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Book forum

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On Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Things: in touch with the past*

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Précis of the book

The impetus to write *Things: in touch with the past* stemmed from interests both personal and academic. It is a pleasure to be able to explore a private passion in a philosophical forum, and I am grateful to *Studi di estetica* for the invitation to pursue the topic with four colleagues in these pages.

For as long as I can remember, I have valued old things. They might be very aged, such as an arrowhead I found on the shores of a lake when I was a child, or objects of more recent vintage, such as a mourning brooch from my grandmother's jewelry box. It was not just the antique look of such things that intrigued me but the very fact that they existed, and, moreover, that I could hold them in my hands. On those occasions, I had a sense of reaching back into history and making almost literal contact with the past.

Many years later when I came to write philosophy, my attention turned to sense experience and the relations among the senses and their objects. Two of my books have explored the bodily senses that are – or that used to be – so frequently neglected by philosophers: taste (which, of course, also engages smell) and touch. Traditionally, only vision and hearing, the so-called distance senses, have been considered capable of providing the kind of experience labeled "aesthetic". I do not believe that sensuous distance, however, exhausts such possibilities. Therefore, to pursue my preoccupation with the fascination of artifacts from the past,

I speculated about the role of the proximal sense of touch, which provides direct, tactile acquaintance with old things.

Caution is needed whenever one proposes a thesis based on personal experiences, including the thrills and marvels of handling things whose origin long predates one's own life. Therefore, I proceeded with care when I began asserting the value of encounters with historical artifacts. But once alert to the issue, I found an abundance of similar testimonies expressed all around me, including reports on radio and television, written accounts, and conversations. Clearly, my obsession with "touching the past" was far from idiosyncratic. Because of this, my study relies heavily on examples, many of which are first-person accounts – but not just mine – of aesthetic encounters with old things.

Things reflects on the marvel occasioned by objects from the past or those that have special history or unique properties. Although in many cases we come upon such artifacts in circumstances where we cannot actually handle them, such as museums, the fact that we are nearby, even close enough to touch, is often an indispensable element of experiencing them. Therefore, I include physical proximity as an aspect of the role of touch in the apprehension of age and of time.

Works of art number among those things, but most of the ones I discuss are artifacts of a different sort, such as household objects that have escaped destruction, stairs bowed from the tread of many feet, old letters, clothing worn long ago. Or even objects in nature, such as giant sequoia redwoods thousands of years old or a wooded path trod by a famous explorer that one can still hike. The thrill, wonder, marvel, and savoring of such encounters, I contend, is a variety of aesthetic experience.

Just what is "touched", in these encounters, however? And when we are able to make physical contact with old things, what do they feel like? Here my account diverges from typical examinations of this sense, because the tactile properties of objects are not at the heart of the matter. Rather, it is physical contact that I think delivers the thrill or frisson of the experience. To be sure, handling an object such as an old clay pot has a distinct feel in one's hands; it is heavy, rough-textured, curved. But a reproduction pot can achieve the very same qualities and fail to deliver the thrill of contact. Why? Simply because it isn't really old, isn't the genuine article or the "real thing".

Thus my foundational argument makes the case that genuineness is indispensable for an encounter with the past that old things (and only *real* old things) can provide. But age itself is not perceptually discernible, although its characteristic marks are. Age is the property that an object

possesses when it has earned its worn, faded, or damaged look. Since it is relatively easy to replicate the look of age – increasingly so with the technology available today – an encounter with the past proceeds on the belief that one truly is in the presence of something made long ago. Of course, that belief may be mistaken, and in many cases (indeed always for me) discovery of an error causes the thrill of the encounter to fade. My presumption that this variety of appreciative encounter responds to a non-perceptual property is one of the somewhat maverick claims of this book, although it is in line with other theories that include the historical context of an artifact among its aesthetically relevant features. To put it simply: one responds not only to the perceptible properties of an object but also to what it actually *is.*

One of the ideas that I grappled with concerns what I labeled "the transitivity of touch". This phrase refers to the impression that in handling something from the past, one "feels" or "senses" or "apprehends" other hands that have also touched it (the fact that I have had to put those words in scare-quotes indicates the elusiveness of this notion). Touch forms a chain of acquaintance, even over centuries. From time to time this idea sounded somewhat loony even to me, so I have been heartened to find it confirmed by others. In the book I quoted this anecdote from poet Helen Macdonald:

> I once asked my friends if they'd ever held things that gave them a spooky sense of history. *Ancient pots with three-thousand-year-old thumbprints in the clay,* said one. *Antique keys,* another. *Clay pipes. Dancing shoes from WWII. Roman coins I found in a field* […]. Everyone agreed that what these small things did was strangely intimate; they gave them the sense, as they picked them up and turned them in their fingers, of another person, an unknown person a long time ago, who had held that object in their hands. (Macdonald 2014: 116)

And here is a statement that I happened upon just recently from a journalist investigating a fifty-year-old murder, who was handed an object that belonged to the victim:

> It was a feline face, barely bigger than the size of my hand, made of glued-together shards of what looked like terra-cotta […]. I understood what the Peabody curators had meant when they told me that touching an artifact was a powerful experience […] a material connection to the past. (Cooper 2020: 233)

Anthropologists and psychologists sometimes refer to this phenomenon as "magical thinking". The term is somewhat derisive, and it is used both to

dismiss the transitivity of touch as irrational and to acknowledge it as an aspect of human mentality (albeit a perhaps a relic of some primitive tendency). Maybe there is a tinge of magical thinking at work, and certainly the imagination is capable of running a bit wild. Nonetheless, I think that more can be said about the role of touch when it delivers an impression of communion with the past.

Touch is the one sense that actually leaves a trace of its operation behind. Vision and hearing do not leave an imprint upon objects that are seen or heard; neither does smell. Tasting does, because eating consumes its object, but it is actually the touch of teeth and tongue that effects those changes. Touch, however, can leave a trace of the one who touches behind in very ordinary ways, such as a footprint or a crumpled cushion (not to mention what we now know about the residue of DNA that we distribute constantly, but which is not a factor here since magical thinking long predates its discovery). This observation is mundane in itself, but I think that it removes some of the irrationality from the notion of transitivity. A footprint is not magic, it is evidence of a previous touch, and the fact that it may remain for ages (think of dinosaur footprints) indicates that sometimes touch remains markedly in place and that the same thing can be touched again in overlapping gestures. All this is highly speculative, of course, but it might help account for why, in the scientific, technology-ridden twenty-first century, magical thinking persists.

I have encountered some push-back on the idea that it is only the real thing, the genuine article, that is the proper object of an encounter with the past. After all, reproductions may be vivid and imaginatively enthralling, so can't they provide the same experience? To some degree they can, and the pleasure of imagining oneself in a different place or time is not to be gainsaid (I am a great reader of historical fiction). These excursions into fictional imagining, however, do not substitute for the real thing.

Evidence for this can be found with a comparison of artifacts and persons, as one chapter of *Things* argues. The cases most dramatically comparable with genuineness of artifacts involve persons and the sentiments they arouse before and after the discovery of mistaken identity. Skepticism is often voiced when judgments about art and artifacts change after their identities are reassessed, despite the fact that there has been no alteration in their manifest aesthetic properties. In contrast, there is no doubt that imposture brings about a change of affection even when there is no alteration in the perceivable qualities of a person. I argue that certain kinds of emotions are directed appropriately to individuals rather than just to the properties that individuals possess, and a similar attachment describes our

valuing an artifact because of its particular identity, including the history that it has.

Love is the obvious example where this commonly occurs. Upon discovery that one is romantically involved with an impostor, for instance, one is justifiably dismayed and angry. Similarly, outrage and disappointment issue from finding that a treasured Chagall painting is a forgery. It is not just because the money laid out for a fake was a poor investment, nor has it much to do with the status of owning a work by a famous painter. Fundamentally, one values a genuine painting from the hand of the true artist, and no matter how similar the fake *looks*, it *is* not the same. This is another way to approach the value of the genuine, which, like age, is not a directly perceptual property.

There is an intransigent problem with the value accorded historical objects for the past they bring into the present, and that is that they inevitably also change. Paint wears away, buildings crumble, items of use require repair, and certain monuments of the past have no definite time of origin since they came to their complete or present form over so many years. Perhaps most dramatically, some art works undergo so much restoration in order to preserve the way they look, that the hand that rendered the painting now displayed is arguably not the original artist at all[1]. In recognition of the instability of both the concept and the items that count as "real" artifacts from the past, I ended the book with a set of suggestions about how one might measure degrees of genuineness.

