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Editors: Lars Aagaard-Mogensen *et al.*
Guest co-editor: Jane Forsey

Wassard Elea
Elea Arte Club onlus
Via La Chiazzetta 27
I-84046 Ascea (Sa)
Italia

WassardElea@gmail.com

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Challenging the Pleasure Principle (A Nietzschean Approach)

Meng-Shi Chen
(Tung-Fang Design Institute)

“I have heard of men who have travelled into countries where horrible executions were to be daily witnessed, for the sake of that excitement which the sight of suffering never fails to give ... You will call this cruelty, I call it curiosity”.

Charles Robert Maturin¹

As far as the term “aesthetics”, which stems from the Greek word *aesthesis*, meaning “sense perception” or “sensation”, is concerned, the aesthetic seems to be inevitably linked with the feelings of pleasure (and displeasure), for pleasure is the simple, if not fundamental, sensational feeling of our direct and transient conscious experience. To say whether a certain artwork gives us pleasure or not is many times tantamount to the expression of how we like it, and this seemingly unavoidable link meanwhile presumes that there is a unique pleasure arising from aesthetic appreciation, as Jerrold Levinson points out: “Without a distinction of aesthetic pleasure taken in an artwork and other pleasures to be had from it, it is unlikely one will be able to explain satisfactorily what the proper appreciation of art – that is, its appreciation as art – might consist in”.²

However, while the terminology of “aesthetic pleasure” has been systemized and popularized in the discourses of aesthetics since the eighteenth century, it seems equally inevitable that the grasp of aesthetic appreciation, in terms of our sensual or emotional responses to works of art, has been repeatedly confronted with the ambiguity of pleasure especially in the reactions to the works of art that arouse negative emotions. It is widely assumed that many people seem to derive pleasure from horror movies and novels,

¹ *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Nebraska UP 1961, p. 160-163.

² *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*, Cornell UP 1996, p. 3.

works which seem designed to shock, terrify, and disgust us. Yet why are some people so willing to put themselves through disturbing experiences that certain works of art provide? Or to put it simply, how can we find pleasure in painful experiences? Apparently, to answer these questions is at the same time to reaffirm the widely-accepted hypothesis that the aesthetic is linked with pleasure. I nonetheless would like to argue that such questions indeed arise from the problematics of this linkage by investigating the perplexing reactions to the spectacles that provoke negative emotions.

Instead of discussing how the artistic or fictional works, best exemplified by horror films perhaps, terrify and disgust us yet apparently and paradoxically appeal to us at the same time, I choose an alternative example for the attempt to highlight the problematics of the hedonic approach to the resolution of this enigmatic phenomenon. By presenting seeing as an activity in which affective power manifests itself, I have chosen the spectatorship of cruel public execution as the example. It is an excellent example because long before the age of media along with capitalist modernity and mass reproduction, public executions, designed to be fearful and spectacular as Foucault aptly points out, were always “live shows” that had direct impacts on collective feelings and thus were unquestionably powerful in terms of the spectators’ affective reactions to the distasteful sights.¹ The initial concern is that the desire of experiencing the intensity and limits that are far beyond the banality of daily lives, as revealed in the popularity of horror movies, has never faded away since the time when public display of execution was overwhelmingly popular.

Whereas to draw a parallel between watching horrendous scenes of public execution in pre-modern times and watching horror movies in modern days may overlook the seriousness of law, justice and state power embodied in the former as if it also reflects the marked characteristic of the latter – the sheer consumption of entertaining commodities – it is the historical evidence that public executions had usually been regarded as good entertainment accompanied by perplexing pleasure.² To be attracted by the

¹ *Discipline and Punish*, trans. A. Sheridan, Vintage Books 1979, pp. 23-31.

² There is a vivid example described by Charles Dickens on the night of November 13, 1849: “When I came upon the scene at midnight the shrillness of the cries and howls that were raised from time to time, denoting they came from a concourse of boys and girls already assembled in the best places, made my blood run cold. As the night went on screeching, laughing, and the yelling in strong chorus of the parodies of negro melodies with the substitution of Mrs. Manning for Susannah were added to these ... Fighting, fainting, whistling, imitations of Punch, brutal jokes, tumultuous

sight of atrocity, torture, pain and suffering is definitely not rare. On the other hand, it is indisputable that some people enjoy being exposed to feelings of un-safety and insecurity. For them a moderate dose of hazard could animate them and add pleasure to routine, if not boring, daily life. To draw the parallel between the spectatorship of public execution and horror movies is therefore to highlight the perplexing desire and fascination of the “moderate” feelings of horror and danger. Very often, seeking and chasing excitement with a moderate dose of hazard eventually turns into mundane pleasure in modern times, which seems to naturally explain why some people are so willing to experience the seemingly unpleasant experiences. Given that the success of modern entertainment businesses is usually based on the mass psychology associated with hedonism, it is not without reason to think of the pursuit of pleasure as the main reason. This is why my first attempt is to trace the possible origin of the hedonistic hypothesis as the determinant motive for seeking seemingly unpleasant experiences and point out the problems this hypothesis may encounter.

No Cruelty, No Festival. Both Nietzsche¹ and Foucault present outstanding arguments, in *On the Genealogy of Morality and Discipline and Punish* respectively, to convince us that our cruel tendency has not been swept away by the disappearance of the public display of cruel punishment. As Nietzsche reminds us of the old proverb – no cruelty, no festival – the cruelty disclosed in various forms of corporeal punishment seems to inevitably include feelings of pleasure. Based on Nietzsche’s articulation, it is easy to assume that it is the mundane characteristics and inescapable tendency of cruelty to generate pleasure in us that made people thrill at the public display of execution common in the old days. Cruelty embodied in such forms of punishment might be just a small piece of our whole bloody civilization. And if we bring in the mundane phenomena of the popularity of fictional and artistic representations of cruelty, and its related matters – violence, terror, ugliness, disgust and evil, etc., all of which can be reflected in severe punishment – we actually do not need Nietzsche and Foucault, not to say

demonstrations of indecent delight when swooning women were dragged out of the crowds by the police with their dresses disordered, gave a new zest to the general entertainment”, cited by R.R. Wilson, *The Hydra’s Tale*, Alberta UP 2002, p. 139.

¹ I refer to *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. R-P. Horstmann, J. Norman, trans. J. Norman, Cambridge UP 2002, hereafter *BGE*; *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. K-A. Pearson, trans. C. Diethe, Cambridge UP 1997, hereafter *GM*; *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale, Viking 1968, hereafter *WP*.

Sade, to remind us of our true nature, although their profound insights are extremely valuable.

However, I will argue here that in terms of the appeal of the spectacle of torture, to experience pleasure is nonetheless not the appropriate reason for crowds to gather around the execution grounds, whether or not pleasure might arise from the sense of justice or cruel intention. The assumption that the spectacle of cruel punishment attracts the crowd because there is pleasure in watching the criminal being cruelly tortured is suspect. To be attracted is not equal to feeling pleasurable. The pleasure principle as the premise of the attraction of cruel spectacle should be put into question. After analyzing Nietzsche's arguments on the pleasure and punishment that seem naturally yoked together, we will see how inevitable it is that such an interpretation becomes a dead end if it is based on a pleasure principle. By tracing Nietzsche's accounts in the following, I will show why the connections between punishment and pleasure are emphatically discussed by him and what problems he may encounter and settle.

Dismissing the pleasure-oriented hypothesis. In the second essay of his *Genealogy*, Nietzsche questions the hypothesis that punishment arises from our sense of justice while strongly holds the view that punishment can nonetheless generate pleasure. Nietzsche's conviction has not only disintegrated the pseudo-hypothesis that justice plays a role in stimulating the enjoyment of the scenes of cruel punishment but also reach to the assumption that enjoyment of the others' suffering is an unavoidable and even necessary condition in human history.

As far as historical origin is concerned, if punishment stems from the ideas of justice of which the triumph would bring us joy, then the hypothesis that we cheer the wrongdoers' sufferings in the punishment they deserve is verified. The speculation that punishment originated from the sense of justice sounds reasonable and natural to us, yet the issue of origin, as one of Nietzsche's projects in his *Genealogy*, is commonly treated as that of instinct and natural phenomena that makes us miss the opportunity or lack the intention to do further investigation. In fact, punishment was never meted out because of the sense of justice in terms of the "primitive" motivation, as Nietzsche suggests.¹ To avoid the overly simple reduction of the ori-

¹ "That inescapable thought, which is now so cheap and apparently natural, and which has had to serve as an explanation of how the sense of justice came about at all on earth, 'the criminal deserves to be punished because he could have acted otherwise', is actually an extremely late and refined form of human judgment and infer-

gin as some English genealogist did, after he denies the hypothesis that punishment arises from our senses of justice Nietzsche offers us a different view, located in a more economic and material way, that seems to solve the enigmatic question of why and how pleasure might be coupled with punishment.

Based on the etymological similarity of the German words *Schuld* (guilt) and *Schulden* (debts) Nietzsche develops a concept that to feel guilty of doing something wrong to someone is to owe him a debt, and therefore the equivalence must be sought after the asymmetry of the economic relationship between debtor and creditor is built up. We can see how Nietzsche presents the correlation of punishment and pleasure based on the debtor-creditor relationship from the following arrangement of his arguments:

- It is a fact that the state of equivalence makes us feel pleasurable in mutual relationships.
- If the equivalence is turned down as what happens between the debtor and the creditor, to reach the state of equivalence again some compensation must be made.
- And the compensation can be made up through the debtor's suffering.
- Therefore if the debtor suffers (which means he is making repayment), the creditor must have pleasure (because of his feeling of compensation and equivalence).
- But to what extent can the debtor's suffering be "a compensation and make the creditor feel pleasurable"? To the degree that to make someone suffer is pleasure.

While Nietzsche's arguments sound sharp enough to articulate the impartible connection between punishment and pleasure, it nonetheless seems that Nietzsche cannot or does not want to go further to answer the question – why to cause someone suffer is pleasure – and treat it as a mere fact. Nietzsche's psychological interpretation of how pleasure might arise in the cruel punishment is therefore stuck on the repetition of the factual depiction rather than moving toward a satisfactory explanation. However, Nietzsche himself seems to have sensed this problem and argued:

I say all this in speculation: because such subterranean things are difficult to fathom out, besides being embarrassing; and anyone who clumsily tries to interject the concept "revenge"

ence; whoever think it dates back to the beginning is laying his coarse hands on the psychology of primitive man in the wrong way", (*GM II*: 4).

has merely obscured and darkened his own insight, rather than clarified it (– revenge itself just leads us back to the same problem: “how can it be gratifying to make someone suffer?”), (*GM II*: 6).

Does Nietzsche try to tear down all the explanatory hypotheses he makes just to point out the difficulty or even impossibility in figuring out how it might be gratifying to make someone suffer? What difficulties does Nietzsche confront here? Can we make any supplementary explanation for Nietzsche to clear away the difficulties? Later we will realize that Nietzsche’s “ironic” statement above actually saves himself from falling into the pitfall of the pleasure principle which he detests.

If we follow Nietzsche’s “logic” from the very beginning, we can first notice that Nietzsche adopts the conceptions of economy and locates the issue in the contractual relationship between creditor and debtor which is “as old as the very conception... referring back to the basic forms of buying, selling bartering, trade and traffic”, (*GM II*: 4). It is the point of view of economy that makes Nietzsche inevitably concerned about *efficiency*. This is why when the paradoxical task of nature is revealed by Nietzsche in the outset of the second essay of *Genealogy* – to breed the animal with the prerogative of promise – memory, pain, suffering and cruel punishment cannot but enter into the process as to play the roles of acceleration to fulfill the task. Likewise, following this logic based on the viewpoint of economy and efficiency, pleasure can also play the role as an incentive to fulfill the task – that the pursuit of equivalence and compensation through cruel punishment brings about pleasure helps human animals achieve the goal of the task.

This supplementary explanation nonetheless merely highlights the nature of cruelty – cruelty *must entail* pleasure (if not cruelty *is* pleasure), for cruelty as inflicting pain to the others has already presupposed pleasure. Although it just reminds us of the nature of cruelty it nonetheless helps us question the hypothesis that pleasure is out of the sense of justice, for pleasure does not need to arise from the sense of the triumph of justice but can simply be found in the cruelty of punishment. Yet as far as our core question – why there is pleasure in sensing the other’s suffering – is concerned, the problem is not solved at all. Besides, to say *pleasure*, which is entailed in inflicting *pain* to the others, is the incentive to fulfill the task just highlights the paradoxical nature of this task, and what is even more problematic, it

indeed turns to be a hedonistic argument that Nietzsche questions a lot,¹ for it equals saying the deepest motivation of cruelty is the pursuit of pleasure.

