

# To Know Beauty Exactly: The Aims of Eros and Aesthetic Judgment

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*Edith Landmann-Kalischer's essays on aesthetics are a remarkable achievement that deserve widespread attention. Here I raise two related problems for her blend of Kantian hedonism with late nineteenth-century enthusiasm for the psychological sciences. First, I argue that she misconstrues the nature of beauty by maintaining that it is possible for it to be the object of science. Second, I argue that her hedonism prevents her from adequately accounting for the dynamics of aesthetic engagement. Unlike many hedonists, she recognizes the need for dynamic engagement, but the details she provides are misplaced. I provide alternate accounts of both what sort of feature beauty is and of the dynamic nature of aesthetic engagement.*

People think swimming is carefree and effortless. A bath! In fact, it is full of anxieties. Every water has its own rules and offering. Misuse is hard to explain. Perhaps involved is that commonplace struggle to know beauty, to know beauty exactly, to put oneself right in its path, to be in the perfect place to hear the nightingale sing, see the groom kiss the bride, clock the comet. Every water has a right place to be, but that place is in motion. You have to keep finding it, keep having it find you. Your movement sinks into and out of it with each stroke. You can fail it with each stroke. But what does that mean, fail it.

Anne Carson, '1 = 1'

Stanley Cavell once quipped that the only thing that is agreed to about the field of aesthetics is that it is 'the youngest of the principle branches of philosophy' (Cavell 2002, p. 167). He continued, 'Nothing further seems to be agreed about it, not even whether it is one subject, nor if so, what it should include, nor whether it has the right name, nor what the name should be taken to mean, nor whether given its problems, philosophers are particularly suited to venture them'. Consider the name. While there is some contestation about the referents of the names of nearly all philosophical sub-disciplines, aesthetics is particularly woeful. The original Greek word from which it derives means 'that which is associated with sensory perception'. The person widely credited with founding the modern field of aesthetics, A. G. Baumgarten (1735), decided to coin a new Latin word, 'aesthetica,' by which he meant both the broader Greek meaning to do with 'cognition by the senses' but also something closer to the narrower meaning we associate

with ‘aesthetics’ now—to use his words, the study of ‘criticism of good taste’.<sup>1</sup> Kant follows Baumgarten, both about which questions to ask and in confusing terminology.<sup>2</sup>

A main site—perhaps the main site—of debate since Baumgarten’s christening is aesthetic judgment. This is not surprising given Baumgarten’s, and later Kant’s, starting point. Baumgarten’s conceit was to investigate whether and how we interact with the world differently when we engage with the aesthetic. Kant’s project had, at least partly, the same sort of motivation—to determine what was special about our distinctively aesthetic engagement with the world. The capacity we use when we so engage is aesthetic judgment, and its outputs are aesthetic judgments.

The final important affinity between Baumgarten and Kant that is relevant for us is that they both took pleasure to be essential to aesthetic judgment. While the details are tricky (see [Guyer 2020](#) and [Ginsborg 2022](#) for some of the details), it is clear that, for both, aesthetic judgments are bound up with pleasure. Kant, mysteriously but for good reason, insists that such pleasure must be ‘disinterested’. This rules out being pleased for idiosyncratic reasons, and is designed to secure a sort of objectivity for aesthetic judgments, despite their association with our usually subjective hedonic faculties. The details are abstruse.

This history is crucial background to Edith Landmann-Kalischer’s remarkable essays on aesthetics, art, and value in [Landmann-Kalischer \(2023\)](#) (and my reactions to them). Landmann-Kalischer was reared in the Kantian tradition and her work reflects the core Kantian commitments about aesthetic judgment. One way in which the essays are remarkable is how contemporary they are. They anticipate ideas and argumentative moves that were hailed as novel decades after—a century even!—Landmann-Kalischer wrote them. Another important virtue is that they clarify and improve upon the Kantian view in crucial ways. The first and longest essay does both things at once. It both makes a remarkably contemporary contribution by defending a so-called secondary-quality account of aesthetic value and, thereby, improves upon Kantian accounts of both the relationship between pleasure and aesthetic judgment and the objectivity of aesthetic value.

