by the public in their "*own particular situation*", undercutting the need of any mediation in the form of a ritual context, in the same fashion in which the printing revolution enables unmediated access to the scriptures that do not mandate the priesthood as an intermediary. The traces of the analogy between these two emancipatory processes are easily detected in Benjamin's text:

> This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind. Both processes are intimately connected with the contemporary mass movements. (Benjamin, 1968, p. 221)

When Benjamin considers the mechanical reproducibility of art, he has in mind the technology of his times and mainly the camera and the art form of filmmaking. The photographic negative is his prime example of mechanical reproducibility of the work of art, as he argues that it conceptually obliterates the old notion of authenticity or the sense of holding on to the original work as opposed to its copies. All 'authentic' prints made of the film-negative are copies of equal value, and none can claim to be the Original. Hence, he declares that art moves from the domain of *the ritual* to the domain of *politics*.

> From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics. (Benjamin, 1968, p. 224)

Benjamin further describes the process where the *aura* withers off with reproduction. In a beautiful passage he describes the *aura* of a fresh encounter with Nature - here, the *aura* experience of a summer afternoon:

> If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch. (Benjamin, 1968, pp. 222–223)

This experience, when accessed by reproduced art - consider the camera or the film - can bring the experience closer, as it were, to the viewer. But by making it easily accessible and available to the public or the masses, it undercuts its uniqueness as an open-ended experience. The original *aura* decays.

> This image makes it easy to comprehend the social bases of the contemporary decay of the aura. It rests on two circumstances, both of which are related to

> the increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life. Namely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former. To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose 'sense of the universal equality of things' has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction. (Benjamin, 1968, p. 223)

To use Benjamin's conceptual framework, we could further suggest what is it that great art could and aims to achieve for us. For great art could be said to have the capacity to reactivate in us the original *aura* of the encounter with nature - if nature is our model here. Van Gogh's *The Starry Night, his Wheatfield with Crows*, or the *Sunflowers* pictures, to name a few, certainly reactivate the *aura* of these genuine encounters with nature. Great artists lead us to experience with and through them the fleeting moments of these encounters. We relive these moments with the artists through their works. We could say that great art freezes and encapsulates these moments for all eternity, and all the same, hands us the key to decode them afresh and relive their *aura*. The original *aura* then comes back to life.

It is here also that the mechanical reproduction of art with its force to obliterate the very idea of the original work of art seems to Benjamin to undermine the original *aura*. Can a post card reproduction of van Gogh's *The Starry Night* or Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* activate the same sense of awe as we have when facing the Original? Could it reactivate the *aura* of the works? This question becomes even more pressing, when we consider the arts that, as Benjamin puts it, are "*designed for reproduction*". In the technology of his time, the prime examples for him, as mentioned, are photography and filmmaking.

This brings us to our digital times and digital art. It is hard to think of a better example of "*art designed for reproduction*" than digital art. By its very constitution, it is created using script and armed with a multitude of available applications that serve as the new "digital painting brushes". Also at its disposal is an enormous wealth of visual objects ready-made for use, as well as strong AI engines that are ready to take part in the creative process. Consider for example, as mentioned earlier, the ability to "draw" and "paint" with text and words. This new all-powerful "*art designed for reproduction*" must bring forth, even with greater urgency, the concerns expressed by Walter Benjamin in his seminal paper. To put it plainly: no Original, no *aura*, no real Art?!

As a consequence, also present are Benjamin's political worries of the cultural and political ramifications of art as a consumable reproduced commodity - of art completely "democratized", if we wish, by the means of its delivery as well as by the means of its production. For if by plugging text in a sophisticated AI engine, any one now can claim to be an artist, then we should ask ourselves

whether this threatens the very idea of what art is and what is the role artists play in our society; does the “democratization” of art deliver a devastating blow to art? Surely, the idea of science democratized in this fashion must endanger the very concept of truth on which science rests. What about the arts, then? What would be the political face of a society with no real art and no real artists? To answer this, we need first to ask ourselves whether the very idea of the Original is dead.

4. The Perfect Forgery

Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus. Han van Meegeren, 1936–1937

The year is 1937 in the Netherlands. Dr. Abraham Bredius, a distinguished art historian and an authority on the paintings of Johannes Vermeer, the great 17th century Dutch master, is presented with a painting of *Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus*. The 83-year-old art historian is thrilled to authenticate the painting as an original work by Vermeer, and he proudly declares with great bravado that:

> It is a wonderful moment in the life of a lover of art when he finds himself suddenly confronted with a hitherto unknown painting by a great master, untouched, on the original canvas, and without any restoration, just as it left the painter's studio. And what a picture!... I am inclined to say—the masterpiece of Johannes Vermeer of Delft... quite different from all his other paintings and yet every inch a Vermeer. (Bredius, 1937, pp. 210–211)

It takes a few years for *Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus* to be exposed as a forgery. The forger is Han van Meegeren, a relatively unknown Dutch artist. In May 1945, he is arrested and put on trial. The allegation is not forgery but collaboration with Nazi Germany. He was traced and charged after a record was found of an art transaction in which he sold *Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus* to none other than Field Marshal Hermann Göring, the second-in-command of the German Fuhrer. Furthermore, it turned out that van Meegeren had sold Göring, for a considerable sum, another presumably authentic Vermeer, this

time the painting *Christ with the Woman Taken in Adultery*. The charges of collaboration and the plundering of a Dutch national asset such as a Vermeer Original and selling it to the enemy were considered grave and could carry a death sentence. His only escape from the charges was to admit instead his crime as a forger of Vermeer: "The painting in Göring's hands is not, as you assume, a Vermeer of Delft, but a van Meegeren! I painted the picture!" (*Han van Meegeren's Fake Vermeers*, no date)

To prove his case, van Meegeren suggested that he paints another Vermeer under the supervision of the court. So came to life another Vermeer, that of *Jesus Among the Doctors*. Following this, charges of collaboration were dropped and substituted for forgery, for which he was sentenced to a short prison time. Nonetheless, the affair did earn van Meegeren a certain level of national hero status for his act of ridiculing the Nazi regime and Göring, as well as for defrauding them of a substantial sum of money with his counterfeit Vermeers.[2]

Let us return to the Vermeer expert's excitement over what we know now was a fake Vermeer. The great art historian does not stop at authentication and further expresses his excitement with the painting:

> In no other picture by the great master of Delft do we find such sentiment, such a profound understanding of the Bible story—a sentiment so nobly human expressed through the medium of highest art. (Bredius, 1937, pp. 210–211)

Benjamin's notion of *aura* immediately comes to mind here. The elderly art historian expresses his exuberance at an encounter with a Vermeer's *aura* radiating as it were out of the work: Vermeer at his best, an *aura* of a Vermeer rising above himself! But as it is often with false memories or illusions, that they overstate that which they purport to do, here, too, the 'more Vermeer than Vermeer' was perhaps the hint, lost on the old expert, that we have a case of a well-crafted forgery.

To succeed in triggering a false sense of Vermeer's *aura*, we could see van Meegeren following closely on Benjamin's definition of the origination of the artwork's *aura* as it is anchored in "*its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be*." Van Meegeren follows scholarly works that place the early Vermeer in Italy and builds on an optional storyline according to which the artist is inspired to paint religious themes that are based on works of Caravaggio. He follows this with years of perfecting the techniques necessary to match the times of the origination of the works, producing the appropriate paints and brushes to correspond with those used by Vermeer. Additionally, he engineers a unique scheme to apply to the paints to give the impression that they belong to a picture painted in the 17th century. All of this is executed on a canvas from an old painting of that period, which is scraped clean of its previous content.

In this fashion, this well thought-of and brilliantly executed, perfect crime succeeded to deceive both the master art historian and the contemporary

[2] Van Meegeren died from a heart attack at the age of 58 in November 1947 while awaiting the outcome of his appeal against his sentencing.

community - and later on, also Hermann Göring. Not lacking a sense of humor, like perfect protagonists of crime stories who cannot resist leaving a signature hint beknown only to them in the crime scene that can reveal their identity, van Meegeren uses objects from his atelier as models for pictorial elements in the forged paintings. Here is the master forger in his atelier, working on his vindication from collaboration with the Nazis as he proves that he is the true creator of a fake Vermeer.

Van Meegeren painting *Jesus Among the Doctors* in 1945

5. The Trained Eye

Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art* and the Cola Wars of the 1970s

In the case of van Meegeren, we encounter the forging or copying of an artist, and not of a specific single picture. Van Meegeren imitates Vermeer and claims that his imitations are originals of Vermeer, and from here follows the accusation of forgery. In the case of the forgery of the single picture, the imitation of the Original takes place with the aim of achieving a perfect or indistinguishable copy of the Original.

The question of the Original versus its imitations or copies has a long-standing presence in the history and philosophy of art. In fact, it can be traced back to Plato and the role that imitation plays in his metaphysics. The partaking relation said to hold between objects and their Platonic forms is that of imitation: the objects of our surroundings imitate or strive towards but

fall short of their ideal Platonic forms. For example, a drawn circle on the blackboard imitates but falls short of the ideal circle. Imitation here appears as a noble pursuit aiming towards the ideal forms, yet falling short.

However, in art, imitation receives no acclaim with Plato. It is degraded as third-removed from the truth activity. First, we have the objects imitating their ideal forms, and second, the employment of imitation with craftsmen, such as a carpenter producing a series of chairs according to a pattern. This second employment of imitation is undoubtedly a useful necessity and deserving of praise. However, the third employment of imitation found in the arts involves imitating ordinary objects. It does not attempt to imitate ideal forms, nor does it aim to produce practical tools. For instance, a painted dinner table imitates the actual table it models but cannot function as a surface for a family dinner. At most, if successfully executed, it can delude onlookers into believing they are encountering a table. It is at this point, when art assumes the role of remaking illusory imitations, that it obtains its notoriously degraded status with Plato. In protesting against Plato on this point, we could even elicit sympathy for van Meegeren's frustration in not receiving praise for his high imitation skills. As he once proclaimed before a reporter in court: "My paintings will become original Vermeers once more. I produced them not for money but for art's sake!" (*Han van Meegeren's Fake Vermeers*, no date)

Taking imitation as the starting point in the analysis of art emphasizes once more the importance of addressing this persistent question of what lies between the Original and its imitative offshoots - the copies, the forgeries, or its indiscernible versions. The most penetrative analysis into this matter, at least in the analytic-philosophical tradition, is Nelson Goodman's seminal book *Languages of Art*. In this book, Goodman delves into the question of copy and forgery versus the Original, where he claims that in art that is not *notational* - a classic analog of which is painting versus, say, a musical score - however indiscernible the Original is from its perfect copy or forgery, there still must be a physical difference between them. Consider, for example, that the copy or forgery are created necessarily after the coming into being of the Original and may utilize by necessity materials and means of production that are different from the ones used in the construction of the Original. This would be certainly the case if the time interval between the two constructions is considerable.

In the van Meegeren trial, for example, chemists were called to examine his forgeries, and they concluded that van Meegeren's methods were not entirely perfect as they could prove that his paints were mixed with 20th century paint hardeners. The physical difference, therefore, may well - and in the analog world of plastic art must - be there, yet it might be completely indiscernible. So indiscernible it was in the case of van Meegeren that even the chemical tests performed in court had a hard time dissuading the expert art historian Dr. Bredius from his stubborn position according to which the paintings were authentic. As is often in life, vested interest - his reputation at stake as the one who first authenticated *Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus* as a genuine Vermeer - caused the master expert to hold on to his position.

Goodman argues, then, that the mere existence of a physical difference serves as the logical anchor that enables us to overcome the difficulty. Once we are introduced to the difference, we could train ourselves to see and evaluate the full scope of the difference. If the untrained eye of an observer is trained on which is the Original work and which is the copy, they may see through the illusory sameness of the two works and rediscover the power of the Original and then observe the copy or the fake for what it really is. Just as an illusion may lead us astray for a while, but once recognized there is no way back and we see it for what it is - that it is an illusion - so is the case also with the fake or the copy.

This can also shed new light on Walter Benjamin's quest for the *aura* that must accompany the Original. The trained eye is taught to discern the Original from the copy or the fake and in this it can observe the work afresh, as it were, for the first time. It reactivates the *aura*, which withers off in the copy, as it brings to life the original's "*presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be*" (Benjamin, 1968, p. 220). This is much in the same fashion when we say of great literature, whether fictional or not, that it brings the epoch of its historical times to life. As we venture through the prose, we relive the times afresh together with the protagonists, as though we were present with them in the plot. It is in this that great art may be said to serve a cause for which no other discipline can substitute.

Nelson Goodman's point here about the trained eye can be brought to bear on more mundane scenarios outside of art. For example, consider the discussion in business and marketing culture about 'blind tests'. There are many known experiments of blind tests, where experts or people of strong convictions about the differences between, e.g., the taste of distinct beverages, fare poorly when they need to identify or compare the beverages served to them. Perhaps the most well-known of these scenarios is the one related to the 'Cola Wars'. The term refers to the long-time rivalry between the soft drink manufacturers Coca-Cola and Pepsi. The two firms were engaged in dramatic mutually targeted marketing campaigns from the late 1970s to the 1980s. The rivalry was fierce and politically colored, as the two polar rivals seemed to be representing established White America, on one hand, symbolized by Coca-Cola, and Pepsi, on the other hand, positioned as the representative of the challenging, up-and-coming young generation. Heavily in play here was also the African American community's identification with Pepsi as the drink that challenges the hegemony of White America - the king of pop, singer Michael Jackson, was the poster boy of the Pepsi campaign. However fierce and political the divide was, it turned out that blind tasting tests had surprisingly dismal results with experts and diehard supporters of the two rival drinks, as both sides failed in them repeatedly. Here, Goodman's analysis could serve us well; when the experiment participants are told which drink is which, they are able - not, as it were, falsely - to notice and taste the differences. This is also true of beer wars and wine tasting. As long as there is a physical difference, we can learn to observe it, feel it, or taste it.

Goodman (1968, p. 113) relies on the necessary existence of a difference to anchor his definition of *autographic* art:

> a work of art is autographic if and only if the distinction between Original and forgery of it is significant; or better, if and only if even the most exact duplication of it does not thereby count as genuine.

Goodman distinguishes, however, the possibility of multiplicity embedded, for example, in etching and argues that it is autographic even though we can create multiple works from of the original mold. This must hold true, we will argue, also of the art of photography, if we recall Benjamin's worries about the duplicative nature of the photographic negative. Goodman draws the line, though, between what he calls *notational* art - music, for example, where the musical score constitutes the identity of the work - and non-notational arts, like the plastic arts, where there is no notation to secure the identity of the works.

Here, in the plastic arts, the important emphasis that Goodman (1968, pp. 111–112) makes is that "the aesthetic properties of a picture include not only those found by looking at it but also those that determine how it is to be looked at". This brings us back into the question of what it is that we see in the picture – the visual *gestalt* experience – in analogy to what it is that we taste in the wine before us. Here, the artwork can offer a potential multiplicity of experiences that the observer can explore in an iterative, educational process. This, as we will suggest in the next chapter, will carry us from being captive by the picture of a *particular, presumably unique object* that we call the Original to an analysis of the deeper, internal structure of what we may call the Original. We will have to explore the property of being 'one-of-its-kind' that must, in the final analysis, capture the essence of the idea of the Original.

