

## Book Review

MOTEN, FRED. *Black and Blur*. Duke University Press, 2017, xvii + 343 pp., \$99.95 cloth.

Fred Moten's work is difficult. This is not a criticism. The work is difficult in the ways that brilliance makes possible and usually in the ways that a complex world requires. It is also rich, passionate, occasionally beautiful, and often necessary, especially for philosophers interested in responsibly engaging contemporary culture and cultural politics.

Moten's recent book, *Black and Blur* (hereafter, simply "*Blur*"), shares in this mix of brilliance and difficulty. I will try in what follows to approach this text in a way that makes the difficulty more manageable and the virtues more fully discernible. I will do this in a way that requires announcing some ground rules.

First, I will say nothing (more) about the book's place in Moten's trilogy, *Consent Not to Be a Single Being*. There is surely a great deal to say about this, but nothing that will accommodate both the limits of this form and the other work I propose to do. Second, more of this work than I would like will involve setting out some general principles for reading Moten. The reasons for this have to do both with the difficulty of the work and with a final ground rule for this review. I will write from the perspective of a mostly analytic, neo-pragmatist philosopher, whose interests in what Moten calls "black study" and "the aesthetics of the black radical tradition" lead me in rather different directions than they lead him. I will do this because that is what I am, but I announce it to concede that certain subtleties of *Blur*, engaging as it does with figures like Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler, will likely be lost on me. It is important to press on anyway because the value of the work is nevertheless not lost on me, which makes it imperative to find a way into it for people like me. I take some comfort from the knowledge that colleagues with metaphysical commitments more like Moten's still find his work forbidding and may find some value in what follows.

Moten's work owes its value and its difficulty to his choices of subjects, resources, and methods. His subjects are important but challenging and include the current state of academic labor, the afterlife of the transatlantic slave trade, and the meanings of challenging conceptual artworks. He explores these topics using a wide range of resources from a variety of traditions, which makes his studies not just richer but also more demanding for the reader. He roots his ecumenicism in a mix of black studies and poststructuralist approaches that conspire to produce an impressive number of both provocative insights and gnomic utterances. All of this, mobilized by Moten's deep, dynamic intelligence and poetic experimentalism—he is an accomplished poet who once nearly won the National Book Award—results in an exacting intellectual practice that challenges readers of all theoretical orientations.

One aspect of Moten's ecumenical method is particularly important for anyone seeking entry to *Blur*. He embraces a collaborative political aesthetic that he theorizes as a matter of ensembles. To read a Moten essay is, typically, to join a boisterous congregation of people, artifacts, and paradigms, all swirling around his work with a density and pace that would shame Stanley Cavell at his most excitable. Readers who happen not to share his references are likely to find themselves, at some point, at a loss.

The thing is, *no one* will share all of his references, and this is part of the point. Readers and writers engage texts using resources gathered during unique journeys through distinct lives, so different people will inevitably bring different resources to the encounter. This is true of Moten and his readers even when they share significant common ground, as must often be the case, and even if, as is somewhat less likely, a reader matches his catholicity and breadth. This makes collaborative intellectual work a matter of active attunement, of finding, establishing, and maintaining the discursive meeting grounds that enable people to think productively together. Elite intellectual cultures pretend that this is less work than it actually is, in part because we use nonintellectual

factors—like race, gender, region, and class—to identify the things an educated person should have access to. This elitism reads failures of attunement simply as personal, perhaps moral, failures, rather than as indicators that there is work to do.

Moten refuses to hide the work of attunement. Instead he foregrounds it, and assigns it to his readers, to make two things clear: that the set of things worth studying and knowing is always up for grabs and that some of these things come from places that the old-fashioned academic polymaths would never have thought to look. (To fix an idea of this polymath, think of Edward Said's description of Erich Auerbach, "among the last great" Eurocentric humanists.) Moten cuts the figure of the polymath in his essays, dropping the names of Important Figures and Texts almost in passing. But he does this not on the assumption that his references should register with any truly educated person, but to highlight and democratize the work of attunement and the experience of conceptual dissonance. Which is to say: Moten's sudden pivot from Adorno and Glenn Gould to Q-Tip and Hazel Carby would leave even the old polymath out of sorts.

Moten's focus on ensembles and attunement turn his essays into performances, which is both fitting—his faculty appointment is in NYU's department of performance studies—and instructive for his readers. *Blur* reads like a series of jam sessions organized and anchored by a single performer. In one set he plays with this group, in another set he plays with that one. (This is also fitting, given Moten's status as perhaps the "leading theoretician . . . [of] jazz studies" [Jesse McCarthy, "The Low End Theory," *Harvard Magazine* Jan.–Feb. 2018].) A document constructed in this way will, for most readers, not reward, or allow, the same kind of engagement and attention from cover to cover. One must pick and choose the essays, and the parts of the essays, with which one can connect, and accept that the rest will have to await the opportunity for more study.

*Blur* will also challenge the reader for less lofty reasons. Many of the essays are reworked contributions to exhibition catalogues. As a result, they often assume the reader's familiarity with their subjects because, in an earlier phase of the text's life, the reader could go examine the relevant artworks just by turning a few pages. While this shift in authorial context also adds to the difficulty of *Blur*, quick trips to Artstor or even Google will help close the gap.

In light of the foregoing, and in light of the fact that the book comprises twenty-five essays, I will forgo the hopeless work of comprehensive summary and evaluation. Instead I will use a close reading of the preface to locate the agenda of the book and then engage selectively with a few emblematic, if not representative, essays.

*Black and Blur* contributes to a project that Moten launched in his first book, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (hereafter, "*Break*"). Following Cedric Robinson and others, *Break* explores the way black culture work interrogates the various conditions—from political economy to phenomenology—that underwrite human experience and sociality. *Blur* advances the project in large part by reconsidering what Moten regards as earlier failures.

The problem with *Break* begins with what should have been its first sentence. Moten meant to start with, "Performance is the resistance of the object," neatly setting him up to study the relationship between black aesthetic activity and resistance to oppressive objectification. For reasons he does not explore in *Blur*, the book began elsewhere. But the troublesome sentence appeared later, and its animating idea continued to inform the project. Consequently, Moten reports, "most of the writing collected in *Black and Blur* . . . attempts to figure out what's wrong with" (p. vii) that erstwhile opening.

The problem with thinking of black performance as the resistance of would-be objects is that it doesn't go far enough. To say that enslaved peoples refused the status of property-objects and enacted personhood in performance is a start; but the best ways of approaching blackness are rooted in an "analytic practice that moves to place under an ineradicable erasure the terms *performance* and *object*" (pp. vii–viii). Black performance (along with, in anticipation of, certain professional-philosophical critiques, in a mirror of Robinson's account of black radicalism's relationship to Marx) troubles the easy dissection of the phenomenological encounter into subjects, objects, and actions. This deepening—or as he will eventually say, blurring—of the phenomenological encounter is what *Break* was really about, Moten now thinks, and what *Blur* means to explore further.

Reconsidering the work of *Break* means revisiting some of that book's core moves, which places Saidiya Hartman at center stage. Hartman, a towering figure in the contemporary study of African American literature and culture, rose to prominence on the strength of an argument about what she calls the "diffusion" of anti-black terror. Refusing the thought that moral evils like slavery reveal their nature most clearly in spectacular violence, she undertook "to illuminate the terror of the mundane and quotidian" by studying "those scenes in which terror can hardly be discerned" (p. x). What scenes are these? Scenes involving enslaved persons not warding off savage beatings but "dancing in the quarters"—at the urging of "owners" trying to prove that slaves were happy after all.

*Break*, Moten says, began to ask “how blackness bears” this “diffusion” of anti-black terror and answered by appeal to the irreducibility of sound—including the sound of black musical performance—to other perceptual or cognitive modalities. This thought inspired a generation of scholars working on black sonic studies, but *Blur* shows that there is still more to say.

To get to this more, Moten revisits a primal scene from *Break*: Frederick Douglass’s account of his Aunt Hester’s scream. Douglass witnessed a brutal attack on his aunt when he was a boy and emphasizes her scream when he writes about the attack. Hartman evades this story, to refuse the seductions of spectacular violence. *Break*, by contrast, insists on the story. Hester’s scream indicates the place that sound occupies in black life; it shows that there is a certain kind of work that *only* sound can do, work that cannot be reduced to or replaced by words or visual images. To study this work, and the complementary work of black song that Douglass also reports, is to reveal that racist terror has been diffused into ordinary experience and that black folk have used to sound to “bear” this diffusion.

*Blur* revisits the encounter with Aunt Hester to deepen the analysis. Moten explains: “the scream’s content is not simply unrepresentable but instantiates, rather, an alternative to representation” (p. 103). To study this alternative is to seek “after what the scream contains (and pours out), and after the way that content is passed on—too terribly and too beautifully—in black art” (p. 103). But this “pouring out” is not cathartic; rather, it is ongoing: “Black art neither sutures nor is sutured to trauma. There’s no remembering, no healing. There is, rather, a perpetual cutting, a constancy of expansive and enfolding rupture and wound, a rewind that tends to exhaust the metaphysics upon which the idea of redress is grounded” (p. 110).

I have used Moten’s own words because I do not really trust myself to do justice to the argument. Some of this has to do with the metaphilosophical differences discussed above. But some of it, and, I suspect, some of Moten’s writerly practice, has to do with the subtlety of the view. I started to think I really understood the view only after returning to the best moment in *Break*: Moten’s marvelous study of the famous photograph of Emmett Till’s open casket. Look at this image carefully, he says in *Break*, and the absent sound of that captured moment will haunt the photograph, underwriting it and complicating it in ways that no words or explanations could. This is about the ineffable, but it also about more than this, in ways that stood revealed for me only after I followed Moten’s directions and had the experience that he pretended to report. *Blur*, for its part, is also about mobilizing the ineffable and of pointing in its

direction with words. Moten’s words will point better than mine.

This turn to the ineffable puts the burden on the reader to engage Moten’s performances and gauge their efficacy. But one more general consideration may increase that burden and stands between us and the essays. Is not all this talk of trauma and terror unduly bleak?

Moten’s view so far may seem to track the crude Afro-pessimism that Jared Sexton (committed to a less crude version) equates with “a reductive and morbid fixation on the depredations of slavery” (“Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word,” *Rhizomes* 29 [2016], par. 4). But Moten displaces morbidity with a positive determination to situate suffering in a wider context of ongoing life and sociality. That determination leads him to say things like this: “There is an open set of sentences of the kind blackness is x and we should chant them all . . . in devoted instantiation, sustenance and defense of the irregular” (p. viii).

This nonoptimistic refusal of pessimism frames the project of *Blur*. The book enacts a grounded political aesthetic that locates terror and pleasure, joy and pain, in a balanced economy of human experience. The essays work together to model this existential balance and highlight its aesthetic dimensions.

I suggested above that the best approach to the essays in *Blur* involves a kind of patient and selective engagement. Here are some of the pieces that most rewarded my attentions.

Essay 3, “The Magic of Objects,” offers what Moten describes as “a small set of formulations” (p. 35). These come as close as he ever gets to a direct, nonpoetic statement of his core commitments. Even this spirals off into what some would regard as literary excess, but it still provides a useful oasis for readers less open to—or simply exhausted by—his usual approach.

Essay 6, “The New International of Rhythmic Feelings,” interrogates Charles Mingus’s antipathy to Ornette Coleman. There’s a lot going on here, involving the doomed metaphysics of identity and problematically mechanical notions of musical time. The ensemble is large here, with Toscanini, Furtwängler, and Beethoven joining Mingus, Coleman, Lord Invader, Heidegger, Hazel Carby, and others. But the most powerful moment occurs in an epic footnote (fn. 3, pp. 293–294) vigorously taking cultural theorist Paul Gilroy to task for an oddly dismissive approach to Afro-US culture.

Essay 28, “The Blur and Breathe Books,” begins with Wittgenstein, works through Stokely Carmichael, José Esteban Muñoz, and Samuel Delany, includes brief appearances by Toni Morrison, John Searle, Emmanuel Levinas, and Stanley Cavell, all in a study of conceptual artist Charles Gaines.

They key to all this is the phenomenon of blur, which helps both to assuage readers seeking a textual anchor for the book's title and to clarify the distance between *Blur* and *Break*. After defining ("defining"?) "blur" as a "partition in refusal of partition; a general assertion of inseparability, which nevertheless still moves in and as a ubiquitous and continual differentiation . . ." (p. 246), Moten applies this idea to various aspects of Gaines's work. This leads into a series of reflections on a series of things, ending up in thoughts about the way—as artists like Gaines can show—blurring inflects social identities and phenomenological positions.

Essay 10, "Nothing, Everything," is a brilliant meditation on poverty, creativity, community, and the conditions under which these phenomena work out their relationships to each other. The occasion for the meditation is the work of "self-taught" artist Thornton Dial, whose rise—from birth among Alabama sharecroppers through adult life as a metal worker to artworld triumphs late in life, all with almost no formal education—Moten, as usual, leaves his readers to piece together on their own. He is more interested in linking Dial's life and practice to the various edifying contexts that the essay's ensemble makes available. On Moten's reading, Dial's life and work emerge from and reflect the rich textures of southern black working-class life, as laid bare by literary critic Deborah McDowell and historian Robin D. G. Kelley; they also mirror, advance, and anticipate certain trends in Italian Marxism, represented most notably in the academy by Hardt and Negri; and all of this combines with Dial's practice—rooted in creating art out of found materials—to shed new light on the relationship between something and nothing. The punch line: Dial shows "that there's no such thing as nothing . . . as making something out of nothing, of making a way out of no way. Mr. Dial makes things out of things. There are things and he is educated in their eloquence" (pp. 155–56).

