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Aesthetic Creation and Artistic Value

In *Aesthetic Creation*, Nick Zangwill sets out a new approach to theorizing about art that results in a very traditional – one might say old fashioned – way of thinking about it. The approach downgrades, but does not entirely disown, finding an extensionally adequate account in favor of one that emphasizes value and function. What do we value about artworks? What functions do they fulfill? Zangwill does *not* say that we value art for just one of its properties or that it has just one function. But he does say there is one pre-eminent function and one pre-eminent way in which we value art. This is art's aesthetic function; its aesthetic value.

The upshot is an aesthetic theory of art. In particular, it is an aesthetic creation theory. Officially, the theory states that something is an artwork because and only because someone had an insight that certain aesthetic properties would depend on certain nonaesthetic properties, and because of this, the thing was intentionally endowed with some of those aesthetic properties.

There is an initial, I believe repairable, problem with this theory that should be mentioned at the start. Consider the following situation. An artist is applying paint on canvass not sure what result she is aiming for. After some days of doing this, she looks at her canvass, sees that it has certain aesthetic properties, that they depend on certain nonaesthetic properties and decides that her work is done and an artwork has been completed. According to Zangwill she is mistaken. No artwork has been made because she never had the *insight* (before the work was complete) that certain aesthetic properties depend on certain non-aesthetic ones.

Insight is not derived from perceiving an existing thing with the nonaesthetic properties. The artist either has a vision of a non-actual thing with the aesthetic/nonaesthetic property combination, or of an actual thing that lacks these properties... The artist strives to actualize an object like the possible one envisioned in the insight.¹

¹ Nick Zangwill, *Aesthetic Creation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 43.

Since our artist does not envision a possible object, she lacks insight and has not created an artwork. But this stipulation not only seems arbitrary, but also seems to go against Zangwill's basic intuition that artworks are those things intended, at least in part, to have aesthetic value. Our artist is attempting to do this, just not in the overly rigid way Zangwill prescribes. That speaks in favor of revising his theory rather than revising our belief that the artist has made an artwork. I see no reason why Zangwill couldn't make an appropriate revision. Hence the possibility of repair.

There is another initial objection that cannot be met by revising the theory. This is that it creates a classification of objects as artworks that is greatly at odds with common usage. On this theory, doughnut packages and kitchen appliances are artworks while many paintings, sculptures, conceptual works, and narrative works normally classified as art are not. This is because the doughnut packages and kitchen appliances are made to have aesthetic appeal, perhaps in virtue of the insight officially required by the theory, but the paintings, sculptures, conceptual works and narrative works are not made with such an intention.

The excluded narrative works require some attention in their own right. Zangwill believes that aesthetic properties depend, in part, on sensory ones. Narratives present thoughts to the understanding or imagination. So narratives per se have no aesthetic properties. A narrative may have a sensory mode of presentation – a series of paintings, a moving picture, an arrangement of lines in a poem or the sound of the words – which have aesthetic properties. But what is presented to the imagination rather than the senses does not. Hence literary works that lack aesthetically valuable visual or aural properties are not artworks on the aesthetic creation theory. I suspect this would encompass many novels and stories, including very great ones.

Unlike the first objection, Zangwill is well aware of this one. How does he try to meet it? His basic strategy is to argue that we should shift the aim of a theory of what art is. Rough extensional adequacy is usually considered a condition of adequacy on a theory that tells us what art is. Zangwill suggests that we adjust that idea and hold that such a theory should also explain what we value in making and appreciating art. We need now to look at Zangwill's arguments for the aesthetic creation theory. This turns out to be not entirely straightforward as they involve an appeal to a variety of substrategies that need their own sorting out.

I find three substrategies. One argues that there is no clear concept to explicate, and that our focus should be on objects rather than concepts or meanings. A second argues that we should attempt to identify a domain of objects based on what we chiefly value about art. The third most modest strategy qualifies aesthetic creation theory by admitting there are counter-examples to it but arguing that they are exceptions to the rule.

Is there a concept of art?

There are two lines of argument against the existence of relevant, standing concept that we should strive to capture in a theory of art. One is that the “folk” concept of art (or least one such concept in use) is built on an error. It combines two kinds that lack a common nature: things that have an aesthetic function and things that have a narrative function. When Zangwill is making this argument, he tends to identify this folk concept of art with the concept of fine art since he thinks they are based on the same error.

