

Aesthetic Acquaintance

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Angelina Jolie is hot (or Brad Pitt if you prefer). Maybe you are one of the lucky ones with first-hand experience of this, but more likely you have it by word of mouth, or, more likely still, you have seen images of Jolie or Pitt. Hotness seems to be represented in (1) face-to-face experiences, (2) talk, and (3) images. Some philosophers stress a contrast between (1) and (2). Richard Wollheim writes that aesthetic judgements “must be based on first-hand experience of their objects and are not... transmissible from one person to another.”¹ Alan Tormey echoes this: “we require critical judgements to be rooted in ‘eye-witness’ encounters, and the epistemically indirect avenues of evidence, inference, and authority that are permissible elsewhere are anathema here.”² Wollheim’s “acquaintance principle” is naturally read as meant to explain the alleged weakness of testimony on such matters as hotness. However, the principle can be read instead as shedding light on a contrast between (1) and (3) on one hand and (2) on the other. When read along these lines, the principle brings out the distinctive role of perceptual experience in aesthetic appraisal.

1. If the acquaintance principle explains why aesthetic judgements are not transmissible from one person to another then one way to read the

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

² Alan Tormey, “Critical Judgments,” *Theoria* 39 (1973), 39.

principle is to unpack the claim that aesthetic judgements are not transmissible. A natural unpacking equates transmission with testimony.³

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

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

The default position comprises three claims, all found in Kant.⁵ The first is psychological: as a matter of fact, we resist accepting aesthetic judgements solely on the basis of testimony. When I tell you that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is deep, you may believe that I so judge but you are unlikely to take on board my judgement. The second claim is epistemic: aesthetic testimony affords little or no epistemic entitlement to aesthetic judgement. My telling you that *Buffy* is deep hardly entitles you to judge

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

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

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), § 33.

that it is deep.⁶ Maybe the second claim explains the first: you withhold judgement because you are not entitled to judge.

One way of explaining the second claim is blocked by a third Kantian claim, which points to an asymmetry: we are fully entitled to some aesthetic judgements, just not via testimony. Here is one example of how this rules out some explanations of the second Kantian claim.⁷ According to a primitive aesthetic expressivism, aesthetic judgements are mere expressions or excitations of feeling.⁸ As a result, they do not express propositions and so there is no question of our having any title to believe them. This is why testimony affords no title to aesthetic judgement. However, this explanation predicts that testimony affords whatsoever *no* title to aesthetic judgement, whereas the second Kantian claim is that testimony affords *little or no* title to aesthetic judgement. More seriously, the explanation is too broad. It predicts that we have no epistemic title to *any* aesthetic judgement, whereas the third Kantian claim is that there is an asymmetry between our title to aesthetic judgements that are and are not based on testimony.

Obviously, the fact that aesthetic judgement is “based on first-hand experience” does not explain right off the bat why testimony affords little or no title to aesthetic judgement. After all, testimony affords abundant title to ordinary (non-aesthetic) perceptual belief, which is in some sense based on first-hand experience. Having seen her, I believe that my cat is brown; and having said that, you are now entitled to believe that she is brown. This shows that we cannot take aesthetic judgement to be “based on first-hand experience” in just the way that perceptual belief is based on first-hand experience. The challenge is to give an account of what it is for aesthetic judgement to be “based on first-hand experience” in a distinctive manner.⁹

⁶ Some recent writers are moderate Kantians, who hold that testimony affords some title to aesthetic judgement, but not as much title as we get from testimony for empirical belief. E.g. Robert Hopkins, “Beauty and Testimony,” in *Philosophy, the Good, the True, the Beautiful*, ed. Anthony O’Hear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Meskin, “Aesthetic Testimony.”

⁷ Meskin, “Solving the Problem of Aesthetic Testimony,” 114-16.

⁸ J. L. Mackie, *Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977), 15.

⁹ E.g. Pettit, “The Possibility of Aesthetic Realism.”

