

Oberlin

Digital Commons at Oberlin

Honors Papers

Student Work

2011

The Ethical Significance of the Aesthetic Experience of Non-Representational Art

Taylor Rogers
Oberlin College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.oberlin.edu/honors>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Rogers, Taylor, "The Ethical Significance of the Aesthetic Experience of Non-Representational Art" (2011). *Honors Papers*. 419.

<https://digitalcommons.oberlin.edu/honors/419>

This Thesis - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at Digital Commons at Oberlin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Papers by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons at Oberlin. For more information, please contact megan.mitchell@oberlin.edu.

The Ethical Significance of the Aesthetic Experience of Non-Representational Art

Taylor Rogers

Oberlin College

May, 2011

- I. Introduction
- II. Key Terms
- III. Key Features of Aesthetic Experience:
Attention & Distraction
- IV. Delicacy & Distance
- V. The Ethical Significance of Perceptual
Delicacy
- VI. Ethico-Aesthetic Properties
- VII. Delicacy and Representational Art
- VIII. Conclusion
- Bibliography

I. Introduction

This paper's aim is to give an account of the distinctive ethical significance of the aesthetic experience of non-representational art. I hope to demonstrate how perceptual skills necessary for such engagement prove to be ethical as well as aesthetic skills. First, I will offer some background on the nature of aesthetic experience, before adopting Noël Carroll's content-oriented account for my own investigation. After clarifying my use of "aesthetic experience," I explain my focus on non-representational art, illustrating the way in which it more accessibly fosters pure aesthetic experience, as opposed to art that is representational. By employing the terms 'non-representational' and 'representational,' I will be referring to paradigm cases of each sort of art as a way of circumventing the need for an account of when and how art represents. Mitchell Green in "Empathy, Expression and What Artworks Have to Teach" asserts, "Some forms of engagement with works of art...either convey or activate a skill¹." In light of this assertion, I analyze how one's aesthetic engagement with non-representational art distinctly cultivates the skill of sensitive perception, or, 'delicacy,' which allows one to perceive all of the aesthetically relevant features present in a work of art, no matter how subtle. By showing that many of these aesthetic features are also moral features, I will argue that the perception of such properties may aid in both grasping moral knowledge and motivating ethical behavior. In this way, I show that the sort of delicate perception necessary for the aesthetic engagement with non-representational art is ethically significant.

¹ Mitchell Green, "Empathy, Expression And What Artworks Have to Teach," in *Art and Ethical Criticism*, ed. Garry L. Hagberg (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2008), 10.

II. Key Terms

In the eighteenth century, Alexander Baumgarten introduced the concept of “the aesthetic” to designate that knowledge which is acquired by the senses. As a prototype of the sort of object intended for “sensitive cognition,” art then immediately became linked with the aesthetic,² and engagement with art became to be seen as the epitome of an aesthetic experience. This association has remained so strong that the philosophical field of “Aesthetics” is often equated with the “Philosophy of Art.” However, these notions of “aesthetic” and “aesthetic experience” have long been extended past their earliest or traditional uses. Literature, for example, is not directly available to the senses, yet is often claimed to initiate aesthetic experience by evoking imaginative responses.³ Many assume that conceptual art also aims to induce aesthetic experience more through the mind than through the senses, although this point is contended⁴. It is thus important to make precise one’s use of the term ‘aesthetic experience’ in a way that is inclusive enough to account for the variety of intuitions about it. Noël Carroll, in “Aesthetic Experience: A Question of Content,” does just this, offering a disjunctive set of criteria for identifying aesthetic experience that provides comprehensiveness within clearly defined limits.

In constructing his own view, Carroll is primarily responding to three main approaches to aesthetic experience. Affect-oriented theorists advance the idea that aesthetic experience is

² Noël Carroll, “Aesthetic Experience: A Question of Content,” in *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 70.

³ Carroll, 70.

⁴ Timothy Binkley, for example, does not seem to think conceptual art is aesthetic.

defined by the highly distinctive experiential quality, feeling, or affect that accompanies it. Epistemic theorists claim that one has an aesthetic experience when one comes to know an object through direct perceptual sensation. Finally, the axiological view defines aesthetic experience in terms of its intrinsic value, or the value it has for its own sake. Each of these views, Carroll argues, are unsuccessful in capturing the full range of aesthetic experiences, including, for example, non-sensuous or dispassionate aesthetic experiences. Additionally, these views fail to distinguish aesthetic experience from other sorts of experience, for example, from other intrinsically valuable experiences like the experience of a delicious meal. After pointing to counterexamples that undermine each of these accounts, Carroll offers his own view on aesthetic experience, the *content-oriented approach*. In doing so, Carroll suggests that we can define aesthetic experience in terms of the form of the artwork and its other aesthetic properties. He argues, “If *attention is directed* [my emphasis] with understanding to the form of the artwork, and/or to its expressive or aesthetic properties, and/or to the interaction between these features, and/or to the way in which the aforesaid factors modulate our response to the artwork, then the experience is aesthetic.⁵”

Attention to form, under Carroll’s view, is characterized by attention to the design of the artwork, or the “ensemble of choices intended to realize the point or purpose of the artwork⁶.” Attention to other aesthetic properties is meant by Carroll to refer to the detection of things such as “the sadness in music, the apparent massiveness of the building, the balance in the sculpture, and the lightness of the dancer’s step⁷.” Expressive qualities will constitute a large portion of these aesthetic properties. What is true of all aesthetic properties, however, is that they are

⁵ Carroll, 89.

⁶ Carroll, 90.

⁷ Carroll, 90.

response-dependent, meaning “they are dispositions to promote impressions or effects on appropriately backgrounded creatures with our perceptual and imaginative capabilities⁸.” These impressions or responses induced by form and other aesthetic properties can include those responses that are cognitive, perceptual, emotive, and/or imaginative. Carroll additionally notes that there will be other, more controversial applicants to the disjunctive set of sufficient conditions for aesthetic experience. For example, Carroll decides to leave out from aesthetic experience “brute recognition of what a representation is”⁹. As we shall see, this exclusion will hold high importance in distinguishing between one’s engagement with non-representational and representational art. For if recognition of representational content is deemed unaesthetic, I claim that representation may, in fact, *hinder* aesthetic experience, by distracting one from the aesthetic features of the work. Finally, another feature of Carroll’s account that recommends it for my project is its informative nature: it offers criteria for how one can seek aesthetic experience, namely, by *attending* to form and other aesthetic properties.

Having clarified the notion of aesthetic experience, the next step is to identify my use of the concept of “non-representational art”¹⁰. Although I will not actually be citing

⁸ Carroll, 91.

⁹ Carroll, 81-89.

¹⁰ ‘Representation’ is an exceptionally flexible notion; its uses extend all the way from a flower ‘representing’ a woman or serving as a symbol of femininity, to a novel representing the day in the life of the Amish. Therefore, the line between what counts as representational and what counts as non-representational art is a hard one to draw, and should certainly not be determined arbitrarily. Determining how to mark the distinction depends on the debate concerning *how* something represents. Do pictures represent by resemblance? By re-presenting? By symbolizing or denoting? Can music represent at all? If so, is this by representing sounds with sounds, by expressing ideas, or by telling a story? Whatever the answer to this host of questions, the term “representation” aims to capture something fundamental about the way information is presented, and the debate about how to specify the term is considerable and complex enough to warrant the hundreds of articles and books already written on the issue. I wish to sidestep these debates.

many specific examples of art in this paper, those that I do cite are aimed to spark no controversy about their “representational” or “non-representational status.” Robert Hopkins asserts that language and pictures are the two most prominent modes of representation. He states, “Pictures are often described as *showing* what they represent, rather than *saying* anything about it [referring to language]¹¹.” Therefore, when employing the term ‘non-representational’ in this inquiry, either specifically or more generally, I will be referring to either paintings that do not ‘picture’ anything, or to works of music that lack parts for the human voice, lyrics, a title, and a program, in order to ensure the absence of explicit representation. In my analysis of ‘representational’ art, I will also aim to examine, either specifically or more generally, indisputable cases, such as narrative cinema that aims to be realistic. My use of examples supports my general aim of showing that the *less* a work of art explicitly represents, the more it enables the development of the sort of perception I find to be ethically significant, as representation often promotes different, non-aesthetic ways of perceiving.

III. Key Features of Aesthetic Experience: Attention & Distraction

Now that we have clarified both my use of ‘aesthetic experience’ and of ‘non-representational art,’ let’s begin an examination of the nature of the aesthetic experience of non-representational art. I find two primary characteristics of such engagement, the first being its active nature, and second being the way it is “self-standing,” a term used by Aristotle to

¹¹ Robert Hopkins, “The Speaking Image: Visual Communication and the Nature of Depiction,” in *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 145.

categorize those sorts of skills that are “only available to the person who is exercising the skill in at least a rudimentary way¹².” In other words, I claim that the capacity to have an aesthetic experience of non-representational art is a skill that necessitates practice. Through practice, one will gain the knowledge afforded by familiarity of what to look for in learning how to attend to form and other aesthetic properties properly. More on that later. For now, let’s examine the first claim that the aesthetic experience of non-representational art is essentially active by first pointing to widespread recognition of this claim in aesthetic thought.

In “Aesthetic Experience and Artful Conduct,” Kenneth A. McClelland offers an interpretation of John Dewey’s account of aesthetic experience, summarizing Dewey’s account with this suggestive claim, “The organic relation between humans and their environment is a transactional affair, and one in which both become equally productive in manifesting the ongoing struggle to endow our world with meaning and value.¹³” For Dewey, any experience can be aesthetic, whether it is of a piece of art, or of an everyday object. However, ‘the aesthetic experience’ necessarily has dynamic unity in that the structure of the experience is marked by the balance of the active and the passive, being receptive to whatever is being experienced while also actively seeking out, sustaining, and directing one’s own experience. These passive and active elements are dependent on both the environment and the subject, as there is both a subject that is experiencing, and an environment that is experienced. One component of aesthetic engagement, therefore, is an “undergoing,” consisting of absorption of the artwork and the information it

¹² Michael Watkins and Kelly Jolley, “Pollyanna Realism: Moral Perception and Moral Properties,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 80, no. 1 (2002), 77.

