The Acquaintance Principle, Aesthetic Judgments, and Conceptual Art

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Abstract

The Acquaintance Principle is the principle according to which judgements concerning the aesthetic value of a work of art made by a critic must be based on the critic's experience(s) of acquaintance with the work itself. Some recent philosophers and artists claimed that some works of conceptual art show the principle to be false. I argue that, if properly understood, the Acquaintance Principle is a truism and that works of conceptual art do not pose any particular problem to it. I also suggest some implications of the principle for aesthetic education.

Article

It is a common idea that a proper engagement with and understanding of a work of art requires actual experience of the work itself. According to this view, one will miss something, which it might not be possible to convey in words, if one simply reads an accurate *description* of, for example, Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, or Sakata Tōjūrō's wagata style of acting, without, respectively, listening, reading or watching them. Philosophers have gone further and, almost inadvertently, assumed that, in addition to engagement and understanding, *aesthetic judgments* should be based only on first-hand experience, as well. In fact, various accounts of the structure of our aesthetic judgements take for granted different versions of the following principle: acquaintance with an object is a prerequisite for expressing a proper judgement on it. In recent studies, this principle has been called sometimes the acquaintance principle or principle of acquaintance (PA). With respect to judgements on works of art, the PA implies that if a person does not perceive a work of art with her own senses, she will not be able to express a proper

judgement on it.

In this paper, I identify the possible merits of this principle and discuss a number of putative counterexamples that are derived from conceptual art. In the first section, I discuss various recent reformulations of the PA. In the second section, I introduce a number of issues from the contemporary discussion on conceptual art and specify why works belonging to this tradition have been taken as counterexamples to the PA. In the third section, I advance various considerations to the effect that works of conceptual art do not pose particular problems to the PA. In the fourth section, I propose two refinements of the PA in terms of the notion of 'artistic medium' and argue that my reformulations are truisms and can vindicate our intuitions about the appreciation of conceptual art. I also draw some consequences deriving from the refinements of the PA for aesthetic education.

1. The Acquaintance

In contemporary debates in aesthetics, the PA has rapidly morphed from being a "well-entrenched principle," a "truism," and a requirement for sincerity in responses to works of art, into a thesis which is, if not properly understood and qualified, clearly false.[1] To a first approximation, the PA can be seen as setting the limits of the transmissibility of the ground of justification for aesthetic judgements. More specifically, Richard Wollheim characterised the PA as the principle according to which judgements concerning the aesthetic value of x proffered by y must be based on y's experience(s) of acquaintance with x, with the possible exception of other very narrow means of transmissibility that can eventually provide y with an adequate basis or grounding for judging x aesthetically.[2] The contemporary debate about the PA revolves around possible counterexamples to the principle, emendations meant to save its spirit, doubts about its overall plausibility, and clarifications of the adequate means of transmission that are not contrary to it.

Paisley Livingston has recently criticized a strong version of the PA that does not

qualify or allow means of providing sufficient grounds for making aesthetic judgements about x other than first-hand experience of x.[3] In particular, Livingston argued that one reason for denying a purely experiential version of the PA is that certain reproductions or copies of works of art — what he calls aesthetic surrogates — can be an adequate basis for attributing to the 'original' works some aesthetic qualities.[4] For example, photographs of paintings in art books or translations are taken as providing a sufficient ground for ascribing to many works some aesthetic qualities. (How many of you think that Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* is a masterpiece and can read Russian?)[5] These considerations suggest that certain aesthetic surrogates can be taken as reasonable means for transmitting the ground of aesthetic judgments for at least certain aesthetic qualities. This clarification does not run counter to the spirit of the PA, because acquaintance is still required, albeit with the surrogates. Livingston defines an aesthetic surrogate as follows: "some object, O_2, is an adequate aesthetic surrogate of another item, O_1, just in case O_2 directly presents enough aesthetic features qualitatively identical to the relevant features of O_1; or, where O_2 is a representation or depiction of O_1, enough of the relevant features of O_1 are observable in O_2."[6]

The idea that an excellent description offered by an expert can provide the ground for aesthetic judgments also casts the pure form of the PA into doubt: if a certain kind of knowledge by description is sufficient to ground aesthetic judgements, acquaintance is not, after all, necessary to ground them.[7] Livingston formulates two possible successors of the PA.[8] According to one of these, the Weak PA (WPA), "direct experience is necessary to the adequacy of some but not all aesthetic judgements because of the limitations of our descriptive capacities and theoretical resources."[9] According to the WPA, what descriptions cannot ground are aesthetic judgments regarding (1) "the specific splendours" of exceptional or unusual works (Schubert, Villon, Balthus, etc.) or (2) "non-semantic, perceptually based