2. Take a step back, though. It makes no sense to read the acquaintance principle as explaining the second Kantian claim unless that claim is true. The claim is true if it best explains the psychological claim that we generally do not accept aesthetic testimony. But if we go on to ask if the psychological claim is true, we find little but clashing intuitions. For Kant, a judge of “a building, a view, or a poem... does not allow approval to be internally imposed upon himself by a hundred voices who all praise it highly.”¹⁰ Unlike Kant, I have many opinions based on what I hear from others about the aesthetic qualities of movies I have missed, music I have never heard, and even paintings that I have only read about; and I use these opinions to decide what movies to see, what music to listen to, and what exhibitions to visit. In this I doubt I am alone.

Those whose intuitions run against mine will seek to explain away my intuitions. I tell you that the Nakasen-do is beautiful and so you visit it when you go to Japan. According to one hypothesis, you have taken on the judgement that the Nakasen-do is beautiful on the basis of my say-so. However, there is another hypothesis. You visit it to see for yourself whether it is beautiful. What you have taken on is the subjunctive belief that you would judge it beautiful if you saw it, and this is not an aesthetic judgement but rather a belief about an aesthetic judgement.¹¹ So my testimony did not lead you to accept an aesthetic judgement.

More is needed to make a go of this hypothesis. I tell you that the ball in the urn is black and then you lay a bet that wins only if the ball is black. Suppose the idea is to explain away your apparent acceptance of my testimony by ascribing to you the belief that you would believe the ball is black if you saw it for yourself. Granted, your having this subjunctive belief does not imply that you believe that the ball is black, but it is grounds for you to believe that the ball is black. And if you have grounds to believe that the ball is black, why not take your apparent acceptance of my testimony at face value? So, does the subjunctive belief that you would judge that the Nakasen-do is beautiful give you grounds to judge that it is beautiful? If it does, then it makes sense to take your acceptance of my testimony at face value. Kantians who say otherwise must explain why without prejudging the second Kantian claim.

Those who share the intuitions favoring the acceptance of aesthetic testimony should also have a chance to explain away the Kantian intuitions. Here is one idea. Folk theories of art, beauty, and the aesthetic

¹⁰ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, § 33.

¹¹ Tormey, “Critical Judgements,” 42; Meskin, “Aesthetic Testimony,” 72.

are shot through with relativism and subjectivism.¹² We mindlessly mouth that beauty is in the eye of the beholder or, more highfalutinly, that *de gustibus non est disputandum*. Perhaps we take it as a corollary of these doctrines that we do not accept aesthetic testimony. However, we shall see that there is another reason to discount the Kantian intuitions.

3. The acquaintance principle states that an aesthetic judgement must be “based on first-hand experience,” with the consequence that it is not transmissible. As this is traditionally read, the consequence is that we get little or no title to aesthetic judgement via testimony. Transmission is testimonial entitlement. However, classic statements of the acquaintance principle come with a rider. Tormey writes that “reproductions or representations... may, for critical purposes, be adequate surrogates for the object of the critical judgement.”¹³ This rider suggests that we need an alternative to reading the acquaintance principle as explaining the weakness of aesthetic testimony.

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

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

Images also play a key role in communicating the aesthetic qualities of art works. At the same time that painting moved out of church and palace into the secular public space of the art museum, it moved onto the printed page, first through engraving and then through photography (and now Google Images). It is hardly going out on a limb to suggest that paintings and sculptures, especially canonical or famous ones, are more often seen depicted than face-to-face. Is it going out on a limb to add that we often judge these works via images of them?

¹² This fact might also explain why the first Kantian claim is true, if it is true. See Meskin, “Aesthetic Testimony,” 84-5.

¹³ Tormey, “Critical Judgments,” 39.

Finally, just as scientific studies of perceptual abilities like face recognition use images of faces as stimulus equivalents of faces, many scientists use images of objects or scenes in order to probe aesthetic responses to those objects or scenes. The technique is routine in studies of landscape preferences (because it is hard to fit a landscape into a lab). A recent article reviewing eight studies of the validity of the methodology concludes that “scenic quality evaluations based on photographs are similar to ratings made by different observers in the field.”¹⁴ This is at least prima facie evidence that some aesthetic judgements about items derive from images of those items.