The pitfall of hedonism. What hedonism argues is that all human action is motivated by the pursuit of happiness and the avoidance of pain. As we have seen above, it turns out to be highly problematic if we try to adopt the hedonistic approach to solve the riddle as to why there is pleasure in painful punishment. As Ivan Soll points out in his eloquent essay, Nietzsche not only detests hedonism but also tries hard to replace it with the conception of will to power that further builds up his whole philosophical enterprise.² The switch of the issue from the pleasure principle to power leads Soll to argue: “the satisfaction [of the creditor] then consists more in *my [the creditor’s] power to make him [the debtor] suffer* than in the mere occurrence of his suffering... it is not the mere occurrence of suffering in others that gratifies me but my being able to make them suffer”.³ Yet although Soll’s ancillary interpretation replaces the pleasure principle with power to explain why cruelty is so prevalent, it nonetheless bogs down over the issue of the mystery of how there is pleasure in cruelty.

A problem related to the old philosophical question about other minds is revealed by Soll: if there is really pleasure arising from the other’s pain, how does one know the other is really feeling pain and suffering so to feel pleasurable? “Why should another’s happiness or unhappiness produce a similar state in me?” he asks.⁴ To solve this problem, Soll adopts a Wittgensteinian approach and argues that it is through “belief” that the torturer, or the creditor in Nietzsche’s word, can assure that the sufferer, the debtor, is feeling pain.⁵ The idea of the requirement of belief also corresponds to the

¹ Nietzsche clearly raises the critical voice on hedonism and its related psychology of moral concepts: “Hedonism, pessimism, utilitarianism, eudamonianism: these are all ways of thinking that measure the value of things according to *pleasure and pain*, which is to say according to incidental states and trivialities”, (*BGE* 225).

² “Nietzsche on Cruelty, Asceticism, and the Failure of Hedonism”, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. R. Schacht, California UP 1994, pp. 168-171.

³ *Ibid.* p. 175.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 172.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 173. Although Soll does not point out that his argument is enlightened by Wittgenstein, a famous passage regarding the knowledge of pain is: “‘I can only believe that someone else is in pain, but I know it if I am’. – Yes: one can make the decision to say ‘I believe he is in pain’ instead of ‘He is in pain’”, *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell 1997, p. 303. The requirement of belief points out the very

theories emphasizing the aspects of cognition entailed in emotions. What they argue is that a full and complete emotion arises in a context where some propositionally formulated thought grounds and explains its occurrence. By such accounts fear, for instance, entails holding a belief that one is in danger. “No belief, no emotion” turns out to be an important idea held by the cognitivist theorists of emotions.¹ Whereas the idea of linking emotion with cognition as Soll and the other cognitivist theorists do may be persuasive, it is partially due to the idea of the requirement of belief that makes Soll’s approach problematic.

While Soll seems to offer a plausible way to explain how there might be pleasure from the feeling of the other’s pain, we can nonetheless notice that his power-oriented approach, according to him intended by Nietzsche, actually does not save us from the pitfall of pleasure-pain-oriented hedonism, for his explanation starts with and sticks on the premise of the pleasure principle, even though the pleasure is now from the feeling of power.

That said, the requirement of “belief” in our knowledge of the other’s feeling more or less presumes the motivation of hedonistic intention – I *must* first believe that you are suffering when I torture you because I *want* to feel pleasure from your suffering. But what is contrary to the hedonistic intention should be: I do not need to believe you are suffering because I do not need to feel pleasure (or I do not care if I feel pleasure) when I punish you, I simply have the power (feel powerful) to do so. Soll unfortunately attaches his supplement of Nietzsche’s explanation to the motivation of pleasure but not power as what he intends to do, and consequently it turns out to be at variance with what Nietzsche says about the trait of pleasure and its relations with power in *The Will to Power*: “pleasure is only a symptom of the feeling of power attained, a consciousness of a difference (– there is no striving for pleasure: but pleasure supervenes when that which is being striven for is attained: pleasure is an accompaniment, pleasure is not the motive –)”, (*WP* p. 688).

essence of pain – my own pain absolutely cannot be doubted, while the other’s pain can absolutely be doubted – as Elaine Scarry’s pioneer study on pain shows us, *The Body in Pain*, Oxford UP 1985, pp. 4, 7, 13.

¹ Noël Carroll terms it a “cognitive/evaluative theory” by saying that “a concurrent emotional state is one in which some physically abnormal state of felt agitation has been caused by the subject’s cognitive construal and evaluation of his/her situation”, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, Routledge 1990, p. 27.

To challenge hedonism by trying to replace the pleasure principle with will to power while searching for the solution in the former is just like what Nietzsche says of the English psychologists who lack “historical spirit”: “it is obvious that the real breeding-ground for the concept ‘good’ has been sought and located in the wrong place by this theory [of the English psychologists’ moral genealogy]: the judgment ‘good’ does not emanate from those to whom goodness is shown! Instead it has been ‘the good’ themselves”, (*GM I*: 2). Yet one may realize that it is obviously difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the feeling of pleasure from that of power. As Henry Staten accurately points out, what Nietzsche means by pleasure in the quotation in the above paragraph is ambiguous – whether it is in the ordinary sense as we enjoy a great meal or in a deep sense as we fulfill a difficult task or conquer a tough situation is not totally decided. Yet as long as it is discussed with power, it seems to relate to the latter – to pleasure in the deep sense. Pleasure can be regarded as a supplement of will to power but not as belonging to the essence of will to power.¹ That said, the will to power *can be* pleasurable but not the will to power *is* pleasurable. In this sense, the counterexample of the requirement of belief in a hedonistic approach is verified – to exercise or feel power, the torturer does not need to hold any belief concerning the sufferer’s pain.

So far we have seen, whether from my own or Soll’s supplementary explanations, there arises a persistent problem in explaining how one might feel pleasure upon the other’s pain, and inevitably turns into the hedonistic result for which the paradoxical nature between pleasure and pain is arguably unsolvable as far as hedonism itself is concerned. Indeed, there is a serious problem that makes the above problem persistent, namely, *the premise that there is pleasure in making others suffer has repeatedly been taken as an improper approach toward the explanation of the “appeal” (“allure” or “attraction”) of cruelty* as proclaimed in the old provision – no cruelty, no festival. If there is a cheerful and festive feature in the public displays of cruelty and torture it is not because witnessing them is pleasurable but because they are simply attractive. The attraction of something does not need to presuppose the pleasure of experiencing it.²

¹ *Nietzsche’s Voice*, Cornell UP 1990, p. 90.

² In terms of how one might be attracted to the apparently horrendous scenes of cruel punishment, there is another weakness or aperture in Nietzsche’s accounts. Nietzsche deals largely with a pleasure that comes from the one who enjoys another’s suffering and simultaneously is the agent of that suffering, i.e., the enjoyment of creditors is

A genuine seductive lure to life. From the analysis of Nietzsche's accounts of the relationship of pleasure and punishment, we can find that trying to explain the appeal of cruelty and its spectacle based on the pleasure principle unfortunately leads us to nowhere. Despite treating the proposition – “there is pleasure in watching the others' sufferings” – as merely a depicted, hypothetical fact, we seem unable to give further explanation of *why* it happens. We can also see that there is a possibility that Nietzsche's raising the issue of the relationship between pleasure and punishment is to bring out the discussions of moral conceptions of responsibility, guilt, and bad conscience rather than verifying the hypothetical claim that cruel punishment and its spectacle *do* engender pleasure. All these may indicate that the explanation of the appeal of the spectacle of cruel punishment based on the pleasure principle is a nonstarter since it wrongly assumes that people derive pleasure from the spectacle and that pleasure is all they are seeking.

If the problem caused by the viewpoint of the pleasure principle does not appear to be too serious in Nietzsche's treatment of the relationship of punishment and pleasure, it is partially because Nietzsche handles it as a mere “postulation”, as Nietzsche himself utters in the earlier quotation. Indeed, it is not until the third essay of *Genealogy* of which asceticism is the topic that the problem of the pleasure principle is fully exposed. Whereas the satisfactions of cruelty raise the issue of why the others' pain and sufferings can be “pleasurable” to or enjoyable for me, those of asceticism pose the greater enigma of how my own pain and suffering can be “pleasurable”

from the pain and suffering that the debtors must compensate. Yet given the fact that most onlookers around execution grounds are unlikely to be the agents of the criminal's sufferings, the crucial question is how Nietzsche can say about the innumerable cases that one person enjoys the sufferings of the others that he himself does not bring about. How can some onlookers enjoy the criminal's being tortured if the criminal's misdeeds do not directly cause them any loss and pain? Soll reckons that, with Nietzsche's theoretical commitment, it is not difficult for someone to argue for the case in dealing with this issue. He thus offers an assumptive account by arguing that it is through the process of identification located in the power relation that one person may enjoy the suffering of another but is not the agent of that suffering: “where the person who enjoys the suffering of another is not also the agent of that suffering, the satisfaction can be located in a sense of power only to the extent that the spectator can *identify with* the perpetrators of the suffering”. Again, Soll seems to have solved the problem with the notion of identification operated by power, but if we look closer, we will find that he does not get himself off the hook of the pleasure principle and is thus unable to really replace it with the concept of power.

to or enjoyable for me. And solving this enigma based on the pleasure principle just adds substantially to the problem of self-contradiction, for the motivation of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain is now disturbed. The disorder of the originally assumptive pleasure-pain relations thus poses the problem of how to think a pleasure that transcends the distinction between pain and pleasure. As Staten points out: “the notion of self-enjoyment [that joy and pain spill over into each other] in a way names the central problem of Nietzsche’s thought from beginning to end”,¹ we may wonder if this kind of approach to pleasure-pain relations embodied in asceticism can prevent us from falling into the overly simple explanation based on the pleasure principle?

So far my discussion of Nietzsche’s ideas about pleasure and punishment have stayed on the “primitive” stage, i.e., the pre-modern age when public displays of execution were still popular. Yet anyone familiar with Nietzsche’s projects knows that Nietzsche goes much further (and deeper) in arguing about the issue of enjoyment and cruelty. What is more uncanny and “interesting” compared with the relatively naïve enjoyment of barbarian cruelty is the phenomenon of asceticism where the enjoyment of self-directed cruelty takes place. Yet the development from barbarians who hurt the others and enjoy watching the others’ sufferings to ascetics who hurt themselves and turn to be the spectators of their own sufferings seems to mark a split that is not determined by collected history but individual psyche, for the “wild animal” – cruelty – has not been killed at all (*BGE* p. 229) but just “sublimated”, (*GM* II: 6); and the “monster” – asceticism – is not “inscribed in the records of human history as an exception and curiosity” but “one of the most wide-spread and long-lived facts there are”, (*GM* III: 11). In this sense, although Nietzsche’s treatment of asceticism is so profound, we probably don’t need to move from pre-sublimated history of barbarian cruelty to the stage of asceticism to see how the pleasure principle may pose problems, nor do we need self-enjoyment to think of a pleasure that transcends the distinction between pleasure and pain.

Regarding the reasons of the appeal of the spectacle of cruel punishment that might transcend the distinction between pleasure and pain, there are good lessons that we can learn from “primitive”, if not barbarian, peoples: “When suffering is always the first of the arguments marshaled against life, as its most questionable feature, it is salutary to remember the times when people made the opposite assessment, because they could not do with-

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 88.

out making people suffer and saw first-rate magic in it, a veritable *seductive lure to life*”, says Nietzsche, (GM II: 7). Is it not the “seductive lure” that has the power to “ignore” pleasure and pain? The fascinating power of allure not only has the potential to transcend pleasure and pain but also beauty and ugliness, as echoed by Aurel Kolnai in his account of disgust: “There is without doubt a certain invitation hidden in disgust as a partial element, I might say, a certain *macabre allure*”.¹ It is not ridiculous to imagine that some onlooker might be disgusted by the process of public execution while completely submitted to the allure of macabre images. Gathering around the execution ground and thrilling at the horrendous scene can be a kind of self-exploration that experiences the blurred border of life and death and tantalizes the edge of tolerance.