Very little about being "in touch with the past" is completely determinate, but that very fact makes encounters with objects that have long endured especially intriguing.

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[1] A fascinating and controversial example of this can be found Lewis (2019).

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Touch, aesthetic experience, and the value of the real thing

We value the past. We value being in the presence of objects from the past, and we go to a great length to preserve and restore such objects, often at significant costs. These attitudes are widely shared, at least within western cultures, yet they raise profound questions. For example, why should it make a difference to our aesthetic appreciation whether we experience a genuine old artefact, as opposed to an indistinguishable replica? Indeed, shouldn't we prefer the latter, if the value of the experience is to put us in touch with, and improve our understanding of, the world the artefact comes from? Wouldn't we get a better sense of what religious life in Ancient Greece was by looking at a copy of a temple, rather than by looking at an original? After all, the original has undergone significant changes and has been affected in a number of ways by the passage of time. Replicas, by contrast, are immune to scruffs, marks, and restorations. They can be made to be as flawless as the original.

Notice also how producing high-quality replicas would be much cheaper than preserving and restoring the original. If so, wouldn't this be a better way to respond to the value of the temple? Making copies and placing them in different parts of the world would enable a much larger group of people to enjoy its beauty. Why not do that then? This challenge is especially powerful given that access to works of arts and historical artefacts is a good that is unjustly distributed. A disproportionate number of them are concentrated in big museums in western countries, and even when admission is free, the cost of reaching them is still prohibitively high for many. Producing high quality replicas would be a way of addressing this injustice, making the artefacts accessible to anyone who lacks the capacity to access the originals.

Many of us, I'm sure, would want to resist this conclusion. The experience of witnessing "the real thing" seems to us importantly different from the experience of witnessing a replica. But how can that be if the two are perceptually identical? Carolyn Korsmeyer's *Things: in touch with the past* (T) expertly navigates all these questions, offering a sophisticated, highly imaginative account of the value of experiencing genuine artefacts from the past.

At the heart of Korsmeyer's account are two claims. The first is the claim that although genuineness is a "perceptually indiscernible aesthetic property" (T: 17), it has a distinctive phenomenal character. There is a special "thrill", or perhaps a "wonder", that we typically experience when we are

presented with a genuine artefact (T: 30). This is because our perceptual experience is normally informed by our beliefs about the objects we witness, including beliefs about their origin and their history. The non-perceptual cognitive state of holding such beliefs has a distinct phenomenal character, which "penetrates" our perceptual experience, thereby generating the thrill associated with the real thing (T: 55).
The second central claim at the heart of Korsmeyer's account concerns the sense of touch, which she sees as the privileged vehicle for this distinctive type of experience. Touching a genuine artefact provides a unique experience, in that it enables us to establish a direct connection with the past (T: 48).

Both claims are elegantly defended in the book. I shall take them in reverse order.

1. *Touching the "real thing"*. Appealing to the sense of touch might sound like an odd strategy to explain the value of genuineness, Korsmeyer is the first to admit. After all, we rarely are able to actually touch ancient artefacts, at least those that are stored in museums. But actual touch is not necessary, Korsmeyer clarifies. Being in the proximity of the object can be enough. In support of this claim, she invokes the notion of "hypothetical" or "implicit" touch: "[e]ven when one falls short of actual contact, one's bodily position in the vicinity of an object is implicit in experience […]. Position includes being near – within touching distance of – an object. It supplies the sense of being in the very presence of something special […]. In short, the sense of touch can operate vividly absent the perception of characteristic sensible properties" (T: 42).

What drives Korsmeyer's argument here is the observation that many of those who report having experienced the thrill associated with being in the presence of genuine artefacts explicitly invoke the sense of touch as key to this experience. But while I find her treatment of the view that actual touch plays a central role in our aesthetic experience persuasive and illuminating, the view that hypothetical touch can play the same role, via mere proximity, seems to me less plausible. To see this, consider for a moment a different sense.

The sense of hearing is crucially important for musical experience. Still, being in the proximity of a musical performance does not seem to generate an especially valuable aesthetic experience. If the doors of the auditorium were open, I could hear Keith Jarrett's wonderful performance. But the doors are closed, so I cannot. There isn't a valuable

experience of "implicit" hearing here. I could, of course, imagine what the concert would sound like, but here the experience would be produced by my (actual) imagination, not by my (hypothetical) hearing. I might also feel the thrill of being near the location of what I expect to be a beautiful performance, but in this case too, the thrill would be produced by my expectations. In no way would this thrill be a response to his performance, which, despite being so close, is inaccessible to me. Why think that touch should work any differently than hearing? Why think that proximity to something we can touch can generate an experience that proximity to something we can hear cannot?

It's worth noticing here that proximity generates the sort of aesthetic experience described by Korsmeyer only in combination with the exercise of other senses, most notably sight. We feel the thrill of encountering the real thing when we *see* the Rothko, even if we cannot touch it. But suppose we stumble into an empty room of the museum, and unbeknown to us, the crate nearby contains a Rothko ready to be installed. Would we feel that thrill, in virtue of the mere proximity? More importantly, should we? If not, it looks as if proximity, or implicit touch, are not what generates the relevant aesthetic experience. Or at least they are unable to generate the relevant experience unless they are aided by other senses. And if so, the question is: given that proximity generates the relevant thrill only in conjunction with, say, sight or hearing, how can we establish that touch really has the central role that Korsmeyer attributes to it?

There is a weaker reading of Korsmeyer's view that does not raise this issue. Korsmeyer does acknowledge that "[f]ull aesthetic experience involves all the senses, as well as imagination and belief" (T: 43). One reason she offers for focusing her investigation on touch is that this is a sense that has received scant attention in the philosophical debate (ibid). As a remedy to this lacuna, Korsmeyer' s contribution could not be more welcomed. But at times she makes the stronger claim that touch is the key to accessing the experience of the genuine, and the problems I've raised above do seem to challenge, to some extent at least, this claim.

A further argument invoked by Korsmeyer in defence of this stronger claim is the idea that "touch is comparatively immune to illusion" (T: 42). As she puts it, "you might mistake the identity of the thing that you trip over in the dark, but there is no doubt that there is something in your path. Touch engenders physical resistance between perceiver and object, and for that reason […] touch is the true test of reality" (T: 42). But the claim we are interested in here is that touch provides a privileged form of access to the real thing, where "real" means "genuine". By contrast, the

sense of reality invoked by Korsmeyer in this quote, is that of existence, or perhaps materiality. The physical resistance provided by the object on the floor attests to its existence, but not to its genuineness. Your balance is compromised exactly in the same way whether you trip on an ancient trunk or on a replica.

2. *Feeling the thrill*. Korsmeyer's arguments rely on an "experiential account of the aesthetic" (T: 29), according to which something counts as an aesthetic experience when a distinctive affective response is produced by it. In the case of the experience of witnessing the genuine, the relevant affective response consists in feeling a thrill. Importantly, Korsmeyer acknowledges that this response by itself is insufficient to account for the value of the experience. She rightly distances herself from aesthetic empiricism, namely the view that there is nothing more to aesthetic experience than the perceptual experience of the object (see Urmson 1957: 75). She does so by arguing that the reality of the artefact in front of us is also a necessary component of the experience. Still, the value of experiencing the real thing for Korsmeyer crucially depends on the production of a response that has a distinctive phenomenal character. Absent the thrill associated with this response, we cannot be said to be having the valuable experience associated with witnessing the real thing.

Now, this view nicely explains why the value of the experience diminishes once we discover that the object is not genuine, a point Korsmeyer often comes back to in her book. When we discover that the Rothko in front of us is just a copy, the thrill we had originally experienced disappears, and this negatively affects the value of the aesthetic experience. But what about cases in which our mistake does not consist in believing that a given artefact is genuine, but rather, in believing that it is not? Suppose you and I both own (what we take to be) copies of the same Rothko. The paintings are indistinguishable and produce in us exactly the same response: We enjoy looking at them, yet we do not feel the thrill we would feel if we were to believe that the painting in front of us was an original. As it turns out, unbeknownst to me, my painting is in fact a real Rothko. Isn't there a sense in which, because of that, my experience is more valuable than yours when we look at our respective paintings? Isn't the aesthetic experience of seeing a genuine Rothko superior to the experience of seeing a copy, even if we reasonably believe that we are both looking at copies? But Korsmeyer's experiential account can attribute extra value to the experience in question only if we realize that we are

looking at the original. This seems to me a problem for the account. The account is unable to explain why there might be a special value in experiencing the real thing despite failing to realize that this is what we are doing.