6. Variations and Singularity

Picasso version of Michelangelo's *David*. DALL·E OpenAI

The drawings above were generated by DALL·E, an AI engine of OpenAI. The generating text was the following word combination: "Picasso version of Michelangelo's David". To this, DALL·E offered optional pictures from which

we have chosen one, titled here ‘original’ in the top center. We then asked DALL·E to offer variations to the ‘original’ and received the rest of the pictures above. It is safe to say two things: first, that these are indeed variations of the ‘original’, as there is an overall gestalt that supports the idea that they are all derived from the same picture; and second, that the ‘original’ represents a superior artistic version compared to its variations.

Setting a picture against its variations is the leading idea in the work of the Czech aesthetician Tomas Kulka. In his work, Kulka suggests setting the artwork against itself as a standard, challenging the idea that it is aesthetically superior to its variations or possible alterations. Kulka (1996, p. 73) defines admissible “alterations” as those changes to the work “that do not shatter the basic perceptual gestalt”. As he examines alterations that are better, worse, or neutral with respect to the original work, Kulka offers a reconstruction of key aesthetic concepts such as *unity*, *complexity*, and *intensity* and thereby a way to ground a better, educated evaluation of the work.[3] The DALL·E example we design is a mechanically executed illustration of this idea.

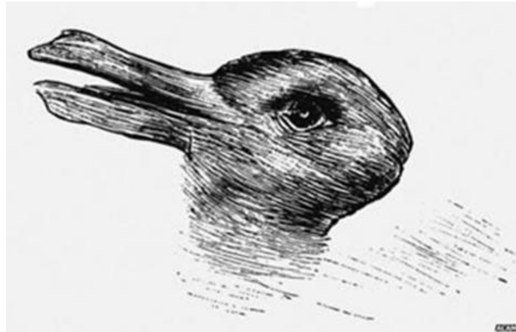
There is something tempting in the attempt to evaluate the work of art against its variations. We may envision the artists themselves grappling during the creation process with competing paths on which to proceed. We could envision the preliminary sketches, the layers erased to make way for new versions, and we could act as experts do when they examine classical artworks - try to reverse-engineer the work of the artist, thereby gaining a deeper insight into the outcome. In fact, digital art provides for the first time in history a new prospect for this idea since we can effortlessly record the whole creative process from its inception.[4]

However, in insisting, as Kulka does, on a single "perceptual *gestalt*" as the constant with respect to which variations are admitted, we forget that an artwork may be approached through many different *gestalts*. To illustrate this, let us reflect on the familiar duck-rabbit *gestalt* switch or the following white versus black figures Mosaic by M. C. Escher, below.

[3] Kulka’s reconstruction is extremely helpful in examining the subject of kitsch. Kitsch is a work that allows for no “meaningful” alterations; all its alterations are neutral with respect to the Original and therefore can replace the original work to no effect. According to Kulka, it is categorically different from art - whether bad or good - since it does not carry any promise of improvement. See Kulka (1996).

[4] This assessment of the significance of variations is also evident in the controversy surrounding the restoration and authentication of the Lost Leonardo, *Salvator Mundi*. The restoration, led by Dianne Dwyer Modestini of New York University, received praise but also criticism for being too creative. One critic doubted the attribution of the work to Leonardo, claiming that the work is half by the master's students and half by Modestini. Considering this critique, the significance of the analysis of alterations cannot be overstated. In the case of the Lost Leonardo, one such alteration emerged when Modestini discovered a drawing of Christ’s thumb underneath the painted one. At least with Modestini, this was an indication for the authenticity of the work. The logic is clear when we bear in mind that the Original precedes the copy. The copy faithfully follows the finished composition of the Original, and therefore such a pictorial deliberation, in this case, of the positioning of the thumb, would clearly seem unwarranted.

Mosaic, by M. C. Escher



Duck-Rabbit

In these examples, we have two "perceptual *gestalts*" competing on our visual field, for we cannot see them both at the same time. We could introduce the distinction between *figure* and *background* and acknowledge that it is impossible to simultaneously access both the figure and the background. A *gestalt* switch happens when we move from one visual reading to the other, e.g., from duck to rabbit. In the switch, roles are also switched, for what we observe at a time is the *figure*, and to allow for this, the complementary pictorial element must retreat to the background. Thereof it assumes the role of *background*.

In the switch of roles, we find out that the complementary *gestalts* are equally essential to the constitution of the work's identity. This poses a difficulty to Kulka, as his scheme requires a singled-out *gestalt*. We suggest, however, that this difficulty opens the door to a new scheme for the question of art. This is our idea of art as a Singular Rule. In previous papers, we explored this idea in depth; here we will introduce the gist of the idea.[5]

Let us follow Kulka and transform artworks into rules. By fixing the "perceptual *gestalt*" constant - *the figure* - we design a rule that takes as arguments all possible variations of the work and we admit the variations that keep the *figure* intact. The unaltered work in itself is trivially such a variation. We could then *switch* the *gestalt* and fix a new rule. The new rule admits variations that do not alter the new gestalt that now plays the *figure*. *Mosaic* by Escher can illustrate this unique structure. We may fix either white figures or black figures as constant. We define in this fashion two possible rules: white-figures as a rule admits variations of the original picture also with backgrounds different from that of the black-figures; we could then switch roles and introduce the black-figures rule, which admits backgrounds different from that of the white-figures. Since the two possible *gestalts* are essential to the constitution of the identity of the work, applying the two rules simultaneously would result in each of them admitting the other as the only admissible variation.

When, as observers, we switch between the two possible readings of Escher's *Mosaic*, we vacillate between seeing the picture as the manifestation of one or the other of the two rules. Seeing the picture as produced by one of

5 See Avital (2007, pp. 20-37), Avital, Dolanska (2019, pp. 17-27).

the rules, the second rule unfolds as the former's unique extension. This is what is meant by Singular Rule: that it is both the rule and its unique extension.

The uniqueness we associate with the Original can be finally explicated. For this, we must note the distinction between a thing's being unique and its being a particular. A particular object in and of itself does not imply that it is unique. In fact, we need a grasp of Singular Rule in order to grasp the true meaning of uniqueness. The idea of the Original as unique implies its being 'one-of-its-kind'. A particular object, e.g., a chair, may fall under a general concept such as "dining table chair" and therefore it is not one of its kind, since its kind is the extension of all dining table chairs. Not so, for example, for an original artwork such as Duchamp's famous chair, titled *Bicycle Wheel*. Duchamp's chair falls under nothing but its own rule or kind.

The logic of Singular Rule teaches us therefore that a particular in and of itself is not necessarily unique, i.e., that the particular in question may not answer to Singular Rule. To put it crudely, that a thing is *One* does not mean it is not *Many*, since if it is not 'one-of-its-kind' then it must be one of many. But the inverse also holds. The multiplicity that is internally written into the construction of certain forms of art does not in and of itself refute the logic of Singular Rule. Following on Goodman suggestion that the multiplicity embedded in etching does not undermine, in his terminology, that the work is autographic, we may now argue for the inverse of our claim on particulars failing to be unique. That there are many particular etchings that answer to the same mold as there are many digital artifacts that answer to the same computer code - or photographs to the same negative - does not necessarily undermine their claim for uniqueness. If by its inner logic the digital artwork answers to Singular Rule, however many are its particular manifestations, then it is 'one-of-its-kind' and therefore unique. Consider, for example, that in a repeated encounter with a traditional artwork, we may consider each encounter in time as a new manifestation of the work. From a logical perspective, a scenario of an art object that occupies as it were a single location in space and thereof is being visited repeatedly in different times does not differ in essence from a scenario of many digital artifacts answering to the same code that are situated all at the same time in different locations in space. Therefore, an etching or a digital artwork may achieve uniqueness however multiplicity is written into their very mode of construction. We may conclude then that the logic of the Original as "one-of-its-kind" as it is understood through the prism of Singular Rule can equally expose the presumed *One* as *Many* as well as reveal that the *Many* is actually *One*.

For true uniqueness, let us conclude this chapter by reflecting on *The Starry Night* of van Gogh. If we try to isolate a gestalt of any of the elements that make up this picture, the swirling skies, the moon, stars, mountain range, the cypress tree aiming high, other trees on the ground, hills, village houses, the church with its spire stretching up - whatever we can focus on visually - we soon discover that none of them can be skipped. All the elements are implicated logically, however repeatedly we may challenge this, through the

Singular Rule scheme. This is Singular Rule in its full glory: an *aura* of encounter with nature that comes to life before our very eyes.[6]

Vincent van Gogh (1889) *Starry Night*

7. Conclusion

Versions of *Salvator Mundi* executed by students and followers

By now we can answer the persistent initial question: no Original, no *aura*, no Art? What we suggest, then, is to approach the question of the Original through the idea of the Singular Rule, which, when properly recognized by the trained or the educated eye, brings to life the original *aura* and justifies the role of art as a constant reminder of true uniqueness.

The Original as a Singular Rule is the standard with respect to which copies are possible. It is the singular-rule nature of the Original that is the driving force for imitators, followers of good faith or bad-faith producers of fakes. For example, we are aware of at least thirty copies of *Salvator Mundi*, as depicted in the examples above. This large number of copies is an indication that there must have been an Original by Leonardo. *The Original, therefore, is the spring of creative power.* Art starts with imitation in the education phase and later aims at independent breakthroughs by creating new Singular Rules: new standards for imitation. The Lost Leonardo may have not been painted by Leonardo, but the power of the original *Salvator Mundi* by Leonardo clearly resonates throughout history. *The Original, in this sense, is present as an ideal even in its*

[6] The focus of our analysis here, as well as our prime examples, is on the plastic arts. However, the general scheme we present, regarding the logic of Singular Rule and its relevance to the question of the Original versus its copies or forgeries - as well as the pursuit after the elusive aura - must apply to the arts in general. This may include music, performance art, and any other forms, as well as, in general, notational arts in Goodman's terminology. Although these art forms were not discussed within the scope of this paper, we would reserve another occasion to demonstrate how they align with our analysis.

absence. I suspect making a similar point was the motivation behind Damien Hirst's latest artistic happening. Hirst offered the owners of his works to choose either the physical work or its NFT; those who have chosen the NFT had their physical equivalent piece burned by the artist. Not judging the depth of Hirst's artistic endeavor, he does explore through this exercise the frontiers of digital art and the role of the Original in it.[7]

In conclusion, we must stress that only ignorance can account for our confusing the copy for the Original. It can confuse, on occasion, even the experts, as the copy to the Original is as the illusion is to the real. An illusion can mislead us into an enhanced, abstracted version of the real, as we are willing participants in its fabrication. The optical illusion of a *fata morgana* in the desert landscape must impress a stronger and more vivid effect of the presence of fresh water on the thirsty observer than that of the visual of a true life-saving oasis. Reflect on Dr. Bredius, the Dutch art historian, entirely taken in owe before van Meegeren's fake Vermeer: his excitement is not different from that of the thirsty wanderer of the desert experiencing *fata morgana*. Both are proven wrong by reality.

This brings forth the real importance of art education. Art education and the study of art history can be seen as the necessary training for us to discern and appreciate genuine uniqueness - however in the case of the distinguished art historian Dr. Bredius this was evidently not sufficient. The role of art education is therefore to cultivate the necessary sensitivity to discern singularity against the backdrop of practice and science that by their very essence eye towards generalization. Science, for one, handles all particulars as falling under (non-singular) concepts and in this way obliterates their possible claim for uniqueness. In fact, when we resist this powerful tendency towards generalization, such as when we consider a scenic view of a landscape unique and inimitable, we actually treat it as a Singular Rule, that is, we treat it as Art. Surely, by awakening within us the *aura* of his nightly encounter, van Gogh liberates the Starry Night from the shackles of generality if only this experience were to be perceived through the lens of science or immediate practical needs.[8]

This also offers a clearer explanation of the analogy between the relationship of the copy to the Original and the relationship of the illusion to the real. The illusion is a fabricated reality. No two desert oases are truly the same but the illusory *fata morgana* abstracts and manipulates general features to create

[7] In fact, Hirst is imitating here, perhaps knowingly, the exercise undertaken by @TaschaLabs that we motioned earlier in the paper in footnote 1 - Hirst's burned artworks for @TaschaLabs destroyed diamond. In both cases, the NFT registers ownership of destroyed physical objects, leaving behind only the digital representation or trace of the artwork with Hirst and the experimental narrative with @TaschaLabs.

[8] This is where Nature can present itself as Art, or as an ideal or a model for what Art is or should be about. This also introduces Art's role in society as a constant reminder of Nature's uniqueness and hence also as a reminder of the uniqueness of our lives. In this, Art presents itself as a counterforce against social institutions like the sciences, whose task can be viewed as that of enslaving nature to our concepts and pragmatic needs. This is the exact sense in which we could say that it is Art that sets Nature, and therefore us, free. Here also, we should note, lies the intimate bond between ethics and aesthetics, since the ethical dilemma must also be conceived as a unique scenario that escapes labeling under general headings or concepts. For more, see Avital (2007, pp.20-37).

a generic oasis image. The illusion copies the real as the copy, the forgery, or the fake do to the Original. The former is generic while the latter is *sui generis*. The latter answers to the logic of Singular Rule and, therefore, as "one-of-its-kind" it is genuinely unique. It is the Original.

Let us conclude then with a scene from the Matrix trilogy. Cypher is offered a deal in exchange for betraying his friends. Cypher indulges on the generic-Matrix-induced juicy steak and proclaims:

> You know, I know this steak doesn't exist. I know when I put it in my mouth the Matrix is telling my brain that it is juicy and delicious. After nine years you know what I realize? Ignorance is bliss!

Art chooses here to differ.

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Doron Avital
The Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas
Tel Aviv University
doronavital@yahoo.com

Karolina Dolanská
Chair of Visual Art Studies
Anglo-American University (Prague)
karolinadolanska@gmail.com

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Aesthetic Judging as Interface: Getting to Know What You Experience

Onerva Kiianlinna – Joonas Kurjenmiekka

One of the aims of aesthetics is to understand aesthetic experience, that of our own and that of others. Yet, the underlying question of how we can get information about other people's aesthetic experiences has not been granted enough attention. This article contributes to bridging this gap. The main argument is that by resorting to aesthetic judging, we can obtain information about other people's aesthetic experiences without sharing them. Put differently, this article outlines how aesthetic judging works as an interface. Aesthetic judging allows us to approximate the aesthetic experiences of others. This happens in at least three ways proposed and analyzed here: "aesthetic participation", "distanced aesthetic empathy", and "affective appropriation". | *Keywords: Aesthetic Experience, Aesthetic Judging, Empathy, Information, Interface, Representation*

1. Introduction

Aesthetics is often divided into different approaches, such as phenomenological, analytic, and empirical aesthetics.[1] Typical ways of posing research questions within these approaches imply different, yet not necessarily conflicting foci: In phenomenological aesthetics, the emphasis is on subjective aesthetic experience as a form of mood, while analytic aestheticians focuse on aesthetic judgments and their justification. Empirical aestheticians, in turn, study aesthetic experiences by measuring test subjects' reactions to sensory stimuli. These approaches are based on differing starting points. At the same time, they all are employed to reveal information about what can be seen as aesthetic processing by using aesthetic experience (that of our own or that of others) as data.[2] Yet, it

[1] These are only examples rather than a complete list or comprehensive characterization of the state of aesthetics. We are excluding, for example, Kantian aesthetics from this list, because the scope of this study is to seek and build some overlap between phenomenological, analytic, and empirical aesthetics.

