

## Symposium: “Categories of Art” at 50

**Dan Cavedon-Taylor**

*“Categories of Art” at 50: An Introduction*

Kendall Walton’s “Categories of Art” is one of the foremost contributions to 20th-century esthetics thanks to its vivid articulation of the following combination of claims: first, that the aesthetic value of artworks is a function of their perceptible properties and yet, second of all, historical/intentional factors enter into audiences’ appreciation, and perception of, such properties. The first thesis is typically associated with aesthetic formalism. Walton’s aim, in “Categories of Art,” was to show that formalism is untenable insofar as it is affirmed in conjunction with a denial of the second thesis; rather, Walton claimed, facts about a work’s origin have an essential role in aesthetic judgment, both as a matter of psychological and normative fact. This thesis is one that, with the help of his famous *Guernica* thought experiment, Walton brilliantly illustrates throughout “Categories of Art.” Various subtle and detailed claims about the nature of aesthetic properties, aesthetic judgment, aesthetic perception, and artistic categories, are developed along the way.

Given the influence of “Categories of Art,” there has been significantly less attention to its arguments than one might have expected. (By contrast, consider the wealth of literature that followed in the wake of Walton’s “Fearing Fictions” and “Transparent Pictures.”) This year marks the 50th anniversary of the publication of “Categories of Art,” presenting an ideal opportunity for the esthetics community to reflect on its various theses. In this symposium, Madeleine Ransom, Stacie Friend, and David Davies examine a number

of these. Walton, in turn, responds, centrally discussing his restriction to categories of art that are perceptually distinguishable, a topic discussed by all three commentators, and how he now proposes to understand this thorny notion.

Ransom takes up the question of how, on the view in “Categories of Art,” facts about an artwork’s origin are meant to affect its perception. Walton is often thought to have in mind here the thesis that perception is cognitively penetrated by beliefs/knowledge that represent the relevant facts. Ransom denies that this is true to the spirit of “Categories of Art” and instead defends a perceptual learning account on which mere exposure to exemplars of various categories of art can affect perception in the relevant ways.

Friend explores how to extend Walton’s thesis to works of literature, artworks which, given their non-perceptual nature, Walton claimed his thesis was not straightforwardly applicable to. Building upon previous work, Friend defends the claim that there is such a thing as reading literature in an artistic category that is analogous to seeing (or hearing) visual art (or music) in a category: features of a text non-inferentially strike one in certain ways, such as playful or biting, via an automatic processes of categorization of the text, such as fantasy or political satire.

Davies investigates the significance of Walton’s aforementioned restriction, when introducing his “psychological thesis,” to perceptually distinguishable categories of art.<sup>1</sup> Brian Laetz (2010) has argued that this restriction denies

historical/intentional factors relevance for category membership, thereby showing that Walton's view in "Categories of Art" is more formalist, and involves a different notion of categorial correctness, than has been traditionally assumed. Davies defends the traditional reading against the first charge. Responding to the second, he challenges Walton's claim that the categories relevant for appreciation must be perceptually distinguishable, proposing an alternative, contextualist conception whereby they incorporate, as standard, the artifactuality of artworks.

It is a testament to the success of "Categories of Art" just how many of its central concepts have become staple tools of the contemporary aesthetician. It is our hope that readers of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* find that the papers in this symposium provide new insights into this masterful contribution to our field.

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1. Walton's psychological thesis is that "what aesthetic properties a work seems to us to have depends not only on what non-aesthetic features we perceive in it but also on which of them are standard, which variable, and which contra-standard for us" (1970, 338).

#### Madeleine Ransom

##### *Waltonian Perceptualism*

Kendall Walton's project in "Categories of Art" (CA) is to answer two questions. First, does the history of an artwork's production determine its aesthetic properties? Second, how—if at all—

should *knowledge* of the history of a work's production influence our *aesthetic judgments* of its properties? While his answer to the first has been clearly understood, his answer to the second less so. Contrary to how many have interpreted Walton, such knowledge is not necessary for making aesthetic judgments; perceiving an artwork as belonging to a (correct) category of art does not require art-historical knowledge. Moreover, contextualist attempts to incorporate art-historical knowledge via the mechanism of cognitive penetration are incompatible with Walton's claim that categories of art must be perceptually distinguishable. Here, I propose a way of elaborating Walton's view that avoids this difficulty and reconciles contextualism with aesthetic perception, the view that we perceive aesthetic properties.

At first glance, a perceptualist reading of Walton seems implausible, given how he characterizes formalism, the view he argues against. Formalism's first component just is aesthetic perception: aesthetic properties "are *in* the works, to be seen, heard, or otherwise perceived there" (CA, 336). Its second is the epistemic claim that aesthetic properties "must be discoverable simply by examining the works themselves if they are discoverable at all" (336). Formalism's third component is the metaphysical claim that a work's history is irrelevant to its aesthetic properties—"it is never even partly *in virtue of* the circumstances of a work's origin that it has a sense of mystery or is coherent or serene" (336). Yet, after presenting the view, Walton acknowledges that "there is something right in the idea that what matters aesthetically about a painting or a sonata is just how it looks or sounds" (337).

The most plausible reading of Walton is that he endorses aesthetic perception while rejecting both epistemic and metaphysical claims. This reading faces an apparent contradiction, however. If we perceive aesthetic properties, then we should be able to simply by examining the individual artwork. The contradiction is resolved by the details of Walton's account: in order for aesthetic properties to be perceivable, one must first develop the ability to perceive artworks as belonging to (correct) categories of art. However, Walton does not adequately explain how this ability is developed. I propose to understand it in terms of perceptual learning.

## I. WALTON'S PERCEPTUALISM

Walton's article presents two main theses. The psychological thesis is that what category we perceive an artwork in affects what aesthetic properties it appears to have. These categories are "perceptually distinguishable," meaning that they are identifiable wholly on the basis of perceptual properties. To perceive a work in a category does not involve inferring from certain perceptible nonaesthetic properties that an artwork belongs to that category. Instead, the perceptible nonaesthetic properties that count in favor of a work's belonging to a category—"standard" properties—must be perceptually unified into a single "Gestalt" quality. We also perceive certain nonaesthetic properties of the work as "contrastandard"—where these count against category membership—or "variable," where these count neither for nor against membership. Perceiving properties as standard, contrastandard, or variable affects what aesthetic properties we perceive the work to have. For example, standard properties may contribute to experiencing a work as unified, and contrastandard properties may contribute to experiencing a work as shocking.

The psychological thesis thus explains why certain aesthetic properties may be imperceptible when viewing an artwork—the relevant category is not yet perceptually distinguishable. However, it does not provide guidance on which perceptually distinguishable categories of art are correct. Without a correctness condition, the view amounts to relativism about aesthetic properties. There are many perceptually distinguishable categories one might perceive a work as belonging to, and if there is no way of saying which is correct, then we must accept that all of them are.

This is where Walton's normative thesis comes in: the correct categories are determined by non-perceptual "art-historical" facts, such as the creator's intentions, the process of the work's production, and which categories are established in the society it was produced in.

It is easy to misconstrue the relationship between Walton's psychological and normative theses. If art-historical facts are responsible for determining the correct category of appreciation, then it seems that viewers should use knowledge of such facts to categorize a work when making aesthetic judgments. However, Walton is explicit that knowledge of the correct category is neither

necessary nor sufficient for perceiving an artwork in that category. To perceive a work in the correct category "does not require consideration of historical facts, or consideration of facts at all" (366). And "[o]ne cannot merely decide to respond appropriately to a work ... once he knows the correct categories" (365–366). Several interpretations of Walton have not appreciated this aspect of his view, and face difficulties as a result.

## II. PROBLEMS WITH OTHER CONTEXTUALIST VIEWS

Walton's view has been labeled "contextualist" because he holds that art-historical context partially determines a work's aesthetic properties. However, unlike Walton, subsequent contextualists have tended to place emphasis on the relevance of art-historical knowledge for aesthetic judgments (for example, Levinson 1980; Currie 1989). This branch of contextualism has trouble with the claim that we experience aesthetic properties at all. The more knowledge is required for an apt aesthetic judgment, the less plausible it is that aesthetic properties are perceived. Contextualists must specify how art-historical knowledge influences perception, or else abandon the claim that aesthetic properties are perceived.

