

JAARBOEK VOOR ESTHETICA 2002

FRANS VAN PEPPERSTRATEN (RED.)



EEN UITGAVE VAN HET NEDERLANDSE GENOOTSCHAP VOOR ESTHETICA

Frans van Peperstraten (red.)

Jaarboek voor esthetica 2002

ISSN 1568-2250

Trefw.: Filosofie, esthetica

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Vormgeving: Joanne Vis

Druk: KUB-drukkerij, Tilburg

AESTHETIC RECIPROCITY: SKEPTICISM OR ADDRESS?

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INTRODUCTION¹

This paper examines how the concept of address may help to theorize aesthetic reciprocity or its absence. Philosophers have formulated powerful cultural ambitions for art. John Dewey and Friedrich Schiller, for example, see art as a civilizing force, indispensable to the ongoing creation of societies and their cultures.²

¹ This paper contains the text of my lecture presented at the conference “Address. Aesthetics and Ethics. Part II” in Utrecht in February 2000, with amplifications that were inevitable because of the change from auditory and visual presentation to the written form. My argument in the Utrecht lecture relied heavily on my analysis of the mode of address of Anna Deavere Smith’s *Fires in the Mirror*, which we considered in a video-edit of the work. *Fires in the Mirror* makes questions of cultural differentiation and legitimization highly tractable and urgent. Given the written form of a paper, I was not able to depend on *Fires in the Mirror* to exemplify the philosophical work that I want the notion of aesthetic reciprocity to perform. In order to overcome this gap in the written text, I have added here to my original lecture, section 1 on art’s cultural functioning and section 2 on the notion of aesthetic reciprocity. Sections 3-5 have been expanded with correlative additional explications that were necessary to keep the argument running. I thank all the participants in the Utrecht conference for our discussions that have proved helpful to my understanding of address.

² For Friedrich Schiller aesthetic experience is indispensable to the realization of society, that is to say, of a morally just political state (*On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Letter 27, 215). John Dewey regards art both as a reflection of civilization and a means of promoting the development of civilization (*Art as Experience*, 326).

For all the cultural stakes that philosophy has placed in art, philosophical aesthetics remains skeletal when it comes to the analysis of art's cultural labor. Art's cultural functioning incurs asymmetries as artworks lock into strategies of differentiation and legitimization that are at play in the cultural arena. These asymmetries, to my mind, complicate a defense of art's cultural aspirations, and call into question current attempts to forge relations between aesthetic and ethical action. Philosophy can begin to come to terms with these asymmetries, I believe, by taking account of ways in which aesthetic relationships are and are not reciprocal. I will argue that the concept of address registers aspects of an artwork's reciprocal or non-reciprocal workings, and identifies a level of aesthetic functioning that is also ethical. With the help of Anna Deavere Smith's documentary performance piece *Fires in the Mirror* I will substantiate these ideas, and indicate how address may be built into the ontological framework of a theory of aesthetic normativity.

1. CULTURAL DIFFERENCE, CULTURAL AUTHENTICATION AND THE STRUCTURE OF ART'S CULTURAL LABOR

The first attribute of culture with which aesthetics needs to come to terms is the phenomenon of cultural difference. By the phenomenon of cultural difference, I shall mean in this paper, schematically put, the fact that cultures are heterogeneous systems that include groups that have different histories, inhabit different social positions, and adhere to different value systems. Because cultural groups inhabit different cultural positions, members of different groups stand in asymmetrical relations vis-à-vis one another. Important sets of asymmetries emerge from the differentiation produced by categories such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and so on. But an even greater range of differentiating forces do their work at the level of the individual, who brings her specific histories and affective positionings to bear on the relations that make up her various social bonds. The consequence is that each member of a culture inhabits this culture in her own, highly particularistic fashion. When we speak about art's cultural capacities, which would include art's ability to function as a mirror of cultural values and assumptions, or art's resources as a vehicle for social experimentation, then these capacities take on different forms for differentially positioned cultural participants, depending on their particular history and their place in a web of social relations. A work of art that may give some cultural members a sense of

being at home in their social world, may produce experiences of exclusion in others.

The basic reason why positionality is crucial to art's cultural work is that culture concerns the relations among agents. Relations with other agents are part of each agent's specific cultural position. As a participant in the sphere of culture one cannot abstract from these relations, because upon such abstraction, one would extricate oneself from actually inhabiting the sphere of culture. One would operate as a detached observer of culture, rather than an engaged participant. It follows that a work's cultural labor will not be a homogeneous achievement that the culture can integrally stand by and hold up to itself along its way on a shared trajectory of cultural development. This complicates the account of art's cultural workings.

The second attribute of culture that poses difficulties for philosophical aesthetics attaches to the fact that cultures are not natural facts about the ways people live or the values they adhere to, but are results of extended processes of legitimization and negotiation. Not any value that is endorsed in a culture is part of the selfunderstanding of that culture or the set of core values in which that culture recognizes itself; not any human attribute evinced in a culture counts as an exemplification of cultural identity. Cultures emerge from authenticating moves and require maintenance through the continued, and continually shifting workings of legitimating systems. Artworks perform their cultural work through the mediation of institutionalized structures of interpretation that engender cultures. A philosophical account of an artwork's cultural role must track the ways in which art relies on and participates in the ongoing processes of legitimization and that keep cultures in motion. We encounter here again the phenomenon of asymmetry. Art's cultural work does not take place in a homogeneous domain of meaning formation but it emerges from a structured system of reception that renders art legible or illegible in ways that are highly specific to the current state of the culture. A work's cultural labor must be read against the matrix of semantic constraints and possibilities that are operative in the culture.