This reading of the something–nothing relation points toward the clearest significance of this piece for philosophical aestheticians. Dial did not come from nothing; he came from a community, and his art came from a social and material and cultural context. Unfortunately, these conditions for his emergence are not, for reasons related to things like class, race, and region, on the radar of the people who think about what we often call "*the artworld*." Moten's piece is a tribute to Dial, but it is also a nimble, eloquent, oddly moving study of a question like this: what is "outsider" art outside of, and what is at stake, what gets lost, in thinking of it as outside?

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MCGREGOR, RAFE. *Narrative Justice*. Rowman and Littlefield International, 2018, 196 pp., \$120 cloth.

Rafe McGregor has provided a welcome addition to the existing literature on narrative and how it can be made useful in the world. McGregor reviews much of the existing literature on narrative theory in order to take us somewhere new—to an understanding of the role of stories in reducing crime, and especially ideologically motivated crimes like terrorism, white supremacy, and Islamic extremism. McGregor carefully develops a case for his position by providing a thorough account of the current state of the philosophical literature about narrative and what an aesthetic education can provide us from Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller to Peter Lamarque and Gregory Currie. He puts a particular emphasis on my book, *In Defense of Reading* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2017) and several of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's works, especially *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, 2013) as examples of contemporary ways in which narrative reasoning, narrative coherence, and aesthetic education are developed and the ways in which contemporary science and social science help us to understand the role narrative has in aiding us to think clearly about our lived experiences. It is within this framework of an explanation of aesthetic education that McGregor breaks new ground; he uses prior works (relying mostly on Kant and Schiller to talk about aesthetic education) to elucidate the ways in which narrative works have been said to be able to help us see clearly how reality is constructed and how we use narrative structure to organize our experiences. He argues that a good aesthetic education, in particular one that includes an education in literature and narrative, can improve moral character and can also help us to attain political justice. He builds on my claim that the fiction/nonfiction distinction is not as important as we once thought it was, but he argues that narrative structure itself is the thing that helps us reason through various kinds of experiences.

McGregor also applies the work that has been done in narrative theory to contemporary criminology. He calls this work narrative criminology and it basically involves "the mapping of narrative patterns onto criminal behavior" (p. 21). He says that a broader definition includes "any inquiry based on the view of the stories as instigating, sustaining, or effecting desistance from harmful action" (p. 21). McGregor sets up the book very orderly, outlining a history of aesthetic education, connecting that to moral and political education, outlining the ways narrative structure and value connect to those forms of education and understandings function, and then ultimately he connects all of this carefully laid groundwork to three chapters at the end of different

kinds of case studies. It is in these cases that McGregor's truly original work comes out.

One of the most important contributions McGregor makes in this work is in the chapter titled "Narrative Value" (Chapter 6). This is the place where, for the first time really, he goes into brand-new territory that aestheticians have not gone into before. Up to this point in the book he has relied upon a steady canon of work about narrative and its relation to aesthetic education and epistemology. Here, however, he goes out on his own and begins to explain what narrative justice can actually do for us and how it works. He says, "I employ *political harmony* loosely, so as to include all three specific aims of the theories involved: the detranscendentalisation of gender, socioeconomic class, religion, and nationality; social harmony; and the reduction of criminal inhumanity" (p. 109). This detranscendentalisation allows us to avoid using standard constructions about these identities but rather allows for our own story construction to play a role in the way these very influential identities get developed. McGregor advocates for the goal of aesthetic education being what he calls "the ethical faculty," or, our ability to understand and contribute to ethical reasoning and decision making. McGregor pulls heavily from Friedrich Schiller, *On The Aesthetic Education of Man*, developing the relationship between the aesthetic and the political. The ethical (faculty) is that which connects those two and is developed using the moral imagination. It is the development of this continuum (aesthetic to ethical to political) that helps with the more coherent storytelling that we can have around gender, class, religion, and nationality. Narrative coherence guides us in all of these identities into being able to have better internal coherence and better internal personal identity.

McGregor readily agrees, rightly I think, that there is no one reading of any single work of narrative that will help to improve us morally, nor could we ever have the mechanisms to "prove" such a thing. He reviews a number of the attempts social scientists have made to demonstrate such a causal or correlational link between reading (as a habit, not an instance) and moral development but ultimately decides that proving this, given the developing state of this research, is not as important as developing the notion that "if fiction can reduce prejudice, then there is a strong case for narrative sensibility having the potential to reduce criminal inhumanity" (p. 117). McGregor develops the whole rest of his argument from this, focusing on the ways in which criminal behavior is closely tied to the coherence of certain kinds of (master) narratives.

In Chapter 7 ("Responsibility for Inhumanity") McGregor develops extensive analysis of two Nazi collaborators (Paul de Man and Howard W. Camp-

bell Jr.) and the ways in which their posthumous stories, both nonfictional and fictional versions, help to explain the motives for their criminal inhumanity. Paul de Man was a celebrated literary theorist who worked in the United States for most of his adult life after immigrating to the United States in 1948 from Belgium. After his death it became public knowledge that he had written for two newspapers in Belgium that were run by the Nationalist Socialist authorities. Howard W. Campbell Jr. was born in the United States and moved to Germany as an adolescent. He became a successful playwright but also worked as a radio broadcaster for Joseph Goebbels (a notorious Nazi propagandist) in Berlin during WWII. Campbell is a fictional character in *Mother Night*, a Kurt Vonnegut novel where Campbell narrates his own memoir while awaiting trial for his war crimes (pp. 131–133). McGregor unpacks the lives of these two men in order to look at what he says is a "deceptively simple question: *What, if anything, did the posthumous accusations of collaboration reveal de Man to have done wrong?*" (p. 133). McGregor suggests three possible answers to this: "collaboration, forgetting, and keeping silent" (p. 135). Both examples show how each man dealt with the knowledge of his own contributions to the war. De Man kept silent after the war, after being released without charges of collaboration (p. 132). According to various biographical sources, he did not seem to be bothered by his involvement in the war or his anti-Semitic writings. He died of cancer in 1983, apparently not struggling at all with the questionable writings he produced early on. Campbell, on the other hand (fictional as he may be) did struggle with his early decisions and ended up committing suicide by hanging while awaiting trial. McGregor's take on these two examples is to show how narrative representation can provide a means to the end of answering complex questions about collaboration (i.e., exemplary narratives can be employed to evaluate responsibility for criminal inhumanity)" (p. 147). *Mother Night* is a complex narrative that provides the kind of narrative structure very similar to kinds of behaviors, decisions, and life trajectories as de Man did, although there were obviously several differences as well. McGregor looks at these two case studies in order to examine the ways in which we read into causation and closure, in particular, which for him are some of the primary ways in which we make sense of narrative constructions. Even though de Man was a real person, much has been read into these issues posthumously, and looking back into the ways in which he dealt with his involvement in the war, his life has very much been read as an interpretable text where lots of speculation has been made about how he justified his past (or if he did, some speculate he was a nihilist who did not care about it a bit).

He also delves into master narratives—but with the master narratives McGregor takes on these do not account for smaller cultural narratives but rather narratives that entice bad behavior, like the American white nationalism movement and Islamic extremism. For example, one of the master narratives he uses is this one:

- (i) In the beginning, our people lived in utopia.
- (ii) Then others arrived and took over.
- (iii) This brings us to the present, where we have two choices.
- (iv) We can either do nothing, in which case the situation will remain as it is now, or we can expel these others and restore the utopia in such a way that it is never threatened again (p. 171).

McGregor points out that this seems to be the same master narrative that Stormfront (an American White Supremacist organization) and the World Islamic Front Statement (a fatwa published by Osama Bin Laden in 1998 requiring Arabs to kill Americans, both civilian and military) both use. Although he does not outline this, it seems also to work as a master narrative for the American Indians, the Germans during World War II, perhaps the Americans' attitudes toward the South and Central Americans that are trying to gain refugee access to the U.S. southern border, and likely countless other colonializations. The purpose of these narratives is to persuade people to act on behalf of a particular ideology. The goal is for people to identify with the perspective of the narrative. McGregor explains that "the form of a narrative representation determines its content, and the structure of the fundamentalist or *Master Narrative* manipulates tactically by means of: (1) Temporal order (because simply switching the order of events will alter moral responsibility), (2) Unity or coherence (because this type of narrative leaves no room for anomalies or exceptions or change), and (3) Linearity (because all current events fit into the middle which is the conflict stage)" (pp. 170-171). That is, because of the oft-cited necessary components of narratives (unified subjects, temporal indications, and causal structures), we can plainly see how people would be convinced by these narratives of invasion and see how there is only one option and that is to act so that the original utopia can be restored. Thus, people who use this narrative to make sense of the happenings on the news will be willing to commit crimes for the sake of the narrative. This might be a stretch, but maybe not depending on how deep into this belief system they are. McGregor points out, however, that master narratives have a tendency to be weak narratives, and they are particularly vulnerable to falling apart when temporal order is changed (we find out

something happened before/after we thought it did) or, more importantly, when the coherence falls apart. McGregor says that the more complex a narrative becomes (ones that have heightened narrativity), the more resistant it becomes to "dissent, difference, and coexistent multiplicity, [and] are more robust because of their broader appeal" (p. 173). The Stormfront narrative that defends White Supremacy, for example, is dependent upon an (explicit) assumption that blacks are *genetically* inferior to whites in terms of intelligence and that the Jewish Problem is that Jews are *racially* prone to lie. For those with a basic science education, they might have to reject both of those claims and thus would not be able to buy into this particular master narrative. But, those who follow this are not particularly well educated (or maybe not particularly well read), and they buy into this explanation that their own purity is somehow challenged by the "Others."

Overall I think that this book is a very important contribution to the study of philosophical understanding of narrative. McGregor produces a nice combination of history, theory, and applied cases and it is with this application that he is really able to move forward some of the theoretical debates into reality. His prose is clear and the breadth of his examples is extensive but he is also able to go into really interesting depth with several of them to show exactly the ways in which we are using narrative structure to make sense of all kinds of experiences, exemplary and simple.

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RABINOW, PAUL. *Unconsoleable Contemporary: Observing Gerhard Richter*. Duke University Press, 2017, 176 pp., \$79.95 cloth.

The virtues of Paul Rabinow's *Unconsoleable Contemporary: Observing Gerhard Richter* are scant, but they are not insignificant. Its vices, however, are pervasive, and make for tough reading. Anyone interested in the philosophy of the contemporary visual arts should skim-read this book, its rebarbateness notwithstanding. I will state what I see as the important achievements of *Unconsoleable Contemporary* so that those who take to heart the discouragements I am about to recite will see why the themes of the book are worth considering nonetheless.

The main subject of Rabinow's monograph is the career of Gerhard Richter. Richter's art, of course, has long offered rich material for critical, art-historical, and philosophical reflection. But it is not Richter's art that primarily interests Rabinow.

(There are no illustrations at all in the book.) He focuses instead on how the composite of Richter's work and his words has given shape to an exemplary career in the contemporary artworld. (Although it lacks illustration, the cover does sport a photograph of Richter at work.) It is indeed a striking feature of Richter's career that he has surrounded his art with a steady stream of, to use David Carrier's blend word, artwriting. Unlike, however, Donald Judd, say, or Adrian Piper, Richter has not carved out for himself an identity as a theorist of art or a philosopher. Rather, in notes, interviews, artist's statements, informal essays (every genre of artwriting—and arttalking, too—*except* recognizable art scholarship), Richter has crafted a sustained but elusive liaison with the discursive spaces that have developed around and within the contemporary artworld. When you visit Richter's personal website, gerhard-richter.com, you find, as expected, high-res images of his art. But the website, accessible in German, French, English, Italian, and Chinese, also features an extensive searchable database of Richter's texts and interviews along with other-authored books, critical essays, museum and gallery catalogs, and so on. It is as if "Gerhard Richter" is the name not only of an artist but a collocated sphere of art and art discourse. Put more simply, Richter presents his art and the critical conversation about it side by side (if not exactly hand in glove) in what everybody nowadays calls a "curated" way. Richter's career thus forces to the surface the question of how to understand the relationship between an artist's works of art and the artworld of words. Given how many critics, historians, and philosophers—people of words—have written about Richter, it is remarkable that no one has thought to make this question central to understanding Richter's art practice. A primary virtue of Rabinow's monograph is that it does exactly this.

