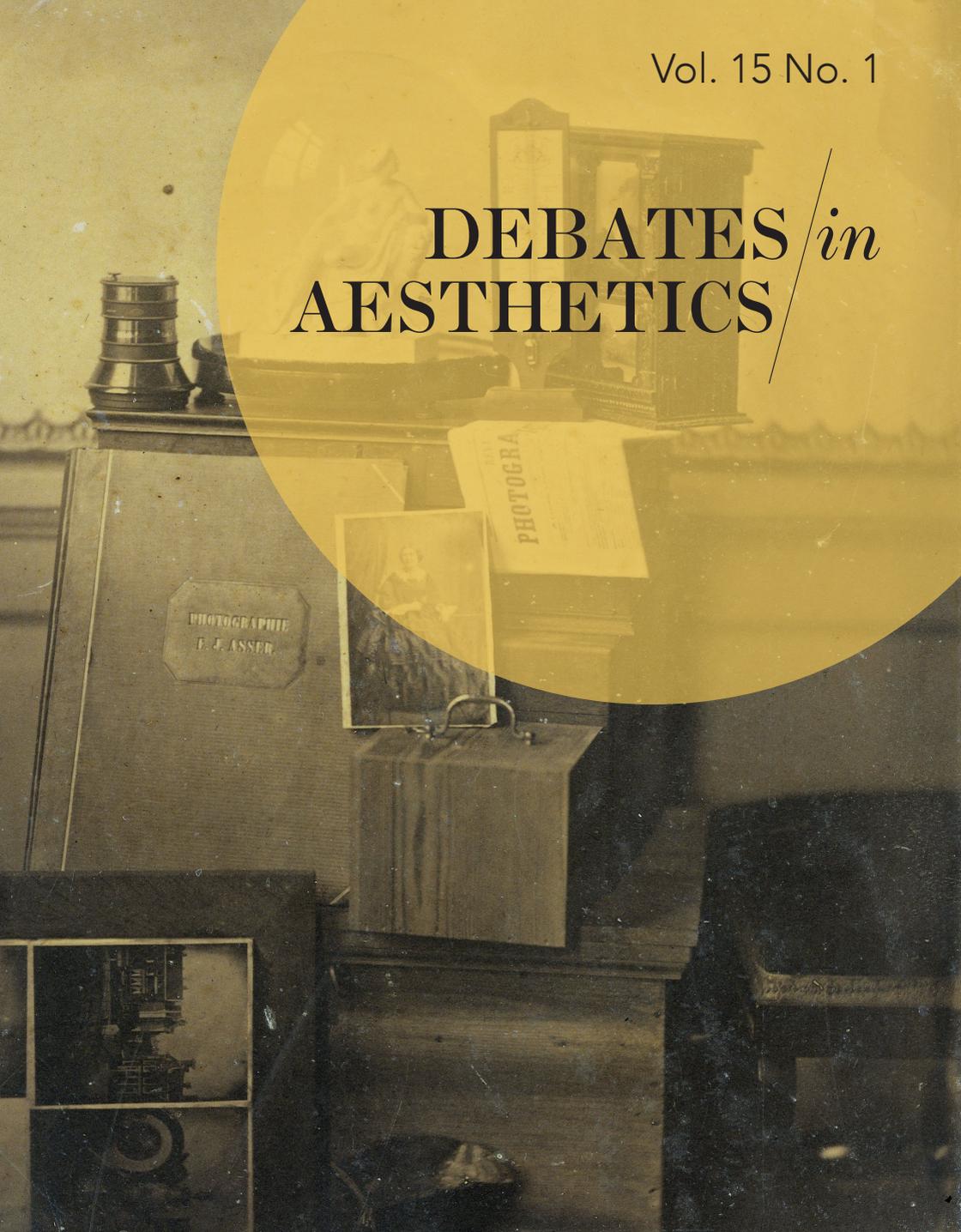


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Contact  
[www.debatesinaesthetics.org](http://www.debatesinaesthetics.org)  
[editor@debatesinaesthetics.org](mailto:editor@debatesinaesthetics.org)

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# INTRODUCTION

Claire Anscomb & Eleen M Deprez

It is our great pleasure to introduce our first issue as editors of *Debates in Aesthetics (DiA)*. In this general issue there are three original articles that range in topic from the use of technology to facilitate sublime experiences, the static-dynamic puzzle of still life works, to the role of authenticity in aesthetic appreciation. We are also happy to present an interview with Terry Diffey, emeritus professor at the University of Sussex and long-standing member of the British Society of Aesthetics.

Berta, in his article, explores technological devices that exploit the tactile sense to, via vibrations on the subject's skin, make distant events, like faraway earthquakes, or digital information, like the Stock Market, perceptible. Through his discussion of Moon Ribas' "Seismic Sense" and David Eagleman's "Versatile Extra-Sensory Transducer" (VEST) Berta distinguishes this kind of sensory alteration, which he terms "sensory augmentation", from three other kinds. He proposes that sensory augmentation enhances our sensory apparatus, making something formerly imperceptible appreciable. Technological devices, such as Seismic

Sense and VEST, are able to enhance our tactile sensory apparatus by the neuroplasticity of the brain and qualities of the skin. Berta argues that this process can alter or facilitate aesthetic experiences. Berta discusses the emotional experiences afforded by these devices (eg. feeling the closeness and immediacy of dangerous events with Seismic Sense) with the Kantian concepts of the mathematical and the dynamical sublime. He also bears on the accounts of the tactile sublime, as promulgated by Alan McNea and Carolyn Korsmeyer. Finally, Berta highlights a potential limitation to his account by noting that devices, such as the Seismic Sense and VEST, aim at sensual comprehension and so stand in contrast to the sublime as an aesthetic of failed comprehension. Berta accordingly modifies his account to conclude that sublime experiences are only possible in the early stages of using these devices, given that attention given to the sensation will likely fade with constant use of tactile sensory augmentation devices.

Berta's article offers a much-needed philosophical enquiry into the aesthetic possibilities of new and evolving digital technologies whilst relying on already existing work on the importance of touch in the arts. Berta's account remains modest in its aim as he suggests that there is a limited timeframe through which sublime experiences may be possible using these devices. Yet, one might wonder whether Berta need concede quite so much in his account. Consider for instance, the fact that, when used in an art context, audiences who encounter these devices in a gallery are not likely to have the opportunity to use these devices to the extent that they become accustomed to the sensations that they cause. Moreover, different kinds of information and different variants of these devices, beyond bracelets and VESTs for instance, will cause different kinds of outputs, and accordingly different kinds of tactile sensory augmentation. The context in which these devices are used is thus likely to shed further light on the exact nature of the sublime experiences that tactile sensory augmentation devices may foster, and as the development and use of such devices progresses, it will be intriguing to exam-

ine these in light of Berta's account in this article.

In her article, Brassey examines the “static-dynamic puzzle” whereby the representational content of still life works can be seen as expressive of emotions, despite the fact that, as paintings, still lifes are static objects that depict inanimate content. Brassey outlines several respects in which emotions are dynamic and examines one disjunct of Mitchell Green’s “Expressiveness as Showing Theory”, namely ‘showing how E feels’, which can seemingly be used to account for this puzzling phenomenon. According to Green, visual stimuli can elicit experienced resemblances to sounds, smells, and feelings, which is to say that their qualitative profiles are congruent. Qualitative profiles, as Brassey explains, refer ‘to where a percept will be located along three intersecting spectrums that respectively run from (i) intense-mild to (ii) pleasant-unpleasant, and (iii) dynamic-static.’ So, a yellow may be ‘intense, pleasant and dynamic’. As Brassey outlines, yellow could be mapped to vanilla, the harp, or serenity. While she suggests that Green’s account seems initially plausible, Brassey proceeds to highlight several concerns about Green’s approach. For instance, how can Green’s third disjunct cope with the fact that the painting *Sunflowers* is taken to represent joy and not vanilla? Brassey suggests that the depictive content of the work may be doing more fundamental expressive work here, which is problematic for Green. She suggests that congruency may partly describe how still lifes come to have dynamic properties, but not why particular emotions are realized. Green, she demonstrates, tries to overcome this problem by proposing that viewers empathetically attend ‘to the qualitative profile of the perceptual material.’ Yet, as Brassey highlights, given the distinction between expressing emotion and being expressive of emotion, Green cannot make this move, for empathy targets mental states, rather than three-space. At best, Brassey concludes, Green could say that it is moods, not emotions that are conveyed through this perceptual material.

Brassey raises some helpful concerns about Green's theory of expressiveness, framed by the question of how the representational content of still life works, which are fundamentally static, may be expressive of emotions, which are dynamic. Indeed, this focus brings to the fore, the worry that it is difficult to motivate the idea that the depictive content of the work is doing the more fundamental expressive work in a piece. Brassey indicates several possible directions that Green could go following these concerns by, for example, insisting that viewers engage in inconsistent experiences when eliciting resemblances or that 'Still Lifes convey moods not emotions.' One interesting route that follows from this, is examining whether the distinction between moods and emotions will help to address the situation. For instance, what could it mean to say that when 'reading' a still life painting, flowing brushstrokes of bright colours can call up a mood of exuberance? How does contagion work in this context? Brassey's proposed alternatives raise some intriguing avenues for future research.

In her article, Giombini questions whether our preference, which is exemplified by the restoration of destroyed artworks such as Cimabue's Assisi frescos, for original artefacts is reasonable. To this end, Giombini examines the debate between, in Jaworski's terms, "originalists" and "anti-originalists". The former group take the status of an object as authentic, or of undisputed origin or authorship, as a necessary condition for aesthetic experience because such objects are the embodiment of the artist's creative act, while the latter group propose that an artefact's status as an authentic object pertains to the law of contagion, that is, the special significance that is attached to originals has less to do with aesthetics and more to do with rarity or emotional attachment for example. Positioning herself between these opposing sides, Giombini argues that there are some instances in which the status of an artefact as an authentic object is aesthetically relevant: 'namely when style recognition is involved.' Drawing upon Alois Reigl's notion of *Kunstwollen*, Giombini argues that style exemplifies historical/cultural/artistic

will. Consequently, Giombini proposes that style properties, which are contextually-dependent but perceptually manifested, provide viewers, who are suitably informed, with information about how the work is to be evaluated and so are aesthetic properties. Giombini thus affirms that our preference for originals is, to an extent, reasonable.

Giombini's article paves a new way for thinking about the relation between authenticity and aesthetic appreciation and, in relation to this, it is intriguing to consider the potential scope of the account. For instance, what could it mean to appreciate a work of installation art as an authentic artefact when it may have different manifestations due to the various ways in which the installation instructions may be legitimately interpreted by a curator or conservator? Moreover, one might question whether it is possible to appreciate contemporary artworks more broadly as authentic objects given the plurality of style in contemporary art? One potential way to address these questions might come from further contemplation of Giombini's conjecture that there are "particular instances" in which an artwork's authenticity is aesthetically relevant.

In the interview conducted by Jeffrey Petts, Terry Diffey reflects on how he came to a career in aesthetics and to the beginnings of the British Society of Aesthetics and the British Journal of Aesthetics (BJA). Diffey's association with the society started in the early 1960s, shortly after the society was founded and he took over as editor of the BJA in the late 1970s. What is particularly striking about Diffey's editorial approach is his highly inclusive attitude, both in terms of the scope of topics on offer in the journal and also the readership, which is a mission that we hope to continue with our work here at DiA.



# SENSORY AUGMENTATION AND THE TACTILE SUBLIME

Yorick Berta

Independent Scholar

*This paper responds to recent developments in the field of sensory augmentation by analysing several technological devices that augment the sensory apparatus using the tactile sense. First, I will define the term sensory augmentation, as the use of technological modification to enhance the sensory apparatus, and elaborate on the preconditions for successful tactile sensory augmentation. These are the adaptability of the brain to unfamiliar sensory input and the specific qualities of the skin lending themselves to be used for the perception of additional sensory information. Two devices, Moon Ribas' Seismic Sense and David Eagleman's VEST, will then be discussed as potential facilitators of aesthetic experiences in virtue of the tactile sensory augmentation that these devices allow. I will connect the experiences afforded by these devices to the Kantian categories of the mathematical and the dynamical sublime, and to existing accounts of tactile sublimity. Essentially, the objects these devices make sensible, earthquakes for the Seismic Sense and digital information for the VEST, produce pleasurable feelings of potential danger, awe, and respect. The subsequent acclimation to this new way of sensing and the aim to comprehend its sensed object are then discussed as possible objections to the interpretation of these experiences as sublime, and as aesthetic in general. To exemplify these issues and concretise my thesis of tactile sensory augmentation as a trigger of the sublime, I will outline an experiment to use the VEST as an aid for faster decision making on the stock market.*

## Introduction

From the figure of the cyborg, an ambiguous merger of flesh and technology<sup>1</sup>, to the recent innovations in the field of virtual and augmented reality,<sup>2</sup> the technological mediation of our embodied experience of the world elicits constant debate about its potential, implication, and value. In addition, phenomena such as wearables or body modifications pose interesting questions to the field of aesthetics. Virtual reality goggles or smart glasses, for example, transform, denaturalise, and deconstruct the way we sensually experience the world. Such devices challenge the very basis of aesthetic experience. In this paper, I want to examine how technological modification of the senses can alter or facilitate aesthetic experiences. I will discuss two devices that exploit our tactile sense (the registration of pressure on the skin).<sup>3</sup> The first, Seismic Sense, is a vibrating ankle bracelet, invented by the artist Moon Ribas.<sup>4</sup> The second, the Versatile Extra-Sensory Transducer (VEST), is a vibratory device worn as a VEST developed by neuroscientist David Eagleman.<sup>5</sup> The ankle brace-

1 On the concept of cyborgism see Grenville (2001) and Kirkup (2010).

2 For an overview on augmented reality technologies, see Dey *et al.* (2018); a review of literature on virtual reality can be found in Berntsen *et al.* (2016).

3 Our tactile sense is thus a subcategory of the sense of touch, which includes tactile, haptic, proprioceptive, kinaesthetic, vestibular, and cutaneous sensations. For an overview and definition of these different 'senses of touch' see Paterson 2007, IX.

4 Even on Ribas' own various web presences, there is conflicting information on the Seismic Sense. On the project's website (ThoughtWorks Arts 2016), it is described as a wearable, an exteriorly worn device, and illustrated with a picture of it worn on Moon Ribas' ankle. Later, it is described as an implant into Ribas' arm, however. On another webpage co-founded by Ribas, (Cyborg Arts 2019) the Seismic Sense is described as an implant in the artist's feet. Since the function of the Seismic Sense is not affected by these differences, I will address it as an ankle bracelet, which, as a wearable, seems its potentially most popular form. Interestingly, Ribas also uses her device as a prop in various performances, whose choreography depends on the seismic activity felt by her. Here, the sensorially augmented artist functions as a medium for the creative power of 'nature' itself. For a summary of Ribas' artistic activities and strategies, see her TED-Talk in Munich in 2014 (TEDx Talks, 2015).

