

## Aesthetic Acquaintance

Angelina Jolie is hot (or Brad Pitt if you prefer). Maybe you are one of the lucky ones with first-hand experience of this, but more likely you have it by word of mouth, or, more likely still, you have seen images of Jolie or Pitt. Hotness seems to be represented in (1) face-to-face experiences, (2) talk, and (3) images. Tradition stresses a contrast between (1) and (2). Thus Richard Wollheim enunciates what has come to be called the acquaintance principle: aesthetic judgements “must be based on first-hand experience of their objects.”<sup>1</sup> Alan Tormey echoes the principle, writing that “we require critical judgements to be rooted in ‘eye-witness’ encounters.”<sup>2</sup> Both philosophers immediately follow up their statements of the acquaintance principle by remarking on what they take to be one of its consequences. Wollheim adds that aesthetic judgements are not “transmissible from one person to another” and Tormey adds that “the epistemically indirect avenues of evidence, inference, and authority that are permissible elsewhere are anathema here.” Thus the acquaintance principle is traditionally interpreted as an explanation of the weakness of testimony on such matters as hotness. However, this interpretation of the acquaintance principle cannot be right if we take (3) seriously. To shed light on a contrast between (1) and (3) on one hand and (2) on the other hand, we need a new interpretation of the acquaintance principle, which unpacks the requirement that aesthetic judgement be “based on first-hand experience.” As it happens, the new interpretation also motivates a distinction between aesthetic judgement and a broader phenomenon which we can call aesthetic belief.

1. Although the acquaintance principle is often described as a truism, it is hardly transparent what is meant by “first-hand experience.” One way to remedy this problem is to interpret the acquaintance principle as meant to explain some fact or facts about aesthetic judgements or the role they play in criticism. As already noted, tradition interprets the acquaintance principle as offering to explain the weakness of aesthetic testimony.<sup>3</sup> On this interpretation, Wollheim’s claim that aesthetic judgement is not transmissible from person-to-person collapses into Tormey’s claim that aesthetic judgement does not travel the epistemically indirect avenue of authority. So, having first understood the claim that aesthetic testimony is weak, we can then interpret the acquaintance principle as explaining the weakness of aesthetic testimony.

For sake of simplicity, define testimony as communication from one person to another which consists in the testifier asserting something she believes.<sup>4</sup> A testifier's communicating an empirical belief (like the Governor left Sacramento this morning, or the butter is on the middle shelf) normally entitles her audience to that belief. Indeed, without testimony, our entitlement to many empirical beliefs would be severely undercut. Most of us have title to believe, through testimony, that Socrates was Athenian, that human chromosomes are made up of DNA, and that brown is dark orange.<sup>5</sup>

Aesthetic testimony is a communication from one person to another which consists in the testifier asserting an aesthetic judgement. For working purposes, define aesthetic judgement broadly, as an attribution of evaluative or descriptive aesthetic properties. Our testifier tells her audience that Brad Pitt is hot, she describes a song as haunting, she calls a drawing beautiful, or she reviews a movie as discombobulated. The question is whether we accept aesthetic testimony and whether we are entitled to aesthetic judgements on the basis of aesthetic testimony.

The default position comprises three claims, all found in Kant.<sup>6</sup> The first is psychological: as a matter of fact, we resist accepting aesthetic judgements solely on the basis of testimony. When I tell you that *Black Narcissus* is deep, you are unlikely to take on board my judgement. The reason is not that you have evidence to the contrary. Rather — and this is the second Kantian claim — aesthetic testimony simply fails to afford much or any title to aesthetic judgement.<sup>7</sup> This epistemic claim can explain the first psychological claim: we do not accept aesthetic testimony because we are not entitled to do so. Moreover, the second Kantian claim is not merely a special application of global skepticism about testimony, for Kantians hold that aesthetic testimony is an exception to testimony's general efficacy.

One way of explaining the second claim is blocked by a third Kantian claim, which points to an asymmetry: we are fully entitled to some aesthetic judgements, just not via testimony. Here is one example of how this rules out some explanations of the second Kantian claim.<sup>8</sup> According to a primitive aesthetic expressivism, aesthetic judgements are mere expressions or excitations of feeling.<sup>9</sup> As a result, they do not express propositions and so there is no question of our having any title to believe them. This is why testimony affords no title to aesthetic judgement. However, this explanation predicts that testimony affords whatsoever no title to aesthetic judgement, whereas the second Kantian claim is that testimony affords *little or no* title to aesthetic judgement. More seriously, the explanation is too broad. It predicts that we have no epistemic title to *any* aesthetic judgement, whereas the third Kantian claim is that there is an asymmetry between our title to aesthetic judgements that are and are not based on testimony.

