"Too Timid a Dictum": The Art of Living

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Timidness is not often associated with philosophers. It is not one of our common traits. And yet. Nelson Goodman recalls a famous anecdote:

> To a complaint that his portrait of Gertrude Stein did not look like her, Picasso is said to have answered, "No matter; it will." (Goodman, 1968: 33)

Goodman takes this Picasso-esque remark to be indicative of a crucial dimension of art: its inventiveness and creativity. His response to the anecdote includes the phrase that appears in my title: "That nature imitates art is too timid a dictum. Nature is a product of art and discourse" (ibid.). Though largely neglected in analytic aesthetics over the past 50 years, Goodman here echoes a long-lived critical and artistic tradition of thinking about art as reflective of our lives to the extent that it is creative of new forms of life, "forms more real than living men," as Shelley put it.

Though my proposal is not Goodmanian, in this essay I wish to drive home the idea that art is inventive, creative, generative, or productive as much as it is imitative and reflective—and that it is often reflective to the extent that it is generative. The two are inseparable; in fact, they are not even two, but a single dimension of art: often art reveals the world *by* creating it.

I will raise the concern that this bi-directional dimension of art is insufficiently treated by contemporary aesthetic cognitivists. Those cognitivists focus on art's revelation of the world without seeing that it is at the same time generative through its cognitive power because of underlying mistaken assumptions about the place of art in our lives, about the nature and variety of human knowledge, and about human nature and life.[1] To be clear: I don't mean to argue that

[1] An expansive version of this project will show that acknowledging the world-creating nature of art highlights another blind spot in analytic aesthetics, in general, and in aesthetic cognitivism, in particular: how our cognitive engagements with artworks are not merely, and not even primarily, a matter of inhabiting their or their characters' perspectives, but rather analogous to our second-personal relationships to other

art is creative *in addition to* being revelatory. I am not pointing to a dimension or power art has alongside its cognitive power. Rather, if I am right, standard aesthetic cognitivism misses the genuine character of art by supposing (in a Humean spirit that severs cognition from conation or motivation) that art's revelatory power cannot be at the same time creative; as if these are two exclusive directions of fit. In this spirit, the aesthetic cognitivist assumes that we cannot learn about our lives through art *in and through* living new forms of life created by this art. But this assumption doesn't force itself on us, just like the assumption that the world is fixed independently of the art we make. Human nature and life are not fixed, but indeterminate. Pursuing them requires an open-ended, creative, self-constitutive endeavor that we achieve partly through art, which reveals ourselves and our world partly *by* creating ourselves and our world.

I. Aesthetic Cognitivism?

Aesthetic cognitivism is a philosophical approach committed to the view that we learn and grow cognitively through art mainly because artworks "reveal to their [audiences] something of consequence about their shared world" (Gibson, 2009).

Proposals of how and what artworks "reveal" and how and what we come to know through them are numerous. Some argue that artworks are the source of philosophical knowledge: they challenge or expand our grasp of concepts (John, 1998), revise whole existing conceptual frameworks or landscapes (Walden, 2023), or serve as thought experiments or hypotheticals (Carroll, 2002; Putnam, 1978). Some artworks are a source of ethical knowledge: they make the subtleties, complexities, and incommensurabilities of pursuing a flourishing life palpable and concrete (Nussbaum, 1990), or "contextualize" such ethical concepts by "presenting them to us in concrete form" (Gibson, 2007: 116), "from the inside" (ibid.), as part of a world of "value and significance" (ibid.). On some other proposals, art enhances our imaginative powers (Gaut, 2009), gives us experiential knowledge of how things are like to experience (e.g., Walsh, 1969), or affective knowledge (e.g., Robinson, 1997). Many argue that art allows us to better understand other people

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people. Artworks often guide and instruct us, as if they were other people, in how to respond to them, and through them, to our world, how to see them, and through them, our world, and above all, how to reconstitute ourselves and live with them in our world. To this extent, proper relationships with artworks (as wholes, not merely to their characters) are like second-person, reciprocal relationships with other people, which are the primary kind of relationships required for proper and ethical understanding of them. For a brief argument to this effect, see Gorodeisky, 2025.

by facilitating our capacity to empathize with or inhabit their perspectives (Camp, 2018, Currie, 1995, 1998, Bailey, 2024). Or it gives us a know-how, training us in how to imagine, feel, or experience, "fine-tuning our mental capacities" (Landy, 2012: 181).

Even though I will worry about the way that standard aesthetic cognitivism raises the question it wishes to answer and its assumptions about art, knowledge, and human nature, I take the core commitment of this approach to art—as "embody[ing] ways of knowing" (Gibson, 2009: 2)—to be appealing and intuitive. Most minimally, aesthetic cognitivism is motivated by the convincing thought that we cannot be appreciatively just to artworks independently of thinking of them as either true or false, precise or distorting, insightful or shallow.[2] Such terms are all over the place in our everyday parlance, fiction, and poetry about art, and in art criticism. For example, it is common to find artists/critics like Ralph Ellison praising the work of a painter like Romare Bearden for its power "for confronting and revealing the world" (Ellison, 2003: 688), and a critic like Helen Vendler, assessing a specific poetic gesture (in Jorie Graham's poem *At Luca Signorelli's Resurrection of the Body*) as not only "carried on intensely, slowly, and often painfully," but also as "believable" (Vendler, 1988: 458).