Beyond Pleasure and Pain. By “genuine seductive lure to life”, what Nietzsche means here may have a much larger picture referring to the state of our “existence” than the mere consideration of the spectatorship of the spectacle of cruelty and pain. However, given that the festive characteristics of the spectacle of cruel punishment may be a mirror of human nature as revealed by Nietzsche, it is not a bad idea that we take the seductive lure (of pain and suffering in life) as the isomorphic interpretive term. Seductive lure indicates our conflicting desire(s), which is vividly depicted by Socrates in his account of the story in which Leontius is attracted by the dead bodies that lay at the place of public execution:

I once heard a story which I believe, that Leontius the son of Aglaion, on his way up from the Piraeus under the outer side of the northern wall, becoming aware of dead bodies that lay at the place of public execution at the same time felt a desire to see them and a repugnance and aversion, and that for a time he resisted and veiled his head, but over-powered in despite of all by his desire, with wide staring eyes he rushed up to the corpses and cried, There, ye wretches, take your fill of the fine spectacle!²

While enjoyment is not particularly emphasized, many agitating aspects of desire, aversion, and attraction are elicited in this vivid story. Apparently, Leontius, who is not presented as a person of unusual disposition but just a man walking home, faces the conflicts of his desires and fails to resist the

¹ *Disgust*, Open Court Publishing 2004, p. 42.

² Plato *Republic* IV, ed. E. Hamilton & H. Cairns, trans. P. Shorey, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Princeton UP 1973, p. 682.

nasty one – the desire to see the grisly sight of corpses with putrid and repugnant smells. His feeling ashamed of the desire to take a look at the corpse indicates the psychological and ethical dilemma he faces. Plato recognizes this conflicting nature of the allure of unpleasant objects, and regards it as a symptom of a disunified mind at war with itself.

This seductive allure likely caused by conflicting desire is something like a “troubled fascination”. The presupposition here is that fascination is supposed to come with pleasure, therefore it troubles us if something fascinates us painfully. It troubles us because we tend to take it for granted that pleasure and pain are opposites; and here the problematics of the issue of pleasure comes back again. But are pleasure and pain really opposites? Nietzsche argues that they are not:

Pain is something different from pleasure – I mean it is not its opposite... there are even cases in which a kind of pleasure is conditioned by a certain rhythmic sequence of little unpleasurable stimuli: in this way a very rapid increase of the feeling of power, the feeling of pleasure, is achieved... it seems, a little hindrance that is overcome and immediately followed by another little hindrance that is overcome and immediately followed by another little hindrance that is again overcome – this game of resistance and victory arouses most strongly that general feeling of superabundant, excessive power that constitutes the essence of pleasure, (*WP* 699).

The reason to support Nietzsche’s argument that pleasure and pain are not opposites is that the pleasure may arise from the alleviation of antecedent conditions such as pain (which caused hindrance) and desire (the will to overcome the hindrance). While Nietzsche’s argument here is close to Freud’s concepts of pleasure in his *Beyond Pleasure Principle*, there is another physiological aspect that makes us think of them as opposites: we tend to try to understand pleasure in the same term that it is natural to understand pain, which is a *sensation* located in the specific spot of our body.

We can find Aristotle’s treatment of pleasure, especially in *Nicomachean Ethics*, quite helpful in clarifying the features of pleasure that are not necessarily opposite to those of pain. For Aristotle, pleasure is not a unitary phenomenon.¹ Unlike pain, pleasure does not designate any specifically recognized sensation or state of feeling. We can sense the sweetness in our mouth and feel pleasure when we eat candy, but to say that this feeling of

¹ Trans. W.D. Ross, Oxford UP 1963, esp. Book X.

pleasure is seemingly “happening” in our mouth as an opposite sensation to a toothache or any other oral pain is not accurate, for pleasure does not take place in a specific spot of our body (organs) like pain. One may argue that pain is not or can not be directed to objects that share particular features. Yet so far as physical sensation is concerned, there is absolutely no doubt about the pain, which we feel the same way every time unless there is a malfunction in our sensational system.

As the above examples show, we can see what Aristotle says that “as pleasant things differ, so do the pleasures arising from them”.¹ And “each of the pleasures is bound up with the activity it completes”.² In this sense, reducing the different feelings of the enjoyment of different activities to pleasure is a somewhat slack way to generalize our feelings, which echoes Nietzsche’s critique of the terminological usage of pleasure and displeasure:

“Displeasure” and “pleasure” are the most stupid means imaginable of expressing judgment: which naturally does not mean that the judgment made audible in this manner must be stupid. The abandonment of all substantiation and logicity, a Yes or No in the reduction to a passionate desire to have or a rejection, an imperative abbreviation whose utility is unmistakable: this is pleasure and displeasure. It originates in the central sphere of the intellect; its presupposition is an infinitely speeded-up perception, ordering, subsumption, calculating, inferring: pleasure and displeasure are always terminal phenomena, not “causes”, (WP p. 669).

Nietzsche’s statement here is apparently against the hedonistic view I reviewed that the ultimate motivation for human beings is pleasure. The presupposition of pleasure that Nietzsche refers to – ordering, subsumption, calculating, inferring – could be based on self-interests and become a convenient tool for making cultural, political or moral judgments. It is probably because of this potential for embellishing judgments, be they negative or positive, that Enlightenment theories of the aesthetic, with Kant’s the best example, wrenched pleasure free from states of self-interest and advocated a notion of disinterested pleasure, which can thus save beauty from the satisfaction of desire. That pleasure is such a serviceable term may explain why the speculations on the aesthetic have been so inevitably linked with pleasure, yet we have seen how Nietzsche deconstructs the presupposition of

¹ *Ibid.*, 1153 a6-7.

² *Ibid.*, 1175 129-30.

pleasure in the spectatorship of cruel punishment, which provides us an alternative example to think of a certain aesthetic experience in which the boundary between pleasure and pain is blurred.

If Nietzsche demystifies the paradoxically emotional reactions generated by the spectacle of punishment and suffering he meanwhile reminds us of the gratification of the desire to take up voluntary sufferings, dark yet all-too-human, perhaps without specific and concrete meaning, and to experience the intensity and limits that are far beyond the banality of daily lives. This desire inflamed by macabre allure has never faded away since the time when public display of execution was overwhelmingly popular. Beyond the spectatorial experience of cruel punishment, I hope to some degree also to have provided an alternative approach to grasp the perplexing response to art with apparently unbearable themes of negative emotions; and offered a different view to fathom the seemingly inevitable yet problematic linkage of the aesthetic and pleasure in the meantime.

The Pleasure Principle Challenge

Carsten Friberg

I am very pleased finding a presentation questioning a use of pleasure in aesthetics. Not because pleasure should not be included in aesthetics, but it seems sometimes misplaced. Or, it may reveal an approach to art and aesthetics which is one-sided, conservative and affirmative of ideologies that sometimes art is opposing.

How, for example, is pleasure related to watching Marina Abramović being subject to maltreatment by the audience invited to use 72 objects on her body, including scissors, scalpel and a gun loaded with one bullet in performance *Rhythm 0* from 1974 in Naples? Or to the *Verfremdungseffekt* of Brecht? Was it not Brecht's intentions to provoke another reaction than pleasure? And when The Situationists invited to shoot at pictures of politicians at *Destruction of RSG-6* in Odense, Denmark in 1963 – and if one could hit their eyes they were offered a free catalogue of the exhibition – did they think of the pleasure of shooting rather than the reflection the visitors were forced to make while they were not able to pass that part of the exhibition without taking a stand point? What kind of pleasure should we take in

projects of this year's *Dokumenta 14* at this moment taking place in Athens where more contributions – and perhaps the presence of *Dokumenta* in Athens – raise ethical questions that are not always pleasant to discuss?

Is there any pleasure to be found in these examples and if not, are they then excluded from being art? They are meant to provoke reactions, is it then the reaction that we take pleasure in? What is meant by pleasure after all?

My pleasure of finding a critique of how “the aesthetic is linked with pleasure” (p. 4) is, however, not without some questions to raise which I hope are not causing any unpleasant disagreements but a way to discuss how we proceed from this agreement. The questions are five.

(1) *Nietzsche*. I will begin with the beginning – with the title. In brackets it's called “A Nietzschean Approach”. What is meant by that?

- a. Is it an approach to a cultural phenomenon – the idea of pleasure explaining interest in painful events – for which Nietzsche offers insights we can use for analysis and discussion?
- b. Is it a reading of Nietzsche, i.e. a focus on how he interprets this phenomenon and we should investigate his reading and interpretation?
- c. Or is it an attempt of radical critique in the style of Nietzsche?

In short: should we focus on pleasure or have the pleasure of discussing Nietzsche and inspiration from him?

I believe it is the first of these three options but for a discussion of what we could call an attitude in Western culture I would expect more references than to Nietzsche. His interpretation is after all an interpretation, and despite him being famous for saying there are no facts, only interpretations he may also be famous for controversial interpretations. Hence, it is controversial to base too much on his critique alone. But perhaps it is a discussion of Nietzsche's interpretation rather than the phenomena in question but in that case we should engage more into his thinking. I believe it is the first but it is impossible not to deal also with a Nietzsche interpretation – and even Nietzsche inspiration.

(2) *The hedonistic trap*. A question is “how can we find pleasure in painful experiences?” (p. 4). A question that appears when pleasure is a premise for aesthetics and in an hedonistic approach to aesthetics. Such an approach must claim that we should feel pleasure in the assaults on Abramović, if her performance is art of course. A premise is introduced, the

premise that there is historical evidence (sic!) for how public execution has been seen as entertaining – at least in a description by Dickens (which can not be called pre-modern as this form of events is later called (p. 13)). To what extent this is evidence I believe is an open question. A century before Cesare Beccaria, in *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764) describes the reaction of the audience to death penalties as pity and resentment – while it ought to be beneficial fright as punishment is for teaching through affecting people to prevent new crime (§ 12) and not for entertainment – and certainly not giving pleasure (cf. § 28). Perhaps people did not behave like the enlightened philosopher intended, but we certainly need more evidence than Dickens. Did the Romans also feel pleasure in horror when they went to the gladiators' fight or did they simply just feel pleasantly entertained? And has the pleasure in public punishment been a hedonistic element or to feel a certain satisfaction – and is that also to be called pleasure? – by witnessing how a violated order is re-established? I agree that "[t]he pleasure principle as the premise of the attraction of cruel spectacle should be put into question" (p. 6) but also that we must listen to how Nietzsche asks for historical sense.

(3) *Economy and debt – a digression in interpretation of Nietzsche.* The Western tradition makes excessive use of economic metaphors. The famous definition of a free man in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, that free or independent is the man who exists for himself and not for others (982b25-26) may be interpreted as someone free of debts. And Nietzsche, one has to remember, was a classical philologist. It is not only Greek, we find it in the Christian tradition where Anselm's *Cur Deus homo?* from end of 11th century explains man's relation to God as one of debt and creditor: "... as long as man does not restore what he owes God, he cannot be happy" (1, 24); but "... this debt was so great that, while none but man must solve the debt, none but God was able to do it; so that he who does it must be both God and man" (2, 18). And Giorgio Agamben points out, that in the early centuries of the church, economy is the key for interpreting the Trinity, where God in substance is one "but as to his *oikonomia* – that is to say the way in which he administers his home, his life, and the world that he created – he is, rather, triple. Just as a good father can entrust to his son the execution of certain functions and duties without in so doing losing his power and his unity, so God entrusts to Christ the 'economy', the administration and government of human history", (*What is an Apparatus?* Stanford UP 2009, p. 9f).

When Nietzsche points at the relation between guilt and debts in German it is no mere similarity of words, it is the same word, *Schuld*, meaning a

cause for something evil or unfortunate, to do injustice, to owe money and being indebted to someone (like owing a favour), (Duden). A Nietzschean critique, I believe, is one pointing at how such social practices in which we exchange goods and relate to each other based on services and agreements become moral interpretations. To violate the economic order is bad for the economic system but it also becomes an idea of what is bad, or evil, as such. Our moral ideas grow out of such social interests, indeed it is the oldest and most naïve moral canon, (*GM II*, 8) hence they do not qualify as moral values but as a way of making virtues of necessities. This, I believe, is the core of Nietzsche's critique of moral ideas: they are not real values but only means of maintaining a social order by translating them into a moral order. I do here fail to find how he relates a debtor's suffering to compensate for economic disorder to pleasure. His critique hereof, quoted from *GM II*, 6, I believe is not an undermining of his hypothesis but a critique directed towards the problematic psychological interpretations such as the one of Dühring he discusses in *GM II*, 12.