[2] The concept of data appears throughout this article. Despite the computational connotations readily attributed to it, we take it in a wider sense, as employed also by Luciano

is unclear how we can obtain information about the aesthetic experiences of others.[3]

So, our overarching research question is: how can I get to know what you experience without sharing the experience? We illuminate ways in which parts of the experiences of others can be accessed and used in making approximations or estimations that, in turn, inform us about the experience in question more fully. There are multiple ways in which the approximation can be formed. Consequently, different ways employ different aspects of experience. We stipulate three of these ways without claiming that this is an exhaustive list.

Although the experience itself is not shared between “you” and “me”, we claim that the processes of judging are similar. We use the term “judging” to refer to the process of forming aesthetic judgments and “judgment” to refer to its end product (which is also included in “judging”). Therefore, both processes (labeled here as “aesthetic judging I” for the first-person and “aesthetic judging II” for the third-person perspective) are touched upon. However, our focus is on the latter.[4] For now, we leave it open, if aesthetic judging II is the only way to collect information about aesthetic experiences of others.

This article relies on a specific use of terminology that is not shared by all scholars. Therefore, in section two, we look at the difference between “aesthetic experience” and “aesthetic judging” as understood here, and in section three, we clarify the concept of "interface" and how it can be used to describe the relation between the two. With this knowledge, we then explore how aesthetic judging works as an interface in sections four and five. The answer to our research question is that I can get information about your experience via aesthetic judging in at least three ways. All of them employ empathy, an often used but not collectively defined concept in aesthetics.[5]

Our contribution is to clarify the field by introducing a division into three types of empathy and describing how they can be used to create meaningful content in each case. The results are the following: First, we suggest using the concept of “aesthetic participation” representing the assumption that you have

Floridi (2011, p. 85): a datum means any interpreted difference without stating how it is or should be drawn. This core meaning underlies but is not restricted to the computational notion. Rather, it provides a general structural prerequisite for any kind of meaning to emerge and “stick to” in the process of interpretation.

3 The same holds also in cognitive science – largely, due to problems with using verbal descriptions as a way of accessing the subjective experience of other people. At the moment, there is no comprehensive understanding of how subjective experience relates to behavior and neuronal space. (Tallon-Baudry, 2022)

4 We think that for example Carlos Vara Sánchez (2022) models how aesthetic judging works for the experiencer (aesthetic judgment I) in a way that is compatible with our thoughts although he speaks about aesthetic experience and, more importantly, unlike us, opposes representationalism. Vara Sánchez identifies two processes of attunement, both of which, we hold, are realized via mindreading: 1) noticing the possibility of creative aesthetic value formation by recognizing a situation that relates to the conception of self, and 2) further exploring this as a cognitive loop (Vara Sánchez, 2022, p. 329–331). Vara Sánchez is also compatible with our view that aesthetic judging links to aesthetic experience in a manner that will potentially alter experience continuing after it although he speaks about “pre-reflective aesthetic rhythm” whereas we would use the term “aesthetic experience” (Vara Sánchez, 2022, p. 333).

5 However, this article does not directly build on any existing debate in aesthetics or philosophy of literature, where issues concerning empathy have been dealt with.

a representation (of your experience). Second, the concept of "distanced aesthetic empathy" denotes me representing the process with which you represented (your experience). Third, the concept of "affective appropriation" means, we suggest, that I represent the subjective or implicit justification of your representation (of your experience).

The large-scale contribution of our paper is also threefold. Firstly, it helps to understand the relationship between aesthetic experience and aesthetic judging. Secondly, it demonstrates that overcoming the traditional divide between phenomenological and analytic aesthetics is fruitful by bringing together the concepts of "atmosphere" and "aesthetic judging". Thirdly, it clarifies the link between epistemology – or more specifically, the concept of information – and aesthetics.

2. Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Judging

"Aesthetic experience" is one of the core concepts both in philosophical and empirical aesthetics. It is also our starting point. We draw the heuristic difference between experiencing and judging on ontology: subjective lived experience is different from a conception of it or measurable individual reaction(s) associated with it. I can *be* in the experience or *have* an experience, but by judging I would *form* or *indicate* a judgment based on it. Thus, we pin this distinction to abstract conceptualization rather than, for example, to the use of language or certain linguistic categories, degree of awareness, or either the speed or order of processing. If this is taken as one plausible way to draw the distinction, we are able to show that the epistemic function or value of aesthetic judging is getting information about aesthetic experience. Here, aesthetic judging would only make sense if there was an aesthetic experience, but this does not mean that aesthetic judging would be automatically more mindful – just like operating other conceptual interfaces does not need to be more deliberate or reflective than the input concepts themselves:

> The imaginative work we do when we use the desktop interface is part of backstage cognition, invisible to us and taken for granted [...] the activity of manipulating it [the interface] can be done only in the blend and would make no sense if the blend were not hooked up to the inputs [existing domains of knowledge – in our cases such as conception of self, lower aesthetic features like brightness or blueness, our own and other people's previous aesthetic judgments, life experiences, symmetry, emotions, language, etc.]. (Fauconnier & Turner 2002, p. 23)

Our premise is that the way cognitive processing happens cannot be experienced first-hand; we do not feel *how* it happens.[6] What we mean when

[6] There is a major controversy about this point between some enactivists and representationalists. If we could get direct (i.e. not mediated by the interface) information about aesthetic experience via affect, it would not be useful to assume an interface of aesthetic judging I. However, it is not clear to us how affectiveness would undermine our point: since cognition is always affective (we do not disagree with this and therefore, cannot position ourselves as if we were opposing enactivist thinking in aesthetics), it is not possible to switch to an affective state that would show us our own intentions and outcomes of action when we are not aware of them (see Carruthers 2013). If one accepts that there are cases where we do not have direct access to our own minds, it would be more parsimonious to assume that in those cases where we are correct about our minds, the interface is working accurately rather than that it was a case of a totally different type of cognition that is just not employed in the other cases. At the end of the day, this is an empirical question and it has

we talk about experience are second-order interpretations as the output of the process (Fields and Levin, 2020, p. 14). Thus, theoretically or conceptually rather than empirically speaking, aesthetic judging and aesthetic experiencing function on different but consistent levels. In practice, however – and this is important – aesthetic experience and aesthetic judging come hand in hand, since all conceptualization and communication (including conscious introspective reflection) of experience requires some abstraction, bringing in an element of judging. (For levels of abstraction, see Floridi, 2011, pp. 52, 69.) By adopting the concept of "interface" we can describe how aesthetic judging can provide information about aesthetic experience when they operate on different levels of abstraction.

Without going into the philosophical question of whether we should assume one experience type called "aesthetic" or several different kinds of aesthetic experiences, we include any subjectively meaningful sensuous undergoing, not only the most, or in some specific sense saturated, moving, or transformative ones. Hence, we can include empirical aesthetics research – cross-cultural or lab-based – as a contribution to understanding aesthetic experience. We hold that the experience is a relation rather than in the subject's attitude or in the object's form. Used in this wide sense, aesthetic experience may take place in contexts related to art but also the everyday: when I am reading my new favorite novel, suddenly smelling a trace of a familiar perfume, choosing to paint my nails and picking a color, sending a friend an encouraging text message, or taking the longer route to the metro station in order to enjoy the scenery.

Aestheticians use descriptions of experience as data. We learn about someone's experience of a place, an artwork, or any other encounter we do not have access to by listening, smelling, touching, and so on. We can make surveys of aesthetic preferences, or measure someone's bodily reactions to sensory stimuli that we think can be present in aesthetic experience. We may empathize with the contents of descriptions, they may remind us of a similar event in our own lives, or they can even produce similar feelings in us. Yet, these are different experiences; we were not in the original experience although we might think we understand it. So, how does the information provided by these two experiences, that of yours and that of mine, differ?

Within the phenomenological tradition, experience can be construed as a relation to which both the subject and object belong; they act simultaneously as constitutive parts.[7] Although Gernot Böhme prefers the term "atmosphere" as the explanandum over "aesthetic experience", he refers to the act of embodied relating. This is arguably too wide a definition for aesthetic experience because it encompasses any sort of perceptual activity. So, the Böhmean conception of aesthetic experience needs to be narrowed in one way or another.

more to do with aesthetic judging I than II. For us here, it is sufficient to note that we do not get direct information about the mind of another person although we may have accurate knowledge about it.

[7] There have been several philosophers arguing for the relationality of aesthetic experience across various trends in aesthetics, John Dewey (2005) being an example from the pragmatist tradition.

We hold that if aesthetic experience is linked to aesthetic judging – inferring aesthetic features that indicate aesthetic value (abstracting aesthetically relevant data from the rest) – the conception becomes a little more restricted. This move requires giving up Böhme's inherent distaste for information processing and analytic aesthetics but still allows aesthetic judgments to be approached as embodied and present in all kinds of (multi)sensory encounters from the mundane to elevated. Still, some aspects of Böhme's description of atmosphere can be used here as a description of aesthetic experience:

> Atmospheres are neither something objective, that is, qualities possessed by things, and yet they are something thing-like, belonging to the thing in that things articulate their presence through qualities[…]Nor are atmospheres something subjective, for example, determinations of a psychic state. And yet they are subject-like, belong to subjects in that they are sensed in bodily presence by human beings and this sensing is at the same time a bodily state of being of subjects in space. (Böhme, 2016, p. 19)

As a loop-like hermeneutic reality of the experiencer, or aesthetic subject, this relation holds an element of being aware of oneself in it, without excluding that this awareness may be "intuitive" and processed fast, without one being able to track it:

> Atmosphere is the common reality of the perceiver and the perceived. It is the reality of the perceived as the sphere of its presence and the reality of the perceiver, insofar as in sensing the atmosphere s/he is bodily present in a certain way. (Böhme, 2016, p. 20)

We want to investigate what this vague yet explicitly fixed "certain way" of sensing actually means in different cases of aesthetic relations.

Let us start from Böhme's theoretical home, phenomenological aesthetics. There, sharing experience intersubjectively is a common idea. A requirement for sharing an experience is the ability to recognize both ourselves and others as subjects (Zahavi, 2015, p. 86). This skill can be employed 1) to understand from the outside what the other person is going through, 2) to get a similar experience ourselves via contagion without much awareness that the other person is having it too, and 3) to share an experience: being aware of the same emotional situation including both subjects in it reciprocally (see Zahavi, 2015 for a comparison of the three). Here, we are concerned with the prerequisite of sharing an experience: recognizing the other person as a subject having an aesthetic experience. This is a close relative of recognizing oneself as an aesthetic perceiver, or in other words, being able to have a Böhmean aesthetic reality. So, recognizing the other person as an aesthetic subject and recognizing oneself as an aesthetic subject belong together. In this article, we will show ways to move between them.

One can never be quite sure if similar sounding (have you ever been in an open space like desert or sea or top of a fell and felt deep solitude in your smallness yet being one with the universe?) or even similar looking experiences ("we both gasped for air when seeing that circus performance") are the same. How can we know what the other person means when we hear about their experience or what they go through when we see them gasping?

What is at stake here is the conception that reasoning – with varying degrees from fast intuitive reactions to painstaking philosophical contemplation – has *direct* access to aesthetic experience and can produce empirical data about the experience itself. We claim that we can access some of the data constituting the experience and that we can produce interpretations about the experience.

In other words, when we start to think or talk about our experience, we are no longer in the experience per se but depending on the viewpoint, either adding something, taking something away, or simply altering it. Experiencing and judging may happen (almost) simultaneously and be impossible to separate from each other, but it is one thing to experience something and another to convey its meaning – even when measuring skin conductance or neural activation, we are not measuring the experience per se, but something else that merely conveys data related to the experience. As such, aesthetic experiencing and aesthetic judging are different things. This would be so even if it was impossible to experience aesthetically without an element of evaluation, or to form an aesthetic judgment without aesthetic experience.

However, this does not mean that one is more deliberate than another – with aesthetic experience being always less and aesthetic judging always more conscious, or aesthetic experience implicit and aesthetic judging explicit. We hold that aesthetic experience and aesthetic judging can come together because judging does not need to be linguistic. If it did, they could more easily be treated independently of each other. Perhaps even most aesthetic judging happens at the conceptual level but without linguistic formulations: I may feel strikingly at ease with a person but not be able to put into words why I immediately sense this kind of atmosphere, or I may struggle to convey exactly what I feel when listening to a great song.

Formulated from the viewpoint of empirical aesthetics, we can extract information about the (assumed) aesthetic experience, but we are not constructing the experience itself for the observer. There is something in between the experience and the information we get from it. We can get empirical, indirect, and partial information about it, but only via judging, never the experience directly.

Note that we leave questions about normativity aside. Our scope is not what kind of aesthetic judgments are normatively correct but what kind of information we get, when they are subjectively justified, or in other words, when the subject has already selected them as meaningful from the variety of potential judgments. We are not interested in whether there are objective or at least detachable aesthetic value categories that can be separated from the subjective experience because the difference between aesthetic experience and aesthetic judging is an ontological and conceptual division.

The stipulative definition for “aesthetic judging” is thus that it is an act of the experiencer that is observable to an outsider – it is a process by which we can recognize either ourselves or someone else as having an aesthetic experience. In other words, forming aesthetic judgments indicates that someone is experiencing something aesthetically, because one way or another, aesthetic

judging requires the experience as its intentional object. Aesthetic judging, no matter how insignificant, such as a sigh, lowering of the heart rate, or a private thought, is a representation where aesthetic experience works as an input. In other words, we do not wish to contest the diversity of immediate bodily reactions present at aesthetic judging. The point is rather that these reactions are abstracted on the basis of the environmental stimuli.[8] Let us clarify the relationship between aesthetic experiencing and aesthetic judging by contrasting analytic aesthetics with phenomenological aesthetics.

One may think that aesthetics and philosophy of information make an odd couple. Böhme (2016) famously thinks that perceptual atmosphere should not be studied in collaboration with information processing. He (2016, pp. 22–23) traces this stand to the embodiment of aesthetic experience:

> The concept of perception is liberated from its reduction to information processing, provision of data or (re)cognition of a situation. Perception includes the affective impact of the observed, the "reality of images", corporeality. Perception is basically the manner in which one is bodily present for something or someone or one's bodily state in an environment.

In contrast, we argue that the collaboration of aesthetics and philosophy of information is profitable for aesthetics. We cannot do away with the concept of judgment because judging is our channel to the aesthetic experience of other people.

