



Institute for Christian Studies  
Institutional Repository

Zuidervaart, Lambert. "Artistic Truth, Linguistically Turned: Variations on a Theme From Adorno, Habermas, and Hart." IN *Philosophy as Responsibility : a Celebration of Hendrik Hart's Contribution to the Discipline*, pp. 129-150. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002.

Used in accordance with the publisher's copyright and self-archiving policies.

November 29, 2013.

# Chapter 9: Lambert Zuidervaart

## Artistic Truth, Linguistically Turned: Variations on a Theme from Adorno, Habermas, and Hart

*All dimensions of experience may help us know truth...*

Hendrik Hart<sup>1</sup>

*All aesthetic questions terminate in those of the truth content of artworks...*

Theodor W. Adorno<sup>2</sup>

*The aesthetic "validity"... that we attribute to a work [of art] refers to its singularly illuminating power... to disclose anew an apparently familiar reality.*

Jürgen Habermas<sup>3</sup>

Hendrik Hart's 1972-73 graduate seminar in systematic philosophy marks a turning point in my intellectual life. I had arrived in Toronto that fall to study philosophical aesthetics with Calvin G. Seerveld, who set his students to work on Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Henk dedicated his own seminar to a thorough study of Herman Dooyeweerd's massive *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, a work I had begun to read at Dordt College. Students led nearly every session in this year-long seminar, and we became a formidable team of Dooyeweerd experts and critics. Hart's manner of directing the seminar and his own insights inspired our best efforts. Together with Seerveld's pioneering in the relatively unplowed field of aesthetics,<sup>4</sup> Hart's innovative work in systematic philosophy has provided a focus for much of my subsequent scholarship.

Hart and Seerveld would have their debates, especially over whether one needs to distinguish an aesthetic dimension to life, culture, and society. Their debates added a sense of urgency to my own inquiries. Deeper down, however, Hart and Seerveld shared a comprehensive conception of knowledge and truth, one which encompassed more than theory, logic, and propositions and could

accommodate the indirect, nondiscursive, and allusive character of much modern and contemporary art. Each in his own way continued Dooyeweerd's critique of "the pretended autonomy of theoretical thought" as a project of utmost significance to culture, religious practice, and Western society.

Looking back, I see just how formative this combination of interests has proved. The final and longest chapter in my master's thesis treats Kant's "dialectic of taste" as a profound but unsuccessful attempt to ground the truth character of aesthetic judgments.<sup>5</sup> The language of the concluding section, subtitled "Aesthetic Truth in Kant's Perspective" (440-66), has many a Hartian inflection. Not long afterwards, at a 1977 ICS summer seminar in aesthetics organized by Seerveld, I presented a paper on "Musical and Musicological Knowing" whose systematic reflections on analysis, theory, and knowledge plainly derive from Hart's work in epistemology. My subsequent study of Theodor W. Adorno's negative dialectic and aesthetic theory drew from Hart's critique of rationality, although Adorno helped me introduce a more explicitly social and political edge than I found in Hart's writings at the time.

This is not to say that I have embraced Hart's work uncritically. One issue in particular has troubled me. It shows up in reports to my doctoral committee (on which he served), in correspondence and conversations, and in my essay on his book *Understanding Our World*. The issue has to do with the connection between analysis and critique; between the logical dimension of knowledge, on the one hand, and human awareness of norms and their violation, of order and disorder, and of good and evil, on the other. The issue surfaces early on, in my master's thesis, where, taking a cue from Seerveld's emphasis on "imaginativity" and "allusivity," I suggest that aesthetic awareness, albeit non-identificatory, is "*the most elemental way*" in which people have self-reflective consciousness of a coherence between subject and object.<sup>6</sup> This implies an aesthetic way of knowing "order" that can be more or less truthful, even though, in Hartian or Seerveldian terms, it is pre-logical or pre-analytical. The issue receives a more forceful formulation in a proposition accompanying my doctoral dissertation, which responds to Hart's "The Impasse of Rationality Today"<sup>7</sup> as follows: "That we must follow logical order in our *explicitly* knowing order does not entail that our knowing order is logical: if we follow nonlogical order in our *implicitly* knowing order, then at least some of our knowing order may not be logical." This topic returns in my essay on *Understanding Our World*, where I question Hart's tendency to claim that conceptual and semantic modes of experience are the only ways in which "nomic conditions" can be known:

If nomic conditions are real in the [Hartian] sense that they obtain for whatever they make possible, then why would there be no other ways of knowing nomic conditions? Why, for example, could we not imagine nomic conditions, and in this imagining

come to know them? Is not such imagining of nomic conditions an essential feature of artistic activity as well as of the hypothetical element in scholarship?<sup>8</sup>

I raised such questions to resist a potential intellectualizing of the "reality" of nomic conditions (à la Plato, for example) and to suggest that they "would hardly seem 'real' if they could not be experienced in preconceptual ways."<sup>9</sup>

In the meantime, of course, Hart has revised his views on nearly every topic that provoked my interest in the first place. Today he probably would have fewer counter-objections to my old worries and criticisms than he had in the 1970's and early 1980's. In the essay quoted at the outset, for example, he mentions poetry, novels, films, and music as providing "truth and knowledge not available to... conceptual knowing," without conceding, however, that such artistic knowledge could afford valid insights into nomic conditions (or what the essay calls "regularity and structure in reality" and "an order of sameness").<sup>10</sup> At the same time, in moving away from his older account of analysis and order, he may have landed in anti-rationalist territory that I find equally problematic, although for different reasons.<sup>11</sup>

Enough of autobiography. My point is simply to acknowledge the formative role Hendrik Hart has played in my own intellectual life, and to thank him publicly for the creative and discerning directions he has taken the Kuyperian tradition in philosophy. Also, I wanted to set a context for the topic of this paper. Although the paper does not discuss Hart's writings at length, I owe to him my interest in developing a broader conception of knowledge and truth and my sense that the topic of "artistic truth" is still worth pursuing, despite a long-standing aversion to this topic in Anglo-American philosophy, and despite recent challenges to the idea of truth within poststructural and postanalytical philosophy.

