

lead by the same road of aesthetic emotion to the same world of aesthetic ecstasy.

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PAUL ZIEFF

2 Anything Viewed

Look at the dried dung!

What for?

If I had said 'Look at the sunset' would you have asked 'What for?'?

People view sunsets aesthetically. Sunsets are customary objects of aesthetic attention. So are trees rocks wildflowers clouds women leaping gazelles prancing horses: all these are sometime objects of aesthetic attention. But not everything is: not soiled linen greasy dishes bleary eyes false teeth not extrem.

Why not? It's not because they're unbeautiful or even ugly. Beautiful things are no problem for a rambling aesthetic eye but not all objects of aesthetic attention are beautiful: Grünewald's *Crucifixion* isn't neither is Picasso's *Guernica*. Brueghel's rustics aren't lovely. The stark morning light in a Hopper is powerful but it is not beautiful. Not being beautiful needn't matter.

These unbeautiful objects are works of art. By chance some objects of aesthetic attention have been naturally produced. For the rest: they are products of art.

What is a work of art? Something fit to be an object of aesthetic attention. Most likely nowadays (now that didactic art is largely dead) something tailor-made for the purpose designed to be just that. If you want to attend aesthetically to something fix on a work of art as your object: that's the way it's thought to be. Is a work of art the paradigm of an object fit for aesthetic attention? What does a work of art have or lack that dung doesn't?

What is a work of art? Not everything. Leonardo's portrait of Ginevra de' Benci is. A mound of dried dung isn't. Nor is an alligator at least a living gator basking in the sun on a mud bank in a swamp isn't. A reason they are not is plain: nothing is a work of art if it is not an artefact something made by man. A gator basking a mound of dried dung are products of nature made or produced by natural forces. Not being made or produced by men they are not classed artefacts. Not being artefacts they are not classed works of art. Such is a common or the common if there is anything that is the common conception of a work of art.

are short and unsure. Soon they fall back into the world of human interests and feel emotions, good no doubt, but inferior. I do not dream of saying that what they get from art is bad or nugatory; I say that they do not get the best that art can give. I do not say that they cannot understand art; rather I say that they cannot understand the state of mind of those who understand it best. I do not say that art means nothing or little to them; I say they miss its full significance. I do not suggest for one moment that their appreciation of art is a thing to be ashamed of; the majority of the charming and intelligent people with whom I am acquainted appreciate visual art impurely; and, by the way, the appreciation of almost all great writers has been impure. But provided that there be some fraction of pure aesthetic emotion, even a mixed and minor appreciation of art is, I am sure, one of the most valuable things in the world—so valuable, indeed, that in my giddier moments I have been tempted to believe that art might prove the world's salvation.

Yet, though the echoes and shadows of art enrich the life of the plains, her spirit dwells on the mountains. To him who woos, but woos impurely, she returns enriched what is brought. Like the sun, she warms the good seed in good soil and causes it to bring forth good fruit. But only to the perfect lover does she give a new strange gift—a gift beyond all price. Imperfect lovers bring to art and take away the ideas and emotions of their own age and civilisation. In twelfth-century Europe a man might have been greatly moved by a Romanesque church and found nothing in a T'ang picture. To a man of a later age, Greek sculpture meant much and Mexican nothing, for only to the former could he bring a crowd of associated ideas to be the objects of familiar emotions. But the perfect lover, he who can feel the profound significance of form, is raised above the accidents of time and place. To him the problems of archaeology, history, and hagiography are impertinent. If the forms of a work are significant its provenance is irrelevant. Before the grandeur of those Sumerian figures in the Louvre he is carried on the same flood of emotion to the same aesthetic ecstasy as, more than four thousand years ago, the Chaldean lover was carried. It is the mark of great art that its appeal is universal and eternal.¹ Significant form stands charged with the power to provoke aesthetic emotion in anyone capable of feeling it. The ideas of men go buzz and die like gnats; men change their institutions and their customs as they change their coats; the intellectual triumphs of one age are the follies of another; only great art remains stable and unobscure. Great art remains stable and unobscure because the feelings that it awakens are independent of time and place, because its kingdom is not of this world. To those who have and hold a sense of the significance of form what does it matter whether the forms that move them were created in Paris the day before yesterday or in Babylon fifty centuries ago? The forms of art are inexhaustible; but all

Most likely there is no such thing as the common conception of a work of art: these are vague ill-defined notions. And some say that some objects that are not artefacts are nonetheless works of art. That needn't concern us: undoubtful examples of works of art are all that are wanted here and now and these are easier to come by when one considers artefacts rather than nonartefacts.

