Chapter 2
The Aesthetics of Embodied Life

Mark Johnson

Abstract At least since the Enlightenment, aesthetics has suffered from what Gadamer calls a "subjectivism" that relegates aesthetics to a theory of judgments based on feeling, where feelings are regarded as non-cognitive, non-rational, and private. I argue, to the contrary, that aesthetics lies at the heart of our capacity for meaningful experience. Aesthetics concerns the patterns, images, feelings, qualities, and emotions by which meaning is possible for us in every aspect of our lives. Empirical research from cognitive science reinforces this picture of the pervasiveness of aesthetic conditions that emerge from the nature of our bodies, our brains, and the structured environments we inhabit. Following Dewey, I then suggest that the arts constitute exemplary achievements of human meaning-making, which is a process that draws on all of the aesthetic dimensions that make up our mundane experience. Consequently, in any adequate account of mind, thought, language, or values, aesthetics moves from the periphery to center stage as the key to our capacity for meaning, imagination, and creativity.

Keywords Aesthetics and human meaning • Anti-Kantian aesthetics • Embodied mind thesis • Image schemas • Body-based meaning

Human beings are animals – highly complex, inescapably embodied, intrinsically social, and sometimes even intelligent, animals – who live, move, and have their being via their ongoing relations with their environments. As such, we have a deep visceral, emotional, and qualitative relation to our world. Everything we can think, feel, and do stems from our corporeal entanglements with our world that provide the basis for all our meaning-making and reflective activity. This – our visceral engagement with meaning – is the proper purview of aesthetics. As a consequence of our embodied nature, meaning comes to us via patterns, images, concepts, qualities, emotions, and feelings that constitute our perception of, and action in, the world. Traditional aesthetics has focused almost exclusively on theoretical explanations of aesthetic judgment, beauty, and art. I contend that these foci of mainstream

M. Johnson (✉)
Philosophy Department, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR, USA
e-mail: markj@uoregon.edu

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aesthetics should be seen as exemplary, intensified instances of the basic aesthetic contours and processes of human meaning-making. In other words, aesthetics is not merely a matter of aesthetic experience and art, but extends further to encompass all of the processes by which we enact meaning through perception, feeling, imagination, and bodily movement. In this essay, I hope to make a strong case for expanding the scope of aesthetics to recognize the central role of body-based meaning, with the arts then regarded as instances of particularly deep and rich enactments of meaning. In short, I will argue for the centrality of aesthetics in the very possibility of human meaning and fulfilled experience. However, in order to make this case, we must first retrieve aesthetics from the philosophical dustbin into which it was discarded as a result of Enlightenment views about the subjective character of aesthetic experience.

The Subjectivising of Aesthetics

If aesthetics is fundamentally about how we are able to have meaningful experience, then one might wonder why this has not seemed evident to aestheticians and philosophers of art. Why is it that people tend to think of aesthetics as exclusively concerned with art and so-called “aesthetic experience”? The answer is pretty obvious, namely, that the philosophical field known as “aesthetic theory” emerged in the eighteenth century based on an inherited Enlightenment view of mind, thought, and judgment that regards aesthetics as merely a matter of feelings, as subjective, and therefore as outside the domain of knowledge judgments. The story of how art and aesthetic experience came to be devalued in this manner runs roughly as follows:

1. Human mind was thought to consist of a set of independent faculties or powers of judgment (e.g., sensation, feeling, emotion, imagination, understanding, reason, will). Everything the mind does is thus supposedly the consequence of how various of these mental faculties interact to produce particular kinds of mental states and judgments.
2. Aesthetic judgments were distinguished as those based entirely on feelings, in sharp contrast with cognitive (knowledge) judgments, which are allegedly based on concepts.
3. Feelings were taken to be private, non-cognitive bodily perturbations.
4. As non-cognitive (i.e., non-conceptual), they were not seen as contributing either to human meaning or to our understanding of, reasoning about, or knowledge of, our world.
5. Because philosophy had come to be narrowly defined as an epistemological project concerned with the nature, possibility, and limits of human knowledge, there was no serious place within philosophy for any aesthetics, other than as an analysis of types of human feeling states and judgments.