There is no way to do justice to such a complex and contentious topic in a single essay or even to indicate how my own conception of artistic truth relates to crucial formulations by Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Derrida. Let me instead make some remarks on the history and significance of the topic and then sketch the beginning of an approach derived in part from Adorno and Habermas. In the conclusion I indicate how my approach might complement Hart's systematic philosophy.

## 2.

The Western philosophical debate about truth in art goes back to Plato and Aristotle. Whereas Book X of Plato's *Republic*, on a non-ironical reading, denies the arts of his day any capacity to carry truth, Aristotle's *Poetics* suggests that Greek tragedy (and, by extension, all the "imitative arts") can provide true insight into the sorts of events and characters that could occur under certain conditions. The difference between Plato and his most famous student turns

on their contrasting accounts of the nature and location of universal "forms," and on corresponding differences in their theories of knowledge and mimesis or representation. My own worries about a Hartian tendency to privilege analysis as the way to grasp order have historical origins in this debate.

The Plato/Aristotle debate in its many versions lasted until the eighteenth century, when new theories of art as expression drastically changed the ways in which truth is attributed to art. From now on the most forceful advocates of "artistic truth" would link it with creativity, imagination, and the expression of that which exceeds the grasp of ordinary or scientific understanding. One glimpses this new tendency in Kant's account of artistic "genius" as an imaginative capacity for presenting "aesthetical ideas," even though he would have found puzzling or downright dangerous subsequent Romantic claims that art's imaginative character makes it a "higher" source of truth than are science and bourgeois morality — a higher source alongside philosophy and religion, in Hegel's account of "absolute spirit." Hart's recent manner of attributing truth capacity to the arts reminds one of the Romantic emphasis on imagination and expression.

The debate shifts once more with the so-called "linguistic turn" in twentieth-century philosophy.<sup>12</sup> Although many traces remain of both premodern accounts of representation and post-Kantian emphases on expression, a philosophy whose head is linguistically turned cannot easily posit direct disconnections either between (representational) art and reality or between (expressive) art and the inner self. Increasingly the questions whether art can carry truth, and whether this capacity or its lack is crucial to art's significance, get posed in one of two ways: 1) Can arts-related conversation (interpretation, evaluation, criticism, historiography, and the like) be true or false? 2) Are the arts themselves languages, such that, depending on one's response to this question and one's theory of language, the arts lack or possess truth-capacities in the way that languages do?<sup>13</sup>

If the debate over truth in art, in its shifting guises, were merely the concern of philosophers, we might find it interesting but not all that relevant. This is particularly so of the way the debate has proceeded since philosophy became institutionalized as an academic profession and began to doubt its own relevance to contemporary society and culture. Yet I believe the topic is highly significant at a time when mass media, entertainment industries, and new computer technologies have become driving forces for an increasingly globalized consumer capitalist economy. A deep ambivalence pervades contemporary Western societies concerning the role of visual imagery, literature, and public performances in human life. Many people regard these as "mere entertainment" providing diversion for consumers and profits for producers and investors. Others, however, worry about the pedagogical, political, or moral impact of the arts and at times hold these to unyielding standards that the critics cannot meet in their own lives. Neither side seems to grasp what

enables the arts to provide either the "entertainment" or the "instruction" that people find satisfying or troubling, as the case may be. Yet everyone turns to visual imagery, literature, and performing arts to find orientation and to confirm or disconfirm orientations already found. Gaining orientation is essential to the acquaintance, recognition, understanding, and know-how that belong to "knowledge" in a broad sense. To that extent, it is not esoteric to regard the arts as ways of acquiring and testing knowledge or to consider specific works or events or experiences of art more or less truthful. The challenge for philosophers is to give an account of artistic truth that illuminates the contemporary cultural scene and provides theoretical insight of use to those who develop public policies, educational strategies, and personal or group decisions in connection with the arts.

Unfortunately, many standard theories of truth prove deficient in this regard. I do not have the space to review them here.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the easiest way to indicate their inadequacy is to observe that they restrict their attention to linguistic and conceptual bearers of truth. Richard Kirkham lists the following as candidates for the sorts of things that Anglo-American philosophers have considered capable of being true or false: "beliefs, propositions, judgments, assertions, statements, theories, remarks, ideas, acts of thought, utterances, sentence tokens, sentence types, sentences (unspecified), and speech acts." Although Kirkham urges tolerance about which candidates to admit, arguing that "there is no sort of entity that cannot in principle bear truth values," he does not actually expand the field beyond linguistic and conceptual entities.<sup>15</sup> So long as the class of truth bearers is restricted in these ways, it will be difficult to construct a theory of truth in art.

Difficult, but not impossible. I can think, for example, of two ways to regard propositions as vehicles of artistic truth. One way is to say that works of art simply *are* propositions or that artworks can be true or false only insofar as artworks function as objects of logical discrimination, in both production and reception. Reminiscent of early Wittgenstein's description of propositions as pictures, this first approach says nothing about the unique manner in which art "carries" truth or falsehood. Another way to locate artistic truth in propositions is to say art *embodies* propositions in a variety of artistic phenomena and media. On this approach artistic truth exists independently of its embodiment, even though the approach could allow certain propositions to be unique to art in the sense that they cannot be expressed or communicated except by way of art.<sup>16</sup> The disadvantage to this second approach is that it reifies a logical object function into a thing in itself, as if propositions are independent and eternal universals simply waiting to be instantiated. Not only is this a questionable view of propositions but also it ignores the social, historical, and political character of artistic truth.

Although some other version may be possible, and although I have not given a detailed account of the two versions mentioned, I think the propositional view

of artistic truth is beyond redemption. If there is truth in art, it will have to be located in something other than propositions. The same applies to the other conceptual and linguistic contenders — judgments, sentences, utterances, assertions, and the like. For what distinguishes much of art, as it has developed historically in various societies and under various political conditions, is its tendency to favor the nonconceptual, nonlinguistic, and nonpropositional. In fact, partly because Western societies have privileged science and technology but have failed to find meaning in rationality, much of twentieth-century art has become anti-propositional. To expect of such art that its truth be propositional would misread much of recent history. A better approach is that recommended by Adorno: to try to understand such art's incomprehensibility.

