

ROBINSON AND SELF-CONSCIOUS EMOTIONS

Appreciation Beyond (Fellow) Feeling

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1 Introduction

In this paper, my focus will be on some central aspects of Jenefer Robinson's influential work 'Deeper than Reason', more specifically on the role our emotional responses play in art appreciation and the value attributed to the ensuing emotional experience. Whereas Robinson argues (1) that bodily responses, and our awareness of these bodily changes, can provide us with information relevant to the appreciation of artworks, and (2) that in some cases affective empathy is *necessary* to artistic understanding, I want to raise two concerns about whether this position holds for artworks conveying self-conscious emotions.¹ Such emotions are of particular interest in this context since, in the first place, self-conscious emotions can, in fact, be experienced without moving us physiologically in a full-fledged sense. These higher cognitive emotions, also known as non-primary or intellectual emotions—including guilt, shame, embarrassment, pride, or nostalgia—are not automatically triggered

¹ Even though higher cognitive emotions have traditionally received considerably less attention from emotion researchers than the so-called basic emotions such as joy, fear, and sadness, there has been a significant increase in research on higher cognitive emotions in recent years. See, for example, the edited collection by Tracy, Robins, & Tangney 2007 and Stocker 2010.

but require self-evaluation. And, unlike the basic emotions, they are also believed to lack stereotypical expressive or behavioural features.² Second, self-conscious emotions are unavailable to affective empathy since they are known for involving self-directed cognition.³ As we will see, it is this tight connection to the self—where the ‘self’ is both the subject and the particular object of the emotion—which makes it difficult to take the emotional perspective of another person.

My strategy will be to question the weight Robinson places on bodily feelings and affective empathy by bringing Peter Goldie’s theory of emotions into play. To that end, I will discuss a particular self-conscious emotion that Robinson’s model is unable to accommodate within her two-step theory of emotions: autobiographical or reflective nostalgia. I take this kind of nostalgia to be *not* a mere deliberate fantasy about the past (e.g. the longing for a non-lived period of history like a retro-nostalgia for the decade of the fifties), but an emotion concerned with the irrevocability of one’s own past.⁴ The artworks I propose to look at in order to develop my claim are the avant-garde films by Jonas Mekas, ‘Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania’ (1972) and ‘As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty’ (2000).⁵ These autobiographical films, also known as ‘film-diaries’, will enable us to discuss the possibility of a model of art appreciation that includes emotions that do not require bodily feelings. At the same time, Mekas’ characteristic style of presenting a collage of images about his

² Tracey & Robins 2007, pp. 6–7.

³ For more on the object of self-conscious emotions, see Tracey & Robins 2004.

⁴ See Boym 2001, Van Tilburg, Wildschut & Sedikides 2018 for a characterisation of nostalgia as a self-conscious emotion.

⁵ Although Robinson’s artistic examples are mainly focused on her areas of expertise—literature and music—her theory has the potential to be expanded to other art forms. Here I propose film, a medium classically focused on emotions, as a candidate that can benefit from this discussion. See Smith 2017, for a recent analysis of Robinson’s work on emotions in a philosophy of film framework.

everyday life while offering his own poetic observations on what the viewer is watching will allow me to show why *fellow-feeling* is not the appropriate way of engaging with artworks of this type—what I shall discuss below as ‘intellectual artworks’. I will suggest that the nostalgic view from which Mekas’ film-diaries are narrated presents problems for perspective-shifting, a necessary process in empathetic responses, according to Robinson. The reason for this lies in the impossibility of sharing the particular object of the nostalgic emotion expressed in these experimental films—something desirable and unrecoverable from Mekas’ past.⁶ The memories presented by the Lithuanian filmmaker are to be understood as a personal self-evaluation of the director’s past, and, as an invitation to reflect on one’s personal story, not as an emotional episode to be felt on Mekas’ behalf. I will conclude that the value of artworks expressing such self-reflective states is, first and foremost, an epistemic one. This is a value bound up with the aesthetic features of the artwork but not reducible to its artistic value (at least if the latter is narrowly construed). Note that this paper should not be perceived as a rejection of feeling as an important part of our artistic experiences, but as a reconsideration of its role and function.