Obviously, the principle that aesthetic judgement is "based on first-hand experience" does not explain right off the bat why aesthetic testimony affords little or no title to aesthetic judgement. After all, perceptual belief is based on first-hand experience and yet perceptual testimony affords title to perceptual belief.

Based on first-hand experience of my cat's coloration, I believe that she is brown. Now that I have testified that she is brown, you are entitled to believe that she is brown. Evidently, we cannot take aesthetic judgement to be "based on first-hand experience" in just the way that perceptual belief is based on first-hand experience. The challenge is to give an account of the special way in which aesthetic judgement is "based on first-hand experience."<sup>10</sup>

2. We might come to understand what it is for aesthetic judgement to be "based on first-hand experience" by seeing how that explains the second Kantian claim — but only if the claim is true. It makes no sense to read the acquaintance principle as explaining the second Kantian claim unless aesthetic testimony really is weak. Moreover, the second Kantian claim is true if it best explains the psychological claim that we generally do not accept aesthetic testimony; but if we go on to ask if the psychological claim is true, we find little but inconsistent or complex practice at best and clashing intuitions at worst.

For Kant, a judge of "a building, a view, or a poem... does not allow approval to be internally imposed upon himself by a hundred voices who all praise it highly."<sup>11</sup> My own intuitions contradict Kant's. It seems to me that I make many aesthetic decisions based on what I hear from others: I decide what movies to see, what music to listen to, and what exhibitions to visit by picking up testimony about the aesthetic qualities of movies, music, and paintings.

Those whose intuitions run against mine will seek to explain away my intuitions. I tell you that the Nakasen-do is beautiful and so you visit it when you go to Japan. According to one hypothesis, you have taken on the judgement that the Nakasen-do is beautiful on the basis of my say-so. However, there is another hypothesis. You visit it to see for yourself whether it is beautiful. What you have taken on is the subjunctive belief that you would judge it beautiful if you saw it, and this is not an aesthetic judgement but rather a belief about an aesthetic judgement.<sup>12</sup> So my testimony did not lead you to accept an aesthetic judgement.

More is needed to make a go of this hypothesis. I tell you that the ball in the urn is black and then you lay a bet that wins only if the ball is black. Suppose the idea is to explain away your apparent acceptance of my testimony by ascribing to you the belief that you would believe the ball is black if you saw it for yourself. Granted, your having this subjunctive belief does not imply that you believe that the ball is black, but it is grounds for you to believe that the ball is black. And if you have grounds to believe that the ball is black (and insufficient grounds to believe otherwise), then why not take your apparent acceptance of my testimony at face value? Just so, does the subjunctive belief that you would judge that the Nakasen-do is beautiful if you saw it give you grounds to judge that it is beautiful?

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If it does, then it makes sense to take your acceptance of my testimony at face value. Kantians who say otherwise must explain why without already having assumed the truth of the second Kantian claim.

To be fair, those who share my intuitions favoring the acceptance of aesthetic testimony should have a chance to explain away the Kantian intuitions. Here is one idea. Folk theories of art, beauty, and the aesthetic are shot through with relativism and subjectivism.<sup>13</sup> We mindlessly mouth that beauty is in the eye of the beholder or, more highfalutinly, that *de gustibus non est disputandum*. Perhaps we take it as a corollary of these doctrines that we do not accept aesthetic testimony.

One suspects that this clash of intuitions results from inconsistent or complex practices of criticism. Perhaps we refuse aesthetic testimony in some critical contexts and accept it in others.<sup>14</sup> A clash of intuitions results if those with Kantian intuitions generalize from the former and those with solidly contra-Kantian intuitions generalize from the latter. If this hypothesis is correct, then the psychological claim needs a more nuanced formulation, and that will be an opportunity to better understand our critical practices. Some suggestions along these lines conclude this paper.

3. Return for now to the acquaintance principle. This principle states that an aesthetic judgement must be “based on first-hand experience.” Tradition reads the principle as intended to explain the epistemic weakness of aesthetic testimony. Thus Wollheim’s claim that aesthetic judgements are not transmissible from person to person is cashed out as the claim that aesthetic testimony is weak. At the same time, however, classic statements of the acquaintance principle come with a rider. For example, Tormey writes that “reproductions or representations” such as photographs and drawings “may, for critical purposes, be adequate surrogates for the object of critical judgement.”<sup>15</sup> This rider seems to concern transmission rather than testimonial entitlement, and it suggests that we need an alternative to the traditional interpretation of the acquaintance principle as offering to explain the weakness of aesthetic testimony.