(4) *The pleasure trap*. Nietzsche's concern is for interpretation. For how something makes sense. Like how do moral ideas make sense? Of which interpretations are they the outcomes? Moral values are constructions based on something else, hence the need for making a genealogy. The idea that we can base morals on feelings such as pleasure is severely criticised; as quoted from *Will to Power*, pleasure is an accompaniment and not a motive (p. 11), and it is always a terminal phenomenon and not a cause (p. 16). Pleasure is a matter of interpretation and has a history; we learn in what to feel pleasure. While there is agreement on this I am puzzled why pleasure continues to be mentioned as a principle for Nietzsche.

Nietzsche certainly is not a systematic writer so I may have overlooked something but when 'pleasure is an accompaniment' and pleasure and displeasure [*Lust und Unlust*] are only signs of transformation in a body to overcome (*WP*, p. 676), and pleasure only follows from a will to power that achieves its goal, I see no reason why we should not follow Nietzsche and abandon pleasure as a principle. Now I begin to fear the challenge of the pleasure principle is more for the sake of saving it from a too narrow idea of what gives rise to pleasure than to really criticise it. We do in the end find that we should reach a point where "the boundary between pleasure and pain is blurred" (p. 17). But do we need Nietzsche for this? Or could we just ask what we mean by pleasure? And, like it is done, question if pleasure and pain are opposites (p. 15) or if there is a far more dialectical relation between them? Nietzsche speaks mostly of pleasure and displeasure, and dis-

pleasure is not the same as pain. What we mean by pleasure may be the essential question, and with Aristotle (p. 15f) also indicated to be a delicate question. In some moral philosophy, especially the English Nietzsche criticises, among them "der Flachkopf [dumb-ass] John Stuart Mill" (KGA 8, II, p. 312) it often seems that pleasure is taken as absence of pain. So is the discussion of pleasure in aesthetics really benefitting from a journey around this kind of moral philosophy? And, in addition, as read by Nietzsche, who is not exactly what we can all a friendly reader? Should we not rather question the use of pleasure in aesthetics at all?

(5) *The psychologism trap*. The use of pleasure makes me wonder why one would take such a psychological perspective at all? While basing the discussion on Nietzsche it is tempting to also follow him a bit further in one of the most famous quotes: "Nein, gerade Tatsachen gibt es nicht, nur Interpretationen. Wir können kein Faktum »an sich« feststellen: vielleicht ist es ein Unsinn, so etwas zu wollen. »Es ist alles subjektiv« sagt ihr: aber schon das ist Auslegung, das »Subjekt« ist nichts Gegebenes, sondern etwas Hinzu-Erdichtetes, Dahinter-Gestecktes", (*Nachlass KSA 12: 7[[60]]*)¹. Not only is the psychological reaction such as pleasure an interpretation in which a world-view is translated into a set of norms we learn to react to – and aesthetic artefacts play a role in this as they contribute to show us forms of reactions we adapt and make our own. Also a question such as that of other minds (p. 9) may be substituted with asking what makes me believe my mind is mine. Whatever is given to me needs interpretation to become something more than just immediately given. What does it mean it is given to me? What kind of relation is there between me – and what is "me" – and something given – but who or what gives to whom or to what? Perhaps Hegel has a point here that understanding mind requires first to be out of one's mind. Why, as the last question, start discussions of aesthetics with feelings and not with interpretation? Or, rather, what kind of aesthetics is it we get when we start with feelings and not interpretation and vice versa?

¹ "Against the positivism which halts at phenomena – 'There are only facts' – I would say: no, facts are just what there aren't, there are only interpretations. We cannot determine any fact 'in itself': perhaps it's nonsensical to want to do such a thing. 'Everything is subjective,' you say: but that itself is an *interpretation*, for the 'subject' is not something given but a fiction added on, tucked behind", *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, ed. R. Bittner, trans. K. Sturge, Cambridge UP 2003, p. 139.

On “Aesthetics at the Heart of Community“

Swantje Martach

Let me begin my commentary on Carsten Friberg’s “Aesthetics at the Heart of Community: On Aesthetics and Education” with two preliminary points. Looking at the paper’s title the reader might interpret the first part as a pragmatic social approach; the second part probably as predicting a comparison between aesthetics and education. None of these assumptions will reveal itself as matching. Looking at the paper itself its historical “contribution” (Friberg denies his paper to be a historical “study”, p. 145) seems prevalent – both social-cultural as well as theoretical-scientific (esp. p. 149f & 154f). However I won’t dedicate my commentary to this aspect as I neither feel suitable nor am immersed enough in this branch of knowledge to do so. Rather I focus on commenting on Friberg’s concepts of human, art, and aesthetics before drawing possible connections between Friberg’s work and my own investigation of genuineness as aesthetic value.

Friberg’s Concepts of Human, Art, and Aesthetics. I see Friberg’s paper as circulating around the two main investigation topics of the human and the art as well as their aesthetic interconnection. The image of the human he draws is the one of an egocentric subject viewing the environment as constructed especially for his species (p. 151), of a subject capable of judging its environment by means of his own imagination in two diverse manners (p. 149), but who is restricted by the limits of his own thinking (*ibid.*). *Prima facie* the first characteristic doesn’t seem very new, bringing back memories of religious teachings of us humans as the highest form of God’s creation. But Friberg also mentions the metaphysical view of the human need to imitate the environment, (p. 146). Without any further explanation this could seem like a juxtaposition. On the one hand nature is said to be constructed especially for mankind, allowing inferences of an infinite human liberty. On the other hand, our acting seems to be restricted by the imposed need to imitate nature. Probably a reconciliation of these two poles is Dewey’s proposal of a congruity of nature and man (Dewey p. 192; all sources are listed below)

as well as Heidegger's *In-der-Welt-sein* with its modus of the *Besorgen*, containing the connotations of caring, procuring, and cultivating (Heidegger p. 58). The second characteristic's emphasis on imagination or *Einbildungskraft* as means for bestowing a higher value on the world seems to rely on Cassirer's writings of the symbolic power as distinctively human, (Cassirer p. 47f). Yet it is not clear where Friberg's dichotomy between autotelic aesthetic judgement versus socially interested taste judgement stems from. Kant defines taste as the faculty of judgement "by means of pleasure" (Kant p. 25) or "of delight" (*ibid.* p. 42), thus as the capacity for the action of judging aesthetically. Friberg instead seems to rather see taste as the means to communicate one's own aesthetic judgement to the public, (Friberg p. 151f). Taste for Friberg is socially interested (p. 150), hence involves both interest and desire, and becomes good or useful *for* an end (Kant pp. 39-41), namely for externally presenting one's own being. This clearly distinguishes it from the aesthetic as well as opposes it to Kant's view of taste as independent of all interest, (*ibid.* p. 36f, 42). As to the third and last characteristic Friberg writes: "We are the limits of thinking" (p. 149), and therewith apparently rests on Wittgenstein's famous utterance which is usually translated as "the limits of my language are the limits of my world". However in the original German version it says: "Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt", (1921: Satz 5.6). Translating the term "Grenzen" as "limits" makes them seem as insurmountable obstacles, whereas when using the term "borders" they rather seem to confine, demarcate, fence in a definite, determined content, namely our mental processes on which language is based and for which language is the expressing medium. Besides in the English version the simple verb "to be" is used, yet the German "bedeuten" consists of the prefix "be-" expressing a focus, an interest, a turning towards (like in *bemühen*, "to endeavor", or *behandeln*, "to treat, to handle"), plus the verb "deuten" with its meaning of pointing or indicating *at* (the "be-"). Thus it is proposed here to translate Wittgenstein's words as "The borders of my language denote the borders of my world". Friberg instead seems to lean on both common translations of "to be" as well as "limits" which were just explained as not completely corresponding to the original key statement, and goes even further than Wittgenstein as he states that *we*, our whole *Dasein* (Heidegger) is not only restricted by, but we *are*, we embody the limits of a thinking that is not said to be our own, but an impersonal, general, probably even collective one. Herewith he leaves aside the comparison

between cognition and emotion, knowledge and feeling, and puts our whole existence into focus. Yet it shall be argued here that it is this distinction that marks our existence. It would be interesting to reflect about: In what way are our feelings confined? Does our knowledge demarcate our feeling? And do we expand the borders of our existence by combining feeling and knowledge?

Art, as Friberg sketches it, is standing in a mutually imitating relation with nature. As just mentioned above, Friberg quotes the metaphysical view that the imitation of nature is a guideline not only for art, but for all human activities (p. 146), as well as Kant who said that in nature “nothing is in vain” and in an organized product of nature everything is ends and means at the same time, (p. 148). Art must then be the perfection of a naturally organized product as it is both disinterested and purposive, (Kant p. 16, 36f; Dewey p. 144). This could be seen as the reason why we should approach nature as if it would be an imitation of art (Friberg p. 150). However applying Alva Noë’s usage of the term *organized*, art wouldn’t be a first-order organized reality like nature, but a second order re-organized (from human’s hand) object, (Noë p. 10, 31). Therefore, speaking with Dewey’s words, a work of art can never “rival the infinite concreteness of nature”, (Dewey p. 99). On the other hand, as nature cannot be determined by pure knowledge (Friberg p. 149), art can be seen as the attempt of interpreting it (*ibid.*) by participating in (Dewey 154), approximating and continuing it. A side conclusion hereof is that art’s agents, creator and perceiver, are not withdrawn from the world, but are acting towards and concerned with it, (Dewey p. 107). Thus, art cannot *happen* in isolation. A separation of art and nature would according to Friberg downgrade art to a mere enjoyment (p. 155), hence shift art into Kant’s realm of the agreeable, the merely sensually pleasing (Kant p. 38), and therewith disconnect art as well from the aesthetic. The reason why art undertakes these interpreting activities lies in the fact that it is concerned with the interrelation between human and world, especially with the effect this interrelation has on us humans, (Friberg p. 157). Going further one could state that art does not only approximate and continue nature, but also our human existences therein, so that an artwork becomes a manifest interplay of human and world. Yet because art is defined as just that, as an interpretation of nature (and mankind) aside from any knowledge, aside from any concept, it also remains finally undeterminable, (Friberg p. 153). However, Friberg writes on the one hand that art is a source of knowledge; on the other that art and knowl-

edge are two cultural artifacts influencing us humans, (p. 147). Although Kant saw knowledge as opposed to aesthetic pleasure aroused *inter alia* by art (Kant p. 13) he admits that in a judgement of the beautiful understanding as a special realm of knowledge might be involved, (*ibid.* p. 4, 35). Thus indeed knowledge could happen to be art's subordinate. The implicit question here is, in what relationship do knowledge and art stand to each other precisely? Are they two independent phenomena standing on the same level? Or can art also be one subordinate, one manifestation of knowledge, possibly useful for (*careful not to drift out of the aesthetic realm*) the investigation of ourselves, (Noë p. 28, 101)?

Friberg subdivides the aesthetic realm into two main approaches, namely the interpretive versus the reflective approach. The interpretative approach asks for appropriate aesthetic interpretations whilst the reflective approach ask for appropriate frames for these aesthetic interpretations, (p. 152). Interpreting the last sentence of Friberg's paper (p. 157), following the interpretative approach the aim is to become a skilled critic, a state that seemingly leans on Levinson's concept of the Ideal Critic which in turn leans on Hume, (p. 225-228); whereas when following the reflective approach, the knowledge of how to best relate with and handle objects is strived for. Yet Friberg's main thesis is that the aesthetic is marked deeply by an educational motivation, (p. 145). For the modest attempt to approach art several concepts are seen as needed. Friberg in this instance quotes Ortega y Gasset, (p. 153). In this line of thought stands the thesis of Stefan Deines, student of Georg Bertram and Martin Seel, who at a congress on aesthetics in Granada, March 2017, stated that an object of art cannot be grasped at all without *knowing* about (or having the *knowledge* of) its respective genre. Hence the human needs education in order to approach art, and art educates us in shaping our way of experiencing and thinking about ourselves and nature, (Friberg p. 153, 157). This perception is seemingly paradoxical as it considers concepts as needed to approach something that exists without any concepts. Besides it is also stated that a "praiseworthy character" or a "*bel àme*" cannot be spotted by taste (in the way Friberg uses it) alone, but becomes only visible when the subject is captured whilst contemplating and finding delight in nature (p. 151f). Here the enjoyment of nature is seen as a metric for evaluating a human as a whole. But the immediate aesthetic perception and appreciation of nature cannot be learned. No education is needed, and no suitable education exists therefore. Following Dewey, I'd rather say that finding aesthetic pleasure, not only in na-

ture, is a kind of achievement, (Dewey p. 4, 19). From Kant and Hume we know that this achievement is surely subjective; its basis being Gadamer's aesthetic consciousness, quoted as well by Friberg (p. 150, 155), as a readiness and openness for experience. The term "cultivation" (*ibid.* p. 151) can also be suitably applied here, stressing the interior character of this happening, whilst education as such is something externally imposed upon the human. Hence Friberg's thought should unquestionably be agreed with, yet his choice of terms seems unsatisfactory. He focusses on knowledge in the sense of both morality in dealing with the world as well as competence in dealing with art, but how education is needed to achieve these and is involved in their processes seems under-explained. In addition, it would be interesting to know how Friberg would connect Nick Riggle's concept of "aesthetic love" with his concept of *educational aesthetics*, or if he sees Riggle's concept as totally counter to his own view. With this self-explanatory term Riggle describes subject-object-relationships that just like complex interhuman relationships are inexplicable as they are not built upon any rationality, knowledge, or education (Riggle p. 444f). Nevertheless Friberg's educational aesthetics, described by himself as "sensitive cognition" (p. 147), as the linkage between feeling and knowledge, imagination and intellect (p. 151), can be seen as an attempt to solve the questions posed in the paragraphs above regarding the interrelation between art and knowledge. If we as humans are confined by our thinking, aesthetics as a reflection both emotional and rational could be not only a further approximation towards the understanding of nature as well as art as its imitation and interpretation, but also a widening of our human existence as such.

