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## Metaphor and the Philosophy of Art

Late 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy has been deeply involved in a debate between realism and anti-realism. My particular area of interest is aesthetics/philosophy of art (henceforth “aesthetics”). The debate between realists and anti-realists has raged for many years through the various problem-areas of aesthetics: evaluation, interpretation, representation, creativity, essence of art, and ontology of the work of art. Of course one can be a realist with respect to one kind of thing and not with respect to another. Typically, however, if one is a realist in one problem-area one will be a realist in others. For example, if one is a realist in theory of evaluation then one will probably also be a realist about interpretation, about the nature of art, and about the ontology of art. Realists hold that things exist as they are independently of other things. This means that: (1) parts have their natures independently of other parts with which they form wholes, and of the wholes of which they are parts, (2) things exist independently of our experiencing them, and (3) their natures are independent of our interpretations of them. Anti-realists question this. For example, they question whether it is possible to maintain a strict distinction between that which is internal and that which is external to a work of art.

Anti-realists tend to see the creative process as organically related to the creative product. Realists tend to reduce the creative process to whatever gives a creative result. They tend to see a result as creative if and only if it is both novel and valuable. They usually insist that evaluation of works of art cannot refer to the process that produced such works'. Alternatively, although they may

See for example John Hospers, “The concept of Artistic Expression”, in Morris Weitz, ed., *problems in Aesthetics* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1970) pp. 212-245, and Larry Briskman, “Creative Product and Creative Process in Science and Art”, *Inquiry* 23 (1980) 83-106. See my criticism of this position in “A Pragmatist Theory of Artistic Creativity”, *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 28 (1994) 169-180.

affirm that the artist contributes something, they limit talk about artist contribution to talk about artists' intentions. Artists' intentions are then understood in a realist way. Realists also deny the contribution of interpreters to the ongoing creative emergence of the work.

Realism has been characteristic of analytic aesthetics as it has evolved since the 1940s. Realism is not just a successor to analytic aesthetics<sup>2</sup>. Wolterstorff thinks that once the scheme/content model that analytic aesthetics inherited from Kantianism is overcome, there are only two post-analytic positions available: Hegelian pragmatism (Rorty) and realism (Wolterstorff), the first of which fails. Wolterstorff is a realist with respect to possibilities and kinds, holding that artists do not create states of affairs but take note of pre-existent possibilities. He also believes that early analytic aesthetics was a species of romanticism, and that his realism overcomes this.

This is also wrong. Early analytic aesthetics was deeply anti-romantic insofar as it accepted only a very limited form of organicism, rejected anything that hinted of mystification (such as the view of the early German romantic Karl Philip Moritz that the artist imitates the creative productivity of nature), and was opposed to the expression theory of art. It shared with romanticism only the idea that the work of art is a self-sufficient totality. Even here, it did not accept the idea Wolterstorff attributes to it, that the work of art is literally useless. Analytic aestheticians Monroe Beardsley and Nelson Goodman held instrumentalist theories of aesthetic value, as does George Dickie even today<sup>3</sup>.

Early analytic aestheticians were realists with respect to concepts. They believed that concepts were *really* there and that, either such concepts could be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions or, at least, we could find objective truths about them. Even Morris Weitz, who rejected the idea that there is a real definition of art, was a realist with respect to the logic of the concept of art. Wolterstorff should have simply said that the early analytic aestheticians held different things to be real than he did.

Although it would seem that realists would be against organicism, they tend to be ambiguous about it. Most admit that there are organic wholes, and that organic wholes have properties that are distinct from, and emergent upon, the properties of their parts. However, this goes against the natural tendency of realists to avoid anything that smacks of mystification.

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<sup>2</sup> Contra Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Philosophy of Art After Analysis and Romanticism", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 46:Special Issue on Analytic Aesthetics (1987) 151-167.

<sup>3</sup> see Monroe Beardsley, "In Defense of Aesthetic Value" in *Contemporary Philosophy of Art: Readings in Analytic Aesthetics* ed. John W. Bender and H. Gene Blocker (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993) 402-406. and George Dickie, "Instrumental Cognitivism", *ibid.* 406-412.

Although realists may grant that works of art are organic wholes, they deny that such works may be parts of larger organic wholes such as the oeuvre of an artist, or the spirit of the age. They deny that works of art have properties that are emergent not merely upon their parts but also upon their relations with other parts, or upon aspects of these larger organic wholes.

As I use the term “realist” it is roughly equivalent to George Lakoff’s and Mark Johnson’s term “objectivist”. Objectivists subscribe to the “myth of objectivism” which is defined in their first book in this way: “(1.) The world is made up of objects. They have properties independent of any people or other beings who experience them.... (2.) We get our knowledge of the world by experiencing the objects in it and getting to know what properties the objects have and how these objects are related to one another... (3.) We understand the objects in our world in terms of categories and concepts. These categories and concepts correspond to properties the objects have in themselves (inherently) and to relationships among the objects”<sup>4</sup>. In a later book, Lakoff defines objectivist metaphysics as the view that “All reality consists of entities, which have fixed properties and relations holding among them at any instant”<sup>5</sup>. Lakoff and Johnson insist that one can be a realist without being an objectivist. I agree with that. I am also sympathetic with their form of realism. However, for the sake of this paper I will use the term “realist” in the more traditional sense.

Although not universal, realism is pervasive in analytic aesthetics, cutting across all problem-areas. Realists-with-respect-to-interpretation hold that works of art have meanings that are objectively there, *in the work*, independent of our interpretation of them. Monroe Beardsley exemplified this stance. A more contemporary example would be Jerrold Levinson. Arthur Danto also holds that there is such a thing as the author’s meaning of the work that is really there *in the work*. Danto’s realism has recently been defended by Peggy Brand and Myles Brand<sup>6</sup>.

\* Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980) pp. 186-7. Lakoff and Johnson mention seven more features of the objectivist myth.

George Lakoff. *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) pg. 160.