The view I have just summarized found eloquent and exquisitely detailed articulation in Immanuel Kant’s highly influential theory of aesthetic judgment. However, despite all of his esoteric twists and turns of transcendental argument, Kant never

succeeded in adequately rescuing aesthetics from the status of the merely subjective [14]. In his Critique of Pure Reason (1781) Kant held that knowledge judgments can be objective and universally shareable (i.e., communicable), precisely because they are based on concepts. In the Critique of Practical Reason (1787) Kant makes it equally clear that the universal validity of moral judgments must also rest on concepts – this time, concepts derived from pure practical reason – and he insists that moral principles could never be grounded on feelings. When he turns to aesthetic judgments, in his Critique of Judgment [19], he argues that a judgment about beauty in nature and art involves a subjective feeling of pleasure evoked by the formal qualities of an object, and so cannot be validated conceptually or rationally. In other words, there can be no rules for the making or judging of beauty. When Kant began his Third Critique with the claim that "a judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment and so is not a logical judgment but an aesthetic one, by which we mean a judgment whose determining basis cannot be other than subjective" ([19], 203), the fateful die was cast. Aesthetics came to be narrowly defined as an inquiry into the nature and limits of judgments of taste (i.e., judgments of beauty in nature and art), which were allegedly based on subjective feelings, even though they laid claim to universal validity. Because Kant took feelings, as subjective, to be relative to the individual bodies experiencing those feelings, he therefore could not use feelings to ground the alleged universal validity of the judgment. This places the judgment of taste in a most awkward position: on the one hand, it appears to be based on feeling (and not on concepts), while, on the other hand, it nevertheless claims universal validity. Kant infamously tried to resolve this deep tension by arguing that aesthetic judgments of taste were not, in fact, grounded on feelings, but instead were based on a unique type of concept (an "indeterminate concept of the supersensible substrate of nature"). The feelings involved in aesthetic experience and judgment are thus taken to be secondary, that is, they are not the ground or cause of the judgment, but merely our felt consciousness of the harmony of the cognitive faculties (i.e., imagination and understanding) that is the basis for the judgment.[1]

Kant never relinquished his conviction that only shared concepts could ground the universal validity of a judgment, so he ends up pulling a philosophical fast one by conjuring up an "indeterminate concept" to ground the judgment of taste. However, this attempt to intellectualize judgments of taste cannot save them from subjectivity.[2] Kant's rigid faculty psychology and his unbridgeable dichotomies between feeling and thought, concept and percept, emotion and reason, imagination and knowledge, made it impossible for him to salvage any significant role for aesthetics in the cultivation of a meaningful and moral human life. My point here is not

[1] In the infamous section nine of the Critique of Judgment Kant says, "this subjective universal communicability can be nothing but [that of] the mental state in which we are when imagination and understanding are in free play," and "this merely subjective (aesthetic) judging of the object, or of the presentation by which it is given, precedes the pleasure in the object and is the basis of this pleasure, [a pleasure] in the harmony of the cognitive powers" ([19], 217–218).

[2] Indeed, Kant insists that judgments of taste have a "universal subjective validity", in contrast to knowledge judgments that have "universal objective validity" that is based on shared concepts ([19], 62).

to enter into debate about the proper interpretation of Kant's aesthetic theory. Rather, I simply want to observe that Kant's legacy in the philosophy of art and aesthetic judgment is what Hans Georg Gadamer calls "the subjectivisation of aesthetics in the Kantian critique" ([14], 39), for, after Kant, the problem of aesthetic judgment comes to be framed as how a judgment that is "merely subjective" – as based on feelings – can lay claim to universal validity.

Although Kant is not entirely to blame for this, one fateful consequence of his insistence on what he called the "disinterestedness" of aesthetic judgments has been the mistaken idea that a full and pure appreciation of the formal characteristics of an aesthetic object requires us to suspend any practical or life engagement we might normally have with the object, so that we can focus only on the formal features that make possible a universally valid judgment.[3] Kant, of course, does not say that we cannot also have a practical interest in the object of our aesthetic appreciation, but only that we must never allow any relation of the object to our interests, life emotions, or vital ends to be the basis of a pure judgment of taste.

Unfortunately, many subsequent philosophers of art latched onto the doctrine of disinterested judgment and what they called the "aesthetic attitude" as the key to a proper experience of an artwork. Kant's idea of disinterested satisfaction was taken to its absurd extremes in the work of Clive Bell, who ridiculously pontificates "For, to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man's activities to a world of aesthetic exaltation. For a moment we are shut off from human interests; we are lifted above the stream of life" ([3], 28). Here we have art completely severed from any connection to the practical affairs of life, existing eternally in a realm that utterly transcends our contingent historical situatedness in the world. I cannot help but observe the irony that Bell was penning this vision of transcendent perfection and release from the affairs of human existence – as if art were an other-worldly reality that could take us beyond the cares of our lives – on the eve of Britain's catastrophic plunge into the hell of the Great War. The juxtaposition of Bell's supernatural realm of timeless beauty (or "significant form") with the ugly tragedy of modern warfare that was about to be unleashed on the world, could not be more stark. Nor could such a transcendent conception of art be more disengaged from the meaning of our daily lives.