When one looks at a gator basking a mound of dried dung is one at once cognizant of the fact that not one or the other is man-made? And does such cognizance at once preclude all possibility of aesthetic attention to the gator basking the mound of dried dung? Though the gator basking is not man-made it is (to invoke the shade of Paley) remarkable in design and structure. By no stretch of the imagination can it be imagined to be less detailed rich intricate in design less complex in structure than an artefact. Given the present state of technology there's no way anyone can actually make a gator basking. But making a mound of dried dung is easy. Conjure up this image: a field in which there are two virtually identical mounds of dried dung. One was and the other was not man-made. Would that fact render the latter less accessible than the former to aesthetic attention?

Imagine this: that the Henry Moore statue at Lincoln Center was in fact not an artefact by Moore but a naturally formed that is nonman-made object found in a desert and transported to Lincoln Center. Would that matter to an appreciation of the statue? Yes enormously. Knowing that one's view of the object would be restructured: one would not in looking at the work look at it as a work. One would not look for manifestations of craftsmanship. One would not look for and see signs of the sculptor's hands: there would be none. But the object would still have shape form mass and balance. The various parts of the object would still be in the spatial relations they are in. The solidity of the volumes would remain unaltered. Nor would the expressive aspects of the object be seriously impaired if impaired at all by its lacking the status of an artefact. It would still possess those physiognomic characteristics which serve to make it an imposing impressive work. That it was not an artefact would not indicate that it was not a fit object for aesthetic attention.

That something is not an artefact does not suggest let alone establish that it is therefore unfit to be an object of aesthetic attention. And unless one has a compelling narcissistic obsession with the marks of men's endeavours one can view things in the world aesthetically without being concerned with or inhibited by their lack of status as artefacts.

If a work of art is a paradigm of an object fit for aesthetic attention it is not owing to the status of a work of art as an artefact. Not that just any artefact is classed a work of art: a garden rake a screwdriver a green paper plate are not though they are undoubtful example of artefacts. What if the paper plate were on a pedestal displayed as a piece of sculpture? Would it then be classed a work of art? By some. Not by others. Even so: if one wanted an undoubtful

example of a work of art wouldn't one prefer Leonardo's *Ginevra* to the paper plate? An undoubtful example of a work of art is a hand-made work a product of an art a craft: it is an artefact the production of which called for considerable and unmistakable craftsmanship. Look at Leonardo's *Ginevra*: that the craftsmanship displayed is remarkable is obvious. (And that is not belied by the fact that one may wonder whether the portrayed slight strabismus is rightly to be attributed to Ginevra herself.)

This exquisite portrait is incomparably more beautiful than any reproduction can suggest. The marvelous sense of atmosphere surrounding Ginevra, the harmonious unity of landscape and figure, and the incredible delicacy with which minute details are rendered can only be appreciated in the original painting.¹

Reproductions rarely capture the quality of a work of art of an exquisite and refined craft. That a work does not lend itself to easy reproduction however may be owing either to its being remarkably ordered (so to speak) a product of great craftsmanship or to its being a clear manifestation of entropy. Leonardo's *Ginevra* would be difficult to copy and so would one of Pollock's typically dribbled pieces: to smash an egg is easy but to replicate the appearance of the smashed egg in all perceivable details may be impossible.

A display of craftsmanship may on occasion facilitate aesthetic attention to an object. The lack of that display in no way indicates that an object is unfit for such attention. Consider a typical work by Piet Mondrian: one of black lines and white ground. Such a work displays virtually nothing of the painter's craft rightly so-called: a tolerably steady hand an ability to apply masking tape judiciously is about all the technical skill required to produce it. Or to reproduce it: a perfect copy would be a matter of a few hours work at most.

That works of art may be artefacts that they may be skillfully hand-made objects here doesn't signify. Figuratively and on occasion literally speaking works of art are framed objects. It is that more than anything else that makes them plausible paradigms of objects fit for aesthetic attention. But both the efficacy and the necessity of a frame are something of an illusion.