Now, the proposal was to read the acquaintance principle as explaining why aesthetic judgements are non-transmissible, where transmissibility is entitlement via testimony. However, it is a mistake to equate transmissibility with testimonial entitlement if aesthetic judgements are transmissible via images. At least, it is a mistake if transmissibility via images is not testimonial entitlement.

One might argue that transmissibility via images is not testimonial entitlement because testimony involves assertion and images never figure in assertion. However, the second premise of this argument is false.¹⁵ Believing that Josh is taller than Brian, I show you a picture of them, which I sincerely take to be accurate, with the intention of getting you to believe that Josh is taller than Brian – and I take responsibility for my action. In general, images can be used in acts of assertion as vehicles that express what is asserted.¹⁶

The better argument is this. Testimony involves “bare” assertion. When I tell you that Josh is taller than Brian and you subsequently accept my testimony, my reasons for my belief may become your reasons,

¹⁴ Steven Shuttleworth, “The Use of Photographs as an Environmental Medium in Landscape Studies,” *Journal of Environmental Management* 11 (1980), 61-70. See also E. H. Zube, D. E. Simcox, and C. S. Law, “Perceptual Landscape Simulations: History and Prospect,” *Landscape Journal* 6 (1987), 62-80. Thanks to Aaron Meskin for these references.

¹⁵ David Novitz, *Pictures and Their Use in Communication* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1977).

¹⁶ See Marcia Eaton, “Truth in Pictures,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 39 (1980), 15–26; Carolyn Korsmeyer, “Pictorial Assertion,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43 (1985), 257–65; and Dominic McIver Lopes, *Sight and Sensibility: Evaluating Pictures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 136-40.

but you do not have direct cognitive access to my reasons because I do not assert them. If I assert my reasons along with my belief that *p*, then your title to believe that *p* derives from your accepting my reasons for *p* and not from my asserting that *p*. However, images never figure in acts of bare assertion as to the aesthetic qualities of things. I cannot show you a picture of the Nakasen-do that depicts its beauty without also depicting some of the features that make it beautiful. I cannot even show you a picture that depicts a simple elegant line without depicting some of the features that make it elegant. There is no bare depiction of aesthetic features, so there is no bare assertion of aesthetic judgements via depiction.¹⁷ If I show you a photograph of the Nakasen-do (at <http://paint.mentalpaint.net/Japan/Nakasen-do>) and then you judge that the highway is beautiful, then you so judge because, as it were, you see what makes it beautiful, not merely because you rely on my say-so.¹⁸

Distinguishing between transmission and testimonial entitlement means we must seek another reading of the acquaintance principle. On this reading, the principle should explain two facts: aesthetic judgement is not transmissible by words, but it is transmissible by images (or “surrogates” more generally). Meanwhile, it remains an open question whether testimony affords title to aesthetic judgement.

4. An alternative to an epistemic account of transmission takes it to be a content-preserving relation between representations. Philip Pettit writes that “the state one is in when... one sincerely assents to a given aesthetic characterization is not a state to which one can have non-perceptual access” – it is “essentially perceptual.”¹⁹ He adds that the state is phenomenologically distinctive, and it is good policy to assume that this distinctiveness reflects a distinctive content – a content that is “essentially perceptual” in some sense yet to be pinned down. This claim about *access* is considerably stronger than any claim about *entitlement*. When the transmission of an aesthetic judgement is blocked, the result is not merely that the person on the receiving end lacks title to the

¹⁷ There is bare *representation* of aesthetic qualities by pictures, but there is no bare *depiction* of aesthetic qualities.

¹⁸ Perhaps this process is one of reasoning. See Robert Hopkins, “Critical Reasoning and Critical Perception,” in *Knowing Art: Essays in Aesthetics and Epistemology*, ed. Matthew Kieran and Dominic McIver Lopes (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005).