Monroe Beardsley, *The Possibility of Criticism* (Wayne State University Press, 1979). Arthur Danto. *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

Jerrold Levinson, *The Pleasures of Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996). Peg Brand and Myles Brand “Surface and Deep Interpretation”, in Danto and his Critics, ed. Mark Rollins Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1993). See a debate between the Brands and myself: Tom Leddy, “Against Surface Interpretation”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57:4 (1999) 459- —and Peg Zeglin Brand and Myles Brand, “Surface Interpretation: Reply to Leddy”, same issue 463-465.

Realists-with-respect-to-evaluation hold that works of art have value that is there *in the work* independent of our acts of evaluation. Monroe Beardsley held this view. Similarly, Frank Sibley believed that aesthetic properties are either *prima facie* positive or *prima facie* negative. George Dickie has defended a realist conception of aesthetic properties similar to that of Sibley<sup>7</sup>.

Realists-with-respect-to-defining-art typically hold that art has an essence independent of the various attempts to describe that essence. George Dickie, Jerrold Levinson, and Robert Stecker all have offered definitions of art in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Although not all of these philosophers claim that they are defining the essence of art, they all believe they have discovered the true and real definition of the term or concept “art”<sup>8</sup>.

Some analytic aestheticians are anti-essentialist. However, even these generally adhere to realism-with-respect-to-evaluation. For example, although Arnold Isenberg rejected the idea that there are real generalizations that could be used in deductive arguments that would generate evaluations of works of art, he believed that statements about the value of individual works are true or false in a straightforward way<sup>9</sup>.

The realist believes that properties of objects are in those objects, in much the way that apples are in a bowl. The property/thing relationship for realists works according to the metaphor of object in another object. Consider the property of sadness. We often say that a painting or a musical work is sad. Much philosophical time has been spent trying to understand what this might mean. Although realists-with-respect-to-properties admit that a painting may be sad, they insist that the sadness of the painting is a property inherent in the painting, and that this property is not related to the sadness of the person who created the painting or any sadness in persons who perceive the painting. The sadness is metaphorically “in” the painting. The view I will advocate sees the sadness as a property that is emergent upon the interrelationship between creator, work and audience.

Much early analytic aesthetics was devoted to attacking the expression theory of art held by such writers as R.G. Collingwood, and Suzanne Langer<sup>10</sup>. This

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<sup>7</sup> Monroe Beardsley, “In Defense of Aesthetic Value”, in Bender and Blocker op. cit. 402M05. Frank Sibley, *ibid.* “General Criteria and Reasons in Aesthetics”, 535-545. George Dickie, *Evaluating Art*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> George Dickie, *The Art Circle: A Theory of Art* (Evanston, 111.: Chicago Spectrum Press, 1997), Jerrold Levinson *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), Robert Stecker, *Artworks* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Arnold Isenberg, “Critical Communication” in Bender and Blocker op. cit., 424-432.

<sup>10</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958) Suzanne K. Langer *Problems of Art* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1957).

theory had emphasized the relationship between the artist, the work of art, and the experiencing audience. Analytic aestheticians' rejection of this relation was in line with their insistence on a strict distinction between that which is internal to a work and that which is external. Thus, it has been typical of analytic aesthetics to insist that the work of art is autonomous, i.e. that its properties are independent of properties of the artist and the audience.

Analytic aesthetics arose in the late 1940s and early 50s as a reaction against what were seen as woolly-minded Hegelian tendencies in art theory. It was seen as an attack on idealism. Benedetto Croce and Collingwood were typical objects of this attack since they were generally held to believe that works of art exist entirely as private mental objects<sup>11</sup>.

However, although analytic aestheticians presented themselves as anti-idealist, the deeper motivation of their attack, I suspect, was fear of relativism. They feared relativism not only with respect to theories of creativity, interpretation and evaluation, but also with respect to theories of the nature of art and the ontology of art. Relativism was seen to be incoherent and irrational. This continues in contemporary realist versions of analytic aesthetics.

The essential ongoing conflict has been between realists and anti-realists, not between realists and analysts. Wolterstorff is quite within the mainstream of analytic aesthetics as a realist sticking his thumb in the dike against the flood of relativizing pragmatism represented by Richard Rorty and others. His disagreement with analytic aestheticians is simply that realism cannot work by way of maintaining the scheme/content distinction, or through believing that one can analyze concepts in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions.

Ironically, in their eagerness to oppose relativism, contemporary realists have sometimes advocated something like idealism. They have often posited such entities as ideal interpreters and evaluators. Wolterstorff holds that works of art are Platonic entities. Jerrold Levinson refers to ideal readers in his theory of interpretation. Alan Goldman uses ideal critics as the cornerstone of his theory of evaluation<sup>12</sup>. In general, realists have found it easy to set aside their concerns about certain aspects of idealism (e.g. the positing of ideal entities) in face of the threat of relativism.

<sup>11</sup> Benedetto Croce, *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and of the Linguistic in General*

Colin Lyas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). We know now that this is a misreading. They actually believed that works of art are emergent upon interactions between artist and medium.

<sup>12</sup> Jerrold Levinson, op. cit. "Intention and Interpretation in Literature" 175-213. Alan H. Goldman, *Aesthetic Value* (Boulder Co.: Westview Press, 1995.) Goldman, it should be noted, accepts a mild form of relativism. His overall tendencies however are well within the analytic tradition.

Unlike relativism, skepticism is perfectly consistent with realism. Many analytic philosophers have been skeptical about such issues as the definition of art and the evaluation of art, although skeptics about the first have not necessarily been skeptics about the second. For example, although Morris Weitz believed that art cannot be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, he still believed that art theory is valuable for the arguments provided in support of attempts to define art<sup>13</sup>. These, he thought, could be read as arguments for attending to certain neglected features in works of art. He assumed that these features exist in works of art independent of our interpretation of them. Thus, he was a realist with respect to aesthetic properties and aesthetic evaluation. Also, as previously mentioned, he was a realist with respect to concepts: claiming that he had found the real nature of the concept of art, namely that it is a family- resemblance concept. His skepticism about the definition of art was natural for a disappointed realist, but did not lead to rejection of realism. Weitz did not consider the possibility that the essence of art might be an emergent entity that is constantly changing, or that definitions of art might capture, and contribute to, this ongoing process. This would require anti-realism.