Some contextualists have provided a specification in terms of cognitive penetration: cognitive states, such as beliefs, provide direct input to perceptual processing, modulating perceptual experience in a semantically coherent way (Pylyshyn 1999). Lamarque writes that "[a]ll perception is informed by background knowledge. ... What Walton's argument establishes so powerfully is that our aesthetic responses are thoroughly determined by our beliefs about what kind of thing we are looking at" (2010, 132).<sup>1</sup> This enriches the psychological thesis: how we come to perceive a work's aesthetic properties is via a belief that it belongs in a given category, where this belief has been formed in response to art-historical facts. This belief may cause us first to perceive the work as belonging to a given category (perceiving certain properties as standard and unified in ways specified by Walton), which then influences which aesthetic properties we perceive in the work (Stokes 2014).<sup>2</sup>

However, this explanation is incompatible with Walton's criterion for a work's belonging to a

perceptually distinguishable category: when we encounter an artwork we must place it in a category wholly on the basis of how it looks, not via our art-historical knowledge (CA, 339). With cognitive penetration, extra-perceptual knowledge is necessary for perceiving an artwork in a category: first, one must have the knowledge that a work belongs in a given category, and only then can this penetrate experience to cause us to perceive it in this category, and thus perceive its aesthetic properties. This knowledge of the correct category cannot derive from perception (or else we would not need to explain how we perceive categories via cognitive penetration), so it must derive at least partially from non-perceptual considerations.

Davies (2020) and Friend (2020) argue that Walton's adoption of the perceptual distinguishability criterion is motivated on purely strategic grounds, and that there is independent reason to reject it. If this is the case, then perhaps contextualists are right to violate the criterion. This is too hasty. The account I develop provides an empirically plausible way of meeting the criterion.

What those who appeal to cognitive penetration get right is that in order to reconcile art-historical knowledge and perceptualism, Walton's psychological thesis must be filled in. The thesis does not provide an account of what Stokes terms the "expertise-to-perception effect" (2014, 10): how experts come to perceive artworks in correct categories. This is puzzling given Walton's position that art-historical knowledge is neither necessary nor sufficient for perceptual categorization. How can one come to perceive an artwork in a (correct) category without such knowledge? Walton provides only the beginnings of a response: "Perceiving a work in a certain category or set of categories is a skill that must be acquired by training, and exposure to a great many other works of the category or categories in question is ordinarily, I believe, an essential part of this training" (CA, 366). I propose a "Waltonian" way of developing this: the training is best understood in terms of perceptual learning, where what is perceptually learned is a prototypically structured representation of a category of art.

### III. WALTONIAN PERCEPTUALISM

Perceptual learning can be characterized as an enduring change in the perceptual system due

to practice or repeated exposure to a perceptual stimulus (Goldstone 1998). The perceptual system signifies whatever cognitive resources are causally responsible for producing perceptual experience. So, perceptual learning often causes a change in perceptual experience—experts perceive the world differently from novices. However, perceptual learning is importantly different from cognitive penetration in that these changes are due to exposure to exemplars of a stimulus rather than the agent's beliefs. While an agent's belief that she has performed a task correctly may accelerate the process, perceptual learning can occur without such feedback from experimenters (Sasaki et al. 2010).<sup>3</sup>

An important aspect of perceptual learning is that it may allow us to categorize objects directly in perception rather than inferring the correct category via perceptual cues. This ability is the basis of what is known in psychology as perceptual expertise: repeated exposure to certain classes of objects allows us to perceptually discern subtle differences that were not apparent before, enhancing our categorization abilities (Gauthier et al. 2010).

The structure of these learned perceptual categories is sometimes hypothesized to be prototypical. Prototypes are idealized instances or central tendencies of a category that we store in memory and use to categorize objects.<sup>4</sup> They are formed by repeated exposure to a variety of category members. Prototype theory was inspired by Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance—category membership is not about meeting necessary and sufficient conditions, but resembling other category members in certain respects.<sup>5</sup> Roughly, objects are categorized based on how many category-typical features they possess, where these are not individually necessary for membership. Atypical features can sometimes count against category membership, but if an object nevertheless possesses a high number of typical features, it will be deemed as belonging. For example, while ostriches do not fly, they nevertheless have beaks, feathers, and lay eggs.

Perceptual learning explains how categories of art are learned over time, involving the sort of training Walton alluded to: exposure to multiple exemplars. It also provides an empirically plausible explanation for how categories can come to be perceptually distinguishable: the perceptual system changes to be able to directly make the

relevant categorizations, eventually resulting in perceptual expertise.

Understanding what is learned in terms of prototypes provides a way of empirically accommodating standard and contrastandard properties. The features that count toward membership just are the standard features of Walton’s account, and those that count against it are contrastandard. This provides a point of contact with work in empirical aesthetics that has found people aesthetically prefer more prototypical objects (including artworks) of a given category (Farkas 2002). Though Walton did not make this prediction, his theory entails that changing which properties are perceived as standard, contrastandard, or variable will in turn alter aesthetic judgments.

#### IV. THE ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE ON WALTONIAN PERCEPTUALISM

Endorsing perceptual distinguishability does not mean endorsing Walton’s claim that perceptually distinguishable categories are limited to “in the style of” a given school, method, or artist (“cubist style”), rather than including historical categories (“cubism”) (CA, 339). I instead argue that we can perceive historical categories themselves. First, we could not categorize a work as being in the style of cubism if there were no common perceptual features that distinguished the historical category “cubism”—the former is parasitic on the latter. Second, the training set arguably determines what the category refers to—if the training set used is historical, then the category will be too, since our categories refer to what they were set up to detect (Dretske 1986).

Given this interpretation of perceptually distinguishable categories, art-historical knowledge can be understood as playing several major though indirect roles in helping people to develop such categories. Most importantly, it will be used to create reliable training sets. To form the perceptual category for “dog” we must be exposed to exemplars of dogs or accurate representations of them. The same will hold for artworks, but there are many ways of parsing the categories. This is where Walton’s account of correct categories is relevant—art historians and critics require art-historical knowledge to select, from all the perceptually distinguishable categories we might become experts with, those that are relevant to our practices. This

informs the way artworks are presented in museums, books, and classes. Novices then use these “training sets” to develop perceptual categories.

In theory, a novice in a reliable environment could develop a perceptual category—provided exposure to enough exemplars—without art-historical knowledge at all. The perceptual similarities become apparent on their own. However, in practice, our perceptual training often goes hand in hand with the learning of art-historical knowledge. While some of this is incidental to forming perceptually distinguishable categories, such knowledge can accelerate the learning process. It can draw our attention to the properties or stylistic features relevant for perceptual categorization, cutting down on the time it takes to localize them. As Walton writes, “facts about a work’s history, however dispensable they may be ‘in principle,’ are often crucially important in practice. (One might simply not think to listen for a recurring series of intervals in a piece of music, until he learns that the composer meant the work to be structured around it)” (CA, 336–337).

Art-historical knowledge may also accelerate perceptual learning by serving as a source of training feedback, and it may serve to bolster or diminish our confidence in our aesthetic judgments. Not only do we perceive works as belonging to a category, and so justify our belief perceptually, we may also have knowledge that it belongs in this category based on testimony or inference (Cavedon-Taylor 2017). Finally, when two people’s aesthetic perceptual experiences differ because of a difference in perceived category, such knowledge will be important in establishing which category is correct. For reasons such as these, art-historical knowledge remains central to developing perceptual expertise.

Given that training on multiple exemplars is involved in developing expertise with a perceptually distinguishable category, it will be impossible to perceive a work as belonging to a category that does not exist in actuality, such as Walton’s well-known example of *guernicas*. “*Guernica*” is a hypothetical category of art composed of objects that resemble in color and form Picasso’s painting of the same title, except that rather than being flat, their canvasses differ in height and texture. We cannot perceive a work as a *guernica*, as Walton noted (CA, 365), because there are no exemplars of *guernicas* for us to develop the perceptual category.