2 Emotional Understanding

How much do we need to feel in order to be able to appreciate aesthetically?

This section highlights the intricate relation between cognition and feeling in our emotional responses to art. I will show that certain emotions towards artworks do not seem to operate in the way Robinson describes. The emotions I have in mind do not, it seems, occur as the result of a non-cognitive affective appraisal of our

⁶ Howard 2012, p. 641.

environment, as Robinson suggests, but instead appear to call for some kind of conscious self-evaluation at the very moment of their experience. My argument will reveal that Robinson's analysis suffers from being developed primarily with emotional bodily feelings as a model and does not sufficiently take into account the distinction between being emotional, on the one hand, and having an emotion, on the other hand. For that reason, what I want to put forward here is a view of art appreciation inspired by Goldie's theory of emotions,

where there are emotional feelings of a kind that can be directed immediately towards objects in the world beyond the bounds of the body: these feelings are bound up with cognition and perception, and are not the mere effects of cognition or perception.⁷

One of Robinson's main claims in 'Deeper than Reason' is that in some cases our emotional responses are means towards artistic understanding. To use Robinson's own words, "cognition without emotion simply does not do a good job".⁸ On this account, in order to gain an appropriate understanding of an artwork – that is, not only of the particular emotional state expressed but of the overall point of view of the work—we need to be able to attend to the bodily feelings related to the emotional experience of the artwork. As Robinson puts it:

Emotional understanding is in the first instance a kind of bodily understanding: my affective appraisals of characters, events, and situations are automatic and instinctive, and they immediately

⁷ Goldie 2009, p. 232.

⁸ Robinson 2010, p. 80.

produce physiological and behavioural responses that reinforce these emotional appraisals.⁹

This defence of the importance of bodily feelings in our artistic experiences is in tune with the portrayal Robinson gives of emotions outside of art appreciation. Her model, in a nutshell, is characterised by identifying an emotion as a non-cognitive appraisal of our environment—that is, an automatic and instinctive evaluation—which *causes* a bodily response in us (e.g. physiological changes, tendencies to act, and expressive gestures).¹⁰ This bodily reaction helps the subject to focus attention upon those things in the environment that matter to her. Robinson adds a second step to her model to ensure the evaluative appropriateness of our bodily response when she claims that this affective appraisal that is experienced subjectively as a feeling subsequently has to be modified by cognitive monitoring, or reflection.¹¹ In a similar sense, emotions for Robinson are a useful tool for artistic criticism because they serve the double function of, first, alerting us to what is of significance and, second, preparing us to critically evaluate these initial responses. For example, my weeping for a character like Anna Karenina works as an inarticulate understanding of the events read about, and it is by evaluating this initial response that I develop my aesthetic appreciation of the novel.¹² In addition, it is when we experience these artistic emotions and reflect upon them that we also come to gain a deeper understanding about the artwork. As Robinson declares:

If I laugh and cry, shiver, tense, and relax in all the “right” places, then I have in some sense

⁹ Robinson 2005, p. 127.

¹⁰ For a complete description of the account, see Chapter 3 in Robinson 2005, pp. 57–99.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 75–9.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 123.

understood the story. But if I want not just to have a rich emotional experience while reading the novel but also to give a critical account—a “reading” or an “interpretation”—of it, this requires reflecting on my emotional experience. I need to reflect upon my affective appraisals, figure out what they were, what it was in the story that provoked them, and whether they were justified.¹³

However, for Robinson not every artwork needs to be emotionally understood in order to be appropriately appreciated. There are some artworks that she excludes from the process of emotional understanding, namely those she describes as being about ‘ideas’. These artworks, she states, demand to be experienced on an ‘intellectual’ level, not on an emotional level.¹⁴ In her own words:

Different kinds of artworks have very different goals. Some are mainly concerned with design or form. Others deal mainly with ideas and demand to be appreciated primarily on an intellectual level. I am not arguing that all artworks have to be experienced emotionally if they are to count as art.¹⁵

Against Robinson, I believe that these intellectual artworks she refers to should also be experienced emotionally. The only difference is that the emotions we engage with in these cases tend to be what are commonly referred to as higher cognitive emotions. Now, the heart of the matter here is Robinson’s refusal to call ‘emotions’ those emotional feelings that do not seem to involve awareness of any

¹³ Robinson 2010, p. 77.

