

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Non-standard Emotions and Aesthetic Understanding

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## Winner of the Fabian Dorsch ESA Essay Prize.

For cognitivist accounts of aesthetic appreciation, appreciation requires an agent (1) to perceptually respond to the relevant aesthetic features of an object *o* on good evidential grounds, (2) to have an autonomous grasp of the reasons that make the claim about the aesthetic features of *o* true by pointing out the connection between non-aesthetic features and the aesthetic features of *o*, (3) to be able to provide an explanation of why those features contribute to the overall aesthetic value of *o*. In this framework, aesthetic emotions have traditionally been confined to the level of aesthetic perception (1) and dismissed from the process of reasoning (2, 3). I argue that this dismissal is due, firstly, to a questionable perceptual reading of the connection between emotional experience and value, and, secondly, to a narrow focus on the basic emotions. My argument will reveal that the non-standard or 'intellectual' emotions, the emotions which are in fact most important to appreciation, can play a significant epistemic role in our appreciative practices. They can do this because they (a) help us to deliberately focus our attention and (b) place the appreciator in a state of second-order awareness of their mental states. I conclude the paper by showing how these two epistemic tools (a, b) can help the appreciator to meet the explanatory/justificatory conditions (2) and (3).

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**Keywords:** aesthetic appreciation; intellectual emotions; aesthetic understanding; aesthetic rationality

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## I. Emotions in Appreciation beyond Aesthetic Perception

Much of the conversation about the role of emotions within a cognitivist appreciative context has presupposed that emotions are to be situated exclusively at the level of aesthetic perception. We tend to see in the literature how emotions are described as pre-conditions for our comprehension and interpretation of artworks. Emotions are what give us a 'criterial pre-focus' – that is, they cognitively shape and organize how we perceive certain situations.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Noël Carroll, 'Art, Narrative, and Emotion', in *Emotion and the Arts*, ed. Mette Hjort and Sue Laver (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 190–211.

In other words, emotions 'colour' our way of thinking of and experiencing the world.<sup>2</sup> It is the focus on the capacity of emotions to generate patterns of salience and to help us phenomenologically understand certain aesthetic properties that has contributed to the idea that emotions are an important component of aesthetic perception.

With this paper, I want to question some aspects of this characterization about the role of emotions in our aesthetic judgements. The main question I want to explore is: can emotions be of value besides their contribution to perception, such as to aesthetic justification (in the sense of providing reasons), and in that case, how? At first glance, an appeal to the emotions might not look like a very promising route if we are to endow our aesthetic practices with rationality. Intuitively, emotions seem to be connected exclusively with the experiential side of appreciation. Yet the particular aim of this paper is precisely to start arguing for the participation of emotions in the activity of aesthetic reason-giving. I take it that this is an important issue that has hitherto been too easily dismissed by the cognitivist.<sup>3</sup> On my view, emotional responses are going to operate as a sort of 'mediator' between our aesthetic responses and explanations of value. I think that an exploration of this issue will be conducive to a better understanding of the existing relations between the different components of our aesthetic psychology.

## II. Aesthetic Understanding

Drawing from Alison Hills's and Noël Carroll's cognitive views on appreciation, I am going to propose an account where to appropriately engage with an aesthetic object is to come to *understand why* it merits our attention. Although, I will defend that their accounts should not be fully taken as they stand. The reason for this is that they both fail in accommodating the affective dimension of our responses to aesthetic value.

According to a cognitivist approach, to appreciate an object is to come to epistemically grasp its content and how this content is presented.<sup>4</sup> We could say that this view is in opposition to a pure affectivist account, where appreciation is cashed out in terms of aesthetic experience. So, whilst for the affectivist the aesthetic value of an object is recognized through experience and measured according to the pleasure derived from such experience, for the cognitivist, aesthetic value is neither constituted nor explained by the capacity of its possessor to please.<sup>5</sup> The cognitivist believes that there is something independent of one's own experience that needs to be evaluated. However, on my view, this does not imply that one's emotional perspective plays no part in such evaluation. Emotions can also help an appreciator to grasp and explain *why* something is aesthetically valuable without our evaluations falling into aesthetic relativism – a worry adverted by the cognitivist.<sup>6</sup> We can call this capacity: 'emotional understanding'. I believe that it is by looking at the different requirements

<sup>2</sup> For more on cognitive emotional colouring, see Richard Wollheim, *On the Emotions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 15, 75–76.

<sup>3</sup> Two key papers that propose a cognitivist approach to aesthetic appreciation are: Noël Carroll, 'Art Appreciation', *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 50 (2016): 1–14, and Alison Hills, 'Aesthetic Understanding', in *Making Sense of the World*, ed. Stephen R. Grimm (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 160–74.

<sup>4</sup> I am distinguishing a 'cognitivist' approach to aesthetic appreciation from 'aesthetic cognitivism'. I take aesthetic cognitivism to be a theory about an object's aesthetic value being a source of knowledge or understanding, whereas cognitivist accounts of aesthetic appreciation refer to the nature of the states and process involved in the understanding of the aesthetic object in question.

<sup>5</sup> The affectivist view should not be confused with aesthetic hedonism. The former is a view about the role of pleasure in (the formation of / justification of) aesthetic judgement, whereas the latter is a view about the value of aesthetic experience or pleasure.