Yet, the account still leaves room for error: experts may miscategorize works, especially when one is the first of a new category (such as when the first fauvist works were judged by impressionist standards). Further errors are possible even with successful categorization. For example, one important source of error in aesthetic judgments on this account is perceptual bias: we may have a perceptual category that has been trained on a biased sample of exemplars, leading to skewed aesthetic judgments. Such considerations provide interesting new areas of exploration for Waltonian perceptualists.<sup>6</sup>

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1. See also Wollheim (1993).
  2. While Stokes (2014) discusses several other ways in which cognitive penetration might alter aesthetic properties, all depend on possessing art-historical knowledge, and so all fall prey to the same objection.
  3. Perceptual learning is also distinct from "diachronic cognitive penetration" (Stokes 2014), insofar as perceptual learning can occur without guidance from the relevant cognitions. In practice, experts often undergo both perceptual learning and knowledge accumulation as part of their training, and so it is easy to (falsely) suppose that the latter is responsible for the former.
  4. Prototypes are sometimes identified with concepts, and so hypothesized to be involved in cognitive processes (Barsalou 1999). I avoid using the term "concept" because I believe (though do not have space to argue for) that the representations used to categorize objects in perception are distinct from those used in thought.
  5. For this reason, prototypes cohere nicely with Walton's general antiessentialist stance. Thanks to Dom Lopes for pointing this out.
  6. Thanks to Dan Cavedon-Taylor, David Davies, Stacie Friend, Dominic McIver Lopes, and Kendall Walton for their helpful comments on this article. I would also like to acknowledge the generous support provided by the ASA Dissertation Fellowship—many of the ideas expressed here were developed during my fellowship and can be found in my dissertation on aesthetic perception.

**Stacie Friend**  
*Categories of Literature*

Kendall Walton's "Categories of Art" (CA) is one of the most important and influential papers in twentieth-century aesthetics. It is almost universally taken to refute traditional aesthetic formalism or empiricism, according to which all that matters aesthetically is what is manifest to perception. CA thus played a key role in ushering in the ascendancy of contextualism in the philosophy of art, generating widespread agreement with Walton's conclusion "that (some) facts about the origins of works of art have an *essential* role in criticism" (CA, 337).

While the part played by CA in undermining formalism is indisputable, questions remain about the extent to which it supports contextualism. Walton clearly retains formalist presumptions. For instance, he writes, "I do not deny that paintings and sonatas are to be judged solely on what can be seen or heard in them—when they are perceived

correctly” (367). Thus, contextualists such as Currie (1989) and Davies (2003, 2006) argue that Walton does not depart sufficiently from formalism, while Lamarque takes Walton’s argument to support his contention that “[w]orks cannot differ in aesthetic character if that difference is not accessible to the senses (or in the case of literature to experience more broadly conceived)” (2010, 126–127).

As Lamarque’s parenthetical qualification suggests, most commentators assume that the argument of CA applies to works of literature. Walton himself notes a word of caution: “The aesthetic properties of works of literature are not happily called ‘perceptual’. . . . (The notion of perceiving a work in a category . . . is not straightforwardly applicable to literary works)” (335n5). However, he goes on to say that although he focuses “on visual and musical works . . . the central points [he makes] concerning them hold, with suitable modifications, for novels, plays, and poems as well” (335n5). Here I consider what “suitable modifications” are required to extend the account to literature.

The basic argument of CA is familiar. Walton first aims to establish a *psychological thesis*: that how we perceive a work’s aesthetic properties turns on which nonaesthetic properties count as standard, contrastandard, or variable for the categories in which we perceive it. He marshals numerous examples to demonstrate that the way we classify a work alters our perception. Most famously, Walton asks us to imagine a society without painting but with an art form called “guernicas,” which share content and design features with Picasso’s *Guernica* but are executed in varying forms of bas-relief. We see *Guernica* as a painting and take the flatness as standard and the figures as variable, whereas members of this society would see it as a guernica and take the figures as standard and the flatness as variable. In consequence, while the painting “seems violent, dynamic, vital, disturbing to us . . . it would strike them as cold, stark, lifeless, or serene and restful, or perhaps bland, dull, boring” (347).

Walton considers and rejects the possibility that aesthetic judgments are category-relative, that Picasso’s *Guernica* is dynamic as a painting but lifeless as a guernica. Someone who sees *Guernica* as cold and lifeless is wrong because they have not perceived the work in a *correct* category. Walton’s *normative thesis* is that a work’s aesthetic proper-

ties are those we perceive in it when we perceive it correctly. He goes on to offer several criteria for deciding the categories in which to perceive a work. Among them are historical criteria: we must take into account whether the artist intended the work to fit in a category or whether the category was recognized in the artist’s society. Because an appeal to these conditions is ineliminable, a work’s aesthetic properties ultimately turn on facts about its history.

Though this conclusion represents a rejection of formalism, Walton does not go as far as contextualists who maintain that aesthetic value may turn on facts about a work independently of their effect on us. Instead, his position in CA exemplifies the view Davies (2006) calls “enlightened empiricism.” Enlightened empiricists maintain (*contra* formalists) that facts about the origins of an artwork are relevant to aesthetic value, but (*contra* contextualists) only insofar as they potentially impact our experience. Enlightened empiricists like Lamarque construe *experience* broadly enough to accommodate literature, but, as already noted, Walton assumes a narrower conception of sensory perception.

Recent philosophical attempts to explain “perception in a category” are similarly restricted. For example, Stokes (2014) argues that the best explanation of Walton’s psychological thesis is that perception is “cognitively penetrable”: that is, our beliefs about the artwork’s categorization alter the contents of our perceptual experiences (see also Lamarque 2010, 132). Stokes discusses various ways this could be so, depending on whether perceptual content includes only low-level nonaesthetic properties such as color and shape, or also high-level aesthetic properties. Either way, the mechanism is specific to sensory perception.

Madeleine Ransom (see Ransom 2020) denies that cognitive penetration is the mechanism that underpins Walton’s psychological thesis; however, the alternative she proposes looks equally unsuited to literature. For Ransom, categorization has its effect through a process of “perceptual learning” (70–75), “an enduring change in the perceptual system due to practice or repeated exposure to a perceptual stimulus” (66–70). The result is a change in high-level perception, explaining, for example, why expert birders can just *see* the difference between species of birds. However, this process is a sensory one and thus difficult to apply to literature.

Ransom rejects the cognitive penetration approach because it sits uneasily with a key feature of CA: that Walton's argument is restricted to *perceptually distinguishable categories of art* (Ransom 2020, 62–66; see also Laetz 2010, 291).<sup>1</sup> Walton's examples include “paintings, cubist paintings, Gothic architecture, classical sonatas, paintings in the style of Cézanne, and music in the style of late Beethoven,” but *only* “if they are interpreted in such a way that membership is determined solely by features that can be perceived in a work when it is experienced in the normal manner” (339).

The focus on perceptually distinguishable categories (henceforth: PD-categories) seems to exclude literature altogether. It may be possible to recognize certain genres of poetry simply by looking and listening, but distinguishing most literary genres requires *comprehension* rather than (or in addition to) sensory perception. Brian Laetz argues that the restriction to PD-categories limits the scope of Walton's normative thesis; whether a work is a forgery, for instance, cannot make a difference to its aesthetic properties if this is not perceptually distinguishable (2010, 291). The worry is that the same applies to literary categories.

There are thus two challenges in applying Walton's argument to literature. First, what aspect of reading literature corresponds to “perception in a category”? Second, in what sense are literary categories “perceptually distinguishable”? Addressing either challenge requires identifying a psychological process that plays the role of sensory perception in the literary case.

On Lamarque's account, the experience of literature includes phenomenology and intentional content (2010, 127). Our attention is intentionally directed on certain literary features of the work, often accompanied by affect (Lamarque 2009, 172). Shelley argues that we “perceive” (non-sensorily) aesthetic properties in conceptual art and literature so long as “we do not infer them, but . . . they strike us” (2003, 372). Just as we hear the serenity of the music or see the elegance of the painting, we are noninferentially aware of Oscar Wilde's wit.

Some take this kind of noninferentiality to be a characteristic of sensory perception. According to the perceptual theory of language comprehension, “fluent speakers have a noninferential capacity to perceive the content of speech” (Brogaard 2018, 2967). Consider the phenomenology of hearing speech in a language you understand, contrasted

with one you do not; or the way Cyrillic text looks to someone before and after learning to read Russian (Peacocke 1992, 89; Siegel 2006, 490). The claim is that meanings themselves are part of perceptual content, processed automatically once the language is learned. Perhaps the same is true of literary features. However, because the perceptual theory is controversial, I remain neutral here.

What matters for present purposes is that there is a corollary to the perception of visual and aural properties in reading literature. The relevant experience is characterized by attention to certain features of a text, which strike us in one way or another as a result of noninferential, automatic processes akin to, or a species of, perception.