¹⁴ Robinson 2005, p. 102.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

particular bodily change or state. An important part of Robinson's motivation for prioritising bodily feelings is the fact that her neo-Jamesian account is built on a base of solely the basic emotions (anger, fear, sadness, happiness, surprise, disgust). William James, in 'What is an Emotion?', famously describes self-conscious emotions as non-standard or purely cerebral, and gives hardly any attention to them, because emotions without bodily feelings are, for him, 'only judgements'. The main difference between standard emotions and non-standard, or 'intellectual' emotions, is that "the bodily sounding—board, vibrating in the one case, is in the other mute".¹⁶ Robinson, following James' lead, also gives a problematic and, in some sense at least, counterintuitive characterisation of 'cold' emotions when she argues that, for example, a lack of bodily feelings during reflection on our remembrances, in the case of nostalgia, prevents nostalgia from having the status of an emotion. In Robinson's view:

If I wish I were young again and in the Paris of yesteryear, then we may say that I am nostalgic for Paris, even if I am not making any non-cognitive appraisal and I am physiologically unmoved. I am not experiencing an emotional response to (my thoughts of) Paris. We can call my state an "emotion of nostalgia" if we like, but this is misleading because there is no "emotionality" or emotional upheaval.¹⁷

My main worry, then, is that, by identifying emotions with individual bodily feelings felt at a specific time, Robinson's model seems to be excluding from the process of art appreciation, a set of emotions that are familiar to us in life and in the arts. In other words, this model

¹⁶ James 1884, p. 202.

¹⁷ Robinson 2005, p. 95.

excludes those emotions that are partly constituted by cognitive processes that unfold over time and which require attention to the personal history of a person; such as my case study, nostalgia, but also grief, shame, envy, pride, etc. Furthermore, the cognitive monitoring or reflective, second-step, which is of vital importance for Robinson's account of the epistemic value of emotions, is something I find problematic since it seems to go against Robinson's refusal to afford higher cognitive emotions the status of really being emotions. One could think that these emotions, especially the self-conscious type, would hold a privileged position in Robinson's account, since they do not need to be subsequently cognitively recognised in order to warrant the appropriateness of the bodily feeling; but as we have seen, this is not the case. What we need, then, is an account of emotions and of art appreciation utilising a unified concept of emotion that does justice to the particularities of both the basic and the higher cognitive emotions. One way of giving a better characterisation of cognitive complex emotions is by adopting Goldie's useful distinction between bodily feelings and *feeling towards*.¹⁸ Goldie's theory, like Robinson's, posits a close identification between emotion and feeling, but contrary to Robinson's model, with the notion of *feeling towards* Goldie can make sense of feelings that do not involve any characteristic physiological change. This notion would also explain distinctive emotional episodes where bodily feeling is involved and yet the feeling is not always present. In Goldie's words:

I think it is possible to do justice to the importance of feelings in emotional experience without needing to claim either that emotions must involve feelings at all times, or that, for each type of emotional experience, there will be a

¹⁸ See Goldie 2009.

distinctive phenomenology which is uniquely identifiable with it.¹⁹

In what follows, with the help of Jonas Mekas' naturalistic films, I try to show how the notion of *feeling towards* allows for a different understanding of the role of emotions in our appreciation of artworks, especially when assessing the value of artworks that deal with ideas. In 'As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty', which is made of fragments of homemade films recorded over a period of about thirty years, we see the everyday lives of Mekas' family and friends. Here, no strong bodily feelings are elicited; instead, we find pleasure in the contemplation of past events, in the ambiance of the film, in ordinary but meaningful situations like weddings, picnics, or family reunions, all of them depicted in an intimate and subtle way.²⁰ This film sets the spectator in a reflective mood by inviting her to experience a kind of nostalgic feeling that goes beyond the boundaries of the body. Mekas' films are an example of artworks that might have associated feelings, but which do not have associated bodily feelings or behavioural dispositions.²¹ When engaging with them we come to judge them as evocative, poignant, or consoling, and we do this by identifying precise artistic choices, and without necessarily being physiologically moved by them. For example, we recognise the calm piano that accompanies Mekas' own voice, the collage-montage, or the exploitation of silence as elements that infuse this work with

¹⁹ Goldie 2000, p. 69.