<sup>6</sup> I understand an emotional perspective as one that represents reality as concerned with what is emotionally significant or valuable to one.

involved in the process of aesthetic valuing that we can start making a case for an amendment of this cognitivist picture.

### ***II.1. 'Seeing' Aesthetic Value***

The first issue that I would like to draw some attention to is the difference between appreciative acts and other aesthetic acts. It is important to take into consideration that appreciating an object is not just a matter of knowing facts about it. Direct or indirect factual knowledge, we could say, can only help us to form a *belief* about its aesthetic character. There is no doubt that having information about the aesthetic object under scrutiny is fundamental to having an appropriate engagement with it. For example, when engaged with an artwork it is important to have relational knowledge about it, such as historical information about the period and style in which the artwork was produced. The point I wish to stress here is that to appreciate requires something *extra* than having access to a detailed list of facts about a work. In other words, aesthetic judgements that are conducive to the appreciation of an object are not description-based justified attributions. Appreciation goes beyond a mere act of knowledge; to appreciate, as some authors have suggested, also involves an 'experience of value'.<sup>7</sup>

How are we then to account for that 'extra' that differentiates appreciation from other actions that merely lead to belief? Traditionally, it has been said that to have an experience of an aesthetic object by appropriate means involves some form of 'perceptual acquaintance'. Thus, it is no surprise that the first condition to properly appreciate an artwork is

- (1) to be perceptually aware of the relevant aesthetic features of an object *o* on good evidential grounds.

This is a long-standing requirement famously referred to as the 'Acquaintance Principle' by Richard Wollheim, which states that first-hand perception is necessary for having a bona fide aesthetic judgement.<sup>8</sup> The acquaintance principle requires that one has had an experience with an aesthetic object first-hand (direct or mediated in the case of reproductions or non-perceptual objects). It's on the basis of that experience that one ought to form an aesthetic judgement. We could say that this principle aims to normatively explain how an 'aesthetic' judgement is connected to sensorial perception. Appreciation starts with perception, but it does not stop there.

### ***II.2. Sizing-up Aesthetic Value***

Once we have come to identify the particular aesthetic features of an object, the second step is to engage in an open process of exploration. The cognitivist thinks that in our aesthetic encounters there is a *doing* involved, where an agent is not merely in a receptive position to the environment but in an active one. To be involved in this process of exploration is to engage with an aesthetic object by coming to understand the non-inferential relations of dependence between its aesthetic and non-aesthetic features.<sup>9</sup> The identification of the set of non-aesthetic properties (for example, colour, lines, composition, texture) which are responsible for the aesthetic effects (for example, grace, balance, unity) is something that we

<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of the estimative and sensiblist dimensions of appreciation, see Victor Yelverton Haines, 'Appreciating Art Appreciation', *Journal of Value Inquiry* 34 (2000): 529–43.

<sup>8</sup> For Wollheim's original formulation, see his *Art and Its Objects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

<sup>9</sup> For recent discussion about the relevance of aesthetic autonomy, see C. Thi Nguyen, 'Autonomy and Aesthetic Engagement', *Mind* (forthcoming); María José Alcaraz León, 'Beauty and the Agential Dimension of the Judgment of Taste', in *On Beauty*, ed. Wolfgang Huemer and Ingrid Vendrell Ferran (Munich: Philosophia, 2019), 123–44.

can do in different ways; either by drawing comparisons with similar objects, reexperiencing the object of appreciation, or following a critic's explanation. What characterizes aesthetic appreciation is not just to have a valuable experience of an object via perception, nor the quest for the truth in the form of an aesthetic belief, but the open process in which we gain a first-person insight about how an object has its aesthetic character. According to Frank Sibley, being able to point out the relationship between an artwork's aesthetic and non-aesthetic features does not only 'satisfy a curiosity' about how an artwork works, but it can also help us to trust our judgement with more confidence and to make it articulate.<sup>10</sup> So, whereas the acquaintance principle stresses the idea that aesthetic judgement requires the operation of the senses, this autonomy principle reminds us of the importance of the first-person dimension of *judging*. So the second requirement to appropriately appreciate an object is to

- (2) have an autonomous grasp of the reasons that make the claim about the aesthetic features of *o* true, by pointing out the connection between the non-aesthetic features and the aesthetic features of *o*.

To recap, appreciative judgements ask for an engagement with *o* through one's own means, this engagement being the result of an agent's aesthetic abilities. Now, for the cognitivist, aesthetic valuing is also thought to be a reason-giving activity in which one is expected to be able to provide, to oneself and others, the reasons *why* the perceived aesthetic features of *o* are seen as good-making features. This helps to indicate where we stand in relation to our understanding of an object's aesthetic goodness. Thus, we need to take a further step if we want to come to fully appreciate *o*.

### **II.3. Explaining Aesthetic Value**

For someone like Alison Hills, the third requirement is one that aims to make a connection between having an appropriate response by one's own means and demonstrating a grasp of the reasons that ground our response by providing aesthetic explanations – even though these rationalizations can be of a rather minimal kind.<sup>11</sup> This would give us the following condition. An agent must:

- (3) be able to provide an explanation of why the aesthetic features of *o*, and other contextual non-perceptual features, contribute (or not) to the aesthetic value of *o*.

