Chapter II

Aesthetics and Re-Contextualization?[1]

Since aesthetics and certain distinctive kinds of reflection often go together,[2] critically developing in the future several merely inchoative types of aesthetic reflection, today could have important consequences for developing not just for aesthetics but also for ethics tomorrow.

§1. Ethics and Aesthetics Tomorrow?

This second essay is about future possibilities for aesthetics. These possibilities may arise from developing rather new kinds of aesthetic reflection in connection with the still problematic relations between the traditional couple of aesthetics and ethics. The aim is not so much to criticize standard accounts of those troubled relations as to complement them.

My suggestion will be that some new orientations for aesthetics may be seen to arise from what I will be calling "re-contextualizing," a specific kind of aesthetic reflection to be understood not just exclusively in today's narrow academic terms, but also in tomorrow's broadly global ones as well.

Our ethically much troubled global situation today most probably will continue tomorrow. This situation constitutes our present and future contexts. Accordingly, some new possibilities for aesthetics in the future probably will need to include critical reflection on the place of some artworks in these contexts.

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[1] This text is a revised version of a paper first presented in Helsinki at an international conference in May 2008 and later published in French under the title "L'esthétique recontextualisée" in *Diogène 233-234* (2011), 165-177.

[2] See for example S. Toulmin *et al.*, "Arguing About the Arts," in their *An Introduction to Reasoning,* 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 349-367.

Further, this reflection probably will also require critically retrieving and then developing further certain creative conceptual tensions between aesthetics and ethics in the past that were largely lost since A. G. Baumgarten's invention of modern aesthetics in the eighteenth century.[3]

In short, the specific character of one kind of a still inchoative aesthetic reflection today, I will be suggesting, may prefigure several new invitations. These invitations are both for articulating in particular the relations between aesthetics and ethics more perspicuously and pertinently in the future. And they are also invitations more generally and more importantly for opening up new possibilities for aesthetics itself tomorrow.

§2. Relations Between Aesthetics and Ethics Today

The relations today between aesthetics and ethics are difficult.[4] For some otherwise important reflection in aesthetics today continues to neglect the ethical contexts of some works of art, their connections with, for example, environmental issues. Conversely, some similarly important work in contemporary ethics continues to neglect the fact that some aesthetic experiences of works of art may contribute to the development of ethical judgment, for example in the cultivation of moral sensibilities. Before proceeding further, then, we do well to recall just how aesthetics and ethics are today said to be related.

On one rather standard and quite influential contemporary account, aesthetics and ethics are said to be related in at least three ways.[5] Perhaps we may summarize the gist of this account not unfairly as follows.

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3 For the eighteenth-century historical backgrounds see P. Guyer, "Is Ethical Criticism A Problem? A Historical Perspective," in *Art and Ethical Criticism,* ed. G. L. Hagberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 3-32.

4 See for example N. Carroll, "Art and the Moral Realm," in *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics,* ed. P. Kivy (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 126-151.

5 This is J. Levinson's view. His account may be described as "rather standard" in the sense that Levinson signs the key entry, "Ethics and Aesthetics," in one of the most recent English language standard reference works

The first way starts with the claim that generally aesthetics is a branch of value theory.[6] Since ethics too is generally a branch of value theory, both aesthetics and ethics may be said to be related in being different forms of the same theory.

The second way starts with the claim that, in particular, aesthetics is concerned with the value inherent in some objects intrinsically, that is, with the value some objects have for their own sake only. Since ethics too is particularly concerned with inherent value, both aesthetics and value may also be said to be related in being different forms of concern with intrinsic value.

And the third way in which aesthetics and ethics are said to be related involves a larger claim. The claim is that aesthetics concerns itself "with the value of perceptual and imaginative experiences to be had from engagement with objects, both natural and man-made, or with the value inherent in those objects in relation to human lives." Since on this account ethics too concerns itself specifically with "the evaluation of human conduct, with how human beings ought fundamentally to behave, particularly in relation to one another,"[7] both aesthetics and ethics are then also related in being specifically concerned with evaluations of human actions.