There *have* been important anti-realists among the analytic aestheticians, notably Joe Margolis and Nelson Goodman. In the case of Margolis, however, the attempt to combine analytic aesthetics and anti-realism seems to have failed. In the 1970s, Margolis maintained what he referred to as a “robust” relativism<sup>14</sup>. He insisted that although literary interpretation is to be construed relativistically, there is still a level of description that must be construed realistically. Literary *descriptions* are literally true or false, whereas literary *interpretations* may only be plausible or implausible. Margolis therefore advocated a kind of property dualism with respect to works of art. Some properties are physical and may be described. Others are cultural and may only be interpreted. Works of art, he argued, are culturally emergent but physically embodied entities. Other examples of culturally emergent entities are persons and social institutions.

As with most dualisms, this one could not long sustain criticism. As David Novitz pointed out, Margolis actually believed that description itself was a form of interpretation since, for Margolis, the work is not first fixed, then interpreted, but rather identified for relevant description *when* interpreted<sup>15</sup>. Novitz saw that, for Margolis, it is impossible to know independently of a specific interpretation that culturally significant properties inhere in a work. In his more recent writings, Margolis has dropped the idea of a distinctive descriptive level in which sentences

<sup>13</sup> Morris Weitz, “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics”, in Blocker and Bender, pp. 191-198.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Margolis, “The Ontological Peculiarity of Works of Art”, in Bender and Blocker, pp. 317-321, and “Robust Relativism”, *ibid.* 506-515.

<sup>15</sup> David Novitz, “Towards a Robust Realism”, in Bender and Blocker, pp. 516-530.

are strictly true or false, although he still resists radical relativism through his insistence on a constative level of interpretation that makes identification and reference possible.

Nelson Goodman advocated a radical relativism based on world pluralism<sup>16</sup>. As he put it, there are many ways the world is. We construct worlds through various kinds of symbol systems. Although Goodman went a long ways towards the position of anti-realism, he was strongly committed to some sort of autonomy thesis in art. He placed great stress on his concept of exemplification, understanding artistic expression as metaphorical exemplification of labels. Although the reference to labels takes us outside the work, it only does so in a minimal sense. It fails to incorporate any reference to the creator of the work of art, the surrounding culture, or the art experiences. Moreover, Goodman's insistence on separate worlds tends to make communication between worlds inscrutable, and any sort of dialectic (e.g. between different world versions) impossible.

The importance of metaphor for aesthetics poses serious problems for realists. Since metaphors can be variously interpreted, they are problematic for a realist theory of interpretation. This is relevant not only for poetry but also for the other art forms where there are non-verbal metaphors.

Many philosophers have argued that the visual arts should be understood in terms of some notion of "seeing as" or "seeing in": a kind of metaphorical seeing. Similar accounts may be made in music with respect to "hearing as". The question is then raised whether any account of painting, in terms of "seeing as" or "seeing in", or of music in terms of "hearing as" or "hearing in", could be held along with a basic commitment to realism.

However, anti-realists cannot simply appeal to the pervasive importance of metaphor in the arts to secure their argument against realists, since the conflict between realists and anti-realists exists within metaphor-studies as well! Donald Davidson and John Searle represent the first camp, and Paul Ricoeur and Lakoff and Johnson the second. I will not go into this debate here, but merely reference the many fine arguments by Lakoff, Johnson, and Mark Turner against the reductionist Davidson/Searle camp<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978)

<sup>17</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, op. cit.; George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean", *Critical Inquiry* 5:1 (1978); John Searle, "Metaphor", in his *Expression and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Also see my "Davidson's Rejection of Metaphorical Meaning", *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 16:2 (1983) 63-78.

## II

Nonetheless, the debate between realism and anti-realism can be resolved. The rest of this article will be devoted to this task. In the process, I will sketch solutions to some of the main problems of aesthetics, including defining art, aesthetic evaluation, interpretation, creativity, and expression. These are all closely interrelated, and it is virtually impossible to make any real progress in one area without doing so in at least some of the others. My approach will necessarily be very programmatic: the details are for another place.

My general solution to the realism/anti-realism debate involves making a larger metaphysical claim: that there are two quite distinct levels to experienced reality, and that these correspond respectively to the positions of realism and anti-realism. Realism holds true for one level, anti-realism for the other. Strictly speaking, this is an anti-realist position. However, it incorporates some of the intuitively plausible features of realism insofar as it allows realism its own restricted domain.

The thesis is realism, the antithesis is anti-realism, and the synthesis is the position offered here: dynamic organicism. I use the term “dynamic” to distinguish it from more static and non-relativistic forms of organicism found in such writers as Beardsley. My position may also be seen as a kind of pragmatism: truth is what works, and realism is true to the extent that it works, and in the experiential domain in which it works. For example, with respect to literary interpretation, realism is true in situations in which it is useful to assume that the author of a work had a specific intended meaning in mind. Realism does not work in all domains of experience.

Anti-realism also works only in certain specific domains. (I might add that Truth, in the deeper Heideggerian sense of the unconcealment of Being, occurs in the creative dynamic interaction between these realms.)

Both realists and anti-realists will be opposed to this thesis. The controversial claim for realists is that there is a level of the experienced world that is antirealist. The controversial claim for anti-realists is that there is an aspect of the world that is realist. I will direct the rest of this article against the realists, leaving the anti-realists for another time.

It might be thought that my point could be made in Goodmanian terms: that realism is true for some ways the world is, and anti-realism for others. However, this strategy would not work since the levels of experienced reality I am referring to are also levels of the creative process. The creative process is a general structure of creativity that crosses domains, containing intuitive and elaborative aspects. The anti-realist dimension of the creative process is associated with the first



aspect, the realist dimension with the second. Both levels may be experienced by the same person in the same process. In other words, the division between realist and anti-realist levels is within worlds (in Goodman's sense), not between worlds. Still, Goodman's notion of world-making is helpful. The creative process is a process of world-constitution which consists of both anti-realist and realist moments.