The rider is sensible. Images are important vehicles for communicating information, including information about the aesthetic qualities of things, and people routinely make aesthetic judgements on the basis of images of scenes or objects.<sup>16</sup>

In the mass media, photographs and drawings are used to convey the aesthetic qualities of all kinds of consumer goods. We may not trust what we see in advertising images, but not all mass media images are geared to advertising. Consider travel reporting, as distinct from travel advertising. Many people make and then act on aesthetic judgements by looking at images in travel guidebooks and newspaper travel sections. That is the purpose of these images. The same goes for clothing and flower catalogues, architectural drawings, and on-line personals.

Images also play a key role in communicating the aesthetic qualities of art works. At the same time that painting moved out of church and palace into the secular public space of the art museum, it moved onto the printed page, first through

engraving and then through photography and now Google Images and ARTstor. It is hardly going out on a limb to suggest that paintings and sculptures, especially canonical or famous ones, are more often seen depicted than face-to-face. Is it going out on a limb to add that we often judge these works via images of them?

Finally, just as scientific studies of perceptual abilities like face recognition use images of faces as stimulus equivalents of faces, many scientists use images of objects or scenes in order to probe aesthetic responses to those objects or scenes. The technique is routine in studies of landscape preferences (because it is hard to fit a landscape into a lab), and a recent article reviewing eight studies of the validity of the methodology concludes that “scenic quality evaluations based on photographs are similar to ratings made by different observers in the field.”<sup>17</sup> Going a step further, some psychologists isolate the factors responsible for perceptions of facial beauty in the wild by measuring responses to facial beauty in composite images of many different faces.<sup>18</sup>

On traditional interpretations, the acquaintance principle is taken to explain the weakness of aesthetic testimony, assuming that the claim that aesthetic judgements are not transmissible from person to person cashes out as a claim about the weakness of aesthetic testimony. However, this cannot be right if aesthetic judgements can be transmitted from person to person via images. Or rather, this cannot be right unless the use of images to transmit aesthetic judgements from person to person is a form of aesthetic testimony. But images cannot be vehicles for aesthetic testimony.

One might argue that images are not vehicles for aesthetic testimony because testimony involves assertion and images never figure in assertion — except that the second premise of this argument is false. Believing that Josh is taller than Brian, I show you a picture of them, which I sincerely take to be accurate, with the intention of getting you to believe that Josh is taller than Brian — and I take responsibility for my action. In general, images can be used in acts of assertion as vehicles that depict what is asserted.<sup>19</sup>

The better argument is this. Testimony involves “bare” assertion. When I tell you that Josh is taller than Brian and you subsequently accept my testimony, my reasons for my belief may become your reasons, but you do not have direct cognitive access to my reasons because I do not assert them. If I assert my reasons along with my belief that *p*, then your title to believe that *p* derives from your accepting my stated reasons for *p* and not from my bare assertion that *p*. However, images never figure in acts of bare assertion as to the aesthetic qualities of things. I cannot show you a picture of the Nakasen-do that depicts its beauty without also depicting some of the features that seem to make it beautiful (e.g. fig. 1). I cannot even

show you a picture that depicts a simple elegant line without depicting some of the features that seem to make it elegant (e.g. fig. 2). There is no bare depiction of aesthetic features, so there is no bare assertion of aesthetic judgements via depiction.<sup>20</sup> If I show you a photograph of the Nakasen-do and you judge that the highway is beautiful, then you so judge because, as it were, you seem to see what makes it beautiful, not merely because you rely on my say-so.

Not all of the following propositions can be true: (1) the acquaintance principle explains why aesthetic judgements are not transmissible from person to person, (2) aesthetic judgements are not transmissible from person to person in the sense that aesthetic testimony is weak, (3) aesthetic judgements are transmissible from person to person via images, and (4) images cannot be vehicles of aesthetic testimony. The first of these propositions is the name of the game and so is not up for grabs. Compelling arguments support (3) and (4). Only tradition gives us (2). Giving up (2) means we must seek a new way to interpret the acquaintance principle, one that does not rely on considerations of aesthetic testimony. Instead, the acquaintance principle should be interpreted as explaining two facts: aesthetic judgement is not transmissible by words, but it is transmissible by images (or "surrogates" more generally).

4. How is aesthetic judgement "based on first-hand experience" in a special way, given that perceptual belief is also based on first-hand experience? Tradition seeks an answer in the weakness of aesthetic testimony. An alternative strategy seeks an answer in a non-epistemic account of transmission. Suppose that transmission is a content-preserving relation between representations. For example, Philip Pettit writes that "the state one is in when... one sincerely assents to a given aesthetic characterization is not a state to which one can have non-perceptual access" — it is "essentially perceptual."<sup>21</sup> This claim about *access* is considerably stronger than any claim about *entitlement*. When the transmission of an aesthetic judgement is blocked, the result is not merely that the person on the receiving end lacks title to the judgement. The question of entitlement is not even on the table, for the receiver is not in a position to make the judgement at all.