A philosophical theory of art which aims not only to voice but also to defend the cultural ambitions that it endorses on behalf of art must recognize the asymmetries that the phenomena of cultural difference and legitimization introduce to art's cultural workings. Absent such a picture, skepticism seems to me to be the appropriate response to art's cultural ambitions. For the asymmetries produced

by cultural difference and legitimization make it doubtful whether art is actually able to foster culture as a whole, as opposed to partial segments of culture, associated with a limited selection of cultural values, lifestyles, and modes of meaning formation. In addition to this it is questionable whether art, in integrally or partially fostering culture is actually doing an unambivalently good thing. Art's supposed abilities to cultivate, to galvanize culture, or to make culture more truly cultural may not be an unambiguous moral force, but may be instrumental in the maintenance of problematic kinds of social differentiation. With these two questions open - the question of whether art actually fosters culture and the question of whether art's fostering of culture is indeed a good thing - it is not clear in which ways art's cultural capacities warrant moral defense. Thus the question is open of whether art's cultural capacities are able to lend support to the claims to public interest that have been made on art's behalf. Correlatively, the viability of the aesthetic domain as a distinctive normative structure, a field where things matter in special, aesthetic ways, becomes tenuous. Thus there is reason for skepticism vis-à-vis the scheme of meanings, that has come to be comprised under the idea of the aesthetic. For why hold on to a domain that is organized around aesthetically specific norms, standards, experiences, judgments, if the public and cultural achievements that support this form of normativity are in doubt?

2. AESTHETIC RECIPROCITY

An aesthetic system that ignores the asymmetries produced by cultural difference and legitimization loses track of art's cultural functioning. More than that, it threatens to produce a framework for aesthetic creation and interpretation that lends uncritical support to the differentiating and legitimizing strategies that are at play in the cultural arena. Aesthetics can hope to take its distance from these strategies by theorizing what I shall call the phenomenon of aesthetic reciprocity.

Aesthetic reciprocity, or a lack of it, as I will understand it, is a characteristic of the cultural relationships that aesthetic agents establish through aesthetic exchange. Aesthetic exchange is a thoroughly relational affair, involving agents making demands on one another and transforming their relationships through the interplay of their demands. For example, the social gestures of presenting and receiving artworks are able to create affinities and distances among cultural agents. Aesthetic exchanges help us to construct accounts of the web of cultural

relations that surround us. While asymmetries of power, history, class, race, gender, and other social determinants often produce a lack of reciprocity among agents, relations can be reciprocal even if they are asymmetrical.³ Reciprocal aesthetic interaction across difference does not leave its trace, in the first instance, in shared or shareable experience, that is to say, in seeing things the way others see them, or are potentially able to see them. Reciprocity, rather, is a matter of the values that are at stake in structures of difference. One such value, for example, lies in the ability to recognize rather than suppress alterity. Another such value lies in the capacity to forge social bonds and affiliations across difference, as opposed to the erection of impenetrable barriers of exclusion.

Many philosophers have commented on art's ability to make us feel at home in the world. My notion of aesthetic reciprocity is designed to refer to art's various abilities to enable its heterogeneous public to be present in the cultural relations they inhabit vis-à-vis one another. In this way I would like to examine at the level of culture, a phenomenon that other thinkers, such as Paul Crowther, have studied primarily at a level that is perceptual, cognitive, imaginary, and purportedly existential and phenomenological.⁴

My notion of aesthetic reciprocity is not an absolute notion. Neither is my aim to posit aesthetic reciprocity as an ideal.⁵ My more limited point is here that a theory of art's cultural work must be able to read the ways in which artworks configure cultural relations with respect to questions of difference and legitimization, and the values that are at stake in structures of difference and legitimization. This involves analyzing the ways in which the aesthetic relations established by an artwork are and are not reciprocal.

By way of a gloss on the notion of aesthetic reciprocity, I would like to list a number of characteristics that would make for more and less reciprocal aesthetic relationships. An example of an aesthetic relationship that is in some respects not reciprocal, would be an aesthetic relationship in which certain participants are asked to put aside a good part of their cultural values, experiences,

³ Iris Marion Young defends a notion of asymmetrical reciprocity in *Intersecting Voices: Dilemma's of Gender, Political Philosophy and Politics*, Chapter 2.

⁴ In a series of books Paul Crowther, following Merleau-Ponty and Cassirer, has defended a view of art as harmonizing a basic relation of ontological reciprocity between embodied subjects and the world. See Crowther's *Art and Embodiment: From Aesthetics to Self-Consciousness and The Language of Twentieth-Century Art: A Conceptual History*.

⁵ One reason for this would be that I doubt that all cultural needs warrant equal respect in any straightforward fashion.

needs, and tastes in order to meaningfully enter into aesthetic exchange, perhaps in order to attain supposedly universalizable experiences of art, or to produce *oeuvres* that are recognizable as *oeuvres* of high cultural quality. This bracketing would be responsible for an aesthetic relation (with an artist, with a public, with an aesthetic tradition) that is in some ways non-reciprocal. For the participants in this case would not be able to be fully present to one another, that is to say, in their individuality, and in the differences that obtain between them.

In a more reciprocal aesthetic relationship, parts of culture would be able to reflect their values, insights, styles, and forms to other parts of culture. An aesthetic exchange that is marked by reciprocity would make differentially positioned aesthetic agents present to one another in their lifeworlds. It would forge points of contact among differentially positioned observers and cultural groups. In a more, rather than a less reciprocal situation, differentially positioned cultural participants would be recognized as full-fledged cultural participants. Each group's cultural needs and their associated conceptual frameworks would be invited to enter into cultural exchange with the needs and frameworks of other groups. There would be a sense that each group's cultural needs and understandings would be given regard in negotiations about what constitutes culture.

By theorizing art's more and less reciprocal workings, aesthetic theory can take account of the ways in which the asymmetries produced by a culture's differentiating and legitimizing structures affect an artwork's cultural labor. It can recognize moral ambiguities that these structures import to art's cultural functioning and take account of these ambiguities in a defense of art's cultural aspirations. In this way philosophy can create a critical distance from the differentiating and authenticating structures that are formative of culture. Absent a theory of aesthetic reciprocity, philosophy runs the risk of replicating the cultural injuries that have followed from structured differences of power. In the following section, I will indicate that the current philosophical project of forging a relation between aesthetics and ethics stands in need of a theory of aesthetic reciprocity.

