



## PRACTICAL AESTHETIC KNOWLEDGE: GOODMAN AND HUSSERL ON THE POSSIBILITIES OF LEARNING BY AESTHETIC PRACTICES

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In this article I aim to shed light on the question of whether aesthetic experience can constitute practical knowledge and, if so, how it achieves this. I will compare the approaches of Nelson Goodman and Edmund Husserl. Both authors treat the question of which benefits aesthetic experience can bring to certain basic skills. Though one could argue together with Goodman that repeated aesthetic experience allows for a trained and discriminating approach to artworks, Husserl argues that by viewing aesthetic objects we can learn to perceive in a more undiluted fashion and to qualify our own perceptions against the backdrop of the conceptual framework that shapes our everyday experience. As a consequence, aesthetic experience is not to be regarded as something that only contributes to a normatively loaded involvement in the distinct field of the 'aesthetic'. Reading Goodman with Husserl and vice versa, I will argue in support of a practical aesthetic knowledge account that mediates cognitivist-constructivist and phenomenological concerns and can thus overcome some of their respective shortcomings. The account I present is useful for understanding the practical value of aesthetic experience in and beyond the confined field of the arts.

There has been a great deal of discussion lately concerning the 'epistemic' or 'cognitive' value of aesthetic experience in the field of philosophical aesthetics. Numerous books and articles have addressed the question of whether the experience of artworks or of the aesthetic taken in a more general sense can contribute to knowledge acquisition.<sup>1</sup> If it can, what is the distinct kind

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<sup>1</sup> One can roughly distinguish two complementary accounts of this question. Whereas cognitivist approaches are positive about the contribution of aesthetic experience to knowledge acquisition, anti-cognitivist approaches deny any distinct epistemic qualities of aesthetic experience. For a general overview of the epistemic qualities of aesthetic experience and the cognitivism-anti-cognitivism debate, see Berys Gaut, 'Art and Knowledge', in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 436–50; Rosalind Hursthouse, 'Truth and Representation', in *Philosophical Aesthetics*, ed. Oswald Hanfling (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 239–96; Eileen John, 'Art and Knowledge', in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (London: Routledge, 2005), 417–29; Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, 'Truth', in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 4 vols., ed. Michael Kelly (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4:406–15; David Novitz, 'Epistemology and Aesthetics', in Kelly, *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 2:120–23. For cognitivist approaches, see David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985);



of knowledge constituted in the course of aesthetic experience? Is it different from knowledge constituted in the course of ordinary experience? Is it different from knowledge constituted in the course of scientific experience?

In my article, I will draw on the relation of aesthetic experience and knowledge addressed by these discussions with one slight, but critical, shift: I will not ask whether aesthetic experience contributes to knowledge acquisition of a theoretical kind; rather, I will investigate if and to what extent aesthetic experience contributes to knowledge acquisition of a practical kind. By knowledge of a practical kind or 'practical knowledge' I do not mean moral knowledge in the sense of practical reasoning.<sup>2</sup> Rather, I mean knowledge concerning practice, that is, knowledge about how to do something.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, aesthetic experience would not enable one to state *what* something is, how it could be used, or how it should be judged. Rather, it would result in inarticulate, implicit, operative, and embodied knowledge. For instance, visual aesthetic experiences could lead one to develop an informed and critical<sup>4</sup> way of looking. For auditory aesthetic experiences, one could develop a nuanced and differentiated sense of hearing. Defending a practical aesthetic knowledge account, one can clearly outline aesthetic experience as an epistemic practice: aesthetic experience not only facilitates a better understanding of the observed object and its meaning; it also provides an 'experimental' field for learning and applying more general epistemic skills, such as raising one's awareness and approaching things thoroughly as well as critically by viewing them from different angles. Arguing in support of a practical aesthetic knowledge account can therefore help to deepen the comprehension of aesthetic experience as a learning

John Gibson, 'Cognitivism and the Arts', in *Philosophy Compass* 3 (2008): 573–89. For anti-cognitivist approaches, see Peter Lamarque, 'Cognitive Values in the Arts: Marking the Boundaries', in *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 127–42; Jerome Stolnitz, 'On the Cognitive Triviality of Art', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 32 (1992): 191–200.

<sup>2</sup> Contemporary debates entail a lively discussion of the interrelation of aesthetic experience and practical, or moral, reasoning. See Matthew Kieran, 'Art, Imagination, and the Cultivation of Morals', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54 (1996): 337–51; Mette Hjort and Sue Laver, eds., *Emotion and the Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Noël Carroll, 'The Wheel of Virtue: Art, Literature, and Moral Knowledge', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60 (2002): 3–26. For an overview, see Sarah E. Worth, 'Art and Epistemology', in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2003), <http://www.iep.utm.edu/art-ep>.

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert Ryle introduces the epistemic distinction between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how'. He considers the inarticulate, implicit, bodily mode of 'knowing how' to be more grounding than the explicit, propositional, rational mode of 'knowing that'. Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (1949; London: Penguin Books, 1990), 28–32.

<sup>4</sup> In this article, I refer to the literal meaning of 'critical' throughout. In this respect, 'critical' is derived from the ancient Greek *krinein*, which denotes operations of discrimination and discernment.

activity, a practice that can help to generate competent and critical epistemic agents who are not only equipped with concrete propositional knowledge, but who also have at their disposal the practical means to enhance their appreciation and to reflect critically upon existing knowledge. Taken this way, a practical aesthetic knowledge account does not disparage theoretical aesthetic knowledge. Rather, it adds a crucial foundational aspect to it, since, as Michael Polanyi puts it, practical knowledge ‘underlies all observation’;<sup>5</sup> and is hence a condition for gaining new theoretical insights.

In order to shed light on whether aesthetic experience can constitute such practical knowledge at all and, if so, how it achieves this, I will discuss two approaches: Nelson Goodman’s cognitivist-constructivist account and Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological account. In comparing their very different theories, some intriguing arguments about the practical value of aesthetic experience can be brought to light. Both – albeit implicitly – treat the question of which benefits aesthetic experience, taken as a distinct practice, can bring to certain basic skills. While one could argue together with Goodman that repeated aesthetic experience allows for a trained and discriminating approach to artworks, and thus constitutes an expert kind of knowing-how, which is basically understood as the ability to make out aesthetic differences, Husserl’s late account of representation (*Darstellung*) brings about two arguments that seem to challenge Goodman’s claim. According to Husserl, by viewing aesthetic objects we can, firstly and more generally, learn to perceive in a more undiluted (and not in a more specialized) fashion and we can, secondly and more specifically, learn to qualify our own perception against the backdrop of the conceptual framework that shapes our everyday experience. As a consequence, aesthetic experience is not to be regarded as something that primarily contributes to a normatively loaded involvement in the distinct field of the ‘aesthetic’ or is only aimed at training an expert who deals with a historically specific conceptual framework; instead, it should be considered as something that sharpens our perceptual skills on a more general level.

In the concluding part of the article I will draw on the remarks of Goodman and Husserl in order to sketch a practical aesthetic knowledge account that combines cognitivist-constructivist with phenomenological arguments and allows us to explore how aesthetic experience constitutes practical knowledge.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 17. Polanyi, who started his academic career as a natural scientist before turning to philosophy, employs the term ‘tacit knowledge’ to refer to a practical epistemic dimension. Stating that ‘we can know more than we can tell’ (ibid., 4), he claims that the foundation of theoretical knowledge – whether in the sciences, ordinary life, or the arts – is a tacit, practically enacted form of knowledge.