Representational states are transmitted from one person to another only with the help of artifactual representations — sentences and images, for instance. Thus transmission can be analyzed as a relation that obtains between the cognitive state of a transmitter and an artifactual representation just in case full grasp of the artifactual representation requires that the receiver be in a cognitive state with the same content as that of the transmitter. That is,

$R_1$  is transmitted by  $R_2$  only if full grasp of  $R_2$  is a state  $R_3$  whose content includes the content of  $R_1$ .

This is obviously only a partial analysis. For one thing,  $R_2$  transmits  $R_1$  only if  $R_2$  is caused in the right way by  $R_1$ . No matter, for the partial analysis is all we need for an account of what it is for types of states to be transmissible. A type of cognitive state is *transmissible* by a given type of artifactual representation just in case rep-

representations of that type transmit states of that type. By this analysis, many types of cognitive state are transmissible by any type of artifactual representation. A perceptual belief that mondo grass is black is transmissible by my saying "mondo grass is black" because your grasp of this sentence consists in having a thought whose content includes that of the perceptual belief. But I have a choice of media and I can show you a picture of some mondo grass in a gardening catalogue instead. Understood in this way, transmission is non-epistemic: you might believe that mondo grass is black, or imagine it, wish it, or even doubt it.

Perhaps aesthetic judgements are only transmissible by certain types of representations. How so? Remembering my walk along the Nakasen-do, I judge that it is beautiful, I tell you so, and you grasp the thought expressed by my words; but your thought differs in content from my judgement because the content of my judgement is "essentially perceptual" and the content of your thought is not. Since your thought does not have the same content as my judgement, my judgement is not transmitted to you. Yet when I convey what I judge by showing you a photograph of the Nakasen-do, your grasp of the photograph is a state which has the same type of content as my judgement, so aesthetic judgement is transmissible via images.

This explanation of why aesthetic judgements are transmissible from person to person by images and not words depends on a non-epistemic analysis of transmissibility plus a claim to the effect that aesthetic judgements have a special kind of content.

5. What do we make of the suggestion that the content of aesthetic judgements is such as not be transmissible from person to person? It will not do simply to state that their content is "based on first-hand experience" or "essentially perceptual," for neither statement can be taken at face value. Your belief based on my testimony that my cat is brown has the same content as my belief based on my experience that my cat is brown. Ditto your belief based on my pictorial testimony that Josh is taller than Brian. So saying that aesthetic judgements about grace and beauty are like perceptual beliefs about brown and tall fails to explain why only the former and not the latter are transmissible by words.

An extreme view is that aesthetic features are essentially perceptual in the sense that they are ineffable and cannot be conceptualized or named. Michael Tanner writes that aesthetic judgements "must be based on first-hand experience... because one is not capable of understanding the meaning of the terms which designate the properties without the experience."<sup>22</sup> Perhaps a view as extreme as this follows from some conceptions of aesthetic properties. Then again, it may be so extreme as to impeach any conception of aesthetic properties that implies it.<sup>23</sup> More moderate alternatives should be considered.

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Materials for a moderate alternative already lie close to hand. If aesthetic judgements are transmitted by images and not words, then the materials we seek can come from contrasting depiction with description. As we have seen, there is no bare depiction of aesthetic features, whereas there is bare description of aesthetic features. Describing the Nakasen-do as beautiful and a line as graceful represents beauty and gracefulness without representing non-aesthetic features of the highway or the line. By contrast, no image depicts the Nakasen-do as beautiful without depicting non-aesthetic features that seem to make it beautiful, and no image depicts a line as graceful without depicting non-aesthetic features that seem to make it graceful.

The contrast goes further. The line's grace is not depicted *in addition* to depicting non-aesthetic features that seem to make it graceful. There is nothing more to depicting the line as graceful than depicting non-aesthetic features that seem to make it graceful. In other words, the only explanation for an image's failing to depict a line's grace is that it fails to depict some non-aesthetic features that would seem to make it graceful. By contrast, as Frank Sibley showed, no description of a work's non-aesthetic features can imply a description of its aesthetic features.<sup>24</sup> So there is always something more to describing a line's grace than listing the non-aesthetic features that seem to make it graceful. Although "the line fits the equation  $y(x^2 + a^2) = a^3$ " may describe the line in figure 2 as having the very feature responsible for its grace, the sentence fails to describe the line as graceful. Of course, some descriptions represent the line's grace as determined by the non-aesthetic features that make it graceful: "the line is graceful because it fits the equation  $y(x^2 + a^2) = a^3$ ." Again, however, with the image, there is nothing more to depicting the line as graceful than depicting its shape.

