

V.F. PERKINS

Integrating criticism into the philosophy of art: V.F. Perkins, *Dead Poets Society*, and 'value interaction'

Introduction

Although he was not a trained or practising philosopher, in the professional sense, the film critic and academic V.F. Perkins believed that his film criticism was addressing serious matters in aesthetics and the philosophy of art. He believed he was doing something more than offering critical appraisals of films even though he understood the latter, at its best, also to be a profound activity. However, this practice of philosophising about art through criticism is not the standard method in the dedicated discipline known as the Philosophy of Art.¹ To illuminate the benefits of Perkins' alternative method, and make a case for it, I am going to attend to his remarks on *Dead Poets Society* (Peter Weir, 1989). I will contrast this method to the more common method of philosophising about art through theory as undertaken by Noël Carroll and Berys Gaut in their contributions to what has become known in the philosophy of art as the value interaction debate. The debate concerns the interaction of moral value and aesthetic value. I believe that Perkins' method is superior in so far as it significantly helps improve our thinking about their interaction.² I will (1) explain Perkins' work on the film *Dead Poets*

Society; (2) show how his criticism exposes the flaws in the value interaction theories of Noël Carroll and Berys Gaut; and (3) draw out a range of limitations in their method while suggesting how a method underpinned by criticism might overcome these limitations and prove to be more advantageous. Although the problems I find with their method are not applicable to all the work that takes place within the philosophy of art, I do believe that many areas and aspects of the philosophy of art would benefit if our thinking about them grew out of detailed accounts of artworks and the associated evaluative experience.³

V.F. Perkins on *Dead Poets Society*

For many years V.F. Perkins taught a class, as part of a third-year undergraduate course in film aesthetics, on the topic of badness (in film). He also presented the topic in various conference papers. Unfortunately, he never published his teaching and presentations on the topic. After his death, however, *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism* published Perkins' notes from the conference presentations (2019). In these, Perkins focuses on a scene from the film *Dead Poets Society* which he says, 'provides an emblematic instance of cinematic badness which is distinct both from ideological offensiveness and (since it is made with great proficiency) from ineptitude' (34). He concentrates on a scene around twenty minutes into the film where a teacher called Keating, played by Robin Williams, a new appointment at an exclusive boy's school, is teaching an English Literature class at the beginning of the school year. The core of the scene consists in Keating ridiculing a large book about evaluating poetry by one 'Dr. J. Evans Pritchard, P.H.D.'—which contains a reductive formula for measuring poetic greatness—and then inviting the students to rip out the pages of its introduction and deposit them in a wastepaper basket.

The scene is bad for Perkins because it is dramatically contradictory, disingenuously manipulative, overblown, simplistic, indulgent, and fraudulent. There is an important moral dimension to Perkins' critique and to his understanding of 'badness' because he wants to show that 'movies may have the attributes of bad communications, being for instance

bigoted, deceitful, vindictive, hypocritical or self-serving' and this will make them 'bad as works of art' (34). The following are examples of key critical statements: '[the film] employs an inflated rhetoric and some crude but effective devices of emotional manipulation that may disguise contradictions between its declared project (anti-authoritarian) and its dramatic structure (which validates the authority of the hero)'; '[t]he film gratifies [...] by making it easy to be on the right side; it offers a dishonestly simplified viewpoint on conflict'; and '[the film shows] a failure to reconcile showmanship with thematic intelligence' (36).

Although Perkins considers the scene to be 'corrupt', it is also 'highly effective' and 'made with great proficiency'. In his analysis therefore he alerts us to the scene's 'crude but effective devices'. He draws attention to, for example, the way one of the students named Cameron (Dylan Kussman) is used by the film to 'define for the audience the appropriate response' (35).⁴ Cameron has already been characterised as unattractive and now his behaviour, first exhibiting 'sheep-like submission' to note-taking and then 'timid neatness' by tearing his page along the edge of a ruler, predictably indicates the wrong reactions to Keating's teaching (35). Perkins notes how the film keeps returning to close-ups of Cameron which indicate the reliance on this structuring principle. In like manner, although Perkins does not mention it, there are also a few pointed close-ups of other students who represent the right response to Keating's teaching. Most striking are those of Dalton (Gale Hansen) whose expression turns from bemused to amused realisation, the intelligent and thoughtful face of somebody 'getting it' and is the first boy to rip out his pages.⁵

The film uses a similarly polarising device 'to secure approval for Keating's approach' when a teacher representing traditional modes of teaching intrudes on the class to angrily protest at the unruly proceedings (35). He interrupts the pleasurable liberating momentum that the scene is wishing to induce. This momentum is perhaps most effectively represented by the 'image of the wastepaper basket travelling from boy to boy' the movement of which, according to Perkins, 'has a pleasing rhythm, and our pleasure is enhanced by the completion of the circuit' (35). Although Perkins does not expand on how the pleasure is generated, doing so may further

substantiate his claims. Keating hands the basket to one of the boys whereupon the camera follows it round in a panning, unbroken close-up as it is passed amongst them, with camera and basket eventually joining up again with Keating. He appears with perfect timing at the other end of the line to reclaim the basket and the inevitability of its return to him is emphasised. The curving camera movement is matched by the basket rotating swiftly through the boys' hands, without it being stopped or grounded, as each boy deposits his pages. The fluency and buoyancy with which the basket is passed and its apparently determined direction—through the boys, back to Keating—make it appear as if the basket is carried by the force of, or on the wave of, Keating's inspirational rhetoric.

As the film shows the basket's passage, Keating is exclaiming on the soundtrack 'In my class you will learn to think for yourself again' and Perkins notes the contradiction: '[w]hat is proclaimed as individualism is pictured as militaristic uniformity' (35). He also notes that the figure of Cameron, previously emphasised, is now excluded from this very directed uprising. Perkins mentions that the film chooses the ripping apart of books rather than the burning of them for fear that 'that image would remind the audience in troubling ways of the recent history of Europe and America' (35). Nevertheless, I felt it was chillingly reminiscent, and just one flame away from the common image in films of various documents set alight and dropped into wastepaper baskets. Moreover, Perkins does not mention, although it is in keeping with his critique, Keating's incessant and aggressive commands to 'Rip' and 'Rip it out' leading to a cacophonous ripping sound which sonically expresses the giddy euphoria of following orders.

Perkins recognises the possibility that the contradiction may be a deliberate part of the film's scheme—'[c]ould this scene become part of a critique—or more rounded assessment of Keating?'—but finds no evidence to support this (36). He writes, 'Here as throughout the film Keating is never made to face an awkward question of judgment. He is always right [...]. No boy refuses, in a principled way, to join in the use of violence against ideas that is pictured in the destruction of books—and the film never

suggests this as a possibility' (36). Indeed, the contradiction exhibited in this scene remains unaddressed throughout the film and it never becomes a productive tension. On a couple of occasions in the film, students take up Keating's advice to 'seize the day', a motto which became famously associated with the film, apparently representative of its inspirational potency. On one of these occasions, a student gets a beating for standing up to authority, and when Keating is unsympathetic to his moment of rebellion, the student understandably asks, 'What about *carpe diem* and sucking all the marrow out of life?' to which Keating replies 'Sucking all the marrow out of life doesn't mean choking on the bone. There's a time for daring and time for caution, and a wise man understands which is called for.' And matters are left at that. This is all conveniently unspecific and in keeping with most of Keating's gnomic advice. Quite where the 'wise man' will glean this understanding, or quite where the line between sucking and choking is drawn is never explored. Despite its vagueness, the dialogue is used to seal up the film's dilemmas prematurely and substitutes for dramatic enactment. The film also appears to rely too much on the Williams persona to do its work, and therefore finds it hard to get beyond the limitations of his performance. The film, not unlike his line delivery, is caught in a superficial amalgam of the whimsical and the earnest (Morkish and mawkish).