Praising *Unconsolable Contemporary* in this way makes it sound like a book of innovative art criticism. And it might be, if Rabinow paid careful attention to Richter's art. But despite its critical shortcomings, which I will return to below, Rabinow raises issues about the relationship of words and works of art that philosophers of art should think about. Or I should say, that we have thought about, but not in this way. In weaving art and its discourses together into what he calls his "daily practice of painting," Richter's career exemplifies the significance of what Arthur Danto called the "atmosphere of artistic theory." Danto famously argued that this atmosphere (what Danto's philosophical hero Hegel called spirit) is the condition of possibility for making and recognizing art at all. By routinely making philosophy, history, and criticism part of his total practice, Richter plainly acknowledges that works of visual art do not

constitute the (art)world by themselves. They are not, to use Danto's metaphor, self-enfranchising, but rather elementally integrated with discursive space. For Danto, that works of art get enfranchised by occupying a determinate location in conceptual space is what makes them cultural entities all the way down. Richter's embodiment of the atmosphere of theory, however, spins Danto's thought in the opposite direction. In screwing artistic theory and art together like a bicycle fork and a stool, which is to say, making them cohabit in a space shaped autonomously by neither, Richter denies not only the autonomy of works of art but also the autonomy of art discourse. Far from the atmosphere of theory that then becomes embodied in works of art, discourse is just one more element in the *Alltagsleben* of Richter's artistic practice. In the way he treats artmaking, artwriting, and arttalking as structures of intelligibility contingently held together in a nontotalized structure of structures—let us call it the artworld—Richter is the Spinozist or Althusserian alter ego to the Hegelian Danto. Perhaps this pushes the point too far. Let us just say, then, that Richter treats the atmosphere of artistic theory in a nonidealist way.

That artists treat concepts as raw material is a routine feature of contemporary artistic practice. For this reason, it is valuable to have a book that approaches Richter's practice as an exemplary "assemblage," as Rabinow calls it, of works and words. Such a book likely could not be written by an art theorist or art historian; such experts, well versed in the ins and outs of the artworld's self-understandings, are what Althusser called spontaneous idealists. To gain purchase on Richter's practice, we need instead a spontaneous materialist (allowing that there is such a beast). Instead of to an art expert, then, we would do better to look to a social scientist who takes express self-representations and self-understandings to be not intentions that are embodied in artmaking but simply another field of the stuff that makes up contemporary artistic practice. As Rabinow is a distinguished anthropologist, as well as one of the main anglophone interpreters of the devoutly anti-Hegelian (and student of Althusser's) Michel Foucault, he is well equipped to offer us just such "an experiment in a contemporary anthropology as well as an anthropology of the contemporary" (p. 4). In this spirit, the name Rabinow gives to the goal of his materialist endeavor is not the interpretation of Richter. Instead, he aims to achieve "interpretive adjacency" to Richter (p. 106). With this concept Rabinow means to distance himself from the critical ambition of extracting the rational kernel from Richter's art in favor of practicing a kind of theoretical assemblage of his own that will bring us closer to what Richter is doing. Mimesis, in short, and not interpretive reconstruction, is Rabinow's materialist aim.

Rabinow's mimetic alternative is instructive about the difficulty art experts encounter in trying to understand the shape of contemporary artistic careers. Rabinow tells us that he has "no special affective or professional stakes in the expanded and globalized art world or the game of art criticism or expanded curatorial powers" (p. 106). In other words, Rabinow has no *interest* in claiming or developing what we ordinarily think of as interpretive expertise. And in dealing with an artist like Richter, so protean, so sly, so committed to the life of painting without being committed to determinate conceptions of what painting is and is for, a little less interest in being an expert might be a good thing. Indeed, precisely because Rabinow has no interest in developing yet one more interpretation of Richter's art, he can ask the deep question of what it means about the contemporary artworld that an exemplary career in it can develop by *blunting* the force of interpretation. Here is one example. Because he is not tempted to recruit Richter's writings and interviews in the service of securing his own interpretation, Rabinow can step back and highlight a phenomenon that has befuddled and embarrassed many interpreters of Richter, namely, that his words license conflicting views of his work. It sometimes seems as if Richter seduces us into treating what he says as authoritative statements of his intention, only to then disappoint our hope practically in the same breath in which he invites it. Richter's fascinating interviews with the art historian and critic Benjamin Buchloh paint this equivocation in bold colors. Buchloh, a friend of Richter's, is so frequent an interviewer and interpreter of the artist that we might consider him Richter's amanuensis. Yet in Buchloh's interviews with Richter, the artist again and again demurs before the critic's arguments and conclusions. Rabinow argues that Richter wants the competing theoretical and critical positions relevant to his art making to be represented inside his practice, not to promote the right positions and denounce the wrong ones, but to craft a stoical distance from the additive totality of positions that comprises the discursive space within which he makes his art. What his art is not, Richter is saying (or would say were he not such a committed Bartleby) is position taking. That task he leaves to Buchloh (which, when you think about it, makes Buchloh into a strange kind of studio assistant). It is a core aim of *Unconsoleable Contemporary* to make intelligible this practice of not taking positions, or as Rabinow puts it, of giving form to the "pathos" of "the Neutral" (p. 138).

As Rabinow rightly says, Richter's intimately aloof relationship to art theory and history is exemplary of the relationship of many contemporary artists to art discourse. Given that Rabinow's own stoical distance from the art-critical enterprise serves to open a new window on Richter's stoicism, it is

unfortunate to have to say that *Unconsoleable Contemporary* is not at all a good book. The reasons are many, and only some of them are philosophically interesting. But before turning to two reasons that are likely to interest readers of this journal, I need to blow off steam about one uninteresting way the book is hugely irritating. Like many academic press publications these days, *Unconsoleable Contemporary* has hit the shelves practically unedited. And I do not mean only that matters of style and pertinence have been left unreviewed, although that is certainly true. Countless sentences are irretrievably flawed in matters of grammar and syntax. Endnotes sometimes fail to correspond to the numbers in the text that send us to them. And the book's scholarly apparatus is maddening: its range of sources is inexcusably narrow, citations are sometimes incomplete, and reference is sometimes made to anthologies without enumerating specific pages, or even mentioning the title of the essay, on which the reference depends. And so on. It is not so much that the book reads as if tossed off, but as if tossed away before it got to the final station of assembly. One can only marvel at how a reputable press could allow this to happen.

What, then, are the two interesting reasons that Rabinow's book is bad? The first is an unfortunate outgrowth of what is admirable about it: the author's commitment to inexpertise or, as we might also call it, dedicated amateurism. Because Richter is so deliberately casual about the epistemic value of art history and the interpretive value of contemporary art discourse, a certain lack of expertise, by which Rabinow means a lack of commitment to this or that learned position, might well be a sound position from which to approach Richter's practice. Such amateurism, we should note, is a traditional anthropological virtue, since participant observers in cultures not their own are, by definition, inexpert. One might go further in this vein and say that the dedicated amateur disdains ready-to-hand theoretical preconceptions for the sake of getting beyond prejudice to the thing itself. Danger lurks here, of course, because the "inexpert" must think without disciplinary guardrails. To avoid careering wildly along the road of inquiry, the dedicated amateur must therefore take on alternative disciplines of scrutiny, which in shorthand we might call close and detailed attention—loving attention—to the subject under examination. But Rabinow also refuses alternative disciplines of attention and so gives amateurism a bad name. Let me cite only one example. Rabinow spends ten pages on Richter's formative friendship and collaboration with the artist Peter Heisterkamp, better known by his *nom d'art* Blinky Palermo. One of the highlights of the collaboration was *Two Sculptures for a Room by Palermo* (1971), for which Richter made life-size gray busts of himself and Palermo that he placed

facing one another on pedestals 174 centimeters high (roughly body-size, that is). Rabinow flubs his description of this work. The installation, he says, “referenced the growing status of artists as heroes and media stars but in a gentler way. It was pleasing aesthetically. It placed the two friends as clearly separate but looking at each other in a remediated setting of a gallery space” (p. 53). Aesthetically pleasing? *Chacun à son goût*. But whatever the busts of Richter and Palermo are doing, they are not looking at each other because *their eyes are closed*. Richter’s *Two Sculptures* is ironical: it aggrandizes, as sculptural busts typically do, but at the same time, in placing the busts on pedestals that do not elevate them above us but serve as no more than placeholders for the abstracted bodies of the artists, it also deheroizes. The ironical effect is clinched by the fact that the busts, despite facing one another, are death masks of living artists. Rabinow is welcome to disagree with this interpretation, or even to label it “yet another interpretation.” But no theoretical commitment to anthropological distance from expert knowledge can save him from the requirement to get the art right.

We all make mistakes, but the profusion of errors about art in *Unconsoleable Contemporary* suggests a darker hypothesis than mere carelessness. Which brings me to the second reason this book is bad. It is part and parcel of Rabinow’s account of the contemporary artworld of which Richter is an exemplar that, as I explained above, it is structured by an educated disavowal of the explanatory and critical authority of the world of words. In a stoical-Foucauldian vein, Rabinow names the *ethos* of the contemporary artist “restiveness.” Not for Rabinow the Nietzschean or Adornian hostility of art to the very idea of a world fully illuminated by the discursive shadow we have cast over it. Exemplary contemporary artists are instead, in his view, “uneasy and on the verge of resisting control” (p. 142). They are “vigilant” and “vigilance should include caution about peremptory negativity. Vigilance requires attention to specifics and a suspension of unwarranted judgment. Judgment without inquiry renders one vulnerable to aligning with those who claim to know the significance of things, events, and situations in advance of their unfolding or assembling” (p. 142). The suspension of unwarranted judgment is of course essential to inquiry. But inquiry entirely without the effort of judgment is empty and unmotivated. (Absent our interest in judging things, stoical counsel is otiose.) When it comes to Richter’s art, Rabinow’s uninterested amateurism leaves him unable to pay attention to the art he discusses, hence produces a lack of discrimination in his thinking and writing. Richter’s art perforce ends up looking not negative or affirmative but neutral. Not carelessness, then, but his own amateur dogmatism explains why Rabinow gets almost all the

art he discusses at least somewhat wrong. We should be grateful that Rabinow has opened the door to in-expert regard for contemporary art. But we must also regret that he takes our interest in Richter so much for granted that the art ceases to sustain attention and judgment. And yet he does go on about it. The first figure through the door Rabinow has opened turns out to be, then, the amateur’s familiar doppelgänger, the crank.

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GJESDAL, KRISTIN. *Ibsen’s Hedda Gabler—Philosophical Perspectives*. Oxford University Press, 2018, 272 pp., \$29.95, paper.

Since its inception, philosophy has defined itself through its relationship to literature. From Socrates’s discussion of the “ancient quarrel” between philosophy and poetry in Plato’s *Republic*, to Heidegger’s examination of the affinity between philosophy and poetry in his lectures on language, philosophers have turned to literature to understand the limits and possibilities of philosophical thinking. *Oxford Studies in Philosophy and Literature* is a new book series that aims to go beyond the existing academic divide between philosophy and literature by positing the two fields as interrelated. Each collection of essays explores the philosophical depth of a canonical literary text—for example, by taking up the questions that the text evokes or by looking at its relationship to different philosophical traditions. Kristin Gjesdal’s *Ibsen’s Hedda Gabler—Philosophical Perspectives* tackles the question of the relationship between philosophy and literature by focusing on the performative as well as the literary qualities of Ibsen’s play. As such, the book invites us to think not only about the encounter between philosophy and literature but more specifically about the relationship between philosophy and theater and the particular manner that Ibsen’s play sheds light on the relationship between the two. Hedda’s theatricality, for example, encourages us to explore the role that theater plays in shaping ordinary action. Kristin Gjesdal explores these and other questions in her excellent introduction, which examines the history of the relationship between philosophy and theater in Europe, from Rousseau to Nietzsche, and the particular formation that this encounter took in Scandinavia. Moreover, Gjesdal draws attention to the unique philosophical perspective that theater provides for reflecting on human existence and the philosophical activity that the play performs. Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*, whose eponymous character obsessively tries to stage her own life until her bitter end, allows us to confront

the drama as a philosophical response to the question of the value of art.

*Hedda Gabler* premiered in 1891 in Munich. Its numerous subsequent productions, on stage and in film, resulted in the text becoming a classic of dramatic literature. Writers, critics, and philosophers such as Henry James, Georg Brandes, Edmund Gosse, Lou Andreas-Salome, and Theodor W. Adorno reflected on the play and its main character—Hedda Tesman (formerly Gabler), some commenting on the life and death that she chose for herself, others asking if the play even depicts a choice that can be attributed to her to begin with. Indeed, as Gjesdal points out in her introduction to the book, Hedda remains an enigma to her readers, who have been wondering since the publication of the play whether she is a perpetrator or a victim—or both, perhaps—of the events that the play sets in motion.

As an ambivalent figure, Hedda epitomizes the enigmatic nature of the play as a whole. Consisting of doubling objects and mirroring relationships, the play resists our attempts to reach a decisive interpretation. *Hedda Gabler* is structured as a textual conundrum, and the multiplicity of meanings within the text makes it receptive to a plurality of philosophical readings. As the title suggests, the volume offers a variety of “perspectives” on the play, all of which reflect on the stimulating encounter among philosophy, literature, and theater. Some of the essays in the volume are thematized and revolve around a specific topic central to Ibsen’s drama: boredom (Leonardo F. Lisi’s “Nihilism and Boredom in *Hedda Gabler*”), beauty (Thomas Stern’s “Hedda Gabler and the Uses of Beauty”), place (Susan L. Feagin’s “Where Hedda Dies: The Significance of Place”), and conversations (Kristin Boyce’s “Philosophy, Theater and Love: Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* and Plato’s *Symposium*”). Other essays concentrate on philosophical and hermeneutical frameworks for exploring dramatic and textual questions central to Ibsen’s dramatic world: philosophy of language (Toril Moi’s “Hedda’s Words: The Work of Language”), intellectual history (Kristin Gjesdal’s “Ibsen on History and Life: Hedda Gabler in a Nietzschean Light”), performance studies (Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr’s “Against Interpretation?: Hedda and the Performing Self”), existentialism (Fred Rush’s “Two Pistols and Some Papers: Kierkegaard’s Seducer and Hedda’s Gambit”), literary theory (Arnold Weinstein’s “My Life Had Stood, a Loaded Gun: Agency and Writing in *Hedda Gabler*”), and critical theory (Frode Helland’s “The Scars of Modern Life: *Hedda Gabler* in Adorno’s Prism”).