We suggest that "aesthetic judging" should be understood more broadly than Böhme does. Here, it is active aesthetic appreciation (including aesthetic disapproval as the opposite of appreciation is not disapproval but disregard). Like atmosphere, judging is relational – rather than a property of the object or subject – and yet materially embodied. It is a necessary middle piece to experience (of atmosphere) that is not reducible to the conditions of justifying a judgment linguistically. Via this concept, phenomenological and analytic aesthetics can come to a fruitful exchange. Additionally, the connection between aesthetics and philosophy of information emerges. In sum, Böhme discards information processing too quickly. Compared to Böhme, we provide a more constructive approach.

Böhme wants to stay within the perceptual experience. Approaching aesthetics from the viewpoint of judging, we nevertheless consider ourselves furthering Böhme's aims. Just like atmosphere for Böhme, for us aesthetic judging is relational – rather than a property of the object or subject – and yet materially embodied. Unlike aesthetic experience, however, it is both quantitatively and qualitatively researchable directly.

In general, defining aesthetic experience as different from unaesthetic experience and defining aesthetic judging as different from unaesthetic judging fall beyond the scope of this article. Rather than providing definitions for "aesthetic experience" and "aesthetic judging", our aim is to define some of the preconditions for appropriate definitions. Thus, the reader is free to pick

[8] If one does not accept the idea of Bayesian predictive processing, one could deny this description. There are several approaches into predictive processing, but since our focus is not aesthetic judging I, we do not go into them here.

their own approach: In terms of experience, one can either 1) think that aesthetic experience can, depending on the context, locate somewhere in the continuum of the heightened, distinctive, and special or mundane, routine, and unobtrusive or 2) think that aesthetic experience is “imaginative, inspired, or vigorous” regardless of whether it is the experience of the ordinary everyday routine or the experience of a unique event (for a fairly recent discussion of aesthetic restrictivism and expansivism, see for example Puolakka 2018). In terms of judging, one can also choose if one wants to operate with judgments 1) based on pleasure or the lack of it or 2) more fine-grained aesthetic categories such as elegant, sublime, and kitsch. The definitions of aesthetic experience and aesthetic judging – or at least the ones presented here – do not change the mechanics of their relation.

3. Interface

In short, aesthetic judging as an interface bridges the aesthetic experience on one end to the information gained from it on the other. This bridging succeeds when there is a specific systemic process. It takes experiential data as input, processes it in a way that provides new meaning (e.g. through abstraction and interpretation of features of the data), and outputs an informational end product. This end product contains a representation and evaluative assessment of the features deemed relevant by the functionality of the process. Notably, what is *not* required to be able to gain the informational end product is full access to the original experiential data and the (sub-)processes undergone within the process of judging. In fact, where this access is lacking, the end product may be our primary resource for inferring what went on in the original experience and its processing.

For a more robust understanding, let us briefly look into the notion of interface in general, and how aesthetic judging fits the functionality expected from “an interface”. After this, in sections four and five, we will take steps toward answering what kind of mechanisms and functionality in human cognition may be capable of inducing aesthetic judging.

As a concept, interface is interdisciplinary, hailing from *systems thinking*, a particular way of making sense of the world.[9] Systems thinking looks at the world in terms of wholes and their relations, forming systems. This seems to be in alignment with the ‘common sense’ way humans intuitively perceive and make sense of the world; we identify individual wholes (e.g. objects) that relate to and affect each other in various ways. However, considering things as

[9] The conception of interface has been adopted and built upon in many different fields of study. It is best established within computer science, where interfaces are found in many forms, serving multiple purposes – for example, user interfaces (UI) between humans and machines, application programming interfaces (API) between computer programs, and interfaces between classes (functional parts) of a computer program in object-oriented programming languages. Other examples include such diverse fields as physics (boundaries between different materials like an oil film on water, or different states, phases, of the same material like ice and water), biology (cell walls and membranes, neural interfaces, biosensing…), economics (business interoperability, customer interfaces, interfaces between economy and politics, economy and the environment…), logistics (supply chains, transportation and storing of information and material goods involving multiple systems…), political and social sciences (studying the diffusion of new technology or cultural practices between interfacing social groups) and communication studies (coordination and communication between different work groups working on the same project).

‘wholes’ still includes the possibility of them being divisible into smaller parts (i.e. systemically related components) or themselves functioning as subsystems in a larger systemic whole.

Most generally, *interface* can be defined as an (inter)connecting boundary between two (or more) systems or system components (including subsystems). Fundamentally, interface is a relational concept – it functions as a mediary between two systems, at the same time separating and facilitating connections between them. Defining ‘interface’ as a ‘boundary’ captures two important aspects of its meaning: *relationality* and *separation*. Boundaries exist *between* systems, not fully part of either one but acting as limits for both. As Branden Hookway (2014, pp. 13–14) points out, one crucial difference between a related notion of ‘surface’ and ‘interface’ is relationality: whereas ‘surface’ is part of or a property of a single whole, ‘interface’ is or results from a relation between two wholes.[10]

The third crucial aspect, *(inter)connection*, is sometimes erroneously understood as interaction (i.e. by Hookway, 2014, p. 16). While the most salient examples of everyday interfaces (such as user interfaces of computers) indeed are interactive, it is not a necessary feature for interfaces in general. An interface is interactive if it allows the connected systems to affect each other, modellable as both providing inputs to and receiving outputs from each other. However, it is quite trivial to exemplify also one-way affecting through an interface. Think for example of traffic lights for a normal “user”. The red, yellow, and green lights convey instructions to affect our behavior in traffic. But no matter what we do while waiting for the green, it will not affect the changing of the light. Yet, even when affecting happens one-way only, for the output of a system to function as meaningful input (and not mere noise) for another system there is a certain compatibility at stake – a structural dependence going both ways. In our traffic lights example, the “user” needs to understand the structure and meaning of the lights *and* the lights must be working properly for the “user’s” behavior to be correctly affected. In this sense, the connection in one-way examples is still ‘inter-’, and we add the prefix in brackets.

For our argument, one-way affecting is an important feature. While some views of aesthetic experience and judging might allow interactivity (in the above sense) between the two in first-person cases (judging I), it is highly implausible that the third-person judging (II) could directly affect the original experience. Becoming informed of third-person judgments may influence first-person experiences (and judging) in the future, but this is due to a feedback loop that goes beyond simply interfacing with an aesthetic experience. Additionally, feedback loops may also affect how the original experience is represented and judged (interfaced with) in the future but not the original experience itself. The experience after becoming aware of or attuned with

[10] Hookway (2014, pp. 13–14) talks about properties of objects and relations between subjects and objects. To avoid the additional connotational baggage the subject/object distinction bears, we have translated his point in terms of more neutral and general ‘wholes’.

aesthetic judgment II about the original experience is not the same as the experience judging II was based on.[11]

Here, we are interested in *information flow*. How and what kind of information can be gained from (other people's) aesthetic experience?[12] How does that information relate to and depend on the experience? We argue that given its successful application to analogous problems in other fields, it would turn out fruitful to consider these questions in terms of interfacing information systems. Here, we begin on the functional level – what kind of functionality should be expected of an interface mediating the experiential information from others, given what (we think) we know of our own aesthetic experience and judgments and the experience of others in general?

It is debatable whether we have full access even to the information present in our own experience, and definitely not to that of others. Thus, the interface should be expected to provide only partial access, resulting in an abstraction of experiential data. Here, following Luciano Floridi (2011, pp. 46–79), by 'abstraction' we mean a collection of observable features, abstracting away data irrelevant to them. The same underlying data can be abstracted in various ways, and Floridi (2011, pp. 54–58) shows how different levels of abstraction pertaining to the same data can be related to each other and switched in between. Floridian abstractions contain an inherent goal-orientedness in requiring an interpretation of the observable features and their relations, while also allowing flexibility in moving between and modifying abstractions for new purposes.

Floridi (2011, p. 52) already remarks upon the comparison between abstractions and interfaces. Indeed, abstractions in this sense serve a very similar purpose to interfaces in computer science: providing information processing economy by abstracting away superfluous data (for the task at hand) while building modularity and organizing dependencies between collections of data. However, if one agrees that aesthetic value is not inherent in an object or event itself but results in relation to it, aesthetic value is something that is added in the process, not abstracted. This is why we prefer the term 'interface' in this context: interfaces allow additive transformations of data as long as they are nomic in nature, i.e. given the same data and level of abstraction the end result remains consistent.[13] Interfaces can also be systems in their own right (e.g. computer user interfaces), with their own internal systemic processes usually required for additive transformations. Given all this, the interface with the aesthetic experience is also a prime candidate for accommodating aesthetic evaluation.

[11] Thus, we do not oppose the attunement and unfolding of experiences of for example performers and audiences as Shaun Gallagher 2021 describes. Having said this, it is unclear to us how this process could be explained without relying on representationality, or operating aesthetic judging as interface.

[12] Given the reasonable assumption that there is a connection between information and knowledge one might also say that this leads us to gain knowledge. However, exploring the connection between information and knowledge goes beyond the scope of this paper.

[13] I.e. isomorphism between data and abstract features is preserved even when something is added to the abstraction. It's unclear whether Floridi (2011, pp. 46–79) would technically allow this within his framework (within interpretations of features) but given the connotations of 'abstraction' we prefer our terminology.

The process(es) of aesthetic judging fits all the features of an interface sketched above. Granted that aesthetic experience and the information we can get from it are systemically different – by accessibility if nothing else; a point emphasized when considering information in the third person (judging II) – judging is what lies in between. Judging happens in relation to experience and produces information from it, thus forming a bridging connection between the two. Aesthetic judging contains both an abstracting and an evaluating aspect simultaneously – abstracting because judging what is aesthetically relevant in perception requires an element of top-down processing, and evaluating because an interpretation of aesthetic value is produced. Abstraction is an inherent feature of interfaces, and evaluation goes beyond "mere" abstracting but is allowed by interfacing. The end product is an informational representation of aesthetic experience combined with its aesthetic evaluation. This combination can be thought of as aesthetic judgment.

4. Aesthetic Judging Working as Interface

Rather than what aesthetic judging is, this article deals with how it works. In the most general terms, when making aesthetic judgments, we are relying on our experience but also expertise and expectations. We are more or less intuitively evaluating different possible judgments we could make as we go. In other words, we are engaged in metacognitive – second-order – intuitive reasoning about aesthetic value.[14] Next, we clarify what this tells about aesthetic judging as a cognitive process, and how it relates to the mechanics of an interface.

Aesthetic judging is goal-oriented in the sense that it has a function: inferring aesthetic value. Stating this does not require taking a stance on the experience or psychological motives of the subject but on the function of aesthetic judging itself. The point of aesthetic judging is to position oneself in relation to the world one is perceiving, and this relating manifests itself as what can be seen as observing aesthetic value, such as beauty, ugliness, everydayness, enchantment, and so on.

More specifically, Aenne Brielmann and Peter Dayan (2022) argue that aesthetic value (in the narrow sense, encompassing only either positive or negative aesthetic appraisal) can be inferred via at least two routes: 1) when the experience is pleasurable because it is easy to process – in other words, when the bottom-up signals match our top-down expectations concerning the experience or the object, or 2) when we feel that the experience has altered our top-down expectations so that what was described in 1) is more likely to take place in the future – in other words, we have been engaged in learning. We will use this description here, because it posits a cognitive model of the mechanism of aesthetic judging, and thus can be operationalized as a depiction of the representationality of aesthetic judging at work. When it comes to the conception of mechanism, we draw on information processing,

[14] This holds regardless of whether one thinks we gain understanding or just mere pleasure in the process.

but will not go into the question of neural correlation. Mechanisms are here seen as functional wholes for an organism: "…mental mechanisms are ones that can be investigated taking a physical stance (examining neural structures and their operations) but also, distinctively and crucially, taking an information-processing stance." (Bechtel, 2008, pp. 23.)

In a nutshell, aesthetic judging I is a type of inference that produces information to the subject about themselves. However, our research question was about the process by which *others* can obtain information about subjective experience. Yet, the setup is similar. In both cases, the aim is that the information gathered about the experience would – to different degrees – align with the information the subject collects from their own experience (judgment I). Hence, this article builds on the promising concept of mindreading making its way, with solid empirical support, from psychology and cognitive science to aesthetics (see for example McCallum, Mitchell, and Scott-Phillips, 2020; Consoli, 2022).[15] Obtaining information about someone else's aesthetic experience via their aesthetic judgment (I), we are mindreading.

Mindreading, as a cognitive capacity, is fallible. It does not mean literally seeing into or experiencing someone's mind "like an open book", nor is it necessarily deliberate or linguistic. Although the term 'reading' in mindreading is misleading in this sense, we think it is more descriptive than the often used alternatives 'folk theory', 'theory of mind', and 'mentalizing'. Even when mindreading is directed towards oneself, it does not mean the mind – in how it is functioning – would be revealed to us once and for all. Taking art as an example, mindreading does not mean that the audience would reconstruct for themselves what the artist felt or thought when making the piece or getting an idea for it, nor that the artist at work would try to construct what the audience will feel or think. Rather, it points to being aware, to some extent, of our own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs as well as the fact that others, too, have thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Mindreading is a necessary element of exploring meanings, and thus, at the center of representational aesthetic judging.[16] To refer back to Brielmann and Dayan's formulation, it is needed in 1) mediating our expectations and sensory data as well as 2) marking the learning process.

[15] In the representationalist framework, mindreading and empathy are overlapping concepts. Although there is no single and unambiguous definition for empathy, it can be understood as mindreading with a focus on reading affective – valenced – states in particular (Søvsø and Burckhardt, 2021, p. 3). We prefer to use the wider concept of "mindreading", because it may be easier to translate to be directed towards oneself and not only others (especially in the case of judgment I) than referring to empathy. In the enactivist framework, however, empathy often refers to interactive attunement, not mindreading and representationality (see for example Gallagher, 2020, pp. 175–184). In this spirit, Dan Zahavi (2017, pp. 41–42) would like to replace mindreading with empathy having a stronger connotation to embodiment and claims that "[o]n the phenomenological reading, empathy doesn't involve sharing, but nor is it merely just any kind of mindreading. Empathy is rather a form of 'expressive understanding' that requires bodily proximity, and which allows for a distinct experiential grasp of and access to the other's psychological life." We do not mind the label, be it "empathy" or "mindreading" since in our reading, both can be seen as constitutively embodied and including environmental processes. In other words, we fail to grasp how inference on one hand and dynamic coordination, interaction, or attunement on the other would necessarily have to be in conflict when talking about aesthetic judging that in our view, belongs to metacognition rather than basic cognition.