Similarly, it might be thought that my strategy is very like that of Margolis, who holds (or held) that there are two levels of interpretation: one consonant with realism and one with anti-realism. Although I share much with Margolis, I believe his position is not sufficiently organicist.

Margolis seeks to validate the first level of interpretation, interpretation as "adequation" (what he formerly called the level of description), in order to retain some notion of stabilities that can secure reference and identity<sup>18</sup>. He prefers what he calls "unicity" - works of art have numerical identity, are logically individuatable, and differing interpretations of a work are interpretations of the same work - to unity. His rejection of the concept of unity, which he associates with modernism and premodernism, is a rejection of organicism.

It is understandable why the organicism of the romantics is still rejected. It led to the totalizing philosophy of Hegel in which everything fit together in an ultimate organic whole. It also led to the isolationism of Parker and Beardsley in which the work of art is seen as an autonomous organic whole. However, organicism may be revived through the same transformation that Margolis applies to other concepts: it may be relativized. We need not hold organic wholes to be fixed entities that exist independent of perspectives. Organic wholes may be emergent differently, and from different collections of entities, attributes and relations, relative to different perspectives, discourses and debates. Of course, this is only possible if we are willing to make some sacrifices with respect to unicity: for example, abandoning the strict identification of marble sculptures with scientifically describable material substratums of marble. Sculptures might better be seen as emergent not only upon those substratums but also upon other things. This is no real sacrifice, at least not for Margolis, since it is in accord with his basic idea that works of art are culturally emergent entities.

Different organic wholes emerge in different frames and in different "ways the world is" (to use Goodman's term). We now see emergence as upon various kinds of substratum, which in turn are culturally emergent. These include the so-called physical substratum, the intentions of artists, the cultural background, and the reactions of actual and potential audiences. The physical substratum itself need not be limited to one specific object. For instance, if the original physical

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Margolis, "Reinterpreting Interpretation", in Bender and Blocker, pp. 454-470.

object “Mona Lisa” were lost, this would not mean the complete loss of the work, since it would continue as emergent upon a wide range of physical substratums, including excellent reproductions. It would still exist as something that can be appreciated and studied.

Relativizing organicism allows us to re-embrace the concept of unity, especially the rich version of it that insists that parts within organic wholes are internally related. If so, mere unicity and mere numerical identity become less important. They are only central to the realist level of experience.

This recovery of unity, in which unity is not fixed to a specific physical object, but is relativized to perspectives and frames (and is dynamically organic), offers significant advantages over contemporary analytic and postanalytic aesthetic theories. We can allow not only for creative readings and misreadings, but also for appropriation, rewritings of texts, and reworking of works. This is something very common today, for example in the contemporary visual arts. Yet, it is often associated with a false postmodernist rejection of the concept of organic unity. Even relatively random juxtapositions of elements can create organic wholes in which parts are internally inter-related by way of the author’s intentions and/or the perspectives of interpreters and other experiencers of the work. We just need to recognize that organic unity is as much invented as discovered, and that in the cultural realm it is a function, at least in part, of perception, imagination and cognitive interpretation.

Margolis’s concept of unicity ties him to the view that reference to works of art is fixed by such things as names, the actual collection of inscriptions involved, and the marble out of which the sculpture is made. A more fluid notion of artwork identity is needed to match aesthetics to contemporary artwork ontology, especially with respect to the creative process.

Problematic in this regard is Margolis’s willingness to accept Roland Barthes’ idea that the text is a “galaxy of signifiers”<sup>19</sup>. This phrase implies that the text is not a unified whole. It seems that in order to maintain unicity, numerical identity, reference, and the demands of constative discourse, Margolis is willing to assume that texts are nothing but collections of words or other signifiers.

I agree with Margolis that for interpretation to be possible we need some relative stability, and that we cannot do without reference, predication, description, interpretation, explanation, analysis, and evaluation. Yet, with all of his desire for stability, one would think he would value something that actually *gives* stability, not just a sea of unrelated or non-organically-related signifiers. Margolis thinks that stability arises from the preformative structures and built-in semiotic

<sup>19</sup> Roland Barthes, “From Work to Text”, in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism* tr. and ed. by Josue V. Harari (Cornell University Press, 1970).

potentialities of the surrounding lifeworld. However, although this is important, organic unity gives a deeper stability found in the internal relations between parts, and the pervasive characteristic of the organic whole. Stability is also found in the larger organic wholes that constitute and *organize* the very domain of semiotic potentialities to which Margolis refers, and with which works of art as organic wholes participate.

Organic unity in the world of culturally emergent artifacts is achieved through conscious and unconscious processes of the writer and of the reader - and this is why, again and again, we must reincorporate these into our account of art and the art process after their exclusion in the obsessively object-centered approach of analytic aesthetics. Within respective consciousnesses, works of art have unity in various ways. One could even say that consciousness (including unconscious processes) makes dynamic organicism possible, since it makes “seeing as,” “seeing in,” “making as,” and so forth possible. It makes possible the deeply imaginative nature of much human sensuous experience and most aesthetic experience. These conscious and unconscious activities bring things into experienced unities with unique potentialities, but in different ways.

These unities, sometimes called experiential gestalts, should be distinguished from mere perceptual gestalts. Nature in its pre-human manifestations does not exhibit this flexible organicism. Only “consciousness of” (along with attendant unconscious processes) allows for different organic wholes that, although quasi- fictional, are real-as-experienced. These unities are not fixed. The artistic writerly mind can take different phenomena, juxtapose them, and create new unities.

With all of his sophistication, Margolis is still working on the subjective/ objective axis where the first level of reality, with its relatively stable, antecedently (relatively) fixed referents, forms a basis for further work, and provides some objective ground for subjective elaborations at the second level of productive practice in which worlds are constituted. The axis I wish to replace this with divides reality in a different way. Neither realm is prior to, or beneath, or foundational to the other; and each interacts with the other in the ongoing creative processes of individuals, societies and mankind. (As Thomas Kuhn taught, we cannot have revolutionary science without normal science, and vice versa.) This is the realist/anti-realist axis. Within the realist dimension, there are distinctions between subjective and objective. However, these are deconstructed at the antirealist level.