¹³ Kenneth McClelland, “John Dewey: Aesthetic Experience and Artful Conduct,” *Education and Culture* 21, no. 2 (2005), 46.

presents. The second component is a “doing,” or an active contribution to one’s own experience. Both, according to Dewey, are imperative for the development of our potential for refinement in lived experience, which grounds our ethical and social efficacy.

If we elaborate on Dewey’s view, it seems that the proportions of ‘passivity’ and ‘activity’ in an aesthetic experience will be determined by both the nature of the artwork and also by the person who is engaged. Although Dewey does not fully tell us what, exactly, the ‘active’ part of aesthetic experience involves, it seems that we can make an intuitively plausible distinction between more active and passive experiences with art. In the kind of experience supported by a work like *Avatar in 3D* (2010), there seems to be more “undergoing,” than doing. Contrastingly, in a work such as an abstract painting by Rothko, consisting only of a few ‘fields’ of color, there seems to be more “doing” required in order to engage with the work. In life, this could parallel the difference between experiences such as riding a rollercoaster (more “undergoing”), and experiences like listening intently to a lecture on microbiology (more “doing”). According to Dewey, an experience can only truly be deemed aesthetic when doing and undergoing are balanced and integrated.

Dewey’s basic emphasis on the active and its ineliminability results from his greatest concern, namely, that overwhelming passivity often permeates normal experience. When our experiences fall short in manifesting aesthetic potential due to such passiveness, we sacrifice the opportunity for both ethical and aesthetic growth. Today’s age of technology has made passive engagement an increasingly viable option in experiencing both art and everyday life. Stimulating video games, ‘clap-on’ lighting, online culture, and countless other ways of experiencing the modern world have significantly diminished the active facet of aesthetic experience. One student, in “Growing up Digital, Wired for Distraction,” explains, “I know I can read a book, but then

I'm up and checking Facebook...Facebook is amazing because it feels like you're doing something and you're not doing anything. It's the absence of doing something, but you feel gratified anyway¹⁴." I believe that engagement with non-representational art has the capacity to cultivate the active facet of experience that is wanting in modern culture. Such cultivation is important in that it will prove to be morally significant.

Along with Dewey and keeping with Carroll's idea that one must *attend to* form and aesthetic properties, many other aestheticians today emphasize active participation as inherent to aesthetic engagement. Marcia Eaton, for example, claims that aesthetic experience "involves attending to, perceiving, and reflecting upon, an object or event's intrinsic properties¹⁵," and that "one learns that properties should be sought deliberately¹⁶." Eaton further points out that both in life, and in art, "It is not only what is discovered that matters but also the fact of the discovery itself...looking at a painting involves actively fitting the parts together¹⁷." Such claims further support the distinction between merely absorbing or discovering information and actively pursuing it. Additionally, George Dickie, in his well-known response to Edward Bullough's account of aesthetic distance, characterizes the aesthetic attitude as involving *close attention* to a work of art rather than entrance into a mysterious and special psychological state. This supports the idea that aesthetic experience is, at least partly, an intentional or purposive activity.

My wish to emphasize the active side of aesthetic engagement, found later to be fundamental in ethical deliberation, initiated my particular interest in non-representational art.

¹⁴ Matt Ritel, "Growing Up Digital, Wired for Distraction," *The New York Times*, 21 (2010), 14.

¹⁵ Marcia Muelder Eaton, *Merit, Aesthetic and Ethical* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2001), 99.

¹⁶ Eaton, 154.

¹⁷ Eaton, 105.

The line between what counts as active and what counts as passive engagement is perhaps just as controversial as the line between representational and non-representational art. However, I wish to use ‘active’ in more than in its minimal sense. Although most cognitive scientists see perception itself as an active, inferential process, this is not the sort of use of the term ‘active’ that I wish to invoke in my own investigation. Rather than a simple processing of perceptual data, “active” attention involves activities that are *purposive* such as intentionally discerning the relationship between elements of a work, detecting a work’s overall structure, bringing one’s attention to detail, and reflecting upon how a work is making one feel. As previously mentioned, Carroll decided to exclude “recognizing what a representation is” from the disjunctive set of conditions for aesthetic experience. As brute recognition does not necessarily seem to involve active participation in the way I am using the term, I am in agreement that such an “activity” remains unaesthetic. Clive Bell points out that “representation is a sign of weakness in an artist;” claiming that “people who cannot feel pure aesthetic emotions remember pictures by their subjects... [and] formal significance loses itself in preoccupation with exact representation¹⁸.” As we have defined aesthetic experience, at least, in part, by attention to form, such concerns are especially problematic. Although Bell’s complete dismissal of the aesthetic relevance of representation is extreme, controversial, and not something I am committed to, I do hold similar concerns. The worry is that representational content, particularly when it is easily accessible, can detract from full and rich aesthetic experience by *distracting* the viewer from the active experience of formal and other aesthetic properties of a work.

¹⁸ Clive Bell, “Artworks: Form and Content,” in *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern*, ed. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (New York: McGraw Hill, 1995), 107.

Let's consider the term "distract." When one is "distracted," there is an implication that one's attention is being pulled away *from* something else. For example, if I am conversing with a waiter, and I find my attention taken away from the specials of the night by a fly buzzing around my head, I may say to the waiter, "the fly was distracting me, could you please repeat yourself?" It was not that I actively *intended* to look at the fly, but rather that my attention was "pulled away" by the buzzing. Therefore, there is some sense in which "being active," in the way we have defined the term, and "being distracted," are mutually exclusive. This is not to say that a distraction cannot turn into an intentional activity, but while one's attention is being "pulled away," rather than "intentionally directed towards" something, the distraction remains a distraction.

In the same way I was intending to listen to the waiter while being distracted by the fly, I may be intending to do homework while my brother is watching *Jaws* (1975). Knowing myself, it is highly probable that my attention will be absorbed by events on screen, rather than by my essay. In this sense, we can say that representational art, at least in the case of film, can be "distracting," as it does not seem that form or other aesthetic properties serve as the distraction, but rather that the representation, or plot does. This is not to claim that form and other aesthetic properties are not present in representation, for they certainly are. If we are construing form as "the choices intended by the artist¹⁹," or the way the work is purposefully put together, it surely seems to be the case that even the way Chief Brody inflects his voice at certain points in the movie could be part of the form. Therefore, I do not aim to deny that form shapes representational content, and vice versa. Rather, I wish to maintain that it is the representation as content that is distracting me. When distracted, I am not interested so much in *how* something is

¹⁹ Carroll, 90.

being depicted. I am not reflecting on film techniques or even on expressive properties, which would require intentional activity. Rather, when my state is one of distraction, I am merely engaged and pulled in by *what* is being represented. It is, of course, true that a loud crash or flash of light in a film, which is not part of representational content, could also serve as a distraction. However, such momentary distraction certainly seems to be distinguished from the way one's attention is sustained by an eagerness to know what will happen next when distracted by the plot.

Similarly, consider a piece of instrumental music. In some cases, the playing of such music may even allow me to focus and engage more easily with my homework than silence would. In this sense, we can say that non-representational art is not always "distracting," but can work in quite the opposite way. I am not claiming that this sort of "engagement" (whether or not it can even be considered "engagement") with classical music is aesthetic, for certainly it is not in the way we have construed the term. Rather, I am claiming that the lack of representation apparent in such works seems to make it *less likely* that I will be distracted by it or from its form. The fact that non-representational, instrumental music can even be ignored, such as when it is playing in the background, suggests that perhaps only by actively attending to it can one engage with it at all. On the other hand, representational music, such as songs with lyrics, and particularly those with complex or insistent and easily recognized lyrics, hardly allow me to concentrate on my schoolwork, furthering the claim that representation, both pictorially (as in the case of *Jaws*) and linguistically constructed, often serves to distract one's attention. Aesthetic properties and form themselves, therefore, do not seem to distract in the same way that representation does.

This is *not* to claim that representation only serves as distraction or that one cannot engage with representation actively. For one surely can, as when one aims to figure out the

intricacies of a complex plot, or the psychologically disturbing motives behind a character's actions. I am not suggesting that "active" engagement grants sufficiency for aesthetic experience, only that it is necessary. Intentional engagement with representation is surely active, but it is often not aesthetic, as when attention to various narrative details and complexities is encouraged by one's interest in representational content, rather than by a desire to apprehend form and other aesthetic properties. For example, my attention to the details of a complex plot is, in many cases, motivated by an interest in the characters and curiosity about what will happen to them. Therefore, my claim is that representation, whether pursued actively or not, often distracts one from actively engaging with form and other aesthetic properties, rendering the experience unaesthetic.

This claim is also not meant to suggest that representation *necessarily* conceals or distracts from form. For example, prevalent in Picasso's cubist paintings are the multi-faceted and distorted faces with which we are so familiar. Through their distortion, these faces bring ones attention to form. We ask ourselves, "Why is the nose positioned where the eye should be?" and so on. With 'exact' or conventionally realistic representation, attention to form is *less* likely, as we do not have to work at recognizing or making sense of what we are seeing- if we automatically recognize a figure, say, in a painting, we just become interested in that figure and not in how the figure is presented. Looking to the sorts of representational arts that are most pervasive in popular culture, where 'reality' television and classically realist mainstream cinema is pervasive, and in general, to those sorts of cases in art that are unambiguous in their representational status, we see this second type of case more often than the first. It seems that in cases of 'realistic' art, which aims to record reality, the presence of form and other aesthetic

properties is de-emphasized, seeming to make rich aesthetic experience, as a result of representation, much less probable.