There are two problems with this line of argument. First, since most people disagree with Zangwill that narrative per se cannot have aesthetic properties, the claim that the concept is based on an error is highly tendentious. Second, even if the concept is disjunctive in the way Zangwill suggests, that does not mean the concept is based on an error. Perhaps the concept of art is a functional concept but there is no common function that all artworks share (as may be the case even if we reject Zangwill view about narrative). This would be an error only if the concept involves the idea that all artworks have a single, common function (which would make it self-contradictory). But Zangwill provides no argument that the concept must be understood in terms of a single common function. So he fails to show that the disjunctive nature of the concept indicates that we are in error about it. For both these reasons I find the first line of argument unpersuasive.

The second line of argument, somewhat surprisingly given the first line, denies that the folk concept is identical to the concept of fine art or any other sufficiently constrained concept. In other words, there is no ordinary concept of art. This is a surprising, bold claim for which one would expect considerable argument. As far as I can see Zangwill’s entire argument consists of making the denial just mentioned and of asserting that there are some dictionaries that record no such meaning for the word art (without however identifying any of these). I find the claim that there is no usable ordinary concept of art implausible. Since the question seems to be an empirical one, let me offer some, though clearly not decisive, evidence. I have been teaching aesthetics for a few decades and each year on the first day of class I give my students a list of items and ask them which name art forms or a class of artwork and which do not. The results are remarkably uniform. Everyone recognizes the forms that congealed under the 18th century concept of fine art as art forms. They also regard some forms that have achieved such recognition more recently as art forms, items like photography and cinema. They are divided when considering the products of crafts that are capable of producing very fine specimens, such as furniture, carpets, and jewelry. They are nearly unanimous in rejecting more humdrum artifacts, and consumables as artworks. They tend to be divided over specimens of avant garde art. I do not need to impart to them an ideology of the fine arts. They already have some such

concept. I would characterize it more as a successor to the concept of fine art than the precise 18th century concept itself.

Suppose, however, Zangwill turns out to be right about non-existence of a relevant folk concept of art. What would follow? Zangwill's view seems to be that he would then be free to define a concept that captures what we find valuable in art, but that ends up excluding some items normally classified as art and including others normally not so classified. But, notice, we can't get this result unless we can appeal to a classificatory practice that rounds up a set of target objects. That, however, presupposes what Zangwill denies viz. a concept of art. Without that, the classificatory practice would not be possible. Hence if he is right about the non-existence of a folk concept, his own project does not get off the ground.

A Value-Determined Concept?

Zangwill's basic idea is that a good theory of art should do two things. It should be roughly extensionally adequate and it should explain much of what we believe about art, especially why we believe that making and enjoying artworks are worthwhile activities. Many other theorists would agree that a theory of art should do both these things but believe that they involve two disjoint tasks: one that sets out our classificatory practice through which we define the kind *artwork* and another that tackles the nature of artistic value, i.e., the value of members of that independently defined kind. I think it is a good question which of these two views is right and, while Zangwill touches on this issue, I wish he had said more to show that his view is the right one.

The main problem for the approach that Zangwill favors is that in attempting to identify an appropriate class of phenomena about which to theorize, it employs two criteria, which pull us in different directions, at least if we accept the way Zangwill cashes out the evaluative criterion. That is, the criterion of rough extensional adequacy delivers up one set of objects that includes narrative works, avant garde works, and what might be called post-avant garde non-aesthetic works (such as the sculptures of Duane Hanson) while the criterion of objects made with aesthetic insight excludes many of these (according to Zangwill) but also includes many items that the first criterion would exclude such as many artifacts not normally classified as art. In other words, when we employ both criteria in attempting to define a concept of art, far from solving the second problem with the aesthetic creation theory mentioned above (viz. its lack of fit with our ordinary classificatory practice), we are in fact simply confronted with it once again.