Some representations have inseparable content. A representation R represents x as F inseparably from its representing x as B just in case R represents x as F by and only by representing x as B. Figure 1 depicts the Nakasen-do as beautiful by and only by depicting it as having certain non-aesthetic features. In general, aesthetic features are depicted by and only by depicting certain non-aesthetic features. The aesthetic content of depictions is inseparable. By contrast, the aesthetic content of descriptions is not inseparable. Aesthetic features are never described by or only by describing non-aesthetic features. My saying "the Nakasen-do is beautiful because it is twisty" describes the highway as beautiful and also describes a non-aesthetic feature that makes it beautiful, but the beauty is not described by and only by describing its twists and turns.

Sibley briefly touched on a similar point, but mistakenly took it to suggest that inseparable content distinguishes aesthetic judgement from ordinary perceptual experience. He wrote that

if a man were not in a position to see or discern that a line had such and such a curve... he could not conceivably tell that the line was... graceful.... One sees the grace in that particular



curve. And if one cannot clearly see or discern the determinate character or properties which are responsible for the merit-term 'P' being applicable, one cannot discern that 'P' applies."<sup>25</sup>

Sibley then attempted to draw a contrast with seeing the brightness of a highway sign. Suppose that speckled signs look brighter than signs with uniform colors, and a given highway sign looks bright because it is speckled. From a distance, one sees the sign's brightness without seeing its speckling, so seeing the brightness is separable from seeing the speckling that makes for the brightness. Sibley inferred that its inseparable content marks aesthetic judgement apart from ordinary perceptual experience, which has separable content.

Grasping why this inference is too hasty drives home an important point about inseparable content. One sees the sign's brightness without seeing its speckling, but it does not follow that the brightness is represented inseparably. The sign looks uniformly colored from a distance, and experience may well represent the sign's brightness by and only by representing its uniform coloration. Perhaps we do see the sign's brightness by and only by seeing other features that seem to make it bright, albeit not always the features that actually make it bright. It would be too much to expect that when a state represents x as F inseparably from its representing x as B, the representation of x as B is in fact responsible for the representation of x as F. The highway sign's speckling and not its uniform color is responsible for its looking bright, but experience may represent its brightness inseparably from its uniform color.

Inseparable aesthetic content is no different. From a distance, the scene in Georges Seurat's 1884 *Bathers at Asnières* in the National Gallery in London certainly looks calm and dreamy. Moreover, we see this calm dreaminess by and only by seeing the scene's flat and uniform coloration. Of course, this is an illusion. The calm dreaminess is achieved not through flat and uniform coloration but rather through relatively saturated hues laid down in dots which are visible only from up close. Once we move in for a close up, we are surprised to learn what features are actually responsible for our seeing the scene as dreamy. In this respect, aesthetic judgement is in the same boat as ordinary perceptual experience.

Malcolm Budd characterizes what he calls "appreciation" as the perception of an aesthetic feature "as it is realized in the work."<sup>26</sup> True, it is one thing for a state to represent the beauty of the Nakasen-do and it is another for it to represent the beauty as realized by the highway itself. However, more is needed to distinguish an appreciation of the beauty as it is realized in the road from descriptions of the beauty as it is realized in the road. My telling you why the road is beautiful represents the beauty as realized in the road, but it falls short of what you get when

you appreciate the beauty as it is realized in the road. How it falls short is clear if appreciation involves aesthetic judgement, which is “essentially perceptual” in the sense that it has inseparable aesthetic content.

Why do images have inseparable aesthetic content? The answer should touch on the nature of depiction. Recognition theories of depiction hold roughly that a picture depicts something as F only if it is so marked as to trigger (in a normal observer in normal conditions) a recognition ability for Fs — a recognition ability that overlaps an ability to recognize Fs face-to-face.<sup>27</sup> Such a theory is easily slotted into an explanation of why pictures have inseparable aesthetic content. An image P depicts x as having aesthetic feature F inseparably from depicting x as having non-aesthetic feature B because (1) P depicts x as B, (2) x’s being F supervenes on x’s being B, (3) P enables a suitable viewer to recognize x as F in P by depicting x as B, and (4) the ability to recognize x as F in P’s depicting x as B is the same as is engaged in recognizing x as F when seeing x as B. The recognition theory shows up in clauses (3) and (4), where clause (4) makes the inseparable content of the image echo the inseparable content of a corresponding experience. This is simply an example of how one theory of depiction can be harnessed to explain the inseparable aesthetic content of images. No doubt other theories can also do the job.<sup>28</sup> No doubt some cannot.<sup>29</sup>

We are seeking to interpret the acquaintance principle as explaining two facts: aesthetic judgement is not transmissible by words, but it is transmissible by images. If aesthetic judgements have inseparable aesthetic contents, then they are transmissible by images but not words. The hypothesis that aesthetic judgements have inseparable aesthetic contents explains what it is for aesthetic judgement to be “essentially perceptual” or “based on first-hand experience.”