Neither can we excuse Edward Bullough who, just 2 years earlier [5], advised us of the necessity of disengaging from life, if we hope to achieve an objective regard for an aesthetic object. Bullough's "aesthetic outlook" requires "putting the phenomenon, so to speak, out of gear with our practical, actual self; by allowing it to stand outside the context of our personal needs and ends – in short, by looking at it 'objectively,' as it has often been called …" ([5], 298–99).

[3] This obsession with aesthetic disinterestedness was taken to its logical absurdity in Clive Bell's ultraformalism in Art (1913), and also in Edward Bullough's infamous treatment of "psychical distance" as a model for the aesthetic attitude – the proper distanced stance for perceiving the aesthetic qualities of an object [5]. The "myth of the aesthetic attitude" was demolished by George Dickie [12], and much earlier by John Dewey [11].

I confess that I cannot but wonder who is experiencing the aesthetic object and grasping its meaning, once we have put the phenomenon "out of gear with our practical actual self"? I, for one, would like my "actual self" to grasp the significance and meaning of the phenomenon, not my non-actual self! How could an artwork have any meaning if it is disconnected from our selfhood and our visceral embeddedness in the world? George Dickie long ago made mincemeat of aesthetic attitude theories of art [12], so maybe there is no point in beating this dead horse any further. But we have not yet freed ourselves from the oppressive yoke of a view that makes art irrelevant to daily life, by extracting it from the visceral meaning of our mundane affairs of living. As Tolstoy [29] argued so vehemently, aesthetics has too often become a parlor game of those wealthy enough to afford museums, concerts, and performances, who then tout the eternal excellence of their preferred artistic achievements, while recognizing no concrete connections to daily existence.

John Dewey wrote Art as Experience [11] in part to counteract what he perceived to be the disengagement of art from life, especially the removal of art into museums, where artworks supposedly become eternal objects of pure aesthetic appreciation. The art museum becomes a temple where we supposedly put aside our worldly cares and engage some transcendent beauty, significance, or truth. He was rightly reacting to the tendency to overlook the pervasiveness of art in all aspects of everyday life – a tendency that occurs whenever we regard artworks as transporting us above the affairs of day-to-day existence. Following Dewey, I am arguing for an aesthetics of our bodily, worldly existence. Such a view places art squarely within everyday life and treats the aesthetic as pertaining to all of the experiential components of human meaning. I shall, therefore, henceforth assume that an artwork, or any object or event, is valuable and meaningful only as it affects me as I am, in this world I inhabit. Once we begin to focus on how we are so affected, we then come to realize the central role of aesthetic dimensions in all aspects of our lives.

Aesthetic Dimensions of Embodied Living Creatures

To say that human beings are complex bodily and social animals is to say that the locus of all our experience, meaning, thought, valuing, communicating, and action is an ongoing series of organism-environment interactions. Dewey [8] preferred the hyphenated term "body-mind" to capture the intimate and intricate interaction of the corporeal, interpersonal, and cultural dimensions of our selfhood. Body and mind are not separate realities, but rather aspects or dimensions of a process of organism-environment interaction, in which organism and environment are interrelated, interdependent, and inter-defined. Consequently, the meaning for us of any object or event arises in the processes of organism-environment interaction that mutually define ourselves and our world. The meaning of any object, person, or event is what it affords us or points to by way of some experience we have or might have – either past, present, or future (possible) experience. For example, the meaning of the cup I see before me is actually a complex of actualized and possible

experiences, including the visual perspectives I can have on it, the ways I can grasp it and use it to drink, the social contexts in which it plays a role, all the past experiences I've had with this and other cups, and a host of future interactions I might have with it as projected possible meanings.

I am adopting what is known as a simulation semantics [2, 4, 13], according to which having a meaningful concept or thought of an object or event involves running a cognitive simulation of a range of possible experiences afforded you by that object or the scene enacted in the event. For example, our concept of a cup is not some abstract, intellectualized Platonic form of cuphood, but rather involves the activation of a functional neuronal cluster for the perceptual images I have of cups and for motor programs for interacting with a cup (reaching for it, touching it, grasping it, raising it to your lips, drinking from it). It also includes all of the feelings and emotional responses associated with cups and their role in our lives, plus any cultural significance cups might have within a particular societal context. The cup exists for me as a horizon of actual and possible "affordances" (to use J.J. Gibson's favored term) that arise from the ways my body-mind can engage that object or event. Aesthetics as a field of inquiry is therefore an investigation into every thing that makes these experiential affordances possible and gives them whatever meaning they have for us. Given our experiential embodiment and embeddedness, we therefore ought to be able to analyze the images, action schemas, radially-structured concepts, conceptual metaphors, metonymies, and feelings and emotions that are afforded us by our world. These meaningful affordances will depend equally, and interdependently, on both the nature of our bodies and the structure of the environments (both physical and cultural) that we inhabit. I will call this inquiry into the visceral sources of meaning "the aesthetics of human understanding and meaning."