The central claim of a secondary-quality account of some feature *F* is that *F* is a dispositional property of objects; it is a disposition to produce a certain reaction.<sup>3</sup> When it comes to color, the reaction is a certain perceptual experience. For Landmann-Kalischer, when it comes to beauty, the relevant reaction is pleasure. The important features of this account, for Landmann-Kalischer, are that, first, it makes beauty a feature of the beautiful objects rather than a projection; second, the pressure to think that colors are objective can be

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1 Ironically, then, Baumgarten’s most sustained discussion about art itself is about poetry, where he defends a sort of sensory epistemology of poetry. See [Baumgarten \(1735\)](#).

2 Compare the meaning of ‘Transcendental Aesthetic’ in the Critique of Pure Reason and the meaning of ‘Critique of Aesthetic Judgment’ in the Critique of Judgment.

3 I am following Samantha Matherne’s dispositional interpretation of Landmann-Kalischer (see [Matherne 2020, 2023](#)). Landmann-Kalischer does not use the word ‘disposition’ but does very explicitly say that, on her view, beauty is analogous to ‘sensory qualities’ and appears to have a dispositional account of sensory qualities. Perhaps the clearest statement of a dispositional view is in the third essay, where she writes ‘we call things “valuable” on the basis of an immediate feeling that they arouse in us, just as we call them “green,” “sweet,” or “hard” on the basis of an immediate sense impression’ (2023, p. 143). Thanks to Samantha Matherne for discussion.

leveraged toward thinking that beauty is objective. This is an improvement over Kant, at least insofar as it demystifies the objectivity that both of them were committed to while retaining a Kantian hedonism.

One important post-Kantian influence on Landmann-Kalischer was the rise of enthusiasm in the power of the psychological sciences. She carves out a central place for this in her general theory of beauty. This plays out most directly in her account of what it takes for an aesthetic judgment to be true (and thus objective). What is required is a ‘law-governed’ relation between our hedonic responses and the right sort of contact with the object. In order to vindicate this, we need a science of beauty. Landmann-Kalischer compares this with optics, which, in Samantha Matherne’s words, ‘clarifies what color is, qua a property of an object that brings about sensation in us’ (Matherne 2023, p. lv); analogously, the science of beauty ‘[clarifies] what the beautiful [is], qua property that bring[s] about disinterested [pleasure] in us’ (ibid.). This science is not just psychology, but psychology is deeply related to it.

Landmann-Kalischer does not provide that many details about the exact content of the science of beauty; this is mostly because she thinks the field is, at best, in its infancy. But she does give some telling examples. She mentions that ‘there have been attempts to determine the absolutely gratifying line mathematically, be it as a circle, a golden segment, or a serpentine line’ (187/81) (unless otherwise noted, all Landmann-Kalischer references are to Landmann-Kalischer (2023), with the page number in the original coming first and the page number in Landmann-Kalischer (2023) coming second); similarly, she says ‘the proportions of the human gestalt that are considered beautiful through conformity to a norm have been set down by Leonardo, Dürer, and others’ (ibid.). Finally, she says, ‘the effort to determine gratifying relationships of sounds objectively and numerically has already succeeded for the art of sound just as completely as the exhibition of sounds as air vibrations for acoustics’ (ibid.). In other words, the science of beauty needs to discover the laws of disinterested pleasure. These laws tell us which features of objects lawfully give rise to disinterested pleasure. If there are no such laws, then aesthetic judgment is not objective.

In my view, the philosophy of beauty took a very wrong turn with Kant. Given the history of the sub-discipline, this is close to saying that it took a very wrong turn with the inauguration of aesthetics as an official branch of philosophy. I also think that a science of beauty is impossible, and that this is baked into the nature of beauty. My first task below is to explain why I think the science of beauty is impossible.

My second task is to explain one of the main Kantian mistakes, which involves its view of aesthetic judgment, before offering a Platonic view of aesthetic engagement. While perception and pleasure are not irrelevant to our engagement, they do not play the foundational role that the German tradition assigns to them. Instead, proper engagement with beauty must involve a diachronic engagement that aims at understanding. This understanding is facilitated by interpretation.