3. THE AESTHETICS-ETHICS RELATION AND THE NOTION OF AESTHETIC RECIPROCITY

In this section, I would like to outline, schematically and somewhat artificially, three philosophical programs that forge connections between aesthetics and

ethics, two affirmative and one critical. Then I will indicate how the question of aesthetic reciprocity complicates the connections between aesthetic and ethical practices that have been crafted by the two affirmative programs.

The first affirmative program focuses on the conduct of life and the formation of the subject, which are taken to have both aesthetic and ethical dimensions, and argue that the ethical dimensions depend in certain ways on the aesthetic dimensions. For example, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray describe aspects of subject-formation and intersubjective relationships as aesthetic creations, and appeal to aesthetic activity in order to develop ethically innovative forms of subjectivity and intersubjectivity.⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, echoing Foucault, calls for an ethos of life that is rooted in an “art of existence.”⁷ Marcia Eaton argues that moral decisions are decisions about one’s life’s stories, which combine questions of style and content, and demand aesthetic sensitivity.⁸ For this reason, Eaton believes that ethical sensibilities require nurturing by aesthetic understanding.⁹ Eaton places aesthetic and ethical considerations in a relation of conceptual interdependence.¹⁰ Karen Hansen argues that certain aesthetic and ethical values, such as power and grace, are intertwined with one another.¹¹ According to Hansen, the notion of a good dinner party or a dreary landscape combine considerations of ethical and aesthetic merit.¹²

The second affirmative program, which has been developed by Noël Carroll and Berys Gaut, focuses on the reception of art. The point of departure for this program is the idea that artworks solicit imaginative and emotional responses on the part of an aesthetically appropriate observer. These solicitations have a moral dimension; the observer is asked to exercise her moral faculties in mobilizing the responses that the artwork demands from her. Because observers are prescribed to engage in moral judgment and feeling as a part and parcel of their aesthetic responses to an artwork, moral judgments, on the second program, simply put, also have a place at the level of aesthetic judgment. For Gaut, a work’s ethi-

⁶ See Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature*, Chs 4-5; and *Art and Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature*, Chs. 4-6, 201; 209; 274-5. See also Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Ch 4, 190, 211, 214; and *To be Two*, 88.

⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, 38.

⁸ Marcia Eaton, “Aesthetics: The Mother of Ethics?,” 361-2.

⁹ Eaton, “Aesthetics,” 363.

¹⁰ Eaton, “Aesthetics,” 261 and 363.

¹¹ Karen Hansen “How Bad can Good Art Be?” in: Jerrold Levinson, Ed. *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*: 204-226.

¹² Hansen, “How Bad can Good Art Be?,” 218-221.

cal flaws and achievements affect its ethical value and our ethical evaluations of the work therefore legitimately impact our aesthetic evaluations of that work. For Carroll, artworks can be judged aesthetically for the quality of the moral engagement they make possible. While the details of Gaut's and Carroll's approaches differ, for my purpose here it suffices to indicate that the second affirmative program recognizes ethical dimensions in an artwork's prescribed aesthetic responses.¹³

While proponents of the third program, which I'll call the "critical program," do not tend to mention ethics explicitly, this program has clear-cut ethical implications. Many theorists have pointed to the gendered, class-based, and racialized structure of theoretical concepts and analytical frameworks in aesthetics. Two examples of this widespread program in aesthetics and cultural theory are Pierre Bourdieu's critique of aesthetic perception as a class-based and historically specific phenomenon, and Naomi Schor's critique of masculinist aesthetic biases against the detail and the particular.¹⁴ I read the ethical implications of the critical program as follows. The critical program calls into question the tenability of the valuations and structures comprised under the heading of the aesthetic. The suspicion emerges that there are systematic and unfounded limitations to the range of aesthetic attitudes, preferences, and needs that current conceptions of aesthetic perception and value are able to acknowledge. The suggestion is that the concept of the aesthetic is inextricably tied to the standpoint of a limited social perspective, associated with certain segments of post-eighteenth century European societies and that aesthetics, even within the field of post-Enlightenment Western art, has provided skewed accounts of what counts as aesthetic. Here we encounter again the problem that differentiating and legitimizing strategies call into question

¹³ Noël Carroll "Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding" and Berys Gaut "The Ethical Criticism of Art" in: Jerrold Levinson, Ed. *Aesthetics and Ethics*: 126-160 and 182-203.

¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, "Historical Genesis of the Pure Aesthetic" in *The Rules of Art*. Naomi Schor, Reading in Detail: *Aesthetics and the Feminine*. What I have called the critical program is a widespread program, of which I can mention only a few examples: Sylvia Wynter's analysis of racialized and colonial biases in Kantian aesthetics ("Rethinking "Aesthetics": Notes towards a Deciphering Practice"), Richard Shusterman's and Carolyn Korsmeyer's analyses of the social assumptions implicit in Hume's notion of a true critic (Shusterman, "Of the Standard of Taste: Social Privilege as Nature in the Aesthetic Theories of Hume and Kant." Paul Mattick. Ed. *Eighteenth Century Aesthetics and the Reconstruction of Art*: 96-119. Korsmeyer, "Gendered Concepts and Hume's Standard of Taste." Peggy Zeglin Brand and Korsmeyer. Eds. *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*: 49-65.); Brand's critique of gendered conceptions of aesthetic value in "Revising the Aesthetic-Nonaesthetic Distinction: The Aesthetic Value of Activist Art." (*Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*: 245-274.); Paul Mattick's analysis of the feminized beautiful and the masculinized sublime ("Beautiful and Sublime: "Gender Totemism" in the Constitution of Art" *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*: 27-48).

art's cultivating powers. There is no straightforward way in which a class-based, gendered, racialized, and heterosexist analytical system is going to link up with the ethically good. Skepticism is in order with regard to the notion that art represents a public good. Aesthetic relations, as conceptualized by current aesthetic systems, have incurred a lack of reciprocity.