If this is right, experiencing literature *in a category* cannot mean drawing inferences from category information to literary properties. If I judge the narrator of Henry James's *Turn of the Screw* reliable because I classify it as a ghost story, or treat the baby recipes in Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* as nonserious because I know the essay is satirical, categorization does not have the appropriate effect. Rather, classification must play a causal role in my being struck by the eeriness of James's story or the humor of Swift's essay.

Elsewhere, I have proposed that reading in a category involves the subconscious adoption of what psychologists call a “reading” or “encoding strategy,” a way of compensating for limits on working memory capacity by prioritizing attention on certain features of a text rather than others (Friend 2012, 202). We cannot give equal attention to every word or detail as we read, so instead we strategically focus on (for instance) what matters to the protagonist or causally significant events. The information that is prioritized is encoded in memory and deployed in further interpretation.

I suggest that classification generates expectations about which features of a text count as standard, variable, or contrastandard, and this prompts us, automatically and noninferentially, to pay more attention to some of these features than others. For example, consider the following passage:

It was no good. Granville Sharp could not go on as before. The undeniable fact was that he had no stomach for the fight. . . . [T]o think that it had been his hand that had supplied the bayonets puncturing American breasts at Bunker Hill, or that had delivered the grenades that



had put the houses of Charles Town to the torch—why, his conscience revolted at it.

If one reads this passage *as fiction*, the “inside views” will count as standard, and readers will not question how the author knows what Granville Sharp is thinking. The contrary is true if one reads it *as nonfiction*. As it happens, the excerpt is from Simon Schama’s nonfiction *Rough Crossings* (2009, 111). The classification explains why Schama has been praised for “plunging us into the very centre of the action” (Wilson 2005) using techniques that would elicit little attention in fiction. One need not have the concept “free indirect discourse” to recognize that the inside views of Granville Sharp’s thoughts are unusual for nonfiction; one need only be familiar with other works in that category for this feature to strike one as noteworthy (compare CA, 341). This is (akin to) the process of perceptual learning described by Ransom.<sup>2</sup>

The next question is how to make sense of experientially distinguishable categories of literature. Reformulating Walton’s criterion, such categories would be determined solely by features that non-inferentially strike a reader when a work is experienced in the normal manner. It is not entirely clear how to interpret this criterion, even applied to visual and aural artworks. For example, is “painting” a PD-category? Criticizing Walton, Nick Zangwill contends that it is not: “what *makes* something a painting is, in part, the artist’s intention” (2000, 479). One might think that because *Guernica* could be either a painting or a guernica, the only way to tell is by appeal to historical considerations. If so, the number of PD-categories will be vanishingly small.

I believe that this restrictive interpretation is mistaken. For ordinary viewers experiencing them in the usual way, paintings are perceptually distinguishable—as would guernicas be if there were any such category. After all, paintings are typically flat, painted surfaces with variable pictorial contents, whereas guernicas are bas-reliefs with standard contents and variable depths and textures. Where a work could fit into either of these PD-categories, historical factors decide which is “aesthetically active” (Laetz 2010, 295).

We can make a parallel point about a literary example Walton discusses elsewhere. He writes that his account in CA helps to

make sense of the claim in Jorge Luis Borges’ story “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*,” . . . that although “Cervantes’ text and Menard’s are verbally identical,” Menard’s, written (not copied) by a different author in a different century, is “more subtle” and “almost infinitely richer.” (Walton 1973, 268)

Cervantes’s and Menard’s works each fit into multiple categories, for instance (works in the style of) *Spanish Golden Age satire* for Cervantes and *postmodern novel* for Menard.<sup>3</sup> Although the texts are identical, this does not prevent the categories from being experientially distinguishable. For example, postmodern novels are not typically written in early modern Spanish.

In less artificial cases, experiential distinguishability looks more straightforward. If a text begins “Once upon a time” and narrates events involving magic, readers will take it as a fairy tale. An expository text explaining the causes of past events with numerous footnotes will be read as academic history. Now, one could discover that something that appeared to be academic history was something else, say an elaborate experimental fiction. Similarly, one could discover that something that appeared to be a painting was, instead, a spare canvas grounded in red lead (Danto 1981, 2). Walton’s claim is not ontological but epistemological, and no plausible epistemic claim about experience requires infallibility.

Why does Walton restrict his argument to PD-categories? One reason is his opposition: If the formalist is to be persuaded, the argument must take place in his or her territory, within the domain of the perceptually manifest. To smuggle in historical considerations whose relevance is precisely what is at issue would be to beg the question (see Davies 2020). Another reason is that it is only when we can perceptually distinguish a category that we are struck by its *gestalt* rather than inferring aesthetic properties from background knowledge.

It cannot be denied that sometimes we rely on information external to the work to recognize a category. And Walton allows this as one of the “causes of our perceiving works in certain categories,” as when we are told in advance that a Cézanne painting is French Impressionist (342). However, such information merely prompts the appropriate *gestalt*; it would fail to produce the right effect if we were not already familiar with works in the category. The guernica and Menard

examples are misleading in this respect, since we have no background familiarity with purely hypothetical categories (Ransom 2020).

They are also misleading insofar as they turn on stark categorial differences. Actual artworks can be experienced within multiple categories which are not mutually exclusive. For instance, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* can be read as a fantasy adventure story, a political or social satire, and a satire on contemporary travel journals. Consider this description of how the promotion of courtiers is determined in Lilliput:

When a great office is vacant, . . . five or six of those candidates petition the emperor to entertain his majesty and the court with a dance on the rope; and whoever jumps the highest, without falling, succeeds in the office. (Swift 1980, 53–54)

Read as part of a fantasy travel adventure, this will seem yet another exotic ritual; detailing unusual customs is standard for the genre. But the passage will strike readers who are sufficiently familiar with the relevant sort of satire as (in addition) a clever, biting portrayal of political intrigue. The satire would have been transparent to its original audience, whereas readers today rely on more explicit cues. Still, however they are prompted to read the work in that category, they will expect apparently innocent descriptions to double as incisive commentary. As a result, they are likely to be struck by the humor.

Such examples indicate that literary categorization makes an experiential difference that is at least analogous to the perceptual effects delineated in "Categories." Much more work needs to be done in understanding how categorization guides patterns of attention in reading; but that is a project for another day.<sup>4</sup>

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1. I suspect that Stokes's (2014) account of high-level perception is closer to Ransom's view than she allows, but I set this aside here.

2. Brogaard similarly argues that learning a language is a form of perceptual learning (2018, 2969).

3. I am inclined to drop the qualification *in the style of*; if we learn to distinguish categories via genuine instances, we are tracking genuine kinds (see Ransom 2020).

4. I would like to thank Dan Cavedon-Taylor, David Davies, and Madeleine Ransom for comments on a draft that prompted numerous and significant improvements. I would also like to thank Kendall Walton for fruitful discussion.

**David Davies***"Categories of Art" for Contextualists*

## I

Walton concludes "Categories of Art" (henceforth "CA") by presenting what he takes to be the moral of his preceding reflections: "If a work's aesthetic properties are those that are to be found in it when it is perceived correctly, and the correct way to perceive it is determined partly by historical facts about the artist's intention and/or his society, no examination of the work itself, however thorough, will by itself reveal those properties" ([1970] 2008, 217). These facts bear not only on the epistemology of art but also on the very nature of artworks: "They help to *determine* what aesthetic properties a work has; they, together with the work's nonaesthetic features, *make* it coherent, serene, or whatever" (217). (All future references are to CA unless otherwise specified.)

Commentators have generally seen Walton as championing a contextualist epistemology and ontology of art in the face of a broad formalist/empiricist consensus at the time (see Currie 1989, 28; Levinson 1980, 11). Brian Laetz (2010), however, has challenged this interpretation. His arguments focus on a detail of Walton's argument whose significance, Laetz maintains, has been overlooked. After outlining Laetz's two principal claims, I argue that one can be addressed if we pay closer attention to the philosophical context in which Walton was writing. Laetz's second claim, however, calls for a more nuanced response from the contextualist.

## II

Laetz's professed aim is to correct two widely accepted readings of CA that bear crucially on its significance. The first pertains to what Laetz takes to be Walton's main thesis, that "the aesthetic properties of artworks depend on their perceptual properties when viewed in their correct category" (2010, 289). The second locates Walton's view relative to formalist and contextualist epistemologies of art. Both readings rest, for Laetz, on a failure to attend to a restriction introduced early in CA to what Walton terms "perceptually distinguishable" categories (PDCs). Laetz argues that this re-

striction casts doubt on "traditional" understandings of Walton's main thesis and indicates that Walton's view is closer to formalism than to contextualism. I first introduce Walton's definition of a "PDC" category, and then spell out Laetz's arguments.