While Landmann-Kalischer sticks to—and improves upon—the Kantian marriage of pleasure and aesthetic judgment, much of her discussion of the objective conditions of aesthetic judgment highlight the importance of diachronic processes. According to her, correct aesthetic judgment has to be ‘won’ by working on our initial hedonically based

judgment ‘in a way that is often difficult and lengthy’ (163/55). So even though she was wrong, in my view, to stick with the Kantian tradition (and, as it turns out, is wrong about what the work consists in), she was sensitive to the need to focus on diachronic processes when theorizing about aesthetic judgment.

## Keeping Judgment in Judgment

A science of beauty would rob aesthetic engagement of honest-to-goodness judgment. That is to say, aesthetic engagement would not involve genuine judgment were there real laws that connected beauty with some sort of stimulus conditions. To see this, let’s contrast two different types of rules in baseball.

Start with what I will call a scientific rule. The foul ball rule is scientific. Roughly, a batted ball is foul if its first contact is in foul territory, which is demarcated by the baselines and the foul poles. This rule is scientific because whether a ball is foul is completely determined by physical facts and thus subject to precise measurement. While it is sometimes difficult to see whether a ball is foul, this is always due to environmental shortcomings—bad lighting, bad angle, poor vision. You can give a full account of whether a ball is foul purely in terms of physics.

Contrast with what I will call a judgmental rule. The sacrifice bunt rule is judgmental. A bunt is a particular kind of striking of the ball; one does not fully swing, but rather attempts to softly tap the ball into play. Sometimes batters will bunt in order to attempt to get a hit themselves. Most often, though, batters will bunt not to get a hit themselves, but rather in order to advance someone already on base; this raises the chance of that baserunner scoring on a subsequent play. When a batter bunts for this reason, their bunt is a sacrifice. They have sacrificed their chance to get a hit in order to advance the runner. This has non-trivial consequences. When it is a sacrifice bunt, the at-bat is not counted as an at bat at all.

You cannot give a fully scientific account of whether a bunt is sacrificial. Whether a bunt is sacrificial does not completely depend on facts that are subject to scientific measurement.<sup>4</sup> Rather, in order to determine whether a bunt is sacrificial, we need to use judgment. Judgment requires interpretation. The scorekeeper of a baseball game needs to interpret that batter’s bunt in light of a stock of facts about the particular game and facts about the batter. If it is the ninth inning and the batter’s team is winning by ten runs and the batter is one of the fastest players, the bunt is very likely not sacrificial. But maybe not; perhaps the manager is really trying to engrain their preferred tactics into the players. If it is the ninth inning and the batter’s team is losing by one and the batter is the catcher, it

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4 This is probably controversial to the enthusiasts of various brain sciences; after all, whether a bunt is sacrificial depends on the intentions of the batter. If intention is a causal notion and all causal notions are in the purview of science, then sacrificiality is, at least in principle, in the purview of science. I admit to the controversy, but note that philosophical theorizing about intention has been nearly uniform in rejecting the idea that there are scientific laws of intention; laws that link the objects of the brain sciences to intentions as a matter of scientific law. This is sometimes because philosophers of intention reject that it is necessarily causal (e.g. [Anscombe 1957](#)). But many causal theorists also deny this, with [Davidson \(2002\)](#) being the locus classicus. For an anti-causalist view of intention that fits very nicely with my perspective, see [Nehamas \(2018\)](#).

very likely is sacrificial. But maybe not; perhaps the infield is particularly vulnerable to a bunt down the first base line, even when it is the catcher at bat.<sup>5</sup>

This does not mean that there are not facts of the matter about whether bunts are sacrificial. Of course there are. Nor does it mean that the scorekeeper has the power to make bunts sacrificial or not.<sup>6</sup> Scorekeepers can be wrong about whether a bunt is sacrificial, for that depends on why the batter bunted; scorekeepers do not generally have authority over that. We should not take the sacrificiality of a bunt to be something mysterious. It is merely not something that can be determined without the use of judgment.

What is important about this distinction is not that it is about rules. What is important is the nature of the features that figure in the rules—that is, being a foul and being sacrificial. One of those features is scientific and the other is judgmental. One is a matter of measurement and one is a matter of judgment.