Each of these three approaches to the aesthetics-ethics relation that I have just described, two affirmative, one critical, helps to bring out ethical dimensions of aesthetic entities and aesthetic dimensions of ethical entities. However, the third, critical program poses difficulties for the other two programs. According to the first program, aesthetic sensibility and creation enrich our moral capacities; they underlie our subjectivity, our ethos, and our relations with others. But if our aesthetic capacities are fundamentally aligned with gendered and classist social structures, then they will not in any straightforward fashion be able to offer moral life the empowerment that ethics needs from aesthetics. In order to integrate the aesthetic into our ethical visions and activities, the first program must address the theoretical and practical implications of an aesthetic form of existence that is mired in problematic social constellations.

The critical program also poses difficulties for the second program, which introduces ethical considerations into the experience, evaluation, and value of art through the idea that an artwork's aesthetic prescriptions exercise our moral capacities. Given that aesthetic structures, norms, and modes of interpretation import ethically problematic social asymmetries, the prescriptions which aesthetics associates with artworks cannot be taken at face value. Their aesthetic force will have to be critically examined for the ways it reinforces problematic conceptual structures. The relevant prescriptions must be examined for the ways they replicate gender and class relations and help to channel social power in ways that must be contested. A morally defensible appreciative relation to art may demand that the viewer take some distance from the force of these prescriptions in a manner that cannot be said to be an aesthetic flaw on the part of the work or on the part of the viewer. To the contrary, this distance is necessary on account of the broader aesthetic framework in which these prescriptions emerge, which, taken as a whole must be challenged, both conceptually and morally, for its connections with problematic social configurations. If conceptions of aesthetic creation and perception are called into doubt, then the interpretive standards legitimized by these conceptions lose their support. It is not clear that the standards of art-appropriate per-

ception advanced in philosophical aesthetics do indeed target the sphere of the aesthetically appropriate. Thus it is not clear that art solicits our moral capacities in the way Carroll and Gaut believe it does. Art may not lock into morality as seamlessly as the second program suggests. Bringing morality to art may not be in the first instance a matter of the observer's uptake of a work's prescriptions, but it may in the first instance require a critical reading of the differentiating and legitimating strategies in which these prescriptions take shape. An initial layer of ethical issues arises thus not at the stage of the viewer's aesthetic uptake of a work's ethical appeals but emerges with the very establishment of these ethical appeals. These two ethical layers, I suspect, intersect in complicated ways. For this reason, I believe that the critical program makes it plausible that ethics enters aesthetics at another level of engagement than the second affirmative program has it, in a way that complicates the affirmations of this program. There is reason to doubt that the ethical evaluations that emerge from the second program link up with a genuinely moral stance on the part of the aesthetic observer.

Even though the three strategies are not easily combined with one another, I find that all three programs illuminate crucial aspects of our integrated aesthetico-ethical functioning. The critical program, however, suggests that current aesthetic systems do not tend to generate reciprocal aesthetic relations but channel gendered and class-based cultural needs. This challenges the hopes which aesthetic theory has put in the moral capacities of art, and the stakes it has raised in the claims that an art of existence may make to the morally good life. A comprehensive account of the aesthetics-ethics relation, accordingly, stands in need of a theory of aesthetic reciprocity. My intention in this paper is to examine the capacities of address in light of this problematic. In the following section, I will argue that the concept of address is able to register ways in which artworks establish or more or less reciprocal aesthetic relations.

4. ADDRESS AS A LEVEL OF AESTHETIC MEANING

An artwork's address represents ways in which the work, as an aspect of its aesthetic functioning locks into differentiating and legitimating structures that are in place in the culture. Address, is thus a vehicle for an artwork's cultural functioning. Accordingly, an observer who registers a work's address is able to register a fundamental aspect of the work's cultural role. More than that, an observer who

registers the work's address is able to use the awareness of the work's address to take some distance from the way the work mobilizes structures of cultural differentiation and legitimization. In this way, the work does not merely deposit its own and the culture's differentiating and legitimating strategies in the observer. Neither the artist, nor work, nor the observer simply act out these strategies. Instead, the observer is able to create a measure of reciprocity in her engagement with the work. The consequence is that a measure of reciprocity accrues to the aesthetic exchange in which the observer engages with the artist through the work, as well as the aesthetic relations that observers (as members of an aesthetic culture in which they are related to other observers) establish with one another over the work. An aesthetic system that theorizes address and acknowledges address as a level of aesthetic functioning that is simultaneously also ethical, political, and cultural, is then able to theorize the aesthetic field in a more reciprocal manner. Here we find then one way in which aesthetics can bring out the differential and legitimating strategies within which artworks exert their effects, rather than replicating these strategies uncritically in its proposed ontological system.