This account should, therefore, contribute to a better and more comprehensive understanding of the epistemic value of aesthetic experience in general and is of interest, especially in light of the recent shift of focus from theoretical to practical and embodied knowledge, particularly in the fields of the philosophy of mind and the cognitive sciences.<sup>6</sup> In order to avoid any misconceptions, I will show that speaking from a phenomenological point of view does not necessarily bracket all the concerns of a cognitivist-constructivist account which are of importance for a differentiated approach in philosophical aesthetics. I will argue that a mitigated phenomenological perspective facilitates an examination of the historically concrete conceptual framework which, according to Goodman, underlies all experience, including aesthetic experience. In this sense, the aesthetic stance can be regarded as a critical, practically enacted method for addressing the relativity and thus the constructed historical nature of every experiential system and its objects. In order, however, to pin down aesthetic knowledge in a practical respect as knowing how to critically engage with experiential objects, one also needs to understand how it emerges in relation to our more standardized perceptions. Husserl's approach mainly focuses on the appearance of phenomena and their aesthetic qualification, but it almost entirely disregards the context of aesthetic practices and our knowledge about them. Moreover, it does not serve the need to regard aesthetic experience as a learning activity, because the aesthetic view can be performed at the very moment of taking on the aesthetic attitude. Therefore, consulting Goodman's account once again in order to draft a consistent notion of practically enacted aesthetic knowledge, I suggest sticking to a phenomenological approach informed and mitigated by cognitive-constructivism. This approach finally enables understanding practical knowledge constituted in the course of aesthetic experience as knowing how to thoroughly and critically examine an object and make out its distinct aesthetic phenomenality, which is trained by repeated participation in aesthetic practices.

<sup>6</sup> It is mainly within the recent, empirically informed philosophy of mind and cognitive sciences that embodied knowledge, mostly grasped as 'embodied cognition', has become a matter of interest. See Evan Thompson and Francisco Varela, 'Radical Embodiment: Neural Dynamics and Consciousness', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 5 (2001), 418–25; Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004); Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Anthony Chemero, *Radical Embodied Cognitive Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); Robert D. Rupert, *Cognitive Systems and the Extended Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Lawrence Shapiro, *Embodied Cognition* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Joerg Fingerhut, Rebekka Hufendiek, and Markus Wild, eds., *Philosophie der Verkörperung: Grundlagentexte zu einer aktuellen Debatte* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013).

## I. THEORETICAL VERSUS PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

In order to comprehensively discuss the epistemic value of aesthetic experiences, one needs not only to have a clear concept of the aesthetic and to understand the distinct way we experience it, but also to shed light on the notion of knowledge. In contemporary epistemology, the epistemic is often said to comprise knowledge of different kinds. In the history of philosophy, however, the concept of knowledge has often been restricted to express forms of 'justified true belief'. Knowledge, in this understanding, amounts to sentences of the form 'I know that  $p$ ', expressed by a knowing subject who is well aware that his or her belief  $p$  is not only well justified (by means of rational reasoning, experience, or the testimony of a trustworthy second person, for instance), but also true. Knowledge of this kind is directed towards true propositions or facts.<sup>7</sup> I can know that  $p$ , if and only if I believe that  $p$ , my belief, is justified, and that  $p$  is a fact, which implies that  $p$  is true.

The traditional notion of knowledge limits the epistemic field to (inwardly or outwardly uttered) sentences of the form 'I know that  $p$ '. This *knowing that* confines knowledge to holding true propositions in the mind and expressing them. A less restrictive epistemological account, by contrast, also sheds light on other forms of knowledge. A practical kind of knowledge in this context refers to competence(s), operations, and abilities of a capable subject, which are in most cases, by the way, indispensable to finding out truths and thus enable the acquisition of theoretical knowledge. Such *knowing how* cannot be fully grasped when regarded as the mere application of theoretical knowledge.

Consider the following example. When somebody informs me of the correct combination of movements that one must perform in order to ride a bike, the knowledge conveyed to me is of a theoretical kind and will, very likely, not enable me to ride a bike the minute I try to apply this knowledge (for example, the fact that I have to hold the handlebars, start to pedal, balance my weight). Riding a bike, just like other forms of practical knowledge, such as knowing how to ski, knowing how to sing, knowing how to dance, and knowing how to draw, cannot be reduced to a set of theoretical rules or standards underlying an action. Rather, they consist in a complex intertwining of an awareness of such rules or standards (whether they be explicitly at hand or only implicitly, that is, on an operative level, but not on a conscious or reflective one) and a (bodily) ability to apply them in action. Accordingly, in order to acquire practical knowledge, it is indispensable to perform and to assess specific premises (if there are such

<sup>7</sup> Ryle holds that this understanding of knowledge and the conception of mental conduct linked to it amount to an 'intellectualist doctrine'. See Ryle, *Concept of Mind*, 27.

premises, in the form of either explicit or operative rules or standards) in the very process of repeated performance. As Ryle puts it, a person comes to 'know how' by applying 'criteria [or standards] in performing critically, that is, in trying to get things right'.<sup>8</sup>

Once we take theoretical and practical forms of knowledge into account, the task of fully understanding the epistemic value of aesthetic experience becomes even more complex. Explorations that restrict themselves to theoretical knowledge allow one to focus on the content conveyed in the course of aesthetic experience and to ask whether it contributes to constituting any specific knowing-that. But when the discussion begins also to involve practical forms of knowledge, it becomes necessary to consider not only the content – what it is about – but also the practice of aesthetic experience, that is, how it is performed. If it is possible to acquire practical knowledge in the course of aesthetic experience, it is useful for determining what distinguishes aesthetic experience as a practice that not only aims at conveying contents – in terms of different themes or subjects – but is also directed towards the aesthetic beholder's practical involvement.<sup>9</sup>

Take, for instance, the difference between naming the distinguishing character of a wine and savouring it. In the latter case one needs to know how to taste the wine in a distinct fashion. This knowing-how cannot be restricted to a practical application of knowing that the wine has a certain quality, say, being lightly fruity with noticeable spice and characteristic white pepper note. Rather, it amounts to the ability to 'experimentally explore' the savour of the wine in tasting it. This knowing-how is not immediately given, but – like riding a bicycle – it has to be acquired through practice and training. In my view, knowing how to savour wine can be regarded in terms of practical aesthetic knowledge. And it shows what aesthetic knowledge can amount to in a practical respect: the ability to perceive thoroughly and critically. But savouring wine is an aesthetic practice only if external purposes – such as quenching one's thirst or getting drunk – are

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 29. Interestingly, Ryle introduces a comparative setting in which he places the 'canon of aesthetic taste' in parallel to the scientific 'inventive technique' as paradigmatic examples of practical knowledge. Both entail performing a 'knowing how' without being able to articulate the proper theoretical criteria that would ground the execution or the performance in some thorough consideration. Ibid., 30.

