

MATILDE CARRASCO BARRANCO

AESTHETICS AND THE MEANING OF ARTWORKS*

The relationships between aesthetics and the meaning of artworks have been revisited since the historical artworld of the 60's avant-garde pushed them apart. At that time artists rejected the aesthetic definition of art, rejected taste and aesthetic quality, and aimed to produce an art not to be aesthetically pleasing, but drawing attention to its meaning, in relation to its context, lacking any formal interest. The idea of an art made to engage the mind of the viewer rather than his eye or emotions extended and conceptualism, in this global sense, became the basis of all-encompassing contemporary artistic practices, particularly in visual art. Based on this emphasis on meaning and context, the conceptual divorce between content and form, art and the aesthetic was complete. However, recently some theoretical attempts are trying to reinvigorate the identification between the artistic and the aesthetic. This has to do largely with new conceptions of aesthetic experience and value, which often broaden these notions including attention not only to formal and expressive properties but also to art-historical, cognitive and moral properties, pertaining more to the nature of the meaning of artworks. This move seems to blur the distinction between aesthetic value and other sorts of artistic value. In this article, I review some of these new accounts and recent discussions in order to defend that while aesthetic value should be conceived in a broad way, it won't necessarily absorb any other values an artwork can possess. Being the result of a certain sort of experience where form and content are not distinguished, aesthetic value in art would include any meaning brought to or gained from an artwork, but artworks' significance goes beyond aesthetic experience and so, the artistic and the aesthetic should be kept conceptually differentiated and should not be identified.

*This article is part of my research done with the financial support of MICINN (FFI2011-23362) and Fundación Séneca (08694/PHCS/08). A first version was presented at the Workshop *Art and Aesthetic Experience*, Università degli Studi di Udine, 8-9 April 2014, and benefited greatly from the discussion with Simone Furlani and the many questions and comments by the attendants to whom I would like to express my gratitude.

1. Putting Aesthetics and Artistic Meaning Back Together

Without subscribing to such renewed identification between the aesthetic and the artistic at all, the “aesthetic turn” of the late Arthur Danto¹ is nonetheless particularly revealing of the trendy new look at their relationship. Danto is famous for having joined that anti-aesthetic mainstream of the 60s’ and 70s’ avant-garde, a historical time that – as he confessed – urged for him to find a definition of art away from aesthetics. His classic argument from indiscernibles, according to which the properties available to perception undermined the difference between art and non-art, inspired the claim that aesthetics was irrelevant to what made *something* art. Years later Danto wondered though if it was the time “to return to aesthetics with an enhanced understanding” (Arthur Danto 2003: 58-59). This new understanding would be based, on the one hand, on the pluralism of aesthetic qualities, since there is no reason for artists to confine themselves to beauty or such other of the aesthetic qualities that evoke visual pleasure and, on the other hand, on the constitutive or “internal” role that those plural aesthetic properties can play in the meaning of artworks.² If these qualities are bound up with a work’s content, they would be “internal” to the work, and if they are irrelevant to the meaning, they would be “external”, being the task of critical scrutiny the explanation of these different kinds of relationships. This can be summarized by what Danto describes as his “effort to break away from the Kant-Greenberg aesthetic of form, and instead develop an aesthetics of meaning” (Danto 2007: 126). In spite of the turn, Danto never added aesthetic qualities to the conditions for something to be considered an artwork, namely, that art is about something and hence possesses meaning and that an artwork embodies its meaning, which is what art criticism addresses. In Danto’s thought, aesthetics, which *sometimes* can contribute to the meaning of the works, remains external and contingent to art’s definition since aboutness and embodiment are still the two features characteristic of artworks (Danto 2003: 128). Aesthetic qualities are not necessary features of artworks after all.

However, Danto’s critics have often pointed out that the concept of artworks as “embodied meanings” refer both to their meanings and how the concrete embodiments are carried out in such a way that it wouldn’t be so easy to separate one thing from the other.³ This would question too a distinction between internal and external aesthetic qualities *of the work*. The notion of an internal aesthetics, as intended to play a role in

¹ I am using the expression coined by Costello 2008. For the scope of this turn, see also Carrasco-Barranco 2013.