aesthetic properties."[10] The latter condition is meant to capture also the idea that certain phenomenological qualities of objects cannot be put into words, due to either their peculiarities or to the specific limitations of our language(s). The first condition is also hinted at by Malcolm Budd, who claimed that a perceiver has a kind of cognitive state that is slightly different from someone who is not acquainted with the work.[11] For example, a description can tell us that *Mulholland Drive* is surreal, but only experience of or direct contact with the film can show us the difference between a *Mulholland Drive*-surrealist and a *La Montaña Sagrada*-surrealistic work. Only someone who is acquainted with both films can understand how their dream-like features are particularly realized and so, correspondingly, understand the expression "a Lynchean atmosphere". The importance of acquaintance for the appreciation and understanding of the realization of general aesthetic properties in peculiar works can be thought of as being derived from the limited resources of our languages. However, it is not important in this context to attribute primacy to one of these two conditions; they are worthy of separate consideration. Elaborating a little on the consequences of the WPA, we can add that a direct acquaintance with peculiar works of art can also be regarded as being conceptually prior to certain subsequent descriptions because, in exceptional cases, acquaintance can provide new terminology for these descriptions. For instance, the description by a critic of a witty dialogue in a film as Tarantino-esque can be fully understood and applied after having seen one of Tarantino's films.[12] A similar case can be made for the experience of colours: a description of Yves Klein's exhibition of eleven blue monochrome canvases at the Galleria Apollinaire in Milan (1957), however linguistically accurate, would miss to convey the experiential content of Klein's famous trademark colour IKB.[13] We can know that the canvases were painted in a deep blue hue that contains a large proportion of ultramarine; however, it can be argued that a complete understanding of the peculiar realization of the blue in each work requires acquaintance with them or with an

adequate aesthetic surrogate, that, in the case of IKB, is particular difficult to realize. Although Livingston does not explicitly include aesthetic surrogates in the WPA, I will understand his formulation of this new version of the PA as including them.

Livingston's other proposed successor to the PA shifts the focus from the transmission of epistemic grounding for aesthetic judgements to concerns regarding value: "(V) S aesthetically gauges or appreciates the inherent aesthetic value of some item only if S has an aesthetic experience of that item, where such experience requires S's direct contemplation of either the item or some adequate surrogate for it."[14] The rationale behind this principle is that a proper appreciation of a work's inherent value requires direct contemplation of such item. Take, for instance, Jenefer Robinson's reader-response approach to interpretation.[15] According to her, a proper understanding of literature requires an emotional engagement with these works. How can we fully appreciate the fate of Anna Karenina in a way that reveals the intrinsic power of literature to stir and reorganize our emotions, if not by reading the novel? Similarly, an understanding of the peaks of emotional and poetic tension in Milton's *Paradise Lost* seems to be incomplete if the work is not experienced directly. "Gauging" the value of a work seems to pass through, among the other things, an emotional engagement with it (at least for cases in which an emotional engagement is appropriate). In many cases, the peculiar way in which something is presented is crucial to the success of a proper emotional engagement of a perceiver with a work. Given that the way in which an author has devised a work, w, is fundamental for the evaluation of the capacity of w to produce such emotional reactions, a direct experience of it seems vital to a proper engagement with w. Another line of reasoning that seems to rely on V is Kendal Walton's theory of representational arts.[16] According to Walton, representational works of art are props for games of make-believe; in particular, the reader of a novel is invited to participate in a game of make-believe whose rules and principles of generation of fictional truths are

regulated (or authorized) by what the author has established (plus other background assumptions and considerations of relevance). It seems that, according to Walton, participation in such games is a crucial element of our aesthetic and artistic engagement with a work and thus for the appreciation of its value as a work of fiction. You have to play the game authorized by the author to see what is worth.

Furthermore, other possible interpretations of the PA emerge from Robert Hopkins's recent work on aesthetic testimony. In particular, Hopkins has articulated two different modes of pessimism with respect to aesthetic testimony.[17] According to the first mode, we may be pessimists about the transferability of aesthetic knowledge through testimony because testimony on such matters does not provide the justification for our own aesthetic beliefs (the *Unavailability* model). In other words, testimony is not an adequate means for transmitting justification from agent A's aesthetic beliefs to agent B's aesthetic beliefs. According to the second model of pessimism, aesthetic knowledge can be transmitted from A to B through testimony, but B will not be in a position to make use of this knowledge (the *Unusability* model). In defending the latter model, Hopkins maintains that a specific form of the PA can assume responsibility for the regulation of our aesthetic reasoning. Following the previously outlined distinction between the different models of pessimism, Hopkins argues that the PA can be thus understood in a non-epistemic way, as a norm of use. According to this formulation, even if agent A has obtained aesthetic knowledge about P through aesthetic testimony, the PA would not entitle A to use the corresponding aesthetic knowledge about P unless A has experienced P firsthand.