<sup>9</sup> To avoid further complication of the discussion, I will focus here only on the view of the beholder, even though the question could also be usefully discussed by focusing on the perspective of the artist and his or her aesthetic experience in the course of aesthetic production. Philosophers like Merleau-Ponty contend that the aesthetic experience of the artist is conveyed to the beholder through the aesthetic object, that is, in his terms, the image. Such an approach would allow the perspective of both the producer and the beholder to be taken into account. I shall leave reflections upon the advantages and problems of this account for another occasion.

subordinated to savouring the wine.<sup>10</sup> Aesthetic practices are characterized by our deriving their value from experience itself and not from any further purposes or ends that are served by experience.

## II. GOODMAN ON THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL VALIDITY OF ART

Nelson Goodman is a philosopher who is well aware of the impact that aesthetic experience has upon knowledge acquisition. Regarding the epistemic character of artworks and aesthetic objects more generally, he can reasonably be considered one of the chief pioneers of a twentieth-century philosophical movement that has shed light on the relationship between aesthetic experience and knowledge. Basically, Goodman is positive about the contribution of aesthetic experience to knowledge acquisition. In his understanding, aesthetic experience can be compared to scientific experience in terms of being inventive, eliciting 'novel objects and connections'.<sup>11</sup> '[T]he picture,' he states, '– like a crucial experiment – makes a genuine contribution to knowledge.'<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, for him 'the arts must be taken no less seriously than the sciences as modes of discovery, creation, and enlargement of knowledge in the broad sense of advancement of the understanding, and thus [...] the philosophy of art should be conceived as an integral part of metaphysics and epistemology'.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> This example might strike some readers as odd, because it regards aesthetic experience as something not reserved to the arts. Yet I think that the strength of both the Goodmanian and the Husserlian approach lies precisely in providing the means to understand as aesthetic even practices like wine tasting.

For those interested in a narrower notion of aesthetic experience connected with the arts, the following example should help to illustrate my point. The first screening of a film showing a train entering a station (produced by the Lumière brothers in 1895) is sometimes said to have made people panic and run out of the cinema in order to escape the approaching train. One may regard this incident – true or not – as an example of an absence of practical aesthetic knowledge. The first filmgoers obviously lacked the aesthetic knowledge of how to perceive a film showing an approaching train. They saw it as something related to their everyday lives: they were afraid that they would be run over by the train. Accordingly, they lacked the means to deal with the screening differently from how they would deal with events in everyday life. To acquire practical aesthetic knowledge in this case would mean knowing how to perceive in a more unbiased, undiluted, and critical fashion, to perceive the object as something not directly related to one's own needs and fears. It would therefore amount to perceiving in a more specialized, but less ordinary fashion, for example, focusing on the medium and the perspective in which an object is given, its material, its orientation in space, its relation to the observer. This ability can contribute to making 'expert observers' of trains who are well aware of how a medium represents this object, as well as to educate perceptual agents who know how to approach an object critically and thoroughly while questioning their own immediate 'natural' response to appearances.

<sup>11</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), 33.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), 102.

Goodman asserts that aesthetic objects such as pictures are not merely means of conveying existing knowledge; to use the language of epistemology, they do not simply impart contents and bear a testimonial character. Rather, they *are productive of* knowledge in creating a novel approach to the world. They are regarded as means of invention, discovery, and creation – as means of enlarging and advancing already existing knowledge. The novelties they elicit concern both the discovery of unknown objects and the disclosure of connections previously never experienced. Thus, in his constructivist notion, Goodman regards the field of the aesthetic as one ‘way of worldmaking’, since it participates in the construction of a contextual framework that constitutes the sense of a historically distinct lifeworld. Every such lifeworld is characterized as a specific system of symbols or classification, comprising the proper syntactic and semantic means in order to ground its genuine sense. Here, Goodman’s account comes out in opposition to the general acknowledgement of the (quantitative and qualitative) difference between the knowledge produced within the field of aesthetics and the knowledge produced within ordinary life and, even, the sciences.

According to Goodman, what we come to know through aesthetic experience, then, is a novel aspect of the world, and we somehow participate in constructing it precisely by forming this new knowledge. The discovery of unknown objects and the disclosure of connections previously never experienced are to be regarded as elements within theoretical knowledge: we discover something new and come to understand how it is structured, how it is connected with other objects. We can also (re-)obtain it as an expressible and repeatable knowing-that: I can articulate it as my knowledge that an object exists, that it has certain qualities, that it bears a certain relationship with other objects, that it has a certain symbolic sense and shows a specific systemic embedding. In this, however, such knowing-that does not directly hold any practical value. It is not classified as a knowing-how that enables us to act in a specific way, it does not constitute any new skills, but consists in conveying information about the factual states of specific objects and their relationships.

Besides emphasizing the epistemic impact that aesthetic experience has on the theoretical level, Goodman also provides a clue for answering the question of whether and to what extent aesthetic experiences can contribute to the constitution of practical knowledge. The practical dimension Goodman focuses on is generally designed in a rather comprehensive way. The actual examples he gives refer to a quite confined area, however, and mainly concern the trained eye, ear, or hand of the expert.<sup>14</sup> In the context of understanding how

<sup>14</sup> The examples Goodman gives suggest that an expert, such as an art historian, is generally more skilled in looking at pictures and discerning aesthetic differences than a layman.



to train an organ of perception to be sensitive enough to realize those indispensable differences for expressing the distinct artistic qualities of an artwork, it is important to face processes of repeated aesthetic experience, tending towards a 'training [of] my perception to discriminate.'<sup>15</sup> This is because, according to Goodman, 'what one can distinguish at any given moment by merely looking depends not only upon native visual activity but upon practice and training.'<sup>16</sup> Aesthetic experience as a practice, then, is not only an immediate way of responding to aesthetic objects. Rather, it is linked to the formation of a certain form of practical knowledge, knowing how to look at a picture, knowing how to listen to music, knowing how to approach a sculpture, and so on. This does not mean that aesthetic experience could not be constituted without this specific kind of knowing-how. Rather, Goodman suggests that the more our organs of perception are trained within the boundaries of a historically and culturally concrete conceptual framework, the better they can detect those differences, qualities, and details. Further, these features qualify as a distinct system of classification within that very same framework and an untrained beholder would possibly not even become aware of them. On this very general level, it seems that Goodman puts forward a strong and convincing argument in defence of the practical value of aesthetic experience, stating that aesthetic experience constitutes a kind of knowing how to practically engage with objects in an aesthetically informed way.