² Danto 2007: 121-129. Later extended to the diverse aesthetic qualities, the internal/external distinction was first formulated in relation to beauty. See Danto 2003: 81-102.

³ See for instance Seel 1998: 102-111; Gilmore 2005: 150-151; Pérez-Carreño 2005: 229; Costello 2008: 252.

conveying a work's meaning, is clearly artistic. Danto stressed the great difference in kind between aesthetic response to art and non-artistic aesthetic response coherently with the difference also stressed between mere objects and artworks, which hold aboutness or meaning (Danto 1981: chap.4). An aesthetic quality is internal "*if it is part of the meaning of a work*" and that in fact "requires a distinction along the lines of that between a work and an object" (Danto 2005: 192). For Danto, the work *W* is composed by the material object *O* and the meaning *M*, where *O* has an indeterminate number of physical features, and only a subset of which belong to *W*. And interpretation is part of what holds meaning and object together as a work. Thus, external aesthetic qualities will be meaningless. But the point is that the work of art, as an embodied meaning, must have an aesthetic dimension internal to its meaning, and unlikely to be seen as only incidental to it.

Following Danto, Graham McFee argues that embodying meaning is certainly an idea that makes sense for artworks, noting also that meaning features are essentially intended ("meant") and not naturally occurring, and that would explain why different embodiments carry out different aboutness or meanings (McFee 2011: 4, 11-12, 13). McFee thinks that an artwork always has some specific embodiment in which "the witnessable work consists", and holds this thesis even against those who think that it is not crucial for certain artworks –say, Conceptual art or Readymades–. "For the meaning of [an] artwork is made concrete in the work itself, where only that concretization counts as bearing that meaning".⁴ Artworks are not "paraphrasable", and direct confrontation with them would be always needed. McFee claims then that the details of the embodiment always have an importance, bearing on the work's meaning. According to him, artworks bear meaning in a "distinctive", namely, "artistic" fashion. Then, one can accept Danto's conditions on identifying art (the necessity of background knowledge of art history and theory that "the eye cannot descry") while retaining an aesthetic theory of art that acknowledges the transformative effect of art-status for specific properties of the relevant objects.⁵ Like many others, McFee objects to Danto for construing aesthetic qualities narrowly in a sensuous and purely perceptual way, when a "perceptual feature" as a feature accessible with no background information is false. Nonetheless, in McFee's account, the contrast between the artistic and the (merely) aesthetic is crucial for the correct appreciation of art. According to McFee, art-status is in fact *transfigurational*, where objects indistinguishable to visual inspection turn out to be different *things*, acquiring different properties in connection to the audience for them. That the object before us is an artwork is crucial for its appreciation – Mc Fee's argument continues– and one must locate it in the history and

⁴ McFee 2011: 96-97. Recently, other philosophers have also defended that even the stronger versions of conceptual art seem connected with the way the works are (aesthetically) presented. See, for instance, Costello 2007: 92-115.

⁵ *Ivi*: 7. See also Costello 2008: 250.

traditions of artmaking and artappreciating in that artform or category (McFee 2011: 2-3). Therefore, the artwork will be misperceived when identified in an inappropriate category, or seen as a “merely aesthetic” object. Here, again in a similar vein to Danto’s, Mc Fee emphasizes the contrast between art and other objects that can be aesthetically appreciated and consequently the distinction between *artistic* properties from their “*non-art* cousins” (McFee 2011: 4). Such contrast is needed to explain *artistic value*, different from the (merely aesthetic) value of an object, and why aesthetic properties amount to something very different when applied to artworks from those uses applied outside art. Hence, this strong contrast leads McFee to conclude against the “unity of the aesthetic” thesis, “where one set of properties, aesthetic properties ...is shared by artworks *and* other things”, and to reject “the idea of artworks having artistic *and* aesthetic properties”, where for artworks all those properties seem to belong to a single aesthetic-artistic class (McFee 2011: 10).