I expect Korsmeyer to be sensitive to this kind of worry. For she does acknowledge that "there can be valuable objects that no one notices – things that *should* be held in higher regard than they are"; and she makes clear that in these cases "the absence of sentiment does not signal that an object is not valuably genuine" (T: 90). Genuineness is taken by Korsmeyer to be an objective property (T: 60, 97). But it's unclear how this view can be squared with the experiential account. How can the thrill produced by touch, real or hypothetical, be a crucial component of the aesthetic experience associated with genuineness, if we can have the experience without experiencing the thrill? Doesn't that show that the thrill is a dispensable component of the value of experiencing the genuine? If it does, this should lead us to reject the experiential account of the aesthetic.

In addressing this worry, Korsmeyer argues that a "veridical aesthetic experience is one that is based upon an adequate understanding of the nature of the work before one", and that "being fooled constitutes a flaw in the experience itself, even if the flaw goes unrecognized" (T: 36). But in making these points, she, once again, focuses on cases in which we do experience the thrill, even if we would not (and should not) if we were conscious of our mistaken belief. And thinking about these cases does support her claim that feeling the thrill is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for the valuable experience of being in touch with the real thing. However, I am interested here in cases in which the mistake goes the other way: cases in which we *don't* experience the thrill, but we would (and should) if we were conscious of our mistaken belief. Thinking about these cases seems to show that feeling the thrill is not necessary to have the valuable experience of being in touch with the real thing.

Of course, this is not to say that, when it is present, the thrill plays no role in our experience of the genuine. It is plausible that when aptly produced, the presence of this response enhances the value of our aesthetic experience. My argument is rather meant to show that the thrill cannot play the central role that Korsmeyer attributes to it.

Given the nature of this contribution, I have not been able to do justice to many important aspects of Korsmeyer's subtle discussion. But I hope what I said is enough to convey both how important the questions she addresses are, and how illuminating her treatment of these questions

is. Anyone interested in understanding the value of aesthetic experience cannot afford not to engage with this work.

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Larry E. Shiner (University of Illinois, Springfield)

Touching the past

Carolyn Korsmeyer's *Things: in touch with the past* (T) is a comprehensive and wisely balanced analysis of the ontology of genuine or authentic things as well as our experience of them. At the same time, the book makes a spirited case for the indispensability of genuine real things in the face of a current fashion for digitally enhanced reproductions. Most importantly, Korsmeyer bases her case for genuineness on the sense of touch which she makes the guarantor of the real as opposed to replicas, typically experienced through vision. Along the way she is able to draw a series of important theoretical distinctions as well as to animate her reflections with many informative examples, drawn from history, literature, art, architecture and everyday life. The examples are a crucial element in making her case for both the complexity of the genuine and the claim that genuineness comes in degrees.

Among the most important distinctions the book develops is a reworking of Alois Riegl's contrast of "age value" and "historical value". An artifact manifesting historical value represents a stage in time and has usually been restored to how it looked at a certain moment in the past and, in the process, the restoration usually erases signs of age. Those who are drawn to age value, by contrast, are interested in the way an artifact connects us to the past by reflecting the passage of time through its visible and tactile signs of aging. Although the two kinds of value are not mutually exclusive, age value achieves the strongest sense of authenticity since it conveys the palpable impression of our being in contact with the past (T: 79-85). This is why repairs and restorations, especially those that add

a surfeit of new material compromise genuineness and deprive many old objects of their aura. "Aura" is another concept that Korsmeyer reworks, in this case in the teeth of the widely accepted critiques of it by thinkers like Walter Benjamin or John Berger (the latter dismissing it as "bogus religiosity") (T: 14). For Korsmeyer, an aura, is not some kind of mystification but a singular potency experienced in encounters with "objects notable for their age, rarity, or singularity, and only Real Things qualify" (T: 15). As one who has long accepted the critiques of the concept of aura, I felt her justification needed more development, although I do not think this a major defect that undermines the book's general argument.

The aura given off by old, rare or otherwise special things has its counterpart, according to Korsmeyer, in the kind of response often evoked by a genuinely old object. The terms she most often uses for our response to the genuine are "thrill" and "shiver", but she also speaks at times of awe, reverence, and wonder. Experiences like wonder, she points out, are a reflection of the aesthetic aspect of the genuine. Yet, since genuineness is a property that presupposes knowledge and belief about the age and origins of an artifact, it might seem surprising that Korsmeyer ascribes an aesthetic as well as cognitive and ethical dimensions to genuineness. Indeed, she goes so far as to claim that genuineness is aesthetic "on its own" (T: 29). When I first read these claims I was skeptical but was won over by Korsmeyer's insistence that the phenomenon of touch is a crucial component of the experience of the genuine, thus adding touch to vision and hearing as an aesthetic sense. Although these claims for genuineness and touch as aesthetic phenomena fit a current trend toward the enlargement of the concept of the aesthetic with which I am sympathetic, they still need justification and I find her extensive discussion of them sufficiently convincing that I won't comment on it further at this point (T: 28-36).

Korsmeyer suggests three criteria of genuineness, especially for larger artifacts such as buildings or memorial sites: continuity of material, continuity of use, continuity of location. Of the three, continuity of material turns out to be the most important since it also applies to smaller and middle-sized artifacts such as heirlooms or artworks. In fact, Korsmeyer embraces a kind of materialism, arguing that the key to the genuineness of artifacts as they age and are repaired is the amount of original material they still bear. The emphasis on materiality goes hand in hand with the central place she gives to the phenomenon of touch. Thus, in discussing the famous philosophical topos of the ship of Theseus she rejects the Aristotelian formalist solution according to which all the material could be

renewed, and the ship would be identical if the form were the same, in favor of a Hobbesian type answer according to which, for the ship to be the same, it would have to be of substantially the same material, even if that involved interrupted existence. Touch comes into play here since material continuity is required for what Korsmeyer calls the "transitivity of touch", the way in which "touching" a surviving artifact of great age can connect us to those who have touched it before.

Touch and the transitivity of touch, therefore, are at the core of the book's argument although that requires solving the obvious problem that many, if not most, rare or older artifacts are inaccessible to physical touch, especially those in museums or closely monitored historical sites. Korsmeyer's solution is to downplay actual physical touch in favor what she calls "implicit" or "covert" touch. As she puts it, there is no need for a "sensuous tactile experience" since the "role of touch in the experience of authenticity is almost entirely nonsensuous and because of the function of this sense to register bodily position" (T: 37). Hence, simply being near enough to something to touch it, even if it is locked in a glass case, will suffice to afford a feeling of being in contact with an artifact. Proximity substitutes for actual touch.

Although Korsmeyer draws on several contemporary theorists who also downplay the role of tactility in our transactions with the world, I find this marginalization of physical contact problematic. Not only does it leave the role of tactility in many encounters with objects from the past unanalyzed, but it also seems odd in light of the insistence on materiality and bodily presence. In fact, the emphasis on non-sensuous proximity, understandable as it is in the light of the pervasive "do not touch" culture of museums, seems to leave vision in the driver's seat. Certainly, we can often "see" the texture of an object and imaginatively project how it might feel if we actually touched it, but these projections are no substitute for the actual sensation of holding something in our hands. One of my most memorable experiences was the opportunity afforded by one of Alexis de Tocqueville's decedents to take notes from the manuscript of his memoir of the 1848 Revolution; Tocqueville's original manuscript was kept in the tower of the chateau de Tocqueville. As I sat in the tower and held and turned the pages he had written and felt their texture and weight, I experienced a shiver of excitement of the kind Korsmeyer mentions, but I am not sure I would have felt anything like that had I just been holding a facsimile or peering at the same pages exposed in a glass case. My observations here are not meant to diminish the importance of the experience of touch as proximity, but I do want to suggest the need

explore the role of actual touch and tactility further. In fact, the question of actual touch comes to mind again when we turn to the notion of the "transitivity of touch".

With the "transitivity of touch", we encounter one of Korsmeyer's most important contributions to understanding the power of the genuine. Korsmeyer takes her cue from the traditional notion that to touch something in the present that was part of, belonged to, or was otherwise touched by someone in the past, connects us to them via a chain of human touching and thus brings the past into the present. Korsmeyer is rightly undaunted by skeptics who charge that this is "primitive" or "magical" thinking. I join her in thinking that to regard ourselves as part of a chain of human touching is the most normal thing in the world for social animals like us; it is enshrined in innumerable social practices that involve traditions handed down from generation to generation. The metaphor of "handing" down or handing on is not accidental and in some religious traditions the transitivity of touch involves a literal "laying on of hands".