The foregoing discussion has shown that, even though certain aesthetic and artistic judgments can be based on descriptions or reliable accounts of encounters with works of art ("*Paradise Lost* is one of the greatest literary works in the English language," "Leopardi's *L'Infinito* is one of the highest samples of poetry because it harmonizes in its verses

philosophical meditations and elegance of expression"), the proper appreciation of certain specific aesthetic features can be achieved only through a direct inspection of the works in question or their adequate aesthetic surrogates. This can be the case because of (1) the intrinsic limitedness of our linguistic resources to capture, only through a description, features that are unique to certain unconventional pieces or to the particular exemplification of a certain aesthetic property by a work; or because (2) gauging the value of a work is related to a proper engagement with it. This engagement is dependent on a direct inspection of a work or a suitable aesthetic surrogate. More in general, the idea is that many aesthetic judgments can be based on accurate descriptions or other indirect means, but there remain certain features of peculiar works that seem to require direct inspection to be appreciated. A related point is that direct inspection (or something near enough) is required to evaluate the particular character of the instantiation of an aesthetic property in a work (sadness as it is realized in Eric Satie's *Gymnopedie I*, or *Gymnopedie I*-sadness), while a description can be sufficient for more general features. Even though direct inspection may not be necessary for all aesthetic and artistic judgments about a certain work, a proper engagement with the work requires such more intimate contact.

Given all the different definitions seen in the previous section, we can distinguish at least three different versions of the PA:

(PAJ) Acquaintance with O (or with an adequate aesthetic surrogate of O) is required for a subject to express an adequate aesthetic judgement about O.

(PAV) Acquaintance with O (or with an adequate aesthetic surrogate of O) is required for a subject to properly appreciate the aesthetic value of O.

(PAK) Acquaintance with O (or with an adequate aesthetic surrogate of O) is required for a subject to use aesthetic knowledge about O.

Although acquaintance can be combined with other aesthetic concepts, our

discussion in this section will mostly focus on PAJ (in what follows, I will use "PA" and "PAJ" interchangeably). The PAJ imposes a structural requirement on the content of aesthetic judgements. More specifically, the PAJ places an epistemic constraint on the act of ascribing an aesthetic property to an object. Following the work of Frank Sibley, Budd distinguishes at least four different kinds of aesthetic judgements based on the different properties that are ascribed to objects. More specifically, Budd claims that aesthetic judgements can be (1) purely evaluative, (2) purely descriptive, (3) a hybrid of evaluation and description, and (4) affective.[18] The PAJ can be thus understood as a specification of certain epistemic constraints for an object to be the subject of these different kinds of judgements.

2. Conceptual Art and the Truisms

According to what Noel Carroll has dubbed the "epistemic approach" to the notion of aesthetic experience, such experience essentially requires coming to know an object in a direct way.[19] Keeping in mind that Carroll's criticism of this general idea pertains to the necessity of having direct contact with an object to characterise the notion of aesthetic *experience*, his remarks are relevant also for the WPA and V. Specifically, Carroll argued against the idea that we must have a direct contact with an object in order to have an aesthetic experience of it. For example, he claims that Duchamp's *Fountain* has been discussed by critics, philosophers and artists, but that only a few of them have bothered to literally go and see the real thing. Suppose we are talking about the 1917 version. Many of the aforementioned critics may have "inspected" the work only via Alfred Stieglitz's famous photograph taken at his 291 studio (which is likely, because the first version of *Fountain* seems to be lost). So, Carroll concludes, "Yet I conjecture that quite often commentators who have not directly encountered *Fountain* have nevertheless made insightful remarks about it or, at least, have thought them to themselves when they have heard or read about *Fountain*

second hand – that is, so to say, 'gotten it,' but without eyeballing it. Have they not then had an aesthetic experience?"[20] However, the nature of the "commentators' remarks" that Carroll has in mind is not clear. For instance, if these remarks are about the subsequent influence of the work for the history of art, this would not be a counterexample to our truisms, in any of their versions. In particular, it is obvious that certain *artistic* judgments, in contrast to attributions about peculiar and specific aesthetic features of a work, do not need a direct investigation.[21] Yet this is not against the spirit of either the WPA or V: direct contact with the work or its aesthetic surrogates is required for our proper engagement and measuring with the work (V) or for judgments on the particular splendour of certain works (WPA). Carroll also wondered whether certain conceptual works of art can be considered as direct counterexamples to Livingston's new formulations of the PA.[22] Other philosophers, in a similar vein, have raised doubts about the role of experience, direct contact, or perception for the appreciation of such works of art.[23] To a first approximation, the general worry is that conceptual works of art do not require direct contact (either because of their non-aesthetic nature or because of the immateriality of their objects) in order to ground aesthetic judgements. To address these worries, I will briefly introduce certain features that conceptual works of art have been characterized as having.

