

though the suggestion that these are less intense and more ephemeral than emotional reactions to real-world events is patently false in some cases. My worry is that the metaphor of “distance” is asked to carry the explanatory heft in the Distancing-Embracing model. *Given* that we *do* respond to what we know are not here-and-now situations, including to what we know to be fictions, it is not obvious that we are “distanced” from what we feel in a way that could solve the paradox of tragedy.

Beginning in the 1960s, philosophers of art (Cohen 1965; Dickie 1964) argued strongly against the idea that aesthetic experience involves a psychologically distinctive attitude of distancing. What was needed, George Dickie argued, was attention of the regular kind, plus knowledge of the conventions, history, and practices of the institutions within which art is made, presented, and appreciated. Despite some pushback (for example, see Hanfling 2000; Pandit 1976; Price 1977), these arguments succeeded in undermining the idea that aesthetic experience depended on an act of psychological distancing. Philosophers of art are not inclined these days to talk of psychological distance, except perhaps as a weak metaphor that could not perform the heavy lifting that the authors of the Distancing-Embracing model require of it.

You are not alone – Social sharing as a necessary addition to the Embracing factor

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Abstract: I argue that the Embracing factor cannot be adequately conceptualized without taking into account the regulatory power of the social sharing of emotions. Humans tend to share their negative emotions with close others, and they benefit from it. I outline how this mechanism works in art reception by regulating and transforming negative emotions into positive experiences.

First, I share with Menninghaus et al. and all *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* readers the pleasure I experienced in reading this elegant and thought-provoking target article. In this comment, I argue that the very function of the Embracing factor, which “positively integrates, assimilates, or adopts the powers of negative emotions in the service of making art reception more emotional, more intense, more interesting, and, in the end, more rewarding” (sect. 1, point B, para. 1), requires an additional sixth processing component termed the *social sharing of negative emotions*. This argument is based on theories that emphasize the social function of emotions (Fischer & Manstead 2008; Keltner & Haidt 1999; Rimé 2007). In a nutshell, they argue that, as humans are social beings, emotions are essentially interpersonal; they signal inner states and action tendencies to other individuals. The act of sharing emotions with others is motivated by, for example, venting, seeking support, finding understanding, and bonding (see Rimé 2009). In turn, this leads to affiliation, enhances group cohesion, and ultimately serves the function of survival. Consequently, social sharing is a universal and often employed act of emotion regulation that is often met with subjective success. It is important to note that the social sharing of negative emotions in real life does not necessarily lead to recovery in the sense that the negative emotion is immediately and completely eliminated (Rimé 2007; 2009). However, this finding does not invalidate my argument of the importance of conceptualizing social sharing in the context of the enjoyment of negative emotions in art reception because (a) there should be several – quantitative and qualitative – differences among the emotions elicited by the arts and in real life, and (b) Menninghaus et al.’s

model is “not a model of conversion, if conversion means a full-blown transformation of negative into positive affect” (sect. 4.6).

How does social sharing work in the process of positively integrating negative emotions into a rewarding perception of art? Please consider how often you attend places where you experience emotions elicited by the arts such as theaters, museums, cinemas, concerts, and readings, along with significant others (reading a book alone is certainly an exception to this rule). Please then remember how often and intensely you share your emotions with your companion immediately after the cultural event by talking about the emotions that this event elicited in you (not to mention the not so well-educated individuals who – to our displeasure – talk during the event). It is important that there are several additional nonverbal ways to share emotions in the form of crying together, consoling somebody, touching each other, exchanging glances, and so forth, that can also unfold during the event. Social sharing leads to affiliation, bonding, and relief, which are rewarding and definitely positive. As such, social sharing is at the core of transforming negative emotions into the enjoyment and pleasure of art reception.

It is interesting to note that this argument is in principle laid out in Menninghaus et al.’s article when they elaborate on empathy, compassion, and being moved in the case of sadness (sect. 4.2.1). These thoughts simply need to be transferred from an intrapersonal perspective to an interpersonal one: Person 1’s sadness, which can be observed and is actively shared, leads to the empathic and compassionate actions of person 2 (and often vice versa), which, in turn, leads to positive feelings on both sides. (Anecdotal evidence says that at least for some individuals, the ultimate motivation to attend operas and watch movies is that it is fantastic to weep bitterly with your best friend.)