Although Ibsen refrained from associating his work with any clear philosophical program or school, his drama is often associated with existential phi-

losophy and traced back to the work of Soren Kierkegaard, the most well-known Scandinavian philosopher in Ibsen’s time. The affinity between Hedda Gabler and existential philosophy motivates and is the subject of two chapters in the collection, Leonardo F. Lisi’s “Nihilism and Boredom in *Hedda Gabler*” and Fred Rush’s “Two Pistols and Some Papers: Kierkegaard’s Seducer and Hedda’s Gambit.” In the chapter opening the collection, Lisi argues that the play explores the conditions for meaningful existence and the (im)possibility of authenticity in modern life. Drawing on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, Lisi offers a close reading of the theme of boredom in the play, from its most mundane manifestations to, finally, its deep metaphysical level. Lisi’s analysis of the latter, most significant level, is not anchored in a particular philosophical position, but in literature itself, which, he effectively shows, has its own way of philosophizing. By reading the play through its textual ties to canonical Western literature, Lisi demonstrates how by responding to tradition—by mimicking it as well as by subverting it—the play reflects on its place in the literary tradition, from Homer’s *Iliad* to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and with it, on the idea that the meaning of the worlds in which the characters in these fictional worlds—as well as in the very actual world in which we live—is not grounded in some absolute value or truth, but is, in fact, utterly human.

Fred Rush makes an explicit connection between Ibsen and existential philosophy by reading the play against the backdrop of Kierkegaard’s notion of the aesthetic sphere of existence. Rush understands the play as a meditation on the nature of agency and the conditions under which it is constituted as such. The essay’s historical introduction situates Ibsen’s work in a broader Scandinavian intellectual framework and concentrates specifically on Kierkegaard’s figure of the seducer in *Either—Or*. This philosophical analogy provides Rush a prism through which he studies Hedda’s dramatic character. By pointing to the affinity between Kierkegaard’s aesthete and Ibsen’s Hedda, Rush shows how the play engages with the modern fracturing of subjectivity. Yet, Rush’s study of Hedda as a seducer enriches the Kierkegaardian philosophical worldview. By casting a woman in this role Ibsen offers a nuanced version of the idea of aesthetic existence, one that considers the material and historical conditions that shape the individual’s pursuit of freedom and her ability to attain it.

The interplay between philosophy and theater is central for Kristin Boyce and Toril Moi, who read Plato’s work and Stanly Cavell’s and J. L. Austin’s ordinary language philosophy, respectively, against Ibsen’s use of dramatic dialogue. In “Philosophy, Theater, and Love: Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* and Plato’s

*Symposium*,” Boyce focuses on the trope of conversation in Ibsen’s drama as a whole and *Hedda Gabler* in particular. Boyce’s choice for putting Ibsen in conversation with Plato is not grounded in specific references that the former made to the philosopher’s work, but rather in the fact that Plato himself chooses the dialogue form as intrinsic to the philosophical dialectic. Focusing on the first conversation between Hedda and her past suitor Lovborg, from whom she became estranged over the years, Boyce shows how the model of the Socratic conversation in the *Symposium* reverberates in the drama, where the dialogic encounter between the former lovers is turned into a locus of intimacy. This makes the force of the dramatic dialogue manifest, for in enacting transformative conversations the theater invites the audience members to recognize their potentials and continue them outside the world of the play.

Toril Moi approaches the play through the lens of ordinary language philosophy in order to discuss the performative force of language in Ibsen’s drama. “The Work of Language in Hedda Gabler” looks closely at the manner in which Hedda uses language in the different social worlds that she occupies to discover the kind of action that they perform—how they set particular activities in motion; how they lead to changes in the courses of events. Moi’s careful analysis of Hedda’s speech reveals its fluidity. Rather than emanating from a stable core, it is utterly relational, gaining its meaning and force from the situation and the person she is addressing. With this, Moi draws our attention to the manner in which the drama, a text that was written for performance, can illuminate the activity that language performs. As the audience, we do not respond to the speech that we hear onstage; Ibsen’s drama deliberately avoids addressing its audiences directly. We bear witness, then, to the ways in which language is used, without using it. But we are also aware of the fact that it is not actually *doing* anything, for, as Moi points out, “every night Desdemona will die.” (p. 154)

Two other essays in the volume examine performative aspects in *Hedda Gabler*, particularly the relationship among performance, agency, and femininity, offering crucial feminist perspectives on the play. Shepherd-Barr argues in “Against Interpretation?: Hedda and the Performing Self,” that *Hedda Gabler* directly engages the contemporary theatrical form of melodrama, using it to problematize the idea of femininity as an essence. This stimulating chapter draws on the promptbook of Elizabeth Robins, a leading British actress who produced the play and performed the title role in 1891. Shepherd-Barr’s reading aligns the play with philosophical texts such as Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, showing that it is charged with expressions of theatricality that allow the actress to use it to explore gender

as performance. By examining how theater and theatricality shape our notion of what passes as femininity, Shepherd-Barr offers a new outlook on the idea that gender is performed—engendered by ongoing, repetitive behaviors and actions. This idea enriches our understanding of Ibsen’s drama but also opens new venues for thinking about the relationship between gender and theatricality to philosophers working in the field of feminist philosophy.

In “My Life Had Stood, a Loaded Gun: Agency and Writing in Hedda Gabler” Weinstein reads the play and the gendered relationships it sets up against the backdrop of Ibsen’s other plays. Focusing on the ways in which Ibsen crafts the strategies that the women in his plays invent in order to escape their constraining lives, Weinstein draws attention to *Hedda Gabler* as a feminist project, understanding it in a manner akin to key texts in Theater Studies, such as Joan Templeton’s *Ibsen’s Women* and Elin Diamond’s *Unmaking Mimesis*. Yet Weinstein understands Hedda’s destructive acts—first the burning of the book, then suicide and infanticide—as transcending their gendered specificity. It is crucial, he argues, that the play was written by a man, who chose to write about a volatile woman because her figure most clearly shows the oppressive power of a culture that is damaging for all. With this Weinstein opens up the question of the relationship between text and performance, for although we may certainly reflect on the play as depicting a universal message, what we see onstage is a very specific woman, acting in certain concrete ways. Weinstein invites us, then, to consider the question of the different effect the play has on readers and spectators and the related question, central to philosophy of theater, of the relationship between writing for performance and other forms of literary writing.

In “Where Hedda Dies—The Significance of Place,” Susan Feagin examines the different spaces that the play contains to reveal how they shape and are shaped by the different characters that use, stay, and move in and through them. Feagin offers a phenomenology of space, approaching it in the spirit of studies such as Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*, which examines spaces as inhabited places, rather than geometrical spaces. Few studies use phenomenology to think about the meaning of drama, let alone Ibsen’s dramatic work. Phenomenology is a valuable method for studying the experiences of readers or spectators of drama, turning to our lived experience and bringing it under our reflective glance. This allows us to articulate the meaning of our experience, the structures that determine its appearance as a phenomenon bearing a specific sense. Drawing on the phenomenological method, Feagin examines how both physical and immaterial spaces gain meaning in the work and how within their

spatial coordinates, Hedda appears so “out of place”; she is both ethically and normatively deviant. This sheds light on the ethical questions that the drama examines, questions that are central to almost all of the essays in the book about the nature of human freedom and the proper ways of exercising it.

The remaining three chapters focus more directly on the relationship between *Hedda Gabler* and the history of philosophy, examining philosophical discussions of the play or looking at the question of influence between philosophers and the playwright. These essays do not only look at how the encounters between philosophy and literature broaden our understanding of drama and theater—how philosophers thematize the questions that underlie the play—but also how the drama sharpens or challenges philosophical reflection by providing a concrete arena in which the ideas can play out.

Both Thomas Stern’s “Hedda Gabler and the Uses of Beauty” and Frode Helland’s “The Scars of Modern Life: *Hedda Gabler* in Adorno’s Prism” turn to the reception of the play by thinkers from the Frankfurt school, particularly by Adorno and Lowenthal. Their analyses of the play, utterly different in style as well as in content, reveal the creative manner in which they approach the drama and its philosophical commentary. Stern offers an original and nuanced reading of the play that shows how the appearance of the beautiful as a central value in the play defies and challenges sets of oppositions around which the play is organized; oppositions that philosophers have consequently taken as means of understanding it. He examines the different philosophical responses to the play and the philosophical context in which these responses emerge (Marxist critiques of the world of the petty bourgeoisie). Carefully attending to the manner in which the play engages with different notions of beauty, he shows how the philosophical readings fall short by treating it as either vacuous or subversive. Instead, he leads us to see how the play “plays” with the meaning of beauty, rendering it unstable, an instability that can lead us to engage with the conventional purposes and uses that define our lives.

Frode Helland begins with Adorno’s analysis of Ibsen’s work and his relevance for our times and then moves to read the play in light of the philosopher’s reflections. Helland does not simply provide an exegesis of the philosophical text or look for illustrations of the ideas in the play. Instead, he uses Adorno as a kind of compass to develop his own reading of the play, which stresses that Hedda’s life and death are fully politicized and, precisely because of that, tragic. This is made concrete by focusing on the temporality of *Hedda Gabler*, which contains no character by this name, for when the play opens Hedda is already married and is known as Hedda Tesman. Looking at

the life of Hedda Tesman through her past existence as Hedda Gabler, Helland provides content to Adorno’s claim that Ibsen’s plays bear “painful scars” (p. 107)—that it radiates with unfulfilled hope for future liberation, which, in Hedda’s case, is related to her past life. In addition to providing substance to Adorno’s fragments on Ibsen, the strength of the essay lies in making us reflect on the manner in which we are situated—as readers and spectators—in relation to the play’s hope for liberation and freedom and to the philosopher’s reading of this unfulfilled promise.

The last essay in the book is Kristin Gjesdal’s sophisticated reading of Nietzsche’s influence on Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*. Gjesdal begins by exploring Nietzsche’s *Untimely Meditations*—an innovative text to choose since Ibsen scholarship typically engages with the *Birth of Tragedy*. She maps the history of the circulation of Nietzsche’s philosophy in the Scandinavian countries in the 1880s and thus provides a strong basis for her thesis that Nietzsche’s philosophy of history, broadly construed as a form of thinking of the historically mediated process by which culture materializes, affected Ibsen in writing *Hedda Gabler*. Honing in on Nietzsche’s influence, Gjesdal tells a story of a philosophical tradition—dating back to Lessing, Herder, and others—that ties theater to the historicity of human existence by providing a concrete way for engaging with premodern forms of experience. At this point Ibsen enters the discussion, as Gjesdal shows that the playwright embarks on a similar project when he crafts his plays as ways to act out particular historical possibilities.

The plurality of themes covered by the essays in this collection gives a sense of the suitability of philosophical reflection for studying literature. The book demonstrates philosophy’s ability to reveal new meanings embodied in works of literature or deepen existing ones. The connection between philosophy and literature is explicit in some of the chapters—those that read philosophical accounts of the play or that read the play through a philosophical framework; it is implicit in other chapters such as those that read the play through the history of its performances or look at its relation to other literary texts. As a whole, the book offers a unique opportunity to think not only of how philosophy reveals new depths in the play but how the play, with its concrete configuration, renews our ways of doing philosophy and opens the door to reflection on philosophical questions in aesthetics, ethics, and politics, such as the ways in which artistic representation shapes and redefines existing social and ethical norms.

*Ibsen’s Hedda Gabler—Philosophical Perspectives* offers novel and stimulating studies of the play. As such, it will certainly be of interest to Ibsen

scholars, providing fresh perspectives on the play by looking at the philosophical questions that it conjures—questions about agency, the power of language, the nature of femininity. But precisely because it examines the play as the birthplace for such questions, the book has much to offer to nonspecialists as well—to students and researchers who are interested in the relationship between philosophy and literature more broadly.

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HUSTON, JOSEPH P., MARCOS NADAL, FRANCISCO MORA, LUIGI F. AGNATI, and CAMILO JOSE CELA CONDE, eds. *Art, Aesthetics, and the Brain*. Oxford University Press, 2015, 544 pp., \$160.00 cloth.

Reviewing Huston, Nadal, Mora, Agnati, and Cella Conde's *Art, Aesthetics, and the Brain* presents me with a logistical puzzle. Stretching to 544 pages with twenty-five chapters covering seven sections, it would turn out to be quite the exercise to summarize each contribution, pointing out each chapter's novel impact and any missteps along the way. Instead, we would do well to evaluate the project holistically, determining its strengths, weaknesses, the intended audience for such a dense work, and just what philosophers—particularly those working in aesthetics—might glean from it. This gives us a rough outline to follow over the next few pages; however, before I begin to summarize the strengths of the anthology, let me reiterate just what the editors aimed to achieve with their selections and gesture at a verdict.