[16] Representationality can be understood in terms of intentionality in one sense of the word, namely that intention is a relation of reference. Mental states can thus be said to be intentional if they are taken to be about something external to them (Pitt, 2020). This means

Due to the central role of mindreading in forming personal aesthetic judgments, we can draw an analog for Kendall Walton's idea of representations. According to Walton, rather than experiencing an artwork, we are experiencing ourselves reacting to it: immersive art functions so that we represent ourselves feeling different feelings, and distancing art as well as abstract art function so that we represent those representations that the works evoke in us (Walton, 1990, pp. 242, 275, 277–280). For him, this is imitation, mimesis, or make-believe, but in our terminology, this could also be understood as mindreading, because it requires being aware that mind is at work, that the object of representation (oneself being moved or imaginatively inspired) exists. Otherwise, it would not be possible to construct the second-order representation of oneself in the first place – one would not be able to represent oneself *as* oneself *for* oneself to appropriate Walton (1990, pp. 242–243).[17]

When (mind)reading someone's experience, we suggest, we are reading it analogically to the way we would be reading an artwork à la Walton. The premise is that there are two processes: the aesthetic experience of the subject (analogical to the Waltonian first-order inference: feeling or representation the work inspires in us) and the knowledge about it the observer has to form for themselves (analogical to the Waltonian "fictional truth" – metarepresentation, namely, the representation of the feeling or representation the work evokes in us). Information about the experience is thus the observer's representation of the experience.[18]

The proposition that aesthetic judging, and with it, the meanings of experience, are representational is backed up by empirical evidence.[19] First, the same objects and emotions (such as disgust) seem to provoke different

that representations have a function, not that the subject would have "some goals in mind" or a deliberate intention or interpretation. Representationality refers to how the subject's ability to function (as a mechanism consisting of interlinked mechanisms and with relation to other mechanisms consisted similarly) and have aesthetic experiences that feel imminent, immersive, and immediate is possible. Aesthetic judgment is a relational process producing the value rather than calculating it. Thus, intentionality links to subjective justification rather than propositional truth conditions. Having said this, the end product of aesthetic judging (aesthetic judgment in the sense used in analytic Aesthetics) can be examined alethically – this is just not our focus in this article.

17 Culmination of this line of thinking emphasizing mindreading as a key metacognitive activity in aesthetics is that art's function can be seen as creating self-consciousness and aiding in the development of the mindreading ability (see Gianluca Consoli 2014, p. 50).

18 In his later work, Walton distinguishes two types of empathy: "empathy in the primary sense" meaning I empathize with you using my own real or imagined current mental states as a measure, and "sort-of empathy" meaning I empathize with you using my memories of the implications of my past mental states as a measure (Walton, 2015, p. 14). In practice, Walton creates, as do we in the text at hand, aesthetic equivalents for the common concepts of affective empathy and cognitive empathy. Since we are not examining imagination, fiction, or art in particular, our take is geared toward understanding how exactly meaning emerges in aesthetic empathy rather than understanding what behaviors feed it. Walton does not answer what kind of knowledge phenomenal concepts provide about the experience of the other person. When it comes to this question, Walton only states that it is enough that the phenomenal concept is the same – or shared – and that empathy produces a type of propositional knowledge that does not have to be verbalizable: for instance, we may not have a word for some specific color (Walton, 2015, p. 7).

19 Enactivists often position themselves as explicitly anti-representationalist. We are not for this dichotomy, because we think that it is most helpful to understand aesthetic judging being embodied, enactive, embedded, and extended (for virtual representations, see Noë 2004).

aesthetic judgments depending on what kind of expectational framework they have been experienced in, for example, whether they have been experienced as art or documentation (Wagner et al., 2014). Second, there is some evidence that experts and non-experts judge the same artworks differently, relying on differently constructed ways of making the judgment (Kirchberg and Tröndle, 2015, p. 176; Verpooten and Dewitte, 2017). All this suggests that aesthetic judging is representational: it works as an interface, providing access to experience but is not the same as experience per se. It only allows approximating experience. Namely, by analyzing aesthetic judging, we cannot determine whether the aesthetic experience of different people varied, but we can show that at least the processing of the experience most likely did. Had it not varied, the same input would have produced the same output in all cases.

Our point is that when we try to get information about the experience, we are not in it ourselves but need to use heuristic tools (interfaces) that we can directly observe. In what follows, we show how such a tool can work. One could now point out that we *do* know directly what we feel. For example, we are aware that we are sad (even if we cannot pin it down to anything that has happened to us). Similarly, we may also empathize with others by affectively tuning in with their mood, we can be cheerful and suddenly feel reserved as we step into a space shared with people who are (even without us knowing) having a conflict with each other. Yet, we claim, there is no need to assume that aesthetic judging was different from the rest of cognition – especially if one accepts that affective and bodily states inevitably play into how people interpret their own thoughts (see Carruthers 2013 arguing for that self-knowledge is interpreted and footnote 6 in this article).

5. Aesthetic Empathy

When I try to understand what you experience, as I am investigating signals you give about it, I need to grasp that the experience is meaningful to you: you have a reason to evaluate the atmosphere a certain way even if I did not know what the reason was. The information gained through aesthetic judging is treated so that it is justified for the subject and as if it was subjectively justified for the observer. Hence, aesthetic judging II relies on empathy. Although aesthetic judging II is an interface to the subject's experience, the observer is on the other side with their own experience, using it to guide them in approximating the subject's experience, or in other words, in operating the interface.

To understand what kind of information can be obtained from aesthetic judging via empathy, we need to clarify what we mean by obtaining information, creating meaning, or understanding in this context. Aesthetic experience is meaningful, and aesthetic judging carries meaning as it conveys this. Meaning, in turn, is on a case-by-case basis risen relation to the non-meaningful (for an evolutionary approach to perceiving meaning, see Fields and Levin, 2020). So, what do we consider relevant when we consider the aesthetic judgments of others? Below is our preliminary suggestion for three different ways that the interface of aesthetic judging works. They all have the

same function – getting information about the aesthetic experience (analogical to inferring aesthetic value via judging I) – but the particular features they take into account differ.

We use the three-class system as a heuristic tool. It is loosely based on the following ones of Heather Battaly's (2011) categories in this order: "empathy as sharing by multiple means", "empathy as knowing by multiple means", and "empathy as sharing and knowing". Put differently, the list goes: emotional contagion and perspective-taking that we label "aesthetic participation", accurately detecting the presence of a mental state that we call "distanced aesthetic empathy", and trying out the other person's mental state that we label "affective appropriation".

When starting to differentiate types of empathy, there is no unified system of classification. Hence, the classes can also be divided differently and seen as overlapping rather than exclusive. Their function here is to provide a means to clarify ways in which the interface that is aesthetic judging works when it grants access to other people's aesthetic experience. The clarification operates at a general level. Other ways of describing the cognitive process could include more sophisticated divisions, all the way down to neural processing.

We do not want to imply that the classification into types presented here aligns with approaches of aesthetics, either. Although we find it plausible that different types could have different importance for phenomenological, analytic, and empirical aesthetics, we leave it as a topic for further study. Respectively, we do not provide an answer for when aesthetic judging is reliable. We wish to only point out that aesthetic judging, understood as an interface operated with empathy, can be seen as a fallible method used in both research and everyday life. This goes to highlight that although empathy as understanding perhaps better fits the tone of phenomenological aesthetics and empathy as explanandum the tone of analytic and empirical aesthetics, their methods may not be as far apart as one could initially think. We argue that the answer to the question "how can I know what you experience?" can be approached in terms of aesthetic judging, which is traditionally neglected in phenomenological aesthetics. If the analytic conception of aesthetic judging is tweaked to better fit describing the subject-experience relation, we hold that one can gain new knowledge about how to get information about aesthetic experience.

Aesthetic participation (I perceive some aesthetic value)

I can feel that you feel. Its aesthetic equivalent is that I detect the presence of aesthetic value where you do too. In other words, we may discuss our aesthetic experiences although we cannot be sure that we are talking about the same thing. We may even assume that we most probably do not have a similar experience. Hence, we do not perceive the *same* aesthetic value.

Participation, here, refers to that aesthetic judging forms and takes place in a social context, broadly construed. Aesthetic judging is shaped by the overall constraints and possibilities of human embodied cognition as well as

a continuum of intergenerational inheritance of what has been aesthetically judged, how, and where. For example, we can see traces of aesthetic experience in Pleistocene artifacts, such as rock paintings, but be confident that we most likely do not experience them similarly to the people who made them. We can fathom that other people may have aesthetic experiences different from mine; someone else may see aesthetic value that I cannot.

Meaning arises when we can nevertheless form an aesthetic relation.[20] Exchange between different aesthetic environments is considered meaningful. I know (partly) what you experience by representing the assumption that you have a representation (of your experience).

Distanced aesthetic empathy (I do not perceive aesthetic value but understand it is perceived by others)

I may imagine how you feel. Its aesthetic equivalent is that I can detect for example your enchantedness without being in a similar state myself right now. Distanced aesthetic empathy is, in a way, a less affective state than the others. However, it requires that we know in first-person, even if only vaguely, what it is to experience aesthetically (without necessarily being in an aesthetic experience at the moment, when operating the interface of distanced aesthetic empathy). The other has perceived something like the aesthetic value they are now evaluating aesthetically, but their own experience is on one side of the interface and the experience of our experiencer on the other.

We are engaged in distanced aesthetic empathy when we accurately detect the presence of an aesthetic judgment. Reading *A Farewell to Arms* left me cold, and persuasion and reasoning about the merits of Hemingway's literary expression – that I do feel I can nevertheless detect as lower-level aesthetic features – and trying to be aesthetically open-minded has so far not turned my head.[21] Still, when I listen to other readers analyze the book, I understand that they have not been left cold aesthetically. I can understand that an encounter with at least somewhat similar surroundings that I did not see aesthetic value in has caused different inference in others (*Nobel tai ei mitään: Jakso 3: Ernest Hemingway (1954) by Vehka Kurjenmiekka and Rasmus Tillander, 2022*).

So, observing your verbal and bodily reactions (judgment I), I may form a conception (judgment II) on if you experience for example a song as touching, bad, calming, or invigorating. These observations form an understanding of how the experience takes place. It may result in forming other kinds of relations later on. It does not explain what you experience but it has meaning when the judgment II represents the process with which you have inferred the judgment I. This is an extremely ambitious aim considering interface does not grant direct access. Hence, keeping in mind that

[20] In other words, meaning arises when we can communicate with each other in the Deweyan sense, not by announcing but by forming a relation (Dewey, 2005, pp. 253, 281–282).

[21] Calling some aesthetic features "lower" refers to the order of inference considering at what stage of aesthetic judging they appear in each case. However, we are not saying that there are at maximum two orders of inference in aesthetic judging. Perceiving the aesthetic value of mathematics could be an example of very layered aesthetic judging, as in order to hold that a theorem is beautiful, it may require for example holding individual lemmas beautiful, which may require holding individual axioms beautiful.

mindreading is fallible, the process per se with which the judgment I has been inferred is seen as meaningful. I know (partly) what you experience by representing the process with which you represented (your experience).

Affective appropriation (I perceive the same aesthetic value)

I may feel how I think you are feeling. Its aesthetic equivalent is that I think I have experienced something like you have and can relate to your experience although it is not mine.

By observing your judgment I and constructing judgment II, I may construct a representation of a similar experience as you are having. Used in this way, the aesthetic interface allows aesthetic judgments to affect aesthetic experience through a feedback loop. Let us assume that I feel disgusted when I see a lappet-faced vulture, avoid going through the housing area built in the 1970s if I can avoid it, hold that coffee tastes bad, or always turn the radio off when they play Stravinsky. These examples are indications that I attach negative aesthetic value to the objects in question. If I am accustomed to judging very different objects positively, aesthetically appreciating for example, atonal music, the lappet-faced vulture, concrete architecture, or nuances of coffee might require me first perceive them as if they were beautiful or nuanced. Think about any development or personal change of heart that did not require any other justification or persuasion than understanding that things could be different (often resulting from verbal interactions or observing those): that it is possible to hold something beautiful that I previously thought was not beautiful. Perhaps I even witnessed someone else making this judgment very different to mine.[22] First, I realize that a different aesthetic judgment is possible, for example, that a vulture can be seen as beautiful, and then I imitate it as if to try it out – finally, through my own experience, the subjective justification of a new aesthetic judgment I may also take place.

Meaning forms when I reach subjective justification or understanding about your experience – just like you had to have a subjective justification for your judgment I. So, reaching subjective justification, drawing aesthetic value, in itself is considered meaningful (as opposed to aesthetic value per se as was the case with aesthetic participation). I know (partly) what you experience by representing the subjective or implicit justification of your representation (of your experience).

The difference between aesthetic judging I and II

To sum up, meaning-making via “aesthetic participation” does not require me to detect the aesthetic value similarly to you, but only to detect the presence of aesthetic value. Your judgment I and my judgment II do not need to match. “Distanced aesthetic empathy” requires a more specific (assumed) match

[22] In the case of aesthetic akrasia, guilty pleasures, both judgments are subjectively justified; the metacognitive representation of a justified aesthetic judgment is never ultimate, “a thing itself”. For aesthetic akrasia, see Marín (2022), who argues that aesthetic liking and judging can contradict but that aesthetic subjects should aim away from such a state if we want to be rational. We hold that there can be degrees of certainty in aesthetic judging and that it is an act of abstraction including an element of underdetermination. Therefore, a person can have akratic aesthetic judgments without it requiring a gap between intuitive liking judgment and rational judging judgment.

between your judgment I and my judgment II. Unlike aesthetic participation, it does not require me to detect any aesthetic value (however, it requires that I am acquainted with the concept in other contexts, that I have detected aesthetic value before). Distanced aesthetic empathy refers to how conclusive the knowledge acquired through it is. It is not merely detecting the presence of aesthetic judging, as was the case with aesthetic participation. "Affective appropriation" is a combination of both previous ways. There is a specific match between your judgment I and my judgment II, and the match manifests itself affectively, through what can be called subjective justification or inferring aesthetic value.

We were not looking at how you make aesthetic judgments (I) but how someone else can collect information about your aesthetic experience. In other words, the other person needs to by mindreading infer, represent, an aesthetic judgment (II) that is an interface to your aesthetic experience. This mechanism can be employed in at least three cases that align with three types of empathy. So, whereas in the case of judging I, one positions oneself in relation to one's own aesthetic experience, in the case of judging II, one positions oneself in relation to someone else's aesthetic experience. The processes are thus analogical: one shifts the focus from reading one's own mind to reading those of others.

Judging II is different from judging I. Aesthetic judgment I and aesthetic experience form a coevolutionary loop: what kind of judgment I is possible depends on experience shaped by reflection and so on; they form each other's selection environments, so to speak. Aesthetic judgment II and aesthetic judgment I are not in this kind of two-way interaction (although aesthetic judgment II may lead to a new aesthetic judgment I by the observer, and even by the original subject of aesthetic judgment I). Rather, aesthetic judgment II as a representation intends to make aesthetic experience familiar not to the experiencer herself but to another person. It does not (necessarily) alter her aesthetic experience, but it does have partial access to judgment I. Aesthetic judging II and I are thus considered two separate interfaces here.

An interface generates plasticity as the same experience affords several interfaces. This is so because aesthetic judgment is an abstraction and therefore, empirically underdetermined. Although the representation of judgment I that is produced in forming judgment II is not stagnant and most likely not identical to judgment I, it produces information only to the observer (whereas judgment I produces information only to the experiencer). Judgment II can then turn (be extrapolated) into the observer's subjective aesthetic experience. This induces aesthetic judging I in the observer that is ontologically different from the original judging I by the original experiencer. Judging II thus is a link to someone else's aesthetic experience. It is operated by the observer as a way for the observer to put their conception of self in relation to the initial loop of aesthetic experience of the other person. This relationing is continuous because there is no absolute way of knowing or final stage of familiarizing oneself with the aesthetic experience of the other person (as this would mean de facto becoming the other person and seizing to be oneself, giving up one's own embodied mind).