To sum up, departing from admitting Danto’s aboutness and embodiment as characteristic features of artworks, McFee emphasizes the dependency of artistic meaning on its aesthetic embodiment. (Aesthetic)artistic qualities are internal or constitutive of the work’s meaning. His “thesis about the *embodiment* of artistic meaning, and its consequent *uniqueness* to that embodiment,” stresses also the need for the direct confrontation with the works and implies “that no explanation *could* be equivalent to ‘the’ meaning” (McFee 2011: 52). Aesthetics and artistic meaning, far from being divorced, seem now to be back together. Moreover, following McFee, under the contrast between artistic and the merely aesthetic properties, artistic and aesthetic value of works would be coextensive for which it will be a way of identifying the artistic and the aesthetic after all.

2. Is Artistic Value Plural?

McFee considers the distinction between the artistic and the (merely)aesthetic crucial for the correct appreciation of art *as art*. Recently, Dominic McIver Lopes has also defended the thesis that claims that the aesthetic properties an artwork exhibits depend upon the artistic category in which we appreciate it, since he also thinks that artworks would not be aesthetically appreciated under the category of “artwork”, but under more specific art form or art genre categories.⁶ Lopes’ proposal is then “to develop particular theories of aesthetic value as realized by specific art kinds (as well as and other artefacts and bits of nature)” (McIver Lopes 2011: 535) . Besides, for Lopes, this is the way to think about aesthetic value as it is characteristically realized by works of art, being also the distinctive artistic value; many other values that artworks can bear

⁶ Lopes’ account, as well as Mc Fee’s, is inspired by Kendall Walton’s discussion of categories of art in Walton 1970: 334-67.

would not be proper artistic values, values of art *as art*. The importance of the distinction relies in making clear artistic criticism's own limits. Because, as Lopes notes too, in order to distinguish art criticism from other evaluative discourse, we should be able to distinguish evaluations of art *as art* from other evaluations, notably, art-historical, cognitive or moral evaluations. Only by distinguishing mere value *in art* from artistic value is there room for genuine disagreement about whether an artwork's moral or cognitive value is an artistic value (Walton 1970: 524-526). No doubt artworks can be valuable in other ways and there can be a certain amount of interaction between non-artistic values that artworks possess and (aesthetic) artistic value. But this does not mean that any of these other values are artistic ones.

However, this perspective raises the question about whether the qualification of aesthetic value as the only artistic one, as well as its distinction from other values, can be made without developing a general account of aesthetic value but by just employing a view of it *merely* orientated by the artistic category of the object in question. Without denying that a correct appreciation of art depends on perceiving the object before us as an artwork and in the appropriate artistic category (where the requisite critical vocabulary for art of that type applies), like McFee and Lopes argue, we also need to explain in which sense our evaluation is considered in every case "aesthetic". This will make real sense of the term and will help explain too in which way aesthetic value would be distinct from other values, notably, art historical, cognitive or moral value.

Robert Stecker makes this point when, arguing against Lopes, he reminds us that aesthetic value is the value of a certain sort of experience and the objects of that experience; a kind of value that we find in art, but not only in art because "it is everywhere" and should be then defined in its own right.⁷ Besides, Stecker thinks that, while aesthetic value is an independent and underived kind of value, artistic value comprises a diverse set of values and it is derived from the interaction of these more basic values.⁸ Thus, Stecker contests the identification between the artistic and the aesthetic, defending the existence of non-aesthetic artistic value for which such identification makes no room, and frames the discussion about the limits of artistic critical discourse and the possible interaction between aesthetic and other values in the context of a pluralistic theory of artistic value. But given that the inventory of specific values of specific works of art is virtually endless, we shouldn't trivialize the notion of artistic value by including any value artworks can bear. Therefore, Stecker offers a test for identifying legitimate artistic value that goes like this: if one needs to understand the

⁷ Stecker 2012: 361. Taking into account the appreciation of the object as art, nature or everyday life, doesn't mean avoiding clarifying what makes a response aesthetic developing a general account which should be also neutral about the relative importance or priority of art and nature within the field of the aesthetic. In this respect, see also, Budd 2005:13-14.