At this point, Zangwill might simply jettison the criterion of rough extensional adequacy and claim that we are better off working with the somewhat novel concept defined by the aesthetic creation theory (possibly modified in light of the first initial objection mentioned earlier). This novel concept would have the virtue of being defined in terms of a simple, easy to understand functional criterion. However, it would not do one thing

that Zangwill thinks absolutely crucial, viz. explain our beliefs and attitudes toward art as it standardly classified, especially our evaluative beliefs and attitudes. It cannot do that because the new concept simply does not explain what we value about many of the items normally so classified that the new concept excludes while giving no way to distinguish what we value in paintings and doughnut boxes that both fall under the new concept. In the end, the strategy of offering a new classification of art objects is doomed to fail because an approach that excludes so much of what we normally classify as art while scooping up so much of what we normally do not so classify, is unlikely to achieve the goal Zangwill assigns to it. You are not going to explain why we value something unless you have that something in your sights.

It is worth considering what might be the underlying reason why aesthetic creation theory fails despite containing important insights. The insights are that artworks very commonly possess aesthetic value, and many artifacts that are not artworks according to our usual classificatory practice also have aesthetic value. If we are going to attempt to be sensitive to practice, the natural question to ask is whether there is some important difference between the two classes of artifacts that both possess aesthetic value. In fact, there are at least two important differences. First, in both classes, aesthetic value is just one of the values possessed by members of each class (a point well understood, and sometimes even emphasized by Zangwill), but each class differs in what these other values are. The non-art artifacts tend to be valuable in fulfilling quite specific useful functions. Thus a chair that we aesthetically value also fulfills the usual function of chairs, or chairs of the type to which this chair belongs. It would be wrong to think of artworks as useless or functionless, but the useful functions they do fulfill tend to have a different character. Artworks often (though certainly not always) have cognitive and ethical dimensions that contribute significantly to their artistic value. They often embody and communicate important aspects of the culture or society in which they were created. They often tell stories or exhibit scenes from those stories that are central to the culture. Second, the aesthetic properties of artifacts in each of these classes, in addition to being valuable in their own right, also enable these artifacts to fulfill other functions well. They enable those who use non-art artifacts to take greater pleasure in their use by making those artifacts more attractive, possibly more expressive of their function, and potentially more harmonious with the artificial environment in which they are placed. With respect to artworks, cognitive, ethical and other culturally significant functions are often enabled by the work's aesthetic properties and piggy back on the aesthetic experiences provided by such works. It was one of Monroe Beardsley's best insights that to fully explain the value of an artwork's aesthetic properties and the experience derived from them, one has to refer the instrumental value of the properties and the experiences. It is because aesthetic creation theory focuses exclusively on art's purely aesthetic function, and ignores other crucial functions often,

if not always, enabled by a work's aesthetic properties, that the theory is bedeviled by counterintuitive inclusions of non-art artifacts and exclusions of paradigmatic artworks.

For this reason, even before we get to the third strategy for defending aesthetic creation theory, we can conclude that it cannot be salvaged as a theory of art. However, perhaps it can still play a role in a theory of artistic value. The previous paragraph asserted that not only do many valuable artworks have aesthetic value, but the very same properties responsible for a work's aesthetic value are also necessary for its having other non-aesthetically valuable features. Perhaps we can make a stronger claim: that all valuable artworks have aesthetic value. Or if there are exceptions, can these be treated as exception to the rule just stated? Let us explore this possibility.

Do all Valuable Artworks have Aesthetic Value?

This idea, that aesthetic value pervades artworks that are valuable at all, has been put into doubt by a number of artistic movements that arose in the twentieth century such Dada and its descendants including conceptual art. Recently, a number of philosophers, Zangwill included, have tried to resurrect aesthetic essentialism, as I will call the idea that aesthetic value is at the core of artistic value. The purpose of the remainder of this paper is to argue that this project hasn't and won't succeed.

Transmitted Aesthetic Properties

There is a fairly large class of avant-garde artworks that are created by appropriation of one kind or another. Sometimes "ordinary" artifacts are redeployed as artworks with little or no reworking (readymades). Sometimes a design or a format is appropriated with little or no reworking to create new objects that are artworks (Warhol's brillo boxes and Lichtenstein's cartoons). Sometimes artworks are appropriated to make new artworks. Art that results from appropriation is among the most common examples on purportedly non-aesthetic art.