Aesthetic cognitivism is also grounded in the thought that art is a central mode of making sense of our world, ourselves, and others—another idea that is hard to resist. Yasujiro Ozu's films and Alfred Menzel's paintings are powerful articulations of our everyday reality, of its temporality, and of the challenge of aesthetically representing the everyday, namely, of those dimensions of our lives that we often fail to see clearly, independently of works like these. Arguably, great works like Flaubert's taught us to see detail, appreciate noticing, and worry about neglecting (cf., Wood, 2008).

Even though these two commitments are intuitive and convincing, and each of the cognitivist proposals introduced above has much to recommend, I wish to challenge the standard ways in which the approach has been posed and developed in analytic aesthetics over at least the last half-century.

I do so by motivating the thought common amongst critics that the greatest artworks often reflect, disclose, render understandable, or reframe our world and who we are *in and through inventing, constituting*, *creating*, or *making* our world and who we are. I am not going to argue that *all* artworks do so. Nor am I going to argue that we do not grow cognitively—conceptually, experientially, affectively, ethically, practically—in the various ways the different aesthetic

[2] Cf. Murdoch, 1997: 245.

cognitivists argue. Yet, I want to drive home the idea that art is *poesis*—in its ancient Greek meaning of being a form of making. Art—understood not as reduced to the set of *things* that artists produce, but to all the activities of making, interpreting, and appreciating, which artists, critics, and other appreciators are engaged in—is not *poesis* just in being a product of a process of making, interpreting, and appreciating, but is itself—through its making, interpreting, and appreciating—a making of ourselves and our world. As Schiller might have put it, without art, we might not have had "the freedom to be what we ought to be" (Schiller, [1795]1993: 147).

On this approach, we so much as have a world to know, partly by having art. Art discloses our world partly by inventing it through its ways of estranging us from, and challenging our habitual ways of living in it so far. Artworks are not productive of insight or knowledge as opposed to being productive of ways of being and living. Rather, they are often the former by being the latter, such that without these works, we wouldn't have had certain dimensions of our world. The question, then, is *not*, as the cognitivist John Gibson puts it, "what aspects of the world would be left undocumented, unaccounted for, if we had no literary works" (Gibson, 2008: 17) or other artworks, but partly, what dimensions of our possible human world would have been unknown as they would have remained *unlived,* or *unactualized*, if we had no artworks? These are not two different questions: if we had no art, some aspects of the world would remain undocumented *because* they would remain unlived.

None of the contemporary cognitivist approaches that I briefly introduced above recognizes this. Yet, in missing how art's cognitive potentials are often part and parcel of its nature as a *poesis* of our ways of living in this world, these standard approaches misrepresent

(1) the nature of varied forms of human knowledge (section III),
(2) a crucial dimension of being a human self and of human nature (section IV), and
(3) the true place of art in our lives (sections V-VI).

And by misrepresenting these three, cognitivists can't but miss the way art creates the world.[3]

Specifically, the standard ways in which the cognitivist's question is usually posed and answered imply, erroneously, that

[3] I focus here on what we have come to classify as the fine arts. But everything I say could only apply even better to more participatory, folk art forms that are distinct from fine art.

(1) art is not one of the ways through which we live our lives, but is rather more like a lamp that sheds light on our forms of life from outside of them: it is a source of knowledge that allows us to *return* to our world and to live in it equipped with the knowledge that we glean by engaging with art. To quote the cognitivist, "We turn from it [the work] and find ourselves now capable of seeing the world in its light" (Gibson, 2008: 4);[4] it is this assumption of a gap between the work and the world that explains why many cognitivists asks how art can so much as "*tell us* something *about* the world" (Gibson, 2007: 123),

(2) our world and our nature as humans is fixed independently of and in advance of artworks that merely reflect them, and allow us to better understand or know them, as they already exist, and

(3) though modes of knowledge are varied, including experiential, affective, imaginative, and practical knowledge, such ways of knowing are nonetheless distinct from modes of responding to, living, and being in the world.

II. *Poesis*

Trying to impress Fanny Price, of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Henry Crawford has volunteered to read Shakespeare out loud to Mrs. Bertram, Edmund Bertram, and Fanny. When Edmund compliments Henry for his fine reading, suggesting that he must be very familiar with Shakespeare, Henry (with a pretense of humility) responds with the following suggestion:

> I do not think I have had a volume of Shakespeare in my hand before since I was fifteen. . . . But Shakespeare one gets acquainted with without knowing how. It is part of an Englishman's constitution. His thoughts and beauties are so spread abroad that one touches them everywhere; one is intimate with him by instinct. No man of any brain can open at a good part of one of his plays without falling into the flow of his meaning immediately. (Austen, [1814]1994: 341)

[4] I don't think that Gibson endorses this view here, or at least I am not sure, as it appears as part of a critical discussion of one strand of the cognitivist approach. Yet, Gibson's own way of presupposing that, independently of artworks, something would go "undocumented" rather than "unlived," and his way of pressing the question regarding artistic fiction's ability to be *about* the world, suggest that he is prone to the same misguided presuppositions I outline in the body of the text. More on his view below.

Shakespeare is part of everyone's DNA, definitely in the West, and possibly beyond it.[5] No matter how many centuries after he wrote his corpus, Shakespeare still speaks to us.[6] We read him today, as Henry, Edmund, and Fanny read him at the beginning of the 19th century, as if his characters live amongst us or we among them, in spite of radical changes in language, fashion, mores, and morals. We feel at home in his world—feel that his characters' ways of loving and avoiding love, of feeling jealousy, of grieving, thinking, and psychologically struggling are ours, expressive of how we love, grieve, feel jealous, or struggle with ourselves and our parents.