Before turning to Adorno, let me note one anti-propositional approach that might seem compatible with a theory of artistic truth but actually undermines the entire project. Some philosophers have used speech act theory to propound a deflationary thesis to the effect that "is true" is not a genuine predicate. Consequently, "there are no such properties as truth and falsity" and "nothing can bear truth values."<sup>17</sup> The deflationary thesis has one potentially salutary effect, namely to break a fixation on conceptual and linguistic entities as privileged bearers of truth. But this potential is purchased at the price of rendering theories of truth superfluous, and that would apply to a theory of artistic truth as well. The deflationary thesis is a parallel in the analytic tradition to a questioning of the very idea of truth within some of French poststructuralism.

### 3.

Although the characterization of truth bearers forms only part of an adequate theory, it is decisive for the question whether truth can be meaningfully attributed to art. That is why I find Adorno's conception of truth content (*Wahrheitsgehalt*) so instructive. Adorno's conception allows one to attribute a nonpropositional import to artistic phenomena that is true or false but is neither representational along either Platonic or Aristotelian lines nor expressive in the manner proposed by Romantic theories. Once that fundamental point is granted, one can address the other questions of truth theory, roughly, what truth is, what it means, and what it does.<sup>18</sup>

Adorno clears the deck of all remnants of logical positivism when he describes the truth content of artworks as neither factual nor propositional yet perceptible and structural:

They have truth content and they do not have it. Positive science and the philosophy derived from it do not attain it. It is neither the work's factual content nor its fragile and self-suspendable logicality.... What transcends the factual in the artwork, its spiritual content, cannot be pinned down to what is individually, sensually

given but is, rather, constituted by way of this empirical givenness.... [A]rtworks transcend their factuality through their facture, through the consistency of their elaboration.<sup>19</sup>

Can we give a fuller and more positive characterization of truth in art? In one sense we cannot, since the truth content of each artwork is unique to it and cannot be cleanly extracted from it: "The truth content of artworks cannot be immediately identified. Just as it is known only mediately, it is mediated in itself."<sup>20</sup> Yet Adorno's discussion allows for a number of additional characterizations, such as these:<sup>21</sup> 1) Truth in art has historical, societal, and political dimensions. Truth content is not a metaphysical idea or essence, for it is bound to specific historical stages, societal formations, and political contexts. 2) Truth in art is not merely a human construct, even though it would not be available in art were it not for the production and reception of particular works in specific media. 3) Truth in art emerges from the interaction between artists' intentions and artistic materials. It is the materialization of the most advanced consciousness of contradictions within the horizon of possible reconciliation. 4) Truth in art depends both on the successful mediation of content and form and on the suspension of form on behalf of that which exceeds this mediation. 5) Truth in art is nonpropositional, yet it invites and needs critical interpretation. 6) Truth in art is never available in a directly nonillusory way: "Art has truth as the semblance of the illusionless."<sup>22</sup>

To summarize Adorno's conception, truth in art is carried by sociohistorical meaning that emerges from artistic production, depends on the mediation of content and form, resides in particular works, transcends them, and invites critical interpretation. Perhaps not every work has truth content (*Wahrheitsgehalt*), but every work having import (*Gehalt*) calls for judgments about the truth or falsity of its import. In a sense, then, truth in art has a double location. First, it is located in the truth content of autonomous works of art.<sup>23</sup> The concept of truth content suggests that truth is *in* artworks and not simply prompted or denoted by them. Second, truth is located in a reciprocation between critical interpretation and artistic phenomena, a reciprocation that occurs by way of the truth content of particular works.

The advantage to Adorno's approach is twofold. First, it refuses to divorce truth from the phenomena of art, insisting instead that truth is thoroughly mediated by the phenomena. Second, it resists the philosopher's temptation to read into art whatever truth the philosopher wishes to find there. But this advantage comes with a double disadvantage. Not only does Adorno privilege autonomous art, specifically *autonomous artworks*, as the site of truth in art, but also he privileges philosophy, specifically *negative dialectical philosophy*, as the most authoritative interpreter of artistic truth.<sup>24</sup>

Admittedly it is difficult to give a philosophical account of artistic truth that does not fall into one of these two traps. Like Albrecht Wellmer, I have found

Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action particularly helpful in that regard.<sup>25</sup> Let me briefly summarize elements of Habermas that are relevant for a theory of truth. Then I shall propose an approach that combines the best insights of Adorno and Habermas, but in a language that does not merely derive from either one.

Habermas retains propositions as bearers of truth, but he turns the claim to truth into an intersubjective validity claim.<sup>26</sup> He speaks in this connection of shifting from a subject-object to a subject-subject paradigm. Habermas regards the claim to truth (*Wahrheit*) as one of three validity claims for which every speaker is accountable when she or he uses language to reach an understanding. The other two validity claims are normative legitimacy or rightness (*Richtigkeit*) and sincerity or authenticity (*Wahrhaftigkeit*). As is illustrated in the following table, the three validity claims correspond to three universal pragmatic functions of language: to represent something in the world, to establish interpersonal relations, and to express the speaker's intentions, respectively. These functions can be derived by considering the three types of illocutionary force that, according to Habermas, speech acts can have: constative (assert, inform, etc.), regulative (promise, request, etc.), and expressive (wish, avow, etc.). Truth is the primary validity claim that we attach to constative speech acts.

#### Diagram 1

##### Habermas's Correlations of Validity Claims, Language Functions, and Speech Acts

Validity Claims	Universal Pragmatic Language Functions	Types of Speech acts
1. propositional truth	representing a world	constative
2. normative legitimacy	establishing interpersonal relations	regulative
3. sincerity or authenticity	expressing intentions	expressive

Habermas says that language users raise a claim to truth whenever they make utterances as a way of asserting, informing, describing, and the like. In ordinary conversation this claim often accompanies language use without calling attention to itself. Truth becomes an issue, however, when an asserted proposition is called into question. At this point it becomes apparent that the speaker has raised a truth claim when asserting the proposition. The only way to "redeem" this truth claim is to engage in discourse. Habermas distinguishes "discourse" (*Diskurs*) from communicative action (*Handlung*). In *communicative action* we silently presuppose and accept the validity claims implicit in our utterances. In *discourse*, by contrast, we engage in argumentation, thematizing validity claims that have become problematic and investigating their legitimation (*Berechtigung*). In discourse we do not exchange

"informations" as we might in an ordinary conversation about the weather, but rather we exchange arguments that serve to ground or refute validity claims that have been problematized. For the most part, "facts" become a topic in discourse, not in conversation.<sup>27</sup>

Habermas tends to regard *aesthetic* validity claims as expressive rather than constative or regulative. In other words, when people call something beautiful or publicly judge the quality of a musical performance or literary work, they are primarily expressing their own experience and raising a claim to be sincere or truthful in that expression.<sup>28</sup> Such a claim can, of course, be challenged by any conversation partner. The sorting out of such challenges would characterize aesthetic discourse. Habermas also tends to characterize art and art criticism as a differentiated value sphere in which expressive validity claims can be thematized. Science/technology and law/morality, by contrast, are differentiated value spheres for the thematizing of constative and regulative validity claims, respectively.