This is not to say that the notion of grounding or basis is completely excluded. There are various stabilities within the realist level, including the preformative structures to which Margolis refers. There is also the deeply creative world- creating metaphor at the deconstructive level that provides the basis for organic unity in the world created. As I have argued, organic unity provides its own kind of stability.

### III

I shall now set forth a few theses about the anti-realist level of experience. First, it is deeply and creatively metaphorical. By this, I do not mean simply that it uses conceptual metaphors. Lakoff, Johnson, and their associates have shown that conceptual metaphor is pervasive throughout human experience. I have no quarrel with this. I am referring to a specific level of experience constituted by novel metaphors that are world-creating in Goodman's sense. I am also referring to the way that metaphor can undercut stabilities taken for granted in the ordinary categorical framework of opposites, for example between body and mind, subjective and objective, etc.

Second, the anti-realist level is associated with moments of insight in the creative process. I do not intend to imply that the creative process derives from any one insight, but rather that the creative process has an aspect that reveals and illuminates by way of metaphorical thinking, and that it illuminates a metaphorical dimension of reality.

Third, it is associated with an important function of the arts. The various arts are particularly good at giving us access to this deeply metaphorical dimension of human experience, one in which various oppositions that are useful at the realist level break down, dissolve or become useless.

Finally, and related to the previous point, this level is ontologically where various dichotomies by which we ordinarily experience the world, i.e. between subjective and objective, mental and material, individual and particular, act and event, and real and fictional, are overcome in this way. We might call this the deconstructive level of human experience.

These are very broad claims that are, at this stage, somewhat vague, highly controversial, and seemingly question-begging. The best way to defend them is to show that: (1) so-called realist attempts to solve various problems in aesthetics fail in systematic ways that involve a refusal to recognize this level of reality, and (2) the overall theory of dynamic organicism is coherent and promises to offer at least plausible solutions to those same long-standing problems in a relatively systematic way.

In an earlier paper, I argued that what philosophers traditionally called essences exist at this level, although at that time I had not described the level quite in these terms. Essences, as I understand them, are culturally emergent entities that are neither wholly objective nor wholly subjective, neither wholly material nor wholly mental, neither wholly event nor wholly substance, and neither wholly universal nor wholly particular. The Socratic quest in philosophy (continued today whenever someone asks the "What is X?" question in

a philosophical way), and parallel quests in the arts (as when a work of art challenges the accepted definition of art), attempt to apprehend these essences. These essences are as much created as discovered.

Essences are at the core of the experienced reality that is referred to by our philosophically contested concepts. They exist as strong potentialities that may be actualized in various ways. The rejection of the essentialist quest in all of its forms is a fundamental mistake, since we are essence seeking, essence-constituting animals. Essentialism of some sort is inescapable<sup>20</sup>.

It follows that the distinction between realist and anti-realist levels of experience should not be mapped onto older distinctions between objective and subjective levels, between material and mental levels, or between the world of universals and the world of particulars. Realism thrives on these opposites. A realist theory can be objectivist or subjectivist, materialist or mentalist, nominalist or admitting of universals. Many legitimate debates in analytic philosophy center on these issues. Antirealism deconstructs these distinctions, or rather, refers to a level of reality in which these distinctions self-deconstruct. Strict antirealists hold that all concepts self-deconstruct, and that realism is wholly false or outdated. Dynamic organicism rejects this.

Dynamic organicism is a form of organicism. Like all organicism it insists that wholes are greater than the sum of their parts. Hence, it holds that some properties of wholes are ontologically emergent. However, it goes beyond traditional organicism in at least three important respects. First, it insists that the entities taken to be organic wholes are flexible and dynamically interrelated. Something is not really an organic whole independent of all contexts: organicism is relativized. For example, different things are experienced as organic wholes when experienced by different people in different contexts. One might experience a painting as identifiable object at a certain place and time as an organic whole. Alternatively, one can see the identifiable object as only one aspect of a larger organic whole which includes a history of interpretation, reproduction, and so forth, or one might combine it with things not normally associated with it to form imaginative organic wholes that have their own capacities to generate insight or to be elaborated upon. Organic wholes are emergent not only ontologically, as is held by some realists, but dynamically, and through different imaginative operations of conscious beings.

Second, it stresses that organic wholes and their constituent parts are charged with potentiality and have a consonant aura of significance. They “shine” ontologically in a way that is often caught by philosophic metaphors of light,

<sup>20</sup> see my “The Socratic Quest in Art and Philosophy”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51:3 (1993) 399-410.

from Plato (the Sun) to the romantics (the lamp). This point is directly related to the preceding, i.e. to the dynamic nature of the cultural emergence that is undergone by such organic wholes as works of art. This characteristic is perhaps the most important, the most controversial, and the most difficult to explain. It is here that the truth of the saying that truth and beauty are one becomes evident: where truth is understood as the emergence of the essential, and beauty as the shining forth of the emergent essence.

Dynamic organicism may be contrasted to a realist version of organicism that does not have a significant dynamic dimension. Monroe Beardsley once argued that aesthetic terms refer to parts of aesthetic objects and their relations to one another<sup>21</sup>. His theory went like this: (1) any partless field is an element, (2) complexes are made up of elements, (3) properties that belong to complexes, and not to any of their parts, are called regional properties, (4) these are either summative or emergent, (5) emergent properties are exemplified by sodium chloride which is salty-tasting even though its elements are not, (6) however, no adequate account of emergence is currently available, and such an account will probably only come about with the help of appropriate technical symbolic apparatus.