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for philosophy. See *OCP*, 2005, pp. 270-271. See also J. Levinson, "Philosophical Aesthetics: An Overview," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), pp. 3-24; the article and bibliography in R. Eldridge, "Aesthetics and Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics,* ed. J. Levinson (Oxford: OUP, 2003), pp. 722-732; papers in *Aesthetics and Ethics,* ed. J. Levinson (Cambridge: CUP, 1998); and those in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics,* ed. B. Gaut and D. McIver Lopes (London: Routledge, 2005). In the general interest of avoiding overly controversial points and idiosyncrasy, where possible I refer to other standard reference works below.

6 Value theory may be taken here rather standardly as the philosophical investigation of the nature of the property or characteristic of those things taken to be valuable or to have value. Cf. the article by N. M. Lemos, "Value Theory," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* [cited hereafter as "CDP"], ed. R. Audi, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 1999).

7 *Ibid.*

Such an account of the basic relations between aesthetics and ethics is certainly plausible; moreover, it is basically sound. Still, this account is not beyond criticism. And it could be usefully complemented in the future.

Thus, while it is true that aesthetics and ethics may be considered as being related forms of value theory, the nature of value, whether aesthetic or moral or otherwise, remains strongly controversial.[8] Hence any general argument for interrelatedness just on the grounds of aesthetics and ethics being "branches of value theory" remains too dependent on a still elusive consensus among philosophers and others about just what values are. Perhaps additional grounds, for example historical ones, should also be considered?

Something similar may also be said about the second claim that both aesthetics and ethics are interrelated in that each is particularly concerned with different forms of intrinsic value. For here too, and perhaps even more so, most philosophers today remain perplexed about how exactly to categorize not just the nature of value but also the many different kinds of value, including so-called extrinsic and intrinsic value.[9] Perhaps further categories, for example axiological vagueness and precision, should be identified?

But the still further claim that both aesthetics and ethics are specifically concerned with the evaluation of actions is especially contentious. Here the problem is not one of an unavailable consensus about the nature of value generally or of the nature of intrinsic value in particular; the problem rather is one of exaggeration. That is, on the abundant evidence of the reflection appearing regularly in contemporary professional journals,

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8 See for example the discussion in M. J. Zimmerman, "Senses of 'Value' and 'Valuable,'" in his *The Nature of Intrinsic Value* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), p. 3.

9 On aesthetic value see for example C. Janaway's article, "Value, Aesthetic," in the *OCP*. On ethical value see R. Chisholm, "The Things that Are Intrinsically Good," in his *Ethics and Intrinsic Values,* ed. J. R. White (Heidelberg: Universitâtsverlag C. Winter, 2001), pp. 25-35.

catalogues, and reviews, in fact most work in both aesthetics and ethics is not centered on evaluation.

For while some work in aesthetics indeed concerns evaluating works of art and results in aesthetic judgments, most work in aesthetics in fact does not issue in value judgments at all. Much work is historical or descriptive or historical or interpretive and so on. For example, one often speaks today in aesthetic reflection on Renaissance works of art not of evaluating and judging a work of art but of "reading a work of art."[10]

Moreover, while some work in ethics also involves evaluating practical actions, most work in normative ethics is much more concerned with what makes certain actions either morally right or ethically good. For example, one also often speaks today in ethical reflection on social problems not of evaluating and judging a social situation but of properly discerning its most central elements.[11] Perhaps using a fuller account of description, for example a hermeneutic one, would be more fruitful?

Replying cogently to each one of these counterclaims is not difficult. Still, there is evidently room for further inquiry, and I will return briefly to each of the possibly larger similarities between aesthetics and ethics below. More importantly, further inquiry into these relations could prove useful for developing possibilities for aesthetics and aesthetic reflection in the future.

In the following sections I consider several new possibilities for aesthetics in the future by focusing on several interactions. These interactions are, however, not between the two disciplines themselves, but between aesthetic and ethical reflection specifically at the outset of what would become the main European tradition in the fine arts.

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[10] Cf. J. Shearman, "Only Connect... Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance" (Princeton: PUP, 1992), pp. 5-6.

[11] Cf. *Measuring Justice: Primary Goods and Capabilities,* ed. H. Brighouse and I. Robeyns (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), pp. 10-11.