²⁰ Ruoff 1991, p. 14.

²¹ Jesse Prinz discusses how there are some emotions that do not have observable behavioural dispositions; nostalgia being one of these. "It may be difficult to link some emotions with specific behaviors (e.g. hope, pride, aesthetic pleasure, confusion, nostalgia, and so on). It may be that some named emotions can impact behavior in a variety of different ways, and it may also turn out that some emotions are not associated with highly specific biologically prepared behavioral responses" (2012, p. 202).

nostalgia. Likewise, the themes of the film—childhood memories, immigrant identity, the reconstruction of a personal self—contribute to setting the spectator in a self-evaluative state. Whereas for Robinson *bodily feelings* are directed towards the body and the awareness of these bodily changes help the appreciator to scan and detect the important aspects of the artwork, *feeling towards* can help the appreciator to take certain aspects present in the artwork under the ‘appropriate light’. Hence, from a Goldiean view the relevance of feelings in appreciation is not about being causally moved by features of an artwork, but has to do with acquiring the ‘right’ phenomenology required for correctly judging the aesthetic features present in the work. For example, in Mekas’ film, where “the restless handheld camera and the rapid montage never holds enough on any image to fix it in our mind”, the viewer will only perceive these images as memories if she is able to pick up the phenomenal character of the nostalgic emotion in place.²² So, *contra* Robinson, I would suggest that the emotionality of the artistic experience is revealed in the way we perceive the artwork. This means that our emotional responses towards artworks are bound up with cognition and perception, and are not the mere effects of cognition or perception.²³ In other words, having an emotional experience of an artwork does not exhaust our understanding of the artwork, but what is relevant about emotions is that they can provide us with a deeper understanding of the relevant aesthetic features present in an artwork. And from there, once we have the appropriate phenomenal experience it is more likely that we acquire an appropriate judgement of the artwork.

I agree with Robinson that in our engagement with certain artworks we tend to scream or at least flinch when a monster appears on screen, or to weep at the end of a sentimental film. That said,

²² Rouff 1991, p. 16.

²³ For Goldie’s discussion on how non-cognitivism gets ‘phenomenology’ wrong, see Goldie 2009, pp. 235-6.

emotional bodily feelings are not the only feelings we can experience. Mekas' films show that in artistic contexts we can also be drawn to experiment with subtle or more cognitively complex emotions. In these cases, what we will typically be engaging with are things grasped with the mind, such as thoughts and memories. It is the automaticity of responses to art such as tears, screams, or laughs, that leads Robinson to propose that the comprehension of our responses, and of the artwork itself, comes after the evaluation of their appropriateness. The reason for this is that no degree of bodily feeling can by itself reveal what our emotions are about, and that is why Robinson's model needs a second step, lest she merely be discussing a subjective feeling.²⁴ The point I am making here is that emotions like the nostalgia expressed in Mekas' 'film-diaries' do not require this second moment because they are by nature partly constituted by reflection. I do not mean to say with this that we do not also reflect upon our self-conscious emotions and come back to analyse what made us respond in such a way. We can attend to what we felt when experiencing a reflective emotion and evaluate the appropriateness of our emotional response to the artwork, but, as I understand it, for Robinson, cognitive monitoring is a necessary step to justify not only the emotion's appropriateness with the artwork but the emotion itself.

My central idea in this section can be described as follows: whilst artworks typically require an emotional response, not every artwork requires an emotional bodily response—think of abstraction, conceptual art, experimental film, or post-modern literature. These types of artworks, which do not elicit bodily responses in us, are normally signified as 'cerebral' or about 'ideas directed to the mind'. I believe that these tags are problematic since they leave intellectual emotions out of the art appreciative process. Therefore, Robinson might consider adapting her account if she wants to be able to accommodate artworks involving higher

²⁴ On this see Goldie 2000, p. 58.

cognitive emotions, but also, I claim, if she wants to be able to do justice to a general insight that has arisen from recent philosophy of emotions, namely the thought that cognition and feeling are not distinct or easily separable.