⁸ In the sense artistic value is for Stecker "heteronomous"; an account developed in Stecker 2013: chap. 2.

work to appreciate its being valuable in that way, it is an artistic value and, if not, it is not (Stecker 2005: 240).

Artistic values, or values of art *as art*, are those derived from a correct understanding of the works. Stecker has in mind a sort of understanding that derives primarily from interpreting artworks and, in particular, “interpreting them for work meaning” (Stecker 2012: 357). Clearly, such understanding is not required to appreciate adventitious valuable properties of artworks, such as financial value. Instead, Stecker claims, it will be a matter of discovering what the artist has done in a work, usually as a result of intending to do that. Then, applying the test, if an artwork has arthistorical, cognitive or ethical value that is part of its artistic value, one needs to understand the work to appreciate this value. They would not be mere adventitious values in art and would “remain artistic values because imbuing the work with such a value is part of the artist’s project in making the work, and appreciating the value requires understanding the work” (Stecker 2012: 360). However, Stecker leaves open the exact nature of interpretation relevant to understanding a work, aware of alternative views about work meaning as well as views about interpretation that make the central aim of interpretation the appreciation of a work. Nonetheless, the sense of understanding indicated is specifically related to another plausible route to discovering artistic value since this derives from the multiple aims that artworks fulfil. As a second test, Stecker affirms that artistic value is derived “from works existing within art institutions or practices when appreciated as members of those practices”, and it’s functional, resting in the capacity of artworks to bestow benefits on their audiences. Both tests will be then complementary and in fact, they would converge in a single one. On the one hand, understanding an artwork’s (intended) meaning correctly involves framing it in its historical context as part of artistic practices. And on the other hand, the non-essentialist account of art as a changing historical practice comprising a variable set of forms and genres offered also by Stecker involves a sort of understanding that would imply the reasons and circumstances that would make intelligible calling something “art”, including people’s expectations, exceeding the mere sociological frame offered by the institutional theory of art (Stecker 2012: 361).

Therefore, following Stecker, since we don’t evaluate artworks *as art* just for aesthetic value but for other things too, artistic value comprises a diverse set of values. And so, for him, artistic value “may include aesthetic value”, but it is not identical to it (Stecker 2012: 355). Aesthetic value comes from a certain sort of experience and aesthetic theory of art “does not do justice to the variety of ways in which we engage with artworks and with art’s engagement with the world” (Stecker 2012: 356). Moreover, since many artworks would have hardly any or no aesthetic value at all, something else must account for their artistic value. This is why Stecker concludes that in spite of the recent theoretical attempts to reinvigorate an aesthetic conception of artistic value, the legacy left by the appearance of the conceptualist practices of various avant-garde movements decades ago still constitutes strong evidence against those

theories. In fact, Stecker claims that this premise does a better job proving the existence of artistic value as distinct from and irreducible to aesthetic value than Danto's argument from indiscernibles, challenged now for a long time for construing aesthetic qualities narrowly in a sensuous and purely perceptual way. As we noted from McFee's objections, the context and the knowledge of the observer affect importantly our cognitive and affective responses to objects, so two indiscernible objects in a "purely perceptual" way would differ in their respective (response-dependent) aesthetic qualities when *experienced* in completely different ways. Stecker also endorses a broader view and defines aesthetic experience as the experience of "attending in a discriminating manner to forms, qualities or meaningful features of things, attending to these for their own sake or for the sake of a payoff intrinsic to this very experience" (Stecker 2005: 52-53). On the other hand, artworks are valued as objects of interpretation and appreciation according to their multiple and not only nor necessarily aesthetic aims. So, in conclusion, according to Stecker, aesthetic value is the value of such experiences and of those objects that have the capacity to provide them. But as we shouldn't trivialize the notion of the artistic by including any sort of value artworks can bear, and for that Stecker offers a test, we should not trivialize either the notion of the aesthetic by including any sort of artistic value. Here, by focusing on a general definition of aesthetic value, instead of developing category-dependent theories of it, Stecker's account should help too, making the right distinctions between different artistic values.