§3. The Appearance of *Sôphrosunê*

In 480 BCE, in the aftermath of the battles of Thermopylae and Salamis between Greeks and Persians and just after the ancient Iranian sack of Athens, workmen buried in a mass grave on the fire devastated remains of the Acropolis the broken fragments and physical evidence of the emergence of the new ethical virtue of *sôphrosunê.*[12]

The evidence is dated reliably from between ca. 485 and 480 BCE. It consists of several central sculptural examples of the transition from Late Archaic Greek statuary to Early Classical Greek statuary, a period that stretches from roughly 480 to 450 BCE.[13] Details of the statues, this historical claim continues, still show us today the emergence of *sôphrosunê.*

Sôphrosunê is one of the classical ethical virtues Socrates subjects to philosophical examination in Plato's *Republic.*[14] English translations usually render "sôphrosunê" as "temperance."[15] And they sometimes paraphrase *sôphrosynê* as acting virtuously out of effective knowledge of one's limitations, as showing moderation or self-restraint.

In much English-language moral philosophy today, however, talk of temperance has often drifted towards talk of mod-

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[12] I rely here mainly on J. J. Pollitt, *The Art of Ancient Greece: Sources and Documents,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 1990); J. M. Hurwit, *The Art and Culture of Early Greece,*1100-480 B.C. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), pp. 320-355; J. Boardman, *Greek Sculpture: The Archaic Period* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991); B. S. Ridgway, *The Archaic Style in Greek Sculpture,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: Ares Publishers, 1993); and B. Holzmann, *La sculpture grecque* (Paris: LibrairieGénérale, 2010), pp. 118-179.

[13] In the 1880's, German archeologists first uncovered these statues systematically. The Greek traveler, Pausanias, had already noted the importance on the acropolis of the Persian debris still unburied in his own times. See C. Habicht, *Pausanias' Guide to Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: UCal Press, 1985).

[14] Plato also discusses the virtues in general and *sôphrosunê* in particular in the *Cratylus* (411d4-415a7), in *Protagoras* (332b4), and in the *Phaedrus* (247d7).

[15] Cf. however T. Irwin's qualifications in his notes to his translation, *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics* [NE], 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), p. 350.

eration, where "moderation" is understood as the avoidance not just of excesses but of extremes. Moreover, much philosophical reflection has turned from examining the ethical virtue of temperance to investigating self-control understood as "a capacity to conduct oneself as one judges best when tempted to do otherwise."[16]

Thus, the contemporary understanding of *sôphrosynê* as mainly self-control has expanded the word's original extension. Unlike Aristotle's restriction of *sôphrosynê* as temperance to the ethical realm, much contemporary reflection extends *sôphrosynê* to the much larger practical domain as a whole.

The Athenian ethical innovation of ca. 460 BCE, however, was not *sôphrosynê* in the much later contemporary sense of temperance as moderated self-control. Nor was *sôphrosynê* to be taken in the then contemporaneous sense of temperance. Rather, the Athenian ethical innovation was a pre-philosophical sense of *sôphrosynê* as what we may call self-restraint.

Of course self-control, temperance, and self-restraint are closely related in several ways. We may take the contemporary expression today of "self-control" mainly in its connotations of moderating such scalar mental events as feelings, sentiments, emotions, passions, motivations so that they do not come to any extreme expressions. Similarly, we may take the contemporaneous expression then of "temperance" as the standing disposition to exercise the "right extent of indulgence," the right extent of "the satisfaction of bodily desires."[17]

Here, by contrast, we may take "self-restraint" mainly in its connotations of voluntarily diminishing still further what may already be an appropriately moderate expression of such mental events and sensual pleasures.

In these rather regimented senses, *sôphrosunê* today is no longer the then ethical virtue of *sôphrosunê* as temperance;

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16 A. R. Mele, "Self-Control," in the *OCP*, p. 861. See also A. R. Mele, *Agents: From Self-Control to Autonomy* (Oxford: OUP, 1995).

17 *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics,* tr. T. Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett, 1999), p. 350.

sôphrosunê today is self-control. And what I am calling the pre-philosophical *sôphrosunê* as self-restraint is not to be understood either in contemporaneous Platonic and Aristotelian terms as just temperance nor in contemporary terms as just self-control. Perhaps we might then surmise that the aesthetic emergence of a virtue of self-restraint is prior to the ethical emergence of the virtue of temperance.[18]

Now if we are reading the art history here correctly, we would seem to have an instance where a particular kind of art historical aesthetic reflection has preceded philosophical reflection. More specifically, a particular instance of aesthetic reflection today has "contextualized" some of the past relations between aesthetics and ethics. It has not, however, contextualized them enough.

Broadly speaking, the contexts of something are the surrounding, immediately preceding, and [immediately] following "circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood."[19] Accordingly, to "de-contextualize" something means to "consider (something) in isolation from its context," whereas "to contextualize" something means to "place or study [something] in context."

In these senses, the aesthetic reflection cited here certainly "contextualizes" the shift in the sculptural representations of human figures during the stylistic transition from the Late Archaic to the Early Classical styles of Greek sculpture. But this particular kind of aesthetic reflection, I think, begins to do something more; it also begins to "re-contextualize" that transition.

That is, the aesthetic reflection on view in this kind of inquiry positions that stylistic transition partly in a new context

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18 "Emergence" ordinarily means coming unforeseeably into existence or prominence (cf. *The Oxford Dictionary of English,* 3nd ed. [Oxford: OUP, 2010]). See G. Vision, *Re-Emergence: Locating Conscious Properties in a Material World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), reviewed by S. Leuenberger in *Mind 122* (2013), 593-596; "*L'éni+gme de l'émergence*" *in Sciences et Avenir, Hors-Série 143* (juillet /août 2005); and E. J. Low, "Emergence," and J. Kim, "Emergent Properties," in the *OCP*, pp. 239-240.

19 *The Oxford Dictionary of English,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 2010).

rather than simply placing that transition in its original context. The aesthetic reflection here begins to position the artworks in an ethical context. That new context, however, is merely contemporaneous with the appearance of the artwork. Hence, this contextualizing aesthetic reflection is still only inchoative; it only begins to bring that transition into the conceptual tensions between aesthetics and ethics.

What this kind of aesthetic reflection still needs to do is to broaden the *contemporaneous* contexts in the 470's BCE, the contexts of the artwork then, to the *contemporary* contexts in the late 1980's CE, the contexts in which that aesthetic reflection cited above is still being pursued now.

While indeed contextualizing the artwork, aesthetic reflection here does not yet "re-contextualize" it; it does not yet bring the artwork through the present into some possibilities for the future. Still, while sensitive to the axiological similarities between the aesthetic values of the artwork and the ethical values of the society, this kind of aesthetic reflection is beginning to reconsider the relations between aesthetics and ethics partly on historical and not just exclusively on axiological grounds.

To see this twofold point more clearly, however, the particular point about re-contextualizing artworks and the general point about articulating more perspicuously the relations between aesthetics and ethics, we need to examine more details in this kind of aesthetic reflection.

§4. From the Late Archaic to the Early Classical

In the moment when Athenian culture underwent the two Persian Wars of 490 and 480 BCE and then the evacuations and the sack of Athens, Greek civilization transited from the Late Archaic to the Early Classical period.

That is, Greek civilization passed from the representations of human figures in the poetry of Pindar to that of Simonides, from the painting of the Onesimos cup painter to that of the vase painting of the Kleophrades Painter of Cassandra grasping the statue of Athena to defend herself against Ajax's murderous

spear at Troy, and from the tragedies of Aeschylus to those of Sophocles.

At the same time Athenian sculptural representation of human beings changed radically.[20] In particular, Athenian sculptural representations of the human face attested both to the omnipresence of excessive desires and to the necessities not just of self-control but of what I am calling self-restraint, to the omnipresence, that is, of perhaps some similar excesses and necessities now globally in evidence today.

Among the once sacred and now defiled and broken statues of teen-aged nude male athletes that the Athenians buried were two subsequently famous pieces. These pieces were called, respectively after their supposed sculptor and from some extant flakes of bright gold paint on the head, “The Kritios Boy” and “The Blond Boy.”[21]

Both are reliably dated to roughly the ten-year period between the first Persian invasion and the Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE and the second Persian invasion and the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BCE.[22]

Consider now in some detail an instance of a particular kind of aesthetic reflection on how these two Athenian sculptures might not improperly be said to represent the emergence of a new ethical virtue.[23]

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[20] See C. H. Hallett, “The Origins of the Classical Style in Sculpture,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies 106* (1996), 71-84.

[21] See J. M. Hurwit’s photographs, figures 149 and 150, in Hurwit 1985, pp. 341 and 342; and A. Johnston, “Pre-Classical Greece,” in J. Boardman 1993, pp. 11-82. Cf. Hurwit’s “The Kritios Boy: Discovery, Reconstruction, and Date,” *American Journal of Archeology 93* (1989), 41-80.

[22] R. Tulle-Kastenbein, “Bemerkungen zur absoluten Chronologie spätarchaischer und frühklassischer Denkmaler Athenas,” *Archäologischer Anzeiger (1983),* 573-584.

[23] The standard general histories of both male and female statues from this period are G. M. A. Richter’s *Kouroi: Archaic Greek Youths,* 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1970) and *Korai: Archaic Greek Maidens* (London: Routledge, 1968). Here I focus on features of the two nude male transitional statues from the Athenian Acropolis only. As transitional figures they are not, properly speaking, *kouroi.*

The sculptures of the Kritios Boy and the Blond Boy, one distinguished art historian writes,

> "...have something the [earlier] *kouroi* [Archaic Greek statues of standing nude young men] lack: mental life, innerness, or character (*ethos*). Something weighs upon their minds, and it affects the way they stand: the body now has a language. The Blond Boy in particular thinks melancholy thoughts. It is likely that both statues commemorated athletes, and it may seem odd that their meditations on victory – on their personal *arête* [virtue as an excellence] – have elicited not confidence or elation but, apparently, consciousness of their own mortal struggle to be 'excellent,' of their failure to transcend. They have acted, the world has acted upon them, and they react by withdrawing within themselves. It is as if their sculptors attacked the claims the *kouros* had made – the claim of timelessness and the automatic aristocratic equation of goodness with beauty (*kalokagathia*). It is as if these new self-conscious youths accept limitations, the responsibility for their own actions, the possibility of choice, flux, and impermanence all at once. The Kritios Boy and the Blond Boy, in fact, announce a new ideal, a new virtue: *sôphrosynê*, moderation, the doctrine of self knowledge and the knowledge of human limitations – the Classical doctrine par excellence."[24]

This in fact unusual kind of aesthetic reflection may strike some reflective persons as overly subjective or as moralizing or as both. But before accepting such criticisms, consider again several of the main points this art historical interpretation seems to be making. These points suggest that the aesthetic reflection here is better understood neither as overly subjective nor as moralizing but as a fuller kind of traditional contextualization. This aesthetic reflection is a substantial repositioning of artworks in the contemporaneous conceptual tensions then between artworks and actions, between aesthetics and ethics.

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[24] Hurwitt 1985, p. 344. For the two following citations see pp. 340-343. Note that pp. 341 and 342 include photographs.

First, the critic stresses the importance of appreciating a contrast between the older, Late Archaic sculptural representations of young men and their newer, Early Classical representations. The idea is that, although some archaic statues represented lifelikeness in, say, impassive stony smiles, these two Early Classical statues represent a greater lifelikeness by reason of their representing mentality, "innerness or character *(ethos)*,"[25] in their facial expressions as a whole. Note the overly general virtue-ethical notion here of "ethos" as character.

Second, the critic stresses the importance of appreciating the suggestiveness of the Early Classical sculptural representation of human beings, the "as if." The critic refers to the statues making claims to timelessness and to the identification of goodness with beauty – "It is *as if* their sculptors attacked the claims the *kouros* had made…" Then he proceeds to refer not to the statues but to those persons the statues are taken to represent as being self-conscious – "*as if* these new self-conscious youths," he writes, were doing such and such.

Finally, the critic refers to those persons the statues represent as "accept[ing] limitations, the responsibility for their own actions, the possibility of choice, flux, and impermanence all at once." Note here the partial move only from the contemporaneous contexts then to the contemporary contexts now.

Despite possible objections then, the key idea here is not implausible. That idea is the fruitfulness of taking the statues imaginatively as personifications. The critic takes the statues as intended to represent not just some historical figures who may have triumphed in certain athletic competitions; he also takes the statues as representing some abstract qualities in actual human beings.

Besides the need to appreciate the importance of the contrast in the powers of these two styles to represent lifelikeness and the suggestiveness of taking the statues as personifications, the critic's last point is an assertion. "In fact," he asserts, the

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25 On the original senses of the basic notion here of ethos see F. Woerther, *L'Ethos aristotélicien: genèse d'une notion rhétorique* (Paris: Vrin, 2007).

two *kuroi* "announce a new ideal, a new virtue: *sôphrosunê*..." Note here the fuller movement from the merely contemporaneous context to several future contexts in later Greek ethical reflection, but not yet to the contemporary context today in which the reflection is formulated.

Nonetheless, we seem to have here an instance of a kind of aesthetic reflection that suggests a broader contextualization, even a re-contextualization, of some relations between aesthetics and ethics. But what then are we to understand more specifically here by re-contextualization?

We can get some help by recalling briefly philosophical uses of the underlying expression, "contextualization," that is, "any view emphasizing the importance of appeal to a context in answering a given question."[26] Consider several examples.

In the philosophy of science contextualism is mainly the view that "theoretical terms like 'electron' only have meaning... by appearing as terms in deductive systems containing theorems which are empirically testable."[27] In epistemology contextualism is mainly "the view that inferential justification always takes place against a background of beliefs that are themselves in no way evidentially related."[28]

Further, in ethics contextualism is mainly the view that "moral problems arise and can be solved only when we already accept some moral principles... [that] can be questioned only in the light of further principles."[29] And specifically in aesthetics, which is our major concern here, contextualism is "the view that a work of art can only be understood in the context of its historical or cultural circumstances or in the light of other works by the same artist or in a surrounding tradition."[30]

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26 *The Routledge Dictionary of Philosophy,* ed. M. Proudfoot and A. R. Lacey, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 88.

27 *The Routledge Dictionary of Philosophy,* loc. cit.

28 M. Williams, "Contextualism," in the CDP, p. 179.

29 *The Routledge Dictionary of Philosophy,* loc. cit.

30 S. Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 2005).

Normally, then, when one tries to understand the notion here of “re-contextualization” in connection with these narrower uses of the underlying expression “contextualization,” one would expect something like the following. Some aesthetic reflection as re-contextualizing a work of art would entail re-situating that work in the original contexts from which it had been removed.

In other words, “re-contextualization consists in setting the work in its original *total* or *global* context, unlike simple contextualization which takes into account only the original *artistic* context.”[31]

The details of the accounts cited here, however, suggest that some aesthetic reflection, specifically as a re-contextualizing, sometimes may entail something more. Re-contextualizing sometimes may involve connecting a work of art with some of its substantial effects on the subsequent emergence of ethical and not just artistic work in the contemporary world now and not exclusively in the contemporaneous world of the artwork itself.

Some further clarification may prove helpful.

Re-contextualizing an artwork as one of the new possibilities for aesthetics and aesthetic reflection in the future would involve not just situating an artwork in its contemporary (and not just contemporaneous) contexts. But re-contextualization would also involve “actualization” of the contemporary aesthetic reflection on that artwork.

That is, re-contextualization as actualization is making the artwork *current*[32] with the concerns of those who share the urgent global ethical environments of the artwork when appreciated today. And the suggestion here is “re-contextualization” rather than “actualization” because of a further notion that the preferred term here of “re-contextualization” implies.

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31 K. Sasaki, personal communication.

32 Cf. the various senses of the word “actual” and its related expressions with examples in *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical* Principles, 6th ed., 2 vols. (Oxford: OUP, 2007). See T. Williamson, *Vagueness* (London: Routledge, 1994), especially pp. 216-247.

The further notion is of a kind of aesthetic reflection that not only makes an artwork current in the sense of situating it among many present concerns today and not just among those of yesterday. That further notion is the idea of highlighting certain features in the artwork that makes it *pertinent* in the sense of having especially relevant ethical importance and not just current interest. The artwork then is viewed as of current interest, but even more as pertinent in comprising features not just of present interest but indeed even of present urgent ethical importance.

Note however, that the notion here of the "currency" of an aesthetic reflection is reasonably precise. For the notion depends on the clear distinction above between what is contemporaneous to an artwork in the past and what is contemporary to an artwork in the present. By contrast, the notion of "pertinence" of an aesthetic reflection is vague. For that notion is always tied to uncertainties affecting the changing ethical priorities that a society continually struggles to establish. In the first case we have the category of a reasonable precision and in the second that of a reasonable vagueness.[33]

Thus, one particular future possibility for aesthetics might be imagined as sometimes involving the practice of a "re-contextualizing" kind of aesthetic reflection. This would mean rearticulating the sense and significance of some (not all) of yesterday's artworks by bringing them into their new and globally troubled ethical contexts today and tomorrow.

But such a surmise still requires more supporting detail.

§5. Attitude, Attention, and Inwardness

When we scrutinize photographs of the two sculptural works that provoked this inchoative re-contextualizing aesthetic reflection, we are brought to reconsider an earlier passage from the same distinguished work of aesthetics and art history. For the critic develops his aesthetic reflection in the passages I have *italicized* below far beyond the art-historical details of stylistic change only.

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[33] Hurwit 1985, p. 343.

> "By shifting his weight and twisting free, the Kritios Boy comes to life. One part of the body affects another, and all parts are subordinated to the curving rhythm of the whole. The block of stone that has always been implicit in the foursquare *kouros* and that had rigidly controlled it is finally shattered, and the barrier between the limited space of the statue and the unconfined space of the beholder falls. *The Kritios Boy is not the democratic Everyman some scholars have made him: he is still an aristocratic image. But aristocrats in a democracy must act differently from the way they do in an aristocracy. The rise of democracy in Athens necessitated adjustments in the aristocracy's conception of itself and its values. Adjustments therefore also had to be made in the images the aristocracy used to reflect and present itself. The* kouros *was not merely by now an artistic fossil: it was a politically and socially loaded image, with all the wrong associations, expressing all the wrong ideals. That is why it would no longer do.* At all events, the Kritios Boy seems to exercise free will and to occupy the same space we do, in the same way we do, breathing the same air. The aristocratic *kouros* is distant, untouchable. The Kritios Boy is penetrable. He is almost vulnerable."[34]

Given the earlier assertion about the emergence of a new ethical virtue as both a reaction and an adaptation of Athenian society and culture to its defilement by Persian invaders, the point now is that we need to see an additional component in the critic's aesthetic reflection. That component is the critic's new attention to other than strictly art historical concerns.

"[T]he rise of democracy in Athens," the critic writes, "necessitated adjustments in the aristocracy's conception of itself and its values." What some of these in fact non-aesthetic adjustments are can be seen aesthetically in the emergence of an artistic innovation, the Early Classical style, and ethically in the emergence of an ethical innovation, the new virtue I should not

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[34] *Ibid.*

be calling here neither temperance nor moderation nor simply self-restraint, but a critical self-restraint.

Yet the critic's reflection does not become ethical; it remains mainly aesthetic. Thus, "the Blond Boy or the Kritios Boy," the critic summarizes, "represents not the abstract idea of a youth, the way a *kouros* does, but an ideal youth. Yet they brood. The *kouros,* safe in his schema and spatial box, stares past us, transcending human limitations and mutability by paying no attention to them. The Blond Boy and the Kritios Boy pause and seem to pay a great deal of attention. They look not outward but inward, and it is their introversion as much as their pose that makes them Classical."[35]

While remaining mainly aesthetic, note however that this kind of reflection makes still a further step in the direction of a broader idea of contextualization. The step, that is, is towards an eventual re-contextualization and not just actualization of an ancient artwork in the contemporary world today.

For the reflections here of how changes in the sculptural representation of the human face were contemporaneous with changes in what acting rightly now had to mean for members of the Greek privileged class after the devastation of Athens is much more than aesthetic reflection on stylistic reflection only.

The unusual kind of aesthetic reflection here is starting to apprehend several Greek transitional sculptural artworks in the tenuous spaces between major artistic innovations and major ethical ones. It seems to presage the possibilities today and tomorrow for new kinds of aesthetic reflection on aesthetics and ethics and new possibilities for aesthetics itself in the future.

Could these kinds of aesthetic reflection today suggest that a fuller idea of "re-contextualizing" some works of art might retrieve certain aspects of the relations between art and ethics that emerged in Greek art and then were lost in the modern period?

Could they suggest that the relations between aesthetics and ethics tomorrow would require not just broader grounding and

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[35] *Ibid.*

categories, but a fuller comprehension of description as sometimes more than just explanatory but hermeneutic also?

Could they even suggest that "the moral significance of what is represented… makes an essential contribution to the overall perfection of the object, and [contemporary and not just contemporaneous] ethical criticism of the content of the work of art would be part of the criticism of it as a work of art"?[36]

§6. Reorientations

I have been considering here some rather novel kinds of contemporary aesthetic reflection in view of opening up several possibilities for the future of aesthetics as a discipline. These still inchoative kinds of aesthetic reflection have centered on the development of one of the arts and the emergence of one of the ethical virtues at a crucial historical moment in Western culture.

The focus has been on the suggestive but incomplete character today of one kind of art-historical reflection on the earlier appearance in Late Archaic Greek sculpture of certain artistic innovations that partly led to the later appearance of a major ethical innovation. First adumbrated in an artistic innovation, this ethical innovation of a reasoned self-restraint later helped Greek societies modify their earlier self-destructive cultural ideal of a violent, warrior ethos.[37]

Could such a later ethical innovation have arisen without the earlier artistic innovations in the development of Greek sculptural art? Could this artistic novelty have emerged without a new kind of reflection that Greek sculptors brought to their experience? And can we today critically grasp the relations between such initial artistic and subsequent ethical innovations without developing newly perspicuous "re-contextualizing" kinds of aesthetic reflection?

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36 Guyer 2008, p. 5.

37 *Ibid.*

Identifying a particularly vague kind of aesthetic reflection at a moment of generalized cultural and social catastrophe in Athens when certain pre-philosophical notions of a reasoned self-restraint emerged from late Archaic Greek sculptural representations of human beings to the qualitatively different early Classical sculptural representations is perhaps suggestive. This vague reflection invites reconsiderations.

For some future possibilities for aesthetics might involve new forms of aesthetic reflection that re-contextualize artistic innovations on view in some artworks today.

They might do so even in such ways as to open possibilities also for future ethical innovations, that is for certain transformations in some basic patterns of human behaviors that now are required if several globalized threats to human civilization such as the continued proliferation of nuclear weapons are to be overcome.

Thus, new possibilities for aesthetics and aesthetic reflection in the future might arise from just how some artistic practices today could be re-contextualized tomorrow. And such new possibilities for aesthetics and aesthetic reflection might also complement the standard and often still overly constrained understanding today of the dynamic relations between aesthetics and ethics.

Envoi

By way of concluding, recall that, under the onslaught of an ancient Iran that nonetheless lacked anything so destructive as the rapidly developing nuclear weapons today, Athens lost its once flourishing population. The ancient Iranians violently reduced the Athenians populace to no more than disorientated collections of bewildered persons evacuated precipitously to nearer islands like Aegina, their unprecedented wealth sacked, their sacred temples and sculptures desecrated, their city utterly consumed in fire, and the luminous sky above become almost imperceptible in the drifting, apocalyptic ash.

In the aftermath of that more than just cultural disaster, artists first caught up several sobering remains of the catastrophe in lifelike yet still wordless forms. The sculptural forms that some of their own vague artistic reflections fashioned later challenged tragedians and philosophers to find the right words for making the mute and stony lessons of excessive pride, of unrestrained self-assertion and then of inescapable catastrophe, of hubris and of nemesis, finally unforgettable.

Much later, several art historians began to develop a re-contextualizing kind of aesthetic reflection that suggests the importance for future aesthetics and aesthetic reflection of re-contextualizing some artworks in today's still undefined spaces between aesthetics and ethics.[38]

Perhaps some future forms of aesthetics and aesthetic reflection as re-contextualization might fruitfully enlarge our present still parochial understanding of the proper limits between aesthetics and ethics, between art and life.[39]

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[38] Note however the objection of K. Sasaki (personal communication). "There are two axes: aesthetics and ethics, and ancient and contemporary. What you are doing is that in order to prove the pertinence of the relation or link of the first couple, you appeal to an ancient case and try to transpose it to the contemporary context of [the] aesthetic-ethic relation. The relation between the two fields is clearly demonstrated in the ancient example. But its transposition to the contemporary context is dubious, because, in the ancient case, the inchoative meaning of future ethics the sculptures implied can only be revealed to the eye of an expert historian of art long after that time: in other words, this meaning was not deciphered by any contemporaneous eyes. So even if you transpose this case to our times, we cannot expect anything positive from such orientation." By way of for now a partial reply only, note that my concern here is not to transpose anything. Rather I would hope but to suggest for the future of aesthetics as a discipline among other resources the further development of a rather novel kind of aesthetic reflection today on relations between aesthetics and ethics in some art historical works.

[39] For a perhaps only partly successful attempt at re-contextualizing see P. McCormick, *Aspects Yellowing Darkly: Ethics, Intuition, and the European High Modernist Poetry of Suffering and Passage* (Cracow: The Jagiellonian University Press, 2010).