Landmann-Kalischer's science of beauty maintains that beauty is a scientific feature. It claims that there are scientific laws that link feelings of pleasure to experiencing certain things in particular conditions. What makes those things beautiful is that they cause us to feel pleasure in those very conditions. The laws secure a sort of objectivity in the distribution of our reactions.<sup>7</sup> But they render beauty a scientific feature; whether something is beautiful is something that, in principle, can be measured scientifically.<sup>8</sup>

Beauty is not like this, though. This was well appreciated by Kant, who famously said 'there can also be no rule in accordance with which someone could be compelled to acknowledge something as beautiful' (101/215).<sup>9</sup> Instead, beauty's discernment necessarily requires judgment; one needs to exercise judgment by relying on taste. Taste is at least partly an interpretive ability, an ability to discern how the stock facts are related in order to give rise to beauty. To use taste is to form a judgment.

Kant maintained that aesthetic judgment cannot be formed in response to a rule because he thought that pleasure is essential to aesthetic judgment and that pleasure is not rule governed. Landmann-Kalischer can respond to the above argument by appealing to this feature of pleasure-based judgment; in other words, pleasure-based judgment being insensitive to rules is compatible with the existence of scientific rules about beauty. My mistake, she might say, is inferring something about aesthetic engagement from the existence of a science of beauty.

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5 Alva Noë has used baseball to make a similar point in [Noë \(2019\)](#).

6 Cf. [Lewis \(1979\)](#)'s discussion of the rules of baseball.

7 This might remind readers of some things that so-called generalists say about the need for rules (see discussion in, e.g., [Conolly and Haydar 2003](#)), which might tempt one to think that my criticism applies to any view that posits aesthetic rules, principles, or laws. It does not; it is about the nature of scientific laws in particular. I myself defend a sort of aesthetic principle in [Lord \(2025\)](#).

8 She of course readily admits that we are far from discovering such laws, although she gestures at some examples (see 187/81). She maintains that the best science can do in her day is tell us about which conditions are deceptive (see 25/287).

9 Kant had parochial reasons why he thought this was true; I disagree with him about the details, although I think we both agree that the exercise of taste is central to judgment, and that the laws of beauty eliminate this.

This brings out a real subtlety in my point. I grant that the rule-insensitivity of pleasure is compatible with a science of beauty; Landmann-Kalischer's view is not incoherent. My claim is that we get evidence against a science of beauty by considering which type of feature beauty would have to be in order for such a thing to be possible. Beauty would have to be a scientific feature. This by itself commits one to a view about what sort of engagement is possible with beauty. Scientific engagement should be possible if there is a science of beauty. So rather than being incoherent, there is a deep tension in Landmann-Kalischer's view. A science of beauty requires that beauty be measurable, that beauty is a scientific feature. Since beauty is a judgmental feature—and we all agree that it is—this is good evidence against the possibility of a science of beauty.

Whither secondary-quality accounts of beauty? This is, I think, a decisive objection to a particular version of the secondary-quality view. This version maintains that beauty is analyzed in terms of the actual responses we have in some scientifically measurable set of conditions. This view commits one to a science of beauty. Fortunately, this does not topple all secondary-quality views. A striking dissimilarity between Landmann-Kalischer and later secondary-quality theorists arises at just this point. Later secondary-quality theorists like McDowell (1985) and Wiggins (1987) (both claiming inspiration from Hume) maintain that what matters are not the actual responses, but instead the merited responses.<sup>10</sup> On a hedonist incarnation of this version of the view, in order for *O* to be beautiful, pleasure must be merited in response to *O*. I will refrain from saying anything more about this version of the view, other than that to be merited is very plausibly a judgmental feature.<sup>11</sup> If that is true, then you can have a secondary-quality view that rightfully avoids a science of beauty.

## Eros and the Judgmental

A basic grasp of the nature of judgmental features is enough to motivate skepticism about a hedonist account of aesthetic engagement. This is because judgmental features are essentially tied to interpretation. To engage with beauty, then, requires engaging in a dynamic activity that extends through time. This is problematic for the Kantian hedonist insofar as they suggest, via their centering of aesthetic judgment, that aesthetic engagement is a static and passive reception of pleasure.<sup>12</sup>

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10 See Gert (2012) for a merited response view of even color.

11 What happened to disinterestedness? One might think this gives Landmann-Kalischer some wiggle room. This might help with the battle but not the war. It does seem plausible that being disinterested is a judgmental feature. This might help make the view more plausible, but only at the cost of rendering a science of beauty impossible, for reasons that by now should be obvious.