Works of art are framed mounted hung illuminated displayed exhibited. The object is supplied with a milieu an environment a background. Presumably all that facilitates aesthetic attention to the works by those concerned to appreciate them. The basic idea would seem to be this: a person *p* performs certain relevant actions *a* in connection with a work of art an entity *e* under conditions *c*. The entity *e* is supposed to be of a kind or character to facilitate and make valuable the performance of *a* by *p* under *c*. If so *e* is then a fit object for aesthetic attention. And what if *e* is dried dung? Then the performance of actions *a* by person *p* under conditions *c* in connection with *e* the dried dung is supposed to be neither facilitated nor rendered valuable by the dried dung. Hence the dried dung is not supposed to be a fit object for aesthetic

attention. But obviously all this depends on the person *p* the actions *a* and the conditions *c*.

Aesthetic value is as it were a cooperative affair. If attending aesthetically to an object is worthwhile then the object contributes its presence and possibly the conditions under which one attends to the object contribute their share while the person contributes his: what is wanted is an harmonious relation between the person and the object. It is never the case that such harmony depends solely on the contribution of the object. For despite its presence the conditions of attention may be infelicitous: who could enjoy viewing Klee's *Twittering Machine* while being tortured? (Perhaps a *roshti*.) If both object and conditions make their contribution something about the person may occasion a difficulty: a color blind person may be cut off from an appreciation of a Matisse nude and so conceivably could one psychologically disturbed about sexual matters.

To say of something that it is worth attending to aesthetically is to speak in an abstract way. For in so saying one abstracts from reference to persons and the conditions under which the actions are to be performed. On occasion this abstract way of speaking is somewhat fatuous. A case in point: 'Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel murals are worth viewing.' Presumably these are great works of art. Theoretically the viewing of these works is aesthetically worthwhile. In fact it is not. It would be worthwhile if the works were not where they are if the conditions of viewing were altered for example if the Chapel were turned on its side. Where they are high up and almost out of sight they are for all save presbyopes virtually inaccessible to the performance of any relevant aesthetic action. Viewing them is literally a pain in the neck. One can recline on a bench or the floor (if the guards permit and the spectators don't trample) but that position is not conducive to aesthetic attention. Here one should keep in mind the illusion of the full moon on the horizon: the apparent size of the moon is radically reduced by turning one's back to it bending down and viewing it between one's legs with one's head upside down. Evidently the positions in which one views things can serve to alter the apparent size of the things viewed. (It is said that Frank Lloyd Wright hated paintings: that would account for the sloping floors and tilted perspectives of the Guggenheim Museum which serve effectively to sabotage any delicately balanced work.)

A work of art is supposed to retain its identity from frame to frame wall to wall room to room: those who suffer from inept framers know how silly this view is. Seurat took care at times to prepare and paint his own frames. But he could do nothing about the walls floors company his works were forced to keep. Conversely is there any doubt that dried dung displayed by the lighting engineers of the New York Museum of Modern Art could prove to be a fantastically intriguing aesthetic object? With appropriately placed lights and shadows walls of the right tint in the right position of the right height

carefully proportioned pedestals anything at all that could be displayed could be a fit object for aesthetic attention.

Would it be the dried dung or the dried dung under special enviroining conditions that would be a fit object for aesthetic attention? Certainly at least the latter is obviously true and I think also the former but let's focus on the latter for the moment for that's the way it always is anyway with any work of art. Works of art such as paintings and pieces of sculpture are best thought of as scores awaiting realization in actual performance. Viewing a yellow version of Josef Albers' *Homage to the square* displayed in a yellow frame on a yellow stuccoed wall would be like listening to a Rossini overture performed *con sordini* with all instruments muted.

To say that an object is fit for aesthetic attention is not simply to say that there are or could be enviroining conditions under which the object would be worth attending to aesthetically. That seems plainly true (to me anyway) and not surprising in the light of twentieth century art and techniques of display. In saying that an object is fit for aesthetic attention one is saying much more namely that the object can be attended to and is worth attending to aesthetically in that such attention to the object is worthwhile and if it is not that it is not is attributable either to interference by the conditions or to something about persons or their actions.