Following Hills, I will call the appreciative process in which an agent performs (1, 2, 3) aesthetic understanding. Aesthetic understanding then has to do with being perceptually aware of the relevant properties of an object and being properly oriented towards the reasons that would help an agent explain why she has ascribed certain aesthetic properties, and not others, to the object – in the sense of detecting the underlying structure of the object that is understood. Thus, there are two levels in appreciation; the level of 'aesthetic perception' (1), which provides an appreciator with the experiential grounding to form an adequate aesthetic judgement, and the level of 'aesthetic reasoning' (2, 3), which has to do with the critical report of a perception in the form of an aesthetic judgement.<sup>12</sup> We could say that, whilst aesthetic

<sup>10</sup> Frank Sibley, 'Aesthetic and Non-aesthetic', in *Approach to Aesthetics: Collected Papers on Philosophical Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 37.

<sup>11</sup> Hills, 'Aesthetic Understanding', 167–69. Importantly, for Hills, aesthetic understanding comes in degrees. The complexity of our explanations in a way reveal the degree of understanding the appreciator has.

<sup>12</sup> For an analysis about the difference between aesthetic perception and aesthetic reasoning, and its importance for cognitivism, see Elisabeth Schellekens, 'Towards a Reasonable Objectivism for Aesthetic Judgements', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 46 (2006): 163–77.

perception has to do with the experience of the aesthetic character of an object, aesthetic reasoning aims to rationally support one's initial aesthetic perception.

Another important defendant of a critical reason-giving approach to appreciation is Carroll. Carroll uses the terms of *active understanding* and *interpretative reasoning* to refer to the kind of abilities that the agent needs to put into play to achieve appreciation.<sup>13</sup> In the case of artistic appreciation, to exercise these abilities is to discover *how* an artwork has managed to reach the desired goals intended by the author. This evaluation would also require an agent to attend to non-perceptual features that are not to be found in the work itself, such as reflecting upon the context of production, identifying under which artistic category the work falls, attending to the authorial intentions, and the function and meaning of the work for its original audience.

Now that we have a better sense of what it means to appreciate, it is time that we start elucidating the place of emotion within this framework. In the case of Carroll, for example, even though he accepts that the understanding of the value of an artwork can sometimes come mediated by an agent's response to the particular expressive features of an artwork, the role of emotions in appreciation have nothing to do with the agent's exercise of her emotional capacities, but more likely with the kind of pleasure derived from 'coming to see things clearly'. The main worry for Carroll is that an agent's subjective responses to value can skew the evaluative process of discovering why something is aesthetically valuable.<sup>14</sup> That is, an agent's emotional responses can in some way 'taint' the objectivity that we demand from this process. For that reason, Carroll thinks that the understanding of aesthetic value demands an *impersonal* stance. On similar lines, Hills does not seem to give a specific space to emotions per se in her aesthetic understanding account, although we find a suggestion in the following passage about how engagement with an artwork can involve responding in 'noncognitive' ways to aesthetic value:

Sometimes, the different sorts of response support each other: the noncognitive response, for instance, which might be a type of pleasure or feeling, may inform the cognitive response; a belief that the artwork has merit. And a better understanding both of the work itself, the aesthetic qualities it has and how they contribute to its value, may refine your noncognitive response, changing the quality or intensity of pleasure or make available further kinds of pleasure or feeling.<sup>15</sup>

Hills believes that an appreciator's cognitive and affective responses relate to each other in the formation of a value judgement. But what we find here is that the non-cognitive or feeling part involved in artistic engagement is defined as the 'pleasurable' aspect of appreciation, where this pleasurable experience works, in the first place, as a way of signalling to the subject that a work is worthy of attention. However, affect seems to do this in a non-rational way since it is 'a better understanding of the work itself' through cognition that ultimately determines *why* a work is valuable. Is this the best way to account for the role of affect in appreciation from a cognitivist framework?

### III. Emotional Understanding

Emotions, as contemporary philosophy of emotions and cognitive sciences inform us, are reducible to neither feeling nor cognition, but involve both elements. So if we are to make sense of the emotions felt during appreciation, these cannot be reducible to a mere pleasurable

<sup>13</sup> See Noël Carroll, 'Hume's Standard of Taste', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43 (1984): 181–94.

<sup>14</sup> Carroll, 'Art Appreciation', 2–3, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Hills, 'Aesthetic Understanding', 173.

feeling nor understood as completely separate from the more cognitively demanding tasks, such as evaluating the aims and purposes of an artwork.

A fair question to ask is if appreciation can be exhausted in epistemic terms. Briefly, making a parallel with a discussion on cognitive goods, we could say that the sort of understanding that results from the appreciative view described above serves as a fundamental good for a flourishing life: *intellectual autonomy*. This is the good of being epistemically self-reliant, where this involves taking ownership of one's epistemic position.<sup>16</sup>

Is, then, aesthetic understanding just a case of intellectual seeing? I would say no. Though there are important parallels, there is at least one important difference: when judging *o* aesthetically, the first-personal perspective involved is importantly emotional in character, in the sense that to aesthetically appreciate is also to exercise a *sensibility*.