Qualitative Aspects of Experience

Let us begin this aesthetic inquiry where Dewey [10, 11] began, with the qualitative character of experience that has traditionally been the concern of aesthetics. Dewey says it best: "The world in which we immediately live, that in which we strive, succeed, and are defeated is preeminently a qualitative world. What we act for, suffer, and enjoy are things in their qualitative determinations" ([10], 243). The central role of qualities in our lives should seem obvious, but that has not kept philosophers from mostly ignoring the workings of those qualities in our day-to-day experience, other than to mark them by concepts such as "red," "sweet," and "juicy." Qualities, however, are not concepts. They are modes of interaction by which an organism discriminates significant aspects of its self and world. When I earlier spoke of objects as "affording" possibilities for meaningful engagement, I was thinking of that engagement primarily in qualitative terms. Human organisms inhabit their world most immediately through their perception of qualities, often at a level beneath conscious awareness. We are in and of the world via qualitative determinations, before we know it.

One of the things we value in the arts is their heightened capacity to present the qualitative aspects of experience – qualitative dimensions that we find it extremely difficult to capture in words and concepts. Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," for example, does not describe or represent the qualities of a situation; rather, the poem presents and enacts those qualitative dimensions by means of images, patterns, and rhythms of the work. When Arnold writes "Listen! You hear the grating roar/Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,/At their return, up the high strand,/ Begin, and cease, and then again begin,/With tremulous cadence slow, and bring/The eternal note of sadness in", the power of the lines comes not merely from any conceptual description, but rather through auditory images that present the qualitative experience of the "grating roar" of the pebbles, and the tremulous cadence of the waves. Meanwhile the syntax of the lines directly enacts the back and forth motion of the pebbles in the waves. The felt rhythm of the waves comes from our parsing of the motion realized by each succeeding phrase of the lines: draw back/and fling/at their return/up the high strand/begin/and cease/and then again begin … Each unit of these lines presents an event of the back and forth motion that you feel of the waves moving up and down the beach. In other words, our understanding of the poem operates through our sensory and motor simulation of the events presented therein.

If you doubt that we live for qualities, then you are out of touch with yourself and your world, for qualities provide the most primordial meaning available to us prior to, and underlying, any conceptual abstraction or conscious reflection we might engage in. Qualities are meaningful in the most immediate way possible for creatures like us. The red flesh around a wound tells us in one case of infection, and in another of the process of healing. The blue sky peeking through the clouds signals the passing of the storm. The desiccated green of the leaves reminds us that it is late summer and the rains have not come. The warm sun on our face on a cool day signals our being at home in the moment. The tartness of the raspberry on our tongue is very heaven, but a different heaven than the feel of your lover's flesh against your skin.

One of Dewey's most important, and yet elusive, ideas about qualities is his claim that every experiential situation we find ourselves in is demarcated by a pervasive unifying quality that gives it its distinct identity and meaning. Although every situation has its unifying quality, Dewey appropriately illustrates this notion with the exemplary case of artworks, because in art the possibilities for meaning are intensified and expanded. In a work of art, Dewey says, "its quality is not a property which it possesses in addition to its other properties. It is something which externally demarcates it from other paintings, and which internally pervades, colors, tones, and weights every detail and every relation of the work of art. The same thing is true of the "quality" of a person or of historic events" ([10], 245). The important thing about the meaning of a pervasive unifying quality of any life situation, person, or work of art is that it is felt before it is known. The qualitative unity is what gives rise to any later abstractive distinctions we can note within our experience. Moreover, any attempt to conceptualize that unity will necessarily select out some particular quality and thereby miss the unity of the whole qualitative unity of the situation. Dewey explains, "The situation cannot present itself as an element in a proposition any more than a universe of discourse can appear as a member of discourse within that universe" ([10], 247).