Take the example of watching a new blockbuster film. As already shown, it does not require much concentration to engage with the representational content of such films, just as when one is distracted. Rather, one can merely sit and be ‘distracted’ say, from more ‘serious’ pursuits, by what is being represented on screen through brute representational recognition and basic plot comprehension. Such cases surely seem to reduce the active facet of aesthetic experience, and, according to Bell, if such works “leave untouched our aesthetic emotions because it is not their forms, but... their ideas or information... that affect us”, they are not works of art²⁰. Although such a claim is contentious, perhaps it is motivated by similar concerns. However, it does seem to be the case that by deliberately and actively seeking out the form and other aesthetic properties of even a blockbuster film, through close examination of camera angles, lighting sequences, or expressive properties, one’s experience can be transformed into one that is unambiguously aesthetic. It thus seems that some sort of *extra effort* is needed to apprehend the form and other aesthetic properties of the film. This “extra effort” may be the active component of aesthetic engagement commonly postulated by aestheticians.

Therefore, as previously stated, I do not wish to assert that works with representational or narrative content lack formal and other kinds of aesthetic properties. Rather, I am aiming to show that when it is strictly plot for plot’s sake that is guiding one’s attention, without regard to the design and aesthetic properties utilized to manifest such plot, aesthetic experience is threatened. Even popular TV programs, if viewed with attention to design and other aesthetic properties of the plot, can yield rich aesthetic experience, keeping with Dewey’s claim about the universality

²⁰ Bell, 103.

of aesthetic experience. I do not wish to deny this, as my specific purpose is to show that aesthetic perception is essential for rewarding and ethically responsible everyday experiences. My point, rather, is that representational art, insofar as it is representational, does not straightforwardly foster aesthetic engagement. Therefore, the sort of engagement necessary for aesthetically experiencing representation in art, without being distracted by its content, is best cultivated through other sorts of experiences, and specifically, through the kinds of aesthetic experiences provided by non-representational art.

As opposed to representational art, non-representational art seems to make more readily available aesthetic experience, as the distraction of representation is absent. Take the example, again, of listening to a piece of instrumental music. In contrast to much of mainstream cinema, the patterns and expressive properties of the music are not hidden or de-emphasized by the readily available narrative and plot. Although there remain ways in which one can actively engage un-aesthetically with music, by, for example, attending carefully to the way a trumpet player's mouth moves with different notes that he plays, such unaesthetic engagement is grounded more in the idiosyncratic activity of the listener than by the work itself. This contrasts with representational art, which by its nature contains potentially distracting features of content. Devoid of these distracting features, it seems that non-representational art better cultivates the active process that in part constitutes both Dewey's notion of '*an* experience', and Carroll's inclusive notion of aesthetic experience. As a result, in pursuing a greater understanding of the nature of aesthetic experience, and of the ethical implications that such experiences yield, I find it helpful to focus on those experiences of art that are more likely to be more straightforwardly or obviously aesthetic; namely, experiences of non-representational art. The ethical implications of the sort of shallow engagement with representational art that I have presented will also be

examined later, as well as how such experiences can be transformed into aesthetic experiences by developing perceptual skills through one's engagement with non-representational art.

Some of the strength of Carroll's account of aesthetic experience lies in large part upon its informative nature. We are overtly given a procedure for engaging aesthetically with an artwork; namely, by *attending* to the works' form and other aesthetic properties. It seems very simple. However, for those of us who have attempted to engage with a piece of abstract, non-representational music for the first time, we know that maintaining this kind of attention is not so easy. This is because form and other aesthetic properties are not made readily available in the same way that representational content is. Rather, they must be actively sought out by sustained attention, and such attention requires training. It is common, as a beginning listener, for one's mind to wander away from chord progressions, dynamics, and tone, as it rests upon tonight's dinner, tomorrow's work presentation, or the cute haircut of the bass player. Distraction after distraction may occur, leaving one's musical "attendance" quite vacuous. However, this kind of distraction is contingent on the listener's skills, as opposed to being intrinsic to a work which has content.

To better understand this distinction, let's look to a personal experience of my own regarding jazz, an art form in which many works are clearly non-representational. In the early days of attending my brother's jazz concerts, which primarily consisted of improvisation, I came to realize, through post-performance discussion, how shallow my own engagement had been in comparison with others. I did not remember, or even take notice, of the subtle movement within the "accompanied bass harmonic," or the "dynamic interplay of arpeggios among the keyboard and trumpet player" or things of that sort. What were the other listeners doing that I was not? Why did I not *get it*? 'Delicacy', in David Hume's account of the true aesthetic judge, is a

necessary skill for aesthetic judgment that enables one to perceive all the aesthetically relevant features in a work, no matter how subtle. Hume would claim that in my early experiences of jazz, I was lacking delicate perception, and therefore was unequipped to fully apprehend the work. He would further claim that obtaining this perceptual skill requires practice at paying attention to, noticing, and picking out formal features of such music²¹. Stephen Davies in “Artistic Expression and the Hard Case of Pure Music,” claims that the difference between experiencing music as sound and experiencing sound as music is that “people who hear music as such hear it as organized. They recognize where a melody begins and ends and when it is repeated or varies;...they can often predict how a phrase will continue or a chord resolve;²²” etc. In other words, the experience of sound is transformed into an aesthetic experience of music when one understands the form and other aesthetic properties of the piece.

I would like to add, however, that ‘technical’ knowledge does not seem to be required for true aesthetic experience. I did not need to understand technical knowledge of jazz in order to come to experience it aesthetically. If this was the case, it is probable that only jazz musicians would be capable of aesthetically experiencing their music, and this does not seem right. Similarly, it is not as if learning the names of different bicycle parts, or how the pedals and handlebars are put together, will help one ride a bike. Rather, bike riding, like aesthetic experience, is a self-standing skill, and one must simply practice riding in order to be equipped with the knowledge of how to do so. In the same way, one comes to become knowledgeable

²¹ David Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste,” in *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern*, ed. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (New York: McGraw Hill, 1995), 254-269.

²² Stephen Davies, “Artistic Expression and the Hard Case of Pure Music,” in *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 180.

about aesthetic components often employed in music and painting through frequent exposure to such art. As a result of greater familiarity, one becomes more sensitive in perceiving these properties, although one certainly must not, for example, know the name of the method being employed.

As aesthetic experience, I claim, is a self-standing skill, only by persisting in my pursuit to understand the phenomenon of jazz performance that moved some to tears, or perhaps sheer ecstasy, and by *practicing* at having an aesthetic experience through frequently attending jazz concerts, did I finally begin to uncover what the aesthetic experience supported by the music was all about. Thus my own experience supports Green's claim that 'know-how' skills, such as learning how to have an aesthetic experience, are "often only possible with some practice"²³. One may have to listen to a certain type of music over and over again, such as I did, before fully grasping the features of the music that are the proper object of attention in an aesthetic experience, namely its form and other aesthetic properties. In my attempt to have such experiences, I had to *actively intend to pay close attention* to the music again and again. Eventually, focusing intently for extended periods of time became easier, as understanding of what to attend to, namely, different aesthetic properties that characterize jazz, became clearer.

Aesthetic experience itself, therefore, is an acquired skill that is gained by *direct experience* or practice. As Aristotle points out, "What we must learn before we can do, we learn by doing."²⁴ This is an important part of Aristotle's account of how we acquire the abilities necessary for forming accurate moral judgments. As an illustration, Michael Watkins and Kelly Dean Jolley, in "Pollyanna Realism: Moral Perception and Moral Properties," point out that

²³ Green, 5.

²⁴ Watkins and Jolley, 77.

“What we must learn before we can swim or ride a bike, we learn by swimming or riding a bike, however poorly.²⁵” They claim that moral perception is obtained through practice, just as these other self-standing activities are. In line with Aristotle, they are defending the role of perception in learning moral facts about particular cases- for example, in the way we might perceive that the torture taking place before us is wrong. Sarah McGrath argues in “Moral Knowledge by Perception” that perception of such facts simply involves the exercising of augmented perception, or skilled perception which enables the perception of things unperceived by unskilled perceivers. Perceiving moral facts, therefore, is no more mystifying than any other instance of perception that requires some degree of sophistication, training, or skill²⁶. This skilled perception important for morality can be cultivated, I will claim later, by one’s engagement with non-representational art. For now, I simply argue that the skilled perception necessary for rich aesthetic engagement with non-representational art is obtained by intending to have such experiences again and again. Through such attempts, one becomes aware of how to listen musically (by attending to aesthetic properties that become more apparent) in the same way that one learns how to pedal, or how to steer, through practicing at bike riding. Carrying out the activity, therefore, is simultaneously a means to and a demonstration of one’s knowledge.

It is not the case, however, that one must learn and practice how to engage with representational art in the same way, as often times such experiences can be unaesthetic, due either to one’s passive engagement, or due to the irrelevant content of one’s active engagement. While in the case of non-representational art, as mentioned, one’s absorbed experience may also be un-aesthetic, this is more likely to be a result of idiosyncrasies of the person engaging, rather

²⁵Watkins and Jolley, 77.

²⁶ Sarah McGrath, “Moral Knowledge by Perception.” *Philosophical Perspectives* 18 (2004), 221.

than being supported or directed by the work itself-- for example, when someone decides to count all of the A notes in a piece of classical music, and this activity takes up all their attention. When listening to others talk about the harmonizing patterns between the bass and piano, this person will have nothing to contribute. This, in itself, may make her feel that her musical attendance was empty, prompting a desire for improvement and practice in her ability to engage aesthetically. Contrastingly, unaesthetic experiences of representational art are often shared and rewarding, as conversations about plot dominate discussion of novels and narrative films. This provides less motivation to “learn how” to have a proper (and more difficult), aesthetic experience of representational or narrative art. Rather, one may feel that he or she has already “gotten the work”, simply by following the plot. It seems, therefore, that while the “self-standing” condition postulated by Aristotle is necessary for all aesthetic engagement, it will be much easier to implement such practice and awareness and thus achieve rich aesthetic experience with non-representational art.