Nonetheless, Beardsley was willing tentatively to describe emergence in the realm of art as when regional qualities in a work of art are not to be found in the parts when separated, and do not depend on these parts and their relations. He elaborated on his concept of emergence by way of a simple illustration consisting of four small circles, each one inch apart from its nearest neighbor forming a square. This, he said, exhibits the regional quality of “suarishness,” which is emergent in his sense. He then noted that the suarishness may be made more intense, and he illustrated this by giving a picture of a square consisting of sixteen circles.

Beardsley thought that talk about things like intensive suarishness can explain aesthetic qualities. Yet the intensive suarishness he described is certainly not an aesthetic quality, and it is doubtful that it is emergent in a way anything like the emergence of aesthetic qualities from works of art. In short, the square, as represented in Beardsley’s illustration, is not an organic whole in a dynamic or culturally significant sense.

Beardsley also spoke of the second square set of circles as having the properties of wholeness and stability. He even implied that it was complex in that it had regional qualities that were not reducible to qualities of its parts. It therefore had all three of the features he elsewhere designated as primary aesthetic qualities: unity, complexity and intensity. Beardsley took these three

<sup>21</sup> Monroe Beardsley, “Regional Qualities”, in Bender and Blocker, pp. 239-242.

qualities always to contribute value to works of art. This constituted his theory of aesthetic evaluation. So it would seem that if the square made of circles were a work of art then it would be a valuable one on Beardsley's account. However, this just does not seem plausible, as I shall now show.

Beardsley insisted that "statements of perceptual conditions of regional qualities do not imply anything about ends and means". For example, statements about the regional qualities of a Rembrandt do not imply anything about the means Rembrandt used. This was consistent with Beardsley's famous anti-intentionalism, which held that we should be restricted from attending to the intentions of the author or the means used in the creative process when evaluating the work of art and interpreting it. However, this strategy excluded much of the very material that could give the painting an aesthetic intensity distinct from the merely technical and non-dynamic intensity of regional properties that we may easily find in the square-made-of-circles. It is no wonder, then, that Beardsley thought the distinction between summative and emergent regional properties probably does not matter very much. His commitment to organicism was halfhearted at best,

Ironically, Beardsley still did not escape the mystification analytic philosophers dread. He said that the various elements of his square "belong together in an important way", and that "without losing their individuality, they take on, if one may speak very metaphorically, a kind of awareness of each other". (May one speak very metaphorically in this way if one is an analytic aesthete? How would such a metaphor cash out?) He suggested that they are "perceptually joined", and concluded that "They do not merely accompany each other, but fuse".

In short, at a crucial moment in the development of his organicism Beardsley was forced to use metaphors that are irreducible to any mechanistic account, and were, from an analytic perspective, mystifying. This metaphorical talk of phenomenal properties being "aware of each other" and "fusing" is a valuable pointer to what is needed for an adequate account of emergence, and we shall touch on it again towards the end of this paper.

Frank Sibley also used an analytic approach to understanding the nature of aesthetic experience<sup>22</sup>. He agreed with Beardsley that there are general criteria in aesthetics. However, he held that there is a multitude of these, and not just Beardsley's unity, complexity, and intensity. He believed that there are certain qualities, such as elegance, grace, or dramatic intensity, which are *prima facie* aesthetic merits but not necessarily actual merits. The relevant qualities interact with each other in works of art. Sibley insisted that what is *prima facie* an aesthetic merit may, in conjunction with other *prima facie* merits, actually become a defect.

<sup>22</sup> Op.cit.

For example, although “highly comic” is a *prima facie* merit, it may detract from the work by diluting the predominant “tragic intensity,” which is also a *prima facie* merit. In this way, Sibley sought to overcome particularist and relativist attacks on objectivist theories of evaluation.

This move towards organicism is commendable, but it doesn’t go far enough. Sibley simply assumed that it makes sense to speak of something as a merit independent of context or, as he puts it, *in vacuo*. This realist assumption about aesthetic properties is deeply problematic. Sibley made lists of terms taken out of all context and presented them to us as obviously *prima facie* positive or negative. At first it seems to make sense to say that terms like “grace”, “elegance”, and “witty” go together as *prima facie* positive whereas terms like “garish”, “sentimental”, and “bombastic” go together as *prima facie* negative. Yet, it would be easy enough to do something very different, for example to give the first list as including the term “garish”. This revised list might well be accepted by some people at some time. For instance, in the contemporary Los Angeles art scene, the paintings of Lari Pittman are widely regarded for their garish grace, elegance and wit. Thus, although it may be granted that certain terms are associated, at various times, with aesthetic merit, and others with aesthetic defect, this is not in itself an argument for realism with respect to aesthetic properties, as opposed to the view that such properties are culturally emergent, interactional, and outside the distinction between subject and object.

Sibley is perfectly right to say that, in some specific cases, the highly comic nature of certain parts of a work detracts from the overall dramatic intensity that it would have had if these comic parts were not present. However, his general claim: “A work that might otherwise have excelled by its tragic intensity is marred by certain (inherently valuable) comic elements that dilute and weaken that (inherently valuable) tragic intensity; or vice versa” is problematic. First, there are a few exceptions. Second, it is not clear that there are enough cases that fit the rule to override the exceptions. There are important and central cases of tragedy, for example Hamlet, that have significant comic elements that do not seem to affect the tragic intensity of other aspects of the play or harm the play as a whole. I suppose that if one took out all hints of the comic from the play the tragic intensity would increase, although this would probably not improve the plays’ overall aesthetic impact. The best we can say is that there are some sentences that can sometimes work *as if* they were general aesthetic laws.

In addition, Sibley’s organicism is limited to the work itself, as narrowly defined. He does not take into account the way that properties can interact with contexts external to the actual work, and can take on more power, or less, as a result of this. Nor does he recognize that the very lists of properties he offers have their own contexts and may be seen as organically related to art traditions



in various ways. Again, at most we can say that some term is a *prima facie* merit term relative to some context.

Virtually any property can be an aesthetic merit when properly contextualized. I have argued elsewhere that even messiness can be such. Relativism, when allied with dynamic organicism, allows for general reasons being used, as long as these are understood to be limited in range, and relativized to the rhetorical situation of the particular argument in question.