Within a unified situation, particular objects, with their qualities and relations, stand forth as focal points within a horizon of possible meanings. The "affordances" of any object, person, or event are the standing forth of certain possibilities for meaningful engagement with and within an encompassing situation. The meaning of the event, person, or thing is a cluster of affordances, including possible perceptions, concepts, feeling responses, and modes of interaction that the thing provides for creatures with bodies and cognitive capacities like we have. To offer an illustrative example, let us return to Arnold's "Dover Beach." The successive stanzas present and enact a complex meaningful situation, a situation that we abstractly describe as two lovers at a window at night gazing across the English Channel at Dover toward the French coast, in a way that occasions a somber and profound meditation on life's tumult, fragility, and uncertainty, in the face of which our only hope is our steadfast love and care for one another. The entire developing poem creates an organically unified situation in which this insight emerges and is experienced in all its anxiety and poignancy. That felt qualitative unity is not re-presented by the poem; rather, it is enacted in and realized through the continuous process of the unfolding of the poem. It is not an insight had apart from the poem, which could then be expressed by the lines. Rather, the unique qualitative unity exists only in and through the poem as a whole.

Image-Schematic Patterns of Meaning

Another important aesthetic dimension of meaning stems from the patterns of interaction with our environment that emerge from the makeup, situatedness, and purposive activity of our bodies. Relative to fleas and whales, we are middle-sized creatures whose perceptual and motor capacities allow us to see, touch, taste, smell, and hear certain middle-sized objects. We exist in a gravitational field that constrains the patterns of our bodily movement. We have evolved to stand erect, rather than moving on all fours, and we have an opposable thumb that lets us grasp and manipulate certain objects. Our visual system permits us only to perceive certain wavelengths of light and only to have good depth perception over a limited range of distances. Our auditory system records only a specific range of sound frequencies. In other words, out of our bodily interaction with our environmental affordances, we take the meaning of things and events in certain specified ways, according to specific interactional patterns. George Lakoff [20] and I [15] have called these recurring patterns of interaction image schemas. For example, given our bodily makeup and the contours of our physical environment, verticality is a fundamental meaning structure for creatures like us. Hence, "up" and "down" are used to mark all sorts of significant relations, from simple physical orientations ("he went up the hill") to abstract metaphorical relations ("She climbed the ladder of success," "Prices rose overnight," and "He went up the chain of command to get authority to act"). Up and down have intuitive meaning and value for us because we inhabit our world partly through verticality relations. Another basic image schema is scalar intensity. We

have evolved to experience degrees of intensity of any sensation or quality. Lights get brighter and dimmer, sounds get louder and softer, surfaces go from rougher to smoother, temperatures move from hotter to colder. Change of degree is so basic to our perceptual makeup that every language has syntactic and semantic ways of signaling these basic image-schematic types of change.

Image schemas are pre-reflectively meaningful to us because they mark basic qualitative determinations of our day-to-day experience and they constitute recurring patterns of experiential change, given the nature of our bodies and environments. Besides verticality and scalar intensity, creatures built like us find immediately meaningful such schemas as center-periphery, near-far, in-out, front-back, right-left, balance-unbalance, containment, source-path-goal movement, iteration, straight-curved, locomotion, and so forth. Languages and symbol systems around the world have found ways to indicate these primordial image-schematic meaning structures.

Importantly, image schemas have their own corporeal logic [15, 21]. If, for instance, a ball is in a box (container), the box is in a basket (container), and the basket is in a closet (container), then the ball is in the closet. This is a spatial logic (here a logic of transitive containment), learned by infants prior to any language acquisition. The corporeal image-schematic relation of successive containment is known in formal logic as the Principle of Transitivity (i.e., if A is in B, B is in C, and C is in D, then A is in D). For the most part, humans learn this image-schematic logic without any need of conscious reflection. It is a logic meaningful to us, insofar as it indicates the possibilities and direction of a developing, unfolding experience. Image-schematic inferences guide our reasoning, both nonconscious and conscious.

Image schemas are basic structures of meaning that play a crucial role in every form of human symbolic interaction and communication. As already indicated, they are pervasive in natural languages across the world, operating in both our linguistic expressions concerning our spatial and bodily experience (e.g., “the balloon went straight up”), but equally in metaphorical structuring of our abstract concepts (e.g., “I’m really up today!”). They abound in spontaneous gesture [23] and American Sign Language [28]. Architecture vastly employs image-schematic patterns, such as containment, motion along a path, links, verticality, front-back, near-far, center-periphery [16]. Dance is a symphony of bodily movements and gestures capable of exemplifying every expressive pattern of human motion [27], and this carries over directly into theater performance [22]. Our musical experience and cognition are built on image-schematic patterns [18, 30]. The visual arts utilize the felt qualities, and the bodily logic, of image schemas and concrete images [1, 17].