However, the fact remains that many of the appropriated objects had some aesthetic value. Danto has effusive praise for the Brillo box design. Some see an attractive luster and graceful curves in the urinal that is the basis of Duchamp's *Fountain* (though Duchamp himself claims to have chosen it for a lack of aesthetic interest). It might be argued – Zangwill, in fact, does argue – that artworks that appropriate aesthetically valuable objects or designs inherit this aesthetic value. (Zangwill also claims that such objects are already art. I find such claims dubious for reasons discussed above.) If such an argument is successful, it would not eliminate all possible counter-examples to the claim that all valuable artworks are aesthetically valuable, but it would at least eliminate or neutralized a good sized chunk of such counter-examples.

However, it is by no means clear that the argument is successful. The appropriated object possessing some aesthetic value is either a different one than the art object created by appropriation (even in the case of readymades) or if it is the same object, it is to be evaluated in an entirely new context. (Which of these alternatives is correct is a metaphysical question that we won't try to settle here for the case of readymades. For the other cases of appropriation, it is clear we have different objects).

A good test case is Sherrie Levine's photographs of photographs, because the appropriated objects are both uncontroversially artworks and ones of high aesthetic value. The originals that have been rephotographed (including those of important American photographers Edward Weston and Walker Evans) had aesthetic qualities intrinsic to their value as art, which Levine's works inherit, at least in the sense that one can look at these works and see the same qualities appreciated in the original. (This is a corollary of the fact that one can look at most photographs and see some of its subject's aesthetic properties.) But those aesthetic properties belong primarily to the subject of the work rather than the work itself. In evaluating Levine's work, where does *its* value lie? Is it in the aesthetic properties of the objects photographed, in a new set of aesthetic properties it possesses that is not possessed by its subject, or in something else? I doubt it is to be found in the aesthetic properties of the original since that would make Levine's work redundant, or pointless. That leaves the latter two possibilities. Since there seem to be no new aesthetic properties in the offing, the value must be found elsewhere. It seems to me to be based on the fact that the works have an unexpected subject matter (other photographs). The realization of this refocuses our attention to properties, including aesthetic properties, but also social and art historical ones, that the subjects have as photographs. This seems to me primarily a kind of cognitive, rather than aesthetic value, though ironically one, which, if successful, gives us a new way to experience the original photographs aesthetically. If this is correct, it doesn't follow from the fact that the appropriated object had aesthetic value that the new art object also does even where the original object was an artwork.

The Modest Strategy

The modest strategy² qualifies the claim that *all* valuable artworks possess aesthetic properties. Recognizing that there are exceptions to this assertion, it claims that most valuable artworks possess aesthetic value as such, and the remaining valuable artworks possess value that is parasitic on the aesthetic properties of the majority of artworks. The Levine photographs, as I have interpreted them, would be a good example of a work the value of which is not aesthetic, but is parasitic on the aesthetic value of other

² James Anderson, "Aesthetic Concepts of Art," in *Theories of Art Today*, ed. by Noël Carroll (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000). Nick Zangwill, *Aesthetic Creation*, op. cit.

works. A different type of example would be anti-aesthetic art (sometimes simply called “anti-art”). This includes some of the much discussed Dadaist works of Duchamp, such as his readymades and *L.H.O.O.Q.* The former are ordinary objects (a urinal, a bottle-rack, a snow-shovel, a bicycle wheel) the artist simply selected and displayed as art with little or no adjustment by the artist. They were purportedly selected for their lack of aesthetic interest. *L.H.O.O.Q.* is a postcard reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* on which the artist drew a graffiti-like mustache and goatee. The modest strategy does not claim that these works have aesthetic value, but simply claims that whatever value they do have can only be understood in relation to, and in contrast with the aesthetic value possessed by most works.

The modest strategy contains an insight. It is correct in claiming that much artistic value that is of a non-aesthetic variety, often if not always, in some way depends on aesthetic value. The works discussed so far are good examples of this. I’m not sure, however, that the thesis universally holds. Perhaps there are conceptual artworks that simply try to present a thought or idea. Perhaps there are political works that simply have a political message. Zangwill³ with admirable honesty mentions the hyper-realist sculptures of Duane Hanson as an artwork that lacks aesthetic aspirations even of second order kind that I have ascribed to non-aesthetic but parasitic works. (He also mentions narrative works, which he believes are wholly lacking in aesthetic value in so far as they address the imagination but not the senses. I pass over these examples here as too controversial since most writers would reject such a restricted conception of aesthetic value.)