Walton introduces the notion of a PDC of art in advancing the "psychological point" that "what aesthetic properties a work seems to us to have depends not only on what nonaesthetic features we perceive in it but also on which of them are standard, which variable, and which contra-standard *for us*" (198). Walton prefaces the "psychological point," which is intended to supplement Frank Sibley's distinction between the *aesthetic* properties that a work *seems* to us to have in virtue of the *nonaesthetic* properties we observe it to have, with the following observation:

It is necessary to introduce first a distinction between standard, variable, and contra-standard properties relative to perceptually distinguishable categories of works of art. A category is perceptually distinguishable if membership in it is determined solely by features of works that can be perceived in them when they are experienced in the normal manner. (198)

Walton maintains that "the categories of painting, cubist painting, Gothic architecture, classical sonatas, painting in the style of Cézanne, music in the style of late Beethoven, and most other media, genre, styles, and forms can be construed as perceptually distinguishable," but only if we exclude, as a requirement, anything pertaining to an entity's history of making (199). Thus "having the look of an etching" is a PDC, whereas "being an etching" is not.

This restriction to PDCs is central to Laetz's argument for the widespread misinterpretation of Walton's "main thesis." He offers two readings of this thesis which differ over what it is for a category to be "correct." On the "traditional" reading, "a correct category is simply whatever category a work belongs to. . . . Walton's guidelines for discerning correct categories are thus guidelines for discerning what category a work actually belongs to" (Laetz 2010, 295). "Guernica," then, is an incorrect category for the appreciation of *Guernica* because *Guernica* is not a guernica. On Laetz's "alternative" reading:

among all the various categories any work belongs to, [a correct category] is a special, privileged category that actually helps determine a work's aesthetic character . . . Seeking a correct category to judge a work is not to seek a category that it belongs to; instead, it is to seek—among all the categories we already know it belongs to—one that is aesthetically active. (2010, 295)

On this reading, Picasso's painting is *both* a painting and a guernica, but only the first category is aesthetically active in being "privileged" in the prescribed sense.

Laetz's principal argument against the traditional reading is a simple one: if, as that reading maintains, it is right to categorize *Guernica* as a painting rather than a guernica because of its provenance, then "painting" and "guernica" cannot be PDCs, and Walton's account is inconsistent (2010, 298). On Laetz's alternative reading, "painting" and "guernica" *are* PDCs that apply to *Guernica*; provenance selects only one as aesthetically active.

As noted, Laetz's second claim concerns the location of Walton's view in epistemological space. He takes Walton's claim that he "do[es] not deny that paintings and sonatas are to be judged solely by what can be seen or heard in them—when they are perceived correctly" (CA, 219) to express qualified agreement with formalism's central thesis that "the aesthetic properties of a work are solely determined by its perceptual, sensible, or manifest properties" (Laetz 2010, 301). Thus, Laetz argues, CA is closer to formalism than to contemporary contextualism in two respects: (1) "the range of aesthetically relevant categories that Walton considers is much more restricted than those of ordinary contextualists," and (2) "the way in which these categories are aesthetically relevant is, on Walton's view, rather minimal as well" (301). In defending (1), Laetz again cites the restriction to PDCs: "The only aesthetically relevant categories that Walton considers are perceptually distinguishable ones . . . defined solely in terms of perceptual properties; . . . in a sense, we can see a work is a painting or hear a work is a sonata" (301). He notes that the categories often cited by contextualists, for example, "being a forgery" or "being a twentieth-century European painting," is not a PDC. Defending (2), Laetz argues that, for Walton, how an aesthetically active PDC bears upon a work's aesthetic properties does not depend on placing works in categories' membership

of which is partly determined by oeuvre, purpose, or provenance (304).

### III

I have stressed the significance accorded by Laetz to Walton's restriction, when introducing the "psychological point," of the categories under consideration to PDCs. Laetz, noting that Walton offers no reason for this restriction, takes it to be "a concession to formalist views" and evidence of Walton's distance from contemporary contextualism (Laetz 2010, 301).

However, once we contextualize CA, other reasons for Walton's restriction become apparent. As Walton acknowledges, CA was written in a philosophical milieu dominated by a formalism whose most formidable proponent was Monroe C. Beardsley (195n1; 196n3). Indeed, a claimed corollary of CA is that the "Intentional Fallacy," as defended by Beardsley and Wimsatt (1946), "is not a fallacy at all" (217). Moreover, citing Beardsley (196n3), Walton notes that formalism denies that contextual factors have any bearing upon aesthetic appreciation, with such factors having relevance only for "art-historical" appreciation (see, for example, Lessing 1965, 464).

Walton aims to show that formalist epistemology fails *on its own terms*, and thus cannot be defended by appeal to the "aesthetic" or "art-historical" distinction. This requires setting up matters in a way that the formalist cannot reject as question-begging. Thus, "aesthetic properties" are defined, by reference to Sibley, as perceivable—under the correct category. Furthermore, the categories claimed to inform the perception of works cannot have nonperceptible features as criteria of correct application. To admit at this stage in the argument categories of art bearing upon a work's aesthetic appreciation that are *not* perceptually distinguishable would allow the formalist to reject, as *not aesthetically* relevant, properties only apparent when a work is perceived under such categories. Walton's restriction to PDCs is therefore explicable on purely strategic grounds without entailing the formalist commitments proposed by Laetz.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, a formalist interpretation of Walton's remarks about the perceivability of a work's aesthetic properties requires that he be using "aesthetic" as synonymous with "artistic," since

the formalism at issue concerns those properties bearing on a work's appreciation *as art*. Gregory Currie commits himself to this understanding of "aesthetic," and assumes that Walton uses it in the same way (1989, 19). This grounds Currie's claim that Walton gives provenance a limited role in determining artistic properties, ignoring those artistic values that reside in an artist's creative achievements. Laetz, reading Walton the same way, ascribes a very limited contextualism that excludes, from the appreciation and value of artworks, properties depending on oeuvre, motivation, and individual history of making.

Nothing in CA justifies such a reading, however. The term "aesthetic," as noted, is introduced via Sibley's account of "aesthetic concepts," something that can be explained on strategic grounds. Furthermore, Walton includes both artworks and nature as bearers of "aesthetic properties," accepting in the latter case a relativism rejected in the former (207, 211).<sup>2</sup> An additional point concerning Laetz's formalist reading of CA is that, even if *artistic categories are PD*, Walton's central contextualist claim—quoted in the first paragraph of this article—is that a work's *aesthetic properties are not*: they are discernible only by perceiving the work in a *correct* category, and correctness depends on provenance.

#### IV

Laetz's *first* challenge to traditional readings of CA rests not on Walton's *motivation* for the restriction to PDCs but only on his *making* such a restriction, something inconsistent, for Laetz, with traditional understandings of categorial correctness. "By perceptually distinguishable categories," Laetz maintains, "Walton means those in which membership is determined *solely* by perceptible features. Thus, under normal conditions . . . one can determine whether a work belongs to a perceptually distinguishable category merely by perceiving it" (Laetz 2010, 291). He later writes: "Categories of art are simply defined in terms of properties that artworks possess. . . . Artworks have properties, and for any property or set of properties they possess, there is a corresponding category to which a work thus belongs in virtue of it" (298).

The latter claim cannot be right. Categories are individuated in terms not of properties *per se*, but

of properties that are standard, variable, and contrastandard. But we might take Laetz's point to be that there is a category corresponding to any artistic *concept* that identifies specific properties as standard, variable, and contrastandard for that concept. Consider "plaid pattern," a nonartistic example.<sup>3</sup> "Containing repeated stripes" is standard, "having certain colors" is variable, and "having lots of curves" is contrastandard. This category is clearly PD. The cited properties are observable and how an object came to have them is irrelevant to category membership. Anything satisfying the concept both can be "accurately" perceived as—perceived as having properties it actually has—and indeed *is*, a plaid pattern.

Laetz (and Walton at the time of writing CA) takes the same to apply to the categories through which aesthetic properties of artworks are perceived.<sup>4</sup> Take "painting" and "guernica" and their applicability to Picasso's *Guernica*. The latter possesses (inter alia) the following PD properties: having a flat surface marked with paint and topologically differentiated at most by the height of the paint marks ("p"); being rectangular when viewed orthogonally to this surface ("q"); and having upon its surface, when viewed orthogonally, the particular "*Guernica*" distribution of shapes, lines, and patterns ("r").