Because Habermas grounds his theory in a reconstruction of social theory and of ordinary language, his approach privileges neither autonomous artworks as the site of truth in art nor philosophy as the most authoritative interpreter of artistic truth. This provides a worthwhile correction to Adorno's approach. Unfortunately, it comes at the expense of nearly eliminating art's capacity to carry truth. At best, in a modification borrowed from Wellmer, Habermas accords artworks a "truth potential" as a singular power "to disclose anew an apparently familiar reality" and thereby to address ordinary experience, in which the three validity domains intermesh.<sup>29</sup> This account implies that art is not entirely locked up in an autonomous sphere of aesthetic validity overseen by professional artists and expert critics but can directly stimulate transformed relations among ordinary selves or between them and the world. Nevertheless, given the distance Habermas himself has pointed out between ordinary experience and the expert culture of the aesthetic domain, his appeal to artistic truth potential is not grounded in a social-theoretical account of how this potential could be actualized.

This problem is linked to Habermas's tendency to underestimate the disclosive functions of ordinary language, as Charles Taylor suggests.<sup>30</sup> Although Habermas grants Taylor the point that ordinary language serves to open up new perspectives on the world, interpersonal relations, and one's self, he does not treat this as a central function of language. Rather, linguistic disclosure is a pre-staging, as it were, of the communicative action in which validity claims are raised.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, Habermas considers the truth potential of artworks and the disclosive function of language to be similar in precisely this regard:

To the extent that experiences with their inner nature gain independence in an aesthetic sphere of its own, the works of

autonomous art take on the role of eye-opening objects that provoke new modes of perceiving, new attitudes and forms of behavior. Aesthetic experiences are not linked to particular practices; they are not related to cognitive-instrumental skills and moral beliefs that grow out of innerworldly learning processes; they are bound up with the world-constituting, world-disclosing function of language.<sup>32</sup>

This has prompted sympathetic critics such as Maeve Cooke to propose that Habermas admit additional types of validity claims beyond the three he identifies, and to expand his conception of communicative action to include the sorts of interpretation and formulation that occur not only in art but also in ordinary language.<sup>33</sup>

4.

This is not the place to sort out such Habermasian debates. Instead let me propose an approach to artistic truth that combines Adorno's insight into artistic "truth content" with Habermas's insight into the differentiated character of validity claims. My suggestion is to consider artistic truth to be internal to artistic phenomena, as Adorno claims, yet differentiated into three dimensions, in a manner reminiscent of Habermas. As I shall explain, these dimensions can be understood in terms of either three relationships that artistic phenomena sustain or three levels at which they function. Moreover, the prevalence of one or another dimension correlates with the historically conditioned status of the phenomenon — i.e., whether or not it is constituted as a work of art.<sup>34</sup>

Let us suppose that all the art we know of, whether "high" or "low," whether "popular" or "esoteric," whether "mass art" or "folk art," has as one of its tasks to proffer and provoke imaginative insight. To be imaginative, such insight cannot be divorced from the media of imagination — images, stories, metaphors, musical compositions, dramatic enactments, and the like. To be insightful, such media of imagination cannot be deployed in either arbitrary or rigid ways. Perhaps, to avoid the static and visual metaphor of "insight," we should speak of imaginative inseeings, imaginative inhearings, imaginative intouchings, and the like. As a generic term I shall use the word "disclosure" rather than "insight."<sup>35</sup>

I take it that when people talk about truth in art, they are referring to how art discloses something of vital importance that is hard to pin down. When philosophers disagree about how to theorize truth in art, their disputes usually concern what art does or can disclose, how this disclosure takes place, and whether this disclosure is important, legitimate, preferable, and the like. Philosophers also disagree as to whether this disclosure is also a concealment (Heidegger), and, if so, how the process of disclosure and concealment contributes to human knowledge.

Art can be true in the sense that its imaginative disclosures can uncover what needs to be uncovered. Art can be false in the sense that its imaginative disclosures can cover up what needs to be uncovered. Once we realize what is at stake in artistic truth or falsehood, it will not do to say "This is merely imaginative; just playful or ironic or parodic exploration; the work of creative genius." Such special pleadings have the inadvertent effect of making art seem irrelevant or frivolous, as if imagination has little to do with disclosure. But it also will not suffice simply to attack disturbing art as "blatantly immoral" or "sacrilegious" or "repressive." Such hyperbolic accusations inadvertently make art seem more directly effective than the imaginative character of its truth or falsity permits, as if artistic disclosure is not tied to imagination.

Philosophers who reflect on contemporary art, and who engage in cultural and social critique, must ask, "What needs to be disclosed in an imaginative way?" This is not so different from the question facing every artist of integrity. There is no way to answer the question once and for all, especially not when one is an artist, since that which needs disclosure is continually changing, as are the media of imaginative disclosure. In the broadest terms, a philosopher must appeal to a general understanding of good and evil. At various stages of social history one or another pathology may have priority. Hence, for example, Adorno may have been right to connect the truth of modern art with the memory of suffering and the exposure of antagonisms in a society that erases this memory and resists such exposure while it multiplies suffering and deepens antagonisms. Nevertheless, where imaginative disclosure is genuinely needed, what needs to be disclosed cannot be limited to autonomous artworks, nor can the identification of these needs be the sole prerogative of philosophy.