Later, one of the schoolboys, Neil Perry (Robert Sean Leonard), commits suicide after 'seizing the day' by contravening his father's wishes and appearing in the school play. Yet even this grave occurrence does not prompt the film to challenge, or deepen its understanding, of Keating's ethos and slogans. Its purpose rather seems to lend further support to Keating by according all the blame to the repressive regime (of school and father). For any viewer who feels the case is, or should be, less open and shut, Perry's death merely bewilderingly rubs up against the grain of the film. One might even consider the film exploitative in that it uses Perry's pain and suffering to sentimentalise Keating further (and his own sentimental exhortations). He is forced to resign from the school, and the final scene shows the boys one by

one standing on their desks in solidarity as he watches on with admiration.

Testing Noël Carroll and Berys Gaut's theories of value interaction

I present Perkins' critical appraisal of *Dead Poets Society* (from now on *DPS*), and my critical appendages, to highlight some specific problems in a couple of the contributions to what has become known in the philosophy of art as the value interaction debate. The debate concerns the nature of the interaction between aesthetic value and moral value in artworks. I particularly want to focus on what has become known as the 'moderate moralist' and 'ethicist' positions, notably the positions held by Noël Carroll and Berys Gaut respectively. I will attend to some of their key claims, but I am not going to work through analysing every aspect of the content and argumentation. This is firstly because I want to orientate toward the bigger methodological picture and secondly because a step-by-step critique has already been done effectively, for example, by Nils Hennes Stear (2020) and by Rafe McGregor (2014). The latter has devastatingly damned, not only Carroll and Gaut's contributions, but the whole value interaction debate, accusing it of using 'vague terminology', resting on 'naïve assumptions', and making 'uninteresting claims' (2014: 451, 455, 459). I concur with McGregor, but I want to explain, by focusing on Carroll and Gaut's contributions, why I think these deficiencies might come about and how they might be avoided.⁶

The moderate moralist position, held by Carroll, claims that moral and aesthetic value interact in a work and that a moral merit will in some cases be aesthetic merit, and a moral defect will sometimes be an aesthetic defect (1996; 1998). The point of the moderate moralist claim is to challenge 'autonomist' positions which argue, among other things, that aesthetic merits and defects are not necessarily, or even significantly, bound up with moral ones. *DPS* therefore looks to be a reasonably fair test case, rather than a tricky counter example, because Perkins' moral critique goes together with

a broader aesthetic one: for example, he finds the film's moral defects simultaneously to be formal defects (for example, the close-ups on Cameron which contribute to the 'dishonestly simplified viewpoint on conflict').⁷ Carroll's further argument is that a moral defect will prevent the 'uptake' of the artwork, that is it 'deters the response to which the works aspires' and can therefore be regarded as an 'aesthetic defect' (1996: 234-235). It seems therefore that the case of *DPS* continues to be helpful for Carroll: Perkins does indeed argue that its moral defects prevent the 'uptake' of the film, deterring the response to which it aspires.

However, this is not the full story. To be precise, *DPS* is morally defective *for Perkins* preventing the uptake of the film *for him*. He does not say this because it is not *only* for him, as others may see the film, or come to see it, in a similar way. Indeed, he hopes others *will* come to see it this way and even that they *should* because there is a moral dimension to the critique. His criticism is implicitly prescriptive as well as descriptive of his experience (of the film). Nevertheless, this is not the same as saying *DPS* is morally defective, or in all cases deters uptake. Indeed, Perkins' response while not unique does not seem to be typical of other publicly-aired views.⁸ One only needs to read the film reviews of the time to see that *DPS* was, with a few exceptions, rapturously received by film reviewers. Here is a selection of the praise summarised on *IMDb*: 'poetry and passion, comedy and tragedy are fused into one absolutely marvelous affirmation of the independent spirit'; 'one of Australian director Peter Weir's most sensitive films'; 'it grips, because it has been made with plentiful feeling and vigor'; and 'commands respect and affection.'⁹ Pauline Kael no less, doyenne of American film reviewers, claimed that it 'turns itself into a classic.'¹⁰ And here is a sample of comments by viewers on *IMDb*: 'One of the best movies ever made'; 'Extremely good movie that explores our deepest desires and the situations that get in our way'; 'It was probably the most influential movie in my life. I was truly inspired to change. Everyone should see it. CARPE DIEM'; 'Influential, beautiful, and powerful. This film will stay in my heart forever. The acting and plot are unmatched by films of its kind, and the message will hold you tight'; 'A thought-provoking

and emotionally engaging drama about one simple fact: nobody can teach you how to live your life'; 'An incredibly emotional and inspirational film.'¹¹ These reactions do not seem surprising to me because I recall experiencing the film's favourable reception by intelligent acquaintances on its release. More importantly, *DPS* is bending over backwards to achieve these responses. According to Perkins it uses a series of 'effective' devices to achieve them and these 'disguise' its corruption. I suspect that Perkins was compelled to offer his critique partly because of the film's favourable critical reception which he regarded as undeserved. He intends to invite a revaluation while also unseating assumptions about what constitutes achievement in film (both formally and morally). One mistaken assumption is that 'effective' straightforwardly corresponds to good.

For Perkins the film's 'effective' devices would be a reason why these critics and viewers do not see the film as contradictory or manipulative or indulgent in the way he does. Alternatively, perhaps they see or understand the same presentation differently, for example, manipulation as a well-directed handling or indulgence as a passionate immersion. Or what Perkins sees as demerits are insignificant and possibly not even registered because they are outweighed or submerged by good aspects. For them, the film is morally meritorious ('inspirational', 'sensitive', an 'absolutely marvelous affirmation of the independent spirit'). It is also aesthetically successful in Carroll's terms because he considers the aesthetic success of a work to be its ability to 'absorb' its audience (1996: 226-227). For Carroll, this shows that the work's uptake is not impeded by any morally defective aspect. It does appear, for these critics and viewers, to have succeeded in absorbing them because 'it grips', 'it commands respect', 'hold[s] you tight, and is 'powerful'. And indeed, Perkins refers to the 'pleasing' quality of the wastebasket passing: the satisfying fluency of the unbroken and palindromic shot. However, such satisfying fluency can be an indication of something too easy, of not enough complicating challenge, friction, or cross-current in the composition. It may therefore be 'pleasing' in both senses: it generates a pleasant sensation for the recipient while also being overly willing to satisfy them

or make them feel comfortable or, as Perkins says, gratified. A related criterion of aesthetic success for Carroll is that the work needs to 'mobilise' a viewer's emotions. Yet, this is what Perkins disapproves of in the film: 'effective devices of emotional manipulation' which are 'crude' and may 'disguise'. A further related criterion of aesthetic success for Carroll is that the work should 'succeed on its own terms', and so he writes, 'If an [artwork] is to succeed on its own terms then the audience must fill it in in the right way, where the "right way" with regard to the emotions is in terms of the emotions the work aims to elicit' (1998: 420). Once again, *DPS* does appear to 'succeed on its own terms', and many audiences do appear to have emotionally responded in the 'right way [...] in terms of the emotions [the film] aims to elicit'. Yet, it is precisely *DPS*' 'own terms' and 'the emotions [the film] aims to elicit' that Perkins is critiquing.¹²