3. The Broad View of Aesthetic Experience

Like Stecker's, many other current views of aesthetic experience distinguish a mere perceptual from a broader and more adequate account of aesthetic value which basically tells us that aesthetic properties are not appreciated in the natural response to the physical features of objects but instead, aesthetic value lies in the experience of the objects, which can be radically altered by the context and the information of the observer. Besides, in the experience, thoughts and emotions are implied along with sensations, covering not only immediately perceptible properties but also relational, representational, symbolic and emotional properties as they are realized in the item.

Stecker says that aesthetic experience derives from attending to forms, qualities and meanings of things, but what makes the experience *aesthetic* is the special kind of engagement with the object required in which the object is valued for its own sake. He makes clear that it is not a mere question of content, but a matter of qualifying the sort of response aesthetic qualities depend on, which, for Stecker, involves the interest we take, the appreciation we feel, or the value we find in them.⁹ When noticing aesthetic

⁹ *Ivi*: 58. For a content-oriented definition of aesthetic experience see Carroll 2006: 69-97.

features, one typically has an appreciative response, different from other cases of response-dependent properties, such as colour properties, or the properties we can identify in a poem, when knowledge, say, to pass an exam, is the only pleasure we get from the experience. If we go on recognizing that the metaphors are witty or the images poignant, we'll be then noticing aesthetic properties (Stecker 2005: 59-60). In this vein, Alan Goldman has insisted in not describing aesthetic experience simply as intrinsically valuable experience but in focusing on that special kind of engagement with the appearance or the form of the object required for being so valued, which would involve perceptive and cognitive activity as well as affection, operating in tandem and informing one another (Goldman 2006: 334). Such experience can also be valued for its instrumental benefits, which can be many, and many other experiences can be valued for their own sake, but aesthetic appreciation engages simultaneously our perception, imagination, thought, and feeling; such an engagement of our mental faculties with the form of the object will be the unique mark of aesthetic experience. As a result, Goldman claims that the virtual world of the work becomes the object of our attention. Having in mind great artworks as paradigmatic, he also emphasizes that we loose ourselves absorbed by that world leading to an intense and meaningful experience as a result. Stecker has objected that conclusion and he is right when arguing that not all aesthetic experiences (in nature and everyday life but also in art) are of such intensity and totality. However, others more interested in identifying and understanding the nature of the aesthetic away from the art-centred tradition, have also described aesthetic experience fundamentally, and whatever its object might be, as the common engagement of our mental faculties.¹⁰ Hence, without going as far as Goldman's selfless absorption, we can establish that a satisfactory condition for a response to be aesthetic is that it be "directed to experience properties of an item in perception, thought and imagination, understood in an all-embracing sense." (Budd 2005: 14).

On the other hand, this doesn't mean that aesthetic experiences are always pleasurable or positive, and even when we find them valuable, some other kinds of enjoyment or satisfaction rather than pleasure are often involved.¹¹ It is the case of many artworks that shock, disturb or disgust us, but they still do us some good and hold aesthetic value because we value the experience of engaging with them in the way just

¹⁰ Jean-Marie Schaeffer defines aesthetic experience as a feedback relation between a cognitive and an affective component in such a way that the first is valued according to the (in)satisfaction it causes. Schaeffer 2005: 35. On the other hand, when in fact Goldman confesses to have in mind the aesthetic experience of art as paradigmatic for his account, he also leaves open the possibility of holding the most prominent features of the conception of aesthetic experience, as he has described them, in the expansion of the notion to other areas, where diverse contents or objects would differentiate experience in art from all other kinds. Goldman 2013: 332. Certainly though, the idea of selfless absorption seems here to be part of the problem for him to follow this path.