By generalizing the phenomenon of transitivity, Korsmeyer is able to generate several telling observations about the contrast between a genuine, "real thing" that shows all the signs of wear accumulated over time, from a replica that has been made to look the way the artifact presumably looked at some point in the past. The reason the worn, but genuine artifact is preferable to even the most brilliant replica, is that the replica can never convey the aura of age since it does not have the material presence to support the transitivity of touch. The genuine or original artifact even in its dilapidated condition may still contain a wealth of material that has been touched, if only proximally, by a chain of individuals reaching far into the past (T: 43-57, 163-8). The concept of the transitivity of touch is, I believe, Korsmeyer's most powerful instrument of analysis.

I want to close my essay by paying tribute to the way this book's theoretical analysis can help us understand our own encounters with genuineness by briefly considering the restoration of Abraham Lincoln's home in Springfield, Illinois, the place where he began his career in law and politics and raised his family in a modest frame house that still stands in its original location. When I first moved to Springfield, in the 1970s, the house, which was decently maintained by the state of Illinois, was surrounded by shabby homes of various ages, several souvenir shops, and was just a block from a street worked by prostitutes. When a local congressman managed to get the home and the area around it transferred to the National Park Service, the Park Service not only took the home apart piece by piece and installed modern heating and air conditioning

along with steel floor joists (to carry the weight of the thousands of visitors), but they also meticulously restored every part of the house to make it look as it did in 1865, the year Lincoln was assassinated. I found little to quarrel with this aspect of the restoration at the time, and today, having read Korsmeyer's book, I realize that I was implicitly accepting the National Park Services' decision to preserve the home's "historical value" rather than let it and the neighborhood further accrue "age value".

On the other hand, I was indignant at the Park Services' decision to apply the same 1865 criteria to all the buildings surrounding the home by tearing down everything that was not there in 1865, leaving the lots as rectangles of grass and installing wooden sidewalks, fences, and period streetlamps. The few buildings that were left had their exteriors restored to their probable look as of 1865. At the time this was done, I was deeply upset at what I saw as the destruction of the continuity of history and complained bitterly at the "Disneyfication" of the Lincoln home site, pointing out to anyone who would listen that, given the house's isolation in a "park" that pretended to be a bubble of frozen time, Lincoln's home could just as well be anywhere – in the Greenfield open-air museum in Michigan, or in the Arizona desert next to the London Bridge. Now, thanks to reading Korsmeyer discussion of the transitivity of touch and the importance of material continuity and continuity of location, I have something more to go on than my instinctive feelings of indignation at the broken continuity of history by not allowing buildings built since 1865 to stand in their original sites around Lincoln's home. But Korsmeyer's theoretical discussion has also reluctantly reconciled me to the Park Service's decision not to preserve those later buildings and calmed me down after all these years of grumbling whenever I passed the Lincoln Home site. Now, I not only understand better why I was indignant back then, but I also realize, thanks to Korsmeyer's judicious analysis of degrees of genuineness, and to her own application of it to places like the Gettysburg battlefield and the Erie Canal terminus, that it is necessary to find a workable balance between historical value and age value and to accept the fact that there will often be painful trade-offs[1]. *Things: in touch with the past* is one of finest demonstrations I know of a book that is both philosophically acute and a reliable guide to thinking about practical matters.

[1] Although I still believe the Park Service went too far in erasing all signs of the continuity of history and creating what looks like a movie set, I realize that keeping everything, including the souvenir shops and the nearby red-light district, would have had its own problems.

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To touch the past

We may get particularly sad if we lose even a small item, let's say, an inherited favourite pen if it once belonged to a dear family member who is not with us anymore. And this may easily be so even if we can perhaps have a very similar item, however, without that personal connection – i.e. the fact that that very piece was in the hand of our relative – since this connection seems not to be replaceable. Perhaps even more curious is the case if an old photograph depicting our beloved antecedent, let's say, her wedding portrait or graduation photo from before WWII – perhaps with some signs of dereliction on it, the image faded or its edges broken – gets lost, and we may get equally sad as in the above case, even if for example we were prudent enough to make a perfect digital copy of the object when it was still existing, as a provision for such a situation. On another level – "level" regarding both size and personal involvement – we also care for artworks, old buildings and for their survival, however in these cases we have further dimensions included, e.g. aesthetic qualities, (art) historical importance and questions of cultural memory. Enlarging the field still further, we are shocked when notable parts of ancient constructions or even entire archaeological fields and urban neighbourhoods or extended natural reserves, landscapes of particular importance are destroyed – for example motivated by extreme ideologies in terrorist attacks or by short-sighted financial considerations – and here naturally the above viewpoints (personal attachment, aesthetic quality, historical relevance etc.) are completed with another crucial aspect: that of the ethical considerations. There seems to be a widely accepted idea that such remnants from the past need to be conserved – widely accepted though apparently not shared by all, as for example both the recent and previous centuries' and millennia's forms of iconoclasm makes it manifest – and the dilemma of what to keep and how to keep – among others also the

question of at what cost to keep – rises regularly on personal, family, national and global levels.

At the same time however one may easily note that questions regarding originality, as well as regarding the properties and values of genuineness are often discussed, and are just as often also properly challenged, both in light of exceptional and scandalous situations (mass destructions, botched restorations, forgeries) as well as in our personal, and perhaps less tragic, everyday experience. It also means that we can trace a certain dichotomy and tension between two phenomena: one is that in many (or most) of the cases we tend to choose and celebrate the original – e.g. maintain it, conserve it, visit it, acquire it etc. – though at the same time what we consider as genuine may not be (the) one anymore.

Carolyn Korsmeyer's instructive and well-argued book *Things: in touch with the past* (T) is a dedicated study to further investigate all these issues. Throughout the volume she regularly reminds us that many aspects *of* and *related to* genuineness and originality are not straightforward cases where we can simply have an absolutist and exclusivist approach. Instead of these she argues for a significantly more relativist viewpoint that not only accepts the possibility that there are various grades in the interpretation of the concept of originality (that formerly may have seemed an absolute and clear case), but that exactly the awareness of this will bring us further. As she writes: "[…] genuineness admits of degrees, and recognizing gradations and different meanings of what it means to be a real thing does not undermine the significance of the concept" (T: 11). In other words, the acknowledging of the relativity helps not only to trace the complexity of the concept and to step out from the simplified view, but also to further discover the consequences – both theoretical and practical – of the multiplicity of the question.

The "degrees" and "gradations" are mapped in detail throughout the book, and they include these very relativisms in a broad range of aspects of genuineness. First of all naturally stand the issues around the concept of originality itself: when, from which point and until which point can we consider something as original? How much change – e.g. reconstruction, repair, restoration – is possible to still consider the work as genuine? As Korsmeyer points out, in several cases things are not "ready" at a certain moment (just think of a larger building or city) hence it is impossible to point at a phase that can be taken as its original state. Plus, many things also get modified as part of a regular maintenance practice – parts changed, items renewed, areas repainted etc. – hence physically they will

not be the same as "in the beginning". All this will obviously put an extremely "purist" interpretation of the concept of genuineness in question.

Another area where the relativity of the phenomena needs to be taken in consideration is regarding the care for these objects, for example how important it is, for whom, and what differences can be in the maintenance or neglect of it? A thing may be important for only one individual, creating a rather personal and sentimental value attached to the object, compared to, for example, national monuments, religious reliquiae, or exceptional works of art, that becomes significant for many of us, and to experience it and be in its presence, hence also to conserve: "Sentiment does enter into aesthetic encounters with objects prized because of what they are and the histories they have undergone. Consequently, there will be inevitable disparity in the appreciative audiences for aura" (p. 69). On the other hand, a further consequence related to the "disparity in the appreciation" will affect the conservation of the object in question, as this practice may also differ. These varieties in some cases are within the acceptable range – just think of the diverse ways how cultures maintain their built heritage, sometimes conserving them in a ruined state as they have survived (e.g. in many Western societies), sometimes regularly rebuilding them to maintain their actual splendour (in the Far Eastern practice). In other occasions the differences in "conservation" and "afterlife" of heritage reaches an ethically (and of course, aesthetically) unacceptable grade, like in the case of the aforementioned complete destruction motivated by extreme ideologies, or also in the case of looting.