6. According to the working theory adopted at the outset, an aesthetic judgement is an attribution of evaluative or descriptive aesthetic properties. This needs amendment if aesthetic judgements have inseparable aesthetic contents, since not all states attributing aesthetic properties have inseparable aesthetic contents. The statement that “the Nakasen-do is beautiful” represents the beauty of the highway without representing any non-aesthetic features that (seem to) make it beautiful. However, this leaves room to add that aesthetic judgement twins with a cognitive state that represents aesthetic properties separately — call it “aesthetic belief.” An aesthetic belief is a belief that represents aesthetic properties separately.

Suppose I tell you that the Nakasen-do is beautiful. This statement cannot transmit an aesthetic judgement, but must it be an attempt to transmit an aesthetic judgement? After all, what I say does not leave you entirely unmoved. You might act on my words. Perhaps you schedule time on your next trip to Japan to take the train and bus to Tsumago, ready to walk the highway and enjoy it. Or perhaps you take it upon yourself to advise others planning trips to Japan to add the Nakasen-do to their itinerary. Surely this is reason enough to attribute to you the belief that the Nakasen-do is beautiful? What more reason could be required?

Moreover, unless my utterance is capable of converting belief, I have failed to assert anything. To make matters worse, I have not even reported my judgement, since aesthetic judgements cannot be reported in words. Happily, the puzzle is easily solved if I both judge and believe that the Nakasen-do is beautiful. Aesthetic belief is not the same as aesthetic judgement. It represents aesthetic features but its content is not inseparable. So the solution is to say that I report my belief and thereby transmit it to you.

Curiously, a distinction between aesthetic judgement and belief is not entirely new. It is even acknowledged by those who interpret the acquaintance principle as offering to explain the weakness of aesthetic testimony. For example, Tormey mentions in passing that "someone might come to believe that  $q$  by coming to know that someone else has judged that  $q$ , but it does not follow that he thereby judges that  $q$ ."<sup>30</sup> Yet if the point is acknowledged, its implications are not given any thought.

7. Distinguishing between aesthetic judgement and aesthetic belief suggests a second look at aesthetic testimony. Perhaps the distinction is just what is needed to understand clashing intuitions about our acceptance of aesthetic testimony, especially if this clash amplifies a distinction between two dimensions of criticism. Does one dimension of criticism characteristically trade in aesthetic judgement and another in aesthetic belief? If so, a closer look at these two dimensions of criticism will shed further light on aesthetic judgement and belief.

Vindicating Kantian intuitions a fortiori, we cannot convert aesthetic testimony to aesthetic judgement, since it cannot even transmit aesthetic judgement. A version of the first Kantian claim is true: we do not accept aesthetic testimony in the sense that it puts us in a position to make an aesthetic judgement. By the same token, however, we no longer need to call upon the second Kantian claim — that aesthetic testimony affords little or no title to aesthetic judgement — in order to explain why the first Kantian claim is true. So those who wish to maintain the second Kantian claim cannot avail themselves of the argument that it is true because it explains the first Kantian claim. Likewise, the acquaintance principle is no longer promising as an explanation of the claim that aesthetic testimony affords little or no title to aesthetic judgement.

As we saw, Kantians might hope to explain away cases where we seem to accept aesthetic testimony about an item by re-describing them as cases where we take on a subjunctive belief about how we would judge were we to see the item (or maybe a picture of it). The objection was that your believing that you would believe a hidden item is black is grounds for you to believe that it is black, so your acceptance of testimony as to its color should be taken at face value. The challenge for the Kantian was to say why your believing that you would judge an

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unseen item is beautiful is not grounds for you to *judge* that it is beautiful.

The challenge is met if aesthetic judgement has inseparable aesthetic content. Believing that you would judge the unseen item beautiful is not grounds for you to judge that it is beautiful. You believe that, were you to see the item in the flesh, you would apprehend its beauty by and only by apprehending some features that seem to make it beautiful. You might even believe that the features in question are such and such. None of this is grounds for making an aesthetic judgement.