Aesthetic appreciation is cognitive insofar as it depends on how the world is presented to the subject, but it is also emotional, in the sense that 'valuing' includes a personal take on how that same world is revealed to us.<sup>17</sup> It seems difficult to comprehend what it means to value if we end up divorcing our assessments from our sensibility. For this reason, I think that it is more accurate to describe aesthetic judgements as those that are the result of an agent's emotional understanding of an object's aesthetic value.

Let's see with an example what I am arguing for. According to the understanding view, to appreciate Grace Paley's short stories we would need to go through the reading process in a way in which we were able to recognize that what makes her stories good and acute is, in part, that the voices of her New York characters sound as if they were completely real. And we can do this by pointing out non-aesthetic properties, such as textual features or the kind of vocabulary or expressions used by the characters. However, in order to grasp the full range of reasons about the value of her short stories, we do more than merely 'understand' their content; we need also to be able to align our emotional perspective to what we perceptually recognize as valuable in the work. Our emotional responses are precisely what allows us to account for the *fragility* of her puzzled and messy characters, or to admire her *courage* when she advises loving more and better to suffer less. We could say that this form of understanding is not exactly a particular way of perceiving the work, but of being responsive to it.

Now, if this sounds convincing, the next question is how these emotional responses contribute in any way to the justification of the proper estimation of the value of the work (and not merely to one's personal concerns). For the rest of the essay, I will work towards a theory of aesthetic emotions that is able to provide us with an epistemic story that can explain this issue.

#### IV. Questioning a Standard-Perceptual Model for Aesthetic Emotions

As said in the previous section, rather than viewing emotion as being opposed to reason, contemporary philosophy of emotions no longer takes emotional states as being completely devoid of cognition, or reducible to the subjective bodily sensations they involve.<sup>18</sup> A widely held thought in this field is that emotions have a positive epistemic role in that they can constitute reasons for our beliefs and judgements, or can provide information about our evaluative situation by making things salient to us. To the question of how emotions can provide us with information about the things that matter to us, we could say that for these emotion theorists, an emotional experience can be evidence of value in an analogous way to

<sup>16</sup> Duncan Pritchard, 'Seeing It for Oneself: Perceptual Knowledge, Understanding, and Intellectual Autonomy', *Episteme* 13 (2016): 29–42.

<sup>17</sup> See Samuel Scheffler, 'Valuing', in *Reasons and Recognition: Essays on the Philosophy of T. M. Scanlon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 24–39, for a defence of emotional sensibility as definitory of our valuing activities.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion on why emotions should be seen as evaluative *intentional* affective responses, see Bennet W. Helm, 'Emotions as Evaluative Feelings', *Emotion Review* 1 (2009): 248–55.

how perceptual experience can be evidence of a non-evaluative situation. I will call this view the Epistemic Value Claim (EVC) about emotions.<sup>19</sup>

One of the main proponents of this direct perceptual access strategy is Christine Tappolet, who has famously argued that emotions are analogous to sensory perceptions in that they allow us to be aware of certain features of the world, namely values. For Tappolet, emotions are at least able to do this under favourable circumstances when nothing interferes with them.<sup>20</sup> The analogy is that, just as the perception of the colour red epistemically grounds my belief that there is something of that colour in the world, the emotion of fear experienced with respect to an angry dog informs me that the dog is *fearsome*. Although most theorists of emotions do not look to the aesthetic context, a fair question to ask is if this claim holds in aesthetics. I will explore if the EVC provides a good explanation of the connection between aesthetic emotions and the reasons adduced by an agent in support of her aesthetic value judgements. I will also give reasons why we need to fine-tune two important pillars on which the claim rests if we are to extrapolate it to our aesthetic appreciative practices: firstly, the focus on the basic emotions, and, secondly, the perceptualist approach to the connection between emotions and value.

#### **IV.1. Complex Emotions for Complex Activities**

The first concern I have with the default view, especially when applied to complex aesthetic activities such as appreciation, has to do with the kind of emotions that the claim has adopted as its paradigm. These are the basic emotions. The basic emotions are those identified with Paul E. Griffiths's so-called affect-program responses; these are sub-personal and pre-cognitive appraisals of adaptive value to some important aspect of the subject's environment or circumstances.<sup>21</sup> These affective appraisals are characterized as short-term, reflexive, and pan-cultural phylogenetically bodily responses to a limited class of perceptual inputs. The thought is that these affect-program responses can occur in the absence of higher cognitive processing and thus without prior evaluative thought or belief. So if, for example, we think of the emotion of fear in these terms, then the affect-program of fear constitutes an appraisal of something as being a threat, since this emotion has been configured by evolution to be triggered by something perceived in the subject's environment that could damage her well-being or that of those who she cares about. Now, what is it that I consider problematic about this model?

The problem that accounts based on basic emotions face is how to make further progress in the epistemology of emotions when they are only looking to how a singular set of emotions work, the set paradigmatically devoid of complex cognition. As pointed out by Peter Goldie, this 'simple' model has serious difficulties when trying to make sense of the idea that emotions can be directed towards matters of intellectual, ethical, religious, or aesthetic import.<sup>22</sup> If we are interested in understanding the epistemic capacities of aesthetic emotions, then it is *prima facie* unlikely that an explanation of how we perceive the *dangerousness* of a dog will provide much illumination. Perceiving the dangerousness of dogs and perceiving the *wit-tiness* and *poignancy* of John Baldessari's conceptual work are two quite different activities. Active reflection through exploration is a central part of the appropriateness of the emotional response in the aesthetic case. It is also the case, importantly, that the story we tell about basic emotions – its reference to automaticity and adaptive import – does not fit well

<sup>19</sup> Important defenders of this claim are Ronald de Sousa, Catherine Z. Elgin, Robert Solomon, Martha Nussbaum, Sabine Döring, Julien A. Deonna, Fabrice Teroni, and Christine Tappolet.