If Harold Bloom is right, Shakespeare taught us how "complex eros" (1998), our jealousy, and our own psychologies are partly by inventing our modern sense of personality—our ways of being a modern self—and with it our modern concept of love and *ways of loving*.

Consider Cordelia's expression of love, early in Act I, Scene I of *King Lear*:

> "What shall Cordelia speak? Love and be silent" (Shakespeare, *King Lear*, I.1, 62)

> "And yet not so, since I am sure my love's
> More ponderous than my tongue" (ibid., I.1, 76-7).
> . . .
> "Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
> My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty
> According to my bond, no more nor less" (ibid. I.1, 90-92).

"Love and be silent." Cordelia needs to say nothing more. We hear her, understand her, accept her as (virtually) the only true lover in the play, since we, partly thanks to her, have come to love as she does: in the wake of Shakespeare, we, modern lovers, have come to be committed to the redundancy of public avowals, such as those strewn through pre-modern discussions of love—just think of Plato's Alchibiades, who, without a moment thought, chooses to publicly crown his

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[5] Think of Akira Kurasawa's *Ran* and *The Bad Sleep Well*, and the many Indian, Chinese, and South Korean adaptations of plays such as *Hamlet* and *King Lear*.

[6] The phrase "speaks to us," which we use primarily about artworks is telling, highlighting how much we take artworks to be analogous to other people who speak to us. But, again, this is a topic for another day.

lover with a wreath (Plato, 213E).[7] It is partly through Shakespeare, at the dawn of modernity, that we have made ourselves into lovers who, like Cordelia, feel that their words cannot stand up to their true embrace of their lovers.[8] We have turned into lovers who feel that they can only betray their lovers, themselves, and their relationships by consenting to a demand to prove their love publicly. The way Cordelia expresses her reaction, to us alone, the audience, in silence—without being heard by those around her—and the specific words she uses are, of course, momentous: like her, we, modern lovers, have come to find public words and avowals to be so inadequate to our love that responding to a demand to prove our love publicly, on stage, would require chaining or taming ("heaving") what we take to be our "free-given" love to our words. Ever since Cordelia, we may even feel "heaved" in the sense of feeling "retched up," on the verge of vomiting, at the face of such a demand.[9]

Many writings about love (ever since Shakespeare) manifest how, through plays like *Lear* and characters like Cordelia, the bard contributed to the invention of the modern love that still shapes who we are and how we love. Consider, for instance, a passage from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. After a day at the Ramsay's coastal house, teeming with guests, life, and tensions between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, the couple is finally alone in their bedroom. Mrs. Ramsay thinks:

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[7] In no way can I do justice to the historical upheavals and the complicated (and not necessarily linear) genealogy and history of the concept of love and our ways of loving, not even merely to this complicated genealogy and history in the West, or even just in the turn from pre-modernity to modernity. I acknowledge that the way I present this turn here ignores subtleties in the ancient ways of loving and the great continuities between the ancient and the modern practices of love. For an illuminating study of the history and upheavals of love as a practice of making sense and a form of human freedom, see Kottman, 2017.

[8] I hope that it is also clear that I cannot do justice even only to the modern conceptions of love and the modern ways of loving. (For a fascinating exploration of one modern "culture" of love, see Kern, 1992.) I don't even mean to suggest that these "modern" ways of loving are still fully characteristic of our current ways of loving; the former may well be changing these days, or have been changing over the last couple of decades, with social media turning to be one of our central modes of living. And in any case, I mean only to be suggestive here of *barely* an approximation of *one* dimension of modern love, while neglecting much that is central in this modern way of loving, including the central tendency of modern lovers to avoid another's love, to seek affirmation, as well as the various modern notions of sexuality, ways of being sexual, and much more.

[9] To be clear: it is not just Cordelia's actions and Lear's tragic end that engage these, but the specific ways the play is written: we have reformed our ways of loving in the way I suggest partly by hearing how quiet Cordelia is (exemplifying "Love and be silent" in front of us), by experiencing (even if inchoately at first) how much apart she stands from the rest of her family in Scene I, Act I and speak to us, the audience, and by feeling heaved or retched up by this performative way of loving through her particular image of "heaving" her heart to her mouth. Artworks achieve the relevant creative/cognitive revolutions I identify in this paper through their *specific* artistic and expressive resources in a way that answers Gibson's "textual constraint" (2009:3). For a recent discussion of this constraint and its implications for cognitivist proposals, see Earley, 2025.

> He wanted something—wanted the thing she always found it so difficult to give him; wanted her to tell him that she loved him. And that, no, she could not do. He found talking so much easier than she did. . . . A heartless woman he called her; she never told him that she loved him. But it was not so—it was not so. It was only that she never could say what she felt. Was there no crumb on his coat? Nothing she could do for him? . . . Will you not tell me just for once that you love me? He was thinking that . . . But she could not do it; she could not say it. Then, knowing that he was watching her, instead of saying any thing she turned, holding her stocking, and looked at him. And as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, of course he knew that she loved him. (Woolf, 1927: 189-90)

Woolf draws on what she knows her readers would accept as genuine love: of course, Mrs. Ramsay cannot tell Mr. Ramsay that she loves him. This is how a true lover would respond to what Mr. Ramsay "wanted"; demanded. Woolf knew too that her readers, those modern Cordelian lovers, would find Mrs. Ramsay's thought that, nonetheless, "he knew, of course he knew that she loved him," without saying that she loved him, a kind of closure, a lovers' justice, which might require them (the readers) to reconsider what they have come to think of the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay up to this stage of the novel. Woolf understood that such a response of a "true lover" might require the readers to ask themselves if the love of the couple is not in fact the only genuine love in the novel, in spite of what they might have thought before.