A challenge, however, arises when one takes a closer look at the implications of this approach. Goodman not only contends that through practice and training one becomes perceptually acquainted with a specific conceptual framework, learning to detect its characteristic traits. He also argues that a specialized way of perceiving, to be learned through practice and training, depends on previous knowledge that has normative impact. In chapter 3 of *Languages of Art*, Goodman suggests that we cannot only learn to approach an aesthetic object differently, we can also learn to approach it in a way we actually *should* approach it in order to make out aesthetic differences and judge the object's peculiar aesthetic qualities. The case he discusses is the following. If somebody is asked to discriminate between two pictures, say, an original work by Rembrandt and a perfect fake each of which looks exactly the same, how can he or she achieve

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The experience of both – the expert as well as the layman – depends upon their foreknowledge. Still, Goodman seems to consider the expert observer to be the benchmark: 'The general level of aesthetic sensibility has hardly risen so fast that the layman of today sees more acutely than the expert of twenty years ago. Rather, the better information now at hand makes the discrimination easier.' Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 111.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 103.

this? The problem raised concerns aesthetic difference and the question Goodman focuses on is whether it is possible to become more sensitive to aesthetic differences: 'is there any aesthetic difference between the two pictures for  $x$  at  $t$ , where  $t$  is a suitable period of time, if  $x$  cannot tell them apart by merely looking at them at  $t$ ?' In other words: can a person acquire the practical knowledge of detecting aesthetic differences in the course of repeated aesthetic experience or is aesthetic difference something that is either perceivable or not, no matter how trained the skills of the beholder are? As Goodman generally affirms the constitution of practical knowledge through 'practice and training', he also considers the possibility that 'I may learn to see a difference between them [the original and the forgery]'.<sup>17</sup>

The critical question now amounts to *how* one might learn to make such a perceptual distinction. Goodman's answer is somewhat surprising, since it not only emphasizes the training of perceptual skills. Moreover, he contends that a beholder who wants to learn to discern a difference that he or she is unaware of at the time could learn to do so if he or she was informed that there actually was such a difference that could possibly be discerned in the future: 'the fact that I may later be able to make a perceptual distinction between the pictures that I cannot make now constitutes an aesthetic difference between them that is important to me now'.<sup>18</sup> Goodman's view thus brings together two arguments. First, he claims that if there is any aesthetic difference, an aesthetic beholder might learn to detect it, even if he or she is not able to perceive it at the time. That means that Goodman ascribes an ability to learn to the beholder. He regards it as possible that a beholder improves his or her perceptual skills and thus acquires knowledge in a practical sense. Second, Goodman contends that learning in an aesthetic respect is not only grounded in a process of practice and training, but is also motivated by the knowledge that there is something to be learned:

To look at the pictures now with the *knowledge* that the left one is the original and the other the forgery may help develop the ability to tell which is which later by merely looking at them. [...] The way the pictures in fact differ constitutes an aesthetic difference between them for me now because *my knowledge of the way they differ* bears upon the role of the present looking in training my perceptions to discriminate between these pictures, and between others.<sup>19</sup>

For Goodman, the knowledge about the actual differences between two pictures serves as a trigger to start off a process of 'practice and training', which is

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., my emphasis.

indispensable in order to acquire the knowing how to make out these differences perceptually. My knowledge about what can be learned is a motivation to enter the process of learning. However, the learning activity also has to respond to a specific kind of normative claim, if it is meant to constitute an expert knowing-how that is of aesthetic relevance in the narrower sense: 'Not every difference in or arising from how the pictures happen to be looked at counts; only differences in or arising from *how they are to be looked at*.'<sup>20</sup> What a beholder can learn in terms of a kind of seeing that is more relevant in an aesthetic respect depends not only on his or her actual 'aesthetic activities',<sup>21</sup> but to a great extent depends on a normative set of clues that give an idea of how one should look at something. This assertion put forward by Goodman slightly alters his more general statement concerning the knowing-how constituted through aesthetic experience. Training and practice alone do not give one the knowing-how of an expert; as an expert is somebody who is not only skilled in looking, but also informed about aesthetic norms, certain differences that enable one to discriminate between originals and forgeries for instance, he or she has to have knowledge about how a picture should be looked at in order to learn to look at it in an expert manner. This knowledge turns out to be a normative source of learning, since it is not only effective as a theoretical rule to be applied in action, as some sort of regulative instance in the very act of looking. Rather, Goodman's hypothesis is that this knowledge directly affects how somebody actually perceives an aesthetic object by telling him or her how he or she should perceive it. As a consequence, it is not enough to repeatedly engage in the practice of aesthetic experience in order to become an expert observer. Goodman states that theoretical knowledge, which operates normatively upon perception in changing the way an aesthetic object is experienced, helps to constitute practical knowledge: 'knowledge of this fact [that one picture is the original and the other a forgery] (1) stands as an evidence that there may be a difference between them that I can learn to perceive, (2) assigns the present looking a role as training toward such a perceptual discrimination, and (3) makes consequent demands that modify and differentiate my present experience in looking at the two pictures.'<sup>22</sup>

Whether or not I can become an expert observer does not only depend on the actual aesthetic experience, on my 'visual activities', as Goodman contends. Rather, in order to achieve the ability to look at a picture as an expert, the knowledge whether there is any relevant aesthetic difference to detect helps me to improve my ability to discriminate. This knowledge gives me an idea of

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 105n3, my emphasis.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 105.

the way I should look at the picture. Before I can learn to look at a picture in such a normatively qualified way, somebody has to tell me that I am to look at it in a particular way or from a certain point of view. As a consequence, being acquainted with the normative claim pertaining to another way of looking at a picture in order to make out an aesthetic difference turns out to be a condition for entering the practical process of 'train[ing] my perception to discriminate'. Further, as regards aesthetic judgement, Goodman states that the 'knowledge of the origin of a work [...] informs the way the work is to be looked at or listened to or read, providing a basis for the discovery of nonobvious ways the work differs from and resembles other works'.<sup>23</sup>

The kind of 'practice and training' Goodman emphasizes in the passages discussed does not serve as a general qualification of perception. Rather, it serves as a means for adapting the norms or schemata of a historically or culturally concrete conceptual framework. This seems only natural, since for Goodman every perception is formed by the norms and schemata of such a framework. 'That we know what we see is no truer than we see what we know. Perception depends heavily on conceptual schemata'.<sup>24</sup> In other words, as he underlines in *Languages of Art*, referring to Ernst Gombrich:

The catch [...] is that there is no innocent eye. The eye comes always ancient to its work, obsessed by its own past and by old and new insinuations of the ear, nose, tongue, fingers, heart, and brain. It functions not as an instrument self-powered and alone, but as a dutiful member of a complex and capricious organism. Not only how but what it sees is regulated by need and prejudice.<sup>25</sup>

Since, according to Goodman, it is our (explicit and implicit) knowledge about the world that guides the way we perceive it, every construction, that is, every invention or discovery must be founded upon the premises of existing concepts. Consequently, as 'nothing is seen nakedly or naked',<sup>26</sup> what we actually experience does not matter more than what we know about what we experience. Goodman's radically constructivist notion of perception seems to restrict the influence of experience on knowledge by emphasizing the influence knowledge has on experience in shaping and regulating it. Hence, with Goodman, one has to regard the acquisition of theoretical and practical knowledge by means of aesthetic

<sup>23</sup> The 'knowledge of the origin of a work [...] informs the way the work is to be looked at or listened to or read, providing a basis for the discovery of nonobvious ways the work differs from and resembles other works'. Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 38.

<sup>24</sup> Nelson Goodman, 'Art and Understanding: The Need for a Less Simple-Minded Approach', *Music Educators Journal* 58 (1972): 142.

<sup>25</sup> Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

experience as intertwined: what makes for a skilled expert on the arts – whether an art historian or an artist – is his or her knowledge of the conceptual framework he or she operates in, a knowledge which might help him or her to learn to perceive, say, aesthetic differences. The knowing-how of an expert amounts to his or her knowledge of the existing conceptual framework enabling him or her to look at an aesthetic object in a qualified fashion. In another respect, however, the knowing-how consists exactly in overcoming this conceptual framework and being able to make out even the most ‘minute perceptual differences [that] can bear an enormous weight’<sup>27</sup> in an aesthetic respect. Consequently, what seems really important to Goodman is that an expert has knowledge about the existing schemata and can discriminate their operations upon perception. Besides, he or she also has to be able to overcome this knowledge in order to gain a different perspective on things. Otherwise, it would be impossible to be innovative when looking at aesthetic objects or producing them.