It is crucial, I think, that imaginative disclosure occurs in art itself, and not merely in people's lives when they experience it, talk about it, and engage in arts-related discourse. At the same time, however, I see little reason to restrict imaginative disclosure to the "import" of autonomous works of art. Every artistic phenomenon, whether or not it is constituted as a work of art, occurs in contexts of production and use. Accordingly, the idea of imaginative disclosure can be differentiated into concepts of mediated expression, configured import, and interpretable presentation. "Mediated expression" indicates a relationship to the context of production. It pertains to the phenomenon's status as an imaginative artifact. "Interpretable presentation" indicates a relationship to the context of use. It pertains to the phenomenon's status as an imaginative object of appreciation, interpretation, and criticism. "Configured import," however, indicates the phenomenon's relationship to its own internal demands, and it may well be peculiar to artworks. In traditional terms, which Adorno also uses, import has to do with the relationship between content and form within phenomena that are institutionally constituted as works of art.

This implies that an artistic phenomenon can be true in three respects: true with respect to the artist's intentions, true with respect to the audience's needs and expectations, and true with respect to an artwork's internal demands. It also implies that an artistic phenomenon succeeding in one or two respects can nonetheless fail in another, just as a well-formed speech act asserting a proposition can be inappropriate, for example, or a genuine act of promising can be misinterpreted. I designate these three dimensions of artistic truth with the terms authenticity (*vis-à-vis* the artist's intentions), significance (*vis-à-vis* the audience's expectations), and integrity (*vis-à-vis* the work's internal demands). Perhaps "great works of art" tend to display all three of these, and continue to display them in new contexts of use.

One can also take such dimensions of truth to mark different levels of functioning. Thus, for example, authenticity pertains to the expression of intentions, significance to the establishing of interpersonal relations, and integrity to the presenting of a world, all within a process of imaginative disclosure.<sup>36</sup> If this is right, then one can postulate more precise links between artistic truth and the sorts of speech acts that commonly occur when people engage in art appreciation, interpretation, and criticism — more precise than a diffuse entering into ordinary experience where three validity domains intermesh, as described by Wellmer and Habermas. To indicate these links, I need to introduce one more set of terms.

It is common knowledge, and a basis for much of analytic aesthetics, that language usage pervades ordinary experiences of art. Viewers, listeners, and readers talk about art, write and read about it, watch videos and television programs about art, read reviews, listen to their acquaintances talk about art, and so forth. Let me introduce the phrase "art talk" as a way of summarizing all these sorts of language usage.<sup>37</sup> When art talk occurs as a relatively unproblematic use of language to reach an understanding, it can be called "art conversation." When it enters a more "reflective" mode, however, and implicit validity claims become an explicit topic of discussion, art talk can be called "art discourse."<sup>38</sup> In everyday art talk people regularly and almost imperceptibly slide between conversation and discourse. There are many possible topics (depending on the artistic medium, the background and experience of the participants, and the setting and occasion), and many different dimensions to art can provide points of entry: technical, economic, political, ethical, etc. Here I am singling out the topic of truth as approached *via* art's aesthetic dimension. My proposal is as follows.

Like language usage in most other contexts, art conversation tends not to thematize the validity claims implicit in speech acts, but it does make the truth dimensions of art available for art discourse. Conversations about art address, among other topics, the artist's intentions, the audience's expectations, and the artwork's internal demands. These conversations shift readily across descriptive, interpretive, explanatory, evaluative, and prescriptive registers. Frequently

one discussion partner or another will find a particular art phenomenon lacking in authenticity or significance or integrity, saying this painting is not genuine or that piece of music doesn't do anything for me or that film is a piece of trash. If someone else disagrees, then the implicit "norms" of authenticity, significance, and integrity can themselves become topics of discussion. Someone, for example, may ask you why you do not find the painting genuine, or why you think it should be genuine, or what you mean by "genuine," and you might respond by appealing to some notion of authenticity. When you give reasons for your judgment and explain your criteria, your conversation tends to turn into discourse.

Art discourse does more than thematize the dimensions of artistic truth, however. It also thematizes the validity dimensions of art conversation itself. Hence the topic for discursive consideration might very well be not simply the authenticity, significance, or integrity of the artistic phenomenon but the sincerity or appropriateness or correctness of a discussant's claims about it. Often, in fact, the topics of art discourse jump back and forth between artistic truth and conversational validity claims. I might assert that a painting by Norman Rockwell presents too rosy a picture of American family life. You might dispute my assertion and ask me to defend or explain it. I might reply by appealing to certain facts — the clean-scrubbed look of the children, the sentimental happiness of the dog, etc. You might grant these facts, but say they do not make up a rosy picture. Or you might grant that they make up a rosy picture, but you might deny that such a picture is too rosy. Very soon we might find ourselves discussing what Rockwell "was trying to depict" (intention) and how others have interpreted this depiction (significance). And so it would go.

At a minimum, this dispute would have two inseparable and simultaneous poles: the painting's import, and the asserted proposition. To reach agreement concerning the first pole, we would need to look at the painting together and try to see "what the painting is all about." To reach agreement concerning the second pole, we would need to establish whether certain shared facts bear out the asserted proposition. If we had not both looked at the painting with an eye to its import, we would be hard pressed to find sufficient shared facts relevant to the disputed proposition. Facts are funded (not founded) by objects as experienced, even though, according to Habermas, facts play a role only in discourse.

So I wish to postulate not simply a general connection between artistic truth and conversational validity claims, but more specific links between each of the three dimensions of artistic truth and each of the three validity claims: between artistic authenticity and expressive sincerity, between artistic significance and normative legitimacy, and between artistic integrity and propositional truth. Moreover, the links are dyadic. In the first place, art conversations cannot get at artistic authenticity without raising a conversational claim

to sincerity; they cannot get at artistic significance without raising a conversational claim to normative legitimacy; and they cannot get at artistic integrity without raising a conversational claim to propositional truth. In the second place, our experience with issues of authenticity, significance, and integrity in art, and our art conversation about these issues, are part of the lived matrix from which the content of the correlative validity claims arises.

If these links and their dyadic structure could be demonstrated in sufficient detail, that would help show that imaginative disclosure is neither esoteric (Adorno) nor peripheral (Habermas). It would also provide a way to build disclosure into the very fabric of communicative action, rather than relegating it to a preliminary stage within language usage. My proposal might even offer a different perspective on propositional truth, both by tying it more closely to imaginative disclosure than standard truth theories allow and by indicating truth itself to be a multidimensional idea whose reduction to propositional truth leads to theoretical impoverishment and practical dead ends.