How is the concept of address able to do this? In order to see how address works it is necessary to look at feminist film theory where the notion of address has been elaborated most fully.¹⁵ Here the idea of address operates to analyze political and cultural dimensions of film by examining how films solicit specific publics or counterpublics. Putting it very simply and in a different vocabulary, I take the central idea for my purposes to be something like the following. Films preprogram the relations they establish with their audiences by addressing these audiences as members of specific, historically produced aesthetic publics and counterpublics. By connecting with specific, historically formed spectatorial competencies, films convey their meanings and pleasures to their audiences. They engage their audiences in specific spectatorial roles. These spectatorial roles do not only include perceptual and imaginative demands at an abstract level, but include also social understandings; systemically gendered, racialized, heterosexist, modes of feeling and reasoning, as well as ethnic and class-based aspects of a public's social outlook, in short, a great range of capacities connected with the

¹⁵ The notion of address that I shall elaborate in the following is indebted to Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema;" Teresa De Lauretis, "Rethinking Women's Cinema: Aesthetics and Feminist Theory;" Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*; Miriam Hanson, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*; and Ellen Rooney, "What's the Story? Feminist Theory, Narrative, Address."

viewer's social positions and relations. Films make themselves comprehensible and enjoyable by locking into elaborate psychosocial structures of experience and understanding. Given that films make such intensive use of the spectator's psychosocial predispositions in order to make their aesthetic effects, it becomes possible to see that the aesthetic demands that films posit for its audience vary for differentially positioned groups of spectators. For an artwork's aesthetic demands reach far into the observers' psychosocial background and that means that differentially positioned audiences have to perform different imaginative, empathetic, emotional, and cognitive tasks in order to follow the narrative with the relevant aesthetic impressions, and in order to conform to the film's formal and emotional demands. Artworks and their forms and demands, accordingly, *address* their publics differentially. The concept of address, which traces this differential mode of operation, connects qualities of the form, medium, and context of a film with the tensions, contradictions, harmonies, and pleasures produced in its spectators in consequence of their individual realizations of the film's aesthetic demands.

Understood along the above lines address constitutes a level of artistic meaning that resides in characteristics of the cultural exchange realized by way of an artwork. In attending to address, it is possible to recognize how aesthetic productions reconfigure the relations between different participants in an aesthetic exchange. For example, Javier Sanjinéz, in an analysis of Bolivian performatives, describes the modes of address adopted by several aesthetic forms, when he argues that a testimonial narrative opens a dialogue, that a staged mass suicide freezes communication, or that a talkshow creates illusory reciprocity.¹⁶ To give another example, by registering a work's address, a critical reading of a film can indicate how the work complicates the enjoyment of a black female spectator or how the work develops a new mode of articulating a female body.¹⁷ The relevant level of aesthetic understanding cannot be split into a fictional, formal, or rhetorical event on the one hand and an ethical or political intervention on the other hand. Address operates in both dimensions of aesthetic exchange. So how does address do this and how can this capacity be deployed in an account of aesthetic normativity?

¹⁶ Javier Sanjinéz identifies these modes of address in three popular performative forms in Bolivia in the 1980s, "Testimonial Discourse and New Popular Trends in Bolivia."

¹⁷ For an example of the former, see Lubiano's reading of the film *Deep Cover* in "Don't Talk with you Eyes Closed: Caught in the Hollywood Gun Sights," 185 and 198; and for examples of the latter, see Doane's reading of Chantal Akerman's film *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce-1080 Bruxelles* and of *Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's Riddles of the Sphinx in Femmes Fatales*, 176-7.

A first thing to note is that address stands in a mediated relation to both artistic and spectatorial intentionality: being a woman or a chinese-american obviously does not amount to writing or listening as a woman or a chinese-american. The relevant exchange is idealized, soliciting actual individuals at the levels of hypothesized artistic agency and codified spectatorship. Artistic choices of address are strategic, in other words, they project idealized acts of reception, which ensure potential uptake by specific audiences. Competence requirements for the audience are negotiated through work-audience interactions within specific traditions, with a work's artistic strategies gradually bringing audiences up to their receptive capacities. The participants in address (both on the artist's and the audience's side) are then produced through the programmatic effects of evolving media and genres, and are "present" in the artwork to one another through their attempts to respond to one another's roles and positions, within the constraints of the operative artistic and contextual background. It is at a level of codified exchange, that one can think of an aesthetic production as opening a dialogue, freezing communication, or staging an illusory form of reciprocity. Such readings identify modes in which fictional activity redraws the relations between the participants in an aesthetic exchange. At this level of meaning, aesthetic agencies, generic norms and competencies, artistic media, and cultural contexts are partially constitutive of one another. This process of mutual formation eludes traditional aesthetic frameworks, which anchor normativity in idealized responses following from a generalizable receptive stance.¹⁸ Via the postulate of common receptive faculties, traditional aesthetic models ground aesthetic normativity in experiences and interpretations at which competent audiences can all ideally arrive. Through this mode of grounding, these models downplay the formative connections between artists, who project their work for specific uptake, and audiences, contexts, media, canons which inform such acts of projection. In this way aesthetic theory sidesteps the interactional complexities that generate address. Hence the rigidity aesthetic theory evinces in light of the differential compositions of the aesthetic community. Hence also its difficulties in theorizing aesthetic exchange as reciprocal interaction.

¹⁸ Admittedly, contemporary versions of the commonalities model would be able to include under the relevant conditions of competency some of the things that help to underwrite address, for example, formal mediation, hypothetical artists, and hypothetical audiences. Nevertheless contemporary discussions that take the commonalities model for granted do not generally consider the formative connections between aesthetic productions, meanings, contexts, interpretations, and audiences. For an explicit recent defense of this model see Peter Railton, "Aesthetic Value, Moral Value, and the Ambitions of Naturalism." Jerrold Levinson. Ed.: *Aesthetics and Ethics*: 59-105.

Address provides a way of acknowledging social and cultural dimensions of aesthetic exchange, while preserving normative structure. Address preserves normative structure because, as I have argued, it is codified, and we are therefore in a thoroughly normative domain. Address represents junctures where *aesthetic norms* deploy *social norms*. To be more precise, address represents an area of aesthetic functioning where aesthetic norms are mobilized and re-established in interaction with social norms, as forms of spectatorship are established and evolve over time. A model of address will consider how artworks, through the mediation of their specifically aesthetic codes, engage aesthetic audiences as socially positioned subjects rather than in “generalizable” personal identities. Such a model recognizes aesthetic significance not exclusively in individual imaginings, momentary identifications, passing affect, insulated stretches of experience, but works with agents (which include artists as well as observers) at the level of roles, functions, character, personality, existential position, identificatory processes, and strategies of social legitimization. It is here where an artwork’s more or less reciprocal dimensions take their form. The model of commonalities and shared experience does not analyze aesthetic meaning at this level.