Bell also recognizes the self-standing condition for aesthetic experience when he claims that “All systems of aesthetic experience must be based on... personal experience...²⁷.” This statement aligns Bell with affect-oriented theories of aesthetic experience, as it is the having of a particular aesthetic emotion that, for Bell, constitutes the aesthetic experience afforded by a particular piece of artwork. One cannot have this particular emotion, or come to know what it is, without undergoing an aesthetic experience involving attention to ‘significant form.’ Unfortunately, for Bell, his argument is threatened by circularity. In response to the question, What is an aesthetic emotion? Bell answers: It is significant form. And in response to the question, What is significant form? Bell answers, it is an object of aesthetic experience. Finally,

²⁷ Bell, 100.

in response to the question, What is the object of an aesthetic experience? Bell answers, it is the aesthetic emotion. But notice that Carroll's view does not fall victim to the same circularity. His answer to the question, What is Aesthetic experience? is: An attention to aesthetic properties and form. One attends to these features by manifesting certain skills. In order to acquire such skills, which include perceptual skills, it may be the case that one must attend to specific features of the work, such as expressive properties like dynamic and tonal changes in a work of jazz. But the latter claim clearly makes no direct reference to aesthetic experience, although obtaining the relevant attentional or perceptual skills may certainly give rise to it.

IV. Delicacy & Distance

At this point, we have considered the idea that the aesthetic experience of non-representational art is active and self-standing, or achieved through the practicing and refining of perceptual skills. Now it is time to examine what such perceptual skills consist of, how they are exercised in order to nurture rich aesthetic engagement, and the ethical relevance of their exercise. I am focusing on perceptual skills because I find perception to be foundational to any sort of direct experience with aspects of the external world, in that something cannot be experienced until it is, in some way, perceived. Therefore, only by perceiving an aesthetically relevant feature of a work can that feature contribute to an aesthetic experience. On the other hand, without such perception, such a feature cannot be experienced aesthetically (or in any other way), which may hinder an overall aesthetic experience of the work. The Humean perceptual skill of 'delicacy,' or the capacity to perceive all of a work's aesthetically relevant features must be presupposed in exploring how the perception of particular aesthetic properties have ethical implications. First, I will examine what is involved in exercising delicacy in response to non-representational art. Then, I will examine the ethical implications of this activity. In this way I

will build on Eaton's claim that "One of the moral lessons of sophisticated art is that one must work to develop perceptive and reflective skills. Aristotle taught that virtue depends on refined skills of both sorts. Art teaches this in part by demonstrating that one must work to develop these skills. Works of art will teach this only if they themselves require such skills²⁸." In light of this assertion, I will provide an argument suggesting that delicate aesthetic perception enhances moral perception by examining the ethical significance of the sorts of properties in non-representational art that can be perceived with the exercise of 'delicacy.' Although ethically significant experiential knowledge is surely obtained in engaging delicately with representational art, without having developed 'delicacy,' fostered most directly and effectively in our engagement with non-representational art, I will claim that our learning from art that is representational may be superficial and ethically uninformative. By illustrating the ethical benefits that delicacy gives rise to, and the way by which non-representational art distinctly cultivates delicacy, I will conclude that aesthetic engagement with non-representational art is in itself an ethical pursuit.

I will start with an analysis of the historical debate about aesthetic distance and disinterestedness in order to show how aesthetic experience can be distinguished by a certain kind of perceptual activity or attention. This is in keeping with Carroll's definition of aesthetic experience as *attending* to form and other aesthetic properties. But, how, therefore, does one attend? I claim that by practicing at aesthetic experience through frequent exposure to abstract art, one can develop the perceptual skill of 'delicacy,' which reduces one's tendency to distraction and supports one's attention to aesthetic properties.

²⁸ Eaton, 144.

It is not a novel idea to suggest that aesthetic engagement requires a special sort of perception. Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Judgment*, defines aesthetic experience in terms of a special sort of ‘disinterested’ pleasure, which is disinterested in the sense that the experience of the object is being contemplated for *its own sake* and without interest in the actual existence of the object. Regardless of whatever purpose the object might have, aesthetic engagement with the object requires contemplating or perceiving its form without reference to this purpose. It is only by engaging with the object and perceiving it in this way, namely, without ‘interest,’ that disinterested pleasure arises, making the experience aesthetic²⁹. I should not, therefore, attend to the aesthetic object with any concern for how valuable it is, whether it is a painting of someone I know or something I recognize, or with any regard for the practical value it may afford.

Therefore, beginning with Kant, we see in aesthetics an emphasis on eliminating ‘the self’ constituted by personal interests in, opinions about, and motivations in relation to the aesthetic object, in order to reach a perceptual state that gives rise to aesthetic experience. According to Kant, this elimination allows the imaginative and cognitive faculties that all humans share to engage in uninhibited ‘free play.’ Aesthetic judgments applied as a result of true ‘disinterested’ pleasure will apply universally, as they arise from the operation of shared faculties.³⁰ For example, although Kant himself does not consider criteria for ugliness, let’s suppose there is an ugly painting of my grandmother. I may judge the painting to be beautiful because I believe my grandmother to be beautiful. However, if I am able to free myself of

²⁹ Immanuel Kant, “Analytic of the Beautiful,” in *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern*, ed. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (New York: McGraw Hill, 1995). 269-297.

³⁰ Kant, 269-297.

preconceptions when perceiving the painting, and as a result, I realize that the painting is ugly, I can expect others to share my judgment.

Edward Bullough in “Psychical Distance” provides a modern re-adaptation of Kant’s notion of disinterestedness. He claims that appropriate *distancing* from the aesthetic object is necessary for aesthetic experience and that proper distancing requires the removal of the subject from practical concerns and self-absorption, or the tendency to focus on how something affects you. He claims that psychical distance “lie[s] between our own self and its own affections³¹”, therein allowing us a different kind of perceptual experience. This distance is produced by “allowing it [the aesthetic object or phenomena] to stand outside the context of our personal needs and ends by looking at it “*objectively*” [my emphasis]³².” According to Bullough, such distance is variable according to the *distancing power of the individual*. ‘Distancing,’ therefore, is an ability, or a skill, that individuals possess, with those more skillful being capable of more aesthetic experiences of more things. The act of decreasing self absorption, or of distancing, in line with Kant, makes the aesthetic object an end in itself, free of utilitarian, scientific, or social values. The aesthetic attitude, therefore, is one of ‘distancing,’ and this distancing is required for true aesthetic perception.

Dickie, in *The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude*, responds to Bullough by denying that ‘disinterestedness’ is a special psychological state. According to Dickie, the difference between interestedness and disinterestedness is one of voluntary *attention* to what is or is not aesthetically relevant (as relevance is established conventionally). Thus, Dickie brings the focus back, for the

³¹ Edward Bullough, “Psychical Distance,” in *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern*, ed. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (New York: McGraw Hill, 1995), 298.

³² Bullough, 298-299.

first time since Hume, to purposive perception in aesthetic experience. As we have already seen, such perception is skilled in that it is not always easy, as in my experience with jazz. Rather, one *learns*, through frequent exposure, how to attend to aesthetic properties through greater familiarity with them, therein perceiving aesthetic features unavailable to the unskilled perceiver. According to Dickie, “all cases of interested attention turn out to be just different ways of being distracted...*distraction is not a sort of attention* [my emphasis], but is merely inattention³³.” The way to classify the aesthetic attitude, therefore, is just a matter of attention, and what is needed is a specification of the criteria for attention in order to determine when one is truly *attending* to the works aesthetic properties, therein rendering the experience aesthetic.

David Hume did just this, much earlier, in his *Standard of Taste*, claiming that a reliable aesthetic judge attends ‘delicately’, *or close enough to the aesthetic object so that she perceives all of its aesthetically relevant features*. Hume further claims that the way in which we should delicately attend to aesthetically relevant features is by eliminating any prejudices, biases, or personal interests, as they are irrelevant and disruptive to (or distracting from) aesthetic contemplation. Therefore, if we accept Dickie’s claim that ‘disinterestedness’ is merely characterized by intentional (or as I have claimed, *active*) attention towards aesthetically relevant features without distraction (by personal interests, concerns or prejudices/biases), it seems that Hume’s notion of ‘delicacy’ is actually very much aligned. Furthermore, according to Hume, we learn what features to attend to through practice and frequent exposure to art. Dickie similarly claims that we pick up the requisite knowledge (of what aesthetic properties to attend to), by being part of the ‘art world.’

³³ Dickie, 58-59.

In this way, Hume's account of the true judge is a source for resolving Dickie's concern with postulating a special state essential for aesthetic experience, yet maintains the intuitions of Kant and Bullough. For only by ridding oneself of prejudices and interests, which can be distracting, can one contemplate the aesthetic object for its own sake, thus allowing for unobstructed perception of aesthetic properties that arouse aesthetic experience. However, arriving at such perception is merely a matter of focusing one's attention, a skill available to us all. One cultivates such a skill by practicing at aesthetic experience and learning how to attend to aesthetic features through greater familiarity with them, as exemplified in my experience with jazz.