Yet another aspect that is regularly mentioned in the book is the variety of the type of objects and of how we perceive them, since it is again fruitful to be fully aware of the relativity these entail. Just like in the other aspects, also here we cannot have one unique form of encounter with the genuine to be described, because the objects are different, hence also the way we can experience them. The difference stands not merely in their "importance" – as mentioned above, if it is worthy for an individual or for a larger group of people, or having universal value – and not even whether the object has aesthetic qualities or not, as naturally also average objects can have significance to many, hence the question if they are (the) genuine matters a lot. However, based on the above we can see that the forms of encounter, of physical encounter varies too: for example if we can touch it with our fingers or hold it in our hand, we can thus have a literally *tangible* connection to the past, or, as Korsmeyer argues: *"with this piece that we hold in our hand the past is gathered into an aesthetically perceptibly present"* (T: 23 – italics in the original). It will be exactly

this "touch" that will be of primary relevance in the analyses, having an aesthetic character. However, as the author demonstrates, we again have degrees, as the experience of the presence of the past through the object that embodies it may happen also when the physical contact is less direct than actual touch, even nearness can suffice, especially in contexts when real touch is not allowed. An extended mode of this latter will be the case when the object (and the past) requires – or at least invites – more than simple touching, for example when encountering sites of historic or natural significance: "Bodily position and movement, as noted earlier, are registered strongly by the sense of touch, and wandering amid this kind of site puts the visitor in proximity to that which is called to mind. This is a profoundly *situated* experience – which is another aspect of things that embody the past; they engage our own physical participation" (T: 131. – italics in the original).

Already these few examples illustrate the degrees and grades in the concept of genuineness itself, in the variety of encountering the real thing and in the forms of its experience, and we can agree with Korsmeyer that only after making the reader become fully aware of all this she can define genuineness. After this however it will not surprise the reader that even the definition will have its own degrees, or, better to say, there will be definitions of the different degrees, e.g. "an object qualifies as genuine if […]", or "an object possesses a fair degree of genuineness if […]" (see T: 186-91.).

Although the above so far may seem as mere theoretical investigations, the reader is regularly confronted with not only the philosophical importance but also crucial relevance and practical consequence of the issue. "This study will not answer all of the questions that arise in practice, but I hope it will provide a framework within which real issues about saving and discarding, nostalgia and practicality, preservation and change might be illuminated" (T: 20). Hence although in the beginning Korsmeyer sets the range of her study mainly as focusing on providing such a theoretical framework, instead of promising to resolve all the questions related to the phenomenon of genuineness and its management, the numerous actual examples over the book serve not only as illustrations of the complexity of the concept but also as analyses of many of the practical consequences.

Naturally not all the areas could be covered at equal length. There are very crucial statements regarding the analyses of issues around the genuineness of nature and other sites, but the reader – at least the present reviewer for sure – would be interested to learn Korsmeyer's ideas re-

garding these issues in more detail. She acknowledges that the focus of the present book was placed more on "human-made artifacts" (T: 198.), that may provide the optimistic reader with the hope that the examination of authenticity and natural environment will become the subject of a future book of hers. Similarly, there are many intellectual delicacies around certain forms and techniques of artworks – as well as around their falsification – where the question of originality is particularly interesting, for example multiplied graphic works like etchings or woodcuts: till which grade can they be considered as "original"? What about for example later prints made from the same plate but not by the hands of the artist? Or, an example that also Korsmeyer mentions in a note, pieces of art created with ephemeral materials (T: 170, n9). These and many other subareas continue to be extremely thrilling to future scrutinization.

In these accurately built analyses we get a precise investigation of the qualities and uniqueness of "the real thing", convincingly proving that genuineness is an unsubstitutable property. Given the nature of the issue, it seems impossible to provide a direct set of guidelines on how to handle each and any individual case when genuineness is harmed or in threat, among other reasons also because of the emotional factor involved in such decisions. The book can nevertheless greatly contribute to the fuller understanding of these complex issues, that, exactly because of the emotional involvement will help us realise more how our own interpretation of past events work, how awareness of personal and universal heritage is formed, and how the urge to care can develop through the connection to the object, to the real thing, that allows us to touch the past.

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The value of genuine things

Carolyn Korsmeyer's fascinating new book, *Things: in touch with the past* (T), is concerned with two questions. First, she asks why we value encounters with genuine things from the past in a way that we do not value

encounters with even the best replicas of such things. Second, she asks about what constitutes a genuine thing. This essay leaves the second of these questions to other contributors to this forum and focuses on the first. Central to Korsmeyer's answer to the first question is the claim that genuineness is an aesthetic property that we value in objects. I am not persuaded that this is a satisfactory answer. For a start, the concept of the aesthetic is poorly understood. Analysing the value of genuine things in terms of a poorly understood concept is bound to leave many unanswered questions. Moreover, a better explanation is available for the fact that encounters with genuine things are valued: such encounters are homages to, and promote communion with, past people and are valued as such. At times, Korsmeyer indicates that she adopts this better explanation.

Korsmeyer has identified a phenomenon in need of explanation. Consider this example. I own a fifth century BC Athenian tetradrachm that I often view with pleasure, thinking to myself that it might have been held by Plato or Socrates. I would be deeply disappointed if I were to be informed that my tetradrachm is a forgery even if only an expert could tell that it is not genuine. Many other people value experiences of genuine things from the past in a way that they do not value experiences of even the best replicas. We may well wonder why this is.

Korsmeyer proposes that "the term 'aesthetic' does as well as any to describe […] the thrill of an encounter with the genuine" (T: 29). Unfortunately, describing an experience as aesthetic casts only little light on it. A wide variety of experiences are described as aesthetic and it is difficult to identify what they all have in common. The line between aesthetic experiences and other sorts of appreciation is difficult to draw. Even if we had an account of aesthetic experience, we would still need an account of the specific sort of aesthetic experience that, Korsmeyer believes, results from encounters with genuine things. In the end, saying that genuineness is an aesthetic property and that we have an aesthetic experience when encountering genuine things is an unsatisfactory explanation of the fact that we value encounters with such things. Such an explanation is too easy and uninformative.

Fortunately, we do not need to look far to find a better account of why we value experience of genuine things. Korsmeyer goes a long way towards providing this account. In an effort to provide an explanation of why we value genuine things, she writes that an encounter with a genuine thing is "like Wow. Or more articulately, it is akin to emotions such as love, reverence, respect, awe, or wonder" (T: 117). Some of these feelings are

plausibly held to be aesthetic experiences. In particular, the feeling of wonder could well be aesthetic. The others are less plausibly held to be aesthetic experiences. Korsmeyer, however, correctly identifies some of the affects that we experience when in the presence of genuine objects. We feel awe, respect and reverence for the accomplishments of our forbearers. These affects, for whatever reasons, are more easily felt in the presence of genuine objects. We want to have these affects because they are the ones that are appropriate to feel in the presence of the relics of our forbearers. We owe them respect and even reverence and genuine things assist us in discharging our responsibilities. Genuine things give us a feeling of filial piety and this is not helpfully described as an aesthetic experience.

Korsmeyer identifies another reason why we value the experience of genuine things. She writes that "appreciation of the genuine artifact" contributes to social and emotional health. Regard for genuine things, on her view, is akin to "love, loyalty, and reverence directed to persons" (T: 111). This is exactly right but it does not suggest that experience of genuine things is aesthetic. Korsmeyer believes that the similarity between our experience of genuine things and the feelings we have for specific human beings supports her claim that our experience of genuine things is an aesthetic experience. Just the opposite is true. We do not value our interactions with human beings as sources of aesthetic experiences. We value these interactions as ways of building communion and intimacy with others and not for their own sake.

Contact or proximity with genuine things promotes communion with past people. Genuine things put some people in the frame of mind where such communion is possible. In a similar way, some people go to church, or seek out relics, as a way of promoting spiritual thoughts. Spiritual thoughts are possible anywhere, but a church can promote them. I hypothesize that we value genuine things as means of promoting communion with (at least some) past persons and of feeling part of something greater than ourselves. This hypothesis is a genuine explanation of the phenomenon with which Korsmeyer is concerned in a way that reference to the poorly understood concept of the aesthetic is not. We understand why communion with (at least some) past people is important and why we value this communion. We understand why feeling part of a whole is important to many people. On my account we are able to explain why the age of something is valuable. It is not valuable in itself, but it is valuable because it facilitates communion with people remote from our time and place and, simultaneously, promotes our well-being.

Consider this example of how real things provide an opportunity to pay our respects to people from the past and to feel communion with them. When I visited Athens, the first place I went was the agora. I did not go to get some feeling (though I did), but because I believed that I ought to go. My visit to the agora was an homage that I owed to Socrates. This homage was most appropriately performed at a specific place. Moreover, I wanted to feel a sense of communion with Socrates. Similarly, I have gone to see copies of the Magna Carta as a way of paying my respects to those who began the long (unfinished) fight for democracy in the English-speaking world. Among my feelings was a sense that I had behaved fittingly and that I had discharged an obligation. Another feeling was that of communion with those who began the (unfinished) fight against arbitrary government. These feelings are, perhaps, best described, in rather old-fashioned terms, as moral sentiments rather than as aesthetic experiences (filial piety is another such moral sentiment).