The Aesthetics of Emotions

Image schemas are not merely skeletal patterns of bodily perception, orientation, and motion. They are also intimately connected to values, emotions, and feelings. What could be more immediately meaningful to us than our visceral emotional

engagement with our world? An experience that we mark out as particularly meaningful is bound to be emotionally charged. And yet, strangely, the field known as Philosophy of Language that emerged in the first half of the twentieth century in Europe and America found it necessary to exclude emotion from any serious treatment of linguistic meaning. The strategy for this dismissal is exemplified in Richards and Ogden's [25] distinction between descriptive (cognitive and truth-conditional) meaning and emotive (non-cognitive) meaning. Logical empiricists tended to distinguish what they called "cognitive" functions of language, such as using sentences with propositional content to describe states of affair or to make truth claims, from what they liked to call "emotive" uses of language to express emotions or psychological attitudes.

Given their primary concern with cognitive meaning, they used this mistaken cognitive/emotive dichotomy as a basis for conveniently ignoring any serious discussion of the central role of emotion in conceptualization and reasoning. This neglect of the affective dimensions of thought has persisted unabated down to the present day in Analytic Philosophy of mind and language.

Today, however, cognitive neuroscience is rapidly dispelling the myth that cognition and reasoning can operate without the involvement of emotions and feelings. On the contrary, it is becoming evident that emotions lie at the heart of our ability to grasp the meaning of any situation in which we find ourselves. Emotions emerged evolutionarily in certain animal species as a way of nonconsciously and automatically monitoring an organism's ongoing relation with its environment and then instituting bodily changes to serve and protect the organism's interests in survival and well-being. In the words of cognitive neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, "emotions provide a natural means for the brain and mind to evaluate the environment within and around the organism, and respond accordingly and adaptively" [9]. In order to survive and flourish, animals need to instinctively avoid situations that could be threatening or harmful, and they need to seek situations that enhance their well-being. For the most part, negative emotions evolved to help an organism avoid unhealthy, dysfunctional, or harmful bodily states, by turning the organism away from the harmful state. Fear reactions, for example, are complex neural and chemical (hormonal) bodily responses to perceived threats within one's environment. Positive emotions, in contrast, tend to move us toward the realization of bodily states conducive to our survival and well-being.

Damasio [6] argues that, whatever else they do, all animals need to establish a permeable boundary within which they maintain a systemic equilibrium. If that equilibrium is significantly disrupted, no organism can long continue to function properly, or even to survive. In response to a disrupted equilibrium, the organism seeks either to return to a pre-set balanced state (i.e., homeostasis), or else it must establish a new dynamic equilibrium (i.e., allostasis) [26]. Emotions arose evolutionarily as one of the processes for monitoring and preserving the integrity, health, and well-being of the animal. Emotions are mostly automatic bodily responses to stimuli that indicate changes in an animal's body state as a result of its changing interaction with its environment. They are a primary means by which an animal tries to re-establish the essential equilibrium of its internal milieu that it needs to con-

tinue functioning. Because emotions play the central role in the maintenance of an animal's integrity and well-being, it is hard to imagine anything more important for monitoring how things are going for the organism, and, therefore, it is hard to imagine anything more directly meaningful to us than our emotional experience.

I [17] have argued that, insofar as emotions allow us to "take the measure" of our current situation and make important responsive changes, they are most certainly meaningful to us at the deepest level of our existence. Emotional response patterns are, literally, changes in our body-state in response to previous changes in our body-state caused by its environment, and they usually precede any reflective thinking or conceptualization. In that sense, they might be called "non-cognitive" (as not conceptual and propositional), but they are nevertheless at the heart of our cognitive processes, taken in the broadest sense, as concerned with all the ways we experience, make, and transform meaning. The central role of emotions in meaning is so obvious to ordinary people that it is puzzling to them to learn that analytic philosophers, until quite recently, have tended to dismiss emotion from their accounts of meaning and knowledge. This is a sad testament to the power of certain entrenched prejudices (such as that philosophy is primarily about the analysis and justification of knowledge claims) that lead us to ignore even the most important phenomena, such as emotions, qualities, and other the aesthetic dimensions of meaning.[4]

Damasio [6, 7] distinguishes between emotional response patterns and feelings of an emotion. The former operate mostly automatically and non-consciously, but sometimes we are able to become conscious of our emotional state; that is, we feel it. Damasio explains that feelings

> are first and foremost about the body, that they offer us the cognition of our visceral and musculoskeletal state as it becomes affected by preorganized mechanisms and by the cognitive structures we have developed under their influence. Feelings let us mind the body, attentively, as during an emotional state, or faintly, as during a background state… . Feelings offer us a glimpse of what goes on in our flesh, as a momentary image of that flesh is juxtaposed to the images of other objects and situations; in so doing, feelings modify our comprehensive notion of those other objects and situations. ([6], 159)

When we feel changes in our bodily state, we become conscious of their ebb and flow, and of the felt qualities of their various dimensions or components. In other words, emotions have aesthetic characteristics. As felt, they have a qualitative dimension, and therefore they are subject to changes in quality, intensity, pace (speed), and directedness. Think of that awful feeling of increasing anxiety – the adrenaline rush, the flushing, the tension of your entire body, the incipient fear – that comes in moments where we feel unsure of ourselves, overwhelmed by circumstances, or fearful of failure or indeterminacy. That fear is a bodily, visceral meaning.