When attention to an object is not aesthetically worthwhile it may be uncertain what the lack is attributable to. If aesthetic attention to a floating clump of seaweed was not worthwhile that may be owing to the fact that while contemplating the clump one was being savaged by a school of sharks. Here conditions may fairly be said to have interfered. But if on a cold dank winter's day in Venice one finds the contemplation of a Tintoretto in a dim unheated church not aesthetically worthwhile is the lack to be attributed to the conditions under which the work is viewed or to a failure of concentration on the part of the person?

As the character of the objects attended to vary the character of the actions the conditions and the requisite qualities skills and capacities of the person may also have to vary if attention to the objects is to be aesthetically worthwhile. Demands made on a person are absolutely minimal in the appreciation of the popular art of his own culture: soap operas rock and roll comic strips western flicks. No special knowledge is called for no special actions are wanted: not even the capacity for continued attention is requisite. (Which is not to deny that from an intercultural point of view these demands can be seen as prodigious: the wonderful world of Barry McKenzie a comic strip is not apt to be available to those who haven't lived among the kangaroos.) Popular art is popular because it is so readily available to all within the culture. But traditional works of art such as Leonardo's *Ginevra de' Benci* Mona Lisa the madonna on the rocks Botticelli's Venus on the half shell are also popular and for much the same reason: from a western intracultural

point of view an appreciation of these works calls for nothing special on the part of the viewer. The same is true of the appreciation of many carefully hand-crafted objects of many beautiful things in general.

When one turns to modern works demands on the person are apt to increase. Elliott Carter's *2nd Quartet* is a work of rare beauty but it is not instantly available to all. If one attempts in listening to the quartet to attend to recurring themes and variations as one would in listening to a work in standard sonata form then one is ready for Beethoven's *C minor Opus 48 No 4* but not for Carter: eighteen seconds of the opening *Allegro fantastico* should be enough to make that clear. Modern works of art often call for prolonged continuous close attention if one is to appreciate them. The same is true of a gator basking in the sun on a mud bank in a swamp. Anything viewed makes demands.

To suppose that anything that can be viewed is a fit object for aesthetic attention is not like supposing that anything one can put in one's mouth is a fit object to eat. It is more like supposing that anything that can be seen can be read. Because it can. It isn't true that one can't read just anything that one can see. Not everything has meaning but anything can be given meaning. One can read a blank piece of paper or a cloud or a sea anemone as some read palms and tea leaves and entrails. One can give meaning to stones but one can't make them edible. And one can see them as displays of solidity as expressive objects.

What's a fit subject to photograph? Anything that can be seen. Or is it not what the photographer photographs but what he makes of it? With his camera and darkroom and skills? What he does with art I can do with my (or maybe you too can with your) eyes. One can look at anything and within limits and depending on one's powers create an appropriate frame and environing conditions for what one sees.

I will describe what I call 'antiaesthetic litter clearance'. A non-aesthetic approach is a simple exercise in futility: the litter is offensive pick it up put it in trash cans sweep and tidy the area. Which owing to the unchanging propensities of the inhabitants will soon almost immediately be covered with litter again. The antiaesthetic approach is to alter one's view to see the original litter not as litter but as an object for aesthetic attention: a manifestation of a fundamental physical factor: entropy. One can look upon the disorder of litter as a form of order a beautiful randomness a precise display of imprecision. (And if you cannot look at litter in this way perhaps you can learn to do so by looking at Pollock Tobey and others.) Garbage strewn about is apt to be as delicately variegated in hue and value as the subtlest Monet. Discarded beer cans create striking cubistic patterns.

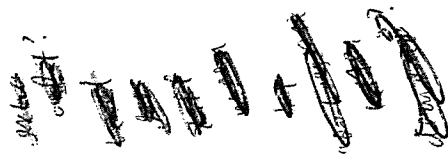
Consider a gator basking in the sun on a mud bank in a swamp. Is he a fit object for aesthetic attention? He is and that he is is readily confirmable. Go look and see if you doubt what I say. He is presently to be seen around Chokoloskee Island in the Everglades. What is in question is the American

alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) not to be confused with a crocodile. Gators have shorter broader heads and more obtuse snouts. The fourth enlarged tooth of a gator's lower jaw fits into a pit formed for it in the upper jaw, whereas a crocodile's fits into an external notch. It helps in viewing a gator to see it as a gator and not as a crocodile. But that requires knowing something about gators.