If Woolf wrote before Shakespeare, she would not have been able to bank on her readers' acceptance of a refusal to publicly and verbally avow love as an expression of true love. It is largely thanks to Shakespeare and works like his that we have come to have this conception of love and to love in this way. If Bloom is right, by reading Shakespeare, we better understand what it means to love or to avoid another's love, the pains that go with such avoidance, and the claims that the love of another makes on us,[10] partly because it is through Shakespeare's plays and sonnets that we have reinvented our ways of loving.

In this vein, Sontag writes, "a great work of art is never simply (or even mainly) a vehicle of ideas or of moral sentiments [but rather] first of all, an object modifying our consciousness and

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[10] It is Cavell (1969(b)), not Bloom, who insightfully and powerfully shows how *Lear* explores the claims of love and the pains of its avoidance.

sensibility, changing the composition, however slightly, of the humus that nourishes all specific ideas and sentiments" (Sontag, 1961: 300). On her view, we hadn't seen human faces as we do now before the advent of the cinema (Sontag, 1963).

Sontag and Bloom are not alone. Numerous other critics and artists have suggested that many of the most enduring artworks reflect and teach us about our ways of being in the world partly by constituting or "inventing" them.[11]

Oscar Wilde famously suggested that if art teaches us to see the fogs in our world, it is by inventing them:

> Where, if not from the Impressionists, do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets . . . The extraordinary change that has taken place in the climate of London during the last ten years is entirely due to this particular school of Art. (Wilde, 1891)

And Pier Paolo Pasolini powerfully explains how Caravaggio invented a new kind of people, a gaze, a light.[12]

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[11] Some philosophers (though mostly those writing before the last 50 years) have also defended the view. Here I quote only two. Hegel writes:

> And it was not as if these ideas and doctrines [about the Divine in Greek culture] were already there, *in advance* of poetry . . . and then later were only clothed in imagery by artists and given an external adornment in poetry; on the contrary, the mode of artistic production was such that what fermented in these poets they could work out only in this form of art and poetry. (Hegel, *Aesthetics*: 102)

And Max Scheler explains the distinctive mode of art's expression in a similar spirit:

> . . . [P]oets . . . fulfill a far higher function than that of giving noble and beautiful expression to their experiences and thereby making them recognizable to the reader, by reference to his own past experience in this kind. For by creating new forms of expression the poets soar above the prevailing network of ideas in which our experience is confined, as it were, by ordinary language. . . . [Poets] enable the rest of us to *see*, for the first time, in our own experience, something which may answer to these [poetic] new and richer forms of expression, and by so doing they actually extend the scope of our *possible* self-awareness. ([1912]2008: 252-53)

[12] He writes:

> First, Caravaggio invented a new world that, to invoke the language of cinematography, one might call profilmic. By this I mean everything that appears in front of the camera. Caravaggio invented an entire world to place in front of his studio's easel: new kinds of people (in both a social and characterological sense), new kinds of objects, and new kinds of landscapes. Second: Caravaggio invented a new kind of light. He replaced the universal,

It is also common to find remarks like the one by the narrator of Jean Stafford's short story *Children are Bored on Sunday*, who "turned sharply," and saw, "of course," Eisenberg, who "wore an incongruous smile upon his long, El Greco face" (Stafford, 2021: 372).[13] The narrator needs to say nothing. We know how Eisenberg looks. Could he look this way before El Greco? Was there an Eisenberg before El Greco?

Relatedly, I wouldn't be surprised to hear Shira uttering, "Look at that—Raul has a Pollock gusto!" Knowing Pollock's paintings, you'd know what Shira means; if she is right, you would see Raul's Pollock gusto—you would see a person, a gusto, which you could not have encountered before Pollock.[14]

This way of speaking ("he has such a Pollock gusto") and these critical engagements with artworks suggest that at least some artworks are *about* the world partly by creating new ways of being in the world.

> platonic light of the Renaissance with a quotidian and dramatic one. Caravaggio invented both this new kind of light and new kinds of people and things because he had seen them in reality. He realized that there were individuals around him who had never appeared in the great altarpieces and frescoes, individuals who had been marginalized by the cultural ideology of the previous two centuries. And there were hours of the day—transient, yet unequivocal in their lighting—which had never been reproduced, and which were pushed so far from habit and use that they had become scandalous, and therefore repressed. So repressed, in fact, that painters (and people in general) probably didn't see them at all until Caravaggio. (Pasolini, 2024)

[13] My last four examples remind us that this is not restricted to fiction, narrative, or poetic works.

[14] Those faces and such a gusto are but one dimension of two worlds that those painters created, or two "lands," in the words of the painter Helen Frankenthaler, who commented, when first seeing a Pollok exhibition:

> It was as if I suddenly went to Lisbon and knew no Portuguese but had read enough and had a passionate interest in Lisbon and was eager to live there; I mean I wanted to live in this [Pollock's] land, and I had to live there but I just didn't know the language" (Nemerov, 2024: 29).