As the editors note that their entry is one into a crowded market of materials on empirical aesthetics, they offer four editorial justifications to help differentiate their project from the rest (p. vi):

1. A breadth of examples where neuroscientific methods are “used to understand the biological foundations of art and aesthetics”
2. A combination of “general and specific” approaches to the “relation between art, aesthetics, and the brain”
3. Incorporating nonvisual arts, including music and dance
4. Including work from disciplines as diverse as philosophy and engineering

Measured by these four criteria, their work is a success; especially evident by the *excellent* contributions of those authors deploying the methods of cognitive neuroscience to dance and music and by the gener-

ous reviews of the literature on offer. However, the anthology's demonstrable breadth hampers attempts to thread a philosophically rich, or coherent, narrative, and instead it can appear as a mosaic of isolated viewpoints with little interaction or interplay among the vivid themes on display.

As prefaced above, the seven contributions covering the cognitive neuroscience of dance and music were some of the strongest in the anthology, often engaging with one another, and present a clear case that each of these artforms should continue to receive thoroughgoing, serious treatment in empirical aesthetics. As an example, take Emily Cross's chapter, “Beautiful Embodiment,” which introduces the “Cognitive Neuroscience of Dance” section. Cross begins with an anxiety-provoking thought exercise: imagine being midway through your daily commute, suddenly to have an instantaneous transformation of your run-of-the-mill train station by a *flashmob* of coordinated commuters dancing (pp. 189–190). This transformation of quotidian contexts by everyday lay performers drives her research question: “how might our own dance abilities (or lack thereof) influence how we perceive performers who excite and impress us?” (p. 190) Working through a series of neuroimaging studies, Cross argues that our motoric expertise of an action sequence is a consequence of our perceptual embodiment of that action (p. 193–194), and this leads us to an animated discussion of the aesthetics of action and the effects of (motoric) virtuosity and fluency that may be applicable to other media. Reviewing seminal work on mirror neurons by Gallese and Hayes, Cross argues that observers are partial to fluid, virtuosic action, in part because of the activation of our sensorimotor systems—perhaps drawn to the challenge of mirroring the skill and grace on display (pp. 196–197).

Cross's emphasis on embodiment and the pluripotency of mirror neurons is further reflected in Beatriz Calvo-Merino's excellent overview of the mirror neuron literature in her own chapter, “Sensorimotor Aesthetics.” Likewise Christensen and Jola's eight-paged table chronicling eighteen studies in empirical aesthetics that use movement stimuli functions as a gem of a review and supports their trenchant, but constructive, critique of the lack of ecological validity in empirical aesthetics: “due to attempts of experimental control and scientific reductionism, and partly due to a lack of knowledge of the subject matter, art in general . . . and dance in particular has been employed in such a manner that it was no longer recognizable as either art or dance” (p. 224). Continuing the theme, Corrigan and Schellenberg provide an excellent introduction to the influence of personality—including the infamous “big-five” traits—individual differences (for instance, political persuasion), and emotion on musical preferences. Rounding out the

section on music, Lehne and Koelsch's chapter privileges lower-level features, such as "tension" and "resolution," of music and dynamic media more generally as entry points into an audience members' evaluative and motivational responses, and this appeal to emotive states engendered by music is echoed in Elvira Brattico's succinct discussion of the social contexts and factors of musical performance. For those interested in how we perceive the features of music and dance and how these perceptions interact with and help form our evaluations of these art forms, these chapters signal a helpful path through dense empirical findings.

The anthology is littered with troves of thorough reviews. Though I found those sections on dance and music the most useful, other sections are similarly charitable to their readers in laying out many of the relevant findings. The chapters in section 5, "Neuropsychology of Art and Aesthetics," come to mind; in particular Anjan Chatterjee's detailed recounting of a plethora of pathological cases where seeming cognitive deficits give rise to artistic ability, alongside Indre Viskontas and Suzee Lee's focused treatment of art production by those suffering with dementia. Although there is a relative dearth of cross-cultural research on any of the art forms reviewed across the book, Gesche Westphal-Fitch and Tecumseh Fitch's work on comparative aesthetics, both cross-culturally and across primate and even avian species provides a foundational overview for those who may be interested in the possibility of "animal aesthetics."

The wager to be made with projects as ambitious as *Art, Aesthetics, and the Brain*'s is that the diversity of viewpoints and contributions, though difficult to unite in a single narrative frame, will prevent or at least reduce the risk that any crucial element or aspect to the inquiry will be left unaddressed. However, it is clear to me that there are at least a few lacunae—both technical and sociological—that should have been filled.

Technically, two issues stick out. First, though there are hundreds of studies across many subspecialties of psychology and neuroscience discussed, from a generous skim I could not find a single neuroimaging study cited that utilizes the more advanced statistical technique of multivoxel pattern analysis, or MVPA. Although MVPA has become commonplace only in the last ten years or so, it offers a far more detailed window into which areas of the brain are recruited by any particular representation than earlier "univariate" neuroimaging techniques. Let me take a moment to analogize the difference in these methods, as any empirically friendly consumer of neuroimaging data ought to be sensitive to the difference between MVPA and earlier univariate analyses.

In a univariate experiment, an experimenter would posit a "region of interest" (ROI) in the brain, whose activation is hypothesized to play some functional role. For instance, in Spas Getov and Joel Winston's chapter, they posit that the "fusiform face area" (FFA)—a small patch of the underside of your temporal lobe—is responsible for processing facial information. In the simplest case, you then detect how activity in the ROI, measured by metabolic (in the case of fMRI) or electrical (in the case of EEG) signals, changes between some control and test condition. Perhaps your control condition is the image of a famous person, and your test condition is an image of dog. In this fictional case, you would find that activity in the FFA decreases for images of dogs, leading you to conclude that this region of the brain does not process dog-related information.

The epistemic foundation of this "univariate" doctrine has been challenged by MVPA, which crucially *does not* depend on a single "region of interest." Rather MVPA uses advanced statistical computation to detect how *multiple* areas of the brain respond to a given stimulus. To detect how the brain processes images of dogs, you would train an algorithm on many trials' worth of brain data where you know that the participant is processing images of dogs. The algorithm can then isolate a *pattern* of dog-related activation across the brain, which may then be compared with new data from other stimuli, for instance, providing insight into whether whole-brain representations of dogs are similar to whole-brain representations of cats. The lesson for the empirically curious who work through the neuroimaging literature is that earlier, univariate analyses likely harbor false negatives and should be treated with caution. Since almost all the neuroimaging work cited in the anthology comes from a univariate tradition, many of those arguments reliant on neuroimaging data (in particular those chapters in Section 2) may have to be revisited with newer techniques.

The second technical issue concerns the problem of *reverse inference*. Many arguments throughout the anthology depend on this common formulation; for instance, consider Brattico's claim: "familiar music has been shown to activate more limbic subcortical areas than unfamiliar music and even liked music. The positive affect derived from understanding [music] might be related to such a brain response" (p. 309). Here, a univariate task measured how brain activity differs between familiar and unfamiliar music, with familiar music showing increased activity in the limbic system. The enthymeme that generates our reverse inference is as follows: limbic system activation is associated with emotional stimuli. Because of its prior association with emotional stimuli, when the researchers find higher activation in the limbic system for familiar stimuli, they infer that

this increased activation is emotionally relevant. But it is plausible that one region of the brain participates in more than one function, and it is likely historically contingent that the limbic system was first identified as being involved with emotion, as opposed to familiarity. Only the chapter by Agnati, Guidolin, and Fuxe directly addresses the epistemic problem of reverse inference, ending with a pessimistic note that “it is not clear if such [neuroscientific] techniques can adequately deal with the interplay of such varied cognitive, affective, personal, social, and cultural factors” that arise in art and aesthetics (p. 435). However, a nuanced treatment of reverse inference is possible; for instance, Eduard Machery has argued that reverse inference, when meshed with a Bayesian statistical foundation, may yield valid inferences. Clearly, there is a path forward to a more stable epistemic foundation for neuroaesthetics once these two statistical and epistemic hurdles are managed.

There are also significant sociological gaps present in the anthology; specifically I noticed how nearly every single stimuli, artwork, art form, or genre under consideration was an example taken from a singularly Eurocentric, white, and classed perspective (Westphal-Fitch and Fitch’s chapter serving as a notable exception). In an anthology with such a broad aim, some explicit diversity of artworks and, by extension, diversity in the participants serving in these studies, is warranted. Leder and colleagues make a good point about the role of context in their chapter, “Aesthetic Appreciation,” but what struck me was their citation of Brian O’Doherty’s description of galleries as “white spaces.” And yet, once I was finished with the book I could not help but find this an apt, general label for the kind of art under discussion. Perhaps this may serve as a genuine call that more empirical aesthetics must be done outside of the gallery and *outside of white spaces*. While investigations of visual aesthetics and art make up the majority of the anthology, not a single chapter was dedicated to photography, film, fiction, or mass art, that is, the kind of aesthetic and artistic experiences *most* people engage with in their daily lives.

Edmund Rolls’s “Neurobiological Foundations of Art and Aesthetics” strikes me as particularly outmoded. Rolls grounds a theory of the aesthetic on Darwinian principles of natural and sexual selection, reducing beauty to the perception and appreciation of those fitness enhancing features, which he describes as a litany of “Female preferences: factors that make men attractive,” including: athleticism, resources, power and wealth, status, age, ambition and industriousness, testosterone-dependent features, symmetry, dependability and faithfulness, risk taking, and odor (pp. 460–461). Naturally, Rolls

gives a list of “Male preferences: what makes women attractive and beautiful to men,” including: youth, beautiful features (!), body fat, fidelity, and “attractiveness at the time of ovulation” (pp. 461–462). Continuing to generalize, Rolls argues that the further a given artwork lies from these “biological foundations” of aesthetics, the less inherent, or somehow innate, aesthetic value a work has: “[where] art becomes very abstract, as in some of the work of Mark Rothko, perhaps [*only*] those especially interested are those who have expertise themselves in what is being achieved technically, such as the painting of colors by Rothko” (p. 464). These arguments lead Rolls to mediate on just why there are not as many women artist, painters, poets, and the like as their male equivalents (p. 466). Here, Rolls offers the following “thoughts,” including that women’s and men’s brains have been subject to different selective pressures, which may have led men to be better at problem solving, and hence more *creative*, thanks to natural selection (p. 466). While Rolls admits, citing Virginia Woolf, that the gendered difference in artists may be due to circumstance, he just as quickly entertains the possibility that women “take” to literature because of the “adaptive value of gossip to women” (p. 466).

Rolls’s arguments fail to grapple with recent, less-gendered explanations—for instance, Rebecca Jordan-Young’s landmark book *Brain Storm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences*, which masterfully takes on many of these supposed gendered differences, particularly those resting on hormonal foundations. Moreover, a charitable reading of Woolf gives us far more testable hypotheses about why there might not be as many women painters as there are authors. As Woolf writes in *Professions for Women*, “For ten and sixpence one can buy paper enough to write all the plays of Shakespeare—if one has a mind that way. Pianos and models, Paris, Vienna and Berlin, masters and mistresses, are not needed by a writer. The cheapness of writing paper is, of course, the reason why women have succeeded as writers before they have succeeded in the other professions.”

Just who is this anthology for, and what is a philosopher to make of it? Likely, if you work in empirical aesthetics you will already be well familiar with many of the names and arguments in this book, but the anthology still serves a functional role: the literature reviews contained throughout the chapters—with the notable dearth of MVPA and cross-cultural work—are an excellent justification alone to find a copy, and it would serve any scholar of aesthetics with strong empirical leanings, if not some empirical background in neuroscience or cognitive psychology, well. For the pure-at-heart philosopher, it is more difficult to home in on the exact utility of the collection, and to some extent it will depend on

how amenable or sensitive their research project is to empirical formulations and results.

There are philosophically interesting discussions interspersed throughout the book, for instance, on the perceptual effects of indeterminate artworks (p. 152), the aesthetics of action (pp. 196–197), the uniqueness of dance as a media (pp. 238–239), the paradox of repeated exposure (p. 291), and the utility of phenomenology in perceptions of time and musicality (Chapter 25). However, the most robust philosophical arguments are found early on, in the first section on *Foundational Issues*. William Seeley's contribution, "Art, Meaning, and Aesthetics," is by far the most engaging philosophical work, where he mounts a thorough defense of why we ought to consider art as an interesting category to treat from a neuroscientific perspective in the first place (p. 29). *Prima facie*, there should be no reason why the brain treats art any differently from another artifactual kind—in quite a close possible world we could have an anthology on *Espresso, Caffeination, and the Brain*. Seeley counters this view by arguing that artworks are unique in that they serve as "attentional engines . . . intentionally designed to direct attention to those aspects of their formal compositional structure, that carry information about their content" and the category they belong in (p. 28). Still, Seeley's clarification strikes me as too broad—after all, advertisements are a paradigmatic example of attentional engines—and what of social media and memes, which do nothing but capture and direct attention to the structure and category of a given post or tweet.