Consider another example. My wife values, above all other genuine things, a kitchen sideboard brought from Pennsylvania to southern Ontario by her Mennonite forbearers at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Calling her experience of the sideboard an aesthetic experience does not capture what is important about encounters with the sideboard. The experience is not valued in itself, as one values an aesthetic experience. Rather, my wife's encounters with the sideboard establishes her place in a community and a location. In the presence of the genuine sideboard, she feels connected both to the land and to the people who have farmed it for more than two centuries. The sideboard is, as it were, proof of this connection and valued as such.

Korsmeyer cites Linda Nochlin as saying something that helps explain why the experience of genuine things is valuable. Nochlin states that a remnant of a work can be "eloquent in its isolation, its suggestion of the passage of earthly grandeur" (T: 185). Again, I agree with Korsmeyer and Nochlin that this is part of the appeal of genuine things, but I deny again that the value that we find in encounters with genuine things or remnants of such things is helpfully described as aesthetic. Encountering a ruin, we feel nostalgia or, perhaps, a pleasing melancholy. These feelings are compounded, I have suggested, with a feeling of communion with our fellow humans. Perhaps these feelings are aesthetic responses. Whether they are or not, characterizing the response as nostalgia or pleasingly melancholy is much more informative. We get some insight into the nature of our feelings.

Genuineness is not a valuable property in all contexts. Sometimes we are not interested in feeling communion with or honouring certain people from the past. When we regard the value of genuine things as more than aesthetic, we are in a position to explain why this is. Here is an example. As a descendant of United Empire Loyalists, I have no interest in feeling communion with American revolutionaries and I would not cross the street to see a genuine copy of the US Constitution (in fact, I have been across the street from Independence Hall in Philadelphia without the least temptation to go in). A genuine original copy of the US Constitution will do nothing for me. Korsmeyer is, of course, aware of the fact that people respond differently to genuine objects and she gives the charming example of Harriet Smith's treasures in Jane Austen's *Emma*. Only Harriet would value encounters with her treasures. Once Harriet loses her interest in Mr. Elton, her precious relics lose all of their value. This is more evidence that we value genuine objects, not as aesthetic objects, but as means to connect with the people who produced them. With some people we value a connection, with others we do not. These reflections count against Korsmeyer's contention that genuineness "is a property that commands attention in itself" (T: 35).

I want to quibble with one more of Korsmeyer's statements. She writes that when genuine things are "willfully damaged or destroyed […] a moral wrong is perceived to have been done – to the culture that produced them" (T: 3). Korsmeyer is wrong when she suggests that the wrong is always done to the culture that produced them. For a start, the culture that produced them may no longer exist and the sense in which it can be harmed is elusive. Even if a non-existent culture can be harmed, the destruction of a genuine thing is not merely wrong because it harms the culture which produced it. The destruction is also wrong because it harms members of other cultures. The UNESCO Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 1972 states that "parts of the cultural or natural heritage are of outstanding interest and therefore need to be preserved as part of the world heritage of mankind as a whole"[1]. Destruction of certain items of cultural property hinders the capacity of people from a variety of cultures to feel communion with the culture that produced the destroyed object. Thus, members of many cultures can be harmed by destruction of some genuine things. This point is

[1] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, *Convention Concerning the Production of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, adopted by the General Conference at its seventeenth session, Paris, 16 November 1972.

a quibble since, from what Korsmeyer says elsewhere in her book, she would likely not disagree with this point.

Things is a remarkable book full of thought-provoking examples of cultural artifacts and insightful reflections on them. Like many good works of philosophy, Korsmeyer's book is valuable sometimes more as a source of good questions than as a source of convincing answers. That said, Korsmeyer certainly makes progress in understanding why we enjoy encounters with genuine things, but I am sceptical about the contention that they are valued essentially as sources of aesthetic experience. Encounters with genuine things are ways of respecting and communing with past people and as sources of pleasing melancholy and nostalgia. These are better described as moral sentiments than as aesthetic experiences.

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Carolyn Korsmeyer

Response

I welcome this opportunity to think further about the ideas developed in *Things: in touch with the past.* These four commentators have spurred me to probe more deeply into some of the claims fielded in the book. I shall address them jointly, inasmuch as several sets of remarks raise related issues. My focus will be on three subjects: the scope of what we count as *aesthetic* properties, values, and responses; the notion of touch as a mode of aesthetic apprehension and the problems raised regarding what I label *implicit touch*; and the contestable concept of the *genuine* with all its complexities.

Although none of my commentators objects to what might seem to be a radical extension of the aesthetic senses to include touch, I begin with the importance of that sense for the aesthetic apprehension of things of great age or rarity (and by the way, I prefer the word "apprehension" to the more common "appreciation," because it foregrounds the cognitive aspect of encounters with the past, the importance of which will be addressed shortly). Maintaining that touch can function aes-

thetically violates the long, if waning, tradition that considers only vision and hearing to operate at sufficient distance to achieve the time-honored contemplative regard that produces the disinterested admiration called "aesthetic". This venerable restriction has relaxed considerably over the last few decades, and now the so-called bodily senses also have their advocates, which is amply evident in several philosophy books on the aesthetic aspects of eating and drinking[1]. In fact, one of my commentators, Larry Shiner, has just published a book on behalf of the aesthetics and artistry of smell (see Shiner 2020). The expansion of the sensory conduits for aesthetic experiences has encouraged inclusion of bodily responses among the ways that we come to understand and appreciate both art and other objects; and there is hardly a more "bodily" sense than touch.

However, my brief on behalf of the sense of touch and its role in encounters with objects of antiquity may seem odd at first, because I am not concerned with the particular sensations registered by this sense. That is, the texture of an object, whether it is rough or smooth, sticky or soft, and so forth is not what is important when describing encounters with things from the past. Rather, it is the intimate physical *contact* that touch permits when one lays hands upon an artifact that has survived over the years. This emphasis on contact, as Shiner notes, leads me to focus on the material being of historical artifacts – another departure from older aesthetic approaches that often stressed the immateriality of an "aesthetic object".

James Young questions my application of the notion of the aesthetic to the thrill that, he agrees, can arise when we encounter objects that have endured over time. Rather than characterizing this experience as aesthetic, however, he describes it as a feeling of communion with our forebears, with people who lived before us and whose lives are glimpsed when we handle the things they left behind. I agree that in many cases, perhaps most, this communion is part of the experience. Indeed, it is an element of what I mean by the transitivity of touch.

Then again, as Zoltán Somhegyi notes, there are ancient objects in nature that prompt that thrill yet are not human-made, and I also agree that such things evoke marvel that matches or at least parallels responses to genuine artifacts. Some natural objects have become recognized as a part of culture and might be said to merge with the human-made world. Consider, for instance, ancient trees that have grown for centuries. Occasionally, those trees are rooted in places where human beings have also left

[1] To mention just three: Sweeny (2018); Perullo (2013); Korsmeyer (1999).

their mark and as such might be said to prompt a sense of communion with people of the past. Some of the ancient yews that grow around Dryburgh Abbey in Scotland, for example, are older than the twelfth-century abbey ruins. One might even point to a relationship established between nature and culture with the slices of old trunks that are displayed with date labels on their rings to note what was going on in the human world when the trees were mere saplings. Indications of the Battle of Hastings or the Great Lisbon Earthquake might put us in mind of antique societies. But in addition, there are natural objects that inspire awe on their own without reference to the human world at all, such as Joshua trees; perhaps we might even include fossils and dinosaur bones. Insofar as these kinds of things prompt marvel, they fall out of Young's alternate proposal. With objects of nature, it is their own great age, or sometimes their rarity, that prompts marvel[2].

(In a way, the perceivable age of an inanimate object, whether natural or artifactual, might resonate with the human world because all of us, person or thing, suffer the changes of time. Francis Sparshott, both a philosopher and a poet, captures this melancholy truth when he observes, "A car rusting on a beach changes year by year as waves tear the doors and fill the body with shingle. A cabin in the bush decays within a lifetime, leaving nothing but an enameled basin or an empty bottle. A face falls away in a few decades, as flesh becomes falser to the skin and truer to the skull." [Sparshott 1985: 92-3]).