To which 'audience' therefore is Carroll referring? He talks about the 'average viewer', then slips into a majoritarian position when he talks about 'large parts of the audience', and then decides he requires a 'morally sensitive' viewer or reader (1996: 233). This puts us in the difficult position of trying to decide who is more 'morally sensitive': Perkins who finds the film 'corrupt' or the critic who finds it 'a marvelous affirmation of the human spirit.'¹³ Carroll could argue that the *DPS* case does not change the fact that a moral merit / defect is sometimes an aesthetic merit / defect, it is simply that we will not be able to specify whether this will turn in a positive or negative direction. It will be different for different people even regarding the same film. I suppose this would be some sort of minimal claim, but it is a very limited one and not particularly helpful if we want to philosophise productively about the moral dimensions of the aesthetic. In actuality, Carroll proposes more than this minimal claim. He makes claims about the logic of the relationship between the moral and aesthetic, and about the consequences for critical appraisal in particular instances. He also implicitly and explicitly makes claims about what a moral defect might look like and the 'morally sensitive' viewer who can spot it. He writes, 'Failure to elicit the right moral response, then, is a failure in the design of the work, and, therefore, is an aesthetic failure' (1996: 233).

What is the 'right moral response' though in the *DPS* case or in many, or even most, cases?¹⁴

Berys Gaut, in a version of 'moderate moralism' he calls 'ethicism', finds that much of Carroll's argument is on the right lines (2007). His version is similar except he replaces Carroll's 'securing uptake' with 'merited response' in his chapter entitled 'The Merited Response Argument' (2007: 227-252). His claim is that if the artwork 'prescribes' an 'unmerited' response then it will be both morally and aesthetically defective (229). Once again Perkins' understanding of *DPS* initially appears to be helpful to Gaut's theory in that he draws attention to the contradiction between the film's 'declared project' and its actual content and structure. Perkins' 'declared', in this context, is not unlike Gaut's 'prescribed', and Perkins' overarching argument seems to provide a case of an artwork where an appreciative response would be 'unmerited' because it 'has failed in an aim internal to it' (Gaut 2007: 231). However, Gaut's scheme works just as well the other way around: it can equally be argued, as it has been, that a film which 'prescribes' an attitude that young boys 'seize the day' by rejecting a dull, rote type of learning is far from morally defective; and that dramatically articulating this with a pleasing vigour and fluency (for example, in the wastebasket sequence) is far from aesthetically defective. The film has succeeded 'in an aim internal to it' and there is nothing 'unmerited' in an audience being inspired by any it. Indeed, I suspect, given all I have read of Gaut on this topic, and the assumptions he makes about morality in artworks, that *DPS* would provide an ideal example of a film that is morally and aesthetically meritorious. There is a problem in Gaut's use of 'an aim internal to it' which matches Carroll's use of 'on its own terms'. Perkins believes that if an aim is misguided then it is not morally good if it succeeds in achieving it, and many of our evaluations of artworks are based on assessing the worth of 'aims' (not simply whether they succeed in rendering them). Moreover, even if a film's aims are worthwhile, one aim may undermine or be at odds with another: for example, Perkins criticises *DPS* for not being able reconcile its desire to be 'a gripping melodrama' with its desire to be 'a thoughtful dramatisation of important issues' (36).¹⁵

The methodological contrast

Because Perkins works with, and through, the film, he is able to more accurately specify variants of value interaction, for example, the type of relational unease just mentioned between 'a gripping melodrama' and 'a thoughtful dramatisation of important issues'. Therefore, the first and foremost methodological point to highlight is that Perkins' claims, specific and general, emerge from, or alongside, his analysis of the film. This is not true of the general claims by Carroll and Gaut which are presented abstractly. In the writings where they develop the theories, outlined above, there are no extended or involved treatments of artworks. Although Perkins' treatment of *DPS* is restricted by being presented in the form of a short conference paper which disallows the extended and involved analyses of films which he often provides in his published critical work, even here his criticism is precise about the location, manifestation, and impression of moral and formal defects, their interaction, and evaluation. He unpacks the film's workings in such a way as to provide us with something to direct our thinking toward. It is therefore instructive in thinking through this case and, in a comparative fashion, other cases which might show similarities and differences. Someone may wish to argue with Perkins, disputing perhaps his criteria or their application, or they may draw attention to countervailing aspects or qualities, but the precision of his observations and attributions would, in principle, ground and discipline any further investigation.

Perkins' micro approach contrasts with Carroll and Gaut's macro approach, although the latter do briefly refer to examples from artworks as they propose their theories of value interaction. At one point, Carroll briefly offers up the novel *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis (1991) as an example (1996: 232-233). He asserts that 'the serial killings depicted in the novel are so graphically brutal that readers are not able morally to get past the gore in order to savour the parody [...]. Certainly, Ellis made an aesthetic error' (232). Leaving aside for a moment the speaking on behalf of 'the readers' who are 'not able morally to get past', Carroll does not show why the brutality in the novel is necessarily a moral flaw when

softening the presentation of serial killings could equally be regarded as such. The major accusation is not substantiated, nor are we given access to the details of the case. The depictions of the killings are not analysed, and it is not shown how, for example, their linguistic formulation, their place in the design scheme, their tonal disparity, or their generic failure (as 'parody') lead to the accusation. Therefore, despite being offered up as gleefully decisive by Carroll, the example is cursory and does not do any of the work it needs to do.

However, more detail about the novel by itself would not necessarily solve the problem. This is because the engagement with it would not be sufficiently integrated into the philosophy such that it was genuinely generative. Much earlier in the book in which the 'merited response' chapter appears, Gaut analyses two paintings of Bathsheba, one by Willem Drost and one by Rembrandt (both 1654) and he shows why he thinks the painting by Rembrandt is both morally and formally better than the Drost (2007: 14-25). These analyses are relatively detailed about the presentation of the paintings, but they are not involved in the construction of the later theory (they are not even mentioned in the theory chapter). At the outset of his analyses, Gaut writes, 'In developing philosophical theories about art, it is important not just to formulate them with care and to consider their general merits, but also to test them against one's responses to particular artworks' (14). And he continues, 'It is customary to perform this testing by marshalling a parade of examples, quickly sketched and peremptorily dismissed' (14). This would be an accurate description of Carroll's use of *American Psycho* and support my impression of how examples are often used in the philosophy of art. Yet, despite Gaut's candid acknowledgement, when it comes to the 'merited response' theory he does not test it against his Bathsheba example or, even better, develop the theory alongside it. The precise terms and claims of the theory are not derived out of the example. These two different sections of the book are oddly dislocated (especially considering the professed intention). Gaut also writes that 'any adequate theory in aesthetics should be able to account for complex cases, and account for them in detail' (14-15). Gaut's account of the Bathsheba case is indeed 'in detail' and his evaluation

makes sense, but it is not apparent, nor does he explain, why the case is 'complex' or provides a robust test (unlike the *DPS* case). His account makes the evaluation appear relatively straightforward.