At that stage, Frankenthaler did not fully understand Pollok's gusto, language, and affective resonance: "I was overwhelmed and puzzled" (ibid.). Yet, she already sensed that the oeuvre created a whole new world, with its own language—a way of being, of experiencing, of relating to one's life, and definitely, for her, a way of doing art that she will go on to pursue, and through this pursuit learn its language. She would acquire the relevant conceptual, symbolic, figurative, and affective landscape as she recreates herself, her art, and her life in light of the world Pollock's art opened up for her. The art historian and biographer of Frankenthaler, Alexander Numerov, says about Pollock's art itself, "No American artist before Pollock had quite so audaciously realized the aspiration *to make a world*—not to copy one, but to invent one. In place of trees and streets and people and paintings often pale imitation of the real force of the world—its actors and environments—painting would itself be a reality, as vibrant as life itself" (2024, 29; my italics).

III. Ways of Knowing and Ways of Living

The cognitivist would likely object to the proposal by advocating a distinction between revealing and creating, between ways of knowing the world and ways of living in the world. According to this objection, even if I am right that through our artworks we create new ways of seeing, living, and being in the world, this has nothing to do with aesthetic cognitivism. Aesthetic cognitivism defends the power of art to be a source of *knowledge*, understanding, or related cognitive stances. But, the line goes, such cognition—a matter of discovery—is distinct and separate from creation, invention, and (new ways of) living and being in the world.

This objection should sound familiar as it is a variant of the well-known Humean approach that claims to find a wedge between cognition and conation, reason and motivation, knowledge and creation. On this view, even though cognition may *accompany* ways of pursuing life, the two are different and distinct. Knowing is not motivational (not a way of feeling, desiring, and pursuing the world), and motivational states are not ways of knowing the world.

But this objection, like the Humean assumption that underlies it and the standard cognitivist approaches that it shapes, is based on a mistake: the erroneous cognitive-conative divide and its unjustifiably narrow understanding of human knowledge. Led by this error, the cognitivist cannot see what the critics I drew on highlight: art as creative of ourselves and our world.

But this Humean assumption does not force itself on us. Due to space constraints, I won't argue against it directly.[15] Instead, I will remind the cognitivist of common modes of knowing the world that are part and parcel of living in the world and responding to it and to each other.

Recall Aristotle first. To acquire the virtues of character is to learn just as it is to create yourself as having a specific character: a person who lives, desires, and is motivated in specific ways. Habituating yourself to being courageous is learning. It involves conceptual learning (of what courage is), practical learning (of how to act in various situations), and affective knowledge of what and how to feel in different scenarios: how to feel fear at the right time, at the right place, and concerning the right objects, events, or people. Learning how to act and feel courageously is learning how to be motivated properly and developing a perceptual capacity—the ability to discern how much fear a situation calls for, what amounts to being courageous here and now—and an understanding of values. Being virtuous is a way of being—of living well—which is at the same

[15] For arguments, see Gorodeisky, forthcoming.

time a way of knowing, feeling, understanding, perceiving, and conceptually discerning. The latter are not distinct from this particular mode of living, but integral to it, cultivated as part of cultivating (new) modes of being in the world. They are part of (re)creating oneself; developing one's second nature. The cognitivist's Humean assumption flies in the face of one of the central ways through which we create ourselves and pursue life.

Gilbert Ryle is among those who have argued that knowledge of this ethical sort must be a form of knowing, understanding, and seeing, as much as it is a form of approving or disapproving, enjoying or disliking, desiring, and acting in certain ways: there is "incongruity in the idea of a person's knowing that something wrong had been done, but still not disapproving of it or being ashamed of it; of his knowing that something would be the wrong thing for him to do, but still not scrupling to do it" (Ryle, 1958: 152). Appreciative knowledge of artworks is analogous, he argues. "Coming to know" that a work is excellent in the specific way that it is "is, also, *inter alia*, coming to admire or enjoy [it]" (154), coming to appreciate it, approve of it, or respond to it in related responsive ways.

Acquiring these (ethical and aesthetic) modes of knowledge involves habituation. It requires "inspiring kindling, and infecting" (153), to mention a few. Here, "The partitions are down between the faculties of Cognition, Conation and Feeling" (152). In these cases, coming to know just *is* coming to see particular things as salient, to feel in particular ways, to be motivated in particular ways, to act in particular ways, to respond in particular ways, and, more broadly, to live one's life in particular ways.

Ryle's argument for this conclusion is grounded in the thought that the relevant distinctions between virtue and vice, as well as artistic excellence and failure, which are the core of each form of knowing, are unforgettable. Once learned, one cannot forget right and wrong, vice from virtue, or aesthetic excellence from aesthetic mediocracy or aesthetic failure. Of course, we can "become so coarsened in palate as to cease to recognize or relish [the excellences of] Jane Austen" (151). But, Ryle argues, this is unlike forgetting pieces of other kinds of acquired knowledge—like the first ten American presidents—kinds of knowledge in which cognition, conation, and feeling are not unified in the same way

According to Ryle, explaining this difference requires that we recognize that these two kinds of knowledge are not a discovery as contrasted with motivation, conation, creation, affection, and praxis. Certain kinds of knowledge, like the one I argue is relevant to many of the greatest artworks, are both.