Through practice, I claim one acquires the capacity to have rich aesthetic experience by learning how to actively attend to an art's form and other aesthetic properties without distraction. Similarly, Hume claims that delicacy, or the ability to perceive all aesthetically relevant features in a work of art, is developed through repeated practice in exercising our natural and shared sense of 'taste' without the obstruction of non-aesthetic prejudices and biases. Not much more work needs to be done to make the claim that the aesthetic engagement of non-representational art cultivates the perceptual skill of 'delicacy.' For, such engagement, through practice, fosters a capacity for active attention towards the work's aesthetic properties, therein allowing for the perception of such properties (delicacy), as one is undistracted by content and/or irrelevant personal considerations. Furthermore, when taking into consideration the argument from distraction, that non-representational art better enables one to actively engage with aesthetically relevant features than art that is representational, we can see why 'delicacy' would be cultivated more readily in relation to non-representational art.

Today, nonrepresentational art is being highly promoted in places such as the TIMARA program at Oberlin College in order to promote this sort of focused attention. In fact, the national public radio show ‘Radiolab,’ created by two Oberlin graduates desiring experimentation within the medium of radio, were recently in a New York Times article by Rob Walker entitled “On Radiolab, the Sound of Silence.” The aim of the show, which often produces banter through “jaggedy sounds, little plurps and things, strange staccato, percussive things³⁴,” and other noises that frequent the modern nonrepresentational music scene, is to “have your listeners’ attention focused so carefully on every nuance³⁵.” Walker points out,

“Radio, (in its normative form), just washes over you or drifts by in the background. It seems ill suited to an audience that multitasks, demands to react or contradict in real time, insists on controlling information rather than receiving it. Yet “Radiolab” — which just won a 2010 Peabody Award — has responded to all this by designing a show for sustained and undivided attention. It wrestles with big, serious ideas like stochasticity, time and deception. It ignores the news cycle completely. And it expects you to stop checking your inbox, updating your status or playing Angry Birds and spend a solid hour *listening*³⁶.”

It seems, therefore, that many have come to understand the important role that the aesthetic engagement with non-representational art can come to play in contemporary culture. By promoting delicacy, such art is equipped to catch the attention of a distracted a modern world.

V. The Ethical Significance of Perceptual Delicacy

³⁴ Rob Walker, “On Radiolab, the Sound of Silence,” *The New York Times*, (2011), 1.

³⁵ Walker, 1.

³⁶ Walker, 4.

In analyzing the ethical implications of ‘delicacy,’ I will show how skilled and sensitive perception is important both for aesthetic and moral understanding. I thereby align myself with a tradition that goes back to Aristotle’s assigning of ethical importance to certain perceptual skills. Aristotle claims that “In moral matters, the answer may lie with perception³⁷.” A recent resurgence of interest in the Aristotelian account of moral perception has arisen in both ethics and aesthetics. In “Pollyanna Realism: Moral Perception and Moral Properties,” Michael Watkins and Kelly Dean Jolley argue that moral perception is a matter of training, and that “we require no *otherworldly* perceptual abilities to perceive moral properties.³⁸” Rather, moral knowledge can be acquired through the exercise of ordinary perceptual skills³⁹. Accordingly, “exercising the skill [of moral perception] reveals something that is not revealed by unskilled, unfit perceptions. Someone who exercises one of the skills correctly sees what a person without the skill does not see-but what is, nonetheless, anyways there to be seen...Correct exercises of the skill are revelatory, not creative⁴⁰.” In order to be appropriately trained and cultivate moral perception, Watkins and Jolley, in line with Aristotle, claim that there is no way to achieve the object of these skills without exercising the skills in question. Therefore, moral perception, just like the aesthetic experience of non-representational art, is a self-standing skill.

Sarah McGrath also argues that moral properties can be perceived with our natural perceptual capacities, and offers an example to ground such a claim. She asks us to suppose that Alice believes homosexuality to be wrong based on scriptures that she takes to be authoritative. But then she gets to know a homosexual couple that moves next door to her, Chuck and Bob. She gradually comes to know that it is not wrong for them to be together, not by inferential reasoning

³⁷ Watkins and Jolley, 75. Aristotle, EN1109b23.

³⁸ Watkins and Jolley 75.

³⁹ It is important to note that Watkins and Jolley are committed to moral realism.

⁴⁰ Watkins and Jolley, 77.

that would be irrelevant given the grounds of the original principle motivating her belief, but rather by simply perceiving that their loving each other is not wrong. Overtime, Alice comes to perceive the love that exists between them, perhaps in the way that they treat one another by use of subtle gestures or words. It is not that she uses reasoning to find that such treatment is sufficient for granting the permissibility of homosexuality. Rather, she simply perceives their love, finding that in itself, free of her prejudices, it is “right.” Such perception therein causes a revision of her original belief: that homosexuality is wrong. Alice, therefore, by perception, gains moral knowledge⁴¹. However, what is interesting about this case for my own investigation is to consider the type of perception that must have been employed in order for such knowledge to be gained. It seems that if Alice had continually allowed her view that homosexuality is wrong to obstruct her perception of Chuck and Bob, perhaps by permitting condemnation to enter into every interaction with them, she would not have perceived the moral fact of the matter. Rather, her belief may have distracted her from understanding them freely, as an entity unconstrained by her prejudice. It could be the case that such condemnation, at first, did disallow clear perception of Bob and Chuck, but that by frequent exposure to them, such ‘interests’ dissipated, as greater understanding of them, outside of her interests, was realized. This suggests that disinterested attention towards people or a situation may be just the sort of attention required for perceiving moral, as well as aesthetic salience.

Let’s look to another example in order to illustrate how disinterested attention is morally significant, insofar as it may prompt ethical behavior. Suppose that you are driving through a crowded intersection and witness a hit and run. The woman who was hit is twitching on the ground in pain. Such a scene often results in quick shared responses to help, as many passersbys

⁴¹ McGrath, 220-225.

begin to take the similar action of stopping their cars and calling for help. Perhaps the scene began as a distraction, as you were driving along and a loud crashing sound quickly grabbed your attention. However, as realization of what has occurred takes place, it seems safe to assume that many immediately and intentionally would direct their attention towards the situation, forgetting about tonight's dinner, or about making their appointments on time. Therefore, personal considerations that can distract one from moral salience are eliminated in a way that results in a shared moral response. Furthermore, in reflection on such intense events, many will vividly recall fine details such as the color of the woman's shirt, the pained look in her eyes, the time of day, or the gentle breeze that was blowing, further suggesting that such disinterestedness in moral experience, caused by the reduction of distractions and 'interests' may foster delicacy in the way same way aesthetic experience does. In fact, it may have been the sensitive perception of some of these details, such as the pained look on the woman's face, which prompted the ethical response.

In many moral matters, where there is less immediacy to the situation at hand, consensus in determining the appropriate response is not as likely, as other considerations, such as religious beliefs, personal benefits, or prejudices enter deliberation. Such interests, I claim, can distract one from perceiving moral features in the same way that they can distract one from perceiving aesthetic properties. When someone, for example, is a member of a particular religious or racial group that is culturally stereotyped, one may be distracted by stereotypical features of that individual when conversing with him or her. If the nature of that conversation holds ethical significance, it may be the case that such discrimination disallows perception of moral salience. Rather than seeing that person as an individual with his or her own particular needs and concerns, and his or her own distinctive moral character, it is easier to view him or her, even

subconsciously, as representing a collective, and to be distracted by such information. For example, imagine that you are conversing with an ex-heroin addict who needs money for gas, as his car has just stopped running. Having had experience with heroin addicts in the past, and seeing his injection scars, your thoughts, while talking with this man, become permeated with worry that you are being manipulated or lied to, as has often been the case in the past. Assume that this ex-addict has overcome these destructive ways, and is genuinely in need of help. Rather than receiving the information presented without personal bias or 'interest,' one's prejudices skew one's perception of the situation, inhibiting the direction of one's attention towards the morally salient features of the circumstance, namely, that someone is genuinely in need of your help. Rather, your bias becomes distracting, with the possible result being moral abandonment. It seems that failure to grasp the moral facts, therefore, is one result of distraction and lack of delicacy.

It is important to note that I am not aiming to equate Kant's notion of 'interest' with Hume's notions of 'prejudice' or 'bias.' However, as 'interestedness' is being used to signify a sort of 'inattention' to the object at hand, the thought is that prejudices and biases can distract our attention from the object of perception, as it rests on factors stemming from discrimination that are irrelevant to an individual's personhood. In this sense, prejudices and bias are sources of 'interest.'

I argue, therefore, that just as aesthetic experience arises by successfully disregarding one's personal interests and prejudices, enabling focused attention in the perception of aesthetic properties, so experiences of ethical salience arise as a result of disinterested and focused attention, where delicacy is important for avoiding stereotyping and moral errors of omission. Therefore, there seems to be a strong parallel between aesthetic and moral perception, as both

require the ability to perceive disinterestedly, which requires an avoidance of prejudices, interests, and other distractions. I am also not aiming to equate ‘distraction’ with ‘prejudice’ and ‘personal interests.’ However, I do hold that prejudice and interests often give rise to distraction in both aesthetic and moral matters, such as when one’s personal interests regarding a piece of art distract one from its aesthetically relevant features, or when one’s bias towards an individual as a member of a stereotyped groups distracts one from their moral personhood or from their having certain rights. Therefore, eliminating bias and interest is an important part of avoiding the distractions that can obstruct both aesthetic and moral experience.

Correctly employing ‘delicacy,’ therefore, allows an avoidance of interests and distractions, permitting the perception of all aesthetically relevant features. Let’s look to some cases in which aesthetically relevant features can also be morally relevant in order to show the way in which ‘delicacy’ can directly have ethical significance, making its cultivation, simultaneously, both an ethical and aesthetic skill. As Marcia Eaton claims, “Artworks develop skills necessary to a rich aesthetic and moral life...one must pay attention to objects and events if one hopes to have an aesthetic experience, and the attention one learns to pay is similar to sensitive observation of the sort required in moral scrutiny⁴².” Eaton coins the term ‘Deliberation Aesthetic Ethical’ in analyzing this congruence in aesthetic and ethical skills.