I wonder if we might try to conceive of 'the example' differently, along with the associated activity of 'finding' and 'providing' supportive examples. Or, if it helps, perhaps we could try, for a little while at least, not to think in terms of examples. I am not merely hoping for better examples when we philosophise about art, or even examples which are better mined, but for a fundamental reorientation. Rather than turning to an artwork on the occasions when it suited, we could stay turned toward it while we philosophise. It might be argued that *DPS* still operates as an example for Perkins, an example, indeed, of badness in film. No doubt it will be rare, perhaps impossible, for the direction of travel to be *all* bottom-up, and I acknowledge there is a chicken-and-egg aspect to this. Nevertheless, even if it is not a pure demonstration of what I am proposing, Perkins' paper on *DPS* offers a material rebalancing. He keeps the film in play as he makes his larger claims and this also enables, as we have seen, more specific ones. Although it might be true that Perkins has some idea of this species of badness in advance, it is also true, that his analysis emerges from a particular aesthetic experience of the film which has compelled him to make the case and stimulated him to explore and articulate relevant detail (partly in opposition to a standard view). Although the sequence from the film may be illustrating a prior idea of badness, it also appears to be contributing to the formulation of the idea, such that the larger claims about badness appear inextricable from the manifesting instance. The actual film is an important part of the process and hard to disentangle from what is a stake. It is not simply serving a big idea.

For Carroll and Gaut, the artworks appear to serve their theories, or perhaps, at best, are introduced to test them, in which case they are still serving a theoretical endeavour. It is also worth mentioning that they serve those theories within the larger encompassing framework of a debate. It may be bewildering to those outside the philosophy of art that two of its leading philosophers have found themselves needing

to insist that moral and aesthetic values may interact significantly.¹⁶ Arguably one of the reasons that Carroll and Gaut's theories settle at this place of seemingly banal generality is because they are restricted by the format of a disciplinary debate.¹⁷ It is not easy for them to move out of the relatively narrow space where the debate takes place to the wider space which remains untouched and where there is much philosophising left to do. Because their contributions to the debate are concerned to present a favoured position, in a quasi-polemical way, representing and advocating it while rebutting other positions, there is a tendency to overstate *and* water down to maintain viability. They are not well placed or well equipped to investigate artworks nimbly or let their philosophy evolve from matters arising.

I concur with Kendall Walton's characterisation of the methodology of contemporary philosophy of art as mainly theory construction (whilst not sharing his satisfaction with it) (2007: 150-152). Carroll and Gaut offer theories of value interaction, whereas Perkins does not, and this is another key methodological difference. Perkins is not attempting to develop or propose a theory of 'badness' for all cases. He is illuminating what he understands to be a species of it.¹⁸ Walton claims, 'Theories are supposed to illuminate particulars, to explain and help us understand the data on which they are based [...]. If we want to investigate particulars, we had better be constructing theories about them' (156). Aside from Walton's disconcertingly coercive 'we had better be', he appears to be mistaken in many ways: Carroll and Gaut's theories of value interaction are not shown by them to 'illuminate particulars'. Nor do they appear to put us in a good position to handle 'particulars'—for example the 'particulars' of *DPS*—should we wish to apply their theories. Interesting, Gaut 'investigates' the 'particulars' of the Bathsheba paintings long before he offers his theory; the illumination of them precedes, and does not depend on, his theory (in fact it seems extraneous). Even if one regards the theories as illuminating in some respect, their theoretical type does not seem designed to illuminate 'particulars'. Moreover, we can 'investigate particulars' in all sorts of ways, and philosophise about them, without 'constructing theories about them' (as Ludwig Wittgenstein

argued, as Perkins shows, and as we repeatedly do in many of our engagements with artworks).¹⁹

The case for a philosophy of art rooted in criticism

The theoretical method that Carroll and Gaut engage in, and which Walton characterises, appears to be too overarching and absolute to 'illuminate particulars'. This is because it is not *situated* to be responsive to the intricacy and variety of artworks and the varying aesthetic experiences that accompany them. *If* we want a philosophy of art to be responsive in this way—and some may not—then we will need a more agile approach. The sort of criticism that Perkins engages in is more likely to 'illuminate particulars'—although not necessarily if poorly executed—because it emerges from, and is directed towards, artworks. It is intentionally fine-grained, homing in on a scene to 'illuminate particulars' regarding editing, camera movement, dramatic coordination, and sound / image relation. Dominic Lopes labels this approach to the philosophy of art 'critical demonstration' where 'rich descriptions of actual examples of art criticism' are given (2016: 658). He gives the example of Alexander Nehamas' book on beauty *Only a Promise of Happiness* (2007):

Nehamas arrives at an alternative conception of beauty through a thoughtful engagement with specific art works, which supply a vocabulary giving voice to an apt description of beauty [...]. What [Nehamas] [...] means is only fully expressed in the context of what he has to say about his chosen art works, and especially about his enduring fascination with Manet's *Olympia*. Nehamas offers a critical demonstration whose proof lies in the experience it gives us of these works. For [...] Nehamas, one way philosophy is done is by doing a kind of art criticism. (2016: 661)

Lopes admits to the 'relative rarity of this kind of writing in analytic aesthetics and the philosophy of art' and my sense too is that Nehamas' book, which I admire, is an unusual contribution (662). Lopes' explanation for the rarity is that this approach requires specialist skills which humanist art scholars might have, but which most philosophers do not: 'few philosophers happen to have the training or temperament for

writing successful art criticism' (665). He says that they are 'outclassed by scholars in departments of literature, music, fine arts, film, and theatre' and consequently they would be better pursuing the commonly pursued non-critical route (665). While I agree with his characterisation, I do not draw the same conclusion as Lopes for the following reasons: 1) if philosophers wish to pursue the philosophy of art there is no reason why they could not learn some of the skills involved in the close criticism of art (in the way that humanities scholars often have to learn some philosophy); 2) even if they did not reach the same proficiency—in the way a humanities scholar seeking to develop their philosophical skills, such as myself, might not—it still would be helpful and even essential for them because the sort of claims they wish to make, and the concepts they wish to use, while travelling on their 'non-critical route' are not independent of the data that criticism provides; and 3) short of critically analysing art themselves they could use pre-existing criticism as their data, by writers such as Perkins for example, as I have done. They might use several pieces of criticism about the same work.²⁰