I am not convinced, yet, that neuroscience of art comes in at the right "level" of analysis, at least while there is still much work to be done on the lower-level properties—those sudden chills and flutters of elation—that may be elemental to an aesthetic experience. The role of social and environmental context also must be taken into account; since being taken into a lab and shown an image of *Guernica* on a seventeen-inch LED screen is, at least in my limited experience, radically different than standing in front of the twenty-five-foot real deal. To do empirical aesthetics correctly, we will have to follow participants to the gallery, or the concert venue, or the street corner—wherever art happens—to actually measure aesthetic effects. Finally, besides the need to replicate these findings at a cross-cultural scale, using a diverse array of art forms, we need to tackle the epistemological considerations that abound. Does being shown a forged, or a participatorially made, or a computer-generated artwork change our aesthetic experience of a work? Given the ease of computer mediated forgeries, especially in photography and now in video with the rise of "deepfakes" created by machine learning, this seems like a salient question

at the border of aesthetics and epistemology that cognitive neuroscience may be well suited to solve. Clearly, there is a lot of work yet to be done.

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DESTRÉE, PIERRE, and PENELOPE MURRAY, eds. *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015, xiv + 538 pp., 26 b&w illus., \$195.00 cloth.

What could it mean to speak of ancient aesthetics? The phrase has seemed at turns obvious and impossible. We are heirs to splendid examples of ancient Greek and Roman art and influential reflections on their composition, beauty, emotional power, and value. How could there not be *ancient aesthetics*? Yet, famously, ancient Greeks and Romans had neither the concept of art nor the philosophical discipline of aesthetics that continues to incline our approach to their achievements. While some formative theorists of the discipline, from Shaftesbury and Batteux to Herder, Baumgarten, and Schiller, understood what they were doing as continuous with, or even an attempt to recover, ancient forms of experience, the terms of experience had changed with the times. We are pressed to find Athenians, Romans, and Alexandrians admiring paintings in galleries, wondering whether an artifact is an artwork, debating whether beauty is a subjective or an objective property, or evaluating music apart from song and dance and architecture, sculpture, embroidery, and poetry apart from civic and religious life. So how could ancient *aesthetics* be more than an anachronism? This familiar problem of historical interpretation is compounded when inquiring with a concept so tied to lived experience as aesthetics and into the experience of something so culturally bound as art, leading many to wonder: how can we pursue aesthetics in even western antiquity without imposing familiar categories onto an unfamiliar world? And if we can, what would it mean to speak of *modern aesthetics* with this fuller history in view? To ask now after ancient aesthetics is to ask after aesthetics's past but also its possible futures.

The present seems ripe to take up these questions. Just as energy has been renewed recently to aesthetic issues within the philosophy of art and beyond—from the wide range of beauty and disgust to the aesthetics of the body, race and gender, and non-Western cultures—scholars of ancient Greece and Roman cultures have renewed aesthetics to the forefront of classical scholarship, a consequence of the "material turn" within the field. The study of ancient aesthetics

is blossoming, however self-conscious that label must remain. The last decade has witnessed fresh studies of ancient variations on such familiar themes as beauty, sublimity, and aesthetic value, artistic performance and reception, and Plato's engagement with poetry, but also, less familiarly, of how the senses themselves were constructed, returning aesthetics to its origins in sense perception (*aisthēsis*) broadly understood. These studies have been specially focused and often quite specialized, however. It is therefore welcome to have finally a companion to guide exploration through this exciting terrain and wonderful to find in this compendium one so sure-footed across its many paths and eager to point out the wide horizons onto which they open. The most comprehensive volume of its kind, *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics* gathers an impressive array of leading scholars to address, specifically, how the arts were variously experienced and conceptualized in the ancient Greek and Roman world. Some of the thirty-three essays provide incisive overviews of contexts or concepts, others more pointed contributions to scholarship. All are valuable resources for graduate instruction and for research on their specific topics, not least due to their consistently extensive citations of primary sources and helpful guides to secondary literature appended to each chapter.

The editors, Pierre Destrée and Penelope Murray, sharply focus in their Introduction "the fundamental question" (p. 9) raised by the volume, *how* one can analyze "aesthetic" experience of "the arts" in antiquity without assimilating ancient lives to modern frameworks. The variety of disciplines and disciplinary approaches assembled suggest a compelling if tacit response: investigate and integrate myriad details of material remains, cultural practices, semantic ranges, literary devices, conceptual relations, and philosophical problems. Through its interdisciplinary approach the volume succeeds in its aim to present a synoptic view of responses to various arts across a range of ancient sources and contexts. To the prior conceptual question, *whether* this view may be termed "ancient aesthetics," Destrée and Murray judiciously anchor their project in the historical fact that the concepts of aesthetics and (the) art(s) have been constantly contested since their explicit formation. Their aim is to show the "versatility of the notion of the aesthetic" (p. 5) by presenting "alternative possibilities" (p. 12) to a rather narrow view that would preclude their inquiry, according to which art and aesthetics are properly divorced from ethical, sociopolitical, religious, and other practical functions. Whether this view is or ever was as dominant as several contributors suggest, special urgency is felt to overcome the influence of Paul Oskar Kristeller's famous remark (quoted in three essays: pp. 2, 143, 310) that ancient thinkers were "neither able nor eager to detach the aesthetic

quality" of the excellent works of art that enchanted them. It is intriguing that Kristeller becomes the *bête noire* of this volume because, despite this remark and his too narrow treatment of Greco-Roman sources, he frames his classic two-part genealogy of the "The Modern System of the Fine Arts" (1951–1952) by suggesting that art be reintegrated with and reconceived in terms of broader aspects of experience, not unlike it was, in his view, for the ancients. The greatest strength of this volume lies in showing us precisely what that looked like, and might yet look like, by detailing how ancient Greeks and Romans connected their responses to the arts at the center of human life. Treatment of individual arts thus forms the thematic core and middle section of the volume, flanked by the historical contexts and by the central concepts and questions that conditioned their experience.

It may prove helpful, rather than repeat the editors' clear summaries of chapters and common themes, to call attention to chapters that reflect well the orientation and central questions of the volume. Essential to its primary aim and surely illuminating for those interested in ancient philosophical aesthetics, the eight essays of "Art in Context" first situate artistic production and reception at Greece and Rome within their changing political structures, social institutions, and religious practices. Greece receives the greater share of attention, though Agnès Rouveret examines the prestige of private Roman collections of Greek paintings and Thomas Habinek traces how poets from republican to imperial Rome formed through a continuous system of patronage a continuous and deliberately classized tradition of literature. Their emphasis on structural conditions complements the learned and accessible survey by Richard Martin of how the performance of Greek poetry in agonistic contexts of religious festivals and symposia were often judged beautiful less for their content than for providing pleasure and comporting with social norms of conduct, including an ethic of fairness. Attentive to the tangle of aesthetic, ethical, and sociopolitical meanings in such key evaluative terms as *kalos* ("beautiful," "noble," "fine," pp. 18, 26) or *urbanus* ("urbane," p. 71), this pair of essays demonstrates well the civic nature of the arts pursued throughout the volume but most intensely in this section. It is a tad surprising, therefore, to detect in some of these historicizing essays intimations of or a trajectory toward some notion of autonomous aesthetic experience. Graham Zanker, for example, proposes that the fundamental principle of Hellenistic art of "leading the soul" (*psychagogia*) sought to provide "pure 'entertainment'" to a wide cosmopolitan audience, thereby "liberating" all arts and particularly poetry from a need to provide ethical or political instruction (p. 63); a similar shift is said to mark the

transition from Greek to Roman music and dance (p. 89), though, as Eleonora Rocconi acknowledges, these arts had always aimed to please and remained integral to religious and political activity. It may likewise concede too much to remark that architectural beauty “cannot be very far from politics” (p. 137). More persuasive is how Rosemary Barrow concretely illustrates, in her fascinating examination of the presence of the divine in Greek sculpture how in this period aesthetic, religious, ethical, and political ideals remained inseparable.

The issue of autonomy comes center stage in the nuanced discussion of ancient Greek poetic practice and criticism with which Andrew Ford begins the central section of the volume, “Reflecting on Art.” Ford is concerned to show that, despite frequent ethical objections, in classical Athens the art or skill (*technē*) of poetry could be considered to have its own (*auto*) laws or norms (*nomoi*) by which its merits or demerits are to be properly criticized. Adumbrated by the contest between Euripides and Aeschylus in Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, this position becomes theoretically developed, Ford argues, when Aristotle claims at *Poetics* 25 that poetry, like every art, has its own standard of correctness. The argument is carefully circumscribed. Since Aristotle there considers critical moves within private debate, the end of poetry to elicit certain emotional responses in audiences does not remove poetic practice from the overarching sphere of the art of politics. One may wonder in turn whether poetic correctness is not more radically ethical or political in this context. For even if poets need not, and should not, present entirely “morally uplifting” behavior (p. 150), to elicit pity and fear in the right way, they would seem to have to structure plots and characters to make contact with what audiences can find intelligible within an ethical framework [cf. *alagon*, Ari. *Poet.* 1460<sup>b</sup>28]. This would not preclude Aristotle’s restricted notion of autonomy from providing the resources that Ford finds in it to defend contemporary literature from politically and ethically motivated charges.

Complemented by Penelope Murray’s careful overview of the relation, particularly in Plato, between poetic inspiration and agency and a rich discussion by Nancy Worman of how stylized portrayals of natural landscapes work to reinforce cultural and political values, most of the eleven subsequent essays in this section further the ambition of the volume to show how ancient Greek and Roman arts would have been experienced. The recovery of ancient *aesthetics* here reaches its peak and promise in three outstanding contributions to the perception of music, dance, and painted pottery. Armand D’Angour makes considerable progress on the relatively recent question of what ancient Greek listeners enjoyed in the sonic qualities of musical compositions. Since their music

has often been studied in terms of its effects of individual and political character, as part of a broader category of *mousikē* alongside dance and song (and, generally, arts inspired by the Muses), we are treated to quite detailed reconstruction of rhythmic and aural elements of music that we can detect in a few extant compositions and fragments (pp. 194–197). This excellent analysis made me wish to hear further how wider cultural valences of musical vocabulary (e.g., *harmonia*: “tuning,” “harmony”; *nomos*: “style” but lit. “custom,” “law”), musical instruments (the scintillating yet anxiety-provoking *aulos*), and being “musical” (*mousikos*) itself may have inflected and complicated the experience and evaluation of the sound structures that D’Angour evokes. In the following kindred essay, Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi pursues an aesthetics of dance more directly “in the midst of explicit and implicit tensions” in cultural discourses between, on the one hand, the conceptualization of beauty in bodily movement and other values and forms of cognition on the other (p. 207). Absent treatises on dance and records of choreography, Peponi analyzes ekphrases of dancing in ancient Greek poetry, including choral directions as to how to perceive and appreciate the action, to elaborate three ways in which apprehending beautiful dance stirred both the senses and the imagination. Her analysis, like the previous, excels at leading readers through texts to imagine the dynamics of aesthetic experience. François Lissarague performs a similar feat, not with texts but with pottery, emphasizing the three-dimensional, temporal, and tactile aspects of actually *using* painted Greek vases that we cannot but fail to miss inside museums and outside symposia. For this reason, Lissarague makes a bold choice not to include illustrations to help to demonstrate how painted images on vases played with one another and with drinkers to create narratives, imaginative associations, instability, suspense, humor, and pleasure. Those unfamiliar with the vases he describes will be rewarded by viewing reproductions after reading, and then rereading, this short but rich piece.

To have simply images in mind, however, would contradict the deeper impulse of this essay to restore these artifacts, qua art, to the contexts of their use. Lissarague is not exceptional among contributors to this volume in wanting to show that the ancients could appreciate something aesthetically yet still for its functions, not purely for its own or for “art’s sake.” How difficult it remains to take this view fully to heart under current conceptions of aesthetics is evident in the fact that the volume all but equates aesthetics with responses to and reflections on the arts and understands the arts almost exclusively in terms of individuated arts of poetry, music, dance, painting, sculpture, and architecture.

Consequently, despite its vast coverage and self-appointed aim not to be comprehensive (p. 5), we do not gain as rich a sense as one might wish of how regularly in antiquity the arts and artists were placed in *contest* with one another or of how important were arts such as embroidery, weaving, or metallurgy that did not become ancestors to the modern fine arts. Our understanding of ancient aesthetics—particularly if it is to bear alternative possibilities for aesthetics itself—could also be enriched by greater emphasis on the cultural significance of beauty, at once aesthetic and ethical, in the realms of fashion and adornment, the sculpting of the body and athletic competition, political spectacle, and the aspiration to glory.

It is worth wondering how far these cultural emphases take us from modern concepts of beauty; yet one difference observed by David Konstan is that the erotic desire that lies at the heart of ancient Greek thinking about beauty pervades responses to its expression in art. His contribution to this final section on individual “Aesthetic Issues” joins others, such as Stephen Halliwell’s superb discussion of fiction, James Porter’s of the sublime, and Michael Silk’s of the value of art, in negotiating the various continuities and discontinuities among ancient and modern conceptual landscapes. In addition to familiar topics from the histories of philosophical aesthetics and literary criticism, including pleasure, tragic emotions, *mimēsis*, and the relation of art to morality, this section includes excellent introductions to the experience of wonder (*thauma*) by Christine Hunzinger and, by Adeline Grand-Clément, to the relatively neglected but prominent archaic and classical Greek concept of *poikilia*, which encompasses the fascinating effect of combining different sensuous elements, especially colors and sounds, as well as ideals of variety, versatility, or complexity. Plato and Aristotle expectedly receive the most attention in this section. More might have been done, as throughout, to avoid or else to communicate clearly points of overlap—Christof Rapp and Elizabeth Asmis both discuss at length the Aristotelian notion of *katharsis*, though differently—and to give greater hearing to other influential thinkers, notably Stoics and Epicureans, Plotinus (but see Malcolm Heath, pp. 390–391), Augustine, and the elder Philostratus. Such omissions, however, only reflect how capacious and integral is the field of ancient aesthetics and the many fruitful questions and trajectories that this volume helps to generate. If ancient aesthetics is a name for a problem, it is one rich in rewards.