¹⁹ Pettit, “The Possibility of Aesthetic Realism,” 25.

judgement. The question of entitlement is not even on the table, for the receiver is not in a position to make the judgement at all.

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

R_2 transmits R_1 if and only if full grasp of R_2 is a state R_3 with the same content as R_1 .

We can say that a type of cognitive state is *transmissible* by a given type of artifactual representation just in case representations of that type transmit states of that type. By this analysis, many types of cognitive state are transmissible by any type of artifactual representation. My perceptual belief that my cat is brown is transmissible via the sentence “Lopes’s cat is brown” because your grasp of this sentence consists in having a thought with the same content as my perceptual belief.²⁰ But I have a choice of media and I can show you a picture instead. Understood in this way, transmission is non-epistemic: you might believe that my cat is brown, or imagine it, wish it, or even doubt it.

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

This explanation of why aesthetic judgements are transmissible by images and not words exploits a non-epistemic analysis of transmission and also a specific claim to the effect that aesthetic judgements have a distinctive kind of content.

²⁰ Perceptual experience is not transmissible by language if it has non-conceptual content.

5. If the transmissibility is preserving content, then the question is what to make of the claim that aesthetic judgement has a distinctive content. Recall that no account of the distinctive content of aesthetic judgement may take “essentially perceptual” at face value. Your belief based on my testimony that my cat is brown has the same content as my belief based on my experience that my cat is brown. Ditto your belief based on my pictorial testimony that Josh is taller than Brian. So saying that beliefs about grace and beauty are like beliefs about brown and tall fails to explain why the former and not the latter are not transmissible by words.

An extreme view is that aesthetic features are essentially perceptual in the sense that they can be attributed only in experience – in a perceptual or quasi-perceptual state like episodic memory or sensory imagining. Some endorse this view. Michael Tanner writes that aesthetic judgements “must be based on first-hand experience... because one is not capable of understanding the meaning of the terms which designate the properties without the experience.”²¹ Thus “the Nakasen-do is beautiful” and “the line is graceful” are utterly meaningless to those who have not seen them. Perhaps a view as extreme as this follows from some conceptions of aesthetic properties. Then again, it may be so extreme as to impeach any conception of aesthetic properties that implies it.²² More moderate alternatives should be considered before taking the view seriously.

Since the distinctive content of aesthetic judgement is transmitted by images and not words, we can contrast depiction with linguistic representation. As we have seen, there is no bare depiction of aesthetic features, whereas there is bare linguistic representation of aesthetic features. The sentences “the Nakasen-do is beautiful” and “that line is graceful” represent beauty and gracefulness without representing the non-aesthetic features that are responsible for the beauty and the grace. However, no image depicts the Nakasen-do as beautiful without depicting the non-aesthetic features that make it beautiful, and no image depicts a line as graceful without depicting the non-aesthetic features that make it graceful.

The contrast goes further. The line’s grace is not depicted *in addition* to depicting the non-aesthetic features that make it graceful. There is

²¹ Michael Tanner, “Ethics and Aesthetics Are – ?” in *Art and Morality*, ed. José Luis Bermúdez and Sebastian Gardiner (London: Routledge, 2003), 33.

²² For a critique of the extreme view, see Livingston, “On an Apparent Truism in Aesthetics.”

nothing more to depicting the line as graceful than depicting the non-aesthetic features that make it graceful. That is, the only explanation for the image's failing to depict the line's grace is that it fails to depict at least one of the non-aesthetic features responsible for its being graceful.

However, there is always something more to describing a line's grace than listing the non-aesthetic features that make it graceful.²³ Although "the line fits the equation $y(x^2 + a^2) = a^3$ " may represent it as having the very feature responsible for its grace, the description fails to represent the line as graceful. Of course, some descriptions represent the line's grace as determined by the non-aesthetic features that make it graceful: "the line is graceful because it fits the equation $y(x^2 + a^2) = a^3$." Again, however, with the image, there is nothing more to depicting the line as graceful than depicting its shape.