6. Conclusion

We identified a gap in aesthetics: an articulation of how aesthetic judging accesses aesthetic experience is needed. We bridged the gap by applying the concept of "interface" to aesthetic empathy. We described how it may function in different ways when "I" draw information about "your" aesthetic experience via a process that is analogical to forming aesthetic judgments about my own experience but that does not include us interactively sharing the experience at the same time and place. These ways are:

Aesthetic participation – I detect aesthetic value where you do, but not necessarily in the same way (I may think your experience might be significantly different from mine)

Distanced aesthetic empathy – I think you detect aesthetic value where I might not

Affective appropriation – I detect aesthetic value the same way as I think you do

We pointed to overcoming what is in our opinion an artificial division between phenomenological and analytic aesthetics by combining the Böhmean atmosphere (rather than linguistic aesthetic judgment) with the traditionally analytic view on the representational nature of aesthetic judging. We do not suggest getting rid of research done within either of the approaches. Rather, we hold that these fields should be in a fluid exchange in studying cognitive processing (including emotions) related to aesthetic phenomena. Further exchange among the fields is long overdue considering the already achieved – and counting – great degree of specialization within both.[23]

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Onerva Kiianlinna
University of Helsinki, Department of Philosophy, History and Art Studies
Finland
onerva.kiianlinna@helsinki.fi

Joonas Kurjenmiekka
Finland
joonas.kurjenmiekka@gmail.com

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SHORT ESSAYS AND DISCUSSION PIECES

Aesthetics and the Ethics of Care

Some Critical Remarks

Kalle Puolakka

This discussion piece raises some worries in the view Yuriko Saito develops in her Aesthetics of Care: Practice in Everyday Life (2022), on the role of aesthetics in fostering a way of life, which is infused by a particular kind of care towards the world. My claim is that Saito's theory is haunted by problems similar to those Gregory Currie has recently addressed towards philosophical views on the cognitive value of literature. Like such approaches in Currie's view, Saito's claim that an appropriate kind of aesthetic appreciation nurtures care ethics, too, would benefit from a more empirically grounded inquiry. Moreover, I believe that Currie's sceptical points on the idea of literature as a vehicle for expanding our emphatic capacities are also relevant to Saito's account of the relation between aesthetics and care ethics. I close by sketching a different way of relating aesthetics and ethics from Saito's in terms of the notion of exemplification. | *Keywords: Aesthetics of Care, Care Ethics, Empathy, Everyday Aesthetics, Saito*

With the recent *Aesthetics of Care: Practice in Everyday Life* (2022), Yuriko Saito continues her important contributions to everyday aesthetics. It is in no way an overstatement to say that without her work, this field would look very different today – or would perhaps not even exist. While such themes as green aesthetics and the ways in which "the power of the aesthetic" can help in constructing a better world were already central to her landmark *Everyday Aesthetics* (2007, pp. 55–58, 77–103), in *Aesthetics of Care*, she gives an even more ambitious account of the potential relationships between aesthetics and sustainable ways of life.

More precisely, Saito's treatment now takes the form of exploring the ways in which what she calls "an aesthetics of care" could help foster an ethically respectful and sustainable relationship to our surrounding world for which there certainly is an urgent need in our times of various crises some of which could even mark a significant threat to our very existence. In this case, she believes that a particular kind of attitude of care ties aesthetics and ethics together. In other words, in her view, proper aesthetic appreciation and care are both permeated by such mental states and virtues as attentiveness,

responsiveness, respect of particularity, open-mindedness, and focused attention (Saito, 2022, pp. 28, p. 30, pp. 35–36). There is "a reciprocal relationship" between care aesthetics and care ethics, in that they both emphasize "the importance of experiencing the other, whether a person or an object, on its own terms through unselfing and decentering while activating the imagination" (Saito, 2022, p. 29, 113).

Saito's account of the aesthetics of care is by no means the only field of aesthetics where the potential ulterior significance of aesthetic phenomena has been explored. It bears an interesting similarity to the long-standing discussion on the cognitive value of literature, which Saito, however, does not discuss. With some terminological and case-example adjustments, her ideas on the aesthetics of care and on the ethical value of aesthetic appreciation could be easily turned into a potential contribution to this field.

Philosophers of literature have seen literature as the source of such cognitive values as conceptual knowledge, knowledge of possibilities, knowledge of the feel of experiences, knowledge of human nature and character, knowledge of the processual nature of emotions. In general, a host of philosophers consider literature an important vehicle for expanding some important cognitive capacities of ours like imagination and empathy (Mikkonen, 2013). The latter emphases are particularly important to Martha Nussbaum's famous ethical view of literature. According to her, literature can promote "a finely aware and richly responsible" moral life, as her motto, derived from Henry James, goes (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 37).

However, certain new developments in the discussion on the cognitive value of literature, I think, also raise some worries for Saito's aesthetics of care. In this short discussion piece, I draw attention to some of them.

One of Saito's central claims is that aesthetic appreciation permeated by an appropriate kind of care strengthens our general care relationship towards the world. She writes: "an aesthetics of care enables an ethical relationship". This is because, "cultivating an aesthetic sensibility to appreciate the object of experience in its singularity and wholeness nurtures ethical attention and respect" (Saito, 2022, pp. 3–4).

To defend her claim that this type of relationship indeed prevails between aesthetics of care and care ethics, Saito draws on the work of a number of philosophers, researchers, and other thinkers, as well as draws attention to some specific aesthetic practices. These, for example, include virtue aesthetics, Arnold Berleant's aesthetics of engagement, the ethical implications of Iris Murdoch's concept of 'unselfing', design education, the analogy Martin Buber draws between encountering a person and encountering a work of art, as well as the art of the tea ceremony in Japanese aesthetics and Emily Brady's notion of imagining well.[1] Along with Murdoch's unselfing, Saito's (2022, pp. 17–18) conceptual arsenal includes such concepts as "radical decentering",

[1] Josephine Donovan's aesthetics of care, John Dewey's aesthetics, Ronald Hepburn's environmental aesthetics, Harry Broud's theory of art education, Marcia Eaton's account of the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, relational aesthetics, Gernot Böhme's notion of atmosphere, Paul Ziff notion of aspection, and Joan Nassauer's landscape aesthetics are

"respecting the other", "appreciating the other on its own terms", and "transcending one's own horizon". All these notions seek to capture different aspects of the kind of world-relation that Saito finds central to care ethics and, due to their structural similarities, aesthetic appreciation characterized by such mental attitudes, in her view, helps foster it.

Despite its numerous merits, one crucial component could be argued to be missing from Saito's account. Even after all the impressive theories, ideas, and concepts she draws on, it is hard to get around the fact that the relationship Saito draws between care aesthetics and care ethics can also be construed as a causal relationship, in the sense that one is assumed to lead to the other or to further its realization. As Saito (2022, p. 8, italics added) puts it, "ethical care acts require sensibility and imagination that are most effectively *nurtured* through aesthetic means". Or still more specifically: "If I am surrounded by… small agents of human decency indicative of the care given to my needs, comfort, and well-being [such as a particularly well-designed peeler], I become *disposed* to pay it forward by spreading the gift of care" (Saito, 2022, p. 115, italics added).

I am not claiming that Saito explicitly formulates the relationship between care aesthetics and care ethics in causal terms, but I, nevertheless, think it is a fair reading of her position. Rather than causality, she describes the relationship between the aesthetics of care and care ethics as a form of "mutual enhancement" (Saito, 2022, p. 5), which, unlike causality, is a bidirectional relationship. But even the claim of mutual enhancement contains an element of causality; the aesthetic has an *effect* on the ethical. Mutual enhancement presupposes at least some type of causal relationship between the two parts of the mutually enhancing relationship.[2]

However, if the relationship in question, that is of nurturing care ethics through aesthetic means, is acknowledged to involve a causal element, it would be good to give empirical evidence for its existence, which Saito does not really provide, apart from some examples of art projects and everyday aesthetic objects she thinks embody an attitude of care (2022, pp. 83–84, pp. 93–98, pp. 100–103, pp. 117–118). The examples she uses from imaginative manhole covers to well-designed ATM machines do illuminate her idea of the aesthetics of care, but they are not enough to establish the kind of connection between care ethics and care aesthetics she seeks in any strong sense; their eventual effect on people remains unexplored and hence their evidential value might not be as strong as Saito believes.

This is precisely the challenge that Gregory Currie has raised for philosophy of literature in his recent *Imagining and Knowing: The Shape of Fiction* (2020). The basic idea of his challenge is very simple: Philosophers of literature who believe that literature can foster the kinds of cognitive values listed above need to present better empirical evidence on the positive impacts they attribute to literature. Currie writes:

also among Saito's key sources of inspiration (Saito, 2022, pp. 30–32, pp. 36–37, pp. 42–45, p. 59, pp. 79–80, pp. 89–90, pp. 117–118).

[2] I thank the reviewer for pressing me on this point.

> We hear a lot about fiction's role in promoting knowledge and understanding, enlarging the imagination and expanding our capacity for empathy. Evidence for some of these claims is available and more can surely be found. But the relation between fiction and learning is massively complicated; we should not let our humanistic values drive us to a defensive posture every time it is suggested that knowledge from fiction might not be so easy to get, that we might sometimes end up with ignorance and error, that it's sometimes easier to have an illusion of knowing than it is to know, that the contours of the fiction/knowledge landscape can't be mapped from the philosopher's armchair. (Currie, 2020, p. 8.)

Already well before Currie's book, Nussbaum received strong criticism for not providing any real empirical evidence for her account of the moral value of literature (see, for example, Possner 1998). Similar critical remarks, I think, can also be extended to Saito's view on the aesthetic conditions of care ethics.

The analogy between Saito's aesthetics of care and the cognitive value of literature can be drawn even further. Empathy has its own role in Saito's view, particularly in her discussion of care in medical practices (2022, pp. 39–41), and literary reading, too, has been considered to improve our emphatic skills. This has also been the subject of considerable debate in the empirical study of literature and one paper defending the idea of literature as an important source of the expansion of empathy, David Kidd and Emanuele Castano's *Literary Reading Improves Theory of Mind* (2013), received global attention when it appeared.

Currie, however, has been quite sceptic towards the claim about literary reading's positive impact on our capacity for empathy. Referring to more recent studies that do not support Kidd and Castano's initial findings, he claims that it is too soon to make any definitive conclusions based on the available empirical research on the matter. According to Currie, some background assumptions also require much more scrutiny (Currie, 2020, p. 206). I believe that Saito needs to confront similar questions to those Currie addresses to claims on the emphatic value of literature.

One of Currie's critical remarks is well-known from other contexts; causality must be separated from correlation. Two things can occur simultaneously, but this does not yet show that there is a causal relationship between the two, in the sense that the other *causes, produces* or *initiates* the other. This, of course, was already the core of David Hume's infamous critique of causality.

The direction of the causal relationship is also not clear. For example, in the case of Saito's analysis, it could be that the ethics of care explains a particular type of aesthetic attitude and not the other way around. Similarly, literary reading does not necessarily explain the possible high level of empathy of avid readers, but the high level of empathy explains their interest in literature (Currie, 2014, p. 651). It is also possible that behind both care aesthetics and care ethics, there is some third factor, such as some type of general human civility, that explains them both. Be that as it may, from this perspective, the contributing role of the aesthetic in care ethics, nevertheless, needs to be better drawn out. This, however, seems to require at least supplementing

philosophical and theoretical insights with the findings of robust empirical inquiry, for example in the form of testing hypotheses with the sorts of experimental methods Currie (2020, p. 213) argues it is time for philosophers of literature to accept into their methodology. It is, of course, itself an interesting question what sort of empirical findings offer support for the claim of the positive cognitive impacts of literature, or, as in Saito's case, the care ethical potency of the aesthetic.

Currie, furthermore, argues that views, in which literary reading is said to improve our emphatic skills, include an understanding of empathy as an inexhaustible capacity that we cannot run out of. However, if empathy, after all, is not this type of boundless capacity, the claim of the positive impact of literary reading on our emphatic skills is put into a new light. This is because, if literary reading requires empathy, we consume our restricted emphatic skills while reading and do not, in fact, necessarily emerge from our reading moment as more emphatic people, but, at worst, quite the contrary. But could not aesthetics of care use up our care ethics similarly? Currie (2020, p. 212) also observes, more interestingly I think, that we tend to allow ourselves small vices after feeling particularly virtuous. From this observation, it again follows that virtuousness in the form of aesthetics of care does not necessarily lead to virtuous care outside of the initial aesthetic context. In general, Currie (2014, p. 651) feels that philosophers of literature should take the possibility that literary reading can give us a false sense of having improved as people, when nothing of the sort has in fact taken place, much more seriously. As he maintains in the above quotation, we might just have an illusion of having cognitively improved. Again, I see no reason why the sense of depth and attentiveness we have of our aesthetic habits could not give a false impression of how ethically careful we are.

One important weakness of Saito's aesthetics of care is that she underestimates the role of interest in fostering our care relationship towards things. She seems to approach care as a kind of general human capacity, which spreads over all aspects of a caring person's life; care in one area of life, such as the aesthetic, radiates to other areas, such as the ethical.

But is there truly this type of relationship between different areas of life? For example, the reason, why someone might be keen on mending his car seems to be that he is *interested* in cars, not that he just happens to channel his general care energy to cars, which could just as well find its expression in other areas of life. Similarly, caring for aesthetic objects can simply result from an *interest* in the aesthetic aspects of life, not that one happens to direct one's general care-like attentiveness to aesthetic matters. In this respect, the relationship between the care we exhibit in our aesthetic life and the care we exhibit in our ethical life does not seem to be that straightforward. It might, in fact, be as numerously complex as Currie believes the relationship between fiction and learning to be.

All in all, I believe that Saito's valuable points on the aesthetics of care would profit from being further considered in light of the kinds of worries Currie addresses to philosophers of literature – which I actually think are overly

sceptical, although that is a topic for a different paper. I agree with Saito that we tend to exhibit more care towards things we find aesthetically valuable, but her ultimate claim seems to be much stronger. The care we exhibit towards the things we find aesthetically valuable or that we find exhibiting care radiates into our life as a whole, and this I think still needs more support.

To be sure, there are other seemingly compelling ways of understanding the moral significance of the aesthetic than in terms of causally improving our moral capacities. For example, Nussbaum (1998, p. 355) has responded to the types of criticism to her view raised above that, rather than as initiators of causal chains, she believes literary works can serve as "examples" of the kinds of qualities and capacities that she thinks underpins "a finely aware and richly responsible" moral life. The ways in which readers adopt and absorb the moral visions or "senses of life" embodied in literary works into their own moral apparatuses is a more complex question than that of straightforward causality, but they can nevertheless have a genuine and significant role in such moral developments.