The same logic can in principle be applied to the benefits of social sharing in the cases of horror and disgust in art reception. In these cases, one can also think of an additional “social” component of impression management: To show significant others that you are not at all scared or that you enjoy being scared can have important interpersonal functions in terms of bonding and/or power, and subsequently, these experiences lead to pleasure (usually only for the actor in the case of power/dominance).

These assumptions can be put to empirical tests by assessing negative and positive emotions and indicators of the aesthetic enjoyment of art with or without other individuals. Specifically, one can systematically vary (a) the type of art (e.g., movie, play, painting), (b) the dominant negative emotion that it induces (sadness, fear/horror, disgust), and (c) the presence or absence of other people. Within the condition “presence,” one can further differentiate among (i) the presence of a (any) person versus the presence of a significant other, and (ii) sharing emotions verbally and/or non-verbally versus not sharing versus suppressing.

Finally, I add that even when engaging in art reception alone, we can anticipate, remember, or imagine the act of sharing our inner feelings with close others, a process that should help regulate these feelings in a manner that is similar to the process outlined above. Taken together, as humans are social beings and emotions have important social functions, the social sharing of negative emotions is the key to regulating and transforming them into positive ones, also and especially in art reception.

Boredom in art

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Abstract: In the light of recent findings on the nature of boredom, I argue that boredom is a potentially useful emotion in art reception and show how the Distancing-Embracing model can be applied to boredom.

Boredom is conspicuously absent from Menninghaus et al.'s discussion. This is surprising. First, as a transitory affective state, boredom is an all-too-common experience. It affects individuals of all ages, genders, and cultures, and it does so in a wide range of situations (Acee et al. 2010; Fisher 1993; Game 2007; Grubb 1975; Iso-Ahola & Weissinger 1987; Ng et al. 2015; Sundberg et al. 1991; Weinstein et al. 1995). Second, boredom is the topic of an active interdisciplinary research program. Its antecedents, effects, experiential profile, and neurophysiological correlates are all currently explored (Danckert & Merrifield 2016; Eastwood et al. 2012; Fahlman et al. 2013), and there is strong evidence in support of the claim that boredom is an emotion in its own right (Van Tilburg & Igou 2012). Third, a great deal of art is boring (Moller 2014). The cello sections of *Moby Dick* are boring. Satie's *Vexations*, if played in its entirety, is boring. Wagner's *Ring Cycle* is boring. And so is Warhol's *Empire*, William Basinski's *The Disintegration Loops*, much of slow cinema, and many second movements of symphonies.

Although the authors do not discuss boredom, their remarks suggest that the Distancing-Embracing model does not apply to boredom. We are told that the compositional interplays of positive and negative emotions can lead to enjoyment *because* they render the experience of boredom less likely to occur. If the reduction or elimination of the experience of boredom is a desideratum of the Distancing-Embracing model, then boredom would seem to be a negative emotion that is incapable of enhancing aesthetic experience.

But if the Distancing-Embracing model does not apply to boredom, then the model fails to account for an experience that much of art elicits in audiences. Such a conclusion need not perturb the authors. The authors could respond that their model is not intended to apply to all negative affective experiences that arise within art, only to those that give rise to enjoyment. Assuming that boredom never leads to enjoyment, boredom falls outside of the scope of their model.

Although such a response is dialectically available, it might not be desirable. First, the authors would need to argue that the experience of boredom never gives rise to enjoyment. Second, the Distancing-Embracing model would offer an incomplete picture of our experience of negative emotions in art—an explanation of the role of boredom would still be needed. For those two reasons, I suggest a way of incorporating boredom into the authors' model. I argue that recent findings on the nature of boredom allow us to think of boredom as a potentially useful emotion in art reception, one that could promote an intense and focused aesthetic experience.