[4] Positive emotions can, of course, sometimes come to be associated with pleasurable states (such as a drug-induced high) that are actually dysfunctional. However, this does not challenge the hypothesis that positive and negative emotions arose over evolutionary history to help types of higher organisms survive, realize well-being, and avoid harm. That these pleasurable feelings can be activated by ultimately harmful substances and situations is simply a reality of contemporary global events and practices.

The arts can allow us to experience the aesthetic dimensions of emotions in an intensified and nuanced manner that is often not available in our day-to-day living. Consider, for example, at least two ways in which the following short poem enacts a certain emotional state.

Quo Vadis
Sometimes I choose a cloud and let it
cross the sky floating me away.
Or a bird unravels its song and carries me
as it flies deeper and deeper into the woods.

Is there a way to be gone and still
belong? Travel that takes you home?
Is that life? – to stand by a river and go.
… William Stafford (*The Way It Is*, 1998)

The first dimension of emotional engagement stems from the way each focal image in the poem evokes a particular quality of an emotional state. There is a very specific floating feeling that accompanies our visual imaging of a cloud drifting silently across a bright sky. We feel light, airy, uplifted, floating. There is a sense of peace, attunement, and harmony. Our imagination of that scene carries us away, buoyed by that cloud. Then, the sweet, precise song of some bird gives rise to that same quality of gentle floating and graceful movement as we follow the sound further into the woods.

It can be difficult to separate the felt quality of, say, floating, from the motion of being carried away by the cloud or the birdsong, but I suggest that the second form of emotional resonance comes from the contour of our developing emotion – the flow and rhythm of the emotion as it develops. The two opening images, I have said, carry us away, and they move us to a different place, which realizes in us a different state.[5] Sometimes we are carried away to places alien, lonely, or frightening; but sometimes we are carried "home", back to a sense of belonging, safety, attunement, and nurturant care. Stafford wonders whether the secret of life is to find a way to let yourself be carried away, but with the faith that your journey will bring you "home". We must learn, he urges us, to "stand by a river and go" – to be present to our changing situation – and to go wherever it might take us. This second kind of emotional response is therefore the feeling of how we move from one emotional state to another, and there is a distinctive rhythm and flow to such movement.

Art can thus evoke emotional responses via imagery that helps to enact a felt sense of some scene or experience, but it can also present (enact) the very patterning of our waxing and waning feelings, as they change in quality, force, directedness, or manner of movement. Music famously accomplishes this latter task, because musical experience is a form of metaphorical motion [18]. Consider, for example, the first few stanzas of "Singin' in the Rain," from the 1952 film of that name. Don

[5] As Lakoff and I [21] have shown, via the STATES ARE LOCATIONS metaphor, we can understand change of state as a change of location (as in "I fell into a depression," "She pushed me over the edge," "I went from joy to anger in a flash"). In the poem, then, a change of location (i.e., being "carried away" by both the cloud and the birdsong) enacts a change in your emotional state.

Lockwood (Gene Kelly) kisses Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds) goodnight on her doorstep and turns around into the rain with a big smile on his face. He shoos away the idling car in front of her apartment and begins to stroll merrily down the street, singing "doo dloo doo doo doo/doo dloo doo doo doo/doo dloo doo doo doo". The rhythm of this merry doo-dloo-doo-ing fairly skips along as he glides and saunters down the street. His gait is open, free, graceful, and flowing, without hint of trouble or tension. Angry, frightened, or tense people do not "doo dloo doo doo." Don pauses, his face uplifted toward the rain, shrugs his shoulders, and closes his umbrella, embracing the rain pouring down on his grinning countenance. He turns to walk again, and begins "I'm siiiiing–in in the rain/Just siiiiing-in in the rain/What a glooor-i-ous feeeeel-ing/I'm haaaa-py again!" The "I'm" is a low D, from which he climbs up to a middle E for the "siiing" of "siiing-in in the rain." The arch up from "I'm" to "siiing" is a felt rush of positive emotional tension – a surging up of sheer joy – mirrored in his floating walk, his upturned face, and his open posture. The melodic contour rises and falls as he saunters. When he gets to "What a glooo-ri-ous feeeeel-ing" he slides upward from "glooo" (low D) to the "ri" (middle G), up to the "ous" (middle A), and even higher up to "feeeeel" (middle C), followed by a flowing drop down to "ing" (middle A). The effect is the felt swelling of positive feeling gushing up and dropping down slightly as it pours out. Analyzing the melodic contour in terms of tones strikes us as almost ridiculous, because the fact is, we just immediately feel the expansive, floating, joy when we hear Kelly sing.