<sup>20</sup> Christine Tappolet, *Emotions, Value, and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Paul E. Griffiths, *What Emotions Really Are: The Problem of Psychological Categories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> See Peter Goldie, 'Intellectual Emotions and Religious Emotions', *Faith and Philosophy* 28 (2011): 93–101.

with the non-instrumental motivation that characterizes many of our evaluative activities.<sup>23</sup> Building on this, and assuming that emotions form a heterogeneous group, I propose that we look next at what are known as the ‘non-standard emotions’.<sup>24</sup>

Non-standard emotions are the kind of feelings that correspond to the intellectual and other secondary emotions: delight, wonder, contemplation, awe, fascination, courage, worry, doubt, epistemic curiosity, concern, tenacity, hope, nostalgia. Unlike basic emotions, these higher cognitive emotions are not automatically triggered but require attentive reflection in the moment of experience. Since we do indeed recognize that feelings can be mediated by thoughts, insights, and concepts, and be directed towards things that go beyond the bounds of one’s own body, I think it is time that we bring in the study of these emotions in aesthetics. It is worth mentioning that attending to the nature of these emotions when trying to do justice to the peculiarities of our aesthetic judgements is not a novel proposal. As Paisley Livingston has recently pointed out, authors such as Edward Gurney and the physician Carl Georg Lange already considered the need to mark a distinction between basic and secondary emotions in the 1880s.<sup>25</sup> These thinkers considered these complex emotions, which arise on the basis of higher cognitive attitudes, to be the relevant emotional responses to focus on in complex evaluative situations. The problem is that recent work on emotions seems to have ignored or explicitly denied their existence,<sup>26</sup> though there are some exceptions. For example, psychologists Nico H. Frijda and Louise Sundararajan take aesthetic emotions to be ‘refined emotions’ that do not seem to fit well within the standard model of emotions, because they are ‘emotions that are not done justice by simple emotion labels, [...] emotions aroused by perceiving objects of art, often called aesthetic emotions, which pose unresolved problems for theories of emotion’. To be an emotion with refinement ‘is an appropriate designation for emotions that show few outward signs but still involve strong feelings and that share the following features: They occur under attitudes of detachment and restraint, [and] their experience involves reflexive second order awareness.’<sup>27</sup>

For Frijda and Sundararajan, non-standard emotions are not a different kind of emotions or a subset of feelings. Non-standard or refined emotions are for them a *mode of feeling* determined by the degree of cognition or self-reflection involved in one’s emotional experience. Thus, we can identify paradigmatic *refined* emotions as, for example, ‘epistemic curiosity’, but we can also have a refined feeling with the same basic emotion label such as ‘fear’ or ‘anger’. Even if I am prone to think that most of our emotional responses in aesthetic engagement involve refined feelings, I do not want to take a stance in this debate about whether there is only one or several ontological kinds of emotions. I think that for the purposes of this essay it does not make much of a difference to take non-standard emotions as a mode of feeling or as an independent sub-set of emotions.

The prevalence of a basic model and a perceptual reading of the epistemic value of emotions is also to be found in contemporary aesthetic theories interested in the question of art appreciation. An influential account that represents what has become the standard view

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>24</sup> I draw here on Michael Stocker, ‘Intellectual and Other Nonstandard Emotions’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion*, ed. Peter Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 401–23. Stocker here is in turn responding to William James’s categorization of the ‘standard’ emotions as found in his seminal ‘What Is an Emotion?’, *Mind* 9 (1884): 188–205.

<sup>25</sup> Paisley Livingston, ‘Lange vs James on Emotion, Passion, and the Arts’, *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 85 (2019): 39–56.

<sup>26</sup> See Anne Meylan, ‘Epistemic Emotions: A Natural Kind?’, *Philosophical Inquiries* 2 (2014): 173–90.

<sup>27</sup> Nico H. Frijda and Louise Sundararajan, ‘Emotion Refinement: A Theory Inspired by Chinese Poetics’, *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 2 (2007): 227.



about the epistemic role of emotions in art appreciation is Jenefer Robinson's neo-Jamesian account. In Robinson's words:

Emotional understanding is in the first instance a kind of bodily understanding: my affective appraisals of characters, events, and situations are automatic and instinctive, and they immediately produce physiological and behavioural responses that reinforce these emotional appraisals.<sup>28</sup>