There seems to be an initial plausibility in this idea: I doubt that anybody would deny the importance of having epistemic exemplars in one's life who can inspire us to develop our epistemic skills and virtues, and who can help us believe in more responsible ways, even if this relationship cannot be compressed into a simple causal relationship (Zagzebski, 2012). Rather than causality, another way to capture the relationship between care aesthetics and care ethics might be in terms of Nelson Goodman and Catherine Elgin's notion of exemplification. On this account, care aesthetics might exemplify care ethics, and, like all exemplifying symbols and things, it could draw our attention to some important features of the object exemplified, i.e., care ethics in this case. Elgin writes on exemplification:

> Exemplification is not just a device for underscoring salient features or supplying emphasis. It often highlights and affords epistemic access to features that were previously disregarded... It points up a feature, enabling us to mark out its contours and appreciate its significance. It equips us to recognize that feature when we encounter it in other contexts. Exemplification, then, is not just a vehicle for conveying salience; it is a source of salience. (Elgin, 2017, p. 186)

Similarly, the care aesthetic appreciation at best exhibits can alert us to some salient features of care ethics and, thereby, help us realize what it is about, as well as grasp its significance, even if the aesthetic in this case would not straightforwardly causally affect the capacities required in care ethics. If somebody wants to learn what care ethics is, we could draw her attention to the care aesthetic appreciation exemplifies.

I do not doubt that similar points can be found in the *Aesthetics of Care* – Saito (2022, p. 92), for example interestingly discusses the ways in which care can be expressed through objects. But at least to me, the core of Saito's claim on the relationship between the aesthetics of care and care ethics could still be made sharper. I hope these small points will be beneficial to that end.

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Kalle Puolakka
Department of Philosophy, History, and Art Studies
University of Helsinki
P.O. Box 24
FI-00014 University of Helsinki
kalle.puolakka@helsinki.fi

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BOOK REVIEWS

A Rhythmic Process of Harmonization: Whitehead's Concept of Aesthetic Experience

Botond Csuka

Dadejík, O., Kaplický, M., Ševčík, M., and Zuska, V. (2021) *Process and Aesthetics: An Outline of Whiteheadian Aesthetics and Beyond*. Prague: Karolinum Press. ISBN 978-80-246-4726-5.

> My own belief is that at present the most fruitful, because the most neglected, starting point is that section of value-theory which we term aesthetics. Our enjoyment of the values of human art, or of natural beauty, our horror at the obvious vulgarities and defacements which force themselves upon us – all these modes of experience are sufficiently abstracted to be relatively obvious. And yet evidently they disclose the very meaning of things. (Whitehead, 1937, p. 185)

Alfred North Whitehead is an unusual guest in the field of aesthetics, to say the least. There is absolutely no reference to 'Whiteheadian aesthetics' neither in Timothy M. Costelloe's *The British Aesthetic Tradition* (2013), nor Paul Guyer's gargantuan *A History of Modern Aesthetics* (2014) – just to mention two recent

comprehensive works in the historiography of aesthetics. This, of course, is hardly surprising, given the fact that apart from some scattered remarks about beauty, art, and aesthetic experience, Whitehead wrote no papers or books specifically addressing these issues. If there is a 'Whiteheadian aesthetics', it must be unearthed: reconstructed from his fascinatingly rich philosophical oeuvre. Whiteheadians, however, tend to dig for different kinds of treasures – after all, they have more urgent things to focus on if one considers the main goal of Whitehead's mature philosophy, starting with his *Science and the Modern World* (1925) and culminating in the bewildering *Process and Reality* (1929): to systematically develop a new metaphysical system, "the last great metaphysical system", as Deleuze suggested, which Whitehead called "process philosophy" or "the philosophy of organism", based on a conception of reality as constituted by interdependent processes. Even amidst our excessive academic industry, there is only a handful a monographs explicitly dedicated to the systematic unfolding of what might be called a Whiteheadian aesthetics by Sherburne (1961), Shaviro (2009), Odin (2016). Karolinum Press's *Process and Aesthetics* aims not only to expound the implicit aesthetics of Whitehead's metaphysics, psychology or philosophy of education, but to argue that "the area of aesthetics is the ideal gateway" (p. 136) to Whitehead's process psychology and even ontology, since his system and basic concepts are "imbued with aesthetic ideas" (p. 8).

Even though the book is an amalgam of earlier studies written by the four authors, Ondřej Dadejík, Martin Kaplický, Miloš Ševčík, and Vlastimil Zuska, it does have a robust profile and a well-thought-out structure. At the heart of the book lies the notion of aesthetic experience, both of art and nature: the chapters reconstruct a Whiteheadian notion of aesthetic experience through reading the relevant textual segments of Whitehead's multi-faceted works against the background of John Dewey's (chapter 2) and Henri Bergson's (chapter 3) aesthetic writings, showcasing both their similarities and differences. Aesthetic experience proves to be an excellent gateway for inquiry, since it takes us to a rich conceptual terrain, allowing the authors to revisit aesthetic concepts such as rhythm or creativity as well as antinomies such as abstraction and concreteness, or mediation and immediacy. And while the last chapter, utilizing the insights gained from the preceding chapters, seeks to elucidate the concept of aesthetic experience in terms of oscillating abstractive processes, the authors also pay close attention to the role and significance of aesthetics in Whitehead's philosophical methodology and overall metaphysical system throughout the book.

Chapter 1 begins by reconstructing Whitehead's philosophy as an essentially aesthetic philosophy, in which aesthetic experience and art serve not only as an "explanatory tool" for the Whiteheadian method of "descriptive generalization", but as the "original area" (p. 21) of its entire system. But what exactly does that mean? The authors argue that aesthetic experience could become the starting point for Whitehead, as it allows us to escape the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness", i.e. our tendency to lean on a set of abstractions when transacting with the world, mistaking these abstractions for the concrete

and individual, which conceals reality from us: "a model of reality is presented as reality itself" (p. 80). Aesthetic experience – both in artistic and non-artistic contexts – can "overcome the antithesis between the concrete and the abstract" by keeping us "as close to the concrete as the necessities of finite understanding permit" (p. 23). Thus, anchoring aesthetic experience in Whitehead's method of descriptive generalization and his quest for overcoming the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, *Process and Aesthetics* shows how "Whitehead's aesthetics is organically integrated within his own philosophy" (p. 24) and that for Whitehead "an analysis of aesthetic experience could lead to a complete knowledge of reality" (p. 32).

While chapter 1 focused on positioning the aesthetic within Whitehead's own philosophy, the subsequent chapters offer a comparative interpretation of his aesthetics with that of Dewey and Bergson. Neither of them come as a surprise, both Dewey and Bergson have well-established places in Whitehead scholarship, though while we know about the connection and mutual respect between Whitehead and Dewey, scholars often disagree about the connection between Whitehead and Bergson. Nevertheless, Dewey and Bergson prove to be excellent choices for such a comparative reading, for there are many similarities but also significant differences between their ideas concerning the primacy of processes over objects, the rhythmic character of life, immediate experience, art and culture, or modern society with its highly compartmentalized institutions producing "celibate" "minds in grooves" (p. 85).

In the book, the authors are generally concerned with the close reading of the primary sources by Whitehead, Dewey and Bergson; Whitehead's aesthetics is put into a larger context – from structuralism to cognitive science – only in the last chapter. Thus, the authors consult or critically engage with the scholarship on Whitehead's aesthetics only occasionally. I believe such a critical engagement would have helped highlight the originality of their contribution.

In the following, I will not go through every nook and cranny of the argument of *Process and Aesthetics*, but rather concentrate on the central idea: Whitehead's notion of aesthetic experience. Whitehead's concept of aesthetic experience – which is intimately connected to his conception of beauty – is reconstructed by the authors, similarly to Shaviro (2009), as a "process of harmonization" (p. 27). This means that the aesthetic experience of "beauty is not a state, but a process whose aim is a harmonious interconnection of experiences without the loss of intensely perceived novelty" (p. 30). In aesthetic experience, writes Whitehead in his *Modes of Thought*, "there is a totality disclosing its component parts" (p. 31).

On the one hand, there is the moment of grasping the "affective tone" of the whole, an emotionally charged, subjective experience. On the other hand, inseparable from the latter, there is the creative process of interconnecting the details of the aesthetic object. This is a process of fusing together the familiar and the unknown, sameness and novelty, order and change, selecting certain aspects of reality, while excluding others (p. 140), resulting in it becoming a "pulsating oscillation" between the abstract and the concrete as well as different levels of abstraction (p. 152).

The above characteristics make the process of aesthetic experience rhythmic – a rhythmic movement of harmonization. The authors quote Whitehead's words from his *Religion in the Making*: "All aesthetic experience is feeling arising out of the realization of contrast under identity" (p. 63). However, the descriptions of aesthetic experience as the "harmony of contrasts" (p. 104) or the fusion of contrast and unity (Whitehead's definition of rhythm) connect it to the Whiteheadian conception of the becoming of an "actual occasion" (pp. 63–64) and, therefore, points to "the aesthetic nature of the occurrent world as such" (p. 66). It is argued in chapter 3 that the rhythmic patterns of aesthetic experience, disclosing immediacy through harmonization, "generally disclose reality as rhythm" (p. 92). Again, this interpretation channels Whitehead's aesthetics deep into his metaphysics.

Process and Aesthetics is, without question, a bold volume: it endeavours to reconstruct a Whiteheadian conception of aesthetic experience as a rhythmic process of harmonization of contrasts, and, going even further, to argue that it is the concept of aesthetic experience that will lead to a better understanding of key concepts in Whitehead's philosophy such as experience, rhythm, abstraction or the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Exposing Whitehead's aesthetics alongside the ideas of Dewey and Bergson resulted in many valuable insights concerning aesthetic experience as a rhythmic, creative process of harmonization penetrating beyond "the realm of conceptualized causality" (p. 101). Finally, the comparative interpretation offered in *Process and Aesthetics* might not only help Whiteheadians, uninitiated into the history of aesthetics, connect their ideas with aesthetic problems, but it might also help experts in aesthetics, uninitiated into the depths of process philosophy, recognize Whitehead as a rich source of aesthetic ideas.

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Botond Csuka
Hungarian University of Sports Science
Department of Social Sciences
H-1123 Budapest, Alkotás út 42–48.
csukabotond@gmail.com

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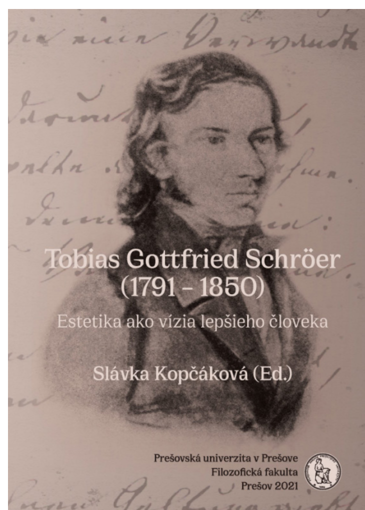
The functions and place of Aesthetics compendia in the development of aesthetics thinking in Slovakia

Zuzana Slušná

KOPČÁKOVÁ, Slávka, (Ed.) – ORIŇÁKOVÁ, Slávka – ZUBAL, Pavol (2021) *Tobias Gottfried Schröer (1791-1850). Estetika ako vízia lepšieho človeka.* [Tobias Gottfried Schroer (1791-1850). Aesthetics as a vision of a better person.] Prešov: University of Prešov, Faculty of Arts. 321 p. ISBN 978-80-555-2767-3.



In recent times, several publications have emerged that critically reevaluate the development of theoretical perspectives. One notable contribution is the monograph titled *Tobias Gottfried Schroer (1791-1850) Aesthetics as a vision of a better person*, supervised by Slávka Kopčáková and co-authored by Slávka Oriňáková and Pavol Zubal. This monograph sheds light on T.G. Schröer as a polymath, esthetician, man of letters, playwright, and music enthusiast. His activities and writings were influenced by the cultural, political, and linguistic climate of 19th-century Prešpork. They went beyond the implicit standards that usually govern the inclusion criteria within academic disciplines. These criteria encompass not only innovative originality but also the research writing style and emphasis on the "national" context.

The authors, Slávka Kopčáková, Slávka Oriňáková, and Pavol Zubal, critically highlight the limitations of applied models used to conceptualize the history of research thought. Considering the prevailing context and the need to describe national traditions as self-sufficient, unique, and comparatively equal to other established traditions, certain concepts and approaches did not fall under the purview of "big science" for various reasons. Schröer, despite being a profound thinker and an original contributor to aesthetics theory and teaching, received sporadic attention in the history of philosophy and aesthetics. However, he enjoyed national and international recognition, and was renowned as an educator who influenced several members of the Štúr generation. His reputation even extended beyond the borders of Prešpork during that time.

Based on a critical analysis of a section of Schröer's work, the editor suggests expanding the institutionalization model of Central European aesthetics thinking through the concept of "school aesthetics". Drawing an analogy to the term "school philosophy" (Meszároš, 2008), the authors perceive school aesthetics as a distinct field within aesthetics theory, whose outputs are preserved in the form of texts such as compendia, manuals, or recorded lectures, but whose primary function was to serve as a system of knowledge that was easily memorable, adoptable, applicable for further learning and practical use.

School aesthetics encompasses a portion of aesthetics theory that was functionally applied as the foundation of the teaching process in higher education institutions. It was in these institutions that future authors involved in shaping and strengthening national cultural identity acquired their knowledge. Within such systems, the compilation nature of propositions, eclecticism, and the absence of originality are not reasons for marginalizing or excluding authors from the discipline's history.

The authors establish a connection between the distinctiveness of school aesthetics, exemplified by Schröer's writings, and the educational system in Hungary. They elucidate the textual strategies employed in the preparation of textbooks and compendia. Schröer, in his work, synthesized into a textbook the contemporary knowledge system of various disciplines he covered, including Latin and its grammar, classical philology, German literature and grammar, aesthetics, art history, politics, pedagogy, and aesthetics education as the education of taste or practical aesthetics. Within the framework of Central European aesthetics, the authors highlight the multi-ethnic and multilingual nature of Prešpork, which enabled T.G. Schröer to transcend regional boundaries and become part of the broader Central European context. The strength of the monograph lies in the authors' deep understanding of aesthetic theory concepts and approaches. They contextualize their study within similar research conducted in Slovakia and offer an innovative assessment of philosophical and aesthetic writings. They perceive aesthetics theory as a multi-layered field that extends beyond its core, encompassing a specific periphery. Placing "school aesthetics" on this (stereotypically conceptualized as uncreative) periphery, following established national concepts, is not seen as a limitation or deficiency.

Slávka Kopčáková and her colleagues clarify the functions of "school aesthetics", which encompass the rich tradition of aesthetics, literary studies, and philosophy-based outputs from professors at evangelical colleges and similar educational institutions.

In addition to providing a unified conceptual framework, the approach also considers the temporal dynamics of the phenomena being described and analyzed. The authors view aesthetics theory as an autonomous field of knowledge, precisely positioned at the intersection of philosophy and the arts. They recognize that aesthetics theory is a dynamic cultural and social phenomenon shaped by social relationships and institutional ties.