In his description of Nehamas' method, Lopes astutely picks up on the way 'the art works [...] supply a vocabulary', and indeed this alternative method provides linguistic benefits. Concepts can more naturally emerge from the bottom up rather than being created out of generalised reflection, detached from the object, and imposed from the top down. Even if a concept's meaning was relatively elastic it would be delimited by the occasions which prompted its use. There would be less referential disorientation. Consider how Carroll's use of 'success' and 'succeed' is exposed as faulty in the way he deploys it once we consider the criticism on *DPS*. For example, he claims: 'Thus, in large measure, the aesthetic success of an artwork is response dependent, i.e. the work depends on eliciting certain mandated responses, if it is to succeed on its own terms' (1998: 420). Perkins shows that although *DPS*' devices can be deemed a success in achieving sought-after effects (and perhaps achieving ticket sales and popularity), this does not mean that the film succeeds in other respects either morally or aesthetically. It would be fascinating to know whether Carroll would have used 'success' in this

way had he been working from an actual artwork and had he been responsive to its various accomplishments. Even if he had still wished to use it, the notion of 'success' could be tested against the aesthetic experience of the work, and either discarded or modified, or at the very least adequately assessed to bring out the complications involved in its application. Such conceptual clarification and finessing would be part of the philosophical work. Moreover, any investigation based on criticism would have a larger pool of concepts. Perkins short treatment of *DPS* makes us alert to, and offers up to contemplation and conversation, a range of concepts used morally – for example inflation, manipulation, gratification, and simplification—showing when we might apply them and what they may look like in relation to artistic expression (and each other). Carroll and Gaut's theories tend to be built around a few words which dominate—for example, 'prescribe', 'merit', 'uptake'—and are applied come what may. Even if they challenge or finesse concepts—for example substituting 'merited' for 'warranted' – they are done so within the circumscribed terms of the debate rather than the plentiful terms generated by the aesthetic experience of an artwork. They are influenced by internal compatibility rather than external correspondence and reward.²¹

Artworks and the experiences of them are active and a philosophy of art integrated with criticism could reflect the flexibility and dynamism. Because the moment-by-moment qualitative reality of our aesthetic experience would move the philosophy, it would help it to be less static. One would engage in a *process* of moral deliberation and aesthetic evaluation with different value-pertinent aspects coming to light as one investigates over time. This deliberation and evaluation would also be dependent on the philosopher-viewer's imagination. Carroll and Gaut often talk about moral judgement as if it were simply a matter of straightforwardly recognising and applying an accepted moral rule to an artwork: 'this is a moral defect which therefore affects uptake'. Taking the *American Psycho* example once again: '[Ellis] failed to anticipate that the readers would not be able to secure uptake of his themes in the face of the unprecedented violence. He invited the audience to view the murders as political satire and that

was an invitation they could not morally abide' (Carroll 1996: 232). It is assumed here that using 'unprecedented violence' as 'political satire' is something 'the reader' 'could not morally abide'. My experience from film study is that things are rarely this unambiguous and indisputable. Consideration is often required for moral evaluation, with assessment taking place within a range of contexts, for example, dramatic, narrative, symbolic, metaphorical, compositional, tonal, authorial, and cultural. To be done fairly and well this takes a creative imaginative capacity. Different outcomes are possible and might lead to outright disagreement. Mark Johnson has elegantly made the case for understanding much of moral judgement in this way:

[T]he process is imaginative insofar as it involves ordering or structuring representations in a new manner [...]. To sum up, moral judgment involves imagination in several related ways: (1) Just to recognize that some rule might be relevant to our present case requires that we organize various details and select out some as more significant than others. (2) We must also imaginatively weigh similarities and differences between the situation at hand and others where a certain rule proved to be applicable. This skill of weighing requires an educated imagination and cannot be usefully formalized. (3) Even if we have discovered a relevant rule, it will typically involve underlying metaphors, the understanding of which is not a rule-governed process. (4) Finally, the situation as I grasp it here and now is not the same as similar cases, so I must tailor the metaphorically understood moral precept to this particular state of affairs, and, in so doing, I make the situation determinate in a novel way. The complex imaginative process I have just described is, in many ways, more similar to what Kant called 'reflective' judgment. (1985: 276-277)

In line with their approach to moral judgement, Carroll and Gaut's theories are similarly inflexible about how they see artworks operating. Criticism however is responsive to the different ways different works address their viewers. For example, according to Carroll artworks 'depend [...] on eliciting certain mandated responses' (1998: 420) and for Gaut they depend on 'prescribing certain responses towards the

events' (2007: 233). Yet, many fiction films seek to dramatise situations which will be open to a variety of responses and some films are actively trying not to 'mandate' or 'prescribe responses towards [...] events.' It is possible Carroll and Gaut might argue, albeit risking further dilution of their theories' relevance and import, that such films are simply mandating or prescribing a 'variety of responses', but there would be a difference between a film which I felt was mandating a 'variety of responses' and one that, say, might invite it, or achieve it without directly seeking it. Although he does not use the word, Perkins thought *DPS* was prescriptive, but the implication for Perkins is that this is a severe limitation of the work. Indeed, I often criticise works for being prescriptive, for example films that are point-making or those that insist on a particular emotional reaction such as jerking tears. Even if we leave the evaluative implications to one side, 'prescriptive' is only one word amongst many I might use to describe an artwork's address if my aim was to accurately characterise it. Gaut's theory, however, implies that it is non-contingent and that it is a necessary feature of artworks (that they prescribe something).²²

To make the sort of arguments they want to make, inevitably perhaps, Carroll and Gaut treat films as affecting us automatically, in a direct, immediate way, and in doing so they assume or apply one type of artistic expression and one type of response to it. Perkins' analysis of *DPS* appears to suggest that its subject matter and meaning are dramatically enacted: they are diffused through the images and sounds. Subject matter and meaning are embedded—physically, materially, metaphorically, symbolically, and thematically—such that their expression is indirect and reception, for example interpretation or emotional reaction, will be complicated and varied.²³ Instead of assuming or applying, our understandings of expression, and ontology more generally, can be derived from the analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of actual artworks (by actual viewers through criticism).

Assuming a particular type of response to art returns us to a basic problem with Carroll and Gaut's theories: their dependence on a speculative notion of 'the viewer' ('the audience', 'the reader' or similar). Either all viewers are homogenised ('the viewer') or standardised ('the average

viewer'), or privileged, singled out to become the chosen few ('the morally sensitive viewer'). Much of the theory is built upon whether 'the viewer' is absorbed, able to take something up, feels something is merited, and so on. Notice how in his *American Psycho* example Carroll speaks on behalf of what readers 'would' or 'could' do such that '[Ellis] failed to anticipate that *the readers would not be able to secure uptake* of his themes in the face of the unprecedented violence. He invited the audience to view the murders as political satire and that was an invitation *they could not morally abide*' (1996: 232; my emphasis). 'The reader' is quite possibly a front for the philosopher's own reading. Louise Hanson correctly critiques the value interaction debate for its reliance on 'indirect' (which include 'qua') strategies (2020). For example, she states that, 'All that Carroll's argument shows [...] is that moral features *qua something else* are relevant: a moral feature is relevant only insofar as it also qualifies as an inhibitor of uptake' (217). It is not, however, only the indirection that is the problem, but the detour taken: what Hanson does not highlight is that the indirection is via an abstracted reader.