I must finish on that promissory note, hoping to redeem some of my more ambitious claims in a book-length manuscript. Let me conclude with comments about the relevance of my approach to Hart's work in epistemology.

5.

Earlier I indicated my long-standing reservations with the way in which Hart's writings link analysis and critique. If conceptual and semantic modes of experience are the primary or exclusive ways in which order is known, as Hart seems to think, then this puts rationality in a privileged position, contrary to the gist of his own criticisms of what he calls the rationality tradition. As is apparent from nearly all his writings, those criticisms are motivated by a religious conviction that knowledge and truth are not only multidimensional but also guided by a deeply spiritual trust with respect to "the existential boundary issues of experience: life and death, origin and destiny, meaning and happiness, good and evil..."<sup>39</sup> In these respects he is a faithful follower of Dooyeweerd, despite the differences in their vocabularies. Both of them propose holistic epistemologies based on anti-reductionist ontologies and motivated by religious concerns.

In Hart's later writings, however, his criticisms of the rationality tradition generate a problematic account of religion. Opposing a tendency to reduce Christianity and other religions to systems of propositions and beliefs (which can then be rejected as irrational by enlightened critics), Hart describes religion as a community's living out of trust, guided by an historically narrative wisdom.<sup>40</sup> That leads to what I consider to be an overly spiritualized epistemology and an insufficiently rational spirituality. I shall sketch what this means, and then suggest how my own approach to the topic of artistic truth could provide fruitful revisions. For brevity's sake, let me restrict my discussion to the essay "Conceptual Understanding and Knowing *Other-wise*."

This essay describes rationality as the “capacity to reach a conceptual understanding of regularity and structure in reality which gives us a general grasp of things.” The measure of worth for conceptual insights is their usefulness in dealing with reality: “If [concepts] are true in our experience this can at most mean that with their help we have been able to make better adjustments to real relationships in our real experience. They help us to control disease, improve crops, spread wealth, and do many other wonderful things that could not have been done without them.” Whether such uses are themselves worthwhile depends, in turn, on their integration with a spiritual way of life: “[Rational knowledge] gives potentially beneficial powers to our culture, even though such power can be... abused... . Hence we [Westerners] face a serious call to responsibility in knowing how to deploy our rational powers... . The power is not as such evil, nor is it automatically good. Only what we do with it in our spiritual journey determines the good and the evil.”<sup>41</sup>

These passages, and many others like them, express what I would call an overly spiritualized epistemology. By that, in this context, I mean an account of “rational knowledge” which first reduces the validity dimensions of communicative action to propositional truth, then reduces propositional truth to a matter of practical effects, and finally subsumes the question of practical effectiveness under a postrational spirituality. I have more to say about “postrational spirituality” below. First I need to explain why I see two reductions, and why I find them problematic.

I find Hart’s account of “rational knowledge” unduly restrictive in light of the “rationality tradition” he criticizes. Since I’ve already discussed Habermas, I’ll return to him, even though one could just as easily go back to Kant’s tripartite discussion of rationality — understanding (*Verstand*), practical reason (*Vernunft*), and reflective judgment (*Urteilskraft*). Kant’s discussion is the obvious predecessor to Habermas’s differentiation of communicative rationality into cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic-practical rationality, with their correlated validity claims of propositional truth, normative legitimacy, and expressive sincerity. It seems to me that Hart credits only the first of these moments of communicative rationality and ignores the other two altogether. This helps explain why he tends to link analysis and order, since, historically, cognitive-instrumental rationality has been concerned to uncover laws, patterns, and the like. But he also overlooks the critical side of cognitive-instrumental rationality, which Kant adumbrated in his discussion of reason (*Vernunft*) in its theoretical employment, and which Habermas stresses by pointing to the communicative preconditions that make such rationality possible. Instead Hart loads critical capacities into other, “nonrational” dimensions of knowledge that trump, as it were, the deliverances of (propositionally restricted) rationality. Hence there can be no criteria internal to “rational knowledge” that help us adjudicate the truth or falsity of its discoveries and assertions, but only the external criterion of a conceptual

insight's potential benefit for human life. Since Hart does not deal with questions about how "rationally" to sort out the priorities of different potential benefits or to distinguish genuine benefits from bogus ones, but assumes these questions will be adequately answered by our spiritual orientation, I reluctantly but ineluctably conclude that he has proposed an overly spiritualized epistemology.

The flip side of this, as I have already hinted, is an insufficiently rational spirituality, or what I described in passing as a postrational spirituality. In "Conceptual Understanding and Knowing *Other-wise*," Hart describes "spiritual knowing" as "knowing focused in hope and trust." Such knowing "seeks to embrace an open vision of hope in embodied trust, without domination or totalization." It allows people to "come to know our future, our comfort, our neighbor in ways that give shape to communal traditions in narratives which direct, edify, and comfort us..." The faith-talk appropriate to such spiritual knowing is "metaphorical" in the sense that it "breaks through the limits of given language to remain open to saying what lies beyond being said." So too the beliefs of faith — a rational dimension within spiritual knowing, according to Hart — are "an imaginative articulation of how trusted forces speak to us as they guide us."<sup>42</sup>

As these passages illustrate, Hart does not advocate a totally irrational spirituality. This would be very difficult to do so long as one speaks of spiritual *knowing*, gives rationality a (limited) role in full-fledged, multidimensional, and integral knowledge, and recognizes a place for faith-talk and beliefs of faith within spirituality. My worry, therefore, is not that Hart has rendered spirituality *irrational* but rather that he has made it *insufficiently rational*. It is telling, I think, that he seldom raises the question of false or destructive spirituality, other than in his caustic and astute comments on the latent spirituality of the rationality tradition. Yet if spirituality is truly a way of knowing, then there must be differences between better and worse instances of it, and there must be ways to tell the difference. Not every object of hope and trust is worthy of such, as the Hebrew prophets made abundantly clear. Not every communal narrative tradition shaped by spiritual knowing promotes human flourishing, as the sordid history of nationalist, racist, and imperialist mythologies in the twentieth century makes painfully plain. Nor will it suffice at such points of deep critique simply to appeal to the story guiding one's own community of faith, which as often as not has squandered whatever hope and trust it receives and has perpetuated the destruction it decries. What is needed is a spirituality that is both critical and self-critical, and for this neither metaphorical faith-talk nor imaginative beliefs are adequate. As described by Hart, they are not sufficiently rational to support criticism and self-criticism. Moreover, because these are the only elements of rationality he admits into spiritual knowing, the spirituality he describes is insufficiently rational.