A model of aesthetic exchange that is open to the structures of address permits then a radical expansion of the range of differentiating factors that legitimately affect aesthetic meaning. Included one finds now, besides commonalities, any sociocultural precondition that can be woven into the structures of address. By indexing different types of aesthetic normativity to different sets of preconditions (which include structures of differentiation and legitimization), a model of address can admit normative differentiation. Thus it can lend normative force to cultural and psychological universals and particularities. Aesthetic normativity, as it emerges from the lineaments of address, resides not exclusively in sharable dispositions, but draws on sociocultural conditions that have generated differentially positioned publics. Thus it extends beyond the idealized responses of a single, generic audience to find a broader subjective base in specific dispositions of multiple aesthetic publics and the aesthetic relations that are in place among socially based aesthetic agents and groups. Aesthetic normativity, as conceptualized with the help of the concept of address has its basis in aesthetic relations, that is to say, in the relations among agents that artworks set up. It is here that questions of reciprocity have their home and it is here that aesthetics can seek to strengthen the cultural aspirations that it has mounted for art.

Address is a dynamical moment emerging from interactions among artist, production, medium, audience, and context. It resides at a level of meaning where aesthetic moments intervene with artistic and spectatorial subjectivity, mobilizing and rewriting their relations. Embedded in its several interactive poles, address reaches from the real into the hypothetical, and crosses from the hypothetical into the real, taking up empirical agents in a process that creates aesthetic significance out of the structures of their exchange. What counts as aesthetic significance is thus relativized to structures of address. A model of address retains normativity but differentiates it in order to create a basis for aesthetic reciprocity. Thus it can hope to counter skepticism about art's public status with a more genuinely reciprocal picture of aesthetic exchange. While my analysis here is schematic, this, in outline, is how I propose to use the concept of address in the analysis of aesthetic normativity. I hope to make this analysis more concrete through a reading of Anna Deavere Smith's work *Fires in the Mirror*.

5. THE ADDRESS OF FIRES IN THE MIRROR

Fires in the Mirror by the African-American performance artist, Anna Deavere Smith is a one-woman theater piece, which explores Black-Jewish racial conflict through the juxtaposition of *verbatim* enacted interviews. In her performance, Smith performs the words, gestures, bodies, and personalities of interviewees of all classes and occupations (African-American religious leaders, Jewish rabbis, human rights commissioners, politicians, race theorists, community activists, artists, homeless, police, mothers, brothers). These individuals were involved, closely or at a distance, in the 1991 uprising in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Crown Heights, following the death of a 7-year old black boy who had been hit, while playing on the curb, by a speeding car driven by a Jewish driver and his passenger, a Hassidic rabbi. After the accident a Lubavitch rabbinical scholar was killed and four days of demonstrations, racial conflict, and street violence followed.

What kind of address can we attribute to this work, in which one person fictionally inhabits the addresses of twenty-some other persons? What happens to the original modes of address and what intervention does the work make in subsequent modes of address that form the dialogue on race?

Smith's performance addresses a divided community, offering points of identification and differentiation to spectators who inhabit radically differentiated

subject positions. Smith explicitly refuses to posit a single, unifying voice in her audience.¹⁹ Her objective is to participate in and encourage dialogue, to accelerate the flow of ideas, and to create a more complex language about race and identity.²⁰ Smith's documentary theater pieces *Fires in the Mirror* and *Twilight* are parts of a series *On the Road: In Search of American Character*. Smith wishes to contribute to what she calls "processes toward character."²¹ She aims to make "a call to the community": "I wanted to be a part of their examination of the problems."²² This is a procedural intention, which does not aspire to the insertion of a voice, or the introduction of a solution. To this effect, Smith activates a documentary register. She calls herself a journalist and her performances are verbatim representations of the words of her interviewees. Cornell West praises the piece in the following terms:

"*Fires in the mirror* is a grand example of how art can constitute a public space that is perceived by people as empowering rather than disempowering. [...] As a citizen, Smith knows that there can be no grappling with Black anti-Semitism and Jewish anti-Black racism without a vital public sphere and that there can be no vital public sphere without genuine bonds of trust. As an artist, she knows that public performance has a unique capacity to bring us together – to take us out of our tribal mentalities – for self-critical examination and artistic pleasure."²³

On West's reading, Smith's work helps to create a new kind of public space, where conflicting parties can meet in new ways. West's reading in terms of public space and Smith's reading in terms of American character both represent Smith's overall address as 'presentational', in other words, as a setting forth of voices. A radically divided community can expect to recognize in this polyphonal composition a facilitation of further racial dialogue, a welcome transposition of the intensities of social battle into a dialogical mode. Smith addresses her audience as a presenter of voices. By presenting in conjunction an array of oppositional and previous-

¹⁹ *Twilight* xxiv.

²⁰ *Twilight* xxv.

²¹ *Twilight*, xxv.

²² *Twilight*, xxiv.

²³ Foreword to *Fires in the Mirror*, xix and xxii.

ly isolated addresses, she has expanded the public space, that is to say, the sphere for the communal formation of public opinion. Does the public space/American character reading adequately represent the structure of Smith's address?