According to one formulation proposed by Sol LeWitt of what Conceptual Art is, ideas or concepts are the most important aspects of works so classified.[24] In LeWitt's flamboyant prose, we are also told that, in Conceptual Art, if the artist explores, or carries through her idea into a visible form, "then all the steps in the process are of importance."[25] His main point seems to be that artists in this tradition care more about the idea or concept behind the work than its concrete realization. The material realization can be a constitutive part of the work, but should be seen as subordinate to concepts and ideas. Other frequently mentioned characterizations of Conceptual Art emphasize this sort of dematerialization of the

object of art.[26] The thought seems to be that, given that ideas can also be works of art, their concrete realizations are not the main or principal point for their evaluation. This process of dematerialization of the object of art was a central tenet of a specific artistic movement, active particularly from the 60s to the 70s, that has now found its space in histories of contemporary art. Joseph Kosuth, another leading figure of the artistic movement in question, further specifies that the cultural phenomenon called "pure" Conceptual Art was mainly concerned with an investigation of the concept of art itself.[27] However, the label "Conceptual Art" is frequently used not only to refer to this specific artistic movement, but also as a name for a broader trend in art. For instance, that Carroll understands "conceptual art" in this latter sense is shown by the fact that he takes Duchamp's *Fountain* to be an example of it. The capitalized "Conceptual Art" will be used in this paper to refer to the specific artistic movement that ran, to a first approximation, from 1966 to 1972, whereas "conceptual art" will be used to refer to a broader trend that has persisted to the present day.[28] Joseph Kosuth, On Kawara, and the group Art & Language all belong to the specific movement ("Conceptual Art"). Conceptual artists, in a wider sense of the term, include also Marcel Duchamp,[29] Piero Manzoni, possibly Yves Klein (at least in certain phases of his career), John Cage, and many others.[30] Conceptual artists of this broader kind have created works that are so different from each other that it would seem to be difficult to find common elements in their productions. Nevertheless, Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens have identified a number of common features: a tendency to replace the emphasis on pleasure and beauty with an emphasis on ideas, a conscious challenge to the limits and traditional understanding of the concept of art, the employment of new media to produce works (which can include ready-mades, installations, videos, events, and so on), and an inclination to depend on meaning and supportive discourse.[31]

3. Case Studies

In light of the above characterization of conceptual art, we may consider what bearing samples of it have on V or the WPA. Take Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs*. This work consists of three objects: a real three-dimensional simple chair, a photograph of that chair placed on the wall nearby it, and, close to the picture on the wall, a dictionary definition of a chair. According to some philosophers, in order to appreciate, gauge, evaluate, express aesthetic judgments about *One and Three Chairs*, we need a description of it, possibly some superficial information about Plato's theory of forms or Kosuth's philosophical readings, but certainly we do not need to investigate the real installation itself.[32] Alternatively, take Michael Craig-Martin's *An Oak Tree*, another iconic conceptual artwork. This piece is composed of a glass of water, a glass shelf, and a text explaining that the glass of water has been changed into a full-grown tree. More specifically, the text tells us that it is the substance of the glass of water that has been changed, without thus affecting its accidental features (colour, weight, size, and so on). Schellekens claimed that the central idea of this piece is the notion of transubstantiation as, for example, is supposed to occur in the Eucharist (in the Roman Catholic interpretation).[33] Again, it does not seem that, in order to explore the idea (coherent or not) conveyed through the work, we need to inspect the installation directly. For instance, you can create your own personal *An Oak Tree* in your kitchen. The works of art just mentioned seem to be counter-instances to the WPA and V, because the making of aesthetic judgements about them does not require contact or direct investigation either of their realizations (if any) or of any of their aesthetic surrogates.

As a first reply to this line of thinking, we may claim that these conceptual works are not relevant for the WPA and V simply because, according to the intentions of their authors, they do not seem to have artistically relevant aesthetic properties.[34] As we have said, a supporter of versions of the PA is not claiming that contact with a work or one of its

aesthetic surrogates is required for the ascription of artistic, rather than aesthetic, qualities. So, for instance, we may claim, without contradicting the WPA or V, that *Fountain* is an artistically influential and theoretically rich work of art even without inspecting it. It may be claimed that, on this reading, the WPA and V would not then capture interesting intuitions on the *value* of art; however, this again do not seem to follow from what we have said. To see the point, suppose that, with Matthew Kieran, we come to think that the end product of a work of conceptual art is not the place to look to find the artist's creativity.[35] Even so, if we draw a distinction between artistic and aesthetic value, we can still say that conceptual art has artistic properties and value (which in turn can be related to its cognitive import) and still adhere to some version of the PA, because we may claim that the appreciation of their artistic value (if any) does not require acquaintance with the concrete realizations of the works in question while accepting that appreciation of their aesthetic value does.[36]