To prevent misunderstanding, let me hasten to add that the missing elements of rationality of most concern here are not Hart's truncated version of rationality as the conceptual understanding of order. Instead I surmise that the pressure created by Hart's restricted notion of rationality drives other elements of rationality from his account of spirituality. If rationality were conceived instead as communicative, hence intersubjective, rather than monological, and as oriented toward a plurality of validity claims rather than toward a (constructed) order of reality, then a richer account of the rationality within spirituality could be given, and the necessity of spiritual discernment and discourse could be fully acknowledged.

Here my own account of artistic truth might help. Much earlier I mentioned the Romantic flavor to Hart's manner of attributing truth capacity to the arts in this essay. He seems to have an expressive theory of art, according to which art discloses the higher truths of the inner self, or at least ones that are "not available to discursive conceptual knowing."<sup>43</sup> In retrospect, this *notion* of artistic truth seems available only to a *philosophy* that has not completed the linguistic turn. An incomplete linguistic turn also affects Hart's accounts of rationality and spirituality, both of which assume a type of immediacy between subject and object, even when the object is a mystery of faith. More specifically, it affects Hart's account of the elements of rationality within spiritual knowing, namely, faith-talk and beliefs of faith. When he describes faith-talk as "metaphorical," the implied concept of metaphor is the Romantic symbol, which directly expresses the ineffable without the intervention of ordinary language.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, when he characterizes beliefs of faith as "imaginative articulations," the implied concept of imagination is Romantic creative intuition, which directly captures what ordinary understanding cannot grasp.

Such nonrational immediacy disappears, however, if one postulates an internally differentiated idea of artistic truth and links the dimensions of artistic truth with validity dimensions in art conversation, which themselves can be discursively thematized. Then imaginative disclosures, such as one finds in art, appear to contain important elements of (communicative) rationality: discussable norms, if you will, of authenticity, significance, and integrity. It also appears that such elements call for conversation and discourse that have their own elements of rationality: the validity claims of expressive sincerity, normative legitimacy, and propositional truth. Moreover, the rationality of both art and art talk are dialogical rather than monological, so that the possibility of criticism and self-criticism is built into the very fabric of imaginative disclosure.

Similar points can and should be made about faith-talk and beliefs of faith. One can grant that these are metaphorical and imaginative without thereby pitting them against or placing them above rationality. If faith-talk and beliefs of faith function as means of imaginative disclosure within spirituality, on my

account of imaginative disclosure they will be open to assessments of their authenticity, significance, and integrity. If they function as means of trustful conversation, on my account of conversation they will imply discussable validity claims to sincerity, legitimacy, and propositional truth. And if faith-talk and beliefs of faith involve both imaginative disclosure and trustful conversation, as I suspect they do, then they will display a nexus of disclosive truth and communicative rationality very similar to the linkages I have mapped for art and art talk.

On this proposed revision of Hartian philosophy, spirituality would no longer seem *insufficiently* rational, but *appropriately* rational. Spirituality construed along these lines will preserve the unique character of "spiritual knowing," but it will not threaten to turn "knowing otherwise" into something that is otherwise than knowing. Perhaps, then, the long journey of exploration that Hendrik Hart helped me launch a few decades ago will have turned up a few discoveries that he, too, finds beneficial for a spirituality he has so generously nurtured, exemplified, and studied as a systematic philosopher in the Kuyperian tradition.<sup>45</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Hart 1997: 38.
- 2 Adorno 1970: 498; 1997: 335.
- 3 Habermas 1985: 203.
- 4 See Zuidervaart 1995a: 1-22.
- 5 See Zuidervaart 1977: 325-466.
- 6 Zuidervaart 1977: 454-56.
- 7 Hart 1981: 174-200. This paper was particularly helpful for sorting out Adorno's "dialectic of enlightenment." See the chapters titled "Art as Knowledge and Praxis" and "Ambiguities of Authentic Culture" in Zuidervaart 1981: 93-126, 127-54. Significant portions of these chapters are revised and incorporated into Zuidervaart 1991, especially 122-77.
- 8 Zuidervaart 1985: 53-54. The term "nomic conditions" points to what Dooyeweerd calls "the law-side" of creation.
- 9 Zuidervaart 1985: 54.
- 10 Hart 1997: 39, 34-35.
- 11 Some of this new worry emerged in the January interim course on "Creator and Creatures" that we co-taught at ICS in 1988.
- 12 Here I use "linguistic turn" in an expansive sense to include the later Heidegger, the later Wittgenstein, Gadamer, and Adorno (whom I consider half-turned) as well as structuralism, poststructuralism, analytic philosophy after World War II, postanalytical philosophy, and most versions of feminist philosophy. I do not mean to suggest that topics such as mimesis or expression have fallen out of fashion — see, for example, Walton 1990 and Davies 1994. Rather, these chestnuts of philosophical aesthetics now get roasted over a fire that feeds upon the unavoidable linguistic mediation of art and aesthetic experience.
- 13 Posing the question in this second way allows one to connect Anglo-American philosophers such as Susanne K. Langer and Nelson Goodman with the German philosophers Gadamer and Adorno, despite many discontinuities between their intellectual traditions and, on either side of the Atlantic, strong contrasts in how each figure relates art and language. Adrienne Chaplin-Dengerink makes some astute comparisons between Langer and Goodman on this topic. See Chaplin-Dengerink 1999.
- 14 Kirkham 1992 is perhaps the best introduction to theories of truth in Anglo-American philosophy. Kirkham claims that "a failure to grasp the big picture about truth is the root cause of many philosophical mistakes" (ix). Other recent surveys of the same tradition include Schmitt 1995 and Lynch 1998. For an introductory treatment that gives greater attention to continental philosophy, see Allen 1993.
- 15 See Kirkham 1992: 54-72; the quotes are from 54 and 59. Kirkham does explore possible worlds in which teddy bears and flowers can be bearers of truth, but the teddy bears in his thought experiment function as linguistic objects, and the flowers seem to function as propositions. See 61-63.
- 16 I owe this version of the approach to suggestions from my colleague in philosophy at Calvin College, Del Ratzsch.
- 17 Kirkham 1992: 70, describing a thesis that he rejects on 69-72 and 329-39.
- 18 I say "roughly" because truth theorists disagree about what they are trying to accomplish and have differing views concerning what can count as a theory of truth.
- 19 Adorno 1970: 194-95; 1997: 128-29.