No matter. A more fundamental objection exploits the distinction between aesthetic judgement and belief. Suppose, as before, that the Kantians propose to explain cases of the apparent acceptance of aesthetic testimony about an unseen item by describing them as cases where we take on a subjunctive belief about how we would judge were we to see the item. The question is now whether believing that you would judge the unseen item beautiful is grounds for you to *believe* that it is beautiful. If the answer is that the subjunctive belief is grounds for an aesthetic belief, then why not take the apparent acceptance of testimony at face value? Alternatively, why is the subjunctive belief not grounds for an aesthetic belief?

The distinction between aesthetic judgement and belief also promises to explain away the original Kantian intuition that we never accept aesthetic testimony. We easily confuse transmission and testimony, aesthetic judgement and aesthetic belief, equating the non-transmissibility of judgement with the weakness of testimonial entitlement to aesthetic belief. The confusion is thickened by a failure to distinguish the roles of aesthetic judgement and belief in two different kinds of critical discourse.

While these two kinds of critical discourse are often mixed together and are rarely found in pure form, they are functionally distinct. Taking a cue from Arnold Isenberg's famous essay, we can call them "criticism" and "communication."<sup>31</sup> In both we find the use of relatively rich and detailed, often metaphorically laden, descriptions to support overall aesthetic assessments. However, the purpose of criticism is to prepare us for an encounter with the object of criticism, to prime us to appreciate it, to guide our experience of it when we come to see it. For Isenberg, "the critic... gives us directions for perceiving" so as to "induce a sameness of vision, of experienced content."<sup>32</sup> In a slogan, criticism guides appreciation. By contrast, the purpose of aesthetic communication is to add to the store of theoretical and practical beliefs which help us to understand what we appreciate and to control our non-appreciative actions. We order the world in part by attributing aesthetic properties to its bits and pieces, and we manage those bits and pieces as well as our relationship to them on the basis of our beliefs about their aesthetic features. None of this is necessarily very fancy. For example, it shows up in decisions about what musical recordings to buy, what places to visit, and what people to dine with.

Given the purpose of criticism, it is reasonable to expect critics to speak from a position of aesthetic judgement. And given the purpose of criticism, we do not

expect those judgements to be transmissible. The critic tells a story, deploys some deft metaphors, paints a kind of picture in words that sets us up to have an experience like her experience when we hear the music or see the dance that she is talking about. Tormey tells this story:

suppose that I tell someone else, M, that the Mantovan fresco is superior in scope, subtlety, composition, and expressiveness to the frescos of Perugino and Pinturicchio.... M reacts with surprise" "I didn't know you'd been to Italy recently." "I haven't," I admit. "But, you see, I have it from W...." It is, I think, quite evident that I am flying here under false colors, and that I have been caught out."<sup>33</sup>

M's reaction is understandable — as long as M takes T to be engaging in criticism. Having missed this qualification, Tormey is led to say that aesthetic testimony fails and the acquaintance principle explains why. He overlooks the possibility of aesthetic communication. Italy has a lot to offer, most of us have to limit what we see, and so we make decisions based on aesthetic beliefs acquired through the testimony of others.

This suggests a hypothesis. We do not mark the difference between aesthetic belief, the currency of aesthetic communication, and aesthetic judgement, which is where aesthetic criticism begins and ends. Since judgement and criticism dominate philosophical thinking about aesthetic discourse, belief and communication get overlooked. The result is that we mistakenly take the non-transmissibility of aesthetic judgement to imply the weakness of aesthetic testimony.

Do we accept aesthetic testimony in fact? To answer this question, replace it with another: do we engage in aesthetic communication?

Tradition interprets the acquaintance principle as meant to explain the non-transmissibility of aesthetic judgement, where aesthetic judgement is non-transmissible in the sense that aesthetic testimony is epistemically weak. An alternative is that the acquaintance principle explains the non-transmissibility of aesthetic judgement by pointing to its having inseparable aesthetic content. The alternative allows for a distinction between aesthetic judgement and aesthetic belief, and it allows that we may have epistemic title to aesthetic belief. If we sometimes doubt that we have such title, perhaps the reason is that we conflate aesthetic belief with aesthetic judgement and we misunderstand how they function in different contexts of aesthetic discourse.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Richard Wollheim, "Art and Evaluation," in *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 233. See also Frank Sibley, "Particularity, Art, and Evaluation," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 48 (1974), 1-21; Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1974); Philip Pettit, "The Possibility of Aesthetic Realism," in *Pleasure, Preference, and Value*, ed. Eva Schaper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 17-38; and Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Dissenters are Malcolm Budd, "The Acquaintance Principle," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43 (2003), 386-92; Paisley Livingston, "On an Apparent Truism in Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43 (2003), 260-78; and Aaron Meskin, "Aesthetic Testimony: What Can We Learn from Others about Beauty and Art?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 69 (2004), 65-91.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Tormey, "Critical Judgments," *Theoria* 39 (1973), 39.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Tormey, "Critical Judgments;" Budd, "The Acquaintance Principle," 491; Aaron Meskin, "Solving the Problem of Aesthetic Testimony," in *Knowing Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran and Dominic McIver Lopes (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 110-11.