For "painting," "p" (or something like it) is standard, while "q" and "r" are particular determinates of determinables that are variable. For "guernica," "q," and "r" are standard, while "p" is a particular determinate of a determinable that is variable. *Guernica* possesses the properties that are standard for both categories and does not possess any PD properties contrastandard for either. By the reasoning applied to "plaid pattern," *Guernica* is both a painting and a guernica: given its perceptible properties, it can be accurately perceived both *as a painting* and *as a guernica*, and anything that can be accurately so perceived *is* both. The further claim is that *Guernica* is *correctly* perceived only as a painting, where *correct* perceivability requires not only accurate perceivability as an "x" (and thus being an "x"), but some project whose ends are served by perceiving something as an "x" (here, grasping the aesthetic properties *Guernica* possesses as an artwork).

But are *Guernica*'s aesthetic properties those that it has when perceived as a "painting" so conceived? Perhaps not. On the above analysis, PDC membership depends only on how something

presents itself to perception, not how it *came to have* its perceptible properties. Since something's being an *artifact* depends on its provenance and not on how it presents itself to perception—recall Danto's canvas perceptually indistinguishable from Rembrandt's *Polish Rider*, produced by an explosion in a paint factory! (1981, 31–32)—the PDC “painting” cannot have “being an artifact” as a standard property. But if it is this category that is made aesthetically active by a visual work's provenance, then one who attempts to discern the aesthetic properties of a work by perceiving its non-aesthetic properties under the category “painting” cannot perceive the latter properties as properties of a thing made, but only as properties of a colored surface. A number of philosophers, however, have argued that, when we engage appreciatively with a visual artwork, we perceive it as issuing from an artist's agency (for example, Baxandall 1985, 7–11; Wollheim 1980, 101–102; Currie 1989, 40–41). We apprehend a canvas in terms of an artistic, rather than a physical, medium, that is, as composed of brushstrokes rather than marks, and design rather than pattern (for example, Davies 2004, chap. 2 and 3). Even the arch-formalist Beardsley (1982) grants this point: to appreciate the aesthetic properties of a dance, he stresses, is to perceive the dancer's movements as “movings” and “posings.”

The manner in which Walton introduces PDCs might suggest some sympathy with this point. For, rather than saying that categories like “painting” are perceptually distinguishable, he talks of what must be excluded *if we construe them as such* (199). One might then try to render the “traditional” reading consistent by taking the “normative point” made in Section iv of CA—preferring contextually “correct perceptions” to relativist conceptions of a work's aesthetic properties—as a rejection of the formalist conception of PDCs. But this might undermine the claim that Walton introduces PDCs to avoid begging the question against formalism. For, if the normative point involves rejecting the formalist idea of PDCs, then will not the question against formalism be well and truly begged?<sup>5</sup>

But no questions will be begged if, once the notion of “correct perception” has been introduced and justified, the considerations just mentioned motivate rejecting the idea that the “categories of art” via which artworks must be perceived in determining their aesthetic properties are PDCs. For the antiformalist point has already been made

by this stage in the argument. The argument is that (1) some sort of categorially inflected perception must mediate between a work's nonaesthetic properties and the ascription to it of aesthetic properties, and (2) a relativistic account of aesthetic properties, while appropriate for nature, is inappropriate for artworks. The contextualist should now insist that this mediating role cannot be played by PDCs as understood by Laetz and Walton, but must at least incorporate artifactuality as a standard property. Moreover, to *correctly* determine a work's aesthetic properties, “painting” must include as standard properties not mere artifactuality but artifactuality of a particular kind: being the result of the kind of making generative of a painting that *makes* certain properties standard, variable, or contrastandard *for an object*.

This motivates treating artifactual categories like “painting” as crucially different from categories like “plaid pattern” where, as shown, anything accurately perceivable as such a pattern *is* one, independently of how it acquired its properties. The current suggestion is that artworks, like other artifacts, differ in that *they* possess the standard, variable, and contrastandard properties for a category *as such* as a result of provenance, and that this bears upon their category membership. It is because of *Guernica's* provenance that *it* has properties “p” as standard and “q,” and “r” as variable. But having a “first-order” property, like “p,” as standard is a second-order property that is not itself perceivable, even if the first-order property is, perceiving something as a painting, then, perceiving it not only as possessing certain PD properties but as possessing those properties *as* standard or variable because of its history of making. Thus, in line with the “traditional” reading of CA, *Guernica* is not a guernica, because, given its provenance, it lacks the relevant second-order property.

The contextualist can grant that PDCs are a useful device for undermining the formalist idea that a work's aesthetic properties can be grasped by simply scrutinizing its nonaesthetic properties. But he or she will insist that the categories mediating our engagement with a work's nonaesthetic properties, and the ascription of aesthetic properties to that work, are not PD in the Laetz/Walton sense. Rather, they incorporate a second-order requirement that an object's first-order perceptible properties originate in a kind of making. The artistic category “painting” then comprises *not* all those things that in virtue of their first-order PD

properties are *perceivable* as paintings (as in the case of plaid patterns), but all of those things so viewable that *themselves* have certain properties as standard and others as variable *in virtue of their histories of making*. Which properties are standard, variable, and contrastandard *for an object* will depend on the role played by a given category in the generation of that object. Such categories can play this kind of role in virtue of their embeddedness in human practices. “Categories of art,” for the contextualist, are a prime example of this phenomenon.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Stacie Friend makes a related point in her contribution to this symposium.

2. My thanks to Dan Cavedon-Taylor for this point.

3. I owe this example to Kendall Walton (private communication).

4. Walton (private communication).

5. Madeleine Ransom pressed this point persuasively in lengthy comments on an earlier version of this article where I expressed some sympathy with the strategy canvassed in this paragraph. Stacie Friend also expressed related concerns. I am grateful to both of them for motivating me to develop

what I hope is a more fruitful way of setting out what the contextualist should say.

6. In addition to the specific debts acknowledged above, this article has benefited greatly from numerous helpful comments on the original draft by Dan Cavedon-Taylor, Stacie Friend, and Madeleine Ransom, and from a later very helpful exchange with Kendall Walton.

#### Kendall L. Walton

*Aesthetic Properties: Context Dependent and Perceptual*

I cannot thank David Davies, Stacie Friend, and Madeleine Ransom enough for their energetic and insightful wrestlings with the messy innards of “Categories of Art” (CA). Provoked and inspired by their queries and proposals, I will sketch how I now prefer to understand crucial aspects of its claims, mostly following the text but filling it out or fixing it where this seems necessary. (I refer to the author of “Categories of Art” as “Walton<sup>70</sup>,” leaving it to metaphysicians to decide how that guy is related to me.)

There are two contrasting themes in CA: Walton<sup>70</sup> argued that a work’s aesthetic properties depend on its historical context as well as its nonaesthetic properties and that “no examination of the work itself, however thorough, will by itself reveal [its aesthetic] properties” (CA, 363–364). Yet he insisted that aesthetic properties are perceptual and declined to challenge the idea that “paintings and sonatas are to be judged solely on what can be seen or heard in them—when they are perceived correctly” (CA, 367). He emphasized the first theme and what later came to be called “contextualism,” countering the “perceptualism” or “empiricism” dominant fifty years ago and the legacy of early twentieth-century formalism. I focus more on the perceptual side of things, correcting for its neglect amidst a resurgent contextualism. (Not enough is being said these days about *beauty*.) But what is most important is the combining of the two themes. Walton<sup>70</sup>’s main objective, and mine, is to show how the contrasting claims cited above can be true together, and that they are.

#### I. PERCEPTUALLY DISTINGUISHABLE CATEGORIES

Appreciators perceive works of art in perceptually distinguishable categories, according to Walton<sup>70</sup>, correctly in some categories, incorrectly in others.

Works possess the aesthetic properties they are perceived to have when perceived correctly. Note that what matters for Walton<sup>70</sup> is which categories works are correctly perceived in, not which ones they belong to. A work might be perceived correctly in categories to which it does not belong, or belong to categories it is not correctly perceived in.<sup>1</sup> Its aesthetic properties depend not on what kind of work it is but on how it is correctly perceived, when these come apart.