- 20 Adorno 1970: 195; 1997: 129.
- 21 Here I simply summarize parts of the detailed account in Zuidervaart 1991. As one would expect from a critical follower of Hegel and Marx, Adorno's characterizations are neither merely descriptive nor purely normative. They are simultaneously descriptive and normative.
- 22 Adorno 1970: 199; 1997: 132.
- 23 Adorno's conception of the artwork's autonomy is dialectical, complex, and not easily summarized. Autonomy has to do with the work's relative independence in society and its lack of obvious social functions, such that in enacting self-criticism it can expose hidden "contradictions" in society. For a recent reexamination of this conception, see Zuidervaart 1999.
- 24 I elaborate these observations and criticisms in Zuidervaart 1991, especially chapters 8 and 9.
- 25 See Wellmer 1991: 1-35. I discuss Wellmer's "stereoscopic" reading of Adorno in Zuidervaart 1991, chapter 11, and will not rehash that discussion here.
- 26 My drastically abbreviated account of Habermas's theory derives from many of his writings. His most important social-theoretical presentation is in Habermas 1984. He gives a lucid summary in Habermas 1994: 45-74. The earliest comprehensive statement of his discursive theory of truth is Habermas 1973: 211-65, republished in Habermas 1986: 127-83.
- 27 Among recent monographs that elaborate and criticize Habermas's approach. I recommend three that focus on truth theory, ethics, and philosophy of language, respectively: Swindall 1999, Rehg 1994, and Cooke 1994.
- 28 "Primarily," because Habermas holds that every speech act implicitly raises all three types of validity claim. A specific speech act in a certain context will, however, raise one claim more directly and the other two claims more indirectly. A meteorologist's statement about weather conditions to a colleague, for example, would more likely be challenged for lack of truth than for lack of appropriateness or lack of sincerity. Nevertheless, the colleague could always problematize the statement along regulative or expressive lines, if it were uttered loudly during a funeral, say, or simply dropped in the middle of a heart-to-heart sharing of their feelings toward one another.
- 29 Habermas 1985: 203. Habermas's revision of his earlier account of art comes in response to Martin Jay's essay "Habermas and Modernism" in the same volume. See Bernstein 1985: 125-39.
- 30 See Taylor 1991: 23-35.
- 31 Habermas 1991: 214-64. Note, for example, how little Habermas actually concedes to Taylor on 221-22.
- 32 Habermas 1994: 73-74.
- 33 See Cooke 1994: 62-63, 74-84. In his response to Seele 1991, Habermas mentions "aesthetic harmony (or evaluative cogency)" as a fourth validity claim. He contrasts this, however, with the other three validity claims as follows (Habermas 1991: 227): "Value standards and the corresponding evaluative utterances can be validated only indirectly, namely by means of authentically world-disclosing productions. Things are different in the case of factual, normative or experiential utterances. Here, their justification aims at proving the existence of factual matters, the acceptability of modes of action or norms, and the transparency of subjective experiences."
- 34 I indicate the need to historicize the concept of "artwork" in Zuidervaart 1995b: 37-54. My suggestions about artistic truth take up where the last page of that essay left off.
- 35 I borrow the word "disclosure" from Heidegger's account of truth in art, even

though I disagree with the direction and details of his account. I go into this in much greater detail in a book manuscript whose working title is *Artistic Truth: Aesthetics, Discourse, and Imaginative Disclosure*. This is a companion volume to a second book manuscript on the politics and economics of new public culture. Both volumes arose from a research project that first took shape when I was teaching at ICS for a semester in 1991.

- 36 Perhaps these levels can also be mapped onto a Seerveldian or Hartian ontology as linguistic, social, and analytic analogues, respectively, within an aesthetic domain.
- 37 "Talk" is intended to include reading, writing, and listening. It is difficult to find one term for all of these, especially since, like Habermas, I reserve "discourse" as a more technical term, but I find "communicative action" problematic, for reasons similar to those given by Cooke in Cooke 1994: 76-78.
- 38 I use the terms "art conversation" and "art discourse" rather than "aesthetic" conversation and discourse for two reasons: to avoid a common tendency among philosophers to reduce art to its aesthetic dimension, and to avoid the equally common tendency to reduce the aesthetic dimension to art. I explain the importance of this Seerveldian anti-reductionism in Zuidervaart 1999.
- 39 Hart 1997: 21.
- 40 In his unpublished 1990 paper "Reason and Religion Revisited," for example, Hart writes that "Christianity is rooted in the storied and ritualized wisdom of a people in the face of the mysteries of our ultimate origin and destiny, developed over time, giving context to human life vis à vis questions that none of us can avoid... [T]his wisdom is accepted in a trust which allows us to be in the world in a certain way... Revelation of truth is not supernatural dictation of divine propositions, but a laying bare of wisdom through trust, a disclosure of ultimate directives that give us hope in journeying to our destiny, whose truth lies in their reliability in use" (6-7).
- 41 Hart 1997: 34-35, 35, 36. One peculiarity of passages like these is that Hart seems to assign truth (pragmatically defined) to concepts rather than to propositions, assertions, or judgments. A discussion of this, however, would take us too far afield.
- 42 Hart 1997: 44-45.
- 43 Hart 1997: 39.
- 44 This Romantic inflection is puzzling, since Hart has paid careful attention to the work on metaphor done by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. See Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 47, where they describe conceptual metaphors as "mappings across conceptual domains that structure our reasoning, our experience, and our everyday language." Perhaps I have misread Hart's discussion of faith-talk as metaphorical, or perhaps he employs two different concepts of metaphor.
- 45 I wish to thank Calvin G. Seerveld, Clarence Joldersma, and my colleagues in the Philosophy Department at Calvin College for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.