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CHANDLER, MARTHE ATWATER. *Expressing the Heart's Intent: Explorations in Chinese Aesthetics*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2017, xv + 284 pp., 31 b&w illus., \$90 cloth.

We might expect the audience for a book about Chinese aesthetics to interest China philosophers. But Marthe Atwater Chandler’s *Expressing the Heart's Intent: Explorations in Chinese Aesthetics* is for readers of all traditions and in many fields—everyone who wants to understand art. It is for understanding your aesthetic experiences, but also those you do not quite have but have felt yourself on the verge of. Just what is it that holds you back, anyway? Read this and see.

Chandler has taken on a rare and difficult task: explaining the theory of a current Chinese philosopher of art, Li Zehou (b. 1930), then using it to understand aesthetic experience in general and regarding three genres of Chinese art: Northern Wei (386–584) Buddhist sculpture, horse paintings of many eras, and the Song Dynasty (960–1179) poetry and philosophy of Su Shi (a.k.a. Su Dongpo).

Chandler accomplishes this in such a way that it is not only an explanation of (several) bodies of philosophical thinking and art work, thereby increasing readers’ *knowledge* (of China, of art, of philosophy), but it makes possible new ways of understanding how we come to understand works of art—have aesthetic experiences. As an East Asia art historian turned Western philosopher, I found her discussions of the three genres stunningly helpful. Works I had barely understood came alive; puzzles were solved; my own most successful aesthetic experiences became more comprehensible.

Somehow Chandler managed something I did not think possible: doing justice to the intricacies of Chinese philosophies and the dramas and complexities of Chinese history while both satisfying China specialists and nudging laymen along comfortably.

She achieves this by means of seamless integration of both Western and Chinese art history and theory and Chinese political and cultural history into contemporary aesthetics (both Western and Chinese), focusing on the contributions of Li Zehou. (She and Li discuss Aristotle, Durkheim, Marx, Mill, Nietzsche, Plato, Putnam, Wittgenstein, Wordsworth, and others.) The task is difficult. It is hard enough doing philosophy or introducing material from another culture—especially across periods as different from each other as ancient China from the Northern Wei Dynasty, the Tang from the Song, or any of them from our times—much less integrating them. Chandler accomplishes all this gracefully, giving enough background so we can understand why each of these historically new visual and conceptual ways of seeing and the communication of what they perceived at

each stage were important—how they changed both art and life.

Chapter 1 explores a term, the “mind’s [or ‘heart’s’] intent” (*shi yan zhi*), that has been crucial to Chinese aesthetics since the *Canon of Shun* in the *Book of Documents* (*Shujing*, eighth to third centuries BCE), when it probably had shamanistic value: “I bid you Kui, the emperor said, to preside over music and educate our sons, [so . . . they will be] straightforward yet gentle, congenial yet dignified, strong but not ruthless, simple but not arrogant. Poetry expresses the heart’s intent (*zhi*); singing prolongs the utterance of that expression” (p. 3). Distinguishing it from the Western Expressive Theory, Chandler tracks the changes in how it has been understood over time and in the work of different philosophers.

Chapter 2 explores the philosophy of art of Li Zehou, the foundation for which is his recognition that “individuals learn to have a sense of beauty in a fairly complex process involving three levels or states” (p. 45). Li, highly regarded and widely influential, is the author or coauthor of nine books (five in English), including studies of Kant, Marx, and Confucius as well as aesthetics, and is the subject of numerous articles and of *Li Zehou and Confucian Philosophy*, edited by Roger T. Ames and Jia Jinhua.

The first of Li’s levels, which he terms “an aesthetic attitude,” is a “strongly sensuous, emotional experience” that is “immediate, intuitive, and sensual . . . generally passive and often quite transitory.” On the next level, “aesthetic attention,” we “return to it, pay closer attention . . . , and ask certain questions . . . focus[ing] on its structure or form—the arrangements of the parts of a painting, the sounds and tones of the words in poetry. Li contrasts aesthetic attention with cognitive, scientific attention . . . [when] we measure and classify, investigate the history of the object, its causal powers,” search out how was it produced—activities that are important in art-historical or ethnomusicological investigation, but distinct from aesthetic attention. In the final level, “aesthetic experience,” “all the elements of aesthetic attention: sensation, emotion, imagination, and understanding, come together in a complex harmony—with different elements predominating in different experiences” (pp. 45–47).

Li registers important criticisms of Kant regarding aesthetic attention and aesthetic experience, or pleasing the will and spirit, since “disinterest” can mislead us into ignoring forms of interest that are subtle, complex, and (as I have argued) more closely related to physical and cultural survival: “On Li’s theory, the insistence that we enjoy art only for art’s sake and avoid consideration of the historical, philosophical, and moral context of a work of art, would limit us to the pleasures of eye and ear of aesthetic

attitude and to the emotional pleasure of aesthetic attention. . . . In the final state . . . all the elements of aesthetic attention: sensation, emotion, imagination, and understanding come together in a complex harmony—with different elements predominating in different experiences” (p. 47). (Chandler recognizes that such a combination of “elements” or ways of processing the work may be irrelevant or counter-productive regarding some works/schools in which the art is *intended* to be taken in without reference to politics or other social forces—such intention being exactly the kind of sociocultural information we need for understanding such works.)

Li’s view makes particular sense with Chinese arts, which have integrated moral and ethical considerations for centuries and which are deepened by, even when they do not require, understanding of the historical concerns their creators referenced either formally or in subject matter. I maintain, however, that it has much broader applicability than Chinese art.

Chandler uses the next three chapters to explore such dimensions regarding three persistent motifs in Chinese art, their accompanying themes, and the historical, social, and ethical conditions and beliefs underlying them. Chapter 3 examines those underlying Northern Wei Buddhist sculptures. Chapter 4 contrasts various paintings of horses, contextualizing them and sorting out the widely varying approaches not only to horses, in their full range of symbolic connotations, but to their embodiment(s) of relations to the state.

Chapter 5 returns us to the “intimate connection between poetry, philosophy, and the practical concerns of political life” persistent in traditional China, presenting the thought of Song poet and philosopher Su Shi (a.k.a. Su Dongpo, 1037–1101), whose several poetic works on his visit to the Red Cliff permeated subsequent literature and painting throughout East Asia. The Red Cliff was the site of a historic defeat (208 CE) of an until-then powerful general that changed the course of Chinese history. The defeat was well known not only to military men but to all scholar officials of the governing class and, since that class comprised most of the poets and many artists as well, throughout the cultured elite. Eight centuries later, Su made a series of visits to the site, writing poems in several forms about his visits, the site, the battle, and the meanings of history and geography for both individual lives and kingdoms. His “odes” and prose poems (*fu*) subsequently were transformed into paintings even more popular than the poems themselves.

Chandler’s epilogue returns to Li Zehou’s conviction that “[a]esthetic experience, like religious and mystical experience, is transforming—one feels part of a greater harmony, a larger community, in a way

that is anything but joyless,” connecting it to the need for transformation of our contemporary world in the most prosaic and practical terms. (The joy evident in Confucian-inspired literati art is one of its most salient characteristics.)

Chandler’s analyses rely heavily on the groundbreaking and potentially earth-shattering, or rather, world-building, framework of insights by Henry Rosemont Jr., Roger Ames, David Hall, Peter Hershock, and others sometimes called the New neo-Confucianism, although, where necessary or useful, she carefully distinguishes the varieties of neo-Confucianism and the reasons for the distinctions. Her scholarship here is reliable and profound, with sources (in footnotes), and with the references needed for either further study or disambiguation of schools and theories supplied.

The art historian in me was delighted finally to have several itching perplexities from my studies of Chinese art resolved. Some of them had raised only a vague disquiet. Why are there “flying horses” in bronze-age art, when the emperor’s famous/infamous expeditions to Ferghana did not bring those western Asian horses to China till much later? Others were more important philosophically. Why are Northern Wei Buddhas so important? (They are peculiar—in proportions, posture, facial expression.) Why is the Red Cliff ubiquitous? There are countless renditions of this theme, even in Korea and Japan, where it became popular in the Edo period among “literati” (*bunjin*; Ch. *wen-ren*) in the style called literati art (*bunjinga*, a.k.a. *Nanga*, or “Southern painting;” Ch. *wen-ren hua*). Why does the Red Cliff play such a large role in this rich but austere ethical and artistic movement?

Images are shockingly rare in philosophy of art, and Chandler and SUNY Press should be commended for providing nearly all images the reader needs. And Chandler’s practice of persistently referring to Chinese names with both the Wade-Giles orthographic system and the People’s Republic of China’s recent pinyin system is enormously helpful to those not devoting their lives to Chinese studies.

The Chinese ethico-aesthetic tradition, which Chandler takes pains to elucidate, proceeds less through rules or codes than by the emulation of exemplars. Since a large part of Chandler’s project requires explaining the fundamental ways in which the Eastern and Western traditions diverge, it would have helped clarify the philosophical methods at work within Chinese history had she cited even briefly (as she does Dao Qian and a couple others) three such exemplars: Wang Wei, Wang Xizhi, and Dong Qiqan. The sixth-century poet and painter Wang Wei (699–759), whose painted handscroll of his estate founded the genre of landscape painting in China—not to mention crucial understandings of the pos-

sibilities of the garden—and is referenced in thousands of paintings over the last twelve centuries, is one of the scholar officials who retired to his “garden” out of disgust with corruption at court, leaving lasting legacies in ethics, poetry, painting, gardening, and aesthetics.

Like Su Shi, Dao Qian, and Wang Wei, Wang Xizhi (303–379) changed aesthetic experience through art. Watching the sky while overlooking a lake (in the famous “portrait” by Qian Xuan [ca. 1235–before 1307] at the Metropolitan Museum of Art), he realized that geese, while flying from “point to point,” as it were, just the way a calligraphy brush moves across the paper, never actually leave the sky, and that their fluid movement is one the calligrapher’s brush might emulate, *without leaving the paper at the end of each stroke* (within or between characters before beginning the next stroke, as had been traditional and continues to be *de rigueur* in both standard and clerical scripts). Wang Xizhi’s realization afforded calligraphy a new fluidity and capacity for expression of the “heart’s intent,” which has underlain the expressive possibilities of calligraphy ever since. It is also precisely germane to Chandler’s project, while Wang’s voluntary retirement established an ethical bulwark, renewing ancient links between ethics and aesthetics.

Most glaring is Chandler’s omission, in the Red Cliff chapter (a full thirty-seven pages), of Dong Qiqan (Tung Ch’i-ch’ang, 1555–1636), the Ming Dynasty (1366–1644) theorist who established the difference between academic or Court (“Northern”) painting and the literati styles, retrospectively dating the distinction back to a putative origin in the Southern Song Dynasty (1160–1279). Apart from his role in art history—both reconfiguring the whole history of painting up to his time and inspiring countless painters, calligraphers, and even potters throughout China, Korea, and Japan for the next three centuries—Dong virtually created literati theory, clarifying political and ethical issues by aesthetic means.

Without Dong Qiqan’s theory, any discussion of literati poetry and theory seems thin, because literati theory and aesthetics are central to any treatment (including Li’s and Chandler’s) of Su Shi and his Red Cliff poems. Can a naïve reader even understand the meaning of literati theory without recognizing Dong Qiqan’s contribution? To be sure, Chandler’s analysis focuses on the relation of Su’s poetry to his version of neo-Confucian philosophy, which, unlike other versions, recognizes poetry as central not only to the arts but to the good life and to the cultivation of an ethical human being. But Dong Qiqan’s recognition of a fundamental schism between Northern (courtly and elegantly precise) and Southern (literati, *wenjen*) “schools,” while named after the division between the Northern and Southern Song Dynasties, also

reverberates with Emperor Xuanzong's flight south (see below), with ethical echoes for individual lives as well as the welfare of states for centuries.

Even a brief mention of these figures crucial to Chinese arts and aesthetics would have helped readers who are still struggling to master the dauntingly complex Chinese tradition (often contestational within itself) orient themselves better within the vast terrain of Chinese philosophy, history, literary and art history, and art theory. It would also have made it easier for teachers to use this book with students. Beyond these practical aspects, these figures have served for centuries to inspire people of many nationalities to emulate them. (On a personal note, when young, and knowing of not a single happy marriage, while writing my master's thesis I took a Japanese literati couple (Red-Cliff painters, both) as a model for my own marriage.) More importantly—and as with Dong Qiqang, above—such figures and their representations induct the reader into the value system of Chinese aesthetics, while illustrating Li's theory. This process of emulation requires not just learning (information or knowledge) *about* them, but encountering them again and again in different contexts, many of which will provide aesthetic experience. Chandler's book should have provided just such a context.