The notion of perceptual distinguishability and Walton<sup>70</sup>'s restriction of the categories of interest to perceptually distinguishable ones are central to the interpretive worries addressed by all three commentators. The characterization of this notion in CA is seriously imprecise, and Walton<sup>70</sup> was inexplicit about the reasons for the restriction. Friend and Ransom want to expand the notion beyond what Walton<sup>70</sup> intended. My conclusions in what follows are roughly in accord with theirs, although I get to them differently. Davies would jettison the restriction, but the result is not entirely different.

A category is perceptually distinguishable, Walton<sup>70</sup> wrote, if "membership is determined solely by features that can be perceived in a work when it is experienced in the normal manner" (CA, 338–339). This was taken to exclude the categories of etchings, Cézanne's paintings, and music composed by Brahms, and would seem to exclude the category of paintings understood necessarily to be artifacts or to have been produced with certain intentions or in a certain manner. Let us call these historical categories, following Ransom (this issue), membership in them depending as it does on circumstances of works' genesis. The categories of paintings in the style of Cézanne, Brahmsian music, and apparent etchings were said to qualify as perceptually distinguishable.

Worries emerge immediately. Ransom and Friend both claim that we can perceive membership in some historical categories and propose that some should count as perceptually distinguishable. They may be right, but there are complications. I can recognize Cézanne's paintings with reasonable reliability when perceiving them "in the normal manner." I can see that something is a painting just by looking at it, or (with somewhat less assurance) that it is an etching. I can distinguish music composed by Brahms from the music of other composers and from most other sounds, just by listening. These perceptual experi-

ences may be cognitively penetrated or require the perceptual learning that Ransom describes, but they are perceptual nonetheless. Mistakes are possible, of course; I might come across a forgery, or a minimalist "guernica" on loan from the Martian Museum of Art, or a natural object that happens to look like an artifact, or computer-generated Brahmsian music. But perception subject to error is perception; we can also be mistaken in recognizing Cézanne-style paintings, Brahmsian music, and apparent etchings.

Should these historical categories count as perceptually distinguishable? Perhaps. They might even satisfy Walton<sup>70</sup>'s definition, as quoted above. But note that what seems evident is that we can see *that* a painting was painted by Cézanne, or hear *that* music was composed by Brahms. What matters on this definition is the possibility of perceiving features or properties themselves, not just perceiving that they obtain.<sup>2</sup>

To better or more clearly accommodate his examples, Walton<sup>70</sup> might have characterized perceptually distinguishable categories as categories whose membership is not determined (wholly or partly) by features or circumstances or events that cannot be perceived when the work is experienced in the ordinary way.<sup>3</sup> Membership in the category of Cézanne's paintings is determined (partly, if not entirely) by Paul Cézanne's applying paint to canvas. Viewing it "in the normal manner" we do not perceive this activity, although we might see *that* the canvas was painted by Cézanne. Observing an etching in a museum, we do not observe the complicated process by which its surface was marked, even if we see that it resulted from such a process. There seem to be no such unobserved circumstances that make a picture an *apparent* etching or in the *style* of Cézanne, or a piece of music *Brahmsian*.

Walton<sup>70</sup> mentioned especially that categories corresponding to aesthetic properties, the category of serene things, for instance, or those of gaudy or graceful things, do not count as perceptually distinguishable (CA, 339). These also are historical categories, if the argument of CA is right. Historical circumstances, which appreciators do not perceive, help to determine works' membership in them; they help make serene works serene. But his criterion as originally formulated can easily be construed as allowing them. Appreciators perceive the serenity of a serene work; they do not see merely *that* it is serene. So, membership in the



category of serene things “is determined solely by [a feature] that can be perceived in a work when it is experienced in the normal manner”—viz. its serenity. (I am reading “solely” as meaning *entirely*: a work’s serenity is sufficient for its membership in the category of serene things.)

Should we restrict our attention to categories Walton<sup>70</sup> considered perceptually distinguishable? Or might historical categories function in aesthetic experience and judgment in the ways other categories do? The idea will be that appreciators sometimes perceive works of art in the categories of etchings, Cézanne-painted canvases, or music composed by Brahms, for instance, and that which aesthetic properties a work seems to have sometimes depends partly on which historical categories it is perceived in.

What is it to hear music in the composed-by-Brahms category? That would be to hear a composed-by-Brahms gestalt; hearing *that* the music was composed by Brahms would not be enough. We might describe the experience as hearing the *music’s having been composed by Brahms*. I think we do enjoy such experiences. But it is unclear how they differ from, for example, hearing the Brahmsian *style* gestalt, how hearing music as composed by Brahms differs from hearing it as Brahmsian, or what difference there is between seeing something as an etching and seeing it as an apparent etching. So, although we need not exclude historical categories like those of etchings and Brahms-composed music, it is not clear that recognizing them will explain much if anything that is not explained by means of categories like apparent etchings and Brahmsian music.<sup>4</sup>

We do need to recognize “aesthetic property” categories, however. To perceive a work in the category of serene things, to perceive the relevant gestalt in it, is simply to perceive its (actual or apparent) serenity, dependent as that may be on perceiving the work in other appropriate categories. There will also be categories constituted partly by aesthetic properties. Indeed, the category of Brahmsian music is probably one. The Brahmsian style consists in part of lush harmonic textures, as well as traditional formal structures, superimposition and alternation of duple and triple meters, and so on (CA 340). The lushness is surely an aesthetic property. Historical circumstances that affect how a musical work is correctly perceived probably help to determine whether it is lush and so whether it is Brahmsian. So, this category is

a historical one! No doubt many other familiar categories are determined partially by aesthetic properties. To be a minuet is perhaps, in part, to have a lilting melody; scariness may help a film qualify as a horror film; humor may do the same for jokes.<sup>5</sup> Lilting melodies, scariness, and humor arguably count as aesthetic properties. Think also of the categories of lullabies, and dirges.

What difference might it make whether a work is perceived in, or is correctly perceived in, “aesthetic property” categories like these? Lushness is standard relative to the category of Brahmsian music, counting as it does toward membership in this category; it is variable or contrastandard relative to other categories. A work’s lushness probably affects listeners’ aesthetic experiences differently depending on whether it is standard or variable or contrastandard for them. So, there are likely to be (second-order) aesthetic properties that depend on whether a work’s lushness—or lilting melodies, or humor, or scariness—is standard or variable or contrastandard relative to categories in which it is correctly perceived (compare Zangwill 1999, 614–615, 617).

Let us resurrect Walton<sup>70</sup>’s original characterization of perceptual distinguishability. Understood in a reasonable way—not exactly as Walton<sup>70</sup> understood it—we can limit our attention to categories it defines as perceptually distinguishable. We must read “solely” as *entirely*, so historical categories are not automatically excluded. And we must be sure to distinguish perceiving features from perceiving merely that they obtain. To perceive a work’s membership in a category, to perceive the feature(s) that qualify it as a member (or an apparent member), is what it is to perceive its gestalt, to perceive it in that category. Only categories that are perceptually distinguishable, on this definition, are such that works can be perceived in them (see Friend, this issue). I am not at all sure that anything much like the above motivated Walton<sup>70</sup>’s original restriction to perceptually distinguishable categories.

## II. THE ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE

“How—if at all—should *knowledge* of the historical context of a work’s production influence our *aesthetic judgments* of its properties?” Ransom identifies this as one of two main questions CA addresses. The answer: “such knowledge is

not necessary for making aesthetic judgments; perceiving an individual artwork as belonging to a (correct) category of art requires no art-historical knowledge whatsoever” (2020, 62). She points out, rightly, that CA does not take appreciators’ perceptual experiences to be cognitively penetrated by art-historical knowledge. And drawing inferences about a work’s categories from such knowledge would not be *perceiving* it in them.

It does not follow that knowledge of a work’s historical context should not ever influence our aesthetic *judgments*. I may investigate a work’s historical context in order to assure myself that I am perceiving it in the correct categories before judging it to possess the aesthetic properties I perceive it to have (Ransom 2020, 65). This historical knowledge may affect my perceptual experience, as well as my judgment. I might decide, deliberately, to perceive a work in certain categories (if I am able to) rather than others, thinking that the former are the correct ones. But this is not cognitive penetration. (Compare: Thinking the sandhill crane is *over there*, I turn to look. My thought affects my perceptual experience but does not penetrate it.)