Even if the foregoing line of reasoning is correct, there are other ways of seeing the problem that, in turn, may lead to possible refinements of the PA. One way is to try to make a case in favour of the idea that a proper and full engagement with a work of conceptual art and related judgements about it (whether artistic or aesthetic) does actually require contact with the work or a proper surrogate, despite what artists and art critics say. For example, we might argue that our responses to a work are shaped significantly by how the work embodied its meaning and idea.[37] For example, consider John Cage's *4'33''*. Actually spending 4 minutes and 33 seconds in silence (and experiencing the impossibility or difficulty of perceiving the absence of sound) in a suitable context, which includes a pianist's following all the other instructions given by Cage, is *not* simply accessory to the appreciation of the work, if not only for the emotional responses elicited. People reading about the work and actually experiencing it have been reported as having radically different emotional responses.[38] Similarly, someone reading about On Kawara's date paintings may think of them as

innovatively refreshing, but may judge them to be compulsively repetitive and incredibly boring when they experience them. For conceptual works in which a certain experience of time is the point of the work, it seems that actually spending time on them is required to properly gauge or appreciate them. Now consider Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs*. Suppose that the point of the work is to show us two possible representational means of reality, photography and description, in order to make us aware of the relationships between representation, language and reality. Relying solely on a description for an appreciation of this work seems to miss its point completely: we are appreciating only one possible way of representation, that is, the dictionary or linguistic one. In confining ourselves to a description, we are thereby confined to the linguistic means of representing reality, which prevents us from appreciating the work in its entirety. In order to fully understand the work, in all its aspects, we need to stand in front of a real chair, a photograph of it, and a linguistic definition of a chair.

4. **Towards New Truisms**

I begin this section by introducing the notions of artistic and vehicular medium, formulate new versions of the PA, and then show that conceptual works of art do not represent counterexamples to them. Works of art, whether they be musical pieces, paintings, poems, installations or operas, have a form that is, in many cases, specific to their type. Certain ways of evaluating a work can be considered as appropriate or not, depending on the form and features of the medium in which the object of evaluation is realized: a work of cinema has to be watched and a work of literature has to be read. Now, I will use the expression "artistic medium of a work w" to indicate the result of certain operations upon various kinds of entities whereby an artist specifies w, following her artistic intentions in a way that makes w accessible to informed receivers.[39] The artistic medium of a work of art can be distinguished

by its physical or vehicular medium that, in turn, can be conceived as the physical realization of the work (if the resulting object is, for instance, a particular disposition of pigments on a canvas or, in general, a physical object), an abstract structure-type, a particular kind of action (as in performance art), or any other possible kind of entity in which a work of art can be shaped. The vehicular medium does not have to be a physical object as, for example, a painting, a sculpture, or a building but it can also be a particular utterance or performance. The artistic medium differs from the vehicular medium, at least at a conceptual level, because the former should be understood as the proper object of artistic evaluation. The artistic medium is thus a vehicular medium inscribed in a specific practice and whose meaning is determined by the intentions of the artist and the conventions dominating the artistic category to which the object belongs. Different forms of art have recognizable artistic mediums: poems and novels for literature, films for cinema. The distinction between artistic and vehicular medium, where the latter is intended as a generalization of the notion of "physical medium" as to include also actions, structure-types and so on as possible ways of articulating an artistic intention, can be summarized in David Davies' words: "The artist characteristically work *in* a particular artistic medium when *working* a physical [vehicular] medium."[40] This does not mean that art forms have an essential and specific connection with artistic mediums.

The relation between a form of art and artistic medium can be not always explicitly specified and the connection between the two questioned in certain cases: sometimes it is not easy to draw a specific connection between forms and medium, even though, in most cases, the nature of the medium is what helps us understand the art form (and, sometimes, vice versa).[41] The distinction between artistic and vehicular medium is partially motivated by considerations regarding the focus of artistic evaluations: at least since the 70s, the idea that a proper appreciation of a work of art requires more than a mere contemplation of its formal properties has gained popularity in analytic aesthetic. In particular, an element which is

considered as playing an important role in our evaluation of art is the appreciation of the achievement or performance that the artist has accomplished in her work, that is, the way in which a certain artistic statement or utterance has been embodied in a particular medium.[42] Through the distinction between the vehicular and the artistic medium of a work of art, where the latter includes the set of conventions and expectations crucial for the understanding of a specific work, it can be argued that the focus of appreciation should be the artistic medium.