To summarize, according to Goodman, not only theoretical but also practical knowledge is constituted in the course of aesthetic experience. Practical aesthetic knowledge consists in the education of the expert’s eye, which is more skilled in looking at pictures and evaluating their artistic distinctiveness than the eye of the non-expert. The development of an expert eye has to respond to the sum of historical, contextual, that is, theoretical knowledge about the artistic object. This knowledge has a normative impact. I have so far argued that a conservative approach, which prioritizes theoretical knowledge, can hardly account for aesthetic practices as altering our perception of the world. Goodman claims that aesthetic activity is indeed a way to renew our view of the world when he states that the arts have to be regarded ‘as modes of discovery, creation, and enlargement of knowledge.’<sup>28</sup> But, although he emphasizes that the nature of aesthetic experience is inventive, it is not entirely clear how the novelties elicited by means of artworks are related to the existing conceptual schemata, provided that the very possibility of their production and even their reception builds upon exactly the same conceptual schemata that are supposed to be surpassed.

As I have argued, challenges arise with the Goodmanian account if one seeks to understand the practical value of aesthetic experience. These mainly concern the normative implications and conceptual pre-conditions of aesthetic experience. Both the normative and the conceptual pre-conditions are bound up with Goodman’s coupling of theoretical and practical knowledge. Though Goodman contends that the practice of aesthetic experience is indispensable in order to attain a discerning perception of objects, he draws on the role of information in

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>28</sup> Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 102.

order to explain a sophisticated change in aesthetic perception. Moreover, since what and how we perceive depends upon our (implicit or explicit) understanding of the schemata of our lifeworld, aesthetic experience largely corresponds to the conceptions we already have about the appearances, meanings, and values of aesthetic objects. The main difficulty I see in Goodman's account is that one might risk losing a peculiar framing of practical aesthetic knowledge by giving too much emphasis to historically concrete concepts and the role they play in guiding perception. Although it is contended that a constructivist knower is free to choose whether he or she will stick to the existing concepts or try to surpass them, I think, based on Goodman's theory, that it is quite difficult to provide a satisfactory answer to the question of what one actually has to know theoretically in order to be able to practically acquire a different knowing-how. Within his cognitivist-constructivist approach, it would be necessary to account for an interaction between theoretical knowledge and experiential activity which would possibly prevail over the domination of theoretical preconceptions. Goodman does not explicitly solve the puzzle of how to relate theoretical preconceptions and experiential activity in a way that convincingly shows that experiential activity can overcome theoretical preconceptions and thus be inventive in the proper sense of the word.

I will therefore now turn the discussion to another approach that lays more emphasis on aesthetic experience as a practically enacted attitude with high epistemic value: Husserl's phenomenological view. Knowing Goodman's approach, then, we should not be surprised to learn that he completely rejects aesthetic theories that operate, like Husserl's, with a strong understanding of pre-conceptual experience. Consequently, it might seem impossible to combine the cognitivist-constructivist and the phenomenological approach. I will argue in the concluding part of my article, however, that reading Goodman with Husserl and vice versa helps to overcome the shortcomings of their respective accounts of practical aesthetic knowledge.

### III. HUSSERL ON THE PRACTICAL VALUE OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

With the outlined challenges in mind, I wish to introduce Edmund Husserl's phenomenological approach in order to discuss the practical value of aesthetic experience with a different emphasis. My choice might be surprising, since, unlike Goodman's, Husserl's works are not primarily concerned with aesthetics. Although he makes some interesting remarks on questions of aesthetic experience and the ontology of representational or fictional objects, Husserl did not develop a proper aesthetic theory or philosophy of art. Indeed, it is not the artwork that is of interest to him; rather, he focuses on the object of aesthetic experience as it is present in an experience, for which he often employs the terms representation (*Darstellung*)

and image (*Bild*). Consequently, it is not surprising that Husserl's account is hardly – if at all – included in discussions of twentieth and twenty-first century philosophical aesthetics.<sup>29</sup> I am convinced, however, that the phenomenological approach Husserl developed and revised repeatedly over nearly five decades is very useful for discussing questions of aesthetics. The phenomenological perspective turns out to be fruitful especially when it comes to the task of grasping to what extent, if at all, aesthetic experience can contribute to the constitution of practical knowledge.

Phenomenologically, the focus when speaking about aesthetic matters is on both the act of aesthetic experience – how it is characterized, how it differs from other acts – and the nature of the aesthetic object, which is regarded as an intentional object of the aesthetically perceiving consciousness. One advantage of the phenomenological viewpoint when considering aesthetic questions is that it enables a clear and ready definition of the aesthetic that has not been developed against the backdrop of a more or less determined symbol system such as the arts. The aesthetic is taken as a phenomenal qualification of objects which correlates to a distinct way of experiencing. An object is aesthetic if it is perceived aesthetically, and aesthetic perception or aesthetic experience is characterized by purity, purposelessness, freedom, and pleasure.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, for an object to be aesthetic it has to be experienced in this particular way.<sup>31</sup>

On the surface, the Husserlian approach to aesthetic experience might appear similar to the 'Tingle-Immersion theory' Goodman refers to in *Languages of Art*. This theory is said to raise the claim that aesthetic experience is properly understood as a pure, free, joyful, and pre-conceptual mode of encountering an

<sup>29</sup> One scholar who emphasizes the importance of Husserl's writings and phenomenology in general for aesthetics is Ferdinand Fellmann. See his *Phänomenologie als ästhetische Theorie* (Freiburg: Alber, 1989).

<sup>30</sup> In his reflections on aesthetics, Husserl was strongly influenced by Kant's third *Critique*. See Edmund Husserl, *Collected Works*, vol. 11, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898–1925)*, trans. John B. Brough (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 168n6; *Husserliana: Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 23, *Phantasie, Bildbewußtsein, Erinnerung*, ed. Eduard Marbach (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1980), 145n1.