Possible connections to my own investigation. I see genuineness as both a mechanism humans are involved in and a metric for beauty when put into appearance and being judged. Kant's and Hume's notion that beauty is not an attribute of an object, but only exists as a point of view inside individual minds makes the subject of genuineness even more important. In sharp contrast to Ortega y Gasset's (as quoted by Friberg) as well as to Stefan Deines' approach stands Friberg's hint at how to capture a genuine character, namely by testing what Dewey remarkably defines as "genuine naturalism" (Dewey p. 160), the subject's consciousness of and its ability to find pleasure in contemplating the infinite variety of natural appearances, marking an immediate intercourse between human and beauty. From my perspective knowledge about the beautiful, as well as the beautiful as knowledge is sensed or felt intrinsic-

ally, and can only be improved by certain forms of externally imposed education. The basis for each aesthetic experience, as well as for the ability to experience aesthetically, remains an internal connection which needs to be achieved, maintained and deepened, beside an interest in being disinterested, a passion for and enthusiasm about beauty itself. Within my concept of aesthetic genuineness, style and taste are seen as both basis and outcome of aesthetic interactions; and imagination is a tool to achieve these. There definitely exists an externally motivated, socially interested taste, but this is only one and a non-aesthetic, non-genuine form of taste which beyond that takes for granted that the education status acts as a determining part for its own social status. How its own social status is constituted and where it derives from is diverse for each individual, just as it is the case regarding one's own self-esteem which already William James considered to be the sum of subjectively weighted components (1890). Dewey states as well that a person who sees art as instrumental is just glorifying its potential for "enduring re-education", (p. 145). Indeed genuine taste is internally motivated, namely for an investigation of one's own being. According to Friberg imagination is not wandering freely but happens as if it would be directed by an intelligence towards aesthetic judgements, (p. 149f). Saying that imagination as a tool for aesthetic experiences would be guided by (maybe not as intelligence, but as driving force) and lead to genuineness reinforces the Janus-head of this phenomenon.

In the attempt to integrate my own investigation into one of the two aesthetic approaches sketched by Friberg, I sympathize with the reflective approach for two reasons. First, art's *raison d'être* here is not considered to be in its mere contemplation, but in its reinterpretation, (p. 153). I would like to add here that art itself not only can be reinterpreted endlessly, which according to Dewey is what precisely marks an aesthetic experience (Dewey p. 113), but can also serve for an endless reinterpretation of the human being. Second, Friberg refers to Merleau-Ponty's view of perception as an identification of the object, (p. 154). From my point of view, aesthetic perception is not only an identification *of*, but as well an identification *with* the object. However the term identification might have too evaluative of a connotation. Maybe confrontation or comparison would be more suitable to describe the mechanism of affirmation-differentiation happening within the intercourse of human and object. However I also find two starting-points to tie my own investigation to the interpretative approach. First, its subjectivity leading to an

internalization of aesthetics into the realm of psychological theories (p. 154f) acts as a connecting link between this approach and the phenomenon of genuineness. Second, the concept of childlikeness I use to explain the uninhibited play-like dealing with objects could be seen as a reinforcement of the approach's research topic of disinterestedness, (p. 154). Both approaches are equally concerned with the relation between subject and world and the effect objects can have on us, (p. 153, 157). Surely art does something to us, be we also do something to art, being the aesthetic agents (Levinson p. 230) who give form to its substance, (Dewey p. 110f.). Therefore I see genuineness as a value and guideline for the subject-world relation which is marked by the aim of diving deeper into our being, or using Friberg's words, is useful in assisting us in the "cultivation of the human spirit", (p. 147).

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On "Mimesis or Interpretive Reading, or How to Talk about Art"

James R. Hamilton

Two introductory remarks. My goal here is: (a) to review what you have just heard, so that – at least if my reconstruction is at all accurate – you hear it again; and then (b) raise a few points that invite Magister Sarah Stoll to say a bit more about the view she has offered us.

I am not an Adorno scholar. So, there is bound to be some confusion on my part, as to what exactly is going on. I hope I have reconstructed this accurately.

Outline of and comments on sections (1) through (3). (A) “Change of perspective: from the autonomy of production to the autonomy of the aesthetic experience”, (pp. 179-181). Stoll’s overall goal in the essay appears to be to show that, “despite Rebenitsch’s criticisms of Adorno and her attempt to resuscitate Kant’s view of aesthetic experience, Rebenitsch’s own conception of aesthetic experience can in fact best be developed using Adorno rather than Kant”, (p. 181).

This much is agreed to: “Through the departure of art from the modernist notion of *work* its autonomy should no longer be sought in the object of art, but in the relation between subject and object”, (p. 180).

However, Rebenitsch also claims three things that Stoll disagrees with.

- (1) Rebenitsch holds that “Adorno’s conception of aesthetic experience... gives precedence to the object and therefore [is] a modernist view of art”.
- (2) Adorno “instill[s] a ‘moment of truth’ into the artwork [so that it] ‘aims for knowledge,’ and thereby wrongly constrains or eliminates the non-cognitive aspects of aesthetic experience.
- (3) She holds that “Adorno’s theory of progress, which he develops in *Art and the Arts*, produces a system”.

The last two are charges of commitments to “heteronomy” in Adorno’s theory, (p. 180).

This introductory section concludes with the claim that “after briefly refuting her two accusations of heteronomy, [Stoll will] concentrate on Rebenitsch’s first accusation, that of Adorno being an objectivistic modernist, and aim to show that the subject-object relation she wants to reach is already structurally contained in Adorno’s concept of aesthetic experience – namely as the interdependence of art and interpretation”, (p. 181).

(B) “*Why “Fountain” cannot be experienced aesthetically*”, (pp. 181-183).

– The main strategy of this section is to use a discussion of Duchamp’s readymades in order to reject Rebenitsch’s second charge of heteronomy, (p. 3).

– But, before that, there is one short paragraph on (p. 2), the second charge of a commitment to “heteronomy”. Here the fact that the work of art

belongs to the empirically discoverable world out of which it arises and to which it relates is taken, somehow, to be a rejection of the idea that non-cognitive experience is not constrained or eliminated from aesthetic experience.

Comments: I agree that aesthetic experience – indeed all experience – is largely non-cognitive, if that means that it is part of our subjective experiencing of the world by means of our senses. But I do not understand how the fact that a work of art is part of the empirical world shows that this is so; so, I invite Stoll to tell me more.

By the way, I also do not see why cognitivism about works of art involves a commitment to heteronomy; so I need some help here too.

And finally, I feel I must ask what is wrong, precisely, with heteronomy? Does that not depend upon precisely what a work of art, or the interpretation of a work of art, or the experience of a work of art, is alleged to be ruled by (heteronomously)? Clearly, I really need some help. – *End comments.*

However, as I already remarked, the focus in this section is on “Rebentisch’s second accusation of heteronomy, that Adorno develops a theory of progress which produces a system and thus excludes objects as non-art which do not fit his framework”, (p. 181). Here is the problem: according to Rebentisch, “this object [*Fountain*] is ...[a] the prototype of boundary-dissolving artworks, challenging the specificity of *genre* and [b] in this way Adorno’s conception of the development of form and [c] subsequently ... Adorno’s conception of aesthetic experience”. Against this, Stoll will argue that *Fountain*’s “context can be taken as a virtual element of its composition”.

The argument against this that Stoll provides goes like this:

- (1) Adorno accepts something like Frank Sibley’s distinction between non-aesthetic features that a work of art may have and its aesthetic features, and (again, similarly) claims that only the aesthetic features are relevant to judgments we might make about a work of art, (cp 182).
- (2) Since *Fountain* was conceived and presented as an anti-aesthetic work, it is offered as a work of art lacking any *aesthetically relevant* features, (*ibid.*).
- (3) Moreover, it is not tied by its non-aesthetic features to any tradition in which *works of art* are made, (cf. Adorno quotation, *ibid.*).

- (4) However – and here Stoll appears to disagree with Adorno – “it does have form; [for] its form builds parasitically upon social facts and makes them its elements”, (p. 183).
- (5) “In this case the social fact would be the museum gallery, whose context becomes part of the artwork and which in consequence becomes aesthetic”, (*ibid.*).
– therefore –
- (6) The readymades are *aesthetically* irrelevant – are “inaccessible to aesthetic experience”, (*ibid.*).
- (7) But also, one can still agree with Adorno’s criticism of the readymades, not because they challenge boundaries (genres), but because they challenge the entire social world of art, (*ibid.*).

Comments: Let me register a thought: would it be helpful here to draw a distinction between aesthetic values and artistic values? Here is what I have in mind: as long as a value guides the artist’s choices in making the work, and as long as the audience for art needs to understand what is guiding those choices, then the value – even if it is also an aesthetic value – is also artistic. However, if the audience does not have to understand the choices the artist made (and what was guiding those choices) then the value is purely aesthetic, having to do with the felt quality of the experience. On this view, the readymades *might* be claimed to have non-aesthetic artistic value.

This would lend support to Stoll’s final remark in the section: “In spite of everything, the readymade can still be judged as positive, even if it is inaccessible to aesthetic experience”. – *End comments.*

In any case, this still leaves us with an under-described notion of “aesthetic experience”. And it is to the task of describing it that Stoll turns in the next section.

(C) “*Aesthetic Experience as the interdependence of art and interpretation*”, (pp.183-188). This is the core of Stoll’s analysis of Adorno’s account of aesthetic experience. The idea is given in these formulations: “The enigmatic character of the artwork mediates between two radically differing perspectives and thus between two different modes of experience, which in relation to each other lead to what we call aesthetic experience”; (p. 184) “the artwork functions as an interface between two worlds: on the one hand there is the *inside* of the artwork ... which asks for *mimesis* to keep track of its internal logical structures; [and] on the other hand there is

the *outside* of the artwork – the empirical world, where what has been experienced *inside*, must be reflected in the scope of ‘interpretive reason’”, (p. 184f).

Let us unpack this a bit.

First there is the claim that works of art are “enigmatic”. By this is meant that works of art are “riddles” that require explanation, and are “not complete prior to experience”, (p. 184).

It is worth noting that, according to Stoll, Adorno’s idea of the explanation of a work of art is not intentionalist; such an explanation does not depend on knowledge or understanding of an artist’s intentions.

Second, to explain the experience of the “inside” of the work of art, Stoll – following Adorno – claims that this consists of memetic reenactment of “the inherent structures of the artwork”, (p. 185f). Here the notion of “mimesis” appears to be the idea of a *resembling* reenactment. This suggestion is reinforced by Stoll’s account of memetic “play”. For, she writes, “the innovation of Adorno’s concept of mimesis lies in this: through abandoning oneself to the new by performing it, one finds possible something that *hitherto* appeared as impossible, something which is situated in the realm of non-knowledge. [And this] abandoning of oneself to the artwork is ‘blind in itself’”.

Third, to explain the experience of the “outside” of the work (pp. 186-188), Stoll – again following Adorno – claims that every work of art must be “mediated by thinking”, but that because “during aesthetic experience the recipient must understand that the solution to the riddle is contained only potentially in the artwork [and] it enforces a search for its solution through its structure, but this search in principle continues *ad infinitum*”, (p. 187) discourse about art, the interpretive enterprise, is necessary but always insufficient.