Most of this is so obvious that it may seem almost trivial to note it, but the felt contour of the musical motion is a concrete enactment of a familiar pattern of feeling we all know and desire. Notice that, even when Kelly is singing "Let the stormy clouds chase/Every one from the place/Come on with the rain" – words that might suggest the ominous or gloomy – the accompanying melody continually counteracts this gloomy possibility with its indefatigably cheery felt qualities that get immediately confirmed in the next line, "I've a smiiiiile on my face!" This line is delivered at the very moment Don pauses, opens his arms wide, turns his face upward toward the rain, and smiles a smile big enough to swallow the storm – an iconic image that captures the entire qualitative character of the event. No description of this song and dance number can capture what is obvious to everybody, and which we struggle to express in words. If you know this piece, it will now be making a continuous encore in your auditory imagination, and you probably cannot help but be affected by its infectious positive feelings. I hope you will not curse me for putting this melody on your interior play-back loop for the rest of the day, or even the rest of the week. One could have worse things stuck in their head.

The Aesthetics of Embodied Meaning

I have been arguing that we should see aesthetics as not just a theoretical exploration of the nature of art, or of some allegedly distinct type of experience that we dub "aesthetic", but rather as pertaining to all of the processes by which any aspect of our

experience can be meaningful. I call this the "aesthetics of embodied meaning" (or the "aesthetics of embodied life"), and I have explained it here mostly in terms of formal elements, images, image schemas, qualities (both pervasive unifying qualities and particular qualities of objects or scenes), emotions, and feelings, because these dimensions are too often overlooked in standard accounts of meaning, value, thought, and language. Aesthetics is about the ways embodied social creatures like us experience meaning, and these ways of meaning-making emerge from the nature of our bodies, the way our brains work in those bodies, and the structure of the environments with which we are in continual visceral interaction. On this view, art is not a particular and unique type of activity (as opposed, say, to science, technology, morality, politics, or religion), but rather is a bringing to fulfillment of the possibilities for meaning that have their roots in everyday experience. The arts are therefore exemplary modes of meaning-making, because they give us intensified, nuanced, and complex realizations of the stuff of meaning in everyday life.

The view I am presenting was first put forth 80 years ago by John Dewey in Art as Experience [11], where he says, "I have tried to show in these chapters that the esthetic is no intruder in experience from without, whether by way of idle luxury or transcendent ideality, but that it is the clarified and intensified development of traits that belong to every normally complete experience" ([11], 52–53). In art, we encounter the qualitative elements and processes of human meaning-making in ways that show us fuller possibilities for significance and growth. "Art," says Dewey, "in its form, unites the very same relation of doing and undergoing, outgoing and incoming energy, that makes an experience to be an experience. Because of elimination of all that does not contribute to mutual organization of the factors of both action and reception into one another, and because of selection of just the aspects and traits that contribute to their interpenetration of each other, the product is a work of esthetic art." ([11], 54) We care about the arts and find them important, on the occasions we do, not merely because they entertain us, but more importantly because they enact worlds, or at least modes of experience, that show us the breadth and depth of possibilities for human meaning. Mostly importantly, the arts do this using the elements of meaningful experience that constitute our everyday perceptions, judgments, and actions.

Unsophisticated and overly simplistic imitation theories of art mistakenly place the value of an artwork in its ability to represent something other than itself, such as some aspect of an external, mind-independent reality. This imitation-as-copying account of mimesis evokes the obvious question of why anyone would want such an imitation, if they could get the "real" thing (object, event, experience)? Once we realize that works of art do not re-present objects, events, meaning, knowledge, or experience, but instead that they present and enact possibilities for meaning and value in an exemplary manner, only then will we understand the significance of art. Those who speak of an "aesthetic attitude" as a disengaged, disinterested, abstractive withdrawal from the affairs of everyday life, in search of some fixed, eternal artistic essence, are actually making it impossible for art to mean something for our lives. Though I would rather discard the term, as misleading and dangerous, the only proper sense of "aesthetic attitude" is sensitivity to the forms, images, patterns,

qualities, and emotions that constitute the stuff of meaningful experience. Only when we are attentive to, appropriately critical toward, and creatively engaged with these aesthetic dimensions of embodied life are we able to be “at home” in our world – connected to our environment and to the people around us in constructive, meaningful, and moral ways.

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