5 This, too, has been presented in a TED-Talk, in Vancouver in March 2015 (TEDx Talks, 2015a).

let makes earthquakes perceptible at a distance, by vibrating whenever there is an earthquake happening somewhere in the world. The device is connected to an online seismograph, causing the vibrations to vary in strength according to the earthquake's magnitude (Boukhris and Almiron 2017, 203). The VEST is equipped with small vibratory sensors on its back which can be controlled via Bluetooth. Depending on the programming, the VEST can receive and automatically transduce different kinds of digital information into vibratory patterns. This way, digital information, such as data from the stock market, can be translated into tactile sensations. I will argue that both facilitate the aesthetic experience of the sublime. In other words the experiences afforded by these devices can be understood in terms of the Kantian dynamical and mathematical sublime.

In Section One, I will explain what sensory augmentation is and how it works. Important here are the premises of brain plasticity (its functional and structural changeability) and the possibility of tactile sensory augmentation. In Section Two, I discuss the two aforementioned devices, which are able to transduce abstract information into immediately felt tactile sensations. Section Three develops an understanding of the experience afforded by the devices using the Kantian categories of the dynamical and the mathematical sublime. Section Four examines a potential worry: how can we render sensory augmentation devices as sublime, when their aim for sensual comprehension of abstract phenomena stands contrary to the sublime as an aesthetic of failed comprehension? To further explore this worry, in Section Five I discuss a particular example of sensory augmentation technology facilitating an experience of the sublime, namely the use of the VEST in stock trading experiments. This will lead me to the conclusion that the sublime experiences manifested with these devices are only possible during the early stages of use before the inevitable normalisation of the tactile sensations, although the desired effect of sensual comprehension is open to question.

## 1 Sensory Augmentation and Neuroplasticity

One way of understanding sensory augmentation is an alteration of the way we sensually experience the world. On this understanding a mirror which relocates the sense of vision, or a white cane which extends the tactile sense, or even temporary sensory alterations such as hallucinogenic drugs can be seen as sensory augmentations. This ambiguity necessitates a distinction between four related concepts of sensory alteration for the purpose of this essay, a distinction which roughly follows four definitions proposed by Jamie Ward and Thomas Wright (2014, 9-10):<sup>6</sup>

- a) Sensory Restoration – repairing a damaged sense modality with, for example, prescription lenses or cochlear implants
- b) Sensory Extrapolation<sup>7</sup> – increasing the range of perception of an existing sense modality, with devices such as night vision goggles or microscopes
- c) Sensory Substitution – replacing a certain sense by translating sensory stimuli of one modality into information for another modality, for example braille
- d) Sensory Augmentation – using technology to make something formerly imperceptible known to the sensory apparatus, such as x-ray radiography

(Ward and Wright 2014, 9-10)

Although the line of distinction between (c) and (d) is rather thin, it is important to separate them to account for the different underlying

6 The authors distinguish between 'compensatory prostheses', which corresponds to my definition of a) 'within-sense referral devices', which expands b) onto relocations of the sensor with mirrors etc.; 'between-sense referral devices', which, as the authors state, is largely synonymous with sensory substitution; and 'novel-sense referral devices', which corresponds to my usage of the term sensory augmentation.

7 The term 'sensory extrapolation' is borrowed from Humphreys (2004, 4).

motivations. Whilst sensory substitution (c) – and also sensory restoration (a) for that matter – simulates the sensing of another modality, restores previous sensory abilities, or establishes normative sensory abilities for differently abled people, sensory augmentation (d) accesses information which lies completely outside the human sensory realm.<sup>8</sup> Particularly, sensory augmentation (d) does not understand the substituting sensory modality as a mere compensation for the substituted modality, but embraces the specific way of each modality to sense the world. The tactile augmentations discussed here are therefore no mere substitutions for vision, but augmentations in their own right. However, sensory augmentation and substitution are inevitably linked. The attempt to augment the sensory apparatus was only made possible by innovations in the field of sensory substitution. The same device can often be used to both substitute and augment a sensory modality, as the history of tactile sensory substitution shows. Therefore, although my main interest is sensory augmentation (d), it is so closely connected to sensory substitution that a prior discussion is required.

Crucial for the development of sensory substitution and augmentation devices was the research by neuroscientist Paul Bach-y-Rita, starting in the late 1960s. His experiments made two important discoveries: (1) the ability of the brain to interpret new sensory stimuli, and (2) the affordance of the skin. Bach-y-Rita developed a method for Tactile-Visual-Sensory-Substitution (TVSS). This enabled blind people to perceive objects at a distance using their tactile sense. In Bach-y-Rita's original setup, an array of vibratory solenoid plates was mounted to a dentist's chair and connected to a camera (1969).<sup>9</sup> The blind participants controlled a camera to scan various items placed on a table in front of them. The camera image was then transduced into vibratory responses,

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8 For an ideological and technological critique of sensory restoration as a reproduction of ableism, see Campbell (2009, 79-96).

9 For a more recent review of the progressings in the field of sensory substitution using different sensory modalities, see Bach-y-Rita and Kerckel (2003).

corresponding to the image in intensity and position on the array. By interpreting the vibrations on their backs, the participants were able to discriminate between the objects placed in front of the camera.

In comparison with previous technological inventions which can be seen as TVSS-devices, such as the white cane or the braille writing system, Bach-y-Rita's setup works without directly or indirectly touching the object and performs a greater range of functions than identifying obstacles or reading text – it makes possible the simultaneous perception of several objects, including non-haptic features such as their shadows, their potential movement, and their spatial relation (Bach-y-Rita *et al.* 1969, 963-4).

The participants in this experiment reported a fast process of adaptation, as they learnt this new means of perception. With time, users became less aware of the tactile stimulation itself and instead began to perceive the objects directly, i.e., without being conscious of the technological mediation facilitating the sensual experience (Bach-y-Rita *et al.* 1969, 964; Bach-y-Rita 2004, 86). The experiment demonstrates two factors which are essential for the success of sensory augmentation devices discussed in the next section: neuroplasticity and the affordance of the skin for additional sensory input. Neuroplasticity denotes the theory that the connections between neurons in the brain are not fixed but get established and consolidated by frequent use. (Hebb 1949, 62; Bach-y-Rita 1967). According to neuroplasticity the brain can transform its anatomical or functional structure according to changing requirements, i.e., it is malleable. Bach-y-Rita's experiments with sensory substitution demonstrate this. After an initial learning phase, the brain is able to interpret new sensory stimuli. This ability, which is necessary for successful sensory substitution, also enables sensory augmentation. Instead of transducing the sensory information of one modality into another, information that is completely alien to the sensory apparatus is translated into tactile stimuli and is perceived directly.

Another finding of Bach-y-Rita's experiment is the potential of the skin to process additional sensory input. Unlike the eyes or the ears, the skin is not permanently occupied with discriminating unfamiliar sensory information. At least on the back, most passive stimulations on the skin are processed unconsciously – if we do not concentrate on it, the sensations of the air or of clothes touching our skin go largely unnoticed. Although subliminal sensations occur within all sense modalities, the threshold for the skin on the back to consciously perceive sensory stimuli is comparatively high (Weinstein 1968). Therefore, it offers a large, typically underutilised area for additional sensory information in the form of vibrations. Although the tongue or the fingertips have far more sensory receptors, Bach-y-Rita's original experiment has shown that the sensibility of the skin of the back is effective enough to discriminate the sensations of four hundred vibratory rods on an array. Keeping these discoveries in mind – (1) the ability of the brain to interpret new sensory stimuli, and (2) the affordance of the skin, especially on the back, for sensory augmentation – I would now like to introduce two technical devices, both of which have popularised sensory augmentation using the tactile sense.

## **2 Tactile Sensory Augmentation Devices**

In this section, I will introduce two devices which engage with the findings of Bach-y-Rita's research to transit from sensory substitution to sensory augmentation: the Seismic Sense and the VEST.

In 2013, the artist and co-founder of the Cyborg Foundation Moon Ribas started wearing a vibratory ankle bracelet with a wireless connection to the US government web service for earthquake data (Boukhris and Almiron 2017, 203). Whenever it receives information about an earthquake happening somewhere in the world, the ankle bracelet vibrates. The vibration's strength matches the earthquake's magnitude on the Richter scale. Ribas thus carries a tactile augmentation which functions as a 'Seismic Sense'. In an interview from 2016, the artist stressed the

feeling of closeness this device facilitates, when she described the effect of a particularly strong earthquake: “It felt very weird, like I was there [...] I feel connected to the people who suffer through an earthquake.” (Quito 2016). The Seismic Sense thus combines an affective quality (“I feel connected”) and sensual immediacy (“like I was there”) with the safe distance to the actual object of perception, the earthquake.

The second example of sensory augmentation is a tvss-device developed by the team of neuroscientist David Eagleman. This device is called the *VEST* (Versatile Extra-Sensory Transducer). It functions as a portable and flexible version of Bach-y-Rita’s dentist chair, which I discussed in Section One.<sup>10</sup> The *VEST* has several vibratory motors on its back which are controlled by an implemented microcontroller. With a specifically designed interface – a smartphone app, for example – information is compressed and sent to the microcontroller via Bluetooth. Here, the information is transduced into vibratory patterns, which can be felt as tactile sensations on the back. If a working interface to compress the incoming information is provided, any kind of information can be transduced into tactile sensations. Given the plasticity of the brain, it is possible that information will eventually be perceived directly as an additional sense.

The *VEST* still remains in a highly experimental state with no established ways of usage. There are, however, many contexts it could be introduced to. The *VEST* could be connected to a camera, for instance, through which the user scans their surroundings and transduces the appearance of objects into tactile sensations on the back. However, we can imagine many other ways to apply the *VEST*. It could be used to ease navigation in space by vibrating when the user has to turn to a certain

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<sup>10</sup> Bach-y-Rita himself developed several portable applications of his TVSS system, including an array of tactile stimulators grid worn as a belt on the abdomen and a small array placed on the tongue, connected to a camera mounted within spectacles. See: Paterson (2016, 168-170); Chirimuuta and Paterson (2015, 416); Renier and Volder (2013, 855).

direction, for example; to get direct bodily feedback whilst controlling complex machinery; as a notification system for upcoming appointments or social media activities; to notify the user of changes of internal bodily states they might otherwise be unaware of (e.g. ovulation or hypoglycaemia); or it could increase synaesthetic experience, enhancing, for example, the enjoyment of music. When sitting in a concert hall, the VEST could be connected to microphones and, depending on the chosen programming, vibrate according to the music's volume or timbre, or the different vibrators on the VEST could match different instruments. Or when going on a run, the VEST could warn against dehydration, give feedback on the heart rate or keep the wearer on a pre-programmed path by vibrating on crossways. Again, theoretically, the relayed information via the VEST could be of any kind as long as it is translatable into vibrations via Bluetooth. These two devices suggest that the brain adapts itself to new sensory stimuli, particularly to those utilising the skin, which is a sensory medium without many interfering conscious stimuli. In addition, the tactile sensations seem to be able to produce feelings of immediacy and closeness. These feelings are important for the next section of this paper, in which I will argue for the Seismic Sense and the VEST as facilitators of sublime experiences – the latter not in a certain area of application, but its general incentive to make abstract information tactilely sensible. While the association of the Seismic Sense with the sublime might seem obvious, given the pre-occupation of both with natural phenomena, the relationship between abstract information and the sublime will require some elaboration.

### 3 The Tactile Sublime

I will first briefly discuss the sublime as conceptualised by Immanuel Kant and describe existing accounts of a tactile sublime. I will then relate the sublime to the devices introduced in the previous section.

In the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant develops two distinct categories of sublime experiences (1987, 101 §24). On the one hand, the dynamical

sublime describes the merely theoretical fear triggered by overwhelming or threatening phenomena in nature, such as thunderclouds or waterfalls. To experience the dynamical sublime in nature, the subject has to reassure herself that the danger imposed by nature is not harming them, yet re-enact the fear it would cause as a form of amazement.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the mathematical sublime describes the incapability of human imagination to comprehend magnitudes in the same way that mathematical concepts can frame them. Magnitude is a relative term, denoting objects which are large beyond comparison, or ‘in comparison with which everything else is small.’ (Kant 1987, 106 §25). Their totality exceeds imaginative abilities and curbs the urge for aesthetic comprehension (Kant (1987, 97-8 §23). Similar to the dynamical sublime, this failure of the aesthetic faculty entails a certain threat for the subject, a momentary questioning of his sovereignty. It opens up ‘an abyss in which the imagination is afraid to lose itself.’ (Kant 1987, 115 §27) The momentary trembling, facing a danger or the limits of aesthetic comprehension, arouses a feeling which is ‘not so much a positive pleasure as rather admiration and respect.’ (Kant 1987, 98 §23 and 114 § 27)

Kant’s account of the sublime is based solely on the sense of vision. Yet, recent work by Alan McNee and less directly by Carolyn Korsmeyer explore the possibility of a tactile sublime (McNee 2015; Korsmeyer 2014 and 2016). In his work on 19<sup>th</sup>-century mountaineering as a multisensory aesthetic experience, McNee coined the term ‘haptic sublime’, which is, unlike the ocularcentric,<sup>12</sup> distanced aesthetic theory by Kant based on

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11 ‘[...] any spectator who beholds massive mountains climbing skyward, deep gorges with raging streams in them, wastelands lying in deep shadow and inviting melancholy meditation, and so on is indeed seized by amazement bordering on terror, by horror and a sacred thrill; but, since he knows he is safe, this is not actual fear: it is merely our attempt to incur it with our imagination, in order that we may feel that very power’s might and connect the mental agitation this arouses with the mind’s state of rest’ (Kant 1987, 129 §24).

12 I borrow the term ‘ocularcentrism’ from Martin Jay (1988).

the proximity of tactile encounter.<sup>13</sup> According to McNee, it is the sensually experienced closeness to the mountains which evokes sublime feelings in the touching subject: the sensations of climbing a mountain, feeling the tension in the whole body, its slow movement in the scenery, the exhilarating feeling of danger, and the contact of the skin to the rock or ice wall all come together to make the mountaineer aware of their bodily presence while simultaneously inducing a feeling of transcendence. McNee stresses that the sublimity of mountaineering cannot only be attributed to the overwhelming nature of mountains, but to the human urge to conquer them: 'The sublime [...] is to some extent an aesthetic of mastery, of overcoming a threat or difficulty.' (2014, 15) This threat is, unlike the Kantian dynamical sublime, not theoretical but real; it intensifies the threat for human sovereignty and the accompanying feeling of respect (McNee 2014, 15-7).

In Korsmeyer's writing on genuineness and the sense of touch, the category of the sublime is repeatedly implied, when she references David Lowenthal's notion of the 'shiver of contact' David Hume on the sublimity of cross-temporal contact (Korsmeyer 2016, 219) and the tactile encounter of ruins (Korsmeyer 2014, 434). In touching something genuinely old, the touching subject is directly confronted with a temporal scale far beyond the human lifespan. Touch, in this case, establishes the perceptual link necessary for an aesthetic experience and elicits the feeling of respect.