The lessons are these. Aesthetic features are depicted only by depicting the non-aesthetic features responsible for them. But aesthetic features are never described merely by describing the non-aesthetic features responsible for them.

In a late paper, Frank Sibley made a parallel point about seeing aesthetic merits as against seeing other kinds of merits.²⁴ An example of the latter is a highway sign's visibility. Suppose that markers with uniform colors are easier to see than speckled markers, and a given highway sign is highly visible because it is uniform in color. From a distance, one can see the sign is highly visible without seeing that it is uniformly colored. Seeing the merit is separable from seeing the merit-making features. Aesthetic features are not like this. Seeing an aesthetic feature is inseparable from seeing the non-aesthetic features responsible for it. Sibley observes,

if a man were not in a position to see or discern that a line had such and such a curve... he could not conceivably tell that the line was... graceful.... One sees the grace *in* that particular curve. And if one cannot clearly see or discern the determinate character or properties which are responsible for the merit-term 'P' being applicable, one cannot discern that 'P' applies."²⁵

²³ Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959), 4-45.

²⁴ Sibley, "Particularity, Art, and Evaluation," 16-17.

²⁵ Sibley, "Particularity, Art, and Evaluation," 16.

Sibley's observation is that one cannot perceive the item's aesthetic feature without perceiving the non-aesthetic features responsible for it. There is no bare perception of aesthetic features, and there is nothing more to seeing the grace of the line than seeing the responsible non-aesthetic features – we do not see those features and the grace in addition.

The distinctive type of content we seek is inseparable content. A representation R represents x as F inseparably from its representing x as B just in case R represents x as F by and only by representing x as B.²⁶ My photograph of the Nakasen-do represents it as beautiful, but it is represented as beautiful by and only by its being represented as having other, non-aesthetic features. My saying "the Nakasen-do is beautiful because it is twisty" represents the highway as beautiful and also represents a non-aesthetic feature that makes it beautiful, but the beauty is not represented by and only by representing its twists and turns.

Malcolm Budd characterizes what he calls "appreciation" as the perception of an aesthetic feature "as it is realized in the work."²⁷ True, it is one thing for a state to represent the beauty of the Nakasen-do and it is another for it to represent the beauty as realized by the highway itself. However, more is needed to distinguish the perception and depiction of the beauty as it is realized in the road from descriptions of the beauty as realized in the road. My telling you why the road is beautiful represents the beauty as realized in the road, but it falls short of what you get when you see the beauty as realized in the road. How it falls short is clear if appreciation involves aesthetic judgement, which is essentially perceptual in the sense that it has inseparable aesthetic content.

Why do images have inseparable aesthetic content? The answer should touch on the nature of depiction. Recognition theories of depiction hold roughly that a picture depicts something as F only if it is so marked as to trigger (in a normal observer in normal conditions) a recognition ability for Fs – a recognition ability that overlaps an ability to recognize Fs face-to-face.²⁸ Such a theory is easily slotted into an explanation of why pictures have inseparable aesthetic content. An image P depicts x as having aesthetic feature F inseparably from depicting x as having non-aesthetic feature B because (1) P depicts x as B, (2) x's being F supervenes

²⁶ See the literature on implicit representation, maybe?

²⁷ Budd, "The Acquaintance Principle," 391.

²⁸ Dominic McIver Lopes, *Understanding Pictures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

on x's being B, (3) P enables a suitable viewer to recognize x as F in P by depicting x as B, and (4) the ability to recognize x as F in P's depicting x as B is the same as is engaged in recognizing x as F when seeing x as B. The recognition theory shows up in clauses (3) and (4). Clause (4) makes the inseparable content of the image echo the inseparable content of a corresponding experience. This is simply an example of how one theory of depiction can be harnessed to explain the inseparable aesthetic content of images. No doubt some other theories can do the job too.²⁹ (No doubt some cannot, and that is a reason to reject them.³⁰)

In sum, aesthetic judgements are states with distinctively inseparable aesthetic contents. They come by this content if they pick up the contents either of experiences or of pictures. That is why they are transmissible by images. They are not transmissible by words because aesthetic descriptions do not have inseparable aesthetic contents.