But are encounters with old things aptly described as "aesthetic"? Young is absolutely right that the term is vague. He calls it "poorly understood", but perhaps he would agree with the alternate description "poorly defined" – and moreover that the definitional problem is intransigent. With so many philosophers having attempted to formulate accounts of "aesthetic", the fact that controversy and indeterminacy still plague the term is certainly not for lack of trying. Perhaps the difficulty can be traced to the fact that "aesthetic" serves too many ends to yield a maximally useful degree of clarity. Indeed, for quite some time, the term was defined largely by what it is *not*, for it was considered easier to target things that fell outside the category: not moral, not religious, not scientific, not practical or useful, sometimes even not emotional (when Clive

[2] Consider the lone extant example of *Encephalartos woodii* at the KEW Royal Botanical Gardens, London. https://www.npr.org/sections/krulwich/2011/05/10/136029423/the-loneliest-plant-in-the-world

Bell advanced his famous notion of an aesthetic emotion, he distinguished it from ordinary emotions).

The history of the development of modern theories sheds light on this negative definitional strategy, which represents an approach that unfortunately occludes the complexity of many aesthetic encounters. What we now call "aesthetics" came into being alongside hedonic theories of value that developed as part of the influential theories of the eighteenth century, especially those prompted by empiricism, which tended to analyze value of all kinds in terms of the arousal of pleasure. Since pleasure can be taken in so many things, there was a lot of theoretical detail work required to distinguish the different sorts. Moral approval might indicate pleasure in the achievement of happiness and social order, for instance; physical pleasure is sensuous gratification; instrumental pleasures are responses to successful practical efforts, and so forth. Many kinds of value indicate the satisfaction of some kind of desire. In contrast, aesthetic pleasure – the central term was "beauty" – was held up as the pleasure that wasn't any of these but was valuable for its own sake alone, free from desire (and hence "disinterested"). The hedonic legacy is still with us.

However, there is another pertinent historical root, and that is the idea that aesthetic apprehension is a sort of immediate, sensed response that delivers compressed or distilled cognition of its object[3]. Perhaps we come close to a pure aesthetic delight with a simple object, such as the delicate green that sometimes appears above the horizon after sunset. But most of the time, objects of experience are too complex to yield such an unalloyed moment, and what we call "aesthetic" is rarely a pure experience unmixed with any other affective element[4]. This is one reason why the term is so intransigently indeterminate and vague, for those moments cannot be described in a single way that serves for all cases. There are aesthetic aspects to many experiences, including those that have ethical, cognitive, and emotional weight.

I build upon the latter in calling the thrill of contact with the past "aesthetic". Wonder, marvel, thrill – these are all emotions that can bring about a pause during which one simply savors the moment when we dwell in that affect. It is possible that most emotions admit an aesthetic

[3] Early versions of this view are perhaps most explicit in the German tradition of Baumgarten and Meier. See Guyer (2014, chap. 6).

[4] Indeed, sometimes pure aesthetic enjoyment occurs in stark conflict with other values. Claude Monet described his horror when he realized that he was admiring the changes of color appearing on the face of his dead wife.

moment. And certainly, those that do need not be "positive" or joyful. After all, it is terror that paves the way to the sublime, and even disgust arguably has an aesthetic element[5]. Young concludes that "Encounters with genuine things are ways of respecting and communing with past people and as sources of pleasing melancholy and nostalgia". And I entirely agree. Melancholy and nostalgia are exactly the kinds of emotions that possess an aesthetic aspect, wherein we pause and savor the experience and the object that prompts them. Are these really "better described as moral sentiments than as aesthetic experiences"? I don't think so, although I would certainly grant that there is often a moral aspect to the event, which is grounded in awareness of what the object is and what it means.

His recommendation that encounters from the past foster communication with those long gone leads Young to offer an alternative view of the value of the genuine. With a real old artifact, do we value the object itself for its own sake only, or do we value it because it is instrumental for our well-being? He favors the latter view and believes that encounters with our forebears contribute to our flourishing. I would invert the claim. It is the object that I value, but not because it promotes my well-being. Rather, it promotes well-being inasmuch as I recognize its wondrous existence. This difference of opinion can be cast as a variety of Plato's *Euthyphro* question: is something valuable because I (or the gods) love it, or do I love it because of what it is? I like to think that Socrates would agree with me in the choice of the latter option.

There are two aspects of my promotion of the role of touch in encounters with the past that have prompted some skepticism. One is my claim about the transitivity of touch – the impression that in touching an old artifact, one becomes a link in a chain of contact with others who have touched the same thing. None of my commentators seems to object to this idea, and since I already defended it in my introductory remarks, I'll move on to the other troublesome claim: implicit touch.

"Implicit touch" refers to the times when one is in the vicinity of a rare or ancient object but is unable, either by difficulty of access or by restrictions designed to protect the object, to reach out and literally touch it. Probably we are all familiar with the temptation to touch something that we know we should not, at the same time recognizing that the reasons we should not provide sufficient motive to obey the rules. Not only museum guards but also conscience protect works of art from the

[5] I make this case in Korsmeyer (2011). See also Kolnai (2004).

damage that might be caused by handling. In many of the Paleolithic caves where our distant ancestors left their mystifying paintings, ancient limners left their actual handprints. Those images seem positively to invite one to lay one's own hand on the very place where many millennia ago others placed theirs[6]. But we (should) recognize that protecting those ancient artifacts from the gradual destruction caused by our touch is more important than our (selfish) experience of direct contact. So we (should) keep our hands in our pockets in such places.

Nonetheless, coming near to artifacts that are ancient and rare, or special in some other sense, delivers an experience that simply reading about them or seeing a picture does not. Hence I speculate that when literal contact is impossible, proximity stands in for touch, operating as a kind of "implicit touch" because given other circumstances, one *might* reach out and grasp or stroke the object.

Both Shiner and Renzo note that implicit touch is less plausible than actual touch. And I have to agree that it is an odd phenomenon. But how else to account for the fact that thousands of people crowd in front of the *Mona Lisa,* even though a good reproduction or digital image is far easier to see? Or, to use an example from *Things*, for the fact that when an original holograph copy of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address was put on display at the Library of Congress in 2009, hundreds lined up to view it in its protective glass case, whereas a perceptually indistinguishable copy garnered little interest. They could not actually touch the paper on which the address was written, but they could come very close to it – to the real thing.

Shiner suspects some inconsistency between my emphasis on the importance of the materiality of objects – which is what makes them tangible, after all – and my concession that when we cannot make actual contact, implicit touch suffices. Certainly, the experience might be even more powerful if we were in a position actually to handle old things. In the book, I quote a library curator who permits himself to handle – without protective gloves – rare first editions and manuscripts written by luminaries such as Benjamin Franklin. He states, "Just to be in their presence is an honor"[7]. Few of us are in a position to share such actual contact, but in its absence, getting close is still pretty thrilling. Shiner's personal testimony of handling the papers of Alexis de Toqueville is another example

[6] See the image chosen for the cover of *Things* – a hand reaching toward an ancient petroglyph of another hand.

[7] Quoted in Korsmeyer (2019: 25).

of this rare privilege, and when one is permitted literally to handle something, mere proximity is a pale substitute.

But does implicit touch serve the purpose I claim for it? Shiner suggests that implicit touch "seems to leave vision in the driver's seat". Renzo makes a similar point by observing that proximity works "only in combination with the exercise of other senses, most notably sight". I have to agree with both points, but not because implicit touch is without force. Rather, experience is almost always multi-sensory, and my emphasis on touch was not intended to imply that touch is the only sense operating in a relevant manner with the apprehension of things from the past. I foreground it (as Renzo notes) because its role in apprehending value is usually overlooked. In addition to multi-sensory experience, belief is also required for an aesthetic encounter with the past; and it is often the wide scope of sight that furnishes the bulk of information about what it is that we are touching (it is no accident that so many visual metaphors are used for knowledge). But this does not entail that sight provides the main sensory avenue for encounters with the past; only that sight affords the commonest means of discovery of the identity of what we draw near to – with or without touching.

Renzo also raises a tricky point: if there is such a thing as implicit touch, why doesn't this phenomenon extend to other senses, such as implicit hearing? He asks, "Why think that proximity to something we can touch can generate an experience that proximity to something we can hear cannot?". The question prompts consideration of bodily position and which senses come into prominence with physical movement. Both hearing and vision are considered the "distance" senses because they can function at a remove from their stimulus objects, although we still have to be within sight or within hearing range of an object. The bodily senses require much closer proximity, even contact. Touch is the paramount external sense that situates us bodily in relation to something else, and this fact edges this sense back into the driver's seat, at least sharing the steering wheel (the so-called internal senses, including proprioception, are also at work, of course).