The same congruence is explored by Alicia Carse in her analysis of the ethical significance of ‘incuriosity.’ In *The Moral Contours of Empathy*, Carse claims, “Too often in everyday life, ‘incuriosity’ reigns”. ‘Incuriosity,’ Carse explains, “encompasses an array of failings. It can consist in an inappropriately disengaged or remote stance toward another, manifested, for example, in forms of indifference, obtuseness, or even callousness, founded in

⁴² Eaton, 153.

disconnection. It can trace to exhaustion, preoccupation, or simple distraction⁴³.” ‘Incuriosity,’ therefore, seems to correspond nicely with Dickie’s notion of ‘interested’ perception, or rather, with simple inattention to the situation at hand, caused by personal interest or distraction. The difference is only in whether one is attending to ethically or aesthetically significant features. Carse goes on to say that incuriosity

“... can be based in the often unconscious or unacknowledged biases and aversions that are at play in our dismissal of, or resistance to, others. These might include prejudices about “funny” accents; discomfort with scarred faces or perceived infirmities (“bad teeth”); or denigrating attitudes about body types, ethnic groups, religious affiliations, or sexual orientations. In all such cases, both relatively innocuous and morally egregious in source, our identification with another is diminished⁴⁴.”

This idea of ‘incuriosity,’ therefore, is often directly connected to the prejudices and biases one holds. However, as Carse asserts, it can also be caused by simple distraction and preoccupation.

Suppose, as Carse suggests, that your daughter is being abused by your new lover. Perceiving this situation accurately will require the ability to pick up on subtle signals, such as your daughter’s sideways glances that indicate distress and uneasiness rather than irritation about household tasks. Or perhaps, you need to perceive her “clipped voice and evasive or hostile language [that is] not just [indicative of] adolescent resistance or nonchalance but [of] a suppressed rage indicating that something is dreadfully wrong⁴⁵.” You might additionally be

⁴³ Alicia Carse, “The Moral Contours of Empathy.” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 8, no. 1/2 (2005), 173.

⁴⁴ Carse, 174.

⁴⁵ Carse, 178.

required to pick up on the tension around your lover's mouth signifying that he is lying, or "the awkwardness of his otherwise elegant gait, or the uncharacteristically solicitous tone of his voice that signals guilty betrayal⁴⁶."

In order to understand what is happening, it will be crucial that you perceive certain expressive traits in others or that you are able to interpret correctly certain behaviors. However, if you disengage from the situation, too preoccupied with your own absorption with your new partner, "there is no reason to believe that the facts of abuse would be visible from such a standpoint, or that [you] would, in disengaging from [your] loyalties and loves, have the requisite practical motivation to see the facts⁴⁷." Failure to pick up on certain morally significant features of the situation will result in a moral abandonment of your daughter, as you will not know to employ the protection she needs. Therefore, learning to perceive without distraction and preoccupation holds moral significance in that it enables one to perceive the information that motivates the morally responsible response. What is particularly important about this example is that it shows how moral failure can originate with inadequate perception, and not just with poor inferential reasoning or failure of motivation.

In this case, the properties one needs to perceive are both ethical and aesthetic. Perceiving the subtleties of tone and the nuances of expression is just what one learns by engaging with non-representational art. Non-representational art, therefore, fosters a delicacy which may straightforwardly enable one to perceive features that, in addition to being aesthetically relevant, are morally important, enhancing moral understanding alongside aesthetic understanding. Furthermore, developing delicacy through one's engagement with non-representational art seems to be the best method, as it does not result in the harming of others in the way that direct practice

⁴⁶ Carse, 178.

⁴⁷ Carse, 178.

with moral situations may. If the mother in our example was to morally fail again and again with her daughter before developing more attentive tendencies, the consequences could be dire. However, in cultivating such a skill within the context of non-representational art, such harm is avoided, as the exercise of the skill extends only to one's own aesthetic experience.

VI. Ethico-Aesthetic Properties

Let's now examine the ethical significance of delicately perceiving some of the specific aesthetic properties of non-representational art; namely, expressive features and patterns. Let's begin with expressive features. I will start by rehearsing an argument for a certain kind of 'resemblance' between the emotional expressiveness found in non-representational music and that found in humans. I will refrain from entering the ongoing debate about what it is for music to be expressive- i.e., whether saying that 'the music is sad' is metaphorical. This controversy does not need to be settled in order to consider structural similarities between our experiences of music and of our own emotions. Given the resemblance between music and emotion, I claim that coming to perceive the subtleties and complexities inherent in some musical expressions of emotion may allow one to better perceive and understand both your own and others' emotions. As perceiving the emotions in another may prompt ethical responses such as care, fostering the perception of such emotions is straightforwardly ethically significant. I will also show the way by which musical expression can provide "affective knowledge," or knowledge about how an emotion feels. As a result, one is better equipped to empathize with others, which will also prove to be ethically significant.

As Stephen Davies points out, there is something peculiar about the ability of music to express human emotion, given that music "lacks semantic or representational content"⁴⁸. In

⁴⁸ Davies, 179.

representational art, human beings can be represented as expressing emotion. But pure music is not representing expressive characters and does not possess its own psychological states. Nevertheless, “pure music- that is, stand-alone music played on musical instruments, excluding the human voice, and without words, literary titles, or associated texts connected to it by its composer- is often characterized as the expressive art *par excellence*⁴⁹.” In order to explain this characterization, Davies argues for a ‘resemblance’ between human emotion and musical expression. An immediate objection arises, however: Surely expression in representational art more closely resembles real-life human emotional expression insofar as it shows us human beings experiencing human emotions. This objection is in keeping with Aristotle’s account of the role of tragedy in our emotional education deriving from its imitative nature⁵⁰. If there is greater resemblance between representations of human beings expressing emotion and actual expressions of emotion than between musical structure and actual expressions of emotion, should we not look first to representational art to learn about human emotions? The answer, I think, is ‘no’ because it is the *intentional attention* necessary for perceiving emotion in music that makes the difference, and such attentiveness, as shown, is not required for our engagement with representational art. The focused attention cultivated by non-representational art enables the attentive engagement with others necessary for subtle and disinterested perception and interpretation of their expressed emotional states. In representational art, by contrast, perception of emotion is often obstructed. But delicacy gained through engaging with non-representational art can be strengthened through engaging properly with representational art and this in turn will aid in a richer perception of others’ emotions in real life.

⁴⁹ Davies, 179.

⁵⁰ Aristotle, “The Poetics,” in *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern*, ed. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (New York: McGraw Hill, 1995), 488-506.

Returning to Davies' argument about resemblance, there are two primary similarities between music and human emotion, the first being a 'temporal unfolding' and the second deriving from the 'configurations of human behavior' that appear in pure music. The first similarity derives from the way emotional expressiveness emerges in the structured temporal progression of the complex elements in a musical work. As Davies explains, "we experience movement in music- in terms of progress from high to low or fast to slow, say, but as well in the multistranded waxing and waning of tensions generated variously within the harmony, the mode of articulation and phrasing, subtle nuances in timing, the delay or defeat of expected continuations, and so on⁵¹." Moreover, this movement is inherently expressive, or rather, it is experienced as a progression between different moods-so we do not just notice the music getting faster and louder- we experience a progression or a change-say, from melancholy to joy, or from languidity to urgency. Often, we also experience our emotions as unfolding over time, or as having many elements with a temporal structure. Jennefer Robinson in "Emotion: Biological Fact or Social Construction," aims to show that emotions are not isolated and momentary occurrences, but are rather, like music, generated over time through a process involving physiological feelings, thoughts, and judgments. These elements may be in tension, and they may intermingle and inform one another.⁵² For example, one may have a thought about one's partner's infidelity, which produces the sensation of a physiological change, say, a tightening in one's chest. One may then take note of one's physical response, judge it to be inappropriate or unwelcome, and work to dispel the unpleasant feeling by rejecting the motivating thought. All of

⁵¹ Davies, 183.

⁵² Jennefer Robinson, "Emotion: Biological Fact or Social Construction," in *Thinking About Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotions*, ed. Robert Solomon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 28-44.

this takes place over time or progressively in order to create the emotional episode. In a similar fashion, different musical elements such as tone, dynamics and style interact in order to create emotional expressiveness within a temporal framework.

In addition to the temporal structure that emotion and musical emotional expression both have, musical expression also resembles human behavior in that we often experience it as having a human-like character. As Green points out, “Fear has a characteristic sound in the human voice; that is why we can literally hear someone’s fear...Music that shows how fear sounds will also sound fearful; a picture that shows how anger looks will also look angry⁵³.” Similarly, a sad person often expresses his or her sadness by the slowness of his or her movements, the heaviness with which he or she walks, or the gloomy tone with which he or she speaks. Music, when expressing sadness, may also use slow movement, quiet dynamics, or “heavy or thick harmonic bass textures, with underlying patterns of unresolved tension⁵⁴.” Conversely, to create an uplifting mood, music may demonstrate exuberance by employing staccato movement and playful melodies, paralleling a happy person that “skips and leaps quickly and lightly⁵⁵.” Thus, Green concludes, one way “we perceive the emotions of others [is] because we perceive characteristic components of those emotions⁵⁶.” And these characteristics are also present in music.

In searching to make sense or understand both musical expression and human emotion, one should invoke “delicacy” or the ability to perceive subtle and complex elements and overall structure. By attending to the subtleties that create structured complexity, we begin to better understand and appreciate how musical expression and emotion arise, cease, and find their place.

⁵³ Green, 14.

⁵⁴ Davies, 182.

⁵⁵ Davies, 182.

⁵⁶ Green, 12.