Stanley Cavell also defends modes of knowing that are not distinct from conation, affection, action, and response. If he is right, responsiveness to another person, a situation, or, as I argued elsewhere, to excellent artworks[16] is also a kind of cognition that manifests a related profile. When "your suffering makes a claim upon me," Cavell argues, I can (and should) come to know your suffering *by* sympathizing with you, pitying you, feeling for you, and helping you in different ways. It is in and through responding to you in these (affective, practical) ways that I both come to know your suffering and to be properly responsive to it, to you, to your claim on me.[17] In cases of knowing that a person is suffering, grieving, or acting admirably, or of knowing the aesthetic excellence of a work, the knowing is not independent of or distinct from particular modes of affective and/or practical modes of responsiveness.

Cavell groups these under the category of response he dubs "acknowledgement." [18] These are the only ways we can be *responsive* to another person's pain, love, trustworthiness, grief, admirability, or a work's excellence. Yet, they are not *mere* responses. Though different from other modes of knowledge—from being certain that you are in pain, believing truly and justifiably that you are in pain, understanding that you are in pain, perceiving that you are in pain, or knowing what it is like to feel this pain—acknowledging another and appreciating a great artwork as it is *are* modes of knowing them.

While there is much more to say on this matter, in this section I meant only to highlight that some important forms of knowledge are not distinct from being (affectively, conatively, practically) responsive to certain dimensions of the world. And some modes of knowledge, like the ones I argue are part of engaging with generative artworks, are not distinct from creating and living (new) forms of life.

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[16] And other aesthetic valuable phenomena. See Gorodeisky, forthcoming.

[17] The suffering of another is not the only thing that makes a claim on me to be responsive to it. Another person's love for me, their claim to be trusted, or be recognized, as well as the excellence of an artwork as an artwork, call on us to be responsive to them in specific ways, by, for example, loving them back, pitying them, trusting them, or properly appreciating the work as the specific work that it is.

[18] Gibson argues that proper appreciation and responsiveness to artworks is analogous to, or a species of a Cavellian mode of acknowledgement (Gibson, 2007). I believe he's right about that, yet worry that he does not adequately represent this mode of knowing insofar as he suggests that it is a "fulfillment" (2007:112) of knowledge that we already have in other ways: the "completion" (120) of merely theoretical, or propositional knowledge. But this is neither Cavell's category of acknowledgement nor the proper form of responsive knowledge of artworks, which constitute a *different form of knowledge*: a different category of knowing something, made possible by being responsive to it (and accepting the separateness between us). Fully explaining our agreement and differences in this respect is a task for another day.

IV. Indeterminate rather than Fixed

I don't mean to suggest that, through the same artworks that create the ways we live in the world, we do not also come to better—or differently—see, understand, or grasp aspects of the world and values that we could not see before. Of course we do. We are even struck by how whole modes of life are not worthy anymore. This is mainly why and how we come to reconstitute ourselves and our world through these works.

Artworks like *King Lear are* perceptive—lucid engagements with our world and so embodiments of knowledge. If they are ways through which we (re)make ourselves into who we are, as I've argued so far, this is mainly because they bring to light the limitations of our former ways of life: of our existing ways of carving up, making sense of, and evaluating ourselves and our world. I take it that Baldwin means to bring this out when stressing that the artist refuses to regard our life as stable and to take things for granted:

> A society must assume that it is stable, but the artist must know, and he must let us know, that there is *nothing stable under heaven*. . . . The artist cannot and must not take anything for granted, but must drive to the heart of every answer and expose the question the answer hides.
>
> . . .
>
> For the truth, in spite of appearances and all our hopes, is that everything is always changing . . . (Baldwin, [1962]1985: 316)

Art can reinvent us to the extent that it refuses to take things for granted and to regard them as stable. If Shakespeare invented our conception and ways of loving, it is partly because his work challenges former conceptions and ways of loving: because, through his characters, their words, metaphors, images, settings, drama, paces, responses to each other, and more—through the works' specific expressive modes—they question whether public, staged, performed avowals of love are fitting to what it means to love a parent; whether we should continue to pursue them as standard, valuable ways of showing love.

Artworks, then, *are* revolutionary. Only a couple of cognitivists acknowledge this,[19] and even they conceive of this power as merely revolutionizing our *concepts*, rather than also the pursuits of our lives and our world.[20] I've shown this to be mistaken. A deeper mistake shapes the approach of the majority of cognitivists who presuppose erroneously that we and our world are determinate and fixed independently of our ways of making sense of it, specifically, independently of our art. Aesthetic cognitivism standardly implies that all that art can do is deliver our world back to us, reflect it as it is, or make it more perspicuous.

But this is wrong: human nature and life, our own self-conception, and self-constitution are indeterminate. To live a human life is to open-endedly constitute oneself, making our nature ever more determinate. We do so in various ways, one of which—a particularly powerful one—is art. Since blindness to the indeterminacy of our nature, life, and selfhood is partly responsible for the negligence of the creative profile of art, I will introduce it briefly in this section.

The human indeterminacy exploited by art is often understood in terms of the temporal, historical, progressive, and perfectible character of human beings and the specificity of what it means for a person to realize herself in the best way in each situation. "Reality is not a given," Iris Murdoch writes (1961: 20), echoing a long tradition of existentialism that she loves to criticize.[21] As humans, we live the "progressive life of a person" (1970: 25), actively "'reassessing' and 'redefining'" (ibid.) ourselves, our world, and each other.[22] Our world, our lives, our concepts, are all "progressive . . . infinitely perfectible" (Murdoch, 1970: 23).[23]

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[19] These are John, 1998, who argues that attentive engagements with certain artworks *challenge* our existing concepts, and Walden, 2015, who argues, more radically, that they challenge our conceptual schemes and frameworks.