12 I certainly do not claim to be the first to make this sort of point. Nehamas (2007a), especially in chapter 1, argues against the immediacy of aesthetic engagement. More recently, Noë (2023), taking inspiration from Wittgenstein, Ambrose and Macdonald (1979), has emphasized the importance of interpretative activity. He claims that this is Kantian, and even that Kant held this basic picture. As far as I can tell, he does not back this up textually. Schellekens (2024) has also recently emphasized the dynamic nature of aesthetic engagement and its connection to understanding (cf. Page 2022).

I come across a painting—let's say Caravaggio's *Basket of Fruit*. This painting is visually striking. It is easy, standing there in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan, to become captivated by the painting, to want to know its beauty exactly.

There are some facts about the painting that we can all agree about; facts about its colors, its geometrical properties, which types of fruit it depicts, perhaps its relations to other depictions of food in Caravaggio's works. These facts are not open to interpretation. They comprise what I will call the common ground.

Other aspects of the painting are open to interpretation. Perhaps the most generic question one can ask—generic because one can ask it about still-lives in general—is why paint a basket of fruit? What is the meaning of this depiction of fruit? Some answers seem true but fail to fully satisfy: It is a good way for Caravaggio to display his technical mastery; it is good practice for when he needs to depict fruit in a larger scene. These explanations are likely true but they fail to engage with the question in the right way. This is especially pressing because, as a matter of fact, Caravaggio is the originator of Italian still-life painting. He is the first to paint a basket of fruit like this. What could that mean artistically?

The painting itself provides some clues, of course. Of particular importance is a shoot on the right-hand side that ends outside of the pictorial space. There are a few curious things about this shoot. First, upon inspection, it is clearly not rendered in full detail, unlike the flora on the left-hand side of the painting. Second, and most oddly, it is also clearly not anchored by anything in the pictorial space. It is being held in place by something outside of pictorial space.

Once you notice the first oddity, it is easy to see that there is a general contrast in detail between the left-hand side and the right-hand side of the painting. Many of the fruits on the right-hand side lack details that fruits on the left-hand side have. Once you notice the second oddity, you are prompted—or might be prompted—to think about the relation between what is depicted and the depicter—Caravaggio himself. Engagement with the common ground has led us to more specific interpretive questions: Why the contrast in detail? What is the relation between what is in pictorial space and what isn't?

My answer—although this hardly matters for my main point—is that the painting is attempting to depict the process of painting itself. Caravaggio himself is fiddling with the basket, removing the shoot. The shoot on the right-hand side is a sort of ghost. The painting now in Milan is depicting the process of producing another painting—unrealized, as far as anyone knows. The shoot on the right-hand side is in the painting in Milan, but the painting in Milan is depicting its removal from the pictorial space of the unrealized painting. This accounts for the contrast in detail. Caravaggio has already finished the left-hand side, but is still in the process of painting the right-hand side. It also assigns an interesting meaning to the shoot and answers the generic why-question. He is painting this basket of fruit in order to say something about the theatricality of painting, even when it is of something as pedestrian as a basket of fruit. In isolation from his other work, this might

seem a stretch, but it gains plausibility when one realizes that he was generally interested in the theatricality of painting.<sup>13</sup>

Interpretative engagement always requires both a common ground and matters of interpretation. Not everything can be up for interpretation; one needs to mine the common ground to answer the interpretative questions. On the other hand, not everything can be common ground. If there is consensus about all of the features of something, interpretation is impossible. In this way, interpretative engagement requires a lack of understanding.

What is in the common ground can and often does fluctuate.<sup>14</sup> My interpretation above has as part of the common ground the claim that *Basket of Fruit* was intended to be an independent work. This is important to the success of the interpretation. If we found out that this is false, that the object was made just as preparatory work for something else, then the artistic meaning I assigned to the contrast in detail would be much more dubious.<sup>15</sup> After all, if it was not intended to be a work in itself, it is much less likely that the contrast has an artistic meaning at all; he just might have exhausted the preparatory use before fully finishing the painting. Were we to definitely find out that it was a preparatory work, that fact would become part of the common ground, supplanting the claim that it is a work on its own. But the interpretative landscape can crucially shift even if it is an open question that it is merely preparatory. In that case, it becomes a matter of interpretation whether it is a work on its own; this requires one to appeal to other facts in the common ground to establish that it is a work on its own (see note 15 for an initial attempt).