<sup>31</sup> Goodman's understanding of the aesthetic is quite different. He expressly criticizes taking aesthetic experience as the contemplation of an object's appearances, and focuses on the symbolic meaning of objects and the act of interpretation. 'A persistent tradition pictures the aesthetic attitude as passive contemplation of the immediately given, direct apprehension of what is presented, uncontaminated by any conceptualization, isolated from all echoes of the past and all the threats and promises of the future, exempt from all enterprise. [...] I have held, on the contrary, that we have to read the painting as well as the poem, and that aesthetic experience is dynamic rather than static. It involves making delicate discriminations and discerning subtle relationships, identifying symbol systems and characters within these systems and what these characters denote and exemplify, interpreting works and reorganizing the world in terms of works and works in terms of the world.' Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 241.

artwork. Accordingly, 'the proper behavior on encountering a work of art is to strip ourselves of all the vestments of knowledge and experience (since they might blunt the immediacy of our enjoyment), then submerge ourselves completely and gauge the aesthetic potency of the work by the intensity and duration of the resulting tingle.'<sup>32</sup> It is certainly not surprising at all that Goodman considers the Tingle-Immersion theory not only 'absurd on the face of it', but also 'useless for dealing with any of the important problems of aesthetics.'<sup>33</sup>

Upon closer inspection, Husserl's emphasis on the purity and purposelessness of the aesthetic does not disappear. The phenomenological approach is somehow idealistic in this respect. But, in opposition to Goodman's reading of the Tingle-Immersion theory, the Husserlian notion of aesthetic experience does not neglect prior experience and knowledge. Experience and knowledge matter for aesthetic contemplation precisely because the aesthetic attitude allows for viewing them from a different angle. I will elaborate on this point below. What is more, Husserl's account operates with a concept of practical knowledge which is illuminating for the discussion of the epistemic value of art. This concept of practical knowledge also serves to demonstrate that the purity and purposelessness of aesthetic experience is not the consequence of a stripping off of 'all the vestments of knowledge and experience'. On the contrary, it is a practically enacted, critical attitude towards 'all the vestments of knowledge and experience', that is, towards our actual beliefs, our 'natural attitude', as Husserl puts it.<sup>34</sup> The critical potency of aesthetic experience stems from its uncommonness, its difference from ordinary experience. It is the same critical potency that makes aesthetic experience an epistemic practice, which, for Husserl, can even be compared to philosophy in some respects, at least in regard to its epistemic value. Aesthetic experience enables one to generate new insights by changing one's point of view, by – practically – enacting a different way of perceiving.

With this, Husserl (like Goodman) contends that aesthetic experiences strongly contribute to knowledge acquisition, even if he is not at all interested in understanding the theoretical knowledge that might be conveyed by aesthetic experience. Both Goodman and Husserl hint at the epistemic impact of aesthetic and scientific experience and at the parallels between aesthetic and scientific

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> In his phenomenological methodology Husserl states that it is necessary to bracket the natural attitude, in order to be able to approach phenomena directly, that is, in order to experience how something is given to the experiencing consciousness. Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana: Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 3.1, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, ed. Karl Schuhmann (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1976), 56.



practice.<sup>35</sup> One core difference in this respect – besides their diverse methodological approaches, of course – is that Husserl compares aesthetic experience to philosophical experience in paralleling the aesthetic attitude with the philosophical attitude. According to Husserl, to approach an object in an aesthetic manner means to open one's mind to a general striving to understand, thus becoming open to fundamentally *theoretical* concerns. Aesthetic experience is *theoria* 'in the original sense. Delight in seeing that understands; correlatively, the *theoretical* interest, delight in seeing-in, in the understanding of the concrete type that belongs to a time as a characteristic part.<sup>36</sup> The *theoria* that Husserl refers to must not be confused with theoretical knowledge. *Theoria* must be regarded as an activity, as a practice, as a knowing-how.<sup>37</sup> And aesthetic experience opens up the possibility to engage in this practice.

For Husserl, there are some intriguing parallels between the way we approach the world aesthetically and the way we approach it philosophically. In a letter to Hugo von Hofmannsthal he contends that the attitude operative in aesthetic experiences was connected to the phenomenological attitude he favoured for philosophical investigations.<sup>38</sup> What makes them akin to one another is their relation to ordinary experience and common sense. While ordinary experience is characterized as our everyday dealing with common objects based upon our natural attitude and beliefs, aesthetic experience as well as scientific – or philosophical – experience is classified as non-ordinary and thus 'unnatural'. For Husserl, ordinary experience is accompanied by an attitude that is indispensable for our everyday business; without relying on our naturally formed beliefs, it would be impossible to fulfil the simplest tasks. In this sense, Husserl does not generally devalue the natural attitude operative in ordinary experience when he contends that we have to put it in brackets in order to gain truly phenomenological insight. He only differentiates between the 'normalizing' value of the natural attitude enabling us to live our lives and perform our duties on the one hand and the epistemic value of the phenomenological attitude that allows us to break the circle of common beliefs and customs on the other. Adopting a phenomenological

<sup>35</sup> Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 255.

<sup>36</sup> Husserl, *Collected Works*, 11:643; *Husserliana: Gesammelte Schriften*, 23:541: 'Theoria im eigentümlichen Sinn. Freude am verstehenden Schauen, korrelativ das *theoretische* Interesse, am Hineinsehen, Verstehen des konkreten Typus, der zu einer Zeit als charakteristisches Stück gehört.'

<sup>37</sup> This idea already appears in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Here, *theoria* is regarded as a specifically human activity. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. and trans. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), X.6.8.

<sup>38</sup> Edmund Husserl, 'Husserl an von Hofmannsthal, 12. I. 1907', in *Husserliana: Dokumente*, vol. 3.1.7, *Briefwechsel: Wissenschaftlerkorrespondenz*, ed. Karl Schuhmann (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), 133–34.

attitude does not mean leaving all of our ordinary knowledge behind; rather, it means adopting another perspective on it. As phenomenologists executing the reduction, we do not act on our common beliefs and customs. Rather, in bracketing them we suspend them, we do something else, that is, we engage in a different form of practice which induces a different kind of perception. Doing something else does not, however, mean that we can (or even should) leave our natural attitude or our everyday knowledge behind. It means, rather, that we view it from another angle, from a critical distance. Suspending our natural attitude, then, also means we obtain a glimpse of our attitude, viewing it from a critical perspective.

The different practice in which the phenomenologist engages is defined by means of restriction or limitation – Husserl speaks of ‘Reduktion’ or ‘Epoché.’<sup>39</sup> Restricting his or her view, the phenomenologist tries to concentrate solely on what is actually given in an experience. This means that in adopting the phenomenological attitude I try to focus on nothing other than what and how I actually perceive, what and how I actually imagine, what and how I actually recall, and so forth. In reducing the field of experience to its content (what is actually given) and mode (how it is given), the phenomenological experience is a restrictive way of experiencing, which, nevertheless, allows one to perceive aspects of the given which are normally out of sight.<sup>40</sup>

Comparing the Husserlian understanding of the epistemic value of aesthetic experience to Goodman’s notion of the epistemic nature of the arts, a core difference becomes evident: Goodman, on the one hand, contends that aesthetic experience aims at ‘making delicate discriminations and discerning subtle relationships, identifying symbol systems and characters within these systems and what these characters denote and exemplify, interpreting works and reorganizing the world.’<sup>41</sup> Husserl, on the other hand, claims that the aesthetic attitude allows for *reflecting* ‘on the manner of appearing.’<sup>42</sup> Hence, Husserl and

<sup>39</sup> Husserl, *Husserliana: Gesammelte Werke*, 3.1:122–33.

<sup>40</sup> The main difference between the phenomenological and the aesthetic attitude, however, comes down to a difference between a knowledge-producing and a knowledge-enacting practice. Unlike the phenomenological attitude, the aesthetic attitude does not aim at having specific insights; rather, it aims solely at enacting a different kind of experience. Still, like Goodman, Husserl hints at a parallel between aesthetic and theoretical concerns, too: ‘Theoretical interest is related to aesthetic phenomena.’ Husserl, *Collected Works*, 11:464; *Husserliana: Gesammelte Werke*, 23:392.

<sup>41</sup> Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 241.