By taking note of subtle nuances present in a piece of music's tone, dynamics, chord progressions, articulation and phrasing, we become extra sensitive to these intricacies, growing more and more conscious of their presence and absence. So, while at first we may fail to perceive the complexity and subtlety of the emotion being expressed, by cultivating delicacy and deep acquaintance we begin to perceive greater significance in expressive music. This greater appreciation and perception of complexity in musical expression has direct bearing on our capacity for emotional sensitivity towards others. Most straightforwardly, one may apply the skill of attending to the expressive qualities that give rise to emotion in music by attending to the tone, speed or expressiveness of another's voice, as these characteristic 'sounds' that indicate emotion can be learned to be discerned in musical expression. Therefore, after refining our ability to attend to the fine details that constitute musical expression, such subtleties may become more apparent in indicating human emotion, allowing one to better engage and understand emotional complexities. This in turn creates greater opportunities for an appropriate moral response, as was demonstrated in the example given by Carse presented. Carse exemplified that the mother's perception of her daughter's subtle expressions of uneasiness and fear (which indicated abuse) was necessary for employing the ethically responsible action of protection.

However, as Green also points out, emotions have more than looks and sounds; they also have characteristic ways that they feel. Accordingly, one way that art expresses emotion is by showing how an emotion feels. Such "affective knowledge" is important, as many of our richer and more complex emotions lack typical ways of manifesting themselves in the way people act, sound, or look. Given its complexity, music can thereby capture complex emotions that may not be as easily perceived in human expression. For example, it seems hard to picture a characteristic way that one appears when in crisis, isolation, loneliness, or regret. Expressive qualities of music

can provide affective knowledge that gives us insight into such emotions. For instance, a long pause in a piece of music may be able to demonstrate the feeling that time has stopped. Such a feeling is often present in an experience of crisis or shock. In this way, music is able to give us a sense of how something feels, rather than just what it looks or sounds like. Furthermore, Green uses recent psychological data to point to the congruence between one's experiences of one sensory modality and an emotion in order to account for how art can provide affective knowledge by its colors and sounds. For example, it is widely agreed that a C-E flat G chord is a "sad" chord and that yellow is a "happy" color. This is not because happy people turn yellow, but because yellow *shows how happiness feels*⁵⁷. In this way, works of art can provide affective knowledge by employing expressive qualities through colors and sounds that are congruent with certain emotions. Green further argues that "knowing how an emotion feels does not normally require sharing the content of that emotion, if only because content is not in general part of the phenomenology of emotion⁵⁸." He claims that in order to understand how another feels, it is not necessary that one has knowledge about the content prompting that feeling. This makes sense when considering the way instrumental music provides affective knowledge by its expressive qualities, without reference to content. This suggests that although content may further explain an emotion, affective knowledge may be fostered more by expression, offering justification for why non-representational art may be better equipped to provide such understanding than art that emphasizes content.

Davies asserts that "The listener's awareness of the music's expressiveness is more like a direct confrontation with, say, a sad-looking person than like an experience of reading or hearing

⁵⁷ Green, 20.

⁵⁸ Green, 19.

a description of such a person⁵⁹.” Therefore, there seems to be a distinction between the emotional responses fostered by engaging with an expressive piece of music and those promoted by reading about a character in a work of narrative fiction. When we delicately perceive the expressive features in music that provide knowledge of how an emotion feels, it seems plausible that we often become mad, sad, joyful, or excited, ourselves, in a way that is *congruent with the “sad” music*. This contrasts with many emotional responses supported by representational art in which we feel mad or sad *for* a character, rather than *taking part in* her sadness. In aiming to understand this distinction, it is important to note the difference between sympathy and empathy. Sympathy involves concern for another and takes the other as its object, such as when we recognize a character is in danger and fear for her. Empathy, on the other hand, involves ‘*taking on*’ the emotion of another, such as when one begins to cry just by seeing another cry. This is not to claim that empathy does not occur in response to representational art, but only that other types of emotional responses may be more frequent. When attending to a piece of non-representational music, many are moved to tears, or to exuberant happiness, seemingly taking on the emotion being expressed by the music. According to Green, knowing how an emotion feels through engagement with art enables one to also “feel with” someone who is experiencing that emotion, stating, “...artworks that are expressive by virtue of showing how an emotion or experience feels enable me to empathize with others”⁶⁰. Such empathetic understanding, I argue, has moral implications in that it often motivates and informs the action taken in response to others needs.

It is essential for a complete moral theory to account for empathy as high levels of moral judgment are unattainable without its cultivation. Carse argues, “Proper empathetic connection is

⁵⁹ Davies, 184.

⁶⁰ Green, 20-21.

itself part of what morality demands,⁶¹ claiming that proper moral responses often entail empathy⁶². This widespread assumption that morality and empathy are closely linked has been accounted for in many ways. I will not go into great detail regarding this subject upon which much has already been written. Rather, it seems fairly noncontroversial to suggest that empathy is ethically significant insofar as feeling how another feels can prompt appropriate moral responses for care. If, on the other hand, one is too preoccupied or distracted by personal considerations to attend closely to another's pain, for example, it is certainly less likely that one will come to empathize with that person, and therefore less likely that one will be motivated to help ease the other's pain. It seems, therefore, that empathy requires the same sort of engagement as non-representational art, namely, an engagement that is attentive to another's expressiveness, without distraction or consideration for personal interests or biases. Representational art, as illustrated, often fails in requiring delicate perception that lacks interest or prejudice. Therefore, non-representational art seems to be a more reliable means for cultivating empathy.

Of course, relating one's own life experiences to another can also aid in empathy. For example, when seeing a friend's, or fictional character's pain, perhaps caused by a recent dramatic break-up, the empathetic emotion may be more easily produced if I can easily call into memory a parallel experience. However, I claim that delicate, disinterested perception is still necessary for empathy that is morally appropriate. Carse points out that there is a danger in empathy that occurs principally from the projection of our own experiences onto others, rather than from an impartial perception of the other's emotional experience. Sometimes 'incuriosity' can be caused by identifying too much with another, as it may cause a failure to perceive the independence and difference that exists, therein causing one to be too simplistic in assimilating

⁶¹ Carse, 171.

⁶² Carse, 173.

the other's situation to memories, associations, and familiar experiences of one's own. Rather than view the other as his or her own locus of experience and agency, one becomes in danger of generalizing his or her experiences as mere confirmations of one's own.⁶³ Carse continues,

“Vibrant emotional resonance with another's state can leave us, as care-givers, in a condition of preoccupied distraction leading us back to the incuriosity empathy is supposed to guard against. If I am emotionally “infected” by your fear or grief, “filled” with your sense of doom or anxiety, I may become consumed by my own reactive distress, riveted by my own discomfort and diverted away from the emotional reality of your experience. This can lead to problematic moral compromise and self-abnegation; it can also disable me in effectively caring for you⁶⁴.”

The key to cultivating an ability to enter into and come to know another's feelings while simultaneously upholding morally appropriate distinctions may lie, as several theorists suggest, in taking an appropriate stance toward the situation at hand, such as a stance of impartiality. It seems that an impartial perspective is just the sort of perspective encouraged by the exercising of aesthetic delicacy, as one puts asides personal considerations in order to perceive, disinterestedly, the expressive features of a work. Similarly, delicacy is necessary for one to focus on another's needs instead of one's own. We can now more clearly see why engagement with non-representational art may be a good way to develop such a skill. If one can learn to engage with another's emotions in the way in which one engages with the expressive properties of a piece of non-representational art, namely, by intently focusing on and attending to the other person's emotions, one may better be able to understand the distinct feelings of others and thereby respond appropriately.

⁶³ Carse, 175.

⁶⁴ Carse, 176.

In addition to skillfully perceiving expressive properties, delicacy also fosters the ability to recognize and perceive patterns and cohesion, supporting one's ability to create a meaningful life. This will also prove to be ethically significant. Davies claims that in music there is closure, not merely stopping⁶⁵. Although there are cases in which music purposely eschews closure, there are many examples of instrumental music that truly "come to an end" by resolving any tensions that have arisen. In this way, although parts of nonrepresentational music can often appear highly disorganized through the employment of atonal melodies, multifarious timing, thunderous dynamics, and delays in anticipated sequences, such pandemonium can still 'make sense' within a larger, unified structure. However, according to Eaton, it is only by actively attending to a work's 'intrinsic properties,' or by employing 'aesthetic attention,' that one is able to grasp the patterns within a work of art that give it such harmony and cohesion. I argue that the delicacy necessary for engagement with non-representational art makes the perception of such cohesion and harmony, as a result of formal contemplation, easier or more fruitful than in representational art forms, which frequently promote distraction from form and other aesthetic properties.

Non-representational music, for example, offers a structured arrangement that requires aesthetic sensitivity of a temporal structure. Throughout one's aesthetic experience, one must continually perform backward and forward reference in order to perceive cohesion and how all the parts fit together. Eaton points out that finding a purpose in life requires the same aesthetic activity of backward and forward reference, as we assess the meanings of our lives through past actions and anticipated future projects. Part of what gives meaning to one's life, therefore, is a certain coherence and ordered arrangement.⁶⁶ However, constructing one's life pattern in order to live a meaningful life requires sensitive perception, or the ability to perceive the intrinsic

⁶⁵ Davies, 182.

⁶⁶ Eaton, 160.

properties of objects and events, “to recognize and construct patterned collections of them and the states in which they inhere, and to connect these to properties and patterns in the world of human action and interaction⁶⁷.” Therefore, by using delicate perception to actively perceive patterns in a work of non-representational music, one also cultivates the sort of perception necessary for perceiving life’s intrinsic properties and patterns. This holds ethical significance in that as one gains deeper understanding of these intrinsic properties through greater cultivation of delicacy, he or she becomes more sensitive to people and events, maturing in his or her understanding of life and adapting his or her life project accordingly. Furthermore, one who fails to notice life’s subtle patterns will oversimplify the world’s structure as a consequence of insensitivity, often resulting in a stereotyping of people and events, and in self-absorption⁶⁸.