## IV

As I have argued, the implications of dynamic organicism for aesthetics are quite broad. We cannot go into them all here. Let us look for a moment at the theory of the nature of art itself. First, at a meta-level, theories of art are themselves deeply metaphorical in nature. For example, as I have argued in previous papers, the definition “art is expression” involves metaphorical identification, and is not best taken as simply a matter of categorizing art as a type of expression. The meaning of “expression” is transformed in its metaphorical application to the term “art.” Theories of art are typically abbreviated in these metaphorical forms. Their metaphorical nature allows for alternative interpretations of such theories. It also allows them to be resistant to counterexamples that would be effective against strictly literal versions<sup>23</sup>.

The philosophical definitions that express insight into essences are metaphorical precisely because the objects of definition are metaphorical in nature. For example, the essence of art has a metaphor-like structure. Elaboration of the metaphor creates the world of the theory, this world in turn mapping onto and shaping the world of experience it is meant to explain.

Second, at the level of actually defining art, we may venture a theory that, although metaphorical, may be particularly apt for our moment in history, which is to say as an answer to the ongoing dialectic of aesthetics/philosophy of art in 2001. Art may be defined in terms of its most fruitful purpose. The purpose of art, if I may say it rather boldly, is the creation of aesthetic charge. “Art as aesthetic charge intentionally derived from creative activity” is a metaphor I use to designate the theory of art that comes out of dynamic organicism. One could put this more formally as “for something to be art it must be an artifact that has aesthetic charge intentionally derived from creative activity”. But I think it is more important to define art as a whole, taking into account processes of creativity and the communication between artist and audience, rather than simply come up

<sup>23</sup> see my “Metaphor and Metaphysics”, in *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 10:3 (1995) 205-222.

with a definition that classifies objects as works of art. In any case, it is not my purpose here to present an explication or defense of this theory of art, or rather this metaphorical beginning of such a theory, but to show the role that actively defining art would play in an aesthetic theory that is dynamic organicist.

It should be stressed that this theory of art is not just classificatory in Dickie's sense of the word. Like traditional functionalist definitions of art, it seeks to capture the evaluative dimension of philosophical definition. Items are more or less art. Truly bad art simply slips out of the realm of art. If something has a very low level of aesthetic charge then it is not art in any strong sense. If it has a high level of aesthetic charge, and is an artifact, then it is art in a strong sense.

Related to this, on the level of aesthetic evaluation, I reduce Beardsley's trinity to a unity: one sufficient condition for good art. This one condition might be variously called unity, complexity or intensity. If something has aesthetic charge then it is good as art. Organicism rules in this respect too. This theory is intended in part to capture the typical art critic's statement of evaluative praise, that a work is powerful or strong. The problem with Beardsley's theory is not so much the terms used as his failure to recognize that these terms need to be taken in a specific aesthetic sense. Unity that is not organically-charged aesthetic unity, complexity that is not organically-charged aesthetic complexity, and intensity that is not organically-charged aesthetic intensity, do not contribute to overall aesthetic value. As I have noted above, that something can have an intense regional quality of squarishness does not make it aesthetic if one sees squarishness in terms of its relation to the mathematical definition of square. The property of squarishness can only be aesthetic if it is a symbol that concentrates cultural significance and carries aesthetic potentiality.

Note that I am not claiming that something is art if it arises from an experience of aesthetic charge. Nor am I claiming that it is art if it generates an experience of aesthetic charge. Nor, again, am I claiming that the aesthetic charge is simply a quality of the work of art as isolated autonomous object. Art, and hence aesthetic charge, are both emergent upon the interaction between artist, work, and audience. Aesthetic charge is at the anti-realist level of experience that is prior to distinction between subject and object.

Another problem in aesthetics centers on the nature of aesthetic properties. As mentioned earlier in this paper, many aestheticians make a strong distinction between two levels of properties. Sibley for example proposed a strict distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties<sup>24</sup>. Although Sibley realizes that aesthetics is not condition-governed, he failed to see that the aesthetic non/ aesthetic distinction cannot apply to the critic's support of his/her judgments in

<sup>24</sup> Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts", in Bender and Blocker, pp. 243-259.

any sense. From an organicist perspective, it just does not make sense to distinguish between aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties of works of art as art. One can isolate purely physical properties of a painting, but then one is not looking at it qua work of art, or even qua object of aesthetic experience. It should be remembered that, on the view offered here, all of the properties of a work of art are organically and internally interrelated. It follows that one can never support aesthetic evaluations by referring to non-aesthetic properties. This would be like trying to support moral judgments based on scientific truths. At best, we can only speak of some properties of works of art as being describable as non-aesthetic. There are no specifically aesthetic or non-aesthetic terms, and no criteria for distinguishing them. Taste is not some capacity to find something objectively mere, as Hume thought with his theory of delicate sentiment, but the capacity to experience aesthetically.

The problem of expression and expressive properties may also be quickly addressed, once again at a very programmatic level. It is commonly believed among aestheticians of music that musical expressiveness should be seen to belong unequivocally to the music work. It cannot belong in any way to the listener, the performer or the composer. This I take to be deeply wrong. Once again it assumes that expressive properties are emergent on a 'one-to-one basis upon a physical object or event of some sort. Dynamic organicism holds that it is emergent upon the relationship between the composer, the performer, and the listener as well as upon the work of art. Indirectly it is emergent upon the dynamic and dialectic

shape of the style, the artform, the culture, and ultimately the species. It would even make sense to speak of musical works as sad in a world in which no one ever experienced sadness.

It is not required for the sadness of the work to be directly caused by sadness felt by the composer. Nor is it required that some listeners actually experience sadness when experiencing the work. What is required is simply some dynamic relationship between the composer, performer, musical work, and listener such

that the work, as the center of these relations, takes on the property of sadness, and such that we can speak of something about sadness being communicated. (There are no hard boundaries between the work and the creative process that gave rise to it, or between the work and the audience's experience of the work. This is fundamental.) The property is understood here not as merely objective, as both subjective and objective, or as neither. In fact, the term "property" might be inappropriate here, as it is associated by many with objectivist ontology "quality" might be better.