<sup>42</sup> ‘To what is the aesthetic consciousness directed? To live in it is surely to take a position, to value something aesthetically. [...] But the manner of appearing is the bearer of aesthetic feeling-characteristics. If I do not reflect on the manner of appearing, I do not live in the feelings, I do not produce them. The appearance is the appearance of the object; the object is the object in the appearance. From living in the appearing I must go back to the appearance and vice versa. And then the feeling is awakened.’ Husserl, *Collected Works*, 11:462; Husserl, *Husserliana: Gesammelte Werke*, 23:389.

Goodman differ on the nature of the knowing-how that aesthetic experience constitutes. According to Goodman, practical aesthetic knowledge – regarded as the knowing-how of an expert – consists in being able to detect differences, that is, to discriminate in a way that matters for the determination of the aesthetic quality of an artwork. In this respect, practical aesthetic knowledge depends on information: only if a beholder knows which differences matter aesthetically, can he or she learn to discriminate expertly. Husserl, however, introduces the practical dimension of aesthetic knowledge as knowing how to engage seriously with and reflect upon the way an aesthetic object appears. Practically enacted aesthetic knowledge coincides with adopting the aesthetic attitude, and thus does not depend on previous theoretical input. It is not clear, however, *if and how* one could learn to adopt the aesthetic attitude. Hence, the question of whether aesthetic experience really makes for a more critical approach in experience remains unanswered.

Coming back to my initial example of tasting wine, one could, together with Goodman, contend that practical aesthetic knowledge amounts to knowing how to savour wine like an expert. For him, it would be important to have information about the actual differences between certain types of wine in order to trigger a process of practice and training, which would finally enable one to acquire the ability to *taste* these differences. According to Husserl, however, the focus would be on the attitude that one must adopt in order to fully concentrate ‘on the way the wine appears’, that is, the wine’s savour, colour, bouquet, and so forth. This attitude makes it possible to discern the wine’s aesthetic qualities. As opposed to Goodman, in Husserl’s view, one does not need any theoretical input to acquire the knowing how to taste the distinct characteristics of a certain type of wine. It is only necessary to perceive it in an aesthetic manner and thereby depart from the ordinary attitude towards it. As a consequence, a person who knows how to savour wine is not regarded as an expert who also possesses theoretical knowledge about the right definitions of the wine’s taste, its character, maybe its history, its reputation, or its dissemination. Rather, this person is someone who knows how to adopt an aesthetic attitude and make use of this attitude to explore the object critically and thoroughly in a more general sense.

Consequently, it can reasonably be stated that both philosophers introduce aesthetic experience as an important experiential field leading to the alteration of practices. Accordingly, Goodman and Husserl emphasize the epistemic value of aesthetic experience in a practical respect. Nevertheless, they emphasize different aspects. For Goodman, theoretical knowledge is indispensable in order to promote the advancement of practical aesthetic knowledge. Husserl, by contrast, thinks it necessary to engage in a different practice in order to provide

the right basis for gaining new theoretical insights. The cognitivist-constructivist account highlights the epistemic impact of aesthetic experience as knowing how to discriminate, discern, identify, and interpret. Goodman's approach also facilitates an understanding of the actual learning process: once someone is told how to look at an artwork, he or she can begin to alter his or her perception by means of repeated aesthetic experience, that is, by means of practice and training. The phenomenological view does not account for the learning effect of repetition in the same way, and thus introduces a different conception of practical aesthetic knowledge. Knowing how to engage with an aesthetic object is given at the moment one adopts the aesthetic attitude. An aesthetic beholder does not actually learn to perceive in a different fashion by means of practice and training. Rather, he or she learns that he or she can perceive differently because aesthetic experience enables a different view of things.

#### IV. AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE INFORMED AND MITIGATED BY COGNITIVE- CONSTRUCTIVISM

Whereas Goodman tends to overemphasize the role theoretical knowledge plays in constituting expert knowing-how, Husserl's account disregards the learning aspect of practice and training in the course of aesthetic experience. Both approaches thus manifest shortcomings when it comes to acknowledging the practical value of aesthetic experience. In this last section of my article, I argue that these shortcomings can be overcome by bringing together some of Goodman's cognitivist-constructivist and Husserl's phenomenological considerations.

What I view as most important for understanding practical aesthetic knowledge is (1) to illuminate what the epistemic value of aesthetic experience amounts to in a practical respect, (2) to give an idea of the way it is acquired, (3) to elucidate the motives and motivation for entering this learning process, and (4) to explain how practical aesthetic knowledge relates to theoretical knowledge. Goodman's account proved to be suitable for answering all four questions, although I do not agree with his overall conception of practical aesthetic knowledge, that is, his reply to question (1), since I regard it as too narrow. Although I am convinced that there is more to practical aesthetic knowledge than the expert's knowing-how, I accept that it is an intriguing aspect. Moreover, I consider his position on point (4) to be problematic, because I see a risk of attributing too much of a role to information and theoretical knowledge, which leads to epistemically curtailing the *practical* dimension of aesthetic experience.

Husserl's phenomenological view enables one to sketch a more satisfying reply to question (1), since it highlights aesthetic experience as a means of developing a critical stance on an object in a more general sense. In this respect, practical aesthetic knowledge consists in the ability to perceive objects in a manner different from how they are normally viewed. This critical mode of perception is of great epistemic value, since it is a condition for gaining new insights, rather than repeating acquired and natural beliefs. Practical aesthetic knowledge matters epistemically, because it allows one to perceive an object critically, an act that can illuminate aspects invisible from an 'ordinary' point of view. Accordingly, the phenomenological account also provides a satisfactory answer to question (4): practical aesthetic knowledge, that is, knowing *how* to view an object thoroughly and critically, is the condition for acquiring new theoretical knowledge, that is, knowing *that* an object has not only the qualities already ascribed to it, but also other qualities that become obvious from a different point of view. Yet Husserl fails to think of aesthetic experience as a dynamic learning activity, and his account is thus not helpful for answering questions (2) and (3). Since, for Husserl, one gains practical aesthetic knowledge as soon as one adopts the aesthetic attitude, there seems to be no value added in repeatedly engaging with an object aesthetically. What I can learn through aesthetic experience, that is, the knowing how to view an object thoroughly and critically, immediately comes with an attitude that does not need to be trained. Husserl gives no explicit suggestions as to how it should be trained. In consequence, the very practical aspect of aesthetic experience is narrowed to the question of whether taking a different view of an object depends only on the different attitude of a perceiving consciousness. If it does, then what is the motivation for a consciousness to take such an attitude? With Husserl the latter question might be answered as follows. The motivation for taking the aesthetic attitude is that aesthetic contemplation is pleasing. But although pleasure might be one motivation for choosing to engage in a particular practice, epistemic value seems not to be a part of the motivational process. Goodman suggests another way of answering the motivation question. The motivation for acquiring practical aesthetic knowledge by practice and training lies in the knowledge that there is actually something to be learned.