[20] To clarify, my proposal shares with Walden's the commitment to viewing many artworks as revolutionary as I argue that, at its best, art consists in revolutionizing the way we live our lives. As Walden argues, these are, indeed often ethical revolutions: epic changes in how we respond to each other, in what proper responsiveness to others is, in what is appropriate to believe, do, or feel. Yet, Walden thinks of these revolutions as conceptual: revolutions in the way we conceive and understand what we are and do. My worry is that this view does not go far enough. Those revolutions are as conceptual as they are "metaphysical" and ethical: revolutions in the way we *are* in the world, in what it takes for us to flourish and how we pursue our lives in light of it. So, while Walden's proposal does accept the indeterminacy of human nature and the open-ended and historical nature of human self-constitution, which I defend in this section, it still severs conceptual revolution from an actual revolution in our being in the world.

[21] For merely one among a myriad of similar existentialist statements, see, Beauvoir's claim that people bear "responsibility for a world which is not the work of a strange power, but of [themselves]" ([1946]1976: 16).

[22] Compare again, Beauvoir's argument that, being a person is "developed in the course of time . . . I must ceaselessly return to it [a past act] and justify it in the unity . . . prolong it indefinitely" ([1946]1976: 26-7).

[23] Though Murdoch is often portrayed (or self-presents herself) as anti-Kantian, the affinities between her view and Kant's view (just like those between her view and the existentialists' view I just alluded to) are palpable, wide, and striking. While this is a topic for a whole book, note only that Kant also argues that our

This indeterminacy is a matter of the self-conscious or reflexive nature of human agents and the "uncodifiability" of human nature and life.[24] All living beings maintain themselves (according to the internal standards fixed by their nature). Yet, to be a human being is to orient oneself towards what one takes oneself and one's life to be reflexively and agentially—by considering what it means to be oneself here and now and so what it means to flourish as a self here and now.[25] The self realizes herself and turns herself into who she is in light of her conception of herself, not a conception of herself as of a given object, but as to-be-realized, and to be realized by being open to and asking herself what she is to pursue, do, desire, feel, value, etc.[26] Thinking that who we are and what our world is are fixed is a misunderstanding of our nature.[27]

That art invents and is part of constituting new ways of being in the world, then, can be recognized only when we recognize that a self is an "ever-perfecting" creature, who historically and self-consciously revises her conceptions of herself and her ways of being in the world. Art is a crucial dimension of our (open-ended) self-constitution: it is one of the central ways through which we reorient, reinvent, and further constitute ourselves, partly by facing the limitations of our previous ways of life.

V. Part of Life

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human nature is not given to us as fixed, but ever made more determinate by us: what characterizes the *human* animal, in contrast to other animals, is that "he has a character that he himself makes, in that he has the faculty of perfecting himself in accordance with ends he takes for himself; whereby he can make himself from an animal endowed with a capacity for reason (*animal rationale*) into a rational animal (*animal raionabilis*)" (Kant, 2006: 417).

[24] E.g., Aristotle, *NE*, II:2; McDowell, 2002; Wiggins, 1987: 237.

[25] This is never a solitary pursuit. Each of us can only constitute herself *with* others. Cultivating second nature is culturation, done in and through culture.

[26] In a more Aristotelian parlance: the concept of nature that guides our self-transformation and shapes our second nature is indeterminate. What we are as human beings, and so what it means for us to flourish, is not fixed in advance of the ins and outs of living our lives as human beings: it is not a "blueprint" (McDowell, 2008: 21) to be merely applied. Instead, it must be made more determinate by open-endedly seeing and determining what may even *count* as human here and now and what may amount to flourishing here and now.

[27] This is the main limitation of Gibson's cognitivist approach, which is otherwise deeply promising and sophisticated. Gibson is right that art, at least at its best, presents life "from the 'inside'" (2007: 116) of it, rather than abstractly, as an observational object to be known third-personally, as the anatomist knows what she dissects in the lab. In this sense, like me, he stresses that art's cognitive potential is a matter of being amidst our lives. He also aptly emphasizes that art does not merely present content, but opens up the world for us as a matter "of value and significance" (116). Yet, he focuses on art's capacity to open this world for us in order for us to see and understand it as such, as if our human world is already settled on its own independently of us and our art. But our world is never fixed and settled in this way, independently of the ways in which we understand it, feel about it, act in it, and independently of the art that we make in it.

No doubt the cognitivist is partly motivated by an apt, even noble, ambition, a "humanistic" ambition, as it is sometimes put (e.g., Gibson, 2007, 2008). The cognitivist is often concerned to convince the world that art is not mere entertainment or decoration, but a humanistic discipline: an embodiment of ways of knowing that are consequential to who we are.

Yet, as noble as this aim is, I am worried that, by asking how art can be a *source* of knowledge, knowledge we use when we "turn back" from the artwork to our world, and by posing the question in ways that suggests that art is powerful or valuable to the extent that it can benefit us with knowledge that we "glean" from it (however embodied this knowledge is in the work's particular details), the contemporary cognitivist (1) problematically instrumentalizes art[28] and (2) misrepresent art's place in our lives. Here I discuss only the latter worry.

The cognitivist's way of posing the question erroneously implies that art is detached from the goings on of our lives. But if my proposal is correct, then art *just is* one of various ways of pursuing our lives and constituting ourselves, alongside our friendships, family lives, civic engagements, and communal pursuits.