One noteworthy feature of the work is the thematization of the question of address itself. The political stances Smith takes on often concern questions of address: a Jewish writer questions the fruitfulness of reiterating stories of holocaust victimization and must be persuaded to cite such a story from her book. Angela Davis discusses the importance of being rooted in community through connections that allow one to travel into other communities, for learning and new experience. A rabbi comments on the yelling of antisemitic nazi slogans in the demonstrations. With the finest sense of antiphonal structure, these slogans are echoed by a youth worker, who argues that black kids do not even know what "Heil Hitler" means, but simply replicate slogans that are around, and think in terms of icons such as Malcolm X. "[T]hey don't know who Frederick Douglass was. They know Malcolm because Malcolm has been played up to such an extent ... now that they know Malcolm ... the system has given ... system gives them Malcolm ... and Spike is goin' to give 'em Malcolm even more..." he argues.²⁴ A UN commissioner comments on the importance of a vocabulary that can describe different types of bias and racism. Smith's piece is about address, about language and the potential and the limitations of modes of speech. But this aspect of the work goes beyond content and presentation. The public space/American character reading must contend with a tension between the register of documentary presentation and that of enactment and aesthetic composition.

Smith's personifications enact address in the widest sense of the term. Her enacted characters solicit emotional approval, demand compassion, inspire fear, call for anger, play up a sense of crisis, project contemplative detachment, reach out for followers, provoke, threaten, bully, neutralize resistance through smiles and turn of voices, persuade through institutionalized modes of argument. Smith displays address through an enormous range of expressive modes. She brings out gestural and emotional correspondences between the modes of address adopted by Jewish and African-American interviewees. She shows similar kinds of body language and speech patterns; similar modes of address, in all sorts of parameters, didactic, dogmatic, manipulative, entreating, etc. Perhaps Smith's

²⁴ *Fires*, 121.

orchestration of address can be subsumed under the documentary mode. For her goal is “to find American character in the ways that people speak.”²⁵ She explains:

“‘Who has the right to say what?’ ‘Who has the right to speak for whom?’ ... These questions are the questions that unsettle and prohibit a democratic theater in America. If only a man can speak for a man, a woman for a woman, a Black person for all Black people, then we, once again, inhibit the *spirit* of theater, which lives in the *bridge* that makes unlikely aspects *seem* connected. The bridge doesn’t make them the same, it merely *displays* how two unlikely *aspects* are *related*. These relationships of the *unlikely*, these connections of things that don’t fit together are crucial to American theater and culture if theater and culture plan to help us assemble our obvious differences.”²⁶

Parallels of address, which Smith foregrounds in her acting are examples of such relationships across difference. Perhaps the enactment of address can then be counted under the documentary register. But Smith’s performance has aesthetic and ethical dimensions that go beyond the activation of a documentary mode.

Through the enactment and the orchestration of other people’s modes of address, Smith fictionally re-signifies or re-addresses them. The juxtaposition of perspectives in a single production works to contextualize and recontextualize each individual perspective. Audiences become aware of each mode of address in relation to the other modes of address and in relation to their various sociocultural contexts. What is more, the work makes one aware of attractions and resistances with which one encounters other people’s modes of address. By bringing these out in audiences the work facilitates their recognition, intensification and overcoming. This is an intervention in processes that are formative of subjectivity.

Now it becomes possible to see that *Fires in the Mirror* invites imaginative participation in other people’s bodily modes of address, their narratives, and their political positions. This invitation represents at one level, the task the work poses for Smith’s own *artistic persona*, which enacts other people’s bodies and points of view; this invitation is extended to the audience, which is asked to ima-

²⁵ Introduction to *Fires*, xxiii.

²⁶ Introduction to *Fires*, xxix.

ginatively participate in the stance of Smith's *artistic persona* as well as in the stories and the stances of the people Smith is personifying. Lastly and fictionally, it applies to the interviewees, whose speech is imaginatively being recontextualized and readdressed. The viewer imagines a public dialogue that engages social agents (which include both the viewer herself and Smith's interviewees) in acts of temporary imaginative identification with one another's positions. At all these levels, the work carries an appeal to imaginatively inhabit other people's positions.

At the same time, the work also invites a rooted inhabiting of one's own position. For each perspective is shown in its own highly particular, specifically voiced and gestural expressive register. Identifying with others' positions is not done at the cost of their particularity; it is not in the role of a generalizable human being that we are invited imaginatively to inhabit two social positions at once – paradoxically turning the self-as-self and the self-as-other into one – but rather by adopting for ourselves other people's very specific bodily modes of address, directed at ourselves and at others. How does the work reconcile these two imaginative tasks – those of imaginatively inhabiting other people's bodily gestures, narratives, and stances while also being anchored in one's own position?

Commonalities and particularities figure importantly in the work. Smith-as-various-other people indicates how certain ethnic particularities are also commonalities across ethnic lines. The viewer can recognize parallels of address that transcend social categories, for example, when both Jewish and Black interviewees are seen to create a sense of crisis or solicit agreement on the part of their audience. The same goes for cultural symbols, which ironically, are shown to take the same structure across ethnic categories. Examples are Al Sharpton's haircut and that of a Lubavitch woman, which are both stylized very precisely in a manner that is equally significant to their respective cultural and historical identities. For all its concern with the common in the particular, the work is not in some fashion suggesting that the particular is in the end a highly specific form of universality, an expression of general human characteristics. The identificatory appeal is not an appeal to set aside differences and to attain a common, generalizable form of understanding. Neither does the juxtaposition of the original interviews work to offer up for consideration and for imaginative participation a set of established cultural particularities and cultural commonalities. Rather, Smith is foregrounding particular dimensions of public participation and public dimensions of particular, ethnically specific conduct. Smith is asking her audience to move back and forth

between the particular and the universal in its readings. Thus she destabilizes received particularities and commonalities. The appeal is to establish a multilayered form of reading that refrains from reifying the specific forms these categories of social exchange have acquired in the social arena. The suggestion is that specific divisions between particularities and commonalities are socially produced and emerge from legitimating strategies that social agents adopt in the modes of address they adopt towards their experiences, towards others, and towards themselves. Here we encounter the point, made by many others, that cultural parallels and differences are constructed, and that the relevant modes of construction, paradoxically, make up a crucial part of what culture amounts to, and must be opened up for imaginative and affective rewriting if social change is to be possible.