6. Aesthetic judgements have inseparable aesthetic contents. However, it does not follow that all attributions of aesthetic features have inseparable aesthetic content. The working conception of aesthetic judgement adopted above must be amended, and it must also be supplemented with a broader conception of aesthetic representation of which aesthetic judgement is a special case.

As long as we liken aesthetic judgements to perceptual beliefs, it is puzzling why they cannot be transmitted by descriptions. The puzzle resolves if we view them as states with inseparable aesthetic contents that echo the contents of experiences and can be transmitted via pictures. No aesthetic judgement barely represents the Nakasen-do as beautiful. Rather, it so represents it by representing the features responsible for its beauty. I may be in such a state when I walk along the Nakasen-do and experience it as beautiful or when I conjure up a visual image of it. You may be in such a state when you look at my photograph of the highway.

Have we replaced one puzzle with another? Suppose I simply tell you that the Nakasen-do is beautiful, with the result that you come to believe that it is beautiful. I have not transmitted my judgement, for your belief does not have the same inseparable aesthetic content as my judgement;

²⁹ At first glance, Robert Hopkins, *Picture, Image, and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

³⁰ At first glance, Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976). A hard case is John Kulvicki, *On Images* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

but I have surely transmitted something. To make matters worse, it follows that I have not even reported my judgement, since aesthetic judgements cannot be reported in words. Happily, the puzzle is easily solved if I both judge and believe that the Nakasen-do is beautiful (and maybe the judgement implies the belief). However, aesthetic belief is not the same as aesthetic judgement. It represents aesthetic features but its content is not inseparable. So the solution is to say that my belief is reported and thereby transmitted to you.

Curiously, this distinction between aesthetic judgement and belief is not entirely new – and, moreover, it is acknowledged by those who appeal to the acquaintance principle to explain the weakness of aesthetic testimony. For example, Tormey mentions in passing that “someone might come to *believe* that q by coming to know that someone else has *judged* that q, but it does not follow that he thereby judges that q. Judging that q implies believing that q, but the converse does not hold.”³¹ But if the point is acknowledged, its implications are not given any thought.

7. Distinguishing between aesthetic judgement and aesthetic belief suggests a fresh look at aesthetic testimony. There is no longer any point to considering whether aesthetic testimony affords title to aesthetic judgement, since testimony cannot transmit judgement. Still, we may consider whether aesthetic testimony affords title to aesthetic belief. It is an open question whether the second Kantian claim is true when refitted to say that aesthetic testimony affords little or no title to aesthetic belief. Some progress has been made though. First, the acquaintance principle is no longer a promising explanation of the second Kantian claim, if the claim is true. After all, the principle sets a condition on aesthetic judgement and not aesthetic belief.³² Second, the distinction between aesthetic judgement and belief tips the balance in favor of the intuition that we accept aesthetic testimony.

As we saw, Kantians might hope to explain away cases where we seem to accept aesthetic testimony about an item by re-describing them as

³¹ Tormey, “Critical Judgements,” 39–40. Critics of the acquaintance principle sometimes acknowledge this too. E.g. Budd, “The Acquaintance Principle.”

³² So we must look elsewhere to explain the weakness of aesthetic testimony. See Meskin, “Solving the Problem of Aesthetic Testimony,” 110–11.

cases where we take on a subjunctive belief about how we would judge were we to see the item (or maybe a picture of it). The objection was that your believing that you would believe a hidden item is black is grounds for you to believe that it is black, so your acceptance testimony as to its color should be taken at face value. The challenge for the Kantian was to say why your believing that you would judge an unseen item is beautiful is not grounds for you to judge that it is beautiful.

A more fundamental objection exploits the distinction between aesthetic judgement and belief. Grant that believing that you would judge the unseen item beautiful is not grounds for you to judge that it is beautiful. Why not construe your acceptance of aesthetic as issuing in aesthetic belief? If the answer is that the belief is subjunctive, then the reply is that your believing that you would believe the unseen item is beautiful if you saw it is grounds for you to believe that it is beautiful, so why not take your acceptance of my testimony at face value?