Here, like in the emotion theories modelled upon Griffiths's affect-program responses, we find a tight relation posited between an aesthetic emotion and a bodily response. This bodily reaction, according to Robinson, helps the subject to focus attention upon those things in the environment that matter to her. Emotions for Robinson are useful to appreciation because they serve the double function of, first, alerting us to what is epistemically significant by making salient relevant aesthetic features of the work, and, second, by motivating us to critically evaluate the appropriateness of this initial response. The thought is that when reflecting upon the bodily feelings experienced during engagement with an artwork the appreciator comes to perceive that the artwork possesses a certain evaluative property, such as being pitiable, horrifying, or amusing. However, it is not clear to me why having our emotions evoked is, in the first place, a route to understanding, and not just to the formation of an aesthetic belief about the presence of an emotional property or a way of accessing the phenomenal content of an aesthetic concept.<sup>29</sup>

As explained in the previous section, to appreciate is more than to perceptually recognize certain aesthetic features in an object. So I take there to be an unanswered and highly relevant question here: How and why is the emotion felt by the appreciator contributing to her judgement about the aesthetic value of *o*? A standard model of aesthetic emotions aspires to provide a story about how to secure the appropriateness of a subjective bodily feeling. This is not a justificatory explanation about whether the aesthetic property disclosed by the emotion relates in any way to the overall value of the work. In other words, to come to know if our feelings are fitting or not to certain elements of an artwork seems like a different issue from coming to understand a work's aesthetic value. Thus, what we are looking for when studying the place of emotion in appreciation is also an explanation about how (and in which ways) emotions can contribute to the grounding of our aesthetic judgements.

#### ***IV.2. Emotional and Perceptual States Relate Differently to Reasons***

The second problem standard theories of emotions face has to do with how emotional and perceptual states relate differently to reasons. As Michael Brady has recently showed, this disanalogy seems to be strong enough to count against an epistemological comparison between these two states, even if both appear to have points in common given their shared phenomenal character and the automaticity in their response. Extrapolating to aesthetics, what is questionable about the perception-emotion correlation is the thought that when undergoing an emotion in the process of reading a novel, listening to a piece of music, or contemplating a painting, we have access to an evaluative concept or property of the work in an analogous way to how we discover something about the world through direct perceptual experience.

In *Emotional Insight*, Brady casts doubt on the analogy between emotions and perceptions in connection to reasons, when he argues that emotional experiences are not genuine

<sup>28</sup> Robinson, *Deeper than Reason*, 127.

<sup>29</sup> I have expanded on this elsewhere, see my 'Robinson and Self-Conscious Emotions', *Debates in Aesthetics* 14 (2019): 74–95.

evidence for evaluative judgements but are merely proxy or *pro tempore* reasons.<sup>30</sup> I suggest that we look at an example proposed by Brady in order to shed some light on this line of criticism. The example is the following. Imagine that you wake up one morning feeling guilty about how you behaved at a colleague's party the previous evening. In this case, Brady thinks that we should not consider that the feeling of guilt *by itself* is a conclusive reason for us to believe that we did anything wrong at the party. The relation between having an emotion and declaring there is an evaluative property in the world is not straightforward as in perceptual experience. For Brady when feeling guilty,

I am typically motivated or inclined to seek and discover reasons or evidence that bear on the question of whether I am right to feel guilty, reasons which confirm or disconfirm my emotional sense that I behaved badly. This suggests that in cases like these – which seem to be obvious cases of emotional responses in normal conditions – we typically do not rest content with our emotional appraisal. We do not, that is, take our emotional responses at face value, or think that they are true by default. Instead, we feel the need for justification to be pressing: we are motivated to seek out facts or considerations which bear on the correctness of our emotional response.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast with cases of normal perceptual experience in emotional cases, what we are motivated to do is to search for the features that explain our appraisals. Thus, what counts as evidence of something being shameful, fearsome, or admirable, is not going to be my emotional state (feeling guilty, scared, or in awe), but the features or considerations that also make the emotion appropriate. Accordingly, the fact that emotions – as opposed to perceptions – cannot themselves be responses to reasons suggests that the justificatory story we tell with regard to evaluative beliefs will be rather different from the justificatory story we tell about empirical beliefs. But, this does not mean for Brady that emotions have no epistemic value at all. Emotions can still help to provide new insights into a specific domain by putting the agent undergoing the emotion in an attentive position to seek further evidence with respect to the truth of an evaluative belief. In other words, emotions do not constitute reasons by themselves but invite us to search for reasons.

On the basis of the analysis above, I suggest that to emotionally understand an artwork is to reflectively attend to those facts that our emotions direct us toward, and then to make sense of those facts (non-aesthetic features) in connection with the overall theme of the artwork, in order to understand or gain insight into the work's aesthetic character. The emotions experienced in the process of appreciating an artwork do not give us direct access to the aesthetic properties present in a work as perceptions do. Emotions cannot do this because they do not have that kind of epistemic relation with value. In the same way, that a feeling of guilt is not a conclusive reason to judge an action as unjust, aesthetic emotions do not disclose or reveal the beauty of an artwork *in* experience. The epistemic value of our emotional responses to art (for example, responding to a work with admiration, curiosity, disgust, love, distress) resides in their capacity to motivate us to search for the facts that explain our perception of a work's aesthetic properties – facts that will also justify these responses. Although aesthetic emotions are responses to the aesthetic character of a work they do not automatically make us 'see' a work's aesthetic value, instead, they motivate us to search for the 'non-aesthetic' features of the work. These non-aesthetic features are the set of properties that make our emotions appropriate and, most importantly, are what counts as an aesthetic reason about how we

<sup>30</sup> Michael S. Brady, *Emotional Insight: The Epistemic Role of Emotional Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

aesthetically perceive an artwork. Emotions, then, work as mediators between our experiences and our explanations of value.