The chief problem with the modest strategy is that it is too modest. It does not sustain the claim that all valuable artworks possess a single value in common viz. aesthetic value. In fact, it is premised on the belief that all do *not*. Hence, for the purposes of this paper, we do not have to decide whether the modest strategy is based on a truth or not. It is enough to point out that it doesn’t save the common value thesis.

A proponent of the modest strategy might reply that, if it can be established that artworks *necessarily* typically possess aesthetic value, the spirit, if not the letter, of essentialism has been maintained. The correct response to this reply is to point out that this is not what has been established. Non-aesthetic art, far from being atypical, is now common. What is at best true, is that it is typical of non-aesthetic art that there is an implicit reference to one of the following: other artworks that are aesthetically valuable (Levine case) or the absence of the aesthetic (anti-art case). This is what gives some credence to the claim that non-aesthetic art is parasitic on aesthetic art. However, it is now quite plausible that not all non-aesthetic art has this character, and even if the claim is true, it falls well short of the stronger one made in the reply. It would only show that *some* artworks necessarily possess aesthetic value.

³ Ibid., 71–72.

The Ambitious Strategy

The ambitious strategy⁴ (Lind 1992, Shelley 2003) claims that all valuable artworks including those mentioned above, do have aesthetic value that is intrinsic to their value as art. This needs to be distinguished from extrinsic aesthetic value that some of these objects possess. If my interpretation of Levine is correct, her photographs have lots of extrinsic aesthetic value inherited from her subjects. *Bottle-rack* has a complex form while the mounted *Bicycle Wheel* has a simple, graceful appearance. However, these aesthetic attributes are equally possessed by any similar bottle-rack or bicycle wheel (mounted for the purpose of repair).

The interesting claim of the ambitious strategy is that these works possess aesthetic properties intrinsic to them as artworks. For example, *Fountain* (Duchamp's urinal readymade) possesses daring, wit, cleverness, impudence, and irreverence.⁵ These are aesthetic properties, it is claimed, and appreciating the work for possessing them is intrinsic to appreciating them as art. Is this claim true? Let us grant that *Fountain* has these properties and that they are relevant to its appreciation. The important question is whether they are aesthetic properties. My view is that (with the exception of wit, which requires a different treatment) there is no clear answer to this question. "Daring", "cleverness", "impudence", and "irreverence", let us assume, can sometimes be names of aesthetic properties (though this isn't completely obvious. Zangwill, for example, denies it⁶). Whether or not they sometimes name aesthetic properties, these terms certainly can and sometimes do name non-aesthetic properties. Impudent behavior, a daring strategy, irreverent remarks about religion, and clever philosophical arguments are cases of items having non-aesthetic attributes denoted by the above expressions. They most plausibly name aesthetic properties when the application of the term is grounded in aesthetic experience. The trouble is that it is admitted by all that *Fountain* sustains little aesthetic experience. Hence, it is not clear that the ambitious strategy can make good its claim to find aesthetic properties in what is commonly thought of as non-aesthetic art.

If one is to argue that works such as the readymades have aesthetic value, one needs to argue that they are capable of providing a significant aesthetic experience when understood as the artworks they are. (This is a criterion I would impose. Zangwill would use a different strategy to reject these purported aesthetic properties.) In the case of *Fountain*, this may just be a viable option. Selecting a urinal and mounting it upside down, gives this readymade a shock value not equaled by all the others. For this reason,

⁴ Richard Lind, "The Aesthetic Essence of Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 50 (1992): 117–29. Shelley James, "The Problem of Non-perceptual Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43 (2002): 363–378.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁶ Nick Zangwill, *Aesthetic Creation*, op. cit.

one is not simply intellectually aware of the irreverent questions Duchamp is asking about the contribution of the artist, the creative process, and the role of craft in making art. One experiences the force of the questions through seeing this work. This is surely why *Fountain* is the most famous of the readymades, the one that always shows up in art-historical surveys, and the one that has by now been discussed ad nauseum. Still, this experience is a very limited one, pretty well exhausted in a single viewing and probably provided as well by a photograph of the work as by the work itself. (So the claim that *Fountain* sustains *little* aesthetic experience is not inaccurate.) The chief value of the work lies elsewhere, in the cognitive value of the reconceptualization it proposes and symbolizes. That other such works have aesthetic value as the works they are is even less plausible.