¹¹ Stecker 2005: 56-58. See also Levinson 1996: 23, and Goldman 2004: 102.

described. We can get satisfaction from the experience of perceptually repellent works of art that assault our senses, shock us affectively, and challenge our intellects, where pleasant qualities are not always a guarantee of aesthetic value (Goldman 2006: 337). Thus, there is no single affective tone and no single emotion always present in aesthetic evaluation. The notion of aesthetic experience is certainly impoverished not only by thinking of it in purely sensory terms, but also by equating the payoff of valuable aesthetic experience with pleasure and pleasant sensations usually derived from the passive contemplation of beauty as the only aesthetic property.

Finally, being engaged with artworks' virtual world will certainly carry out certain detachment. Aesthetic value as derived from engagement with objects for their own sake is traditionally labelled 'disinterested'. For Kant, this kind of pleasure was the key for claiming the universality of aesthetic judgment, and especially for the autonomy of aesthetic experience. Since then, the concept of 'disinterest' has assumed formalist connotations which, when defining art, reduces the value of art itself isolating aesthetic experience from any reference to the world at large and from any interest in practical issues. However, that sort of isolation is not necessarily connected to the basic idea of aesthetic value as the value afforded by the attention intentionally directed at an object as represented with certain properties: the aesthetic object. And particularly dealing with artworks, focusing on the object disengaged from purely personal concerns doesn't mean excluding the circumstances of the viewer. Quite the opposite, situating a work in its "specific creative context" is required since proper aesthetic experience of art is informed.¹² In any case, the variety of aesthetic properties is related to what an artwork represents, expresses or suggests. The 'form' of the work in which aesthetic attention focuses can be described in a very wide sense including attention to representational properties, historical context, referential or symbolic content along with sensuous, formal and expressive properties. Under this broader view, 'form' means any way a work embodies or presents its content. The moral, cognitive, religious, and so on content of the work is more of the nature of what is embodied. But aesthetic experience is concerned with how artworks' meanings are embodied and, so aesthetic value is concerned with the *special* relation between form and content. As Goldman has put it, the distinction between form and content would not be a distinction found in the experience of artworks, but emerging only later in analysis.¹³ The point is that under this broad view of aesthetic experience it wouldn't be consistent to exclude from aesthetic value those other artistic values.

According to the broad view, the acquisition of truths, moral insights or political lessons, even the historical importance, are an integral and inseparable aspect of our full experience of or engagement with the works. Conveyed in particular embodiments, any

¹² See Levinson 1996: 16-17.

¹³ The question is addressed in Goldman 2013: 330.

meaning brought to or gained from an artwork seems to be part of their aesthetic value and would not be separable from the other acknowledged aspects of the appreciative experience of artworks as it occurs. As a result, we'll respond to the interaction of the various properties of the object also inseparable in experience from our fresh emotional reactions to them. In a broad conception of aesthetic experience, there seems to be a risk of other values being absorbed into aesthetic value. At this point, "the question is whether there is any justification or point to separating out cognitive and moral engagement and insight from aesthetic experience so as to leave a residue of artistic value beyond the aesthetic" (Goldman 2013: 330).

4. Valuing Art

Stecker holds a broad view of aesthetic experience. However, according to him, even when aesthetic experience derives from attending to forms, qualities and meanings of artworks, aesthetic value is not only distinct from other artistic values, but also there can be art with no aesthetic value at all. He appealed to anti-aesthetic or anti-art movements, as works that were originally made to challenge a variety of assumptions about art, and later to redirect the focus of art from aesthetic matters to ideas of various kinds. But some of those assumptions had to do with a purely non-cognitive perceptual view of the aesthetic confined also to beauty or such other of the aesthetic qualities that evoke pleasure, like Danto also recognized after his "aesthetic turn". In fact, Stecker sees too that "it would be oversimplistic to claim that no works made within these movements have aesthetic value," (Stecker 2012: 355) but nonetheless in many it would be very modest or even completely absent. He asks us to consider, for example, Sherri Levine's photographs of Walker Evans's photographs. Stecker argues that, in a way, they do have aesthetic value since they inherit the aesthetic value of the object photographed. But that can hardly explain their value as art, which their cognitive value (based on the fact that they have an unexpected subject matter, namely, other photographs) does primarily explain. Their realization refocuses our attention on properties, including aesthetic properties, but also social and art historical ones, that their subjects have as photographs (Stecker 2005: 233-234). Stecker affirms that Levine's photographs also have art-historical value in marking an important stage in the development of appropriated art, which also contributes to its value as art. Stecker doesn't think, although he confesses too not being sure about it, that the value of Levine's work lies in a new set of aesthetic properties but in those other non-aesthetic artistic values.