The reflective emotions I have been discussing might not be vividly felt in an automatic way, but in this section I hope to have shown how sometimes in the arts it is emotion without cognition that does not do a good job.

3 Affective Empathy

Which emotional perspective should we adopt in art appreciation?

Recently, empathy has been accorded a central role in explaining our emotional involvement with fictional characters and events presented in a narrative.²⁵ These empathetic responses are thought to be an intimate form of identification in which we come to make sense of another person's emotions by imaginatively engaging with the person's point of view. In this section, I challenge Robinson's account and push her to take into consideration the limitations of perspective-taking as a tool for art appreciation when applied to self-conscious emotions. Indeed, on many accounts empathy is seen as a valuable tool in the proper appreciation of artworks—including film.²⁶ Robinson, for her part, defends the view that 'high level' affective empathy can be helpful for understanding the point of view from which an artwork is shaped, with this being especially true for novels, plays, and films that purport to depict 'real life' events.²⁷ Also,

²⁵ One of the most important volumes on empathy is the edited collection by Coplan & Goldie 2011.

²⁶ See Smith 1995; Gaut 2010; Vaage 2009.

²⁷ Robinson 2005, p. 106.

it is through *fellow-feeling* that we gain access to key elements of appreciation like the theme, vision, and unity of the work.²⁸

So, if we want to understand a character that we care about, like Anna Karenina, what we need to do is to imagine what is like to be in Anna's situation, and we do this not only to understand her despair but also to acquire a fuller understanding of the work.

That said, the presumption that such affective empathy is possible might be seen as problematic when we apply it to self-conscious emotions, which are bound up with a strong sense of self. So, while, for example, nostalgia typically involves a process of self-evaluation and of self-awareness—you are nostalgic about *your* memories—fear and pity do not seem to be necessarily concerned with the self, but with external objects, such as green slimes or characters like Anna Karenina, respectively. And, even though Robinson does not want to generalise by asserting that 'every emotional response to art is empathetic', her notion of art appreciation does not provide us with a clear picture of which emotions or affective aspects of an artwork are to be empathetically understood and which not. I suspect that for Robinson's account, those characters or events that we feel positively towards count as an invitation to be felt in an empathetic way (feeling Anna's own sorrow), while those who we feel negatively towards are not to be emotionally understood in an empathetic manner (revulsion for Macbeth).²⁹ This difficulty of feeling empathy for characters like Macbeth captures our imaginative resistance to adopting perspectives that go against our values or worldviews. For example, Alex Neill maintains that the success of empathic imagination is

²⁸ For Robinson, "fellow feeling is fellow *feeling*, not just an intellectual recognition that someone is in trouble, say, but a 'gut reaction' or compassion, an emotional or bodily response, a response consisting in autonomic and motor changes" (2010, pp. 80–81).

²⁹ Robinson 2005, pp. 108–12.

dependent on how much the other is *like myself*.³⁰ However, in the case of reflective emotions—where the self is part of the formal object of the emotion—the limit is not a problem of imagination or of possessing different psychological dispositions. I believe that the problem lies in the impossibility of accessing the particular object of another’s self-conscious emotion. Here there is no external perceptual recognition or imaginative access to the target of someone else’s emotion. In the case of nostalgia, we fail to intentionally imagine the other’s recollections in an empathetic way because the yearning associated with this emotion is inseparable from the subject’s self-evaluation of her own past. Furthermore, in order to experience nostalgia, we not only need to be aware of the event that is remembered by someone, we also need to have the correct phenomenal experience of the event. This is partly due to the fact that in order to experience nostalgia it must be the case that one has the feeling of being in a specific space, transported by one’s own memories. So even if nostalgia can be triggered by external objects perceptually recognisable by all, it is the personal connection with this object to someone’s autobiography that sets off the emotion. It is this narrative sense of self that makes self-conscious emotions peculiarly resistant to empathy.