Returning now to the main line of argument, there are artists whose works cannot be categorized easily as belonging to a particular and already relatively familiar art form or category. Is *An Oak Tree* an installation or an idea? What is the nature of this work? For present purposes, it is not important to categorize conceptual works ontologically; what matters is that each sample of conceptual art has necessarily its own peculiar artistic medium, whatever this may be. We can rephrase versions of the PA in terms of the notion of an artistic medium as follows: (V2) S aesthetically gauges or appreciates the inherent aesthetic value of some work of art *w* only if S has an aesthetic experience of its artistic medium, where such experience requires S's direct contemplation of either the artistic medium of *w* or some adequate surrogate for it. This principle can be further generalized by excluding the notion of aesthetic experience: (V3) S aesthetically gauges or appreciates the inherent aesthetic value of some work of art *w* only if S directly engages with the artistic medium of *w* or some adequate surrogate for it. Similarly, we can rephrase WPA as follows: (WPA2) Direct contact with the artistic medium or an aesthetic surrogate of *w* is necessary for the adequacy of some but not all aesthetic judgements on *w*.

It may now be asked why conceptual works of art do not represent counterexamples to these formulations of the PA. Take the allegedly most difficult cases for the PA, that is, cases in which the works in question are just ideas expressed in a certain semantic form or "invisible" vehicular medium. One of these cases is Robert Barry's *All the*

things I know but which I am not at the moment thinking: 1.36 pm, 15 June 1969, New York. This joke transubstantiated into a work of art by the artworld does not seem to involve any material object; it is just a string of words. Yet it is not clear why we should take these works as posing particular problems. After all, works of literature are *prima facie* cases of non-perceptual works of art.[43] Leaving aside this point, conceptual works of art that apparently do not involve concrete objects have as artistic medium the *expression* of an idea (the idea is the work of art, a string of words is the medium). Frequently, the vehicular medium is just the title of the work. If the artistic medium includes a sentence, an adequate aesthetic surrogate of it can be also an accurate rephrasing of the work, because they are both in the same kind of medium and can perfectly convey all that is involved or conveyed through it. If this is the case, then even these alleged difficult cases of conceptual works of art are not counterexamples to the various formulations of the PA. After all, we have to come to know these works in some way or another. If the work of art is an idea and its medium is a simple sentence, just a title, then a linguistic reformulation of the medium is also an adequate surrogate of the work because of the inner simplicity of the work itself. Given that, somehow, we have to come to know a work of art to appreciate it, if this work is an idea that is expressible through a short sentence, then a short description can in principle maintain all its relevant artistic or aesthetic properties (if any) for our particular evaluative purposes.

Consequences and Conclusions

In conclusion, the refined formulations of the PA that I presented above suggest that contact with the artistic mediums, or their surrogates, is crucial for certain aesthetic judgements about works of art or for their full appreciation and engagement. Some have taken conceptual art as providing counterexamples to the requirement that we need such contact. However, it has been forgotten that the nature of this contact does not have to be necessarily through a

physical or three-dimensional object, that is, a physical medium. In fact, as I have shown, some of these alleged counterexamples can be directly addressed or accounted for in different versions of the PA referring to the notion of artistic medium, which does not exclude non-physical objects as proper vehicular mediums.

Our discussion of the PA is also of relevance for artistic education. Given that much contact with art is mediated by descriptions in textbooks or over the internet, the educator should always be aware that for a proper aesthetic understanding of certain works of art, where direct acquaintance with them is difficult for the students to have, a careful choice of the appropriate aesthetic surrogates is fundamental. More specifically, artistic education can be designed so as to enhance the capacity of obtaining aesthetic experiences through a proper engagement with works of art. Such experiences, in order to ground proper aesthetic judgments, should be connected to proper aesthetic surrogates, when direct acquaintance is not possible. A further suggestion for the educator comes from the debate on the transmissibility of aesthetic or artistic knowledge. The idea is that aesthetic knowledge, intended as a stock of well-motivated beliefs and judgments on matters of aesthetics, has its proper ways of transmissibility. Take for instance V3, the truism according to which an agent aesthetically gauges the inherent aesthetic value of a work of art only if the agent directly engages with the artistic medium of *w* or some adequate surrogate for it. Thus, laudating a specific work is not enough to transmit proper aesthetic knowledge.[44] An educator should instead enable her learner to engage with the work in the way proper to the artistic medium in question.

In conclusion, if we think that ideas have aesthetic value and that they are works of art, possibly in the form of a simple sentence, then an adequate surrogate of such medium can be also an adequate paraphrase of such an idea. Having a literary or linguistic form does not

exclude having an aesthetic surrogate, as for literary works of art. So some versions of the PA are truisms after all.