However, the idea of non-aesthetic art and art where aesthetic value is completely absent can be challenged, and also whether Levine's photographs and Walker Evans's photographs share the same aesthetic value, since their aesthetic properties would be different indeed. Going back to McFee's view, artworks bear meaning in a distinctive (aesthetic)artistic fashion. Thus, artistic meaning is conveyed in a (aesthetic)form. The

meaning is the content or aboutness of the work as it is particularly embodied. Artistic meanings are then of particular works, with particular embodiments. The two sets of photographs are different works and their meanings are also different. One must grasp them in the direct encounter or experience from their respective embodiments, which are indiscernible *only* from a mere perceptual point of view not from an informed artistic point of view. The experience, per se aesthetic not artistic, would engage us on different levels, both cognitive and affective. On a broad view, aesthetics and meaning seem inseparable since form is the vehicle through which we reach content in the experience of the work. So, the aesthetic value of Levine's photos won't be the same as Evans' since both direct our attention differently to make their respective points. Because we respond to them differently, Stecker would be right in claiming the more modest aesthetic value of the former. But, in any case, that will depend on the capability of Levine's work, as content embodied in a form, to engage us, for instance, shedding light on some aspects of our perception, opening up a set of imaginative associations, arousing thought. Every artwork, even the more austere ones, can be then evaluated from an aesthetic point of view, referred to the specific ways in which their meanings are conveyed.¹⁴ Nevertheless, this is not saying that all artworks provide rich aesthetic experiences, neither that aesthetic value exhausts artistic value.

In spite of McFee's treatment of aesthetic qualities in art just as the "artistic" ones, he uses a distinction that explains the existence of non-aesthetic artistic value. When meaning "meaning", McFee wants to distinguish it from "significance". Quoting Hirsch and Levinson, he explains that meaning "is what the signs represent", their content, while significance "names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable." (Mc Fee 2011: 31). Artistic value, functional as Stecker conceives it, is a matter of significance. However, artistic value doesn't include any impact of the work on the audience or the society. It is derived from an understanding of the works for works *meaning*. Once we encounter artworks correctly (as objects of interpretation and appreciation framed in artistic practices) experiencing their forms, qualities and meanings, we reap art's benefits. They come from the aesthetic experience itself, valuable for its own sake, but other things too can be taken away from that experience, "controlled by the meaning of the work".¹⁵ Stecker is right when claiming that there can be works with very modest aesthetic value, and consequently, other values are to blame for their artistic value. Historical importance, cognitive and moral value constitute aesthetic value when mobilized in the aesthetic experience of an artwork but they are per se non-aesthetic values, and still properly artistic when expressing some other way in which we engage with art. There

¹⁴ Cf. Costello's analysis of Art & Language's *Index 01* (1972) in Costello 2008: 261-262.

¹⁵ As R. A. Sharpe puts it: "Here is a major difference between those responses to a work of art which are peculiar to me or even to my culture and those which are controlled by the meaning of the work, in so far as that is recoverable", quoted by Ivi: 135.

are those other ways indeed. It is possible that one enjoys finding important connections between artworks, locating them in a historical narrative, and assessing the historical importance of certain works paving the way to new movements without that being part of an aesthetic experience. Or we can value a work for communicating certain didactic or political messages even when they haven't been developed in any interesting way in our aesthetic engagement with the object. Art has and has had multiple aims and functions hence, when we recognize certain purposes in our responses to the artwork's meaning, we concede to them significance for the work's artistic value. Consequently, since critical scrutiny must concern the artwork itself, other perspectives than aesthetic evaluation can legitimately take part in it.