Along similar lines, authors like Noël Carroll, Peter Goldie, and Peter Lamarque believe that the difficulty of perspective-shifting lies in the different informational and evaluative positions between the audience and the characters involved.³¹ Goldie understands that this problem is not a contingent one that has to do with imaginative limits, but a conceptual one, because perspective-shifting usurps the ‘full-blooded notion of first-personal agency that is involved in deliberation’.³² Therefore, putting it more crudely, self-conscious emotions seem to work as anti-empathetic states that need to be

³⁰ Neill 2006, p. 254.

³¹ See Carroll 2011; Goldie 2000, 2011; Lamarque 2011.

³² Goldie 2011, p. 303.

experienced from one's personal perspective.³³ Let's go back to Mekas' example to get a better sense of what I am suggesting.

In 'Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania', made in the summer of 1971, we find the story of a displaced person who decides to go back to his home country after escaping from the Nazi occupation during the Second World War. This is the personal story of Jonas Mekas, a man in search of a home, who is in the process of reconfiguring his identity when the emotion of nostalgia appears. He feels profoundly nostalgic about his hometown, the Lithuanian village of Semeniskiai, and the family he had to leave behind. He longs for insignificant but meaningful things, like the taste of the water he used to drink from a well, or the old women that reminded him of 'sad autumn birds' when he was a child. From time to time, we hear the filmmaker's voice reflecting on these scenes. And it is through Mekas' delicate and painful descriptions of his own past experiences that we come to understand that his manner of valuing this document is very different from a spectator's appreciation of the nostalgic work, even for someone like Mekas' brother, who accompanied him in the process of making the film.³⁴ This asymmetrical emotional response towards the film is noted by Tomkins when he declares that:

[a]ccording to Adolfas, the trip was an intensely emotional experience for his brother, who broke down and wept several times when he was called on to say something before a gathering. Adolfas, three years younger than Jonas and completely at home in America, apparently was not subject to the same emotions. But for Jonas the trip seemed

³³ Thanks to Laura T. Di Summa for inviting me to put this in a more explicit way.

³⁴ Thanks to Paisley Livingston for his comments on this.

to confirm his long-standing suspicion that he has not yet found any place of his own in the world.³⁵

The impossibility of empathising with Mekas occurs not because his psychological states are alien to us—we all have nostalgic memories and the capacity to recollect those *brief glimpses of beauty*, but, contrary to what Robinson seems to be holding, because the artwork's perspective is not something that we can, and more importantly should, attempt to match. What, then, is the appropriate emotional response to Jonas Mekas' work? Although the embodiment of nostalgia in a personal narrative makes it inaccessible to us, at least if it is a question of our supposedly feeling the same way as the nostalgic subject, that does not mean we cannot be sensitive to it at all. So, even if the images we find in Mekas' film-diaries do not have the same meaning for, or connection with, the spectator, his work is still valuable to us because we are able to see his artistic intention of retelling the past as something familiar. It is just that our emotional responses will not be a *pure* autobiographical nostalgia like the one expressed by Jonas Mekas himself.

Nevertheless, there are times in the viewing of Mekas' films in which we can experience some kind of analogous but self-directed autobiographical nostalgia. This can be explained without appeal to empathy, but through memory association. This is an idea shared by Robinson when she states that we possess emotional memory.³⁶ According to Robinson, we store past emotional situations that help us to understand similar episodes as the ones presented in a novel or film. In Mekas' case, the content of the film can trigger a nostalgic memory in us, and this is a pleasurable experience for the spectator because we tend to feel pleasure in what is familiar to us. It is this feeling of pleasure in the familiar but, more importantly, the capacity Mekas has for presenting the world as broken and beautiful which

³⁵ Tomkins 1973, p. 32.