So, fourth, to combine these accounts of the experience of the “inside” of the work of art and the experience of the “outside” of the work, Stoll invokes the idea of a Gestalt image, wherein “the enigmatic character repels and attracts the recipient again and again, [in] an interplay between mimetical performance and the reflection of it [that] takes place”, (p. 186).

Two things are supposed to follow from this: (a) that unlike in Kant, aesthetic experience in Adorno is not immediately linked to pleasure; and (b) meaning stays unstable during the (in principle) infinite process of aesthetic “experience” so that “an interpretation of the artwork can never be final”, (p. 187).

Comments: I want to note that the description of the *artistics* and the *inartistics* is truly wonderful. I did not know of this before. I am glad I now do.

My first question is why aesthetic experience does not involve the intentions of artists. I concede that Adorno does not hold that. And perhaps that is sufficient for Stoll's exegetical purposes in the paper. But is it true? Claiming that "aesthetic experience has been interpretation all along" (p. 184) does not settle the matter. In fact it only complicates it by suggesting that *aesthetic* experience is interpretation, which suggests it requires understanding. Here again, I am inclined to ask whether it would be helpful to draw a distinction between aesthetic values and artistic values along the lines I have suggested. For then we could explain why *aesthetic* experience does not involve appeal to the intentions of artists. For, indeed, it would not involve giving interpretations either.

My second question is about the notion of "interdependence". The relation of interdependence is often regarded as one of mutual reliance and responsibility, normally between people, and relative to some external standard (the reliance and responsibility are emotional, economic, ecological, and/or moral). Clearly Stoll does not have this in mind. At most Stoll seems to mean, when applying the idea to the aesthetic experience of works of art, that each (the work and the interpretation of the work) is as fundamental as the other, so that there is *no* asymmetry of *any* kind – especially as regards which one determines the work's content.

But why is the symmetry understood as a *dependency* relationship? How does the work of art *depend* upon its interpretation, and how does the interpretation *depend* upon the work of art? Is either of these a *causal* dependency relationship? If not, then what is the nature of the *non-causal* dependency? I just need some explanation.

My last question concerns the last bit. I understand how the idea that there can never be a single definitive interpretation of a work of art – which seems true enough, by the way – follows from the idea that works of art are riddles (as opposed, I guess, to puzzles). But how does it follow from that idea that "aesthetic experience ... is not immediately linked to pleasure"? I agree it is not; for I do not think that everything we prefer is reducible to pleasure. Pleasure is a common preference of people, but not the only one they might have. But I need an argument, and I do not see one here. It would seem that enigmas are just as pleasure-inducing as puzzles, despite the fact the latter can be definitively solved. – *End comments.*

Stoll concludes her paper with two short sections, about which I do not have space to recount or comment. So, I will just list the titles of the sections, and thank her for the opportunity to think about this very interesting essay.

Those section titles are:

4) “*The initiation to aesthetic experience: erotics, desire, and madness*”, (p. 188f),

and

5) “*How to talk about art: aesthetic experience as a manual for interpretation*” (pp. 189-191).

Comments on Silverbloom

Parysa Mostajir

Silverbloom’s exploration of the work of Schiller and Adorno provides a compelling case for the power of art to critique social and political relations, while her comparison of the two theorists provides an insight into the complexity of determining exactly how this critical work is done. While Schiller is committed to beauty as a means of demonstrating alternative possibilities to those that currently hem us in, Adorno attacks beautiful art as complicit in reproducing a false ideology of socio-political harmony. Ugly art, for Adorno, is our salvation. Unlike beautiful art, it illustrates existing violence in society, critiquing it by exposure. Silverbloom’s discussion of the two theorists convinces us that the socio-political relevance of art is a longevous conviction deserving serious consideration by modern aesthetic theory. But, although she seems to land in Adorno’s side of the court concerning the differing merits of beauty and ugliness in art, she leaves us with a clear understanding that the nuances of the socio-political power of art are far from fully worked out.

In these minutes, I wish to explore some of the questions for further consideration raised by this rich and fruitful paper. The topics I wish to explore are as follows: Firstly, I would like to question the adequacy of the analogy between formalization of matter in artworks, the domination of reason over sense, and the political relations found in society. Secondly, what precisely is meant by the statement that the harmony in beautiful art is

an illusion? Does this claim depend on a specific account of an audience's interaction with visual art? Thirdly, how are we defining ugliness in art? – Is it tension, sinister subject-matter, or the production of an aesthetic effect of displeasure or discomfort? Fourthly, depending on the answer to this last question, can we confidently state that it is ugliness in art which provides us with the means for progress, and that it is beauty in art which disguises violence and makes us complacent? Finally, I tentatively suggest an alternative dichotomy to consider as that which has the capacity to emancipate or oppress us – honesty and dishonesty, or perhaps true and false consciousness.

Concerning the analogy between formalization of matter in artworks and the Enlightenment-inspired domination of reason over sense, Silverbloom says, "The violence endemic to social reality is reproduced in the artwork as the violence of formalization". This is, indeed, presumed to be the reason that ugly art is such a powerful social critique. In witnessing the struggle and tension undergone in artworks in the process of bringing discordant elements of matter into formal harmony, we simultaneously witness the violence done to individual subjectivity and emotions by the authority of universal categorisation and instrumental reasoning. This claim appears to rest either on the assumption that all forms of socio-political violence take the form of subjectivity and emotion being dominated by abstract concepts, or on the assumption that ugly art's critical potential only applies to a small subsection of socio-political violence. I would be interested to hear which of these, if either, Silverbloom accepts, and I would like to challenge the plausibility of the former. Can we really consider the multitudes of complex forms of violent human interactions as reducing to the same kind: that of the domination of reason over sense, or universal over particular? Does reason never provide relief from oppression? The disgust felt by homophobic persons at the thought of homosexual intercourse, for example, and its authority being superseded by U.S. constitutional law, might be considered an instance of reason liberating humanity from the oppression of sense. Or, the invention of new concepts in philosophical discourse, such as the concept of epistemic injustice, can clarify an area of oppression that exists as a result of neglect or lack of transparency, and can thereby transform social understandings of specific types of oppression in a progressive way. This, too, might be understood as an instance of reason liberating us from socio-political violence. It is plausible to state that, as with any medium, art has limitations as to what it is capable of expressing, but I would hesitate to limit art's critical power to that which conforms to the structure of reason dominating sense. If we do wish to establish this limitation, does

this mean that there is valuable critical work to be done beyond the boundaries of art?

On another point, Silverbloom discusses the sense in which harmony in beautiful artworks is an illusion. A fact acknowledged by Schiller himself, the artwork is said to disguise the process of struggle and tension through which the artist achieves the final visual product of beauty and balance. Beauty is taken to be the result of the concealment of the artist's efforts in the technical production of the artwork. It is therefore merely an appearance of harmony and freedom of all components, cloaking a coercive process that brought about their current form. This challenges the authenticity of the harmonious vision we see in beautiful artworks, and suggests their complicity, applying the analogy to society, in disguising the violence done to the individual parts by the tyranny of the whole. I believe, however, that this may rest on a misunderstanding of the nature of the audience's interaction with visual art. Consider, for a moment, music and drama. In listening to a symphony, one encounters a great deal of tension, in the form of anticipation, unrealised expectation, and delayed satisfaction. In drama, one encounters despair and anxiety. Happy endings might be provided in a closing cadence or final act, but the tension that gives rise to the beautiful artwork is apparent to the audience throughout. Post-Hegelians such as Dewey and Collingwood would tell us that, in visual art as well, the aesthetically-engaged audience witnesses the tension through which harmony is finally achieved. In Dewey's words, "with the perceiver as with the artist, there must be an ordering of the elements of the whole that is in form, although not in details, the same as the process of organization the creator of the work consciously experienced" (*Art as Experience*). In order to appreciate visual art aesthetically, one must actively reconstruct the artist's process of bringing harmony to dissonant aspects of the materials, and this involves the resolution of tension that gives rise to the beautiful result. The definition of the beauty of an artwork as an illusion thereby comes into question. We are not, as it were, indulging in ignorance when we view a beautiful work of art, since the effort that leads to the resultant harmony is not, in fact, disguised. We witness and reconstruct the tension as it culminates into an achieved harmony. In this sense, harmony in beautiful artworks takes effort, but it does not follow that it is illusory. Making the analogy once again, we do not expect achieved harmony in society to be effortless either, but to be constructed and reconstructed continually. Perhaps beautiful art deserves recognition as an honest and potent form of social critique in light of this.

This leads me to another question raised by Silverbloom's discussion of Adorno: what is meant by ugliness in art? Is ugliness a feature of the composition? Of the subject matter? Is Picasso's *Guernica*, for example, ugly? It certainly has an ugly subject, but the composition is arguably beautiful. Perhaps it is in this juxtaposition that we find ourselves disturbed. This may be a product of evolving sensibilities, but I would be surprised to discover that a majority of people found even the work of Basquiat ugly. This leaves me wanting more detail on the definition of ugliness in art as it is employed in Silverbloom's essay.

Concerning the power of ugliness in art, if we look to Christian representations of the torments of damned souls in hell (the 15th century surreal paintings of Hieronymous Bosch, for instance), we see disturbing images that leave us with discomfort. These images cannot as easily be seen as challenging socio-political violence, however, since they arguably reinforce the fear of hell and therefore the authority of the church. If we look to renaissance painting, ugliness can be witnessed as a strong enforcer of hierarchy through their artistic depictions of hell. A more modern example is the anti-semitic propaganda of Nazi Germany, such as Fritz Hippler's film, *The Eternal Jew*. Ugliness in this film did not expose the socio-political violence enacted upon individuals at the time, but rather aroused fear and disgust (for example, through the juxtaposition of images of swarms of rats with images of Jewish people living in Polish ghettos), in an attempt to justify unimaginable violence. This reinforces a point made earlier concerning the sincere liberating capacity of reason over emotion. But for now, we must ask, what work ugliness, in and of itself, is doing in art's production of social critique. Beauty, of course, can be used to disguise or justify violence. Leni Riefens-tahl's *Triumph of the Will* is powerful Nazi propaganda in its beauty, just as *The Eternal Jew* is in its ugliness. Da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks* is powerful reinforcement of the truth of scripture and the authority of the church in its beauty, just as Bosch's *Violent Forcing of the Frog* is in its ugliness. But where does ugliness' superiority to beauty lie as a method of social critique, if it too can be used as an enforcer of oppression?

If both ugliness and beauty have a role to play in the critical power of art as well as the political abuses of aesthetics, then is there perhaps an alternative dichotomy we can take as the determining factor in an artwork's progressive potential? Collingwood, in his *Principles of Art*, suggests that the production of art is a simultaneous creation and expression of an emotion. The product is, as in Dewey's perspective, then perceived by an audience who reconstructs the emotion that helped constitute it. Art is, therefore, a

language; it is a medium of communication between persons, a communication of emotions and attitudes, rather than of concepts. However, although concepts and propositions do not enter into this form of communication, there is a dichotomy at work which makes it comparable to ordinary language: honesty and dishonesty of expression. An artist who fails to sincerely express their perspective will produce artworks that fail to have critical and transformative potential. If this failure is due to political obstruction to freedom of expression, the work will appear stifled and simplistic. If it is due to an artist's intention to mislead others, it will take the form of propaganda. If it is due to laziness or incapacity for introspection, it will take the form of mass culture. This is, in fact, something that Adorno focuses on in his critique of the culture industry – the simplicity of narrative, the erasure of complexity, the reduction of individuals to types. This can arise from the absence of ugliness and the insistence on beauty, but perhaps this is only insofar as the presence of beauty is dishonest. If gender violence is aestheticised, if complex characters are reduced to The Hero, The Villain, and The Girl, if happy and bitter endings are invariably awarded to those with respectively good or bad characters, then there is a suppression of ugliness here, but there is also suppression of complexity, laziness of perspective, and dishonesty of expression. In this sense, perhaps it is not ugliness *per se* which holds the transformative and critical power in artworks, but rather the unflinching honesty of the artist in presenting beauty and ugliness in their true contexts and proportions, in spite of the potential for discomfort caused, and in spite of the temptation to idealise.