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[1] For example, Michael Tanner claimed that "it is, in general, a necessary condition of making a sincere aesthetic judgement that one should have first-hand experience of a work, but it clearly isn't a sufficient condition." See Michael Tanner, "Ethics and Aesthetics are – ?," in Jose Bermudez and Sebastian Gardner, *Art and Morality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 24.

[2] See Richard Wollheim, *Art and its Object*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968/1980), 233. See Paisley Livingston, "On an Apparent Truism in Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43, no. 3 (2003): 261 n4, and Malcolm Budd, " The Acquaintance Principle," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43, no. 4 (2003): 386–392; for various other statements of the principle. A restricted version of PA, limited to judgments of beauty, is explicit in Kant's third *Critique*. See Robert Hopkins, "Beauty and Testimony," in *Philosophy, the Good, the True & the Beautiful*, A. O'Hear ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 209–236; Aaron Meskin, "Aesthetic Testimony: What Can We Learn From Others About Beauty and Art?," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 69, no. 1 (2004): 65–91; for a critical assessment of various issues on testimony about beauty.

[3] See Livingston, "On an Apparent Truism in Aesthetics."

[4] See Barbara E. Savedoff, "Looking at Art through Photographs," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 51 (1993): 455–62.

[5] Note that this does not mean that *all* the aesthetic properties of all literary works can be conveyed through an adequate translation. Poems present particular problems in this regard. See Cleanth Brooks, "The Heresy of Paraphrase," in his *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (London: Methuen, 1968), 157–75; for a theory according to which

poetry essentially involves resolutions of stresses in a way that is similar to architecture and music. The balancing of the elements of a poem is obviously conducted in the linguistic form, which is, in turn, inherently related to a specific language. If this is the case, then aesthetic judgments of poems have to be grounded on an acquaintance with the original version of the work (or, if the PA is false, on descriptions based on original versions of the poem).

[6] Livingston, "On an Apparent Truism in Aesthetics," 264.

[7] The distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description is famously discussed by Bertrand Russell. See Bertrand Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, XI (1910/11), 108–128. See Richard Fumerton, "Knowledge by Acquaintance vs. Description," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, electronic version (2008): http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/knowledge-acquaindescrip/ for further discussion. In this paper I use the notions of acquaintance but also "direct contact" or "investigation." I leave aside cases in which aesthetic judgments are grounded on memory, because the different versions of the PA can easily be adapted to cover these cases.

[8] See Cain Samuel Todd, "Quasi-realism, Acquaintance, and the Normative Claim of Aesthetic Judgement," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 44, no. 3 (2004): 290–294 for a criticism of Livingston's reasoning.

[9] Livingston, "On an Apparent Truism in Aesthetics," 276.

[10] Ibid., 276.

[11] See Budd, "The Acquaintance Principle," 391.

[12] Among others, Timothy Binkley has argued forcefully that, in appreciating the Mona Lisa: "… regardless of how precise and vivid my description is, one thing it will never do is acquaint you with the painting. You cannot claim to know that work of art on the basis of

reading the most exquisite description of it." See Timothy Binkley, "Piece: Contra Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 35, no. 3 (1977): 266. In the rest of his paper, Binkley assumed a sceptical stance toward the PA.

[13] See David Hopkins, *After Modern Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 81.

[14] Livingston, "On an Apparent Truism in Aesthetics," 277.

[15] See Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[16] See Kendal Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[17] See Robert Hopkins, "How to be a Pessimist about Aesthetic Testimony," *The Journal of Philosophy* 108, no. 3 (2011): 138–57.

[18] See Malcolm Budd, "The Intersubjective Validity of Aesthetic Judgements," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 47, no. 4 (2007): 333–371; and Frank Sibley, "Particularity, Art, and Evaluation," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Vol.* 48, (1974), reprinted in John Benson, Betty Redfern, and Jeremy Roxbee Cox (eds), *Approach to Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 88–103.

[19] See Noel Carroll, "Aesthetic Experience: A Question of Content," in Matthew Kieran (ed.) *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 69–97. Other relevant papers are his "Four Concepts of Aesthetic Experience," in *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 41–62; and "Aesthetic Experience Revisited," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 42, no. 2 (2002): 145–68.

[20] See Carroll, "Aesthetic Experience: A Question of Content," 78

[21] In this paper, I take artistic value as containing art-historical value. For a discussion, see David Davies, *Art as Performance* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 32.

[22] Carroll, "Aesthetic Experience: A Question of Content," 94, n12.

[23] See Timothy Binkley, "Piece: Contra Aesthetics," Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), James Shelley, "The Problem of Non-perceptual Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43, no. 4 (2003): 363–378; and Amir Konigsberg, "The Acquaintance Principle, Aesthetic Autonomy, and Aesthetic Appreciation," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 52, no. 2 (2012): 153–68.