Much of analytic aesthetics has dealt with the problem that works of art seem to have various properties that we would normally attribute to humans. We say that a painting can be sad, can represent things, and can have meaning. When analytic aesthetics began, philosophers in the analytic tradition were already

worried about souls of humans. Dualism was considered to be bad metaphysics. Worse yet would be the mysticism of believing that works of art themselves have something like souls. To avoid this, it was important to keep very distinct two levels of properties: the level of the physical properties, and the level of the ontologically emergent properties.

This theoretical approach was, and still is, pervasive in analytic aesthetics. As I have noted, Joe Margolis in the 1970s distinguished between the level of description and the level of interpretation, Frank Sibley distinguished between the level of non-aesthetic properties and the level of aesthetic properties, and Monroe Beardsley distinguished between the level of local properties and that of regional properties. To add one more: Alan Tormey distinguished between non-expressive and expressive properties<sup>25</sup>.

However, this kind of dualism suffers from the problems of dualism in general. How do the different levels communicate with each other? How is the second level emergent on the first? How can we find a clear demarcation line between the two? Since reduction is not allowed, we have some of these authors saying strange things. Tormey for example speaks of works of art as autonomous self-expressive objects. He denies that they can have inner natures, but contradictorily insists that they can be “seen into”, that they have a certain “perceptual thickness”.

As I see it, the ontologically emergent properties of persons and works of art can be taken to form overall organic wholes. The ontological center of these I shall call “the soul of”. In this way, we can speak of the soul of a person, or the soul of a work of art. I do not intend to imply that these entities are unique substances, or that they exist after death.

It is typical for believers in souls to speak of them as emergent from bodies in the sense that for each body there is one soul. Art works are also generally thought: to be emergent from individual physical objects. It is worthwhile, however, to take another perspective in which souls (or minds) of persons are not just emergent upon bodies but upon the interaction between bodies, activities, things made, and larger communities. Similarly, it is worthwhile to see artworks as emergent upon interactions between personal souls, cultural context, and physical medium perceived aesthetically, all of this occurring dynamically in the creative process broadly understood to include not simply artist’s making but also the audience’s appreciation and interpretation. Thus, I will speak of the ensouling process as the process in which souls emerge in the very process of creativity.

Souls, on this view, are emergent not simply on bodies but also on relations between bodies and artifacts, including works of art (both as created and as

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<sup>25</sup> Alan Tormey, “The Concept of Expression: A Proposal”, in Bender and Blocker, pp. 164-169

appreciated). So, too, works of art not simply emergent on physical objects (e.g. a piece of marble) but on cultural institutions etc., as mediated by human consciousness. This is in keeping with the insight of Arthur Danto and George Dickie that works of art have properties that are non-evident and based on art historical or artworld context<sup>26</sup>. However, my view is that works of art have souls in the sense that they participate in the ensouling process, a process that includes the ensouling of persons and cultures. Danto and Dickie's contextualism is too narrow in that they do not take into account either the level of the personal or the level of the entire culture.

This way of looking at works of art brings back the romantic theory of expression minus any commitment romanticism may have had to the autonomy thesis or objectivist hermeneutics. A work of art is expressive not in that it merely has expressive properties but in that it participates in the constitution of expression for the maker and also the appreciator. There is, of course, quasi-autonomy for works of art. They may be *seen as* self-expressive objects, and this fiction is illuminating in certain ways. It is somewhat similar to the experience of novelists who believe that characters in their novels are taking on a life of their own. However, a wider view reveals that works of art are part of a dynamic process of expression in which creators and appreciators actualize their own potentials.

It is time to bring the creator and the appreciator of the work of art back into the overall equation of expression. Works of art have souls in the sense that they participate in the ensouling of humans who create and interpret them and the cultures that spawn them. Humans have souls, but not simply emergent upon bodies or brains. It makes sense to speak of works of art having intentional properties just because they participate in this larger project of ensouling. Of course, this leads us to need to overcome our tendency to see our souls as just contained within our bodies or, more narrowly, our brains. It also requires us to take somewhat more seriously the art-lover's tendency to identify strongly with works of art and their creators.

## V

In a general sense, realism is in retreat before anti-realism. However, it is not eliminated. It is incorporated as one level of reality, the other level of which is referred to by anti-realism. Dynamic organicism, nonetheless, allows room for some of the ideas most disliked by analytic aesthetics: expression theory, a form of essentialism, the binding of evaluation and classification, and relativism. Theory

<sup>26</sup> Arthur Danto, "The Artistic Enfranchisement of Real Objects: The Artworld", in Bender and Blocker, pp. 199-206, George Dickie, "What is Art? An Institutional Analysis", *ibid.* pp. 207-218.

of interpretation is resolved in something like Margolis's way, but without substituting unicity for unity, and without insisting that creative interpretation be based on adequational interpretation. Rather, the two types of interpretation are seen as dynamically interactive as aspects of a larger creative process. Theory of evaluation splits the difference between universalism of Beardsley and the particularism of Isenberg: there is *one* characteristic that is necessary and sufficient for aesthetic value and this is aesthetic charge. Beardsley's criteria of unity, complexity and identity are fused into one thing. Contra, Sibley, all specific terms of aesthetic evaluation are positive, negative or neutral relative to the context of the creative process that they refer to, and to which they are organically connected in various ways. Theory of the nature of art allows for art to have a constantly changing essence which is emergent both ontologically and dynamically. Unlike recent aestheticians who opt out of actually giving a metaphor-like definition of art, I posit one that is consonant with dynamic organicism: "art is aesthetic charge". This of course would have to be expanded and clarified at length if it were to act as a contender in the field. Theory of creativity overcomes the obsessive object-centered nature of analytic aesthetics, allowing for larger ranges of organic wholes and a dynamic process in which the author and audience constitute and reconstitute the art object within the context of larger debates within the culture and between cultures. Theory of expression also, overcomes this object-centeredness, recognizing that the very distinction between subject and object only works usefully at the realist level of experience.