What I suggest is that in order to obtain an adequate picture of the practical epistemic value of aesthetic experience, we must combine the phenomenological and the cognitivist-constructivist view. The main point of intersection I see is that both approaches underline a potential alteration of practices which motivates the acquisition of knowledge. According to Husserl's understanding of aesthetic experience, the alteration of practices is caused by taking another attitude,

the aesthetic attitude. Goodman contends that an alteration of practices is possible once one realizes that there might be aesthetic differences that are not immediately given. The insight in this necessity can trigger a process of practice and training. This process amounts to a learning activity since it strengthens the ability to discern and interpret. But discerning and interpreting are regarded as more 'regional' skills: they mainly concern the reading of an artwork against the backdrop of its context, historical, symbolic, or otherwise. Training and practice thus serve to develop expertise in the arts or aesthetics. But this expertise need not be restricted to engagement solely within these fields. It might also be helpful in taking a skilled approach also to phenomena that are not primarily aesthetic. Husserl's comparison of the aesthetic and the phenomenological attitude gives us some idea of what such an approach might aim to investigate. Following Husserl, taking an aesthetic attitude allows for the critical viewing of an object, because it brackets the existing beliefs concerning this object. Accordingly, it suppresses a natural perspective and enables the observer to take a different stance. Such a stance is suitable for qualifying a normal point of view against the backdrop of the existing conceptual schemata. Hence, it can serve as a means of critiquing in the proper sense of the word, that is, detecting differences. Moreover, it is indispensable if one wishes to find out something new about an object. Innovations can be developed only if the practice of observation is altered. But the practice of observation can only be altered effectively when one repeatedly engages with this different way of perceiving, that is, by training and practice. A key motivation to repeatedly practice and train may well be the articulated knowledge that there is something to be learned in doing this. But I think it is problematic to limit the motivation for learning by training and practice to this knowledge, because it requires somebody who already knows what is to be learned. It is more convincing, I believe, to argue that the motivation to enter this learning process can be seen in the appreciation of the different practice that aesthetic experience opens up. Since aesthetic experience is a practice, if not *the only* one, that frees the observer to regard an object just for the sake of regarding it, it turns out to be a practice that is truly 'experimental', since it invites one to look at things differently than one does under normal conditions. Understood this way, the aesthetic attitude amounts to nothing other than regarding an object just for the sake of regarding it. And this free way of regarding determines an experiential field that is to be explored by the aesthetic beholder. Both approaches discussed seem to ensure the possibility that aesthetic experience will provide an experimental approach to perception that matters epistemically. Husserl claims that experiencing aesthetically means restricting one's view to 'the manner of appearing'. It is the manner of appearing 'that

determines aesthetic comportment, one appearance inducing aesthetic pleasure, another inducing aesthetic displeasure, and so on.<sup>43</sup> Regarding an object just for the sake of it happens to be pleasing if this object demands thorough examination, that is, if it is beautiful or ugly, evokes feelings, is interesting, raises questions, and so forth. But besides inducing pleasure, displeasure, interest, and/or inquisitiveness, the restricted view allows one to take a different stance, thus allowing one to experimentally develop different insights into the observed object. When Goodman states, 'The aesthetic attitude is restless, searching, testing – is less attitude than action: creation and re-creation',<sup>44</sup> he is also underlining the experimental character of aesthetic experience taken as a practice, an action that is to be performed with an aesthetic attitude. In doing this, he is emphasizing the more general epistemic character of aesthetic practices: the aesthetic attitude involves the actions of 'searching and testing' and thus trying different approaches to explore the observed object.

The concept of aesthetic attitude in the cognitivist-constructivist as well as in the phenomenological framework gives us some idea of the impact of aesthetic experience as an 'experimental' practice and thus triggers a process of learning by training and practice, which can generate either experts or critical epistemic agents, taken in a more general sense. A readiness to take the aesthetic attitude can certainly be encouraged by information about the possible outcome of learning; but this information cannot substitute for the epistemic value of looking at an object simply for the sake of doing so, that is, freely engaging with an aesthetic object on the basis of having an aesthetic attitude.

It is this freedom that also marks the core difference between strictly phenomenological and, on the other hand, aesthetic experience, as we have seen. While the phenomenological attitude means evoking philosophical insights and is ultimately aimed at the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, the aesthetic attitude is free not to do so – but it is still somehow inclined towards this. Looking at an object aesthetically, one is free to look just for the sake of looking. To just be looking is not something 'natural', since we normally do not engage in such 'just for the sake of it' practices. It is therefore also something we are unaccustomed to doing and, consequently, something we do not know how to do. The space of aesthetic experience – being emotional, sensual, and pleasure-oriented<sup>45</sup> –

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 11:461; 23:388.

<sup>44</sup> Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 242.

<sup>45</sup> For Goodman emotion is also a very important feature of aesthetic experiences. According to him, however, it is important to emphasize that in aesthetic experience emotions are enacted and not only felt passively. 'Indeed, emotions must be felt – that is, must occur as sensations must – if they are to be used cognitively. Cognitive use involves discriminating and relating them in order to gauge and grasp the work and

invites us to perform such alien practices and become somehow familiar with the experience.

The epistemic feature of aesthetic experience is not exhausted by this apprenticeship in 'looking just for the sake of looking'. The change of view bound up with the performance of 'just for the sake of it' practices entails a different way of experiencing. Experiencing something in a different way, furthermore, is the very basis for gaining new insights and consequently also for extending not only one's practical knowledge, but also one's theoretical knowledge. Expertise in the process of aesthetic experience, then, qualifies as a foundation also for the diversification of one's actual knowing-that.

So what is it that we actually learn through aesthetic experience in a practical respect? As aesthetic experience can be regarded as an experiential space that allows for suspending operative natural beliefs and simultaneously motivates a different way of encountering an object, it can deepen our knowing how to perceive in a threefold sense. First, by triggering a process of practice and training, it can help to improve our skills to discern and interpret and therefore to acquire expert knowing-how in a peculiar symbol system. Second, drawing attention to the actual appearance of an object can increase our motivation to perceive thoroughly and critically in a more general sense. Finally, keeping one's distance between the way something is normally perceived and the way something can be perceived aesthetically allows one to qualify one's own experience against other ways of experiencing, such as usual perceptions which are subject to a historically concrete conceptual framework. In this respect, aesthetic experience turns out not only to embody the very process of enhancing practical knowledge but also allows one to reflect upon it. If a person gains knowing-how by applying 'criteria [or standards] in performing critically, that is, in trying to get things right',<sup>46</sup> aesthetic experience not only motivates a knowing-how that is different from our natural perception (since it opens up alternative angles of perception); it also highlights the critical potential of this learning curve. Accordingly, what we can learn practically in an aesthetic experience is how to extend our perceptual abilities by perceiving differently *and* to reflect critically upon this difference in the act of perception. We can acquire the knowing-how to examine an object thoroughly and critically and make out its distinct aesthetic phenomenality. This knowing-how is trained by means of repeated participation in aesthetic practices. When we are 'trying to get things right' in the realm of the aesthetic, there is

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integrate it with the rest of our experience and the world. If this is the opposite of passive absorption in sensations and emotions, it by no means amounts to canceling them. Yet it explains the modifications that emotions may undergo in aesthetic experience.' *Ibid.*, 248–49.

<sup>46</sup> Ryle, *Concept of Mind*, 29.



always more than one way to do so, since aesthetic experience is not limited to the one and only synthesis of grasping something the way it is normally seen. Aesthetic experience opens up a free experimental space for playfully examining the possibilities of regarding something alternatively. Examining the possibilities in this way turns out to have consequences not only for the development of our practically knowing how to perceive, but also for our reflecting upon the very status of this knowing-how.

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