This brief foray into interpretation shows the dynamism of interpretative engagement. My initial captivation in Milan leads to an investigation that unfolds through time, involving not only a thorough visual investigation of the painting, but also engagement with the history of the painting, the interpretations of others, and a comparison of the painting with other work by Caravaggio and others. Later steps in the process can alter the significance of earlier stages. These alterations can substantially shift the meaning of the painting or its parts. Meanwhile, the whole process is mired in a lack of understanding and a quest to plug this hole. But the quest is paradoxical since I know that to plug the hole completely will lead me to see the painting in a radically different way—to see it as spent, used up, finished.

Ancient Greeks could immediately name the attitude that drives this process: Eros. Eros is often listed as one of the core types of ancient Greek love, associated with passion, both sexual and otherwise ('erotic' and its cognates are, in modern English, nearly essentially tied to the sexual. The Greek concept does not have an essential connection to the

13 See [Fried \(2010\)](#) for more on this general theme in Caravaggio's work. See pp. 108–10 for some discussion of *Basket of Fruit*. See [Lord \(2024\)](#) for a fuller presentation of my interpretation.

14 Cf. [Nehamas \(2007a\)](#)'s discussion of his interpretation of Manet's *Olympia*, especially his response to [Sontag \(2001\)](#).

15 For the skeptics: First, we know that Caravaggio was interested in still-life painting for its own sake because we know he painted other works of still-life (all sadly lost now); second, in many ways *Basket of Fruit* is a finished work, and makes common Caravaggist artistic points. For example, the basket is sitting on a very thin ledge depicted on the bottom of the painting, which produces a trompe-l'oeil illusion. This contrasts with the very shallow pictorial space, giving the impression that the basket is going to fall into the viewer's space. This is a common Caravaggist commentary on the theatricality of depicting three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface.

sexual even if it has a weaker connection). Although often neglected by analytic historians, eros plays a key role in several of Plato's dialogues. Most famous is the speech Socrates recounts (and seemingly endorses) in the *Symposium*, about the central role of loving beauty in a thriving human life.<sup>16</sup> In this speech, eros grounds the passionate pursuit of understanding the beautiful, which eventually leads to and through philosophy until one gains understanding of the nature of beauty itself. This process is interpretive, as philosophy, and, indeed, all theorizing, obviously is. As Carson (1986) puts it, eros 'is a movement that carries yearning hearts from over here to over there, launching the mind on a story' (p. 172–73).

Eros, then, is a passionate response to beauty, and its aim is understanding. It is sparked by mystery, by one's ignorance of the true nature of the beloved's beauty. Interpretation is the process that eros pushes one toward—'launching the mind on a story'.

This dynamic process is not incompatible with pleasure being central to aesthetic engagement.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the poet of eros, Sappho, famously describes the phenomenology of eros thusly: 'Eros the melter of limbs (now again) stirs me—sweetbitter unmanageable creature who steals in' (Anne Carson translation in Sappho 2002). Eros involves pleasure—the sweet—but also a painful longing—the bitter.

The problem for the Kantian view, then, is not logical, but spiritual. It presents aesthetic judgment as a momentary passive reaction. This is only accentuated by Landmann-Kalischer's secondary-quality view. This is because, on that view, beauty just is that which causes this reaction. If that is all that beauty is, then it is no wonder that being pleased is the apex of aesthetic engagement.<sup>18</sup>

To her credit, Landmann-Kalischer recognizes the importance of dynamic aesthetic engagement. She calls one's initial pleasure toward something a 'primary judgment'. She insists that these 'need to be carefully worked on in a way that is often difficult and lengthy' (55/163). She goes on to catalog some of the ways in which they need to be worked on.