Hanson does argue, again correctly in my view, that 'we should start taking direct strategies seriously' (218), but things become less clear as she continues to make the case:

[Parallel debates in the Philosophy of Art] tend to appeal to critical and appreciative practice—to the art-critical judgements we, in fact, make. (Do we tend to rate a work more highly as art on the basis of its originality? Do we tend to take cognitive value to bear positively on our overall assessment of a work?) So why not do this in the case of ethical value? Why not ask: do we tend to take ethical value as relevant when assessing a work's overall artistic merit? [...]. As a methodological principle, we should try to adopt a theory that is in accordance with what we, pretheoretically, think on an issue. (220)

These sentences show that Hanson's apparent challenge to the method only goes so far. What sort of 'critical and appreciative practice' is being referred to in the first sentence of the quotation? Although I am not immersed in the 'parallel debates', I have enough knowledge of them to know that they do not 'tend' to engage in the sort of critical practice I am advocating, and Lopes also confirms this. Hanson's 'practice'

could refer to a wide variety of behaviours—for example, everyday practices or professional practices which themselves vary—and indeed the dash runs 'critical and appreciative practice' into 'art-critical judgements' misleadingly suggesting their equivalence. 'We' can make 'art-critical judgements'—'The wastebasket scene in *DPS* is inspiring'—and not engage in the sort of critical process adopted by Perkins that might usefully reveal an artwork (for philosophical investigation). Moreover, given that critical practice rarely becomes a core part of the philosophising, it is not clear what 'appeal to' amounts to.

'Tend' is used again within the parenthetical questions and this is revealing because most 'critical and appreciative practice' of the sort I am advocating would not establish tendencies about evaluative criteria such as originality or cognitive value. Claims would depend on the work, and the experience of the work, being considered: sometimes originality will be a salient or a positive criterion, and sometimes it will be neither. Hanson goes on to write about 'adopt[ing] a theory', and although the philosophy of art can do this, I am suggesting that it does not have to, and this will at least free it from the considerable burden of making 'pretheoretical' thoughts about artworks accord with theories about artworks.²⁴ Note also Hanson's phrase 'in accordance with what we [...] think'. The use of 'we' here—and 'we' is mentioned six times in this quotation—assumes that there are *a priori*, agreed upon, 'pretheoretical' positions in relation to the experience of artworks that can be implicitly trusted and on which we can then base theories. Yet whose 'pretheoretical' thoughts should be prioritised in trying to understand *DPS*? (Furthermore, by appealing to her 'we', Hanson is *also* relying on an indirect strategy to make her case.)

Walton in his essay on philosophical methodology writes that 'theories [...] [are] designed to explain and help us understand a body of data' and 'philosophers [...] specialize in devising theories, or choosing among alternative theories, after the data are in' (2007: 151). Leaving aside the move to theorise the data, as distinct from other ways we might philosophise in relation to it, it is not clear what this 'body of data' amounts to, nor is it clear when we might conclude we have reached the satisfactory point at which the 'data are in'. Is the 'body of data' a particular segment of an artwork, a whole

artwork, a corpus, an artform, or a generalised idea of artworks, and by whom is it collated? Even within a segment, as in the wastepaper basket scene of *DPS*, there is a range of data, much of it salient though not obviously or immediately so, which needs to be observed and interpreted (and interpreted to be observed). Walton goes on to write, 'there is a body of very ordinary knowledge, gleaned from everyone's everyday experience of the world, which seems pretty secure, and that constitutes a large part of the data that philosophers' theories are designed to illuminate (152). The *DPS* example alone suggest this is rather fanciful. What is the 'body of very ordinary knowledge', that 'constitutes' the data of artworks, or the data of films, or even one film like *DPS*? What 'constitutes' 'everyone's [...] experience' when individual experiences of *DPS* differ?²⁵

A philosophy of art rooted in criticism would not assume that we could know an artwork or a viewing experience in advance (nor know in advance about the features of art and the experience of them). It would recognise that different aspects of works will be brought out by different viewers / critics. A work's identity would not be certified prior to the philosopher's individual experience, investigation, and critical articulation.²⁶ 'The viewer' in this method would be a real person—for example, V.F. Perkins or whichever philosopher-critic was offering their appraisal—rather than a fantasised or ventriloquised one. The perspective of this real person would be based on carefully analysing the work and their evaluation, commonly intertwined, would be offered for my assessment, and yours. You or I could then develop our own philosophical investigations accordingly in response. A philosophy of art rooted in criticism would understand that criticism is a form of 'perspicuous presentation', in Wittgenstein's terms, 'whereby something that had always been in plain view, and yet overlooked by us, when properly arranged (perspicuously presented) is brought to our attention and strikes us significantly and as never before' (Moyal-Sharrock 2016: 244). I have witnessed students and conference delegates changing their minds about *DPS* after hearing Perkins' 'perspicuous presentation', and I have seen versions of this dawning as tutor and students analyse film sequences together over the course of the seminar. The artwork appears to change, or what we

understand the artwork to be changes; we see and experience it differently. As Aaron Ridley says, this is 'a process of discovery that may well have no determinate end' (2003: 214). A philosophy of art which recognised this would have to embrace the indeterminacy of the work and the experience of it, knowing that the substance of any such philosophy would benefit from the various and perspicuously derived data.

One of the consequences of this approach would be to push the philosophy of art back in the direction of aesthetics where criticism is the report of the aesthetic experience of the artwork. The separation of the philosophy of art and aesthetics may be, or has been, convenient, but I think, and hope to have shown, that there is a need for them to come back together.²⁷ This is certainly true for areas such as value interaction where matters of value, and in particular aesthetic value, are involved. Yet, it might also be helpful for investigations into, for example, ontology, fiction, emotion, depiction, intention, and interpretation, where *working out* from concentrated aesthetic experiences may open these areas up to unexpected insight. In all these topics dear to the philosophy of art, artworks are often assumed to be objects that invite an aesthetic experience, and it matters to the topics, to their sense, and to their purpose, that they do. Yet the aesthetic experience is not an integral part of the way the topic is addressed. In particular, the removal of the evaluative part of the aesthetic experience is an absence that at best limits an investigation and at worst irreparably distorts our understanding of a work. Imagine how artificial, misleading, and barren it would be if Perkins investigated, say, fiction, emotion, or intention in *DPS* without the evaluative component – summarised by him as 'badness'—that is intrinsic to the experience and the identity of the film (as he sees and hears it).²⁸

In conclusion, a philosophical approach rooted in criticism, and for which I have been arguing could, in principle, be profitable in the following ways. Firstly, it could responsibly evaluate how a range of different aspects of an artwork interact, and this would aid thinking about individual works. Secondly, and in turn, this thinking about individual works could enable more general investigations into features which cross artworks and would take the form of revealing similarities and differences through instructive comparison (rather

than proposing conclusive, catch-all theories). Perkins reveals not only the way that *DPS* is (morally) bad, but the ways in which a film may be (morally) bad from the ways in which *DPS* is bad: the way in which, for example, hypocrisy in a film may arise from image / sound contradiction. Thirdly, and finally, this approach could also be attuned to a range of meta-concerns about our critical engagements and articulations, for example: the different ways artworks are addressed; the processes of perception, description, and recommendation; the form and logic of argumentation; the nature of evidence; the scrutiny of assumptions, emotions, and prejudices; and the weighting of features and criteria. Because the investigation into these concerns would be based in, and inform, the close analysis of artworks, this would be an analytical philosophy of art also worthy of the name.