<sup>4</sup> For some complexities, see C. A. J. Coady, *Testimony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Peter Graham, "What Is Testimony?" *Philosophical Quarterly* 47 (1997), 227-32; and Sanford Goldberg, "Testimonially-based Knowledge from False Testimony," *Philosophical Quarterly* 51 (2001), 512-26.

<sup>5</sup> Read this claim as acceptable to both reductionist and fundamentalist approaches to testimony — e.g. Elizabeth Fricker, "Against Gullibility," in *Knowing from Words*, ed. Bimal K. Matilal and Arindam Chakrabarti (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994); and Coady, *Testimony*.

<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), § 33.

<sup>7</sup> Some recent writers are moderate Kantians, who hold that testimony affords some title to aesthetic judgement, but not as much title as we get from testimony for empirical belief. E.g. Robert Hopkins, "Beauty and Testimony," in *Philosophy, the Good, the True, the Beautiful*, ed. Anthony O'Hear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Meskin, "Aesthetic Testimony."

<sup>8</sup> Meskin, "Solving the Problem of Aesthetic Testimony," 114-16.

<sup>9</sup> J. L. Mackie, *Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977), 15.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Pettit, "The Possibility of Aesthetic Realism."

<sup>11</sup> Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, § 33.

<sup>12</sup> Tormey, "Critical Judgements," 42; Meskin, "Aesthetic Testimony," 72.

<sup>13</sup> Meskin, "Critical Judgments," 84-5.

<sup>14</sup> Brian Laetz, "A Modest Defense of Aesthetic Testimony," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66 (2008) 355-63.

<sup>15</sup> Tormey, "Critical Judgments," 39.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Kathleen Stock, "The Role of Imagining in Seeing-in," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66 (2008), 371-4.

<sup>17</sup> Steven Shuttleworth, "The Use of Photographs as an Environmental Medium in Landscape Studies," *Journal of Environmental Management* 11 (1980), 61-70. See also E. H. Zube, D. E. Simcox, and C. S. Law, "Perceptual Landscape Simulations: History and Prospect," *Landscape Journal* 6 (1987), 62-80. Thanks to Aaron Meskin for these references.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Randy Thornhill and Steven W. Gangestad, "Human Facial Beauty," *Human Nature* 4 (1993) 237-69.

In sum, aesthetic judgements about items routinely derive from images of those items.

<sup>19</sup> David Novitz, *Pictures and Their Use in Communication* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1977); Marcia Eaton, "Truth in Pictures," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 39 (1980), 15-26; and Carolyn Korsmeyer, "Pictorial Assertion," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43 (1985), 257-65.

<sup>20</sup> There is bare representation of aesthetic qualities by pictures, but there is no bare depiction of aesthetic qualities.

<sup>21</sup> Pettit, "The Possibility of Aesthetic Realism," 25.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Tanner, "Ethics and Aesthetics Are — ?" in *Art and Morality*, ed. José Luis Bermúdez and Sebastian Gardiner (London: Routledge, 2003), 33.

<sup>23</sup> For a critique, see Livingston, "On an Apparent Truism in Aesthetics."

<sup>24</sup> Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959), 4-45. Sibley enters a qualification: descriptions of non-aesthetic features can imply that an aesthetic term does not apply. For example, "the line is jagged" implies that it is not graceful.

<sup>25</sup> Sibley, "Particularity, Art, and Evaluation," 16.

<sup>26</sup> Budd, "The Acquaintance Principle," 391.

<sup>27</sup> Dominic McIver Lopes, *Understanding Pictures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> At first glance, Robert Hopkins, *Picture, Image, and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>29</sup> At first glance, Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976).

<sup>30</sup> Tormey, "Critical Judgements," 39-40. Critics of the acquaintance principle sometimes acknowledge this too. E.g. Budd, "The

Acquaintance Principle."

<sup>31</sup> Arnold Isenberg, "Critical Communication," *Philosophical Review* 58 (1949), 330-44.

<sup>32</sup> Isenberg, "Critical Communication," p. 336.

<sup>33</sup> Tormey, "Critical Judgments," 38.

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