What is boredom? By "boredom" I mean the state of boredom (Elpidorou 2017b) and not the personality trait of boredom—the latter is conceptualized as the frequent experience of boredom in a wide range of situations, is measured using self-report scales (Farmer & Sundberg 1986), and has been shown to be correlated with a number of harms (Elpidorou 2017a; Vodanovich 2003; Vodanovich & Watt 2015). As a state, boredom is a concrete and short-lived affective experience that is characterized by feelings of dissatisfaction (Csikszentmihalyi 1975; Fahlman et al. 2013; Greenson 1953; Hartocollis 1972), attentional difficulties (Eastwood et al. 2012), and the perception of meaninglessness (Van Tilburg & Igou 2012). In a state of boredom, one is disengaged with one's situation (Fahlman et al. 2013) and one wishes to do something else (Bench & Lench 2013; Elpidorou 2017b; 2017c).

Recent work on boredom suggests that boredom is an emotion with a self-regulatory function. Because of its affective, cognitive, and volitional character, boredom can motivate the pursuit of a new goal when the current goal ceases to be attractive, meaningful, or satisfactory (Bench & Lench 2013; Elpidorou 2014; 2015; 2017b; 2017c; Pekrun et al. 2010; Van Tilburg & Igou 2011, 2012). Specifically, Van Tilburg and Igou (2011; 2012) have argued that boredom not only makes one's activities seem meaningless, but also motivates one to re-establish a sense of meaningfulness. Indeed, boredom is capable of triggering meaning re-establishment strategies that affect an individual's behavior and cognition (Barbalet 1999). Furthermore, it has been shown that boredom can elicit nostalgia (Van Tilburg et al. 2013). Nostalgia can promote meaningfulness and is

itself a bittersweet (although primarily positive) affective state (Routledge et al. 2012; Sedikides et al. 2008; Wildschut et al. 2006).

These two features of boredom—its capacity to promote meaning re-establishment strategies and its relationship to nostalgia—render boredom an emotion that is consistent with the Embracing factor of the authors' proposed model. First, boredom can motivate us to find or discover meaning in an artwork that previously failed to capture our attention. If we have no other option but to engage with the artwork, we will have to alleviate boredom by seeking alternative ways to interact with the artwork. Many contemporary works in theater, film, and music do precisely that: by not permitting easy solutions to boredom, they force us to return to the artwork and to try to uncover meaning. Boredom can thus produce a multilayered and cognitively demanding engagement with the work of art. What is more, by compelling us to discover meaning, boredom could lead to the favorable retroactive appraisal of the artwork (Oliver & Woolley 2010).

Second, and somewhat more speculatively, just like other negative emotions (e.g., sadness and fear), boredom may also give rise to a concomitant feeling of a mixed affective nature that can reconcile the presence of boredom with our hedonic expectations of art reception. In the case of boredom, nostalgia could be the mediator emotion that transforms our experience and leads us to judge that our engagement with a boring work of art is not bereft of enjoyment.

The above considerations constitute only the beginning of an account of the role of boredom within art. Still, they underscore boredom's potential value in art and show how the Distancing-Embracing model can be applied to the case of boredom.

Individual differences in embracing negatively valenced art: The roles of openness and sensation seeking

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Abstract: We elaborate on the role of individual differences in the processing mechanisms outlined by the Distancing-Embracing model. The role of openness is apparent in appreciating meaning-making art that elicits interest, feeling moved, and mixed emotions. The influence of sensation seeking is likely to manifest in thrill-chasing art that draws on the arousing interplay of positive and negative emotions.

The Distance-Embracing (D-E) model of the enjoyment of negative emotions in art reception lays out a framework for understanding the paradoxical exposure to and enjoyment of negatively valenced artworks. But clearly, not everyone enjoys disturbing or unpleasant art. Although some people seek or relish it, others go to great lengths to protest or decry its existence and public display. While the authors acknowledge the existence of individual differences, the D-E model itself does not elaborate on the exact nature of such differences or how these differences should be understood in relation to known dimensions of personality. Yet, a better understanding of how people differ in their engagement with negatively valenced art is crucial for insight into the factors that lead to such engagement. In this commentary, we elaborate on the role of individual differences, focusing on the role of two traits—openness to experience and sensation seeking.

Both openness and sensation seeking are traits that describe approach tendencies, but toward partly different situations. Openness reflects cognitive exploration (DeYoung 2014) and is related to consumption of visual art, literary works of fiction, and classical