The distinction between aesthetic judgement and belief also promises to explain away the Kantian intuition that we do not accept aesthetic testimony. We easily confuse transmission and testimony, judgement and belief, equating the non-transmissibility of judgement with the failure of testimonial entitlement to aesthetic belief. The confusion is thickened by a failure to distinguish the roles aesthetic judgement and belief play in two different kinds of aesthetic discourse.

These two kinds of aesthetic discourse are often mixed together and rarely found in pure form, but they are functionally distinct. Taking a cue from Arnold Isenberg's famous essay, we can call them "criticism" and "communication."³³ In both we find the use of relatively rich and detailed, often metaphorically laden, descriptions to support overall aesthetic assessments. However, the purpose of criticism is to prepare us for an encounter with the object of criticism, to prime us to appreciate it, to guide our experience of it when we come to see it. For Isenberg, "the critic... gives us directions for perceiving" so as to "induce a sameness of vision, of experienced content."³⁴ Criticism guides appreciative actions. By contrast, the purpose of aesthetic communication is to add to the store of theoretical and practical beliefs which help us to understand what we appreciate and to control our non-appreciative actions. We order the world in part by attributing aesthetic properties to its bits and pieces,

³³ Arnold Isenberg, "Critical Communication," *Philosophical Review* 58 (1949), 330–44.

³⁴ Isenberg, "Critical Communication," p. 336.

and we manage those bits and pieces as well as our relationship to them on the basis of our beliefs about their aesthetic features. None of this is necessarily very fancy. For example, it shows up in decisions about what CDs to buy, what places to visit, and what people to dine with. If we make all our aesthetic decisions on the basis of aesthetic judgement, we will be too late of a lot of good things.

Given the purpose of criticism, it is reasonable to expect critics to speak from a position of aesthetic judgement. And given the purpose of criticism, we do not expect those judgements to be transmissible. The critic tells a story, deploys some deft metaphors, paints a kind of picture in words that sets us up to have an experience like her experience when we hear the music or see the dance that she is talking about. Tormey tells this story:

suppose that I tell someone else, M, that the Matovan fresco is superior in scope, subtlety, composition, and expressiveness to the frescos of Perugino and Pinturicchio.... M reacts with surprise" "I didn't know you'd been to Italy recently." "I haven't," I admit. "but, you see, I have it from W...." It is, I think, quite evident that I am flying here under false colors, and that I have been caught out."³⁵

Given our expectations about how criticism operates, M's reaction is understandable if M takes T to be engaging in criticism.

However, this story compels Tormey to say that aesthetic testimony fails and the acquaintance principle explains why. What gets overlooked is the possibility of aesthetic communication. This suggests a hypothesis. We do not mark the difference between aesthetic belief, the currency of aesthetic communication, and aesthetic judgement, which is where aesthetic criticism begins and ends. Since judgement and criticism dominate our thinking about aesthetic discourse, belief and communication get overlooked. The result is that we mistakenly take the non-transmissibility of aesthetic judgement to imply the weakness of aesthetic testimony.

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

It seems almost paradoxical to assert: (1) the acquaintance principle is true, (2) the acquaintance principle explains the non-transmissibility of aesthetic cognition, and (3) aesthetic testimony affords title to aesthetic

³⁵ Tormey, "Critical Judgments," 38.

cognition. The paradox evaporates if we add that (4) transmissibility is not the same as testimonial entitlement. But the evaporation of the paradox leaves some gaps to fill. For one thing, (4) calls for a theory of transmissibility. The content-preservation theory of transmission delivers a new reading of the acquaintance principle and motivates a distinction between two kinds of aesthetic cognition which can be harnessed to defend (3). Finally, a new reading of the acquaintance principle brings out the distinctive character of aesthetic judgement and hints at its role in our aesthetic activities.