Those who defend aesthetic value as the value of art *qua* art often claim that aesthetic function is the proper function of artworks, sometimes it is also claimed that it is unique to art. But I have argued that this is not so since we experience aesthetically other objects and not only artworks, and we also engage with artworks in other non-aesthetic ways. However, being always present, it seems to me that aesthetic function plays a special role in our encounter with art. This is also because "aesthetics may itself explain why we have art in the first place", as Danto acknowledged.¹⁶ Aesthetic value doesn't exhaust artistic value. But in the aesthetic experience of artworks our sensuous, cognitive, and affective faculties are simultaneously addressed, and often challenged. This way in which our thoughts connect with feelings helps to explain mainly what after all makes art so significant for human life, even for those more reluctant to accept that the aesthetic is essential to art.

WORKS CITED

- BUDD, Malcom. 2005. *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature. Essays on the Aesthetics of Nature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- CARRASCO-BARRANCO, Matilde. 2013. "De la Estética de la Forma a la Éstética del Significado. Sobre el Giro Estético de A. Danto." *Revista de Filosofía* 38-1: 79-97.
- CARROLL, Noël. 2006 "Aesthetic Experience: A Question of Content." In Matthew Kieran, ed. *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- COSTELLO, Diarmuid. 2007. "Kant after Lewitt: Towards an Aesthetics of Conceptual Art." In Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens, eds. *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, 92-115. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2008. "Kant and Danto, Together at Last?" In Kathleen Stock, and Katherine Thomson-Jones, eds. *New Waves in Aesthetics*, 244-266. Houndmills-Basingstoke-Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁶ " ... We have it in order that our feelings be enlisted toward what art is about". Danto 2003: 59. Being a confessed Hegelian, Danto didn't think that art had ever been superseded by philosophy, especially in dealing with the large human issues. He believed that we still need thoughts presented to human sensibility in art, probably because of the way we are (Danto 2003: 137).

- DANTO, Arthur C. 1981. *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: a Philosophy of Art*. Cambridge (MA)-London: Harvard University Press.
- 2003. *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art*. Chicago and LaSalle: Open Court.
- 2007. “Embodied Meanings, Isotypes, and Aesthetical Ideas.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65-1: 121-129.
- GILMORE, Jonathan. 2005. “Internal Beauty.” *Inquire* 48-2: 145-154.
- GOLDMAN, Alan. H. 2004. “Evaluating Art.” In Peter Kivy, ed. *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*, 93-108. Malden (MA).: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- 2006. “The Experiential Account of Aesthetic Value.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64-3: 333-342.
- 2013. “The Broad View of Aesthetic Experience.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71-4: 323-333.
- LEVINSON, Jerrod. 1996. *The Pleasures of Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press.
- MCFEE, Graham. 2011. *Artistic Judgement. A Framework for Philosophical Aesthetics*. London: Springer.
- MCIVER LOPES, Dominic. 2011. “The Myth of (Non-Aesthetic) Artistic Value.” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 61-244: 518-536.
- PÉREZ-CARREÑO, Francisca. 2005. “Símbolo Encarnado: del cuerpo al efecto.” In Ead., ed. *Estética después del fin del arte. Ensayos sobre Arthur Danto*, 209-232. Madrid: Antonio Machado.
- SCHAEFFER, Jean-Marie. 2005. *Adiós a la Estética*. Madrid: Antonio Machado.
- SEEL, Martin. 1998. “Art as Appearance: Two Comments on Arthur C. Danto’s *After the end of Art*.” *History and Theory* 37-4: 102-114.
- STECKER, Robert. 2005. *Aesthetics and The Philosophy of Art. An Introduction*. Lanham (MD): Rowman and Littlefield.
- 2012. “Artistic value defended.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70-4: 355-362.
- 2013. “Aesthetic Autonomy and Artistic Heteronomy.” In Owen Hulatt, ed. *Aesthetics and artistic autonomy*, 31-50. London and New York: Bloomsbury.
- WALTON, Kendall L. 1970. “Categories of Art.” *Philosophical Review* 79-3: 334-367.