Both these models of tactile sublimity replace the distance necessary for experiencing the Kantian dynamical sublime with a moment of physical contact. Ribas' seismic device, then, can be understood as a reconciliation of this tactile sublimity with the distanced dynamical sublime. The Seismic Sense conforms to the dynamical sublime firstly because earthquakes as the given object of perception are a traditional

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13 McNee uses the term 'haptic' instead of 'tactile' to account for the synaesthetic experience of mountaineering, including proprioceptive and kinaesthetic sensations (2014, 14).

trigger of sublime experiences. For example, in his treatise on the dynamical sublime, Kant discusses natural phenomena such as ‘tempests, storms, earthquakes.’ (1987,<sup>122</sup> §28) Secondly, the Seismic Sense elicits a sense of possible danger while maintaining a safe distance. It is exactly this combination of danger and distance that makes the Seismic Sense eligible for the aesthetic category of the sublime. In the accounts of McNee and Korsmeyer, the sublime experience is brought about by physical presence. In the case of the Seismic Sense, the physical presence becomes telepresence, which denotes ‘the presentation of perceptual information that claims to correspond to a remote physical reality’ (Goldberg 1998, 33). The ankle bracelet as a device able to facilitate telepresence reconciles the tactile sublime and the Kantian dynamical sublime: it establishes an immediate contact with the destructive powers of nature but secures a safe distance, which enables the feeling of respect while emphasising the subject’s independence.

The VEST, on the other hand, responds to the mathematical sublime. This is because it establishes a perceptual link with phenomena across multiple spatio-temporal dimensions, questioning human sovereignty. Specifically, in this case, the overwhelming phenomenon is the sheer amount of information gathered in the ‘information society’.

The post-industrial paradigm of the information society has been, among others, postulated by Theodore Roszak. In his book *The Cult of Information*, Roszak analyses the impact of a 1948 paper on communication theory by Claude Shannon. In this paper, Shannon proposes a new definition of information, not as a carrier of meaning, but as a ‘purely quantitative measure of communicative exchanges’ (Roszak 1986, 11) which is independent from both sender and receiver. Information gains value on its own and effectively reduces human agency and sovereignty. Roszak argues that this new definition of information prefigures the paradigm of the information society, as a society organised in decentralised global networks, in which humans become mere

participants (1986, 15–16).<sup>14</sup> Information itself, organising and controlling human interaction, becomes a sublime phenomenon – something that is increasingly hard to grasp in its totality and is less and less subordinate to human command.

This relation of information and sublimity has in recent years been further popularised by ‘developments across a range of technologies, from digital sensors, computer networks, data storage, cluster computer systems and cloud computing facilities’ (Bryant *et al* 2008, 2-3 in McCosker and Wilken 2014, 156), developments that have led to the algorithmic aggregation of information in nearly every aspect of life. This is subsumed under the term ‘big data’, which denotes amounts of data that are too big to be intelligible by humans. Moreover, due to the logic of total data accumulation, which lead to the phenomenon of big data, humans themselves became profitable sources of information. This logic increases the subjugation denoted in Shannon’s model of information. Thus, the concept of big data as a relative magnitude, the challenge it poses for human sovereignty and the problem of representability or comprehension lead back to the mathematical sublime. The VEST not only allows users to experience phenomena such as big data sensually, but makes this experience a potentially aesthetic one, as a feeling of the sublime.

Although the category of the sublime was originally used in relation to predominantly visually experienced phenomena, the work of McNee and Korsmeyer have paved the way for an understanding of a tactilely experienced sublime. The physical presence, which is essential to both accounts of tactile sublimity, is, in the devices discussed here, transformed into telepresence. While the Seismic Sense refers to the traditionally sublime phenomenon of earthquakes, the VEST is able to make digital information sensible through vibrations, facilitating an equal feeling of sublimity.

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14 See also Poster (1994, 173).

Yet, framing tactile devices as sublime facilitators poses a problem. The VEST proposes an alternative way of knowing, an immediate, sensual form of comprehension. If, however, the VEST is able to aptly comprehend big data for its user, a conflict with my interpretation of the feelings it produces as sublime would arise. In the following section, I will explore this conflict between the VEST's aim for comprehension and my interpretation of it as aesthetic facilitator further. Observing a process of normalisation in the sensual experience afforded by the VEST, which reinforces the aim for comprehension, I will argue that sublime experiences are only possible in the early stages of the use of such devices.

#### 4 Sensual Comprehension and Normalisation

The relationship between sensual comprehension of abstract information and the sublime has been discussed in detail for the topic of data visualisation.<sup>15</sup> I will relate this discussion to the given case of tactile sensory augmentation devices, with regard to Bach-y-Rita's experiments, as well as existing work on somaesthetics – the aesthetic experience of one's own body.

For the case of data visualisation, Lev Manovich argues that visualisation is indeed anti-sublime, since it attempts to represent overwhelming masses of data in perceptible, and what are frequently referred to as 'beautiful', graphs (Manovich 2002, 8). Anthony McCosker and Rowan Wilken, on the other hand, plea for data visualisation as a trigger of sublime experiences in its own right, which rather 'reinforces the sense of 'unknowability' that has become associated with sublime experiences of phenomena connected with 'big data' (2014, 156).

For the case of the VEST, I will take the view of McCosker and Wilken. The VEST primarily establishes a sensual relationship with the represented object, a sublime anticipation. Similar to imaginatively encoun-

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<sup>15</sup> See Manovich (2002); Jevbratt (2004); Stalbaum (2006); Sack (2011); McCosker and Wilken (2014).

tering centuries of history with a single touch, the venerating gesture Korsmeyer sees in the tactile encounter of ruins, I propose that the vibrations of the VEST can produce a feeling of respect for the excessive amounts of information channelled through it. In the beginning, when the vibrations seem erratic and incomprehensible, the wearer of the VEST might feel overwhelmed by the constant stream of data, and the sheer vastness of the informational world they are now exposed to. Here, the 'urge for mastery' (McNee) is paired with the 'sense of unknowability' (McCosker and Wilken).

It was reported that the participants of Bach-y-Rita's original experiment became accustomed to the vibrations and with time came to perceive objects directly. This indicates that the initial sublime 'shiver of contact' may weaken. This process of normalisation is the exact reversal of what Richard Shusterman and Sherri Irvin describe as a criterion for somaesthetics — the unusual attention one has to give to bodily sensations to perceive them aesthetically (Shusterman 1997; Irvin 2008). Due to the malleability of the brain, the user of the VEST will give less and less attention to the sensation itself, and start to feel them as a direct manifestation of the data the VEST has been connected with. Following this line of thought, neuroplasticity hinders aesthetic experience: the tactile devices discussed here start out as facilitating sublime aesthetic experiences, which, with increasing normalisation, eventually fade into ordinary sensory perception. The aesthetic appreciation of ordinary objects thus requires a sense of unfamiliarity and an unusual attention to the sensual experience itself, both of which are challenged by constant exposure.

I will end my paper by exemplifying this tension between the category of the sublime and the process of normalisation with a particularly remarkable experiment performed with the VEST. This experiment, aiming for a tactile sensing of the fluctuations of the stock market, combines the characteristics of the mathematical and the dynamical

sublime and, notwithstanding that this aesthetic effect might dissipate after repeated use, illustrates the device's processing of big data.

## 5 Sensing the Stock Market

In a separate experiment carried out by Eagleman's team, the VEST was linked to data from the stock market.<sup>16</sup> The stock market is an electronic network of shareholders, which has been described by economists such as Shiller or Kahnemann as behaving like a herd, yet without any common or higher purpose.<sup>17</sup> The fluctuations in the stock market, which the buying and selling of stocks produce, are in their entirety mostly erratic, unforeseeable, and in times of crisis highly destructive for the economy. In this context, the VEST is promoted as a novel approach to the stock market. It promises an intuitive, visceral understanding of the market fluctuations and a considerable advantage in the virtual trade of buying and selling stocks, in which only the fastest and most knowledgeable participants profit.<sup>18</sup> Eagleman explains the rationale as follows:

We stream 5 seconds of real-time data from the internet to a person wearing the VEST. Then two buttons appear on a screen, and the person has to make choice. A second later they get a smiley face or frowny face telling them whether their choice was the right one. The person has no idea that what they're feeling is real-time stock market data, and that the buttons represent buy or sell decisions. [...] Eventually we'll tell the participants what is really going on, and we are interested to know what the expe-

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16 David Eagleman reports on the ongoing experiments in a TED-talk in Vancouver, March 2015 (TEDx Talks, 2015a). A scientific publication of the results is yet to be published.

17 See, for example, Shiller (2005), Tversky and Kahneman (1974), and Brunnermeier (2001).

18 Research has shown that traders with a highly developed sense of interoception, a visceral feeling for the internal state in the body, are significantly more successful at high-frequency-trading. See Kandasamy *et al* (2016).

rience will be like for a person who wears this stock market VEST for long time. Are they suddenly going to feel a tightening in their stomach and think, “Oh gosh, the oil price is about to crash”? (Eagleman in Thomson 2015, 27)

In this setup, the VEST enables its wearer to adapt to the rapid fluctuations of the stock market and to integrate its, at times, devastating instabilities directly into the sensory apparatus. In particular, the VEST offers a new way to interpret the constant, overwhelming and often hardly intelligible flow of information in real-time, and to sensually experience the devastations caused by ruptures in the stock prices. This way, the tactile sensing of the stock market responds to the mathematical as well as the dynamical sublime.

Eagleman does not try to conceal the fact that the experiment is highly speculative and might not provide a substitute or even a supplement for traditional stock market analysis. However, the erratic vibrations indicating changes on the incomprehensible scale of the world economy will eventually cease to produce sublime experiences and dissipate into ordinary tactile sensations that the wearer of the VEST will get accustomed to – whether they can make sense out of them or not.

## 6 Conclusion

In this article, I discussed two tactile sensory augmentation devices and their potential for aesthetic experiences, in particular experience of the sublime. Following Jamie Ward and Thomas Wright, ‘sensory augmentation’ has been defined as a way to exploit an existing sense modality in order to make something that was formerly imperceptible known to the sensory apparatus (Ward & Wright 2014, 9-10). Consequently, I have proposed that this is distinct from sensory restoration, extrapolation and substitution.

I have suggested that sensory substitution is the precursor for sensory augmentation, given that the sensory substitution experiments by Bach-

y-Rita have demonstrated that the plasticity of the brain and the affordance of the skin for sensory substitution are key to successful tactile sensory augmentations. The devices I have examined, in this paper, make use of these preconditions to enable new aesthetic experiences of the world — earthquakes in the case of the Seismic Sense and digital information in the case of the VEST. Moreover, I have demonstrated that these experiences fit the Kantian concept of the dynamical and mathematical sublime. I have singled out the problem of comprehension as a possible objection to my account. The sublime, as an aesthetic of failed comprehension, stands contrary to a possible motivation of the VEST, which is to comprehend phenomena, such as big data, tactilely. I have argued that instead of a feeling of comprehension, the VEST produces a feeling of unknowability, which triggers the sublime. An aesthetic feeling such as the sublime, however, requires that attention be given to the sensation, which will probably fade with constant use of tactile sensory augmentation devices. The facilitation of sublime experiences is therefore an effect confined to the initial stage of the usage of such devices. In order to concretise this issue and the abstract feature of the VEST to give a sublime sense of overwhelming amounts of data, I have examined an experiment to make stock data tactilely sensible. The lack of intelligibility of stock market fluctuations, and the possible danger caused by them culminates in a feeling of mathematical as well as dynamical sublimity.

This example illustrates that the Kantian sublime not only offers a way to conceptualise recent technological innovations and the social fabric they are weaved into, but also an entry point for the field of aesthetics to engage with the technological augmentation of the senses.

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## STILL MOVING

Vanessa Brassey  
King's College London

*Here is something puzzling. Still Lifes can be expressive. Expression involves movement. Hence, (some) Still Lifes move. This seems odd. I consider a novel explanation to this 'static-dynamic' puzzle from Mitchell Green (2007). Green defends an analysis of artistic expressivity that is heavily indebted to work on intermodal perception. He says visual stimuli, like colours and shapes, can elicit experienced resemblances to sounds, smells and feelings. This enables viewers to know how an emotion feels by looking at the picture. The hypothesis is intriguing, but I show that his suggestion that we empathize with the pictorial content is implausible and that this exposes a flaw in the way his argument moves from experiential mappings to experiential-affective mappings. Consequently, I register some reservations about the way Green supposes we detect these cross-modal qualities.*

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Expressive, emotional or moving qualities are considered a significant source of value for Still Life paintings (Budd 2012; Wollheim 1987). One lauded feature of Zurbarán's *Still Life with Pottery Jars* (c.1635) is its air of exuberance, Morandi's *Pots* (c.1946) series are praised for their appearance of serenity, and Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* (c.1880) for a sense of joyfulness. Accounting for this has generated much philosophical discussion as theorists seek to explain how inanimate paintings of inanimate objects can readily be seen as having emotional (qua psychological) properties like exuberance or joy.<sup>2</sup> The representation of an emotion in a static object, beyond the straightforward depiction of a facial expression, exercises philosophers since it involves representing something dynamic. Emotions may be considered dynamic in several senses of the term: (1) physiologically, that is involving a change in a subject's physiological state and awareness of the same through bodily feeling, (2) psychologically, that is involving changes in the way the subject represents their environment, and (3) temporally, that is involving a subject directing their feelings towards the past (e.g. regret, nostalgia) or the future (e.g. anticipation, fear) as well as the present (e.g. happiness). In addition, emotions are considered dynamic because they come and go and because they unfold through a series of initiating, sustaining and monitoring phases. For these reasons, emotions are considered to be paradigmatically dynamic properties. So how can we see them in static pictures?<sup>3</sup> How might we explain the odd result that static paintings

1 I would like to thank all the participants at the BSA Postgraduate conference 2018 for their feedback on the original paper, the editors of this journal and an anonymous referee for detailed and constructive feedback on previous versions of the manuscript.

2 This is one influential formulation of the question of expression favoured by Davies (1994) and Budd (2012), but there are others, for instance, Matravers (1998).

3 Still Life paintings are paradigmatically still and therefore static, even though they afford 'experiences of' that are dynamic. Although a painting may undergo change by fading, crumbling, drying or cracking, these changes do not relate to their representational content, which remains, in some sense, fixed.

depicting still objects are correctly experienced as moving?

In this paper, I consider a novel explanation to this ‘static-dynamic’ puzzle from Green (2007). Although the theory is intended primarily to explain a difference between a bodily emotional expression and the expressiveness we predicate of insensate landscapes and artefacts, it (1) addresses how static pictures may appear dynamic and (2) has the bonus feature of equipping theorists with a generalisable way of understanding how single medium artworks offer us rich sensory and affective experiences. It potentially offers an exciting new solution to the phenomenon of expression considered more broadly. As per Green’s hypothesis, Van Gogh’s Still Lifes exploit our proclivity to experience a similarity between certain colours (e.g. yellow) and certain affective states (e.g. exuberance) while Morandi’s Still Lifes map the physiological profile of tranquility or peacefulness to the colour of rosy-pink rectangles.<sup>4</sup>

I proceed as follows. In Section Two, I present Green’s solution in the light of the static-dynamic puzzle and in Section Three, I discuss the appeal and limitations of his hypothesis. In Section Four, I show that the hypothesis, while exciting and novel, has better outcomes in relation to experiential properties than it has to affective ones.

## 2 Expressiveness as Showing

The Greenian explanation for the puzzle is extrapolated from his broader theory concerning the expressiveness of artworks (incorporating other media, such as pure music). According to his self-titled ‘Expressiveness as Showing Theory’ (hereafter EST):

EST: It is apt to experience P as possessing affective or experiential quality E just in case P is a potential source of knowledge

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<sup>4</sup> There have been a number of psychological investigations into the expressive properties of visual stimuli and Green makes use of several. A broad historical overview is provided in Winner (2019, 60-77).

of E—either by showing how E characteristically appears, how E characteristically behaves, or how E characteristically feels.  
(Green 2007, 195)

I will pay particular attention to EST's third disjunct: showing how E feels. This promises to do much of the productive work, by elucidating how an observer not only sees that *Sunflowers* depicts sunflowers, but also experiences the pictorial space as being suffused with expressive qualities. It is this layering of depicted and affective objects that will explain just what 'brings the figurative thing up on to the nervous system more violently and more poignantly'.<sup>5</sup>

In order to understand in what way expressive qualities are dynamic, it is useful to be aware of a fundamental distinction in the literature between expression and expressiveness. Expressions of emotion are manifested by psychological beings.<sup>6</sup> Paintings are not psychological beings and so are said to be expressive, rather than expressions, of emotions. This distinction can seem confusing at first. A crude but effective way to grasp the distinction is to say that in expressiveness only the outward characteristics of emotional expressions are manifested. These outward characteristics however are sufficient for enabling suitably attuned viewers to know how anger appears, behaves or feels. In this way, expressive qualities convey 'what it is like' to feel anger, while not conveying anger (Green 2007, 192). Green follows the literature by resisting a conflation between expression and expressiveness. When he talks of expressiveness he is not suggesting there is a transmission of an actual emotion going on.

With this distinction in place, we can now consider Green's hypoth-

5 Francis Bacon in interview according to Sylvester (1980, 11).

6 Following James (1884) some theorists prioritize bodily feelings in an account of the emotions, for example Prinz (2004). Others advocate that emotions are cognitive judgements, for example Solomon (1988). An introduction to the debate is found in Price (2015).

esis. Briefly, he holds that static percepts share qualitative features with dynamic percepts and it is the mappings between the two that account for expressiveness. He begins by citing experiential mappings. Green says, citing Marks (1987) ‘intuitively, we think that yellow is more like the sound of a piccolo than it is like the sound of an oboe’ (2007, 179). He observes that a static yellow swatch may elicit an experienced resemblance to the dynamic sound of a piccolo. His explanation for this is that their qualitative profiles are congruent. What does Green mean by ‘qualitative profile’ and ‘congruent’? ‘Qualitative profile’ refers to where a percept will be located along three intersecting spectrums that respectively run from (i) intense-mild to (ii) pleasant-unpleasant, and (iii) dynamic-static (Green 2007, 179).<sup>7</sup> Let’s say yellow is intense, pleasant and dynamic. In this case, it will be ‘profiled’ somewhere in the light-pleasant-dynamic quadrant of this qualitative three-space. Piccolo sounds may have the same profile. In this case it will be ‘congruent’ with yellow (Green 2007, 181). One way to visualize this is to think of three-space as an analogue of Munsell colour space [Fig 1] which represents how colours cluster along three spectrums measuring lightness, intensity and chroma.<sup>8</sup> One can imagine three-space will be constituted by colours, sounds, textures, smells and so on clustering in qualitatively similar locations.

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7 The hypothesis should survive a change to the three dimensions mentioned.

8 This example is mine not Green’s.

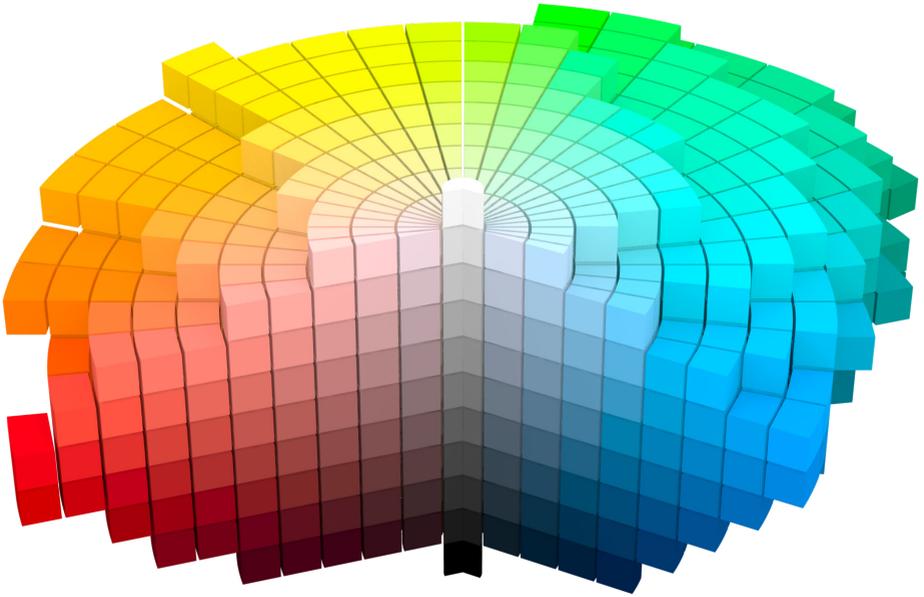


Figure 1 Three-dimensional representation of Munsell colourspace (SharkD, 2015)

So far, we have been told that two experiential states in different sense modalities can elicit an experienced resemblance for perceivers in some qualitative respect. Next, Green suggests that an affective state, an emotion, will map into this three-space. He uses the following example. In the grip of anger, Elizabeth will be given to raising her voice or kicking furniture, revealing that 'anger is intense, slightly unpleasant, and highly dynamic.' (Green 2007, 179) In expressiveness then:

The major triad C–E–G is congruent...with confidence or cheerfulness, for both are intense, pleasant, and relatively static. The color yellow is congruent with exuberance, for both are intense, pleasant, and dynamic. (Green 2007, 183)

In this way, Zurbarán's paintings gain their expressiveness by exploiting a qualitative congruency between the colours, shapes and sensations. Green says that in order to elicit the experienced resemblance the viewer must empathize with the expressive (congruent) content. It is supposed that this mode of attention allows the viewer to appropriately entertain the intersubjective and functionally tractable aspects of the way joyful excitement feels (Green 2007, 188).

In summary, Green holds that an emotion such as anger has a qualitative profile that can be plotted in 'three-space'. This profile can be expressed cross-modally (that is, the same profile can be expressed visually by a colour or shape, or audibly by a sound). In this way, a painting instantiating the colours or shapes that map to anger's qualitative profile will appear to be expressive of anger.

### 3 Discussion

#### 3.1 *Biological or Conventional Congruency?*

At this point it would be reasonable to ask if the idea of qualitative 'three-space' is a *prima facie* plausible concept. Why believe that while

the senses differ in respect to information processing and in how they present the world around us, there are important and fixed neural communicative channels between them?<sup>9</sup>

Green could block this skeptical worry by citing evidence for the pervasive inter-modality of neural processing and sensory equivalence. According to empirical psychologists the tendency to name a spiky shape “kiki” and a roundish shape “bouba”, indicates that our brains systematically connect sounds, spatial movement and shapes at a sub-personal level (Milan et al. 2013). Green’s view is that these type of connections are not merely conventional, but that there is something universal or deep-wired at play here.<sup>10</sup> But, one may ask, would a weaker association be problematic for EST? The tendency we display in our colloquial discourse to link upwards scaling sounds, with upward movements and dark to light colour hues is not obviously fixed biologically. At least, it is easy to imagine a culture in which the association was reversed.

I think EST can survive the weaker associative explanation. Given the pervasiveness of empirically noted congruencies, it is reasonable to anticipate that normal intermodal associations, however they develop and despite the absences of any biological imperative, will, once neurally fixed, apply comprehensively. Even though conventional association is weaker than a biological congruence, it is enough to ensure that intersubjective attitudes flourish. If associating percepts, say  $S_1$  with  $S_2$ ,

9 Simner et al. (2005) holds that within any population, standard biases exist in the associations of letters with colours. While grapheme–colour synaesthetes were significantly more consistent over time in their choice of colours, Simner’s studies identified notable levels of inter-subject agreement across general populations. From this, he concludes that grapheme–colour synaesthesia, whilst only exhibited by certain individuals, stems in part from mechanisms that are common to us all. Meanwhile Matthen (2015) endorses the view that the senses, while different from one another in terms of information processing, share communicative channels. He notes that speech and flavour in particular are constituted multi-modally. The substitution of one modality in place of another, for instance demonstrating an agent’s ability to retrieve visual information from specially arranged tactile stimulation, suggests that we can, in some sense, ‘see’ haptically.

10 Green cites Marks (1987).

can become neurally fixed, there is no more reason to deny the efficacy of congruency than there is to deny the efficacy of money or names. This means that a Still Life which exploits neurally fixed associations could elicit a phenomenological mapping of a static percept to dynamic percept.

### 3.2 *Fine-grainedness*

We are now ready to consider a further criticism from Moore (2010) who puts pressure on Green's theory at the following point. How similar do S<sub>1</sub> and S<sub>2</sub> have to be to count as instantiating the same place on the grid? For example, what is the minimum level of fine-grainedness that is sufficient for eliciting an experienced resemblance between 'yellow' and 'exuberant'? Set the level too wide and the static percept can be mapped to every location on the grid (every perceptual experience will have some qualitative profile). Set it too narrowly and a percept will only map to itself.

Green would reply, I suspect, that fine-grainedness can be satisfied by ensuring that the terms 'intense' and 'dynamic' pick out the same thing when said of experiences of yellow, trilling piccolos and exuberance. This is an empirical question, not a philosophical one and the philosopher need only acknowledge that qualifying the lexical semantics is important, because EST needs it to be the case that words like 'dynamic' mean roughly the same in all domains – 'colour', 'sounds' and 'introspecting states'. But it does not require the philosopher provide *evidence* that they do. A Still Life that is made up of percepts that are in the vicinity of intense-pleasant-dynamic qualitative space will elicit experiences that are more like joy than they are like sadness. This explains why my experience of *Sunflowers* in which I see warm yellows, a patterned texture, round, fleshy forms and dashes of sap green incline me to say the picture is joyful or uplifting or positively charged. It does not require me to provide a fine-grained description of joy, a joyous episode or arouse in me specific feelings of joyousness in order for the experi-

enced resemblance to manifest. This response, should Green choose to exploit it, would also enable him to offer an explanation as to why specific works (that is, works in a specific material mode) are not easily replaced by works in an alternative mode. Since the translation across genres is inexact, an expressive aural work is not replaceable by a visual work without loss. Two such works that both expressed 'joy' or 'anxiety' would offer similar but non-duplicating experiences.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.3. *Psycho-Physical Considerations*

Here is a second worry from Moore. Even if the link between S1 and S2 is relatively settled inter-subjectively and beyond simple convention in some qualitative respect, is this *all* we need to explain the link? Why deny psycho-physical facts about the external environment, psychological salience or physiological subtleties will impact on the conceptual linkage between sensation and emotion? (Moore 2010, 97) One may ask: is congruency sufficient for temporally static objects to be experienced as instantiating dynamic qualities?

EST endorses sufficiency. Recall, EST says it is apt to experience the painting as exuberant when 'it shows us...how E characteristically feels.' (Green 2007, 195) One can simply look and see that yellow and orange rectangles arranged just so are exuberant (Green 2007, 41).

This inspires me to formulate a further criticism of the view. Let's say we grant Green's claim that yellow has default associations and that these are neurally fixed. Should we not then expect there to be some insistent experience or visualization of sweetness, light joy or the trilling of piccolos (or whatever maps to the yellowy palette)? If so, this expectation is not met by our actual experiences. Despite spending many hours enjoying paintings I struggle to remember an experience of them that was noticeably noisy or tasty. Whatever dynamic properties I may be aware of when attending to *Sunflowers*, an experience of flutes or vanilla

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11 I would like to thank an anonymous referee for pointing this out.

does not appear to me to be among them. Yet, Green appears to cite an insistent intermodal mapping between yellow-colour: piccolo-sound: vanilla-taste: joy-affect. For this reason, one might ask why the painting of the Sunflowers is taken to represent joy but not the taste of vanilla? Can any putative neurally fixed association be overridden or muted? This question is distinct from questions about whether the mapping display plasticity.<sup>12</sup> For example, that at time 't' yellow maps to a particular taste (lemons), sound (flutes) and mood (joy) for S, but at time 't+1' yellow maps to vanilla, the harp and serenity for S. The question concerns the more local, specific issue of why this colour maps to *affect* when experienced *here and now* in this picture. What determines the corresponding sensational partner cued by a particular visual stimulus? One thought is that there is a further pictorial cue that constrains the mapping between select senses, but which has been overlooked in this account.

Green could reply that there is nothing overlooked. Visual stimuli merely have a propensity to trigger these experiences, but no automatic or insistent trigger for them. He may suggest that general consensus concerning the expressivity of an isolated shape, phenome or colour swatch is made more determinate by further cues in the work – for instance, the depictive content. There is a suspicion however that since these further cues can determine whether or not a percept 'fires' or 'triggers' the mapping, they are more fundamental (or prior) to the expressivity.

Green seems to disagree. He thinks that the sensational mappings act 'as a kind of prop on the basis of which to imagine' feeling the appropriate emotion (Green 2007, 190). From this, I take it that he intends the mappings to be basic and to enable a further imaginative enterprise that allows the viewer to represent the dynamic emotional qualities. But it is not clear why these mappings should precede the viewer imagining

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12 Perceptual plasticity is discussed in Bayne (2015).

the emotional qualities. According to standard models of imagining oneself to feel into or along with emotionally resonant objects, things work in the reverse order to the one Green offers us.<sup>13</sup> This makes it unclear why some mappings are represented by the viewer and others are muted in the representation. Since the viewer's imaginative enterprise is informed by the actual mapping (the mapping is the cue to imagine thus), what is the precedent cue that determines the viewer should execute 'this mapping' from the potential set 'all these mappings' in Green's schema? This follows from the earlier comment that if there are no automatic insistent mappings that take place, there is a further respect in which a specific mapping remains unexplained. As things stand, congruency may partly describe *how* Still Lives come to have dynamic qualities, but not *why* this particular emotion was realised.

Consider, for instance, how Freud's *Girl with White Dog* (c.1951) also uses a yellow palette but is experienced as anxious not joyful. The picture is tense, sad and still. The explanation of this is not going to be satisfied by what Green has told us. The worry is that EST at best identifies a series of specific compositional elements that have led us from static object to dynamic experience, but that this does not give us an account of the kind of causal connections that account for *why* we experienced the painting in this way, to the exclusion of other possible associations and experiences. Why for instance, do I not experience Chardin's paintings as tasting of vanilla, as smelling of rotting fish or as cacophonous? Why is there the connection between this static percept and *this feeling*?

Green could respond by explaining how yellow is experienced as both joyful and anxious in the two paintings by pointing out that colours appear different when embedded in different contexts. A viewer's experience of a colour is sensitive to the colours around it and to the type of light source shining on it. For example, in simultaneous contrast, a single pigment, placed inside different surrounding colours, holding all

13 See Coplan (2011).

other conditions steady, looks different to us and in metamerism colours 'change' when light sources change (between LED and natural daylight). For this reason, a palette of yellow, orange-yellow and sap green will convey sweetness in one picture, while a palette of yellow-grey and purple-grey will convey sourness in another.

### 3.4 *From Experiential to Affective States*

I think this throws up a more serious problem for the Greenian. The static-dynamic relation, if it holds at all, is most obviously held here between two experiential states, that is, states associated with our senses. Green needs it to be the case that 'yellowy-orange' is congruent with a sub-species of *affective* states – that is, emotions. These are states that are about something or experienced toward objects. So, *Sunflowers*, if expressive of emotion-like states, may be said to express anticipation (e.g. 'Gauguin is on his way to Arles!'), hope (e.g. 'will he like the paintings?'), or delight (e.g. 'he appreciates the work!'). These states are much more cognitively rich than intensity, pleasantness and so on. How then will EST explain the way we are able to move from congruent experiential states to congruent experiential-emotion states?

Green's answer seems, at first, ingenious. He says the congruency between (static) experiential percepts and (dynamic) affective states is realised by the viewer empathetically attending to the qualitative profile of the perceptual material (2007, 187-192). The viewer elicits an experienced resemblance between static perceptual information and dynamic *affective* states, just as the viewer may experience the mappings between two experiential states by empathising with the qualitative properties.

However, once we start to reflect on the claim that viewers empathise with congruent properties, we see that it is odd. For one thing, emotional qualities are not reducible to their physiological profiles without remainder. An emotion mapped in three-space would appear to lack 'aboutness', or what the feeling aims at, that identifies the state. For this

reason, it is not clear what identifies an emotion from a cluster of possible emotions that share similar physiological traits. How would I be able to distinguish anger from fear using three-space properties? It seems we need some intentional content to get the empathy going. Green argues that the retrieval of dynamic qualities from the static stimulant is part of a cognitive process, in which the viewer comes to know something about E by simulating the appropriate mental states (2007, 187-192). He must think then, that the static-dynamic congruency enables a sharing of emotional states with some degree of accuracy and where the viewer can come to know how some E feels. But what would satisfy 'some degree of accuracy' here?

In addition, it is not clear why empathising is appropriate, or even possible, if levelled against three-space. How does Green make sense of the idea that viewers undergo an experienced resemblance between the perceptible properties of paintings and the feeling of an emotion by 'empathising' with their three-space qualities? According to Green, a necessary condition on empathy is that it is directed at and involves concern for 'another' and involves imagining one's way into another's situation. It therefore involves an observer (e.g. Bonnard), and a target, (e.g. Van Gogh). Green, it seems, thinks that in experiencing *Sunflowers*, Bonnard will 'call into consciousness [his] experience of  $\phi$  feeling without actually reliving  $\phi$ ' (2007, 190). Bonnard in some sense 'reads' the painting, using the yellow and the thick impasto textures to call up the emotion 'joy', a property of subjects like Van Gogh. But per EST, Bonnard's target is three-space and not Van Gogh's mental state. The question can then be asked in this way - is empathy the correct way to make sense of Bonnard's experience if we accept congruency? It seems incoherent to say Bonnard *empathises* his way into three-space (Green 2007, 190). While there is nothing particularly implausible about the perception of an intermodal congruency, nor anything implausible about the suggestion that we empathise with pictorial content, there is something odd about the way Green is fitting these two together. That is, he is not

fitting them together plausibly. Three-space is a theoretical construct, whereas empathy aims at sentient emoting beings. By his own lights, Green fails to illuminate why empathising will harness the congruency in three-space in the same way our gateway senses supposedly give us experienced resemblances cross-modally.

While I'm aware that empathy is a slippery concept that can be shoe-horned into something that either fights Green or helps him out, I struggle to see how Green can respond satisfactorily to this incompatibility. Rather than give up on the idea that there is a seamless congruent relation between affective and experiential states in three-space, he can attempt to resolve the tension by getting the description of empathy to work. Green's account of empathy aligns with the commonly held view that we imagine our way into the emotional states of other persons, not conceptual constructs. For this reason, it will require significant reconstruction to cohere with congruency. One suggestion is that he simply insists viewers engage in incoherent experiences when eliciting resemblances. Just why the viewer is not aware of the incoherence, misuse of empathy or lack of imaginative targets would have to be spelled out elsewhere. Alternatively, he might say that, qua expressiveness, Still Lifes convey moods not emotions. They may be anxious but they are not sad, exuberant but not excited. As a result, empathy is not warranted and something softer – a form of contagion will elicit the appropriate dynamic 'feel'. What Green cannot do is defend the disjunctive claim 'EST' using the current explanation.

#### 4 Conclusion

Green offers an exciting hypothesis about expressiveness which was used to elucidate the static-dynamic puzzle for Still Lifes. An initial discussion exposed a problem with his articulation of the relationship between qualitative properties and empathy. Consequently, the puzzle of expressiveness remains unsolved.

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Figure credit

Figure 1 SharkD, Three-dimensional representation of Munsell colourspace (Wikimedia Commons, 2015). Reproduced under license: CC BY-SA 3.0



# ORIGINALISM AND ANTI-ORIGINALISM STYLE AND AUTHENTICITY IN AESTHETIC APPRECIATION

Lisa Giombini  
Roma Tre University

*Since the mid-Sixties, philosophers have debated over the aesthetic relevance of authentic art-objects, perfect replicas, and restoration. In particular, a dispute has ensued concerning the cogency of our penchant for original artworks. Originalists argue that authenticity, the quality of an object being of undisputed origin or authorship, is a necessary condition for aesthetic experience, since the appreciation of an artwork presupposes its correct identification. Anti-originalists retort that we have no art-relevant reason to favour originals over visually-indistinguishable duplicates. To this extent, they claim, 'there is no identification without (prior) evaluation'. In this paper, I re-examine the underpinnings at the core of this discussion. I argue that aesthetic appreciation does not necessarily require judgement of authenticity. However, there are instances in which authenticity does intrude upon aesthetic evaluation, namely when style recognition is involved. In these cases, I propose that errors in historical attribution reduce the impact of the object and jeopardise aesthetic appreciation altogether.*



Figure 1 Basilica Superiore di San Francesco d'Assisi (Assisi, Italy). The vault with Cimabue's frescos after the earthquake. (Sebasgs, 2007)

## 1 Introduction: The Assisi Fragments

On the morning of 26th September 1997, an earthquake shook the Italian regions of Umbria and Marche injuring several people and causing massive material damage. The 13<sup>th</sup> century Basilica of San Francesco of Assisi was damaged, its vault severely cracked [Fig 1]. Hundreds of conservators, guided by art-historian Giuseppe Basile, scoured the rubble for remnants of Cimabue's famous frescos. Their painstaking work of retrieval led to the recovery of thousands of tiny, almost unrecognisable fragments, many no bigger than one euro coins. Cataloguing the pieces and reconstructing the masterpiece took years. In 2006 the restoration was finally completed: "At the end of this difficult task", Basile proclaimed, "we can say that we have achieved our goal!" (Basile 2007).

This is not just a heartening anecdote. Why, I want to ask, did the restorers take on this project at all? Thanks to modern preservation technology, the work could be easily replicated as it looked before the event. Moreover, the frescoes are so high on the vault that they were difficult to

discern in detail before the earthquake even happened.<sup>1</sup> My suggestion is that the Assisi case provides a compelling example of one element that most of us find crucial when engaging with art-objects, namely, the significance of experiencing originals as opposed to reproductions. People are willing to travel distances to view authentic artworks, even if they would not be able to distinguish them from reproductions and even if reproductions could offer a more rewarding experience. The relevance we attribute to originals also justifies their monetary worth. A poster of Klimt's *The Kiss* at the *Galerie Belvedere*, Vienna, costs eight euros, yet the actual painting is worth millions.<sup>2</sup>

Why are originals so important to us? Is our preference reasonable at all? These questions have been at the core of a long-standing philosophical discussion centred on art and authenticity, a discussion often invoking the notion of an artwork and its perfect copy.<sup>3</sup> Drawing from this debate, I argue that authenticity can be conceived as a 'derivative' rather than a primary source for aesthetic appreciation. Unlike standard aesthetic properties, authenticity cannot be immediately grasped from an object's surface appearance; it can, however, be appreciated derivatively through identification of the object's relevant style features – something requiring at least some knowledge of art history. Stylistic

1 Michael Leech goes a little too far, I think, in saying that, since the frescoes are twenty meters above the floor, even before 1997 "merely a blur of colour" could be seen by the many churchgoers and art-lovers who visited the basilica (Leech, 1999). As evidence, consider that Cimabue explicitly designed the frescoes to be appreciated from a certain distance. Thus, although not all the work details were visible to the naked eye, the essential configuration of lines, shapes and colours were in fact always discernible.

2 *The Kiss* is regarded as a national treasure in Austria, so it is unlikely that it will ever be sold. If such a transaction were to happen, however, it is predictable that the painting would break sales records. Indeed, Klimt's far less renowned *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer* was sold for \$135 million in 2006, "the highest sum ever paid for a painting" according to the New York Times (Vogel 2006). For an inspiring discussion on artworks' economic value see Sagoff (1981).

3 See Goodman (1968), chapter 3: 'Art and Authenticity'. For an overview of the debate see also Goodman (1986); Dutton (1983); Elgin (1991); Morton and Foster (1991); Bowden (1999); Wreen (2002); Kulka (2005).

properties bring authenticity to the aesthetic frame by ‘exemplifying’ the historical meaning they convey. When an object is identified as an instance of a given artistic style, its being proved inauthentic reduces the aesthetic impact or even jeopardises the experience altogether.

## 2 One Problem, Two Solutions

Philosophers<sup>4</sup> have long reflected on the role played in art experience by that set of contextually-dependent properties – historical, artistic, relational – that are not perceptible yet can be ascribed to an art-object. Those properties are responsible for what we call the object’s authenticity. Determining an artwork’s authenticity is equal to determining how the work came to be, how it is related to the context of production and to its creator’s intentions Dutton (2003). Within the fine arts, saying that something is authentic is saying that it is what it is reputed to be, in origin or authorship, with little room for uncertainty. Unquestionable provenance is fundamental for attribution of authenticity. This makes sense of a common way of thinking of the art critic as someone whose basic job is to pursue traces left on an artwork back to its historical origin, so as to ‘authenticate’ it. But to what extent should authenticity also affect our aesthetic appreciation of an artwork? To this question, two main solutions have been offered in the literature. While some<sup>5</sup> theoreticians argue that our preference for originals is justified, others<sup>6</sup> retort that it is just fetishism, sentimental attachment, or, at its worst, plain snobbery. Borrowing the terminology from Jaworski (2013), I refer to the first position as ‘originalism’, and to the second as ‘anti-originalism’.

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4 See, among the many others: Goodman (1968); Walton (1970); Sagoff (1978, 2014); Danto (1981); Levinson (1989); Lamarque (2010); Korsmeyer (2008; 2012).

5 Sagoff (1978); Levinson (1989); Farrelly-Jackson (1997); Dutton (2003); Korsmeyer (2008).

6 Lessing (1965); Zemach (1989); Jaworski (2013).

## 2.1 *Originalism*

Originalists claim that authenticity – the quality of being of undisputed origin – is essential for an artwork’s identity and a prerequisite for it to have aesthetic significance. Accordingly, it is necessary for an artwork’s correct appraisal, for only insofar as an artwork is authenticated can it be properly appreciated as ‘the product of an artistic process’ (Sagoff 1978, 455). One reason for this is that we don’t appreciate an object simply for the sake of its appearance or for the feelings it induces, but for what it is, and for its production history (Ibid., 453). Knowledge of the process by which a product was created determines the way it is to be evaluated (Ibid., 456). If an original is different from a forgery, thus, it is because it is the endpoint of a unique creative act, whereas the forgery is not (Dutton 2003, 258).<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, an object is identified as an artwork rather than an artefact of another kind, in virtue of its context of creation and its special relation to an artist – not in virtue of an intrinsic property it displays (Levinson 1989, 232). Events which occurred in the making of an artwork, comprising the intentionality of the creator, play a fundamental role in art evaluation.

Authentic artworks are special to us because they are ‘internally related’ to the individual who produced them (Farrelly-Jackson 1997, 144). Our appreciation of them depends on the ‘close-relation’ (Battin 1979, 155) between an artist and her work – a property ‘the eye cannot see’, yet it is somehow ‘embodied’ in the object. For example, we value Cimabue’s frescos as the embodiment of his creative act – that is to say, as the actual site of his artistic achievement.<sup>8</sup> This creative act is what we want

7 Forgery is, according to Sagoff, the result of a process that is “the reverse of creative” (Sagoff 1978, 454).

8 However, this creates a further issue: How can viewers perceive the artist’s activity as ‘embodied’ in authentic objects if it is not directly appreciable? For space reasons it will not be possible to address this question here, but see, on this point, Origgi (2004).

to be ‘in touch’ (Korsmeyer 2012, 371) with and it is what the duplicate lacks, though a duplicate may represent or betoken it (Levinson 2004, 15). Of course, reproductions and replicas can ‘perform immense service in apprising us of the look’ of many artworks and ‘allowing us to renew or deepen our acquaintance with them’. But this is ‘hardly reason’ to think that such replicas ‘could ever *displace*’ (Levinson 1987, 281) the authentic objects they derived from: after all no one considers a visit to Little Venice the same as a visit to the true, historical Venice.

## 2.2 *Anti-originalism*

According to anti-originalists, authenticity is only essential to an artwork’s identity and aesthetic appreciation when it is so recognised by ‘well-trained art critics’ (Zemach 1986, 239; 1989, 67). Original artworks do not possess any art-relevant quality that perfect copies do not have (Jaworski 2013, 2): there is indeed no significant feature<sup>9</sup> that ‘*all* originals have in common, that make *every* original better than a duplicate, a copy’ (Ibid., 13). Therefore, when it comes to appreciating ‘a work of art as a work of art’, an exact duplicate may be in principle ‘just as good as the original’ (Ibid., 2).

It is important to distinguish anti-originalism from aesthetic empiricism. Aesthetic empiricism says: since an original and the duplicate strike the senses in the same way, they deliver the same aesthetic experience, so why care about the difference?<sup>10</sup> The discovery that a work is forged does not alter its perceivable qualities – hence this discovery shouldn’t bear any aesthetic significance. Note that this argument implies an understanding of ‘aesthetic experience’ as a peculiar state

9 Among the features that might significantly alter our aesthetic appreciation of an artwork, and that seem to nod in the direction of originalism, Jaworski (2013) lists: the influence that an original artwork, yet not its replica, may have had on subsequent art; the difference in meaning between the original and the duplicate; the idea that the original, but not the duplicate, is an instantiation of an original creative concept. None of these aspects is, he argues, sufficient to justify our preference for originals.

10 See Bell (1949); Lessing (1965); Battin (1979).

of excitement or thrill, equally elicitable both by the original and by its identical copy. This is, of course, the stimulus-response theory of aesthetic appreciation that Goodman mockingly attributes to ‘Immanuel Tingle and Joseph Immersion (ca.1800)’ (Goodman 1972, 94). Anti-originalism, however, does not contend that an object’s status as original is *always* aesthetically irrelevant, but that it takes an art expert to discern in which case it is relevant and in which it isn’t. In the case of a stolen altarpiece, for instance, it is the curator who decides whether the lost work can be replaced with a replica without detriment to the overall aesthetic effect of the site.<sup>11</sup> The aesthetic relevance of authenticity is a matter of case-by-case evaluation.

Indeed, the special significance we attach to originals, so anti-originalists believe, has nothing to do with aesthetics per se (i.e., with contemplation of an object for its own sake), but with something else – rarity, emotional attachment, faith. We cherish the original object because it is *that* object (Zemach 1989, 67). If it seems hard to discard the thought that something about originals makes them more valuable than any copy, it is because we consider them blessed with ‘the Midas Touch’ of the artist (Jaworski 2013, 14). An original Klimt is valuable because Klimt touched it, and Klimt is an important artist. What binds us to authenticity, thus, is a form of fetishism rooted in what anthropologists call the *law of contagion*, the belief that through physical contact objects acquire special qualities (Newman & Bloom 2012). Advances in replication technique, however, may require that we abandon these creeds. If, for example, a molecule-by molecule 3D-print could ever be invented in the future, anyone might have a Cimabue decorating their ceilings – eventually, we might come to accept this as normal.

11 An example here is Caravaggio’s *La Natività* in the Oratory of San Lorenzo in Palermo (Sicily). The original altarpiece was stolen in 1969 by the Mafia, and has never been retrieved. Later on, it was decided to replace the work with a perfect replica, so as not to jeopardize the overall aesthetic appearance of the chapel. Indeed, the splendid stuccoes by Giacomo Serpotta which adorn the walls of the oratory were explicitly designed as a complement to Caravaggio’s painting.

### 3 Who is Right (If Anyone)?

Consider again the following: An earthquake occurs, reducing to fragments a treasured medieval fresco. Would a replication of the fresco, known to be such, be lacking something, sufficient to render it aesthetically worthless altogether? Originalism contends that it would, since the fresco's authenticity – its relation to the original artist's handwork – is essential to its aesthetic appreciation. Indeed, according to the originalists we don't appreciate the frescos aesthetically for their appearance or effect, but for what they are, and how could we appraise something and not care what it is? Anti-originalism, conversely, argues that no a priori reason prevents the replica from equalling the original, because authenticity is not *per se* a condition for aesthetic appreciation. The problem, in essence, is that it is unclear whether our aesthetic appreciation of artworks has to do with the fact that these have been created by a certain someone at a certain time. Can history, background, origins – in a word, authenticity – count as sources for aesthetic appreciation? Note that two different questions are implied here: 'What makes any artwork valuable?' and 'What makes one artwork better than another (supposedly identical) one?'<sup>12</sup> Whatever our response to the former question, an answer to the latter might prove the originalists right. In fact, one might think with the originalists that this amounts precisely to the role an artwork has in the history and world of art. Arguments in support of this answer to the question come from Korsmeyer.<sup>13</sup> Identifying the authenticity of the experienced object, she argues, is not important for art appreciation only, but for our enjoyment in many other domains (Korsmeyer 1999, 91). Take food: part of the pleasure of eating is the sup-

12 Though the two questions are intimately related, my interest here is with the second (i.e., the value we attribute to original artworks as opposed to reproductions) rather than with the first (i.e., the value of art in general). I must thank an anonymous reviewer for this clarification.

13 See Korsmeyer (1999; 2008; 2012).

position that we are eating certain things.<sup>14</sup> Art, like food, requires the identification of a relevant context to be brought into focus. Individuating the nature of things allows the emergence of their properties, just as food type affects taste qualities.

All this is plain enough, yet the anti-originalist may raise a further objection. It is one thing to say that identifying something as authentic *matters* to our appreciation and therefore authentic art-objects may have enhanced significance to us (for instance because of their so-called 'survival value').<sup>15</sup> It is yet another thing to claim, as the originalists do, that being original is *prerequisite* for artworks to be properly appreciated, that is, to be appreciated *qua* artworks (Sagoff 1978; 2014). This last claim can be disputed. An artwork's aesthetic appraisal does not necessarily depend on the relation of that work to a given person. Of course, whether a work is original may be a relevant factor for its appreciation. It is not, however, the *primary* factor on which aesthetic appreciation is based. What makes the Assisi frescos treasured as an artwork is not their having been painted by Cimabue in the first place. Rather, Cimabue is famous because he painted the treasured frescos.<sup>16</sup>

The originalist may respond that our demand for authenticity is not directed toward a specific person, but toward whoever turns out to be the original creator of the work. Relevance is given to someone *for* the

14 See also Danto (1981, 14) on this.

15 See Meiland (1983). Survival value, he explains: "is simply a fact that we prize items from the past, and the longer they have survived, the greater value they have for us. This value [...] is independent of aesthetic value." (p. 116) In this sense, the original Cimabue, having greater 'survival value' than the copy, may have greater *overall* significance to us than the copy.

16 Of course, there exist artworks whose aesthetic significance essentially lies in their 'having being made by' someone, works which get their fame from the fame of their creator – take Rousseau and Nietzsche's musical compositions, for example. But these are pieces of no particular intrinsic worth; and furthermore, these are exceptions (see Battin 1979).

works s/he has produced, not because s/he is *that* specific someone.<sup>17</sup>

This, however, leaves unexplained our reaction to unveiled misattributions. The case is simply stated: an artwork attributed to an artist *A* has been admired by thousands of art-lovers over the years. One day it is revealed to be a misattribution, a work of one of *A*'s followers. Its fame dims, as its value on the art-market collapses.<sup>18</sup> But why? The discovery that the work is misattributed does not alter it aesthetically. Were we really interested in the identity of its author only *qua* author of that artwork, we should now praise her, whomever she has turned out to be. Instead, we simply devalue the work. Once again, are we just being snobbish? Or are we confused?

This clutter of considerations brings us back to our starting point: Should authenticity deserve to play any role when it comes to assessing the aesthetic valence of an art-object? To unravel the issue, we have to move forward in the discussion.

#### 4 The Case of Style

At the turn of the twentieth century, the father of modern conservation theory, Alois Riegl distinguished two sorts of values possessed by artworks - past and present - according to whether the values pertain to the work as a historical monument or as artistic object (1982). Every artwork is always concurrently a product of history and an aesthetic object. As a result, it is difficult to decide if a property of the work is historical, aesthetic, or both: the historical features of an artwork can indeed *also* be aesthetically relevant (Riegl 1982, 21-51). This is particularly evident in the determination of style. Broadly understood, style indicates the distinctive visual appearance of an object, which is deter-

17 I'm grateful to an anonymous reviewer for having envisaged this objection.

18 It is also possible that a piece be sold as the work of an artist's pupil, only to be later attributed to the artist himself. In this case its market value increases exponentially (cf. the famous cases of Rembrandt's *The Unconscious Patient* (ca. 1624–25) or Caravaggio's *The Cardsharps* (1594)).

mined by the creative principles, inspiration and taste according to which something is designed.<sup>19</sup> Wollheim identifies two senses in which the concept occurs: we can talk of *individual style* to refer to the style of a singular artist (i.e. ‘the style of Cimabue’) and of *general style* to refer to the style of a period or artists’ group within a period (i.e. ‘Gothic Art’) (1979, 129-130). General style represents the ‘common denominator’ in the production of a time, something that is external to individuals and not a function of their own activities as artists.<sup>20</sup> To explain this idea, Riegl (1993) introduces the idealistic notion of *Kunstwollen*, ‘artistic will’ – a creative impulse to make art in a particular manner that drives the artistic production of one period and is nourished by the historical and cultural values of the epoch.<sup>21</sup>

Like Riegl’s notion of *Kunstwollen*, general style can be used taxonomically as a mean of organising the variety of works and approaches that characterise the art of the past. It is, however, more than an instrument for the art historian – a device for sorting what is considered distinctive in a particular moment of art history. Indeed, general style itself can represent the intentional focus of aesthetic appreciation. As Riegl explains, what is noteworthy about style is that stylistic patterns are able to transpose a period’s historical/cultural/artistic will into the artwork’s perceptual characteristics: they translate this particular will into form, ‘shape and colour in the plane or space’. To use current terminology, one could say that they *exemplify* it. For example, geometric patterns of ancient art exemplify much of the aesthetic feeling of the people who made it, and generally of how they framed their relation-

19 Compare with Ernst Gombrich’s comprehensive definition of style (1968).

20 General style can be further divided in sub-classes (1) universal style; (2) historical or period style; and (3) school style Wollheim (1979, 129-130). See also Robinson (1984) on this.

21 Years after the formulation of the idea of *Kunstwollen*, the concept has been reassessed by a number of other art historians like Panofsky (1981), Wölfflin (1950) and Worringer (1953).

ship to the world.<sup>22</sup> More importantly, they do so via aesthetically salient features – features that contribute to the object’s aesthetic appreciation. Style properties are contextually-dependent properties, yet they manifest perceptually, lending themselves to appreciation: they ‘show as well as say what they are about’ (Genova 1979, 323). Style is thus tied to history as well as to the aesthetic impact of an object: to paraphrase Danto, it brings artworks’ history on their surfaces (Danto 1981).

Goodman has famously emphasised style role in the process of both classifying and appreciating an artwork (1975; 1978). On the one hand, recognising style – an often-challenging endeavour requiring a ‘knowing eye or ear’ (Goodman 1975, 810) – allows us to attribute an artwork to one artist, period, region, etc. Style serves in this sense as ‘an individual or group signature’ which helps us place the work in the appropriate context by answering questions such as: Who? When? Where?. On the other hand, however, style identification is integral to the understanding of artworks and of ‘the worlds they present’ (Ibid., 807) – the worldview of which such works are expressive. Style has thus direct aesthetic significance insofar as it tells us ‘the way the work is to be looked at’ (Goodman 1978, 40). Knowing an artwork’s style is aesthetically relevant because stylistic properties provide us with information as to how the work is to be evaluated – thereby, style counts as an aesthetic property.

That style attribution can affect aesthetic appreciation is a well-known fact. The greater a viewer’s familiarity with recognising styles, the richer her experience. For a naïve viewer, Cimabue’s painting *Maestà di Assisi* (1285-1288) [Fig. 2] is just a depiction of a Madonna with the child Jesus. For an experienced viewer, it reveals a different meaning. She can

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 22 According to Riegl, because in ancient times people had a defensive relationship towards the hostilities of nature, they framed their relation to the world in a way so as to keep the represented objects within tightly controlled boundaries. For example, the *Kunstwollen* determining ancient Egyptian art (pyramids especially) is a will to create ‘absolute’ objects surrounded by space conceived as a void; objects whose pure abstractness isn’t subject to the distorting effects of visual perception (see Riegl 1993, 53-83).



Figure 2 Cimabue's Maestà di Assisi, Basilica Inferiore di San Francesco d'Assisi, Assisi, Italy. (Starlight, 2006)

classify the painting as a Gothic masterpiece with specific iconographic properties. She might notice the tapered hand shape, typical of the Middle Ages Tuscan pictorial style, or observe that the throne is depicted frontally, with both sides open like pages, as is usual in pre-perspective painting. To understand and appreciate this artwork, the viewer may profit from all these stylistic features – provided, of course, that she is acquainted with that particular style and the symbolic or iconographic code it entails. With increasing style expertise, appreciation shifts from mere description of 'what is depicted' to a classification in terms of complex art-specific properties.<sup>23</sup> Information about style is thus relevant for aesthetic experience as it offers an unlimited pool of knowl-

<sup>23</sup> This is confirmed by empirical studies. See Leder, Belke, Oeberst and Augustin (2004).

edge to improve our perceptive discrimination skills. But style recognition provides a further element to art appreciation: the capacity of generalisation and differentiation. Once the concept of an artistic style is learned, the viewer is able to classify new examples by acknowledging similarities and differences with known artworks. Aesthetic perception can be strengthened or refined by testing against further cases: interesting qualities are revealed through the juxtaposition of works in a comparison.

Though perhaps not sufficient by itself, attributing an artwork to the right stylistic period is therefore crucial for aesthetic appreciation, and impacts on the quality of the experience. But to be effective, identification in terms of style requires the object to be authentic – situated at the right place in the right event sequence. This might sound perplexing, for style properties can be imitated. A painter can represent a subject *à la manière de* Cimabue. A composer can write like Vivaldi<sup>24</sup>, and a sculptor carve statues resembling Canova's in every respect. To be sure, imitation 'in the style of', or *pastiche*, has been common artistic practice for centuries.<sup>25</sup> So why is style tied to authenticity?

As noticed above, one important thing is that stylistic properties exemplify content through form. 'By wedding form to content' (Genova 1979, 322), style transposes the imperceptible properties of a work – its artistic meaning – into perceptible aesthetic patterns. Medieval artists' pious intent, for instance, is displayed in their works by means of

24 One example is the Austrian violinist and composer Fritz Kreisler, who wrote several musical pieces in Baroque's style and presented them as Vivaldi's originals. When truth came out in 1935, he responded to critics' complaints: "The name changes, the value remains".

25 However, it is almost impossible for a modern artist to dive himself completely into the stylistic conventions of a period. Even van Meegeren's paintings display elements of the style of his own time: for example, in his *Christ and the Disciples at Emmaeus* (1936) the characters' faces seem influenced by the photographic images of the Thirties. The man in profile, for instance, shows facial features that today, in retrospect, appear very modern. These stylistic aspects were much less obvious to the viewer of the 1930s, probably because they seemed just 'normal' at the time (see Dutton, 1993).



Figure 3 Cimabue's Maestà di Assisi, detail of the Virgin's hands. Basilica Inferiore di San Francesco d'Assisi, Assisi, Italy

stylistic devices; the Virgin's hands' style serves as a 'vehicle' to express her merciful royalty: it 'instances' this meaning. [Fig. 3] Similar examples abound in art history. The point is that while the formal patterns determining a style can be reproduced, what cannot be imitated is the original 'will' – Riegl's *Kunstwollen* – those patterns were meant to exemplify. In Sagoff's terms: 'No one – not even a great copyist – can paint in the style of Caravaggio today. The copyist can only mimic or imitate that style' (Sagoff 2014, 12). The style of a given period, meant as a codified set of signs, can be more or less satisfactorily re-evoked today for a variety of reasons – as a homage, a parody, a technical training etc. None of these, however, matches the *original* artistic reasons why a style was created. Imitations, however accurate they might be, can never keep the initial meaning associated with certain stylistic properties. Out of the artistic tradition of the period, thus, style's authenticity is simply impossible. A linguistic example might be convenient here. By using the same signifier – a given stylistic pattern – to refer to a different signification, copies produce a sort of perceptual 'false-friend'. Like pairs of words in two languages that look similar but have different

meanings, copies can mimic a style's formal features but end up conveying a whole other message. Hence the problem, for this might therefore be a prompter of aesthetic deception. Prokofiev's *Symphony No. 1 Op. 25*, 'Classical', for example, owes much of its structure to the eighteenth century, but it is in fact emblematic of the neoclassical *Kunstwollen* of the interwar period: a 'call to order' after the experimental ferment of the avant-garde.<sup>26</sup> Interpreting this work as an authentic product of the Age of Enlightenment would be deceptive and prevent the work from being appreciated appropriately.

This helps explain why errors in style attribution reduce the aesthetic impact of the object or even threaten the experience altogether. Whenever we classify art-objects as 'gothic', 'baroque', 'neo-classic' we are *appreciating* their authenticity, that is, their connection with a given historical moment and its specific *Weltanschauung*. Visitors of Assisi presume that they are experiencing a masterpiece that has been there since Middle Ages – fragmented as it is – by *perceiving* its authenticity through its manifest stylistic features. Were they to discover that the frescos are just modern imitations, they would feel deceived, for, as Korsmeyer puts it, they would perceive the right stylistic property 'in the wrong frame' (Korsmeyer 2008, 121). If so, then stylistic features can *differentiate* the original from the replica, though always in a 'derivative' way – a way, that is, which requires a reasonable knowledge of art history, since styles are difficult to identify without explicit learning.<sup>27</sup> When we detect, recognise, and attribute style, the origins of the object

26 As the example suggests, one could also argue that each time a style is emulated, a new style is brought into being.

27 Although stylistic knowledge may also be acquired implicitly, e.g., via repeated exposure to works that have a certain style. Interestingly, empirical studies have shown that implicitly acquired style increases simple preferences among viewers (Gordon and Holyoak, 1983). However, the process of style-identification requires its outcome to be explained, and this involves the mastery of categories that can only be acquired via an explicit training in art history.

– whether or not it is authentic – make a crucial difference to our perception and counts as a genuine factor of aesthetic evaluation.

## 5 Conclusion

Originalists are wrong to think that the aesthetic merits of authentic artworks depend on placing them in relation to an appropriate person or context. This, however, does not make authenticity a feature for fetishists or snobs, as anti-originalists contend. Authenticity may well not be a primary condition for aesthetic appreciation, but it is surely a ‘derivative’ one, one that is mediated by style identification. By exemplifying via form and design the peculiar *Kunstwollen* of an epoch – its relevant historical/cultural/artistic features – style makes authenticity aesthetically appreciable.

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Figure 1 Sebasgs, Volta Cimabue (Wikimedia Commons, 2007). Reproduced under license: CC BY-SA 3.0

Figure 2 Starlight, Cimabue's Maestà di Assisi, Basilica Inferiore di San Francesco d'Assisi (Wikimedia Commons, 2006). Reproduced under license: CC BY-SA 3.0

Figure 3 Starlight, Cimabue's Maestà di Assisi, Basilica Inferiore di San Francesco d'Assisi (Wikimedia Commons, 2006). Modified under license: CC BY-SA 3.0



## TERRY DIFFEY: A PHILOSOPHICAL LIFE

Jeffrey Petts

*T. J. Diffey is Emeritus Reader in Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Sussex where he taught from 1962 until his retirement in 2003. He was editor of The British Journal of Aesthetics from 1977 to 1994, and is author of Tolstoy's What is Art? (1985). He has published numerous articles in aesthetics, some of which were collected in his The Republic of Art and Other Essays (1991).*

*In your introduction to the 'Republic of Art and Other Essays' (1991) you talk of philosophy as a journey, a 'process of discovery', and hopefully 'one of such interest that it is not unreasonable to suppose that others are making it too'. So, can I start by asking where and when yours started and how you came to focus on philosophical aesthetics?*

I grew up in Dorset and was very interested in landscape, local history, the antiquities of Dorset and all those sorts of things. I read quite a few books on the county and it wasn't long before I encountered reference to the great local writer Thomas Hardy, who was a figure of national standing and of great influence locally, expressing

the character of the local people and countryside. I got interested in Hardy and literature as a school-boy and without knowing anything about philosophy I thought Hardy was a philosophical writer: he'd make comments on the nature of life and so on. I remember, for example, in *Tess of the D'Uberilles* (1891) Tess has an accident with the family horse, which is killed, and that has an effect on the livelihood of her family: she reflects that perhaps we live on a 'blighted star', which I took as an example of a philosophical remark. Soon after that I found out that Hardy was interested in Schopenhauer<sup>1</sup>.

*So, this explains how you became interested in philosophy, but where*

*did your interest in aesthetics come from?*

I had come across aesthetics in my sixth form via a second-hand copy of E. F. Carritt's *An Introduction to Aesthetics* (1949), which I think in my *Memoir of the British Society of Aesthetics* (2019) I said was the most boring book I've ever read!<sup>2</sup> And I didn't come across aesthetics in my undergraduate philosophy courses at the University of Bristol. But when I had the opportunity to go back to Bristol to do a PhD, starting in 1960, I wanted to work on the idea of the 'value judgement', partly because I'd been particularly engaged by the ethics course there. It was then very much about the analysis of the language of ethics, metaethics, what was going on linguistically when we made moral judgements and about the effects on behaviour. I was going to explore that area but a tutor, Peter Nidditch<sup>3</sup>, said that 'everyone was working on that topic'. I doubt that was true, but he suggested that, given my interest in literature, why didn't I focus it on evaluative judgements within art and literature? So that's what I did and that's how I got into philosophical aesthetics.<sup>4</sup>

*Did you think then that you were in some sense pioneering in*

*philosophical aesthetics, given its absence from undergraduate philosophy and the dullness of the book you'd read on the subject?*

Well, during my PhD thesis I was left very much on my own, partly through my choice. I'd asked the head of department at Bristol, Stephan Körner<sup>5</sup>, to supervise me because I was getting a lot from him as a philosopher but I knew he wasn't interested in aesthetics. His main role as supervisor was to insist I produce a piece of writing every two weeks and that whatever else I did I should include a study of Kant's 'Third Critique' (1790). Apart from the 'Third Critique' I was left completely on my own. I got the impression that there wasn't very much aesthetics around. So, I read widely and promiscuously anything that seemed to pertain to the topic of art.

*You say there wasn't much aesthetics around, but one book that comes to mind as most significant from that time, and a turning point in philosophical aesthetics, is William Elton's collection of essays *Aesthetics and Language* (1954).*

Yes, you're right. There were a few works, of which Elton's was one, that I found exceedingly useful. Another was Frank Sibley's paper 'Aesthetic Concepts' (Philosophical

Review, 1959). So, it's not true to say there wasn't any contemporary aesthetics but there just didn't seem to be very much. Two other things to mention in that context are firstly that when Stuart Hampshire gave a paper at the University of Bristol I was introduced to him as someone working in aesthetics and he asked me if I'd read Ernst Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* (1960). That was published in 1960 and I used it in my PhD thesis. The other thing was R.G. Collingwood's *The Principles of Art* (1938)', which started my journey with him, and I'd go as far to say was *the* major text in philosophical aesthetics. It had been published in 1938 but the twenty years or so that had passed wasn't a long time in philosophy.

*Those first years that you were active as an academic philosopher seemed to be ones where there were opportunities to develop the whole field of aesthetics from a range of sources. I wonder if you felt then that you were obliged to follow any particular tradition or approach – Kantian, analytic, historical?*

Those traditions didn't seem very full-bodied. But I can be more specific. I admired, what was then called, linguistic philosophy and

the linguistic philosophers, particularly J.L. Austin, J.O. Urmson and R.M. Hare.<sup>6</sup> But their school, if you want to call it that, or their philosophical method, wasn't working in aesthetics. In my thesis I was motivated to see to what extent you could apply what Hare said about ethics, for example, to aesthetics.

*What conclusions did you draw from attempting that?*

My thesis on aesthetic judgement and works of art was a negative thesis. I thought that there was a great problem in identifying the aesthetic judgement. The moral philosophers like Hare could quickly hone in on questions like 'what is it to say something is right' or that 'something is good' and they didn't consider a rich moral vocabulary. It was only later in ethics that more sensitivity was developed to the whole range of ethical language by philosophers like Philippa Foot and Bernard Williams<sup>7</sup>. So, the brutal answer is that it proved a dead end to follow Hare's example in aesthetics because there is such a rich language in aesthetics, in the way we talk about art.<sup>8</sup> But I think the reason why my thesis itself wasn't a failure is that through it I worked out what became 'The Republic of Art'<sup>9</sup>. I'd soon got more interested in the question

'what is art?' than in the language of the aesthetic judgement. This led me to read Tolstoy's book on art for example. At this time too, around 1962, I became aware of the number of new universities being opened and was told that I should consider applying for a lectureship in philosophy, it being a time unlikely to recur when there were quite a lot of openings suddenly becoming available. I started at Sussex in October 1962.

*How did philosophical aesthetics fit in to teaching philosophy at Sussex?*

There were four or five philosophers and we constituted the 'subject group' as it was called, with Patrick Corbett<sup>10</sup> as the professor and working with him we designed the curriculum. There was initial opposition to teaching aesthetics from one philosopher in particular who said that aesthetics was Hegelian and that Karl Popper had disproved Hegel, so we shouldn't waste our time with aesthetics. That person didn't stay very long and with Roger Taylor also interested in aesthetics we managed to get the subject on to the curriculum in around 1964.

*At that time too the British Society of Aesthetics was starting out. Was its development connected to the*

*new universities (like the University of York, the University of Warwick, the University of East Anglia, Lancaster University and the University of Kent) and their growth?*

No, I don't think so because the Society was very much London-based. The nucleus of the Society were people in London like Ruth Saw and Ruby Meager, who were academics working in aesthetics, and Harold Osborne, who was an independent scholar<sup>11</sup>. I should say that's a correction to the idea that aesthetics wasn't studied much in England. The Society too had people who had an interest in dance, music, sculpture, painting, art history, a whole range of people across the arts really. I'd add too that the new universities you mentioned did play an important role in the development of the teaching of aesthetics.

*What was your role in the early days of the Society?*

The Society was founded in 1960. I had just started my PhD then and I don't think I knew of its existence. I think I found out about it for the first time when Harold Osborne came down to the University of Sussex in 1964 and I was invited to meet him with colleagues for lunch. It was there that Harold asked us if we'd be willing to

contribute to the *British Journal of Aesthetics*.<sup>12</sup> My connection with the Journal began with a book review on a work by Adrian Stokes<sup>13</sup> on a kind of Freudian aesthetics on which I'd done no work. Indeed, what I did discover many years later as Editor of the Journal was that there can be quite a mismatch between the books that come in for review and the panel of available reviewers. Anyway, I joined the Society around that time, 1964 or 1965; I was a very junior member and my main connection was to receive the Journal, which I read avidly and soon became very useful in the work that I was doing. As I also say and give more detail in my *Memoir of the Society*<sup>14</sup>, it did have a monthly London lecture programme in the Holborn Public Library. I listened to some very good lectures and met other members of the Society and some of its distinguished members. After my first book review too, Harold Osborne kept me on as a book reviewer. I began to 'mine' my PhD thesis, which I'd received the degree for in 1966, for particular articles. The Journal published 'Evaluation and Aesthetic Appraisals' in 1967 and then 'The Republic of Art' in 1969. At that time I still didn't have a role in the Society as such, I but was getting to know Harold Osborne better through my

contributions to the Journal and meeting him at Society lectures. The next real change was in the 1970s, I think 1972 or 1973, when Eva Schaper gave up organising the Society's national conferences and I was asked to take over the job. The first conference I organised was in 1973. I continued to meet Harold Osborne through those years and he'd let me know he'd be retiring to Switzerland soon; he'd retired from the UK Civil Service but had continued to work on significant things like his *The Oxford Companion to Art* (1970) and other books on art. Sometime early in 1977, he said he was moving to Zurich and asked if I would take over the Journal. Later that year I collected submitted papers and other materials from him and was briefed. It's worth bearing in mind the Journal was not electronically set then and the production process was quite long: every issue took six months to go through the press. The first issue for which I had full responsibility for the content was the summer of 1978.

*Did you have specific aims for the Journal when you took over or was it a matter of continuing its work?*

In the first instance I just wanted to keep the show on the road: I didn't

begin with a set of aims but was more interested in having copy on time for the printer. But, I did begin to develop certain principles. One was that I wanted to have a range of topics in any given issue. Relatedly, I saw that authors were sending in responses to pieces they'd read in previous issues of the Journal, so that material became self-generating. For example, there might be a lot of papers on Kant. You can have special issues on Kant of course, but I didn't think you should inadvertently sink any given issue of the Journal with material on one topic only. One of my other working principles was that I had to be able to understand the article myself, and I don't think my level of comprehension was that high, so I was always looking at papers from the reader's point of view.

*So what kind of readership did you have in mind? Did you think a general, interested readership should be able to understand articles in the Journal?*

Yes, I did. I didn't regard the Journal as one solely for professional philosophers. I should mention that at that time the Society had members who were teachers from the art colleges, for example. There was a great interest in what

was called 'aesthetic education'. I went to more than one conference on aesthetic education either sponsored by the Society or with its members at colleges of education and we'd get contributions for the Journal from their staff too. The more general readership did seem to drop away and the philosophers were taking over, but this seemed part of the self-evolution of the Journal that I mentioned earlier. Another phenomenon I noticed was that philosophers would turn themselves into aestheticians by, for example, putting together two interests, say one in Wittgenstein and another in music. They would write something about it and send it to the Journal on the grounds that they were contributing to aesthetics, as distinct from people like Frank Sibley and so on who were actually working in aesthetics. The former couldn't be regarded as contributing to the field of aesthetics because they were making no reference, to continue the example, to anything anyone had said *about music* and rather were trying to present a Wittgensteinian account of music.

*You edited the Journal into the mid-1990s...*

Yes and I was very proud of the Journal and that it had grown in

stature. Oxford University Press had taken over producing it just before my editorship began and I was pleased it was something they were happy to continue publishing. It's worth keeping in mind too that at Sussex there was an interdisciplinary system in place: my teaching at Sussex was wide. For example, I taught seminars on philosophy and English Romanticism, and devised courses on art and society, and also, one that was particularly close to my heart, on utopian literature. Now if you think of an academic philosopher as doing things like that, they're not a paradigm case of a professional philosopher. So, while I didn't think of the Journal as an organ of professional philosophers, narrowly defined, on the other hand I'd have been mortified if I'd been told the Journal wasn't up to professional standards.