Nevertheless, we often perceive and judge works of art without making use of, or even bothering to acquire, the art-historical information that bears on which categories they are correctly perceived in, and no doubt, we frequently perceive them correctly and judge them accurately. We just “look and see,” noting a painting’s serenity or gaudiness; we listen and hear music’s frenzy or its lush harmonic texture. We can be wrong, but when we have no particular reason to doubt the veridicality of our perceptions, we do not bother to check.

Aesthetic perception is no different from perception in general in this respect. We look and see a mountain goat in the distance, without checking on the host of circumstances which, if not the right ones, would mean that our perception is not veridical. Epistemologically, these cases are parallel. But what we might or might not check on in the aesthetics case are circumstances that help to *determine* what aesthetic properties the work possesses. Lighting conditions, the presence or absence of mirrors, and so on, do not help to make it the case that a mountain goat is or is not there in the distance; the goat does that.

Ransom expands on Walton<sup>70</sup>’s claim that perceiving works in a given set of categories is a skill

that must be acquired by training, specifically by being exposed to other works in the relevant categories. The training, “perceptual learning,” effects “an enduring change in the perceptual system,” she suggests (2020, 64), rather than giving us factual knowledge that might be used in inferences or might cognitively penetrate our perceptual experiences. I would add that not only do we gain an ability, as Walton<sup>70</sup> emphasized, learning how to perceive works in certain categories; the change makes for a tendency to do so automatically, without thinking. Let us say that we acquire a certain *perceptual disposition*; we come to be disposed to see certain kinds of things in certain categories. To say that what is acquired is an ability is not quite right. It is not exactly that we are able to see works in a given category should we choose to. We might not know how to choose. What typically happens is that, after the relevant training, we *do* see the relevant works in the relevant categories, often automatically and without thinking.

### III. ARTIFACTS AND FORGERIES

Some “contextualists” think CA does not go far enough in their direction. Davies emphasizes the importance of artifactuality. We perceive a work as a “thing made,” as “issuing from an artist’s agency,” he insists (Davies 2020, 74), and this requires recognizing categories that CA, on one construal, disallows. Others contend that forgeries differ aesthetically from original works of art, even if the two are perceptually indistinguishable, and claim or suggest that CA has trouble accommodating the difference. I agree that works’ artifactuality and their status as forged (or not) both matter aesthetically. But they matter in very different ways.

To account for the importance of artifactuality, Davies holds that works are to be perceived in categories in which *being an artifact* is a standard property, for example, the category of paintings understood as things painted by someone or the much larger category of artifacts—categories that are not perceptually distinguishable “in the Laetz/Walton sense” (2020, 74).

I do not rule out perceiving works in such categories. But it is unclear how doing so would differ from perceiving works in the clearly perceptually distinguishable category of things *apparently* painted by someone, or that of *apparent* artifacts. Should not this count as perceiving works as

"things made"? In any case, standard properties tend to be ignored, taken for granted as it were. What is important is that works' having apparently been made in a certain manner—laboriously or haphazardly or in haste or with confidence—be *variable* (or *contrastandard*) relative to categories in which they are correctly perceived. This they certainly are.<sup>6</sup>

Forgery is different. I think we rarely, if ever, perceive works in categories in which having been forged or apparently having been forged is standard. We do not perceive anything like a forged gestalt. Nor is having apparently been forged variable or contrastandard relative to categories in which works are correctly perceived. We do not experience a work of art as a "thing forged" or a "thing not forged." (An unusual exception: Some experts perceive certain paintings as Van Meegeran-forgeries-of-Vermeer.)

There is another way of accounting for aesthetic differences between forgeries and originals. The fact that a work was or was not forged may affect which categories it is correctly perceived in and, as a result, what aesthetic properties it possesses, categories that may be perceptually distinguishable in the strongest sense. More generally, having been produced in a certain manner can affect how a work is correctly perceived, whether or not we perceive its having been or apparently having been produced that way (see CA, 358).<sup>7</sup>

#### IV. LITERATURE

I am mostly on board with Friend's (2020) suggestions about how the claims of CA might be extended to literature. We need an analogue of the notion of perceptually distinguishable categories, in whatever sense that is important. But the extension is problematic even apart from this notion. "The aesthetic properties of works of literature are not happily called perceptual," Walton<sup>70</sup> observed (CA, 335n5). If they are not perceptual, they will not be perceived in anything like categories, whether "perceptually distinguishable" or not, and which categories a literary work is perceived in will not affect which aesthetic properties one perceives.

I agree that noninferential experiences of being "struck" by properties of literary works are enough like seeing or hearing properties of visual and musical works to serve as analogues. A story

or poem may *seem* to readers to be ironic or subtle or rich or awkward or profound or witty or provocative, as a song or painting seems—strikes us as—serene or agitated or gaudy or graceful.

There is also a close enough analogue of perceiving in a category—call it experiencing in a category: experiencing a literary work as a romantic comedy or a lyric poem or a detective story or a nursery rhyme or in the style of Hemingway or Cervantes or Proust. A reader may be under the impression that she is reading a romantic comedy or a lyric poem; she may think of what she is reading as a detective story or as in Hemingway's style. And features of the text may be standard, variable, or contrastandard relative to categories she experiences it in.


But are these experiences noninferential? Friend observes that "distinguishing most literary genres requires comprehension" (2020, 68). Does the reader note relevant features of the work and figure out (implicitly, if not explicitly) that it is a nursery rhyme or a ghost story (or anyway that it possesses the associated "gestalt")? That would hardly be an analogue of perceiving in a category.

The worry is misplaced. To experience a work in a category, like hearing or seeing in a category, is not, or not merely, to *recognize* the gestalt of the category. It is not a momentary occurrence, but a continuous state that may last a short or long time. The reader experiences the work as a detective story or in Hemingway's style when, and as long as, it seems Hemingway-ish or detective story-ish to him or her (see CA, 341). (So, it is misleading to describe experiencing a work in a category as being *struck* by its membership in the category.) The reader's impression of the work's category may have begun with an inference based on features of the work, but he probably does not continue drawing the inference. He might not even remember the features that convinced him that the work is a detective story or in Hemingway's style or a work of magical realism, or that they did the convincing, as he reads on—continuing to think of the work as a detective story or Hemingway-ish or magical realism.

Literature is no different from visual and musical works in this respect. To see or hear a work as surrealist or Brahmsian is not to infer that that is what it is, but one's seeing or hearing it that way might have begun with such an inference.

Reflecting on Ransom's, Friend's, and Davies's discussions taught me that the innards, the details, of CA are messier than I remember. I hope my sketchy remarks have gone some way toward tidying things up, but lots of loose ends remain, issues left dangling and under rugs. Some require the resolution of ongoing debates about the content of perceptual experiences and how perception and cognition are related, debates that were not very active or very advanced in 1970.<sup>8</sup>

Fortunately, none of this messiness, intriguing and important as it is, threatens the main arguments of CA or the general shape of its conclusions. Works of art are rooted firmly and essentially in their particular cultural contexts, in circumstances beyond the perceptual range of appreciators in the gallery or concert hall. Yet their aesthetic properties are there to be perceived and appreciated and valued.

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1. Walton<sup>70</sup>'s four criteria of correctness are, explicitly, criteria for determining which categories a work is correctly perceived in. There is no good reason to suppose that exactly the same criteria, similarly weighted, govern category membership.

2. "I see the serenity of a painting, and hear the coherence of a sonata" (CA 365). The distinction between seeing a work's serenity and seeing merely that it is serene is desperately in need of explanation—which it will not receive in this essay.

3. Here and elsewhere it is *metaphysical*, not epistemological, determination that I have in mind.

4. It can be correct to hear a work as composed-by-Brahms even if it was not.

5. Or perhaps horror films and jokes appear to "aim at" scariness or humor, the apparent aiming itself being an aesthetic property.

6. I have argued, independently of the apparatus of CA, that how a work appears to have come about is often aesthetically important, and that this appearance may depend on what we know about how it actually came about (Walton 2015, 36–42, 52). Appreciators perceive the appearance, but not the actual process of production.

7. Whether a work is a forgery also matters quite apart from any effects on our perceptual experiences. We often value the "authenticity" of originals, for instance. Authenticity will not count as an *aesthetic* value, however, if we recognize a tight connection between the aesthetic and the perceptual. Some will call it *artistic*, although I am not sure what that is supposed to mean. But it is a value, however it is classified (see Davies 2003.)

8. Walton<sup>70</sup> was well aware of E. H. Gombrich's declaration that eyes are never innocent, but the nature of their guilt, as well as its extent, is in dispute now more than ever.