Andrew Klevan

Andrew Klevan is Professor of Film Aesthetics at the University of Oxford. He is the author of *Disclosure of the Everyday: Undramatic Achievement in Narrative Film* (2000), *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation* (2005), *Barbara Stanwyck* (2013), *Aesthetic Evaluation and Film* (2018), and the co-editor of *The Language and Style of Film Criticism* (2011).

Works cited

- Blackburn, Simon (2010), 'Some Remarks about Value as a Work of Literature', *BJA*, 50, 85–88.
- Carroll, Noël (1996) 'Moderate Moralism', *BJA*, 36, 223–238.
- ____ (1998) 'Moderate Moralism versus Moderate Autonomism', *BJA*, 38, 419–424.
- Combs, Richard (1989) 'Dead Poets Society', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 56, 272–273.
- Gaut, Berys (2007) *Art, Emotion and Ethics*. Oxford: OUP.
- Hanson, Louise (2020) 'Two Dogmas of the Artistic-Ethical Interaction Debate', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 50, 209–222.
- Jacobsen, Daniel (1997) 'In Praise of Immoral Art', *Philosophical Topics*, 25, 155–199.

Johnson, Mark (1985) 'Imagination in Moral Judgement', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 46, 265–280.

Klevan, Andrew (2018) *Aesthetic Evaluation and Film*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

____ (2019) 'Aesthetic Criticism', in Carroll, Noël & Laura T. Di Summa, Shawn Loht (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of the Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 409–439.

____ (2020) 'Ordinary Language Film Studies', *Aesthetic Investigations*, 3, 387–406.

Lamarque, Peter (2014) *The Opacity of Narrative*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.

____ (2020) 'The Disintegration of Aesthetics', in his *The Uselessness of Art: Essays in the Philosophy of Art and Literature*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 50–66.

Leavis, F.R. ([1952] 1968) 'Reality and Sincerity', in his *A Selection from Scrutiny: Volume I*. London: Cambridge University Press, 248–257.

Lopes, Dominic Mclver (2016) 'Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art', in Cappelen, Herman & Tamar Szabó Gendler, John Hawthorne (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Methodology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 657–670.

McGregor, Rafe (2014) 'A Critique of the Value Interaction Debate', *BJA*, 50, 449–466.

Moyal-Sharrock, Daniele (2016) 'Wittgenstein and Leavis: Literature and the Enactment of the Ethical', *Philosophy and Literature*, 40, 240–264.

Nehamas, Alexander (2007) *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Perkins, V.F. (1972) *Film as Film*. London: Penguin.

____ (2019) 'Badness: an issue in the aesthetics of film', *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism*, 8, 34–37.

Ridley, Aaron (2003) 'Against Musical Ontology', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 100, 203–220.

Scruton, Roger (2007) 'In Search of the Aesthetic', *BJA*, 47, 232–250.

____ (2009) 'Feeling Fictions', in Hagberg, Garry L. & Walter Jost (eds) *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 93–105.

Stear, Nils Henne (2020) 'Fatal Prescription', *BJA*, 60, 151–163.

Walton, Kendall (2007) 'Aesthetics—What? Why? And Wherefore?', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 65, 147–161.

Notes

1. By 'Philosophy of Art' (from now on without capitalisation) I am referring to an academic branch of philosophy, the research of which takes place typically in the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* and some other journals primarily situated in the analytic, anglophone tradition and which commonly, if not exclusively, operate by a particular methodology. I am not referring to the widespread and diverse philosophising about art and artworks that takes place in disciplines dedicated to the arts (such as english literature, art history, or film studies). I would like to thank Britt Harrison for her penetrating scrutiny of this essay, and her invaluable advice and suggestions.
2. Arguably, the word 'method' is not apposite in relation to Perkins' work if one understands the word to be describing something systematic and regulated. This reasons for this will become clear over the course of this essay. I use 'method' in a looser sense as meaning something more like a way of proceeding. And the investigations into the way he proceeds in his academic work are I think fairly described as methodological.
3. As I am a film specialist, and as this is a film journal, I will emphasise the art of film in this essay. However, the claims about method are more widely applicable. For an extended, dedicated account of what criticism is and what it involves see Klevan (2018, especially 'Part II: What is Aesthetic Criticism?': 59–166) or Klevan (2019).
4. The original publication may be consulted for all relevant images.
5. In the next few paragraphs, I will couple Perkins' criticism on the film with my own. My contributions grow out of his and are intended to accentuate his points.

6. It should not be assumed that by focusing on the positions of Carroll and Gaut that I prefer, or wish to ally myself with, other positions in the debate because I do not (even though they may include insights I find worthwhile). See McGregor (2014) for a bibliography of the value interaction debate.
7. When I use the terms 'formal' or 'formally' in this essay, I am referring to the form of the artwork: its shape, structure, configuration, and presentation (the form it takes). I am not referring to the observation of conventional forms of, say, ceremony, behaviour, dress, or writing (and which would contrast to the casual).
8. For full disclosure, I also thought the film was bad on a first viewing. In fact, I discussed the film with V.F. Perkins as a film student before I knew his views. Nevertheless, Perkins' analysis sharpened and expanded my understanding of its problems. See Richard Combs (1989) for another instructively dissenting critical viewpoint which dovetails with Perkins'.
9. Available at https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097165/criticreviews?ref=tt_ov_rt (Accessed: 08/11/2021)
10. Available at https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097165/criticreviews?ref=tt_ov_rt (Accessed: 08/11/2021)
11. Available at https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097165/reviews?ref=tt_ov_rt (Accessed: 08/11/2021)
12. I am not sure where Carroll has derived his criteria for aesthetic success because they are not standard in the literature on aesthetic evaluation. See Klevan (2018) for a discussion of the literature.
13. It is worth noting that Perkins found the film, rather than the audience, 'corrupt', and presumably he was not beyond susceptibility, if not to this film, then to others.
14. The matter of 'the viewer' or 'the audience' is a fundamental problem for Carroll and Gaut's theories and I will return to it later in this essay.
15. These two aims are not necessarily at odds because the reconciliation is achievable. It has been achieved in many good film melodramas and is an accomplishment that Perkins frequently celebrates in his film criticism. Investigating the failure in *DPS* is a way of distinguishing and understanding the accomplishment elsewhere.
16. It seems clear that they do. Much less clear is how the interaction does, or should, affect the evaluation of a work, or what