Next, I will explain how attending to the nature of non-standard emotions can help us retain emotions in appreciation without falling into the worries the standard perceptualist picture presents.

## V. The Epistemic Value of Non-standard Emotions

In this last section, I want to give some final ideas on how non-standard emotions can have a place in appreciation beyond aesthetic perception. I close the paper with the analysis of a particular artistic example, which helps illustrate how my proposal plays out in practice.

In the first place, non-standard emotions seem to be able to help an agent to (a) focus her attention in a deliberate way, and, secondly, (b) place an agent in a state of second-order awareness of her mental states. I believe that these two characteristics can serve as valuable epistemic tools to help the appreciator meet the double requirement for aptly understanding an aesthetic object, especially at what the cognitivist identifies as the level of aesthetic reasoning (2, 3). As explained in Section II, this level comprises the following requirements for aptly engaging with an object in a way that leads to appreciation:

(2) to have an autonomous grasp of the reasons that make the claim about the aesthetic features of *o* true by pointing at the connection between the non-aesthetic features and the aesthetic features of *o*;

(3) to be able to provide an explanation of why the aesthetic features of *o*, and other contextual non-perceptual features, contribute (or not) to the aesthetic value of *o*.

Now, with regard to (a) being valuable for (2), we saw in the last section how Brady provided a model of emotions connected to the exploration of reasons. My thought is that non-standard emotions can afford a mode of attention different to the attention involved in the basic emotions: *intellectual attention*. This form of engaging with an artwork can motivate the aesthetic appreciator to grasp the reasons that would support her investigation about aesthetic dependence in a conscious, controlled, and goal-directed manner.<sup>32</sup> Given that the object of aesthetic appreciation is one that must be interpreted and evaluated in a careful and thorough manner, it is natural to think that the critical reflection involved in the aesthetic case is going to be more challenging than the one we need in cases of basic fear.

Secondly, as regards (b) being relevant to (3), coming to understand why it is that we find something aesthetically valuable – even if it is by delivering a minimal kind of explanation – is a difficult task. Especially given that it in some sense demands from the appreciator a reflective awareness of the mechanics of their own aesthetic psychology.<sup>33</sup> The task of introspecting about one's occurrent mental states when giving an explanation of value is something which non-standard emotions, particularly the self-conscious type, are well-suited to help with. The line of critique about the fragility of aesthetic knowledge and the difficulty of justifying one's value judgements is based largely on the fact that such attitudes concerning artworks are thought to be unreflectively formed. These sorts of aesthetic responses are most often heavily

<sup>32</sup> For contemporary discussions on intellectual attention, see Elena Cagnoli Fieccconi, 'Aristotle on Attention', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (forthcoming), and Mark Fortney, 'Conceptualizing Intellectual Attention', *Theory & Psychology* 29 (2019): 775–88.

<sup>33</sup> See Richard Nisbett and Timothy Wilson's well-known experiments, recollected in 'Telling More than We Can Know: Verbal Reports on Mental Processes', *Psychological Review* 84 (1977): 231–59. See also Sherri Irvin, 'Is Aesthetic Experience Possible?', in *Aesthetics and the Sciences of Mind*, ed. Gregory Currie et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 37–56.

based on the standard primary emotive reactions: laughter, anger, sentimental feeling, suspense, and so on. So, this objection doesn't really target the kinds of more complex and reasons-based aesthetic responses I have been focusing on with regard to non-standard emotions. The latter emotions are more likely to contribute to flexible reasons-based responses that are actually a matter of understanding.

Finally, in order to illuminate these two points, I would like to look at *Ena and Betty, Daughters of Asher and Mrs Wertheimer* (1901) by John Singer Sargent. With this example, I also want to apply some of the issues mentioned throughout the essay. Let's see now what a theory of emotions for aesthetic appreciation modelled upon the non-standard emotions would look like.

In engaging with *Ena and Betty*, we could say that complex feelings such as freedom, courage, and calmness are experienced, or recognized as relevant, when confronted with the painting. And when we reflectively attend to these experiences we notice that much of what makes Ena (on the right side of the painting) fully alive is the gracious way in which she holds her sister. But most importantly, it is the half-smile Sargent gives her, which makes her appear brave and full of joy. The autonomy that Ena breathes, and transmits to the viewer, is achieved by comparison. It is when we turn our eyes towards Betty, a figure where calmness and decorum reigns, that we better perceive the force of Ena. This blend of freedom and serenity conveyed by the painting makes us see the sisters as companions or equals, balancing and complementing each other's character. There is also something eerie about this painting. A feeling caused by the darkness that emanates from the background of the scene, but also due to the great contrast produced by these dark tones and the cold white light that emanates from the figures' skin. This state of suspense that the work puts the viewer in conduces us to keep investigating what explains this aesthetic effect. One of the things we discover in our engagement is that there is an important narrative element in the painting. So even though the figures are clearly posing, if we attend to certain details we come to see that Ena gives the impression of being caught by surprise. Ena's smile, teeth, and slightly open jaw invite us to think that there was a story before and after this precise moment captured by the artist. A story that the spectator is invited to complete in her imagination. It is said that the excellence of a portrait resides in the gaze of the portrayed subject, but in Sargent's case, it is in the depiction of the mouth where the truth of character resides. Think, for example, of Sargent's portrait of Henry James where we perceive the same strategy. It is now that we can finally grasp why there is something suspenseful in Sargent. In other words, we have now access to the set of reasons (facts about the work) that will help us ground our aesthetic judgement about the work.