In combining a rooted inhabiting of one's own position with a transformative imaginative inhabiting of other people's positions, the work's address exemplifies what Angela Davis says about community membership, in her interview. Davies speaks of an anchored inhabiting in one's own community that makes possible travel to other communities, "to understand and learn."²⁷ In this respect the piece differentiates itself from other modes of address which it discusses, for example, from a stultified reiteration of victim stories in political conflict, from an uncritical deployment of pre-formatted slogans and from a reverential deferral to iconic figures, that in the present context have lost a force that they once had. These modes of address keep social relations as they are; they inhibit the critical, identificatory mobility that would permit a genuinely public dialogue.

Shifting among more or less exaggerated, distanced, or sympathetic enactments, playing men, playing whites, Smith's personifications insert then the necessary critical distance that helps to reconcile a rooted inhabiting of one's own stories and positions with a transformative participation in other people's stories and positions, and keeps in motion processes of identification, de-identification and re-identification.²⁸ It is such motion, in Smith's terms, "a moving from one side to the other, in experiencing one hand and the other hand," in which she aims to interest people.²⁹ Her contribution to the race dialogue is the production of an alterna-

²⁷ Fires, 31.

²⁸ In this respect, the work's address conforms to the feminist mode of address described by Ellen Rooney in "What's the Story? Feminist Theory, Narrative, Address." See also Rooney's "Feminist Theory and the Mode of Address: Towards a Semiprivate Room" in this volume.

²⁹ *Twilight*, xxxviii-ix.

tive mode of address, one that intervenes at the level of language and subjectivity:

“If we were able to move more frequently beyond [the] boundaries [of ethnicity], we would develop multifaceted identities and we would develop a more complex language. [After all, identity is in some ways a process toward character. ... It is not fixed.] Our race dialogue desperately needs this more complex language.”³⁰

Smith has crafted a new mode of address through other people’s addresses, one that provokes shifting empathies and distantiations, and that contributes an alternative stance to the race dialogue. Exemplifying Davis’ stance, she makes available a mode of inhabiting address that is both committal and critical, one that invites its participants to inhabit subjective identity as a mobile process, to relate to one’s position through moves from the particular to the universal and back, through an ongoing process of identification and differentiation with and from others.

6. RECIPROCITY AND THE AESTHETICS AND ETHICS OF ADDRESS

Smith has crafted a new mode of address by fictionally reconfiguring others’ modes of address and by inviting her spectators, through their engagement with these modes of address, to reposition themselves vis-à-vis one another and one another’s expressive forms. In virtue of this specific structure of address, *Fires in the Mirror* makes an aesthetic intervention in social relationships that are formative of cultural identity, racial consciousness, and religious stance, exercising an *ethical* impact through *aesthetic* means. *Fires in the Mirror* is a meta-aesthetic work in the sense that it suggests that aesthetic reciprocity can be fostered through specific modes of address. *Fires in the Mirror* allows readers to stand apart from the structures of differentiation and legitimization they see themselves applying in their cultures. In this way the work does not only make an intervention in cultural forms of subjectivity but also presents a picture of the ways in which aesthetic theory can take its distance from structures of differentiation and legitimization that are at play in the social domain. The concept of address, so the work suggests, is crucial to this project. An artwork’s address resides in the ways the work

³⁰ Introduction to *Twilight*, xxv.

functions within aesthetic relationships, which may be more or less reciprocal. In recognizing the relational dimension of aesthetic exchange, the concept of address is able to register aspects of an artwork's more or less reciprocal cultural functioning and it allows us to identify ethical and political aspects of aesthetic exchange.

It becomes now possible to see that the concept of address paves the way for rapprochements between the two affirmative and the critical perspective on the aesthetics-ethics relation, set out above. As I have suggested in section 4, an aesthetic model in terms of address, as opposed a model in terms of commonalities, indexes the force of aesthetic prescriptions to the specific relational possibilities and limitations that an artwork weaves around itself. By indexing the force of these prescriptions, not to a received ground of commonalities but to a more complex relational network, the model of address can hope to reconcile the critical program with the second affirmative program, which grounds ethical dimensions in an artwork's aesthetic prescriptions. The model of address also has implications for the first affirmative program, which solicits our aesthetic capacities for moral life. The model of address, I have argued, is able to take its distance from the differentiating and legitimating strategies that are operative in the culture, and can therefore hope to conceptualize aesthetic exchange as a form of reciprocal interaction. Here we find a way in which the model of address can help to reconcile the critical program with the first affirmative program. It is as a mode of reciprocal interaction that art can aspire to yield an ethos of existence, to support morally innovative modes of subjectivity, and to support a philosophical notion of art as a public domain.

What does philosophical aesthetics need to do in order acknowledge the interventional capacities of address? Briefly put, as noted earlier, traditional aesthetic models theorize aesthetic normativity through shared experience. While shared experience certainly has a part to play in aesthetic interaction, *Fires in the Mirror* makes it clear that sharing is not equivalent to meaningful, reciprocal exchange. Artworks make different emotional, empathetic, interpretive, evaluative, and identificatory demands on differentially positioned spectators, which do not necessarily converge in one ideal type of spectator. Each spectator is asked to take herself through a critical process that, given the particularities of her subject position, enable her to register and respond to an artwork's solicitations. It is possible to acknowledge normativity and reciprocity in this context by rendering the

force and nature of aesthetic norms and appeals sensitive to the structures of address, to a network of relations in which artistic and spectatorial agency, context, medium, and aesthetic production are mutually formative of one another. The specific demands that artworks make on a spectator are then relative to relations that emerge in the realization of particular forms of address. It is these relations that give rise to the promises and entitlements that aesthetic exchange holds in stock for its participants. What begins to shimmer here, I believe, is a concept of aesthetic normativity that recognizes its foundations in an interpersonal dynamic that is at once ethical and aesthetic.

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