One might question a premise of the preceding argument. Is it really true that, for a work to have aesthetic value or possess an aesthetic property, it must be capable of providing an aesthetically valuable experience? Some have suggested that it is not. Noël Carroll⁷ (2004) offers the ‘argument from form’, which can be construed as supporting such a result, though its official conclusion is somewhat different. The argument from form goes like this. In the case of some conceptual artworks, one can experience their formal properties on the basis of reports about them. Formal properties are a species of aesthetic properties. Therefore, one can experience aesthetic properties of some artworks on the basis of reports about them. And if experiencing form is aesthetically valuable, then this aesthetically valuable experience can be had on the basis of reports about such works.

So far, this argument does not challenge the idea that, for a work to have aesthetic value or possess an aesthetic property, it must be capable of providing an aesthetically valuable experience. It just says that a report about a work can be the provider of the experience. However, if we look just a bit below the surface of this argument, we can see how such a challenge emerges. First, we need to recognize that Carroll has a rather special conception of the form of an artwork. It is the ensemble of choices that are intended to realize or, as Carroll suggests later, succeeds in realizing, the point of the work. Second, we have to ask what a report about a work’s form, in the sense just specified, will provide its recipient. The answer is information about the point of the work, and choices the artist makes that are intended to or succeed in realizing this point. Such information can be expressed in a proposition, and while Carroll sometimes speaks of experiencing formal properties this way, he also speaks of “grasping” a work’s form through such a reporting and “cogitating about” a work’s form. These alternative modes of expression suggest that talk of experiencing formal properties by means of such reports needn’t be taken literally. There is no specific experience that goes with grasping, or cogitating about a proposition. If not, works can possess aesthetic properties or have aesthetic value, without

⁷ Noël Carroll, “Non-perceptual Aesthetic Properties: Comments for James Shelley,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 44 (2004): 413–423.

being capable of providing aesthetically valuable experiences. Thus, when we work through the implications of this argument, we see that it does challenge the idea that such experience is required.

Does this mean that the ambitious strategy was right after all in arguing that the standard counterexamples to aesthetic essentialism such as the Dadaist and conceptual works we have been discussing are really rife with aesthetic properties that are intrinsic to their artistic value? No. The argument turns on a rather special notion of formal property and the claim that formal properties, *so defined*, are aesthetic properties. I see no reason to grant the second claim. After all, given Carroll's definition of form, you can grasp the form of this essay while having no aesthetic experience, and seeing no aesthetic value in it. You just have to see how my choices in writing it are intended to argue or succeed in arguing that not all valuable artworks are aesthetically valuable. There is no aesthetic property to be experienced, grasped, or cogitated over in this. For all we know, the same could be true when we grasp the form of a work of conceptual art. Hence, something can have form in Carroll's sense, without it possessing an aesthetic property.

So we should conclude that neither the modest nor the ambitious strategy succeeds in showing that all valuable artworks are aesthetically valuable or even that this is necessarily typically true.

The Unique Value Strategy

I now turn to a very different way of arguing that aesthetic value is at least necessarily typically present in valuable artworks. The idea is that if it weren't, artworks couldn't be valuable in the way we believe they are. They would turn out to be replaceable and dispensable, whereas no one thinks that is the case.

When one thinks of many of the ways we find artworks valuable, we may start to fear that the valuable properties artworks offer could be offered by other things.