Response to Parysa C. Mostajir's "Pragmatism and the Primacy of Experience"

Rachel Silverbloom

Parysa Mostajir's paper seeks to establish a common ground between two experiences or practices that have often been positioned in stark contrast with one another: the scientific and the aesthetic. Mostajir appeals to John Dewey's writings, concerning both metaphysics and aesthetics, to illustrate the ways in which both aesthetic and scientific practices are motivated by the same natural drive toward resolving tension and re-establishing

harmony or homeostasis between an individual and their environment. In this response, I will turn my attention toward just a few of the many interesting and compelling claims that arise throughout the course of Mostajir's paper. Each of them, as I will try to indicate, involve a particular way of conceiving the relation between harmony and tension, unity and disunity, sameness and otherness. My questions are aimed at this element of Mostajir and Dewey's aesthetic theories, and the consequences that they might entail. First, I will attempt to summarize Mostajir's claims, then I will raise some questions regarding them. It is worth noting, here, that I have *never* read Dewey; as a result, my questions and concerns may arise from a place of ignorance or misunderstanding, and may simply call for further clarification on the part of Mostajir.

As Mostajir helpfully establishes in the beginning of her paper, Dewey's aesthetic theory is informed by his metaphysical claims concerning the primacy of immediate experience over the mediated concepts and ideas offered in and through reflection. Immediate experience regards its world, Dewey claims, as an unanalyzed totality, undivided by the familiar dualisms of subject/object, form/matter, etc. The carving up of experience into such conceptual categories occurs only in and through preceding reflection. As Mostajir explains, the "total, unanalysed" unity of experience is granted priority by Dewey insofar as it is not only the means by which we first encounter or perceive the world, but it is also both the ground and the end of all human activity, (p. 111). While human beings are often engaged in processes of dividing, analyzing, and erecting boundaries, Dewey claims that even these types of behaviors or activities are ultimately motivated by, and aim toward, maintaining or reasserting the unity that is presented in and through immediate experience. The tensions and divisions that result from reflection are not valuable for their own sake, as Mostajir notes, but rather play two related yet distinct roles: their disruption of homeostasis provides the impetus for human striving to reassert that unity, and their overcoming and resolution enriches experience in some way. Philosophy, for example, certainly carves up experience into conceptual categories, yet this activity of dividing and partitioning is not done for its own sake; rather, its ultimate purpose is to bring greater clarity to our experience of the world. Reflection presents problems that, when resolved, make possible a "richer reintegration" of experience, (*ibid.*). Such a sense of clarity brings with it a feeling of harmonious integration with the world and a deeper or perhaps more effectual relation to one's environment. As Dewey writes, "At the pinnacle of existence are moments in experience when we feel a sense of equilibrium

and integration with our surroundings”, (p. 113). This unity, when achieved, is seemingly nothing new that has been produced by this process, but rather something to which we return again and again; it is nothing other than that originary unity presented to us in and through immediate experience, only now our encounter with that unity is “enriched” by the meandering path through which we rediscovered and reaffirmed its existence.

It is precisely that moment in which unity is achieved or felt that Dewey seems to locate the “aesthetic”. Rather than a static property or quality of an object, the aesthetic, Mostajir explains, refers to something that an object *does* with or in experience. The aesthetic finds its existence, then, only in the lived experience of the individual or perhaps, one could argue, of a given culture. This distinction, I think, provides a very useful framework through which to explain how certain objects can appear as art-objects in certain contexts or historical periods, but not in others. An object manifests as aesthetic given the very specific way in which it is taken up by a given culture or individual and thus, for Dewey, does not dwell in some separate realm, held apart and autonomous from everyday life or experience, but rather is itself continuous and intertwined with its social and material milieu. As such, the constitution of the particular object that evokes the aesthetic has little importance; the experience of the aesthetic need not arise from an artwork at all. Instead, “aesthetic” is a term that can be used to describe *any* experience that involves a feeling of consummation or unity between the individual and the whole, the organism and its environment. As Mostajir explains, “The aesthetic, to varying degrees of intensity, is a quality of any given experience which results in the establishment of harmony, and allows for the expansion and enrichment of the living organism”. It culminates in “a complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events”, (p. 116).

With this definition in hand, it seems rather easy, then, to apply the term “aesthetic” to many experiences that we otherwise would not. The distinction between the political, the religious, the intellectual, and the aesthetic becomes one of emphasis rather than true difference. If what is most salient in any given activity or practice is the feeling of unity or integration, that experience is an aesthetic one; it may be, at the same time, a scientific practice, as Mostajir argues in her paper. My first question directly relates to the general aspect of this definition, and perhaps it simply stems from an ignorance about Dewey’s own work. While the stated intent of Mostajir’s paper is to establish a common ground between the scientific and the aesthetic on the basis of their mutual striving toward reasserting the unanalyzed totality of

immediate experience, it seems that the latter half of the paper does something a little different. Rather than showing that two relatively autonomous practices have a common ground or aim, Dewey's definition of the aesthetic seems to make it possible not only to say that the distinction is a semantic one, but, perhaps even more controversially, that all activities are, at bottom (and perhaps most importantly), aesthetic. The aesthetic, as the very experience of unity and integration that is ontologically primary in Dewey's metaphysics, appears to be asserted as the true nature, ground, and aim of *all* practices.

Stated briefly, then, my first pair of questions are as follows: Is it the case (or, would Dewey argue) that scientific and aesthetic practices share a common ground, yet remain at least relatively autonomous and distinct from one another, or is it rather the case that *all* practices and experiences are fundamentally aesthetic, and that the appearance of difference is simply a matter of emphasis?

My next question arises not from the form of the definition of the aesthetic but rather its content. The dialectical relationship between the ordinary unity of experience, its carving up in and through reflective thought, and its subsequent reunification is, on Dewey's account, not only the constant and essential movement of human existence but also, Mostajir explains, "the *only* motivating source and end of any human activity", (p. 113). This "natural rhythm" by which individuals fall in and out of equilibrium with their environment is what provides the momentum for all human endeavors, (*ibid.*). The impetus for action is the resistance or tension that arises between an individual and their environment, and the desired outcome (and the true value) of such activities is their resultant restoration of a sense of harmonious integration or equilibrium. Regarding these claims, my questions are as follows: Can the striving toward harmonious integration exhaustively ground and motivate *all* human activity? Is it not possible for human beings to seek out or experience disharmony, tension, or dis-integration that is not ultimately re-integrated back into the apparently seamless flux of immediate experience? Are there things, relations, or activities that are disharmonious or disorienting in their own right, and whose value is granted precisely in their resistance to reappropriation into the unanalyzed totality? Such experiences would, on Dewey's account, appear to be reduced to mere stages of resistance that must be overcome on the way to a more satisfying, enriched sense of equilibrium. The impetus for this question is my concern regarding what happens to otherness, not only of things in the world but also of other people, if we take Dewey's priority of unity seriously. If our behav-

iors are guided by and grounded in a drive toward re-integration and unification, can *appropriation* be avoided, or is it a natural and perhaps even a desired part of existence? If life reaches its “pinnacle” at moments of seamless unity, does it follow that experiences of otherness must always be overcome in order to recover that ideal stage of sameness?

It will come as no surprise, perhaps, that I would suggest that aesthetic experiences do not only offer us the appearance or feeling of unity and harmony, but rather are capable of presenting us with irreducible otherness that resists our (admittedly “natural”) impulse to reabsorb and reappropriate. Part of what is so captivating and frustrating about works of art (as perhaps just one instance of the aesthetic, if we are to follow along with Dewey) is their persistent interruption of our attempts to fully capture or affix their meaning in order to, perhaps, gain a clearer understanding of our world or of ourselves. There is always an excess of meaning that remains ungrasped in the aesthetic that frustrates our attempts to integrate it with ourselves. Furthermore, it is this resistance to reintegration that seems to mark the distinctive and perhaps essential element of the work of art or the aesthetic experience. In practices which employ concepts in order to identify, grasp, and manipulate the world, as is the case in scientific disciplines, any resistance on the part of the world is chalked up to not having appropriate or advanced enough tools at our disposal. Science, it could be argued, regards its world as something fully comprehensible and exhaustible, if only we have the resources and the time to do so (granting, even, that such a level of advancement might never be achieved). Aesthetic practices and objects seem, on the other hand, to accord an indispensable kernel of incomprehensibility, inexhaustibility, and mystery that cannot be overcome with more time, more money, or more tools. This element of the aesthetic, I would suggest, is one that resists, rather than facilitates, harmonious integration, and that sets it apart from the other disciplines in a way that perhaps grants it greater value than any feature it might share.

My final question regards this latter comment, and I ask it without having any answer in mind. What is gained in asserting the similarities that aesthetic practices and objects have with those of other disciplines? Is the aim something more than (and by this I do not mean to suggest that this is a minor aspiration) ameliorating the widespread cultural-historical allergy to art or aesthetics as a frivolous practice or discipline? And what, if anything, might be lost in grounding the relation between the aesthetic disciplines and others in a foundation of sameness, rather than distinct otherness or dissimilarity?

Martach's Genuineness or Commodity

Sarah Stoll

Swantje Martach supposes, in „The Role of Genuineness in Artistic and Aesthetic Experiences“, – as the title suggests – that there is more than one artistic and more than one aesthetic experience. This already tells us that she does not think structurally about artistic and aesthetic experience. She also does not use the term „aesthetic“ in reference to its philosophical history from Baumgarten on. She uses the adjective more as it is used in everyday discourse, designating either an object created in some artistic way or a person who has style and taste and therefore differs from other so called non-aesthetic people. Hence Martach wants neither to give a definition of what aesthetic experience is, nor of what art might be. Instead she looks at our behaviour in relation to the cultural products of contemporary society. She asks how everyday experiences (at least in western capitalist societies) like watching a Quentin Tarantino movie or wearing clothes from the German designer Gabriele Strehle affect their watchers and wearers. In the end she asks *how to have style and taste* because, I quote: style is the „desirable outcome of artistic experiences“, (p. 127).

Martach conceives the process of aesthetic exchange on a communicative model, where communication takes place between a *creator* and a *receiver*. But when she leaves the object aside, the argument falls into a tautology. I quote: „for the creator, [the experience] is how and what the perceiver will experience (with) the object; for the perceiver it is how and what the creator himself experienced and would have intended him/her to experience (with) the object“, (p. 126). I would instead emphasize the „eigenvalue“ (*ibid.*) of the object that exists detached from its creator or describe the process as an act of mimesis where the recipient tries to immitate the process of production to create for herself style and taste.

The argument becomes less tautological and more concrete when Martach describes what happens with the receiver herself in these everyday experiences. For this description she uses the grammatical categories I and Me, not only to make a distinction between agency and reflection, but also to make a distinction between subject and object within the subject itself. I

and Me thereby appear as two sides of an *in itself divided* self which are at the same time necessary for its constitution. According to Martach, in the process of an experience, an exchange is provoked between a person's I and Me. One should rather say, between a so-called aesthetic I and aesthetic Me, because it is the process of aesthetic self-constitution that is described here, namely the constitution of a self with style and taste, (p. 126ff). Martach supposes that the process of (aesthetic) self-constitution is – as outlined above – initiated through our confrontation with products of the culture industry – like Tarantino movies or fashion designers.

This process is initially described with John Dewey's late nineteenth century empiricist philosophy and the antique Chinese philosophy of Zhuang Zhou. It appears as a circle with a shift from an „innate“ or „natural being“ to one that „re-find[s] authenticity“ through (re-)finding specific „aspects“ of a personality (pp. 123,125). She then outlines the process as happening in four steps or stages, the terms of which are „naturalness“, „originality“, „childlikeness“, and „authentification“, (p. 126). I will try to reformulate the process in my own words: First the recipient enters into an experience as an *I* with its own projection which she experiences as *naturalness*. Second, she is confronted with the *originality* of an aesthetic object. Through confrontation with this originality her former projection is challenged, which leads to stage three. In *childlike play*, the object is somehow projected back onto the recipient's self. Thus the recipient experiences herself partly as an object: the reflecting *Me* comes into play and the so-called natural *I* and its projection is made uncertain. After integrating this challenge – in other words, after integrating the *Me* into the *I* – the self becomes „authenticated“. *Authentification* here means a way of re-naturalization through conscious *cultivation*.

Here the term *genuineness* becomes important. I quote: „Strehle strives for the ideal of a genuine interaction between object and subject. Following Benjamin's subdivision of the arts' value into cult and exhibition value the designer leaves fashion's value of exhibiting, the *I*, aside and places her emphasis on the value of wearing the cultivated and authenticated *Me*“, (p. 129). As a „second skin“, Martach supposes that Strehle's clothes would „compensat[e] the subject's imperfection“, (*ibid.*). This passage functions as an image for a self enlarged and „cultivated“ through self-reflection, a self which needs culture to really be itself. As only „natural“, it would be imperfect but as cultured it can become perfect. This is the sense in which Martach uses the terms „(re-)finding“ and „authentification“.