To illustrate her point, Eaton distinguishes between the ‘aesthetic life’ and the ‘unaesthetic life.’ The ‘aesthetic life’ is the sort of life lived by one who has gained the sort of sensitive perception towards art and life that I call ‘delicacy’. She is able to position herself to accommodate others, as she comes to give real people and places the same delicate attention used towards artistic creations⁶⁹. She thereby grows in her understanding of how people and events arrange themselves, discovering the patterns that organize life, and ‘fitting herself in’ accordingly. She strives for control not of the world, but of her role within the world’s patterns, questing for integrity and for meaningful relations with friends and family⁷⁰.

The unaesthetic life, on the other hand, is a life involving oversimplification of the world’s structure. One fails to perceive life’s subtle intricacies and patterns, resulting from

⁶⁷ Eaton, 163.

⁶⁸ Eaton, 109.

⁶⁹ Eaton, 109.

⁷⁰ Eaton, 110.

insensitive perception of people and events. This is ethically significant insofar as oversimplification, ensuing from gross inadequate pictures of the world which are inadequate because they are not pictures resulting from sensitivity to objects or events, can result in both stereotyping and self-absorption⁷¹. As seen, stereotyping can be morally significant as the unfit perceiver fails to take note of the details and idiosyncrasies that grant an individual's autonomy from a stereotyped collective. This disables perception of that individual as his or her own person and leaves one unequipped to respond to his or her individual needs. Self-absorption also results from this lack of aesthetic perception. For example, according to Eaton, one who lacks aesthetic delicacy may never remember the details of another's life that have been repeatedly given in conversation, as one is preoccupied with personal considerations⁷². This could be ethically significant for two reasons. First, it could result in failed relationships with others, as they fail to feel understood. Secondly, if such details prove to be important, consequences from failing to perceive such information could be ethically significant. For instance, consider that a friend has repeatedly told you that he or she is allergic to peanuts, and you fail to attend to such information. As a result, one is ignorant of such allergies when cooking dinner for that person in peanut oil, therein causing serious harm to the friend. Another example of how self-absorption can be ethically significant is seen in the Carse example, where a mother, preoccupied with her own love life, fails to notice subtle clues signifying her daughter's abuse. In such a case, it becomes evident that the information needed to respond morally and appropriately is often not made readily available, paralleling the way that form and other aesthetic properties are often inaccessible to the unfit perceiver. In both cases, what is needed is delicate perception. As non-representational art offers a method of cultivation that does not cause harm to others, I find that

⁷¹Eaton, 108.

⁷² Eaton, 108.

attending to the intricate patterns and ordered structure within such a context is a good way to cultivate one's ability to attend to the intrinsic properties of people and events that reveal life's patterns. Such a skill is important as it promotes meaningful living and also avoids stereotyping and self-absorption.

VII. Delicacy and Representational Art

According to Eaton, ethical understanding essentially involves two questions. The first question asks what should one do, and concerns those general principles that aid in moral reasoning. Art can supply answers to this first question through narratives and representational arts that offer moral schemas, such as "you should persevere." The second, question, however, involves what kind of person one should be (or, how one should act)⁷³. Non-representational art, I have claimed, can aid in answering this question by fostering perceptual skills necessary for moral living. I claim, therefore, that while representation, through its content, can teach us about important moral principles that are necessary for living virtuously, *the skill of delicate perception grounds appropriate understanding* of these moral principles, as without such perception, one's 'learning' and perception of such principles may be drenched in personal considerations that obstruct the salience of moral and aesthetic properties.

In representational art, there is always a danger- just insofar as it is representational, that understanding of the plot is skewed by distraction or other personal considerations. A work's content may trigger a train of thought that does not bear directly on an understanding of the work. Our prior commitments and experiences may also influence our evaluation of characters and their actions. Suppose you are watching a romance film. First, one may easily start to reflect

⁷³ Eaton, 151-152.

on your own experiences with love, distracting you from the depicted situation of the characters. Secondly, it may be the case that through your experiences with love, you have become quite a romantic skeptic. Therefore, when engaging with the film, such beliefs permeate your analysis of the presented content, and the way in which you view the story. Such can prevent you from viewing the scene delicately or perceiving aesthetically relevant features of the work which support the principle that “you have to struggle in order to win at true love”.

Even more straightforwardly, art that is representational can foster indelicate engagement with stereotyped portrayals of characters. This is a very common problem in popular film and television which relies on stock characters such as the dumb blonde or the faintly ridiculous black or the latino sidekick. The worry is that we can start to see the world in terms of the stereotypes of popular TV by developing certain general habits of perception. However, these worries do not arise with non-representational art. Prejudices associated with content are absent and one is more easily enabled to engage delicately. By cultivating delicacy in our engagement with non-representational art, one may become better equipped to maintain a critical distance on stereotyping in popular narrative art or the personal associations of a work’s content. Thus the sort of perceptual delicacy cultivated in non-representational art enables one to more richly perceive a narrative work’s meaning and also to dismiss morally inappropriate material.

VIII. Conclusion

Attentional problems are certainly on the rise in modern society; such a distracted way of living may be ethically threatening. In recent decades, inattention has surely taken its moral toll, as people are easily able to ignore, or be distracted from, morally relevant features in our modern world. The fact that we have not modified our lives in considerable ways points to the fact that

we have failed to perceive the gravity of such problems. Delicate attention may prove to be vital in illuminating and making salient such ethical features of the world, giving abstract art a greater social role to play by cultivating delicacy.

In conclusion, I have aimed to show that aesthetic experience is primarily an active skill in which one intentionally focuses his or her attention on the form and other aesthetic properties of the aesthetic object at hand, for its own sake, disregarding personal considerations and interests that obstruct the perception of intrinsic properties. Secondly, aesthetic experience is a self-standing skill in that it is only acquired by practicing at having such an experience. I claim that non-representational art makes aesthetic experience more accessible, as form and other aesthetic properties are not hidden by distracting representational content. Furthermore, participation in popular critical discussion of non-representational art requires engagement that is aesthetic. By contrast, discussions about narrative cinema or literary fiction often focus on plot. Through frequent engagement with non-representational art, one can develop delicacy, or the ability to perceive all of the aesthetically relevant features that are present in the work. One learns how to attend intently to the aesthetic object, as greater familiarity guides one's knowledge of what to look for. With the development of this sensitive perception, distraction by personal considerations is less likely. Contrastingly, representational art- merely by its having content, makes it easier to engage in a way that lacks delicacy, as one often draws on one's own values and background knowledge to understand content. Through cultivating delicacy, however, one may learn how to engage with representational art in a disinterested way so that one notices formal and expressive features in themselves as well as the way the work's design shapes its content (and vice versa). Furthermore, I aimed to show that insofar as aesthetic properties such as expressive features and coherence can be moral properties as well, the development of

delicacy fosters moral perception. Such moral perception may then ground ethically appropriate responses. Without the perception of the ethico-aesthetic features of a particular situation, appropriate response becomes less likely. In conclusion, I have shown that the aesthetic experience of non-representational art is ethically significant insofar as it develops perceptual skills necessary for ethical living.

Bibliography

- Aristotle, "The Poetics." In *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern*, ed. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley, 488-506. New York: McGraw Hill, 1995.
- Bell, Clive, "Artworks: Form and Content." In *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern*, ed. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley, 98-110. New York: McGraw Hill, 1995.
- Bullough, Edward, "Psychical Distance." In *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern*, ed. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley, 297-311. New York: McGraw Hill, 1995.
- Carroll, Noël, "Aesthetic Experience: A Question of Content." In *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran, 69-98. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006.
- Carse, Alicia, "The Moral Contours of Empathy." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 8, no. 1/2 (2005): 169-195.
- Davies, Stephen, "Artistic Expression and the Hard Case of Pure Music." In *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran, 179-192. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006.
- Dickie, George. "The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1964): 56-64.
- Eaton, Marcia Muelder. *Merit, aesthetic and ethical* . Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Green, Mitchell, "Empathy, Expression And What Artworks Have to Teach." In *Art and Ethical Criticism*, ed. Garry L. Hagberg, 95-125. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2008.
- Hopkins, Robert, "The Speaking Image: Visual Communication and the Nature of Depiction." In *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran, 145-160. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006.
- Hume, David, "Of the Standard of Taste." In *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern*, ed. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley, 254-269. New York: McGraw Hill, 1995.
- Irvin, Sherri, "Aesthetics as a Guide to Ethics." In *Aesthetics Today*, ed. Robert Stecker and Ted Gracyk, 370-379. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010.

- Kant, Immanuel, "Analytic of the Beautiful." In *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern*, ed. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley, 269-297. New York: McGraw Hill, 1995.
- Matt Ritel, "Growing Up Digital, Wired for Distraction," *The New York Times*, 21 November 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/21/technology/21brain.html?emc=et> (accessed November 22, 2010). 1-11.
- McClelland, Kenneth. "John Dewey: Aesthetic Experience and Artful Conduct." *Education and Culture* 21, no. 2 (2005): 44-62.
- McGrath, Sarah. "Moral Knowledge by Perception." *Philosophical Perspectives* 18 (2004): 209-228.
- Rob Walker, "On Radiolab, the Sound of Silence," *The New York Times*, 07 April 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/10/magazine/mag-10Radiolab-t.html?pagewanted=1&_r=2&emc=eta1 (accessed April 07, 2011). 1-4.
- Robinson, Jenefer, "Emotion: Biological Fact or Social Construction." In *Thinking About Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotions*, ed. Robert Solomon, 28-44. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Watkins, Michael and Jolley, Kelly Dean. "Pollyanna Realism: Moral Perception and Moral Properties." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 80, no. 1 (2002): 75-85.