[24] See Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (1967): 79–84; reprinted in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds.), *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), 12–16; and "Sentences on Conceptual Art," *Art-Language: The Journal of Conceptual Art* 1 (1969), 11–13.

[25] LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," 14.

[26] See, for instance, David Hopkins, *After Modern Art 1945–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). The expression "dematerialization of art" gained some currency from Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," *Art International* 12, no. 2 (1968): 31–36; reprinted in Alberro and Stimson (eds.), *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology,* 46–50. See Derek Matravers, "The Dematerialization of the Object," in Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens (eds.), *Philosophy and Conceptual Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 18–32; for a discussion of the relation between Conceptual Art and Modernism.

[27] Joseph Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy – Part I and II," *Studio International* 178 (1969), reprinted in Alberro and Stimson (eds.), *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, 158–177, at 171.

[28] This convention has been proposed in Goldie and Schellekens (eds.), *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, xii, which is, in turn, influenced by Paul Wood, *Conceptual Art* (London: Tate Publishing, 2002). Daniel Marzona extends the temporal limit of the specific artistic movement to 1975. See Daniel Marzona, *Conceptual Art* (London: Taschen, 2005), 24–25.

[29] See Benjamin Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, Alexander Alberro, Thierry de Duve, Martha Buskirk, Yve-Alan Bois, "Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp," 70 (1994): 126–146.

[30] See Silvia Kolbowski, "An Inadequate History of Conceptual Art," 92 (2000): 54, for a list of artists that are recognized by other artists as being involved in conceptual art, broadly understood. Margaret A. Boden discusses John Cage as a conceptual artist in her "Creativity and Conceptual Art," in Goldie and Schellekens (eds.), *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, 216–37.

[31] See Goldie and Schellekens (eds.), *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, xii–xiii; and Elisabeth Schellekens, "Conceptual Art," Electronic version, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2007) http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/conceptual-art/; and Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens, *Who's Afraid of Conceptual Art?*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 35–61.

[32] See Carolyn Wilde, "Matter and Meaning in the Work of Art: Joseph Kosuth's *One the Three Chairs*," in Goldie and Schellekens (eds.), *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, 119–137, for a philosophical discussion of Kosuth's piece along with a comparison with Van Gogh's and Jasper Johns's "chairs."

[33] See Elisabeth Schellekens, "The Aesthetic Value of Ideas," in Goldie and Schellekens (eds.) *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, 79.

[34] We may want thus to add a conditional clause to both principles "if aesthetic considerations are relevant to the work w,…"; however, it seems that this condition is superfluous.

[35] See Matthew Kieran, "Artistic Character, Creativity, and the Appraisal of Conceptual Art," in Goldie and Schellekens (eds.), *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, 211.

[36] In addition, note that the WPA, for instance, is not committed to the claim that *all* judgments of aesthetic value should be grounded on inspection of the work or its surrogates.

[37] See Diarmuid Costello, "Kant after LeWitt," in Goldie and Schellekens (eds.), *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, 111, for a similar claim.

[38] See John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961); Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise. Perspectives on Sound Art* (New York and London: Continuum, 2006), 7–23.

[39] See David Davies, *Art as Performance*, 72–5; "Medium in Art," in Jerrold Levinson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 181–191; and Joseph Margolis, *Art and Philosophy* (Atlantic Heights, NJ: Humanities Press, 1980) for the notion of artistic, physical, and vehicular medium. I do not intend to defend any particular ontological stance on art, because what follows does not depend on that. See also David Davies, "Telling Pictures: The Place of Narrative in Late Modern Visual Art," in Goldie and Schellekens (eds.), *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, 138–55.

[40] Davies, "Medium in Art," 183.

[41] See Noel Carroll, "Performance," *Formation* 3, no. 1 (1986): 64–78; and Davies, "Medium in Art"; for a discussion of the claim that each form of art has a specific nature determined by what is allowed by its related medium.

[42] See Kendall Walton, "Categories of Art," *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970): 334–67; Denis Dutton, "Artistic Crimes: The Problem of Forgery in the Arts," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 19 (1979): 304–14; Jerrold Levinson, "What a Musical Work is," *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980): 5–28; Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

[43] See Peter Lamarque, “On Perceiving Conceptual Art,” in Goldie and Schellekens, *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, 3–17; for a discussion of the relation between conceptual art and literature.

[44] See the effects of exposure to bad art and the influence of judgments suggested to appreciators in A. Meskin, M. Phelan, M. Moore, and M. Kieran, “Mere Exposure to Bad Art,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 53, no. 2 (2013): 139–64.