Seen from the side the gator appears to have a great healthy grin conveying a sense of well-being vitality. When Ginevra's portrait was painted by Leonardo she must have been sick for a long time. The pallor of her face conveys a 'sense of melancholy'.² The ossified scutes along his back forming the characteristic dermal armour constitute a powerful curving reticular pattern conveying simultaneously an impression of graceful fluidity and of remorseless solidity. Ginevra's face is 'framed by cascading curls. These ringlets, infinitely varied in their shapes and movement, remind us of Leonardo's drawings of whirling eddies of water'.³ He has just come out of the water to bask in the sun. His sight is acute as is his power of hearing. But his eyes now have a lazy look being half-closed for he has upper and lower lids as well as a nictitating membrane. Ginevra too stares at us out of half-closed eyes. He is not strabismic. Her eyes are hazel. His seem green and remote despite the great grin.

Anything that can be viewed is a fit object for aesthetic attention. But not everything can be viewed just as not everything can be eaten. And in eating and in viewing the difficulties may be attributed either to the object or to the person. The former are obvious: stones can't be eaten and some gases subatomic particles and so forth can't be viewed because they can't be seen. But what cannot be eaten or cannot be viewed owing to the person is another matter. There are places where a rat foetus is considered a delicacy. The same is true of sheep's eye balls in aspic. In India warm monkey's brains are served up raw. Eskimos are reported to munch with delight on deer droppings (perhaps only in times of stress). Many in my society could not ingest these items: they would be stricken with nausea in the attempt. And there are hideous offensive nauseating objects that one cannot bear to view. Are such objects fit for aesthetic attention?

Yes why not? That I am psychologically incapable of attending aesthetically to a certain object tells you something about me nothing about the aesthetic qualities of the object. The same could be true of a work of art. Suppose Derain had done an heroic portrait of Hitler: I could not attend aesthetically to that work. Hitler was a repulsive nauseating object. That nausea is readily evoked by any lifelike image of the person. But my nausea would not be a criticism of Derain's art. Many of us cannot bear to look at blood particularly our own: that is not to deny that blood may be of a beautiful color and form beautiful patterns as it flows. If there were something that no one was psychologically capable of viewing even though the object was available for



viewing then one might wonder whether such a thing was a fit object for aesthetic attention. But as far as I know there is no such thing and even if there were there's no need in theory anyway to countenance a morbid sensitivity that makes one psychologically incapable of viewing something in the world.

If anything that can be viewed is a fit object for aesthetic attention aren't some things more fit than others? No why think it? But granted that both a gator basking and Leonardo's *Ginevra* are fit objects for aesthetic attention isn't *Ginevra* more fit? No. In what way? It would make sense to compare the two only if there were some basis of comparison. But there isn't.

But isn't one painting better than another? In some ways and not in others. Rubens' paintings were superior to those of many of his contemporaries with respect to technique and pigmentation. Ingres' work displays finer draftsmanship than that of David. Vuillard's works have finer color than Manet's. But this isn't to say that Vuillard's works are more fit than those of Manet for aesthetic attention. If you are concerned to attend aesthetically to color then giving such attention to Vuillard's works will prove more worthwhile than giving such attention to Manet's works. But there are other things to attend to in viewing Manet's works. There are always other things to attend to.

For one can attend to anticolor: one can attend to precisely those aspects of hue value saturation of Manet's works which when standing on one's right foot adopting the stance of judge one judges to be inferior to Vuillard's. And one can without losing one's balance adopt a different stance standing on one's left foot one judges Manet's color superior to Vuillard's. And one can stand squarely on both feet and abandon the silliness of aesthetic judgements.

In looking at *Ginevra* one can attend to the silliness of craftsmanship and the beauty of form and shape: in looking at the gator basking one can attend to the beautiful grinning display of life. Anything that can be viewed can fill the bill of an object fit for aesthetic attention and none does it better than any other. Granted that 2 3 5 7 11 and so forth are primes: are some more so than others? A monk asked Ummon: 'What is Buddha?' Ummon answered him: 'Dried dung.'

[*'Anything Viewed'*, in *Antiaesthetics: An Appreciation of the Cow with the Subtle Nose* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1984 by kind permission of Kluwer Academic Publishers), 129-39.]

ALLEN CARLSON

3 Aesthetic Appreciation of the Natural Environment

I. *The Central Problem of the Aesthetics of Nature*

In his classic work, *The Sense of Beauty*, philosopher George Santayana characterizes the natural landscape as follows: