

Book forum

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On Alva Noë, *Strange tools. Art and human nature*

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Précis of the book

In *Strange tools* I give the outlines of a general theory of art. My aim is to answer three questions: what is art? Why does it matter to us? What does the fact that it matters to us tell us about ourselves? The book is framed against the background of a small group of puzzles, questions and phenomena, which cry out for analysis.

The first of these I dub *the fact of making*. Art is a *doing and making* practice. Artists make stuff. Paintings, sculptures, buildings, installations, but also songs, dances, performances and poems. Artists roll up their sleeves and get dirty with their hands; their work is mechanical, practical, bound up with tools, technologies, all manner of skill and know-how.

But there is a puzzle in the vicinity: the value of artworks, unlike the value attached to cars, or bookshelves, or dishwashers, or telephones, isn't straightforward and practical. We know what telephones and dishwashers are, and we know what they are for, and so deciding whether they are successful, or less than successful, is usually a pretty straightforward affair. In particular, we can decide whether they were well-made, well-designed, well-crafted, well-thought out. But these questions, even when they do apply to artworks, are never the decisive thing when it comes to whether they are successful as artworks. Indeed, artworks, in contrast with other products of manufacture and items of technology, generally leave the questions "*what are they? What are they for? What might be the standards by which to measure their success?*" entirely open.

Any theory of art must address this question: why this dedication to skillful making and production on the part of artists when the value of artworks seems to be, in the end, independent of these sort of practical considerations.

The second phenomenon I labor in this book to understand has to do, as I'll put it, with the extraordinary *transformative power of aesthetic disagreement*. It is a remarkable fact about art, in all its varieties, that it is liable to provoke disagreement. Some will deny that the work of an artist (or a kind of work) is any good, or even that it rises to the level of art. Others dispute the value of art in general. Art lovers, whether amateurs or professionals, whether makers or consumers, dispute their aesthetic evaluations. Now the truly remarkable thing about all this disagreement is not the mere fact of its existence, but the fact that it exists despite there not being any generally accepted procedures or rules for resolving it.

In this regard, the domain of art looks a lot like philosophy: a zone of what would seem to be entirely substantive and yet, at the same time, unsolvable disagreement.

In the case of art (and that of philosophy too), disagreement generates conversation and the conversation, for its part, generates new understanding; aesthetic conversation, of criticism, opens up works of art for appreciation. Aesthetic criticism, argument, conversation, do not leave us where they find us. However irresolvable, aesthetic argument is productive. These are not fruitless disagreements. A theory of art should address this productive, transformative character of aesthetic discourse.

A third issue is the *problem of aesthetic experience* itself. There is a tendency to think of aesthetic experiences on the model of something like sensations. The aesthetic experiences, so it is sometimes supposed, take place *in us*, as a result of the triggering action of the aesthetic object, the artwork, on our nervous system. Armed with this conception, it then seems appropriate to ask such questions as: what is it about the aesthetic stimulus in virtue of which it triggers the aesthetic effect? What are the neural correlates of the aesthetic response?

But this way of looking at things is all wrong. Artworks aren't merely triggers, and what you can learn by reflecting on the events triggered inside us by artworks won't have much to do with what art or its experience. And finally, and even more revealingly, aesthetic experiences are not stable, sensation-like data points. A general theory of art needs to frame a more plausible account of aesthetic experience as well as a more plausible conception of what biology and neuroscience can hope to tell us about art and aesthetic experience.

In *Strange tools* I address these issues about art and its relation to science, philosophy, technology and making, as well as a host of further questions about pictoriality, dance, and popular music, as well as the history of thought about all this. I will not try to recapitulate all of these discussion in this short summary. What I offer here is a very brief restatement of the chief claim of the book as well as of what I take to be the book's most significant discovery.

In *Strange tools*, I start with the fact that, as I put it, human life is structured by organized activity. Organized activity is the domain of habit; it is typically skillful, and expressive of intelligence as well as a range of other sophisticated cognitive powers such attention. But it is also basic, in the sense of being both spontaneous and also foundational in relation to other activities and goals. Talking and walking are examples of basic and foundational activities, in this sense. They are also, typically, goal directed.

Technology plays a special role in connection with organized activities. For tools and technologies themselves depend on being securely integrated into patterns of organized activity. To every tool or technology there corresponds suites of organized activities, and organized activities are frequently clustered around tool-using, making activities. Driving and writing are important examples, as is dancing. Dancing, in the sense in which we dance at parties and weddings, is an organized activity – it is spontaneous and “natural”, but expressive of intelligence and sensitivity; it is typically social and serves all manner of social functions (celebration, courting, etc.); dancing entrains what we do and how we move with a characteristic and recognizable temporal and spatial dynamics.

The existence of tools, technologies and organized activities is the precondition for art, rather as straight talk is the precondition for irony. Crucially, what we call art works with these constitutive habitual dispositions; artists make art out of these. So, to use one of my paradigm examples, dance artists don't merely dance the way the rest of us do at weddings and parties; rather, they take the very fact of dancing and make art out of it. Instead of showcasing it, showing off, they are more likely to disrupt it or interrupt it and in so doing expose it for what it is, an organized activity. Or to use a different example: pictoriality – both the making and use of pictures (in whatever medium, photography, drawing, painting, digital media, etc.) – is a culturally embedded and settled communicative activity, and has been for millennia. We are fluent with pictures in personal as well as commercial transactions. Think of the pictures of cars sent

out by the dealership, or of chickens and broccoli sent out by the supermarket in the weekly circular, or of grandma on the shelf, or of the selfies we take together at the ball game. These pictures carry explicit or implicit captions, and their meaning and content, what they *show*, is secured, usually, by these captions. We never have to think twice, there is never anything to think twice about, when it comes to seeing what these pictures show. But pictorial art is a different thing altogether. The artist isn't participating in the economy of picture making, but is reflecting on it, or exposing it, or putting *it* on display (note, this may not be *all* that the pictorial artist is doing, just as choreographers are interested in a great deal more than dancing. For example, artists of all stripes [choreographers and painters in particular] are participants in an art culture; art targets other art, almost always).

Art practices, then, are tied to *making* activities, to human doing and tool use, for these latter are its preconditions and form the ground or terrain on which different art forms or media arise and do their work. Choreographers make art out of dancing, and pictorial artists make art out of picture-using activities. Literary writers, for their part, make art out of the raw materials given by the basic fact that human beings organize themselves, or find themselves organized, by speech and writings.

Artists make things not in order to surpass mere technology or manufacture, not because they can do it better or in a more "aesthetically pleasing" way. They make things because we are makers by nature and by culture. By making, and by exposing what making takes for granted, artists put *us* on display. And they do so in ways that change us and, finally, liberate us from the bonds of habit and character. How so?

The basic thought is this: art loops down and changes the life of which it is the artistic representation. Take the case of choreography. How people dance today at weddings and clubs is shaped by images of dancing provided by choreography. Our dancing, mine and yours, incorporates art dancing, however indirectly¹. Over time, across generations, the entanglement of dancing and the art of dancing is effected. The entanglement is not so great as to make it the case that the line between the dance art, or choreography, and what we are doing at weddings, is blurred. But now the line becomes itself a place of questioning and puzzlement. As an example from painting, consider the fertile exchange, at art schools, and in

¹ See Di Paolo, Cuffari and De Jaegher 2018 for more on "incorporation".

the art world, between fine art and commercial art in the mid-twentieth century (e.g. the Bauhaus, Warhol).

The fact of entanglement has important and surprising implications. Here is the most significant of these: pictures are anchored in our visual and communicative lives. But pictures are entangled with art. This means that our visual and communicative lives are themselves in the field of art's influence. Or take language. Writing is anchored in our linguistic experience, but writing is in turn entangled with art. So speech, as a phenomenon, cannot be thought of as quite "natural", if by nature we mean something pre-given independently of the looping work of art. The fact of entanglement puts pressure on the very idea of an art-independent human nature. The point goes well beyond the now familiar idea that, as I put it in *Strange tools*, we are cultural by nature. The very idea that we have a *nature*, one that it is the business of science to study, independent of art and philosophy, may now be questioned.

In closing I would like to mention briefly two more themes that enliven *Strange tools*.

First, in the framework of *Strange tools*, seeing, talking, walking, and dancing are first-order organized activities, and the fine arts, as we call them, are second-order reorganizational practices. I also argue that philosophy is a reorganizational practice, too. Philosophy interrupts our habits of thought and talk just as the visual artist disrupts (*inter alia*) our background assumptions about what a picture is. My view is not that philosophy and art are the same, but that they are a species of a common genus.

Second, an important fact about art is its recalcitrance. Art just won't be labeled or categorized; it doesn't wear its nature on its surface. A work of art, whether classical or avant garde, is always a challenge, a provocation. As I put it in *Strange tools*, the work of art says: "see me, if you can!", and you never can, at least not at first, because the artwork is proposed in such a way as to obscure or make problematic everything that needs ordinarily to be in place for there to be anything like straight forward recognition, comprehension, or perception. But this has a consequence that art is always a problem, and so, that art flirts with the negative or the unpleasant; it always threatens to be boring, or impenetrable. These negatives are not indicators of artistic failure, but very typically of success. Art is difficult, on purpose as it were, so that we may reorganize ourselves in order to comprehend it.

Against the background of these comments, a theme that runs through *Strange tools* has to do with museums and their role. Given art's mechanisms as, in effect contextual and communicative, working with

background, art is always vulnerable to falling into desuetude, for the background conditions will change. Just as what is funny now may not always be funny. But art can survive these kinds of changes, it can retain its power to entrance and transform, thanks the culture of reception, through the weeks, months, years, decades and centuries-long conversations the works themselves sustain. The museum is one of the places where this aesthetic conversation and criticism flourishes. Museums are not, then, or at least not only, warehouses for art; a museum hosts the artwork and sustains it. But there are dangers faced by museums. For example, a contemporary preoccupation of museums is making work “available” to ever larger numbers of visitors. This is an admirable goal but also potentially defeating. For if, as I believe, art’s very life depends on its *difficulty*, there is a danger in doing too much to make visitors to galleries feel comfortable. It might be better to find ways to give them permission to accept a little discomfort.

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The strangeness of strange tools? Alva Noë’s aesthetics and the emancipatory potential of art

With *Strange tools* (ST), Alva Noë has presented an illuminating account of art as an essential element of human practices. Noë proposes that we understand art as a practice through which people reorganize human activities. This places his account of art squarely in the tradition of the aesthetics of Kant, Hegel, Gadamer, and Adorno, just to name a few. One of the important lessons of philosophical aesthetics since Kant is that analyzing art requires that we consider how it contributes to the human form of life as a whole. Accordingly, art is not just one domain of objects and practices among others. Rather, it should be conceived of as a practice that contributes to more or less all areas of human life. Building upon the foundation laid by Kant (1790), Hegel (1835) described art as a practice through which communities develop and articulate an understanding of

themselves. Gadamer (1960) and Adorno (1970) followed Hegel in different ways, pleading for an understanding of art as a specific form of reflective and critical practice.

Situating Noë's work in this tradition makes it easier to appreciate an important aspect of it: Noë conceives of art as a reflective practice that breaks with a bias typical to the German aesthetics tradition, namely its bias for high art (as distinct from popular culture). Noë's definition of art incorporates everyday, popular culture (see e.g. ST: 168-81), which lends his explanation of the reflective potential of art a different scope. But with this important change of perspective, Noë risks being one-sided in another way. His work tends to understand art as a practice without resistance. According to Noë's account, artistic practices loop back on (or feed back into) ordinary, everyday practices. In his perspective, art (as a second order activity) has the potential to reshape and transform everyday (first order) practices. But his explanations of the transformative potential of art make it look as if art as a second order practice directly restructures first order practices. In other words, Noë's writing seems to depict the transfer between art as reflective practice and first order practices as running smoothly. But if art's transformative potential realizes itself within everyday practices without barrier, one might wonder where the strangeness of art remains. Does Noë in fact account for the strangeness of strange tools?

In what follows, I argue that on the whole, Noë's aesthetics falls short of explaining the emancipatory potential of art. My reflections are structured in three short steps. In the first, I distinguish between two ways in which second order practices can loop back into first order practices. In the second step, I explain why we can only really grasp how art feeds back into everyday practices if we conceive of art as something that develops structures that are *not* applicable to everyday practices. The third step outlines how Noë might better make sense of the strangeness of strange tools if he were to provide an account of art's emancipatory potential.

(1) Let's start with a look at the explanations *Strange tools* offers. Art as reflective activity brings "our organization into view; in doing this, art reorganizes us" (ST: 29). I read this as saying that art is an activity that thematizes everyday practices: artistic pictures thematize ordinary pictures and artistic music (in the classical tradition) thematizes sound and rhythm as it belongs to our life-world. "Art puts us on display. Art unveils us to ourselves" (ST: 101). In effect, I think Noë means that art is a practice

that investigates organized everyday activities in such a way that it reorganizes and transforms them. The expression that Noë prefers is “looping”: artistic practices loop back on ordinary everyday practices.

I think that we should distinguish between two types of looping back in order to get a better understanding of how Noë’s theory works. The first type can be characterized with Noë’s concept of reorganization. A good example for this type of looping back is grammatical reflection. If we attain grammatical knowledge about linguistic structures, we re-determine the structures in question. In doing so, we gain control of linguistic structures and develop linguistic discipline. It is characteristic of this type of looping back that second order practices develop structures that are then implemented in first order ones.

The second type of looping back concerns questioning the structures of first order practices, which are generally taken for granted. I would characterize its effect by saying that it unsettles our understanding of the structures in question. Think of how psychoanalysis works. The psychoanalytic cure is a second order practice that does not provide a “model” (ST: 152-61) for better comportment in everyday life. Rather, it aims at articulating the structures of everyday practices in order to open up space for a re-figuration of them. The re-figuration itself, however, is not organized by the psychoanalytic cure. In this second type of looping back, the transformative potential of reflective practices lies in the way they defamiliarize first order practices.

Even though Noë’s explanations of how works of art function as strange tools could be understood as combining both types, he seems to slightly favour the first type. His prime example of reorganizing activities – choreography (see ST: 13-8) – underscores this point. Choreography is a technique of reorganizing dance. Someone who works as a choreographer reflects on dance in order to open up a new perspective on the possibilities of dancing (be it by relying on traditional techniques of dancing or by inventing new ones). By reflecting on dance, she develops structures that are implemented in new forms of dancing. In this way, choreography as second order activity transforms dance.

But is it possible to understand art in this way? Think of a novel like Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*. Flaubert’s narrative investigates the structures of bourgeois society, and, in particular, the role of women in marriages. But the investigation is not meant to reorganize the structure of bourgeois life. Rather, its reflective potential consists in the way it unsettles our understanding of the social structures in question. A similar explanation can be given of Manet’s paintings. A painting like *Un bar aux*

folies bergères (1882) analyzes how individuals are lost in modern structures of living. It does not reorganize these structures and does not contribute to the organization of different ways of living within modern societies. I could invoke countless examples to support the claim that art's reflective potential has to be conceived on the basis of the second type of looping back.

(2) In the second type of looping back, reflective practices develop structures that are not as such implemented in first order activities. This is characteristic of art, a claim shared by very different positions like Adorno (1970) and Danto (2007). Artworks and artistic performances develop structures on their own that do not as such correspond to other practices (even though lots of artworks include elements of other practices like, for example, words of natural languages). The specificity of the structures developed by artworks or artistic performances challenge those who deal with them. If recipients want to gain access to the structures created by artworks or artistic performances, they have to interact with them. They have, for instance, to follow the affective plot of *Madame Bovary* or to discern the complex optical structures of the women behind the counter in Manet's painting. But all this does not equip recipients with structures that would allow them to reorganize everyday practices. Rather, it irritates and unsettles our relation to the ways the latter are organized.

One might say that artworks or artistic performances reorganize specific activities like affective comprehension or seeing ("See me if you can" is Noë's expression for this kind of reorganization; see ST: 102). They do so if recipients engage with the structures of the artworks they are confronted with. But this kind of reorganization that happens in receptive activities has no direct impact on everyday practices. If one learns to see with Manet's painting, this kind of seeing cannot simply be implemented in everyday situations. The activities that artworks provoke loop back on first order activities of, for instance, affective comprehension or seeing by irritating and unsettling our understanding of these activities. In short, interaction with an artwork leads the recipient to call into question the structures of everyday practices that they generally take for granted (see Bertram 2014). The questioning as such does not imply a specific reorganization. If the interaction with an artwork directly prompts a reorganization, no questioning takes place. This is to say that art's reflective potential does not unfold in cases in which artworks do not irritate us in any way.

I asked whether Alva Noë provides an explanation of the strangeness of strange tools. I think Noë speaks of strange tools because artworks as tools have their place within second order practices. But this does not explain the strangeness in question. Think again of grammatical vocabulary as a tool for grammatical discourse. Within grammatical discourse, the word “verb” is operative as a tool for thematizing specific words. It works differently than linguistic tools of first order language – like “table” – do. Even though the difference between first order practice tools and second order tools is important, there is nothing necessarily strange about tools that have their place within second order practices. Thus, it is necessary to give a different explanation of the strangeness of strange tools if one wants to make sense of this expression (which I would like to do, since I find it to be very apt).

As already hinted at, I propose that we understand the structures developed in art as structures that are specific to art. They are not applicable to everyday practices. The configuration realized in a painting or a poem, the structure of movements that a dance performance confronts us with – these are examples of structures specific to art. By developing structures like this, art estranges recipients and challenges them. Thus, it is the very structures developed in art that are the basis of its strangeness. These structures give art a specific quality among second order practices – a specificity that explains the way in which artworks can illuminatingly be called strange tools.

(3) Distinguishing between two types of looping back not only helps us to understand how art works. It also enables us to distinguish between, on the one hand, reflection as determination of first order practices, and, on the other hand, reflection as emancipating us from structures of first order practices that are taken for granted. As I understand it, Alva Noë’s concept of strange tools is a contribution to an understanding of art as emancipatory practice. Strange tools are tools that evoke estrangement and, thus, break through dominating structures.

One of the most important aspects of the German aesthetics tradition has been to conceive of art as a practice of freedom. In this vein, Kant stressed that beautiful forms prompt a free play of the faculties of the understanding. This free play realizes a step out of the structures and necessities of everyday life. In this sense, Kant characterizes aesthetic experiences as “disinterested” (Kant 1790: §2) – as free from the interests of habitual practices.

Kant’s account offers a blueprint for an explanation of the emancipatory potential of art. Following Kant, Schiller (1795) and Hegel took art to

be a practice that contributes to the realization of a free society. In my view, Noë's account has, in general, the potential of contributing to this tradition. Realizing this potential presupposes that one understands how art estranges us from first order practices. Artworks develop structures by means of which they enable us to re-negotiate structures of everyday life. Explaining art's reflective potential in this way allows us to recognize its emancipatory potential. I think that we should rearticulate the basic ideas of *Strange tools* in this way.

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Some reflections on Noë on dance

Dance has long played a central role in Alva Noë's thinking about how our perceptual access to the world is essentially linked to our capacity for embodied agency. In *Out of our heads* (hereafter OH), for example, he states that "human experience is a dance that unfolds in the world and with others" (xiii). In two interviews¹ published prior to the publication of

¹ *Alva Noë on consciousness*, available on Lapidarium at <https://amiquote.tumblr.com/post/3626488314/alva-noe-on-consciousness-why-you-are-not-your> and *Life is the way the animal is in the world: a talk with Alva Noë*, available on Edge at https://www.edge.org/conversation/alva_no-life-is-the-way-the-animal-is-in-the-world.

Strange tools (ST), he makes further claims about the relevance of dance for understanding perception and consciousness. First, he identifies ways in which dance serves as a model of what perception or consciousness is: “Perceptual consciousness is a mode of exploration of the world, making use of a certain kind of practical bodily understanding. [...] This makes dance, for me, the perfect metaphor for consciousness”. Dance is “a beautiful modeling or illustration or reenactment of the basic situation that we are in as embodied socially situated dynamic beings”. This is because perception is not something that takes place in the head. Rather, it is “a way of acting. [...] The world makes itself available to the perceiver through physical movement and interaction [...] *What we perceive* [...] is determined by what we are *ready* to do”. Like perception, dance is an embodied engagement with a structured environment given to us in terms of our possibilities for movement.

Second, he claims that we can *learn* about perception and consciousness in *looking at dance*: “When you look at a dance [...] you understand the movements and the forms and the patterns of the ensemble in a particular dance environment, which may be a stage or it may be some other kind of environment. To watch a dance is to make sense of this kind of dynamic”. In watching dance performance, we can see in the dancer’s explorations of the dance environment a model for the ways in which perception occurs not in the brain but in brain-mediated exploratory engagements by the embodied perceiver with her environment.

However, we should note, while dancing *in general* might serve as a model of perceptual experience on the enactive view, dance *performance* – dance as it enters into the arts – cannot, although it might be used to *display* or *exemplify* perceptual experience, as in the works of Lisa Nelson (see below). The performer differs from a mere agent whose behavior is subject to evaluation in that she *intends* for her actions to be appreciated and evaluated, and thus is *guided* in what she does by the expected eye or ear of an intended qualified audience (Davies 2011: chapter 1). In this sense, a performance is always “for an audience”. This distinguishes the dance performer from the dancer who is “caught up” in act of dancing. This also has implications for what we can learn from *perceiving* dance performance *as such*. For the “contemplative, puzzled, interpretive attitude” that we take to artworks contrasts with our basic perceptual awareness of everyday objects (OH: 120). In appreciating artistic performances we adopt this attitude to the actions of the performers, viewing them as enacted *for us* in order to make accessible the “point” of the work.

Strange tools presents some fascinating extensions of these earlier discussions of dance. The most general claim is that “art has its origins in this basic fact about us, that we are organized, integrated, pulled together by activities such as breastfeeding, walking, talking and perceiving” (ST: 11). But a more provocative claim is that “choreography is philosophy” (ST: 16). We might schematize the argument for this claim as follows:

P1: Choreographers cannot *make* dance, nor can they *present or stage* dance.

P2: What they do is stage *representations* of dance.

P3: In doing this they “unconceal” the centrality of dance to our being the creatures that we are.

P4: To do this is to do philosophy.

Let me consider the different steps of this argument in turn.

P1. Dance, Noë maintains, is an “organized activity”. Our participation in organized activities “shapes, enables and constrains us; we find ourselves put together and made up in the setting of the activity”. But, because organised activities are emergent and are not governed by the deliberate control of any individual (ST: 5-6), we can get “lost” or “caught up” in such activities. Perception itself is an organised activity, and so is dancing: “People dance on purpose [...] The dancing just happens [...] The ability to dance is precisely an ability to let go, to let oneself be danced (as we might say)” (ST: 12-3).

The choreographer cannot (usually) “make” dance or present dance on stage because, as noted above, dance performance differs crucially from dancing qua organized activity in being self-conscious, guided and shaped by the dancer’s expectations about the reception of her performance by an audience. This is not a matter of conscious deliberation, but it still gives the dancer a measure of embodied control over what she does.

P2. What the choreographer stages is therefore not itself dancing but a performance that represents dancing or the possibilities of dancing.

P3. Noë offers a number of different descriptions of the significance of P2 with respect to P3:

[A] “When a choreographer stages a dance, [...] he puts dancing itself on display. Choreography shows us dancing, and so, really, it displays us, we human beings, as dancers [...] Choreography exhibits the place dancing has, or can have, in our lives. Choreography puts the fact that we are organized by dancing on display” (ST: 13).

[B] “*We are dancers* and that is a deep and important fact about us, about the way we are organized. To stage a dance is to put into view this

organized activity within which we are, by nature, embedded but within which we are, as we tend to be, lost" (ST: 14).

[C] "Choreography casts light on one of the ways we are organized, that we are organized by dancing" (ST: 14).

[D] "Choreography is concerned with the ways we are organized by dancing" (ST: 15).

[E] "Dancing is an organized activity; it is one of the activities that absorb us. Choreography is a practice for investigating our absorption" (ST: 15).

[F] "We are unknowing dancers by nature; choreography gives us an opportunity to encounter this aspect of ourselves" (ST: 15).

[G] "Choreography, and all the arts [...], seek to bring out and exhibit, to disclose and to illuminate, aspects of the way we find ourselves organized" (ST: 16).

[H] "What the choreographer does [...] is find a way of bringing into the open, to use an image from Heidegger, something that is concealed, hidden, implicit or left in the background, namely, the place of dancing in our lives, or our place in the activity, the self-organized complex that is dancing" (ST: 16).

I want to distinguish here between "internal" and "external" construals of what is being claimed in P3. I shall argue (1) that the internal reading, as a general claim about what choreographers do, is factually implausible, and (2) that it is only on the internal reading that the claim that choreography is philosophy is itself plausible. On the internal reading of P3, the claim is that what *motivates* choreographers in staging particular representations of dance is a desire to illuminate, exhibit, make manifest to us, the ways in which our ordinary lives are organized by dancing. This seems to be what is claimed in [D], [E], [G], and [H]. On the external reading of P3, on the other hand, the claim is that, whatever their motivations, the staging by choreographers of particular representations of dance makes apparent to us, and in this sense displays, the ways in which our ordinary lives are organized by dancing. See, here, [A], [B], [C], and [F].

On the internal reading, P3 seems to be empirically false. It might seem that there are at least some choreographers motivated in this way. For example, in works by Lisa Nelson discussed by Noë in his interviews, Nelson creates an environment that the dancers are invited to explore in their movements. The environment contains various cues that call for engaged responses on the part of the dancers, and challenges them to learn how to cope. Their coping structures the evolution of the dance. The

dance then is intended to exemplify the strategies of coping that organisms adopt in their engaged embodied interaction with the world structured by their activity as an environment. But even here, what is intentionally made manifest is embodied perceptual consciousness, not dancing.

Nor does P3 read “internally” apply to other prominent choreographers. Here are three examples. (1) Jerome Bel is arguably concerned not with displaying dancing as an organized activity, but rather with how dancing is represented in dance performance, somewhat as Robert Rymann’s canvases are about ways in which visual artworks are exhibited in galleries. (2) Matthew Bourne, in staging *Swan lake* and *Sleeping beauty*, is motivated by an interest in expanding the ways in which staging a representation of dance can serve to display something else – and thus in the possibilities of dance as a narrative art. (3) Yvonne Rainer’s “task dances” are concerned with making apparent to the audience the role of embodied intelligence in ordinary task-oriented movement (see Carroll and Banes 1982). A choreographer intentionally stages a representation of dance in the interest of “displaying” *something* but this is not usually the centrality of dancing as an organised activity.

On the external reading, [P3] seems more plausible, although, as noted earlier, we might ask whether, in becoming aware, in watching a staged dance performance, of the centrality of dancing qua organised activity in our lives, we can also appreciate the performance as a work of dance. For, in apprehending the represented dance in this way, we have to abstract from the performance qua performance. To the extent that we see and appreciate what is going on on stage as dance *performance*, it ceases to represent dancing as an organised activity.

P4. “The choreographer”, Noë claims, “opens for us the place of dancing in our lives. Choreography makes manifest something about ourselves that is hidden from view because it is the spontaneous structure of our engaged activity”. This is “a paradigmatically philosophical activity”, analogous to Socratic dialogues in Plato’s works: “Plato puts our thinking, asking, arguing [...] on display and in doing so offers us a way to find ourselves, a way to get found where we were lost”. This is “exactly the project of choreography – to fashion for us a representation of ourselves as dancers; to make perspicuous what is otherwise concealed and only poorly understood. The work of choreography – the work of art – is philosophical. [...] Both philosophy and choreography aim at [...] a kind of understanding that, in Wittgenstein’s phrase, consists in having a perspicuous representation” (ST: 16-7).

This argument seems to presuppose the internal reading of P3. But if that reading fails to do justice to the diversity of choreographical motivations, then the claim can only be that choreography *might* be a way of doing philosophy. But could one argue, in line with the external reading of P3, that choreographers “do philosophy” without *intentionally* doing philosophy? To coopt an expression from Dominic Lopes (2007), can there be “incidental philosophy”? One can produce an X incidentally if:

- 1/ one intends to produce a Y,
- 2/ one has no intention of producing an X,
- 3/ one takes some set of properties P to be required for something to be a Y,
- 4/ one succeeds in producing a Y, but
- 5/ one thereby also produces an X because the set of properties required to be an X are a sub-set of the set of properties required to be a Y.

Might it be claimed that those choreographers for whom the internal reading of P3 fails, and who do not intend that their works do philosophy in the way proposed, nonetheless do philosophy incidentally? I think not, because I don't think that the motivations required to intentionally do philosophy are a subset of the motivations that drive such choreographers, but I leave this as an open question.

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Noë's *Strange tools* and Everyday Aesthetics

In *Strange tools. Art and human nature* (ST) Alva Noë is mainly interested in the philosophy of art. And yet any theory or definition of art must distinguish between art and non-art and thus must say something about

non-art aesthetic experience, particularly non-art experience in the realm of the everyday. Noë's overall approach is strongly inspired by Dewey, and Dewey, because of his *Art as experience*, is generally considered a grandfather of Everyday Aesthetics as a sub-discipline. Another perhaps equally important grandfather is Heidegger, especially if we consider what he says about tools in *Being and time*. However, there is a tension between these two sources. In this article I will explore this tension as it emerges in Noë's book.

It seems odd to think of art objects and performances as tools. Consider a hammer as a paradigmatic tool. The claim seems to be that works of art are very much like hammers except that they are strange. But it is essential that tools have function, and art, according to Noë, has no function at all. But if art is not a tool it is odd to refer to it as a "strange tool". Perhaps Noë's distinction between art and non-art is more rigid than it needs to be. One sign of this is that his position forces him to say some things that are counterintuitive. One of these is that dancers (that is, those who dance on stage in dance performances) do not really dance but are in fact doing something else, choreography (ST: 13-8). Now, it is commonly believed that a choreographer is someone who designs a dance. Someone who dances a dance on stage, a performer of dance, may or may not be a choreographer. And a choreographer may or may not be a dancer, although most are. Noë can insist that he has his own special meanings for "dancer" and "choreographer", but why should we go along? Most dancers would take offense at the idea that they were not real dancers but that someone who prances about with no training is. I will argue in this article that Noë is forced into this line by way of some things he says about what he calls Level 1 activities. His idea is that art activities, as Level 2 activities, are secondary reflections on primary Level 1 activities which, themselves, are primitive and largely unreflective. But it might be that Level 1 activities are not as primitive as he makes out, and that the Level 1/Level 2 distinction is softer than he thinks.

Noë, borrowing from Heidegger, uses turning a door handle as an example of a Level 1 activity. This activity can be seen as one that is largely unconscious. As Heidegger puts it, we are not aware of the tool until it is broken. But I do not think this is true. We are often aware of the door handle even when it is *not* broken. Actually, we can only be aware of it in a positive way (as what Kant calls a dependent beauty) *when* it is not broken. We can also appreciate it in a disinterested way, whether broken or not. In short, Level 1 is aesthetically rich, but in a different way than Level 2. For Noë, non-art aesthetics is a matter of the collection of objects that

are not art, along with associated activities. We understand a door-handle only against the background of a way of life (ST: 22). Such objects are products of manufacture and their standard of excellence is usefulness (ST: 103).

Notice that nothing is said about aesthetic experience. It would be better to say that we understand a door handle against a background of a way of life that has an ineliminable aesthetic dimension. Following Heidegger, Noë thinks tools recede into the background in everyday life. As he puts it, "We rarely if ever need to stop and ask questions about door handles. Unless we are designers, we don't think about them very often" (ST: 22). But, again, this is not quite true. We think about door handles when we are purchasing a house, when we are re-designing an interior, and when we buy a new door. We may not think about them often otherwise, but we notice if something is wrong. Moreover, this happens not simply when they no longer work correctly but also when they no longer look right, for example because of changes in fashion or in one's own taste.

Yes, everyday life is different from art, but not as different as Noë makes out. We choose to purchase a house based in part on its architectural style. The door handle is part of that. It does have aesthetic properties. And we do notice those properties from time to time. The handle I am looking at right now is satisfying to me because it fits with the 1920s style of my home. I would be irritated if it were replaced by something that works just as well but looks different.

In short, Level 1 things, as Noë describes them, are *too* non-art-like. Ordinary dancing, conversation, breast-feeding, and perception (all of which he describes as Level 1 activities) are like art-making in some ways, and sometimes remarkably so. One could say that the ordinary dancer wants to dance beautifully and wants to express him or herself, just as the art-dancer does. Even a dancer who is primarily motivated by the desire to attract sexual partners, a motive which Noë attributes to Tony Manero, the hero of *Saturday night fever*, wants to dance well (ST: 12-4). I do not think that the dancing we see in this movie, or even the dancing it is supposed to represent, is non-art. Even an ordinary non-art dancer who dances while cooking dinner alone wants his or her dancing to have certain aesthetic properties. He or she wants her moves to look good. Similarly, those who design objects of everyday life, including kitchen utensils and ordinary homes, are not as non-reflective as Noë makes out. Think of William Morris, Art Nouveau, and the Bauhaus.

Noë defines Level 1 as “the level of the organized activity or the technology”, and Level 2 as “the level where the organization at the lower level gets put on display and investigated” (ST: 29). Yet this division hides some confusion. Take amateur photography. At first it seems that this is Level 1 activity since it is organized and it involves technology. But art photography is also organized and involves technology. Does that make art photography Level 1 too? Moreover, amateur photography displays things every bit as much as art photography does. Does that make it Level 2? And a lot of non-art photography, for example newspaper, nature, forensic, and astronomical photography, involves investigation, although not necessarily the same kind as art photography. Are *they* at Level 2? Additionally, amateur photography and art photography are, for the most part, both concerned with aesthetic properties.

Level 1 activities seem, on some accounts, to fall within the domain of the everyday, and thus would be of particular interest to everyday aestheticians. Noë says, “At level 1, we have activities like talking, moving, dancing, making pictures, singing, etc”. What defines them “is that they are basic and involuntary modes of our organization” (ST: 29). But what is basic is relative (that humans talk and other animals do not suggests a great deal of complexity in this ability) and there is nothing involuntary about these activities: we choose to talk, move and dance. Moreover, although Noë says that these “are things we do by nature or second nature”, *later*, in the very same chapter, he says much the opposite. There he introduces his concept of “looping”, arguing that second order investigations “loop down” and organize first order investigations. He even admits that many of these activities at the first level are “socially shared and culturally shaped” (ST: 29).

A further confusion is introduced by the ideas of “making strange” and decontextualizing. Noë thinks that “a tool has significance only in the context of its embedding”. For example, a picture in a family album loses its significance when it loses its caption (ST: 30). However, art, too, removes things from their settings and makes them strange, as when Robert Rauschenberg hangs a painted bed in a gallery and titles it “Bed”. So this also cannot distinguish Level 1 from Level 2. Moreover, there are ways of making strange that involve usage and perception of everyday items outside of art contexts. For example, an old family portrait found in an antique shop can exert fascination even when the name and specific context of its making is not known. Also, *art* loses its meaning, or at least its original meaning, when it is taken out of context, although it can pick up a new meaning in a new context.

Noë says that second-order activities arise out of the first level as maps of that level that make sense of the ways we are organized by first level activities. Choreography, for example, loops down to shape how we think about dancing. Dance, he argues, cannot be “insulated from [...] choreography’s model of ourselves as dancing”. And “Our most inspired, most fun-spirited, most playful dancing is itself organized, cliché-like, by what are choreographic representations of ourselves dancing” (ST: 31). This is right, except that choreographic representations of dancing that involve people dancing on stage are, as I have argued above, instances of dance. Agreed, there is a dynamic relationship between the aesthetics of art and the aesthetics of everyday life (see Leddy, 2012). Yet, although Noë thinks that this phenomenon of looping causes the difference between dancing and choreography to be obscured it is simpler to say that the difference is not as profound as he thinks.

Another example of looping comes up when Noë discusses Anne Hollander on how looking at mirrors is a matter of creating “a posed portrait” of oneself (ST: 48). As he puts it, “we measure the dressed people we see, and how we feel about our own visible, clothed bodies, by the standards set up in pictures” (ST: 50). This seems right. However, when he says that “art influences how we see ourselves” (ST: 50) it would be clearer to say that this means such things as the art of fashion design. Fine art does this more indirectly.

Noë says that Hollander’s point “opens up the possibility that the kid on the street corner with his basketball shoes just so [...] with his definitive style, is actually doing something serious” (ST: 50). And this is certainly in accord with the aesthetics of everyday life. Agreed: such kids are “doing something in the vicinity of art” (ST: 50). Yet, unfortunately, Noë does not use the word “aesthetics” in relation to these things. Instead he talks about cognition. Ironically, however, his language betrays him. For he says that conversation (a first level activity) involves “exquisitely refined cognitive attunement to self and other” (ST: 6). The very idea of “exquisitely refined attunement” is aesthetic, as is the fact that conversation “can be a source of pleasure” (ST: 7).

But perhaps our difference is only one of terminology. Noë contrasts “aesthetic contemplative seeing” with “seeing in the wild” (ST: 51). To me, this seems like two different kinds of aesthetic experience or two different approaches to the aesthetic. Of seeing in the wild, Noë, says that “[m]ost seeing, most of the time, precisely not contemplative; not, in any sense, aesthetic. It does not rest on deliberate acts of looking and inspection” (ST: 52). He further observes that: “We drive, we tie our shoes, we

prepare dinner and then eat it. And we use out eyes and our other senses when we do all this. Wild seeing is spontaneous and engaged; it is direct and involved” (ST: 52). Yet there is an aesthetic dimension to all of these activities. We tie our shoes and they look right after brief contemplation. Spontaneous engaged seeing is not necessarily incompatible with this.

In short, there seems to be no room for everyday aesthetics in Noë’s formulation even though he brings up many of the activities of everyday aesthetic life. This is because he radically disconnects contemplation from perception. But his notion of contemplation is too rarefied. The radical distinction between wild seeing and contemplative seeing cannot hold if we allow for brief contemplation, and aesthetic experience generally, at Level 1.

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Lullabies or leaky roofs? On art as a strange tool

1. One instructive way of reading *Strange tools* (ST) is to focus upon its attempt to reconcile two different understandings of the relation between art and ordinary experience. On the one hand, Alva Noë claims that art is a practice that pervades all aspects of human life, without any fixed or privileged domain. But on the other, he insists on a sharp demarcation between what is and what is not art. For an organized activity to become art, it has to relinquish its goal-oriented nature and put on display the activity itself, by making it “strange”, that is, by subverting or disrupting the pre-existing rules. This tension gives rise to some puzzling statements. The kids on the street, “when they make up new ways of dressing themselves, [...] are also doing something in the vicinity of art” (ST: 50). Yet “Mama’s lullaby is not art, precisely because it is a lullaby” (ST: 76).

We stumble on the same problem when we look at the relation between art and technology or manufacture. Art, Noë claims, draws upon technology, but is not technology. While technology follows pre-existing

rules, art subverts those rules and puts them on display. Art is “the enemy of function, [...] the perversion of technology” (ST: 98). “Design organizes and enables; art subverts” (ST: 101). Similarly, for architecture to be truly art it would have to become useless: it would have to make “leaky roofs” and “uninhabitable spaces” (ST: 116). However, Noë also argues that producing ordinary implements such as “dishes and cups” can be an artistic practice (ST: 134). How is this possible?

2. To begin to answer this question, it may be worthwhile to focus upon Noë’s indebtedness to the aesthetics of John Dewey. The two thinkers share the view that art is rooted in ordinary experience and that, in a sense, “we are all artists” (ST: 205). Both Dewey’s pragmatism and Noë’s enactivism are committed to the thesis that experience is something we do, something we achieve. It is art in germ. However, Noë implicitly undermines Dewey’s influence by insisting on the qualitative gap between art and everyday activity. More so than Dewey, he thinks of aesthetic responses as “cognitive achievements” (ST: 132): art is more a matter of philosophical investigation than a matter of aesthetic appreciation or of successful integration of experience. Sure, we may enjoy a piece of craftsmanship well executed or the grace of a tennis player. But this does not mean we are already moving within the realm of art. Dewey, by contrast, was inclined to think that an activity is artistic when “the perceived result is of such a nature that *its* qualities *as perceived* have controlled the question of production” (ST: 222).

Let me translate this disagreement into Noë’s technical vocabulary. The basic organized activities of our everyday life, he writes, are “level-1 activities”. Some paradigmatic examples are breastfeeding, dancing, having a conversation. These activities are natural but skilled; they are partly independent of an individual’s control, but they are goal-oriented; they display rhythmic structure and have a capacity to arouse pleasure. Dewey would have had no problem granting an artistic quality to at least some of these practices. For Noë, however, art is exclusively a matter of “level-2 activities”, that is, activities that make us think about, and re-organize, the activities of level 1. His key analogy here is *writing*. Writing makes us think about our level-1 linguistic practices. Similarly, art is a way of writing ourselves: it lets us focus upon ordinary practices by relinquishing their goal-oriented nature and questioning their tacit background. But Noë does not thereby wish to abandon Dewey’s insight altogether. While placing art squarely within the boundaries of level 2, he does not intend to

deprive level 1 of its aesthetic potential. How does he do that? By means of two ingenious strategies.

The first strategy pivots on one of the book's deepest insights, namely the postulate of a "looping down" relation between level 2 and level 1. Although ordinary technologies and organized practices are the basis and precondition for level-2 activities, the latter constantly feed back into level 1. They re-organize the way we are primarily organized. For instance, the invention of writing changed forever the way we speak. In the same vein, artistic practices re-organize level-1 activities by grafting an "aesthetic sense" (ST: 71) onto ordinary experience. Only by making and enjoying pictures do we learn to see the world aesthetically, as though we were looking at a picture. It is, therefore, too simplistic to think that, just because ordinary experience is pervaded by an aesthetic dimension, artworks are merely the refinement of that experience.

The second strategy aims to show that, even in the absence of an established level-2 activity, organized experience is nevertheless oriented towards producing a reflective attitude that is the prelude to a fully-fledged level-2 activity. So while not all languages are written, the very fact of participating in linguistic activities entails a "writerly attitude," an attitude to question the rules, to think about the sense of one's own participation in these rules. This allows Noë to uphold the Deweyan thesis of art as experience, notwithstanding the separation he advocates between art and ordinary practices. Art is like the writerly attitude (ST: 206): even in the absence of an established artistic form, the very fact that we are primarily organized triggers a questioning and reflecting attitude that paves the way to art proper.

This second strategy, however, is more problematic than the first. To begin with, it may raise the suspicion of circularity: the universality of writing is predicated on the assumption that humans are endowed with a writerly attitude even when they do not write. Second, the idea that writing involves a reflective attitude is tricky. As Noë himself admits, we can obviously make use of writing in quite unreflective and unartistic ways. However, for Noë this is not the point. The point is that writing *itself* involves a leap into a new way of thinking about ourselves as speaking beings. But if this is so, why not grant the same property to picture-making? After all, Noë argues that pictures *as such* are a way to investigate and "write down" an even more primitive activity, namely the activity of vision. And yet, for all his insistence on the analogies between "writerly" and "painterly" attitudes (ST: 44), he introduces a perplexing asymmetry between writing and picture-making (ST: 29). While writing is always

treated as a level-2 activity, picture-making is a level-1 activity, which is only raised to level 2 when put to good use by artists.

I suspect that Noë is implicitly relying upon two different conceptions of reflectiveness here. In the case of language and writing, he uses the concept in a weaker sense, which does not demand of all instances of writing that they be equally thoughtful and reflective. In the case of pictures, he uses a much stronger sense of the concept, which only allows artistic practices to be truly reflective. Similarly, Noë is reluctant to grant aesthetic potential to pictures as such, notwithstanding the fact that *all* pictures have the power to “present things visually as manifestly absent” (ST: 150). But it seems to me that taking this definition seriously is admitting that, in a sense, *no* picture is just a way to “show you something” (ST: 45), precisely because a picture is not a mirror (ST: 49). Granted, not all pictures are artworks. But perhaps all pictures do have the power to “invite you to wonder what you could possibly see in or with or thanks to a picture”, as Noë writes of figurative art (ST: 45).

Perhaps we might go some way towards resolving the tensions I began with if we give full credit to this aesthetic potential of pictures and other forms of expression, and at the same time distinguish more accurately the basic kind of reflectiveness involved in writing or picture-making from the sophisticated cognitive act involved in the creation of an artwork. This would be a way to embrace more wholeheartedly Dewey’s insight about art’s rootedness in ordinary experience. With a brilliant turn of phrase, Noë says that “art investigates the aesthetic” (ST: 71). Mama’s lullaby, a simple drawing, a spontaneous dance: whether or not these “aesthetic” components of human life are exclusively the product of art’s looping down on experience, they pose a serious obstacle to all clear-cut distinctions between the realm of practice and the realm of art.

3. Let me now tackle the parallel problem of art’s relation to technology, or more generally, to the practical and goal-oriented aspect of ordinary experience. This means, in turn, thinking about art’s dependence upon the pressures of a socially structured environment. Noë has no difficulty admitting that artworks are quite often *also* in the business of fulfilling certain technological goals or other kinds of exterior function. However, he believes that this adds almost nothing to the genuine purport and value of art. Here again, I would like to mention some reasons why placing too much emphasis upon this demarcation line may end up hampering our appreciation of art’s value *as* art.

Notwithstanding his insistence on the conversational nature of art, Noë's view of artistic creation is somewhat individualistic. While artworks – he writes – “set up problems” and “perhaps offer solutions” (ST: 106), their problems are internal and self-sufficient. “Art is a problem for itself” (ST: 112). Its substance does not lie in what artists are “contracted” to do (ST: 105-6), but in the ability to challenge or subvert such pre-existing rules as pervade our social environment.

One might counter this conception by arguing that genuinely artistic problems can hardly be separated by what artists are urged to achieve as a result of social pressures. In formulating the individual problem they intend to work on, artists cannot but take seriously the historical situation in which they find themselves working, if only because the meaning of their artwork as a communicative act also depends upon the context of interpretation. To make a creative move is to make a move in a social setting.

Noë's insightful chapter about pop music provides a good illustration of what I mean. We would misunderstand the rise of pop music, Noë claims, if we read it as yet another stage in traditional music history. Rather, we have to understand it as the invention of a new art of fashion, or personal style. What remains little accounted for in Noë's argument, however, is that you don't even get to be a pop artist if you are not ready to come to terms with powerful social forces such as the market or the public's expectations. Your creative moves are massively constrained by these forces and it would be artificial to separate the disruptive aspect of your musical-stylistic creations from what you are “contracted” to provide.

If we understand an artist's creative moves as moves within a social setting, it becomes easier to see that the subversive or challenging attitude that Noë takes to be the hallmark of art is only one way in which rules can be put on display and investigated. The most fitting and encompassing concept here might turn out to be *innovation* rather than subversion. Artists can draw attention to (or put on display) a social norm through different innovation strategies. They can depart from a given standard with an unexpected move, or they can try to top previous artists by improving on what those artists were doing already. Discarding the latter aspect as not genuinely artistic is, among other things, impossible because it is inextricably interrelated with the former. Quite often, standards of excellence in art are partly “pregiven,” even though they remain “open to consideration and reconsideration” (ST: 103). Note too that the very ideal of art as subversive and disruptive can be understood precisely

as such a pre-given standard to which, paradoxical as it may sound, artists have striven creatively to conform.

Focusing upon this dialectic of pre-given standards and innovative moves may help us appreciate the role of mastery in art, without elevating it to a goal in itself, but without making it irrelevant either. It is certainly reasonable to believe that true artists are never content with achieving mastery for its own sake. They also seek to innovate. But the two things may well proceed in tandem. For mastery can be defined as proficiency in resolving an expressive problem against the background of a given set of rules or techniques. It is the ability to devise creatively and intelligently new ways of solving problems that predate the individual artist, and to re-articulate those very problems. In this sense, an architect with artistic ambitions is certainly not doomed to design leaky roofs. She can draw upon her artistic proficiency to turn a practical problem into an expressive one and come up with a creative solution.

Illusionism in painting is another interesting case in point. At times, Noë suggests that the task of producing a realistic picture may certainly become an artist's goal, but that this will hardly be what makes the artwork an artwork (ST: 107-9). But I think that this makes things too easy, and for two reasons I have already raised. First, there is no pre-determined rule governing how to achieve realism. Whether we are thinking about Leonardo or Cranach, the goal of painting a realistic picture is both a standard of excellence those artists were "contracted" to meet and a genuinely artistic problem that demanded creative invention. More generally, the history of European painting from the Renaissance to Impressionism is also the story of innovations that satisfied an overarching, pre-given goal in unpredictable manners. It is close to impossible to disentangle rule-breaking from rule-following here. Second, precisely because of Noë's claim that pictures show something as manifestly absent, the very fact of achieving mastery in illusionistic depiction, far from being mere virtuosity, may be a powerful way to shed light on our level-1 activities, those of vision and of picture-making at large. It may be a stunning, thought-provoking demonstration of the ambiguity of pictures and of the power they exert.

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Alva Noë

Response: art loops and other problems from *Strange tools*

Generous and intelligent criticism is a gift I am very grateful to receive. Nothing would please me more than if the authors to whom I here reply were to feel as well understood and as generously engaged by me as I feel I have been by them.

I respond to each author individually. While there is some cross-reference among my replies, I have tried to make each fairly self-contained. This means there is some repetition, but also that I am better able to tailor what I write to the specific concerns of the critics. And besides, where problems come up again and again, repeated attention to the challenge may be a good thing.

Reply to Bertram. Bertram is right that Kant offers a template for understanding the emancipatory character of art. Kant's (1790) account has everything to do with the strangeness of the artwork. The entities of everyday life yoke our powers of perception and cognition to the task of representing them correctly, on pain of misperception. But this is never so with the artwork, which always defies categorization. When confronted by a work of art, we are unable to sort it by the standard of antecedently given concepts (or with reference to goals, needs, interests, practical values). Whatever pleasures art can afford arise only, then, when one is driven back from recognition, identification, concept or judgment.

Kant bequeaths us a paradox: the artwork is at once an opportunity for aesthetic experience, that is, for a kind of sensory encounter. And yet the artwork, by dint of its undomesticated resistance to any label or rule, cannot really be known, not in any cognitively substantial way. This is why I say, in *Strange tools*, that the motto of the work of art should be "See me, if you can!" for, of course, you cannot, at least not at the outset.

In the framework of *Strange tools*: the artwork rises to its distinctive manner of invisibility because it disrupts habitual modes of engagement (what I call organized activities) and thus defies business as usual. The artist's picture is not a picture at all because it abrogates the rhetorical certainties that would ordinarily let you simply see what it displays. Unlike run-of-the-mill pictures, the art-picture stops short of showing and confronts you, instead, with questions or curiosities or uncertainties about what it might be showing or whether it succeeds in doing anything at all.

Painters make art *out of pictoriality*, that is, out of the practice of making and using pictures. But these art-pictures, unlike those which we find in magazines and websites, books, and catalogs, refuse to play by the rules alone against the background of which a picture can *show* anything at all.

I agree with Bertram entirely that the artwork, a phenomenon of reflective practice, that is, a second-order undertaking, does not, as it were, “apply” to first order practices and “determine them” or regiment them. Art does not serve first-order activities by improving them and keeping them “running smoothly”. Art is not a form of management or reform; it doesn’t serve domestic interests in this way.

It is my agreement with Bertram on these points that makes it difficult for me to endorse his gloss on my view of choreography. Bertram writes: “Choreography is a technique of reorganizing dance. Someone who works as a choreographer reflects on a dance in order to open up a new perspective on the possibilities of dancing (be it by relying on traditional techniques of dancing or by inventing new ones). By reflecting on dance, she develops structures that are implemented in new forms of dancing. In this way, choreography as a second order activity transforms dance”.

Great care is needed here in part because of difficulties attaching to the very word “choreography”. Sometimes this word is used simply to name a discipline whose job is the laying down and determining of steps. In this sense of the word, a general at war is a kind of choreographer, for he or she is one who determines what steps the troops will take in pursuit of their military objective. Engineers and urban planners may also, in this sense, be engaging in a kind of choreography. The opposite of choreography, in this sense of the term, is improvisation, for to improvise is precisely to choose to follow no previously prescribed choreographic course.

As I use the term, however, choreography is not the name of a kind of determination or control, nor is improvisation the opposite of choreography. I would not allow that choreographers are in the business of developing structures (Bertram’s word) that can then be implemented in dancing as a first-order activity. Choreography, as I understand it, does not aim to “apply” to first order dancing.

To see why, and to mirror what I said about pictures above (i.e. that art pictures aren’t really pictures), consider that what the choreographer produces is not *more dancing*, but something different and other, namely, the dance artwork (or the capital-D Dance). Dancing and Dance are different. The former, as I describe at greater length in *Strange tools*, but also in Noë (2017a) and also in Noë (forthcoming), is an organized

activity. It is a zone of habit and unreflective doing. Dance (with a capital-D), in so far as it is concerned with dancing at all, takes dancing, or the fact that we are dancers, that is, that we are organized by dancerly habits, and puts these on display.

Crucially, then, Dance is not *about* dancing, nor does it apply to it, nor is it the case, more generally, that art *thematizes* everyday life. Rather, Dance makes art *out of* the fact that we are dancers. Dance as an art form acquires its distinctive manner of significance from the fact that dancing is important to us; we are, in fact, organized by dancing.

Not it is also the case that, as we have already considered, the scope of Dance's concerns – like that of art in general – is not confined, as it were, to dancing, that is to say, to one mode of organized activity. So I agree with Bertram, that artworks develop, as he puts it, “specific structures”. But it is in no way part of my position to claim, and I do not, that the specificity of the structures developed by artworks can “equip recipients with structures that would allow them to reorganize every day practices”. I agree with Bertram when he writes: “If one learns to see Manet's paintings, this kind of seeing cannot simply be implemented in everyday situations”.

But what then of the looping between Dance and dancing, or between art and life, that is so central to my account? If this is not to be described as a kind of smooth revision or regulation of dancing from above, then what is going on here?

To repeat, on my view the choreographer is not facilitating, revising, or updating dancing. That is the work of party planners or social “influencers”. Rather, the choreography is interrupting dancing, putting a stop to it, demanding it become something other than what it has habitually become. These interruptions and refusals are revelatory. But they are also transformative. Consider that choreographic works are typically publicly available, and serve as shared images or models or representations, of what dancing looks like or means or can be. Baryshnikov, Michael Jackson, Gene Kelly, or Beyonce, each of these is a kind of socially available picture of what Dance is and what dancing can be. Ordinary dancing people *incorporate* these models or images and come to embody them in their dancing personalities. As a result, dancing – what people do at weddings and clubs – comes to express choreographic ideas. Over grand historical time skills, this leads to the sedimenting (in Husserl's term) of choreographic values inside dancing activities. Dancing and Dance have be-

come entangled; we can no longer dance as if there wasn't in fact a choreographic tradition that informs our non-art dancing activity. Dance is one thing and dancing another. But through a kind circular looping, they have become entangled.

I now turn to the theme of emancipation which is rightly emphasized in Bertram's discussion. On the theory of *Strange tools*, art emancipates us by disturbing our habitual activities, and by providing us with the resources to carry on our activities in new ways. Art doesn't free us from habit altogether; it cannot tamper with the basic fact that we are creatures of organization, and organization is both constitutive (or constituting) and also limiting. But art disrupts, unveils, irritates – exactly as Bertram says, and as he shows in his work (Bertram 2014) – and this action of art in fact transforms us (in my sense “reorganizes us”) and drives our cultural and historical change.

Art is a reorganizational practice – in my view, like philosophy – but its immediate end is *ecstasy*. I don't mean physical ecstasy or intense pleasure. I mean release (or *ek-stase*). We are captive to our own habitual modes of organization; this is an existential limit on human being (and maybe all animal life). Art works to disrupt these and, as I have claimed, it does so in ways that not only unveil us to ourselves – let us come better to see everything that we take for granted – but also let us put ourselves back together again differently. Because the ways we get put back together again must over time in turn come to define us, that is to say, constrain us, the need for more breaking free, for more art, for more ecstasy, returns. This describes a basic engine of human cultural becoming.

Art, as Bertram rightly states, is not simply one domain of objects or activities among others. Its importance shows up in relation to human life as a whole. This idea animates *Strange tools*. As the fluxus artist Robert Filliou is said to have written: “Art is what makes life more interesting than art”.

Reply to Viola. Viola cites Dewey's statement that “The doing or making is artistic when the perceived result is of such a nature that *its* qualities *as perceived* have controlled the question of its production” (Dewey 1934: 50). The experience afforded by such a product will be, as Dewey says, “dominantly esthetic”. Here “dominantly esthetic” means that the experience is integral and balanced. And crucially, for Dewey, the achievement of this sort of esthetic character is a condition of being an experience in what Dewey calls “the pregnant sense” at all. But more

needs to be said, and Dewey is clear about this, to distinguish this very general notion of the esthetic from the specific, real concerns of art. After all, *all* experience aims at the esthetic in this sense and is valuable in so far as it achieves it. Is there a special concern and province of art proper or of the kinds of aesthetic experience at which art distinctively aims? Dewey gives a clearly affirmative answer: In run-of-the-mill experiences, e.g. of an intellectual nature, “the conclusion has a value on its own account. It can be extracted as a formula or as a “truth”, and can be used in its independent entirety as factor and guide in other inquiries” (Dewey 1934: 57). Art is altogether different, Dewey insists. So he continues: “In a work of art there is no such single self-sufficient deposit. The end, the terminus, is significant not by itself but as the integration of its parts. It has no other existence” (Dewey 1934: 57). Art is not *for* this purpose of that. It is not a product with a value that can be exchanged, transmitted, translated, or applied to different domains. And he goes on: “A drama or novel is not the final sentence, even if the characters are disposed of as living happily ever after. In a distinctively esthetic experience, characteristics that are subdued in other experience are dominant; those that are subordinate are controlling – namely, the characteristics in virtue of which the experience is an integrated complete experience on its own account” (Dewey 1934: 57).

What matters in the artwork, finally, then, is its *exemplary* character; it exhibits the conditions of its own integration; it shows that experience is striving for integration. In contrast with every other modality of lived experience, the experience of an artwork is nothing other than an encounter with “the characteristics in virtue of which the experience is an integrated complete experience on its own account” (Dewey 1934: 57).

What Dewey here offers is the appreciation that there is no opposition between art’s singular and sharply delimited nature, that it stands apart, and the ineliminably aesthetic potential (to use Viola’s phrase) of everyday experience. It is *because* the aesthetic is planted in ordinary life as a challenge and an admonition that art (the non-ordinary) is able to achieve its distinctive role, that, namely, in my terms, of putting our nature – that we are put together through the ways we actively do and make – on display. This act of making manifest what was hidden – afforded by art, constitutive of aesthetic experience – is transformative or, in the terms of *Strange tools*, reorganizational.

Dewey, it is important to be clear, and in contrast to some other enthusiasts about everyday aesthetics, is not a leveler. It is not his view that

there is no difference between life and art, between mechanical labor and artistic creation. What he discovered is that ordinary life and work, indeed, ordinary life thought of biologically as a ceaseless process of doing and responding to the effects of what one has done, provide the conditions of the very possibility of art and its value. Art is valuable because it rises out of and enables us to understand the meaning of what is non-art.

It is in this spirit that I argue, in Viola's words, that art is a practice that pervades all aspects of human life. Art and life are *entangled*, as I now put it. But – and here I echo what I think is Dewey's true insight – we can only make sense of this entanglement, and only appreciate its true meaning, if we appreciate the categorial difference between art and non-art.

Viola illustrates my distinction between Level 1 activities and Level 2 practices with the example of speech and writing. Writing rises out of the need for normative elucidation at Level 1; it then in turn loops down and transforms speech itself. But Viola notices a “perplexing asymmetry” in the way I treat writing and picture-making. “While writing is always treated as a level-2 activity, picture-making is a level-1 activity, which is only raised to level 2 when put to good use by artists”.

This is an acute observation; I could have perhaps done a better job forestalling the (incorrect) impression that I treat pictures and writing differently. Viola is on target when he suggests that I might have done more to “distinguish more accurately the basic kind of reflectiveness involved in writing or picture-making from the sophisticated cognitive act involved in the creation of an artwork”. Let me try to do this here now.

According to the theory of *Strange tools*, writing and pictoriality may both be viewed as technologies. We drill our children in mastering the rules of writing. And similarly, the use and manufacture of pictures – in daily life, commerce, journalism, science, etc. – is a familiar and utterly domesticated means of communication, and has been for millennia. Technologies of this sort, as I describe in *Strange tools*, are bound up with human activity and habit; they can be thought of hubs of social organization; the history of tools and technology such as these is the history of evolving patterns of activity and social organization.

Crucially, writing and pictoriality, thought of this way, as technologies, are *integrated with* speech and visibility (both seeing, but also talking about what we see and communicating in visual ways). Speech in a world with writing, becomes something different, as does seeing in picture-world. Speech is writing-dependent and seeing is picture-dependent, at

least this is true sometimes and for some stretches of our linguistic and visual lives (respectively. See Noë 2017b for more on speech and writing; in work in progress I explore the relation between seeing and pictures).

What I have been describing are phenomena at the level of what in *Strange tools* I called “organized activities”, that is Level-1 activities that are habitual, skillful, socially embedded, goal-oriented, practical, and also, very importantly, fundamentally constitutive of who and what we are, of our very nature as human beings.

Art, I argue in *Strange tools* is never just more participation in our Level-1 carryings-on. It is not just more talking and writing and drawing or scribbling or dancing or building. It is the illumination of our making nature by disrupting our habitual ways of carrying on. Indeed, the impulse to make art arises out of the fact that we are, in a sense, held in bondage to our habits and organized activities. Art aims at ecstasy, at setting us free, or at least, at releasing us from the local ties that bind.

As Viola is well aware, I argue that art not only represents our lives, it transforms them as well. Artistic work exemplifies us to ourselves and gives us a means for naming the condition in which we find ourselves so that we can do things differently. Through historical recursion, processes of sedimentation (Husserl, again), art and non-art become thoroughly entangled. The kid dancing at a party *incorporates* art dance he has witnessed (or perhaps he has only witnessed those who have witnessed those who have witnessed it); and the artist on the stage is achieving something to which he aspired already as a teenager on the dance floor. Similarly, the commercial artist producing advertising images is working under a *job description* and has clear goals and clear benchmarks. This puts him in a different *universe* from Leonardo. But then again, not really. Leonardo is there for him, a model of what it is to work with drawing and design as he does. And then also there are commercial designers – of kitchen ware, or whatever – whose projects, occasionally, refuse to be one thing or the other, design or art, life or philosophy. There is no mystery here. This is entanglement. And there is a principled way to comprehend the reality of the entanglement (without actually disentangling). Non-art (technology, design, craft) is carried forth under the aspect, as it were, of settled, taken-for-granted methods, strategies and standards. It is all normal, in Kuhn’s (1962) sense of “normal science”. Art is never normal; what art takes for granted is only that there is a zone of normal rule-governed life which has called it into being but from which it is excluded.

Viola focuses on my examples of architecture and Mama’s lullaby. Crucially, it is not the burden of my theory to deny anything. I don’t want or

need to refuse the title of art to Mama's song, or to refuse crediting the technological accomplishments of the engineer with architectural, that is to say, artistic significance. If the question comes up, then this can only be because we are dealing with sites of entanglement. And then we ought to be able to make clear, in a realistic, empirical way, just what we are talking about.

Take the case of architecture first. No doubt that architects *do* care to make it so the roofs don't leak. It can seem dogmatic to insist, then, that the architect's excellence in matters functional is divorced from the more distinctively artistic work. If not leaking is important, and the architect is doing artistic work, then why not credit the attention to water tightness as belong to the artistic merit?

My critic doth protest too much! It's about as true as anything can be that architects, I mean the real, toiling, makers of buildings, are typically beholden to their clients and are required to let considerations of budgetary and other practical realities (materials, structural soundness, the weather) dictate choices. Architects find themselves in a genuine bind; they are required to make something that fits a pre-existing standard of excellence (e.g. the expectations of the client), and also to do what all ambitious architects do, namely, in effect, rethink what a home, or office, etc. is or can be. Architects challenge their clients when they are at their best by confronting them with ways of making space and life that defy habit. Who can deny architecture's pull in direction of the uncomfortable?

If I am right, then, architecture is uniquely an art of compromise and it is important that we name the compromise. In architecture, the *job* and the *art* are rivals for control. If we flatten the difference between the pull of engineering and construction from the pull of art, in the work of the architect, then we lose a handle on the phenomenon of the compromise itself, a phenomenon so salient in the working experience of architects everywhere.

Now what about Mama's lullaby? This is a more delicate case. Again, in one sense it should be obvious, just as a straight forward, empirical, everyday, common sense matter, that most of the time Mom's song is no artwork. Not because it is not good, or not as good. It may be just as good as the intimate whispery vocals picked up and laid down on a contemporary recording. The point is that art is a kind of labor and it arises from a kind of commitment to its problems and traditions. Mom's focus, as I am imagining it, is likely to be something very different: she's holding and

soothing. Why confuse these things? Which is not to deny that the situation may be far more complicated, owing precisely to the fact of entanglement. Maybe Mom's lullaby sing-song is directly modeled on the whispy recording so that, in a sense, she is directly citing, or sampling it. Or maybe in an even more explicit and fuller sense she is doing art's work as she sings the child to sleep. This might take the form of vocal play, or experimentation, rethinking what a lullaby is supposed to be, or is expected to be like. In cases such as this it might be entirely correct to categorize the lullaby as an artwork and its singer as an artist. But also notice, that in this case, it is highly likely, I think, that Mama will have compromised the effectiveness of a lullaby as a lullaby. Experimentation and defiance of expectation, that's not what gets baby to sleep!

Notice, whatever we say here, we don't need to obscure the difference between art and non-art. Nor, in refusing to deny that distinction, do we deny the lullaby's "aesthetic potential". What does "aesthetic potential" mean? My proposal is clear: Mama's lullaby is art entangled and thus participates, through the cultural web-work assembly of art loops, in the idea of art or performance.

The critical thing to appreciate is that the difference between art and non-art is never a material one – it isn't about sound or quality. It's more conceptual or categorial than that. To borrow a comparison from a different domain. Consider: I can tell you that it's warm in here by asking you to open the window, or ask you to open the window with the words "it's warm in here". What I am saying, which speech act I am performing, is not fixed by the form of words. And so with art. To decide what Mama is doing, we need to think about the larger meaning of her action and not its local intrinsic qualities. And again, crucially, art, finally, is a special kind of work; it's reflective and ambitious in a way that the singing of lullabies, or dancing around the kitchen, or making sure the roof doesn't leak, is not.

I conclude by mentioning a point on which I agree wholeheartedly with Viola. It is crucial that we avoid thinking of the artist's business in individualistic terms. I admit that I sometimes write as if it is artist against the world, so to speak. Or rather, as if the artist is working with the raw materials that life throws up, e.g. the painter works with pictoriality and the choreographer with dancing. But in fact, as I discuss also in my reply to Davies, art is a *practice*, and so, the first thing an artist needs to do is *join in*, as it were. Yes, the choreographer has an eye on dancing, but she will also have an eye on what other choreographers are doing and have done. Reacting to, commenting upon, one-upping, outdoing, honoring

and sampling the work of other artists is likely to be immediately pertinent to the artist's work and concerns. To be an artist is, usually at least, to take up a post in a lineage of shared concerns and values. This is why there are schools and traditions and why the conversation among artistic styles remains lively.

How this bears on the question of art and technology is subtle. The value of art is unlikely to consist in how it manages to find solutions to merely technical problems. For reasons I have given, art isn't technology. But it does presuppose it. That is, it takes it for granted and works with it. So working with technological problems can be a way for artists to engage with artistic problems. And this is something that the social, competitive, art world surely enhances. Art students may be given "problems" to solve, some of them no doubt partly technical in nature, and the ability to grapple with the technical, and to innovate, or achieve mastery or excellence, in a technical domain, may be inextricable from any other sources of artistic significance. And so I agree with Viola when he writes: "More generally, the history of European painting from the Renaissance to Impressionism is also the story of innovations that satisfied an overarching, pre-given goal in unpredictable manners. It is close to impossible to disentangle rule-breaking from rule-following here".

Reply to Leddy. Everyday life is shot through with opportunities for aesthetic response. And yet the nature of such response, the source of its importance, and its connection to art, are not well understood. Leddy thinks the theory developed in *Strange tools* leaves no room for everyday aesthetics. I'll try to explain why I do not agree.

Leddy celebrates everyday aesthetics: "My shoes laces are *just right!*". "What pleasure in the stylistic fit between my home and my door knobs!". "As I dance around the kitchen cooking, I take delight in the beauty of my movements!". But these eruptions of satisfaction actually leave the genuine phenomenon of the aesthetic, at least as I see it, unmentioned. The interesting fact is not that we take so much delight in the world around us, both natural and designed. The interesting fact, rather, is how very little of all that deserves contemplation, and would afford pleasure, we manage even to notice. Most people (this author included), most of the time, are as good as blind!

While aesthetic significance is everywhere to be found, you don't get to enjoy it just for the price of admission. You need to learn to discern, e.g. the different design choices made by manufacturers of forks and

knives, chairs, door knobs and homes, or whatever. You need to learn to look and you need to learn to see.

Yogi Berra (an American baseball coach famous for his sayings) quipped wittily: “you can see a lot by observing”. The underlying fact here is that observing isn’t easy. It requires effort, and curiosity. And its natural setting is social. A friend calls your attention to the variety of shades of green among the foliage and remarks on this having to do with the age of the leaves and the onset of spring, and *voilà!* now these different shades are salient to you; or someone mentions the canvas tarp forming the covering of the VW bus, and *now* you can see it too, and appreciate what a difference it makes to the overall character of the vehicle. To learn to see, is to learn to take an interest in things, and the world is full of different families of things to take an interest in.

So aesthetic response is less the occurrence of something sensation-like, and more like a movement from not perceiving to perceiving, or from perceiving to perceiving differently. It is thoughtful, and social, as well as perceptual. It is pleasurable, or it may be, but it may also be effortful. And finally, it is transformative or, in my sense in *Strange tools*, reorganizational.

Aesthetic response, as I have already said, is not something you get for the price of admission. It’s more expensive than that! And yet it is every where to be had. Crucially, it is not, in any straight forward way, a phenomenon of art. It is better thought of as a mode of perceptual consciousness. Active looking, curiosity, thought, care, can transform what has been there before you all along. By such activity, that is, by observing, by paying attention, by caring, you can bring what was there all along but unseen into focus for perceptual consciousness.

Aesthetic value is not specific to art, but art engages in very specific ways with aesthetic response; it works with it and makes it a problem. Artworks afford aesthetic engagement, that is, they let us undergo the passage from not seeing, to seeing, or from seeing to seeing differently. But they typically do something else, too. They let us *catch ourselves in the act* of doing just that, of bringing the world, or the artwork, into focus for consciousness. Art makes the aesthetic an opportunity for investigation.

This is the work of art, as I explain it in *Strange tools*. Artworks (paintings, musical works, performances, etc.) unveil us to ourselves and change the way we experience what there is around us; they reorganize us.

Artworks can do this, can serve in this way to support our learning, growth and reorganization, by being, in effect, *hard to discern*. They are ciphers. The work of art is always a puzzle. What is it? What does it mean? What does it ask of me? What should I ask of it? How do I get started? Antecedent to the investigation of the work itself, these questions have no pre-given answers. Artworks throw you back on yourself, on what you have taken for granted, etc. And this adds a further dimension to its reorganizational power.

Now Leddy and others (e.g. Saito 2007) are right that I can take up the aesthetic attitude to my shoes or my cell phone or the baseball game just as readily as I can take it up to a painting or a piece of music. There is an aesthetic dimension to the experiences of everyday life. But this fact should not be taken to count against the sharpness of the distinction between art and non-art. At best, it serves as a reminder that aesthetic opportunity is there to be had even at some remove from art.

My insistence of the sharpness of the distinction has different sources.

First, it is, as I would put it, anthropologically accurate. A person isn't a comedian just because she makes me laugh. Comedians aren't just funny, they *work* with the funny.

And something similar is true in the case of art. A product or situation is not an artwork just because it captures our aesthetic interest and engages us. Art is a very distinct kind of product of a very distinct kind of labor. Artists don't merely make things of aesthetic significance, they work with aesthetic significance.

Second, the thing about shoes and cell phones is that we know what these are and there are criteria for whether they are more or less successful instances of their kind. It may not be easy to compare and evaluate cell phones or washing machines. But there are criteria of success and failure and we can take these for granted. It is the *complete absence* of antecedent criteria of success or failure, good or bad, etc., that is the defining feature of the artwork. This stems from the fact that artworks, unlike other objects of human making or manufacture, have no pre-given functions.

Now there are considerations that weigh against this. Saito (Saito 2007; see also useful discussion in Nguyen 2020) has argued that attached to artworks there are aesthetic or prescriptive *frames*. Paintings are to be viewed head on from the front, rather than from the side, for example, or from behind. And novels are meant to be read starting on page one at the first word and proceeding to the last, etc.

The point about frames is insightful and it would have an important implication *vis-a-vis* everyday aesthetic experience. When it comes to the everyday, Saito observes, the frame is absent; no one is directing your attention, director-like, to what you are supposed to be looking at, thinking about, etc.

But I would turn things around. The frames attach not the works of art, but, as it were, to the technologies they exploit. Works of art do not rely on the existence of frames, aesthetic or otherwise; but they do presuppose the existence of practices of using pictures, writings, dancing, and other technologies and organized activities that are characteristically framed. Crucially, according the standpoint of *Strange tools*, whether a picture is an artwork has to do precisely with whether and the degree to which it puts pictorial and writerly frames into play, or even into abeyance.

This last point is a reminder of the fact that in order for tools and other technologies (e.g. pictures) to be meaningful at all, to seem to carry an obvious or straight forward significance, it must be that we rely on a whole host of background assumptions. For those assumptions to be given up, or for us to no longer to be able to rely on them, is for the picture to go dark. But it is the darkening of the picture, the making of it problematic, that is precisely where art does its work.

The theme of art vs technology is central to the argument of *Strange tools*, as my previous replies make clear. My basic idea is that art has a kind of “meta” or “reflective” relation to tools and other technologies. It is oriented to them, but not *of* them.

I refer to artworks as strange tools, not because they *are* tools. But because they masquerade as tools. The painting looks like a picture, but because it lacks the stable, fixed, explicit rhetorical setting in which one simply see what it displays, the painting turns out to be a kind of fake picture, or picture impostor. Looks just like a tool, but it isn’t.

Leddy finds my decision to call non-tools *strange tools* odd. I admit the phrase is meant to be playful and puzzling. I meant for it to be at least somewhat *strange*. A number of distinct points converge around my use of the phrase. One is that, for reasons just stated, we need to resist to idea that art pictures are pictures in any ordinary sense. At best they are strange ones. And what makes them strange is that they disrupt what needs to be taken for granted for them to function normally as pictures.

Another point: I am keen to bring out the constitutive role of technology and tool use in human life. Tools and their correlative habits and skill-sets organize us. Why do artists *make things*? Is it that the things they

make are so *special*? On my view, it is not *what* artists make that is special, but the fact of making itself whose specialness they put on display. They do this precisely by working with tools that refuse to fulfill their nature as such.

A last example that I have used in a different context. An artwork is a *tool* the way a model apartment in an apartment complex is a *home*. That it is to say, it is *not* a tool, but it is (often) materially identical to one. And that's a crucial feature of the way art works.

A few brief remarks in response to specific points.

Leddy objects to my characterization of Level-1 activities such as walking and talking as “basic and involuntary modes of our organization”. He says that “there is nothing involuntary about these activities: we choose to talk, move and dance”. I surely don't deny that we can choose to talk, to move, or to dance. My point is that we rarely exert voluntary control over *how* we do these things. I don't choose my syntax, or my verbal tics, just as I neither investigated nor chose the movements that “feel right” or “natural” to me when I dance. Leddy objects to my use of the term “basic”, too. He writes: “What is basic is relative (that humans talk and other animals do not suggests a real deal of complexity in this ability)”. I agree, as I think I make clear in the book. Talking is basic even though it is a complex, indeed, a highly intelligent behavior; this is due to the way it is anchored, through habit, in our lives.

There is one remark of Leddy's to which I strongly object: “Most dancers would take offense at the idea that they were not real dancers but that someone who prances about with no training is”. First, it is not my view that dance artists are not real dancers. Second, it is surely a fact beyond any contention that you don't need training to be a dancer. Third, I offer an account of choreography as an art that seeks to explain the fertile and meaningful connection between dancing and dance as an art form. Fourth, I don't say anything to diminish the importance, value, meaning, or “aesthetic potential” of dancing. Finally, my own ideas on these topics have been developed in dialog with dance artists. While I can't saddle them with agreement with what I say, I can assert, unequivocally, that it is untrue that “most dancers” would take any offense.

Actually, there is an important issue here in the vicinity. Dance is historically one of the least valued of our arts. There are many possible explanations for this. A few might be: dancers don't produce lasting artifacts, so there is no commodification of dance art and so less money and

less prestige attached; dance is physical; dance performance is historically very gendered and is associated with sexual display; in general, the public is not very educated about dance and its history.

In reaction to such ideas and prejudices, I have sought to develop an account of Dance as a site of investigation and knowledge according to which it is as rigorous as any of the other arts; and I urge that we think of the work of choreography as having the weightiness of philosophy.

Finally, Leddy writes, about amateur photography, “At first it seems that this is Level 1 activity since it is organized and it involves technology. But art photography is also organized and involves technology. Does that make art photography Level 1 too? Moreover, amateur photography displays things every bit as much as art photography does. Does that make it Level 2?”

I’m glad of the opportunity to explain. If by amateur photographer, one means a person who use cameras (for example, on their phones) in the way we all do these days – making snaps of our kids during recitals, or documenting an amusing piece of graffiti, or whatever – then amateur photography is Level 1. Mention of technology is a bit of a red herring. Photography, after all, in the relevant sense, just is a technology. What makes it Level 1, in this setting, is that it is used habitually in order to achieve ends whose values and standards are pre-given and taken for granted. Pictures, in the sense in which amateur photographers make pictures, as described here, are precisely instruments for display; we use pictures to show something. So yes of course the amateur photographer displays something, to the degree to which she or he is any good.

Art photographers, according to *Strange tools*, are doing something else entirely. They aren’t just making pictures. And so what makes them *art* photographers is, *a fortiori*, not the fact that their pictures are in some way superior. I say that aren’t *just* making pictures, because of course, they may be also making pictures. But a Jeff Wall photograph is only misleadingly described as, to pick one example, a picture of vagrants hanging around in an abandoned lot, even if, in fact, that is *exactly* what it looks like. Art photographs are not mere documents, mere shots. And so what *they* put on display is not so much *what they may happen to seem to depict*, but rather, *everything that the activity of showing things in pictures, depicting them, normally presupposes*.

Of course there is interplay and exchange between amateur and art photography. To really do justice to this would take more space and time than is available to me here. But to mention what is for me the main

point: amateur photographers are likely to be familiar with art photography and this may serve for them as a kind of model informing their approach to what they are doing. Amateur photography happens in a world made different by photography as an art. And the same may be true in reverse.

This sort of entanglement is wide ranging. It may not just be our *making* activity, as amateurs, that is modulated by art photography. It may be, more generally, the way we look, not only at our pictures, but at the world, that owes a debt to art. This in turn bears on a point I made at the outset of this reply. I mentioned that there is no specific tie between aesthetic engagement and art, for art is not the only source or opportunity for aesthetic engagement. This is true, no doubt, but a layer of complexity gets added in when we consider that it might be art itself that first tutors us in how to take up the aesthetic stance to both non-art and art. Art may play a role as originator of the aesthetic even if the aesthetic is not limited to art.

Perhaps it is not only the way we see, in daily life, that gets inflected with the photographic image, but the way we think about what we see, or about ourselves in so far as we are seen. And all this, this thick, rich, cultural complexity, is there, in the offing, at least potentially, when the amateur whips out his phone to take a picture of the Ferrari, or turns it on himself for a selfie.

And so we can appreciate that everyday life is redolent of artistic and aesthetic meaning and potential. But crucially, what lets us bring this fact about our everyday life into focus, is a clear understanding of art's distinct, non-ordinary, and strange, mission.

Reply to Davies. Art forms are not confined in their range of suitable themes or subject matters. Paintings can tell stories. Dances can explore social relationships. Poetry can articulate rage in the face of wrongs committed. There are, of course, traditional styles of painting, dance and poetry, and these traditional styles may tend to dictate appropriate themes or topics for exploration. But such dictates are, in the end, more fodder for the play of artistic imagination. Artists are free to explore what they will in their respective media.

But there are, I would insist, two interesting and very important limits on the free reach of artistic curiosity.

The first limitation concerns what you might call the material basis of the medium. If you are a painter, you must, if only incidentally (to use

Davies' term), deal with the limits, properties, and qualities that are proper to working with paint. Painters work with pigments and handle shape, color, form, and do so always, inevitably, with an eye to the visual. So although painters are free to paint about war, personality, hypocrisy, or the Trinity, they will always find themselves tied to questions and problems related to making something with a certain kind of material body for an audience of predominantly visual spectators. In so far as the painter is making what we call a "picture" – and I think it can be agreed that this is not something that every painter does – then we can safely assert that the painter's work has, of the nature of the beast, an abiding concern with pictoriality. Or maybe, to strive for even greater caution, we can say that pictorial painting is always, of the nature of the case, liable to raise questions about "the picture".

The second limitation stems from the fact that every artist in whatever medium is either an active participant in, or at least the inheritor of, a tradition. As a general rule, making paintings, or performing dances, or writing poems, is a reaction not *only* to what is going on in the world about which the artist cares. It is also, and I think we can safely say *always*, a response to other efforts, within artistic media, to come to grips with the world in different ways. Learning to draw, for example, is learning *to do something*, and so the model or template upon which one must ground one's efforts is the active drawing behavior of others. I can capture this by saying that artists have, almost necessarily, an orientation to *art* in addition to, and as distinct from, their orientation to life.

Taken together, these facts about the pertinence of the medium, and the interest in tradition, put a constraint on the otherwise utterly topic-neutral freedom of artistic investigation.

Now, although I was aware of these considerations when writing *Strange tools*, I did not put them front and center as I have done here. I took for granted, for example, that choreography as an art form has a specially, or at least specially problematic, relation to dancing. I offered a theory according to which a) dancing has a special status in human life, for it is an organized activity, and we are, so I argue, constituted by the suites of goal-directed organized activities; b) choreography, or dance art, is quite distinct from dancing for, unlike dancing, it is something entirely other than the mere continuation of or participation in the organized activity of dancing. And yet, c) for all that Dance is not dancing, Dance acquires its significance, its relevance, its very *raison d'être*, from the existence of dancing; Dance may not *be* dancing, but it takes it for granted and undertakes its work in its vicinity. This explains d) such things as that we

use the same word for both and that many people fail to notice that a choreographer is not, as a matter of fact, simply someone who makes *dancings*. I then argued, e) that Dance makes representations of dancing, representations which perform a dual operation of manifesting or disclosing dancing to us and doing so in ways that will tend to change the way we dance; we come to incorporate the model into our activity. And it is this last fact, I argued, which shows how art and life that is to say, Dance and dancing, get fruitfully and productively entangled.

But I should have said more, I now see, to acknowledge that some Dance will have targeted not *dancing* but other Dance (Bel, in Davies' example), or other non-dancing themes altogether (e.g. Davies on Ranier). Such Dance works, I might have observed, are not making Dance out of dancing, but are making Dance out of Dance, or out of some other socially available raw materials such as ordinary practical movement.

All this by way of my response to Davies' thoughts about how to interpret my claim that Dance aims at disclosing dancing in our lives. Davies thinks "internal" readings, according to which I am making a claim about actual artists' intentions, are false. Bel and Ranier supply counter-examples. Now, I am not persuaded that the work of these artists is not in fact motivated by a lively interest in interrogating what *dancing* is. But that is of no matter. It was not my intention to be propounding a claim about what artists intend or how they understand the meaning of their own projects. Nor was it my intention to claim that that sorts of concerns thrown up the condition of dancing as an organized activity are the only sources for dance as an art form, as I have tried to explain.

But what about an external reading, according to which dance art is understood to have a certain revelatory significance regardless of the conscious aims of its practitioners? More plausible, according to Davies, but it confronts, he believes, a further problem: that there is a rivalry between watching the dance as a performance and thinking about the performance as somehow exemplifying something important or interesting about the place of dancing in our lives. "To the extent that we see and appreciate what is going on on stage as dance *performance*, it ceases to represent dancing as an organized activity".

This is an interesting and important objection. It goes to questions about criticism and the meaning of artworks, on the one hand, and aesthetic experience, on the other.

Let me begin with an important observation of Davies: "while dancing *in general* might serve as a model of perceptual experience on the enactive view, dance *performance* – dance as it enters into the arts – cannot".

I agree with Davies here. He cites earlier work by me (e.g. Noë 2009 as well as some interviews), in which I urged that we think of dance as a good metaphor for perceptual consciousness. Just as the dance doesn't take place in the dancer's musculature, so the experience doesn't take place *in* us. The experience, like the dance, is something we do, not something that happens in us, and it is something that we undertake in dynamic relation to the environment (or to other dancers, music, etc.). In fact, when I developed these ideas I had not yet adequately appreciated the difference between dancing and Dance. It was only later, when I had the opportunity actually to work with dance artists, that I realized, as I would put it, somewhat provocatively, that their work has less to do with dancing than the refusal to dance.

Now Davies understands the significance of this fundamental distinction between dancing and Dance very differently. He writes, that "the performer differs from a mere agent whose behavior is subject to evaluation in that she *intends* for her actions to be appreciated and evaluated, and thus is *guided* in what she does by the expected eye or ear of an intended qualified audience" (Davies 2011: chapter 1; see also my Noë 2012, introduction). This echoes the lines of Dewey quoted by Viola in his commentary, and I am in broad agreement.

But the fact that the performance is *for* the audience, as Davies stresses, should not prevent us from appreciating how challenging and hard to understand, hard even to perceive, performances (and other artworks) are likely to be. This is perhaps obvious when the work is *avant garde*. It can be maddeningly difficult to make sense of the action on the stage; the experience can be disorderly and disconnected, impossible to name or remember. Davies mentions a "qualified" audience. But there is no audience so qualified as to simply be able to make sense of works of experimental art. What qualification means here at most is a willingness to accept the state of not knowing, or not comprehending, or not seeing, and a trust that active looking, thinking, questioning, will bring, in its wake, the transformation required actually to encounter the work in a meaningful sense.

In my view, the situation is no different when it comes to dance in its more traditional or classical varieties. Here too there is an infinity of choices about what to think or where to look. Convention, superficial familiarity, may make the encounter much less jarring. But what it loses in outrageousness it is likely to make up in boringness. And anyway, here too audiences have a lot of work on their hands if they are to find a way to comprehend what is going on before them.

Dance, in my view, and art more generally, is always a problem for its audience, even when, as Davies said, everything about its production is guided by an awareness of the audience and its expectations.

Here's why this matters: granted, the performance we see is not merely the exemplification of dancing as an organized activity. It's its own thing. Note, this would be true, even if, as for example in Bel's piece *The show must go on*, there is literally nothing other than familiar, ordinary, dancing taking place on the stage. The *fact* of performance changes everything. But this is the beginning, not the end of our discussion. For the performance, as I understand it, is a riddle. *What are you seeing if you are not seeing people dancing?* The question of the work's meaning and significance cry out for understanding. When the work is avant garde or experimental, audiences may be too numbed or bored to ask the questions they need to ask to wake themselves up and start the process of bringing the work into focus. And most of us have very little dance education, that is, we don't have a lot of knowledge of dance experimentation to draw on when confronted with a new work. This means we have fewer tools in our tool box and also that we are less likely to pick up on the references made to other performances, performers and choreography. When the work is classical, audiences may be likely to have such a good idea of what they think classical performance looks like, that they will find it difficult actually to see what is on display before them. They are in the position of visitors to the classical-paintings wing at the gallery who comfortably stroll past the pictures, never arrested, never made to stop and actually look.

The experience of the dance, the aesthetic experience, is, on the view of *Strange tools*, precisely what is made available by a more active interrogation of the work. The aesthetic experience is not a perceptual experience, nor is its duration limited to the running times of the performance. The work gives you an opportunity and, finally, it is an opportunity to see differently, to think differently, and, I would submit, to think new thoughts about what Dance is and, also, what dancing is¹.

¹ I have benefitted from conversation about the themes of this reply with many people. Here I would like to mention Micah Dubreuil, Eric Yang, Jonah Ragir and Jochen Schuff.

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