I take it that this is partly why Cavell argues, "The creation of art, being human conduct which affects others, has the commitments any conduct has" (1969: 199), and why Sontag writes, "Works of art, psychological forms, and social forms all reflect each other, and change with each other. But of course, most people are slow to come to terms with such changes" (1961: 299).

In this respect, art does not stand apart from life. Though it often seems (and presents itself) as detached from life, the artwork is a living thing, one of the main ways through which we pursue our lives, vulnerabilities, and strengths; one of the main ways through which we resist oppression, discrimination, cry for and grieve loved ones, and live in so many other ways:

> My Poem is life, and not finished.
> It shall never be finished.
> My Poem is life, and can grow.

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[28] Art is not a mere "machine to think with" (Richards, 1969: 1), to paraphrase I. E. Richards, who did not mean this phrase pejoratively as I do—as a worry about the philosophers' treatment of art. Nor is it even a machine designed or used "to assist us in fine-tuning our mental capacities" (Landy, 2012: 181). Art is no instrument, whether humanistic or otherwise. It is not something that "serves" us. As I have argued in (Gorodeisky forthcoming), its goodness cannot be understood in terms of any of its many benefits, cognitive or otherwise.

Wherever life can grow, it will.
It will sprout out,
and do the best it can.
I give you what I have.
You don't get all your questions answered in this world.
How many answers shall be found
in the developing world of my Poem?
I don't know. Nevertheless I put my Poem,
which is my life, into your hands, where it will do the best it can.

(Gwendolyn Brooks, *My Winnie*)

Though it does so in distinctive ways,[29] art is no less a mode of being in the world and pushing ourselves beyond our current ways of living in it than our friendships and other "social forms" (Sontag 1961: 299) are.[30] "A work of art is a thing *in* the world, not just a text or a commentary on the world" (Sontag 1961(b): 21). As the photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson wrote about taking photographs and the art of photography, "It is a way of life" (1999: 16). This should not be surprising as artworks are not merely human products, but *expressive* of a human, and—through their unique modes of expressiveness—of the human. Art is a human take on itself and its world, which is our world. It is precisely because an artwork is unintelligible independently of notions of intentionality and expressiveness, that we treat it as if it were (another) person, follow its progression, and make sense of it as an expression in the same way that we follow a person's speech; this is why we tend to take artworks to be meaningful along the lines in which a person's expressions are meaningful:

[29] Which I could not elaborate on in the narrow scope of this paper, but see Gorodeisky, MS.
[30] This highlights a crucial difference between my proposal and Joshua Landy's (and any cognitivism that takes art to provide a know-how): even though Landy suggests, not unlike me, that art is formative of who we are, he explains this idea by arguing that art (or at least many artworks) forms us by providing us with a training in particular skills and capacities. If I am right, though, art does *not* merely "train" us to live life, by honing skills that we will then need to employ in living our lives apart from it. Instead, I argue that what we miss by focusing only on the extant cognitivist proposals, including Landy's, is the place of art as part and parcel of the way we live our lives and constitute and reform ourselves.

> [W]e follow the progress of a piece the way we follow what someone is saying or doing. No, however, to see how it will come out, nor learn something specific, but to see what *it* says . . . A work of art does not express some particular intention (as statements do), nor achieve particular goals (the way technological skill and moral action do), but, one may say, celebrates the fact that men can intend their lives at all (Cavell, 1969: 198)

VI. Consequential

Much more remains to be explored, explained, and defended. There are questions about the relevant kind of knowledge that I merely briefly defended above, knowledge which is not distinct from a way of living, being, and responding; how the indeterminacy of human nature shapes our self-consciousness and self-constitution remains an open issue; and most relevant to my argument are lingering questions about the expressive modes and styles of art, which render artworks not only an integral part of pursuing our lives, but particularly powerful modes of challenging outdated forms of life and reinventing ourselves and our world, more powerful than many other ways of pursuing life.[31]

What I *have* argued is that recent advocates of aesthetic cognitivism have been blind to (or largely silent about) art's power to constitute new ways of being in the world. The reasons why are too numerous and too capacious to be adequately covered here. Yet, reflecting on some of them is consequential as they reveal how we tend to miss (or deceive ourselves about) the place and creative role of art in our lives, and how we widely yet erroneously assume the Humean alleged cognitive-conative divide. They reveal our resistance to acknowledging the indeterminacy of human nature, the varied forms of knowledge crucial to living this life as both revelatory and creative, and the true place of art as part and parcel of the ways we live our lives.

[31] In Gorodeisky, MS, I argue that this latter is explained primarily by (1) the arts' distinctive modes of expressiveness, modes that are continuous with everyday ways of making sense of ourselves and expressing ourselves, yet divergent from those, (2) a prevalent artistic self-consciousness, which is at the same time societal consciousness of the artist *as an* artist, which Baldwin explains by arguing (in the passage I quoted above) that the artist refuses to take anything for granted, but instead challenges what she sees, and, relatedly, (3) a dimension of the institution, practice, or "game" of art that encourages and gets us to expect and value art's challenges, opacities, and divergent from ordinary modes of expressiveness.

Though aesthetic cognitivism is enlightening in many ways, we are "too timid," too blind, and too inadequate to one of art's greatest powers and genuine place in our lives if we do not acknowledge its power to create ourselves and our world.[32]

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