While I think Landmann-Kalischer is absolutely right to notice the dynamic character of aesthetic engagement, her (official) emphasis is misplaced. The reason why she calls for work is that she thinks this is needed to secure objectivity, and the catalog she presents is about ways in which the primary judgment or the conditions under which it was formed can be wrong, misleading, or biased. She summarizes 'two stages or forms' of work (56/164); first, 'the primary ... judgment can ... be corrected through comparison and experience' (ibid.). Reflecting on our reaction to the target work in comparison to others can reveal flaws in our primary judgment. The second form of work, though, provides

16 See Nehamas (2007b) for an interpretation of this speech that meshes very well with my views.

17 So too with perception, rendering this compatible with my focus on perception in Lord (2026).

18 As an anonymous reviewer pointed out to me, to be fair to Kant, his account has more dynamism than I have let on since he thinks that the 'free play' of the faculties is crucial to aesthetic engagement. This does help some, but at least on one reading, it will only get dynamic engagement in the door pre-aesthetic judgment. More importantly, the sort of interpretive activity I take to be central is straightforwardly cognitive in a way that seems anathema to Kant's general categorization of the aesthetic. Finally, as a very cursory glance at the secondary literature reveals (see, e.g. Ginsborg 2022), it is very unclear what he even means by the 'free play' of the faculties.

the ‘ultimate warrant,’ and it lies in ‘the objective determination of [the primary judgment’s] adequate stimuli’ (ibid.).

This brings us full circle. Landmann-Kalischer’s ideal dynamics of aesthetic engagement amounts to scientific investigation. On her picture, we aim to secure the objectivity of our aesthetic judgments—our feelings of disinterested pleasure. The ‘ultimate warrant’ we can gain for them, the best vindication of their objectivity, is provided by a demonstration that we formed them in the right conditions; that is, that we were in conditions specified in a law of beauty.<sup>19</sup>

The psychological sciences are a less popular topic for poets than eros. Landmann-Kalischer’s view about the dynamics of aesthetic engagement looks much different than mine. Mine is focused on the process of bringing to bear one’s taste on an object through an extended process of interpretation, prompted by a passionate desire to understand. This process is an exercise in judgment, directed at features that are essentially judgmental. As I argued above, Landmann-Kalischer empties the judgmental from beauty. So it is no surprise that her dynamics treat beauty as a scientific property to be investigated through scientific law (although see n. 19 for some nuances).

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Anne Carson’s ‘1 = 1’ is about swimming. For Carson’s narrator, swimming is a demanding activity, not just physically, but also intellectually and emotionally. This is partly because each body of water ‘has its own rules and offering’.<sup>20</sup> Proper swimming must respect the idiosyncrasies of the water.

Carson likens this to aesthetic engagement; ‘that commonplace to struggle to know beauty, to know beauty exactly’. Interestingly, the lines that inspired my title can be, in isolation, read in support of a more static view of aesthetic engagement. ‘[T]o know beauty exactly, to put oneself right in its path, to be in the perfect place to hear the nightingale sing, see the groom kiss the bride, clock the comet’. This makes it seem like the quest to know beauty exactly is just about being in the right place at just the right time—to be in a position to receive ‘adequate stimuli’.

Swimming shows us the error of this model: ‘Every water has a right place to be, but that place is in motion. You have to keep finding it, keep having it find you. Your movement sinks into and out of it with each stroke. You can fail it with each stroke’. To know beauty exactly

19 There are some important textual complications. First, some of what she says about the first form of work—the comparison and experience type of work—does look something like interpretation—for example, her discussion of ‘physical’ deceptions. Second, and perhaps most importantly, is her claim in the second essay, ‘On Artistic Truth,’ which is that aesthetic engagement enables a sort of learning about ‘subjective reality’ that science cannot yield. The work we do on judgments about subjective reality might look much more like interpretation. While I am sympathetic, this seems to bring out a deep tension. What she says about aesthetic learning about subjective reality seems obviously incompatible with a science of beauty. All of this granted, I think the most important thing for my point is that her insistence that ‘ultimate warrant’ comes through scientific confirmation.

20 The epigraph quote, which I am unpacking here, is from page 2 of the PDF. *The New Yorker* makes it difficult to find the original pagination.

does require you to be in the right spot at the right time, but that spot and that time are always moving. Establishing one thing through interpretation opens up new questions, which bend around to old assumptions, which cause revisions, and so on and so forth. To engage aesthetically is to plunge forth into this mystery, always aware that, at any point, you can fail that which is beautiful, at each moment forced to wonder: ‘What does that mean, fail it.’

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