Drawing near to an object, one might *almost touch* it. Pressing your ear against a closed door may yield faint sounds, but does one *almost hear* it in the same way? I don't think so. Being near enough to touch delivers a sense of presence before an object; listening through a closed door simply delivers faint sounds. If a rare artifact is in an opaque container, we do not *almost see* it, even though we might know that is nearby. And ignorance that a Rothko resides inside a crate yields no

experience at all to speak of (and to expand the thought experiment a bit: there can't be almost-smelling, because even if a whiff of an odor is very faint, it still counts as being smelled. If there is such a thing as almost-tasting, it takes place by means of smell when suspended molecules enter the nose and mouth). One could ponder the comparison of "almost" experiences with a longer list of hypotheses. But I venture to say that almost touching would yield a sense of awe; almost hearing strains one to listen closely; and almost seeing merely frustrates. Because the sense of touch is paramount among the external senses to register bodily position, it plays a strong role in the experience of proximity.

For implicit touch to come into play one must believe that one is in the presence of the genuine or real thing. That belief might be undermined by additional information, in which case one's encounter loses its impact. This fairly common experience might lead to the conclusion that the value of the genuine thing is a matter of imaginative projection. None of these commentators reject the idea that genuineness has a special value, nor that it is a nonperceptual property that affects experience. But since we live in a world of simulacra, I hope it is of interest to explore the difference between replica and real somewhat further.

Renzo questions my experiential account of aesthetic apprehension by claiming that we can experience a genuine thing, but without what I posit as its characteristic thrill or shiver or marvel. For instance, if I own a genuine Rothko painting but believe it to be a replica, I experience the genuine thing without the thrill. Therefore, it might seem thrill is "a dispensable component of the aesthetic value of experiencing the genuine". However, this objection underplays the role of cognition in aesthetic apprehension. Let me approach this point from a new angle, folding into Renzo's point a more commonly heard claim about replicas and the experience they deliver. This is also another way to understand the appreciation of age value, a term derived from Riegl that Shiner highlights.

It might seem that if there is no perceptual difference between a real object and an excellent copy – and many copies are truly excellent – then claiming that there is an experiential, aesthetic difference between the two confuses what can be apprehended with what can be projected by the imagination. There is a way to address this issue that escaped my notice when I wrote *Things*. This additional line of argument gives me an opportunity to adjust a claim in the book, for I believe that although the *perceptual* qualities of real and replica may be indistinguishable, the belief that one is real and the other a copy means that they are not truly *indiscernible* in experience. At first glance, that sounds like a strange

claim, even inconsistent. However, considering the phenomenon of *recognition* – a cognitive activity where the perceptual element is especially evident – illuminates the idea.

When an object, whether an artifact of human making or a product of nature, endures over many years, it achieves an appearance that registers the passage of time, recording on its surface the events that have changed it from its first fresh, original appearance. That is to say, it accumulates perceptual properties that manifest its age. Stone steps become worn and bowed from the pressure of many feet, painted surfaces fade and chip, roofs sag, vases and saucers crack; old recordings skip and scratch; both the scent and the look of dried flowers turn from sweet to dusty; tree trunks thicken and twist. All such perceivable characteristic testify that the object has endured over years. Its aged look has been *caused* by events in its history, and as such it might be said to embody its past. Its perceptible characteristics convey what can be called a "narrative aura", meaning that its appearance broadcasts its age and the extended period of time that it has, as it were, witnessed[8].

In contrast, an exact replica is recognized as having properties that appear aged but have a different cause because they merely imitate something old. The imitation may be admirable and technically marvelous, so exact that were the two objects to be switched, it would take expert analysis to tell them apart. Nonetheless, when one recognizes a replica, one automatically also recognizes that the object of perception has qualities that mimic something else. Either they copy an actual old thing or they assume the characteristics of something that looks like it endured through history.

This is another way to understand the role of belief in encounters with the past. The belief that something is a real artifact of antiquity (or really belonged to one's grandmother, or really are the dried flowers from one's wedding – for encountering the past need not entail that the past is very distant) affects the thrill or marvel or value of the encounter. Recognizing an imitation or replica is not the same experience as recognizing a real thing.

Nelson Goodman (1968), elaborated and expanded by Catherine Z. Elgin in Elgin (1983), provides some terminology that advances my claim about recognition, specifically, the term "exemplification". The schematic analysis developed by Goodman and Elgin is more complicated than is needed for my purposes, but their methods are useful to explain the

[8] I explore narrative aura and exemplification in Korsmeyer (forthcoming, 2022).

different experiences of replica and real thing. To put it briefly, the two kinds of objects, despite their similar appearance, possess different referential functions.

Before Goodman singled out the mode of reference he labeled "exemplification", it was more or less overlooked, perhaps because it is so common that it falls beneath attention[9]. Exemplification occurs when an object possesses a property and also refers to that property, thereby calling attention to it. His own examples are things like paint chips and fabric swatches, both of which possess the features that they also are made to display, and to which they thereby refer. For instance, a paint chip both possesses the property of yellow – that is, it simply *is* yellow – and refers to that property, exhibiting it to the buyer seeking a sunny color for a wall. It possesses many other properties that are not referred to, such a being five inches long and backed with paper. It does not exemplify those features because color is the only one that is relevant for the purpose of a paint chip. Swatches and chips are tokens of the things they exemplify – they *are* what they refer to. In short, exemplification presents what an object is; it refers to itself.

Exemplification provides an additional way to think about the distinction between real and replica. Only the real thing both possesses the properties of being old and worn over the years and refers to those very properties (that's another way of saying that it embodies its history). A replica may present the appearance of being old and faded, but it imitates rather than exemplifies age or damage. Imitation refers to either a real old thing or to features that characterize something of age, including not only period style but also the signs indicative of age: wear, fading, and breakage. The perceptual properties of an aged artifact have been caused by events it has undergone over time. The perceptual properties of even the most scrupulous replica have a different cause: imitative crafting or manufacture. While the marks of age can be replicated, the symbolic function of exemplification cannot.

If we think of the cognitive factors that are presumed for an encounter with the past in terms of *recognition*, it is clear that belief enters into perception. That is, the appearance of an object rides on some understanding of its reality. Calling attention to the referential relation of exemplification is an efficient way to distinguish apprehension of the real thing from a replica. One can replicate the visible appearance of a new thing so

[9] He makes this observation in the Foreword to Elgin (1983: 1).

that it appears old, but aesthetic encounters with old things presume proximity to a *real* old thing.

If apprehending the appearance of age involves recognizing its cause, then the real thing and the replica are not aesthetically indistinguishable after all. They may look the same with regard to their immediately perceivable properties, but knowledge that different processes account for their appearance affects their aesthetic impact. Recognizing that "this *is* the ancient object and its damage accrued over time," is different from recognizing "this *looks just like* the ancient object and the damaged look has been replicated". Referential function identifies the object of attention, the kind of thing it is, thereby setting in motion the aesthetic encounter. Exemplification excels at summoning the past into the present.

Recognition also is interestingly in play with the degrees of genuineness that Somhegyi singles out in his commentary. In extremely complicated ways, it colors the admiration one has for objects that have been repaired or restored, for a restored artifact looks newer than it actually is, and the response of the informed perceiver adjusts with the alterations to the original. Consider the recent, notorious history of the *Salvator Mundi*, a painting putatively from the hand of Leonardo da Vinci (and at $450,000,000 the most expensive work of art ever auctioned). If Leonardo's was the original hand that painted the picture, his is far from the last, and the perceptible surface is now wholly replaced by paints applied by the hand of another[10]. How can this not enter into our experience of the painting (should we ever see it again, for it has disappeared from public sight)?

Time affects us all – human and artifact alike. Unlike ourselves, artifacts can be restored and hence stay in the world longer than we can. But restoration and the material changes that it often necessitates generate great complexities that undermine a firm delineation of what it means to be genuine. My affinity for the materiality of old things leads me to favor the preservation of at least a remnant of what came to be long ago[11]. Hence the notion that genuineness comes in degrees, a notion that Somhegyi endorses. Recognizing the endurance of even a small bit of a thing sustains the power to deliver the thrill of encounters with the past – because it retains a tangible remnant of history.

[10] See Lewis (2019).

[11] This approach is also favored by many preservationist efforts and represents a thread running through UNESCO protocols on restoration.

I conclude by again expressing my thanks to *Studi di estetica* for this opportunity to explore in a new forum the ideas developed in *Things.* I am grateful to my four commentators for their insightful observations, as well as for the reminder that although a book may be published, it is never truly finished.

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