I like the thought that style and taste are at the same time, I quote, „inherent elements of artistic and aesthetic experiences“ (p. 128) as they are also the result of them. It shows that the recipient enters the process of self-constitution with her whole actual being which then gets changed during that process. But here I think two ideas which contradict each other are mixed: one of *origin*, *nature*, and *innateness* with a more post-structural one. Self-constitution occurs only through an Other as one finds in critical theory or already in Zhuang Zou, when he offers the paradox „do I have to look to something else to be what I am?“ (p. 127) and answers *yes* because „the perfect man has no self“, (p. 129). So it would be more about the constitution of a self through an Other – even the other of the culture industry – than about any kind of „self-discovery“, (p. 127).

This brings me to my questions. Firstly, why this search for *origin*, *nature*, *authentic being* – why this striving for *harmony*, or of (re-)finding something which is already there? And secondly, is the process described as an especially aesthetic one or is it more generally a process of interaction with the world of the culture industry that surrounds us? If not, my question would be: what is specifically aesthetic in it? It appears to me that the process described here is not in any way subversive but rather a precise description of the creation of submissive western capitalist subjects through western capitalist popular culture. Martach tells us that the experiencing person would be able to affirm or reject and therefore to decide what he or she wants to integrate into her self (cf. p. 128ff). But if the offered choices are between the fashion of Strehle and the fashion of – for example – Karl Lagerfeld, then we must ask: is there really a choice at all?

According to Martach the goal of experiencing aesthetic products is to „become perfectly integrated into everyday-life culture“, (p. 126). This could be a definition of the products of the culture industry. But these products, fashion and films, in the sense that critical theory intends, would be no means against „self-alienation“, (p. 132). I think what here is called the goal of aesthetic and artistic experiences, namely to reach a „higher, more intense life“ (*ibid.*), is instead the false promise of the culture industry: of commodities and commodity fetishism.

Locating the Aesthetic

Response to James R. Hamilton: "Verdicts: aesthetic and artistic appreciation"

Mads Nygaard Folkmann & Hans-Christian Jensen

To discuss what verdicts and aesthetic and artistic appreciation are goes to the very core of some of the fundamental questions of aesthetics. What is aesthetic "meaning" (or "aesthetic meaning"), how is this aesthetic meaning constituted, where is it located and how may it be dependent not only on the evaluated objects and activities but also on the evaluating subjects? What does the verdict, aka evaluation, of aesthetic qualities in objects or activities require of understanding or even education from us?

Prof. James R. Hamilton differentiates between *artistic* and *aesthetic* verdicts and concludes by stating that "to render an artistic verdict, as opposed to rendering an aesthetic verdict, one must show one understands the object or activity being evaluated", (p. 179). On the one hand, an *artistic* verdict enters an evaluation and understanding of the object in question, of how it is made. In the context of the Russian formalism from the beginning of the 20th century this can be called the objects' "priyem", *прием*, a word highlighted by this movement to stress the investigation in the ways e.g. artworks are constructed and have a "method", (Shklovsky 1993; Striedter 1994). On the other hand, *aesthetic* verdicts seem to deal with the resonance called forth in the subjects and articulated as preferences. Individuals and, further, groups may demonstrate different kinds of taste and attempt to let these apply to other individuals and groups.

So, to be reductive, we may see in Hamilton's proposition a *dichotomy of object and subject* which is a founding figure all along the tradition of philosophical aesthetics. We want to open up the discussion by exploring this dichotomy through some of the elements pointed to in the article:

- 1) How can we approach the "priyem" of the objects in question, and what does intention mean in this context?

- 2) What is the borderline between aesthetic appreciation as something which is motivated by elements in the objects and symbolic meaning as something more arbitrarily ascribed to the objects either by individuals or social groups?
- 3) How can different kinds of disciplines, with different kinds of approaches and different kinds of traditions (and different geographical origins and positions) contribute to enlighten this dichotomy?

Artistic Objects. In the examples of the Morris Louis painting and the design for the Natural Museum of Utah, Hamilton points to several aspects. Verdicts may be dependent on knowing how things are made, constituted or composed. We can detect some kind of “achievement” (p. 178) when seeing how they are made. We can see that someone has done something in order to create the artwork or the piece of design.

The question is, whether the knowledge of *intentions* (e.g. the artists’ intention) plays a role for the understanding of the achievement. In literary theory, the “intentional fallacy” is an idiom long known (Wimsatt & Beardsley 1946), and Roland Barthes proclaimed the “death of the author”, (Barthes 1977). In these approaches, the access to intention should be blocked in order to investigate the artifact, its “*priyem*”. In design, it is another case, even we also here have a “*priyem*”; we may not have intentions leading back to one singular, originating individual but to multiple actors: designers, manufacturers and even consumers. The open question is if we need an access to or an understanding of intention to enact artistic verdicts? Also, in design – and in other types of objects we meet – purpose plays a role (e.g., Forsey 2013), and the understanding of purpose may be related to our ability to gain access to some kind of intention. Maybe “intention” plays different roles depending on the medium in question.

Further, what happens when the composition principles in question are put into self-reflective play? When we do not only have a “*priyem*” but even a communication of the “*priyem*” of the “*priyem*”? Self-reflective play with meaning constitution and construction principles can be found in many different kinds of artefacts. It can be found in Keats’ unfinished poem *The Fall of Hyperion* (1821), just to pick an example, exploring how the poem by its own means may enable new kinds of experience: The poem is not just a story about Hyperion but stages itself and points to itself as a medium for meaning construction and framing of human experience, (Rajan 1980). Or it can be found in contemporary conceptual art and design exploring its own status of art or design – or both in a cross-over. The open question here is

which role this kind of self-reflectivity to be found in many objects may play for our understanding of – and to our access to the understanding of – their construction principles.

Aesthetic Appreciation. Within our field, studies in design culture, which is very much influenced by the tradition of Cultural Studies, the question of aesthetics has for a long time been framed by a sociological notion of taste. In opposition to the Kantian philosophical notion of taste, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu pronounced his investigation of the social space of consumption in France in the 1960s to be based on a “social critique of the judgment of taste” – the subtitle of his book *Distinction*, (Bourdieu 1986). The interest has more been to look out into the social space and investigate practices of “taste communities” (Southerton 2001) than to scrutinize the specific texture and the “priyem” of the objects in question.

So if we take a starting point in the basic premises of our own field, aesthetic appreciation is something which is constructed in the social contexts subjects engage in. Thus, verdicts depend on the social positioning and formulation of taste cultures. The articulation of the aesthetic appreciation may then not be motivated by specific qualities or aspects of the objects but may demonstrate itself to be arbitrary. This aspect – that objects may be arbitrary to the kind of subjective-social evaluation and appreciation they lead to – was a central point in Halton & Csikszentmihalyi’s seminal study on *The Meaning of Things* where the authors demonstrated that people may appreciate all sorts of things, even kitsch objects and bad simili reproductions of art objects, (1981).

What is at stake here is a question of *symbolic* meaning as something different from aesthetic meaning. We may use the term “symbolic” to describe the different kinds of meaning people may ascribe to objects, (Folkmann 2016). Symbolic meanings are arbitrary in the sense that e.g. we can attach a specific meaning content to objects that do not signal the same meaning for other people. Also, the objects may in different ways be seen as transitory carriers of a cultural meaning that in different ways are attributed to the objects; the anthropologist Grant McCracken speaks in this way of “a mobile quality” of meaning as it “is constantly flowing to and from its several locations in the social world, aided by the collective and individual efforts of designers, producers, advertisers, and consumers”, (McCracken 1988: 71).

The question is, then, how symbolic meaning as arbitrary, cultural and social relates to the act of aesthetic appreciation. Is aesthetic appreciation always already arbitrary, cultural and social as it embedded in the social

texture of the articulation of taste? Or, it is possible to point to elements in the objects being evaluated and appreciated which *motivates* an aesthetic appreciation, that is, which is ‘designed’ to call forth certain responses in the subject? On this point, we find a potential for going back to the specific constitution of objects, their “*priyem*” or assemblage of parts in a certain way aimed to appeal for aesthetic responses.

Our question on this point remains an open one: When we turn the attention to the objects, how can we describe the elements in objects (and in their contexts) which call for an aesthetic appreciation? Of course, the answer must be specific to the type of object in question, whether it is installation art, literature, or industrial design. But in general we may ask which elements in the objects *motivate* an aesthetic appreciation which, then, may operate as the foundation for an attribution of symbolic meaning.

Approaches to Aesthetics. The symposium on Aesthetic Foundations demonstrates a vivid discussion on aesthetics. Despite the long tradition of aesthetics, much is still to be discussed and explored. Contemporary cultural expressions call for new conceptualizations. The symposium also demonstrates that we may approach aesthetics from different disciplines and positions.

At least three positions appear to us: First, the discipline of *philosophical aesthetics* approaches aesthetics as a philosophical topic in its own right. It relates to art, even if art sometimes appears as material only to demonstrate the theoretical points. Second, *art theory* seems to be closely linked to a reflection of the aesthetic. In art theory, aesthetics is often not part of the same philosophical reflection as in philosophical aesthetics, and it can be questioned if “aesthetics” in art theory signifies something else than a “theory of art” – this last may very much be Adorno’s approach to aesthetic theory in his seminal posthumous work on the topic, (Adorno 1970). Last, *cultural approaches* to other fields than art may also relate to the concept of aesthetics. Aesthetics has, though, for a long time not been a part of the framework for a cultural analysis of our field, design. Focus has been on studying the relation of production, design practice and consumption, whether it would be in a context of cultural studies (du Gay 1997), the discipline of “Design Culture” (Highmore 2009, Julier 2014), or Design History (e.g. Fallan 2010; Lees-Maffei 2014).

We have two points regarding this. First, a reflection of aesthetics may be highly relevant for our field. Perhaps art cannot do without aesthetics, but aesthetics can do without art. As an approach to analysis of design and the cultural settings of design, the interest in aesthetics may lead

to insights into how objects are coded in order to create appeal to consumers, and how this may be staged in various ways and by various means by different actors in the circuit around the products, e.g. by companies and consumers on social media platforms.

Second, we must be aware of the frictions between the disciplines and positions we speak from; especially when we use the same term, “aesthetic”. But we should also find a common ground of discussion, which this symposium very much testifies is possible.

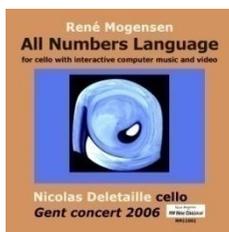
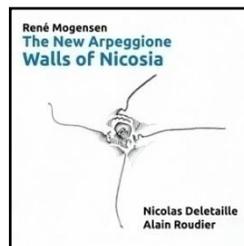
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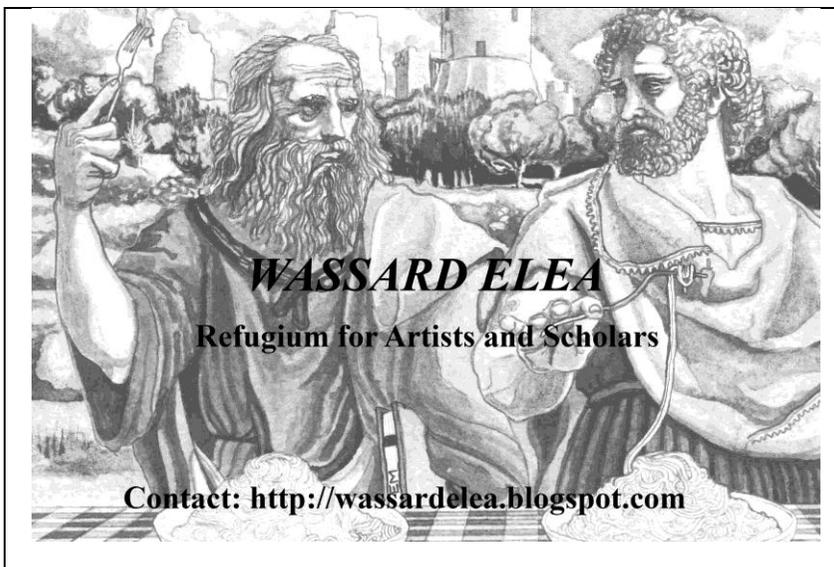
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