Consider... the kind of view according to which works of art communicate some truth or enable us to experience some emotion... Two worrying possibilities seem to be allowed. First we could gain the same truth or emotion by making or perceiving a quite different work of art... and so we ought to be indifferent between making or perceiving one or the other... Second, we could gain the same truth or emotion by doing something that is nothing to do with art at all, and so we ought to be indifferent between making or perceiving a work of art and that other thing.⁸

Take any *function* art fulfills, and we can see that others things are capable of fulfilling it too. Certainly art hardly has a monopoly on the ability to provide moral insight or a refined awareness of human psychology, to increase intelligence or induce admirable habits of feeling. (Further, there

⁸ Ibid., 24.

are many artworks and perhaps some art forms that are incapable of doing these things). Artworks are not the only things that represent the world in fascinating or unusual ways or with verisimilitude. They are not the only things we find expressive or evocative of human emotions, or of religious or political sentiments. They are obviously not the only sources of escape from everyday life and not the only providers of “worlds” in which we can lose ourselves. They are not even the only things that are beautiful or give us aesthetic experiences. Aesthetic value can be found in nature and almost every domain of human endeavor. If this is so, it is conceivable that these other things might do a better job at offering these valuable properties, and thus art could be replaced, superseded by these other things. At best, art would have to compete with these other things.⁹

There is another related worry. Suppose we value a work for containing a moral or psychological insight. The work is not only replaceable by something else that provides the same insight, but even if the source of the insight is the work, once we have it, we don't have to return to that source. Once we have absorbed the insight, it seems that we can now dispense with the work. A theory of artistic value that implies this dispensability is thought to be just as unacceptable as a theory that implies replaceability. The value of artworks is sometimes said to be inexhaustible, but even if this is exaggeration, they can be revisited on many occasions and yield up new value each time. So it may be thought that a condition on a good theory of artistic value is that it implies that artworks have a kind of value that makes them neither replaceable nor dispensable.

Irreplaceability would seem to be guaranteed if at least part of the value of an artwork is unique to that work. If there is one aspect of the value of an artwork that is unique to it, it would seem to be the valuable experience it offers to those who understand it or the valuable aesthetic properties it possesses.

Perhaps one can cleverly think of cases where a pair of artworks, or a pair of consisting of an artwork and a non-work, offer identical experiences or possess the same aesthetic properties. Since such cases would trade on the exceptional, the coincidental or the bizarre, let us not pursue them and grant that usually an artwork uniquely offers the valuable experiences to be had from it and a unique set of aesthetic properties. How significant is this fact in understanding the value of art? It is significant but not as significant as one might think.

To see why it is not as significant as one might think, consider first a parallel case from a realm of outside of the artworld. (There are countless examples along these lines). I enjoy fishing not just because it sometimes results in catching fish, but also because, among other things, of the enjoyable experiences I have casting lures, retrieving them, and playing fish with my fishing rod. These pleasurable experiences are unique to the

⁹ Malcom Budd, *Values of Art: Pictures, Poetry Music* (London: The Penguin Press, 1995). Alan Goldman, *Aesthetic Value* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

particular rod I use; had I used a different rod I would have somewhat different experiences. (This same point could be expressed in terms of properties of my fishing rod. Henceforth, I will speak of experiences rather than properties because that is where I think the locus of aesthetic value is to be found.) This does not keep my fishing rod from being replaceable. It is not just that I could buy another rod of the same type (model) – that would just involve getting another token of the same rod. No, I could buy a different model that offered similar (perhaps better) experiences. The fact that something offers a unique experience is no bar to its replaceability, if there are other things that offer equally desirable experiences, and there is no real loss in exchanging one experience for the other. Notice one more thing: if you want to know what makes a fishing rod a good one, it won't be very illuminating to be told that people have valuable experiences with it. You need to know what functions fishing rods serve. Only then will you understand how some might be better, and provide better experiences, than others.

Fishing rods are instruments; works of art are not. However, one can run similar examples with non-instruments such as fine cigars or wines. A particular fine cigar, such as the Julieta no. 3, offers a unique experience. It would nevertheless not be unreasonable to substitute for this experience an equally good one offered by another cigar. The moral of such examples is twofold: first, if you are worried about the replaceability of one artwork by another, or of artworks by non-artworks, then merely discovering that artworks provide a uniquely valuable experience shouldn't allay your fears. Second, if you want to understand the value of art, it certainly won't suffice to know that artworks offer uniquely valuable experiences. You will need to understand the sort of value such experiences provide, and to do that you will have to make reference to items like the functions or purposes (not unique to art) listed at the beginning of this section, and the instrumental value of those functions. If this is so, then discovering that artworks provide uniquely valuable experiences is no reason to accept aesthetic essentialism. The experiences may be unique to the works that offer them and this may make the experiences uniquely valuable, but the type of value involved in these experiences is not unique to art.