aspects, moral or otherwise, will be emphasised or prioritised. This will depend upon the nature of the artwork, the context of production and reception, the disposition of the viewer, and the sort of claims about the work, and the different parts or aspects of the work, they are wishing to make. It is worth noting that in discussions about art, it is all too common and frustrating to see an emphasis, or even an exclusive concentration, on moral aspects where presentational matters are side-lined. Moral considerations, as Daniel Jacobsen writes, 'take over the entirety of the evaluative space' (1997: 156). I suspect that this frustration has contributed to the advocacy of autonomist-style positions, and as someone who specialises in studying the form and style of films, I am sympathetic. This is, however, something Perkins does not do in his account of *DPS* where he keeps the moral and formal considerations in balance. In Perkins' work on aesthetics, moral and aesthetic values inevitably do affect each other because he understands 'the aesthetic' to be referring to the way things present themselves and as such these things will have a moral dimension. Indeed, attention to the work's quality of presentation, its character, and its attitude to its material and its audience—including how it appears to imagine or conceive of its audience—are underestimated areas of contemporary moral evaluation, and insufficiently acknowledged, as far as I can tell, in the value interaction literature. Yet such attention is familiar in the British tradition of criticism—it was an important aspect to F.R. Leavis' literary criticism—and this would be an example of where the interests and insights of criticism could inform discussion in the philosophy of art (even if it does not wish to practice criticism itself). In Perkins' critique of *DPS* it is not necessarily the basic ingredients of the work that are morally at fault, for example, the inspirational teacher, but rather the way the teacher is presented in the scene through performance, camerawork, sound, and editing. The work has morally bad qualities akin to ones that we might attribute to the behaviour of human beings or in Perkins' terms has 'the attributes of bad communications': it is inflated, manipulative, and hypocritical. See also Leavis ([1952] 1968) on sincerity in artistic expression which has some fascinating similarities in its critical approach to Perkins' treatment of *DPS*. For relevant contemporary commentaries on the Leavis essay, see Blackburn (2010) and Scruton (2009).

17. Overall, I have not found the contributions to the value interaction debate helpful in understanding, and managing,

the evaluative dilemmas that arise with multi-faceted artworks. Hence my desire for the philosophy to work through artworks, responsive to their configurations. (I apologise if I have missed a contribution to the debate that did do this.) Let me offer the hypothetical example of my experience of a rap song (which bears some relation to some real experiences I have had). I am listening to a rap song which I consider to consist of extraordinary formal and stylistic achievements in terms of melody, rhyme, production, and performance. However, I find some of the lyrics abusive and demeaning to women and some homophobic, and these are deplorable attitudes (to me). Asserting that moral defects are aesthetic defects, or sometimes are, does not seem to address the problem I face. The songs have plenty of formal merits, both in parts of the songs that do and do not contain the ethical attitudes I deplore. Although the song's moral defectiveness will affect my evaluation, it will not necessarily prevent the 'uptake' of the whole song—a crudely all-or-nothing response—and perhaps should not (even though it could and should for some listeners). This will be especially true in artworks where I consider the moral flaw less deplorable or more undecided (as is often the case). There will also be those occasions when a moral flaw once thought to be easily forgivable, whether rightly or not, is now considered more significant. Indeed, one can never be certain about what would count as morally relevant to an evaluation. Critical theory and cultural studies, for example, have alerted us to moral defects in artworks which through normalisation have gone unseen or been mistakenly deemed insignificant. There may also be disagreement over whether certain content is morally meritorious or not. Some listeners considered the hip hop band N.W.A.'s attack on the Los Angeles police to be a moral defect, where others felt it to be a moral imperative. Moreover, my hypothetical rap song may be morally good in one way, or even in many ways (sensitive to matters of race and economic inequality) and not in another (insensitive to matters of gender and sexual orientation). In addition to its formal musical qualities and other aesthetic achievements such as, say, the imaginative development of its genre, it offers (1) a social critique of oppressive institutions (2) incorporates, and represents, ways of life marginalised and misunderstood in mainstream discourse (3) envisages how Afro-American protest might proceed and (4) lets penetrating voices, previously unheard or silenced, sing. And it has some lyrical content which I think demeans women. These are

challenging and troubling matters in the evaluation of artworks, and they are not easy to negotiate. Therefore, it could be beneficial to have a philosophical debate which would proceed by having several philosophers addressing a selection of the same songs, each working through how the material might be interpreted, assessed and weighted, alert to the handling of criteria and other 'meta' aspects, and responding to each other's responses.

18. I should note that Perkins has himself offered theories in his work most notably in his book *Film as Film* (1972).

19. See Klevan (2020) for an extended advocacy of a philosophical approach to film study which is non-theoretical.

20. No single piece of criticism will offer an objectively true report of the artwork which should rest without amplification, supplement, or challenge. Perkins' criticism offers a particular aesthetic experience that leads to a way of grappling with matters and concepts arising, and then to dialogue and further investigations, critical and philosophical.

21. For more on finding language appropriate to the artwork and the experience of it see Klevan (2020).

22. See Stear (2020) for an extended discussion of the problems regarding Gaut's attachment to the idea of 'prescription'.

23. For example, as pointed out earlier, I find the cacophonous ripping of the books and the insistent order to do so in *DPS* reminiscent of other atrocious behaviours in history. I assume that this is an unintended evocation and therefore revealing about how the film has not thought through the ramifications of its rhetoric. However, this evocation would not be necessarily obvious to everybody, or accepted even if pointed out.

24. Although I understand the context in which the word is offered, I am uneasy with classifying thoughts as 'pretheoretical' as if they were simply waiting to be theorised or could only be conceptualised in terms of forthcoming theorisation.

25. Regarding the improvement of data, I would not wish to make the move that is often proposed at this point, which is to be more objectively empirical, making use of social surveys, questionnaires, interviews, experiments, psychological tests, observations, and similar. This method would be inadequate in providing the form of disclosure required for the type of philosophising proposed.

26. Aaron Ridley (2003), in what I consider to be an important essay about the methodology of the philosophy of art, takes a similar position to my own regarding the matter of musical

ontology. He argues that characterising the identity of musical works will only be relevantly meaningful if pursued through evaluative criticism.

27. Such a realignment has been explicitly and implicitly argued for in the work of Roger Scruton and Peter Lamarque. For example, see Scruton (2007) and Lamarque (2014; 2020)

28. Ridley makes a similar point about evaluative engagement regarding musical ontology when he writes:

The question whether this or that performance, or style of performance, is actually any good [...] is scarcely raised. If one is serious about the philosophy of music, the last fact should strike one as scandalous [...]. [The] indifference to genuinely evaluative issues [...] presupposes a sharp distinction between what it is to take a philosophical interest in music and what it is to take a critical interest in it. It is true that such a distinction can be drawn. It is true, that is, that the philosophy of music is not identical to music criticism. But the distinction is not, and cannot be made to be, a sharp one, for unless one's philosophical engagement with music is driven by, and is of a sort that might pay dividends for, one's musical experience—including one's evaluative experience—there is no obvious sense in which one is engaged in philosophical aesthetics at all (2003: 214).