*If I can now turn to your own work in a little more detail: it has covered a wide range of issues.<sup>15</sup> Is it reasonable to suggest that your overarching philosophical interest, or at least motivation, is the general value of art?*

Yes, that's right, but also in relation to the evaluations we make of particular works of art. So, when you listen to artists and critics

talking, they're quite strong in their judgements about the merits and demerits of a work. My curiosity has always been what those judgements are founded on and what guides any insight when that insight or capacity doesn't seem to depend on the universal. I mean, we're not puzzled by visual judgements people make, like the colour of grass, whereas what is problematic is how people differ over their views of the quality of one work as against another. All sorts of hypotheses have been advanced about whether then we have a sense of beauty analogous to the sense of sight and so on. I don't want to get into those theories here. I would just note though that they were issues that really concerned me, as they did one of my favourite philosophers David Hume in 'The Standard of Taste' (1757). It was a genuine perplexity that I was working from, rather than something I devised for the sake of academic employment.

*Did you come to any conclusions about 'taste': do you think it's a capacity some people have? Is 'taste' even the right word – for example it seems to me that rather than there being a general capacity, people have different capacities to appreciate depending on the closeness of their everyday in-*

*volvement with particular kinds of things.*

Hume was perhaps on to this, or something similar, when he said that a degree of leisure was required in order to appreciate works of art because you had to have a wide experience of art. But I really should say that after my initial project, my PhD thesis, I'm not sure I ever did have a particular project in mind that you could call 'my work'. I was much more an occasional writer by which I mean that I responded to requests to write or give a paper, address conferences and so on. For example, one of my papers, 'What Can We Learn From Art?'<sup>16</sup>, was in response to a request to contribute to a symposium. It wasn't written as part of one of my projects but it did allow me to crystallize thoughts I'd had on that subject. Similarly, I drew a distinction between apologies for art and evaluations of artworks in my book on Tolstoy<sup>17</sup>. For much of the time that I was editing the *Journal*, the *Journal* was at the centre of my philosophical life and the other energies would have been going into teaching. Also, I was always active administratively at Sussex, for example being Dean of one of the schools of study.

*Can we turn then to a philosopher*

*whose work you do particularly admire, R.G. Collingwood?*

My admiration for Collingwood is focused on his extraordinary range as a philosopher. He tackled the philosophy of history, the philosophy of art, of science, metaphysics, politics, and was also interested in philosophical method. I valued him for having a synoptic vision of philosophy as distinct from the piecemeal approach to philosophical questions which was found in linguistic and analytical philosophy. What I've got in mind here is one of the contributors to *Aesthetics and Language* (1954) who talks about doing aesthetics in a piecemeal fashion, where you take a particular question and you examine the confusions that have gone into asking that question. Then you move on to the next question. But what interests me in Collingwood is that the 'next question' for him is determined by his vision of what a philosopher should be doing as a philosopher. So, I was interested in, I suppose, Collingwood's respect for philosophical method. That related too to why I wanted Stephan Körner as my PhD supervisor because he too was extremely interested in questions of philosophical method, in his case very much under the influence of Kant. More particularly my respect

for Collingwood was due to his *The Principles of Art* (1938) and his earlier *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art* (1925). I'd also like to say that I had an interest as a schoolboy in archaeology – my school had its own archaeological site – and as a young man I did several digs with professional archaeologists. I think the first time I heard about Collingwood was actually in regard to his work on Roman Britain.<sup>18</sup>

*Reading Collingwood's An Autobiography (1939) he was taken to archaeological digs at a very young age by his father and seems to have drawn something about proper philosophical method from archaeological methods, so it's interesting you seem to have had a similar experience. His autobiography, written at the end of the 1930s, also shows the wider significance he saw for philosophical method when he ends it by suggesting the piecemeal philosophy of what he called 'minute philosophers' was partly responsible for allowing the rise of totalitarian thinking like fascism. I wonder if you link philosophy, art and society as strongly?<sup>19</sup>*

I devised an 'Art and Society' course while at Sussex. Collingwood might have been a motiva-

tion but I don't think he was on the syllabus. But he would have seen aesthetics – if he ever used the term – as one aspect of a unified philosophy. We have to be careful not to divide philosophy into branches that then become autonomous or self-supporting specialisms. Collingwood is quite the reverse of that; he's working on different aspects of philosophy. He's saying some really important things morally. One is that we should take responsibility for our feelings and emotions as well as for our actions. We tend to assume that our emotions are things that befall us and that we're in their power, and while true to some degree, Collingwood is saying we're not totally helpless, that we need in a sense to own up to them, which is what he's saying in terms of his notion of the 'corruption of consciousness'. I think it's an important insight. And you have to remember that when Collingwood was at Oxford in the 1920s, moral philosophy was full of examples like 'I've borrowed a book from the library, ought I to return it?' and he thought that these were trivial moral questions and the real moral question is something like 'what sort of person am I to become?'. Now, in order to work on that, you

need to work on your emotions and passions.

*In that regard, perhaps alongside your admiration for Collingwood, was William Wordsworth as important in your philosophical life? I'm thinking of the recent republication of your 'The Roots of Imagination: A Philosophical Context' (1981) in a book in a series on Romanticism.<sup>20</sup>*

I took *Tintern Abbey* to be a kind of literal transcription of the transcendent; that is, in the poem he shows the reality of the transcendent. Now, that is an extraordinarily idiotic thing to say in the modern world, where consumerism for instance makes any talk of the transcendent futile and meaningless. You have to keep a sense of the transcendent in this hostile and uncomprehending environment. That is a personal insight; but as for philosophy, its task for me is to see what if anything can be defensibly said about that conflict between the transcendent and ordinary life. This leads into the present phase of my life, which is the life of a Buddhist. It's only now that I'm an ordained Buddhist that a number of the things that I worked on when I was a philosopher have become much more

acted out in my life rather than worked upon at the level of theory.

*I heard a lecture you gave recently at the University of Sussex on Buddhism<sup>21</sup>. Apart from talking about its teachings, you explained that Buddhism has been part of your own practical, everyday life before and since you retired from academic philosophy – as something quite distinct from your academic work. Still, it seems to me that it's perhaps an integral part of the whole philosophical journey you've undertaken?*

I'm not philosophically active now in the sense that I'm not writing anything in aesthetics or any other branch of philosophy. But I'm very grateful for my philosophical education and for some of the things I did work on in my active years as a philosopher. I'm involved in and following the Buddhist path now. To do that you need to study the teachings of the Buddha and follow an ethical path and have a meditation practice. From a philosophical perspective each of those areas – study, ethics and meditation – are interesting. Meditation, for example, involves the contemplation of beauty. In terms of ethics, that's probably too big an issue for this interview but Buddhists follow what they call 'train-

ing precepts' and I can give some examples of those. I undertake to abstain from taking life, to abstain from taking the not-given, and these are, in their positive forms, respect for life and generosity. Philosophically they're certainly not commandments but are more like Kant's hypothetical imperatives. Basically, if you want to achieve enlightenment then be generous - I mean, this is putting it in a terribly over-simplified and reductive way. It's rather more sophisticated than that but the underlying logic of the situation is that if I don't follow these precepts then natural consequences follow in that there are negative effects on oneself.

In terms of study, and thinking in terms of what I've said about philosophical method, Buddhists have a concept of 'emptiness' or 'sunyata' and we think about the emptiness of all phenomena, but what sort of thought is that? What I want to say is that anyone who was educated in philosophy about the time I was would be very familiar with approaches to perception in terms of sense data theory. There's an analogous approach in Buddhism to the world as really comprising appearances or sense data with no underlying substantiality or permanence. In relation to anti-essentialism about art, to say that you

can't define art is to say there's no essential identity that works of art must possess to be works. Incidentally, you also get this in Hume's treatment of the self in a famous passage in his 'Treatise of Human Nature' where he looks into himself and can't find it. That passage is sometimes used in introductory texts to Buddhism; Buddhists entirely agree with Hume on the non-essential nature of the self. I was very surprised when I was reading a commentary on Nagarjuna, the Buddhist philosopher, by Stephen Jay Gould, who trained in Western philosophy, how he draws heavily on Hume's notions of insubstantiality and impermanence. So in a rather ironical way, for most of my professional life I was concerned intellectually with anti-essentialist approaches to art, but they've now become much more experiential in the sense of seeing what difference this approach generally makes to the way one lives one's life. That the self is ultimately unreal is not just an intellectual point for Buddhists; it relates to how you then relate to other people and other beings because there's no ultimate distinction between myself and others.

*Does that relate to a division perhaps in Western ethical thought between on the one side the*

*'golden rule', even existential morality, and constructing a universal morality, and on the other ideas about living a 'good life' oneself?*

Well that is a crucial point and there is a division in Buddhism between different schools. One of the standing charges in the West against Buddhism is that it is selfish in that you're only interested in the development of your own soul. That is a criticism that has got some anchorage in, and is a reasonable gloss on, some Buddhist teachings in the Theravadan tradition. But the Mahayanan tradition has what's called the Bodhisattva ideal; Bodhisattvas are compassionate beings that postpone enlightenment for themselves until all beings are relieved from suffering. This ideal is designed to redress the otherwise selfish emphasis. But the trouble when you start to talk about this is that it starts to sound supernatural, pretty much removed from the human world!

*A good time for lunch..?*

Good idea, I'll see if there's a table at 'The Friars Oak'...

*Interview conducted by Jeffrey Petts, 20/10/2018, in Hassocks, West Sussex.*

## Endnotes

- 1 Diffey later wrote about the connection in, for example, "Metaphysics and Aesthetics: A Case Study of Schopenhauer and Thomas Hardy" in *Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and the Arts*, ed., Dale Jacquette, (Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 2 The *Memoir* is available at [http://british-aesthetics.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Memoir\\_BSA\\_and\\_BJA\\_Terry\\_Diffey\\_Parts\\_1and2.pdf](http://british-aesthetics.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Memoir_BSA_and_BJA_Terry_Diffey_Parts_1and2.pdf)
- 3 Peter Nidditch (1928-1983) lectured at Belfast (1954-6), Liverpool (1956-9) and Bristol (1959-63), before becoming senior lecturer and then reader in the philosophy and history of science at the University of Sussex. In the 1970s he moved to the University of Sheffield to take up the Chair in Philosophy, which he held until his death in 1983.
- 4 The PhD was the basis of 'Evaluation and Aesthetic Appraisals', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 7(4), 358-373 (1967).
- 5 Stephan Körner (1913-2000) was Professor of Philosophy at the University of Bristol from 1952 to 1979. He specialised in Kant and the philosophy of Mathematics.
- 6 J.L. Austin (1911-1960) and J.O. Urmson (1915-2012) are notable ordinary language philosophers and influenced R.M Hare's (1919-2002) work in moral philosophy.
- 7 Philippa Foot (1920-2010), an important figure in virtue ethics; Bernard Williams (1929-2003), a leading 20<sup>th</sup> century moral philosopher.
- 8 Frank Sibley's 'Aesthetic Concepts' in the *Philosophical Review* 68(4), 421-450 (1959) was a key text in suggesting this rich aesthetic language.

9 'The Republic of Art' in *British Journal of Aesthetics* 9(2), 145-156 (1969).

10 Patrick Corbett was the first professor of philosophy at the University of Sussex.

11 Ruth Saw (1901-1986) was Professor of Aesthetics from 1961 to 1964 at Bedford College, University of London. Saw was a founding member of the British Society of Aesthetics. In 1968, on the death of Sir Herbert Read, she became President of the Society. An obituary by Harold Osborne is in the *British Journal of Aesthetics* 26(4), 307-308 (1986). Ruby Meager (1916-1992) was a founder member of the British Society of Aesthetics. An obituary by Eva Schaper is in *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 32(4), 293-294 (1992). Harold Osborne (1905-1987) was an independent scholar; he was the first editor of the *British Journal of Aesthetics*. His career was in the UK Civil Service and he worked at the Board of Trade when Diffey knew him: his obituary of Osborne is in the *British Journal of Aesthetics* 27(4), 301-306 (1987).

12 The *British Journal of Aesthetics* was founded in 1960.

13 Adrian Stokes, *The Invitation in Art* (1965), reviewed by Diffey in the *British Journal of Aesthetics* 5(3), 304 (1965).

14 See note 2

15 Diffey's publications include pieces on Tolstoy, defining art, evaluating artworks, the value of art, aesthetic experience, Schopenhauer, Collingwood, John Cowper Powys, and English Romanticism.

16 'What Can We Learn From Art?', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 73(2) 204-211(1995).

17 Diffey returns to this distinction in 'Aesthetic Instrumentalism', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 22(4), 337-349 (1982).

18 R.G. Collingwood, *Roman Britain* (Oxford University Press, 1923).

19 R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford University Press, 1939).

20 'The Roots of Imagination: the Philosophical Context'. Republished in Routledge Library Editions: Romanticism, Vo.24 *The Romantics* (Routledge, 2016). The piece explores, for example, how Lockean empiricism and English Romanticism are at issue over questions about the nature of perception and the nature of language and meaning.

21 'Buddhism', lecture delivered to Philosophy of Religion staff and students in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Sussex in March 2017.

# *Notes on Contributors*

## **YORICK JOSUA BERTA**

is a scholar and writer based in Vienna. He is currently preparing a PhD project on non-human agencies in decaying art of the 1960s.

yorick.bera@gmail.com

## **LISA GIOMBINI**

is currently Researcher in Aesthetics at the University of Roma Tre and Visiting Research Fellow in Philosophy at the University of Hertfordshire. She was DAAD post-doctoral fellow at Stuttgart Academy of Fine Arts (2016) and at Freie Universität Berlin (2017-2018) and a Research Grantee at University of Prešov, SK (2019). She is the author of *Musical Ontology: a Guide for the Perplexed* (2017) and a member of several philosophical association including the European Society of Aesthetics and the American Society of Aesthetics.

lisa.giombini@uniroma3.it

## **VANESSA BRASSEY**

is a Ph.D. candidate at King's College, London, where she works under the supervision of Sacha Golob and Derek Matravers, pursuing an investigation into the phenomenon of artistic expression. In addition, she contributing editor at the Centre for Philosophy and the Visual Arts, exploring the connections between philosophical theory and the artist's practice through film and live events in collaboration with Tate Britain, Tate Modern, The National Gallery, The Photographers Gallery and The Institute of Psychoanalysis.

## **JEFFREY PETTS**

is an independent scholar based in London. His research centres on the concepts of aesthetic experience and work and their relations to art, design, workmanship and everyday aesthetic interests. He was awarded an MPhil from the University of Sussex in 2000 and a PhD, 'Work and the Aesthetic', from the University of York in 2013. 'Aesthetic Experience and the Revelation of Value' was published in *JAAC* in 2000; 'Function and Flourishing: Good Design and Aesthetic Lives' in *JAE* in 2019.





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