I said above that the fact that artworks offer unique experiences does have some significance in an argument for the irreplaceability of the value we receive from individual works. What we have seen so far is that just citing this fact does not cinch the argument. What needs to be added is that there is a real loss in exchanging one valuable experience for another. The experiences uniquely provided by a great, or perhaps even a good artwork are irreplaceable because, even though there are other equally good experiences out there, the world would clearly be poorer for the loss of this one. The same is much less likely to be true for a certain fishing rod model, but it is also not true for many lesser artworks. In both cases, these sorts of things are constantly going out of existence or becoming unavailable without a great loss of value in the world.

The idea of dispensability is distinct from replaceability. The latter idea involves the thought that something else can substitute for the original item by providing an equivalent value. The former idea involves the thought that the original item is no longer needed once its service in a valuable role is over. Toothpaste tubes are no longer valuable when they no longer hold toothpaste. They are then dispensable and are dispensed into the wastebasket. If one focuses on one specific instrumental value of artworks, these works can also seem dispensable. This can lead someone to deny that the artistic value of a work is any such instrumental value.

The value of a poem as a poem does not consist in the significance of the thoughts it expresses; for if it did, the poem could be put aside once the thoughts it expresses are grasped.¹⁰

I believe this passage is correct if we interpret it as saying that the significance of the thoughts does not account for the whole value of a poem (though it would be incorrect if it meant to exclude this significance as even a part of a poem's artistic value). We can grant, for example that the imaginative experience derived from reading the poem also forms part of its value, both with respect to the experience in its own right and for benefits it delivers. However, since it is dispensability we are worried about, let us ask whether locating the value of a poem in the significance of its thoughts really make the work dispensable, while locating it in experiences intimately tied to the poem avoids dispensability. Neither claim is as obvious as it might seem at first sight. If a poem's job is to deliver an experience, why shouldn't we say that we could dispense with it once the delivery is made? There could be two reasons for denying this. One would be that we want to repeat the experience. Whether we do or not seems to be contingent on individual preferences. The other reason for not dispensing with the poem would be based on the belief that we have not exhausted the poem of experiences it could make available. Then we could return to it with the expectation of new experience. I think this is the more common reason for rereading a poem. Now what about the poem's significant thoughts? There are three reasons why we might reread a poem out of interest in its significant thoughts. First, we may want to remind ourselves of what these thoughts are, or re-encounter them (just as we may want to re-encounter an experience of a poem). Second, we may be unsure whether we interpreted the poem correctly with respect to its thoughts. So we may read it again to see if we really got it right the first time. Third, we may read it with the expectation that it will yield up new thoughts. We may believe it will be open to new interpretations that will deliver new thoughts. Hence, valuing a poem primarily for its significant thoughts (and I am not saying that we do) would not make it more dispensable than finding its value in experiences it delivers.

¹⁰ Malcom Budd, *op. cit.*, 83.

There are many reasons why we want to return to works of art. We just mentioned two such reasons: to re-encounter some aspect of the work, and to encounter something new in or through it based on a new interpretation of the work. A third reason is supplied by pluralism about artistic value. If artworks are valuable as art is in multiple ways, we may return to a work to derive from it a different kind of value than we found in an earlier encounter. A first reading of a poem might concentrate on what it says. Next we may want to analyze how it says this through its formal structure and imagery, for example. On another occasion, we may simply enjoy the story it tells, and so on. Since a work offers multiple pleasures and benefits, there is good reason to believe that we haven't exhausted them all in a first encounter.

We began this section with the fear of the replaceability and dispensability of art as a motivation for locating artistic value in an experience uniquely provided by a work. We have found that the mere fact that a work offers such an experience fails by itself to dispel these fears. Artworks are not "emptied" like toothpaste tubes primarily for three reasons: the importance of the functions they can fulfill by providing their unique experiences, their multiple interpretability, and the plurality of valuable properties that they possess.