On the standard model, the admiration and eeriness felt throughout our engagement would themselves be thought to provide us with reasons to use in our judgement (once we have secured the appropriateness of the feeling). However, on the model I am offering, these states are only something which puts us in search of the reasons about the true nature of the object. These feelings, for example, push us to consider the expressions on each of the sisters' faces. When we do so we further note the joy in Ena, and in turn how this joy is given to her by Sargent through the depiction of the mouth. This lively depiction also allows us to understand the narrative component of this painting. This is something that helps us situate Sargent's portraits in between the work of old masters such as Velázquez or Ingres and the modern paintings of Hopper. The thought here is that our emotional response doesn't itself provide direct epistemic justification about the presence of a certain aesthetic property, it rather directs our attention in such a way that we pick out the contours of the mouth as crucial in depicting the psychology of Ena, which in turn also helps us explain the initial suspenseful feeling in attending to the work. But it is *how* the mouth is depicted what would work as a justifying reason about the content of one's judgement. At the same time, it is once

we have access to this relation between the non-aesthetic features and the aesthetic features of the work that we can come to understand *why* there is something suspenseful in Sargent. We are now in a good position to evaluate, for example, how the uniqueness of choosing the mouth over the eyes contributes to the good-making of the artwork.

To appreciate, on my view, is to have an emotional understanding of the work in question. It is to enter a process of discovery of meaning where aesthetic emotions make us aware of the relation between the perceptual and non-perceptual features that explain our initial responses. These are also, at the same time, the reasons that allow us to form a justified judgement about the work's aesthetic character. Non-standard emotions help us in this task by putting the appreciator on hold, by fixing attention, and leading the subject to learn about the object she has responded to through the exercise of her aesthetic abilities. It is important to note that on my account, our feelings of curiosity, freedom, calmness, and eeriness when engaging with Sargent's painting do not give us *direct* access to the aesthetic properties that connect with these responses, as the standard perceptualist emotion theorist would argue. Aesthetic emotions do not automatically reveal, in a pre-cognitive manner, what subjectively matters to the appreciator. Instead, our affective responses are an *invitation* to search and evaluate the facts (non-aesthetic features) that explain why the painting is perceived in a certain manner. There is no direct epistemic route from one's response to aesthetic value. Moreover, even if it were the case that the perceptual analogy was sound, this perceptual recognition would not be enough to *understand why* an artwork is (or is not) aesthetically praiseworthy. It would not be enough to put us in a good position to appreciate the painting. Appreciation for the cognitivist does not end, but starts, at perceptual recognition of specific properties. What I am proposing is an account that links the feelings which arise in our perceptual engagement with the conscious rationalization of our value judgements.

## VI. Summary

Following the cognitivist's lead, I started this essay by presenting the activity of appreciation as a form of *aesthetic understanding*. Importantly, according to this view, appreciation requires an agent to have a grasp of the reasons *why* an object is experienced as being aesthetically valuable. The main task has been to try to ease some of the worries that the cognitivist is faced with concerning the difficulty of arriving at appropriate explanations of value when subjective affect is involved. It is by looking at what I have called the Epistemic Value Claim in the philosophy of emotions that I opened the door to a possible epistemic route where there is no need to divorce one's evaluations from the emotional perspective of the agent doing the judging. My argument has aimed to show how non-standard emotions can help us reconsider what it means to emotionally understand objects of aesthetic value. Non-standard emotions can do this because they can help us to deliberately focus our attention and place the appreciator in a state of second-order awareness of their mental states. I have ended the paper by showing the different way in which these two epistemic tools can help the appreciator to meet the 'aesthetic reasoning' conditions of the understanding view set out by the cognitivist.

I am aware that there is still important work to be done in order to sustain a change of paradigm like the one proposed here. Yet, I hope to have sparked some renewed interest in a set of emotions that appear to be aligned with what it means to *appreciate*. That is, to reflectively care about what is understood to be of aesthetic value.

## Acknowledgements

Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Emotions and Emotions Concepts Conference, University of Bern, November 2018, the European Society for Aesthetics annual conference, Warsaw, June 2019, and the American Society for Aesthetics annual meeting, Phoenix, October 2019. I am very thankful for the feedback from the audience. Particular

thanks go to Elisabeth Schellekens, Paisley Livingston, Jeremy Page, Lorenza D'Angelo, and the *Eстетика* editors for their invaluable comments when discussing several drafts of this paper.

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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**How to cite this article:** Martínez Marín, Irene. 'Non-standard Emotions and Aesthetic Understanding.' *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics* LVII/XIII, no. 2 (2020): pp. 135–149. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/eeja.211>

**Submitted:** 15 December 2019

**Accepted:** 10 June 2020

**Published:** 15 September 2020

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*Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Helsinki University Press in cooperation with the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague.