Even with a work as masterful, profound, exciting, and "reader friendly" as this one, I have a few criticisms. The most serious concern East Asian art. *Expressing the Heart's Intent* suffers from its lack of images of the Red Cliff. They would not only have illustrated some of Chandler's points about the differences in Su's own experiences of going to the Red Cliff and consequently in his poems about them (with repercussions in his views of aesthetic experience) but would have helped readers understand how pervasive his writing was and the varied means by which it pervaded East Asia. (So many of those Red Cliff paintings are by Japanese literati seven centuries later!) Finally, they would also illuminate for art historians just why those images differ iconographically (some having rocks in the water at the base of the cliffs, others not; some showing a figure playing a flute, others not.) It turns out they depict Su Dongpo's different trips, about which his poems, too, differ dramatically in their emotion.

The narrative of Su's life and work would be stronger with just a sentence or two about another of his greatest contributions (which every educated East Asian knows but which is harder for Americans to discover). This is his *Song of Everlasting* (a.k.a. *Unending*) *Sorrow*, about the tragically misguided love of the Tang emperor Xuanzong (712–756) for the concubine Yang Gueifei—an infatuation that led him to ignore official duties and contributed to the rebellion deposing him. The repercussions were

not only political (he fled south; Yang Gueifei was executed; the rebels assumed power, though only briefly)—albeit with lasting repercussions for the Chinese psyche—but ethical and moral: Xuanzong becomes the very definition of the bad ruler who lets his personal life and emotion play too large a role—the anti-exemplar, if you will.

Su's poem was influential as literature—reprinted in world literature anthologies even today and made into at least three movies and a television series. The visual arts legacy is also substantial: Xuanzong's journey became an important subject of narrative/landscape painting, and the love affair has been painted on countless Japanese screens and scrolls.

But its greater significance is as a cautionary tale for all subsequent rulers in East Asia. It provided the romantic, political, ethical, and social background for the opening of Murasaki Shikibu's eleventh-century psychological novel *The Tale of Genji*, against which Prince Genji's father's infatuation with his mother is to be understood, an infatuation that similarly causes the tragic destruction of Genji's parents' love for each other—and that becomes the scaffolding of Genji's lifelong Oedipal Complex, provoking his self-reflection that leads to his tradition-shattering moral innovations as an adult. The Northern/Southern division is never strictly geographical or political; it is also always ethical, and this infusion reverberates and is conveyed through the arts.

In the contexts of a chapter arguing for the centrality of poetry (especially Su's), and of a book arguing for the possibility of poetry and aesthetic experience as central to philosophical understanding of the human condition (not to mention the role of the arts therein) as well as to Chinese ethics and politics, omission of mention of Su's influential poem in a chapter about him is disappointing.

Chandler overstates the case when she argues (p. 69), citing the Dunhuang painted caves as an example, that the Northern Wei Buddhas were "usually [surrounded by] colorful murals representing bloody and tragic events." Having spent two weeks at those caves, I would say the Dunhuang paintings do so only rarely; most emphasize Paradise and other Buddhist benefits. More serious is Chandler's introduction to the section on meaning, necessarily complex since Chandler is presenting not only Chinese theories but also several competing (Western) philosophical theories—along with, in some cases, several versions of them—and specific (Western) theories of meaning in visual arts. Beginning *in media res*, as it were, with Putnam's refutation of a theory which is itself presented only afterwards, makes it quite difficult for those not already familiar with the theories to follow. (And the dating regarding the Qin and Han dynasties is wrong, p. 113).

Chandler's tackling this set of closely related philosophical problems centered on the single central issue, the meanings of the phrase "the mind's intent" that has been central to Chinese aesthetics for over two millennia, from shamanistic times to the present, will prove invaluable. With admirable clarity, Chandler situates Li's thinking within contemporary Western philosophy of art, Communism, and both traditional and emerging analyses of Confucianism in East and West. More importantly, she makes his philosophy relevant to current questions, theories, and experiences of arts and aesthetics. Being invited to delve into a book as fascinating, as easy to read, as challenging, as penetrating, and as innovative as Chandler's *Expressing the Heart's Content* is a rare privilege. I now want to extend that privilege to all the readers of this review.

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NUSSBAUM, CHARLES O. *Understanding Pornographic Fiction. Sex, Violence, and Self-Deception*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, ix + 178 pp., \$100.00 cloth.

Charles O. Nussbaum explores modern Western literary pornography at the intersections between Max Weber's sociological explanation of the rise of modern capitalism, speech act theory, the philosophy of literature, and moral psychology. Although it is a challenge to use different traditions and disciplines to explain a conceptual field, Nussbaum is able to build a theoretical framework for explaining how modern pornographic fiction emerged and which identifies its specific features.

The book is divided into four parts, and it explores two theses: the first is that "modern pornographic fiction functions as a self-deceptive vehicle for sexual arousal," and the second, that "its emergence owes as much to Puritan Protestantism and its inner- or this-worldly asceticism as does the emergence of modern rationalized capitalism" (p. 2). Nussbaum focuses on pornographic narrative fictions that for Susan Sontag qualify as literary art, that is, literature that depicts sexual activities and intentions. However, in contrast with Sontag's discussion about the artistic features of pornographic literature and recent philosophical discussions about pornography as art, like those collected in the book edited by Hans Maes and Jerrold Levinson *Art and Pornography: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford University Press, 2012), Nussbaum discusses

neither the artistic status of pornographic fictions nor the literary value of pornographic texts.

In Chapter 1, "The Protestant Ethic and Modern Western Pornographic Fiction," Nussbaum proposes that there are two kinds of modern pornographic fiction. One, explicitly sexual, emerged in eighteenth-century England from the literary form of the obscene. And a second one, the violent pornographic fiction, was originated in the nineteenth century in "the older forms of the gothic novel and the so-called penny dreadful" (p. 2). Even though Nussbaum develops the historical analysis of these kinds of modern Western pornographic fiction in the next chapters, it is interesting how, from the beginning of the book, he offers arguments resisting the confusion between the obscene and the pornographic, discussing Matthew Kieran's arguments regarding obscenity in his paper "On Obscenity: The Thrill and Repulsion of the Morality Prohibited" (*Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58 no. 1, 2002). However, contrary to Kieran, he argues that "there is no necessary connection between obscenity and morality" (p. 4) as there is for pornography. Nussbaum argues that for the purposes of understanding the emergence of pornography, specifically as a Western literary form, a historical analysis in which morals play an important explanatory role is necessary. For that reason, he employs Max Weber's theoretical framework in order to explain how the types of pornographic fiction he distinguishes emerged from Western Protestant morality and, in consequence, how pornography commends to us responses that are morally prohibited or condemned.

Nussbaum's use of Weber's sociological model from *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as an explanation of the emergence of Modern Pornographic fiction is original, as is how he analyzes it as a dispositional account for historical analysis. One of the most important contributions of Weber's interpretative theoretical approach to sociology was the concept of ideal types, which are logically consistent societal and institutional features that capture different types of social action. Nussbaum argues that, while Weber's model is an idealized cognitive model, it is an interpretative framework that analyzes human behavior in the social field according to the way individual motivations may cause certain social behaviors. Since Weber was developing a methodological model of sociology contrary to positivism, he proposed a theory of causation, influenced by Johannes Von Kries, in which any historical fact X is significant as an adequate cause of a effect Y if the absence of X would condition the course of Y in a different way. For Weber, ideal types are imaginative constructs, but as long as they are causally adequate explanations of the way social

action is motivated, they also offer an interpretative framework of the meanings and values individuals give to their actions, because those meanings and values motivate their actions in the social field. Although Nussbaum did not consider the complexity of Weber's distinctions between values and meanings and ideal types of social actions, he interestingly offers an interpretation of Weber's ideal types as dispositional tendencies, that is, as long as they are not causally necessary, they may indicate the presence of certain motivations as causes of different types of human social behavior just as dispositions do.

In the next chapter "Literary Discourse and Pragmatic Literature," Nussbaum analyzes pornographic narrative fiction as literature from the approach of speech-act theory. Nussbaum analyzes Grice's theory of implicature and provides a short revision of further Gricean and anti-Gricean accounts, such as those offered by Gregory Currie, M. L. Pratt, Jerrold Levinson, L. Horn, D. Sperber and D. S. Wilson, and W. Davis and A. Wierzbicka. Then Nussbaum defends the claim that fictional statements are display texts that "invite the audience to make-believe that they are reporting facts," but also, following Pratt, that they "seek to induce an audience to share a speaker's wonder, amusement, terror, or admiration by producing in that audience effective and imaginative involvement" (p. 44). However, Nussbaum needs to explain how those display texts emotionally engage the reader. For that reason, he briefly discusses the distinction between simulation theory and theory-theory in order to defend a mixed approach that aims to explain how pornographic fictions are able to produce sexual arousal. In order to do that, first he opts for a folk-psychological approach, but as a dispositional explanation, in order to be consistent with Weber's sociological explanation of human behavior. But then he commits to the off-line simulation approach to fiction. Even though Nussbaum argues that fictional reception in general depends on Gricean implicature, in the case of pornographic literature, simulation runs off-line because pornographic literature is a sexually explicit display text that "discourages imaginative engagement because engagement is a potential hindrance to arousal" (pp. 45–46). Then, because of his commitment to Weber's explanation of the rise of specific social behaviors in the Modern Western world as a result of the Protestant Puritan religious morality, Nussbaum needs to explain how off-line imaginative engagement to pornographic fiction came to be morally condemned. To support this, he turns to Martha Nussbaum's theory of perceptive equilibrium and how literature is able to develop, question, or modify our mental models. In the following chapter he discusses the challenges of perceptive equilibrium, that is, the problem of imaginative resistance.

The central idea of the chapter "Pornographic Fiction, Implicature and Imaginative Resistance" is that "pornographic writing exploits the conversational pragmatics of literary speech situation in order to work its arousing effects in persons burdened with the Puritanical conscience and its descendants" (p. 100). Along the same lines of Weber's explanation of the relation between individual motivations and social behaviors, Nussbaum maintains that an individual's moral values affect not only her emotional responses to pornography but also how pornographic literary texts became socially condemned. For Nussbaum, pornographic texts, like propaganda, violate the rules that govern a literary speech-act situation. However, pornographic texts do convey the author's commitments to deliver a set of implicatures, but because those implicatures may produce imaginative resistance, they may in consequence prevent sexual arousal. For that reason, for Nussbaum pornographic texts are self-deceptive. However, for those with Protestant-Puritan values there is still imaginative resistance. That means, for Nussbaum there must have been morally proscribed behaviors for the emergence of pornography as a literary form and, for the same reason, for people to imaginatively resist what it depicts. That resistance is explained by a feeling of guilt toward those imaginings. In this regard, Nussbaum implicitly adopts a Christian interpretation of guilt and takes it as one of the main reasons to sanction or even prohibit pornographic texts.

It is interesting how Nussbaum shows that the category of the pornographic has not been used at just any time or in all cultures. For example, obscenity occupied a place in the ancient world but pornography did not. He uses Auerbach's main thesis in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* not only to defend the "separation of styles" in Western literature but also to analyze the influence of Christianity on the conception society had of women and sexuality and how Protestant (specifically Puritan) Christianity influenced the rise of Western pornographic literature. However, contrary to Rae Langton's criticism of the sexist and misogynist attitudes pornography depicts, Nussbaum defends the idea that pornography "is not the business of cultivating ways of seeing" but instead "it is in the business of arousal" and that it "markets the virtual commodity, prostitution the actual one" (p. 95). But also, he points out the fact that homoerotic pornography is excluded from the discussion about the relation between pornography and morals if pornography just involves subordination of women. Although it is interesting how Nussbaum highlights the fact that, with the advent of Protestantism, there were abolitionist movements against prostitution, previously tolerated in Europe, and how this prohibition effected not

only a change in the conception of women and of adultery but also the rise of pornography, his arguments against feminist approaches that explore how pornography cultivates certain ways of seeing are not convincing. If a change in the conception of prostitution as a result of the Protestant work ethic was important as a probable cause for the rise of pornography as a literary form, then prostitution as a way of objectification of human bodies must be a probable cause of the portrayal of the objectification of female and male bodies, because any field of meaning, following Weber, is an important feature to consider in order to theoretically explain individual motivations and its consequences in different types of social action.

Finally, in the last chapter Nussbaum analyzes some evolutionary and anthropological approaches to human sexual behavior, and he argues that “tendencies to engage in socially proscribed modes of sexual (as well as violent) behaviour remain part of our primate evolutionary inheritance” (p. 112). The debate over evolutionary explanations of human social behavior is absent from his discussion about anthropological modes of sexual behavior, but also his anthropological analysis of

polygamy and adultery excludes societal cases of polyandry. To conclude, he discusses how cognitive dissonance as “self-generated state of emotional discomfort whose purpose is the avoidance of the imposition of negative social sanctions” (p. 135) may explain how actions inconsistent with agent’s self-concept may cause shame when they are inconsistent with ideals or guilt when they are ethically inconsistent.

Although *Understanding Pornographic Fiction* does not explore the artistic status of pornography or how fictional pornographic narratives are aesthetically evaluated, it contributes to the debate about pornography in two ways. First, it shows the importance of including historical analysis in the philosophical investigation about specific artistic forms. But, most importantly, it contributes to the discussion about pornography and morals regarding the influence moral values have on artistic forms and how different types of social behaviors historically affect those artistic forms.

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