One notable aspect is the critical discussion of the functions of knowledge that is generated and created outside of academia and universities. This knowledge played a significant role in shaping the foundations of theoretical disciplines prior to the establishment of national research institutions. The monograph paints a portrait of T.G. Schröer as an educated and well-read individual who was deeply connected to the culture and communities of his contemporary Prešpork, seamlessly integrating himself into the ethnically diverse population of the city. The first chapter of the book, titled 'Tobias Gottfried Schröer (1791-1850). Aesthetics as a Vision of a Better Person', written by Kopčáková, provides a biographical overview that introduces the political, cultural, and social atmosphere of Prešpork and Hungary during that time (pages 11-64).

The core of the book is the second chapter, titled 'Aesthetics and Aesthetics Education in Tobias Gottfried Schröer's Work', authored by Kopčáková and Oriňáková (pages 65-155). Their aim is to position Schröer's approach within the context of Central European aesthetics thinking. The authors employ a complex interdisciplinary research methodology, drawing from aesthetics, literary studies, classical philology, pedagogy, and drama. They delve into greater detail regarding Schröer's key work, Isagoge in eruditionem aesthetics (1842). They outline Schröer's aesthetics system, which is both conventional and eclectic, while also adhering to contemporary didactic principles and recommendations.

The success of the authors' approach is evidenced by the fact that Schröer's textbooks were not only known and used within Hungary but also beyond its borders. Schröer respect the contemporary division of aesthetics theory into two areas. General aesthetics encompasses the reflection of the laws of aesthetic perception and experience, as well as aesthetics categories that emphasize beauty. It also provides a summary of central aesthetic concepts from the past, offering a brief overview of their proponents. So-called 'special aesthetics', on the other hand, involves the description of the theory and aesthetics of individual art forms.

Although Schröer's concept does not surpass the established standards of the time, his texts were utilized as educational materials, extending their readership to home education contexts. Aesthetics education, as presented by Schröer, aimed to shape individuals towards humanity, cultivating and accumulating humanity itself. This vision of a better person aligns with the concept of anthropological aesthetics. Drawing inspiration from Schiller's idea of an aesthetic being (*homo aestheticus*), Schröer highlights the formation of morals and religious sentiments as the key function of aesthetics education. It is worth noting that Schröer's inclination towards German culture and his admiration for figures like Schiller, Goethe, and Hegel are dominant in his theses on aesthetics education, even considering his ethnicity.

The monograph titled *Application of Aesthetics Education in Teaching Languages and Literature, Tobias Gottfried Schröer's Art Works*, authored by S. Oriňáková and P. Zubal, brings new insights to an area that has received considerable attention from scholars, particularly those from Hungary and Germany (pages 157-232). The authors shed light on the context of teaching languages (Greek, Latin, German) and literature. Education in the humanities and classical philology was an integral part of Schröer's teaching, both at the boys' lyceum and the girls' high school. Latin remained the language of learning and education for Schröer, and within classical philology, he also studied ancient culture and literature. In the Hungarian school system, Latin held a prominent position in higher education and served as preparation for university studies, with this dominance being firmly established and legislatively supported. While German was Schröer's native language and the language of his professional activities in lyceum education, it gradually began to be replaced by Hungarian in the 1840s. Schröer's works, along with his teaching-related activities and overall body of work, played a significant role in the institutionalization of the teaching of aesthetics as a school subject. Due to the popularity of his writings, the authors consider Schröer as one of the founding figures of Central European school aesthetics, where aesthetics education is defined as the activation of mental faculties leading to the cultivation of taste and a good life.

The layout and organization of the monograph demonstrate the authors' adeptness in language and stylistic skills. A promising aspect for the future is the authors' ambition to prepare annotated editions of the most important works of this previously overlooked figure in the history of aesthetics. The inclusion of rich visual material from Slovak and foreign archives, as well as the trilingual summary (English, German, and Hungarian), reaffirms the importance of the topic in the research on 19th-century aesthetics thinking and the teaching of aesthetics.

Zuzana Slušná
Institute of Aesthetics and Art Culture
Faculty of Arts, University of Presov, Slovakia
zuzana.slusna@unipo.sk

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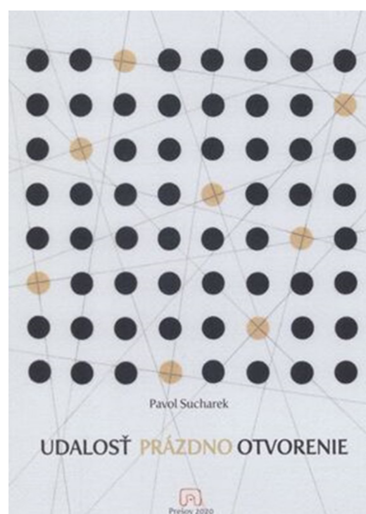
Fundamentálne koncepty Maldineyho myslenia

Damián Michalco

Sucharek, P. (2020) *Udalosť, prázdno, otvorenie: Henri Maldiney a fenomenológia umenia*. Prešov: Filozofická fakulta. ISBN 978-80-555-2612-6.



Pavol Sucharek pôsobí na Inštitúte filozofie Filozofickej fakulty Prešovskej univerzity v Prešove a je etablovaným autorom filozofických textov pre slovenskú vedeckú i širšiu odbornú verejnosť. Dôkazom sú jeho preklady odborných textov francúzskych autorov, napr. Emmanuela Lévinasa (*Štyri talmudické čítania*), Jeana Baudrillarda (*Heslá*) a Frédérica Grosa (*Filozofia chôdze*). Vo výbere autorov môžeme identifikovať vedecko-výskumné zameranie autora, ktoré sa opiera o cieľavedomé vnímanie jazykového a kritického myslenia v témach súčasnej kontinentálnej filozofie, resp. fenomenologickej estetiky, filozofickej etiky a metafyziky frankofónneho prostredia. Publikácia *Udalosť, prázdno, otvorenosť* (2020) nasleduje autorovu potrebu priblížiť fenomenológiu vo filozofii 20. storočia v kontexte estetického obratu v podobe kompaktnej publikácie, ktorá je výsledkom dlhoročného štúdia predmetnej literatúry.

Kniha je členená na päť hlavných častí, ktoré predstavujú uzatvorenú štruktúru s vlastným autorským presahom do logickej synergie textu: *Fenomenológia alebo fenomenologická estetika?* (s. 15–29), „*Bod obratu*“ (s. 29–66), *Udalosť, prázdno, otvorenie* (s. 67–109), *Východ a Západ – Odlišná bojová stratégia s rovnakým výsledkom?* (s. 111–132) a *Praktická existenciálna fenomenológia* (s. 133–160). Apendix tvoria časti *Hommage a Henri Maldiney, Myslieť. Tvoriť.*, a *L'événement-avènement. Prichádzajúca udalosť* (s. 161–172) a knihu uzatvára kapitola *Súčasný stav výskumu* (s. 173–180).

Prvé dve časti knihy prinášajú vysvetlenie kontextov vzniku a vývoja fenomenológie. Autor sa sústreďuje na objasnenie rozvetvenia filozofie a jej odklon od tradičnej západnej metafyziky. Sucharek analyzuje pojem umeleckej formy, čím chce prehĺbiť a možno aj revidovať vybrané všeobecné charakteristiky fenomenologických analýz Merleau-Pontyho. Na aktualizáciu a prehĺbenie využíva Maldineyho práce a Kandinského dielo, ktoré sú súčasným rozmerom francúzskej filozofie. Prostredníctvom produktívneho zosúladenia náhľadov Kandinského a fenomenológie umenia sprítomňuje Maldineyho poňatie podstaty umeleckého diela s ohľadom na špecifické chápanie abstrakcie ako ústrednú tézu autentického umenia. V tretej kapitole sa Sucharek následne venuje výlučne Maldineymu a jeho predstave fungovania elementárnych skúsenostných procesov v rovine otvorenej a dynamickej jednoty.

Zásadné filozofické aspekty pre osvetlenie ontologického štatútu umeleckej subjektivity a význam Maldineyho fenomenologickej estetiky Sucharek ponúka na pozadí interpretácie čínskej tušovej krajinomaľby vo štvrtej kapitole. V úvode kapitoly sa čitateľ dozvedá o všeobecnej podobe fenomenológie. Autor pomocou deskripcie predkladá niekoľko základných možností porozumenia genéze fenomenológie, resp. fenomenologickej estetiky. Ústrednou témou tu je fenomenologicko-estetický obraz predstaviteľov M.L. Dufrenna a J.-F. Lyotarda. Tvrdením „Hranice sa posunuli, do istej miery splynuli“ (s. 28), autor vyjadril naše ponímanie knihy. Fenomenológia sa pre autora knihy stáva nástrojom ako poukázať na význam umeleckej tvorby a ako porozumieť človeku, ktorý je otvorenejší voči svetu.

Ďalšie témy a okruhy autor premosťuje v párových výrazoch: existenciálna požiadavka umenia ako „bytia“, vnímanie a pociťovanie, zážitok a skúsenosť, udalosť a uvedomenie, otvorenie a prázdno. Všetky tieto oblasti umožňujú lepšie pochopenie Maldineyho myslenia, pričom Sucharek sa vyhýba bežným výkladom a priamočiarym analýzam, jeho zámerom je vysvetliť Maldineyho pojmy vo vzťahu k fenomenológii, napr.: priestor, forma, rytmus. V podkapitole *Hľadanie zákonitostí* alebo *Forma, Hĺbka, Prázdno* autor interpretuje a charakterizuje Maldineyho konštatovanie, že jediným modelom skutočného (autentického) umenia je abstraktné umenie na pozadí korelácie s Kandinského dielom. Sucharek ilustruje vlastnú pozíciu k filozofovaniu a umeniu s dôrazom na paralely medzi umením a fenomenológiou. Zdá sa, že autor (ako Maldiney) sa stretáva s príbuznými javmi, ktoré majú stabilný motivačný význam k filozofickej interpretácii Kandinského odkazu, ale i umeniu abstraktného maliarstva. Zaujímavá je špecifikácia jednotlivých diel ako ilustrácia významových rovín pojmov (napr. *Kompozícia VI*). Je možné konštatovať, že Sucharek sa snaží interpretovať fenomenologický princíp skúsenosti, ktorým vyjadruje svoj vzťah k uchopeniu problematiky a detailne to ukazuje v charakterizácii teoretického rámca „umeleckej tvorby“. Autor vymedzuje umeleckú tvorbu hlavne u Merleau-Pontyho, ale jeho stanoviská dopĺňa a prehlbuje v duchu argumentácie, že „k umeniu by sme nikdy

nemali pristupovať ʻzvonku'" (s. 51). Dozvedáme sa, že Maldiney chápe človeka ako bytosť, ktorá vyniká nie svojou schopnosťou myslieť, ale svojou schopnosťou pociťovať, vďaka čomu sa nám umelecké dielo sprítomňuje (s. 57– 61). Sucharek nás vyzýva k možnosti otvoriť sa chápaniu estetiky i vlastnej existencie vďaka ním koncipovanej estetickej skúsenosti. Nové spôsoby interakcie verejnosti s umením ilustroval na dynamickom príklade umeleckého vnímania a pociťovania vo väzbe na väzbu Prázdno/Nič – Otvorenie – Priestor, s konkrétnou aplikáciou na Kandinského *Kompozíciách*.

Jednou z najkvalitnejších častí predkladaného textu je Sucharekova kompozícia myšlienkového experimentu pri analýze a vysvetľovaní čínskej anekdoty, ktorú podľa slov autora „...objavil v Maldineyho knihe *Umenie a existencia*" (s. 113). Ukazuje vzťah umelca k vlastnému dielu berúc do úvahy aspekty umeleckej činnosti v klasickom čínskom myslení. Vysvetľuje v čom spočíva dynamika vízie, estetična prázdneho priestoru, a ako chápať moderné abstraktné umenie na podkladoch čínskeho chápania techniky, námetu či formy. Ako uvádza Gombrich (1992, s. 105): „cieľom ctižiadosti čínskych majstrov bolo nadobudnutie takej ľahkosti v práci so štetcom a tušom, aby dokázali zachytiť svoju vidinu, pokiaľ mali inšpiráciu" a autorovi sa to v tejto časti knihy podarilo. Možno sa bude čitateľovi zdať, že odpoveď vopred pozná a zdá sa mu táto pasáž knihy rozsiahla, no nie je to tak. Vyjadruje len základné taxonomické ciele autorovho zámeru „rozobrať" filozofické aspekty prázdna a dychu Maldineyho fenomenologickej estetiky a na tomto príklade je ilustrovaný vzťah filozofie a umenia – medzi chápaním súčasného umenia a východnej kultúry, čo indikuje interkultúrny projekt fenomenologickej tradície, ktorá má vďaka analýze Maldineyho koncepcie mnoho príbuzných aspektov s východoázijským myslením.

V závere knihy autor pracuje s existenciálnou analytikou, klinickou psychológiou a psychoterapiou, súčasnou antropológiou a sociálnou filozofiou. Najsilnejšiu časť publikácie prináša autor komentujúc východnú kultúru, vďaka ktorej sa len potvrdzuje, že autora nemožno kategorizovať ako teoretického akademika, ale ako myšlienkového praktika. Z komentárov o jednotlivcovi je zreteľné, že autor je otvorený vzťahu k svetu a bežnej skúsenosti sveta. Sucharek nám vysvetľuje ako sa jedinec sebauskutočňuje a ako jednotlivé pojmy (s ktorými Maldiney neoperuje) majú platnosť v praktickej časti filozofie. Pracuje s termínmi rytmus a otvorenie v medziach vzťahu k sebe, druhým a svetu a sme tu svedkami oživenia aplikovanej etiky (napr. bioetika, etika biznisu a pod.) a praktického použitia fenomenológie v psychoterapii. Doterajšiu analýzu autor uzatvára uplatnením Gestalt-terapie (s. 147–161), ktorá je východiskom trojuholníka – telo, myseľ a emócie, ktoré sú v jednotlivých častiach knihy načrtnuté, vysvetlené a vedú k jej záverom. Samotná terapia slúži ako plátno umelca, o ktorom viac pojednáva analýza v jadre knihy a dostáva sa k technikám atraktívnej podoby foriem klinickej psychológie – arteterapii.

V prípade recenzovanej publikácie ide o originálny projekt predloženia fenomenologickej koncepcie Henriho Maldineyho v širších súvislostiach slovenskému prostrediu. Sucharekov text nás vedie od fenomenológie k psychológii, od psychológie k psychoanalýze naspäť k základným zložkám fenomenológie ako prístupu, vďaka ktorému kontinentálna filozofia zažila rozmach a je zásadnou pre oblasť umenia, umeleckej teórie, kritiky a estetiky. Ciele predloženej publikácie sú viac než nadmieru splnené a autor čitateľovi ponúka podnetné interpretácie v jazykovo bohatom texte.

Autor v analyzovanej knihe otvára priestor v našom prostredí k neznámej fenomenologickej vetve a pozýva nás na otvorenú filozofickú diskusiu o nej. Ide o kompaktnú publikáciu, ktorej jednotlivé kapitoly sú adekvátnym obrazom odkazu Henriho Maldineyho. Avšak, skutočný význam tejto publikácie a jej opodstatnenie pre teoretický diskurz sa ukáže až časom.

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Damián Michalco
Inštitút filozofie
Filozofická fakulta Prešovskej univerzity v Prešove
damian.michalco@smail.unipo.sk

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