³⁶ Robinson 2010, p. 74.

connects us to his story in an intense and unique way. So, the nostalgic experience of Mekas' work does not reside in its capacity to be *fellow felt* (or experienced in a bodily way), but in how the aesthetic experience involving an acknowledgment of Mekas' nostalgia can inform our knowledge of our own past.³⁷

An example is the moment in 'As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty' where we hear the filmmaker's voice inviting us to create this intimate connection between his life and our own:

I am looking at these images, now, many, many years later. I recognise and remember everything. What can I tell to you, what can I tell to you. No. No. These are images that have some meaning to me, but may have no meaning to you at all. Then, suddenly, this being midnight, I thought: there is no image that wouldn't relate to anybody else. I mean, all the images around us, that we go through our lives, and I go filming them, they are not that much different from what you have seen or experienced [...] From what you have seen or experienced. All our lives are very, very much alike.³⁸

If Robinson's theory specifies that art appreciation sometimes requires the appreciator to adopt the perspective from which a story is told, then it needs to give space to those emotions that require a strong sense of self and that are not readily imagined by another person. While I believe that she would urge us to try to imagine what it would be like to have lived Mekas' life, I believe that the epistemic merit of Mekas' film resides instead in its capacity to help us to

³⁷ My thanks to Jeremy Page for urging me to pursue this.

³⁸ Mekas 2013, p. 13.

understand our *own* personal past. And, as art appreciators, what we ought to assess is not only this invitation to reflect about the way we think about the past, but the way in which emotions are conveyed and crafted in Mekas' experimental films.

In this section, I have used Mekas' autobiographical films—and our responses to them—to challenge Robinson's assertion that affective empathy has the potential to play an important role in our appreciation of artworks. I have focused on the self-conscious emotion of nostalgia, which, I argued in section one, Robinson's account should accommodate as an emotion if she wants to do justice to our complex emotional life. As noted above, many commentators have suggested problems with the notion of affective empathy, and my contribution here consists in showing that self-conscious emotions present a specific and unique challenge to accounts like Robinson's because these emotions are tied to the subject's sense of self and autobiographical self-understanding, something which we necessarily cannot share. The intimacy that Mekas reveals with his work is a personal invitation, or guide, to experience the world in a very specific way, with tenderness whenever childhood memories of his daughter are portrayed, wonder and amusement when images about their youth in Greenwich Village during the sixties appear on screen, or even with indignation when sad memories about WWII and his life as a displaced person are remembered. I believe that a possible path for Robinson to explore would be to think of our experience of self-conscious emotions expressed in the arts as yielding an epistemic merit related to an enriched understanding of how emotions work. Asking us to share another's emotions and the feelings based on them might be asking for too much.

4 Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that we cannot explain all emotional cases using the two-step model defended by Robinson. Her theory of

emotions is problematic for those artistic cases where understanding and value do not reside in the capacity of the audience to bodily feel or imagine the same emotion expressed. As we have seen, not all emotions are either bodily feelings or instances of empathy. I have focused on the nature of self-conscious emotions, and in particular on the expression of autobiographical nostalgia in Jonas Mekas' 'film-diaries', in order to show how emotional feelings, in art appreciation, can be better understood if we adopt Goldie's notion of *feeling towards*, instead of Robinson's *bodily feeling*, especially in the case of 'intellectual' artworks. I have also tried to assess the limitations of perspective-shifting in Robinson's affective empathy when applied to reflective emotions that are tied to a strong sense of self. In Jonas Mekas' work, the epistemic value of his films—and our appreciative response to them—comes not from bodily feeling the same nostalgic emotion expressed in his highly personal work, but from how the aesthetic experience involving an acknowledgment of his nostalgia can inform our knowledge of our own past. It is in this recognition that we understand Mekas' exploration of private and subjective memories as something universal.³⁹

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³⁹ I am very grateful for helpful comments and suggestions from two anonymous reviewers and the editors of 'DiA'. An earlier version of the paper was presented at The Cognitive Value of Aesthetics Conference at the University of Tampere in August 2017, where it benefited from the feedback of the audience. Thanks in particular to Peter Lamarque and María José Alcaraz León. Finally, my special thanks to Elisabeth Schellekens Dammann, Paisley Livingston, and Jeremy Page for their patience, help, and invaluable comments when discussing several drafts of this paper.

judgements. She is the coordinator of the Nordic Network for Women in Aesthetics.

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